

Richard Christen, *Some Grounds to Appeal: The Australian Venues for First-Class Cricket*. **The author, Sydney, 1995. Bibliog., illus. pp. v + 248 + 5.** \$50 from the author, PO Box 762, Parramatta NSW 2150.

Scholars, such as John Bale, have drawn attention to the importance of the sports stadium as a promising topic for research. Others, such as John MacAloon, have looked at the way that sporting venues 'frame' an event, adding greater meaning to sporting contests. Because it is alternative 'home', a 'shrine' or even a 'church' for the dedicated sports fan, each cricket or football ground reveals much about the way sport is organised, watched and constructed around Australia.

This self-published book is an impressive and valuable contribution to the expanding literature of the sports stadium. It is an encyclopaedic in character and is a carefully-researched volume on the thirty-nine grounds on which first-class cricket has been played in Australia. There is also discussion of the World Series Cricket (WSC) grounds, which were used from 1977 to 1979. (WSC games played there have not been accorded first-class status). There is also a five-page insert which includes another two new grounds which acquired 'first-class status' in 1995/96.

Richard Christen has dug up a mine of information on each venue: there is a history of each ground and its general appearance; its changing physical character; the history of individual stands; the authorities which governed the ground; major events at the ground and the number of first-class games played there. Because cricket grounds have been shared with many other sports, the book also includes much material on the relationship of cricket with various football codes, cycling, greyhound racing and other sports. Cricket and greyhound racing shared the Gabba for many decades and the Sir Gordon Chalk Building was designed specifically for the greyhound club. Cricket grounds have also been used for a wide variety of public activity: A Shield match was transferred from the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) to Showgrounds Oval,

Wangaratta when the MCG was being prepared for a Papal Mass.

By its nature this book also contains much information about the politics of Australian sport and cricket in particular. There has been considerable debate about the extent to which major cricket games should be played in large well-appointed metropolitan grounds or whether some matches (involving international teams, Sheffield Shield and Limited Overs Domestic competition) should be played on smaller suburban grounds or at country centres. There is also the issue of the relationship between cricket and other authorities, state governments, local councils along with the proprietors of showgrounds or cricket ground trusts. Major matches in Brisbane were moved from the Exhibition Ground to the Gabba after the 1930/31 seasons because cricket authorities lost money at the Exhibition Ground. Members of the Royal National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland (RNA) gained free access to cricket matches. This became a contentious issue because many spectators borrowed RNA badges to avoid paying gate entry.

Christen also records the remarkable history of World Series Cricket grounds when Supertests and Limited Overs international matches were played on a motley collection of football ovals, a showground and a trotting track. He also discusses the miracle performed by groundsman John Maley, who nurtured pitches in concrete trays in glasshouses.

This is a handsome lavishly-illustrated book with coloured plates and black-and-white photographs. It is clearly an expensive labour of love' with the author self-publishing 5000 copies of *Some Grounds to Appeal*. Richard Christen was the deserving winner of the Literary Award of the Australian Cricket Society, the Pollard Trophy, for 1996.

This book will be an invaluable reference work for cricket historians in particular and sports historians in general. Having used this book for articles on grounds in the Oxford Companion to Australian Cricket I can attest to the thoroughness and reliability of the immense amount of research undertaken by Richard Christen.

Richard Cashman
School of History
University of New South Wales