

11. THE COLOSSUS EXPANDS

1927-1943

The confused conditions confronting the Club reflected the troublous time through which the whole world was passing. Every evening, scores of members would walk through the town, cross the footbridge over the railway and foregather in the Bar to discuss the coming economic blizzard. The ladies dealt with their woes elsewhere but all were nurtured by the Club caterer, George Brissenden who, appointed in 1923, served for eighteen years (dying in 1943 shortly after his retirement) and was succeeded by his brother Charles.

Upon Allsop's death, the assistant secretary R. B. Orford served a probationary period of six months and was then appointed Secretary. The work had tremendously proliferated and was shared with Douglas Meintjies, Sporting Secretary. Meintjies was of particular assistance in the quarterly meetings of sub-clubs which Kent instituted.

The disruption caused by the Railway encroachment was fundamental. Not only was a substantial area lost but the grounds had to be redesigned and new stands and other premises built. One of the small existing stands was dragged bodily forward on rollers by a donkey engine but such salvaging was less important than the new works. Kent and his committees were in constant consultation with the architect, H. Porter. It was essential to complete the reconstruction as soon as possible since the loss in revenue and the dissatisfaction of the members whose tennis courts and other facilities had been removed, were severe. It was however possible to introduce innovations (such as cantilevering a stand over Wolmarans Street) and many improvements. Compensation was £33,000 but expenditure totalled £38,000 and by the end of 1927, the Club was borrowing £1,000 free of interest from the Twelve O'clock Club and another £1,000 at 5% to improve the main Hall for the benefit of its dances. Alternative sources of revenue were now imperative.

Although Jacob Swart sent Christmas greetings in 1927 from the Cape where he now lived in retirement, he neglected to remind the Club that it was approaching its 40th anniversary and in the busyness of reconstruction, the occasion passed unrecognised. Kent was ably assisted by his vice-chairman, J. H. Piton (of lob bowling fame) and later by the American B. L. Bateman as well as loyal and hard-working committees. Much fell on the shoulders of Orford and the groundsman Houliston whose wages were raised from £6 to £7 a week. (During 1927, the Club had lost one of its great characters in "Doe" Brennan, chairman of the Baseball Club and also of the Irish Club, whose verve and enthusiasm had inspired meetings since 1909.) Sir Julius Jeppe, now approaching 70, was always at Kent's right hand and eased the continuous negotiations with the Railways.

Both hard times and disorganisation militated against the Wanderers and the membership steadily declined (1,729 in 1927 and 1,395 in 1928). Ellis Park profited by the opportunity. There could be no payment of debentures. Desperate necessity drove the Club to an expedient which, in other days, it would have considered preposterous. It leased its main ground for dirt-track racing by motor cycles and from October 1928 onwards, Joe Sarkis and his professional colleagues roared around the arena under the aegis of the African Dirt Tracks and Entertainments Company.

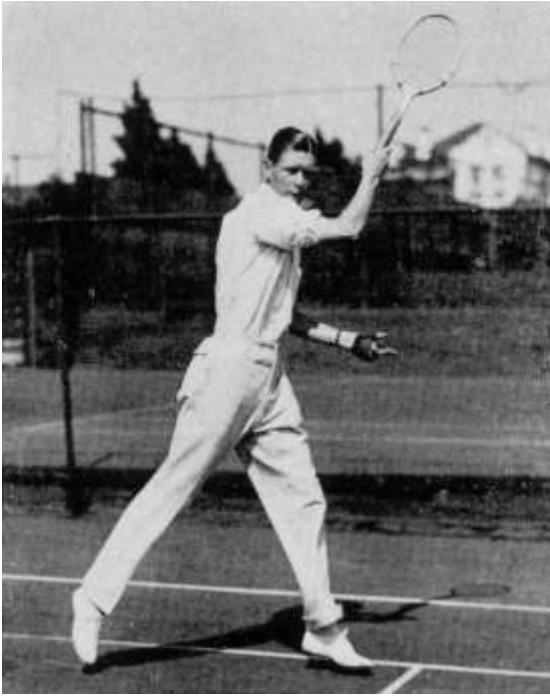
The whole concept of amateur sport, said Kent sadly at the annual meeting in March 1929 when he had been a Committee member for 21 years, had radically changed and the amateur, as previously conceived, hardly existed. It had been an abnormally quiet year with no visiting teams (and consequent loss of revenue) but the Club had managed to bridge the gap in its services by starting a Bowling Section, presenting the Mayor with a silver jack when he opened the green. The problem of turfing the ground was under constant consideration but was replete with difficulties which research later removed.

As the world slid into financial chaos (Wall Street crashed in October), the Club lost its most energetic and powerful proponent in the death on the 2nd September 1929 of Sir Julius Jeppe, pioneer and founder. Kent was deeply affected. It was Jeppe who had persuaded him to take the chair in 1920 and who had remained steadfastly at his side when other magnates, secure in their own social structure, their comfortable homes and the support of their mining houses, had withdrawn more and more from Club affairs. "Sir Julius", said Kent, "was probably the greatest friend and worker the Club has ever had - his loss has been one of the greatest suffered in the history of the Club - his advice has been of inestimable assistance." No steps were taken to commemorate his services and Sir Lewellyn Andersson was elected to his place as vice-president.

The passage of time continued to impose its inevitable losses in the Club's grandees and Life Members. Otto Beit, patron and benefactor, died in December 1930 and C. Aburrow and Frank Hilner in 1931 when the failing Lionel Phillips, now 76 and retired at the Cape, declined to continue as Patron (he died in 1936). Of the death of David Pullinger, ruined and remote in 1931, the Club was never told (its letters were simply returned from the previous address) and no honour was done to the man who saved it from early extinction and supported it for all the time that he was able. In 1933, Gustav Sonn, foundation member and euphonium player, died - "interested in the Club until the end", said Kent, and present at every annual meeting.

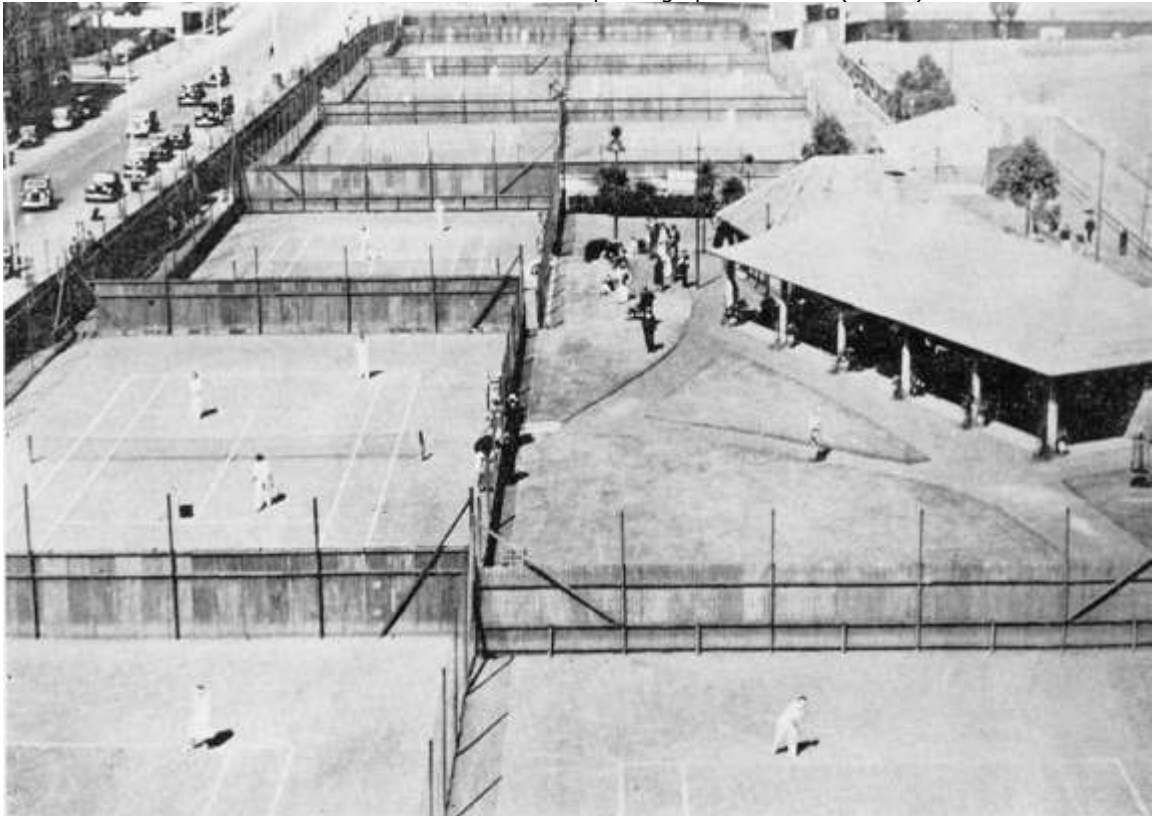
Although the Club concerned itself with the proper honouring of Allsop (it wrote round the world to ascertain the best type of Cricket Score Board), increasing hardship only slightly mitigated by the regular revenue of the Dirt Track Racing, which at first attracted large crowds, drove it to more mundane matters. Conditions prevented the realisation of one of its most longstanding aims—turfing. At the annual meeting in 1930, a motion by S. J. Pitts of the Transvaal Cricket Union to provide a turf wicket had been agreed but so far from a perennial *cause célèbre* reaching its end, Kent made an extraordinarily long speech outlining difficulties which later appeared absurd. He was painfully sensitive to criticism from the coastal towns which already had turf wickets and which mocked the ancient Wanderers for its dilatoriness. They failed to realise, he said at great length, that grass remained green throughout the year at the coast but in the winter, turned yellow, dry, hard and slippery on the Rand. No one then knew what kind of grass might be suitable and costly and lengthy experimentation was necessary. There was controversy among the grass experts themselves.

Paradoxically, although the denizens of the flats, houses and offices surrounding the Wanderers Grounds protested against the permeating clouds of dust that infiltrated every premise, there was strong public feeling against turfing. Johannesburg at heart remained conservative. South African cricketers had made their name on matting and the Wanderers' own Nummy Deane had even then brought great honour to his Club and country by captaining the Springboks (he joined the Wanderers Committee).



Max Bertram, Wanderers Tennis Springbok

The tennis courts at the Old Wanderers with traffic passing up Wanderers (Keizer) Street on the left



The disputation was pointless. Before the end of the year, the slump was such that members resigned by the score and many wrote asking for time to pay their subscriptions. In May 1931, the unemployed rioted in Johannesburg and distress and penury increased. There were wholesale retrenchments in State and private organisations and among many Wanderers members affected was A. S. Frames, who left the Railways. In 1932, Havenga as Minister of Finance reduced the salaries of all State servants, from 15 % off Cabinet Ministers to 5 % off the lowliest clerks. At the same time, the Mayor of Johannesburg asked the Wanderers Club for collectors for his Relief Fund. The times were critical.

The Club, now a vast business organisation, had ridden into the Depression in full awareness that it must find "outside activities" to subsist. On the sporting side, it had recovered from the reconstruction of its grounds and its members had brought honour to it in many sections (see Appendix IV). Of the nation's seeded list of 24 tennis players in 1931, eight were Wanderers members - Mrs O. C. Peacock, Mrs Everett, Miss Audrey de Smidt, Miss D. Cole, Miss Dulcie Kitson, Louis Raymond, R. Malcolm and Max Bertram. The Athletic Section had prospered from the visit of an American Team with novel training methods and the Soccer Section - and revenue generally - from a successful experimental visit by the Motherwell team. Bowls was developing and experiments in grassing were continuing but no debentures could be paid because of heavy capital expenditure and the foreboding future. The appeal of Dirt Track racing was failing and the current vogue for Midget Golf was no compensation (the staff laid out a course in the Club's grounds). Terrible times lay ahead and increasing numbers of members had difficulty in paying their dues. Llewellyn Andersson and William Dalrymple remained loyally with the Wanderers and helped it as much as they could.

It was, said Kent, the quietest year in the history of the Club. It had survived severe economic depression and even shown a small profit. The loss of 5% of the membership was less than he had expected and the salaries of the staff had not been reduced. Worse was to be anticipated and fundamental changes were taking place in sport itself. World malaise was expressing itself in the destruction of previous ideals and traditions and international games had become contests in national prestige. Locally, contentious feeling - "an unhealthy current of dissatisfaction and discontent" - was undermining the existing control and management of most sports. Champions in any game considered themselves above reproach and "shamateurism" was taking the place of the old sporting spirit. Kent did not refer to the perpetual squabbles and bad behaviour among members which constantly appeared on Committee agendas and which equally reflected the malaise and tension of the times. He spoke cheerfully, spiking the guns of his critics as was his wont, but the future - particularly financial - looked black.

Like manna from Heaven, there fell into the lap of the Wanderers Club the general public's craving for inexpensive entertainment in the shape of Greyhound Racing. In the face of bitter resentment from the older members who saw their precious preserves turned into something worse than Epsom Downs, the Club made structural alterations to its main grounds to accommodate the equipment and business of the African Greyhound Racing Association. There was no lease but an agreement by which the Club took a percentage of the gate money. By October 1932, regular meetings were held and proved exceedingly popular. The highest and the lowest in the land participated (Lady Dalrymple owned and raced greyhounds), great crowds regularly attended and the Club profited handsomely. It was just in time. In September 1933, the Twelve O'clock Club gave six months notice and a valuable regular revenue departed. By then, even more outrageous sources of income had been adopted.

Kent resisted re-election but the Club would have none other. Orford resigned at the end of 1933 and on the 1st December, A. S. Frames, secretary of the Cricket Association as Allsop had been, was appointed and confirmed in office on the 1st January 1934. There began an association of nearly twenty years between two men which, at its end, had accomplished a complete transformation in the locale, character and activities of the

Wanderers Club. Algy Frames shared in the general respect and admiration of Victor Kent but it fell to him to provide a quiet determined man with the material to mount his campaigns and to disarm his critics. Both came in abundance in the turbulent thirties.



Audrey de Smidt (Mrs A. McAllister) – Wanderers Tennis Springbok

Members of the Wanderers Tennis Club who played for Transvaal and for South Africa in the 20's and 30's
Left to right front row: Mrs G. E. Peacock (Springbok), Mrs. J. W. Neave (Springbok), Mrs. A. E. Lowe, Miss D. Kitson, Mrs. C. L. Winslow
Back row: Mrs. E. C. Hall (Springbok) Mrs. Craze, Mrs. R. Steyn

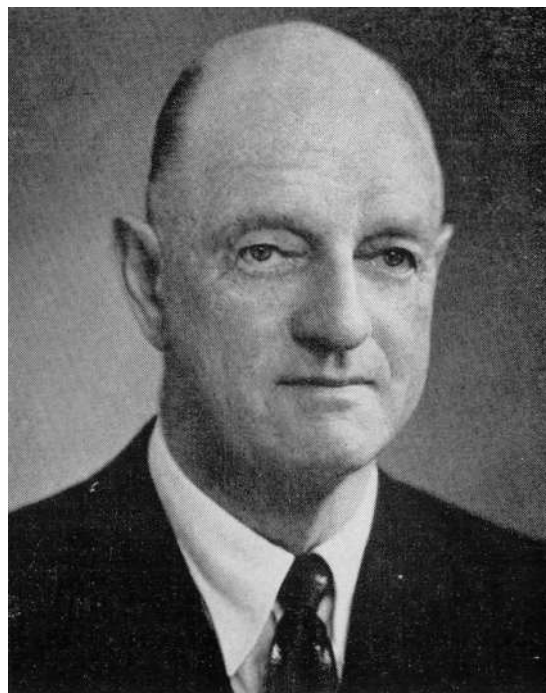


In the absence of overseas touring teams and with a membership that barely maintained its level, additional revenue was essential. "Shabbiness" was a word that belonged to the Wanderers Club and if members were to continue to be attracted, the Club House had to be redecorated. The architect-artist, William Timlin of Kimberley, designed many "improvements" including a Grotto and much money was spent. The Club had no alternative but to outrage its older members even further. In 1934, it entered into its first agreement with a commercial body promoting professional sport and in due course, open-air boxing contests and wrestling matches were staged by the Transvaal National Sporting Club. Many famous boxers such as Pete Sarron, Aldo Spoldi and the local Laurie Stevens

appeared there. Daily, the Wanderers became more like the Coliseum in Rome and the revenue was very satisfactory. It was even possible to redeem £1,800 in debentures - Kent's perennial aim - and to reduce the annual subscription of members enrolled before 1908 to one guinea.



Victor Kent



A. S. Frames

Then a pistol was held at the Club's head. The South African Cricket Association insisted that all international matches be played on turf. The Club's experimental practice pitches had been ruined by drought but now the main issue had to be faced. At a special general meeting of 150 members on the 7th August 1934, there was still hostility and long argument but when it came to a division 87 prevailed over 23 and the decision was taken. The mitigation of the historic dust evil had weighed heavily.

It was the first of the many Herculean labours that fell to Frames and he described it thus, "The preparations for what was then considered a gigantic undertaking needed particularly careful handling and with our head groundsman, Houliston, I set about getting together the ingredients for the work of growing luscious green grass on what had been since 1889 a completely hard stretch of red earth.

"Compost was almost an unknown quantity in those days so we had no alternative but to use kraal manure and a considerable amount of sludge which the Johannesburg City Council very kindly gave free. It had previously been decided to use Magennis grass from the banks of the Modder River near Kimberley. The soil for the actual wicket was to be Umgeni from Natal. Now, thoroughly equipped with all the necessaries, we started out on our 'Great Adventure'.

"We had not gone very far with the ripping-up process when we came across solid rock in front of the north cricket screen and had to call in two certificated miners to blast out the encumbrance. The next obstacle was a stretch of shale running along almost the entire length of the eastern side of the ground but here Houliston overcame the difficulties.

"When the sludge was brought in and spread over the ground, a pretty indifferent aroma made itself unpleasant to flat-dwellers and others who lived in the vicinity. My telephone was red-hot with complaining individuals but I had an answer for all. I countered their complaints by saying: "For years you have been complaining about the red dust evil and now when we are eliminating this nuisance, you are still not satisfied." Protests were made

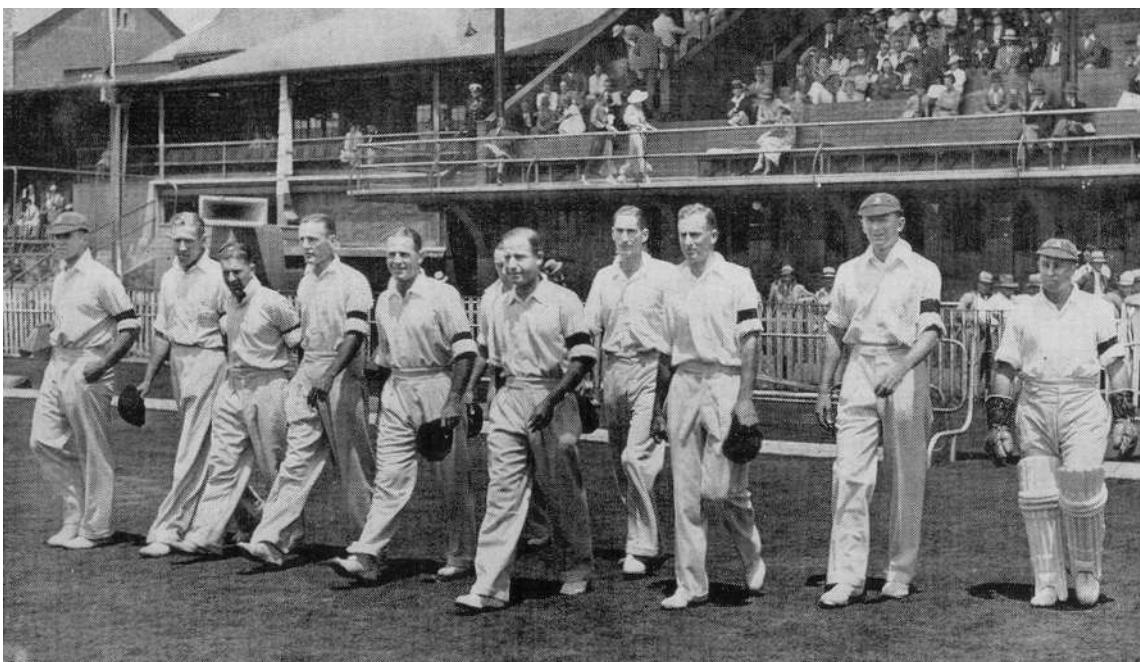
to the City Health Department but when the inspectors arrived and found the cause of the evil came from their own disposal works, there was nothing they could do about it.

"When the grass eventually commenced to take root, there appeared yet another 'evil'. thousands of beautiful tomato plants arrived in the midst of the grass. On investigation, we ascertained that the process at the disposal works did not, among other things, disintegrate completely tomato seed. To cope with our difficulty, we got anybody who desired tomato plants to come along with their baskets and help themselves. Our plan succeeded admirably.

"Our labours were eventually rewarded by the appearance of a singularly beautiful turf outfield and on the 9th, 11th and 12th March 1935, Transvaal played Free State on this ground and scored 609. Free State made only 70 in their first innings and were 74 for six when rain put an end to play. The reason for Free State's small score was that none of their players knew anything about batting on a turf wicket..."

The grass ground quickly became famous and the Australian team which played on it in 1935/36 commented very favourably upon it. One of the Wanderers' chronic *causes célèbres* had ceased.

As Johannesburg entered its Jubilee Year and the vast Empire Exhibition was staged at Milner Park (in which the Club declined to participate but Jubilee matches were played on its grounds), Kent could report the most successful financial year ever spent - at so high a cost in capital outlay that no debentures could be redeemed. The turfed front ground had been an outstanding success and the Club was inundated with applications to hire it but as the grass had to be conserved, its use and its revenue-production were limited. Greyhound racing flourished on one night every week, a fortnightly Club cabaret enjoyed a large attendance, Squash Courts had been built and opened, three touring teams had successfully played (despite the intrusion of a new phenomenon - barracking - at the Australian matches), the membership had increased and the Club was no longer big enough to deal with its demands. Both the grounds and the buildings were now too small to cope with the proliferated activities which the Wanderers Club had undertaken. People marvelled at the oasis of recreation in the centre of the Golden City and counted the citizens fortunate in having both a vast public arena and private courts and greens in a context consisting of skyscrapers. In fact, the canny Kent told his members, the Club had outgrown its premises and thought must be given to the future.



The Springbok team takes the field for the fourth test against the Australians at Wanderers' Club in February 1936. Although they were to be humiliated by an innings and 184-runs defeat in this match, there were moments of personal triumph for two of the team members in the

Second Test played on this ground six weeks before. Dudley Nourse (fifth from left) made 231, the highest score ever made by a South African against Australia; and Bruce Mitchell (third from right) took four wickets for five runs in nine balls. The cricketers are wearing a black armband in the picture because King George V had just died

The periphery of the northern suburbs at that time ended at Rosebank. Open veld stretched beyond but already the town was extending rapidly in that direction. The new Monro Drive gave access to the fashionable Lower Houghton and, after Schlesinger's pioneering Whitehall Court, huge blocks of flats were beginning to appear at Killarney. The move was to the north and its speed was remarkable. Among the Committee members of the Wanderers Club were men who watched it appraisingly but they kept their counsel. Any known enquiry about property would be prejudicial to the interests of the Club. By November 1936, they had completed their survey and were ready to confront a special meeting attended by 153 members. They would seek authority "to purchase outside land for the purpose of laying out playing fields and extending the Club's activities in such other directions as the Committee may recommend or deem necessary".

It was Kent's practice to brief himself beforehand, largely through Frames, on the difficulties and criticisms that were likely to be raised and in his opening address, he customarily dealt with them so effectively that there was usually little discussion. Now, with the special meeting strictly in camera, he told the members that the Club was already renting outside grounds to accommodate its overflow, that the Finance Committee had carefully considered and inspected property available and that they would recommend the purchase from several owners of about 200 acres on both sides of Corlett Drive at Illovo, that the site was a mere 12 minutes drive from the Wanderers (Frames had tested it himself - there were no robots or dense traffic in those days) and that though there was absolutely no intention to vacate the old historic ground, the danger of expropriation had always existed, One of the properties alone would cost £25,000 and the total would be much more.

He spoke wholeheartedly in favour of the Finance Committee's motion with his vice-chairman E. L. Bateman in full support. There was no opposition - only a few questions and upon the motion being put, it was carried unanimously. The Wanderers had taken a big and brave step into the void. No Club in South Africa had ever attempted town and country sections or involved itself in such massive capitalisation. The Town Council would have to be asked to alter again the historic lease to enable the Club to increase its borrowing from £30,000 to £50,000. No one was very clear how the new arrangement would work but much would have to be done before the bare and tussocky veld, varied only by a Portuguese vegetable garden and a cottage or two, could be made appropriate to any kind of game.

Historically, the moment was ironically inept. In March 1937, Kent told the annual meeting that nothing was further from the Committee's thoughts than relinquishing the old grounds. He paid unusual tribute to the Press for its cooperation in not reporting the negotiations for purchase of new property. On the 9th April - less than a week later - the Stock Market crashed on the notorious "Black Friday". It said much for the courage and purposefulness of the Wanderers men that five days later—on the 14th April 1937 - they recommended an expenditure just short of £100,000 compounded of £45,000 for land and the balance for buildings and construction, redemptions, overdraft, etc. The special meeting approved and also agreed that the new property should be called Wanderers Club (Kent Park) and be run as a separate organisation controlled by the parent Club. A survey of the ground would be made and a draft lay-out prepared by Felix Oliver, a Club member. The incredibly complicated development steadily proceeded.

The preoccupations of the General Committee were immense but in June 1937, they remembered that the semi-centenary of the Club impended and appointed a sub-committee to make recommendations. It never met. The past was constantly before them in the deaths of pioneering members - A. E. Williamson, a past chairman, and Sir George Albu who had joined in 1891, died in 1935; John Orr and prematurely, poor Jock Cameron, one of the Wanderers greatest cricketers, in 1936; J. N. Greenlees, a founding member, in 1937 and in September, Barend Vieyra, "the father of Gymnastics in South Africa". When

Vieyra came from Holland to Johannesburg in the nineties, he was the only certificated and qualified physical culturist and gymnast in South Africa. His influence on physical fitness was incalculable and, apart from many other avenues, he raised the standard of the Wanderers Gymnastic Club (despite its many vicissitudes) to professional height and achievement. Its members, desiring to commemorate him, commissioned the sculptor Couzyn to make a bronze portrait bust which, costing £172, was ultimately installed at the entrance to the Wanderers Gymnasium. Vieyra had also served on the General Committee for many years. His son Simeon continued his service.

A few days after Vieyra's death, the Gymnastic Club approached the General Committee with proposals for celebrating the Wanderers' Semi-Centenary in 1938 as they had done in 1908. Again a sub-committee was appointed and again it never met. Everyone was too busy with the development of the Illovo property. Only Jacob Swart, now 80, wrote emphatically to remind the Club that the anniversary date was the 18th August and that it had been celebrated in 1908. Casting around, Frames found the old Minute book of the Athletic Club founded in March 1889 and, ignoring record and precedent, the Committee decided to celebrate a non-existent anniversary in March 1939. It was completely forgotten. Illovo dominated all thoughts and activity.



Two famous Springbok cricket captains on the Old Wanderers Ground – Alan Melville and Herby Wade

It had become customary for Sir Llewellyn Andersson to conduct the first Committee meeting after the annual general meeting and call for nominations for the chair, whereafter he withdrew. Recently bereaved by the loss of his wife, he rose on the 17th March 1939 and so far from performing his perfunctory rites, enquired what the new Committee was going to do about the fiftieth anniversary as he had given documents to Kent proving beyond dispute that the Club was founded in October 1888 (his letter of appointment as secretary gave that date). Kent was again re-elected and raised the matter at the next meeting which decided that as the date was already past, nothing could be done. Andersson did not let the matter rest.

In the hectic days of Stormtroopers and *Anschlusse* which the South African public regarded with incredulous disinterest, the affairs of the Wanderers Club prospered. While

the Illovo plot was hatched, its sporting facilities were strained to the uttermost. During 1937, the Tennis Club had a waiting list of 325 and other sub-clubs were similarly congested. The monthly magazine and fortnightly cabaret united the members who now had grand ideas of erecting an all-weather stand but found that there was no room on the old grounds. Revenue was burgeoning and for the first time, the 1937 balance sheet showed no £100 debentures. They had been paid off with the new loan. By July 1938, the Membership Roll had to be closed. There was no more room.

While the commemorative wagons prepared to lumber towards Johannesburg on their way to the *Voortrekker* Centenary Celebrations in Pretoria (historical pageants were held on the Wanderers Ground), the ground was being levelled at Kent Park for rugby and other playing fields including a golf course. It was necessary for developments to be sanctioned by the members who assembled to the number of 163 at the Club House at a special meeting on the 27th September 1938. In the middle of the meeting, a motion to adjourn was agreed and the convocation fell silent to listen to Neville Chamberlain, son of Joseph, broadcasting the account of his meeting with Hitler. Some of those present never returned from the result of that interview.

It was agreed that at Kent Park, a separate Golf Club and other sporting sub-clubs should be formed which would lease their grounds and premises from the parent Wanderers Club. In due course, it was done and Victor Kent formally opened the new Golf Club in March 1939. A few days earlier, he had presided at the parent Club's annual meeting and commented on its tremendously expanding activities. The outbreak of war caught it in full stride.

While the "phoney" war pursued its strange course and a totally unprepared South Africa discarded its bush carts and girded itself for action in Central Africa, little changed at the Wanderers beyond the automatic expulsion from membership of internees. Union troops did not go into action for many months and, hostilities seeming both distant and unreal, people diverted themselves as ardently as ever. Club revenue remained as buoyant as before. The impact of mobilisation took long to register but the Wanderers suffered in other ways, notably in the suspension of much work at Kent Park and the loss of its founders and grandees. Charles A. O. Bain had died unnoticed in 1938. During 1939, James Hyde died at a great age in England, his pioneering contribution never properly recognised, and in September, Sir Willem van Hulsteyn, a patron of tennis, W. T. Graham and H. J. Lamb, a past chairman. In October, greatly mourned, Nummy Deane was buried. When Sir Abe Bailey died in August 1940, the event could only be noted but when Jacob Swart died of heart failure at the age of 83 in Cape Town early in 1941, his ashes being interred with his wife and son at Plumstead Cemetery, Sir Llewellyn Andersson emerged to declare the Club's indebtedness to its true founder.

Himself 80, Sir Llewellyn came to the annual meeting of the 25th March 1941, attended by only 60 members, to do honour to the colleagues who had joined him in forming the Wanderers Club in 1888. He brought his letter of appointment to prove that the date was before October 1888 and, having paid his tribute, he regaled the gathering with reminiscences of the early days. He confirmed the history of the Club colours and how his friend Billy Simkins had been able to obtain none other in 1888. Kent in his turn acknowledged the Club's debt to Jacob Swart but, at that time, no further gesture could be made.

By then, the Club had moved into low gear. 846 of its members were on active service, the women as well as the men, but the roll was kept low so that they could be admitted when they returned. Once again, only candidates exempt from military service were enrolled. Although the Greyhound Racing continued a popular attraction, revenue decreased and expenditure was curtailed. The Club's finances had very carefully to be managed and the exigencies of war soon made themselves felt. Shortages afflicted everyone and from 1942 onwards, the Club's reports were no longer printed but roneoed in limited copies. The First Division had gone to East Africa and many members were wounded, killed and decorated.

Constant report being made in the Club Magazine whose editor, Major M. Ratcliffe, was among them.

The Wanderers grounds continued the focus of the City's life and all kinds of war activities took place there - recruiting, fund-raising occasions, parades and assemblies. Its older members were implicated in all aspects of service. Towards the end of 1942, Victor Kent on a mission to Pretoria, entered into conversation with Claude Sturrock, Minister of Transport and was astounded to hear that the Railways intended expropriating the Grounds. On the 23rd October 1942, the Wanderers General Committee met secretly and decided to buy more land at Illovo. It seemed certain that so far from Kent Park providing a country subsidiary to the parent urban club, it would in the end have to assume the substantive role with all buildings and facilities. The threatened action soon became publicly known.

Having driven the Italians out of Abyssinia and joined the Allied Forces in Egypt and the Western Desert, the First Division came home on leave. On the Wanderers Grounds, there ensued perhaps its most memorable and moving scene (later followed by many other, including the return of the Prisoners of War). It was described by the participant Major Ratcliffe.

"On arrival at Park Station more or less in a daze", he wrote, "we found a platform practically bare except for Major General George Brink, His Worship the Mayor and a few necessary officials. We were quickly decanted from the train, told not to worry about our kit and instructed to line up so that the Mayor and General Brink might say a few words of welcome. As we did this, we looked furtively around for the sight of a mother, wife, sister or sweetheart. There was no one in sight. Aha! we thought, for reasons of security, our return had been kept dark. There would be no delay and we should be on our way in no time which we thought was a very good idea.

"We listened patiently to the kind words of welcome from Mr Lionel Leveson and General Brink and then learned that we had to march through the subway to the Wanderers for dismissal. Well, even this arrangement suited many of us - Wanderers members - and we were not actively averse to the prospect of 'downing a quick one' with Algie before going home so we cheerfully lined up for the last lap.

"Then we marched on to the glorious green carpet that is the main ground—and got the shock of our lives. We found ourselves looking on one of the biggest, most colourful and enthusiastic crowds the famous old ground had ever held. The sight dazzled our eyes - until the wild cheering that broke out brought forth a certain moisture that rendered further perception difficult.

"We were halted briefly while a voice over the loudspeaker told us that our relatives were waiting for us under our initials. We then saw that huge letters divided the arena into 26 areas and in the flash of an eyelid, our column disintegrated in 26 different directions like chaff in a whirlwind. Inside a few seconds, we had found our families and had been kissed and mobbed as never before. It was an unforgettable welcome...

"We were most impressed by the staff work of those responsible. No detail had been overlooked and it could have been done at no other place than the Wanderers. Our warmest thanks are offered to all who played a part.

"If there is to be, in the 'New Order' for which we are supposed to be fighting, any place for spiritual values, human sentiment or tradition, then this experience alone, this great public welcome to troops returning on leave, should be enough to preserve the Wanderers Grounds for all time.

'It is not often thus around
Our old familiar haunt we're found,

Bless then the meeting and the old spot.”

When the members met at the annual general meeting on the 16th March 1943, they instructed the Committee to oppose expropriation. Kent was re-elected to the chair and a great and costly battle was joined between the Wanderers Club, its landlord - the City Council - and the predatory Railways.

