

THE ART AND CRAFT OF THE LORD'S TICKET

Making an entrance

JULES AKEL

The total had reached 130. Not runs in an innings, but postcard-sized pieces of paper that opened the gates to the home of cricket. To some, perhaps, they were simply an entry ticket, a mundane record of a financial transaction. But, 25 years ago, I realised they could be more than that. And so this story began.

Back in 1992, Colin Maynard, MCC ticket office manager, saw a map I had created for The All England Lawn Tennis Club, at Wimbledon; it spurred him to commission something similar for Lord's. He must have been happy, as he promptly asked me to design the 1993 Ashes tickets, so starting a fruitful association. The commission was renewed, and extended to other major matches. By 2016, the number of tickets had reached three figures.

But what is a ticket, beyond a fragile and ephemeral item, casually discarded after the event? For me, it is far more than a token for admission. It's a store of value, which can play a substantial role in sustaining the reputation of the venue. It carries with it the eager anticipation of a day with friends, and later becomes a souvenir. From my seat I have heard them discussed (favourably), and some have been framed after the game. Usually purchased months in advance, a Test match ticket is also a significant outlay. So, from the start, I sought to make it a precious and crafted object in its own right – a symbol of the investment, and what it would unlock.

As with banknotes, the first tickets were produced using a technique that allowed fine-line work, which is a challenge for both designer and printer.



Indeed, these tickets were valuable in themselves: they contained all the necessary information – seat and row number, plus date – which meant each was unique and immediately valid. Consequently, they were delivered and stored as though they were cash, checked and double-checked and kept under lock and key at the ground. The similarity to currency went as far as the paper, with some of the early tickets printed on the Crane’s Crest stock used for the US dollar bill. Later, with the advent of online booking, full-colour printing became possible. Tickets were designed so that details such as price, date, seat, row and stand could be overprinted by MCC immediately prior to despatch.

Then there was the challenge of keeping the designs fresh. My thoughts turned to the Test nations, their cultures and religious traditions, which offer abundant visual inspiration. Sri Lanka is predominantly Buddhist, India Hindu, and Pakistan Muslim. For South Africa and Zimbabwe, I could explore the richness of tribal art; for Australia and New Zealand, Aboriginal and Maori painting, and for West Indies, the vibrant colours of the Caribbean.

All this emphasis on the visiting nation did not go unnoticed by the ECB, who in 2010 suggested the designs could be more, well, jingoistic. To my mind the quality of the game is of greater importance than the victor, but I listened, and the ticket for the one-day international against Pakistan was my response. It showed a ball comprising the cross of St George breaking stumps of Pakistani green.

A year later, my design for the ODI against India caused a rumpus. The manager of the visiting team persuaded the Indian high commissioner to complain, even though the tickets had for several months been sold in their thousands to supporters of both sides. But now an irate diplomat rang Maynard, who was enjoying a sunny Sunday morning in a deckchair in his garden.

Exception had been taken because the ticket showed an arrow, made up of a stump and red-and-white flights, embedded in the centre of the Indian flag.



A ticket from 2008, before the addition of individual details.

LORD'S
THE HOME OF CRICKET

npower
TEST SERIES

England v. Pakistan
Fourth npower Test Match

M.C.C.
Lord's Ground,
London NW9 8QY

*This Ticket admits to the seat specified.
It is for the use of the applicant or a
person accompanying the applicant.*

*No spectator may bring into the Ground more
than 2 pints of beer OR 75cl of wine. NO
FURTHER ALCOHOL will be permitted on
any subsequent re-entry.*

Fourth Day
Friday 29th August 2010—Start 11.00 a.m.

Enter stand by
Staircase N

Edrich Stand
Lower Tier

Row **11** Seat **5** **NO SMOKING**
£30

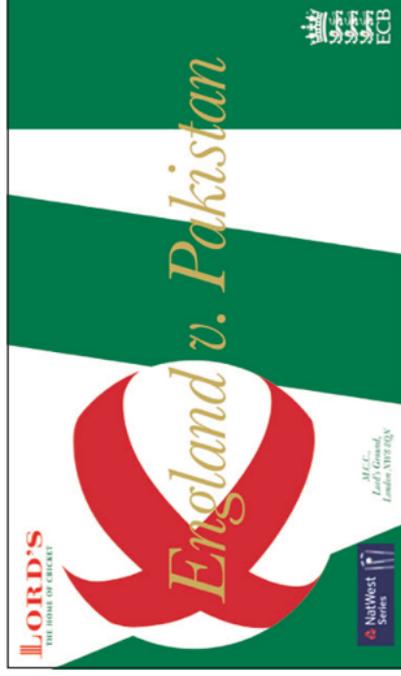
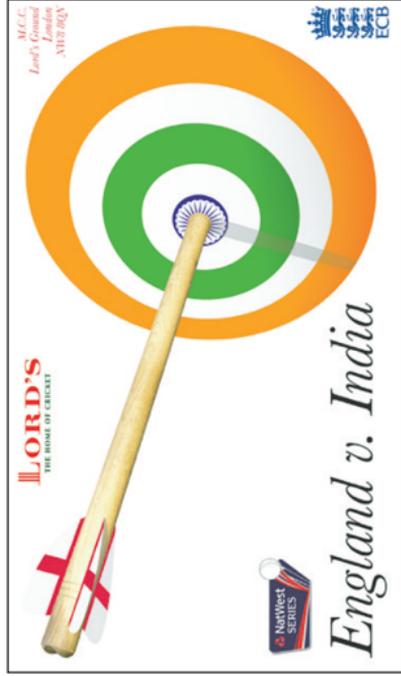
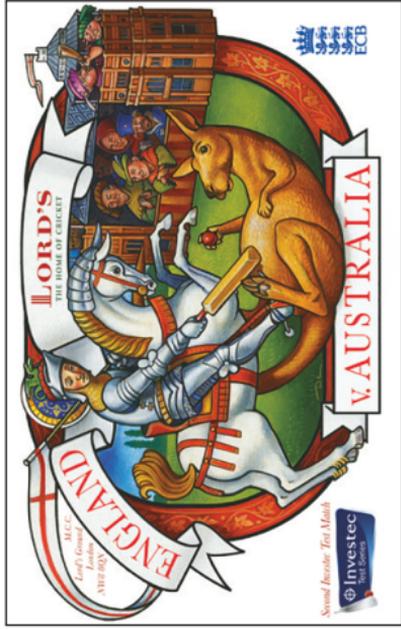
Trouble was, the centre of the Indian flag shows a wheel – the Ashoka Chakra – revered by millions. Maynard swiftly composed an emollient letter to the high commissioner, mentioning the combative nature of cricket, and smoothing ruffled feathers. Even so, designs for matches involving India were in future more sensitive, to the relief of the Maynard household.

It was different when the Australians visited. In the spring of 2012, I started work on the tickets for the 2013 Ashes Test. In a prophetic moment, I depicted St George on his stallion, poking a supine kangaroo with his bat. Sure enough, England won by 347 runs. Did my gentle sledging affect the outcome?

Surprisingly, perhaps, I have no particular favourite, though the seven reproduced here (in this article and the colour section) give a flavour of 25 years' work.

With the arrival of e-ticketing, the pictorial printed ticket, with all its creative ideas, is at an end, my small canvas rendered obsolete by the march of the machines. The new system may be efficient, but perhaps lacking in soul. Still, all things considered, and with appreciation to MCC for their loyalty, the whole experience was entrancing.

Jules Akel is a designer of brands. His book, Cricket Tickets, is published by Christopher Saunders.



TICKET TO THE CRICKET

The ingenious art of Jules Akel.