

James Saunders King

DURING the Napoleonic wars James Saunders King served as a midshipman in the British navy in American waters and, thereafter, in the British merchant navy passed himself off as a lieutenant. He came to the Cape at the end of the year 1820 on board the *Salisbury* which transported an independent group of settlers to the colony. By 1822 he had obtained command of this ship which plied between Cape Town and Algoa Bay. On one occasion he sailed with F. G. Farewell up the east coast of southern Africa to St. Lucia. Shortly afterwards the ship was forced by contrary winds into the lagoon at Port Natal where he promptly took the opportunity to make a detailed survey of the Bay. For his trouble he thought himself entitled to a lieutenant's commission in the British Navy, but the authorities did not agree with his contention. The incident brought renewed notice of the Bay of Natal and it was this which caused Farewell to consider the possibilities of trade with the Zulu through the port. With Nathaniel Isaacs, King sailed for Port Natal from Cape Town in the *Mary*, but bad luck dogged the two men and they were wrecked on the bar at the port. King determined to settle where he found himself and he became a firm favourite with the Zulu chief Shaka. In April 1826 King left Natal on the sloop *Helicon* but returned six months later only to engage in a serious financial quarrel with Farewell. In February 1828, Shaka sent King on a mission to negotiate an alliance between the Zulu and British government but nothing came of this plan. King returned to Natal in a state of great depression and, contracting dysentery at Port Natal, died there in September 1828. He lies buried in the Lieutenant King Park on the Bluff near Durban. He had an impractical nature and although he contributed to the foundation of the white settlement in Natal, he remains one of the more obscure figures in that venture. Perhaps his greatest contribution was a diary which was much used by Nathaniel Isaacs in his *Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa*.

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