

Wisden Cricketers' Almanack, or simply Wisden, colloquially the Bible of Cricket, is a cricket reference book published annually in the United Kingdom. The description "bible of cricket" was first used in the 1930s by Alec Waugh in a review for the London Mercury. In October 2013, an all-time Test World XI was announced to mark the 150th anniversary of Wisden Cricketers' Almanack.

In 1998, an Australian edition of Wisden Cricketers' Almanack was launched. It ran for eight editions.

In 2012, an Indian edition of Wisden Cricketers' Almanack was launched (dated 2013), entitled Wisden India Almanack, that has been edited by Suresh Menon since its inception.

Wisden was founded in 1864 by the English cricketer John Wisden (1826–84) as a competitor to Fred Lillywhite's *The Guide to Cricketers*. Its annual publication has continued uninterrupted to the present day, making it the longest running sports annual in history. The sixth edition was the first published under its current title; the first five were published as *The Cricketer's Almanack*, with the apostrophe before the "s".

Charles Pardon, with George Kelly King, founded the Cricket Reporting Agency (CRA) in 1880. From Pardon's becoming editor of Wisden in 1887, the editor was nearly always a CRA partner and the CRA was responsible for the editorial production of the Almanack, until in 1965 it merged with the Press Association (PA).

Wisden was acquired and published by Robert Maxwell's publishing conglomerate, Macdonald, in the 1970s. Cricket fan Sir John Paul Getty, Jr., bought the company, John Wisden & Co., in 1993 and in December 2008 it was sold to A&C Black, which is owned by Bloomsbury. The company presented the Wisden Trophy, for Test matches between England and West Indies, in 1963 to celebrate its 100th edition.

In 2013, a history of Wisden was published: *The Little Wonder: The Remarkable History of Wisden*, by Robert Winder (ISBN 978-1408136263). "The Little Wonder" was John Wisden's nickname.

Wisden is a small-paged but a very thick book (over 1,500 pages in modern editions) with a distinctive bright yellow cover that it has carried since the 75th edition in 1938. Prior to that, covers varied between yellow, buff and salmon pink. That edition was also the first to display the famous woodcut of two cricketers, by Eric Ravilious, on its cover. It is published each April, just before the start of the English domestic cricket season. Since 2003 the woodcut has been replaced as the main feature of the front cover by a photograph of a current cricketer, but still appears albeit in a much-reduced size.

It is produced in both hardcover and softcover versions. Since 2006, a larger format edition has been published on an experimental basis. This is said to be in response to requests from readers who find the print size of the standard edition hard to read. It is around twice the traditional size and was

published in a limited edition of 5,000. It is not a large print book as such, as the print will still be of a size found in many standard books.

From 2011 an Epub version, The Shorter Wisden, has been available in online bookstores. Described by the publishers as a "distillation of what's best in its bigger brother", it includes the Notes by the Editor, all the articles, reviews and obituaries and the reports on all England's Test matches for the year in question. Excluded are the statistics and other cricket reports contained within the Almanack proper.

The contents of a contemporary edition include the following sections:

Comment: Around a hundred pages of articles on cricketing topics, including the introductory "Notes by the Editor", which address often controversial cricket issues and always provoke discussion in the cricketing world.

Awards: The traditional Wisden Cricketers of the Year awards, which date back to 1889, and the Wisden Leading Cricketer of the World award, started in 2004.

Records: Traditionally the main source for key statistics about the game, although it has never attempted to be comprehensive. Nowadays the records section is intended to be complementary to the much more detailed data available online at Wisden's associated website ESPNcricinfo.

English cricket: By far the largest section of the book. Hugely detailed coverage, including scorecards of every First class game played in the previous English summer, and summaries of minor counties, second eleven, university, school and premier club cricket, as well as the Village Cup.

Overseas cricket: Full coverage of all international cricket and brief coverage of domestic first class cricket outside England.

Law and administration : This short section, 80 pages in the 2010 edition, has information about and addresses of official cricket bodies as well as the full laws of cricket, together with appendices. There are also details of meetings held by official bodies, including their major decisions, as well as articles about the Duckworth–Lewis method and Powerplays. The laws have been omitted from the most recent editions.

The Wisden Review: This section includes the Chronicle (noteworthy events from the previous year), reviews of other cricket books published in the year, noteworthy retirements and the highly regarded obituaries section among others.

Book reviews and the Wisden Book of the Year: John Arlott wrote the Books section from its inception in the 1950 edition until the 1992 edition, just before he died. Beginning with the 1993 edition the Books section has been written by a different person each year, often someone "with a literary reputation first and a separate enthusiasm for cricket". The first such reviewer was J. L. Carr, and others have included Sebastian Faulks (1997) and Leslie Thomas (1998).

The Almanack: This section contains fixtures for the forthcoming international and English domestic season, the international schedule for the upcoming seven years and the Index of Unusual Occurrences featuring quirky cricketing stories. A selection from recent years includes: Rabbit burns down pavilion; Hot-air balloons stop play; Cricketers arrested for dancing naked; Fine leg arrives by parachute; Fried calamari stopped play; Umpire locked in ground overnight.

Wisden has had a large number of contributors. The majority involve match reports for the various fixtures recorded each year, but also biographies, reviews and opinion. Many great cricket writers have written for Wisden, along with many great cricketers. Neville Cardus contributed many notable essays and for many years John Arlott was responsible for the book reviews.

Since 1902 (with the occasional exception) Wisden has honoured five cricketers for their outstanding achievements over the previous year. Further details, with a full list of recipients of the award, can be found at Wisden Cricketers of the Year.

For the first 32 years of its existence the Almanack was only published in softback form, in a paper cover that varied in colour through the years between shades of pink, yellow and buff. From the 33rd (1896) edition onwards hardback copies became available at twice the price of the softback.

In 1889 the Almanack published its first photoplate, commissioned to accompany the Editor's nomination of six great Bowlers of the Year. From then on a photoplate appeared each year up to and including 1915. The plates were attached to an un-numbered page in the Almanack and had a tissue protector. They continued to show a number of selected players of the year except in 1896, when W G Grace was the only subject, and in 1913, when the 50th edition published no selections but celebrated John Wisden himself. After a two-year hiatus during World War 1 the plate reappeared in 1918, but as a mechanically printed image depicting five School Bowlers of the Year. The image in the 1919 edition continued to reflect wartime exigencies with its five Public School Cricketers of the Year before normal service resumed in 1920 with five Batsmen of the Year. From then on, with four exceptions (see Wisden Cricketers of the Year), the norm was to include an image of five Cricketers of the Year. It was not until 1938 that other photographs were introduced.

From 1933 to 1939 the softback editions of the Almanack contained a cricket bat bookmark attached by the blade to the inside of the spine with yellow string. The bat handle of the bookmark is easily lost and softbacks with entirely intact bookmarks command a price premium.

In 1938 the Almanack underwent some significant style, design and material changes under the supervision of Robert Henry Harling. He introduced a new typeface and new designs for the front covers of both the softback and hardback editions. A yellow linen cover featuring the iconic woodcut by Eric Ravilious replaced the paper wrapper of the softback edition – a reason why softbacks from this time onwards are often referred to as "linens" even though they changed to a cloth-effect card binding in 1957. The design of the softback from 1938 onwards is probably the one most associated with the word "Wisden" in the mind of the general public.

There was a change to the orientation of the gilt lettering on the spines of hardbacks from 1941 to 1948. This was probably required by, and then a relict of, the slimness of the volumes published during World War 2. Excepting the 1963 centenary softback, the external appearance of both types of the Almanack then remained substantially unchanged until 1965 when the hardback was issued with a dust jacket. This was printed on yellow paper with the same design as the softback, giving a uniformity of appearance to both formats.

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The first three facsimile sets reproduced the wrong back cover for the 1878 edition – they incorrectly showed a list of articles supplied by John Wisden & Co. The Willows facsimile contains the correct advertisement, for a book on Oxford and Cambridge cricket matches from 1827 to 1876.

To celebrate the 150th edition, a facsimile of the 1864 edition was offered by John Wisden & Co as an incentive for those who subscribed to both the 2013 and 2014 editions. The facsimile offer was repeated in 2014 for those willing to subscribe to the Almanack by direct debit. This is not a true facsimile as the back cover does not reproduce the "List of Articles" of the original, but instead on the inside there is an advertisement for Wisden reprints from the Willows Publishing Company and on the back a celebration of 150 years of Wisden. At the bottom of the back cover information is provided about the reprint: "This reprint of the first edition of Wisden was produced in 2013 for the publisher, John Wisden & Co, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. Printed and bound by MPG Books."

Facsimile dust jackets are available for editions of Wisden from 1965 to 2003 to replace those that have been lost or damaged. They are also offered from 2004 onward as "traditional covers" that can be substituted for the original photo dust jackets. Supplied by Wisden's "official dust jacket supplier", these jackets are laminated and are printed in black on yellow (unlike the original jackets issued with the editions from 1965 to 1978 that incorporated colour elements). Replacement dust jackets are also clearly distinguishable from the originals as they are marked on the back cover with the words "REPLACEMENT DUST JACKET".

The same supplier offers traditional design dust jackets for editions from 1946 to 1964. Although these mimic the appearance of the softback covers they are not true facsimiles as the original hardback editions were never issued with dust jackets.

On 1 December 2018 Willows Publishing sold all their remaining stock of circa 2500 books to www.wisdenauction.com

The size of Wisden print runs is of considerable interest to collectors as rarity has a very strong influence on the value of individual editions.

