

## *Notes and Queries*

### ***Restoration of Fort Napier***

Graham Dominy, Editor of *Natalia*, has provided this note on a praiseworthy project.

The Natal Provincial Administration deserves congratulation for the careful and sensitive repairs and restoration work undertaken at Fort Napier (now part of the Midlands Mental Hospital), making a virtue of necessity. In other words, it has been cheaper to restore old buildings for hospital use than to build new ones. The Provincial Works Directorate has spent considerable effort on the restoration of historic military buildings for hospital purposes. 'A Ward', which is arguably the oldest building extant in Pietermaritzburg, having been built as the core of the fort between 1843 and 1845, has been reroofed and the original artillery bastion below the water tower has been repaired. The finest work has been done on the corrugated iron 'Cavalry Officers' Mess' which was erected at Fort Napier in the 1890s. This building, thanks to the careful planning and control of NPA architect, Nigel Robson, and National Monuments Council representative, Andrew Hall, has been restored to its former glory.



Fort Napier, 'the Cavalry Officers' Mess' in the late 1890s shortly after completion.

*(Photograph: Natal Museum)*

***Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift***

After many years of controversy and allegations of neglect, the Natal Provincial Administration and the KwaZulu authorities are rightly proud of their new museums and interpretation centres on the historic battlefields of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift. These projects have also been planned as part of rural upliftment exercises and side by side with the new museums go new schools and community projects.

Barry Marshall, the director of the KwaZulu Monuments Council, describes the opening of the Isandlwana Interpretation centre by King Goodwill Zwelithini on 18 January 1992 as a great success that evoked a fantastic response from people all over KwaZulu. Representatives of the Royal Regiment of Wales (successor to the 24th Regiment), the Natal regiments and the Zulu amabutho all participated in the ceremonies.

Two days later the Rorke's Drift Provincial Museum was officially opened by the Administrator of Natal, Mr Con Botha. Dr John Vincent, the head of the Natal Provincial Museum Service provides the following note.

It may be considered an exaggeration to say that 'after 113 years Rorke's Drift-Shiyane has a museum'! However, one could say 'at last' with some justification.

At a ceremony on 20 January 1992, the Administrator of Natal, Mr C.J. Botha, officially opened the Rorke's Drift-Shiyane Provincial Museum, and dedicated it to the brave men who fought and died in the battle on the night of 22 January 1879.

To some the term 'museum' may be a misnomer, for it does not contain much contemporary material that can be attributed to or associated with the event. Perhaps 'interpretative centre' better describes what is now there. It is housed in two separate buildings.

Exhibitions in the first explain the background to Rorke's Drift-Shiyane — its prehistory, James Rorke, the missionaries, etc. and describes the build-up to the Anglo-Zulu War. A large relief model vividly illustrates the surrounding country and the British and Zulu movements during the days preceding the battle.

The second building houses a series of displays dealing with the Rorke's Drift-Shiyane battle — preparations, the battle for the hospital and later events, culminating in some of the aftermath of the war. Most of the figures are life size, whilst another relief model represents the night of the battle, with more than 2 000 figures 22 cm high, each hand-painted and some recognizable, giving a sense of reality and drama. Other innovations are illuminated maps, a recorded commentary and sound effects.

It was not easy to do full justice to the events that took place, but certainly the museum is a vast improvement on what was previously there. The comments of visitors — most complimentary and some constructively critical — have been encouraging and gratifying. Most satisfying though has been the feeling that 'at last' the valour of combatants on both sides has been recognised.

As part of its drive to raise funds to provide the museum and educational projects related to it, the KwaZulu Heritage Foundation commissioned Natal sculptor Gert Swart to produce a bronze maquette, of which a limited edition of twenty castings has been offered for sale. The work depicts Zulu and British

soldiers locked in confused close combat, a Victoria Cross, the horns of the Zulu battle formation, and King Cetshwayo seated above all. The first copies of the maquette were presented to the reigning Zulu monarch, King Goodwill Zwelithini, and to the Prince of Wales in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Regiment of Wales.

Gert Swart also presented a copy of the work to the Natal College of Education, which in turn made it over to the University of Natal to serve as a floating trophy to encourage the work of first-year students of history on the Pietermaritzburg campus. The late Vice-Principal saw the work and was pleased to approve of this project, and the award was, with his blessing, named the Colin Webb Trophy.

### ***Collecting 'The struggle against apartheid in Natal'***

Museums are playing an ever more important role in the affairs of the community. Graham Dominy has provided a note on an important initiative by the Natal Museum.

In an Africa-wide competition, the Natal Museum has been awarded a grant of US \$11 000 by the New York-based Social Sciences Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies, to undertake a scientific collecting programme of artefacts and reminiscences of the long, fraught years of the 1980s and earlier struggles against apartheid. The Natal Museum has made a collection of relics and signage of the apartheid system and, with the American funds, it has embarked on collecting 'the other side of the story'. Political ephemera such as posters, banners and T-shirts are being collected together with oral testimony and photographs. The symbols and stories of a wide cross-section of communities and organisations are being sought. A valuable collection of photographs from a peace monitoring group in the Natal Midlands has been donated to the Natal Museum as part of the project and is being processed. An exhibition is planned for 1993.

### ***Hermannsburg Mission House Museum***

Also on the subject of museums, Gilbert Torlage writes of an aspect of the recent interest in German settler affairs.

On 19 September 1854 a small party of German Lutheran missionaries and colonists arrived at the farm *Perseverance* near Greytown. Their intention was to settle and to convert the Zulu people to Christianity. They quickly constructed a small building where they ate, cooked, and housed a smithy. Within weeks, however, sparks from the smithy set the thatch roof alight. Fortunately the timber of the beams was still wet and did not burn. One year and one week after their arrival, the missionaries moved into the substantial home that they had completed. Out of these buildings grew the village of Hermannsburg, centre of one of the German communities of Natal.

The first building and part of the large home have now been turned into a museum in which items from the mission and the wider German community are displayed. The displays have recently been redesigned and renovated by the Natal Provincial Museum Service.

Fittingly, the refurbished museum and displays were officially opened on 19 September 1992 — exactly 138 years since the first arrival of the Germans. The visitor to the museum encounters an early missionary, his wife (predictably working away in the kitchen) and his son, as well as a stonemason engaged in building a church, and finds a number of other insights into the South African German settler community's history and culture.

The museum is open from Monday to Friday between 9 a.m. and noon, or visits can be made by appointment with the curator by telephoning 03345-405.

### ***Grahamstown Cathedral bells restoration — Natal contributes***

Dr Dai Herbert notes an unusual venture in which, in a reversal of historical roles, Natal has provided help to the Eastern Cape.

This year, 1992, marks the 150th anniversary of Dick King's famous ride from Durban to Grahamstown to summon help for the beleaguered forces in Natal. Perhaps coincidentally, but nevertheless quite appropriately, in this same year the business community in the Durban area has been of assistance to the city of Grahamstown in a somewhat unusual way.

This involved the project to restore the bells of Grahamstown Cathedral launched by the South African Guild of Church Bell Ringers in conjunction with the Grahamstown Guild of Church Bell Ringers. For many years the Grahamstown Cathedral bells, and particularly the frame which supports them, have been in a poor state of repair. Ringing of all eight bells in full-circle ringing has been virtually impossible because of the excessive movement of the bell frame within the tower. In 1991 members of the above-mentioned guilds decided that, in order for the cathedral's bells to continue to call the faithful to worship, they needed to be rehung in a new frame.

An appeal for aid was therefore launched. Because of the current economic recession it was thought that cash donations would be hard to get, so donations in kind were solicited. It is in this respect that industry in Natal has made a major contribution. The ball started to roll when Eric Webster of the Durban Guild of Church Bell Ringers contacted Frikkie Koch of Cut and Supply Steel Centre in Pinetown. In a very generous gesture this firm has supplied all the necessary steel and constructed the frame in accordance with the design specifications of Eayre and Smith Ltd, an overseas bell hanging specialist. After this, the steel was sandblasted by R.J. Southey (Natal) (Pty) Ltd, Durban, and was then galvanised by Voigt and Willeke (Pty) Ltd, Umbogintwini. Transport of the frame to and from these various companies in the Durban-Pinetown area was undertaken by Turner's Transport of New Germany, and Grindrod Transport of Mobeni, leading eventually to its arrival in Durban docks. From there the frame was shipped on board the M.V. *Barrier* of Unicorn Lines (Pty) Ltd to Port Elizabeth 'by favour of the Captain' (i.e. free of charge). Portnet kindly waived harbour fees at both ports. Transport for the final leg of the journey, from the dockside at Port Elizabeth to Grahamstown, was provided by Eskom. The new frame, much to the delight of all concerned, was unloaded at the cathedral on February 14, 1992.

This was an enormous boost to the restoration effort — the new frame was now sitting in the cathedral and had cost the appeal no more than a few phone calls. The old frame has since been removed and the new one installed under the supervision of a bell hanger from Eayre & Smith. New bearings and fittings still need to be attached to the bells. To this end much work remains to be done and a good deal of money needs to be raised. In connection with this the Durban Guild of Church Bell Ringers has provided funds for the printing of appeal leaflets aimed at generating funds to see the restoration through to completion.

This project is undoubtedly an historic initiative that will help to perpetuate an interesting aspect of South Africa's cultural heritage. Since the estimated cost of the new frame, installed in the cathedral, was of the order of R100 000, the contribution of companies in and around the Durban area has been a major one.

### *Pietermaritzburg Bird Sanctuary — some historical notes*

The note that follows has been adapted from a submission made by Mr D.P. Taylor, Primula Rd, Pietermaritzburg on behalf of the Centre for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife, Durban, to the Environmental Committee of the Pietermaritzburg City Council.

The foundation for a bird sanctuary was laid, albeit unconsciously, by the [Coronation] Brick and Tile Company, ancestor of Corobrik. In the process of excavating raw materials, for amongst other things, the imposing Pietermaritzburg City Hall, they created a large pit. This, by 1935, had outlived its usefulness and had become simply another relic of the march of progress.

The mayor of the city at that time, Mr Albert Allison, was impressed by the number of birds that subsequently came to roost in the skeletons of wattles, syringas and bluegums which had grown and then drowned in the rain water running off into the clay pit. Inspired by this, he persuaded the City Council to buy the land, including the pit from the Brick and Tile Company and to declare the area a bird sanctuary. This was done on 14 January 1936.

A stream was diverted from the Dorpspruit to fill the pit and created a lake of some five acres in extent. Large numbers of egrets and herons came to roost and breed in the summer months with a few hardy individuals staying over winter. By 1940 the bird population was estimated to be 25 000 during the summer. In September 1948 the sanctuary was officially named the Albert Allison Park.

Not only were birds naturally attracted to the sanctuary, but a conscious policy of introduction was pursued, ranging from mallard duck and Egyptian geese sent by a Dannhauser farmer and two pairs of mute swans from the king's swannery on the River Thames, England. The latter came, with royal permission, through the agency of Miss Doris Mellor, headmistress of Wykeham School, whose uncle was the 'Keeper of Swans'. The area also featured a pair of black swans from Australia, peacocks, tortoises and English fallow deer. By 1941, over sixty bird species were to be found in the sanctuary.

Trees and shrubs were planted throughout this time, many of them

donated by Albert Allison himself, who also planted an acorn from Windsor Great Park, England, on the day of King George VI's coronation. The oak that grew from this still stands in the sanctuary today. Other persons of note were also asked to plant trees and their contributions are likewise still to be seen, including yellowwoods planted by Field Marshal and Mrs Smuts in 1939 and the King and Queen of England during the royal visit of 1947, a sneezewood by Col F.C. Stallard and a cherry tree by J.H. Hofmeyer.

A cloud fell over the future of the sanctuary in 1955, when the proposed route of the new national road, approved by the City Council in 1948, was made public. The route cut through the south-eastern portion of the sanctuary, involving the uprooting of the nest-site trees on that side and the reduction of the lake area by 30%. Construction eventually began in 1963 and the bird population seems to have been severely reduced.

In 1969, in a move of questionable wisdom, the Natal Parks Board killed all the fish in the lake (which had previously been introduced to control water insects) and re-stocked the water with game fish for sport anglers. By 1975 the area had become substantially degraded — photographs in the *Natal Witness* for that year show dead egrets, entangled in fishing line, hanging from the trees. The area had become the haunt of tramps, drunkards and stray animals including cats, and undoubtedly the birdlife was adversely affected.

Little has changed in recent years and bird numbers appear to be decreasing annually. The area is far from the sanctuary that it used to be and is little used as a recreational facility by the residents of the city. Moves are afoot within municipal circles to reassess the viability of the sanctuary from an environmental viewpoint and in the light of changing social behaviour and needs.

### ***Ready Aye Ready***

John Deane notes a significant anniversary in Natal's educational history.

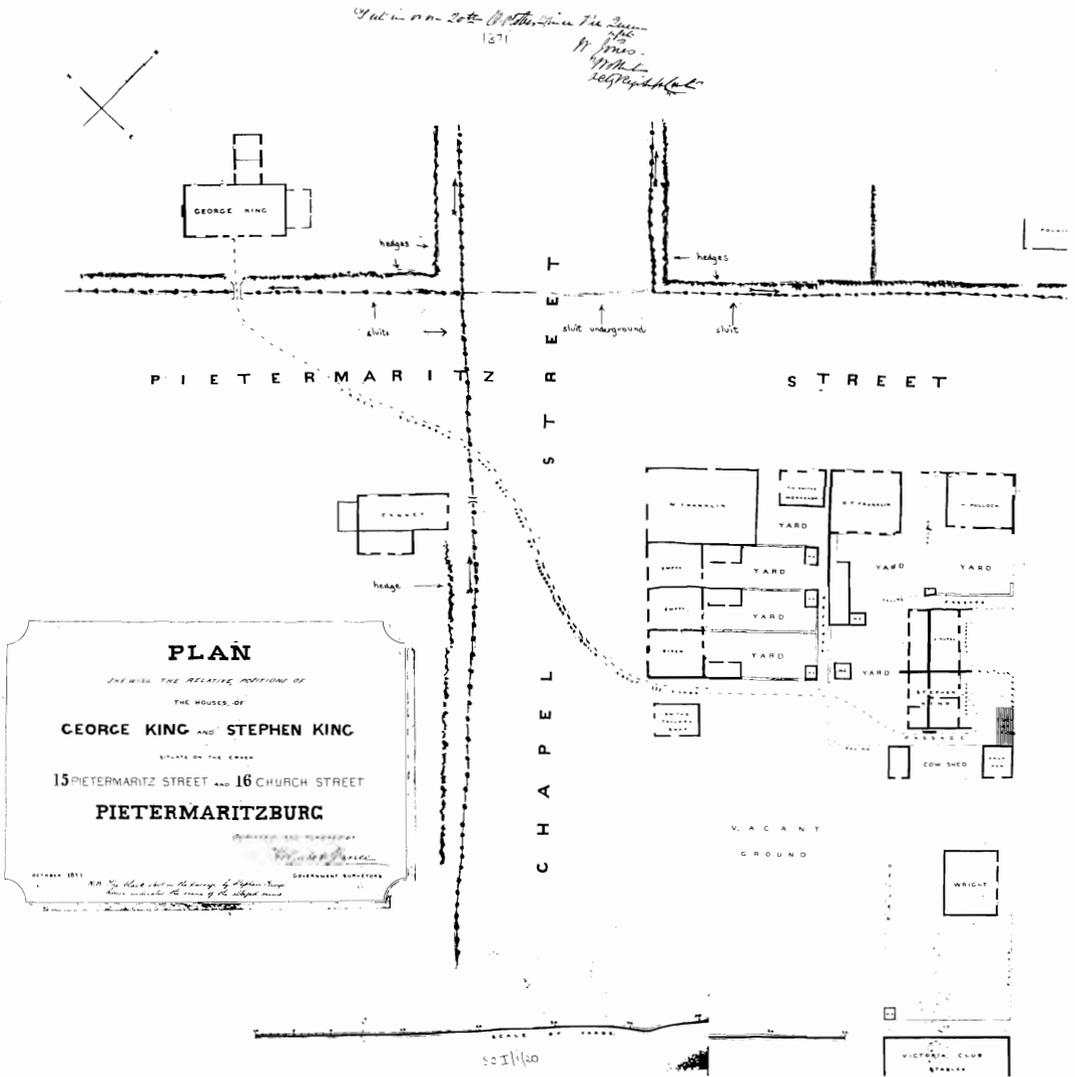
Merchiston Preparatory School boys wearing their light and dark blue colours, and their badge with lion rampant and motto 'Ready Aye Ready', are part of the Pietermaritzburg scene, and the school celebrated its centenary in 1992. Its founders were the Misses Elizabeth Allan and Agnes Rowe. The former was from Scotland, and her friendship with Dr John Rogerson, Headmaster of Merchiston Castle School in Edinburgh, resulted in her obtaining permission to name their establishment Merchiston House School. There has been regular contact between the two schools over the years. The centenary celebrations in 1992 included a procession of pupils through the streets of Pietermaritzburg, from the present school buildings to the former school in Burger Street, where a commemorative plaque was unveiled. In 1953 Natal historian Professor A.F. Hattersley recorded the first sixty years of Merchiston's history in a small volume, long since out of print. Hattersley's work was reprinted as the first part of an attractively illustrated centenary history published this year, which now gives the whole story to date, in one volume.

**Providence Terrace and the Pietermaritz/Chapel Street sluits**

Ever alert to the depredations of 'progress' in the townscape, Shelagh Spencer has offered a note on a piece of restoration that has interesting criminal and geographical aspects to it.

After watching with trepidation the deterioration over the years of the double-storeyed block of shops on the Chapel Street/Pietermaritz Street corner, it is pleasing to see that it has been restored, maybe not quite as it was originally, but certainly in keeping with its period.

This building, Providence Terrace, as it was called, was erected when the lot belonged to George Franklin (1808–1897). George, a builder and



Providence Terrace

(From a plan in the Natal Archives Depot)

tinsmith from Laugharne, Carmarthenshire, Wales, emigrated to Natal on the *Nile* in 1850. Initially Franklin and his family lived on the land allotted them in the Lidgettton area as settlers emigrating under the auspices of R.M. Hackett and John Lidgett. By September 1857, however, the Franklins were in Pietermaritzburg, where Franklin was making a living as a 'tinplate worker'. He bought the land on the corner of Chapel and Pietermaritz Streets (viz. Lot L of Erf 16 Church Street) in January 1858. It has not been possible to establish when Providence Terrace was built, but it was a reality by the time Franklin became insolvent in Nov. 1865, because four houses and a workshop in Chapel Street were listed among his assets. One of the accounts submitted by creditors in his insolvent estate was for 'glazing, etc. at Mr Franklin's New Buildings'. When the block was advertised for sale by auction as part of his insolvent estate in the *Times of Natal*, 1 September 1866, it was described thus: 'the very neat row of two-storeyed cottages named Providence Terrace . . . situated at the corner of Chapel Street and Pietermaritz Street, including the old established store'.

The accompanying plan of Providence Terrace is part of a larger plan dated October 1871 of the corner of Pietermaritz and Chapel Streets. The original was prepared by the firm of surveyors, Holgate & Spence, and submitted as evidence in a Supreme Court rape case (SC I/1/20 in the Natal Archives). The dotted line shows the route taken by the accused, William Jones, and the victim, from the house diagonally opposite Providence Terrace to a dwelling behind it. The original is coloured, and an interesting feature is that the position of the sluits is shown, as well as the direction of the flow (by means of arrows). The Chapel Street sluit between Church and Pietermaritz Streets was positioned on the opposite side from Providence Terrace (not shown on this diagram), while the Pietermaritz Street/Berg Street block of Chapel Street was watered on both sides. The Pietermaritz Street sluit ran along the north side of the street, and apparently under Chapel Street. On the original plan the arrows indicate that in the Chapel Street/West Street block the water flowed towards West Street, while in the Chapel Street/Commercial Road block it gravitated down Pietermaritz Street to Commercial Road.

### *Fit for a king*

The state of King's House in Durban has been a cause of concern in recent years. John Deane notes a marked change for the better.

King's House, on a Berea hilltop in Durban, has been renovated and refurbished after a period of neglect and uncertainty about its future. It was built in 1903 on land given by the Durban Town Council 'in full and free property to the Colonial Secretary of Natal, his successors in office or assigns, to be used only for the purpose of a Marine Residence for the Governors of the Colony, in perpetuity.' After Union the Governor-General and later the State President of the Republic became 'successors in title', and the list of those who have stayed in the house includes visiting royalty, governors, governors-general and prime ministers. The building apparently became known as 'King's House' only after the visit of King George VI and his family to South Africa in 1947. While in Durban the royal party (including the 21-year-old Princess Elizabeth,

now Queen Elizabeth II) temporarily exchanged the staterooms of *HMS Vanguard* for the stately home on the Berea.

Originally the house was not fully furnished, extra furniture being hired when there were dignitaries in residence, but in 1934 stinkwood pieces from Westbrooke in Cape Town were brought in and new items were purchased. During the Second World War the house was used as a hospital and convalescent centre, and during this time some furniture was moved to official residences in Pietermaritzburg, Bloemfontein and Pretoria, but was brought back to Durban after the war when the house was once more in periodic use by the Governor-General.

As time passed, the prevalent republicanism in government circles led to a neglect of many things with strong colonial or royal associations. King's House fell into disuse and disrepair, and some of the furniture was again removed. The people of Durban and Natal became aware of what was happening, and a 'Save King's House' campaign led to a petition containing 10 000 signatures. The state was prompted to acknowledge its responsibility, and in August 1988 the Minister of Public Works issued a statement that must have caused some wry smiles in Durban: 'The cultural-historical heritage of the colonial period is near to the heart of the Government. The legacies of the colonial past rightfully belong to all of us and it is of particular concern to the Government that they should be preserved — in the case of King's House, not only for Durban, but also for Natal and the Country. King's House is the responsibility of the Government and it has every intention of meeting that obligation. But it is more than an obligation; it is a commitment, a commitment to restore it to its pristine glory and to let it play its intended part in Durban's social and cultural calendar.' These fine words were indeed backed up by the return of the furniture that had been dispersed, and a two-and-a-half million rand restoration and renovation of the house.

And so King's House is once more in its 'pristine glory'. The restoring architects must be complimented on having undone some of the unfortunate alterations which over the years had compromised the integrity of the original design. The internal appointments are more than pristine, with temperature control and plumbing far beyond anything available in Victorian and Edwardian times. The house is under the control of the State President's Office, but it is also at the disposal of the Administrator of Natal for occasions when the use of such a venue is appropriate.

Compiled by MORAY COMRIE