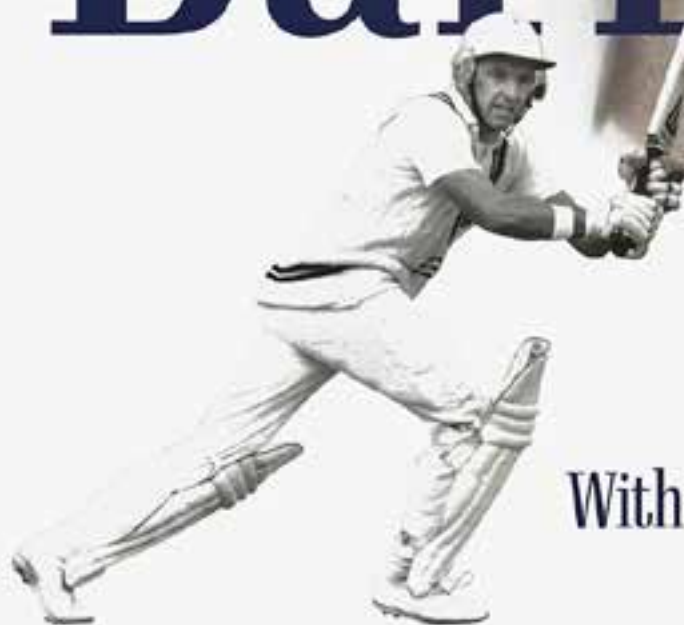


**BETTER
THAN HE
KNEW**

THE *Graham*
Barlow
Story



With James Hawkins

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Highs and lows

TWO POSTCODES, more than 200 miles apart, are the locations where Graham Barlow experienced the highest and lowest points of his 17-year playing career. Scarborough and Enfield cricket clubs are historic settings, both established in the mid-19th century. The contrast in fortunes that Graham experienced at these two grounds could not be more stark.

*Scarborough Cricket Club, North Marine Road,
Scarborough, YO12 7TJ
26 August, 1976*

The pinnacle of Graham's career was his international debut at Scarborough against the all-conquering West Indies team of 1976. The *Daily Express* back-page headline the following day undoubtedly captured the mood, 'Barlow's finest hour'. Graham's debut was the first of three one-day internationals played for the Prudential Trophy following the end of the Test series. It was day one of an international career that lasted just 300 days.

Graham's journey to this point had not been an easy one and it was a far cry from the tenement flat in Stockwell which his family had been renting 15 years earlier. Following the family's relocation to Ealing, Graham's transformation from schoolboy honours at Ealing Grammar School to Middlesex colours, via Brentham

Cricket Club, had been relatively seamless. After his first-class and Championship debuts as a 19-year-old in 1969, Graham found the transition from schoolboy cricket to county cricket much tougher and struggled to make an impression for the next couple of years. A wise decision to take a three-year sabbatical to study physical education at Loughborough College followed. When Graham returned to Middlesex in 1974, he was in and out of the first team. Twelve months before, almost to the day, he had bagged a pair against Warwickshire. Graham played for Middlesex in both losing Lord's one-day finals in 1975, but some would argue his inclusion was mainly on the strength of his fielding. Before the 1976 season had started, Graham's place in the Middlesex first team was far from guaranteed.

Graham's England call-up was thoroughly deserved. He was in the form of his life, with almost 1,900 runs in all competitions, including four centuries, that included his maiden first-class and one-day hundreds. He was averaging more than 50 in first-class cricket and had been awarded his county cap. Middlesex were riding high at the top of the County Championship, lining up their first trophy since 1949. In the *Daily Mail* of Friday, 20 August, Alex Bannister wrote under the headline, 'England call in the young ones at last', suggesting that Graham was now a serious candidate for the winter tour of India.

There had been a bit of a build-up in the press, but I was still surprised to get the call-up. There was nothing official, I just remember someone coming and telling me. The chairman of selectors, Alec Bedser, was a nice guy, but he didn't have great communication skills and surrounded himself with old players, that we referred to as 'rockers from the locker'. The fact I played for Middlesex certainly made a difference to the other competitors. Gubby Allen was always at Lord's and would watch every ball from the committee room. His opinions were always listened

to because people seemed scared of him. Looking back, I wasn't ready to play at that level. I was in a bubble. It was as simple as see it, hit it. OK, it's gone for four.

The preceding Middlesex game saw Graham score a half-century in a losing cause against Essex in the John Player League. On the following Wednesday, Graham made his way by car up to Scarborough, arriving at the team's hotel to find that he was rooming with the Northamptonshire stalwart and 1975 BBC Sports Personality of the Year, David Steele, who would make his sole one-day appearance and play in his last match for England.

I didn't know David from Adam, but he was very down to earth, and we got on well. He was known for being so difficult to get out and played forward to everything, even after it whizzed past his ear holes! After the team meal, we chatted, and I remember his very simple view on facing the West Indian pace attack. He told me to remember these boys can only bowl one ball at a time. He wasn't worried at all and had found a way to deal with the pace. Walking into the England set-up was pretty daunting. The one person that I knew was Both [Ian Botham], who was also playing his first England game. Before he joined Somerset, he was on the MCC ground staff, and our paths had crossed at Lord's as young professionals.

Graham's first game was a match of debuts and the first of only two international men's matches at the historic Scarborough ground. For England, a 20-year-old Ian Botham, Graham Gooch, John Lever and David Steele all played their first one-day internationals. For West Indies, Michael Holding and Collis King also played in their first ODIs.

One-day international cricket was still very much in its infancy. It seems difficult to believe now, but England had not played an ODI

since June 1975 when they were defeated by Australia in the World Cup semi-final. Despite being the inaugural World Cup winners, West Indies had played only once since the final, beaten by Australia at Adelaide in December. The match was only the 37th one-day international since the inception of the format in 1971 and the 20th played by England.

G.D. Barlow not out 80

The Scarborough ground was packed with 13,000 spectators. The gates were closed half an hour before the start of play, with the holiday crowd hoping to enjoy the last of the hot summer weather.

The England captain Tony Greig had chipped a bone in his finger playing for Sussex, so Alan Knott deputised. On the morning of the game, England decided to leave out Surrey seamer Robin Jackman and another promising young batsman, Derek Randall. Clive Lloyd won the toss and put England into bat in swing-friendly bowling conditions caused by morning mist blown in from the North Sea.

The match started disastrously for England when the only Yorkshire-born member of the team, now playing for Lancashire, Barry Wood, was bowled first ball of the match by Andy Roberts. David Steele then edged low to Collis King at slip and Bob Woolmer was beaten for pace by Michael Holding, mistiming a hook and gifting a simple catch to wicketkeeper Deryck Murray. The score was 23/3 and the blond-haired Graham Barlow strode to the wicket.

All season I had been batting at three or four, so I was glad when I found out that I was down at number five because I thought that new-ball attack would sort me out. I was thinking that the ball would be knackered by the time I got in. I hadn't faced anything like that sort of pace before; the next closest was facing Keith Boyce bowling very quickly for Essex at Ilford. I got my pads on early for some reason and I was batting inside the first ten overs. As I walked out, I felt incredibly nervous.

Michael Holding was fresh from his match-winning figures of 14-149 in the final Oval Test match, which helped to inflict another heavy defeat on England. This opening spell would include the first of 5,473 balls that he would bowl in one-day internationals, with Woolmer the first of his 142 scalps in 102 appearances. He was now standing at the end of his exceptionally long run-up with Graham waiting and with too much time to think.

There were two or three balls left in the over. You couldn't hear Michael running in, the Whispering Death nickname was so true and very different to facing Dennis Lillee or Syd Lawrence. Michael was a real athlete. You could tell by the way he moved that he had represented Jamaica in the 400m. I remember deciding to lift my bat to half stump height as he approached. He released a good-length ball on a fourth-stump line. I moved to play my shot and THUD! The ball was in Deryck Murray's gloves. It felt like the speed of light! I thought to myself, 'What on earth am I doing here? I am not good enough for this.' The game was televised, and the ground was rammed. I could feel sweat rolling down my back for fear of letting everyone down. The second ball was an attempted bouncer, but the pitch was slow. I played it as though it was a throat ball, but it didn't get up and hit the bottom of my glove on my bottom hand and the ball landed at my feet. There were quite a few slips, but no short leg. I was quick in those days and fear does funny things to you, so I was off like a rocket down the other end, taking the get out of jail card. Thankfully Dennis [Amiss] was backing up.

A bowling change brought on Bernard Julien. He was sharpish and swung the ball, but nowhere near the pace of Holding and Roberts. I blocked two then he pitched one up on my legs that I whipped away one bounce for four and I was away.

In the next passage of play, Graham and Amiss added 49 runs at a run-a-minute before Amiss was bowled around his legs by Julien. Graham then joined forces with Graham Gooch, and the two debutants put on 64 to further rebuild the innings.

Amiss recalls Graham's debut fondly, 'It was a high-class innings against that pace attack. He looked every bit at home in his England cap and sweater. Graham was good to bat with, and his off-side shots were Gowerish. Graham fitted into the team so well and was very lively and attentive in the field.'

Graham Barlow's debut innings lasted 15 minutes short of three hours and ended with him 80 not out from 139 balls with eight boundaries. In doing so he became the eighth England cricketer to score a half-century in one-day internationals and the third left-hander behind John Edrich and David Lloyd. It was a brave innings, but not without good fortune. He survived dropped chances on 19 and 38, and a most unusual incident occurred when he was on 71.

I was batting with Knotty towards the end and we took a single to Michael Holding down at fine leg. His return hit the stumps at the keeper's end and ricocheted down to break the stumps the bowler's end with both batsmen out of their ground, as we ran an overthrow. Jepo [Arthur Jepson] was umpiring and decided that neither of us were out. The West Indies weren't too happy, and play was held up for a while. I wasn't sure whether he was right or not to be honest.

After a final flurry with Derek Underwood, the England innings closed on 202/8 from their 55 overs, with Andy Roberts taking 4-32. Trevor Bailey, reporting in *The Financial Times*, liked what he saw: 'Although Barlow did give a couple of chances during his innings he played very well and in addition to producing some good strokes gave the impression of confidence in his own ability – so often the sign of a good player.' Peter Johnson in the *Daily Mail* was equally complimentary, 'Graham Barlow found the courage to use his skill

and ride his luck to make 80 of his side's inadequate 202. His innings full of fierce off-side driving.' Michael Melford, writing in the *Daily Telegraph* under the headline, 'West Indies race home despite defiant Barlow' was also encouraging, 'It is his athletic belligerence, which commends him most strongly at this point. Off front and back foot, he hits the ball with great enthusiasm and is not slow to bang it over the top if the opportunity arises ... there is a spirit and range of stroke, which confirmed all the hopes held of him.'

In reply, West Indies made light of the England total. Viv Richards scored his maiden one-day international hundred, ending unbeaten on 119 from 133 balls, which continued his golden summer. It was two weeks since his mammoth 291 in the final Test match at The Oval. Only Derek Underwood and Barry Wood stemmed the onslaught as West Indies stormed home by six wickets with 14 overs to spare.

Graham was now the 32nd player to represent his country in one-day international cricket, the 31st being his county team-mate Fred Titmus, who of the more experienced members of the Middlesex playing staff had been the most supportive in Graham's early days and still referred to him as 'The Boy'.

I remember Fred commenting on my success in 1976, saying that I had scored quickly and put the team in winning positions. It was the only time that I ever heard that I had contributed more than most. To hear that from Fred, someone who knew what he was talking about, gave me a huge buzz.

Two weeks later at the same venue, whilst playing for T.N. Pearce's XI against the West Indians, Graham learnt of his selection to tour India alongside his Middlesex team-mate Mike Selvey. Less than three months later, on 17 December, Graham became the 470th man to play Test cricket for England, against India at New Delhi. On 22 June 1977, just over six months later, Graham would leave

the field as an England player for the last time, palpably lbw to Len Pascoe on the final day of the Jubilee Test against Australia on his home ground at Lord's.

Graham never reached the highs of his first match at Scarborough again in an England shirt. He scored heavily in the tour warm-up matches, but when he stepped up, nerves got the better of him and his potential was left unfulfilled. In the field, and as a tourist, he was second to none. Later in his career, he felt he was ready for another chance, but the opportunity to play again at the highest level never came.

There was talk in 1985, when I scored five centuries in six matches, that I might be in with a shout again. I was a much better player by then and I knew how to play quick bowling, which was all thanks to watching Slacky [Wilf Slack] down the other end. By that time, though I was 35, England were playing well in the Ashes, Goochie [Graham Gooch] and Tim Robinson were the established openers and both scoring runs. I was forced to retire a year later, so it didn't really matter.

Enfield Cricket Club, Lincoln Road, Enfield, EN1 2RY
4 August 1982

Just three weeks shy of six years to the day since his international debut, Graham found himself playing in the Middlesex second XI, fearing for his livelihood and missing out on an all-important benefit year.

After being picked for England and touring, I admit that I had an elevated sense of my own importance and an inflated ego. This made me ignore my usual principles and ended my marriage. I couldn't score a run at the start of the 1977 season and was dropped from the England set-up. I slotted back into the Middlesex middle order, and we became a

very decent side and had more than our fair share of success. In 1981, the partnership with Slacky started when Brears [Mike Brearley] was suddenly called away on Test duty. It ended up being my best season since my breakthrough year. I scored well in all competitions, batting up and down the order.

After the disappointments of 1977, Graham reached the benchmark of a 1,000 first-class runs for four consecutive seasons. His performances were solid and consistent, but not spectacular enough to catch the selectors' eyes, and England had also found another free-scoring left-hander in David Gower. It was a period that saw a lot of rotation in the Middlesex batting line-up with Graham, Roland Butcher, Clive Radley and an emerging Mike Gatting forming the bedrock of the middle order. In 1977, the success of the previous year was backed up by sharing the Championship with Kent and beating Glamorgan in the Gillette Cup Final. In 1980, the same double was achieved, although this time the Championship win was outright. In 1981, Graham had his best return since 1976 and was the county's player of the year for his 'fine batting form and exemplary fielding'. A newly formed opening partnership with Wilf Slack saw the pair break the county record opening partnership with an unbroken 367 against Kent at Lord's. Less than two weeks later, Graham made his career best of 177 against Lancashire at Southport.

During the winter, Graham was not invited to join the South African Breweries England rebel tour, though he freely admits that he would have gone, because it was so lucrative. It proved to be a difficult winter for personal reasons off the field, and when Mike Brearley returned to open the innings with Wilf Slack, whose place was now cemented as the regular opener, Graham was moved to No.3. As the 1982 season began, his off-the-field problems appeared to manifest themselves on the field as well. Graham struggled for runs and by early June his highest score in all formats was just 37 not out.

G.D. Barlow ct and bld Simmons 0

G.D. Barlow bld Simmons 1

By mid-June, Graham was out of the first team; his final first-class innings against the touring Pakistanis saw him clean bowled by Imran Khan without scoring. Three weeks earlier Graham had experienced the exact same fate when Imran appeared for Sussex in the Championship. The pattern was no different in one-day cricket. After two dismissals in four days for just a single by Lancashire's Jack Simmons, August was spent playing and captaining the second XI. In the last game of the season, Graham scored a hundred in a big win against Essex at Willesden, but 370 runs from his eight second team games was scant reward for a capped player of Graham's pedigree.

The coach, Don Bennett, was well respected, but I never really knew where I stood with him. I remember when I was much younger how sparing he was with praise. As a 30-something, it was the most difficult time for me and I was at my lowest ebb. The team that I had been part of for so long were doing well and I was now on the outside looking in.

The first team secured another Championship, which would be Mike Brearley's last before retirement. Ten months of torment would pass before Graham's next first-class appearance and his return to the Middlesex first XI at the top of the order with a century against Lancashire at Lord's, on 5 May 1983. Michael Melford confirmed Graham's return to form in the *Daily Telegraph*, 'A lot of Middlesex's success in the past few years has been facilitated by his runs and his return must be highly encouraging.'

From that day on, the now white-helmeted Graham, with a new, slightly raised bat set-up, remained at the top of the Middlesex order with room-mate Wilf Slack. He now enjoyed arguably the most successful period of his career until his sudden retirement due

to a back injury in June 1986. His departure from the game left a final record of 508 appearances, 18,393 runs, 31 centuries and his memorably athletic fielding.