

Natal Training College (1909-1987)

The pre-service section of the Natal College of Education, the old Natal Training College ceases to function as an institution for the training of teachers at the end of 1987. So passes a great and widely respected college of education, its demise brought about by the pressures of demographic and economic necessity and the disruptive reality of a segregated education system. In a time of scarcity in black education the demand for white teachers in an exclusively white system has fallen to the point where even one college of education is more than adequate for the training of the small number of teachers required for the white schools of Natal. It is indeed sad to contemplate the dismantling of NTC which for so many years educated almost all of the Province's primary school teachers and collaborated with the University in the professional training of graduate teachers.

While remembrance is still fresh we must record something of the spirit and achievements of NTC, that institution so infinitely and enduringly influenced by the *genius loci* of the former Government House, and the special sense of community created by the girdling walls which draw people together, yet over the lifetime of T.C. have deterred the incursions of raiders no more menacing than the bucolic students of Cedara.

To many it would seem that the greatest achievement of NTC has been the expression of an ethos which had encouraged in its students a humane and caring attitude towards the community and the individual child, and a respect for scholarship. These values have been transmitted by the benign contagion of the labour and love of those who have served NTC, and by the pervasive influence of this place. As Neville Nuttall wrote in 1959, it is a place which warmly endears itself to the people who live and work in it as the years go by, and its personality is apparent, in form and substance, to all who love it.

The College was established with about eighty students who moved into the modified and refurbished premises of Government House in 1912. In 1976 when the decision to confine its activities to the preparation of Pre-Primary and Junior Primary teachers only was taken, the enrolment was 282. At this point most students were taking the three year course with some staying for a fourth year specialist course. The academic staff now numbered forty-five, and the departments included physical science, biology, mathematics, physical education, music, technical drawing and handicrafts, art, biblical studies and, of course, education, English, Afrikaans, history and geography. The restriction of the training from 1977 saw a reduction in numbers and the disappearance of men students from the courses.

A feature of any viable centre of education is a continual adaptation to changing circumstances and an innovative response to the challenges of research and educational need. NTC has certainly met these requirements and it is interesting to see how often the appointment of a new rector has coincided with the introduction of new courses, or the alteration of criteria.

Mr Gowthorpe initiated the Teacher Training classes in 1909 and became the first principal of a college which was at that time run on traditional lines and in many ways like a secondary school in the treatment of students and

the presentation of subjects. A member of his staff, Professor Alexander Reid, known to everyone as Sandy, took over from Gowthorpe and initiated the collaboration with the University whereby students took four first-year courses at Natal University College over the two years of the Teachers' Third Class Certificate course. The exhilarating rigours of the ride on the upper deck of a city tram must remain vividly with all who commuted between NTC and 'Varsity for lectures.

In 1942 Prof. A.H. Allsopp (Sloppy) became Principal and while there were no major changes in the courses during his time, they were enriched and some facilities enlarged. The Governor's Ballroom, that paradox of wood and iron splendour, was demolished to make room for a new Women's Residence and a swimming bath, and the Art Department exchanged its rather spartan premises and assemblage of classical plaster sculptures for the expansive facilities of the Allsopp Block, which also included a hall-cum-gymnasium and two lecture rooms.

With the appointment of Neville Nuttall in 1952 came radical developments inspired by his study tour of teacher training institutions in Britain and some Continental countries. Not only were syllabuses revised and academic studies broadened, but a tutorial system was introduced. This was to prove a major factor in humanising staff-student relationships and developing classroom skills. The College Medal was instituted by Nuttall as a means of giving recognition to excellence, a goal he constantly set before us all. The physical expansion of the College was considerable in his time: the Gowthorpe Block, the Reid Block with Students' Union and Music Auditorium, and a men's residence later to be named Bowden Residence, were built in Nuttall's time. But it was the achievement of a chapel for which he had so strenuously and persistently striven that crowned his labours for the College. Though he had to be content with an adaptation of the Governor's kitchen he was satisfied to see the fine ideal he had so long cherished enrich the spiritual life of NTC.

Were there but space and time one could dwell on the personalities and diverse achievements of all the Principals and Rectors of the College. Each of the nine in his own way added a fresh dimension to the work of NTC and set the stamp of his style and philosophy upon the course of events. One recalls Wynne Bowden with his single-minded devotion to the recruitment of men, and low-key diplomacy so different from the volatile Neville Nuttall whose fulminations both private and official could arouse both terror and pity. George Dale, impetuous, at times irascible and constantly in motion was followed by the unflappable and circumspect Ronald Tonkin, surrogate wise uncle to staff and students alike. Then came George Harrison, urbane in his dealings and dynamic in his innovative and often radical planning. Yet diverse as these men may have been they had in common a concern for people and a desire to see students enriched and fulfilled by their years at NTC.

And what of the students themselves, those often immature young people drawn from the many corners of Natal and 'foreign parts'? Their contributions to the College, both in studies and practice, on the playing field and in wider spheres, have been generous and substantial and in some instances, most notable. A survey of those now teaching in all phases of

education would reveal that an impressive number have exploited their talents to the full and grown in stature, frequently beyond the expectations of those who worked with them and tried to set them on a positive path. One never ceases to be impressed by the professional and academic achievements of former students, so many of whom have improved their professional and academic qualifications and are occupying senior positions in the schools of Natal. Among their number are a former director of education, numerous principals of schools, workers in the advisory and supervisory services of the Natal Education Department, and lecturers at colleges of education.

In matters affecting relationships with the wider community outside the sheltering and temptingly reclusive walls, NTC has reached out to make contact with those once traditionally and now legislatively separated from us. And progress has been made: from the netball rumpus of 1955 when the Principal was taken to task for having allowed students to play netball against the pupils of an Indian school (where, of course, some of them did their practical teaching) to more recent times when students have been drawn into coaching activities for black scholars, and where staff and students have become heavily involved in the College's outreach programme which attempts to spread teaching expertise and skills among unqualified and underqualified teachers of other race groups in the Pietermaritzburg area. The closure of NTC will see the dispersal of the staff and students who have done so much in this field.

NTC has made a rich and lasting contribution to education, particularly in Natal. It is fitting to recall the College Prayer (composed by Neville Nuttall) and quote the lines which express the essentials of the credo of NTC.

Teach us to think little of our rights and much of our responsibilities;
and grant that both while we are here and when we go out into a world
of wider loyalties, we may have the courage and strength to keep our
faith and devote ourselves to the service of our fellow men, regardless
of all differences, by the common bond of thy Holy Gospel.

GEORGE DALE

