

## *Speech by His Honour the Administrator of Natal*

AT THE OPENING OF THE HALL OF NATAL HISTORY  
AT THE NATAL MUSEUM ON THE 8th NOVEMBER, 1972

THERE are various approaches to history and therefore various definitions, and often the word conjures up only thick tomes of recorded dry facts which some people regard as irrelevant in the modern context. Similarly, many people think of museums as collections of old bones and stuffed animals and birds and outdated objects. But there are others of us who regard and experience history as a living social science reaching back into the past, with its lessons teaching us how to handle the present and how to formulate guide lines for the future — but it is more than that.

History is that subject which teaches us — if I may use the word in a special sense — which teaches us our pedigree, culturally, amongst other things. It records man's greatest achievements, his finest creative moments and surrounds us with the evidence of a worthwhile past which enriches the present with the best of that which has been. The urge to preserve, to enjoy, to fill the present with links with the past, links that give us a sense of belonging, is, I think, natural and instinctive in man. Therefore, man has over the years established archives and musea for both natural and cultural history and this dates back over the centuries to the days of the ancient world.

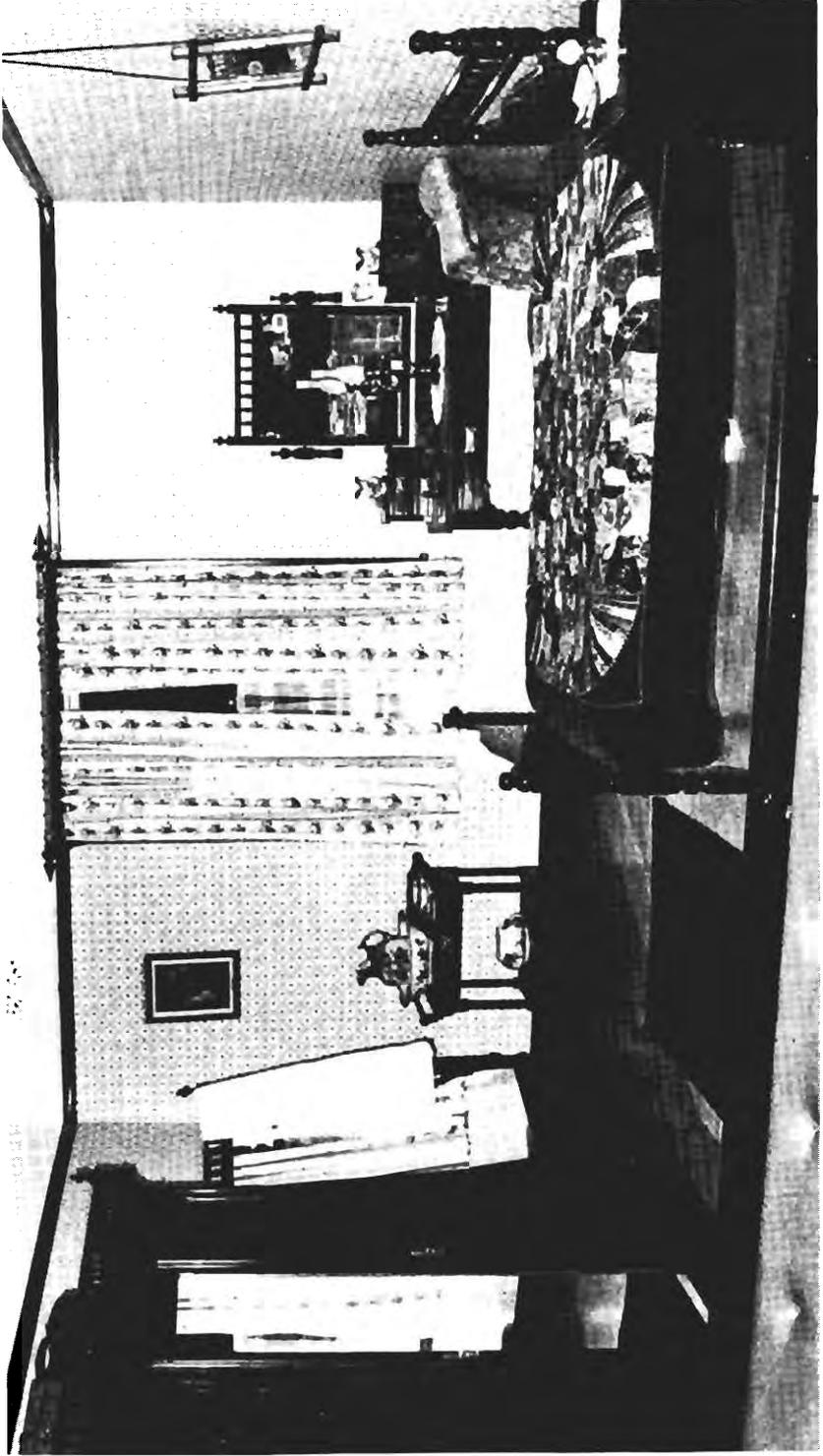
### **The Past—Dead but not done with**

In a fairly recent publication under the title *The Aims of History* by the late David Thomson, lecturer in history at Cambridge University, I find this extremely interesting approach to the subject. I quote a few sentences:

The past is dead but not done with. It is dead because it cannot now be changed in any detail whatsoever. It is not done with because its relics and its consequences surround us in our daily lives and, as already shown, it is believed, and with good reason, to matter greatly to us. The social task of the historian (and of his vast army of helpers, from archaeologists, epigraphers and anthropologists to archivists, librarians and curators) is to make sure that we do learn whatever can be learnt about the past, and that such knowledge and understanding of it as we have is accurate, trustworthy and precise.

It was widely held, even by leading professional historians at the beginning of this century, that 'the only source worthy of the historian's serious attention was documents'. No historian would maintain this attitude today.

Dit is hierdie bewustheid van die geskiedenis en van die waarde daarvan wat ook die besieling was vir hierdie museum en hierdie Saal vir Natalse Geskiedenis wat ongeveer 6 000 vierkante voet beslaan. Dit is gepas dat hierdie Saal



The Natal Museum. A lady's bedroom about 1887.  
(Courtesy of *The Natal Witness*)



The Natal Museum. Mr. W. S. Rees poses for a smoking scene of the late Victorian period.  
(Courtesy of *The Natal Witness*)



The Natal Museum. Yellow-wood fireplace, late Victorian period.  
(Courtesy of *The Natal Witness*)

in die hoofstad van die provinsie, hierdie stad Pietermaritzburg, moet wees wat so ryk aan geskiedenis en tradisie is. Hierdie saal is beplan om in drie fases voltooi te word; die eerste fase was die restorasie en bewaring van sekere aspekte van Shepstone-oord. Die derde en finale fase sal aan die vroeë geskiedenis van Natal gewy word.

Vandag het ons die voorreg om by die voltooiing van die tweede fase in die ontwikkeling van hierdie saal teenwoordig te wees. Hierdie fase is aan die Goewernewoning en sy meubels gewy.

Daar is mense wat onder die wanopvatting verkeer dat ons voorvaders, as pioniers, minder gesofistikeerd was as wat ons is. Die reproduksie van 'n deel van die Goewernewoning behoort egter enige sodanige illusies dadelik uit die weg te ruim. Dit is uiters interessant en insiggewend om die geskiedenis en sommige van die gebeure na te gaan wat om die Goewernewoning gesentreer was.

### **Government House, 1859**

The first section of Government House was built in 1859 and further additions were made in 1870 and 1888 and the last part was completed in 1901.

Each change of Governor probably also involved certain alterations and additions to the interior decorations and furnishings. In its final stage the building included the following rooms, furniture and fittings:

Diningroom with an expanding table and 60 diningroom chairs, etc.

Drawing-room with numerous easy chairs, whatnot, sofas, etc.

Morning-room with couches, easy chairs, bookcases, etc.

Smoking room.

Twelve bedrooms, with 50 single beds and all the relevant furniture and fittings.

Billiard room.

Governor's office well-furnished including 50 inkwells.

Council chamber.

Ballroom with 50 bentwood charis.

Numerous rooms for the household staff such as butler and house-keeper.

Kitchen: well equipped with pots, pans, kettles, mincers and included 415 cake tins, 10 sets of carvers for meat, 8 sets of carvers for poultry.

Government House provided a home for the Governor and his family. Every important person who came to Pietermaritzburg either visited or stayed **there**.

### **Its Visitors**

Among the more important visitors were: Prince Alfred the first Royal visitor to Natal in 1860, the Prince Imperial of France in 1879, President Kruger in 1891, Buller, Roberts and Winston Churchill in the period 1899-1902, the Duke and Duchess of York, later King George V and Queen Mary. The Empress Eugenie also stayed at Government House where she was lent certain items such as a commode for her long journey by road to visit her son's grave. All the later governors arranged receptions, balls and other such social functions at Government House. These were usually to honour a celebrated visitor or to commemorate an important event such as the Queen's Birthday. These were always glittering and spectacular occasions and invitations were keenly sought after. The Commanding Officers and military personnel lent colour to such occasions.

Die Natalse Opleidingskollege wat voorheen in verskillende geboue gehuisves was, het die Goewernewoning op 3 Februarie 1912 betrek. Die personeel en studente het al die meubels en toerusting gebruik wat beskikbaar was.

Met die verloop van tyd het baie artikels soos tapyte, gordyne, lakens, potte en panne gedaan geraak en breekgoed is beskadig. Ongelukkig is sommige meubelstukke ook verkoop omdat hulle as ouderwets of nutteloos beskou is. Baie van die groot en aantrekliker stukke is egter behou en is net in die personeelkamers gebruik. Hier was hulle veilig teen beskadiging en is hulle sorgvuldig bewaar.

### **Raad van die Natalse Museum—Nuwe Gebou**

In 1962 is die Raad van die Natalse Museum in die beplanning van hierdie nuwe gebou betrek. Daar is besluit om een groot saal van sowat 6 000 vierkante voet as die Saal vir Natalse Geskiedenis af te sonder. Ongeveer hierdie tyd het die Direkteur van Onderwys die Raad versoek om 'n inventaris van die goewernewe meubels op te stel sodat hulle geïdentifiseer kon word. Die identifisering van hierdie meubels het ernstige vraagstukke opgelewer aangesien daar geen merke of nommers van enige aard op enige van die stukke was nie. 'n Inventaris, gedateer November 1911, wat deur dr. J. B. Leverton in die argief ontdek is, het uiters waardevol geblyk. Baie mense is geraadpleeg, insluitende mnr. R. W. Wells wat die grootse deel van sy lewe aan die Natalse Opleidingskollege deurgebring het; etlike onderwysers wat in 1912 aan die Natalse Opleidingskollege begin het asook vroeë personelede is opgespoor. Hulle het almal gehelp om stukke uit te ken en hul hulp was werklik van onskatbare waarde. Net die items wat met sekerheid aan die goewernewestudperk behoort het, is opgeneem en enige twyfelagtiges is weggelaat.

### **Government House Furniture in Hall of History**

With this list of valuable historical furniture and a large empty hall, it was inevitable that these should be combined.

An approach was made to the Administrator-in-Executive Committee, who realised the enormous educational value of this project, and thereupon the furniture was granted to the Natal Museum on the following conditions:

Only such pieces of furniture as would actually be displayed and the list of items agreed upon by the Director of Education and Director of the Museum would be transferred;

The Director of the Museum would submit a list of items required as and when such furniture could be displayed;

No item or items of the above furniture would be removed from Pietermaritzburg.

The items of furniture loaned could be recalled in whole or in part should circumstances arise which justified such action, provided that six months' notice of intention to recall, would be given.

On 17th November, 1971, all the 35 items were transferred to the Museum. The five period rooms to house this furniture were actually planned for this purpose. Only the walls and floors were completed by the contractors. All the other structural fittings were completed by the Museum staff and include the ceilings, doors and windows, wall coverings, skirting boards, fireplaces, picture

rails, etc. The planner and driving force behind all this work was Mr. W. S. Rees, officer in charge of the Cultural History section, assisted by Mr. C. Crane. Mr. Rees was confronted with many problems; he had to construct these rooms in the period of about 1870; all the materials and reconstruction had to be of the highest standard of workmanship to conform with the requirements of the Governor's residence; and he had to locate certain items such as lamps and ornaments which were not included in the items of furniture.

### **Salvage from old Buildings**

Most of the doors, windows, skirtings and ceilings were rescued or purchased from old buildings in Pietermaritzburg and Durban in process of demolition. These were all renovated, repaired and installed. The quality of the workmanship in all the structural fittings is also, in fact, a link with the past, for this quality we have to a large extent lost with our modern approach to cost and speed.

Baie van die items van hierdie meubelment het 'n mate van reparasie nodig gehad en is met groot sorg en deeglikheid gedoen. Al hierdie items is nou in dieselfde toestand soos hulle was in die tydperk van die Goewerneurs.

Die 35 items wat ons onvang het was nie voldoende om die vyf tydvakkamers vol te maak nie: aangesien dit die neiging in daardie dae was om die kamers met groter en kleiner artikels van allerlei soorte vol te maak. Elke kamer is derhalwe met items uit die museum se eie versameling of uit spesiale aankope aangevul. Die stoele vir die eetkamertafel was nie meer beskikbaar nie maar 'n stel is aangekoop. 'n Groot aantal groter sowel as kleiner artikels word nog benodig om hierdie tydvakkamers te meubileer.

### **Appeal for Pieces of Natalia**

The Council of the Natal Museum and its Curator, Dr. Pringle, and his staff must be congratulated on and thanked for their enthusiasm and hard work. In this spectacular and very scientific way they have made a valuable contribution to the annals of our province. But is it their sole responsibility? I am sure there are many Natalians who have in their possession items which belong here and would feel happy to have these valuable pieces of Natalia safely housed and preserved in this Hall for the benefit of all Natal and all South Africa. On behalf of the Council of the Natal Museum I issue an appeal and an invitation to those of our people, who have suitable items, to avail themselves of an opportunity to make a personal contribution to the splendid and unique Hall of Natal History.

It affords me much pleasure to declare the second phase of this project, namely, the restoration of certain aspects of Government House and its furniture as displayed in this unique Hall, officially opened.

*Acknowledgements.* We should like to express our thanks to His Honour The Administrator, Mr. B. Havemann, for permission to reprint the text of his speech delivered in November 1972; also to Dr. J. A. Pringle, Director of the Natal Museum, and the Editor, *The Natal Witness*, for information, photographs, and other assistance.