

A GOOD CATCH

Delightful character sketches from a former Sussex captain and MCC president

PAUL COUPAR REVIEWS
LOST IN THE LONG GRASS
BY JOHN BARCLAY

FAIRFIELD BOOKS, HB, 240PP, £15



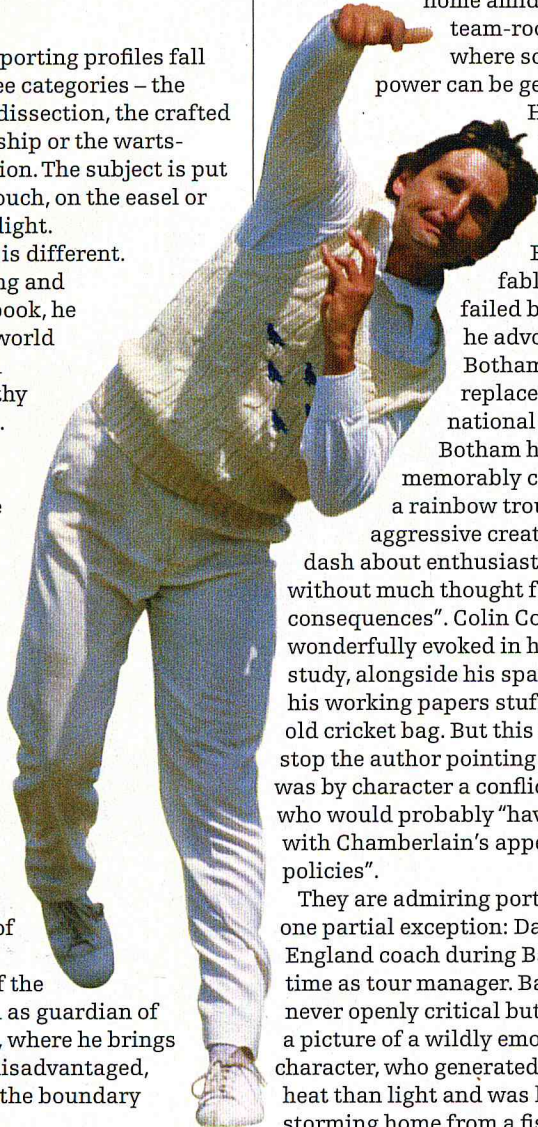
MOST MODERN sporting profiles fall into one of three categories – the psychological dissection, the crafted work of writership or the warts-and-all revelation. The subject is put either on the couch, on the easel or under the spotlight.

John Barclay is different.

In this charming and idiosyncratic book, he brings an old-world gentleness and human sympathy to his sketches.

He portrays 25 cricket people and one cricket dog – his beloved terrier Robert (a sporting character fetched from the very long grass indeed).

Our author draws his material from his time as a player at Eton and Sussex, as tour manager of England in the bad old days of the mid-1990s and as guardian of lovely Arundel, where he brings cricket to the disadvantaged, overseen from the boundary by Robert.



Barclay's gentleness does not preclude honesty. His friend Mike Atherton is described as an impressive thinker but "less at home amidst the

team-room banter where so much power can be generated".

He points out, rightly, that Mike

Brearley's fabled genius failed badly when he advocated Ian Botham as his replacement as national captain.

Botham himself is memorably compared to a rainbow trout – "wild aggressive creatures which dash about enthusiastically without much thought for the consequences". Colin Cowdrey is wonderfully evoked in his chaotic study, alongside his spaniels and his working papers stuffed in an old cricket bag. But this does not stop the author pointing out that he was by character a conflict-avoider, who would probably "have gone with Chamberlain's appeasement policies".

They are admiring portraits, with one partial exception: David Lloyd, England coach during Barclay's time as tour manager. Barclay is never openly critical but builds a picture of a wildly emotional character, who generated more heat than light and was last seen storming home from a fishing trip.

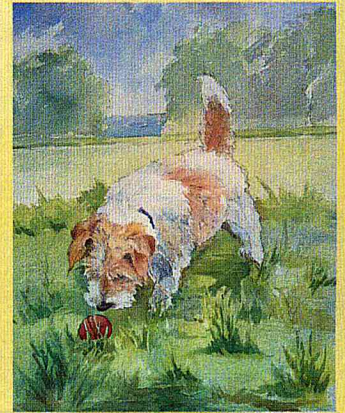
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To have a chance, please answer the following question:

How many Tests did Ian Botham play as captain?

Send your entry to the usual address or email Barclay competition@thecricketer.com, including the subject line 'Barclay competition', by December 2.

LOST IN THE LONG GRASS



John Barclay

foreword by John Woodcock

Barclay is modest about his literary skill but in places he writes memorably. The grand Jim Swanton would have made a good president of MCC or perhaps even Archbishop of Canterbury – "conceivably both". Ian Gould belonged in an era "when a cup of tea, a cheese roll and a cigarette constituted a warm-up". Javed Miandad's genius was "baroque ... as opposed to Viv Richards' Wagnerian thunder".

A couple of the portraits are perhaps just *too* nice to be insightful. Despite Barclay's own depression, for example, his piece on Peter Roebuck ducks the issue of what drove this brilliant, troubled man to throw himself to his death.

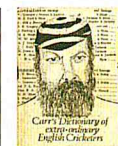
A keen fly-fisherman, Barclay brings the attributes of the best anglers to his writing – patience, lack of ostentation, wry humour and understated skill. He avoids taking the blunderbuss to anything which moves, and that is most refreshing.

Paul Coupar is a former features editor of The Wisden Cricketer

IN A TWEET
**A FRESH PERSPECTIVE
ON A FAMILIAR CAST**

CARR'S CRICKETER: OLD WAT

A Swaledale sheepdog who, with Mr Trumper of Harefield, defeated Two Gentlemen of Middlesex in 1827. Scores – Two Gents: 1st inns, 3 (both run out); 2nd inns, 3 (both run out). Mr Trumper: 3 (and 2 for his dog); 2nd inns, 2*.



Taken from Carr's Dictionary of Extra-Ordinary Cricketers (1977) by JL Carr, the novelist and cricket enthusiast. Republished by Aurum in 2005. Next month: John Derrick