

The Isis Tour 2018

Tourists



Back Row: Ganesh Ranjendran, Joe Walter, Damien Todd, Ravi Kella, Ollie Walter, Matt Stanbury

Front Row: Allan East, Stuart Langston, Nick Wyatt (Captain), Keith Whiter, Keith Ponsford

Mothers are said to forget the pain of childbirth the moment they see their baby. The same type of total amnesia also appears to affect the Isis tourist. As the 2018 expedition began everyone had cast aside the 2017 memories and were eagerly anticipating the brutal pain of being lost on route, remaining trapped in an enclosed area whilst being driven at 95 miles per hour approximately three feet behind an Eddie Stobart pantechnicon lorry for hours and the agony of sharing a hotel bedroom with a gnarled and ancient, snoring pensioner. It was time for the tour.

Three cars set out for the West Country and a relaxing pub lunch before the exertions of the cricket. The first was filled with the middle aged youth of the team (two Walters, Wyatt, Langston and Todd). Having carefully packed their slippers and comfort-fit slacks they merrily set off at dawn emboldened by the treat of a leisurely trip with stops to sniff the rose filled scent of a hot June afternoon. It was not to be. Walter J was self-anointed navigator, a folly so obviously disastrous that if something like it had been committed in the sixteenth century Columbus would still be looking for America. Thus a trip to a marble museum was followed by a mutinous crew being directed along a circuitous route over roads resembling the wrinkly legs of an elephant. Arriving back at the marble museum some hours later they then proceeded to Devon - too late for lunch and drinks.

Meanwhile, the second car, crammed to bursting with the crusted remains of Whiter, Ponsford, East and The Duke of Stanbury set out much later due to Easty having been busy cruising around. Whiter was at the wheel, at least nominally. His driving skills, which included overtaking whilst lighting a cigarette and simultaneously looking in the glovebox and changing the music on the radio were a sight to behold. Unfortunately his passengers were unable to take advantage of this spectacle as they were busy cowering in the footwells behind their seats, hands over their eyes slowly rocking back and forth. This journey had a striking resemblance to objects approaching the speed of light.

Physics tells us that the closer you get to the speed of light, the slower time goes. So it was for Whiter's passengers. Unfortunately, the lack of bladder elasticity of all four meant they were unable to hold as much as they once did. Stopping frequently for relief, combined with Lord Matthew of Stanbury's ability to wander off for hours in search of a butler to obtain him a cup of coffee, meant they only reached the bottom of a large Exeter hill moments before the first game began. Whiter's heavy boot made light of the incline although his transmission was left behind. This car also arrived late.

The third car of Kella and Ganesh set off in good time and arrived as planned. They truly were the Mark Ealhams of travel.

Isis vs Exeter Erratics

In the immediate moments before the first tour ball was bowled everything seemed possible. The Exeter grass gleamed in the warm sun, Viscount Stanbury had his usual odour of Old Spice and carbolic soap, even the skipper was not bellowing "Take a blow" every 30 seconds. All genuinely believed that the perennially halt and lame of the bowling attack would be up and cantering about in the field mixing sliding stops with one handed pick-ups, that the Walters would arrow the ball in from the boundary, Damo would play himself in, Stu and Ganesh would score runs and wicketkeeper Kella would never flap at a delivery like a nervous OAP shooing away a stray cat. This did not last as long as it took to win the toss.

When it comes to the batting order and bowling choices for any Isis tour match it has become apparent that there are two radically opposed schools of thought. There are complicated socio-economic and political theories about how these divergent views came into being but it is in essence a battle between highbrow romance and brute pragmatism. There are those who yearn for a skipper who embraces the carefully constructed care-worn philosophy of David Gower whilst others pine for a leader in the mould of Douglas Jardine, famous for immaculately planned and impeccably effective cricketing strategies.

With the sartorial elegance that is Alex Bevan left at home it was left to Ravi Kella, who looks like the kind of well groomed, tastefully tattooed, silk -shirted dandy you might encounter singing Candle in the Wind in an Amsterdam night club, to carry the flag for the dreamers and influence the selections. However, he was to be no match for the pragmatic, hard-nosed (although less so following his errant fielding at Eynsham last year) skipper.

With Erratics by far the weaker of the tour opposition Wyatt lead from the front by opening the batting and packing the top order with his mates. Turmoil immediately raised its angular head when, as the openers began the long walk to the middle, the skipper realised he had forgotten to bring his grey cricket shoes with quilted fronts and rainbow laces, so beloved by the young and trendy, and began to panic. This was soon put behind him as he and Olly Walter embarked on such a slow start that everyone would have been forgiven for thinking they had fallen asleep and woken in 1967 to see Boycott and Barrington at the crease.

Despite a ground so small it was possible for a four year old to jump over it at the halfway stage Isis had crawled to a mind numbing sixty without loss. The only highlights had seen Whiter, fielding for the opposition, make a stunning stop to prevent a certain 4 from Walter. This was all the more surprising as, for the rest of his time on the field, he was as mobile as a Belfast sink. Wyatt put his best foot forward, the ball consistently denting his left leg which finished looking like the world's

biggest plum. Having snailed his way to 31 he eventually attempted to hit a ball and was immediately caught. Walter followed soon after. Out came the sun, out came the clouds and out came lbw wandering across his stumps while wafting at a straight one. Kella gone for 11.

The better looking Walter took matters into his own hands striking the ball to all parts of the ground provided they were on his leg side. He raced to 34 including an almighty six to a boundary so short the ball landed agonisingly close to his toes. At the other end wickets tumbled in less time than it takes Roy Blatchford to get an lbw decision wrong. The Isis ringer Ganesh eventually arrived at the ground to bat, having been earlier abandoned in the pub by Kella, but may as well have stayed there. Langston, a strapping young man with a torso so wide it is a surprise that it hasn't been used by Banksy for his latest art work, went for a duck. Viscount Stanbury, who had given new meaning to the phrases leg glance and the pull by panting around the boundary after the opposition captain's wife, also went quickly, no doubt so he could locate the nearest bordello. It was left to Whiter to remind us of the true spirit of the club by running young Walter out first ball as he moved towards his first 50 for ten years. Ponsford Senior, decked out in his wife's rectangular dark-rimmed glasses, the type normally associated with the sort of chaps who play double bass in a mainstream jazz quartet, held his end up until the finish, not something that has happened much in recent years according to his wife.

Defending 182 the tourists took to the field. Anyone who has ever played for Isis will know that captaincy brings with it certain privileges, not the least of which is selfishness. When it came to the bowling, Wyatt had such dedication to his own cause that he made Donald Trump look like Mother Theresa. He avoided the early Erratics big hitters by giving the opportunity to the people in the 'old folks' car. Whiter, Ponsford, East and Stanbury, resplendent in their matching soiled 1950s Isis CC underwear were bashed to all parts for little reward. Nevertheless, the public-spirited nature of the home team meant there was a regular fall of wickets and Isis gained the upper hand. The Erratics captain, however, stood firm and the game swung decisively their way. Whiter, fresh from his latest bout of liposuction, was brought back to save the day and was promptly dispatched for two consecutive sixes before deceiving the batsman with a slower ball so lacking in velocity that it gave new scientific meaning to the phrase 'stationary object'. The Erratic's captain then pulled a hamstring trying to reach a delivery so wide that he needed a golf buggy to reach it. With him gone the skipper decided he should bring himself on 'as the situation demanded it' and proceeded to mop up the tail and win the game.

The Evening

Having ignored the opposition in the pub the President proceeded to needlessly fine a team of rapidly balding males, without a future, and on a downward sporting slope littered with shattered cricketing hopes. Suitably disgruntled the tour party returned to the hotel to prepare for the night out.

The hotel lobby reflected what we all know about cricket's attempts to come across as modern, sexy and sophisticated. It had failed. Anyone present would have seen Damien Todd wearing a wonderful shirt that appeared to have been made from the remnants of a Laura Ashley frock, whilst Stu looked resplendent in a ketchup stained Star Wars t-shirt and gut suspending pants. The Marquess of Stanbury was magnificent in some comfort fit jeans his mum had ironed a crease down the front of and a pair of top of the range flip flops, although that was better than Ponsford Senior who had obviously stopped buying clothes just after Tony Blair left office.

Joe Walter, unhappy with Young Stoneman's planning in 2017 (all turn up in the hotel lobby, walk off, eat a lovely curry, wander aimlessly for an hour until stumbling upon a great pub, have a good time), had taken upon himself the task of organising the evening's entertainment and food. This was a cruel blow to Harry. Being replaced as the social event organiser for a group of menopausal men by someone who enjoys gently cycling the country lanes of West Oxfordshire, endlessly reading the Isis CC statistics page and photographing interesting rock formations is not something for anyone's CV. But J. Walter had a cunning plan. Remove the parts of the night that made it fun and increase the other elements - turn up, walk off before everyone gets there, don't eat, wander aimlessly for hours, fail to have a good time. Everyone was keen to see what was on offer.

Young Joseph, keen to take his leather pants out clubbing decided to begin the evening with aperitifs. Having tried to shake off most of the party by jumping in a taxi with his mates and speeding off he was eventually discovered in a splendid harbour side location apparently unknown to anyone else in the city. Sir Stanbury set the tone for an evening of hell-raising by partaking in a chilled glass of prosecco. Aware of their responsibilities to the team Kella and Ganesh drank fruit juice. Their scientifically developed fitness regime meant they could keep their fat to weight ratio akin to a stick of celery instead of the steak and kidney pudding the rest of the team had managed. Keen to recover the evening from a start slower than a Walter and Penhallurick opening stand, 'Once Upon a Time Big Man' Whiter raised the excitement levels by indulging in a game of 'Heads and Tails'. Whiter did not drop the coin once, an astounding feat considering his usual acumen in the catching department. All of this led to Whiter becoming drunk. And Stu. And Damo.

J. Walter, having found the harbour area had no food outlets, resorted to The Young Stoneman plan of wandering aimlessly. This is a strategy as well thought through as a no deal Brexit and possessed of a similar type of catastrophic outcome. With time ticking on, and East and Senior Ponsford with little time left in this world, the tourists hastily set off up the hill to the centre of town in search of a team-bonding meal to round off the day. O. Walter, dressed in his hand-knitted jumper led from the front, as he so often does. Allowing restaurant after restaurant to pass by as frequently as the ball passes the outside edge of his bat and with the time ticking towards midnight he eventually stumbled upon an Indian restaurant keen to accept the Isis horde. However the skipper, a man of great tactical acumen, able to read a cricket match and a brasserie situation with equal aplomb, pulled back the velvet drapes of perception to reveal his opinion.

"There is probably something better up there," he said, pointing vaguely in the direction of the sky. So, like the well trained unit Isis CC has become under his stewardship, we wandered off yet again. Unfortunately, J. Walter's leather trousers had led, by this time, to severe buttock chafing and he and his mates rushed off to find solace in a KFC and an expensive, gold-plated gin palace. The rest of the group, abandoned, leaderless and finding all eateries now closed, splintered into small groups. Ponsford and East found the nearest bar with a bemused Whiter eventually finding them under a table where they insisted they were searching for dropped pork scratchings. Kella and Ganesh found a small bistro still serving food and enjoyed a lovely meal before retiring to the hotel for a good night's sleep. And so day one ended.

The Morning After

The next morning saw the majority of the tourists doing their best to avoid any suggestions they were lean and fit by tucking into the £8 'eat as much as you like' breakfast. Damo and Stu decided that there were no longer enough role models for the larger cricket fan anymore and decided to do

something about it. Their batting fortunes, they decided, would be enhanced by looking more like Mike Gatting and Inzamam ul Haq as they selflessly scoffed all the sausages and bacon on show. Damo ate so much he could barely stand up from the weight of all the ketchup in his stomach. Baron Stanners spent his time complaining to the Lack of Entertainment Officer about the dearth of opportunities the evening before. "Where was the chance to down pints, frequent a grab-a-granny night in a local club with two-for-one offers on Pina Coladas and to get in a fight in a car park," he whinged. Meanwhile, Kella and Ganesh, freshly showered and coiffured, swaggered around the breakfast bar in crisply ironed slacks, cream shirts and Gucci loafers looking for all the world like men auditioning for parts in a Cadbury's Milk Tray advert.

Isis v Temple Cloud Invitation XI

Day two of the tour now moved to Bristol. All departed to Temple Cloud for the second match of the weekend. The Vauxhall Insignia assembly of grizzly, lackadaisical amnesiacs (VIAGRA) set off determined to hold up their reputations as best they could. However, confined together in close quarters for over an hour, they were overcome by an olfactory treat resembling a hint of urine and cabbage (with maybe some steamed dumplings thrown in for good measure) that emanated from Ponsford's kitbag. They arrived late.

With England playing Panama in the World Cup our hosts had kindly set up a TV and bar. The skipper and his mates had grabbed the best seats. Wyatt, still hazy from his gin drinking exploits of the night before took up the challenge of consuming as much beer as he could. He watched the game unfold with a radiant grin on his face, captivated by the way the players in their white kit seemed to have assumed flowing nebulous shapes, while the pitch had taken on a fresh and charmingly rich cosmic hue. It was only when Langston tapped him gently on the shoulder that he realised that he was, in fact, facing the wrong way and looking through the window as the clouds refreshingly won 6-1.

Tour games fall into one of three categories - games the club should win (Erratics), games they might win (FFMCC) and games they have less chance of success in than Damo has of picking up an award from the Noise Abatement Society for his snoring. Temple Cloud falls into the third category. However, buoyed by the England team's success the captain won the toss, chose to bat, sent in Whiter and Prince Matthew to open and put himself at number 11 before lying down to contemplate the joys of a hot day, excessive alcohol consumption and the opportunity to dream of a memorable Isis victory. He was to be disappointed.

The Big Man, having badgered the captain all year for an opportunity to parade his batting skills to an adoring audience, unfurled a leading edge for one before seeing his middle stump dislodged. He returned to the pavilion slower than a fully-laden brewery dray. Out came the sun, out came the clouds and out came clean bowled wandering across his stumps while wafting at a straight one. Kella gone for a duck. It was left to Easty and Princess Stanners to pull the innings back from disaster until the latter, buoyed by his recent coronation as the Lothario of Isis, spotted an old woman and her pussy wandering around the outfield and rushed off to urinate in front of her. Ganesh, following the lead of his good friend Kella departed for a duck leaving the way clear for Dynamite Damo.

Isis were now privileged to witness cricket in all its forms. At one end was East, a self-anointed middle-order batsman, somewhat rotund, all polite smirks, carrying the faint whiff of mildew and a weakness against all types of bowling. A purveyor of one elegant cameo a year. At the other end was Damien Todd something altogether more modern and dynamic, a batting, crunching spirit, freshly risen from the earth. The kind of man who crashes through the door of the changing room using his

mighty willow, before menacing any passing female with a hooting cry of, "Now, that's what I call a stumping opportunity." Damo attempted to knock down the stone wall surrounding the outfield by continually larruping the ball into it. The partnership was to yield 37 valuable runs before he departed, caught on the boundary, for 35. He was replaced by Walter Old. As is usual he set about repairing the innings by taking 20 overs to reach a carefully constructed 29 whilst simultaneously encouraging his partner by instructing him in the virtues of the forward defensive push, the relaxing qualities gained from owning an extensive Celine Dion CD collection and the intrinsic advantages of cream coloured carpets. Easty immediately gave up his wicket not even able to hang on for the inevitable run out. Langston and Ponsford came and went quickly before Young Walter and the captain saw the remaining overs out leaving Isis on a remarkable 170 for 9.

Isis took to the field for the final time in good heart. Ponsford took one end and bowled a controlled spell giving little away. Meanwhile at the other end the captain, always one to shoulder responsibility, opened the bowling. His first ball was crashed to the boundary but his experience and tactical skill was brought to the fore as he followed this delivery with his infamous 'slower' ball. It rose from the track with the peaceful and merry hum of a post-coital dragonfly. The 14 year old batsmen watched its stately progress, adjusted his headgear, surveyed the leg side field and whistled a few bars of the theme from The Magnificent Seven before belting it to the boundary. The skipper decided it was obviously a track suited to spin so he immediately took himself off and called for Walter J. He was certainly able to extract spin but unfortunately only after it had cleared the walled boundary and landed in the adjoining field and this despite him emitting a helpful cry of 'Catch it!' East followed and fared little better and it was left to Whiter to save the day. The Big Man was once a pace bowler of primordial menace. But by now the only frightening thing about him was his appeal. This was a blood-curdling roar delivered from a bow-legged squat that gave the impression of a man with piles sitting down on the wrong end of an invisible knitting needle. The umpire gave not out. And so the day was not yet saved.

Despite the fall of the odd wicket Temple Cloud continued to make hay as the sun shone down on a desperate Isis. The skipper had one last throw of the dice. He tossed the ball to Old Walter. According to the opener he took wickets using a mix of guile, flight and variation of pace and line. This, of course, is the universally accepted Isis cricket code given to his brother for bowling really slow crap in the vague hope of eventually getting somebody caught at deep midwicket. This did not work and the Cloud romped home with 10 overs to spare.

The final throes of another remarkable tour saw The President fining all and sundry for minor misdemeanours. King Stanners objected threatening to get his groom to give Ponsford a good horse whipping. Sensitive to accusations that he was abusing his powers The President fined him the most and justice was seen to be done.

With the sun setting it was left for ten good men and the skipper to enjoy a well-earned barbeque and some more beer. Wyatt summed it all up. "There are many remarkable things about a tour but to spend time with a bunch of people who regard preparation and frequent washing as the key to failure, who read the sign at the hotel offering an eat all you can breakfast and take it as a life-changing maxim and possess an unquenchable desire to blame their fellow teammates for anything that goes wrong is truly life enhancing. To tour with ten modern cricketing legends is fascinating and heroic and seems even more so when they are completely out of focus due to my excessive drinking." Roll on 2019.

Allan East