

Book Reviews and Notices

PIETERMARITZBURG 1838–1988: A NEW PORTRAIT OF AN AFRICAN CITY

Edited by JOHN LABAND and ROBERT HASWELL

Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press and Shuter & Shooter, 1988. 286 pp. illus. R49,95 + GST.

It is at once an exciting and a disturbing experience to read this handsomely produced book, which marks the 150th anniversary of Pietermaritzburg: exciting because it echoes in so many ways Alan Paton's evocative phrase — 'Pietermaritzburg, the lovely city'; disturbing because of its constant reminder that here, as with Disraeli's England of the mid-nineteenth century, we have an account not just of one city, but of two — a city of wealth and privilege, and a city of poverty and exclusion.

This two-fold response is to the great credit of the editors and authors of the book, because it is an indication that this portrait of Pietermaritzburg has not made the mistake of so much past writing about our capital city, in which the focus has been almost entirely on the one community to the virtual exclusion of the other. Even that doyen of our Natal historians, Professor Alan Hattersley, was guilty of this myopic one-sidedness. Indeed, he revealed his complacency and bias with his remark in his *Portrait of a City* (1951), quoted in this volume, that 'Pietermaritzburg has done not a little for its Bantu population'.

It is extremely poignant to find oneself reading in this book three carefully researched and revealing chapters on the peri-urban Vulindlela, on Edendale and on Sobantu Village, with a chapter sandwiched in-between giving Brian Spencer's memorable description of growing up in Loop Street. Two cities indeed!

In fact, there are more than just two cities described here, because in Pietermaritzburg, as in Durban and elsewhere in Natal, we have the meeting point of the three great cultures of Africa, Asia and Europe. The book is described as 'the portrait of an African city'. That is true in the sense that it is a city in Africa; but there is a long way to go before it becomes truly African.

The range of subjects in this portrait is remarkable. Ecology and geology; architecture and the arts; education and the economy; history and politics; religion, health and sport: all these and more are covered. But not only covered; they are illuminated by admirably short chapters or boxed insertions, which both inform and fascinate the reader. So we have, for example (and selecting almost at random), pieces on 'The Pietermaritzburg Town Hall', 'The trial of Langalibalele', 'From rickshaws to minibus taxis', 'Afrikaans authors of Pietermaritzburg', 'Alan Paton of Pietermaritzburg', 'The Pubs of Pietermaritzburg', 'The Duzi Canoe Marathon,' 'Gandhi: the

Pietermaritzburg experience', as well as somewhat longer descriptive or analytical pieces. There are three poems as well: 'Sinjale' by D.J. Opperman (written at 20 Longmarket Street), 'cloudburst over machibise' by dikobe wa mogale, and the very moving 'echo sounds in Maritzburg' by Mlungisi Mkhize. It is a pity that nothing similar in Zulu was found, but it is much to the editors' credit that contemporary orthography has been used in regard to Zulu names. It is very disappointing that, apart from the two poems mentioned, there is no contribution to this book by an African. Is this due to the constraints of our time, such as the emergency regulations? The editors drop a hint along these lines (p. xix). But surely this shouldn't have excluded black reminiscence such as that given from a white perspective on life in Loop Street?

The book includes a fine, wide collection of photographs and other illustrations. There is even a clever page full of Leyden cartoons illustrating a variety of Pietermaritzburg personalities. The beer halls, the railways, the Hindu temples and Christian churches, the hospitals and schools, houses and huts, gardens, gracious homes, thorn trees and forests, shops and traffic: these are there as well as the very varied human face of Maritzburg and its immediate environment.

Is this a classic example of 'a coffee table book'? Yes and no. It is a book which can be dipped into with interest and delight. Yet it is a book which also challenges, disturbs and inspires. It does not try to avoid the seamier and even tragic side of our capital city's life and history. It describes 'an apartheid city' which has itself been built on 'a segregated city', the one a more savagely ideological version of the other. It does not avoid the grievous truth that the 150th anniversary has occurred in a city caught up in terrible conflict and violence. Yet it also points the way to a new future, already being adumbrated among the more reasonable and far-sighted of Pietermaritzburg's citizens, in which the divided city will more truly become a city for all — an African city. So the concluding chapter ends with an adaptation of some words written long ago by Gandhi, whose philosophy was shaped deeply by what happened to him on the Pietermaritzburg railway station on 7 June 1893 (the story is told in this book):

We do not want our City divided and our windows burglar-proofed against those who could be our neighbours; we want all the people of this land to move about our City as freely as possible, knowing that none of us will be blown away.

I find that it is impossible to review a book like this dispassionately. If one cares for Pietermaritzburg and its people, one is left, reflectively, penitently, hopefully, wanting very much to be part of the kind of future this book holds out to us all.

MICHAEL NUTTALL

FOR HEARTH AND HOME — THE STORY OF MARITZBURG COLLEGE 1863–1988.

by SIMON HAW and RICHARD FRAME.

Pietermaritzburg, MC Publications, 1988. 518 pp. illus. R49,95.

All the best books about schools emphasize the people, for it is people who make or break schools. *For Hearth and Home* is rich in people in all their idiosyncratic glory. This galloping tale of the fortunes of Maritzburg College recounts in picaresque style the adventure that is education. The action, the ideas and values are informed by the South African character of its birth and its realization of ethos in a city where Brit and Boer have left their corporate cultural stamp.

Schools are fascinating places. Like Eugene Marais' antheaps, they are the sum of their parts — organic entities at once concerned with common goals and vulnerable to the imperatives of individuality. They are shaped by decisions taken at the flood and their character reflects an image of human interaction in the cause of progress — for the pupils, for the school. Part of the considerable charm of this book is that experience of success is handled, on the whole, with disarming candour. The trumpets are blown but the bum notes are also heard.

The structure of *For Hearth and Home* deals mainly in narrative but the business of recording perceived success and failure makes the work an essential item for educational archives. Its concern with the human factor provides a drama of struggle in the early days, and mainly successful strategies to deal with the pervading demand for 'success' over the last 50 years or so. The problem for small schools is expectation of failure; that of big schools anticipation of inviolate superiority. School communities become beguiled by the performances of the few. The danger is that individual effort is trivialized into scoreboard generality and corporate achievement melodramatized into myth. In this story of Maritzburg College, the boys, the teachers, and the headmasters, are downstage-centre. Brightly-lit, theirs is a tale told of movement towards greater appreciation of the need for school and home to work closely in the education of the boys. Until the time of Hector Commons as Headmaster, 'both staff and headmaster had tended to treat "nosy" parents with the glacial distaste that an Englishman might accord to a drunken hobo stumbling through the hallowed portals of his club'. This attitude changed in 1966, and a more sensitive and sophisticated view of fagging and initiation procedures began to influence policy.

The authors, Haw and Frame, weave the story of College into the cloth of the contemporary scene. One sees policy and practice against the events of the day. The business of school is clearly the business of life. Challenge and opportunity evoke a response of remarkable variety from remarkably various headmasters. The redoubtable Clark, his office marked by wars at both ends, and the College motto in 1896; 'Pixie' Barns and the 'Spanish flu'; Septimus Pape of the 'bombastic voice'; John Willie Hudson with his 'thundering authoritarianism' and 'histrionic ebullience'; 'Bones' Fuller, the delegator and stickler for 'standards' ('You long-haired lout, get out of my school and when your hair conforms to the standards, come back and see me and perhaps I'll take you back to my school!'); Hector Commons, 'leading from the top'; Keith Olivier, with a renaissance grasp of curricular possibilities, recognizing individuality and the richness of cultural opportunity. And for much of the later history, the character and charisma of the remarkable Skonk Nicholson,

deputy-headmaster from 1957 to 1982.

Readers closely associated with Maritzburg College as former pupils, teachers, parents, and headmasters, will enjoy this accurate and carefully recorded account of the fortunes of one of Natal's most famous schools. Fables and foibles come thick and fast, and the humour is splendidly open and fair. Sacred cows are kindly but summarily despatched, and the authors have not flinched from attempting judgments of leadership and management styles. In this fine chronicle, teachers are spared nothing. Credit is given where it is due; criticism is fulsome and sensitive to personality and engaging eccentricity. *For Hearth and Home* has much of the bounce and zip of 'The Boys' Own Paper' or 'Champion'. It is also rich in perceptive observations of what things make good schools work.

NEIL JARDINE

THE BATTLE OF ULUNDI

by JOHN LABAND

Shuter & Shooter, Pietermaritzburg and KwaZulu Monuments' Council, Ulundi, 1988. xvi + 56 pp. illus. maps, gloss., chron., bibl. R11,40.

In this short book the last great battle of the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879 is described and put into its historical context. Though based on very extensive research, it is not forbiddingly scholarly in presentation. It is clearly written, and is obviously intended for readers who may be unfamiliar with both the British and Zulu background.

On the importance of the battle of Ulundi, John Laband takes issue with Jeff Guy. Guy argues in *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom* that Ulundi was a minor battle puffed up into a major victory in order to reinflate the reputations of Lord Chelmsford and the British army after their humiliation at Isandlwana, and in order to enable the British to retire from Zululand without seeming to have been defeated. Guy argues that the Zulu attack on the British position at Ulundi was half-hearted, their casualties were far fewer than Chelmsford claimed, their capacity for further resistance was essentially unimpaired, and the real reason the war came to an end shortly (not immediately) after Ulundi was the arrival of Sir Garnet Wolseley with the news that the Zulus were to retain their land and cattle.

Against this Laband argues that Chelmsford's victory was indeed a decisive one. The evidence for Zulu half-heartedness is countered by evidence for 'intrepidity', 'enormous pluck' and 'amazing courage'. Laband suggests that the evidence of courage refers to the initial stages of the battle, and the evidence of half-heartedness to the later stages, when the hopelessness of the attempt had become apparent. This would not, however, explain why the Zulu failed at any stage to reach the British lines and engage in hand to hand combat as they had done at Khambula, the great majority getting no closer than 70 to 100 metres. The fact that the British fired only between 6.4 and 7 rounds per infantryman during the course of the battle, which lasted between half and three quarters of an hour, is not fully explained by Laband's reference to a statement in an official manual on 'small wars' that 10 rounds per man was the norm in a typical battle. One would not expect this war against the Zulu to be below average, particularly since they also had some firearms, while many

'small wars' must have been fought against enemies not having them. Laband gives reasons for believing that Chelmsford's estimate of 1 500 Zulu dead was accurate; but it seems that between a third and a half of these were killed attempting to escape after the battle proper was over, a process compared by the gloating British to tent-pegging and pig-sticking.

Laband's strongest argument is based upon the fact that the British position at Ulundi was unfortified. The Zulu had learned from bitter experience at Khambula and Gingindlovu that an attack on a fortified British position was suicidal. But they still cherished the belief that if they could get the British to fight them in the open their numbers and their valour would prove irresistible. It was this belief that was shattered at Ulundi. As the British had calculated, the Zulu were forced to recognise that they were defeated and that the war was over.

Laband, however, continues: 'In fact, the predominant Zulu attitude was that they had had enough of war, that they wanted peace and to be able to go home to resume the normal course of their lives. Everywhere was the hope that the British, having made their point, would go home too'. (p.47). This seems to support Guy's position, rather than Laband's. Although it is true that by July 1879 the British objective had become confined to 'destroying the power of the Zulu state' (p.48), it had originally been more ambitious than that. Zulu valour, and the British philanthropy and parsimony that it stimulated, caused the Imperial government to decide against annexation. There is evidence that the Zulu understood they were fighting to avoid being made to pay taxes and work like the *amakhafula* of Natal. With Wolseley's arrival they knew that they had succeeded, and that they would indeed be able 'to resume the normal course of their lives'. Although the Zulu defeat at Ulundi would probably have been the last great set-piece battle of the war in any circumstances, a British attempt at annexation, rule and settlement might well have provoked a guerilla resistance more serious than the 'few minor skirmishes in the remote north-western corner of Zululand' (p. 47) that did occur.

Laband has shown that the battle of Ulundi was more important than Guy allows, but there remains a good deal of truth in Guy's arguments. One is left with the impression that the defeat of the Zulu army at Ulundi ended the resistance of the Zulu state, but that Wolseley's peace terms played a major role in ending the resistance of the Zulu people.

Much of what has been written on the Anglo-Zulu war is by participants or amateur popularisers. Laband's work, by contrast, is thorough and scholarly, and the results, even in popular form such as the present book, cast new light on old questions.

To help visitors identify sites, the maps depict (in light grey) features which did not exist in 1879. Visitors should take note, however, that, while the maps in this volume show the modern main road as running east of Fort Nolela and the drift through the White Mfolozi used by the British, the map in Laband and Thompson's *Field Guide to the War in Zululand* (1979) shows it as running to the west, and that the earlier map seems to be correct.

R.L. COPE

MOODIE'S ZULU WAR

by D.F.C. MOODIE, with an introduction by JOHN LABAND

The Anglo-Zulu War Series. Cape Town, North & South Press, 1879, reprinted 1988. 264pp. illus. R49-95 (hardcover), R29-95 (paperback).

Settling down to write a review of this book on the 110th anniversary of the Battle of Ulundi is a reminder of the continuing interest evoked by that conflict. The centenary produced a considerable literature, both academic and popular, and ten years later the flood continues. This volume is to be followed by three more reprints of rare titles.

In 1977 the late Frank Emery mined a rich vein of historical ore in long-forgotten newspapers to produce *The Red Soldier*, a collection of first hand accounts of their experiences by soldiers who fought in the Anglo-Zulu War. *Moodie's Zulu War* is a much earlier example of the same sort of work.

Duncan Moodie grew up in Pietermaritzburg, to which he had come as a child in 1845 when his father was appointed Colonial Secretary to the first British administration of the newly acquired colony of Natal. In 1869 he moved to Australia where he embarked on a career in journalism. The interest aroused, even in colonies as distant as those in Australia, by the shock Zulu victory at Isandlwana, encouraged him to produce this collection of extracts from popular journals and newspapers, aimed at the general reading public. As an empire loyalist, Moodie was concerned to include stirring accounts of British bravery, fortitude and action, as well as to justify the British initiation of the conflict.

Some of these tales, particularly those connected with the epic dash of the survivors from Isandlwana to Fugitives' Drift, or the eerie visits to the battlefield some months later to bury the dead and retrieve undamaged wagons, have become well-known through much secondary retelling. Others are less familiar. I was particularly intrigued with the morbid fascination which the untimely death of the Prince Imperial had for the Victorians. A whole chapter of over 40 pages is devoted to it and the seemingly unending obsequies which followed. They were certainly not ones to try to avoid the realities of death.

The publication of a facsimile edition of this hitherto rare volume, is a thoroughly worthwhile project. John Laband, the General Editor of the series, has written an informed and perceptive introduction. One looks forward to the appearance of further titles.

T.B. FROST

(Reprinted from the *Natal Witness*, with permission).

GANDHI'S EDITOR: THE LETTERS OF M.H. NAZAR 1902-1903

Edited by SURENDRA BHANA and JAMES D. HUNT

New Delhi, Promilla & Co. Publishers, 1989. 125pp.

Mansukhlal Hiralal Nazar was born in Surat, India in 1862 and, after living for a time in England, arrived in Durban in December 1896. A confirmed Indian nationalist, he immediately became embroiled in South African Indian politics when he established a close personal relationship with Mohandas K. Gandhi. He served as joint-secretary of the Natal Indian Congress between 1902 and 1904, and as first editor of *Indian Opinion*, the weekly newspaper founded by Gandhi in 1903, until its base of operations was moved in 1904 from central Durban to the Phoenix Settlement. In that capacity, Nazar was largely responsible for implementing the objectives which underlay the establishment of *Indian Opinion*, namely, to unify southern Africa's disparate Indian community, to create a greater awareness among whites of the disabilities which Indians in the sub-continent had to endure, and to seek redress through appeals to both local and imperial authorities.

The sixty-one letters contained in this volume, more than half of them addressed to Gandhi, were written in Durban between September 1902 and June 1903. They provide insight into the thought and hard work that was involved in launching *Indian Opinion*, as well as into the discriminatory conditions to which Indian South Africans were being subjected during the early twentieth century. Each letter is individually contextualized by means of an introductory note and the text has been carefully edited, though, disappointingly, the editors have not been able to identify the mysterious Atmaram Maharaj, to whom almost a third of the letters published were addressed.

Surendra Bhana and James D. Hunt have already published extensively, the former on the history of Indian South Africans, the latter more specifically on Gandhi. Their collaboration in editing this collection of letters has made a worthwhile contribution to both of these interrelated fields.

BILL GUEST

VINNICOMBE'S TREK: SON OF NATAL, STEPSON OF TRANSVAAL, 1854-1932

by R.N. CURREY

Portsmouth, Heinemann and Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1989, 232 pp. illus. R39,95 + GST.

This is the story of a Natal family during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, with Tom Vinnicombe, the grandfather of the author, the main character. Of Devonshire stock, Tom's father, George, had come to Natal with the Byrne settlers and established himself as the infant colony's first organ builder. Besides making and repairing musical instruments, he taught music, singing and dancing. In 1863, however, (the family tree creates confusion by giving the date of his death as 1849), he died after an accident, leaving his wife with five young children to support.

Tom had been born in Pietermaritzburg, and grew up here and in Durban. In the year of the Anglo-Zulu war, he married Rachel Phipson, daughter of Thomas Phipson who, for twelve years, was Sheriff of Natal. At a time when the railhead to the interior had reached no further inland than Pinetown, their

lives depended on the wagon. In it they trekked after gold, first to the Eastern Transvaal, and then further north. Yet it was not as a miner, but as a builder of churches – for the *gemeentes* in Pietersburg, Standerton and Bethal – that Tom Vinnicombe was to leave his mark. His disgust at the Jameson Raid led him to become a Burgher of the Transvaal Republic.

Inevitably, the Anglo-Boer War split his loyalties. He was working on the church at Bethal when hostilities broke out, but refused to serve with the Boer commandos, and was eventually imprisoned in April 1900. Escaping, he joined the forces of General Buller as they pressed into the Transvaal, and served with the Natal Guides. Here he risked execution for treason by slipping through to Bethal, still in republican hands, to take food to his family. It was a huge piece of bluff. His presence in the town in British uniform was taken to mean that the advancing British forces were near and that he had simply come on ahead to see his family. In fact, such was not the case, and Tom's trip back to the safety of the British lines is a classic of high adventure.

He later exchanged the life of a Guide for that of Town Overseer of Volksrust. Outside the town there grew up a concentration camp, full of the displaced victims of the policy of farmhouse burning, and among them were Cornelius and Sannie Uys whose daughter Tom had once courted and who had been kind to him in his youth. Tom used his influence to get the two old people out of their tent in the burgher camp, and took them into his own home. Alas for his kindheartedness. Like two elderly cuckoos, they took shameless advantage of his hospitality and eventually *bought* the house from him at well under its market value. His generous nature was similarly exploited by the Bethal church building committee who got him to complete the window-high structure after the war at the contract price which he had quoted before it. As a consequence, though he indeed finished the church, the church finished him.

Tom spent a number of his retirement years in Pietermaritzburg, working on the verses in which he recorded his experiences. Do any elderly residents remember him in the 1920s when he lived here? His story, however, is undoubtedly more memorable than the medium in which he so often chose to record it. Modelled on the cliché-ridden Victorian ballads of his youth, many of them would have done credit to the great poet McGonagall himself. The extracts quoted in the text are eminently skipable. But his story is not. Its publication in this volume is certainly worthwhile.

T.B. FROST

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NATAL MUSEUM JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES, VOLUME 1

edited by DR J.G.H. LONDT

Pietermaritzburg, Council of the Natal Museum, 1989. 168pp. illus.

The *Annals of the Natal Museum*, now in its twenty-ninth volume, is a learned journal well-known in academic circles in this country and abroad. Over the years it has published the results of much significant research, especially in those branches of the natural sciences in which the Natal Museum is known as a specialist institution: Arachnology, Entomology, Lower Invertebrata and Malacology. The establishment of research departments for Archaeology, Ethno-Archaeology and (more recently) Cultural History has resulted in a growing number of research articles in these disciplines appearing

in the *Annals*. In view of this trend, the Museum Council this year considered that the time had come to publish a separate journal of studies in the humanities. The *Annals* will revert to being a publication for the natural sciences only. Hence we note the appearance of the new *Natal Museum Journal of Humanities*. Its first issue sets a bench-mark of excellence, and is devoted entirely to Dr A.D. Mazel's paper, based on four years' archaeological work, 'People making history: the last ten thousand years of hunter-gatherer communities in the Thukela Basin'.

JOHN DEANE

