

**Keith A P Sandiford, *Cricket and the Victorians*. Scholar Press, Aldershot, 1994. Bibliog., illus., index. pp. 207. £35.**

It is significant that Keith Sandiford acknowledges a particular debt to the careful socio-economic analysis employed by Tony Mason in his study of Victorian and Edwardian soccer. For as a single work, *Cricket and the Victorians*, stands as a contribution of equal importance to the social history of sport.

Sandiford sets out to identify cricket's place within the socio-economic, political and religious fabric of Victorian society. In explaining the pre-eminence of cricket above all other sports, he stresses a strong 'Georgian legacy'. Cricket benefited greatly from being formalised long before its counterparts. The question of why it then became one of the quintessential tenets of Victorianism is less easily understood. Sandiford therefore opts for a detailed explanation of the phenomenon, rather than attempting a definitive answer.

As well as the Georgian legacy, *Cricket and the Victorians* discusses the centrality of cricket to notions of Muscular Christianity, the dynamics of cricket's 'explosion' in participants and popularity from the late 1840s, the vexed issue of class and relationships between amateurs and

professionals, the nature and economic impact of Victorian cricket crowds, the technical and technological advances which accompanied professionalisation during the industrial era, and the diffusion of the game throughout the British empire. While all of these themes have been explored previously, not least by Sandiford himself in various individual and collaborative articles, they assume much greater clarity when synthesised into a single work.

The publicity statement modestly claims that this is a book aimed at a general readership and at undergraduates with a special interest in sports history. Without question, this audience will be well served. But those more familiar with the arguments will also find a great deal that is either new or significantly expanded. There is, for example, a valuable reassessment of the role of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) as an initiating and arbitrating body. Sandiford argues that although the MCC became the strongest club in England on the basis of affluence, longevity and cricketing skill, it never sought absolute power and authority during the Victorian era. It only relented when pressure from county committees and further dramatic expansion of the game during the early twentieth century made it clear that a central administrative body was necessary. In so far as the MCC sanctioned law and structural changes to Victorian cricket, it generally did so only in response to initiatives from others.

As much as *Cricket and the Victorian* discusses the publicly visible institutions of county cricket and Test cricket, it also devotes significant space to the impact of League and village cricket and to one of the more remarkable manifestations of Victorian cricket mania—the relative popularity of ice cricket. The volume of activity during the bitter winter of 1878/79 prompted *Wisden* to carry reports of several ice matches, and it was not unusual for regular first-class cricketers to participate.

In short, the Victorians could never satiate their desire for cricket and its accompanying ethos. Keith Sandiford—with the aid of a very comprehensive bibliography, but perhaps not by a somewhat preclusive price—has conveyed this peculiar phenomenon with clarity and insight.

Greg Ryan  
Department of History  
University of Canterbury