

Notes and Queries

Literary lions and landmarks

Does KwaZulu-Natal have its own literature? Colin Gardner has suggested that, though KwaZulu-Natal writers have produced a 'fair range of subtle literature', the province can only be said to have provided the *site* for it. 'It is difficult,' he argued, 'to be sure in what sense Natal (*sic*), which is a part both of South Africa and of the world, can claim ownership of "Natal literature"' ('"Natal literature": a Scrap of History and a Glance at Some Poems', *Natalia* 14, 1983). Whatever the concept 'Natal literature' may or may not mean, *Natalia* notes some literary events and anniversaries during 1998.

Alan Paton

The University of Natal's Alan Paton Centre took the lead in Pietermaritzburg's celebration of its famous son's most famous work.

A film festival was mounted in May during which two versions of *Cry, the Beloved Country* were shown, as well as the 55-minute documentary *Alan Paton's Beloved Country*. This film, which won the Avanti Award for the best documentary of 1996, was produced by Cathy Myburgh and introduced by Jonathan Paton.

In September the Transitional Local Council hosted a Civic Reception at which both the Mayor, Councillor Siphso Gwala, and Colin Gardner spoke of Paton's links with the City and the abiding significance of *Cry*. Next morning Joiceyn Leslie-Smith of the Alan Paton Centre led a tour of sites associated with Paton. The party, which included members of Paton's immediate family, visited number 19 Pine Street, where he lived until 1914, and the upstairs room at the Lambert Wilson Building in Longmarket Street which housed the national headquarters of the Liberal Party of South Africa from 1958 to 1968. Tea at the Tatham Art Gallery followed. Formerly the Supreme Court, this was where Paton's father spent his working life as a shorthand writer.

At Maritzburg College visitors saw buildings that would have been familiar to Paton as a scholar and later as a teacher, and also the wall where one of his poems was inscribed to mark the school's centenary in 1963.

Old walls that echoed to our cries,
Our oaths and prayers and laughter,
And echo now to cries of those
Who follow after.

When earth has taken back to earth

Our unremembered bones,
 Preserve the echo of our names
 About your stones.

(Written in 1928 and published in the *Maritzburg College Magazine* in 1934.)

Then to the Colin Webb Hall on the University campus. In Paton's days at NUC one building housed all the lecture rooms, labs and administrative and lecturer's offices, and the hall itself served as the library, a theatre and a venue for dances. Since Paton had been active in all spheres of student life, including amateur dramatics, he would have known this building well, so it was an appropriate setting for a reading of his poems presented by the Good Companions. The last stop was made at the Alan Paton Centre itself which houses the Alan Paton archive and where his study has been recreated.

That evening the celebrations were brought to a rousing climax by Helen Suzman who delivered the fifth annual Alan Paton Lecture under the auspices of the Centre and the Liberal Democratic Association. A warmly appreciative audience gave her a standing ovation at the end of her talk, 'Alan Paton, Liberalism and the New South Africa'.

William Plomer

It was twenty-five years ago that William Plomer, another writer to whom Natal may lay claim, died in England. His contribution to the literature of this province was significant though his stay here was short. His novel *Turbott Wolfe* (London, 1926) was set in Zululand and enraged South African readers and reviewers – with the notable exception of *The Natal Witness*. He collaborated with Roy Campbell in the editing of *Voorslag*, and wrote a number of short stories and poems. The exact site of the cottage at Sezela where *Voorslag* was born is difficult to identify, but the house near Entumeni where *Turbott Wolfe* was written still stands; despite alterations it retains the atmosphere of the period. The building that housed the family's store where Plomer himself worked is now a post office and a nursery school, but another small store stands alongside. The youths lounging on the verandah, the chickens scratching in the dust and the group of old men intent upon a game of *umalabalaba* are timeless, and it is easy for the visitor to imagine the place as Plomer would have known it.

Bessie Head

Though Bessie Head had strong connections with KwaZulu-Natal it does not feature in her writing almost all of which is set in Botswana, where she lived from 1964 until her death in 1986, and which claims her as its own. In June this year The University of Botswana's first ever international conference was devoted to this writer and her work.

Head was born in 1937 in Pietermaritzburg where her mother was a patient at Fort Napier Hospital. Her family were unwilling to care for this child of an unknown father and she was put out to foster care. She formed a deeply loving bond with Nellie Heathcote with whom she lived at 73 East Street, Pietermaritzburg, and whom she believed to be her real mother; she was fourteen years old and an inmate

of St Monica's Home at Hillary, near Durban, when she was disabused of this belief in a way that was particularly insensitive.

Gillian Stead Eilerson, author of *Bessie Head: Thunder Behind Her Ears* (Cape Town, London and Portsmouth NH, 1995), which is the first full-length work to appear on Head, is herself a writer with a background in KwaZulu-Natal. She was born and brought up in this province, and attended school and university here.

John Conyngham

This author, who is editor of *The Natal Witness*, has assured *Natalia* that his recently-published third novel *The Lostness of Alice* is 'partly set in Natal'. We would have liked to review it but unfortunately it was published too late in the year for that to be possible. Horace Rose, editor of *The Natal Witness* from 1904 to 1925, was also a novelist, but his books have dated badly and are unlikely to find readers today.

A further note on Alan Paton: the schoolteacher

A reminiscence of my father [writes W.H. Bizley] has alerted me to the possibility that Alan Paton the schoolmaster, as presented in biographies, does not get a totally fair 'press'. My father, slightly lame in one arm, remembers Paton as the one and only Maritzburg College master who spotted that he had difficulties in geometrical drawing, and who arranged for him to have longer time for tests and special desk facilities. He remembers Paton – who is inevitably drawn as of thunderous bad temper – being a powerful enough 'drawcard' for certain College boys to walk all the way to the Paton house in Gough Road, and that for Friday evening 'fireside' sessions where one could 'blarney' or read incipient masterpieces to one's heart's content. (This probably related to the Students Christian Association camps he used to run with Cyril Armitage and Jan Hofmeyr at Anerley on the South Coast.)

Spurred by such memories, I have phoned or personally interviewed several more old Collegians. Hector Commons, headmaster of College in the 1970s, insists that Paton was 'most impressive' and knew his subject, mathematics, extremely well – so much so as to influence his (Commons's) decision to go on with mathematics after school. 'When he came into the classroom, with his bright and breezy presence, things came alive. There was no chance of not attending! But he was perhaps best suited for bright pupils. I remember him teaching – without reference to any syllabus – a third form class the "proofs of divisibility", something most teachers would regard as far beyond the capability of that standard.' Commons remembers him as able to tell a good joke, but not as one who would easily suffer a joke against himself!

George Chadwick, too, recalls that Paton was always very well prepared and on top of his subject – in his case, strangely enough, third-form Afrikaans. Chadwick had such a good opinion of him that, later, during World War 2, when he was faced with the problem of how to occupy the time of troops in camp near Johannesburg, it struck him that they might go to Diepkloof and get Paton to show them around and explain his reformatory project. Three lorry loads descended on the institution, and Paton held their attention all afternoon. (This was before Paton was a 'world figure',

and the scheme would hardly have occurred to someone who had ‘bad’ schoolboy memories of him.)

Ian Behrmann was able to give me the fullest account. He does not rate Paton quite as high as such famous teachers as Charles Carpenter (or indeed as Pape himself, when it came to Latin) but agrees that he was always absolutely on top of his subject, and that the tinge of impatience that biographers have noted can be explained by this very enthusiasm. Behrmann was present on the notorious and much-quoted occasion when Paton slung someone physically out of the classroom. He says that, at the time, the boys in the class regarded it as a characteristic over-reaction, but did not see it as a symptom of a brooding brutality. It was a spill-over from Paton’s typical way of dramatising lessons. For instance, he often used to divide the class in two and have competitive quiz exchanges between the two sides, orchestrated to reach a pitch of rivalry as the lesson drew to its end. The ‘violent’ episode was an unfortunate moment in what was usually an entertaining and absorbing learning process.



Alan Paton (middle row, third from left) in a Maritzburg College staff photograph in 1928.
The senior masters in the front row are Goldstone, Hudson, Carpenter,
Pape (the headmaster), Leach, Lamond and Kent

On the lighter side, Behrmann recalls that Paton, although a dedicated maths and science teacher, had the true *littérateur's* enjoyment of playing with words. He had a nickname for everyone in the class, and was given to punning. When one boy said his name was Kohrs, he said ‘Of course, of course. ...’ And when another was downed in a pugilistic bout with B. Hosking, Paton remarked ‘So you won’t be Hosking for any more trouble.’

After the War, but before he was world famous for *Cry, the Beloved Country*, Paton addressed the Natal Teachers’ Society. In explaining why he felt he was too much an individualist to have had a career in their ranks, he recalled one moment when he was very much in the minority *vis-a-vis* his peers on the Maritzburg College staff. This was a moment apparently much talked about in its day, but

which does not figure in the College history *For Hearth and Home*. Behrmann believes (but is open to correction) that it was C.G. Bennett, head prefect and cricket captain, who was 'asked to leave' when, following what he considered to be prejudiced refereeing by R.W. Kent, he had led his (house) team off the field. (The fact that in *For Hearth and Home* two head prefects are named for 1932, Bennett and one other, and similarly two cricket captains, must surely bear out Behrmann's conjecture.) At any rate, Paton, obviously responding to the fact that the boy had, in one perspective at least, acted 'on principle', opposed the expulsion, but found that the majority of the staff was ranged against him.

In that brief, now-forgotten incident might be discerned the future author of *Cry, the Beloved Country*.... !

(The author would like to thank the Alan Paton Centre, University of Natal, and the Maritzburg College Old Boys' Association for some valuable leads.)

St George's Garrison Church

Jack Frost has supplied a note regarding St George's Garrison Church which celebrated its centenary on Friday 9 October 1998. A large congregation attended a special Evensong on that day.

The church was built late in the colonial period as a memorial to British soldiers who had laid down their lives in the service of the Queen in Britain's wars in southern Africa. It accordingly houses a rich collection of brasses, mural tablets and stained-glass windows, commemorating not only those who had already fallen by 1898 but casualties of the South African War and, in the form of a beautifully-carved reredos, those who died in World War I. There are, in addition, similarly worded mural plaques recording the lives and service of three headmistresses of Wykeham school. Very early on in its history St George's was requisitioned by the military as an additional hospital ward in which to nurse the flood of casualties being sent back to Pietermaritzburg from General Redvers Buller's three-month-long attempt to raise the siege of Ladysmith. The number of soldiers nursed within its walls during 1900 eventually rose to 427 before victory on the Natal front eventually allowed its return to ecclesiastical use.

Even during its days as a church for the Imperial garrison the importance of civilian participation was stressed by successive chaplains. But the withdrawal of the South Staffords, the last of a long line of regiments to garrison Fort Napier, within days of the outbreak of World War I in August 1914, transferred the ownership of the church from the War Office to the Bishop of Natal and St George's itself to a new role as a daughter church in St Peter's parish. Since the 1976 amalgamation of St Peter's with St Saviour's, it has been a chapel of the new Cathedral of the Holy Nativity.

In the late 1920s another role was found for the church as a schools' chapel ministering to the spiritual needs of the boarders of city schools, notably Wykeham (which had a particularly close link, both geographical and emotional, from its founding in 1905 until its closure at the end of 1989) and Maritzburg College.

St George's can claim a remarkable world record. In September, 1927, Mr Willie Poole was appointed its organist. At its centenary service, over 71 years later, he was still on the organ bench to play some of the opening voluntaries before the

cathedral organist and choir took over. According to the Royal School of Church Music this remarkable period of faithful service constitutes a unique achievement of which, according to their records, there has been no equal in the history of church music. Today the soldiers are long gone and the schools have their own chapels, but worship at St George's continues with a small congregation Sunday by Sunday.

National monuments and heritage sites

Eloquent pleas and urgent petitions for conservation and restoration have failed to save yet another of the oldest houses in Pietermaritzburg. Number 241 Commercial Road, until recently occupied by Oxenham's Bakery, has suffered the ultimate indignity of demolition and replacement by an American fast food outlet. It has not escaped the notice of Maritzburgers that this nightmare of corporate architecture stands at the corner of Commercial Road and Burger Street. (See Brann R and R Haswell, 'The Oldest Houses in Pietermaritzburg', *Natalia* 13, 1913.)

But conservation efforts in KwaZulu-Natal are not all unsuccessful. In its report for the year ending 31 March 1997 the National Monuments Council lists eight premises in the province as having been newly declared as national monuments. We quote from the report :

The Durban Light Infantry Headquarters with the property on which it is situated, at 5 DLI Avenue, Durban.

This building complex was erected in 1904. Apart from serving as a military hospital during the First World War (1914–19), it has always been the headquarters of the Durban Light Infantry Regiment. Architecturally, the Infantry Headquarters is characterised by a combination of redbrick and stucco surfaces and the use of elements which are synonymous with medieval military buildings. It consists of a drill hall and associated offices and stores, an officers' mess, a regimental museum, a warrant officers' mess and a regimental chapel. This building complex is a landmark on both DLI Avenue, a major artery of the city, and the Greyville racecourse. It is also closely associated with the history and traditions of one of the country's best-known regiments.

The former War Department Lords' Ground Boundary marker, at No. 2 Old Fort Road, Durban.

This marker, the only surviving beacon of its kind, marked the corner of Lords' Ground, formerly the cricket ground of Durban. In 1986 the Old Fort Road was upgraded and the beacon, still in its original position, is now situated on the pavement. Stone markers of this kind were commonly used during the Colonial era to demarcate property owned by the War Department. Among the areas thus marked were vast expanses north of Durban's city centre such as the so-called Ordnance Land, the Old Fort and Lords' Ground. The importance of this site is essentially military and scientific in that it illustrates nineteenth-century land surveying practices, in particular methods of marking boundaries.

The property with the Hollis House thereon, at 178 Florida Road, Windermere, Durban

J Hollis, founder of the Clairwood Racecourse and building contractor of the Durban City Hall, built this house between 1907 and 1909. After the Hollis family sold the mansion, it was used as a boarding house and subsequently as offices for the Natal Teachers' Society. The house has a Marseille-tiled roof, orate gables, much decorated plaster work and a balcony with coupled Ionic-Doric composite columns supported on square piers at ground level. The interior of the house is noted for its staircase, moulded plaster ceilings and wall panels, stained glass windows and roof lights, teak panelling, as well as teak and marble floors.

The original cell block of the old Pietermaritzburg Prison, at 2 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg.

Built in 1862, this cell block replaced the Voortrekker prison on the Market Square. It has been associated with several prominent Zulu prisoners, amongst them Nkosi Langalibalele Hlubi (1873) and King Dinizulu (1907–1909). The prisoners from the Inniskilling Fusiliers' mutiny at Fort Napier in 1887 were also accommodated here, as well as local political figures in more recent times. The building originally housed prisoners of both sexes and probably included a death row, as the gallows were attached to the front door. During the 1980s a new prison was built in Pietermaritzburg, after which the old building complex stood empty for several years. It has since been taken over by Project Gateway, a non-profit church-based organisation dedicated to the upliftment of the local population. The combined use of redbrick and sandstone at such an early period is unusual in Pietermaritzburg, which is renowned for its redbrick buildings. This cell block is one of the older surviving Government buildings in Pietermaritzburg and has several architectural features which mark it as a forerunner of such buildings in the city. (Editor's note: Cf. the article 'Scratching out one's days' in *Natalia* 27.)

The Tatham Art Gallery and the adjacent gardens, in Commercial Road, Pietermaritzburg.

This art gallery is housed in Pietermaritzburg's former Supreme Court building which was designed in 1864 by Peter Paterson who had assumed office as Colonial Engineer in 1860. The building was to provide accommodation for the Supreme Court and the Legislative Council of the Natal Government. Although the foundation stone was laid in November 1865, the building was only completed in 1875. The old Supreme Court was built in the Renaissance pavilion style with a symmetrical arcaded front showing Romanesque influences. The four pavilions at the corners of the building are demarcated by pitched roofs carrying finials. The terracotta bricks of the external walls are hand-made and differ from the well-known red Maritzburg brick. External brick work is broken by bands of stone mouldings and plaster, and by courses of cream and black brick. The columns are plastered, as well as the corners of the building.

The historical core of Fort Napier, in Napierville, Pietermaritzburg.

The first group of local English inhabitants established themselves on 31 August 1843, when a small British force encamped on a hill called Camp Hill to the west of

the town. This force comprised two companies of the 45th Regiment of Foot, 15 engineers and a few artillerymen with three guns, all of which were under the command of Major Smith. The next day the construction of a primitive fort commenced, consisting of a central square with two flanking redoubts. Shortly afterwards the defensive post was named Fort Napier in honour of Sir George Napier, the Cape Governor. Within two years permanent buildings of stone and brick with tiled roofs had been provided, but the remaining buildings, together with the already declared recreation hall and St George's garrison church, form part of this historical building complex.

The Joseph Baynes Mausoleum on the farm Nel's Rust, Richmond District.

Born in Yorkshire in 1842, Baynes came to Natal as a Byrne Settler in 1850. He developed the potential of the fields to which his estate was suited and was particularly successful with the innovations he introduced concerning scientific farming methods and commercial agriculture. He is known too for the early use of electricity and mechanisation and was the first South African to dip cattle. Baynes also introduced large-scale commercial dairy farming and made it viable by using methods such as pasteurisation and refrigeration. He was an important Friesland breeder, but was also well-known for establishing commercial pig farming and pork processing in Natal. An astute businessman, he owned a chain of dairies, tea rooms and pork and cheese factories in Natal, the Transvaal, the Free State and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). In addition, Baynes was a controversial but, for his day, enlightened politician who served as a member of parliament in Natal between 1899 and 1910. Baynes left the Baynesfield estate to the nation, specifying that all profits were to be used for agricultural development and research, as well as the education of African farmers on the estate, the creation of a public park and the establishment of homes for black and white children. Set in an oval garden surrounded by a low stone wall, the mausoleum was constructed in 1923 after the death of Baynes's second wife. It is the site of Joseph Baynes's burial place and consists of a small chapel-like structure in the Gothic revival style. It has a corrugated iron roof, copper guttering and bronze grilles in place of glazing and doors. A memorial plaque in the mausoleum concludes with the following words: 'The Estate is bequeathed in trust for the benefit of South Africa and the advancement of its people, and to ensure continued employment for the European and non-European people residing on the Estate.'

The Lynmouth Glacial Pavement, situated on the remainder of the farm Hopewell, 881, Richmond District.

This site is of notable geological significance, exhibiting good evidence of the glacial activity and a prolonged period of glacial deposition of the Dwyka formation over a period of 40-60 million years, beginning approximately 300 million years ago.

In the Natal Midlands a large single ice sheet moved over the Natal Group sandstone bed-rock leaving behind polished surfaces (glacial pavements) and telltale scratches (striations) of debris carried in the glacier. Situated somewhat above the Little Umkomaas River, this site forms the floor of a seasonal tributary which has scoured away the overlying shale. The Natal Parks Board has already declared the

surrounding area a site of significance, because of its natural beauty and the presence of cycads and large numbers of aloes.

A home at last

Like William Plomer's novel, *Turbott Wolfe*, the sculptures of Mary Stainbank did not find favour in Natal and she sold little of her work. A retrospective Exhibition in the late 1980s gave another generation of Natalians an opportunity to re-assess it and to accord her the belated recognition she deserved. (See Hillebrand, M., *Mary Stainbank: Sculptress of Natal*, *Natalia* 17, 1987.)

For some years the Stainbank collection was housed in the Natal colonial legislative building, once the home of the lower house of the Natal Colonial Parliament and later of the Natal Provincial Council. When the Natal Provincial Legislature began to use the building it became necessary to find another home for the sculptures. A number of local artists and art historians negotiated successfully with the Voortrekker Museum to house them in its annexe in the former Longmarket Street School building, and in October the sculpture collection and the Mary Stainbank Archive were officially opened by Melanie Hillebrand, Director of the King George V Art Gallery in Port Elizabeth. The artist's studio has been recreated using her own workbench and tools, and the sculptures can be seen to advantage in a pleasing setting.

Was she Gandhi's typist?

There is a well-known photograph of Gandhi with his staff taken when he was running his law office in Johannesburg. Among them stands a competent-looking woman with spectacles. Does anyone know who she was? The photograph can be seen in Brookes, E.H. and C.de B. Webb, *A History of Natal, Pietermaritzburg*, 1965.

Boxing days

On a recent visit to Namibia a member of our editorial committee enjoyed the Swakopmund Museum's small display of furniture made out of paraffin boxes. Particularly impressive were a writing desk and a dressing table, each with perfectly-fitting drawers made of paraffin tins. Do any of our readers know of any items of such pioneer furniture in Natal, whether in museums or privately owned?

Natal and Voortrekker museums retain national status

The South African Constitution identifies cultural affairs as a provincial responsibility, and for this reason the national Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) has for the past four years been re-organising the national museums and art galleries. The institutions in Gauteng and Cape Town are to be grouped together (in a quasi-Smithsonian model) to form two national 'flagships'; all other institutions will be devolved to the provinces where they are situated. Five of these others, including the Natal Museum and the Voortrekker Museum, both in Pietermaritzburg, successfully argued for their retention of 'national' status. All five (the other three are in Bloemfontein and Kimberley) will

continue to be funded by DACST, but the provinces concerned will be more closely associated with the institutions than in the past. In commenting on the completion of the Natal Museum's building extensions (*Natalia* 26, Notes and Queries), we reminded readers that the museum was actually founded by the Natal Society in 1854, and later grew into an independent institution. Its research departments and collections in arthropodology, malacology, lower invertebrates, archaeology and historical anthropology are national assets and acknowledged internationally. The Voortrekker Museum's sphere also extends across provincial boundaries. It is appropriate that the two should remain national institutions.