

# *New names for old*

## *Transformation in the streets of Pietermaritzburg*

Post-apartheid South Africa had to be transformed. The previous social order was characterised by doctrines of racial superiority and separation, by privilege and deprivation, by gross inequalities, by institutional and personal racism, and despite a fine tradition of law and jurisprudence, by a deep and pervading injustice. Change and reform were not the words to describe what needed to happen. *Transformation* became the watchword and the policy, affecting all aspects of life. Some place names were obviously high on the list of things to be changed. Airports named in the heyday of apartheid after the likes of Malan, Strydom, Verwoerd and P.W. Botha very soon had new names linking them to the cities or towns where they were situated. Nor were Louis Botha and Jan Smuts airports immune, despite those men's different political allegiance. It was not just fifty-six years of Afrikaner nationalist apartheid that rankled, but more than three hundred years of discrimination, about which an Afrikaner academic wrote a book.\* Any naïve white South Africans who thought all the trouble began in 1948 soon had their eyes opened.

Place names are only one rather small aspect of transformation, but one which more than many others forces people to recognise that a far-reaching process is under way. It soon became clear that the ANC majority in the Pietermaritzburg-Msunduzi municipal council wished to change some street names in and around the city in order to remember and honour those who had played a notable part in the struggle for liberation. There was to be consultation and discussion, a special committee was set up, intended to be representative of all inhabitants of the city, and the proposals and possibilities canvassed led to some quite heated correspondence in the *Witness*. There was in fact a widespread feeling that the committee, the discussion and the consultation were more show than substance, and that the preconceived agenda of the local ANC would be carried out — as indeed it was.

\* Sampie Terreblanche: *A History of Inequality in South Africa, 1652–2002*

It was decided that no street would be named after a person still living, and no street named after a person would have its name changed. Therefore Boshoff, West, Pietermaritz, Pine, Retief, King Edward, Prince Alfred, Victoria, Alexandra, Greyling, McCallum, Prince Charles, Saint Patrick and all the rest would not be changed.

While some applauded this decision, others disliked the idea of losing names inextricably bound up with the Voortrekker and British history of the city. What, they asked, was offensive or unacceptable about the names of Longmarket or Berg streets and those useful directional names like East Street, Greytown Road, Durban Road or Howick Road? There was no great desire to keep a street name reminding them of Governor Sir Benjamin Pine (*The Bent Pine* as the title of one book dubbed him), or of a visit by 16-year-old Prince Alfred in 1860.

Perhaps the most fiercely opposed was the renaming of Chapel Street, which clearly tells of the early religious history of the city, and where the original Methodist chapel building still stands. Such objections were noted, but they did not substantially affect the renaming.

And so Pietermaritzburg has the following set of nineteen new street names, given here with the old name in brackets. Only in three cases (Murray, Baynes and McKenzie) was there a departure from the general principle of not changing the names of streets or roads already named after persons.

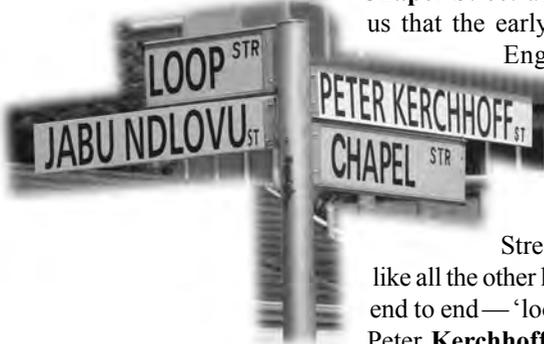
The photographs on the following pages show a selection of the new and old street signs, which are intended to exist side by side until people become used to the new names.

Alan Paton Ave	(Durban Rd)
Archie Gumede Drive	(Newport Drive)
Bhambatha Rd	(New Greytown Rd)
Chief Albert Luthuli St	(Commercial Rd)
Chief Mhlabunzima Rd	(Baynes' Drift Rd)
Chota Motala Rd	(Old Greytown Rd)
Gladys Manzi Rd	(part of Murray Rd)
Harriette Colenso Rd	(Bishopstowe Rd)
Hoosen Haffejee St	(Berg St)
Jabu Ndlovu St	(Loop St)
Langalibalele St	(Longmarket St)
Masukwana St	(East St)
Mbubu Rd	(Sweetwaters Rd)
Moses Mabidha Rd	(part of Edendale Rd)
Peter Brown Drive	(Duncan McKenzie Drive)
Peter Kerchhoff St	(Chapel St)
Reggie Hadebe Rd	(Richmond Rd)
Selby Msimang Rd	(part of Edendale Rd)
Skhumbuzo Ngwenya Rd	(Slangspruit Rd)

**Edendale** Road was the obvious name for the road leading to the mainly African settlement of that name in the valley south west of Pietermaritzburg. In 1851 a hundred Christian families of Griqua, Sotho, Rolong, Hlubi, Swazi and Tlokwa origin settled on the farm *Welverdiend*, and under the guidance of the missionary Revd James Allison laid out a settlement and named it Edendale. **Moses Mabhida** was born at Thornville near Pietermaritzburg in 1923. In 1942 he joined the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP), and went into exile in the 1960s. While in exile he became general secretary of the SACP and a member of the ANC National Executive Committee. He died in exile in Mozambique in 1986.

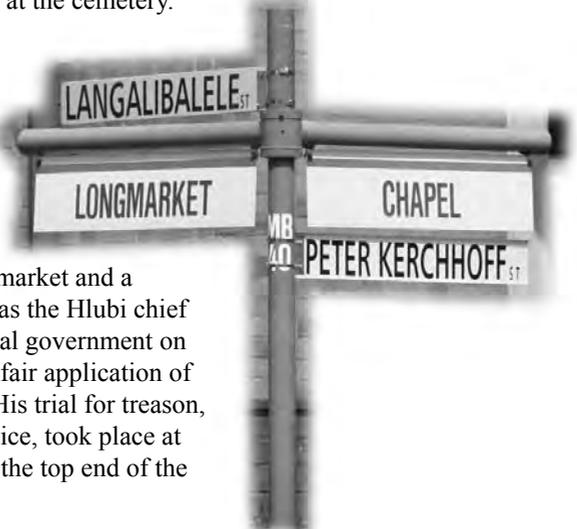


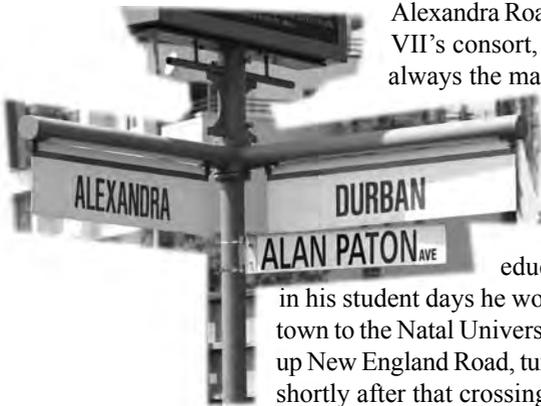
**Chapel Street** and **Church Street** intersected, reminding us that the early British settlers were mainly Church of England and Methodist adherents. **Church Street** (Kerkstraat) originally referred to the Voortrekkers' (Dutch Reformed) church, but under British rule it easily became associated with the Church of England cathedral, St Peter's. **Loop Street**, another trekker naming, was certainly, like all the other long streets, a walk of more than a mile from end to end — 'loop' being the Dutch word for 'walk'. Revd **Peter Kerchhoff** was the founder of the Pietermaritzburg



Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA), and an ardent campaigner for social justice in the 1980s and 90s. Mrs **Jabu Ndlovu** was a trade unionist whose home was attacked and burnt during the political violence in the city in 1989. She, her husband and their daughter were killed. The repressive nature of the apartheid regime is illustrated by the fact that attendance at her funeral was restricted, and people were turned away by the police, who later assaulted mourners at the cemetery.

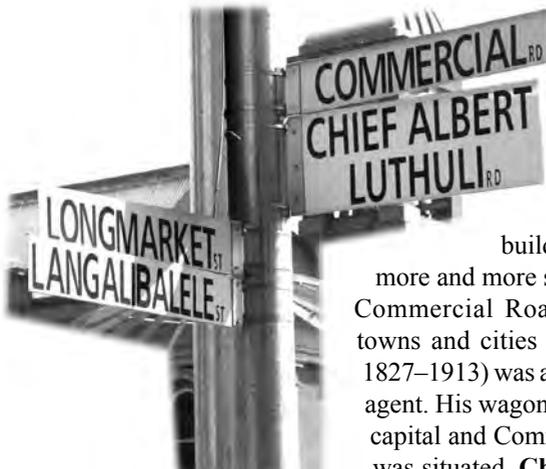
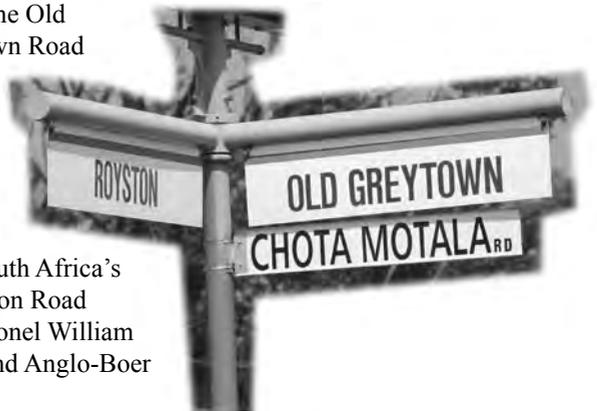
**Longmarket Street** was a self-explanatory name until the municipal market was moved from the Market Square to Mkondeni on the edge of the city. It is a traditional Dutch descriptive naming, and Cape Town, for example, has both a Longmarket and a Shortmarket street. **Langalibalele** was the Hlubi chief who in the 1870s opposed the colonial government on a number of issues, especially the unfair application of gun-registration laws to his people. His trial for treason, now widely seen as a travesty of justice, took place at Government House, which stands at the top end of the street that now bears his name.





Alexandra Road, named after Queen Alexandra, Edward VII's consort, remains unchanged. **Durban Road**, not always the main exit route from the capital to the port, becomes **Alan Paton Avenue**. It seems almost unnecessary to explain the significance of the new name. Paton, world-renowned author and fearless opponent of apartheid, was born and educated in Pietermaritzburg. Incidentally, in his student days he would sometimes have taken the tram from town to the Natal University College in Scottsville, the route going up New England Road, turning right into King Edward Avenue, and shortly after that crossing the road that now bears his name.

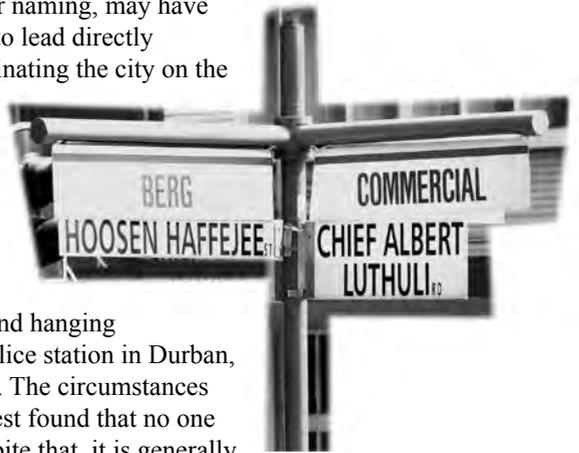
Originally Greytown Road, it became Old Greytown Road when New Greytown Road was created as the exit route. Dr Mahomed Moosa (Chota) Motala was a veteran member of the ANC and the Natal Indian Congress, a medical practitioner devoted to serving the poor, a community leader in the city, and after 1994 South Africa's first ambassador to Morocco. Royston Road (unchanged) was named after a Colonel William Royston, who died during the Second Anglo-Boer War.



**Commercial** Road was originally Nelstraat, named after the Voortrekker who originally surveyed and laid out the town's streets. Then it became Leathern Street, named after William Leathern (1804–58), a hotelkeeper, builder and mayor of the city in 1857–8. As

more and more shops were built along it, it was renamed Commercial Road, with many examples from British towns and cities in mind. Leathern's son (also William, 1827–1913) was a carrier and a commission and forwarding agent. His wagons plied between Commercial Road in the capital and Commercial Road in Durban where his depot was situated. **Chief Albert Luthuli** was president of the African National Congress from 1952 until his death in 1967, and suffered banning, residential restriction and other persecution by the apartheid government. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1961.

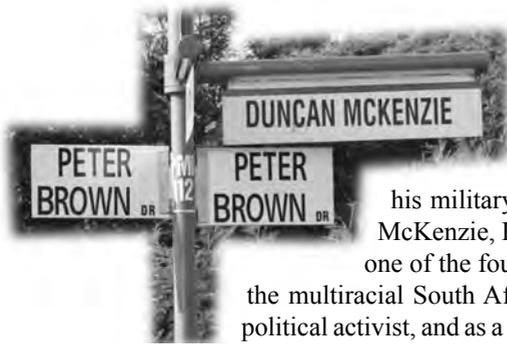
**Berg** Street, an original Voortrekker naming, may have been so called because it appeared to lead directly towards the summit of the hill dominating the city on the south west. That is not really a 'berg' (mountain), but it isn't a molehill either, and the early residents may be forgiven for their slight exaggeration. **Hoosen Haffejee** was a young dentist and political activist who in 1977 was detained by the police and later found hanging in his cell in the Brighton Beach police station in Durban, his body bearing numerous injuries. The circumstances were highly suspicious but an inquest found that no one could be blamed for his death. Despite that, it is generally believed that the police were responsible.



**Archie Gumede**, born in Pietermaritzburg in 1914, was a lawyer and political activist. His outspoken support of the banned ANC resulted in a lengthy banning order in the late 1970s, and when that was lifted he became chairman of the Release Mandela Committee and later chairman of the United Democratic Front. He worked much of his life in Durban, and died in 1998 at the age of 84.

National road signs awaiting change indicate Newport and Murray roads. The former is now **Archie Gumede Drive** and part of the latter is **Gladys Manzi Drive**. Gladys Manzi became an ANC member in the 1950s and was repeatedly held in detention, subjected to torture and finally suffered punitive restriction to the Umlazi Township near Durban. When her banning order expired she once more spoke on public platforms and was a leading figure in the United Democratic Front.





**Duncan McKenzie**, a major at the time of the Second Anglo-Boer War, was colonel in charge of the operations to quell the Bhambatha Rebellion in 1906, and later served with distinction during the First World War. He ended his military career as Brigadier-General Sir Duncan McKenzie, KCMG, CB, DSO, VD. **Peter Brown** was one of the founders, and later the national chairman, of the multiracial South African Liberal Party. He was a social and political activist, and as a farmer was especially concerned about the apartheid government's forcible removal of long-established African communities from rural areas declared 'white' — the so-called 'black-spot' removals. He suffered a banning order for ten years, from 1964–74, during which time the Liberal Party was forced out of existence by a law forbidding non-racial political activity. After his banning order expired, he was one of the founders of the Association for Rural Advancement (Afra). In 2000 Brown was one of eight people on whom civic honours were conferred by the city of Pietermaritzburg. There is a small irony in the fact that the city, in its wish to be rid of the memory of the man who crushed Bhambatha, renamed Duncan McKenzie Drive after Peter McKenzie Brown, a great-nephew of Sir Duncan.



**East Street** was simply the easternmost street in the original town layout. That part of town came to be largely an Indian residential and commercial area, and so the association of East and Oriental was often made, the point illustrated in this photograph by the minarets of the Islamia mosque. **Masukwana** is the Zulu name of the Dorp Spruit, a small stream and a tributary of the Umsunduzi, which flows parallel to the street.

