

Martin Williamson reviews
Tom Graveney at Lord's
By Stephen Fay
Methuen, hb, 238pp, £18.99



More than just cricket

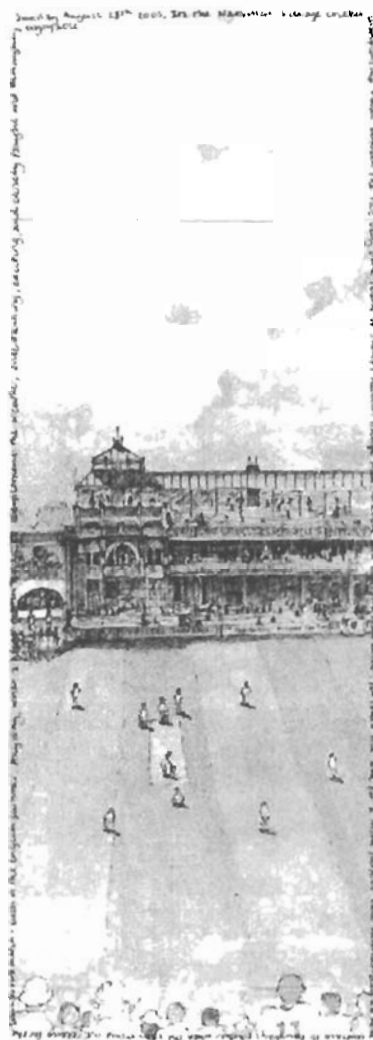
I APPROACHED this book with a degree of weariness: another book on Lord's - there are almost as many as there are books about this summer's Ashes - and one seemingly concentrating on the tenure of Tom Graveney as MCC president. I expected a fairly routine tale of the comings and goings in St John's Wood. I am happy to admit that I was very wide of the mark, although the title does it a disservice: anyone approaching the book may be forgiven for imagining a guided tour around Lord's conducted by Graveney. He is, in fact, a peripheral figure; it is the array of behind-the-scenes personalities who are the heartbeat of this book.

Stephen Fay, the former editor of *Wisden Cricket Monthly*, has managed to produce an entertaining and informative account of a year in the life at Lord's. Graveney's one-year reign gives the book its frame, and he is a colourful character in his own right, but it is the daily machinations of a multimillion-pound business that really captivate.

Lord's does so much more than just stage cricket. MCC organises more than 400 out-matches against clubs and schools each summer as well as high-profile overseas tours to emerging countries. Its role running world cricket might have all but disappeared, but that has been replaced with the important one of being the ambassadors and nurturers of the game.

It's the characters that provide the colour. From the groundsman who would prefer that people stayed off his pitches, to the pride of the man responsible for producing the members' passes, to the men who take more than 30,000 people a year on guided tours. All have their tales to tell, and to his credit, Fay gives them the space to do so.

Graveney's time at Lord's also coincided with the beginning of the end of Roger Knight's time as secretary. Fay's conversation with Knight is illuminating, that he has now also assumed the title of chief executive highlights that MCC has ceased to be a private members' club and is now a business. And perhaps there is an element of regret over what has happened when he says: "We talk about cricket too



Illuminating presence: MCC artist Karen Neale's illustrations of Lord's - including this of the National Village Cup final - add colour

little. There is a huge danger we become just a money-making machine."

The book is illustrated with pen-and-ink drawings by the talented Karen Neale, the MCC cricket artist this year. While it would have been tempting to use well-worn photographs, Neale's vignettes are a refreshing addition.

All in all, this book would appeal to anyone with an interest in cricket, all the more so if they happen to be an MCC member or a regular visitor to Lord's. Perhaps we will all be a little more attentive to the details on our next visit