

# *Ten Weeks in Natal*

## *Bishop Colenso reconnoitres*

*On 30 November 1853 John William Colenso, then rector of a country parish in Norfolk, was consecrated first Anglican bishop of Natal. From January to April of the following year he visited Natal to assess the needs of his new diocese, and especially the possibilities of missionary work among the Zulus. He travelled far and wide in the Colony, meeting a wide cross-section of its population, and on his return to England wrote the 271-page Ten Weeks in Natal. It was published by Macmillan & Co. in 1855 and is now something of a collector's item. It is appropriate that Natalia should devote its Reprint section in this issue to a brief selection from the book, to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Diocese of Natal.*

### **Arrival and first impressions**

Monday 30th January 1854. As the sun rose... the mist and rain cleared away; and when I next mounted the deck the coast was before me, green as an emerald, and the hills so beautifully sloped that I can only compare the scenery with that of Devonshire and Cornwall, except that here in Natal, as in Kafraria (*sic*), the green heights go down to the very edge of the white beach, which margins the shore all along for miles. What surprised us most was the greenness of everything, in the very midst of the hot season; whereas at the Cape we had left everything burnt up, and brown, and dusty... But this difference, it appears, arises from the fact that, in these eastern parts of South Africa, the *summer* season is also the *rainy* season, and therefore perpetual verdure covers the land, except, of course, where the natives burn the grass.

About 10 a.m. we reached the Natal Bluff, behind which lay the bay. Upon this stood a light-house and signal-station, to which we made signs for a boat to come off. And then, gliding gently by the Bluff Head, we came in view, gradually, of the *outer* bay of Durban, with its white line of breakers stretching across the middle, and indicating the presence of the notorious 'bar'. The entrance to the *inner*, or real, bay of Durban, is about 300 yards wide at high water, but was so hidden from view as to be scarcely discernible. A boat, however, soon came out, in which I landed, having crossed the bar with a little tossing, but no real danger or difficulty. The distance from Table Bay to Port Natal (or Durban) is about 800 miles; and the whole sea-voyage from England occupied just six weeks, besides half a week spent at Capetown.

At noon... I stepped out upon the jetty at Port Natal, a stranger among strangers; but

I was very soon relieved from all uncertainty as to my future movements, by the kind attentions of Mr Middleton,<sup>1</sup> one of the churchwardens of Durban, who had come down to the Custom House to meet me, with a horse for my use. ...

A ride of half-an-hour brought us to the town of Durban, of which I can hardly yet form a judgement. I have seen a number of detached pretty-looking cottages, very small; also some shabby-looking huts, which I take to belong to Kafirs, but am not quite sure of this.<sup>2</sup> On reaching McDonalds's Hotel,<sup>3</sup> where I decided to remain while in Durban, I very soon received a visit from the Rev. W.H.C. Lloyd,<sup>4</sup> Colonial Chaplain, and procured from him a full account of the state of things in this place, as regards the progress of the Church and the educational wants of the inhabitants. I find that there are about 400 houses in Durban, and 1,200 white inhabitants, almost all English, besides a great number of Kafirs employed in service. Opposite to my window, which looked out upon the market-square, stood the unfinished church of St Paul's,<sup>5</sup> the walls of which had risen to the top of the windows, but were there arrested for want of funds. I had hoped to have found *this* church at least completed, and ready for consecration on my landing; but many unfortunate circumstances had contributed to hinder the progress of the works. Among others, the original contractor had failed,<sup>6</sup> and, finding himself in a difficulty, had sold off the 30,000 bricks which he had ready for the finishing of the church. ...

### The town of Durban

Thursday 2nd February 1854. I have now seen the town sufficiently to know that it may be described as a large collection of cottages, with a few small villa-like buildings and other houses – interspersed with green foliage, little gardens, and remnants of the old “bush”, and *apparently* scattered about without any order, but *really* arranged in streets, or along roads, which cross each other at right angles, and are of considerable width, but are covered a foot deep, as is also the Market Square, with white sand, which in this strong easterly wind is blowing about disagreeably enough.... This quantity of sand, under foot always, and sometimes, as now, in the eyes and mouth, is certainly a drawback to Durban as a place of residence... A greater evil in Durban is the water, which is taken usually from wells that are not sunk deep enough, and, consequently, abounds with decaying vegetable, if not animal, matter, and innumerable animalcules and worms. The effect is by no means favourable to the health of the residents, more especially that of the children, who have no *refuge*, I suppose, as their parents have, in stronger beverages. Some wells have been sunk deeper, and the water has been found to be brackish. Deeper still, no doubt, it would be pure enough. At present the remedy is to drink rain water, or the water of the Umgeni River, which is brought by carriers a distance of four miles, and is excellent. Indeed, had the *Dutch* founded the town of Durban, as they did that of Maritzburg, they would long ago have had the Umgeni pouring its beneficent streams through every street, and bringing health and cleanliness to every door....

### The Zulu language commission

Had an interview with His Honour, the Lieutenant Governor, B.C.C. Pine, Esq.,<sup>7</sup> who, with Captain Struben,<sup>8</sup> the magistrate of the Klip River Division, and Mrs Struben, rode into Durban this evening from Maritzburg. He has, I find, appointed a commission to prepare a Kafir grammar and vocabulary; and he desires as soon as possible to enforce

the rule, as in India, that all functionaries of the Government, engaged among the natives, shall pass an examination in the Zulu language. His Honour expressed a wish to place me on the commission, to which, of course, I gladly assented, though I can do nothing in this matter, I fear, until my return from England. The only Zulu grammar as yet published, is that of Mr. Schroeder,<sup>9</sup> written in the Danish<sup>10</sup> language – the work of an excellent missionary and an able philologist, but not suited for beginners, or for English students generally....

### **The custom of lobola**

The Zulu servants are exceedingly thrifty, and careful of their money: they never spend it on themselves, I am told – are never, or very rarely, seen intoxicated. They hoard their four months' saving, and bury it, until they can buy a cow; and eight or nine cows will buy a *common* wife. A chief's daughter's price will be, perhaps, 150 cows. 'And yet,' says Mr Fynn,<sup>11</sup> in his evidence before the late Kafir Commission,<sup>12</sup> 'it is a mistake to suppose that this price is paid for the *purchase* of a wife. That is not the native idea of the transaction. Or, at least, whatever may be the present notion, the original intention was, that it should be a kind of deposit or pledge for the proper treatment of the woman, and an assurance of the husband's regard paid down to the parent. And, accordingly, the girl feels herself slighted and contemned if not paid for. One ran away from her husband, and left him, as not having been duly married to him, when she found she had not been paid for. "If she was not worth paying for," she said, "she was not worth having."'

### **A musical evening in Durban**

This evening I attended the *first* meeting of the 'Durban Philharmonic Society'. I could not well spare the time; but, indeed, I was very desirous to assist the movement, and to help forward the young people of this place, in their efforts for rational and social amusements of this kind. I was glad also of an opportunity of showing practically from the first, that I do not consider true religion to consist in a system of restrictions and negations, but in a real spirit of devotion to God's service and love to our fellow-men. There was a regular programme of two parts, with eight pieces in each – from Handel, Rossini, Beethoven, &c. The music hall was a large store, fitted up ingeniously for the occasion with flags and evergreens. But I was rather amused when, in the middle of the performances, the ladies were requested to step aside for a few minutes, while part of the roof was taken off to cool the room!

### **En route to Maritzburg**

Monday 6th February 1854....Shortly after leaving Pinetown, but not till we had ascended a capital new piece of road, through the same beautiful scenery as before, and had taken our last view of the sea from the summit of the hill, the character of the country began to change, and it became very grassy, and gradually more and more clear of trees. The surface of the ground still undulated in large bold slopes; but the aspect of the whole was not that of a soil, so rich and exuberantly fertile, as it had been nearer Durban. I saw, however, quantities of fine-looking clover in the grass, and gathered some very elegant wild flowers. In one place enormous surfaces of granite cropped out, which we had to ride over, as they were level with the road. But ever since leaving Durban, except while passing through the valley of Pinetown, it has been all up and down; and

I am often reminded of my native Cornish hills, except that here the proportions of the scenery are so much more gigantic.

### **First sight of the capital**

Tuesday 7th February 1854. [*The Bishop had spent the night at a little inn at Stirks Spruit*<sup>13</sup> (*sic*).]...At Uys Doorns,<sup>14</sup> rather more than five miles from the city, I was met by a large party of gentlemen, who had kindly ridden out to receive and welcome their Bishop. After the reading of an address, to which I briefly replied, we rode on together, our numbers being swelled by additions, including a few ladies and two Kafir chiefs, with their attendants, until we formed a body of some sixty or more equestrians. At last, said one to me, 'There is Maritzburg!' and there indeed it was, seeming to be only about half-a-mile off, down in the valley directly before us; but, to my surprise, I was told it was still five miles off. It looked a long white town, sloping gently down from the left to the right of the picture, with the military camp<sup>15</sup> posted on a little eminence at the extreme left, and one conspicuous tower rising from the centre, which belongs to the Presbyterian Church, while the bell-turret of the Wesleyan Chapel was also visible, and even that of the Roman Catholic Chapel; but no trace was yet discernible of the little church, or any buildings of the Church of England. ...

### **Impressions of Maritzburg**

As we drew nearer, the town looked exceedingly pretty from the number of trees, with dark green foliage, which rise up in every part of it, and, I am told, are growing rapidly, and adding every year to the picturesque beauty of the place. Certainly, the surrounding scenery, consisting of huge downy hills, in the bosom of which Maritzburg is settled, is very inferior to that about Durban. But the former town, for the size and character of its buildings, and especially as regards cleanliness, from the stream of water which runs on each side through every street, must be considered to have at present many advantages over the latter. Being almost in the very centre of the colony, it is probable that Maritzburg will always continue to be the seat of Government; but notwithstanding this, and though the traffic to and from the Klip River district must pass through it, it appears to be a much quieter place than the busy trading town and port of Durban. ...

### **Maritzburg mud**

Wednesday 8th February 1854. A thoroughly wet day, and the streets of Maritzburg thick with cloggy mud. This mud, I find, is *the* disagreeable [feature] of this place, as the sand was of Durban. ....

### **Bishopstowe-to-be?**

Friday 10th February 1854. Rode out with Dr. Stanger,<sup>16</sup> the surveyor general, to inspect a site, about 2½ miles out of the city, where I might probably obtain from the Government a grant of land, on which to build an episcopal residence....

### **Zulu nicknames**

The Kafirs invariably give some name of their own to any one who is brought into some special relation with them...and those names are often very ingeniously formed, to express some peculiarity in their personal appearance, manners, character or office. Thus

a *tall, slight*, English lad received the name of *umKonto*, or ‘Javelin’; an English lady is very likely to be distinguished by the title of ‘the great white elephant’ – the *greatness*, however, it may be as well to add, having reference to her *dignity*, not her *dimensions*. Miss Barter<sup>17</sup> once rejoiced in this appellation; but it has latterly been exchanged by them for one far more appropriate, namely, *No-musa*, ‘Mother of Mercy’.

### **Discussion on polygamous converts, with Revd Mr Posselt at Emmaus Mission**

Wednesday 1st March 1854. .... We had a conversation upon the much-vexed and difficult question of the treatment of polygamy among Christian converts from heathenism. The most painful case, Mr. Posselt<sup>18</sup> told me, which he had ever had before him, was that of a young man, who had two wives, both of whom he loved, and both loved him. The man wished to be baptized, and so did one of the wives – the other not. As the two converts gave evident signs of their sincerity, he said, he knew not what to do, but at length decided to marry them. ‘The word of God was sharper,’ he thought, ‘than any two-edged sword.’ He ‘could not, with the examples of the holy men of old, enforce separation, as if polygamy were in itself sinful.’ But he ‘set before them the Lord’s will – one husband, one wife – under the order of the Church;’ and then said that ‘though, for the present necessity, their state was permitted, yet it was not sanctioned by Christianity; and he hoped the good Lord would teach them what to do in the matter.’ The two, accordingly, were baptized, and admitted to Holy Communion. But the man’s mind, after his pastor’s words, was uneasy; the congregation complained of his being allowed to have two wives; and the baptized wife threatened to leave him if he did not put the other away. At last he did so; but the poor woman bitterly felt the separation; for ‘she loved him best,’ his mother said, ‘and was the most dutiful daughter to her;’ and she came to the Missionary, with tears in her eyes, to say, ‘You have not only taken my husband from me, but you have taken my child also,’ – which, by law, became the property of the father.

I must confess, that I feel very strongly on this point, that the usual practice of enforcing the separation of wives from their husbands, upon their conversion to Christianity, is quite unwarrantable, and opposed to the plain teaching of our Lord. It is putting new wine into old bottles, and placing a stumbling-block, which He has not set, directly in the way of their receiving the Gospel. Suppose a Kafir-man, advanced in years, with three or four wives, as is common among them, – who have been legally married to him according to the practice of their land, (and the Kafir laws are very strict on this point, and Kafir wives perfectly chaste and virtuous,) have lived with him for thirty years or more, and served him faithfully and affectionately... – what right have we to require this man to cast off his wives, and cause them, in the eyes of all their people, to commit adultery, because he becomes a Christian? What is to become of their children? Who is to have the care of them? And what is the use of our reading to them the Bible stories of Abraham, Israel and David, with their many wives? I have hitherto sought in vain for any decisive Church authority on the subject. Meanwhile, it is a matter of *instant* urgency in our Missions, and must be decided without delay, one way or other. ...<sup>19</sup>

### **A Zulu’s impressions of London**

Monday 6th March 1854. .... Mr Shepstone<sup>20</sup> gave me an amusing account of the

manner in which one of the party of Zulus, who were exhibited in London last year, had discoursed to some of his black brethren in Natal about the wonders of England.<sup>21</sup> He had been sent back before the rest, on account of his health. .... He spoke of railways. ‘They fastened together twenty great wagons, heavily laden, and then they tied on in front a little strong bull, and then they let him go; and off they went at such a rate, that, if he had been let go by himself, he did not know where he would have got to.’ ‘London was so big that he never saw the end of it. People, and cattle and wagons, were always coming in, but he never saw any going out;’ the fact being, no doubt, that he and his companions were only taken to walk in the Park at the early hour of 10 a.m. when few would be about to see them; and thus he had drawn a very proper inference from the fact, that he always saw at that hour the stream of life pouring *in* to London. ‘They had got a bridge over the great river, and had got boats to cross it; but they were not content with that – they must have a *hole* to go under it (the Thames Tunnel).’ ... He saw Her Majesty the Queen. ‘When she was in a room, she was very much like any other *umFazi*; but when she came out among her people, then he saw that she was Queen of them all; for they took off their hats to her, and, when there was no room for *him* or anybody else, they made plenty of room for *her*.’ ‘There was something very wonderful up *pezulu* – high in the clouds. It was continually going, going, going, making a sound. He supposed it must be the *amaTongo* – spirits of the dead.’ Mr. S.<sup>22</sup> imagines that he must have meant bells. Certainly he could never have heard a peal of bells in Natal, and I fear it must be long before we can hope to have the sweet home-music there. ...

### The concluding words

Monday 10th April 1854. At noon I received an affectionate farewell address from a large party of the townspeople; and then, after taking refreshment, provided by the kindness of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I rode down, accompanied by himself and Mr Shepstone, and about forty friends on horseback, to the Point, from which a boat took me to the steamer<sup>23</sup> – just at the very same hour, and on the same day of the week, as that on which I had landed from the *Calcutta*, – having spent, in the interval, through God’s Grace, a not inactive, and, I would hope, not unprofitable,

### TEN WEEKS IN NATAL

### NOTES

1. William Henry Middleton (1825–1911), a Durban merchant, was on the building committee for St Paul’s. At about this time he went farming at *Snaresbrook* in the present Northdene area, growing coffee, arrowroot, tobacco, groundnuts, and later sugar. Like many others, he was a casualty of the economic difficulties in the mid-1860s, and had to sell *Snaresbrook*. A couple of years as the station-master at Umgeni, Durban followed, then in 1871 he moved to the Orange Free State. Here he recouped his finances enough to retire in 1880.
2. Colenso was right to be dubious. Newly-arrived immigrants often engaged Africans to erect traditional huts to serve as temporary abodes for themselves.
3. i.e. the Commercial Hotel in Smith Street, then run by Ann, the widow of Hugh McDonald (c.1797–1853). McDonald had been captain of the coasting vessel *Pilot* before taking over the hotel in 1846. In 1857 the name was changed to the Masonic (it was the Freemasons’ meeting place), and in 1860, after Prince Alfred had stayed there, it became the Royal, a name it still retains. The property remained in the McDonald family until September 1878.
4. William Henry Cynric Lloyd (1802–1881), AM (Oxon.). Durban’s Anglican minister from 1849 to 1878. Archdeacon of Durban from July 1869. During the dissensions in the Natal Church, Lloyd initially opposed Colenso, but when the latter was confirmed in his see by the judicial committee of the Privy

Council, Lloyd gave him his allegiance.

5. St Paul's, in an unfinished state, was used for the first time for Divine Service in April 1855.
6. William Parker Downs (c. 1814–1878) received the contract in early March 1853, the foundation stone being laid on 17 March. By October there were problems with the supply of bricks. R.S. Upton was the architect.
7. Benjamin Chilley Campbell Pine (1809–1881), MA (1840), barrister, Grey's Inn (1841). After a short stint as Acting-Governor, Sierra Leone, became Lt.-Governor of Natal 1850–1855. Knighted 1856. After gubernatorial posts in the Gold Coast, St Christopher, and the Leeward Islands had a second term in Natal, July 1873 to April 1875. He was recalled because of the Natal government's harsh reaction to the Langalibalele 'Rebellion'. Retired 1875.
8. Johannes Hermanus Marinus Struben (1806–1869), a retired ship's captain, and naturalised British citizen. Appointed to Klip River Division magistracy in August 1850, and retained the post until February 1856 when he absconded to the Transvaal pending an enquiry into the 1854 theft in Ladysmith of public monies. He was chosen for his strong personality and his Dutch background, which it was considered would endear him to the Boers who, among the whites, were in the majority in this division.
9. Revd Hans Paludan Smith Schreuder (1817–1882). First arrived in Natal in c.1843/44, and in 1846 joined the Norwegian Missionary Society. In 1847, after unsuccessfully seeking permission from King Mpande to work in Zululand, he went to China. Here again he was rejected, so returned to Natal in Dec. 1848. In 1850, after healing Mpande of an ailment, he received the opening he needed, establishing the Empanjeni mission station in 1851. Five others followed. He was appointed bishop in 1866.
10. Danish [*sic* i.e. Norwegian]. This was *grammatik for Zulu-sproget*, published in 1850.
11. Henry Francis Fynn (1803–1861) One of the original 1824 Cape hunter/traders. He had good relations with King Shaka, but by 1834 found conditions under King Dingane no longer commercially viable so returned to the Cape. There he held various posts in connection with African administration, the last being British Resident with Chief Faku in Pondoland. This ended in early in 1852, and from there he returned to Natal. He entered the Natal magisterial service, his final posting being in the Lower Umkomanzi Division of Durban County (May 1855).
12. *Commission appointed to enquire into the past and present state of the Kafirs in the District of Natal, and to report upon their future government, and to suggest such arrangements as will tend to secure the peace and welfare of the District.* (1852).
13. Sterk Spruit is the river on the Pietermaritzburg side of Key Ridge on the Pietermaritzburg/Durban road. At this time the accommodation house was run by William Tate.
14. At Uys Doorns was the first accommodation house outside Pietermaritzburg en route to Durban. It was in the Ashburton area, near present Lynnfield Park. Mine host at that time was Charles Boulton.
15. i.e. Fort Napier.
16. William Stanger (1811–1854) MD (Edinburgh), FRGS – arrived in Natal in March 1845 as Surveyor-General, having previously been Surveyor to the Central Board of Roads in the Cape Colony. An amateur geologist and botanist. Died a month after this meeting with Colenso of 'inflammation of the lungs'. Durban's Stanger Street and the town of Stanger (now Kwa Dukuza) were named after him, while the Inchanga Cutting on the Pietermaritzburg/Durban road was known to contemporaries as Stanger's Pass.
17. Catherine Barter (c.1818–1895) came to Natal in 1852 with her brother Charles, to keep house for him and to fulfil her desire to evangelise 'the heathen'. Charles's marriage in 1856 left her free to concentrate more fully on missionary work. Wrote *Alone among the Zulus* (1866) and *Home in South Africa* (1867), both under the pseudonym 'A plain woman'.
18. Carl Wilhelm Posselt (1815–1885) of the Berlin Missionary Society. In 1847, together with Revd W. Guldenpfennig, established the Emmaus mission station west of today's Winterton. In July 1848 moved to what became New Germany to minister to the newly-arrived German settlers brought out to grow cotton by the company of Jonas Bergtheil. After cotton failed, and a number of the emigrants left New Germany, he returned, with his black congregation, to Emmaus in September 1852. In May 1854, some of the Germans having gone back to New Germany, and a petition having been sent to the management committee of the Berlin Missionary Society, Posselt finally returned to New Germany, where he ministered to both the Germans and his African congregation at nearby Christianenburg (the nucleus of today's Clermont).
19. Colenso's final stand allowed baptized polygamists to keep all their wives, but to refrain from taking further wives.
20. Theophilus Shepstone (1817–1893) CMG (1871), KCMG (1876), started his official career in the Cape Colony in 1834 as an interpreter, and after several posts, all in African administration, came to Natal

in 1846 as Diplomatic Agent to the Native Tribes. When Natal was separated from the Cape in 1856 and representative government was introduced, the post was redesignated Secretary for Native Affairs, and carried with it a seat on the Executive Council, as well as an *ex officio* position in the Legislative Council. During Colenso's visit he accompanied him on a two-week journey to the northern regions of the Colony, and from this grew a firm friendship which lasted 20 years. It came to a dramatic close when Colenso realized that he and Shepstone were poles apart in their attitudes to the treatment being meted out to the amaHlubi and amaNgwe tribes after the Langalibalele 'Rebellion'. In 1876 Shepstone resigned, and in April 1877 annexed the Transvaal to Britain. He retired as Transvaal Administrator in 1880. Thereafter he could be described as *L'Eminence grise* behind Natal's African administration in both Natal and Zululand.

21. These Zulus, 12 in number, left Natal in December 1852 in the care of Alphonzo Torkington Caldecott (1803–1862), with his son Charles as interpreter. The aim was to make 'the people of England better acquainted with the native character of Natal'. In London they were exhibited at St George's Gallery, Hyde Park Corner, and in June 1853 were visited by Queen Victoria and family. The Caldecotts were permitted to take the Africans on condition that Caldecott stood £500 surety for their good treatment, and that he find two others to stand surety as well, each for £250.
22. Shepstone.
23. The *Natal*, which sailed that same day.