

## On Cricket Annuals

That moment in late Spring when the new “Wisden” arrives has surely to be one of the most eagerly anticipated events of every year for the cricket tragic. I have a (sort of) complete run of the little yellow wonder. It’s “sort of” because the volumes from 1864 to 1945 are the magnificent facsimiles produced by Willows Publishing – indistinguishable from the “real thing” except for their pristine condition and their affordable price. From 1946 onwards (the year of my birth as it happens) I have originals and from 1965 they have dustjackets so are yellow rather than brown on my bookshelves. In times of often inexplicable change Wisden is a constant and every edition is a magnificent achievement – all 159 of them. My cricketing skills were so minimal that the idea that I would appear anywhere in Wisden is laughable. But when my biography of John Shepherd was published in 2009 it led to my getting a mention in the “Cricket Books” section (page 1617!) in the following year’s edition. I think I’ll settle for that.

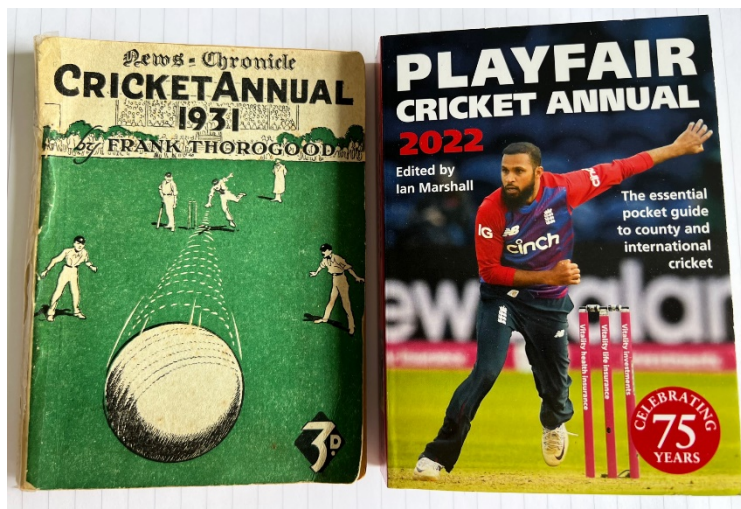


Perhaps the most famous Wisden of all was the 1939 edition which Jim Swanton had with him as a prisoner of the Japanese from 1942-1945. This has a particular resonance for me as my father was a fellow POW officer and knew Jim well. Dad was one of the many who read that Wisden from



cover to cover. One of the five cricketers of the year was a promising youngster called DCS Compton who had scored a century in his first appearance in an Ashes Test. “An adaptable player with a touch of genius” he was called. They weren’t wrong! I was able to see that Wisden up close in the MCC library a couple of years ago and that fact that my father had been one of its captive readers added to the experience.

I saw my first First Class cricket at Fenners in Cambridge (where I was at school) in the 1960-1964 seasons. In 1963 I discovered the “Playfair Cricket Annual” in its new format inherited from its predecessor publisher the Dickens Press where it had been the “News Chronicle” Annual until 1960.



The latest Playfair is advertised as the 75<sup>th</sup> and technically this is true though actually the first Playfairs were a very different format and with different contents. In 1963 the old Playfair format ceased publishing and the name “Playfair” was attached to what had previously been the “News Chronicle” annual since 1931! So qua format the 2022 “Playfair” is actually the 91<sup>st</sup> not the 75<sup>th</sup>! As with Wisden the basic style of the Playfair (as it became) is

pretty consistent today with that first edition. Every County's staff and statistics are recorded and presented in the same way as ever – as are major matches. It's all rather comforting!

As with Wisden I have a complete run of the little "Playfair" cricket annual – all 91 of them. The 5.5 "x 4.0" size is unchanged, and it still fits conveniently in my jacket pocket – even if the jacket does not fit quite as comfortably around me as it once did!

**Paddy Briggs**