

Brian Mathew Crowley and Pat Mullins, (eds), *Cradle Days of Australian Cricket: An Anthology of the Writings of 'Felix' (T.P. Horn)*, (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1989). Illus., index, pp. 182, \$29.95.

Mathew Engel, (ed), *The Guardian Book of Cricket* (London: Penguin, 1986). Index pp. 320. \$19.95.

The largest attendances at a cricket game have represented only a small proportion of the level of popular interest in a major match. Radio has enabled homes and cars to listen to a match in progress, television coverage has created some of the technically best sports broadcasting in the world, AAP makes a fortune each summer from its clients who bring up on their computer screens the latest score. Yet, for most of cricket's history, knowledge of what has happened on the field of play has been and remains the newspaper accounts on the evening of the match and the morning after.

It is the nature of such reportage that most of it is ephemeral. Very occasionally an individual match will lift itself out of the ordinary, the deeds of the participants will pass into localised legend and, just possibly, the better newspaper accounts will stand beside the deeds they describe. Anthologies of fine cricket writing have a solid provenance, collections of specially-commissioned articles, chapters from books, magazine reminiscences. It has been a great deal harder to fashion a book out of daily reportage.

The Times managed it with *Double Century*, a celebration of its own bicentenary. *The Guardian*, a distinguished rival for a century and a half, has here collected some of its best cricket writing. No Australian newspaper has yet made such a venture. Brian Crowley and Pat Mullins have gone some way down that track by gathering from *The Australasian* the articles of Thomas Patrick Horan who wrote for nearly four decades under the pseudonym 'Felix'.

The two collections, for the period they share, provide one contrast between a weekly colonial newspaper and a great daily Liberal newspaper in a great Imperial city, a further contrast between a newspaper where sport was the staple of its readers and one whose main mission was to preach a consistent philosophy to the Cabinet of the day. The respective space allocated to cricket says it all.

Mullins and Crowley have laboured mightily to produce the 'Felix' collection. Three million words of his reporting traced through the columns of *The Australasian* between 1879 and 1916 - they filled 30 scrapbooks with photocopies. The two Australians are cricket enthusiasts with a number of books to their credit. Matthew Engel is a former Cricket Correspondent for *The Guardian*, a successor to the likes of Neville Cardus, Denys Rowbotham and John Arlott.

Concurrent with his journalism, Horan played first class cricket. he was a member of Australia's team in the first ever Test in 1877. A hard-hitting batsman who could maintain his wicket when required, Horan was a member of the Australian team that fabled day at The Oval when Spofforth ran through the best of England in the Test that gave its name to the Ashes. Horan's writings reflect a man who was well-read: he could employ metaphors that drew on literature and the classics. His understanding of the game comes through in his descriptions of its technical aspects and the reaction of the players to unfolding drama. He had a vast following for his weekly pieces known as 'Cricket Chapter' so that, each year from 1893, *The Australasian*, published his more considered views on the direction of the game in pieces entitled 'Round the Ground'.

All newspaper journalism has to be divided into pre-radio and post-radio, pre-television and post-television. Once people could hear the contents of cables from distant England in the comfort of their own homes, newspapers necessarily steered their reporters away from ball-by-ball resumes. Once people could actually see the action on a screen at home - see the critical moments over and over and over - then newspaper sports editors began to demand reportage that all

but took for granted the readers' knowledge of what happened. Description gave way to analysis, off-field controversies (real or invented) and post-match interviews. In some ways, Horan's need to explain each week what had been happening in the cricket of the week previous developed his analytical skills built around a practitioner's special insights. The collection from *The Guardian* reveals that evolution.

The first cricket pieces appeared in the paper in 1821, notices really, a part of the general news of the day. The distinctive sports section occupying pride of place at the back of a paper was an invention waiting for tabloids and the end of the century. The arrangement of pieces is not chronological. Engel has divided the book into certain common themes - Great Days, Grim Days, Country Days, Quiet Days, One-days.

The pieces reveal the same local boosterism and bias. The Great Days, for example, celebrate the English one-wicket victory in the Fifth Test of 1902, Laker's Test, the appalling Seventh Test of 1970-71, Boycott's hundredth century at Headingley and the 1981 Test that will be forever associated with Ian Botham. All this proves is that Engel is a loyal Englishman - a compilation by an Australian editor from Australian sources would doubtless overlook all of these.

There are chapters on the Roses matches and the most memorable affairs at Old Trafford. (This was, after all, a Manchester newspaper.) The themes of editorial lament are unchanging. In the 1950s writers speculated on the decline of English cricket - England was on the verge of regaining the Ashes and enjoying one of its most successful decades. In the same period others wondered whence the money would come now that the game had shed the last of its amateurs and the Attlee Government had created a proper wages system for all workers. Before the anguish of the Packer revolution, *The Guardian* noted that the members of the winning Yorkshire side in the 1969 Gillette Cup were going to receive a match payment of five

pounds. With 25,000 spectators and many millions watching on television, this contempt for the players was fatal for the Old Order.

Profiles of individuals include the inevitable pieces on Bradman and Hobbs but there is space too for moving sketches on Fred Trueman and Ken Barrington. Not all were greats - Harry Pilling of Lancashire overcame a height of 4ft 7inches to earn a regular place in the County team. Not all were players - Ernie Knights was groundsman for Hampshire for 54 years. Not all the matches made history - there is a large section of minor matches in two centuries and the annual match between the journals of the Left, *Tribune* versus *New Statesman*.

Matthew Engel brings a light touch to the editing. The pieces flow from one to another without introduction or explanation. It is otherwise with the 'Felix' collection. Crowley and Mullins labour over the explanatory context. There is just too much annotation. The Ashes Test of 1882 receives a note that occupies a full page, hardly necessary in a book that will not be attracting the general reader. Editorial intrusion is a vexed question, surely, but its absence or otherwise says much about the durability of the journalism it is collecting. Either a piece of reportage speaks largely for itself or it has perished with the event it is reporting.

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