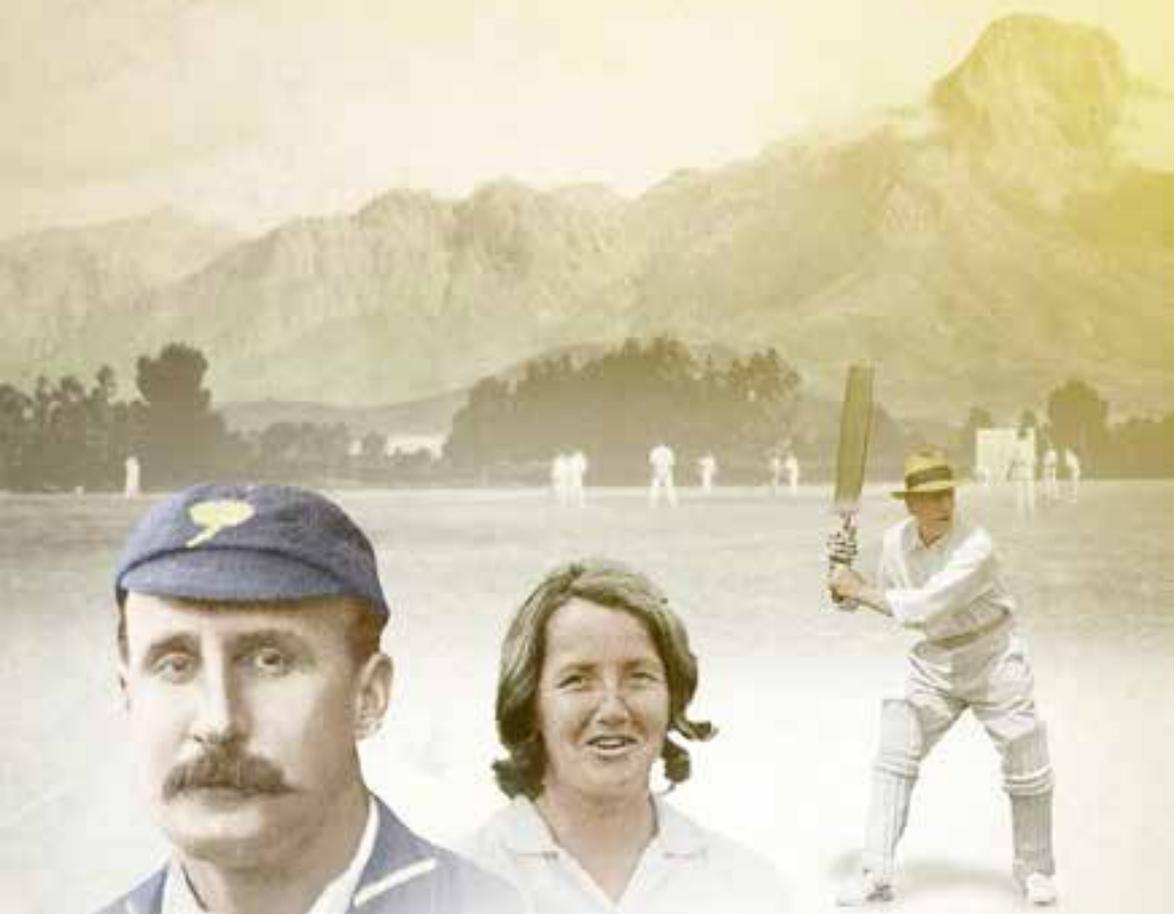


Richard Parry and André Odendaal



 SWALLOWS AND
HAWKE

English Cricket Tours, MCC and
the Making of South Africa

1888-1968

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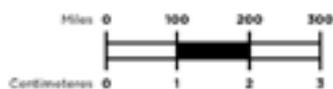
PART 1:
OPENINGS

Tour 1: 1888-89

Inscribing cricket on the South African landscape



Approximate Scale





1

Adventures: Aubrey Smith 1888/89

TIMING IS everything, in life and in cricket. December 1888 was Southern Africa's moment. The geopolitical plates of the empire were spinning. The Battle of Majuba Hill in 1881 had ended direct control by Britain over the Transvaal and put back the cause of the federalists on the subcontinent. But five years later gold was discovered on an unprecedented scale and Britain's citizens led the ravenous wolf pack descending on the independent Boer Republic of the Transvaal. Cricket had a role to play in keeping the subcontinent within the imperial embrace.

A cricket tour of Southern Africa, even by the standards of the risk-addicted late 19th century, was a mad sporting idea, perhaps the maddest since 1859 when George Parr's North American cricket tourists were cast adrift on a storm-tossed north Atlantic with a broken jib. A tour required financial commitment, extraordinary organisation, personal bravery, and an ox-wagon load of luck. Distances, scheduling constraints, climate, limited transport infrastructure, physical perils, political difficulties, (questionable) quality of the opposition, playing conditions, day-to-day logistics and infrastructure, and not least the financial adventure, should have deterred any sane would-be enthusiast. But this was an age characterised by overconfidence, arrogance, ignorance and a relish for risk.

The mail steamships traversed the oceans reliably and quickly carrying hundreds of thousands of passengers annually across the

Atlantic and to Australia. With the mineral discoveries, the prospects for a massive expansion of passenger activity between Britain and the South African ports inspired Sir Donald Currie, owner of the Castle Line, to use a cricket tour to South Africa to promote his ships.

Two men created the 1888/89 tour to South Africa. William 'Joey' Milton an old Marlburian, was the South African salesman and organiser. He was a Victorian super-hero: an England rugby international; captain of the Western Province, Cape Colony and South Africa cricket teams and president of the Western Province Cricket Club (WPCC). In 1890, he would become prime minister Cecil Rhodes' private secretary, his servant as head of the Civil Service, responsible for the first segregationist legislation, and a racist who excluded 'Krom' Hendricks from representative and professional cricket.

In 1888, Milton raised a £3,000 guarantee. The tour was on.

The hero behind the tour's delivery was Major Robert Gardner Warton. Warton had played for Essex and had been secretary of Milton's WPCC. In 1887, he returned to England with a heart condition, but fortified by an army pension, recruited and managed the touring party. He shepherded 13 cricketers around Southern Africa on a relentless timetable and tight budget, braving the immense distances, meeting the demands of the players and hosts, and even spending long days umpiring in the broiling sun. It was an astonishing achievement.

Previous foreign tours to Australia or the USA were primarily entrepreneurial, but in South Africa's case the profit imperative was partly balanced by the imperial mission to gather the scatterings of colonial South Africa into the imperial family, to advertise the country for investors and support the mining industry.

Warton's team needed to exhibit cricketing skills beyond the locals, but only enough to encourage and not overwhelm them. The team were ambassadors for empire and entertainers both on and off the pitch. It was a tall order. Warton engaged the 25-year-old C. Aubrey Smith as captain, supported by the even younger Monty Bowden and signed up Johnny Briggs, Maurice Read and Bobby

Abel, all previous Australian tourists, Frank Hearne from Kent and Somerset's A.J. Fothergill. Briggs, Harry Wood and Abel had all played Tests against the Australians in 1888, Frank Hearne had played for an England XI, and Smith had captained Shrewsbury's team against the Australians.

1.1 Aubrey Smith: An education in captaincy

Aubrey 'Round-the-Corner' Smith, the son of a Brighton doctor, was a fast-medium bowler, tall and broad-shouldered, and effective on matting wickets which suited the off cut and bounce he got from a high action. He was in demand as an 'amateur' who could hold his own at first-class level. In 1887/88, both Sydney and Melbourne invited a Shaw/Shrewsbury combination and Martin Bladen (Lord Hawke) respectively to tour. Smith captained the Shaw combination. He faced dust storms which blew acrid dust into every orifice; strikes of both players and officials; press criticisms of his ungraceful batting style; attacks on the 'shamateurs' and the enthusiastic attentions of various ladies. He managed all with aplomb.

As captain, he had already experienced the extremes. In Melbourne, the player strike meant a Smith-led victory by an innings and 456 runs to the complete indifference of the locals. Six months later, in a season so wet that not a single first-class hundred was scored in July, Smith captained Sussex against Surrey at The Oval. Monty Bowden hit 189 not out out of 698 and Surrey won by an innings and 485 runs. A record victory and a record defeat within the year.

The side was 'balanced' by amateurs who had the right class and social polish. Basil Grieve, the hon. Charles Coventry, Emile McMaster and Cameron Skinner were at best club cricketers but were the 'right sort' and could afford the trip. Skinner, 'an unreliable bat and an uncertain field', was there for his entertainment value. He was a member of the Lyric Club opened in London in 1888 by the grandees of international cricket tours, Lord Hawke, G.F. Vernon and Sir Timothy O'Brien and he specialized in scenes from

Shakespeare, musical interludes, and 'tableaux vivants'.¹⁵ An even split of seven professionals and seven amateurs provided the social balance and adventurous if fallible performances on the field. They were drawn by gold fever and colonial adventures for the military inclined adrenaline-junkies.¹⁶

English amateurs, Warton discovered, were divided into 'shamateurs', who performed at a professional standard and needed to be remunerated accordingly, and amateurs who had sufficient resources to play without payment but whose cricket skills were incidental. The 'shamateur' Monty Bowden negotiated a deal, which included superior accommodation and 'well lighted' transportation, expenses and a fee (£100). Warton was also forced to hand over £125 to keep his 'shamateur' captain on board.¹⁷

The tour followed the money. 'Joey' Milton had negotiated guarantees with nine centres across the sub-continent.¹⁸ The guarantee system meant the financial tail wagged the touring dog. Overall viability relied heavily on discounted travel from Sir Donald Currie's Castle Line and the Cape Railways under Sir James Sivewright.

Before they set sail Warton said his main objective was to strengthen colonial cricket. He expected to win and did not see matting wickets as a problem. The tour began a month earlier for professional Frank Hearne who was sent to coach the Cape cricketers. Hearne was welcomed by Harry Cadwallader of Kimberley's *Diamond Fields Advertiser* as a boost to local cricketers, but his rival scribe Charlie Finlason, writing as 'Daily Gossip' for the same town's *Daily Independent*, branded Hearne a 'spy' who would learn far more than he taught.¹⁹ It was the first shot in a press war that was to dominate the tour.

15 Kevin Walmsley, 'A.C. Skinner revealed', *The Cricket Statistician*, issue 180, Winter 2017, 27-31

16 Charles Cox, *The Cricketing Record of Major Warton's Tour*, (London: Reprinted by J.M. McKenzie, 1987) 18

17 David Kynaston, *Bobby Abel*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1982) 126-127

18 *Cape Times*, 15/9/1888

19 *Cricket*, 27/12/1888, 471

The team were excited to be escaping the murk and depression of the London streets. Bobby Abel was given a send-off in the Prince Albert pub with Tom Hayward's father on the piano. Sir Donald Currie hosted a farewell lunch on board the *Garth Castle*. The team's Surrey affiliations were reflected in chocolate and yellow colours and a Union Jack badge. As the hospitality flowed, Currie donated a cup for the best performance against the tourists. Aubrey Smith in his first speech of the tour described this as 'a pioneer team' which did not want to 'crush out the germs of cricket'. He commended the unity of professionals and amateurs working together 'showing an example to all sportsmen'.²⁰ Major Warton warned them of the task ahead. They would travel a remarkable 15,975 miles, including 2,218 by rail and 785 by coach and cart.

At last, the *Garth Castle* eased through the greasy waters of the East India Dock, away from the Whitechapel streets where the Ripper's hapless final victim, Mary Kelly, had been gruesomely dispatched just two weeks before. (The cricketer Montague Druitt, who earlier that season had bowled Bobby Abel, was suspected of being the Ripper. He drowned himself in the Thames in early December.)

On 23 November 1888, Warton's boys sailed from Dartmouth. The Bay of Biscay was choppy and when they arrived in Lisbon, the port was blanketed under a thick fog.

1.2 *The Garth Castle Minstrels*

As they left Europe behind, Aubrey Smith and the team 'blacked up' as the '*Garth Castle* Minstrels'. The musical theatre mixed slavery, racism, spiritualism, and the abiding popularity of the exoticism of Africa into an entertainment staple which was astonishingly popular. Seventy-five years later, Fred Trueman was to celebrate his 300th Test wicket by appearing on stage in *The Black and White Minstrel Show*.

The troupe performed in a semi-circle with Smith and Monty rattling bones and tambourines while exchanging jokes between

20 David Rayvern Allen, *Sir Aubrey*, (London: J.M. McKenzie, 2005) 68

songs and dances. The show was a huge success, particularly Smith's boss stump speech, traditionally full of outrageous pomposity and malapropisms.

Blackface perpetuated the Jim Crow stereotypes of the American south – with the clear emphasis of black inferiority through racist humour heavily based on white interpretations of slave lore. The bizarre spectacle of an English cricket team in black face pretending to be American slaves in colonial Africa reinforced white supremacist world views and entertained simultaneously. What the black waiting and kitchen staff must have thought can only be imagined.

On deck, a grand six-a-side cricket match was played, and Johnny Briggs walked away with the potato race. Then the Skeleton Coast treated them to a 35-degree roll which put an end to the entertainment. In Cape Town, the papers filled column yards about the strength of the tourists. At Newlands Cricket Ground, a score box was built to shield the pencillers from the 'maddening questioning crowd' and a grandstand constructed for 800 guests.

Cape Town was a diverse and stratified society. The social hierarchy, 50 years after the end of slavery at the Cape, encompassed Xhosa and Khoi migrants employed on public works, a predominantly Muslim ('Malay') working class descended from slaves, sailors and immigrants who inhabited the Bo-Kaap and District Six areas and well-heeled white colonials in the salubrious southern suburbs. At Newlands Cricket Ground, a small enclosure was built at the request of the Malay community.²¹ It was here that the correspondent of the Transvaal's *Potchefstroom Budget* was shocked by two English professionals socialising with black female companions in plain sight.

Under Table Mountain, the long-running debate about poverty, the working class and urban blight in District Six had begun and was to continue until the nationalist government's forced removal policy in the 1960s saw the area bulldozed and its inhabitants scattered on the

²¹ *Cape Times*, 6/12/1888

windswept plains of the Cape Flats. Ratepayers in 1888 complained of ‘sickness due to the smell as there is no drainage ... streets with no lights ... being killed by loafers in the absence of police protection’.²²

The *Garth Castle* finally nosed into Table Bay around 3am on 14 December. Journalist Harry Cadwallader scrambled aboard the pilot boat, to be the first to greet the team. On reaching Table Bay, the Englishmen found themselves ‘with a lovely view of Cape Town and Table Mountain rising sheer and square completely dwarfing the town ... when we got into dock we found a large crowd awaiting us – a large percentage being [Africans] and Malays ... the team were driven up in wagonettes drawn by white horses to their hotels – the amateurs to the Intercontinental and the professionals to The George’.²³

Warton and Milton met to finalise the ambitious itinerary. Their self-confidence was a reminder that it was only four years since the whole continent had been parcelled out among the European powers at the Congress of Berlin although less than ten per cent was under European control. Budget constraints meant constant pressure to play and get to the next venue, which condemned them to endless gruelling days baking on a blinding cricket field or trying to sleep squeezed rattling and bouncing over dangerous and unpredictable tracks. Meeting the tight schedule of 19 matches over several thousand miles was to be a triumph of player resilience and management resourcefulness. And luck.

The team had a gentle practice session at Newlands, eagerly watched by the locals. The professionals were characteristically downbeat, with one telling the *Cape Times*, ‘[As] good a ground as this means there is good cricket about.’ The amateurs attended an evening bazaar in aid of the Organ Fund. Skinner provided a recital and Smith sang ‘Enniscorthy’, a mournful 18th-century Irish ballad, which was already his signature tune. The next day, they had their first sight of ‘that curious effect, the table-cloth over the mountain, a

²² *Cape Times*, 29/11/1888

²³ Major Warton in *Cricketer*, 24/1/1889, 1-2

clear sky above and a white cloud lying flat and bright upon the top and pouring down like a huge waterfall'.²⁴

Cricket was the focus, but politics was the game. The biggest social event Cape Town had ever seen was attended by the governor, (the picaresque Sir Hercules Robinson), the prime minister (Sir Thomas Upington), and everyone who was anyone in Cape Society. Sir Thomas Upington called for a British protectorate to the Zambezi and did not see why they shouldn't go further north. As for the role of sport in politics, 'nothing has greater effect of binding colonies together than visits by teams such as this. The future of England depended on her colonies.' India had effectively financed Britain, while having its own economy destroyed, for more than two centuries.²⁵

But an even greater source of wealth and power in the African hinterland might be about to tumble into the Queen's lap.

For Sir Hercules, cricket was, after racing, the most English of sports. He preferred sports where he had an animal between his legs rather than a cricket ball.²⁶ Aubrey Smith was not put out by Cape flummery. He recognised the significance of the first tour and foresaw regular visits in a few years. There was a far thicker link 'between us as subjects of Her Majesty than anyone realises at Home'. Major Warton drily reflected that Sir Thomas Upington had laid out a challenge for future visiting teams – not only to go as far as the Zambezi but to head off on a kind of circular tour via Khartoum.

1.3 *Aubrey Smith at Newlands*

'Newlands was a picture to be remembered with its surrounding mass of pines, overtopped by the great Table Mountain on one side, the new stand covered with red cloth standing out against green background. The picturesque effect given on our own grounds by the ladies' dresses being enhanced by the bright and varied colour of the many Malay women in their holiday attire.'²⁷

24 *Ibid*

25 Shashi Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire*, (London: Penguin, 2018)

26 *Cape Times* 18/12/1888

27 *Daily Independent*, 16/1/1889

At midday on 21 December 1888, Johnny Briggs, the diminutive and charismatic Lancashire left-armer, bowled the first ball to Cape Town publisher W.H. 'Dicky' Richards of the Western Province XXII. Richards pushed it defensively to point and opened a new field of dreams in international sport. It is hard to imagine a sporting baptism in a grander setting.

Monty Bowden stood up to Briggs and Smith's right-arm medium and had two stumpings and an lbw appeal turned down before Richards eventually pushed the ball to mid-on for a single. Western Province were on the board. From 32/1 the locals collapsed to 36/7 before 'Joey' Milton cut Briggs through point, then smashed him over square leg and clubbed him into the Pavilion for the first six. After lunch he was caught by Bowden, having scored 36 out of 38 while he was at the wicket. Twenty-two batsmen meant cascades of wickets – nine to Briggs, eight to Fothergill, with five stumpings and two catches to Bowden.

The visitors faced the heat, intense glare and the express pace and hostility of Nicolaas Theunissen. His steepling bounce, raw pace and a loose mat laid on grass, smashed the batsmen in the ribs and on the knuckles, and with 22 in the field runs were as rare as molars on a duck. By close of play, Warton's men were 50/4 with a grimly determined Abel on 18, all in singles. The mat was re-stretched overnight, batting became easier and the tourists finished two runs behind on the first innings.

The second innings replayed the first: a small but significant opening partnership (21/1), followed by a collapse (25/7) and advantage to the tourists. Milton again collared Briggs, smashing him for six boundaries before Johnny gratefully grasped an uppish straight drive and Milton departed for 40 to a huge ovation. He ensured a target of 141, but sunstroke put him out of action for the remainder of the game and the next. Theunissen again worked the batsmen over. When Smith was bowled at 115/7 the game was in the balance, but Theunissen polished off the last three wickets and the Western Province XXII had won by 17 runs, a feat which, as Smith pointed out, Australian XXIIIs had never achieved. Smith blamed

the defeat on the impenetrable mass of fielders, English injuries, sunstroke and the relentless banquets.

1.4 Christmas Day and black cricket

On Christmas Day, the team drove to the Simon's Bay naval base. 'For the first ten miles the road was shaded by avenues of splendid oaks or tall pines, which scented the whole district. All along the road, the oleanders and plumbago are in full bloom, with here and there a huge magnolia. At Muizenberg, the road passes along the foot of the mountains rising sheer out of the sea. The white sands at Fish Hoek have all the appearance of snow, suitable for Christmas,' said Warton.²⁸

'Here and there wherever a spare piece of ground could be got, we saw young blacks playing cricket; some with stumps and bails, others with empty paraffin can and stones for wickets – anything for a game of cricket ... [O]n our return journey we saw a public ground at Mowbray literally covered with black men, eagerly contesting three or four cricket matches, while all around the ground under the trees sat hundreds of Malay and [African] women intensely interested in the cricket. It was a curious sight, even to a cricketer,' reflected Smith.²⁹

On Boxing Day, the tourists faced a Cape Colony XV with Milton replaced by Charlie Finlason. Finlason was destined to have a huge impact on the pitch and in the press box. He was a talented cricketer, and his pro-colonial journalism was as combative and controversial as his bowling.

The tourists started well, reaching 86/2, but then Johnny Briggs was lbw to a ball which he claimed to have hit the cover off, Maurice Read was given out hit wicket to Ashley and Smith was stumped by Porter standing up to Theunissen. The tourists subsided to 122, with Theunissen claiming 7-51. The Colony XV managed a handy 37-run lead on the first innings thanks to a superb 46 from A.B.

²⁸ Major Warton in *Cricket*, 24/1/1889

²⁹ Aubrey Smith in *The Sportsman*, 23/1/1889

Tancred, who hit Briggs into the pond for six before being bowled by Basil Grieve's fast underarm. Three of the last four batsmen were all 'bowled Briggs 0', in a lemming-like panic which was to become a familiar tour motif. The tourists raised their game the second time round, with Smith leading from the front with 46 and set a target of 126.

1.5 Charlie Finlason in action

Charlie Finlason as a player and talented writer was able to bring a strong sense of immediacy to the action, writing in the *Daily Independent*:

'The Colony have 126 to make with 14 wickets in hand. Tancred and Cox set ... only 75 to get with all wickets intact. Wickets of the very best batsmen in the Colony for the most part. Men of renown ... all were smiling when Tancred played carelessly at a low long hop and was bowled. Cox went almost directly afterwards, then came catastrophe. W.H. Richards the Cape Town crack, Dunell, the Bay [Port Elizabeth] champion, Stewart the oft proclaimed best bat in the Colony, De Villiers, Grimmer all went in and came out without scoring. Five ducks' eggs all in a row!

'But hope did not desert the colonial supporters ... The sprinting Charlie Vintcent started with a huge skier which almost fell into the hands of a fielder ... Richards put up a ball when he had but 5 and Howe played on before he had scored. Twenty-nine still wanted, the tail reached, the bowling deadly, the fielding as close as a box and the crowd standing on their toes with excitement! What a time for a nervous batsman!

'Finlason and Vintcent began to run at once, ran indeed at the very ghost of a chance. The roars that accompanied each run demoralised the field, some overthrows took place, a snick for two, a boundary hit, some leg byes and the men still with 11 runs to make.

'The wily Briggs put a stop to all this happiness; Finlason was completely humbugged by an artful yorker on the leg stump. Even then there was still hope as Vintcent was still in. Alas for such hopes Theunissen placed the first ball back into the hands of the India-rubber Briggs, and then Charlie Vintcent retired from a spread-eagled wicket. No hope now for those 11 runs. Still people did hope

against hope. Ashley spooned a catch to Briggs who missed it amid a terrible howl, but Porter was run out ... and the Englishmen ... won only by the skin of their teeth.’³⁰

From Aubrey Smith’s perspective victory was essential, ‘In defeating the Combined Fifteen of the Colony, a side stronger than our first match, the effects of that [first] reverse are completely wiped out. Cricket in South Africa is far more developed than has hitherto been supposed at home.’

Nicolaas Theunissen, the Stellenbosch express who claimed 25 of the 40 English wickets in the two games, was in Smith’s view ‘a dangerous bowler on a matting wicket, where he can get “work” on his fastest balls – and he has considerable variety of pace’. In the second game, Theunissen claimed 70 per cent of the 20 available wickets at 14-114, while Briggs took 42 per cent of the Colony’s 28 available wickets at 12-106. ‘Joey’ Milton, facing considerable debts for the new ground, was delighted with a profit of £400.³¹

As the lights of Cape Town glimmered on the water, a grand farewell ball on the *Roslin Castle* proved the event of the season. Once the exhausted dancers had staggered to their carriages, the *Roslin* cast off for Port Elizabeth (PE). As Algoa Bay this was the destination for the 1820 Settlers, imported to serve as a buffer against the Xhosa on the eastern frontier, and the port of entry for the Cape Mounted Rifles in King William’s Town. In PE, Warton’s tourists shared a stage decorated with Union Jacks and a large portrait of W.G. Grace, already a god-like figure on the periphery of empire.

Owen Dunell’s Port Elizabeth XXII won the toss and the locals totalled a challenging 193. They might have managed more if Briggs had not rolled over the last four wickets in four balls (first three bowled and last man stumped). In reply, Bertie Rose-Innes, cutting the ball both ways off the mat, had the tourists stumbling to a humiliating 24/6 and only a battling 58 from Harry Wood dragged

³⁰ *Daily Independent*, 3/1/1889

³¹ *Sportsman*, 31/1/1889

them to 127. Even so, Maurice Read's half century in the second innings was not enough to prevent a second loss, this time by 55 runs.

After three losses against odds, they had to find a way to score against packed fields. Not even the exceptional Johnny Briggs could win these games on his own. He would be ever present, playing in every game, and bowled right through 18 of his 38 innings in the field.

Aubrey Smith, perhaps seeking to draw attention away from the team's performance, suggested that their presence was 'to have so great an effect on the cricket of the Cape not only amongst the white population but even amongst the black ... I think it is not only the case here but wherever you go in the colonies it is cricket which binds men together in the cause of sport and I hope it will always be so.'³²

This was the only time black cricketers were mentioned in a speech by an England captain for 75 years. It was ignored by the locals. Smith was on safer ground when he promised 'a succession of visits to this country and return visits of South African cricketers to England (cheers) ... although it is very kind of you to invite us out every evening, I think when playing cricket [hospitality] ought to have its limits.'

1.6 Travails

Hospitality over, they steamed to Mossel Bay with team colours flying, even if their tails were between their legs. They regretfully declined an oyster supper on arrival and embarked in small swaying two-person 'Cape carts' for an epic journey through the Outeniqua mountains to Oudtshoorn. It was moonless, pitch black and only one of the carts had a flickering light weakly illuminating flashes of rock and plenty of sheer emptiness as the carts laboured upwards a wheel turn at a time. Bugle calls kept them in touch. Abel and Fothergill in the last cart veered off the road, inches from disaster. After interminable bone-shaking terror they reached the Great Brak River and wolfed down duck and chicken legs at the Temperance Hotel. Bobby Abel implored Smith to wait until daybreak before

³² *Daily Independent*, 10/1/1889

proceeding further, 'It's better to be killed at once than to be frightened to death by degrees.' The team were quickly unmovable, curled up in corners and under tables. At first light they were on the road again.

Another steep climb through mountains thickly decorated with yellowwood and ironwood and a 400-foot sheer drop brought them through the Montagu Pass drenched in the clouds. Down the other side they spotted hawks and inspected ostriches. The Sundays River was in flood, but they plunged in. The carts stuck fast as the horses struggled desperately and eventually reached the far bank greeted by a cheering crowd. Bobby Abel arrived last as usual, but a frontiersman's brandy flask cheered him up considerably. 'Mr Smith,' he shouted, 'this is ripping, and I don't care tuppence for any river in this country.'³³

The tour was a travelling trading and cultural exhibition designed to showcase South Africa and its resources. Oudtshoorn was the global centre of the ostrich feather industry, the essential ingredient of late-19th century fashion. High-quality feathers were worth more than their weight in gold. Oudtshoorn was also the base of Jack van Reenen, big hitting batsman and president of Western Province CC in its early years.

The game against a South Western Districts XXII was predictable. The opposition featured substantially built farmers with long black beards, looking (according to Smith) like Old Testament prophets. Divine inspiration was sadly absent. They found themselves 16 down for 29 before recovering to 53 all out. While there was some improvement in the second innings, the tourists won by an innings and 80 runs, thanks to Harry Wood's 85. Intense local interest was not limited to the white population. The lower end of the field was segregated and roped off for black spectators, for whom, unusually, a refreshment booth was provided. The black population supported the visitors.³⁴

33 *Cricket*, 21/1/1889

34 *Cape Times* 3/1/1889

Next came the precipitous Swartberg Pass, even more terrifying than the Outeniquas, with sheer drops on either side of the hairpins. Many preferred to walk. They spent a day 'along the most dismal road' it had ever been Warton's fate to travel on, 'some 30 miles of bleak desert; small salt bushes and mimosa shrubs alone relieved the monotony of sand and stones; and six hours of jolt, jolt, jolt, at a miserable pace dragged by lame horses.' At last, they met the train for the onward trip to Kimberley and slept dreaming of lush outfields and a gentle drizzle.

Kimberley's modern existence began with the discovery of the 'Eureka' diamond in 1866. By 1870, the volcanic diamondiferous pipe on De Beers farm was the largest man-made hole on earth. Africans as well as whites poured into Kimberley digging out endless tons of blue earth to convert their share of the mineral bonanza into guns. While numerous profitable finds made prospectors and buyers rich, the real money flowed with the setting up of a Stock Exchange in 1881 and Cecil John Rhodes' consolidation of thousands of claims into the De Beers monopoly.

Africans dug and whites sifted for the stone which would make their fortunes. Black diggers finding stones were the scourge of the white industry. The Kimberley Magistrates Court was devoted to illicit diamond-buying (IDB), which usually took place in the dead of night. To counter IDB, Kimberley installed electric lighting before London. Jack swallowed a stone weighing 68 carats and worth an estimated £150. 'I came here to work like everyone else,' he told the court, '... and I wanted something too.'³⁵ The monopolistic industry created a compound system which imprisoned African workers in enclosures fenced and roofed with fine mesh. Insanitary and crowded conditions meant the Rhodes-controlled De Beers compound had an annual mortality rate of more than ten per cent. Rhodes' crony, Dr Leander Starr Jameson, was the medical officer and ignored a smallpox epidemic which ravaged the De Beers compound in 1885.

35 Richard Parry, 'Diamonds, Cricket and Major Warton: Cricket in Kimberley 1885 to 1889', *Cricket Lore* vol. 3 issue 6

Some 1,838 black miners died in 1888 out of a total black male population of 11,814.³⁶

Cricket was a large part of the cultural baggage of British adventurers in the northern Cape. By 1871, thanks to the enthusiasm of the prospector, editor, professional firebrand and cricket tragic, William Ling, the first games were under way.³⁷ The game flourished in the red dust and for the next 20 years cricket became the main cultural activity in the town apart from the bars and flophouses. It rooted its peculiar values in the dusty veld, provided an intangible linkage to England and briefly advertised the town as the cutting edge of 'progress' in the sleepy Cape Colony.

The English XI were about to face new challenges. The informal competition for the 'warmest welcome' was driven by Kimberley's desperate struggle to convince the world of the viability of the town. Kimberley had a week to milk the imperial spotlight and slow the breakneck rush of prospectors to the richer pickings of the goldmines.

Warton's tourists were met by a large crowd at 4.30am. Their week's programme included a promenade and photography session, a visit to the mines, smoking concerts, a pyrotechnic display, a lavish banquet at the Kimberley Club (amateurs only), dinners and public balls. And six consecutive days of cricket from Monday to Saturday. If the endless round of social events hampered the visitors on the field, well Kimberley had to match the wins in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth.

1.7 Labour, tragedy and scandal

The visitors' programme started with a visit to the 'Big Hole' and the De Beers compound. Just six months previously on 11 July 1888, the De Beers night shift had been trapped by a fire that swept through both main shafts. A total of 178 Africans and 25 Europeans lost their lives, but the tragedy was hushed up and hardly reported beyond Kimberley.

36 *Cape Times*, 29/1/1889

37 Richard Parry, 'Diamonds, Cricket and William Ling', *Cricket Lore* vol. 3 issue

During the cricket week, a rockfall at De Beers mine killed three black workers and a dynamite explosion killed a black worker and wounded an overseer. The following week, eight Africans cut holes in the compound wall and escaped over the roof. Two were caught, charged with the criminal offense of absenting themselves from their master's employ without leave and sentenced to a month's hard labour – a free month's work for De Beers.³⁸

Half a century later, Aubrey Smith told Bill Edrich that he had had to charm the local authorities who discovered a player trying to smuggle out a large diamond. The player was not identified.³⁹

The town had been whipped into a frenzy by Charlie Finlason, Kimberley's all-rounder on the pitch and cheerleader off it. He was a vehement critic of English class-based hypocrisy and a 'South Africa first' patriot anxious to advertise Kimberley's pioneering spirit over the lackadaisical and complacent snobbery which he thought defined Cape Town.

Warton, hoping to reduce the glare on the Eclectics ground, had wired a request for the matting to be (as Finlason put it) 'dyed a nice green tint to look like the velvety turf of England'. Kimberley's reply was robust, 'Very sorry, no green dye available on the diamond fields but we can manage a brilliant sky blue.'⁴⁰

All cricket in South Africa was played on matting, but no two mat surfaces were the same. Mat was laid on grass in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, and on rolled earth, gravel and cinders away from the coast. The Kimberley match was played on brick-red soil, the colour of a cricket ball with the shine knocked off it, patched with white sand spread by wind, the surface rolled until hard as asphalt and studded with sharp stones. The straw-coloured matting threw up a glare which made the eyes water. Johnny Briggs took one look and asked, 'Do we have to play cricket on that?'

38 *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 19/1/1889

39 Bill Edrich, *Cricketing Days*, (London: Stanley Paul, 1950) 95

40 *Cape Times*, 17/1/1889

They did. Nearly 5,000 spectators, more than half the town's white male population, crammed into the ground decorated with flowers and ribbons. A.B. Tancred lost the toss and Smith batted. Despite the alien conditions, most of the English XI, apart from Read and Smith, played the quick and bouncy pitch with ease.⁴¹

Finlason was as idiosyncratic and as talented a cricketer as he was a journalist. He was an incessant talker and bowled with an unusual slinging action beginning with his wrist somewhere behind his heels. He normally bowled at fast medium pace, but once an over or so threw up a 'moon ball', which could turn sharply but often had the close fielders jumping for cover.

Bobby Abel was England's best professional batsman after Arthur Shrewsbury, with a decisiveness of stroke and a high backlift which generated his power of shot. He showed composure, concentration and at 5ft 5in a remarkable ability to stay on top of the high bounce on an exploding surface while accumulating runs against the packed 18-man field.⁴² Bowden made 31 before being caught by Finlason to the disappointment of the spectators. Briggs clowned around, pretending to run and to dismiss himself off a bump ball, but soon lunged at a Finlason moon-ball and was stumped. A 41-run partnership for the eighth wicket between the amateurs, Emile McMaster and Basil Grieve, took the visitors to a respectable 177.

Kimberley's first five wickets fell for 44, until Charlie Vintcent cut loose, in what Warton, who was umpiring, described as 'scorching heat throwing up insupportable glare from the matting'.⁴³ Vintcent was South Africa's 100 yards record holder, lightning fast between the wickets and innovative with the bat. Despite the heat, he ran three fives in the innings, one of which the tourists were sure had ended in a run out. When Major Warton at square leg gave Hickson not out, Bowden kicked one of the stumps halfway down the pitch. Eventually, Vintcent was given out lbw but only after completing two leg byes.

41 *Cape Times*, 21/1/1889

42 *Daily Independent*, 15/1/1889

43 *Cricketer*, 21/2/1889

His 87 would be the highest score against a touring side until Frank Hearne scored 94 for the Cape Colony XIII against Lord Hawke's team in 1896. Vintcent was one of two South African representative cricketers with only one eye. 'Buster' Nupen was the other.

A cameo from Alfred Hill, the 'Slogger of Kimberley', ended controversially. Bowden appealed for a stumping when Hill was in his ground, threw the ball up and when Hill left the crease, thinking he was out, Monty ran him out. Charlie Finlason dipped his quill in venom to describe the action. Warton's team faced a deficit of 48 and Finlason ran through them with his exotic mixture, taking 6-25. Only Bowden resisted with a dogged 27 and with 34 to get to win in the last innings, Kimberley was a racing certainty. Before the match started, the hon. Charles Coventry had picked up £500 to £10 for a Kimberley win.⁴⁴

With the betting frenzy in the pavilion, Kimberley's nerve almost failed them. Finlason and Tancred were run out and seven wickets were down for 15 before a tea break gave everyone a chance to compose themselves or hedge their bets. To frantic cheers, Hickson and Howe finally saw Kimberley home by ten wickets.

The tourists were exhausted by travel, entertainment, playing against odds and demanding and alien conditions. 'You have a hot sun in Kimberley and a dry climate,' Smith said, 'We found our mouths like limekilns and our tongues like hearthrugs.'⁴⁵

The following day, the tourists ventured blinking into the savage sun to face a Cape Colony XV. Theunissen reminded the tourists of his speed and hostility. He hit Hearne and Wood with deliveries that reared off a length and several batsmen were caught at short leg. Wood went to hospital before continuing his innings and a fighting 29 from Bobby Abel was needed to save England from total humiliation. Theunissen's analysis of 5-37 in 31 overs restricted them to 91, their second sub-100 total of the week. They were jeered by the spectators.

44 *Cape Times*, 21/1/1889

45 Allen, *Sir Aubrey*, 80

The Cape Colony XV were comfortably poised on 139/11 in reply when Finlason joined Bobby Klinck and ran the fielders ragged, putting on 73 for the 12th wicket. Klinck made 81 in a powerful display of hitting. Finlason combined unlimited confidence, speed between the wickets, crude technique and obstinate defence, making 47 before Klinck was run out by a direct hit from Smith. The Colony was 176 runs ahead. Monty Bowden and Bobby Abel fought back, but ultimately Kimberley claimed a second win.

Finlason praised the intensity which the tourists brought to the game. Their ground fielding was ‘a revelation ... they are on springs and field with an élan never found in a colonial team’.⁴⁶ But their intensity veered into sharp practice. Umpires were hustled, and malicious appeals were common. Bowden’s behaviour in kicking a stump down the pitch, his sleight of hand to run out Hill and his petulance when hit by Theunissen were not well received.⁴⁷ Initially sympathetic to the challenges of playing against odds in unfamiliar conditions, Finlason decided the tourists were cheats and ‘squealers’.⁴⁸

His rival, Harry Cadwallader, writing in the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, slammed these ‘discourteous and churlish comments’ by a writer of ‘contemptible scurrility and babyish lampooning’.⁴⁹ Charlie Finlason never shirked a fight. ‘I trust the addle headed goose will take this timely hint,’ he said. ‘... His wild abuse of me is a sort of hogwash emanation from a muddy brain and an enlarged liver.’⁵⁰

The final banquet at Pirates Club started well. The Kimberley mayor hoped that Johnny Briggs with his ‘jovial smile and aldermanic appearance’ would come back as their local professional. Warton too managed to remain light-hearted. They had played three games not two and the last game was Kimberley hospitality versus sleep. He shrewdly added that Kimberley had reaped a bonanza. The first day

46 *Daily Independent*, 18/1/1889

47 *Ibid*

48 Jonty Winch, *England’s Youngest Captain*, (Windsor: Windsor Publications, 2003) 100

49 *Daily Independent*, 22/1/1889

50 *Daily Independent*, 21/1/1889

alone contributed a gate of £616 and the total gate for the week was in the region of £1,600. A huge windfall of £500 would be shared among the three main clubs – Kimberley, Pirates and Eclectics.⁵¹

1.8 'Cricket is a rotten game'

Aubrey Smith made his frustrations evident. 'I suppose you want me to say something about cricket', he said. 'It is the rottenest of all games. After travelling 6,000 miles to make five runs in four innings I do not know of a more rotten game.' He accepted defeat, 'as all Englishmen know how to do', but warned 'wait until we meet you again'.⁵²

Darny Haarhof, a prominent local businessman, said he was 'not at all satisfied' with the way the English cricket team were referred to by 'Gossip' (Finlason) in the *Daily Independent*. The English applauded and shouted, 'Quite right.' His toast to the press pointedly omitted the *Independent*. Warton regretted that the issue had been raised. Finlason blamed Harry Cadwallader, 'the journalistic flunkey of the South African press'. The *Free State Express*, which had its own political priorities, thought 'Gossip's' 'truthful criticisms' upset the English team and 'they were even more chagrined when he backed up his words by bowling them out and running up a big score'.⁵³

Despite this melodrama, Charlie Finlason managed a chat with 'quiet little Bobby Abel' who described the hardship of playing six days cricket in baking heat and against odds. 'You see,' Abel said, 'where the skill comes in is in placing the ball through fielders and you can't place the ball through a 22-man field. You just shut your eyes and hit.' In Bobby's opinion, uneven cricket was not cricket and 'you would learn so much more with equal sides'. He thought that South Africa would be beaten by the better county sides but were stronger than the Parsees from India.⁵⁴

51 *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 26/1/1889

52 *Cape Times*, 24/1/1889

53 *Cape Times*, 9/2/1889

54 *Daily Independent*, 26/1/1989

The players couldn't wait to reach the next destination. By January 1889, fortunes were being made on the Witwatersrand as the gold was stripped from the outcrops, land prices along the line of the gold reef boomed and trading on the stock market reached hysterical proportions. The Transvaal Republic asserted its independence under president Paul Kruger. Amid the mayhem, they collected taxes and retained control through a dynamite monopoly, which controlled the operation of the mines and a restrictive railway policy, which prohibited a rail link from the south until an outlet to the sea through non-British-controlled Delagoa Bay was built.

Kruger's rail ban condemned visitors to wedging into 'Buffalo Bill's coach', three to a seat with shoulders overlapping, shins and seats in contact and eight men including the two drivers outside with 6,000lb of luggage. 'How we hated our neighbours whose elbows were continually finding our ribs; how we abused those behind for grinding our backs with their knees. How hopelessly and mournfully we endeavoured to court sleep and with what shouts of joy we hailed each outspan,' lamented Smith.⁵⁵

The unending scrubland broken only by the odd melancholy animal skeleton made for monotonous scenery. Johnny Briggs had a huge catapult but could only find Cape sparrows and meerkats. The coach stuck fast in a stream at Klerksdorp, and they set off on foot until the vehicle was finally dragged out of the mud. Four hours' sleep on the first night became three on the second.

When they arrived at the Johannesburg Club, they had travelled 300 miles in 60 hours sardined into a boiling, bouncing box. But they were energised by the smell of blasting cordite amid a sea of tents, and corrugated iron stores with mine-heads stretching out in every direction. Their hosts took them to Jumpers mine where they were shown 'Banket' rock formation in which the gold was found. Aubrey Smith was absent, already negotiating his post-tour career as a Johannesburg stockbroker.

⁵⁵ *Sportsman*, 27/2/1889

The party explored the underground workings by candlelight, saw the extraction process and explored the black workers' compound. The miners on night shift were 'lounging around', cooking maize meal and 'inhaling copious whiffs of dagga smoke'.⁵⁶

Warton was inhaling cigar smoke at his next social venue – the Stock Exchange. 'At 10am the secretary enters the rostrum and then the howling, screaming, excited mass of brokers raises pandemonium.'⁵⁷ The dramatic speed of 'progress' on the Rand was exemplified by the development of The Wanderers cricket ground. President Kruger had been persuaded to grant the lease for the ground and act as club patron. Jacob Swart constructed a venue in six months, clearing and levelling the ground and building a pavilion despite the summer rains.

Spectators were charged three guineas for a week in the pavilion and the Johannesburg XXII readily agreed to the tourists' request for a dark green mat. Briggs, Smith and Fothergill dismissed the locals for 138. After the Kimberley humiliation, Smith decided to lead from the front and opened the batting as well as the bowling. But the tourists foundered against James Wishart (35-21-24-5) and George Cooley (36-19-35-5). They avoided the compulsory follow-on by a single run. The bowlers steamrollered the XXII for 58 in the second innings. Briggs claimed 9-19 and Smith, bowling like a man possessed, 10-25. Sixteen batsmen were either bowled or LBW. It was game on with 137 to get. Abel was dropped on one and the day ended with Warton's team secure on 76/0. The local nine-man attack could not shake the openers and the following day they completed a ten-wicket win.

In the first innings the XXII's fielding had surpassed expectations, and the bowling of Cooley and Wishart was surprisingly effective.⁵⁸ In the second innings numerous chances were grassed. It is seldom that a score of 60 in the first innings translates into a second innings

56 *Daily Independent* 1/2/1889

57 *Cricket* 21/3/1889

58 Cox, *Major Warton's Tour*, 76

total of 137 for no wicket. In terms of runs per wicket these were the lowest and highest scores of the tour.

The tourists' first innings failure followed the fearsome journey and a gruelling session in the heat. The turnaround came after a Sunday off, when the team had a chance to regroup. It allowed Smith to channel his frustrations into leadership by example. His ten wickets were taken at a rate of one every seven balls. He was on a hat-trick four times in his 17 overs, and snapped the off stump of Fleischer, top scorer in the first innings. He inspired the rest of the team, and Abel and Hearne stepped up when it mattered.

Not only had the match been turned on its head, but so had the tour in this single innings. But what caused this turnaround? Johannesburg was a town where fortunes were made daily and anything that could attract a bet did so. The game was the backdrop to frenzied betting. It was alleged that the XXII had taken every bet against themselves that they could find.

Cecil Rhodes bet £5 at 9/1 that Abel and Frank Hearne would win without losing a wicket. The winnings were shared between them. Abel's innings was worth nearly £200 and the professionals also received a gold nugget with a rough diamond set in it. Finlason was delighted by the English performance against his Johannesburg enemy.⁵⁹ But the result hinged on a scoring error which had allowed the English to avoid the follow-on.

The following day Warton's men returned to The Wanderers to face a Transvaal XV. Bobby Abel continued in a batting bubble until a catch at silly point finally dismissed him for a remarkable 114 in five hours. It was England's first hundred in South Africa. He was shouldered off to receive the plaudits of the ladies as the band launched into 'See the Conquering Hero Comes'. The innings ended with a merry 48-run last-wicket partnership between Coventry and Fothergill. Amateurs could not receive cash, so Coventry was motivated by J.B. Robinson's offer of a mine share, valued at £70, offered for the highest amateur score. Fothergill supported Coventry

⁵⁹ *Daily Independent* 2/2/1889

for long enough for the latter to claim the prize and received £20 for his efforts.

George Cooley took 4-73 in 36 overs, adding to his 54 overs in the previous game. Tragically his exertions were to prove fatal. He caught a cold, then a lung infection and in these pre-antibiotic days, he sadly passed away. When Transvaal batted, a huge dust storm made the pitch invisible from the pavilion and the matting disappeared under a coating of red sand. Faced with a deficit of 130 runs, the second innings was a familiar procession and the tourists won by an innings and 42 runs.⁶⁰

1.9 Johnny the Lionheart

Johnny Briggs's efforts over these two intense weeks showed his stamina and strength of character as well as his skill. England's wins depended on his performances during an era of four-ball overs. In the two losing games in Kimberley, his figures had been 133 overs, 58 maidens, 203 runs and 19 wickets – an average of 10.7 per wicket at an economy rate of 1.5 per over. His equivalent figures in the winning games in Johannesburg were 119.4 overs, 67 maidens, 189 runs and 29 wickets – averaging 6.5 and conceding 1.6 runs per over.

Johannesburg's *Diggers News* described facing him, 'First you get a ball breaking from your leg, then comes one looking just about the right length for a slog, and you are tempted and get out to it, and find by some unaccountable means the ball pitches much shorter than you anticipate and shoots under your bat ... and you look round and find your stumps down ... the style of delivery is never changed; you can get no intimation from that twinkling eye and good-humoured mouth ... hit him over the pavilion and he will laugh with you, and the next ball will raise your bails.'⁶¹

As the *Natal Mercury* explained, knowing what Briggs did, did not make him any easier to play. He turned the ball both ways and disguised his dramatic changes of pace. He relied principally on variation and studied batsmen's weaknesses. He deliberately sent down loose balls. He was a clever dissembler up to all sorts of tricks

⁶⁰ Cox, *Major Warton's Tour*, 85-9

⁶¹ *Standard and Diggers News* 14/2/1889; *Dimond Fields Advertiser*, 11/3/1889

and antics and raised many a laugh in trying to get rid of a batsman. He took liberties which would not be permitted in a man of lesser ability.⁶² It is hard not to imagine a 19th-century Shane Warne.

Asked for the secret of his bowling, Briggs swore he didn't know it himself.

South Africa, said Warton, was a land of surprises. The players were astonished by the two-year-old 'toddler town' with a population of 20,000, fine streets and handsome buildings. They visited three mines and spent their mornings in the Stock Exchange delightedly following the bull market where a little information went a long way. If the cricketers were obsessed with the exchange, the brokers were getting through business as fast as possible to get to the cricket. By the time that Smith's report on the first game of the tour appeared in *The Sportsman* during England's February freeze, he and Monty Bowden were registered members of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange.⁶³

Natal was a separate British colony with a population of 30,000 whites, 60,000 indentured Indians working on the sugar plantations, and around 400,000 Zulus. Whites were continually frustrated by 'work-shy' Africans who preferred an independent existence to labouring at derisory wages. The government's key problem was to force them out through stringent taxation and labour regulation. Natal's divide and rule strategy to control Zululand to the north rested on maximum force to crush any perceived resistance to taxation as the fates of traditional leaders Langalibalele in the 1870s, Dinizulu in the 1890s, and finally the Bambatha Rebellion in 1906 demonstrated.

The team may have hoped the worst of the travelling was behind them. The professionals took the shorter route via Harrismith and the amateurs the longer northern route to see the battlefields at Majuba Hill and Laing's Nek. The former clambered aboard their coach at 5am on the Saturday and reached Harrismith on the Sunday night.

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62 *Natal Mercury*, 16/1/1889

63 *Cape Times*, 16/2/1889

On Monday morning, they found themselves marooned in the middle of a flooded river until hauled out by a span of oxen.

The amateurs started eight hours late on Saturday and had to travel through the night. During a savage electric storm, they discovered one of the drivers was paralytically drunk and the other asleep and they had to take over the reins of the ten-horse coach. On Sunday afternoon, they ascended Laing's Nek, and 'gaunt and drear' Majuba Hill towering away to the right with Colley's grave and those of the fallen. Warton found it incredible that in 1881 the red coats could have been dislodged by a handful of Boers. Colley had taken the hill for no apparent purpose, failed to spot the Boers on the slopes until too late and had not secured his defences.

After this reminder of British vulnerability, the amateurs drove, in Warton's words, 'Up and down steep hills, strewn with large boulders over which we bumped mercilessly, until our heads and every joint of our bodies ached ... the last 33 miles taking eight hours'. The coach passed ox wagons heading to Johannesburg from Durban carrying tram rails, Pommery champagne and Worcestershire sauce. At last, in a heavy thunderstorm the amateurs fell into a railway carriage, arriving in Pietermaritzburg on Tuesday hours before the start. The *Natal Mercury* heralded the visitors, 'Chosen from a population of 34 million, our champions represent 34 000 ... let the best players win.'⁶⁴

Awaiting the team in Pietermaritzburg, therefore, were the army – the 64th Staffordshire and the Inniskilling Dragoons – and George 'Happy Jack' Ulyett to join the party. Ulyett was a veteran of five Australian tours, had played in the first-ever Test and was a front-rank batsman, fast-medium bowler and outstanding fielder. More significantly, his lively and humorous personality provided a shot in the arm for Warton's weary travellers.

The Pietermaritzburg skipper insisted on playing XXII instead of XVIII players. In cool, damp conditions, Briggs claimed 11-34 as the home side subsided to 92 all out. In reply, tight bowling limited the tourists to 164. Despite rain delays, the home side failed to bat

⁶⁴ *Natal Mercury*, 13/2/1889

out for a draw. Basil Grieve's fast underarm had a rare outing and his 5-10 in 11 overs were his best figures on the tour.

The cool weather continued against a Natal XV. The tourists managed 176. Orthodox left-armeder Gustav Kempis turned the ball sharply and young policeman Peter Madden's raw pace and eccentric action proved troublesome. Even J.T. Henderson, doyen of Natal cricket, admitted that Madden threw 'but only occasionally when he was anxious to get rid of a particularly sticking batsman'.⁶⁵ Batting for 35 minutes in poor light, Natal were six wickets down for seven runs at stumps. When Don Davey was bowled by Smith the next day, they were drowning at 8/8. They eventually conceded a lead of 91, followed on and lost by an innings and ten runs. Luck and the umpires were not on their side. Major Warton later admitted that his lbw decision against Natal's star batsman, Frank Crawford, was a 'shocker'.

When the governor referred to the team as 'good companions', Smith retorted that if they lost, they were 'about as objectionable a set of fellows ... as could be found ... and they cordially hated the game of cricket'.⁶⁶ Airy thoughts about 'balance' and the duty to encourage the local game had been crushed by four losses and Kimberley. Now only victories would do.

The visitors' train switch-backed through the lush spectacular landscape of the Valley of a Thousand Hills to Durban. They were welcomed by a volley of railway fog signals and delighted to see grass on the outfield for the game against a Durban XVIII, but it was long and thick. Monty Bowden took the aerial route and smashed a couple of huge sixes off Madden, one of which lodged in a tree. Cameron Skinner scored his only run of the tour before running himself out trying to steal another. Thanks to a ninth-wicket partnership between Coventry and Fothergill, the visitors made 187.

Briggs's achilles heel was discovered. He could not cope with the extreme humidity. Durban responded with 127, including a fighting

65 M.W. Luckin, *The History of South African Cricket*, (Johannesburg: W.E. Hortor and Co, 1915) 99

66 *Sportsman*, 20/3/1889

22 not out from Madden and a stylish 17 from Don Davey. Skinner, confidence running high, clutched E.C. Davey's lofted drive, his only catch of the tour. Rivalry with Pietermaritzburg was satisfied when Durban, unlike the uplanders, avoided the follow-on. In the second innings, Kempis demolished Abel's stumps for the second time in the match and did the same to Read, Grieve and Coventry. His 5-32 and Madden's 4-35 dismissed the tourists for 68. With Durban chasing 129, Johnny Briggs rallied, telling the team, 'My soul is in arms and eager for the fray.' Durban started well and looked like having the edge. Briggs removed the foundations when he snatched five wickets for four runs, but Bob Christison counter-attacked, and the pendulum swung towards the locals until he was caught for 31. With four wickets in hand, 35 to win and 15 minutes left, the home side shut up shop to earn the tourists' first draw of the tour.⁶⁷

Durban had the largest natural harbour on the sub-continent, but like most South African ports it was protected by a sandbar. Known as Annabella's bar after a famous wreck of the 1860s, ships anchored in the outer bay while passengers and goods were ferried by lighters. Pier extensions had failed, and it was not until 1904 that the Bar was defeated by a fleet of 15 dredgers. Warton's team had two options for embarkation from a lighter on to a moving ship – a semi-dignified ascent by ladder or a less heroic basket hoist. Most scrambled up on rope ladders. Bobby Abel tried a dozen unsuccessful ladder ascents to the guffaws and unsolicited advice of his teammates, before accepting the ignominy of the basket with elder citizens Maurice Read and Jack Ulyett.

They arrived in East London 20 hours later and following another basket offload, transferred by train to King William's Town (KWT). They were travelling and playing cricket in the Eastern Cape, which for 100 years had seen endless sporadic but bitter warfare between colonial interlopers, the British army and the Xhosa peoples. Only the social collapse during a final disastrous famine among the Xhosa brought the sequence to an end in 1878.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*

Many Africans were among the 2,000-strong crowd at the Eastern Cape military HQ. The King William's Town Africans, captained by Nathaniel Umhalla, had won the African version of the Colony's Champion Bat competition and often defeated their white KWT counterparts.⁶⁸ Nathaniel was a son of paramount chief Mhala, who was convicted of a war plot during the cattle killing of 1856 on evidence, which William Porter, Cape Attorney General, suggested was 'scarcely conclusive'.⁶⁹ While Mhala languished as one in a long line of African leaders imprisoned on Robben Island, his son learnt his cricket across the bay at Zonnebloem College for African chiefs.⁷⁰

No African players were considered for the Cape Mounted Rifles XXII, whose ineptitude scraped the bottom of the cricketing barrel. Briggs took their first four wickets without a run on the board and ended up with the other-worldly figures of 15 wickets for four runs off 22.3 overs. He was slightly more profligate in the second innings with 12-19, taking his figures for the match to a ridiculous 27 wickets for 23 runs. In the return fixture, Ulyett smashed three sixes in a chanceless 103, and the tourists won by an innings and 95 runs. These games had no pretence to genuine competition, but supposedly strengthened troop morale on the frontiers of the empire.

At the City Lords ground in Grahamstown, nestling in a bowl of hills and part of the scene of a famous battle in 1819, Bobby Abel carried his bat for 126 not out from a team total of 256. Giddy smashed 45 in the Grahamstown XXII reply, as the fielders staggered around in a dust storm, but another innings defeat swiftly followed. Next came a 300-mile rail trip, via Port Elizabeth, to the old Boer town of Graaff-Reinet, scene of the infamous Slachter's Nek rebellion⁷¹, to play a Midland Districts XXII. They clattered through 150 miles

68 Richard Parry, 'Black Cricketers, White Politicians and the Origins of Segregation at the Cape' in Bruce Murray and Goolam Vahed (eds), *Empire and Cricket*, (Pretoria: UNISA, 2009) 24-26

69 Mostert, *Frontiers*, 1229

70 Janet Hodgson and Theresa Edelman, *Zonnebloem College and the Genesis of an African Intelligentsia, 1857-1933*, (Cape Town: African Lives, 2018) 2, 3, 118

71 Mostert, *Frontiers*, 403-406

of the 'dismal and monotonous' Great Karoo ('place of thirst' in the Khoi tongue) where animals lying on the rails proved the only diversion, eventually arriving at the 'gem of the desert', an oasis with an abundance of trees, a river and almost encircled by mountains.

The town had been built in the 1770s, as the Dutch trek-boers (nomadic herders) settled on farms called *Vergenoegd* (far enough) or *Slegtgenoegd* (bad enough). They fought a vicious 30-year war with the San peoples, whose hunting lands they had appropriated, exterminating thousands in a colonial genocide. The remainder amalgamated with the local Khoi peoples or headed deep into the Kalahari Desert. Despite periodic rebellions against authority in distant Cape Town, Graaff-Reinet became the centre of the South African wool industry, which explained the early advent of the railway in 1879 and the cricketers a decade later. The place was more memorable than the game. The ball came through like 'greased lightning', off the mat laid on anheap, cinder, and cement, while the glare rivalled Kimberley. A patient innings by Abel and a spectacular collapse to 12/18 in the second innings produced the usual innings defeat.

Warton's team returned to Port Elizabeth a toughened, seasoned and more confident XI. The match against an Eastern Province XV was a warm-up for the representative game against a South African XI. Potential South Africa XI players Rose-Innes, Jackson, Giddy, Dunell and Stewart batted well before Arnold Fothergill took 7-19 in a sustained and aggressive spell and Abel's technique and patience ensured a comfortable win by eight wickets. The phoney war was over. Now Warton's men would be pitted against the best players in the subcontinent on, at last, equal terms.

Warton's team selected itself with McMaster and Skinner on the bench. The South African XI tried to balance regional as well as cricketing priorities: a surprise pick being the teenage Okey Ochse from the Free State who had not faced the tourists. Their match-winner, Nic Theunissen, was refused leave to play by his Stellenbosch theology professors.

The South Africans took the field in olive-green caps with a yellow 'SA' monogram embroidered by the wife of Owen Dunell,

South Africa's captain. Dunell, who had played for Oxford University in the 1877 FA Cup Final, won the toss and batted. But the side described as having no tail proved to have almost no body. In Briggs's second over, Rose-Innes lost his off stump to a 'snorter'. Philip Hutchinson was bowled first ball. Tancred and Vincent defended resolutely, but South Africa had to wait ten overs before recording what history would later declare to be their first Test run.⁷²

Three slip catches by Bobby Abel reduced the home side to 17/5 and confirmed the worst fears of the South African batsmen, promoters and caterers. Tancred and Dunell, the best South African batsmen on display, staged a recovery until Tancred was beaten by a fast Smith in-swinging and bowled for 29 at 58/6. Smith, bowling with speed and hostility, ended with 5-19 as South Africa were rolled over for 84. Dunell was left on 26 not out.

Bobby Abel, excited at facing only 11 fielders for the first time on the tour, smashed the first ball of the innings from Gus Kempis to the leg boundary for four. But the South Africans exerted some pressure. Kempis got George Ulyett and Maurice Read, reducing the tourists to 14/2. Bobby Abel dropped anchor until caught by Milton for 46. The English were only three runs ahead with two wickets left at 87/8. Two runs later, Fred Smith fluffed a stumping chance from Grieve to howls from around the ground.

Getting rid of the English tail had proved a stumbling block all tour. Coventry hit out to take the total to 103 and was replaced by the dangerous Fothergill, a wolf in sheep's clothing at number 11. After a nasty crack on the finger, he smashed four fours and a huge driven six off Rose-Innes. When Milton had him caught for 32, the English had a lead of 64.

South Africa batted steadily to overhaul the deficit with three wickets down, but Tancred was fooled by Briggs's dip and caught and bowled for his second 29 of the match. The dangerous Milton slogged a quick 19 before he was caught by Bowden. In this team of 'amateurs', South African-born Tancred played the colonial role,

⁷² Cox, *Major Warton's Tour*, 176-184

canny and focused, while Milton was the archetypal upper-class English amateur, playing country house cricket. A more judicious approach on Milton's part might have created a more challenging target than the 66 England required to win. South Africa's first Test match ended in an eight-wicket defeat.

This was the tourists' 17th match. Fit, travel- and battle-hardened, they had not lost since Kimberley – ten wins ago. Unlike the 'home' team they were experienced in local conditions and had played on all varieties of matting and underlays. They knew what they were capable of, how to exploit local conditions, the quality of the opposition, and had a winning habit and the confidence to match.

The South Africans by contrast were weekend amateurs with no experience of three-day cricket. They had never played together and only a few had played at PE. With minimal time for preparation, there was no chance of assessing the conditions or their resources. They had done remarkably well in their first Test.

Finally, the show swung north for a return against Kimberley. They had not lost since their previous visit. Their captain stayed behind. His mystery 'fever' may have been a diplomatic means to avoid Kimberley where he had not gone down well in the press furore. The locals insisted on the same glare-inducing beige mat and 18 players and escaped with a draw to maintain an unbeaten record against the tourists. James Logan, the self-styled 'Chief of Matjiesfontein', made his first tour appearance.⁷³ He was to be a central figure for the next decade.

Smith had apparently not recovered from enteric fever and Monty Bowden as the only amateur with first-class cricket experience became, at 23, England's youngest captain in the second Test in Cape Town. The Western Province match-winners, Theunissen and Ashley, were back, and Milton replaced Dunell as captain. Bowden won the toss and batted. The fearsome Theunissen, who had terrorised the pink and perspiring English batsmen two months before, now found a different team from the hesitant outfit who had

73 *DFA*, 22/3/1889

been flummoxed by 22 fielders. Bobby Abel anchored the innings as he had held the tour together and was seventh out for 120 hitting out tiredly at Ashley. The left-armed finished with 7-95 in an England total of 292.⁷⁴

It would be charitable to draw a veil over the rest of the match, remembering a reasonably closely fought first day and a masterful performance from Abel. But the history of cricketing car crashes has its own ghoulish fascination. The record number of enthusiasts who flooded through the gates next day hoping for a South African fightback had little idea what an extraordinary morning's cricket was in store.

After a quiet start, Briggs seized South Africa's fragile batting by the throat. Demonstrating total control, he bowled Hutchinson for three (11/3), Dunell for four (19/4), and Milton with a 'magnificent ball' for seven (31/5). Richards broke the sequence by nicking to Abel off Fothergill for a duck and then it was all Briggs. Vincent and Fred Smith bowled Briggs, Theunissen lbw Briggs, and finally, after Tancred had steered him for four through fine leg, Briggs demolished Ashley's stumps. South Africa were all out for 47 in less than an hour and a half, Johnny finishing with figures of 19.1-11-17-7.

Tancred had carried his bat for 26, an oasis of calm amid the mayhem. This was a remarkable achievement among the clatter of wickets. But until the ninth wicket fell, Tancred played Briggs primarily from the non-striker's end. Should he have tried earlier to protect the bottom half of the order?

Trailing by 245, South Africa's prospects looked hopeless as they followed on. Briggs, the cherub turned avenging angel, again slaughtered South Africa's representatives in front of 4,000 stunned spectators. Sixteen South African wickets had fallen for 65 runs between the start of play and lunch. Briggs bowled every batsman except Rose-Innes, who had managed to run himself out off the first ball of the innings without facing a ball, and Dunell, who got out to Fothergill. Briggs owned the South Africans. They were all out for 43.

⁷⁴ Cox, *Major Warton's Tour, 195-201*

Briggs bowled 58 deliveries in the innings, conceding 11 runs, several of which came from misfields, and the only ball to go for more than a single was an overthrow for two. His second-innings figures were 14.2-5-11-8, and his match figures were 33.3 overs, 16 maidens, 28 runs and 15 wickets, still a record in a single day of Test cricket.

So how do we explain this massacre by an innings and 202 runs, still the worst trouncing (in terms of innings defeats) by England against South Africa? Port Elizabeth had suggested that despite the gulf in experience, South Africa could at least put up a fight. Newlands was a different proposition. And Briggs was the X-factor. As a tactical cricketer, his ability to exploit the surfaces he bowled on was unparalleled. On hard, high-bouncing wickets, Briggs had relied on orthodox left-arm style with subtle variations of pace and length, but at Newlands, slower with a lower bounce, he bowled a little quicker with the ball drifting in with the arm from off to leg, sharp turn from leg and a devastating faster ball. His control, reputation and personality paralysed the opposition. His fellow professionals said he had never bowled better in his life. He destroyed and dismantled the defensive technique of any batsmen at the other end of the mat, sometimes even before a ball was bowled.

After a final unofficial match, the English tourists headed back to the *Garth Castle* for presentations and farewells. The professionals received £20 bonuses for ‘their social qualities and gentlemanly behaviour’ (of course they were not actually ‘gentlemen’). Tancred, Theunissen and Gobo Ashley scooped the batting and bowling awards – gold watches not cash to avoid offending amateur sensibilities.

The final annihilation obscured South Africa’s earlier successes and their fighting efforts in the first Test and created a climate of inferiority. The tour had severely tested the stamina of the tourists, who had no respite from an endless round of baking days, sandstorms, long alcoholic evenings, endless packing and bouncing across the veld. They had covered 15,975 miles, 13,003 by steamer, 2,218 by rail and 785 (painfully) by coach and cart. They were away for 146 days, 41 on board ship, 25 in coaches, carts or trains and spent 51 days in the field.

Net profits outstripped the Warton guarantees, and the excess was shared between local clubs to pay for improvements and build facilities. Warton had his future secured in Rhodes' employ. Bowden's showmanship and keeping skills were eye-openers, Briggs was a force of nature with the ball and in the field, and Abel showed why he was one of the world's best batsmen.

The significance of the matches was not lost on either set of players. Of the colonial players, their fielding was often brilliant. The bowling was much better than the batting, with Theunissen their star fast bowler and Ashley a model of consistency. The batsmen, apart from Tancred and Dunell, showed understandable nerves before large crowds.

As Bobby Abel pointed out, playing against odds reduced the quality of the cricket on display. Batting was more difficult with packed fields; bowling took longer and was more exhausting. The talent gulf was widened by the experience gap and by the tourists' greater familiarity with South African conditions than the locals.

1.10 Farewell

Aubrey Smith already had the stage uppermost in his thoughts, 'The curtain was going down and the play over, would the audience applaud (yes) ... hoped those who had looked on the play had seen something which will live in the memory ... Those on stage would look back on the tour with a feeling of gratitude and pleasure.'⁷⁵ Bowden and Smith waved goodbye as the tug escorted their colleagues out of Table Bay. Their thoughts turned to the riches of the Rand, but the outcrop mining bubble burst and their stockbroking business failed. Monty Bowden met a sad end and was buried in a coffin made out of whisky cases near 'Old Umtali'. Aubrey Smith begged his fare home and reinvented himself as a professional on the stage. Hollywood would call later. The long theatrical nights on the tour had not been wasted.

⁷⁵ *Cape Times*, 27/3/1889

For South Africa, the purpose of the tour was to place the region in the spotlight. As Cadwallader put it, 'Among the tourists were one or two men gifted with brains and money ... and no doubt have transmitted accurate information on the state of affairs here and in the Transvaal and the prospects which await South African development'.⁷⁶ Two decades later, when South Africa joined the Imperial Cricket Conference, the two representative matches gained Test status, creating an imperial back story. Cricket did not take place in a neutral bubble. The status of these early games demonstrated cricket's place in the tool kit of empire.

⁷⁶ *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 22/3/1889