

6. CONFLAGRATION

1896— 1898

For the first time in its history—but not the last—the official government of Johannesburg was usurped by an unauthorised body. The Reform Committee, constituted on the night of the 30th December 1895, took over the administration of the town, then in a state of complete upheaval with near-panic on the Reef where many of the mines closed. The excitement and emotion in Johannesburg was so volatile that the Transvaal Government wisely withdrew all signs of its legal authority and Lieutenant Tossel, Lieutenant Charlie Pietersen and their force of ZARPS were moved elsewhere. The Reform Committee became solely responsible for law and order, the controlling of thousands of unemployed natives, the provision of food and the quartering of numbers of women and children who had fled from the outlying areas and even from the suburbs into the town.

The Wanderers buildings and grounds were used for many diverse purposes, notably the assembling, drilling and instructing of a force of town police and the sheltering of the refugees. Many occupied temporary accommodation in office buildings in town (including Tattersalls) and for some days, the Wanderers Hall, Gymnasium and Skating Rink housed frightened families who bivouacked on the floor.

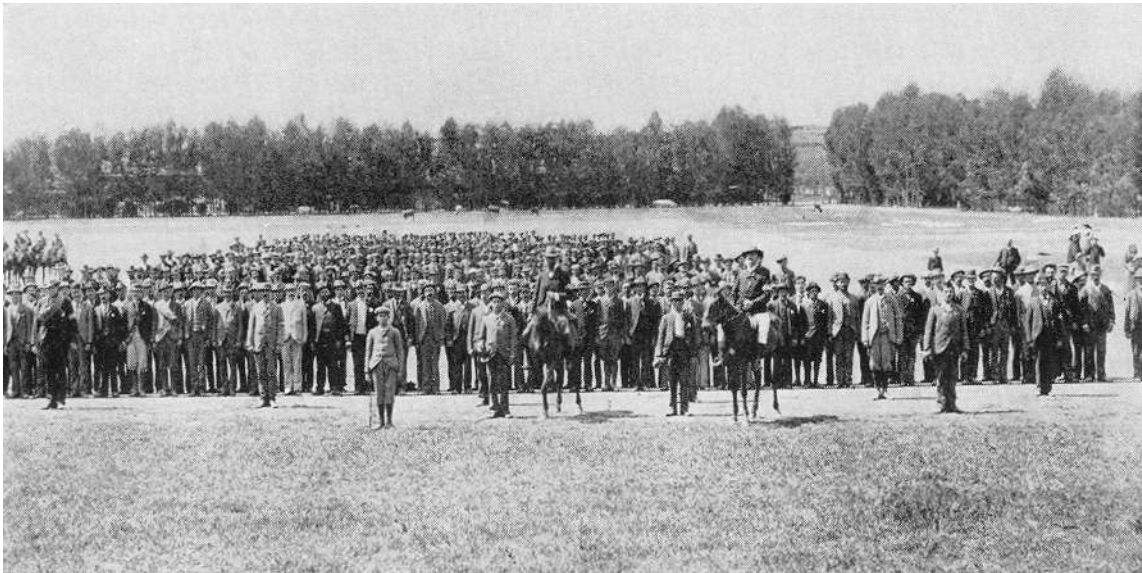
Most of the Reform Committee were members of the Club and worked without rest to maintain order and some sort of reasonable attitude to the shock of Jameson's unprovoked invasion (which his brother Sam had declared impossible). The force was on its way and the Reform Committee could not repudiate it. Llewellyn Andersson took a party of men to the top of a kopje at Auckland Park to mount a searchlight to guide the Raiders into Johannesburg. Abe Bailey sent for Frank Connock and his cycling colleagues and asked them to organise an express Cycling Corps to carry dispatches which some of them did. Lionel Phillips, as chairman of the Committee in the absence of Charles Leonard, hardly ate or slept. Burgher commandos rode about the surrounding districts and left the town to itself.

On the 2nd January, they closed in on Jameson and his force and compelled their surrender. The burgher forces then entered Johannesburg and also took advantage of the Wanderers Grounds as a convenient point of assembly. Lord Hawke with his team in Cape Town, was waiting to play on them and impatiently expected news of the end of the "disturbances" and a message from Abe Bailey with whom Hawke was to stay, advising him to proceed. The telegraph was jammed and it was several days before reliable news



Lionel Phillips centre foreground as "Folly" with his wife Florence Philips (second in the 2nd row in Empire dress) at Alfred Beit's farewell Costume Ball in April 1895

Uitlander citizens of Johannesburg drilling on the Wanderers Grounds during the unrest caused by Jameson's invasion



was transmitted. The Wanderers Club, like every other institution, had come to a standstill. Even its Bands were silenced and their music was not heard for months.

A week of chaos supervened with the Reform Committee still in charge of the town. Jameson and his men were in prison but the members of the Committee were at large and going about their business without let or hindrance. There was a strong inclination to toss the episode off as a misbegotten exploit (it could hardly be conceived as treason as the Reformers had sedulously flown the Transvaal flag) and the Wanderers Committee made strenuous efforts to stage the postponed New Year's Sports Meeting. A telegram was sent to Lord Hawke telling him immediately to bring his team for the scheduled match against the Transvaal. It would be very valuable, officials said, in taking the public's mind off the "disturbances" and the unpleasant implications of the Raid. After "kicking his heels in Cape Town for ten days", Lord Hawke was only too glad to catch the train for Johannesburg where he and his colleague, Sir Timothy O'Brien were to be met by Abe Bailey and taken to his home, Clewer House.

While the English cricketers were on their way, the Transvaal Government finally took action against the Reform Committee and under farcical conditions, arrested those who were unaware of the decision and took into custody those who smilingly gave themselves up to their old friends, the officers commanding the ZARPS. To Charlie Pietersen, original sponsor and secretary of the Wanderers Club, there fell the duty of apprehending many of its leading members. In full uniform with his sword clanking on the marble floor, he strode up and down the vestibule of the Rand Club, embarrassedly buttonholing those of his colleagues who had taken part in the "plot". They on their part greeted him with customary cordiality and some insisted on being arrested by him and not by any other ZARP officer or detective. He treated them with every courtesy and allowed them to bring all kinds of creature comforts including bottles of whiskey and other provender to the Doornfontein Gaol whither he took them in his own carriage.

On the 9th and 10th January 1896, most of the leading Johannesburg men were taken into custody and sent on their way to the Pretoria Prison. They included the President of the Chamber of Mines, Lionel Phillips; and the President of the Wanderers Club, George Farrar; its chairman H. A. Rogers, its whilom secretary C. L. Andersson, and many members of its present and past committees including Abe Bailey, Henri Bettelheim, Sam Jameson, W. E. Hudson, A. L. Lawley, Solly Joel, Frank Spencer and other supporters. Mining and commerce were seriously affected by the removal of the men who directed them but the town very rapidly resumed an air of normalcy and visitors commented on the difficulty of appreciating that anything was untoward. The shops were open, ladies drove about in their carriages, everyone went about their business and the Wanderers Ground, vacated of its refugees, hurriedly prepared for the cricket match. The officials of the Transvaal Cricket Union were hard put to find a team. After the "disturbances" and the odium they had incurred, no one wanted to come to Johannesburg.

Journeying in their train into the Transvaal, Lord Hawke and his team wondered what they would find. At Vereeniging, scowling commando men lined the track on either side and as the team dismounted to pass through the Customs two by two, it was noticed that their bandoliers were full of cartridges. But, wrote Lord Hawke in his biography, "we made such good friends with them that we presented them with a couple of bats and were loudly cheered." There was no end to the madness of the *verdomde Rooineks*.

As Lord Hawke got out of the train at Park, a gentleman approached him and announced that "he was very sorry—Mr Bailey is not here. He is in gaol." So was almost everybody else who could have taken the place of his absent host and *faute de mieux*, Lord Hawke put up at the Rand Club. He was glad of its sanctuary when General Cronje with a large commando rode along Commissioner Street through the town in a show of force and the people, sensitive to the shame and ignominy that had been visited upon them, booed the Boers heartily.

The perspicacity of the responsible men who had insisted on the visit of the English cricket team a mere day or two after the imprisonment of the elite of the town, was amply proved. The inhabitants flocked to the Wanderers as never before. During the three days of the match against a Transvaal team of 15 players (the English were above county strength), over £800 was taken at the gates. Lord Hawke, Sir Timothy O'Brien and Charles Wright found time to make the tedious train journey to Pretoria to visit Abe Bailey and other friends in the Pretoria Gaol where, after "dining" with the prisoners ("I never partook of a merrier meal"), they played poker with Lionel Phillips and George Farrar with matches as tokens. Phillips had sworn off poker after unfortunate experiences in the early days but made an exception. It cost him and Georgie £90 but the cricketers succeeded in their intention "to cheer up these good fellows".

The team consisted of ten "gentlemen" including the famous C. B. Fry and four professionals of whom the all-rounder, George Lohmann of Surrey, one of cricket's immortals, was outstanding. Lord Hawke, himself the epitome of the best in cricket, was a remarkable personality whose affability and *sang froid* endeared him to everybody. "There is", wrote an English newspaper of the day, "something individual and distinctive about him as he walks out of the pavilion. His blue cap with its white embroidered rose (Yorkshire) is pushed back on his head until it looks like a biretta. Bulky of frame, loosely knit and strong, he moves easily, indeed with an appearance of slowness however fast his pace really be. His handsome open face, swarthy in complexion, is yet clean and fresh as that of a lad... His dark eyes scan searchingly round, never resting long, but the charm of his countenance is its transparent honesty and his smile wins every man, not to speak of every woman He has done more for cricket than anyone else but only those behind the scenes know what a stern fight he has waged for the purity of the game and with what firmness he has combated abuses." His influence in South Africa was salutary.

The Transvaal XV which took the field on the 13th January 1896 at the Wanderers was a comparatively scratch lot but it included the peerless wicket-keeper Halliwell, J. J. Slatem, Louis J. Tancred, George Allsop and the youthful all-rounder J. H. Sinclair. Lord Hawke marvelled at Sinclair's batting. He hit 75 in the first innings and only 4 in the second but his talents were manifest. He also took 7 wickets in the first innings and 3 in the second. The match was very creditably drawn and the English team set off on its tour with many minor incidents (when George Lohmann realised that he was expected to disembark from the ship at East London in a basket, he absolutely refused and, remaining on board, lost his place in the next match). It returned to Johannesburg in March for the second Test Match.

The resumption of sporting events at the Wanderers was on all hands desirable. A shocked and disillusioned public needed distraction from the uncertainties of the future. "The New Year Sports", the record states, "were postponed on account of hostilities until the 22nd and 25th January. An uneventful and dull meeting—so many of our leading and active officials in gaol and only a few of the minor lights were allowed out of *tronk* (quod) on bail; however athletics looked up again in March, over thirty competitors taking part in the sprint." The band and orchestra remained silent.

The Club was hamstrung by the absence of its principal office-bearers. With the chairman and others in gaol, no annual general meeting could be held and February passed without the routine report to members. Jacob Swart mourned the absence of George Farrar whom he revered both as Turf Club and Wanderers man. "When he was president of the Wanderers Club and I acting as a sort of managing committee man", Swart wrote later, "we had a very hard struggle to make both ends meet and go on with the improvements we had decided on. We met nearly every day and there I learnt his worth. He was a worker—not one of those who had grand ideas in committee meetings and wanted others to do the work! He was of wonderful assistance to the secretary Andersson and myself and often put his hand in his pocket—he once lent us £300. All the men who worked for him did well. There are a good many people in Johannesburg who have to thank Georgie for where they are today." But Georgie and his colleagues remained in gaol and the Wanderers limped on.

A hubbub on an international scale developed and the world's press, reporters and illustrators flocked to Johannesburg. The Jameson Raiders were sent to England for trial by their own Government but no one knew what would happen to the Reform Committee members whose absence from their normal duties was slowly crippling the life of the Rand. Increasing pressure was put on the Transvaal Government to release them on bail. Before the cat could jump in any direction, a calamity struck Johannesburg which made brothers of all men.

On the 19th February 1896, a railway engine shunted into a line of trucks loaded with inferior dynamite which had been standing in blazing sunshine for three days at Braamfontein, then populated by humble and impoverished people. The shock instantly detonated the whole load in an explosion which was said to have been audible at Bloemfontein. The carnage was frightful and no existing resources could cope with it, least of all the tiny General Hospital. It was many days before the hundreds of horribly mutilated casualties could be counted and some were never known.

Those who were visible or could be disinterred from the debris of ruined houses, were taken a few hundred yards to the Wanderers Club where the Hall, the Gymnasium and other premises were converted into a hospital and the Skating Rink into a morgue. The chairman of the Hospital Board, Dr A. P. Hillier, had been allowed out of the Pretoria Gaol on bail and joined nineteen doctors, under the supervision of Dr Bensusan, in ministering to the appallingly injured victims lying on iron beds hurriedly brought to the Great Hall. The General Hospital was already full and its nursing staff completely occupied but, supervised by Nurse Nettleton, many women including Mrs Solly Joel, gave their amateur services day and night at the Wanderers. They were helped by Jacob Swart and other members who knew what facilities could be made available. A few hundred yards away where the railway track now ended in a vast chasm surrounded by devastation, W. P. Taylor, Jimmy Sinclair and other Wanderers men searched in the upturned earth and ruins for further victims.

President Kruger came immediately from Pretoria and was shown the site and the arrangements made for the casualties. When he came to the Wanderers, he wept openly. There were 36 corpses lying on the Skating Rink. "The President", *The Star* said, "exhibited considerable emotion, particularly when shown the long array of black coffins the lids of which were in some cases removed to display the ghastly contents." He moved through the temporary wards in the Club House and spoke to some of the shattered patients, the majority of whom were Dutch-speaking Transvalers. The scene afflicted him deeply and he had difficulty in making known to those in charge that he appreciated what they were doing and would give them all possible aid. In a voice thick with emotion, he promised that the Government would do its duty. The town had already done so. Within two days, it had collected over £100,000 for a relief fund. For more than three weeks, the Wanderers men and women toiled in the hospital which their Club House had become. The impression it made on them was lasting and sobering.

When the English team returned to Johannesburg early in March, "the whole, of the Wanderers Hall which was our pavilion, stank of iodoform and was full of wounded", Lord Hawke remembered. The second Test Match was played on the grounds in the aftermath of tragedy and while doctors, nurses and undertakers still frequented the premises. South Africa was overwhelmed and lost by an innings and 197 runs with Lohmann earning the extraordinary average of 8 wickets for 7 runs. Halliwell was outstanding and Sinclair made his name as a bowler in the series.

Shortly after the match, all the Raid prisoners were released on bail after a preparatory examination with the exception of the four leading members of the Reform Committee—Phillips, Farrar, Frank Rhodes and Percy Fitzpatrick (who was liberated for a week-end only). The Wanderers men among them, with the most praiseworthy devotion to their duties, immediately tried to set the affairs of the Club in order and on the 20th March 1896, the sixth annual meeting was held, only one month late. After eight weeks in gaol

under primitive and exacerbating conditions, H. A. Rogers took the chair and delivered a lengthy report. The realisation had been forced upon the Club and its members that it was no longer merely the social and recreational centre of the biggest gold mining industry in the world. It had become a public institution responsible for all aspects of the welfare of the population whenever occasion demanded.

"Members all know the hard and distressing times the Club has had to encounter since Christmas last", Rogers said, "and though it has been a source of pride and gratification to the members of the Club to know that their institution has been of such signal benefit to the public on two great occasions in the late history of Johannesburg, yet it has not been without heavy cost to the institution in many ways." The membership had increased by 25%, the debenture holders continued to waive their claims, a sizeable loan might now be raised but huge problems of expansion and improvement confronted them. There was in addition the disturbed political situation and the forthcoming trial of the Reform Committee members. Of those who attended the meeting—Abe Bailey, Andersson, Rogers himself and others—none knew what their sentence would be or how the Club and Johannesburg itself would be affected, but they continued to plan and to look optimistically into the future.

Julius Jeppe became chairman, Andersson and Swart were elected to represent the life-member/debenture holders and Rogers, Bailey, Ernest Lezard, W. T. Graham, H. Duval (the manager of the Bank of Africa with which the Club dealt), S. A. White, F. W. Smith, Gustav Sonn and C. Boeschoten to represent the members. D. J. Pullinger took the place of George Farrar as president and J. G. Currey became vice-president in the place of the departed J. B. Taylor. On the motion of Jacob Swart, the meeting inaugurated the appointment of Patrons of the Club as "an acknowledgement of the services of those gentlemen who had served on the Committee but had very little time to give to the business of the Club. They would thus be kept in touch with its activities." Thereupon appointed as the first Patrons of the Wanderers Club were Friedie Eckstein (of the Corner House), Solly Joel, Abe Bailey, J. de Beer, Henry Nourse, C. L. Andersson and Lionel Phillips.

The system ultimately became futile and farcical with a huge list of Patrons of very varying standing in the community and sometimes afflicted by a total loss of interest in the Club, but initially it was well intended. It was in the first instance a flamboyant affirmation of faith in the good intentions of the men who had formed the Reform Committee to save Johannesburg. (Almost the first action of the new committee was to award an honorarium of two hundred guineas to C. L. Andersson who had ceased being secretary a year previously.)

The now manifold responsibilities of the Wanderers Club and its chairmen towards the community as a whole were vaunted by *The Star* in a sub-leader: "As to Mr Rogers himself, he has always been unremitting in his labours for the institution. Busy financier as he is, he has ever found time to personally direct the affairs of what is probably the most important enterprise of its kind in the colonies. Mr Rogers confirmed the statement that the Sunday concerts will shortly be resumed. "The sooner the better." James Hyde had attended the meeting and heard the chairman report the arrival of large quantities of new music. The band and the orchestra were already in rehearsal. Their regular concerts were important to the stability of Johannesburg.

As the time of the trial drew near, feeling rose. It had not at first appeared to anybody that the insurrection in Johannesburg was anything but an ill-conceived exploit by leading men who should have known better. There was considerable animus against them for having disturbed the peace. Now the realisation dawned that their lives were in danger. Phillips, Farrar, Rhodes and Fitzpatrick might well be shot or hanged and even now, they languished in goal while others went free on bail. Huge petitions had been signed and presented without success and the prospects were black. At the end of April the trial took place in Pretoria and the four leaders were sentenced to death by hanging. The shock to

Johannesburg was immense and further disturbances were feared. The Stock Exchange closed and responsible men tried to curb threats of violent action. Women organised a



Julius Jeppe, chairman of the Wanderers Club during the late 90's whose charm, tact and ability steered it through troublous times

petition of 3,000 names pleading for the lives of the condemned. It had to reach the President and the Executive Council before they could confirm the sentences. The fastest thing on wheels was still the bicycle and the fastest cyclist Frank Connock. He rode the thirty-five miles along a gravel road to Pretoria in 2 hours 20 minutes and handed the petition to the committee entrusted with presenting it. Ultimately the sentence was commuted to a heavy fine and prohibition of political activity. Lionel Phillips left the country and, apart from a lightning visit in the same year, knew the Wanderers no more. Ten years later, he returned. Georgie came back sooner.

Johannesburg continued in a disturbed and unstable state for many months and never recovered the equanimity of "the good old days" when its people came to the Wanderers for fun and games. All forms of sport except cycling fell into decline and the Wanderers Gymnasium again became moribund. The effect on the Club's revenue was serious and at the end of 1896, the chairman Jeppe had to report that "from the objective point of view, the working of the Club has been thoroughly satisfactory though the financial results have not been as successful as could he wished, the stirring events of the past year being greatly responsible for the loss the Club has sustained." The Club had now to compete with manifold distractions including "Theatres of Variety" and numerous ad hoc entertainments. The "disturbances" had limelighted Johannesburg in world affairs and every kind of individual, desirable and undesirable now gravitated toward it. Many purveyed stunts and entertainments and others came to practice professions, including the oldest in the world.

Among the young hopefuls who came to Johannesburg in 1896, and later exercised a profound effect on the Wanderers Club, was Arthur Ruben who, born in Sweden and educated in Germany, proposed practicing his trade as a printer. Taking the customary three days and three nights by train from Cape Town, he arrived on the 25th May. "In the train", he wrote, "I met a middle-aged couple with a rather attractive young girl of about 16 years of age. They were French and the young girl and I struck up quite a friendship. On my arrival, I was met by my brother and two of his friends and as it was a holiday, we drove out to Orange Grove where there was a balloon ascent in the hotel garden. As we strolled through the garden, we encountered the French family and when I very politely greeted them by taking off my hat to them, my brother and friends laughed at me and said

'They are just prostitutes'. At the time, I didn't believe them but when a few months later, I strolled down Kerk or Jeppe Streets, I came face to face with my young train acquaintance. There was no mistaking her profession..." Prostitution flourished so flamboyantly in the Golden City that when Kitchener occupied the town in 1900, he packed all its practitioners into a train and sent them to Cape Town where, with the constant traffic of troops, they prospered exceedingly and greatly distressed the inhabitants.

With the population constantly increasing and the atmosphere daily becoming more strained and hectic, the character of Johannesburg changed and the old forms of diversion lost their appeal. It was typical of the times that in May 1896, the lady members of the Wanderers should organise noisily into a Cycling Club and issue circulars (printed by Mr Ruben) to potential recruits. Lady cyclists in boaters and bloomers were considered as outrageous as the latter wearers of bobbed hair and the miniskirt but the Wanderers ladies persisted and in time, a special track was built for them. Their devotion to their bikes was however erratic.

During the winter of 1896, the hearts of the Johannesburg people were considerably uplifted by the visit of an English rucker team captained by J. Hammond and including the famous giant forward P. F. "Baby" Hancock and Walter J. Carey, subsequently Bishop of Bloemfontein. They were enormously entertained and won almost all their matches. In later years, Carey remembered one incident "as an example of the rough and ready hospitality of the Johannesburg of those days. We developed enormous appetites at night and nothing would satisfy us except buttered eggs. Half a dozen of us went to a small hotel about midnight and asked if we could have buttered eggs. The landlord who was a great husky Lancashire man, came out in a bad temper (and out of a warm bed) and said: 'I'll fight any one of you. If you win, you can have buttered eggs.' We trotted out Hancock with his 17 stone 9 of weight (247 lbs). When the landlord saw him, he just said: 'Come inside'. And when he found that Mortimer, one of our team, was a Lancastrian, we had buttered eggs and champagne free of charge!"

Athletics still had some hold on the public but the lordly cyclists ruled the roost. Attendances at Sporting Meetings were declining—except in November 1896 when Carnival Sports were held in aid of the Hospital and proved "a gigantic success". They were distinguished by a curious 100 yard race between Connock on a cycle and P. Blignaut on foot from a standing start. Connock won in 10 seconds—"certainly a surprise for a runner has all steam up in a jiffy whilst a bike wants a little coaxing for the first thirty yards", commented G. A. Parker, the sporting historian.

The Club continued to concern itself ardently with keeping sport "pure" and Jeppe was able to report with pride that there had been "far fewer complaints about faked racing" and that betting had all but stopped - no mean feat when gambling, always endemic in Johannesburg, now flourished like the green bay tree. The idealistic support of principles was admirable but as always, sources of revenue were more important. That the membership was increasing was due to a considerable extent to non-sporting activities and particularly to the work of James Hyde and Ernest Lezard, secretary of the Committee charged with administering the orchestras and other entertainments.

The Wanderers had accepted the obligation of purveying regular entertainment to a restless community. It was a service which, in the latter nineties, developed into a considerable enterprise, almost overshadowing the Club's other sections. The Wanderers Military Band and Orchestra gave regular Concerts, now fortified by established star artistes" such as Ada Delaporte who received ten guineas per performance. They also acted as joint impresarios with Arturo Bonamici and other professional purveyors of entertainment, usually on a half-share basis. When the famous conjuror Carl Hertz performed at the Wanderers Hall in June 1896, the Club received half the admission charges amounting to £47. In September, it presented the world-famous singer Sims Reeves in association with Bonamici.

In his day the greatest tenor in England, Sims Reeves was now toothless, penniless and seventy, his voice being reduced to a squeak. A member of an audience recorded that listening to this sad, cadaverous old man bravely trying to sing "Come into the garden, Maud", the song that once had made him famous, was such a pathetic experience that it made me want to cry. But his reputation was enough for Bonamici and the Wanderers to make £170 each from his recitals.

Even more spectacular was the feat of the Wanderers Choral Society conducted by James Hyde which early in 1897 performed "Elijah" and netted £175. Once again the Committee voted Hyde an honorarium but this time they paid him a hundred guineas.

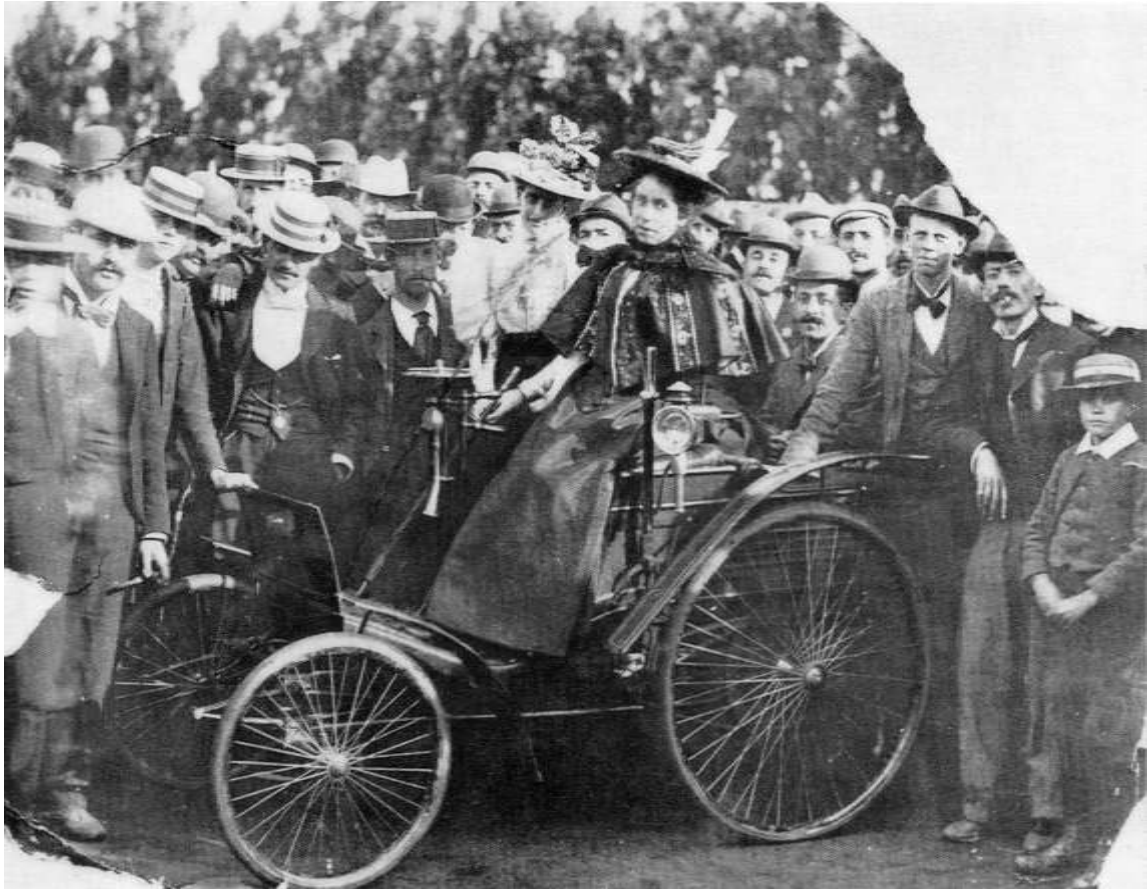
It had seriously been proposed to limit the Club membership to 750, a figure which it was now approaching. An annual subscription of five guineas entitled all members, by resolution of the seventh annual meeting, to membership of all sections and they were of course admitted free to everything staged on Club premises, whether by the Club itself or by outside impresarios. The administration of this multi-faceted institution was now a formidable undertaking demanding competent staff. On the 1st August 1896, the Club appointed George Allsop, the well known cricketer (lured by Jeppe from his employment on a mine) as secretary at a salary of £50 a month.

Born in Hampshire, Allsop came to the Cape as a boy of seventeen in 1881 to work for an uncle at Paarl. The gold rush carried him to Johannesburg in December 1887 where, between playing cricket, he did clerical work in a mine office. A confirmed bachelor, he was a man of deep and diverse cultural interest and read enormously. He also practiced numerous hobbies particularly in craftsmanship and at one time owned as many as seven lathes on which, almost until the end of his days, he worked beautifully in wood, ivory and other materials. He remained secretary of the Wanderers Club for thirty one years, assisted at the outset by J. A. F. Pearson. Their staff consisted of Fritz Wilhelm, the groundsman-handyman and his assistant V. Rae with numerous natives.

The deteriorating political situation increased the uncertainty and instability which had afflicted Johannesburg after the Raid. The arrival of Sir Alfred Milner in May 1897 as the new Governor of the Cape and High Commissioner for South Africa did nothing to fortify the hopes of those whose fortunes depended on the avoidance of conflict and the Rand slowly slipped into another phase of deep depression. It was fortunate that at a period pregnant with problems, the Wanderers Club should have as its chairman one of its most distinguished founders, Julius Jeppe.

Of German origin, Jeppe came to Pretoria as a youth and, a most versatile sportsman, played a pioneering role in athletics (he was a hurdler), cricket, polo, marksmanship, racing and other fields. His account of early cricket in Pretoria played on Church Square in the Seventies when an aspiring Grace smote a ball into the Raadzaal while the Volksraad was in session, is one of the classics compounded in Luckin's "History of South African Cricket". Fundamentally he was a philanthropist and there were few spheres of community welfare (hospitals, children's homes, preservation of natural resources and the like) which he did not serve all his life. He was thirty-seven when he became chairman of the Wanderers Club but in addition to the sporting experiences of his youth (when he had come to know all the outstanding personalities in every field), he was favoured with a sound conservative judgment and a personality that commanded the respect of his colleagues. He directed the Club during the most trying years of its existence and literally conducted it through its baptism of fire.

The late nineties when Jeppe first held the chair already bore the shadow of impending catalytic event of worldwide significance. In January 1897, for instance, the first motor car—a comically feeble Benz imported by J. P. Hess and subsequently bought by "Coffee" Jacobs to advertise his product—was exhibited at the Wanderers Grounds and wheezed around the track. Seventy years later, the little boys who then watched it remembered that it took a long time to start and that they ran alongside as it made its painful progress.



Johannesburg's first motor car being demonstrated at the Wanderers Grounds

Within a few years, the horseless carriage became the fastest thing on wheels and completely revolutionised both the structure and the purpose of the Wanderers Club. The motorcycle destroyed for all time the sporting predominance of cycling and introduced new forms such as dirt-track racing while the motor car profoundly affected the membership and converted large numbers of people from participant players into passive spectators attracted only by singular spectacles which the Club was expected to supply.

On Jeppe too fell the onus of dealing with a Government which could have been forgiven for being non-cooperative. Somehow not only a practical but a cordial compromise was reached between the fanatical jingoism of Johannesburg with its central congenial Club and the Republican Government with its sharp distrust of the *Uitlanders*. The overwhelming event of 1897 was the Queen's Jubilee and Johannesburg lost all sense of proportion in celebrating "The Queen's Record Reign", largely at the Wanderers. (C. L. Andersson was the secretary of the enormous committee of which Her Majesty's Agent in Pretoria, W. Conynhame Greene was president.)

The Witwatersrand Celebration, Festival and Demonstration in Jubilation of the Queen's Record Reign took place between the 22nd and 27th June 1897 and exhibited an ambivalence which must even then have seemed incredible. The official programme which ran into several editions, proudly bore adjacently the Royal coat-of-arms and the Republican device, and Government officials were expected to respond to some of the toasts at the Grand Banquet. The focus of the festivities was the Wanderers whose every official took part and whose every premise and piece of ground was used for the purpose, including the massing and dismantling of the gigantic Procession, the staging of constant concerts by its own and other brass bands and orchestras (James Hyde was the convenor of the Musical, Theatrical and Entertainment Committee which included such powerful personalities as Frank Fillis, Luscombe Searelle, Ben Wheeler, Arturo Bonamici and Edgar

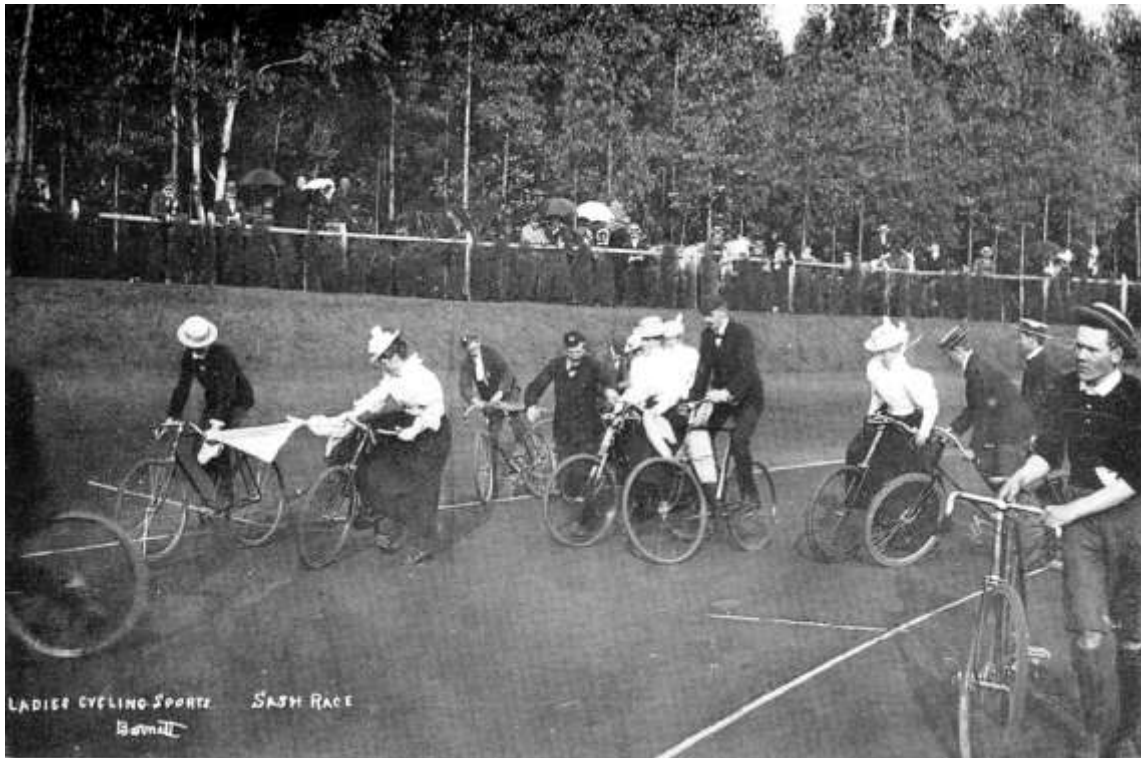
Hyman of the Empire), and the organisation of the Sports, Balls, team matches of every kind and all sorts of Sideshows. Variety entertainments took place in the Hall, Dancing and Concerts on the Skating Rink, Professor Balsamo "The Great Wizard" in the bowling alley, and Punch and Judy Shows, Pepper's Ghost, a Camera Obscura, Cyclorama, Kinetoscope, Shooting Galleries and other Victorian diversions on the Grounds. The Wanderers was in fact the heart of the jubilation but, regrettably from the financial aspect, levied only nominal charges for hiring their premises to which admission was free.

Despite Johannesburg's passionate "patriotism", Jeppe was able to report at the end of the year that the Club had on many occasions to approach the Government's representatives and its officials who assisted in every way they possibly could. "I have no hesitation in saying that if we only carry out the wishes of the Government", he went on, "we will always find the Government our true friend." (Applause) The same happy relationship maintained with the new Municipal Council (which had replaced the Sanitary Board) and its Burgomaster, Johan Zulch de Villiers.

There were many of Jeppe's ilk who tried to temporise in an impossible situation but the tempers of the young men who had founded the Club and who were now only ten years older and mostly still in their thirties, ran high and sometimes uncontrollably. Strain and tension were never absent from the Johannesburg scene, Despite strict prohibition, fights took place in the Stock Exchange and Charles Bain, now returned to make his fortune anew, once locked the door in the face of the president to prevent his seeing one. Blood sometimes flowed. "Business on 'Change", recently telegraphed the Johannesburg correspondent of the *Cape Times* (which transmitted it to London), "was partially suspended owing to the brokers being absorbed in an *affaire d'honneur* between two prominent financiers, Messrs Abe Bailey (then thirty-two) and Rissik. Heated phillipics heralded an Homeric combat during which a belligerent—one of the hurricane species—tapped his rival's claret. The fracas was short and merry and excited to a marked degree the speculative activities of the throng."

If Abe Bailey were as hot-blooded as the most impetuous among them, in his soberer moments he never shirked his responsibilities to the Wanderers. Neither did David Pullinger nor the Corner House through Friedie Eckstein (who recommended the disbursement of its funds). In 1897, when the Club found it imperative to expand and to replace the cyclists' cinder track with a cement one, to lay new tennis courts (there were never enough), to build a member's stand and other improvements—they together guaranteed a loan of £9,000, each contributing £2,000 and Bailey promising an additional £3,000.

Jeppe re-stated the aims of the Club. The policy, he said, had been to attain three objects, the first and primary one being to foster and encourage sport in all its branches, secondly to make their sports and their beautiful grounds as attractive as possible to the members and to the public in general and thirdly, to gather sufficient funds to carry out these aims. Their successes during 1897 had been very variable. The Sporting Meetings had been poorly attended with little competition whereas the Cyclists had gone from triumph to triumph (they had contributed £423 to the Club's revenue and the track was no longer big enough to accommodate the Saturday crowds). The success of the Cyclists had given rise to the allegation among the members that they were now running the Club. The sole exception was the Wanderers Ladies Cycling Club which put forth remarkable energies in May for the Queen's Jubilee and staged a Ladies Cycling Meeting with every success. Mrs Barney Barnato presented the prizes and was herself rewarded with a magnificent basket of flowers costing £3 10s. It was supplied by Messrs Lloyds Ellis & Large of Orange Grove who now tended the Club's gardens and customarily decorated the Hall with flowers and greenery on festive occasions. The Ladies Cycling Club then collapsed from the effort and was seen no more. The Gymnasium too, despite the availability of expert instructors in the manly arts, was again moribund.



The sash or scarf race for men and women cyclists at a Wanderers Sports Meeting in the 1890's

All forms of sport suffered from the depressed times but none struggled more effectively to combat them than the other entertainments which the Wanderers provided. The Orchestras and Band were now the biggest in the country (sixty five members) and, with regular supplies of the latest music from London, James Hyde had assembled "a most valuable library". At regular concerts, the public paid only 2s a head and the members nothing. In the circumstances, it was remarkable that the bands could show a profit of £48. "Mr. Hyde", said Jeppe, "has been untiring in his efforts to bring the musical culture of Johannesburg up to the highest standard and his work in connection with the orchestra, military band and choral society is deserving of the highest praise." It also deserved a bonus which, under financial strain, amounted only to £40. James Hyde was always most polite and punctilious and never failed to acknowledge by letter his grateful appreciation of recognition.

The games for which the Club had originally been constituted continued precariously. Rugby held up its head and the Club's team which included English, Irish and Welsh internationals, scored the most points in its competition and had the least scored against it but failed to win the Cup. An agreement of great importance was concluded with the Transvaal Rugby Union by which all local matches were played on the Wanderers Grounds for a period of three years. Soccer wavered on, only temporarily stimulated by the visit of the Corinthian team. Cricket was improving and once again, the Club had played host to Currie Cup matches. Encouraged (financially and otherwise) by Abe Bailey who was still an active playing member and captained the Club's first team (in which Allsop also played), the services of a professional were again commanded and George Lohmann was appointed for the 1897/98 season.

No recorded comment on George Lohmann of Surrey, "one of the greatest cricketers the world has ever seen", is anything but adulatory. Such sober judges of the game as Lord Hawke and Plum Warner wrote of him in extravagant terms. A blond giant, beautifully built and amiably disposed with a wonderful zest for life, he was "the beau ideal of a cricketer". In England, it was written of him:

*When Surrey laded out defeat,
Who did it?
When Notts and Yorks and Kent were beat,
Who did it?
Lohmann did - George Lohmann,
Something like a yeoman
Neither fast nor slow man— George!*

"This 'neither fast nor slow man' embodies very aptly and beautifully the kind of bowler George Lohmann was. No bowler of any period has enjoyed quite such a command of pace and spin as he. Agile as a panther, he never bowled two balls alike. A 'fast' bowler in that sense of the word he never was, yet the batsmen did not know what class of ball was coming next and, as the ball 'always came with his arm', his off- and leg-breaks were almost equally dangerous. In the field we have never seen anything like his lightning-like catches at short-slip. In batting he always favoured the dashing style of play and could generally be depended on for runs when the side was in a tight place. 'We ne'er shall look upon his like again'."

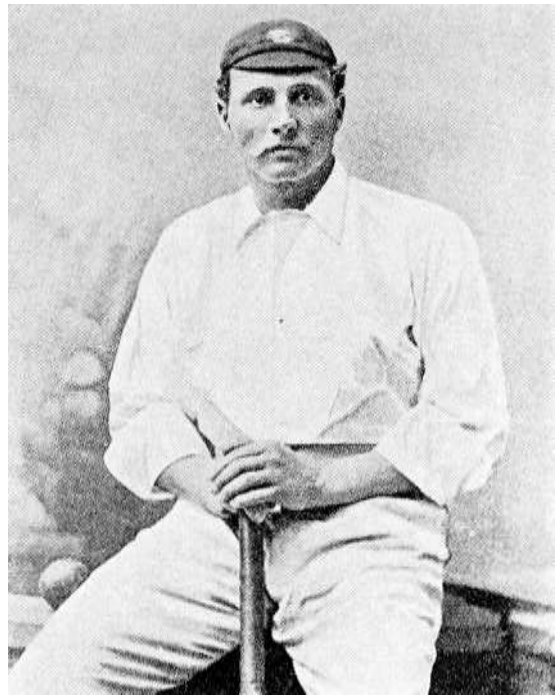
Lohmann had many apt pupils in Johannesburg but none more talented than Jimmy Sinclair, already the hardest hitter anyone had ever seen. It was allegedly off Lohmann that Sinclair started hitting balls right out of the Wanderers Ground and over the trees. Tradition has it that he did it three times in one over. He was the youngest of Abe Bailey's mature team which included such established maestros as the batsman-keeper Halliwell, the lob bowler J. H. Piton, Louis Tancred, and the sprinter T. B. Parker, now at the end of his athletic days. Lohmann coached at the Wanderers Club for one season only, his services proving invaluable, and then accepted employment with the Johannesburg Waterworks Company, continuing to play with the Wanderers team as an amateur. He was severely shaken and bruised in an accident when driving in a trap early in 1898 but soon recovered. He loved cricket with a wonderful enthusiasm and, as Lord Hawke said, "few men ever revelled more in the glory of living" but the signs of an early death were already upon him. The Wanderers never had a more distinguished or popular professional.

Over the years, there had been much tinkering with the Club constitution and bye-laws and the Subscription rates had varied with the times. Emphasis was always on active sportsmen and the original founders deplored the idea of arm-chair administrators. Apart from the life-member/debenture-holders, the Club's Committee always consisted of participating players. Now it was suggested that the chairmen of the sub-clubs—men who had faithfully served the various sports but had mostly retired from active participation—should again serve on the Committee and that the Constitution be amended accordingly. At the annual meeting on the 8th February 1898, the proposal was surprisingly defeated and many regretted it.

Jeppe spoke with optimism and confidence but the Club's finances were in a shocking state. Further expenditure on improvements was essential but the future seemed obscure. Exactly one week later, it was brilliantly illuminated by the destruction by fire of the Club House. Only the Social Club and Skating Rink escaped. The loss in revenue was incalculable.

At midnight on Tuesday the 15th February 1898, the stage of the Wanderers Hall ignited and the fire spread to the desiccated timbering. Within half an hour, the whole building was blazing like a torch—"one of the most striking conflagrations witnessed in Johannesburg within the last few years"—and threatening to spread to the semi-detached Social Club where Allsop and Pearson had their quarters. Allsop was out but Pearson and an electrician who roomed with him, jumped from the first-floor windows to the ground

George Alfred Lohmann, coach of the Wanderers Cricket club during the 1897-1898 season



WANDERERS CRICKET TEAM 1897-1898

Back row: W. R. Solomon, T. R. Parker, A. Soames, E.L. Johnson, J. E. Greveson (*inset:* George Lohmann)
2nd row: A.E. Cooper, G. Allsop, J. H. Sinclair, Abe Bailey (Captain), E. A. Halliwell, G. H. Shepstone, J. H. Piton
Recumbent: L. J. Tancred, H. M. Colegrave





President Kruger (holding an umbrella over his head) preparing to address the crowd during a visit to Johannesburg in 1898

where a crowd was collecting. There was nothing they could do to save a building which, by Johannesburg standards, was "old". Allsop soon joined them and a strong force of ZARPS, mounted and on foot, under Commandant van Dam, came from the Fort to control the crowd. Certain that the fire would spread to the Social Club, onlookers helped to throw out its contents, damaging much of Allsop's and the Club's property in the process. A breeze bore the blaze away from the semi-detached wing towards the railway and the roaring flames, visible along the Reef, merely ignited the palings of the cycle track forty feet away.

One of the ZARPS had belatedly run to fetch the Fire Brigade in Von Brandis Square and about an hour after the outbreak, Captain Bleksley and his men arrived with their steam fire engine and reels of hose. They could only stand and watch as the fire consumed the Club House, leaving only one brick wall and a mass of debris, and destroying the windows and verandah of the Social Club which Bleksley saved by sousing. By then, thousands of people had come to watch. The flames had been visible above the height of the tall blue gums and were reflected in the night sky in "a bright ruddy glare".

At noon on that same day—the 16th February 1898—George Allsop reported to a special meeting convened in Julius Jeppe's office, the extent of the loss. Totally destroyed were the Club House with its two outside stands, its famous Hall with stage, grand piano, bandstand, Band Room with music and instruments valued at £1,856 and dressing rooms, the Bar (whose caterer J. Mendelsohn lost all his stock of liquor) and Tea Room, the offices with all their contents including Minute Books, Letter Books, Agreements, Members' Roll Book, all ledgers, cash books and journals, and miscellaneous items such as £254 worth of gymnastic apparatus in the Hall, £50 worth of theatrical scenery, fittings, etc.

Gone forever were the original Minute Books of the Zingari-Wanderers Club which Charlie Pietersen had handed to C. L. Andersson in August 1888 and every single record of the Club except the lists of the original £5 debenture subscribers which were in the custody of the Club's lawyer, Mulligan. The meticulous records kept by Allsop of all Club occasions lay in ashes but Andersson and others subsequently gave him all they had themselves preserved in the way of Rules, Constitutions of Sub-Clubs and Programmes of Sporting Meetings which he glued into massive Scrap Books that still survive. There are no Minute Books of the Wanderers Club from the year of its foundation until February 1898 when Allsop wrote the minutes of the last meeting from memory, the agenda and all attached papers having been destroyed.

There survived only a small safe containing Cash Books and Cheque Books (of which one Ledger beginning September 1895 has remained), the money always being taken at the end of the day to the New Club for safe keeping. The safe itself, charred and smoke-blackened at the interstices, remained in the Club's possession and, soon too small for its extensive purposes, was ultimately consigned to the Ladies Golf Club House where, with its characteristically Victorian doors, beautifully hand-painted with spring Alpine flowers it remained in use.

Much damage had been done to the Social Club but it was reparable. The Rink building remained intact and provided a feasible hall. At a time when it could least afford it, the Club had been deprived of its most regular sources of revenue—the Bar and the leasing of the Hall. Typically, on the actual day of destruction, it caused to be published in Johannesburg newspapers:

WANDERERS CONCERT

Despite the great fire at the Wanderers, the Committee has decided to hold the usual concert on Sunday evening. A magnificent programme has been arranged and special artistes engaged for the occasion. The Grounds will be lighted by electricity.

Nearly a quarter of a century later, Julius Jeppe rose at an annual general meeting of the Club to pay tribute to the services of George Allsop. Waxing reminiscent, he recalled that at a committee meeting in February 1898, prospects had been so dismal that the members had agreed that the only thing that would save them was "a good fire". Early the next morning, Allsop had awoken him to tell him that the Club House had been burnt to the ground. He remembered that one of the committee members, Solly Joel, then chairman of the Rand Waterworks Company, had come to look at the ruins, "had laughed like the devil" and asked when the next meeting was.

