

10. CRISIS UPON CRISIS- THE END OF AN ERA

1911-1927

The year 1912 began without warning that by its end, the Wanderers Club would be so far humiliated as to sacrifice its dearest principles.

The over-worked Allsop, who had had no leave since 1907, was allowed to manage the South African Cricket Team in England without pay but was given £25 "pocket money". Bailey as usual paid all expenses. Times were slack and his work was done by his assistant J. A. F. Pearson at £10 a month extra and a strict injunction to stop his longstanding free-time occupation at Turffontein as a race judge recorder (whither no doubt Jacob Swart had lured him in the first place). Pearson was no substitute for Allsop (the Club had made him an honorary member) but did his best. He left in 1913 after nearly twenty years service and died on the 25th May 1923.

During Allsop's absence, the rodent influences on the Clubs progress began to take effect. Johannesburg had spread far beyond the original fashionable suburbs close at hand and the Wanderers had become increasingly remote from its largest source of membership. The Railways had added to its difficulties by blocking all entrances from the town side and threatening to expand the station at the expense of the playing fields. The Town Council refused to provide access by tram and revenue from all sources fell. In September 1912 the Transvaal Cricket Union transferred its matches to Ellis Park. Relations with the Rugby and Soccer Unions continued to be most unhappy.

Newly-elected to the Grounds and Buildings Committee, young Victor Kent of the moribund Soccer club noted the disgraceful condition of the dressing rooms, stands, Club House and premises generally. Money was needed to maintain and improve them but the Club's finances were in a scandalous state. Even Bailey in London could not fend off the Pullinger Trust which now demanded full payment of outstanding debentures. A scheme was devised to buy them and supply the Trust with new debentures payable in 1916 but Ernest and Essex Pullinger would have none of it. It had become impossible even to pay interest and some members recommended liquidation.

The life blood of the Club was its members, their steady annual subscriptions and the income from five-guinea entrance fees, and leases of the grounds were diminishing and there were only occasional nine-day wonders like Sousa's Band, The Royal Besses O' the Barn, the Sheffield Choir and Pagel's Circus. Membership was dropping fast and the dynamic Arthur Ruben raised the matter in committee and demanded action. A special general meeting was called and Julius Jeppe, never too grand to give his best attention to Club affairs, pointed out that if the membership were 1,400 in 1904, it should beat least

2,000 in 1912. Both members and revenue were in fact less and still declining. Another such meeting considered a sub-committee report and a proposal to revive the Social Club which, in the light of its past failure, Jeppe crushed. It was agreed at last to spend £250 on refurbishing the dressing rooms but the basic problem remained.



Even the Second Annual Club Gathering when the newly-knighted Lionel Phillips unveiled the 1912 Roll of Honour (from which Mrs Kirby, Lady Tennis Champion of South Africa had unfortunately been omitted) failed to stem the spate of resignations. On the 3rd December 1912, a special meeting confirmed the General Committee's recommendation that the entrance fee be suspended for three months. The effect was immediate and scores of new members joined. The character of the Club fundamentally changed. Membership now fell within the means of an entirely new class of person and, from a quasi-exclusive association of sporting ladies and gentlemen, the Club's basis broadened to include anyone desirous of a convivial meeting place. By March 1913 when the annual meeting was held, 450 new members had joined, bringing the total to 1,690.

Retrenchment and economies were effected and all staff were forbidden outside work, although Allsop was allowed to continue as secretary of the Cricket Association. Otto Beit lightened the debenture load by donating his shares worth £500. Even the newspapers regarded the Club's critical state sympathetically and the previously inimical *Rand Daily Mail* called on the public to support it. While welcoming the inrush of members, the Committee still exercised its discretion and in an historic gesture, black balled the controversial London journalist Hannen Swaffer, then working in Johannesburg. The Society of Journalists instantly threatened to boycott the Club which hurriedly offered him honorary membership. He graciously accepted it in a letter of the 28th March 1913.

Blow upon blow fell upon an organisation which, so recently the pride of Johannesburg, now seemed unable to accommodate itself to severe economic stress and political unrest. Though long expected, the sudden death of Jimmy Sinclair on the afternoon of the 23rd February 1913 in the presence of his wife and dearest friend, Jack Keegan (a loyal Club supporter and Committee member for many years), came as a personal loss to every

member and to much of the population of South Africa. He had worthily carried his country's flag. Always "the darling of the cricket crowds", he had shown that South Africa could produce an all-rounder of world class and his dynamic performances at the wicket ("one of the greatest hitters the game has ever known") had electrified countless thousands from Lords to the Antipodes. Sinclair was much more. He was a true sportsman and gentleman and had brought great honour to the Club for which he played and on whose Committees he loyally and zealously served until an incurable affliction turned his great frame into a gaunt and skeletal structure incapable of supporting his fine spirit.

He was only 37 when he died and his loss to the Club was immediately recognised in telegrams from the Western Province Cricket Union and the Bloemfontein Wanderers. The cortege of his funeral was one of the longest ever seen in Johannesburg. Louis Tancred and George Allsop helped to carry his coffin and Julius Jeppe, vice-president of the Club, stood at the head of every office-bearer of the Wanderers and a great cohort of sportsmen. A fund was opened to commemorate him on a tombstone in Brixton cemetery and in the Club premises as well as to care for his wife and two little boys. Times were very bad and money was not readily available but, early in 1914, the Club installed the brass memorial plaque which, more than forty years later, was finally affixed in the Cricket Room of the great Stadium Pavilion at Illovo.

Apart from financial depression, Johannesburg was fast approaching revolution. Industrial unrest, stimulated by Trade Union pioneers, began with a strike on the Kleinfontein Mine in May 1913 and slowly spread. It was no time for the expansion of sporting activities. Dr Brennan tried to reactivate the Boxing section but there was no interest. The ping-pong tables so optimistically bought in 1912 were sold. No one used them. Every means was sought to obtain funds to maintain the hand-to-mouth existence to which the Club's finances now committed it. The Pullinger pressure became more insistent. On Victor Kent, it made particular impression. James Hyde offered to resume the Sunday Concerts on his own responsibility but the Committee knew that with the Quinlan Opera Company in town, there would be no patronage. A Club Sweep was proposed and deplored but was nonetheless instituted. A trickle of revenue came from the Halls but, even in its extremity, the Club cavilled at an application to hold a public meeting to demand the recall of the unpopular Lord Gladstone who had authorised the use of Imperial troops to quell the Strike.

By then, the Strike had become general and there was violence everywhere. The Labour Party leased the Hall for a mass meeting which remained orderly and no damage was done though the Club had insisted on guarantors and its Finance Committee had taken out insurance against strike damage. Sport was coming to a standstill and few people had the heart to play games. Only the Ladies Cricket Club which included many non-members insisted on practice facilities at extended hours (they were ordered to leave the nets at 4.30 p.m.) and Mr Kingswell resigned from the Club when it made difficulties. There was so little activity that the Committee now met only fortnightly at the J.C.I. office.

In December 1913, the Club's honorary vice-president and long-standing supporter, Sir Lionel Phillips, escaped assassination by a hair's breadth and lingered for weeks between life and death. The Committee wrote "expressing regret at the dastardly outrage and its hopes for a speedy recovery". As the year ended, anarchy again threatened the Reef and Johannesburg itself was in danger of surrender to striking miners and other workers. Llewellyn Andersson was asked by General Smuts to organise a Civic Guard and many Wanderers members served in it. As in all times of crisis, the Wanderers Grounds were commandeered by the military forces. Lieutenant-Colonel J. Dawson Squibb (later secretary of the Country Club) was the officer commanding the Wanderers Camp and Allsop carefully collected his Standing Orders and preserved them. From the 14th January 1914 onwards, they were issued by other officers in Dutch for the benefit of the commandos who came in from the country to defend the town from wanton destruction by the strikers and encamped on the playing fields. *The Star* published a daily column in Dutch.



Early days of Women's Cricket at the Wanderers





Burgher Commandos encamped on the Wanderers Ground in January 1914, during the General Strike

The situation verged on civil war and the military controlled the town. When the Wanderers Committee desired to meet, Allsop had to obtain a special permit before the members could foregather at the Rand Club. This printed document supported by photographs of troops in action and on the Wanderers Grounds was to have been hung in the Club House as a record of historic happenings but more urgent events intervened and the Permit was preserved by Allsop in the Minute Book. The Club suffered grave disorganisation and loss of revenue but charged the Department of Defence £40 a day including water and light for occupation. By the end of January, the industrial crisis was over.

The Club's domestic crisis, particularly financial, had intensified. There seemed no way of relieving its crushing load of debt and the embarrassment of unrelenting pressure from the Pullinger Trust. The Committee had discussed at great length a proposal to let the Grounds for professional sports but Jeppe, original founder, true guardian of the spirit of sportsmanship and now vice-president of the Club, rose in his wrath and effectively opposed it. At the annual meeting in March 1914, the membership bent before the blast and, reversing the decision, agreed to let the Grounds to professionals. One of the Club's most sacred principles had gone (within weeks, the cricket screen was used for commercial advertising); but Lamb as chairman had no option but to emphasise the heavy debenture debts "incurred in brighter happier days". The spate of resignations had continued and the membership had receded to 1,496 but the Club had held up its head in the Test Matches with a powerful M.C.C. team on its grounds in December and January before the strike flared. Zulch, R. Beaumont, Louis Tancred and other members had played creditably before large crowds.

The downward trend persisted. The winter months were never particularly profitable and the summer of 1914 brought tragedy. South Africans were divided amongst themselves and a Rebellion impended. The Club's grandees took to arms—Llewellyn Andersson, George Farrar, Abe Bailey and others resumed their military roles and Dr Brennan and other committee members enlisted for service in German South West Africa and later East. Jacob Swan, now nearing his sixties, had retired from the Turf Club as a result of a severe motor accident which broke his health and could only follow the fortunes of his soldier son Basil.

No one realised at the outset that the First World War had begun. Johannesburg life went on much as usual and games still took place on the Wanderers Grounds although troops were drilled on its fields. Its Halls were constantly let at a nominal charge for "Patriotic Concerts". The Finance Committee saw what was coming and its recommendations for severe retrenchment and economies were accepted. Allsop's salary was reduced to £35 and Barend Vieyra's retainer to £15. Clerks were dismissed but Miss Walpole remained at £11 a month and began a period of yeoman service. The number of native groundsmen was severely curtailed. Many members suspended their subscriptions while on active service but larger numbers simply ceased paying. Almost immediately, one of Captain Winslow's sons was killed in the field.

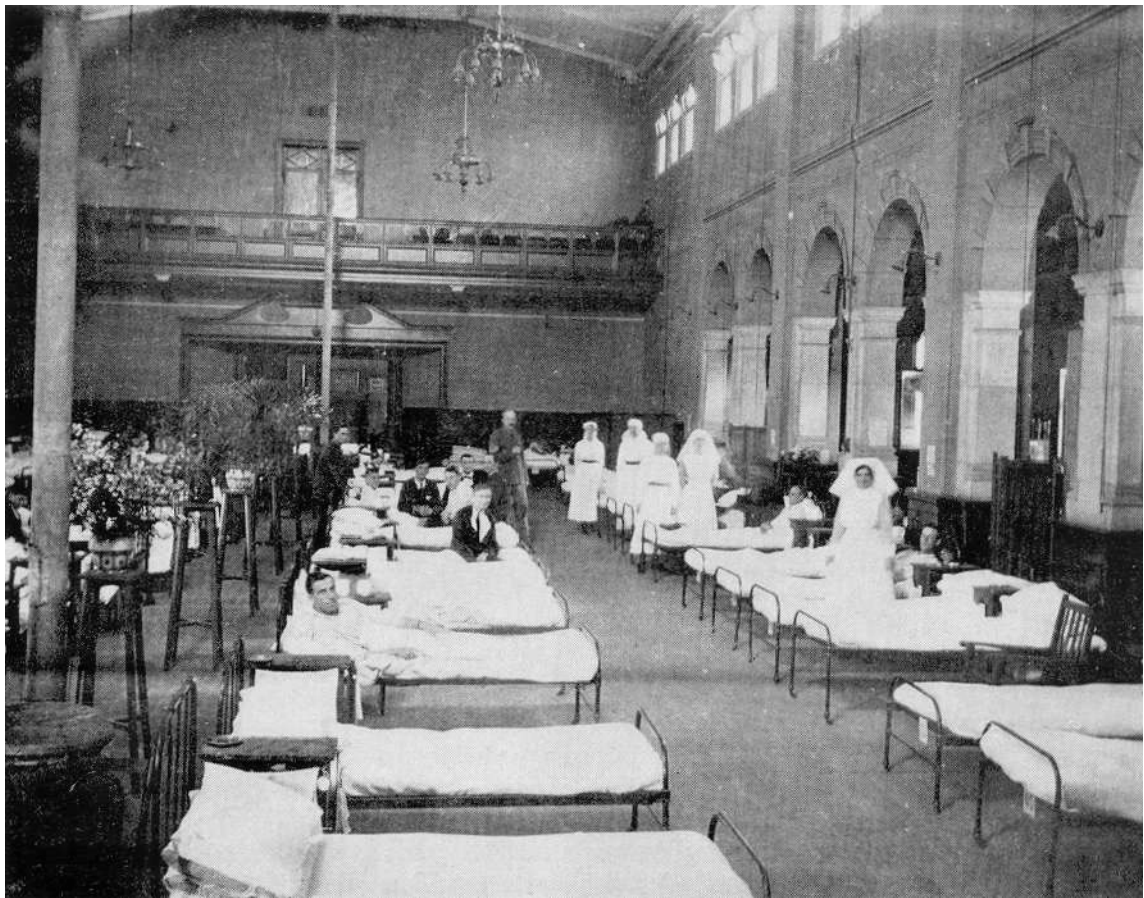
In November the Mayor Norman Anstey came with Sir Thomas Smartt, leader of the Opposition, to ask for the conversion of the Gymnasium Hall into a Convalescent Home and, somewhat overlapping the original request for premises, it was duly instituted at a charge of £20 a month. All sport finally stopped and so many hooligans and vagrants infested the grounds that Allsop was unable to cope with them. It was decided to reduce the subscription owing to diminished facilities and to permit quarterly payment. The Club still held attraction and new members continued to join. It was essential, Lamb said, to maintain sporting facilities though no member on service need pay subscription fees. 120 were with Botha in South West Africa, among them George Farrar who in May 1915, was carelessly killed when a train ran into his railcar. Circumstances prevented adequate tribute being paid to a true Wanderers pioneer who had given of his best to establish the Club in its difficult days; nor to a less active founder, W. J. Stonestreet, who predeceased him by a few days.

The Club was now partially paralysed. A third of its men were on active service and the remainder heavily preoccupied. The new Town Hall, opened in April 1915, joined with the Carlton Hotel in attracting sources of revenue. The Wanderers Convalescent Home in the Gymnasium closed at the end of the S.W.A. campaign (when the returning troops were welcomed by the Mayor on the Wanderers Ground) and war activities continued with Recruiting Committees. Much of Johannesburg was wrecked and ruined by the Lusitania Riots of May 1915 but the Wanderers escaped (although its German-named caterer endured unpleasantness). It suffered instead from attacks in an upstart journal *Truth* which stated that so far from belonging to the people of Johannesburg as its title implied, it was a closed corporation "where the working man finds no cheery welcome". Socialism was beginning to fasten its grip on the Rand.

As the War settled into its grim routine, some sort of life returned to the sporting body. The Wanderers tennis courts were always in demand and it was agreed to let some. Football matches were occasionally arranged. The Committee which now met only monthly made a radical decision when application was made for a ground for coloured footballers. The position was very different now, it reasoned, from some years previously and it allowed the match on payment of the usual fee without creating a precedent. By the same token, it permitted Indians as spectators from a special stand, also without creating a precedent. The ruling endured varying interpretations. In 1919, when the Rugby Union asked for facilities for coloured spectators owing to the dearth of whites, it was refused in the terms of the earlier substantive decision but a few weeks later, a special meeting upset it and decided to admit non-whites to the grounds (excluding matches against the All Blacks) though refusing to permit coloured matches. The attendance at the meeting was very meagre and Lamb was reluctant to accept its decision. The coloureds, he said, had many grounds of their own. In 1921, when the Indian Football Association applied for the admission of spectators, it was refused for the reason that accommodation was limited. Charity matches by coloured players were freely permitted. A settled policy remained elusive.

By 1916, the Club hardly maintained its identity. Many of its members were fighting in East Africa where, among others, the cricketer A. S. Frames was wounded. Others were dying on the Western Front and in the massacre of Delville Wood. Allsop was occupying himself with organising a huge Gala to raise funds for troop comforts. The membership roll

had become farcical. Most of it was in arrears. Vestigial games remained, notably Tennis and Gymnastics. Miss Walpole was retrenched and went to the Robinson Deep. The remaining white and native groundsmen were dismissed and Allsop himself was expected to supervise the maintenance of the tennis courts. Weeds grew on the playing fields. The Bar was producing very little revenue and the catering showed a loss but the Club House was still a congenial place and there were still applications for membership. The Committee resolved that for the duration, no one should be allowed to join who was eligible for service. It was a patriotic gesture which led to endless hurt and unpleasantness. Intended to discourage "slackers", the Committee's rigorous enquiries into the credentials of applicants and the unfortunate decisions to which they sometimes came, provided perpetual embarrassment. Sadder was the growing spate of resignations, many from members of very long standing. The Wanderers Club and the gaiety and recreation for which it stood, had little place in the growing gloom. In 1917, it virtually lost its identity and became The "Wanderers Military Hospital".



The Wanderers Hall, when most of the Club had been given to V. A. D's to run a military hospital, during the First World War

At the point when expenditure exceeded revenue, the Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachment offered to lease the Gymnasium Hall as a Hospital for Military Patients. Its members could make use of the Gym of Marist Brothers School in the meantime. It was granted at £20 a month and soon after, the Bar premises were included as they produced no revenue. The Club Committee frantically sought new sources of income and considered golf, bowls, skittles and whippet racing. Boksburg Municipality and the Bloemfontein Municipality advised them about laying bowling greens but nothing could be done without money. All debenture holders had been asked to forego interest for the duration. Ernest and Essex Pullinger were on active service but Bailey, Jeppe, Joel and the others agreed. When the annual meeting was held in February 1917, there was no quorum and a week later, only 15 members could be found. It was then decided to suspend the entrance fee. Once again, candidates (mostly women intent on tennis) were attracted but the income was negligible.

Huge fund-raising enterprises for war causes were held on the derelict grounds and 'Appy 'Amstead raised a considerable sum. Allsop himself obtained leave to organise a gigantic War Market in December 1917. By then, he was only part-time secretary of the Club at a reduced salary, having become secretary of the Wanderers V.A.D. Hospital. Miss Walpole, summoned from the Robinson Deep, ran the Club on a salary of £12 10s a month. The Monthly Circular, previously self-supporting, was discontinued. Shadowy though its existence, the Club was by no means dead. Its tennis courts were always thronged and the Club House remained a meeting place.

At the adjourned annual meeting of 1918 (only 13 members had attended on the appointed date), Lamb, who had remained in the chair throughout, reported that of 350 members on service, 31 had been killed. In their letters from the various fronts, members referred in terms of loving remembrance of the Club and of the happy days of the past. They also enquired with tender solicitude, he said, about the Club's welfare. He adjured those present to keep the Club's flag flying as some small service to the heroes in action. Competitive sport was non-existent but various games could be maintained. It was impossible to turf the main ground as the Rugby Union had requested because the Hospital required it for huts but bowling greens could be laid. The Pullinger boys had agreed to forego their interest. A huge amount was owing in arrear subscriptions but somehow the Club would press on. A year passed without any appreciable development except a threat from the Town Council (the Moffat Plan) to drive Eloff Street straight through the Club's grounds to give access to the northern suburbs. It proved empty.

When the War ended, there was no dramatic change. Both the Halls and most of the grounds remained occupied by the V.A.D. until June 1919. "The Wanderers", said Lamb, speaking to his annual report, "is more widely known as a Military Hospital than as a Sports Ground". That it had emerged at all from a dark and trying time was due to the magnanimity of the debenture holders. People had forgotten that it was not public property but a private Club which had spent £50,000 on creating sporting facilities. Criticism of its war-time lethargy was ill-timed. The 16 tennis courts were now so congested that membership of the Tennis Club had to be curtailed and the Municipality was asked for a few feet of the newly-named Kitchener (formerly Keizer, latterly Wanderers) Street to enable more courts to be laid. Before team games could be resumed, two bowling greens and a swimming bath were needed.

Many months passed before the soldiers returned and were demobilised. Reggie Schwarz, pride of the Cricket Club, was not among them. The members of the Club endowed a cot in the Transvaal Memorial Hospital for Children in commemoration of their dead colleagues. In June 1919, Allsop laid a realistic report before the Committee. It was time to take stock and plan for the future. There were only 655 paying members, he said and the debenture debt hung like a millstone round the Club's neck. The Wanderers Club must confront and accept the fact that it no longer existed only for its members whose support would sustain it. If it were to survive at all it must become a purveyor of public spectacle and obtain its sustenance from gate money. The original Wanderers, created as a private sporting club in the interest of games and sportsmanship, no longer existed. Only a commercial entrepreneur could take its place.

The Club was forced to set its course accordingly. With the return of its Halls, the Bar and Catering produced satisfactory revenue again. The Peace Celebrations were held on its grounds. An Australian Military Cricket Team attracted the public. The membership crawled up to 970. The Monthly Circular was revived, now in attractive sporting jacket. Allsop and the faithful Miss Walpole were rewarded with small increases and bonuses. The long-suffering Abe Bailey was induced to forego the £665 interest due on his £4,000 loan (now reduced by £1,000) to pay for a ladies tennis dressing room which, anticipating his generosity, had already been built. Lamb had retired (he was presented with a case of pipes in appreciation of his long chairmanship) and E. A. Williamson, a Member of Parliament, had taken his place. When the annual meeting was held in March 1920, Victor Kent, persuaded by Julius Jeppe, was elected to the chair of a Committee which included

A. S. Frames representing the Cricket Club (an honour which he declined but accepted in 1922 as chairman of the Rugby Section).

Victor Kent was an unassuming, even unimposing businessman who had trained as a bookkeeper. His association with the Wanderers Club dated from January 1891 when an uncle had taken him to see W. W. Read's English Cricket Team. He was then twelve years old and had frequently revisited the Grounds on its grand occasions until, settling in Johannesburg, he became a member of its Soccer Club. As its chairman, he in due course joined the General Committee in 1908 and as a member of its Grounds and Building Sub-Committee, was well trained in the Club's financial strictures. He was outstandingly a man of moral principle and if his personality lacked in dynamism and compelling attraction, it was compensated by an extraordinary talent for conciliation.

Victor Kent was shrewd and businesslike to the point of being commonplace but in his ability to conciliate opposing factions and to see a way through an apparent impasse, he showed remarkable leadership. Nor, despite his reasonable complaisance, was he averse to striking a firm attitude and adhering to it. He became chairman of the Wanderers when it most needed direction and the direction he gave it was moral. The Club could neither hold up its head nor develop with the "permanent floating debt" which it had come to consider an inevitable bedevilment. Kent considered its moral duty to lie in discharging its debt to its early supporters (particularly Pullinger whose Trust continued its pressure) and framed its policy accordingly. He was on a batsman's wicket and success came early.

The returning soldiers and war workers craved relaxation and revenue was quickly restored. In addition, there was the large number of young men and women whose natural development and aptitude for games had been frustrated by five years of War. One of the first signs of their enthusiastic return to sport was the flourishing of the various University Athletic Associations. History was made on the Wanderers Grounds in October 1921 when Saul (Pete) Suzman organized the first annual Inter-Varsity Sports, then engaged only between the Transvaal (Pretoria), Johannesburg and Grey (Bloemfontein) University Colleges. Sir William Dalrymple donated a floating trophy which was duly won by Johannesburg and presented to its leader Suzman by Lady Phillips, wife of the president of the ad hoc organisation, Sir Lionel Phillips.

Suzman was not satisfied with the limited opportunities for fraternisation offered by one-day Inter-Varsity Meetings and with the wholehearted support of his principal, J. H. Hofmeyr, almost single-handedly created the South African Universities Athletic Federation of which he became president. It staged far more extensive and successful annual meetings. The effectiveness of the Federation put Suzman in a position to organise a visit in 1923 of an Oxford University Athletic Team (including several Americans) which for the first time enabled local athletes to measure themselves against overseas standards. An historic meeting attended by the Governor-General, Prince Arthur of Connaught, was staged in September 1923 on the Wanderers Grounds in which the Club's own champion, Len Richardson, renowned for overseas honours, participated in long distances in which Suzman himself competed. The Wanderers Cricket Ground became the scene of many stirring meetings and its Athletics Club, later captained by Suzman, George Dustan and others, brought great credit to its parent in later years.

These pleasing portents characterised Victor Kent's first year of office. The membership slowly increased and extra-mural distractions were quickly provided, notably by the Twelve O'Clock Club which leased the Gymnasium Hall every Saturday night for an indefinite period for dances that remained a fond memory for generations. They were entirely independent of the Wanderers Club (which even borrowed money from the sponsors) but redounded greatly to its credit. Allsop propounded a grand scheme of reorganisation with secretarial assistance and the invaluable but frail Miss Walpole was elevated to £20 a month. In his first annual report, Kent could announce "a most successful season". A Debenture Redemption Fund had been established. Some had been bought from various



Right: Professor J. H. Hofmeyr, principle of the Transvaal University, handing the Dalrymple Cup to Lady Phillips for presentation to S. (Pete) Suzman, captain of the T. U. C. Athletic Team, at the Wanderers Ground in 1921

mining houses and others had been redeemed. The process would continue and progress would be reported at the next annual meeting in March 1922. It was not in fact held.



Right: Prince Arthur of Connaught, Governor-General of the Union, talking to Len Richardson, champion distance runner and *(left)* S. (Pete) Suzman, president of the S. A. Universities Athletic Federation on the Wanderers C Ground at the Meeting between Oxford University and S. A. Universities in September 1923

The post-war Johannesburg seethed with socialist talk of conflict with the capitalistic mining magnates. A Labour Town Council (whose members by virtue of the Municipality owning the freehold, were honorary members of the Club) infuriated Julius Jeppe by refusing to provide proper access from any direction. In an atmosphere of intransigence and foreboding, the Club pursued its domestic rehabilitation. The Transvaal Rugby Football Union again pressed for a turf field and it was decided to plant A ground. David Pullinger, reduced in wealth and disillusioned overseas, agreed to become once more a Patron of the Club which had so shamefully exploited him. Under Kent's regime, there was now some hope of his loan being recovered. Edith Walpole who had held the fort during the war years, received an honorarium of 50 guineas with acclamation on her retirement and wrote of her "very happy memories and many kindnesses" and the Club appointed Miss Cathleen Smith in her place. She carried a heavy burden. Allsop went on leave and also accompanied an Australian Cricket Team on tour. The Club was now expanding into its new role of spectacle and sports promoter.

On the 6th January 1922, the Committee agreed to a request from the Commissioner of Police to camp 500 men on the grounds "for public safety owing to a possible strike". Smuts was taking no chances this time but he grossly underestimated the situation. A miners' strike became a general revolution and the administration of Johannesburg itself was taken out of the hands of the Municipal Council and into those of an anarchist Action Committee. The police were powerless to control a massive movement. Increasing numbers of troops poured into Johannesburg and filled the Wanderers Grounds. Llewellyn Andersson called out his Civic Guard and was in the thick of hostilities which were not simply street fighting but open warfare with bombs, artillery and aeroplanes.

The General Hospital could not deal with heavy casualties. On the 9th March, two days before its annual meeting, the Club surrendered possession of its Gymnasium Hall and on the 13th, the huge Dance Hall with all its accessory rooms for hospital purposes. Part of its grounds were already packed by prisoners, sitting disconsolately and some aggressively, on the slopes of the banked track. Civilians and soldiers died in scores and hundreds were wounded. They were the blackest clays of Johannesburg's history.

On the 31st March 1922, the Wanderers Committee passed a vote of condolence to the relatives of all killed. One of its oldest members, W. J. (Bill) Corrigan who had made his mark in the Gymnastics Section, had been done to death and many members had been wounded in trying to restore law and order. Victor Kent waxed violent in his denunciation of the foreign socialist influences (Trade Unionists) that had incited the Revolution. The Government should prohibit uneducated immigrants, he said, "these people can never be good citizens because it is impossible to make sportsmen of them". He failed to record that many of the people of Johannesburg of whom sportsmen had been made, were playing tennis in Parktown while men were dying in their defence in the town below. Recreation and relaxation had become obsessional in the post-war population.

When the annual meeting was finally held on the 11th April 1922, further progress could be reported. Allsop had been Secretary/Manager for a quarter of a century and in addition to imposing his impressive personality upon the Club he knew the history, said Kent, of every blade of grass. There was need of his towering presence, despite a slight and perhaps justifiable tendency towards dictatorial attitude. The new class of member - sometimes openly described as "undesirables" - were wanting in sportsmanship and some of the members of the ultra-popular Tennis Club had "constantly to be reminded of breaches of etiquette". In time, distinguished tennis players and trophy-winners in other sections considered their prowess sufficient contribution to the Club and refused to pay their subscriptions. Victor Kent needed all his powers of conciliation to deal with an increasing outcrop of squabbles. Sportsmen of the twentieth century had become more egocentric than "clubbable".

In June 1922, the Club rejoiced at the knighting of Llewellyn Andersson and Julius Jeppe and banqueted them both. Its original founders were now diminishing in number. Jack Currey, first chairman, died of pulmonary causes in the Karoo in August 1922 and A. H. Reid, founder member and architect of the Club's first pavilion, in Cape Town in November. Charles Marx, a Committee member since 1898, had died earlier in 1922 and his son Fritz continued the tradition of service to the Club. An Encyclopaedia Britannica preserved on the premises was his gift.

For the next five years, in the face of hostility and public attack, Kent pursued his policy, loyally supported by the Committees which continuously elected him to the chair, of reducing the Club's debt. The times were no longer propitious. A deepening depression crept into South Africa and by the early thirties, gripped it by the throat. It was a new world after the Great War and many of the old *shibboleths* seemed in danger of disappearance. One of them was sportsmanship. Men no longer behaved like gentlemen in public or on the playing field. Bickering and squabbling were the order of the day among both individuals and organised bodies and the Press fulsomely cooperated in publishing ill-natured attacks on all and sundry. Kent had to face it all.

His duty was to turn the Wanderers into a money-making proposition while at the same time preserving amateurism in sport and encouraging the Club members to uphold its best spirit. At first, he appeared to succeed in none. As much as he was obliged to obtain the highest reasonable revenue from the lessees of the Club's grounds, he was accused of turning it into a commercial venture and depriving the Johannesburg people of facilities which were theirs by right and not by any Committee's dispensation. The Rugby Football Union, which had enjoyed a lease to the Club's disadvantage, continually contested its amendment in terms more favourable to the lessor and finally betook itself to Ellis Park. Its chairman delivered an unbridled attack on the Wanderers in the Press and Kent was forced

to reply at great length. There could be no relaxation in the Club's policy, he said, until the debt of £28,000 was eliminated and, as a private institution, it had every right to take such steps as it thought fit to do so.

Time and again, the Wanderers reiterated that it was not a public amenity but a private Club entitled to conduct its affairs in the best interests of its members. Mischief was made of the place the Club had attained in the general public's estimation and it was constantly accused of ignoring the claims of the common people. The feud with the Football Union accumulated such bitterness and publicity that Sir Julius Jeppe personally intervened and arranged a joint meeting. Until his death, he remained at Kent's right hand to help whenever he was able.

Attacks on the Club's "commercialism" continued and were described by Kent as "the silly season topic of this town". They regularly appeared when there was a dearth of news and were symptomatic of post-war malaise—a phenomenon which expressed itself also in the sporting field. The Club continued its policy of trying to reduce its standing debt and its Chairman, confronting its members, to state his position as "desiring your prayers, not your congratulations". It was on all hands a trying time.

Sporting activities flourished, especially in tennis where Mrs G. E. Peacock set new standards and in 1923, Master N. Farquharson became Boy Champion of South Africa and was made an honorary member of the Club which he prettily thanked by letter. Cricket continued at its high level despite the death in 1924 of J. W. Zulch whom the Club wished to commemorate. Allsop toured the country as a South African selector with the visiting M.C.C. team and R. B. Orford, previously a clerk in the Railways, ran the office in his absence.

The Monthly Magazine, now run by the cricket historian, Maurice Luckin, was intended to promote and sustain *esprit de corps* among the members but it appeared so erratically and so unsatisfactorily that an Editorial Board was finally appointed to assist it and M. Ratcliffe became editor. The improvement failed to stem a disturbing deterioration among the members.

The Club had always set much store by achievement on the playing field but by 1926, the spirit was lacking and a meeting of all sub-clubs was called to consider the "poor showing made by many of the Club's teams", the lack of cooperation and sociability among members, their disloyalty and want of *esprit de corps*, and the fact that the Club was no longer attracting sportsmen of note. Johannesburg was now a great metropolis with many outlets elsewhere and, in any case, the depression had tightened its grip and distress was everywhere evident. A fund was opened ostensibly to make a presentation to one of the Club's oldest and most faithful members but in fact to relieve his penury. Applicants for jobs constantly approached Allsop and even the booming Twelve O'Clock Club (from which the Wanderers had borrowed £800 to improve the Dance Hall with a maple floor and other features) requested a reduction in rent.

The Club needed no entrenching in the public's mind as the natural centre of all civic and other celebration. The Prince of Wales had been rapturously received in 1925 and the officers of *Repulse* separately entertained. Princess Alice held her charity Balls in the Wanderers Hall and wrote to thank the Club for its support. Countless touring teams in every sport had provided public spectacle in its arenas. In 1926, Johannesburg celebrated much of its 40th birthday on the Wanderers Grounds with Firework Displays and other public diversions organised by the Publicity Association. Jacob Swart contributed a number of historic articles to a special issue of *The Star* including his reminiscences of the Wanderers. But now public feeling turned against it in an event which was as much its salvation as its doom.

Since the day in 1902 when Julius Jeppe had warned the Club of the inevitable encroachment of railway development, the subject had figured on Committee agendas.



The Old Wanderers Ground in March 1926 showing (left) the strip 100 feet deep and 400 yards long parallel to Hancock Street which was surrendered to the Railways for £30,000

Park was no longer a comic siding but a huge glass and steel station totally inadequate to handling the growing traffic of the sub-continent's largest city. The Wanderers had conceded 8 feet of ground along Hancock Street to facilitate access but, in 1924, far more extensive demands seemed imminent. Plans for a new station were rumoured and a special committee meeting in September 1924 decided to keep them in view, though nothing yet was definite, always bearing in mind the risk of expropriation.

By the time Kent confronted the annual meeting in 1925 (the debenture debt had been further reduced and the membership stabilised at 1,300), some of the vagueness had been dissipated and it was known that the Railways proposed depriving the Club of a sizeable piece of the grounds on which it had spent a total of £80,000.

The Club struck the attitude that a Sports Ground was as important as a station and strong words were uttered. Schoolchildren had free use of its facilities, its grounds were host to innumerable visiting teams who improved the standard of almost every sport, it was the nursery of the country's champions and the joy of the citizens quite apart from its titles at the hands of President Kruger and Lord Milner. (Few citizens appreciated the Wanderers more than the cricket-mad J. H. Hofmeyr, principal of the University of the Witwatersrand and shortly to become Administrator of the Transvaal and later Deputy Prime Minister. "Hoffie" was frequently to be found watching cricket matches.) Sir Julius Jeppe, a figure of great stature in the affairs of the community, and Victor Kent were in constant colloquy with Club and Railway officials, notably Sir William Hoy, the general manager, seeking to temporise and conciliate and find a way out of the difficulty. There was none and public opinion began to harden against the Club's apparent opposition to the progress of the town.

On the 25th September 1925, a special meeting was held to settle the matter. Nearly 100 members, including founders such as Gustav Sonn, Bernard de Malraison and C. A. O. Bain, attended and heard Kent present the case in a lengthy address in which he counselled that it were better to accede to the Railway demand for 100 feet in depth of ground along about 200 yards of Hancock Street with appropriate compensation than, by refusal, force expropriation. He then moved accordingly and the meeting unanimously agreed. It would mean the redesigning and rebuilding of premises and property but the sacrifice would have to be made. In view of the huge expense (including the demolition and reconstruction of stands), the Wanderers would have to be adequately compensated and negotiations began on that basis.

Malicious influences then mounted a campaign against the Wanderers, alleging that it was "holding up the new station" and demanding too much compensation. The Club was accused of "lack of patriotism" and the example of the Jewish community which had sold a

Synagogue to the Railways was held up as the proper spirit. Victor Kent felt that he had served long enough but Sir Julius insisted that he remain until the Railway affairs were settled. By February 1926, all was cut and dried. The Railways were to pay £33,000 compounded as follows:

Value of Land	£9,050
Loss of Revenue	£1,000
Expenses, Architects etc	£1,000
Reconstruction	£21,950

They had in fact already paid £15,000 and plans were being drawn for the complete reconstruction of the area which, whatever its future potential, would represent a dead loss to the Club for a considerable period. With the disruption of their grounds, Tennis, Baseball and Athletics would suffer particularly.



George Allsop, Secretary of the Wanderers Club from 1896-1927, painted by his friend William Duffus, after his death.

The portrait has hung since in the Club House

The burden Kent bore was heavy and, in addition, the aging Allsop had been ill but recovered sufficiently to attend the annual meeting on the 15th March 1927. Kent paid heartfelt tribute to the assistance Sir Julius had given him in negotiating with Sir William Hoy. The year had been satisfactory. The debenture debt had been reduced to £11,600, the membership had increased to 1,463, Nick Ratcliffe had greatly improved the Club Magazine and, despite the unpredictable times, the Club would be moving forward. On the motion of Dr Brennan, Victor Kent was unanimously elected a Life Member. Within a fortnight, George Allsop was dead.

There ended with him an era in the life of Johannesburg. Reaching the Rand in December 1887, he had been one of the foundation members of the Wanderers Athletics and Sports Sub-Club of March 1889 and had become in his time a towering figure in the cricket world, both as player and as administrator. He had lived to see a *coterie* of sportsmen, exulting in the joys of physical exertion and companionship, develop into a huge organisation whose commercial transactions were intended to enable sporting facilities for its multitudinous members. He had watched the insidious intrusion of spectator sports into participant activities and the demand of the public for exciting spectacle outgrow its individual need for physical recreation. Through it all—through wars and revolutions and depressions—he had maintained the identity of an institution which in its utter independence of Government or any official support, remained through all its mutations an expression of the free spirit of its members. Chairmen and committees came and went but George Allsop remained to

give character and a palpable mystique to a social phenomenon which had become his life. "Allsop created the traditions of the Club on the very fine traditions that he had brought out with him from England", said Kent commemoratively a year later, "and the high standard of the Club today is the most convincing testimony that can be paid him".

A guard of honour of Trade School cadets lined his journey to the grave in the plot at Brixton Cemetery which the Club had bought for him. His funeral was largely attended and many sporting bodies contributed to the tombstone ultimately erected upon it. Their thoughts turned to a more appropriate memorial and in due course, subscriptions were received by the Club in association with the South African Cricket Association to pay for the most modern and efficient Cricket Score Board which was duly erected on the grounds. A. S. Frames became secretary of the S.A.C.A. in his place. In 1933, the City Council agreed to the naming of the short road that gave access to the Club from Wolmarans Street in his honour. Allsop Road, closed once a year to establish prescriptive right, had a short existence and was soon enveloped.

William Duffus, entirely on his own account, painted a portrait of Allsop immediately after his death and offered it to the Club for thirty guineas. The Committee thought it needed altering but Mrs Allsop (for whom the Club had provided) disagreed and it was hung in a place of honour in the Club House, later moving with other memories and portraits to new premises. The black Windsor chair, from which for thirty-one years Allsop had ordered the affairs of the Club, became one of its historic relics. Those who now sat behind his desk confronted a strange new sporting world.

