

## THE ARREST OF WALTER READ

## Expense account

DEAN ALLEN

The journey home for England's cricketers from South Africa has not always been as uneventful as it was in late February 2016. Almost 125 years earlier, they arrived in the country for a tour which would finish with the arrest of their captain, Walter Read, as the team boarded the ship, following a pay dispute with the trip's organiser, James Logan.

A Scotsman born in 1857 in Reston, a working-class Berwickshire village, Logan had arrived in Cape Town in 1877, when British imperial intentions were focused upon achieving control of the region. Having acquired great wealth through insider trading and shady diamond deals, he made a name for himself by setting up a model village, with all the latest trappings of Victorian Britain, in Matjiesfontein, over 130 miles north-east of Cape Town, where locals quickly christened him the "Laird". His support of first-class cricket was part of his overall strategy of personal advancement.

The first tour with which he was associated was Read's, in 1891-92 – the second by England to South Africa, following C. Aubrey Smith's side three years earlier. At the time, W. G. Grace was busy leading another England team, to Australia, and it was thought there would be little interest among the South African public. This proved the case – and a year later Logan was in court contesting repayment of his investment.

The dispute revolved around the sum of £750, lent by Logan to Read, a Surrey amateur, and Edwin Ash, the team secretary. Ash claimed the loan was to be paid back only from tour profits. Logan, however, had allegedly told him that "he did not make money out of sport, but only wanted his money back with reasonable interest" – and before the team left for England. Fearing he would not be repaid, Logan had Read and Ash arrested moments before their departure for England on March 23, 1892. They were released on giving security, pending an action, and were eventually allowed – along with the rest of the embarrassed England team – to sail home.

If ever proof were needed of the financial motives behind these early tours in the supposedly golden age of amateurism, this case provides it. The essence of Logan's complaint was that his money had been spent dishonourably on the "so-called amateurs", while Read and Ash accused him of profiteering. There was little evidence of this, however, and in a unanimous decision in June 1893 the case was awarded to Logan with full costs.

Not only had he exploited a moral repugnance of shamateurism to his advantage in court, but Read, Billy Murdoch and the other gentleman players suspected of receiving payment were pilloried in the South African press. The *Cape Times* alleged that Read had originally demanded £850 (around £75,000 today) to appear on the tour, and that Murdoch had been paid over £350.

"Everyone knows that the curse of sport at the present day... is the group of evils spoken of familiarly as professionalism," declared the *Cape Argus* the day after Logan's victory. The *Cape Times* added: "The colony will at least be wary of men calling themselves 'amateur' cricketers – men who bargain for payment of up to £850, over and above all first-class touring expenses, before they consent to come out to a young and comparatively poor sporting country like South Africa for a few months' tour, while the acknowledged 'professionals' are only paid a hundred or so apiece."

*Dean Allen is the author of Empire, War & Cricket in South Africa: Logan of Matjiesfontein.*