

BOOK REVIEWS

David Rayvern Allen (ed., *Arlott on Cricket: His Writings on the Game*. Willows Books, Collins, London, 1984. pp.308. \$27.95.

E.W. Padwick's *A Bibliography of Cricket* (2nd ed., 1984) lists some 83 publications to 1980 that have been the sole responsibility of John Arlott. When to that is added the number of contributions that he has made to benefit brochures, club histories and the like over the years, then one begins to realise the enormity of David Rayvern Allen's task in culling the 'best' for a book of 300 pages. But perhaps this is unfair to Arlott; Allen might have chosen another 300 pages of Arlott's work, completely different, and come up with a book of an equally high standard.

This is a solid four-square volume that stands as eloquent testimony to the quality of Arlott the writer. His style is pragmatic, and pithy; he never wastes words or deviates from the topic at hand. It is almost diametrically opposite to the more flowery writing of his-predecessor at *The Guardian*, Neville Cardus. Arlott's character sketches are superb, revealing a complete understanding of the nature, the motivation and even the weaknesses of his subject. All Arlott's writing bears the stamp of a man who has done his homework. 'He writes authoritatively on a wide range of subjects from a concise history of touring teams in America, through a lengthy dissertation of the lives of Alresford's (Hampshire) famous cricketers of the late eighteenth century, to a scholarly essay on cricket literature. In every contribution Arlott demonstrates a vital awareness of the origins of the game.

Arlott is equally literate writing on the controversial issues that pervade the game from time to time. His discerning dissection is utterly convincing. Arlott champions no one single group; both the 'Establishment' and those that are seen to be 'Anti-establishment' come in for criticism where such comment is deemed to be deserved. No one can doubt Arlott's honesty.

It was my three-year-old son who recently pointed out an omission that had previously escaped my notice. 'Daddy, there are

no pictures'. Apart from the extremely attractive dust-cover photograph of Arlott posing in his library, there are indeed no photographs, unusual in such a large book. Quite frankly, the book does not suffer through this paucity of illustration, for Arlott's 'word pictures' more than adequately convey his message.

One minor annoyance is the lack of a detailed table of contents. It would also have been useful to have included a bibliography of Arlott's cricket works. Perhaps the task was felt to be too onerous, given that Geoffrey Whitelock took four issues of the *Journal of the Cricket Society* to do much the same thing.

It's not easy to do justice to this fine book in a short review and I'm reminded of a club cricketer attempting a critical treatise on the technical merits of Don Bradman's batting. This book is both authoritative and entertaining, an impressive compilation of essays from the pen of one of the greatest cricket critics.

Richard Finlay
West Hobart