

Neville Nuttall

The death of Neville Nuttall in July 1983 in his eightieth year must have reminded many men and women in Natal of the important contribution made to education in its widest sense by a man who was a schoolmaster *par excellence* and a supremely gifted teacher of English.

Neville Nuttall was born in Durban on 14 October 1903. His first school was Highbury Preparatory School at Hillcrest, a school for which he had a life-long affection. From Highbury he went to Kingswood College, Grahamstown and, for the final year of his school career, to the Durban High School.

He was one of the outstanding students of his time at the Natal University College in Pietermaritzburg. A Bachelor of Arts degree in 1923 was followed by a Master's degree in English in 1924 and the Higher Education Diploma in 1925.

For thirty-eight years he served in the Natal Education Department, being successively Senior English Master at the Durban High School, Headmaster of Newcastle High School, Inspector of Schools and Principal of the Natal Training College.

On his retirement from the Education Department at the end of 1963 he was invited to join the staff of Hilton College, where he was Senior English Master for six years.



Neville Nuttall
(Photograph: Natal Training College Archives)

During his retirement in Underberg, in his home on a stretch of the Umzimkulu River, he was actively involved in the work of the Anglican Church. In 1973 he was ordained a priest of the Church of the Province of South Africa.

In the midst of his busy life he wrote four original works. They were *Trout Streams of Natal: a Fisherman's Philosophy* (1947); a novel, *Proud River* (1965); *Lift Up Your Hearts: The Story of Hilton College* (1971); and *Life in the Country* (1973).

He was the compiler of two anthologies of verse, a selection from the writings of Olive Schreiner, an anthology of long short stories and an anthology of biographical writings.

Through the years he wrote verse of quality and appeal and in his retirement he wrote a regular column for *The Star*, the Johannesburg daily newspaper.

Neville Nuttall gave his loyal devotion to the three institutions where he spent the most fulfilling years of his professional life. They were the Durban High School, the Natal Training College and Hilton College.

Generations of DHS boys were aware of his deep poetic insight and remembered with gratitude his ability to transmit to them his own enthusiasm for English literature. One of those boys, while serving in the Western Desert during the Second World War and looking up at the stars, remembered his English master's exposition of *Lycidas* and was moved to write and tell him so.

Neville Nuttall's eleven years at the Natal Training College saw a transformation in the nature of the College. The Director of Education had said to the newly appointed Principal, "Your job will be to teach them the primary school syllabus — and nothing more." Happily for the College, that directive was ignored and NTC became a place in which the value of academic study for its own sake was recognised. His own intense pleasure in literature was passed on to his students and, as one who worked with him during those years testified, "The study of a poem was a kind of voyage of exploration and discovery".

Hiltonians of the 1960s were privileged to experience what DHS boys of the 1930s and 1940s and NTC students of the 1950s had known as Neville Nuttall took them on journeys of literary discovery.

While men may be honoured for the glittering prizes of office which come to them, richer by far are the memories which are cherished of men who have deeply influenced others. Generations of Natalians acknowledge their debt to Neville Nuttall for what he taught them, but they remember him not only as an inspired teacher whose every lesson was a little masterpiece; they also remember him as a man of kindness, charm, imagination and humour and as one who was ever generous in his encouragement of his pupils and of younger colleagues.

He was greatly blessed in his family life. He and his wife, Lucy, who was his collaborator in much of his writing, created a truly happy home for their two sons, in whose successes they rejoiced. The Nuttall home, whether in Durban, Newcastle, Pietermaritzburg, Hilton or Underberg, was a welcoming place of grace and gentleness.

R.G. SLATER