

ILLUSTRATING SPORTS HISTORY

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Richard Bouwman, *Glorious Innings: Treasures from the Melbourne Cricket Club Collection*, Hutchinson Australia, Melbourne, 1987. Bibliog., illus., index, pp. xi+131. \$29.95; David Frith, *Pageant of Cricket*. Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1987. Illus., index. pp.640. \$69.95, Reet Howell and Maxwell Howell, *A History of Australian Sport*. Shakespeare Head, Sydney, 1987. Illus. pp.156. \$24.95.

Sports history suffers, in comparison with some other fields, in the availability of written primary source material. When it comes to pictorial history, however, the situation is reversed: sports history is much more amply endowed, in terms of quantity, quality and variety, than most other areas of history.

Many of the first academic sports history monographs failed to mine this very rich vein. I am as guilty as most. My first endeavours in sports history *Sport in History* and *Patrons, Players and the Crowd*, had no illustrations whatsoever apart from a diagram in the second book.

The case for illustrating sports history is really quite overwhelming as these three books under review attest. Pictorial material reveals a great deal about a particular game and the artist's perspective of what was important in the game. A picture can also be reinterpreted for its hidden agenda in terms of organisation of a contest, watchers, styles and traditions of play, ideology and even moments of unrest. An analysis of pictures yields information about the age, gender and social status of a crowd for instance.

Pictures, and paintings in particular, reveal much about the ideology of games. Art has played an important role in the celebration and the promotion of sport. The rise of organised sport coincided with the rise of photography and the growth of pictorial supplements particularly in weekly newspapers. The extensive publication first of lithographs and then of actual photographs of events and participants must have played a very significant role in the growth of sport at this time.

The use of pictorial material also provides the academic writer with an opportunity of communicating if not with the broader sports public at least with some sections of it.

Although some minor criticisms can be made of the three books under review, they are all particularly welcome because each points to the great potential of illustrated sports history.

The Melbourne Cricket Club, based on the superb Anthony Baer collection, is one of the finest of its kind. Visiting it for the first time is like contemplating the crown jewels, the display is so dazzling that it is hard to know where to start and how to absorb the vast richness of the offerings. *Glorious Innings* is a welcome guide to a small portion of the Melbourne Cricket Club's treasures as it is based on a very successful formula. The book is based on three concurrent strands. First there is the picture of each artifact and a precise description of its dimensions, type (lithograph, engraving, painting), its date, its maker, owner and location. Next there are side notes explaining the significance of the item in question. Finally there is a brief chronological text which provides a history of some aspects of the game and provides a general historical context for the artifacts.

There are two commendable features of this book. *Glorious Innings* will assist visitors to the Museum to dwell on a particular item and to consider its particular meaning. The volume will also encourage those who come to place individual items in some broader historical context rather than seeing them as a random collection of outstanding and colourful artifacts.

Sir Donald Bradman, in his Foreword to *Pageant of Cricket*, states that this illustrated history of cricket 'goes closer to providing us with a complete picture of the past [of cricket] than anyone else has been able to achieve.'

The effort involved in producing this work was quite staggering. 2,000 illustrations were culled carefully from 50,000 picture references which were in turn selected from some 500,000 illustrations examined. The lengthy and very valuable captions to the selected pictures add up to more than 120,000 words.

Although this is not a conventional history of the game, and probably shouldn't be compared with them, it will be far more useful than any existing history. The inclusion of so many well-chosen pictures more than supplements the text; the illustrations are suggestive in their own right.

There is a very good collection for instance on 18th century paintings and engravings, dating from the 1740s, which brought home to me more vividly the links between art and cricket. Recurrent themes, cricket played in bucolic surroundings and young boys with the dreamy eyes of cricket devotees, attest and splendidly illustrate the romanticisation and elevation of cricket in the 18th century.

Although there are some pictures of cricket in countries other than England, this is mainly a volume about the pageant of cricket in England. It would probably take another volume of this size to cover adequately the cavalcade of cricket in other countries.

A History of Australian Sport, by Reet and Max Howell, is worth purchasing simply for the fine spread of 19th century pictures.

While there are some familiar illustrations from some of the major sports, there is an impressive coverage of minor sports such as pictures of an intercolonial handball match (1875), an eight-oared race (1875), a lacrosse game (1876), intercolonial polo tourn-

ament (1880), a penny-farthing bicycle race (1882) a pedestrian meeting (1890s) and an automobile race (1904).

This is by far the best part of the book because as the 20th century progresses the major and success-story sports, and particularly the Games, seem to dominate at the expense of the minor sports.

Most of the illustrations are captioned effectively in that the authors list the source and, when a newspaper is involved, the date of publication. Unfortunately a few of the illustrations, such as the Anniversary Regatta, are undated which detracts from their inclusion.

The Howells are also to be congratulated for including a fine range of illustrations relating to women, in fact, this is one sports history book in which women feature almost as much as men. There are some excellent pictures relating to women's sport in the 19th century which suggest that it was quite varied: these include one of swimming and diving at St Kilda (1878), ladies' archery (1878), activities at a ladies' gymnasium (1881), 'Professor' Cavill's ladies' swimming class (1882) and two undated pictures of a women's lacrosse team and two women involved in roller hockey.

There are also other pictures featuring mixed sport: mixed doubles in tennis in 1887 and pictures of the memberships of tennis and archery clubs.

It is not particularly fair to analyse, from an academic perspective, the brief text which is undoubtedly aimed at a generalist rather than a specialist audience and which focusses on great events, heroes and heroines and achievements of Australian sport. However, the publication of a chronological history of Australian sport written by qualified sports historians is such a unique event that I cannot resist making a few comments.

The Howells adopt a very broad definition of sport: 'we include' they note, games of low organisation, recreational pursuits and dancing, as well as highly competitive games'. So the collection includes pictures of balls and picnics in addition to organised sport. While this is a broader definition of sport than I would prefer, I can accept that there are grey areas in any definition of sport but one has to think hard whether to include the picture of the unemployed playing cards (which the Howells do) in a history of

sport.

It is pleasing to note that one of the seven chapters is devoted to 'the years before settlement' but, unfortunately this chapter lumps together, with very little explanation, a range of diverse activities from hunting and fishing to climbing, making cat's cradles and inter-tribal tournaments. The Howells have sidestepped a number of tricky methodological questions about whether sport existed before 1788 in Australia and, if it did, what kind of sport was it and why was there a greater emphasis on pastimes and 'games of low organisation'. The chapter sits awkwardly with the other six.

There are a few minor quibbles. I don't think that cricket was 'the first competitive sport played in the colony' (p.28). That honour probably goes to boxing, a sport popular with both convicts and settlers. The comment that 'single wicket cricket was played because there were often 'not enough players' (p.28) is also dubious. This game was simply an attraction vehicle for gambling on the merits of two supposedly evenly-matched cricketers.

[Rex Harcourt and Ian Harriss have contributed the following additional notes on *Pageant of Cricket*.]

David Frith is to be congratulated on this extraordinary piece of work. He has chosen 2,000 photographs and prints that he believes provide a visual history of cricket, and he has supplemented these with 120,000 words of text. It is undoubtedly an important landmark in the literature of cricket. There is quite simply nothing like it.

Since it is the task of reviewers to draw attention to errors or deficiencies in the work under review rather than to simply dispense praise, we shall now raise a few concerns.

Frith has stated (pp.98-99) that the ground in question for the match played by the first English team in Australia in 1861-62 is the MCG. This can't be so, because we knew from the Melbourne Cricket Club minutes that a clock gable was added in 1860, and it is clearly not present in the photograph that Frith has selected. Perhaps it is the Albert ground in Sydney, because it had a stand like the one shown.

Frith seems to have repeated on p.128 the error made by Jack Pollard in mistaking Spofforth for F.R. Allan. The original photograph in the Melbourne *Leader* correctly shows the player concerned as F.R. Allan.

This raises a most important matter which relates to cricket literature in general. The attribution of sources is too imprecise. Although Frith lists his sources in the beginning of the book, he does so in a manner that does not allow verification of individual items. The book should have been documented in a manner that would allow someone else to retrace Frith's footsteps. As it stands, many of Frith's comments have to be taken on face value.

Nevertheless, there are many moments of sheer delight in this book. On p.119, for example, there is an interesting photograph of the East Melbourne Cricket ground, which no longer exists. It is now the Jolimont railway yards, and it is remarkable to realise that in the background there are buildings that do still exist.

The book also provides the basis for a social history of cricket attire. It is extraordinary to trace the evolution of the dress of both players and umpires and to realise that modern day colourful clothing is perhaps just as traditional as plain white or cream.

To sum up, Frith has produced a most remarkable book.

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