

# *By Post Cart to Harding*

## *from Mary Moore's diary, 1892*

### **Introduction**

Mary Moore (1860–1933), was, in 1892, in her early thirties. She was a resident schoolteacher at St Anne's Diocesan School for Girls, which was then situated in Loop Street, Pietermaritzburg. She arrived in the colony to take up this post on 22nd October 1890. A woman of vigorous curiosity, she was not slow to take up invitations from the parents of her scholars, in order to get to know the country better. The visit here recorded was with the daughter of the magistrate of Harding, Mr John Jackson, returning home for the July holiday. As recorded by Miss Moore, it turns out to be an unparalleled account of a Natal post cart journey in the 1890s.

Later in her life, in 1905, Mary Moore left St Anne's to found Wykeham School, also in Loop Street, Pietermaritzburg.

Brief acquaintance with her style leads one to suspect that she might well be Natal's finest diarist. Further work on the diaries by a colleague on the Natalia editorial board will begin soon, and will almost certainly result in a more extensive publication in due course. These excerpts are from a handwritten note-pad that was discovered and saved — by the slenderest chance — by Mr J. Nixon, (Miss K. M. Nixon's father), who spotted it lying heaped in a 'lot' at the premises of Ireland and van Aardt Auctioneers. It now forms part of Miss K. M. Nixon's collection.

*Sunday 26th (1892)* The afternoon I spent in a dressing-gown endeavouring to pack and mentally using bad language when I thought of the post cart officials who limited a respectable female to 20 lbs of luggage. Finally my coolie basket was packed with great care, likewise a little bag Kip Heaton lent me for the occasion.<sup>1</sup> You may carry what you can — and what you carry as hand-bag or bundle or rugs is not weighted. They laughed at my hand-bag for in it I got all I could need for the night on the road and also my black serge dress and a pair of boots besides etc. They told me not to let the post cart man touch it. That evening I wrote my mail letter and went to bed, not early for I had much to do.

*Monday 27th* The long-looked-for day at last! I woke early and found I had time to sleep again. I slept and then had to get up. At last the 'goodbyes' were said and we were all in the train. Natalie Jackson with little Katie Broome (small child of 3 or 4 going to visit Grandmother Mrs Jackson) Emily Turpin (daughter of clergyman near the Jacksons i.e. about 20 or 30 miles further on) Minnie Strachan (one of my girls, my best, going home a day or two later than others because just had mumps) and self (also Mary Anne? out on spree going home with Natalie, her first journey into distant country). I thought over everything and could not think of anything I had forgotten and congratulated myself thereupon . . . We went by train to Richmond Road.<sup>2</sup> As we drew near the Station we passed a loaded wagon out-spanned. Natalie and Emily exclaimed 'there is our box'. They had sent on their heavy luggage the week



Mary Moore. A painting based on this photograph is inscribed 'Wykeham 1905', so it might be assumed that this is Miss Moore fulfilling the first year of her lifelong dream, to be seated in the Headmistress's office of a school of her own founding. She had been acting headmistress of St Anne's since 1897, and had chosen the Hilton site for that school.

*(Photograph: Wykeham Collegiate School)*

before by wagon and it had only got thus far. Natalie had offered to send anything heavy for me by that wagon, but having a little knowledge of the deliberability of wagons I had thought that as I should need my clothes while I was at Harding and they would have to be returned to me after I left it would be better to have them with me. Natalie has no hope of receiving her box from that wagon for another three weeks or month and I shall be back again in Maritzburg by that time . . .

Having arrived at Richmond Road we left the train to go on to Durban and we went outside the station to await the post cart. I had only been in the Grey-town post cart, from Maritzburg to Albert, just the short stage. That post cart is a tremendous affair like the Sattleham bus only much more powerful and drawn by 6 or 8 horses. I expected the same sort of thing. Lady Warden had got us our tickets and paid dearly for them — we could only be booked through to Umzimculu where we had to spend the night and change post carts and our tickets were from Richmond Road to Umzimculu £1–10 Each. Up to these holidays they had always taken school girls and mistresses at reduced fares — this time they refused on account of expenses. Forage is scarce because as last year was a good harvest they did not trouble to grow any for this year consequently now it is hardly to be had and we have to suffer for it.

I shivered when the men came near our luggage — one cross looking man made inquiries and felt our baskets and looked at our names. 'They are going to charge for over-weight,' said Minnie. 'Hold your hand-bag, do not let it be

looked at with the basket.' However they did not charge us. Besides us there were four big men — tall and heavy weights, big stout men. The post cart came up. I gasped! Before me was a dog-cart with a tent over it drawn by six horses. They put in sacks and sacks of letters — the mail is always put in before anyone may take a seat. 'We cannot go', I said, 'there is no room.' The girls laughed: 'We shall all be packed in, you don't know what can be put in there.' Our luggage was put in and put on, at any rate it disappeared, some under the driver's legs, other inside the cart for our own legs and the rest tied on a sort of rack behind.

The driver, a Griqua named Antony, was in his seat. Two big men took the box seats on either side of him. A chair was brought out and we were told to sit in the middle. We climbed up: there was a seat behind the box seat, facing the horses, upon which they tried to make four squeeze, but it was impossible. Minnie, Natalie (nursing Katie) and I got in, our knees up to our chins, for our feet rested on luggage. Even our seat was a seat that opened and held luggage. Emily and two more men climbed up and sat on the luggage on the rack behind. They had a very bad time of it — dust, insecurity and discomfort. We had the best of it inside, for back and front took some of the dust off us: but we got rather cramped.

You should have seen me — beautiful always! I was most beautifully got up in my oldest dress, my jacket, my old blue cloak over all to keep off some of the dust, a little black sailor hat and a long brown gauze veil that covered hat and face and tied behind and then came round and tied under my chin. The dust rose in clouds; the horses were lost in it. Up hill we raced, down hill we galloped — going down was more comfortable than going up for we were sent forward, and neither sat nor stood but really knelt on the seat in front of us.

Every now and then the driver yelled 'Hole on' or 'Hole out'. I thought he was encouraging his horses, but, finding that simultaneously with these cries we were all thrown on the top of one another, I evolved out of my inner consciousness that it was a kind of warning to passengers when holes, stones etc., caused the post cart to rise and fall unexpectedly. Those behind were in danger of sitting on the road and seeing the cart vanishing in the distance. Once or twice the warning cry was heard before the bump was felt, but — sometimes — it came after, which was too late!

After a good run we came to the end of the first stage. We turned off into a sort of siding sheltered by a few trees. There was a stable — the Jehu<sup>3</sup> leaped down. He was followed by the men who were only too glad to stretch their cramped legs. Several naked native grooms ran out, the harness was unbuckled and each horse gave his head a toss, threw up its legs and bounded away. A fresh set of horses was inspanned, and in very few minutes we were off again. There was not a house near, simply the stable and a hut for the stable-boys.

Away we went again leaving a cloud of dust behind us, and finding ourselves too often in a cloud of dust ourselves, as the curves of the road changed our current of air. It began to grow oppressively warm. All at once there was a cry of 'Stop!' — a basket had fallen out, and handkerchiefs etc. were scattered along the road. This is no uncommon thing — we stopped as soon as possible and re-packed and off we went again and never drew rein till we were at Richmond. There we all got down. It was about noon. We went into the Hotel (so-called!) — and had a 20 minute rest, while the mails were unpacked and delivered. Three of the heaviest passengers took their leave, for which we were not sorry — there was no longer need for anyone to be on the rack behind — but Antony had filled one box seat with mails so poor Minnie

had to sit on the luggage on the rack. She bore it till we changed horses at the next stage. Then, being an old traveller, she said in an imperious tone to Antony 'I am coming in front, you must move those mails'. Antony grumbled, but moved them and Minnie climbed over us to the front.

Another set of horses was inspanned — these were very fresh. One got his feet over the traces. When Antony wished to start they bounded up into the air and jumped aside and then set off at a towering rate. We had come to the worst part of the journey. The horses ought to be very fresh for there was a very long and toilsome stage before another change.<sup>4</sup> We had to go down, down, down, into the Umcomaas Valley and then climb up hills and mountains on the other side. There was formerly a stable down in the valley, but it is so hot there that horses cannot live and the stable had to be given up and the horses driven straight through.

On the hill there was a cold bracing breeze but as we descended it grew hotter and hotter till it was so sultry you just languished on and hoped to live through it. The hills, or rather mountains, had brown dried grass all over their surface, big euphorbias of pale yet bright yellowish green and aloes of every shade of red and brown. They looked very pretty but it was not a healthy cool-looking vegetation. Having descended by many a circumbendibus and curve — for the road has to wind about to make it possible, the descent is so great — we seemed to be in the valley along a flat for some time. The horses were allowed to stand to breathe. When we moved on we made a little air but when we stood still it was scarcely endurable, the sultry heat was so oppressive. Then we had to mount higher and higher by circuitous routes cut out of the sides of the mountains, often very steep indeed, and then a little level place where the horses were breathed for half a minute. Their flanks heaved and they breathed so heavily and gasped so for breath you felt quite sorry for the poor beasts.

The heat and the dust were so sickening it was a relief to be up — we had then a little spin to Waterfall Hotel where we were to dine. I was looking for this hotel when we passed a wagon and a policeman on guard near it. He was one of ten on their way from Harding to Maritzburg. At Harding about 80 are barracked, for it is on the border for Pondoland, and the disturbances there render their presence necessary. Ten were changed, for they have grown so tired of Harding that they would not behave.

At last Antony drove up before a little shanty. 'Here is Waterfall', said Natalie. 'Where?' I asked, in my innocence, thinking we had stopped at a stable by mistake. There was no mistake: we all got down and went into a tiny cottage where dinner was awaiting us<sup>5</sup> Antony only allowed us about 20 minutes for it — but when you are P. carting you do not yearn after your dinner, and it was quite long enough for us. There were several police on the verandah, belonging to the wagon — they looked as dirty or even dirtier than we did. There was water but it was not safe to wash unless you could wash thoroughly so we just dusted our faces by flicking handkerchiefs. As for our clothes: wherever there was a ridge or a wrinkle it was turned into a potato garden, and our backs and collars etc. were like the road itself. We set off again with fresh horses.

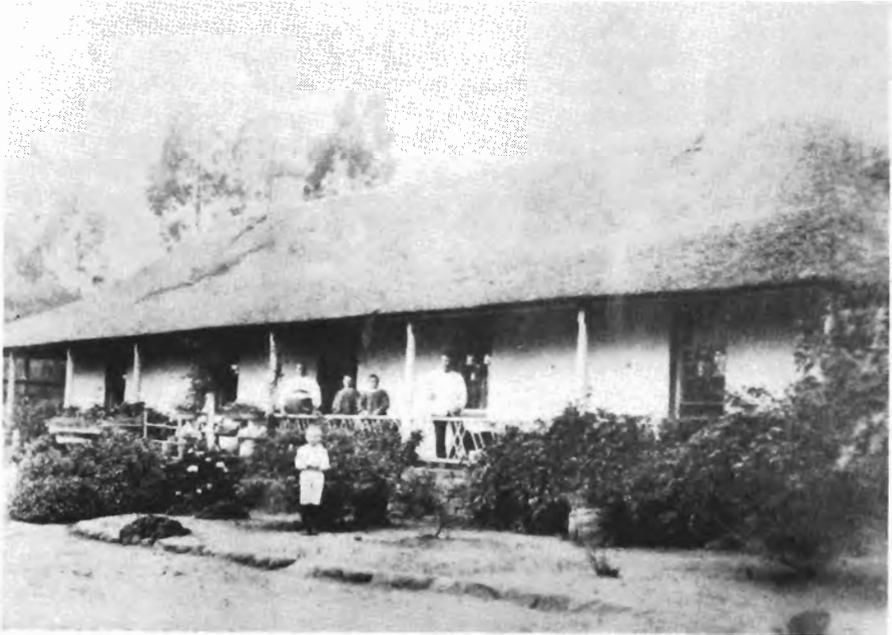
We had a change on the road at a side stable and then came to Ixopo (to be pronounced Ic-co-per with a wondrous click in the middle). I forgot to say that Waterfall is so named because there is no water near. Ixopo is where the Chadwicks live (whose daughter Mabel died last Term at S. Anne's).<sup>6</sup> Quite a town, or rather, a township, with a magistrate, Mr Chadwick, a post-office, an

hotel and a few houses. We got down and entered the hotel. We were allowed a quarter of an hour for a cup of tea. Whenever was tea more refreshing! It was not particularly good tea but it seemed excellent. One of Natalie's brothers lives at Ixopo, so he found us — a big young fellow 6ft 2 ins, handsome face, black hair, and eyes very nice. All too soon our hr expired and we climbed into the post cart again. We left our last man there and picked up a small boy. Now I said to Anthony 'I want to come in front' — so I did, and found that the front seat was a very comfortable one, you escape the jerks and the jolts there and that means not a little.

Now it was getting late afternoon. Soon the sun went down, leaving a crimson glory on the hills around, then came the after-glow and every object stood out distinct and clear in the rare atmosphere. The hills were most beautiful all around. We changed horses once more on the top of a hill, miles from everywhere, and went on again. Darkness fell. There was a new moon, a tiny crescent. I had not seen it before so I turned my purse and having Minnie's with mine I turned hers too.<sup>7</sup> It grew darker and darker: the stars came out, we still dashed along. There was scarcely a glimpse of the road but the horses know it well, and Antony could drive with his eyes bandaged. Grass fires were on the hills; we were drawing near Umsinculu.

We stopped at a house to deliver the mail and then drew rein at the Umsinculu Bridge.<sup>8</sup> Here we had to get down and collect our luggage. Natalie, Emily and the child were going to the Oxlands, who were there with a little carriage drawn by bullocks to meet them. I was going with Minnie. Presently a carriage crossed the bridge. There was not a single light near but Minnie recognised a brother's voice and we got into the carriage and left Natal. When we came to the other side of the bridge we were in Cape Colony, no longer Natal, and a custom house officer asked if we had anything to declare — as we had not, away we went. It was pitchy blackness except here and there where you saw or passed a grass fire. In about 20 minutes we drew rein and got out. I clung to Minnie, we crossed a little of the garden from the drive and I saw in the darkness a figure. Minnie greeted it as 'Mother', it took my hand and led me to the house, it was Mrs Strachan. When we came into the light I could see her — a dear motherly soul, but enormous. My mother would be a shrimp near her, in fact, would not be noticed. Mr Kirke even and Mrs Pratt would have sunk into insignificance. I suppose her girth — I cannot give it another name — would be a little over, certainly not under, 2 yards. There was a sort of wrinkle or little crease in the middle about where the waist comes in other people. But she was as kind as she was big, a regular good, motherly soul. I was taken to my room, a big one along a dark verandah, and left with some hot water and with the help of a clothes-bust<sup>9</sup> I endeavoured to make myself presentable. Presently Minnie came to fetch me to dinner. Then I saw the family, at least, part of it.

There was a big fellow whom they called Robert, one of two elder sons, a big bearded man who would have passed for 35 but is really only one and twenty. There is another big son farming away from home — then two more who have been at the Maritzburg College and have just gone to Cape Town to finish their education. Mr Strachan, the head of the family, has gone to settle them. While I was there that evening a telegram came to say the three had arrived safely at Cape Town. There were two little girls nearly as tall as I am and much stouter, Bessie and Lundi, about 10 and 11, who are coming to St Anne's next term. A small boy was the baby of the family, about 8, named Charlie, and there was a boy staying there called Harry Stafford.<sup>10</sup>



The Strachan family, Ezweni, 1875. From left to right: Jane Strachan (mother), Wallace, Fred, Robert and Donald Strachan (father).

*(Photograph: Ken Strachan collection)*

We had dinner and then had talk until Mrs Strachan suggested that I might like an early bed. I was conducted to my room and told if nervous I might have one of the little girls for the night and told I should have some coffee in the morning before starting. It was such a lovely bed and I felt so nice, and the pillows were so deliciously soft and I was so tired, I soon went off to sleep and thought I was racing along in the post cart in my dreams.

*Tuesday 28th* Awoke in a funk lest I should miss the post cart. I struck a light: a quarter to six. I allowed myself another quarter of an hour in bed, keeping the light that I might keep awake. After a few minutes I looked at the clock again. Joy! O Joy! It was only 3 a.m., I had made a mistake before. I put out the light and comfortably went off to sleep again until six proper and then I began to dress. Some coffee was sent to me and in a short time two servants came for my basket and bag and I went out to find everybody dressed. The eldest son had been sent to delay the cart if it should wish to start without me. As Mr Strachan is owner of the carts from Umsinculu they can do much as they like. Minnie and Bessie drove down to the office with me, but we were not late, were in fact too early — the horses were not inspanned. We walked down to see the river then returned and waited about. It was bitterly cold; there was frost on the grass as we came along from Bizweni, the Strachans' place. I suddenly remembered that my ticket only brought me to Umzimculu and I had now to get another. We went to get it and found that Mr Jackson had written for it from Harding that I might be sure of a seat.

After a long time I said goodbye to Minnie and we set off in that part of Cape Colony known as Griqualand East. The new post cart was even smaller than the one of the day before. It seated properly six people, seven with the driver. If there are more people they are tied on somehow till there is not an inch of cart to be seen. This morning when we started on the front seat was the driver George, a Griqua (yellow mixture) and another Griqua and on the back seat, the small boy who had come with us from Ixopo and myself. We stopped at a Post Office for mails and they had to mend the traces. At the Office they were saying that, from July 1st, the cart was to start at four a.m. instead of seven. Jolly for my return journey! Mrs Strachan asked me to say at Bizweni again on my return. Soon after we came to a cross-roads where Natalie, Emily and the small child were in an ox-carriage awaiting us. They were got in and we were full up — such a squeeze with luggage to wedge us in, for the cart was without any contrivance for luggage, and much smaller than yesterday's.

Natalie asked if I had any of her luggage. She had contrived to lose another basket — the one with all Katie's things in it — and Emily had lost something too. Poor Natalie, she was nearly destitute. I had not lost anything and had even an umbrella unbroken. They told me anything of that kind was always broken in a cart. I only took my old umbrella. Every now and then George pulled up and mended a broken trace with a bit of string. He never shouted 'ware holes' and we got considerably bumped. The drive was much the same as usual, up and down, dust but not much heat — it was too early. We were beginning to feel breakfasty when they said we were nearing Ibisi (E-beas) where we were to breakfast and change carts for the last time.

Just before we drew up at the Hotel (there is no village only the hotel for travellers, a tin store and a shed) we had to cross the Ibisi River. As it is the dry season we went straight through it: in summer they have to be punted across, except when very bad and then they have to cross on a rope. Two ropes are thrown across — you walk on one and cling to the other. When the driver said he was going through Natalie declared we should be upset and the boy passenger stuck his hands in his pockets and said 'Ah well, I can swim.'<sup>11</sup> We got through alright and drove up to the hotel. Here we were turned out. Our cart was going off to Kokstadt and we had to take the Harding cart. But first breakfast — Natal tea with condensed milk but fairly good, butter horrible, uneatable, and fried eggs too much done — not a breakfast for an epicure. Fortunately the post cart does not give you an appetite!

Our new cart was tiny — a little low cart with room for 2 in front and 2 behind with luggage strapped anywhere — a very ramshackle, springless, little disreputable, dusty, old concern driven by a Jehu rejoicing in the name of Adam — a Griqua of course. In the post cart we all, back and front, faced the same way. All looked to the horses and we arrived at the back seat by climbing over the front one. There was a kind of hood to the concern but it was not put up. 'Over the hills', they said, is Harding. We crossed the hills and came to the flats, and big stretch of level ground. Then hills again, till we saw a police barracks and tents, then down a hill into Harding. As we stopped at the P. Office to deliver the mails Mr Jackson<sup>12</sup> came up from the Court House. Then Adam drove us (or rather Natalie) down a long avenue, in which trees are conspicuous by their absence, up to the Residency, as a magistrate's house is called. Here we were unpacked and welcomed by Mrs Jackson . . .

(Mary Moore's diary has a very full account of her stay in Harding, but we select only the passages that show the impression the country made on her as a traveller, Ed.)

*Monday 4th* Last night it was said that today Mrs Jackson and I might drive to Umtamvuna on the border, and thence to Pondoland, to say we had been there . . . We were accompanied by (Tondou?), a young Zulu on a pony, a kind of outrider or guard without whom Mrs J. rarely goes out. He was useful in showing us the road and his pony urged on our old mare. We were in the borrowed spider, a light thing on 4 thin wheels, only seating the driver and one other. We went over hills and down hill — all around looked lovely russet brown, the hills in winter tints, every shade of red and brown, dying off in the distance into purples and blues and overhead varying clouds, and on some hills flecks of sunlight shifting continuously from one spot to another . . . When we had had a long drive Mrs J. said 'Now we are about halfway, would you rather return?' 'No' I replied, and on we went, till we came within sight of the Umtamvuna River, far down in a valley below us.

And now came the worst bit of the whole road. There was no brake to the spider: the hill was very steep. The trap pressed on the mare and two or three times she just put her hoofs together and had a slide; to make the road worse there were what they call bolsters across it, great mounds put slantwise across. The road is only a cutting in the side of a hill. Thought we must be over once or twice, but we drove up to the village safely. Like all settlements here, of course, it is down in a hollow. It consists of two hotels, each possessing a store of its own, and one other house, where dwells a Mr Hughes-Chamberlain, the Civil Servant . . . We drove up to the Websters' Hotel . . . took off our hats and were re-freshed with a cup of tea.

Then Mrs Webster offered to take us to see the falls. We walked for about five minutes over burnt grass, and then began a scramble at the side of the river (the far side is Pondoland). We had to imitate the goat climbing and scrambling and hanging on to plants along a steep narrow path made in the rocky sides of a hill flanking the river . . . Having scrambled down into the bed of the river we turned to see the Falls. The river is very wide, but not presently having much water we stood on huge rocks — now dry, but submerged in summer. These were beautiful falls! — fan-shaped, then a stretch of rock, then a narrow rushing little torrent, another stretch of rock, and another fall . . . Then below there was a little stretch of quick water and then rapids, another stretch, more rapids, rushing into a big quiet pool, and then floating calmly on for another hundred yards or so before the river met with fresh obstacles and found new rapids.

It was very beautiful! There was no sign of life near, no sound but the sound of rushing and falling water. Dark hills were in the distance around us, with steep rocky banks and thick, thick covering of vegetation, somewhat hardy and repelling in its appearance. We scrambled back and arrived on burnt grass once more . . .

We had lunch and then Mr and Mrs Webster took me into Pondoland . . . We crossed the river in a punt<sup>13</sup> A thick wire has been put across fastened from side to side, and by means of it the punt is pulled across, Mr W. working hand over hand on the wire. Having landed they told me I was in a free country and might do anything, even commit murder, and I could not be punished. I refrained from doing anything however and we just went into a store called by Mr W. a bond-store, but also nicknamed 'Jackson's Hotel' — Mr Jackson had fined the Websters £10 for selling rum to Pondos on the Natal side of the river, so they at once built this store on the other side . . . About a year since there was a battle at Umtamvuna all around the Websters' Hotel. It was a faction fight, 12 000 Pondos against 12 000, and about 8 000 of them on horseback. A bullet

accidentally went thro' the pantry window but that was the only damage done to them. Whites are safe — they dare not attack them — but they burnt down the kraals around (we saw the ruins of them.) Mrs W. stood in her garden and watched the fight . . .

***Return trip: Harding to Pietermaritzburg***

*Monday 18th* Adam told Mrs J. there was another passenger of the name of Bouverie. Mrs J. said: 'If he is the old man, General Bouverie, he is a swell, but if it is one of his sons, they are scamps.' When we drove up to the Office I saw a long lank sunburnt individual leaning against the horse-rail . . . the Post-master came out with a flourish and said 'Allow me to perform an introduction. Mr Bouverie, Miss Moore'. I looked to see if he were the Swell or a Scamp and knew by the twinkle in the (tail?) of his left eye that he was the latter . . . Soon he said he was going down to Durban to fetch his wife and two little ones. He had sent them down there on account of the disturbances in Pondoland, and now thought it safe for them to return. I saw then he was no longer a scamp but a convert, a reformed character . . . He says the people (Pondos) are a set of thieves, but not nearly as bad as in Natal where, if found, they are taken before a magistrate, whipped or imprisoned, while in Pondoland, or no man's land, they know the farmer will shoot them down like dogs if they dare take anything, as it is a free country. I said 'but you would not shoot to kill.' He said 'Indeed I should, and have . . .'

We had to wait at Ibisi for the cart from Kokstadt, and go on to Umzimculu in it. The cart was very late; it was nearly half-past four when it came in and was so full that our driver Adam had to take us on in the Harding cart. We mutually congratulated ourselves on this for Mr B. said if he had been alone, the only passenger from Harding, he would have had to hang on to the Kokstadt cart in some way or other, sit on the step or on a shaft . . . We started first but had to take on the horses we had brought from Harding, while the other cart had six new horses. They soon got in front of us. Adam drew up to let them pass. 'If they want to be first let them', he said. Sitting behind was a most hideous little yellow lad, with a wide flat nose, a huge mouth, thick lips, slits of eyes and very little hair: he was a half-cast, his father a Bushman and his mother white — he was really the most hideous boy I have ever seen. He scoffed at Adam, said he could not drive, could not hold a whip etc. etc. . . . Adam gnashed his teeth with rage, and said 'They don't understand me, I'm, a quiet man'. Then he called the boy a dog, consigned him to an early grave, and a very hot place, and drove like mad. He whipped up the poor tired horses and galloped on and on, always keeping well in the whirl of dust raised by the other coach, much to our discomfort. When there were curves in the road and it was possible he went straight ahead over everything, regardless of holes, stones, mounds and hills.

We bumped and jolted and only just kept in. Once I thought I was out. I clung to the cushion, the cushion came loose, I bounded up in the air . . . Bang, rush and tumble, away we went like fury. I grew quite weary of clinging but still gripped desperately for dear life . . . All the time Adam, the 'quiet man' was muttering vituperations and expletives against 'the dog of the son of a bushman . . .' Our eyes smarted and burnt, it grew colder and colder, the sun sank, it became darker and darker. We knew the road by the moving whirl of dust in the front. On we went, the darker it grew, the wilder became our chase and the worse the bumps and jumps, for no stones or holes could be seen to be

avoided, and Adam's one thought was to keep up with the rival cart. At last we drove up to the UmZimculu post office . . .

I had thought before that Mrs Strachan was no sylph. Now I found that her better half was no sylph but quite a match for her . . . Mr Strachan is much the same as those jugs, beer-jugs, I think they are, that you see sometimes in farm-houses at home or country inns — jugs shaped like fat men . . . I went to bed soon after 9 p.m. and was not sorry to creep between the sheets. The bed was as soft as goose-feathers and down could make it, perfectly lovely, but all night I was racing along in the post cart.

*Tuesday 19th* This time we had to cross the bridge and go into Natal for the Natal cart . . . Mr Bouverie and I sat in the middle in front and behind were men: one had a lovely kaross of lions' skins. They were all grumbling at the hardness of the hotel's beds and the noise of the bugles before 4 a.m., which were meant to awaken passengers for the 4 a.m. cart (south) but which effectually prevented all other people from sleeping. We raced on and on, changing horses every eight miles or so, until we came to Ixopo; here we were allowed  $\frac{3}{4}$  hr for breakfast. We went into the inn. They at once began to frizzle things on the fire, and when every man had had a turn at grumbling because breakfast was not waiting for us instead of us for breakfast, it came in. We had to hurry rather. I did wish they could provide good bread and butter and good tea or coffee with real milk, but just now, milk is scarcely to be had for love or money — nearly all butter is salted and bread is always a risk at an inn. When we set off again we took with us some more passengers: two Ladies, a husband and a little girl. I soon learnt that the husband's name was 'Headley dear!' — every two minutes it came out.

It was rather a squeeze . . . Where there were not bodies there were shawls, rugs, karosses, boxes, baskets, bags: these jammed us into our places pretty well. 'Headly dear!' nursed the little girl. It grew very warm and when we came into the Umcomaas Valley it was terrifically hot, you felt you could scarcely breathe. When we were all in this state, Mrs 'Headley dear' turned round and saw her child's face. 'Oh! Headley dear you have let her get quite hot!' 'Headley dear' said never a word in self-defence.

The dust was killing in some places, and there my fellow ladies covered their faces with their handkerchiefs, hid their heads in their hands and rested them on the back of the front seats. It had such a funny effect, it looked as if they had just entered a conventicle . . .

We saw several Trappists in different parts of the road, for besides their big settlement at Marionhill [*sic*] near Pinetown, they have another near Umzimculu and another building between Ixopo and Waterfall. First we met one on horseback — he wore a white cassock over black trousers or else vice versa, a black soft hat. His cassock was very inelegantly tucked up to allow him to sit on his horse . . . a well-fed, well-groomed animal. Near their new house we saw a nun — she wore scarlet dress, blue apron bordered with black, a close-fitting white starched cap, and gorget and a black veil. Before we reached the far side of the Umcomaas we passed a number of them, some riding, some seated in a spider. They keep silence in English, but allow themselves to answer questions in Zulu. They all looked very solemn when we saw them, and were certainly keeping a strict silence among themselves.

The stages were the same as before, but the long stops were at different places. I was glad that we had no meal at Waterfall. The man there has missed his vocation; he would have made his fortune as an undertaker, but as a host he

is a dismal failure. We had a long stop at Richmond for lunch. There the Davis contingent (i.e. 'Headley dear' and family from Umzimkulu) stayed for the night, but another passenger joined. Old Antony our driver was deposed; the man of the inn at Richmond is the agent for the cart there, and he wanted to get to Richmond Road Station, so he made Antony give up the ribbons to him. He could not drive to Antony's satisfaction. Poor Antony groaned, gave advice and said he was killing the horses. The man's one idea was to do the stages in less time than usual, so he whipped up his team and we galloped up and down and reached Richmond Road having beaten the record, but not sorry to have arrived whole, for we had had a reckless, breakneck journey.

At Richmond Road there was some time to wait before any train . . . I was very glad to sit down. I had a cup of tea and was eating when I heard a whistle. It was only 5.30 and I knew my train did not leave till 6.15. To my astonishment Mr Bouverie came — it was a luggage train, would I like to go by it, or prefer to wait. I said 'go' — so he put me into the brake van, said 'goodbye', and I thanked him for his kindness. There was another passenger, the one who had joined us at Richmond. Presently a coolie opened the door, looked at us, grinned, and said something I could not understand — however, it was that the carriage we were in was now detached from the train, and we were being left behind. Out we scrambled — we were about 6ft from the ground — and were soon fixed in another brake van, and off!

When we got into Maritzburg the station was deserted; there was nobody to meet anybody. I hired a 'Jack' boy — a kind of commissioned porter — to carry my baggage and set off for St Anne's . . . After a hot bath I crept into bed, to be awake nearly all night with the sound of the post cart wheels in my ear, and the cries and adjurations of the driver. 'Heck! Heck! Ho! Ho! Dick! Dick! Sam you lazy beast! Sam! Get up Sam! Fly! Fly! Heck Fly! Heck Fly! Alick! Alick! Ho Ho man! Ho Ho! Heck Heck! Fly! You lazy beggar!'

## NOTES

1. Miss Heaton was the headmistress of St Anne's, Miss Marianne Browne the Lady Warden, i.e. the Principal. (Note from Dr Sylvia Vietzen.)
2. The present Thornville.
3. Victorian nickname, after the impatient biblical king — First Book of Kings — whose charioteers speeded on his campaign.
4. Mr Ken Strachan points out that the post cart route did not follow the present road. It went down to the Umkomaas via the Nkobeni tributary stream, and then climbed the other side toward Springvale Mission.
5. See later in the text: the name 'Waterfall' was a joke, since there was no water in sight. Mr Strachan reports that there are still some tumbledown sheds at the site.
6. Dr Vietzen notes that Mabel Chadwick had died, aged 16 years, in April 1892. This was reported in a letter of Mary Moore to her mother, dated 6 April 1892. It caused great distress at the school, which then also had to cope with the 'rumouring' that followed. The hotel mentioned at Ixopo must have been the 'Off-Saddle', which is still there today.
7. I have found no explanation of this very widespread superstition!
8. Mr Strachan comments that this bridge would have been only very recently completed, in 1891. For decades before that, one had to cross by 'pont'.
9. Victorian coathanger frame, sometimes known as a 'dumb valet'.
10. See note on Strachan clan and enterprises below.
11. Dr Vietzen recalls this as the scene of a tragedy in 1957, when the Revd and Mrs H. F. A. Treble were washed away and drowned.

12. Concerning the identity of Mr Jackson, Mr J. Nixon, the discoverer of the diary, received the following comment from Mrs F. St George, (née Vanderplank):

Thank you for letting me read this diary . . . I was taught by Miss Moore at Wykeham and how well I know her handwriting . . . Miss Moore would entertain us with humorous ghost tales. At the theatre last night I sat next to Frank Broome (Judge) and told him of the diary, as he is the grandson of the Jacksons with whom Miss Moore stayed, and brother to little 'Katie' who travelled with them. He says he was born in 1891 . . . The Strachans still populate Umzimkulu and I believe are still gigantic folk . . . (letter of 30 April 1964)

Mr Nixon also received a note from Mrs A. H. Young (née Hathorn), dated 15 August 1964. She mentions a conversation with Mrs Cecil Jackson, then aged 96. Mrs Jackson 'tells me there were three Jacksons, brothers and all magistrates. Her own husband, Cecil, (the eldest) became a judge of the Native High Court. Miss Mary Moore's host was John, and the third one, Arthur.'

13. Mr Cecil Bircher of Pietermaritzburg has identified this as 'Gun Drift', on the Harding-Bizana road, named after gun-running escapades at the end of last century. His uncle, A. A. Bircher, owned a trading station on the Pondoland side of Gun Drift in the 1920s and 1930s. By that time it was more brandy toting that was remembered, when it was recalled how the 'runners' used both hands to grip the thick wire edifice over the river, and so often dropped bottles on the way across.

On the Natal side was 'Gun Drift' farm, which borders the Umtamvuna Falls visited by Mary Moore. Mr Bircher remembers them as not very big, but spectacular, because of the long series of rapids. The pools formed ideal swimming spots, and were trout-filled.

The long climb down to the 'hollow' of the drift, described in the diary, was known by the locals as Sheeps Walk. Amazingly, it was, in the 1920s and 1930s, owned by one Hugh Bouverie: obviously a descendant of the 'reformed scamp' described on Miss Moore's return journey! Apparently the glamour lived on: Mr Bircher remembers him with an aristocratic nose and an ability to talk hypnotically for hours. (In a portion of the diary not reproduced here, Miss Moore records Mr Bouverie's long discourse on Pondo custom and witchcraft, which would probably not be received today as 'politically correct'.)

### *A memoir of Mary Moore from a Wykeham 'old girl'*

Margaret Anderson (née Moodie) is now 94 years old. She appears in a famous Natal University College SRC photograph taken immediately after the First World War, that includes in its ranks Alan Paton, R. O. Pearse and Leif Egeland.

Margaret journeyed each term from the Polela Institute, founded by her Scottish missionary father, to Mary Moore's Wykeham School, a journey that started with a thirteen-mile ride on the 'Donnybrook Trap' to join the train.

Wykeham — staffed with imported teachers, and writing Oxford Preliminary exams — was known as something of a 'snob' school, 'training girls to be the wives of diplomats'. ('I only married a schoolteacher . . .' says Mrs Anderson.) Diplomacy was induced, no doubt, by the practice of never saying, at table, 'pass me the marmalade', but 'Would you like the marmalade?', which sufficiently gave the hint.

Mary Moore was then in the last years of her teaching career. Margaret remembers her as a little slim woman, 'a really good person', whose last professional years were somewhat blighted by severe deafness, such that one had to shout in her ear to communicate. Suffering from this disadvantage, she nevertheless created such an aura about her as to have no discipline problems — the girls of the day ('Rose Ella and Ivy Crookes, Doreen and Sheila Arnott') were in complete and rapturous awe of her. Despite her affliction, she taught literature, and would enthusiastically act out every part in the Shakespeare play she was teaching. In fact she was a most successful producer:

when Margaret played Shylock in Miss Moore's production of *The Merchant of Venice*, she remembers the headmistress saying to her father — who had come all the way from Bulwer for the performance — 'Well Mr Moodie, what do you think of our little Ellen Terry!'

Besides churchgoing, about the only public exposure for the girls was the walk in crocodile down to the YMCA for 'gym'. Margaret remembers twisting an ankle at 'gym' at a time when Mary Moore's production of *The Rivals* was running. The result was that she played the part of the old man with the gouty foot with an authenticity that won applause.

Mary Moore was an absolutely dedicated headmistress. Her bedroom was just behind the Office, wherein she was not only academic Head, but also secretary and treasurer. Every evening, all fifty girls of the school lined up and kissed her goodnight (in continental style, a peck on each cheek!)

1914–18 was of course dominated by War news. Miss Moore read out to the girls the latest reports from the newspapers each morning. Wykeham girls had seen off the 'South Staffords' from Fort Napier Garrison in 1914, and assiduously knitted socks for them. Then came the news that they had been wiped out, almost to a man. Fräulein Schmidt, the school's excellent French teacher, was obliged to become 'Miss Smith' overnight! Miss Moore insisted that her girls sang not only the British Anthem, but those of the allies: The French, Belgian and Russian anthems. Girls tittered when they heard about the soldier in the waiting room who had stood to attention for twenty minutes while they practised God Save the King.

In fact Margaret's culminating memory of her school days was the mad rush (by Wykeham standards) to St George's, to ring the bell when Armistice was declared.

### *The Strachan family*

With the kind assistance and the resources of Mr Ken Strachan, the following resumé is compiled.

Donald Strachan (1840–1915) arrived in South Africa in 1858, avoided the worthless land offered him at Byrne, moved to Umzimkulu, and married Jane Hulley (1849–1901) of Ixopo, whose father had in fact been interpreter for the Revd Robert Owen in his negotiations with Dingane.

Even in a 'race of giants' it was recognised that Mrs Strachan's size (see Miss Moore's text!) was due to a heart condition. In fact in the last years of her life the doctor would not allow her even to operate the treadle of her own sewing-machine.

With reference to Mary Moore's overnight stay of Monday 27th June 1892, the 'big fellow' called Robert (1870–1936) was the eldest Strachan son. The one 'farming away from home' was Frederick (1872–1944) while the two brothers Thomas (1874–1917) and Donald (1875–1945), (Ken Strachan's father) were being taken by their father via Cape Town to Victoria College, Stellenbosch.

How amazing that (over a hundred years ago) their successful arrival was reported telegraphically, in remote Umzimkulu, on the very day of their arrival!

Next came Mary, (or 'Minnie', (1878–1960) who is Miss Moore's travelling companion in the present text. The 'two little girls nearly as tall as I am' were Jane, known as Bessie (1880–?) and Florence Lundi (1881–?) named not after

Ulundi, Natal, but after 'Elundi', the local dialect name for the Drakensberg, where her father was on inspection when she was born. The 'baby of the family' was Charlie (1883–1948).

The boy Harry Stafford was taken in by the Strachans because his father, the magistrate's clerk at Umzimkulu, had been killed in the famous Kokstad dynamite blast. This was when the military magazine blew up, after the Griqua rebellion. (Incidentally, his uncle, Walter Stafford, had been the rider who brought the news of the defeat at Isandlwana to the Governor in Pietermaritzburg, in 1879).

The Strachan business empire amounted to a chain of fifteen stores, along with a network of post cart services serving Richmond, Port Shepstone, Kokstad, Matatiele and Mt. Fletcher, and even including a link service from Kokstad to Umtata. Ken Strachan points out that this required a most intricate organisation. A full-time blacksmith had to be employed, not only to shoe the draft animals, but to renew the iron tyres of the carts. Ordinary veld grazing was not sufficient sustenance for draft animals, and a supply of mealies and oats had to be kept at all the stages, which (as the text makes clear) could be as close as every eight miles or so. Mules were eventually found to be tougher animals than horses, but two horse-teams were kept on for 'show', and completed the final stages into Umzimkulu and Kokstad respectively.

The bugles that woke passengers at the Umzimkulu Hotel at 4 a.m. (see Mary Moore's return journey) were indeed part of the post cart ceremonial. If you had the contract for Her Majesty's mails, you were fined if you were more than half an hour late. Much bugling had therefore to be done to keep people and animals on their toes. The bugle call that sounded when the post cart swept into Kokstad every day was especially familiar, and an indication of the time of day.

Mr Strachan points out one feature of colonial South Africa that I had never heard of before: the time zoning. Cape Colony and Natal Colony were one and two hours in advance of Greenwich Mean Time respectively. So the Natal gentility on the north side of the Umzimkulu River rang the gong for tea at 3 p.m., and then heard the Cape side ringing for tea an hour later! This only changed with the Act of Union.

Present-day travellers who have been, until 1994, plagued by border posts when crossing into the Transkei, will be amazed that in colonial days (as Miss Moore's text makes clear) one was no less harassed, and had to get a Customs clearance at the border.

W. H. BIZLEY