



## Read of the Week

**Empire, War and Cricket in South Africa**  
Dean Allen  
Zebra Press  
Review: Brian Joss

How many people have stopped at Matjiesfontein or driven by without realising what a role its founder, James Douglas Logan, played in the history of South Africa? Especially cricket, an imperial past-time, if ever there was one, and a sport that the #Rhodesmustfall movement seem to have missed in their haste to remove vestiges of colonialism in this country.

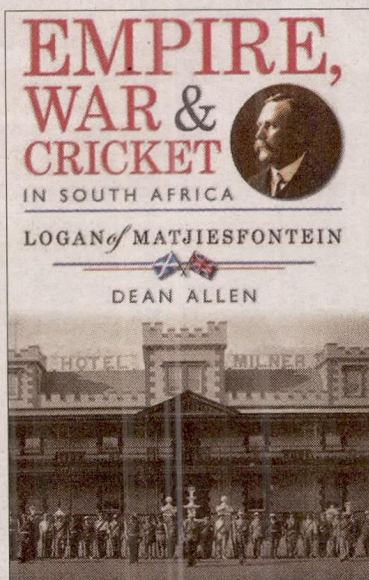
Logan, the son of a Borders railwayman, arrived in South Africa from Scotland in 1877, and his entrepreneurial endeavours helped him to amass a fortune in the growing colonial society. An astute businessman, he had his fingers in many pies, and his headmaster at Reston House School, although prescient when he wrote, "I should rejoice to hear of his obtaining a good situation", could not have imagined the heights his former pupil would reach.

Logan started his working life as a porter on the Cape Province Railways and by sheer hard work he was offered the post of district superintendent of the railway section between the Hex River and Prince Albert, and he was to be stationed at Montagu Road, which in 1883 changed its name to Touws River.

For anyone else it may have been a problem but Logan saw it as an opportunity and established Matjiesfontein to build his own empire, but this was after he began providing catering on the railway stations.

However, the story is really about cricket, war and empire. Even in those years sport, in this case cricket, was closely aligned to politics. So it seems nothing much has changed.

Like Rhodes, Allen points out, Logan was a product of his times and epitomised the British colonial spirit. Although he knew the value of self-promotion, and there is plenty of evidence of that in the newspapers of the day, he was largely reticent about his private life and rejected an



offer from Olive Schreiner to write his biography.

The Laird's privately sponsored cricket tour by South Africa to Britain in 1901 cemented his place in this little known history which has been uncovered by Allen, who could have made the narrative as drawn out as the Timeless Test, which was played between South Africa and England in 1939, but has written an entertaining and intriguing story.

The book is illustrated with rare and historic photographs and documents and written in the best tradition of story-telling. It will keep you glued until the last page and will give you an unusual perspective on our history.

● There were 10 days (46 hours) of cricket in the Timeless Test, which ended in a draw. When the players went for tea as the rains came, England were short of 42 runs for victory with five wickets in hand. The game was abandoned and declared a draw as the visiting team had to be on the Durban train to catch the Athlone Castle home.