

Book Reviews and Notices

THROUGH DESERT, VELD AND MUD: A HISTORY OF 15 MAINTENANCE UNIT 1899–1999

by H.R. PATERSON and M. LEVIN. 15 Maintenance Unit, Durban. 2000.

Napoleon famously said that an army marches on its stomach. This is the story of the endeavours of a volunteer unit to feed a variety of stomachs over a century. From its origins at the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War, the men of 15 Maintenance Unit have kept their fellow soldiers supplied with rations, equipment, fuel and ammunition. To do so they have used every conceivable type of transport: ox wagon, mule cart, camel, sled and every type of truck to ensure that the supply lines never faltered.

15 Maintenance Unit has only held that name since 1971. It had a number of titles before that, going back to its original incarnation as the Natal Volunteer Transport and Commissariat Department in 1899. It was brought into being two months before the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War as a special service or irregular unit of the Natal Volunteer Force, in effect a militarisation of the Public Works Department transport section with all its expertise in handling mules and wagons. Within a month of mobilisation it was under fire in the siege of Ladysmith.

Its record in the year during which it went through the siege, followed by the campaign to drive the Boers from Natal must surely be unprecedented in the annals of warfare. It had started out with 300 mules; when it was demobilised in October 1900 it still had 290 of them. When one considers that the British army lost over 400 000 horses, mules and donkeys during the war, this achievement is well-nigh miraculous.

The unit, now artificially divided into the Natal Service Corps and the Natal Militia Transport Department, again saw service in the so-called Bhambatha 'Rebellion' in Natal and in World War I in German South West Africa and German East Africa. It went through World War II as No.1 supply Company.

The authors take one deftly through these campaigns, though in each case the understanding of the reader would have been considerably enhanced by the provision of maps. It does not require a map, however, to enter into what the brigade trains suffered. In German South West Africa it was extreme heat by day, bitter cold at night, dust storms, thirst, shortages of wagons, mules and drivers. In German East Africa the logistical problems posed by swamp, mud, jungle and disease were, if anything, even more formidable.

By World War II transport was slightly more sophisticated, but the conditions under which the men had to operate just as challenging. In the campaign against the Italians in East Africa and Abyssinia, for instance, few drivers would forget the Chalbi Desert, a vast, flat, white waste of soda and lava dust, completely devoid of vegetation and unbearably hot. Repairs to vehicles had to be improvised. There were times when trucks had

trunks of trees wired between the back axle and the underside of the three-ton body to make a rigid fix. The back axle then had to be wired with towing cables to the forward cross parts of the chassis to prevent the back wheels and axle from being left behind!

After the heat and sand of the deserts of East and North Africa the snowy conditions of Italy in winter provided no less of a challenge. Some drivers considered driving on icy roads their greatest difficulty – and the vehicles of one company were averaging 21 000 kms each per month! And where motorised transport could not reach the forward areas, resort was again had to animal transport in the shape of mule trains which alone were able to negotiate the steep mountain paths.

15 Maintenance Unit was, of course, involved in South Africa's border war in Angola. One of its exploits was conveying 44-gallon drums of tar from Grootfontein to Mavinga, 480 km away inside Angola, for tarring the dirt airstrip, the biggest single logistic convoy ever undertaken there. The expedition was to involve no less than 20 days of driving through the Angolan bush.

One of the most attractive and interesting features of the book is its well-nigh unparalleled collection of photographs. There is one, sometimes two, on virtually every page. Readers in Pietermaritzburg, for instance, will be intrigued by a shooting competition at Bisley in 1911 showing the hillside, on which the targets can be made out, entirely devoid of vegetation – a far cry from today's bush-covered reserve. For this rich treasure not only the two authors but the commanding officer at the time of the centenary, Lt-Col Steve Camp, must receive credit. Camp's maternal grandfather, Pte. Geoff Lidgett, served with the regiment during World War II and clearly family albums as well as official archives have been thoroughly trawled.

After 1994 and the ending of conscription, 15 Maintenance Unit, as indeed the entire Citizen Force, experienced a dramatic decline in members who were prepared to volunteer for service – as well as drastic budget cuts. One of the most dangerous times, however, for any peace force is the absence of any perceived threat. It is in facing this danger that the unit enters its second century.

T.B. FROST

FROM BOYS TO GENTLEMEN: SETTLER MASCULINITY IN COLONIAL NATAL 1880–1920

by ROBERT MORRELL

Pretoria, University of South Africa, 2001, 322pp. illus. R104,20

Gender studies, or the study of power relationships between men and women, have become increasingly important in many social disciplines over the past two decades. The tendency has been to focus on the study of women, but, more recently, masculinity studies have restored the balance and made possible a more authentic approach to examining gender relationships.

Robert Morrell has been a prime mover in bringing issues of masculinity to public attention in South Africa. In 1997 he organised a Colloquium on Masculinities at the University of Natal. Leading international gender theorists took part, though most of the 29 papers were presented by South Africans. A quarter of the delegates were women. Morrell edited and published 18 of the papers – ranging right across South African society – in a book entitled *Changing Men in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2001).

Interesting questions emerged from these studies. For example, is the acquisition of gender identity a psychological process, or does the social context play a vital role? What exactly is the power that is central to gender relationships? What, in fact, is patriarchal power? Is the family, seen by early feminists as the centre of patriarchal power, more influential than single-sex environments such as the military, sports associations and age groups? It is these and other questions which come together in Morrell's fascinating book, *From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in Colonial Natal 1880–1920*. It was, in fact, his doctoral research into settler families in the Natal Midlands that contributed substantially to his interest in the broader topic of masculinity.

From Boys to Gentlemen is much more than its title suggests. There is the pure social interest of reading about the 'Old Natal Families' in and around Pietermaritzburg. This is the name that has been coined for families who can successfully claim a connection with Natal's colonial past. Anyone reading the book, who has lived in the Natal Midlands, or had ties with the region, is likely to experience some form of emotional response, probably nostalgia, as the familiar names, schools, agricultural shows, volunteer regiments, clubs, societies – and way of life – come alive in these pages. While it is the period 1880–1920 which is the context, it says something about the strength of these traditions that many lived on well into the 20th century and are, indeed, recognisable even today.

The central interest of the book is Morrell's thesis that Natal's white settler population cultivated an identity which combined gender and class to produce a community of the English gentry type. From its ranks came the leaders in public life, the law, the church and the military. Its ethos was imposed from childhood through adulthood by means of a network of structures. Prominent among these were the all-male schools, most significantly Michaelhouse, Hilton College and Maritzburg College. With them went the volunteer regiments, such as the Natal Carbineers and Umvoti Mounted Rifles, old boys' associations, the influential farmers' associations, sporting clubs and other male groupings, at the pinnacle of which was the Victoria Club in Pietermaritzburg. A 'settler masculinity' became the norm for 'proper male behaviour' in Natal. It was tough, exclusive, competitive, militaristic and sexist, but also hard-working and dutiful. It contributed in no small way to bolstering a racially exclusive society in Natal. Its power was unleashed on the indigenous population from time to time, as in the Bambatha disturbances of 1906. Patriarchy was at the heart of it. Morrell indicates that, of the 25 271 whites living in Natal by 1880, 6 395 lived in the Midlands and 'most lived unquestioningly in a world where their race and gender gave them power and privilege' (p.18). This dominant mould is given even more clarity by the author's delicate treatment of those who did not fit it, in a chapter entitled 'The forgotten and the excluded – the secret history of the ONFs'.

It follows that the position of women within this view of Natal settler society provides another sphere of interest. While the author handles this in relation to his topic, there is clearly scope for a detailed study of white colonial women in Natal in their own right, something which is being done extensively at present in relation to women in other parts of the British Empire. Morrell's evidence tends to show how women fitted into the patriarchal pattern. Their roles were defined. Wives and mothers supported and fostered the male image in the family and in the community. Hence their supportive roles at agricultural shows, cattle sales, rugby and cricket matches, and other key

events. Few women held public positions beyond the home environment. Those few who were admitted to the colonial service, industry or business at the beginning of the 20th century held only junior positions. And without the vote, women suffered gender inequality that was only partially compensated for by the protection given them by their menfolk. The author does, however, recount interesting stories given to him by relatives, of strong, adventurous and resourceful women, many of whom were competent with rifles, who proved that generalisation can be dangerous. He gives instances, too, of men who, contrary to the trend, divided their estates equally among their sons and daughters, not simply among their sons.

How the author has researched this highly complex and sensitive subject is also of considerable interest. He traces the historiography of Natal settler society. It began with the work of early historians such as A. F. Hattersley, which was largely descriptive and uncritical. He moves through to the work of the revisionists, which is highly critical of settler communities on the basis of their racial attitudes. Morrell makes a valid case for a new approach to understanding how these communities functioned. He delves deeply into the factors which influenced their consciousness using a wide variety of intimate evidence specific to the institutions, organisations and the families themselves. This includes interviews with many individuals.

If there are any reservations regarding this immensely worthwhile study, they would relate to the author's use and interpretation of the oral evidence, especially of casual remarks made by interviewees. Similarly, there is the occasional sloppy deduction such as the one on p.75, which observes that, by 1880, St Anne's College was operating at Hilton. The source quoted makes clear that St Anne's started in Pietermaritzburg in 1877 and moved to Hilton in 1904. One is tempted, too, to question, on occasion, whether the evidence does point so strongly to the class aspect of the Old Natal Family concept. There must surely have been settler farmers who would have considered it snobbish and extravagant to aspire to Michaelhouse or Hilton College for their sons. And what of the ones who were gentle, unaggressive and unsuited to the author's gender label? One can also, at times, wonder if the 'masculinity' argument is not a little contrived. Will 'boys not be boys' one way or another even without social engineering?

These are quibbles which are far outweighed by the huge interest and value of this searching and seminal work. Slow reading though it is – because of its weighty research – *From Boys to Gentlemen* and its author are worthy winners of the Hiddingh-Currie award for academic excellence.

SYLVIA VIETZEN

(D)URBAN VORTEX: SOUTH AFRICAN CITY IN TRANSITION

edited by BILL FREUND and VISHNU PADAYACHEE

Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 2002. 345pp. ISBN 1-86914-013-3.

To Maritzburgers, Durban often feels as if it might be in another country and this impressive edited collection by sixteen contributors provides good reasons for this perception. For instance, the metropolis controls a budget larger than the rest of KwaZulu-Natal province. It also boasts the major cargo port of Africa, the container hub of the western Indian Ocean and a facility of hemispheric significance: the passage of one standard container vessel alone is worth R800 000, although some of this leaks out of

the local economy. During the years of siege economics from the 1960s, Durban was well placed to be a centre of import substitution, which cemented its manufacturing base. Furthermore, it is one of South Africa's few debt-free municipalities, for long a place of "financial discipline and innovation" in the words of Michael Sutcliffe, now the city's manager (p.161).

The origins of Durban's political economy lie in race-based intervention of the most severe, discriminatory – but highly successful – kind in search of cheap labour that resulted in an eponymous system of municipal economics. Hemson points out that traces of this live on in the tight labour market and a continued, harshly etched division between a settled, primary labour force and the socio-economically marginalised population, even though Durban passed through a relatively benign period of progressive local government before the final collapse of apartheid. He dwells on the irony of the political significance of the Durban strikes of the 1970s and 80s and their long-term economic hollowness. The anti-union Frame Group, for instance, which dominated textiles and employed thousands, is now but a shadow of its former self and its Jacobs headquarters has been sold off as real estate.

By far the most interesting chapters in this book are the last, about the poor: Wendy Annecke on the Canaan informal settlement that grew out of violent conflict in the 1990s in the hinterland; Stein Nesvag on street trading in the city centre; and Harald Witt on Durban's fresh food distribution. These are stark and fascinating accounts of reality for so many South Africans: the economics of the rubbish dump, the spaza shop and the extended family; the role of wood and paraffin in energy provision; the re-conquering of central Durban by female street traders and the importance of the muthi trade; and urban agriculture and the transformation of the agricultural produce supply network. Annecke illustrates interesting trends in government policy regarding electrification and energy provision, Nesvag shows the resilience of traditional medicine, and Witt touches on the world of fresh produce speculators such as the 'chili kings' and the 'madumbi kings'.

This book also clearly demonstrates some of the structural problems, historical and contemporary, inhibiting the city's development. The port, for instance, is a national asset and its policies are frequently at odds with local need regarding commerce and tourism. Draught has always been a problem, while containerisation has been a more modern issue for a port whose strengths lie in cargo handling. Jones provides an absorbing and thorough account of the harbour in the context of past and present shipping economics. Financial institutions have long treated Durban as a 'branch economy' of the Reef and even Cape Town, as a bank-by-bank analysis and examination of local economic giants such as Tongaat-Hulett's show. Padayachee provides a tantalising and short glimpse of the Provincial Building Society, the first lender to deal with Africans and Indians, in the mid-twentieth century.

Historically, local government and para-statal such as the railways played a hugely interventionist role in development, but globalisation has lessened this potential. Durban's industrial strengths in clothing, textiles and wood are all vulnerable in this regard and these sectors have had to make major structural adjustments such as targeting more sophisticated markets to compete in the export trade. Similarly, the automotive components industry (catalytic converters, exhausts, tyres and seat covers) has successfully fitted into a global pattern but has experienced problems regarding inventory levels, defect rates and labour absenteeism. A less predictable but beneficial effect of globalisa-

tion has been the reach of international environmental monitoring groups which have helped to tackle the problems created by air and groundwater pollution to the south of Durban presented by the Umlazi landfill site and the Engen refinery. These have kept alive an old tradition concerning the right and the organisational strength to confront powerful industrial interests.

The general reader needs to persevere to make best use of this book, but will eventually be rewarded for persistence. Unfortunately the index will be of no great help. While serviceable, it clearly lacks a final edit: the entry for 'Indians', for instance, has over 50 page references, which obviously require subdivision. It contains a number of names of authors, citation references reflecting the Harvard system that are meaningless in an index; and presents a number of indexing howlers such as a mix up between the entries for 'hawkers (and street traders)', 'informal sector' and 'street trading'.

Durban is a remarkably well-documented city and this book maintains a fine tradition started by Kuper, Watts and Davies in the 1950s subsequently maintained by Beall, Maylam and Edwards, amongst others (including Freund himself in earlier writings, especially on the Indian community). The comparable lack of work on the capital city is glaringly and sadly only too apparent.

CHRISTOPHER MERRETT

FOOTPRINTS IN GREY STREET

by PHYLLIS NAIDOO

Durban, Far Ocean Jetty, 2002. 246pp.. illus. R80

Anyone expecting to find in this book an urban or cultural study of Durban's Grey Street would be mistaken. It is about people, ordinary people, some now in positions of authority in South Africa, others hardly known, but to their immediate compatriots. These were the people who were left-wing activists in the struggle against apartheid and whose lives touched Grey Street, either literally or figuratively. Phyllis Naidoo, veteran freedom fighter, lawyer, social worker and 75 year-old-grandmother, has gathered together her intimate memories of these 'heroes of the struggle'. In so doing she has given us a near primary source of considerable interest and value. Interspersed between chapters are several poems by the Sunday Times journalist, Molly Reinhardt who, in her weekly column entitled 'With Love and Hisses', did a service to those who were banned by her jibes at the apartheid regime.

Written in blunt and colloquial language, almost to a fault, Naidoo brings the reader into the harsh reality and human intensity of the 'struggle'. Gone are any sentiments about the Ajmeri and Madressa arcades, the monuments and landmarks, the trees and the flowers of the Grey Street precinct; rather we read of the 'comrades' who lived here, visited, passed through, hid underground, worked here, or registered their protests here. Some 60 people enter into Naidoo's memories: Archibald Gumede, her legal partner; Mac Maharaj, with whom she was a part-time student at the 'Non-European' section of the University of Natal; Cynthia Phakathi, Chief Albert Luthuli, Denis Goldberg, Errol Shanley, Dorothy Nyembe, Eli Weinberg, Richard Turner, Jane Turner, Govan Mbeki, Jacob Zuma, George Ponnen and Justice Hassam Mall, to name a few. So widely does the network spread that it is regrettable that the book has no index. Phyllis Naidoo, herself, was deeply involved. She hosted, fed, rescued, accompanied, defended, be-

friended, employed, was a relative, or in some way crossed their paths. She spent ten years under house arrest in Durban and 13 years in exile during which time she worked as legal advisor to those escaping from the state. She acted as attorney for Robben Island prisoners, including Harry Gwala. She survived a parcel bomb in 1979 and endured the assassination of her son in Lusaka in 1989. It is with palpable authenticity that she enables the reader to encounter, at close quarters, the suffering and the human bonding of those agonising but vibrant times.

A substantial body of 'struggle' and prison literature has appeared in South Africa since 1994. It is engrossing reading, but it is painful in the extreme to observe the human travail which unlimited power can generate. It is painful, too, to realise how long it takes for resentments, especially racial ones, to heal. Hope has to be placed in the commitment of our constitution to a South Africa which belongs to all its people.

Footprints in Grey Street cries out for more precise proof-reading and editing. However, praise must go to the publisher, Far Ocean Jetty, for making grassroots, home-grown material such as Phyllis Naidoo's candid memories of those crucial times, available to the reading public at a reasonable price. Only in this way will we foster understanding and empathy and build the South Africa we all long for.

SYLVIA VIETZEN

WINNEFRED AND AGNES: The true story of two women

by AGNES LOTTERING

Cape Town, Kwela Books, 2002. 248pp. illus. paperback. R92.

In the opening sentence of the introduction to her book Agnes Lottering says: 'I am a Coloured: designated by the apartheid regime an "Other Coloured". For I am a true half-and-half mixture of black and white, of Zulu and Irish to be precise – and extremely proud of that.' Her paternal great-grandfather was Jim Rorke, whose trading post gave Rorke's Drift its name, and her grandfather James Michael Rorke married a daughter of Chief Myeni of Ubombo. Her father Benjamin Rorke married Winnefred Nunn, daughter of George Nunn and Roselina Dhlomo. (George Nunn's father, an Englishman, had been Dinuzulu's blacksmith and armourer.) Here, as with the better-known Dunn family, is a domestic and familial meeting of African and European. In the history of Natal and Zululand the group relations of Zulu, Boer and Briton loom so large that the small group which resulted from the intermarriage of white and black is often invisible.

Winnefred and Agnes illustrates various other interfaces, too: between Zulu and Swazi; Roman Catholic Christianity and witchcraft; cruel male domination and submissive female acceptance; a generally westernised way of life and rural tribal customs; country (the family farm at Ngome between Vryheid and Nongoma) and town (Vryheid and later Durban).

In the first part of the book Agnes Lottering tells the story of her mother, Winnefred Rorke, from her brief teenage love affair which left her with an illegitimate child, through her marriage to the young widower Benjy Rorke in July 1934, to her death aged 61 in Addington Hospital in Durban. Rorke's prolonged and almost pathological grief at the loss of his first wife Katrina, an Afrikaans girl from Utrecht, was mixed with unbelievable physical and mental cruelty to the young woman who took her place. This was the

family into which Agnes was born, with all its ignorance, guilt, jealousy, cruelty and superstition set in the idyllic beauty of the Ngome Forest – a beauty from which Agnes was to draw strength and comfort throughout her life.

As a child Agnes was aware of the cold and brutal way her father often treated her mother, but not until she came to write this book did she beg a very old aunt to explain some of the reasons for the tensions and violence that existed in her childhood home. This information, together with the natural closeness there had always been between mother and daughter, enables Agnes to write her mother's story as a convincing first-person narrative. It also gives her some understanding of her moody, violent and domineering father, and softens her judgement of him.

Agnes' own life was perhaps even more difficult than her mother's had been. After she suffered a traumatic miscarriage, her lover Pieter, a young Afrikaner farmer, vowed he would take her away to Swaziland and marry her, but in 1952 he was killed in an accident. This had been the great love and passion of her young life, and the loss of it echoes down the years of her later unhappiness. Unable to bear any longer the harsh regime at home, she ran away to Vryheid, found a job, and married Lemmy Lottering, a young Coloured printer at the *Vryheid Gazette*. He, although skilled and in a good job, proved to be an incorrigible drunkard and wife-beater. The home deteriorated to such an extent that Social Welfare took the children to places of safety in Durban. A move to Durban to a better job in a large printing works brought with it a reformation in Lemmy, but it was short-lived. Having irreparably damaged his brain with alcohol, he was later admitted to Town Hill Mental Hospital in Pietermaritzburg, where he remained, incurable.

Despite the grimness, there is hope, humour and resilience in the lives Agnes describes. She writes without any literary pretensions – in fact with a naivety of style and directness unusual in biographies. *Winnifred and Agnes*, besides being the story of two women and the adversities they faced, is a window on to the life of a little-known sub-group in the so-called Coloured community. Its very existence is rooted in this province and the meeting of British and Zulu, and the book is an interesting addition to the broadening documentation of KwaZulu-Natal's social history.

J.M. DEANE

A FORTUNATE MAN

by ISMAIL MEER

Cape Town, Zebra Press, 2002. 368 pp. illus. index. R159.95

The autobiography of Ismail Meer is an important addition to the growing body of South African liberation literature. Meer began the book two years before his death in 2000 and his wife, sociologist Fatima Meer, completed it using his rich autobiographical writings and his spoken memories. Here is the testimony of a man of great stature, a great South African. It tells of a family, a community, and of a man, grappling with the day to day issues of living while working to build an honourable nation. Meer's unqualified commitment to the equality of all human beings permeates the book. Nelson Mandela, in the foreword, writes, 'Ismail was my friend. I learnt a lot from Ismail – he was a universalist who loved humanity without distinction' (p. vii).

Ismail Chota Meer was born on 5 September 1918, the son of a general dealer in the small village of Waschbank near Dundee. His descriptions of community life and local people are precious memorabilia of rural Natal. In 1931 the family business failed and Meer found himself in Durban. There, while working in the clothing industry, he finished his primary school education at the age of 17. With the help of M.I. Meer, proprietor and editor of *Indian Views*, he spent his high school years at Sastri College. This was a happy time during which his social and political interests were nurtured. He also launched into journalism with articles for *Indian Views*. Soon he was extending his journalistic flair to *New Outlook* and *Indian Opinion*, entering vigorously into the complexities of local Indian politics at the time.

In 1940 Meer enrolled at the Natal University in Durban. This meant being a part-time student in the 'Non-European Section' which had been tenaciously pioneered and organised by Mabel Palmer since 1936. Through her teaching, he became acquainted with the Fabian socialist views of Bernard Shaw and Sidney and Beatrice Webb, together with the internationalism and profoundly intellectual approach which Palmer cultivated. In order to hold these classes at all, Mabel Palmer walked the tight rope between placating the University's 'white' policy and giving her 'Non-Europeans' the best she could with the help of loyal academic friends like Florence Macdonald and Elizabeth Sneddon. In 1942, law lectures for 'Non-European' students were cancelled through the influence of the Natal Law Society. Mabel Palmer's protestations – and Meer's own as president of the Non-White Students Representative Council – were of no avail and Meer left to complete his legal studies at the University of the Witwatersrand.

There his firm friendship with his classmate, Nelson Mandela, began and his resistance politics entered a new phase. From this period, through to the establishment of his legal practice in Verulam and his life in Durban, Meer recounts his involvement in 'the struggle'. There was the 1946 Passive Resistance campaign, the 1952 Defiance of Unjust Laws campaign, the launch of the Freedom Charter and the birth of Umkhonto we Sizwe. He was accused in the 1956 treason trial until charges against him were withdrawn in January 1958. He describes vividly his family's experience of house arrests, imprisonment and petrol bombs, the most painful of which came in his latter years when his wife, Fatima, and son, Rashid, were detained for lengthy periods. It was probably his readiness to work behind the scenes – from mediating to painting posters – which has given the impression that he was perhaps an 'unsung hero' of the struggle. This seems hardly true when one reads that it was Ismail Meer who accompanied Nelson Mandela on his extensive trips to meet world leaders in 1990, after his release from prison. And from 1994 until his death, Meer held an African National Congress seat in the KwaZulu-Natal Legislative Assembly.

One of the attractions of this memoir is Meer's conversational style. It is as if he is talking to the reader. Those who knew him personally will re-live his ability to tell a good story, with all the humour and anecdotal charm of one who valued human beings but was not blind to their faults and foibles. At the same time, the detail can be overwhelming, and sorting out the numerous family members by initials and interpreting the many acronyms requires perseverance. His deep love for his wife, Fatima, yet candid and realistic handling of both his and her idiosyncrasies is endearing, as are his fond stories of his children, Shamim, Shehnaz and Rashid. His ability to recreate the local colour – of Bamboo Lane and the poinsettias in Pinetown, of the markets and spicy

aromas of Grey Street and its environs in Durban, of his lively law practice in Verulam and the inevitable anecdotes that went with it: these, together with so much else, make this a gem in Natal local history and culture. One meets so many people across the spectrum: Indira Gandhi, Alan Paton, Chief Albert Luthuli, the Cachalia family, A.W.G. Champion, Dr Yusuf Dadoo, the Pahad family, Dr Goonam, Hilda and Leo Kuper, Dr Monty Naiker, J.N. Singh, even Bernard Shaw when he visited Durban during Meer's student days. There are inside views of Indian life, of the Passive Resistance campaign, of the 1949 riots, and of the experience of being banned, which give a new dimension to the Durban twentieth century scene.

Ismail Meer was one who could cut through and rise above ideological and religious divisions in the interests of the ultimate human good. Thus, when the African National Congress restricted its membership to African people, Meer joined the Non-European United Front in 1938 and the South African Communist Party in 1941 until, partly through his influence on Nelson Mandela, ANC membership was opened to all races. At the same time he moved freely with Alan Paton and members of the Liberal Party of South Africa, and participated readily in the International Club in Durban. Similarly, he was a committed Muslim but associated freely with all, of whatever outlook, who sought a more just South Africa. One of his consistent endeavours was the 'liberalisation' or 'freeing' of people's minds. Thus, as early as his Sastri College days, he formed the Liberal Study Group, a 'non-racial think tank' (p. 36). And one of the efforts of his latter days was the Liberal History Foundation which he described as 'bringing bodies and personalities together' and providing 'a platform for celebrating our past heroes and politically significant days, which are now entrenched in our non-racial, democratic calendar' (p. 262). In the same spirit he established the Democratic Education Advancement League. Through all of this, his lifelong love of journalism kept his ideas flowing and circulating.

A Fortunate Man is packed with detail and requires concentrated reading. But, as a personalised account of the highways and byways of the liberation struggle in South Africa, from its early days into the years immediately following its victory in 1994, particularly in its Natal context, it is a document of immense value and gripping interest. Its author has been justly described by Nelson Mandela as '... a man of great integrity, both in his personal life and his political thinking'.

SYLVIA VIETZEN

A GUIDE TO THE ARCHITECTURE OF DURBAN AND PIETERMARITZBURG

by DENNIS RADFORD

Cape Town: New Africa Books, 2002. vi, 121pp., soft cover, R153,00

Here at last is a handy portable guide to the best examples of urban architecture in the province. Only 13 x 24 cm and 120 pages, it will fit into a wide pocket or purse, and should be carried about by any resident or visitor intent of seeing these fine buildings

in Durban and Maritzburg.

What is refreshing and new about this guide is that it gets away from just the Victorian and Edwardian. Indeed, while there is much of these, there is much more of the rest, and domestic or residential architecture receives at least as much attention as public architecture. Only industrial architecture comes up short, but the author reiterates that is because there is precious little of it with real merit.

The guide is divided into six sections: five for different parts of Durban (including suburbs) and one for Pietermaritzburg. Each page has a major building, of which there is a colour photograph and below that is a descriptive paragraph and often a sketch of a floor plan or of an elevation or an historic photograph of it. Below, smaller in size and with only essential data, are colour cameos of nearby buildings of interest.

The author has tried to be representative of all kinds of architecture, but inevitably his selection is very personal, although all of the civic and religious showpieces are included. There is no potted history of architecture or styles to start with, and the author's prose is sophisticated – this is not a book for the ignoranti – sometimes idiosyncratic and even tart, as when he writes of 88 Field Street: 'On a hot summer's day the energy being used to cool the curtain-walled building must make even the mildest "greenie" wince'. Or: 'The overall effect [of Paradise Valley Apartments] is not far removed from the socialist architecture of the Eastern Bloc countries but in this case slightly redeemed by the dramatic setting and the surrounding green of the remaining vegetation'.

The sites are grouped by area, as indicated – sections for Durban City Centre, Inner Suburbs, North, West, South, and then for Pietermaritzburg. There are indexes categorising the buildings by type – commercial, community and educational, industrial, residential apartments, residential houses, and religious – and by styles – Victorian and Edwardian, Interwar historicist, Art Deco, International Style, Traditional, Modernist, Postmodern (1980s) and Contemporary (1990s and early 2000s). There is also an index of architects, for in every case the architect as well as the date of building is given. Thus the reader can reorientate visits selectively and on any number of lines.

Faults are very few. On page 107 Maritzburg's South African War memorial is misidentified as the Anglo-Zulu War one, and 'Sydenham' gets an extra 'n' on page 24. Ten or so of the photographs are rather too much on the dark side, and in four or five instances plans or historic photographs don't seem to jibe with the main photograph on the same page. I have doubts about the viability of the stylistic category 'Interwar historicist', which seems to include the so-called Berea style, some Cape Dutch Revival and even some Art Deco. The term really seems a catch-all for 'other' architecture of the interwar period. I also think we are shortchanged on Art Deco and the International Style. And 'Traditional' for the most part just means Hindu temples.

I have read this book three times and dip into it again and again with great pleasure. There is no other one like it. And since the author has just emigrated, it seems unlikely that it will be extended. Let's hope the stocks last.

PAUL THOMPSON

ZULU VICTORY: THE EPIC OF ISANDHLWANA AND THE COVER-UP

by RON LOCK and PETER QUANTRILL

London: Greenhill Books, and Mechanicsburg, Pa, USA: Stackpole Books, 2002.
336 p. Illus. Maps.

No sooner did John Laband, editor of *Lord Chelmsford's Zululand Campaign 1878–1879* and author of *Rope of Sand* and *Kingdom in Crisis* and at least a dozen other books on Zulu and Anglo-Zulu war history, write that the field of Anglo-Zulu War studies was practically exhausted than he emended the statement upon reading Ron Lock's and Peter Quantrill's manuscript. '*Zulu Victory* is no tired, familiar rehash of the battle of Isandhlwana... Rather, is it controversial in the most positive sense of that word... [Its] great virtue is that it genuinely opens up the debate once more on a number of key issues with well-considered speculation combined with solid forensic argument...'

Zulu Victory: the Epic of Isandhlwana and the Cover-Up is a very readable book in the popular history genre. Its main themes are that Lord Chelmsford, commander of the British imperial forces invading the Zulu country, displayed egregious generalship, whereas his counterpart Ntshingwayo was superior to him in strategy and tactics, and that the clash of arms at Isandhlwana should be remembered first as a Zulu victory and second as a British defeat. Indeed, in the foreword Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi congratulates the authors for giving a new Zulu slant on events. But British defeat it certainly was, and Chelmsford sought to shift the blame to his subordinate Colonel Anthony Durnford, who died in the battle but was not in command there. Hence the 'cover-up'.

The first three chapters tell how the war began and the composition and qualities of the opposing armies. The next two carry the central invading column into the Zulu country and tell of the initial manoeuvres and encounters. The heart of the book is in the following two chapters which describe the events of the battle in some detail and with some criticism. The last two chapters expose the cover-up. The text is followed by a section with end notes and a bibliography and several appendices. There are more than enough maps – which is usually not the case in such works – and the cartography is excellent.

There is nothing new at all in blaming Lord Chelmsford for bad generalship or in exonerating Colonel Durnford for responsibility for the defeat, but so long as the battle is kept before us these matters should be made clear, and the authors do, of course, just that. The 'key issue' is what the opposing generals knew and when they knew it, and very much attention is given to reconnaissance and the use of mounted troops and scouts. In consequence, Ntshingwayo appears quick to apprehend and quick to act, whereas Chelmsford, who should have known better, persisted in false notions of what his enemy is about.

Among the more interesting speculative items, the authors consider how long it would take a scout to climb Isandhlwana hill and report back on what he had seen, how long it would take a mounted man carrying a flag (furled) to ride from the battlefield to the so-called Fugitives' Drift, and why Colonel Pulleine, in command of the camp, did not strike tents, as he should have, as the battle loomed.

Also, the account includes much on the Natal Native Contingent, which has received little attention until recently. About half the imperial units engaged in the battle were of the contingent, and were just as important as the British regulars in determining its course. The authors have striven to give the contingent its due, and if their picture is

incomplete or blurred in places, it is not for want of trying to do the subject justice.

There are, of course, some problems with the account, and these are most readily explained by a glance at the bibliography and the end notes. The apparatus is not properly laid out and leaves out much that would be required in a scholarly work, but then this is not a scholarly history but a popular history, and popular historians are normally excused from such academic bric-a-brac. None the less it is striking that the Chelmsford Papers are not cited, nor are colonial government records, both of which are accessible in the archives in Pietermaritzburg. It is also not clear what the authors mean by 'various papers' in the repositories at Kew and Windsor. They should specify what these are. The notes indicate a partiality to later rather than earlier works by participants in events, which methodologically is questionable. The authors are idiosyncratic in what and how they cite: quotations are rarely attributed, significant statements are unsubstantiated, and page numbers are rarely given. Fortunately, the section on the cover-up is so written that the sources are usually made evident in the text.

The problem of lax or spotty attribution is serious in the narrative parts of the book. For instance, in the crisis of the battle, it is not quite clear to the reader where the British line is, whether it has been flanked, overrun or broken through, or all three. In this case the map of the battle is a great help. Yet it is not clear, even with the aid of several beautifully done maps, who started the battle just where. In other instances, imagination supersedes fact. The genius of Ntshingwayo is simply inferred and then reified. Colonel Pulleine's emotions and reactions in command of the camp seem to be of similar invention. Speculation of this sort needs to be curbed. Methodology is important. Good notes are essential. Without them curious things will happen. For example, it is stated three times that Captain Murray's detachment of NNC returned to camp during the night of the 21st–22nd with cattle taken during Lonsdale's reconnaissance of Malakatha and Hlazakazi, and that they participated in the battle. This is the authors' supposition. There are no citations. There is no solid evidence to support the statement.

What Professor Laband has told us about the book is true enough, but obviously some qualification is necessary. For the scholar the book is rather like the curate's egg. For the average reader it may be quite otherwise. What is demanded of a scholarly work is not demanded of a popular one, and if the popular work is correct in the main and, above all, stimulating, then it is to be recommended. Consider Donald Morris's *Washing of the Spears*. This book, too, will probably be read and enjoyed by this generation's military history buffs.

PAUL THOMPSON