

INSIDE THE BOX – My Life With Test Match Special by Peter Baxter with foreword by Jonathan Agnew  
Pp 224 Illustrated. Published by Quiller Books.

Great broadcasting institutions are bourn out of teamwork; whether it's the writers, actors, presenters; or in the case of Test Match Special, the commentators and expert summarisers who are the eyes and ears of the listener during the five days of a test match. Good teams need a leader, and between 1973 and 1997 that job fell to Peter Baxter, who, with the help of Shilpa Patel and others has moulded the team into what it has become today.

The book's strength is that without any broadcasting or technical jargon, one gets a very good insight into the production of one of the most enduring sports broadcasts.

Peter Baxter inherited a good team, including John Arlott, Brian Johnston, E. W. Swanton, Bill Frindall and Norman Yardley. The author and publishers are to be commended on the inclusion in the book of Frindall's untimely death in Dubai at the end of January. There is a nice reference to John Arlott taking Frindall under his wing when the scorer took over in 1966. Arlott apparently said to him "You like driving, I like drinking. We're going to get on very well".

And that is the book's charm. Little vignettes which give the reader an insight into the personalities of the people who become "friends" via the radio but who they are unlikely to ever get to know personally.

Peter Baxter talks with enthusiasm about the "pillars of TMS" Jonathan Agnew, Christopher Martin-Jenkins (who, had Angus McKay, the one time editor of the BBC sports desk had his way, might now be known as "Chris Jenkins"! ) and Henry Blofeld. Then there are the newcomers such as Simon Mann; the experts such as Mike Selvey and Vic Marks; and the foreign friends such as Tony Cozier, Jim Maxwell and Brian Waddle.

The future of TMS has not always been assured, and Peter Baxter has spent some time fighting his programme's corner with his peers and masters within the BBC. He, as many of the programme's listeners, believe that TMS should be the province of the best commentators, as opposed to perfectly competent staff commentators. Not everybody within the BBC shares that view; and it will be interesting to see whether in a few years time, the programme's current producer Adam Mountford is able to write as enjoyable an account of his time "Inside The Box" as has Peter Baxter.

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