

Book Reviews and Notices

THE PLOUGHSHARE OF WAR: The Origins of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879

By RICHARD COPE

Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1999. 282pp. illus. R95

Dr Cope points out in his preface that although the causes of the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879 have been considered in numerous chapters and parts of chapters in previous publications, this is the first book on the subject. Does this then mean that something new has been brought to the interpretation of the subject? The answer lies in the exhaustive scope of his 30-year research, and the skill with which the background events have been woven together to provide the setting which made it possible for Sir Bartle Frere to force a war on a reluctant Zulu King, a reluctant British Cabinet and a reluctant Colony of Natal. As Norman Etherington, one of the examiners of Cope's doctorate on which this book is based, has written, it is too easy to blame Frere for causing the war, and as a consequence, to overlook the deeper causes. *Ploughshare* does not do this.

A great deal of care has been taken in the planning of the book. The preface and introduction are essential reading, concisely providing the reader with a template on which the ensuing chapters are structured. The section on the historiography is important. In examining Colin Webb's proposition that there have been three types of explanation for the origins of the war, many of the themes which are to be considered in detail later in the book, are introduced. Particular attention is given to the evaluation of 'proletarianisation, an inescapable component of capitalist production' as 'part of the purpose of the confederation policy', and the introduction ends with

From de Kiewiet's comment it appears...that there is evidence of a desire on their [the Victorians] part to facilitate the advance of capitalist production. Perhaps this is why they acted as they did and why they felt justified in doing so. Whether this is so can only be settled by an examination of the available evidence, to which we must now turn.

This is a rather protracted turn, as we are first introduced to the political and economic background of the Zulu Kingdom, Natal and the South African Republic (ZAR) up to the mid-1870s; the relations between Shepstone and Cetshwayo; the ZAR-Zululand Border dispute; and the links and tensions involving those already mentioned with Pedi and Swazi at a variety of levels. There is more. The Diamond Fields in Griqualand West, firearms to Natal, the Langalibalele affair, Shepstone's visit to England to meet Carnarvon, the influence of Froude (who regretted the abolition of slavery and favoured forced labour in South Africa) on Carnarvon, and the posting of Wolseley to Natal. What Cope has established is that there existed a

complex system in South Africa by 1875, in which no factor can be seen in isolation. There is a high degree of interlinking of events, their contexts and the relevant personalities and their persuasions. It is now that Wolseley sees that 'Natal... is the most dangerous point at present in the whole Colonial Empire' and argues for a substantial increase in military force.

We get closer to Victorian attitudes with the consideration of Carnarvon and his efforts to bring about confederation. Detailed as the coverage is, the reader is likely to feel the need to refer back to the works of Clem Goodfellow, Robinson and Gallagher, and de Kiewiet, to read more about the 'blunders' of 'little Carnarvon', to quote Disraeli. Things did not go Carnarvon's way. Molteno refused to have anything to do with the Cape Town conference of 1875, called by Carnarvon to discuss confederation. The conference was moved to London in 1876 but was also a failure. Yet Carnarvon insisted that the Transvaal, with its rich potential, had to be brought under British control. The stage was set for its annexation, and it was declared British territory by Shepstone on 12 April 1877.

We then see a shift in Shepstone's attitude towards Cetshwayo. Despite the lack of evidence, Shepstone increasingly spread the word that the Zulu threat was real and that the Zulu Kingdom had to come to an end. In this bellicose atmosphere, it is almost with a sense of relief that we meet Bulwer. He was not, like Bishop Colenso, an advocate of the Zulu cause, but he refused to accept Shepstone's opinions, and was determined to avoid war. Bulwer's Border Commission was approved by Frere with the greatest reluctance and the correspondence between Bulwer and Shepstone clearly shows the latter's resentment at having his 'expert' interpretation of the situation disputed.

Sir Bartle Frere is the major player in the final chapters of the book, which make for totally absorbing reading. Cope presents a masterly analysis of the man, highly regarded in important places, but driven by personal ambition to gamble his reputation away. We are exposed to the thinking of Disraeli's cabinet and the Colonial Office, much of which is referable to the definition of the book's quest, as presented in the Introduction.

A recurrent theme of importance is that of timing. It took time for messages and instructions to be relayed between Britain and South Africa. Frere played this to his advantage to deliver the Ultimatum in disregard of Hicks Beach's telegram. The possibility of war in Afghanistan and Russian intervention in eastern Europe arose at the same time as the Colonial Office was considering the Border Commission report. Frere's letter to Chelmsford indicating his awareness of the risk being taken in forcing a war without home or local support was dated 22 January 1879 — the day of the Battle of Isandlwana.

The Epilogue and Conclusion are succinct. They are also reassuring, in that so much material has been presented in the book that it is not easy to keep track of the main thematic trajectory. After reading this final chapter, I found it very useful to re-read much of the main body of the book.

During my five-year caretaking stint at Isandlwana I was frequently asked 'Why did the British want to attack us?' An excellent question, which the diligent reader of this most important book will be far better equipped to answer than I was then.

MIKE TAYLOR

NOMSIMEKWANA OF EMKHAMBATHINI

Durban Local History Museums, Educational Pamphlet no. 2, 1999. 44pp. Price: R10. Obtainable from the Museum Shop at the Old Court House Museum, Aliwal St, Durban 4001 (or fax 031-300 6308).

The history and bibliographical detail of this little publication cannot conveniently be reflected in the above heading, and it is necessary at the outset to say something about that. On 12 October 1939, in an interview with members of The Zulu Society, Chief Somquba Mdluli of the Mkhambathi (Table Mountain) district near Pietermaritzburg related the story of his grandfather, Nomsimekwana, chief of the Mdluli, who died in 1901. The (Zulu) transcript of his account is among the papers of The Zulu Society in the Pietermaritzburg Archive Repository. It has now been translated into English by Sicelo Majola and Christopher Mchunu, edited by Robert Papini, and issued as a booklet by the Durban Local History Museums.

The story of Nomsimekwana and his people was recorded in written form as long ago as 1864, and is mentioned, among other places, in Bird's *The Annals of Natal* (1888), Bryant's *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (1929), Mackeurtan's *The Cradle Days of Natal* (1930) and Lugg's *Historic Natal and Zululand* (1949). Somquba Mdluli's narrative taps directly into family oral tradition, and provides a useful comparison with other accounts. Its publication in translation now makes this particular version easily accessible, after 60 years of obscurity.

Robert Papini's commentary examines briefly how this story, and other similar ones from the same period (1820-40), have helped to create beliefs about the political and economic dynamics of precolonial south-east Africa and the *mfecane* which are now seriously questioned. In particular, he suggests a revision of the view that cannibalism was widespread among the people displaced by the Shakan upheavals.

Nomsimekwana's story invites reconsideration of that particularly gruesome strand in the history of this region. One of the most dramatic and memorable events in the narrative is the young man's escape from a band of *amazimu* (cannibals) by jumping into a river pool and hiding under water among the reeds, despite the presence of crocodiles and hippos. (To this day, the stretch of water near the confluence of the Mpushini and Msunduzi rivers near Bishopstowe is known as Nomsimekwana's Pool.)

In fact, during the 20 years covered by the narrative, and during the chieftainship of Nomsimekwana's father Mcoseli, the Mdluli people endured one disaster after another. They fled from Shaka's soldiers to Njasuti in the Drakensberg; incurred the enmity of fellow-fugitive Matiwane of the Ngwane (who later had Mcoseli killed); returned to Mkhambathi only to find bands of *amazimu* in the area; moved north of the Thukela to seek safety and protection, but in their impoverished state became serfs; returned to Mkhambathi and endured some harsh treatment at the hands of the newly-arrived Voortrekkers under their leader 'Potolozzi' (Pretorius); fled from expected execution of Nomsimekwana himself in punishment for alleged complicity in stock theft and settled at Embo; and finally after the Trekkers' control of Natal had ended, were invited by the British to return once more to their ancestral lands. Nomsimekwana's remaining 50 years of peaceful life in the Colony of Natal must have been very different from the turbulent and dangerous years of his young manhood.

This booklet is a welcome addition to the historical record of the province. The text of Somquba Mdluli's narrative makes readily accessible the particular oral transmission of a biography colourful and interesting in itself. The commentary and notes place it properly in context and contribute to a better understanding of conditions in south-east Africa in the first four decades of the 19th century.

JOHN DEANE

1899: THE LONG MARCH HOME

A little-known incident in the Anglo-Boer War

by ELSABÉ BRINK

Cape Town, Kwela Books, 1999. 111 pp., illus., paperback, R90,00

If one of the positive aspects of commemorating a war is to dig deep and recognise how extensively it touched the lives of ordinary people, then Elsabé Brink has rendered the Anglo-Boer War a notable service. Furthermore, she has gone right to the heart of the challenge facing historians of South Africa today, namely the linking of indigenous and settler themes and the creation of a history in which differing groups can find identity. The story of how John Sidney Marwick, the grandson of a Byrne settler, who was born and raised in the most English colonial Natal village of Richmond, walked with some 7 000 Zulus from Johannesburg to the safety of their homes in Natal and Zululand at the outbreak of the war, is both moving in its humanity and encouraging in its inclusivity.

As Natal Native Agent in the Transvaal, Marwick negotiated at length with the Kruger government and the Department of Native Affairs to get the Natal black workers displaced by mine closures back to their homes when it became clear that war between Britain and the Boer Republics was drawing closer. With trains to Natal almost at a standstill, his plan to walk them to Natal was eventually sanctioned on condition they kept together and were marshalled. Hlobeni Buthelezi, a descendent of a minister to Zulu King Mpande, offered to be head marshal and to collect suitable men to assist him. On 6 October 1899 Marwick led the first 4 000 out of Johannesburg and returned for the others. For ten days, over a distance of 400 kilometres, the 'march' moved forward: through Heidelberg and Standerton to Charlestown on the Natal border; to Newcastle where some returned to their homes; through Ingogo and Dannhauser to Hatting's Spruit where they were able to take a train to the coast for £1. Marwick arrived at Pietermaritzburg station on 16 October and was met by the Secretary of Native Affairs, other dignitaries, his brother and local people. This simple outline says nothing of the dangers they encountered and the delicate diplomacy which underpinned the operation. Much of the time Marwick's pony was given to the sick and struggling among the marchers. He had to parley with General Piet Joubert and the Boer commandos waiting to invade Natal, who were naturally alarmed at so large a black presence in the area. He had to ensure that justice was done when the marchers bought provisions from storekeepers and farmers along the way. He had to discipline the occasional marcher for theft and reckless behaviour. Yet through it all a relationship of trust between Marwick and the 'gang', as he called them, was sustained. Of him the Zulus said, 'Child of the Englishman, but for whose presence none might brave the Boers'. They saluted him: 'Care for the

dark race' and again, 'Gather the orphans of the Zulu'. (p. 68) Likewise, Marwick was praised widely in Natal and Britain.

The author has garnered new and varied sources and built out this sometimes forgotten story into an enthralling and noble tale. She is perhaps a little more partisan than Peter Warwick in *Black People and the South African War 1899–1902* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983) who implies that Marwick was also ensuring that Zulu taxes would reach Natal, and she is less inclined to highlight the unruly and comical aspects of the march as does Thomas Pakenham in his brief account in *The Boer War* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1979). It is possibly not so much for unearthing this story that the author should be commended as for the way she has presented it. It represents a clear step forward in South African historical writing. The juxtaposition of 'A childhood in the Zulu Kingdom' and 'A childhood in colonial Natal' in Chapters 1 and 2 respectively gives equal place to the leading players in the story, as does 'The Zulu men who went to the Witwatersrand' and 'The first Natal Native Agent in Johannesburg' in Chapters 3 and 4. The anecdotal contributions of Marwick's granddaughter are balanced by the author's appeal to Zulu descendants of the march to come forward with information and stories which are bound to exist in oral tradition.

This is a book for everyone. It is written in a style that makes it accessible to young readers and second language readers without sacrificing adult interest and historical accuracy and referencing. It is illustrated with a wide range of contemporary photographs and maps. The concept of 'the march', moreover, is bound to have resonance in present-day South Africa; that it is not new and can be used in different ways could be a salutary lesson in history for many.

In short, this is one of the most satisfactory books to emerge from the crop of publications marking the Anglo–Boer War centenary. It demonstrates that history is indeed society's memory and that none of it should ever be regarded as irrelevant.

SYLVIA VIETZEN

THE SMALLER MAMMALS OF KWAZULU-NATAL

By PETER TAYLOR

Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1999. 146pp. Illus. R115

This is an excellently-written and well-produced book which is a must for all those with an interest in small mammals and the fauna of the region — whether they are amateurs or professional conservation biologists and specialists. It covers a wide range of common and lesser-known species, from bats and insectivores to rodents and bushbabies, which comprise the faunally diverse communities in the sub-region. Some are pests of forestry and agriculture, others are exceedingly rare. These delightful small mammals inhabit the varied habitats found in the province, ranging from the sand forest of the coastal plain to the Drakensberg mountains, and from the semi-arid northern interior to the steamy south coast.

The book is well illustrated with good quality photographs, clear maps and informative tables. The double-column A4 format is appreciated and the sub-headings enable quick reference to information. It is well referenced and right up to date, though I would have liked a more informative Contents page. The text is authoritative

and economical, but easy to read, and contains masses of valuable information. Nine new species are included in the species accounts. Some general synopsis of the higher taxa would have been useful, especially for the lay person. The identification keys are from Meester, and work well.

The book is very good value for money, and the sequel, which will focus on the bats of KwaZulu-Natal, is eagerly awaited.

MIKE PERRIN

BATTLES OF THE ANGLO-BOER WAR (series)

By McFadden, Torlage, Watt, Bourquin & Gillings

Randburg, Ravan Press, 1999. A series of seven booklets covering the battles of Talana and Elandslaagte, the Siege of Ladysmith, Colenso and Spioenkop, Vaalkrantz and Thukela Heights. R45 per booklet or R280 for the boxed set of seven.

The famous battlefields of Northern Natal have long been places of pilgrimage. The 1979 and 1981 Centenary Commemorations of Isandlwana, Rorke's Drift and Majuba proved a gold mine for academics, authors, publishers, military history guides, museum curators, hoteliers and tourists alike. The current centennial celebrations throughout South Africa of the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 bid fair to rival that success, for new publications are flowing from the presses, and book launches are a constant temptation. The publications committee of ABW 100 KwaZulu-Natal, through Ravan Press, have produced this series of handbooks to the Natal campaign with the tourist in mind.

Pilgrimage was a perilous adventure in former times. In the 1950s an eminent couple of Pretoria professors dedicated some weeks to a detailed and chronological field study of the seven key engagements of the Natal campaign. Armed with compasses and binoculars they plunged into uncharted territory, heroically battling ever onwards and upwards with a heavy suitcase. It contained holy writ — Amery's authoritative and weighty *Times History of the War in South Africa*. One of the professors died tragically shortly afterwards — of battle fatigue! He would have been spared had the Ravan Press publications been available — neat, portable, reliable and eminently practical.

The authors of the series are experts in their field. Familiar with the terrain, steeped in the human tragedy of the war, they are acclaimed specialist guides on the 'Battlefield Route'. Pam McFadden has made the Pyrrhic British victories of Talana and Elandslaagte her own; Gilbert Torlage was the original custodian of Spioenkop, indeed its saviour; Steve Watt's painstaking and meticulous knowledge is awesome, just as the reputations of 'Ziggie' Bourquin, the doyen of them all, and of Ken Gillings for scrupulous accuracy and empathy are unquestioned. Their accounts are marked by admirable clarity and brevity.

Each book follows the same format — a clear route map marking the battle sites, a modest preface emphasising the Battle Books as field guides, and an introduction that neatly places each battle in the context of the overall strategy of the campaign. The detailed accounts of the action are succinct and digestible, an easy read on the battlefield or in bed that night, and enlivened by apt photos and sketches from the collection of the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service. A final delight are the

fine maps specially commissioned from the Cartographic Unit of the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg that follow lists of forces engaged, artillery employed, casualties suffered and decorations won. The series is a mine of reliable information and expert testimony in manageable form (a mere 45 pages), in print legible to old eyes, and of negligible bulk.

The Battle Books make no claim to literary flair or to controversial theory. That is left to the authors they recommend — Ruari Chisholm's brilliant *Ladysmith*, Kenneth Griffith's *Thank God we kept the flag flying* and Thomas Pakenham's masterly *The Boer War*. It all serves to whet the appetite of the passing visitor.

SHEILA HENDERSON

SEVEN MONTHS UNDER BOER RULE

By Gerard C. Bailey

Printed and published by R.A. Burns & Co. (Pty) Ltd, 4 Kabel Rd, Avon Industrial Sites, Dundee, South Africa 3000. Limited edition, 1999. Available from the Talana Museum, Dundee, or from R.A. Burns & Co. R100

Hot off the presses to meet the deadline of the Anglo-Boer South African War Centenary Commemoration, this handsome small volume is a limited privately published edition. Hardbacked, bound in red leatherette, boldly blocked in gold and impeccably printed, it is a unique piece of rare Africana.

At the outbreak of war in October 1899, the Revd Chilton Bailey was Vicar of St James Anglican Church in Dundee. Evacuating his young wife, who was expecting their first child, the vicar chose to stay behind in the town and minister to his depleted flock. After the Battle of Talana he had the heartrending task of consoling the dying and burying them in his churchyard and on lonely Talana hillside, amongst them General Sir William Penn Symons.

Part memoir, part diary, Bailey's account of the battle, of the annexation of 'Meyersdorp' and the welcome relief of the town in June 1900 is the only civilian account of the Boer occupation of Northern Natal so far published. It contains much fresh detail. Humour and deft touches of characterisation brighten an otherwise sombre theme.

There is a great poignancy to the story. In June 1900 Mrs Bailey returned with a baby girl from her forced exile in Durban. The young couple at the vicarage made themselves well loved in the busy little mining village as they nurtured their flock, counselling the bereaved and comforting the returning refugees, traumatised by the devastation of their looted homes and businesses.

Tragically, the Revd Mr Bailey fell victim to typhoid. In December 1900 schoolchildren were marched through the streets to St James to attend his funeral and burial next to General Penn Symons. (In old age some of them remembered with sadness the tragic black-clad widow standing forlornly beside the grave, her baby girl in her arms.)

In its infant days Talana Museum traced that baby girl to England. Unmarried, and with few close relations, Miss Bailey agreed to send the Museum a copy of her father's diary, with permission to publish, and the promise that on her death the original would be willed to St James Church.

It is fitting that 100 years after the events he described in Dundee, Revd Chilton Bailey's diary should have been printed in the town by a former owner of the historic Northern Natal Courier, Mr R.A. Burns. Mr Burns had the honour of presenting a copy to HRH The Duke of Kent at the launch of the KwaZulu-Natal Commemoration on 10 October — the very date the diary commenced. Serious collectors could not do better than acquire a copy before the limited first edition is exhausted. The Bailey Diary is one of a kind. As promised, the original is in the keeping of St James Church, Dundee.

SHEILA HENDERSON