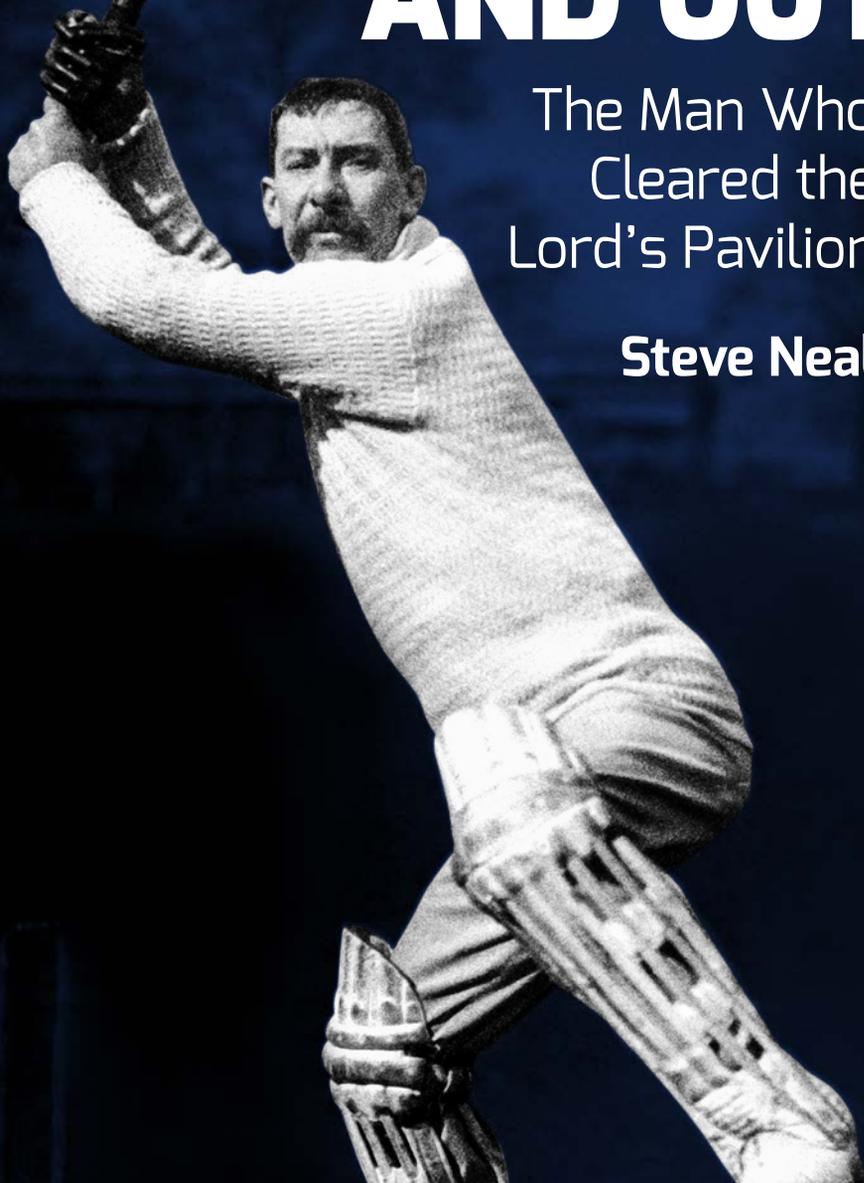


# OVER AND OUT

The Man Who  
Cleared the  
Lord's Pavilion

**Steve Neal**



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**Albert Trott:**  
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# Contents

Acknowledgements . . . . .	9
Clearing the Great Pavilion – 31 July 1899 . . . . .	11
How sweet it is to be free . . . . .	21
‘He is an Australian and must therefore have a sport’ . . . . .	29
A box called George Giffen, some warm moments and the arrival of Mr Stoddart’s XI . . . . .	43
Enter the outsider . . . . .	57
Decisive encounter . . . . .	70
The Prince of Jolimont and the reasons why . . . . .	81
‘Oh yes, I am satisfied’ . . . . .	92
Hard as nails . . . . .	106
‘It’s a funny thing’ . . . . .	120
‘We know more about his tricks’ . . . . .	129
The unknown devil . . . . .	139
‘All he’s got to do is to keep his head’ . . . . .	153
‘How weak people are given strength and made into physical giants’ . . . . .	163
His last bow . . . . .	175
Scenes from a life . . . . .	184
And when they are in their cups, they forget their love both to friends and brethren . . . . .	197
The great cricketer . . . . .	209
Selected sources . . . . .	214
Index . . . . .	220

# 1

## Clearing the Great Pavilion – 31 July 1899

THE LONDON weather is fine this late July day, and the crowds turn out an hour before the start to secure their favourite spots in the Lord's ground. At the toss, W.G. Grace calls correctly in his high-pitched voice and decides that MCC (Marylebone Cricket Club) will bat against Australia. Earlier in the summer, the great man had shown his age, just turned 51, when fielding in the first Test, finding it difficult to get his arms beneath his great belly to gather the ball. The jeering Trent Bridge crowd made him stand down from the England side, the selector dropping himself, but he was not yet ready to give up the first-class game. He strides out to bat from the great pavilion with Plum Warner. Albert Trott and the four other professionals, playing for MCC, tuck themselves away in the professionals' pavilion (sometimes referred to as the 'bowlers' pavilion') and hope to stay there, playing cards in peace and privacy, for as much of the day as possible. But the old man is soon back, caught off Noble, and the pace of Ernie Jones proves too much for a clean-bowled Plum Warner. MCC's score is 14/2, and the pros shuffle, look up and wonder what kind of day they are going to have.

Here comes the amateur Charlie Townsend, who has played for England this season, and with the great Ranjitsinhji he sets about securing the innings and building it, waiting for Ernie Jones to tire. It's lunch and time for a fortifier in the professionals' pavilion, a chance

to keep the legs rested after the hard work of bowling, the limbs tired after the first three months of the season. Play restarts and Townsend goes soon after, undone by Trumble's spin. Francis Ford, who has played with Stoddart's England team in Australia, comes in but he only makes nine before Ernie Jones knocks over his stumps. It's 123/4. It's better than it was, but MCC need to consolidate – it just needs someone to come in and hang around with Ranjitsinhji and allow him to really get going. However, the batting order has been decided, and there's no communication between the two MCC dressing rooms. 'You're in,' someone shouts, and Albert stacks his hand of cards and rubs his cigarette in the ashtray to put it out, barely feeling the singe on the tips of his great fingers.

Albert looks across from the balcony and checks that Mr Ford is back through the gate and taking the steps up to the great pavilion before he begins his walk out, the ground looking mellow on this sunny afternoon, the 10,000 heads in the crowd lapping it up. He pulls his cap down a little to shade his permanently narrowed eyes, as he doesn't like squinting in the sun. The crowd clap, more than Victorian good manners, because they know what he can do and they've turned up expecting something. He's one of the *Wisden* cricketers of the year after not even a full season in the county game. There's a cry of 'Good old Alberto,' or something like that, but he's shutting out everything as he makes his way at an angle to the wicket.

He's 26 years old, long arms and legs, with his trunk still reasonably slim, although he has put on weight since he came to England. At one time, when he first played Test cricket, you would have used the word 'rangy' to describe him, but that's gone. His face is older than his years – he's been told that more than once of late, and that's because of Australian sun and English coal fires. It's the skin that ages; his thick moustache gives him a false seniority, and his hair is thick as well, but it's rarely seen because he always wears a hat.

At the turn of the century, in *Annals of Lord's and History of the MCC*, Alfred D. Taylor described Lord's as 'an amphitheatre for gladiatorial contests with its massive and mighty circle of seats, stands, boxes and buildings.' And in 1899 it looks like that, with the pavilion higher than anything else and the stands stretched out low, like arms linking to enclose the space from the world outside. All Albert thinks about is that it's a contest between me and him, whoever they put up against me: it's a contest and one of us will win. Albert likes batting with Ranjitsinhji, the Indian prince, and thinks him the very best

batsman in England, with his wristy strokes and the way in which he scores behind the wicket on the leg side. No one has done that before – a true innovator. Ranji is an entertainer, and with the two of them together at the wicket, the sense of expectation stirs around the corners of the ground as men grab their beers and hurry away from the bar. As Albert takes his long strides towards the wicket, he makes a skyward lunge or two with his bat, stretching his shoulders, getting them ready. His bat is from James Cobbett of Marylebone, a 'Jubilee' Patent No. 3386-87, Gutta Percha Driver. (Gutta Percha, the wonder patented stuff, similar to rubber, was used for bat grips and also to insulate the underwater cables that sent news of the cricket to Australia.) From the opposite crease, Ranjitsinhji shoots him a quick look and gives a little smile, but neither of them says a word: their minds on the game and what's coming next.

This season there's only been one plan for Albert when batting at Lord's and facing the pavilion. Have a quick look and then send the ball back over the head of the bowler, and make the beggar rick his neck as he catches sight of the dark ball intruding the clouds. Against Yorkshire, he hit 137 in an hour and a half and twice struck the upper balcony of the main pavilion. But the top – he has to get to the very top, over the pavilion – that is his aim. MCC members know that, W.G. Grace and the amateurs know that, the pros know that and so do those who have paid cash at the gate. The Australians have to counter. Everyone watches to see what will happen.

Darling chooses Hugh Trumble to operate from the Pavilion End. Trumble has taken wickets throughout the tour with his off breaks and has never been easy to hit; it would later be said in *Wisden* that 'whenever the ground gave him least advantage he was deadly'. Albert has played with him in the Victorian team, so he knows about his well-disguised slower ball, which often results in a caught-and-bowled. Trumble runs in and Albert off-drives him high over the enclosure by the professionals' pavilion. That was one for the pros. One of them comes down and throws the ball back over the rope to the Australian fielder. Next, Trumble tries to surprise him with his quicker ball. He gets hold of this a treat and sends it into the top row of seats in the pavilion. That's one for the members. It's gone a long way. It was cruel luck too, though, for the ball was still rising when it struck the seats, and without that obstruction the ball would have cleared the pavilion. Albert grins under his thick moustache. He's enjoying this, but Joe Darling isn't. Enough. It's time for it to

stop. He takes off Trumble and puts on Monty Noble, the thinking crafty cricketer.

Monty Noble – the man from Sydney the same age as Albert, the exact contemporary, the man you measure your own career against. When Albert broke into the Australian team, Monty was still playing for Sydney Juniors against A.E. Stoddart's XI. Both are all-rounders, and Noble bowls off breaks and medium pace like Albert, and he has a curve ball too – just like Albert, developed from playing baseball, where he used a special grip to fool the batter. Monty, the all-rounder, the man who occupies Albert's true place in the Australian team.

Darling and Noble confer and assess the field, adjusting the position of the men out on the boundary until they are in a better place. The man from Sydney frowns and pauses and makes Albert wait, but he just taps his bat twice on the ground and watches for the ball. His long arms stretch towards it and he hits. From the moment the ball leaves his bat, he has no fears for its future. He puts a hand on his hip and watches the ball rise until it is no more than a pea in the sky and it seems like it will go on forever, but it strikes one of the long chimneys of the pavilion and bounces over the other side. It's gone. He half bows, half nods to the applause of the crowd. Those in the crowd that day will remember two things: the ball going over and their own roar when it happened. The Australians fidget and give uncomfortable laughs. Someone fetches another ball.

Monty Noble's face has soured, and he fiddles with his field yet again; when he runs in to bowl, it's as if he doesn't ever want to reach the crease. All Albert wants is more of the same, but a higher, farther hit unsullied by seats or chimneys, a shot where the ball is only troubled by the clouds. He gets to the ball and has the power, but he doesn't middle his shot – the ball loops up high in the air, and Joe Darling catches him just inside the third man boundary. Out for 41. Monty is happy and smiles as if it's all been part of a plan.

And Albert walks back to the little pavilion next to the big one, and the crowd are pleased because they've come today and seen the hitting, but they're disappointed because he's out and they still expected more. He's irritated too, wanting more, but his regret gives way to a pleasure achieved. He's a man of his word, for he's done what he said he would do. He slows down, not milking it for himself, but for the crowd. He hears and sees that they want to applaud some more, but he's the only one who notices that he's walking slowly. The crowd know the hit over the pavilion is the biggest hit ever, because you've got something

so big and grand and well known to measure it against at the greatest cricket ground in the world.

There are long beers waiting for him in the professionals' pavilion. There's never a shortage of those wanting to treat Albert Trott. The chat is about whether the hit will be credited with a six, as no one knows whether it dropped in or outside the ground. But, as the ball landed in the garden of a house where a dressing room attendant lives, still within the confines of the ground, it is only four runs.

*The Times* is complimentary of his 'wonderfully tall hitting', and *Cricket* says of his innings: 'Trott's batting was altogether interesting after he had steadily played himself in, for he set forth to make big hits with a determination which was very refreshing. With each hit he seemed to acquire greater strength, and presently he drove a ball which pitched on the seats in the top gallery of the pavilion – a very big hit.'

MCC get up to 258 off 95.4 overs, with Ranjitsinhji out for 92. Around 5.20, Albert is out on the field again as the Australians begin their innings. He opens the bowling, and before a run has been scored he has Worrall caught at point by W.G. Grace. He gets Trumble lbw, which brings Victor Trumper to the crease. Victor Trumper, the greatest batsman of the Golden Age, has scored 300 not out this summer against Sussex, the highest score by an Australian in England. In June, W.G. Grace visited the Australian dressing room and presented Trumper with his own bat, declaring, 'From the present champion to the future champion.' Trumper, in his slatted pads, with his unique shot of a leg glance between the legs, the most natural and gifted of batsmen is the man to score the runs. Today, though, he makes only four of them, for Albert clean bowls him. The Australians are 18/3. Trumper returns to the dressing room. Perhaps this was the moment when he had the time to scrape his initials 'V.T.' and the year '99' into the soft terracotta of the balcony in the dressing room.

It's not been Trumper's day or Noble's or Ranjitsinhji's day but Albert Trott's day, 31 July 1899. He's cleared the Lord's pavilion, which has never been done before (and, at the time of writing, it hasn't been done since), and taken the wicket of the greatest batsman of the age. 'I'm glad I did it against them,' he says.

\* \* \*

The first time Albert 'Alberto' Trott saw the pavilion, he eyed up the height at the very top. It was bigger than any pavilion he'd ever seen, and he tried to estimate the distance from the wicket and how it

compared to the size of the grounds that he'd played on in Australia. He liked the feeling that came with a big hit. 'I'm going to smash some poor bowler clean over the top,' he said. That was three years earlier, when he'd first arrived in England from Australia, fresh off the boat, and MCC, his new employers, showed him around his place of work, Lord's cricket ground. His other aim was to break the clock face on the racquets court, but he hadn't done that yet.

The 1890s were the age of cricket pavilions, built by clubs and schools at home and throughout the Empire. Specialist prefabrication firms, such as Rowell's of London, sold everything from the simple wooden rustic model, harking back to the village origins of the game, to the grand design with ornate cast ironwork. But there was nothing prefabricated about the pavilion at Lord's commissioned by the private members' club, MCC. It was designed by the architect Thomas Verity, one of the most skilful planners of the day, who was noted for his work on theatres such as the Criterion at Piccadilly and the Comedy Theatre at Haymarket. The Queen Anne style, with its red brick and detailing, featured the motif of MCC and the decorative terracotta heads supporting the upper terrace, modelled on committee members. The tower at each end marked out the space it occupied, and there were hints of a defensive fortress, but the pitched roof with projecting canopies added a lighter touch, and the white painted balconies and plate glass softened the façade. The higher the pavilion stretched up the more fanciful it grew, with the final decorative squares of ironwork pointing up to the sky.

The pavilion spoke of power and pleasure in equal proportions, planned for the benefit of MCC members, so they had a good view of the cricket from the tiered viewing terraces and the Long Room, the best seats in the theatre. Inside there was a library, committee rooms, a writing room, so that the business of cricket could be conducted effectively and very close to where the game was being played. Its message to the world was clear. In 1890, *Baily's Magazine* described it as 'really magnificent ... the building is apparently meant to stand forever ... it is impossible to count the number of rooms, bathrooms, lavatories etc. ... a "grand Law court of cricket".' Built in an age of wealth and prosperity, the building not only said that MCC was in charge of the game of cricket but that it intended to be so for a long time.

Of course, another important function of a pavilion is to provide a dressing room for the players. The home-team dressing room was at one end of the pavilion on the second-floor level, the away-

team dressing room was at the other, and the players could watch the progress of the game from the balconies with their terracotta balustrades. Or at least some of them could enjoy the benefit of this vantage point.

Born in Australia, Albert had played Test cricket against England in the final three matches of the 1895 series in the country of his birth, with considerable success. He achieved the best ever bowling debut in an Ashes series, taking 8-43 at Adelaide, and finished the series with a batting average of 102.5 on the basis of some hard-hitting knocks, including some big hits off the leading English fast bowler, Tom Richardson. However, when it came to the 1896 tour to England, he was not selected. Undeterred, he took up an offer to play for A.E. Stoddart's Middlesex. He spent two years qualifying for the county, playing for MCC at 30 shillings a week plus £5 for a first-class match and £3 for a second-class one. Middlesex, MCC, Lord's was his new allegiance and England his home. He enjoyed a mightily successful first-class season in 1898. Despite an early-season injury, which meant the loss of a month's cricket, he still took 130 wickets at 17.94, including ten wickets in a match five times. An impressed Lord Hawke invited Albert to tour South Africa, where he played for the England team against the colony and took 17 wickets in the two matches at 11.64. He'd renounced his cricketing birthright and gone over to the other side.

His reputation stood high. He was one of the in-form bowlers of the day, and, wanting to field the strongest possible team, MCC selected him for this match against the touring Australians. On the morning of 31 July, he'd taken the Metropolitan Railway to Lord's from his home in the new, growing suburb of Willesden Green, walking past the grand villas of St John's Wood and into the ground. But he didn't turn into the main pavilion and take the stairs to the dressing room to join his teammates, including those stars of the Golden Age of Cricket W.G. Grace, Plum Warner and Ranjitsinhji. Instead he took the entrance to the players' room. This had been built at the same time as the main pavilion, as a low extension abutting the north side. Visually it was different from the main design, more of a nudge on the side, and the style, as pointed out by *Baily's Magazine*, 'was very much of the same pattern externally as the well-remembered rustic Pavilion'. It was here where he changed and watched the game. He was not allowed in the dressing room of the main pavilion.

The irony of there being a separate dressing room for those who were paid to play was that some of the amateurs, such as Grace and

Ranjitsinhji, were making far more in expenses than the professionals were earning in match fees. The Australian tourists also straddled the amateur/pro divide in an odd way. They were housed in the away dressing room in the main pavilion and on their tours of England were always treated as amateurs. However, one of the purposes of the tours was to make money for the Australian players, who split their share of the gate money between them – cricket as a business proposition. The 1899 tour consisted of 34 matches including the five Test matches, a game against Midland Counties, one with Oxford University Past and Present and a match in Truro against what was billed as an ‘England XI’. In some of these tour matches, when an early finish looked to be on the cards, games were sometimes extended to the third day as the home team made an unexpected fightback and the tourists secured an extra day’s gate receipts. The pot of money was divided up before the boat journey back to Australia. Young Victor Trumper, on this, his first tour, was originally on a lower percentage than the more established players, until, on the strength of some excellent performances, he was promoted to a full share by a democratic vote of the team.

The Australian game was run on more egalitarian lines than the English one. When the England team toured Australia, the local press, anxious to highlight the hypocrisy of separate accommodation for amateurs and professionals on tour, turned up at the hotels to quiz and hound the team’s management. James Phillips, an Australian who had umpired in Test matches in both countries, was well placed to comment on the way things were ordered in the two teams.

‘In generalship the Australians are easily first. They play more in unison; they exchange views in the dressing room and thereby their captain is assisted materially in many of his plans.

‘Off the field an Australian captain receives the benefit of the opinion of his comrades, as if he were chairman of a board of directors. The average English captain is more of an autocrat. He rarely seeks advice from his men. If a consultation be held it is invariably confined to the amateurs and the batsmen, not the professionals and the bowler. I can recall instances when I have been standing umpire when able and intelligent professional players on an England side have seen the fallacy of some plan of their captain, but nothing has been said by them, no suggestion made, to remedy the mistake.

‘Another mistake is made in England which does not improve cricket as a science – that is, the system of isolating professionals off the field. Surely, if a man is good enough to play on the same side he

is good enough to dress in the same dressing-room. It is there most useful hints and ideas are exchanged when a game is in progress, which cannot be done so well on the field.'

'Dimboola' Jim Phillips played with Albert in the Middlesex teams, and had watched him bowl from his umpire's position in the Tests in Australia. Always ready to scout talent, it was he who had steered Albert in the direction of Lord's after he was not selected for the 1896 tour of England. A fearless and respected umpire on the county and international scenes, Jim Phillips was one of Albert's continuing links with his old home after he moved to England, and Albert would have been well aware of his views on the English game.

Jim Phillips was not the only Australian to be critical of how the game was organised in England. Joe Darling, the captain of the Australian team, said that the English amateurs treated the professionals like dogs. The amateurs at Middlesex addressed the professionals at Middlesex by their given names when things were going well, but slipped back to surnames when there were problems on the field. As late as the 1920s, Lord Harris reprimanded the Middlesex amateur A.J. Webbe for addressing the professional Lee by his first name, 'Harry'. Albert Trott, though, shrugged this to one side because of his ability. He was the kind of man who attracted nicknames, from his teammates or from the crowds at the games, going by the names of Albatrott, Alberto or just plain Trottie.

Today he had been up against this new-style Australian team, with its strong leadership off the field and a disciplinary system that curbed the excesses of some of the earlier tours. Heavy drinking, fisticuffs and a general roughness of behaviour were no longer the way. It was a very different team in attitude from the one that Albert had played in some four years previously. Times had changed, and a gap had grown between him and his cricket roots, over 10,000 miles away. It wasn't just cricket and country – it was also family. One of the big changes that would have struck Albert was that his older brother Harry was no longer the Australian captain. He wasn't even in the Australian team, where he'd been a fixture for the last 11 years.

Harry's replacement as skipper, Joe Darling, was 28 years old, son of a grain merchant who disapproved of young men playing cricket. Darling was a well-educated Presbyterian from Adelaide, a man who was ready to lead the way on the muscular, orthodox Christian view of sport as being a moral and suitable activity for young men. His methods of managing the team had the support of the emerging

star batsman Victor Trumper, who also preferred early nights and a restrained regime. On board the ship, Darling made the team exercise on deck and work down in the hold, shovelling coal to improve their fitness. On this day they had been up against hard-drinking Albert Trott, the man who had rejected Australia for England, the man who stole the scene with his big hits. And Captain Joe Darling had a 'plain man's aversion to foppish or showy players'.

The Australians didn't rate him, and they had let him know it throughout the tour. Albert always wanted to do well against them. On this July day, he had made his point after not being selected for the tour three years earlier.