

Sugar and settlers: early Isipingo

by Duncan Du Bois

IT WAS LACK of interest in J.C. Byrne & Co.'s land allocations that resulted in Dick King's 5 816-acre farm *Isipingo* becoming the residence of a settler who, after Edmund Morewood, became the greatest pioneer of the sugar industry. He was Michael Jeffels. He arrived in Natal with his wife Mary and two children aboard the *Sovereign* in March 1850. Although assigned land for cotton cultivation near Byrne, Jeffels preferred to forfeit it and pursue his own enterprise.¹ He immediately procured a piece of land, which he called *Albion*, from King at the far south end of the *Isipingo* flat near the Mbogintwini (today's eZimbokodweni) river. He built his house above the river near what became the old South Coast road and

initially planted beans, cotton, oats and mealies. In addition he collected salt and made soap to augment his income. He noted that when he arrived there were only three other settler families in the district.²

Isipingo was not only the southern outpost of Durban Division in 1850; it was also the southern frontier of settler presence in Natal. It was situated at the southern end of an extensive flat plain bounded on the north side by the Mlazi river where, in later years, the *Reunion* sugar estate was established. To the west lay an African reserve; to the south the eZimbokodweni river and an African reserve beyond that. James Ecroyd, who settled at *Isipingo* in 1851, described the soil as "rich alluvial loam".³ Dick King does not

appear to have exploited the soil to any degree and seemed content, certainly until 1854 when he planted his first sugar cane crop, to lease out or to sell off parcels of land from his extensive property.⁴ The first recorded cultivation of note in *Isipingo* was of cotton grown by John Galloway and Alfred Southam, who arrived in Natal in 1848. Writing from his *Island Plantation* estate to Lieutenant-Governor West in April 1849, Galloway, who had 20 acres of cotton, sought to impress West with a sample of his crop. At the same time he lamented the difficulty he had in obtaining African labour and advocated a land tax to compel Africans to work.⁵ Labour problems proved perennial in the area, as in other parts of Natal, which later resulted in the introduction of indentured Indian workers. However, Galloway and Southam's enterprise was short-lived. Uncertainty as regards labour and doubts about the profitability of large-scale cotton production saw them sell up and leave.⁶ In 1849 Southam sold his land to Sidney Platt, who was soon joined by his brother Laurence. Initially Platt grew beans on his 250-acre holding but swamped the market.⁷ By 1851 he was asking four shillings an acre for his land.⁸ In 1851, Laurence bought his own farm and named it *Prospecton*.⁹

Other pioneers to settle in the *Isipingo* district included William Joyner with his wife and five children, who arrived aboard the *Conquering Hero* in June 1850. He lived in Durban for two years before moving to *Isipingo*. Robert Mack and his son, James, who arrived aboard the *Henrietta* in July 1850 "with half-a-crown in his pocket", as he put it, also gravitated to *Isipingo*.¹⁰ Living conditions for the

new settlers were extremely difficult. Before proper housing could be built wattle and daub huts thatched with grass served as basic shelters. "Nature lay close at hand everywhere, untamed and dangerous," wrote Eric Slayter. Snakes, bats and insects abounded. Sheets of calico cloth were hung across ceilings in an attempt to prevent such creatures from falling on the heads of those within. Joyner feared leopards and set traps for them – unsuccessfully.¹¹ Basic foodstuffs were either unobtainable or in short supply. James Ecroyd, in a letter to his mother in 1851, lamented the absence of sugar, milk and butter and how he was surviving on dry bread and treacle.¹² Years later the *Mercury* recalled the "mealie and pumpkin" diet on which so many of the settlers of the 1850s had relied for their sustenance.¹³ Money was also scarce. Ecroyd remarked that "for cash almost any kind of tools or implements may be bought at half the price they are worth in England".¹⁴ Of the new settlers, William Joyner built the first permanent home from bricks he produced from local clay. The name *Dingwall*, as his farm and his home were called, was the name of his birthplace in Ross and Cromarty, northern Scotland. Writing in 1862, *Natal Mercury* editor John Robinson aptly summed up the challenge which the Natal colonist faced when he stated, "His life is pre-eminently one of work, frequently of privation, certainly of struggle."¹⁵

Charles Barter in *The Dorp and Veld*, published in 1852, stated, "Natal undoubtedly possesses the means of producing a staple article of export, sufficient to ensure her own ultimate prosperity." He saw cotton as the most promising crop

and did not even mention sugar.¹⁶ But, as Alfred Southam and John Galloway discovered at *Isipingo*, cotton production was not only labour intensive but it was also very costly. Cecil Rhodes later described it as a “sink” with a “capacity to absorb any amount of capital” after he and his brother abandoned their efforts at cotton growing in the Umkomanzi (today’s uMkhomazi) valley during the early 1870s.¹⁷ Difficulties with parasitic pests during the 1850s added to the woes of those who tried cotton cultivation and by 1857 it had ceased to be a settler enterprise.¹⁸ Cotton never constituted an appreciable percentage of Natal’s exports, whereas by 1875 sugar had reached unquestioned predominance in the colonial economy.¹⁹ Ironically, it was in January 1849, while he was employed as a manager for the Natal Cotton Company, that Edmund Morewood, the man who initiated the Natal sugar industry, advised the directors to cultivate sugar and coffee.²⁰

Despite the adulation heaped upon him for his pioneering efforts, Morewood’s role in the history of sugar in Natal was a brief one. In December 1852 he announced that *Compensation* was up for sale. The reason he gave for quitting was “the want of sufficient capital to carry out the manufacture of sugar”. By March 1853 he had left Natal, never to return.²¹ It was at that point that the role of sugar pioneer passed to Michael Jeffels, and *Isipingo* became the cradle of the Natal sugar industry.²² In his tribute to Jeffels, sugar historian Robert Osborn wrote that he was “the one man, more than any other, to whom the South African sugar industry owes its determination to make the most of

the certainty established by the lone pioneer, Edmund Morewood ... that Natal could produce sugar as good as any and as a commercial success”.²³

In May 1852, Jeffels was the first at *Isipingo* to purchase plant cane from Morewood. In August he added to that by importing a further quantity directly from Mauritius. The extent of his initial cane cultivation was just two acres.²⁴ Soon afterwards Joyner, Platt and Mack followed his example. Whereas Morewood had used very basic wooden rollers to produce his first sugar, Jeffels exemplified the “pioneering individualism” to which Peter Richardson has ascribed the success of Natal’s new industry,²⁵ by ordering a proper iron-made mill from the Vauxhall foundry in Liverpool.²⁶ The first of its kind in the colony, it arrived in July 1853. By June 1854 Jeffels had 20 acres of cane and earned accolades from the *Mercury*, which claimed that his sugar was the finest yet produced in Natal.²⁷ At that time Jeffels also became the first planter regularly to send sugar through to Durban.²⁸ Whereas he later admitted that he had been needy and had even gone without shoes in 1853, in July 1854 his second imported iron mill arrived from England.²⁹ His success continued on its upward trajectory when, early in 1855, his sugar won top prize at an exhibition in Cape Town and was later also exhibited in Paris.³⁰ In the October 1855 issues of the *Natal Star* Jeffels advertised the sale of his Green Natal cane plants at 15 shillings per thousand.

The absence of proper equipment had frustrated Morewood in his efforts to produce sugar. To tackle that challenge, Jeffels suggested at a meeting of fellow planters in Durban the formation of a

company to erect a central mill which could meet the needs of a number of small cane growers. However, he was ahead of his time and nothing came of the proposal.³¹ By 1854 there was a growing clamour in the sugar growing districts for machinery to convert the cane into a manufactured state as the extent of land under cane cultivation rapidly increased,³² thereby substantiating Hattersley's observation that "no great enlargement of the total area under cultivation took place until the commencement of sugar farming on the coast".³³

Robert Babbs arrived in Natal in September 1850 aboard the *Globe*. Like Jeffels, he declined to take up his Byrne & Co. land allotment near Umhlali and settled at *Isipingo*. He became known to his fellow colonists for his literary ability, having won a prize of £25 from the Natal Society in 1853 for the best essay on Natal.³⁴ Between August and October 1855, the *Mercury* published five lengthy letters from Babbs in which he discussed the labour issue. Essentially he opposed the imposition of hut tax on Africans (which commenced in 1849) arguing that it brought no benefits to them nor did it address the interests they had.³⁵ He came to the conclusion that the solution to labour problems was the "importation of labourers from every part of the world".³⁶ Ironically, three months later Babbs contradicted himself in his response to a government request for information to be furnished regarding the numbers of Indian labourers planters might require. He stated that although he could not pledge himself that he would not require imported labour within a five-year period, he remained "of the opinion that there is an abundance of kaffir

labour to supply the whole colony".³⁷ That statement was also at odds with his role as chairman of a meeting of planters, held at the Trafalgar Hotel in Durban in November 1855, when Babbs drafted a petition setting forth the labour requirements of planters and calling for the introduction of Chinese and Indian labour.³⁸

As a labour-intensive occupation, sugar cane cultivation required a large number of regular labourers. In the manufacturing season a high proportion of those had to be semi-skilled to operate the milling equipment. In spite of the presence of a large indigenous population, the Native Affairs Commission of 1852-1853 found that a "uniformly insufficient supply of labour" had arisen because of an "over-abundance of land located in the reserves". Consequently, Africans enjoyed a degree of economic independence in that their needs did not compel them to subject themselves to regular employment by colonial planters.³⁹

A feature of the frontier settlement of *Isipingo* in the 1850s was its sense of community. Although Jeffels was at the forefront of cane cultivation, it was a joint venture in the district. Equally deficient in expertise and all previously bean planters, Jeffels, Joyner, the Platts, and Dick King embarked individually but collectively on the sugar enterprise. Together with Babbs and Mack, they attended the first auction of locally grown sugar held in Durban in 1855.⁴⁰ They all had a relationship with Dick King, the original landowner in the district, in that their farms were once part of his extensive estate. Issues concerning education and religion strengthened their bonds. When the first marriage in

the district took place in 1853 (between Sam Rose and Martha Davenport) no church building existed in which the couple could exchange their vows.⁴¹ For a long time, as a report in the *Mercury* noted, the residents of *Isipingo* lamented “their religious and educational destitution”. Despite meetings to obtain subscriptions to construct a building that could be used for divine services on a Sunday and as a school building during the week, no progress was made. Early in 1856 at a meeting on Jeffels’s *Albion* estate, a committee was formed to oversee the erection of a church which was built in due course on half an acre of land donated by Edward Priddle.⁴² Local settlers donated £27-10-0 towards the £55 cost of the building, the balance of which was provided by the Anglican Bishop of Natal, J.W. Colenso. Although the church building of the parish of St James was completed in 1856, it was destroyed by fire in 1869 and rebuilt in 1872.⁴³

By 1856 there were more than 30 settler families in the *Isipingo* district.⁴⁴ With the nearest and only school on the coast for colonists being some 20 kms away in Durban, *Isipingo* parents were anxious to have a school in their district. To that end they petitioned the Colonial Secretary. In a memorial written by Babbs and signed by 17 local settlers, a request was made for an annual grant of £25 for education. In motivating the request Babbs made a telling point: the *Isipingo* district was equally important, if not more important, than other districts that received grants because it was “the most fertile in the colony”. The reply from the Acting-Governor was disappointing. Although he anticipated that education would receive attention

from the Council, he was “unwilling to make any arrangement in advance”.⁴⁵ In June 1859 the Member of the Legislative Council for Durban County, Adolph Coqui, appealed for £50 to be budgeted on the 1860 Supply Bill for a school at *Isipingo*.⁴⁶ In 1861 the Report of the Superintendent of Education noted that *Isipingo* School had 37 registered pupils. It was one of 27 schools in the colony at the time.⁴⁷

Community involvement was also reflected in the participation of local men in the *Isipingo* rifle club which was loosely formed in 1856.⁴⁸ It was common practice to form rifle groups as a basic defence network. Settler communities like the one at *Isipingo* were small and isolated and therefore vulnerable to any unrest that might occur in the neighbouring African reserves. During the period under discussion no such disturbance occurred. However, in January 1861 planters and householders met to discuss the need to form a volunteer corps. In the memorial they drew up addressed to the Acting-Governor, Major Williamson, they also asked for government assistance in the erection of a fort for protection of their cattle “to prevent them being stolen by the natives”.⁴⁹ There was no response from the colonial government as regards the request for a fort. In June, Jeffels, in his capacity as chairman of the meeting of *Isipingo* residents who gathered once again in the school-room to discuss the need for local security, wrote to the Colonial Secretary stating that the volunteer corps would require between 36 and 40 rifles.⁵⁰ At this time resident magistrates of other districts forwarded lists of volunteers to the Colonial Secretary’s office. The largest list, containing 80 names, emanated

from the Tugela Division, Victoria County.⁵¹ Unrest on the Tugela border, termed a “Zulu demonstration”, caused a wave of insecurity to spread through the colony.⁵² In November 1861, the Isipingo Volunteer Corps was formally proclaimed under the captaincy of Dick King. The corps was required to meet fortnightly for a drill and to hold a special parade on the Queen’s birthday.⁵³ In 1862 it had a membership of 29 men.⁵⁴

In other civic-related matters, Babbs was a member for Ward 2 in the Durban County Council until his resignation in September 1855.⁵⁵ Osborn has claimed that Jeffels was a Durban councillor⁵⁶ but that was not the case. Instead, Jeffels was reported as having attended meetings of the county council.⁵⁷ Established in terms of Ordinance 3 of 1854, the purpose of county councils was “to provide better government of the different parts of the district”. It was envisaged that county councils would assist in basic governance such as the provision of roads and in suppressing illegal trade in gunpowder and firearms.⁵⁸ As an incentive to local communities to accelerate the building of roads and bridges, the ordinance committed the government to expend in any county at least double the amount that the county raised in local rates.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the sums of money involved were so small as to make the whole exercise worthless. A case in point was the sum of £13-8-10¼ which the Auditor John Hathorn acknowledged as having been raised for the half year ended June 1855 in Durban County.⁶⁰ Not surprisingly, Lieutenant-Governor John Scott, in his opening address to the first elected council in March 1857, noted that the workings of the

county councils had been haphazard. He recommended that the ordinance be repealed, adding that such councils could work only in situations where the population density was greater.⁶¹

As a community, *Isipingo* was very nearly wiped out in April 1856 when 27 inches of rain fell over a five-day period.⁶² The *Isipingo* flat was described as “one vast sea”.⁶³ In its edition of April 25 the *Mercury* provided a detailed account of how Dick King, with the aid of a raft, rescued Mr M.B. Smart and his family from the rooftop of their home situated on land leased from King. Rising waters had forced the Smarts to spend two days and three nights marooned on the roof of their house. Whole plantations were devastated from Verulam to *Isipingo*, with losses estimated at over £30 000. William Joyner lost a new steam mill that he was still busy assembling. This proved financially crippling for him and for a while he was forced to turn to house painting in order to survive.⁶⁴ Babbs and Jeffels were fortunate that their newly ordered steam mills were en route to Durban when the flooding took place.⁶⁵

By July, Jeffels had once again made history by being the first in Natal to erect and operate a steam-powered mill. The *Mercury* was ecstatic about this progress and described Jeffels’s sugar as “fully equal to the best qualities ever imported”. On a personal note, it paid tribute to him as “the type of a class that forms the pioneers of all successful colonisation”.⁶⁶ For the rest of 1856 and into 1857 H.W. Currie, engineer and machinist, ran an advertisement in the *Mercury* which featured a letter Jeffels had written in praise of the expertise Currie had shown in erecting the first steam-powered



Lamport's sugar mill, Isipingo, c 1878

mill. By August, Babbs also had a steam mill running – the second one in the colony. As the *Mercury* correctly observed, these developments served to hasten the production of sugar and showed what vast strides had been made since Morewood's humble beginning.⁶⁷ Moreover, that progress was *Isipingo*-based. Of 12 sugar mills at work in Natal in 1856, eight were to be found on the *Isipingo* flat.⁶⁸ By the end of 1857 the concentration of sugar planters in the *Isipingo* basin involved 13 families and a total of 476 acres of plantation.⁶⁹

At that time, to the north in Victoria County, J.B. Miller had established

Oaklands alongside Morewood's *Compensation*. Adolph Coqui was part of a group that started *Chaka's Kraal* sugar estate. James Renault Saunders was established on his *Tongaat* estate, Sam Bishop had 110 acres at *Bishopstoke*, and A.B. "Sugar" Kennedy was planting cane on his *Sea Cow Lake* estate, the latter two both on the Mngeni river. South of the Mngeni Henry Milner's sugar estate was established at *Springfield*, and Ralph Clarence was at *Clare* estate. Sugar cultivation was advancing at a rate unequalled by any other enterprise within the colony. Within two years the value of sugar exported rose from

£483 in 1856 to £2 008 in 1857.⁷⁰ From 1858 the sugar belt leapfrogged beyond *Isipingo* into the area known as Lower Umkomanzi Division (later Alexandra County) when Crown Land grants were taken up there and a new community of settlers made sugar cultivation the mainstay of their livelihood.

From 1858 two issues dominated the lives of sugar planters: labour and capital. The tentative steps taken by Morewood and Jeffels earlier in the decade had evolved into a feasible and worthwhile enterprise. Prospects of windfall profits from sugar resulted in an inflation of land prices. This encouraged banks to offer credit at higher rates to would-be sugar planters, thereby increasing indebtedness.⁷¹ Driving the increased dependence on credit was the urge to increase production by modernising equipment. Whereas in 1856 there were only two steam mills, by 1864 the majority of the 58 mills at work were steam-driven.⁷² Despite the logic of central milling, first proposed by Jeffels in 1854, planters plunged headlong into purchasing their own mills and machinery. For Robert Babbs at *Isipingo*, this phase of speculative growth proved his undoing.

From November 1857 he leased an additional 58 acres of land from W.R. Thompson at *Clairmont*. In July 1858 he took out leases on two parcels of land, 177 and 271 acres respectively, at *Isipingo*. Possibly encouraged by the praise he received from a Cape Town newspaper for the quality of his sugar,⁷³ in April 1860 he added an additional 168 acres which he obtained from Dick King. In December 1860 Babbs earned another accolade for his sugar, on that occasion from the

Cape Agricultural Society.⁷⁴ In 1861 he imported a 40-horsepower boiler, the largest in Natal. At that time he employed a workforce of 120 Africans.⁷⁵ When *Mercury* editor John Robinson visited the South Coast in 1861, he remarked that Babbs had the second greatest extent of land under cane in the colony – 360 acres – and the largest mill.⁷⁶ But by December 1861 he was insolvent, having been forced to borrow on his assets at crippling rates of interest. A report in the *Natal Star* noted that Babbs's "plans were too liberal and vast to result in success in times so commercially and in other respects tight as the present".⁷⁷ In May 1862 Babbs and his family relocated to London.⁷⁸ When his *Umlaas Plantation* was subsequently put up for public auction, the inventory of his movable and immovable property illustrated the extent of his acquisitive appetite. The listing in the *Government Gazette* was as follows: various types of machinery, a 30-horsepower steam engine, two batteries of 1 500 gallons each, buildings, boilers, stables, outbuildings, agricultural implements, 99 acres of property at *Wentworth* and 40 to 50 tons of oat forage.⁷⁹ Whatever Babbs's contribution was to the founding of the sugar industry at *Isipingo*, it was dissipated amidst the protracted legal tussles which then ensued amongst his creditors.⁸⁰

In the closing years of the decade labour deficiencies tended to dominate the concerns of *Isipingo* planters. These arose out of what Jeffels termed "the rapidly extended operations of the country", referring to the growth of cane cultivation. At a public meeting in February 1858, he noted that he had had no more than two Africans seeking work in recent months and called

for “steps to be taken immediately to supply ... the deficiency”.⁸¹ In response, the *Mercury*, as the champion of the sugar enterprise, praised Jeffels for his “forcible representation” in outlining the nature of the labour shortage.⁸² Since *Tongaat* sugar planter James Renault Saunders had first broached the possibility of importing indentured Indian labour in 1855, the *Mercury* had enthusiastically endorsed the idea as a practical measure to secure “an adequate supply of reliable and effective labour”.⁸³ However, Lieutenant-Governor John Scott was dilatory in sending the necessary application to the India Board, the India Government and the Land and Emigration Commission, and as a result hopes of some formal progress in that direction did not materialise in 1858.⁸⁴ In the elections held in March 1859 for a new Legislative Council, Adolph Coqui, who was elected for Durban County, which included *Isipingo*, pledged that he would support “any judicious steps to place the supply of labour on a more reliable footing, either by local measures or by immigration”.⁸⁵ In May several petitions requesting the resolution of the labour shortage were submitted to the Legislative Council. They included requests from *Isipingo* and Lower Umkomanzi Division.⁸⁶

A select committee of members of the Legislative Council was appointed to consider ways of resolving the labour shortage. Its findings resulted in the passage of legislation in June 1859 which opened the way for the importation of indentured labour. Although Robert Babbs, as noted above, had no difficulty in hiring African labourers, his experience was evidently not shared by other planters

in the district, for the record shows that seven *Isipingo* planters submitted requests for indentured labour. Sidney and Laurence Platt each requested 15 Indians with Laurence stating his need as being urgent. Jeffels and George Thompson each indented for 12 Indians; Joyner applied for six, W.A. Atkinson for 10 and Edward Priddle requested 20.⁸⁷ Jeffels was prescriptive about his order. He wanted “nine young men and three boys” and stated that he intended to have one Indian as a cook and one as a groom while the rest would be employed as “agricultural labourers”.⁸⁸ But when the Indians assigned to him arrived, they evidently did not measure up to his requirements for he refused to accept them, saying he would prefer “to await the arrival of the next Calcutta ship”.⁸⁹ By May 1861, a survey of the allocation of indentured Indian labour in the *Isipingo* basin showed that 113 were being employed. Dick King and Robert Mack were the largest employers with 36 and 34 respectively.⁹⁰ R.B. Willy, the field cornet for Ward 2 of Durban County, which included *Isipingo*, commented in his survey submitted for the annual *Blue Book* that, ironically, Africans had been more inclined to work since the arrival of the first Indians. Willy ascribed that to the poor maize crop Africans had had in the previous season.⁹¹

From being isolated, virtually deserted and uncultivated as it was 10 years earlier, by 1859 *Isipingo* was described as a “flourishing little township”.⁹⁰ Its produce, *Isipingo* sugars, was advertised as “dry and bright” and available from the stores of H. and W.H. Savory.⁹¹ Besides the establishment of a church and a school, by 1860 *Isipingo* also boasted

a twice-weekly postal service link with Durban.⁹² It was managed by Mr E.J. Pugh, who was appointed postmaster on 30 December 1859 at a salary of £10 per annum.⁹³ He was also the schoolmaster,⁹⁴ while his school-room served as a centre of social interaction until the county hall was officially opened in July 1863.⁹⁵ Meetings of the Temperance Society were held there,⁹⁶ as well as public education lectures such as the one given by Dr J.E. Seaman entitled “The story of chemistry” in January 1862.⁹⁷ The school-room was the venue for a meeting held in July 1861 to discuss the disturbances on the Tugela border and to call for the establishment of a volunteer corps.⁹⁸ Sessions of the branch court were also held in the school-room. The presence of indentured Indians on the local sugar estates began to have a bearing on court business. One such instance occurred early in 1862 when the only business of the court concerned a dispute that had arisen amongst Indians on the estate of Mr R.F. Bingham.⁹⁹

The Indian presence also had an economic impact in that a market for what were called “coolie stores” came into being. A statement of sales at Beningfields’ public auction held in Durban in June 1861 showed that Robert Mack of *Isipingo* had purchased 35 bags of rice, five bags of dhol and a bag each of garlic and black pepper for his indentured labourers.¹⁰⁰ The extent of that business was well illustrated by the £3 351 Beningfields Auctioneers paid to the colonial government following the sale of Indian foodstuffs and spices. The transaction was termed the “largest that [had] ever taken place in this colony,” according to the *Natal Star*.¹⁰¹ The various Indian items – rice, dhol, turmeric,

coriander, tamarinds, ghee, chillies, garlic – attracted considerable customs charges for the importer. For example, the invoiced cost of 210 tons of rice landed by the *Tyburnia* in April 1861 was £1 443-15-0. But after freight, insurance, customs, warehousing and other dues were added, the final cost reached £3 168-12-0.¹⁰²

By 1862 considerable progress had been made in the “cradle of the South African sugar industry”, as Robert Osborn has defined *Isipingo*.¹⁰³ Planters were buoyant in their outlook. Adolphus Noon calculated that he needed an additional 35 indentured labourers before July 1862 in order to meet his labour needs.¹⁰⁴ A report in the *Natal Star* early in 1862 described the crops in the district as “looking unusually well” and promising to “partly repay planters for their losses in recent years”.¹⁰⁵ An international assessment of *Isipingo* sugar by Layton and Hulbert of Mincing Lane in London had rated it highly, describing it as a “handsome specimen”.¹⁰⁶ In retail stores in Natal “*Isipingo* sugars” competed for sale alongside “Tongaat Estate sugars”.¹⁰⁷ However, the original band of pioneers was diminishing and being replaced by newcomers. A sketch map of the area made in 1864 shows several newcomers, namely, [William] Quedstedt, [Thomas] Bailey, [Absolom] Clothier, [J.B.S.] Austin and [James] Fayers.¹⁰⁸

In 1860 William Joyner sold his *Dingwall* estate and took up a Crown Land grant in Lower Umkomanzi Division at Ifafa.¹⁰⁹ He also cancelled his order for six indentured Indians.¹¹⁰ Babbs, as noted, returned to England. M.B. Smart, another of the original planters who arrived in 1853, had prospered, apart from the losses

he incurred in the flood of 1856, becoming the fifth sugar planter in the district to erect a steam mill.¹¹¹ But by 1863 he had vacated the district and disposed of his *Milverton* estate to John Daniel Koch.¹¹² Smart died in April 1864 leaving his wife and seven children.¹¹³ *Milverton* was combined with Babbs's *Umlaas Plantation* and renamed *Reunion Sugar Plantation*. In 1866 it was declared insolvent.¹¹⁴ The *Mercury* of 21 August 1866 advertised the sugar estate of another Isipingo pioneer, Sidney Platt, as being for sale.

Dick King, the first settler to receive title to *Isipingo*,¹¹⁵ had married Clara Noon in December 1852 and they became parents to seven children.¹¹⁶ Although he had a steam mill by 1857 and 110 acres under cane by 1861,¹¹⁷ the mainstay of his survival seemed to derive from the ongoing sales of parcels of land from his extensive property. In 1861 a further 258 acres of King's land was advertised for auction.¹¹⁸ A surviving fragment of correspondence from 1864 shows King as "desirous of clearing all [his] liabilities". In a letter to the general manager of the Natal Land and Colonisation Company, Carl Behrens, he stated that he was "relying on the Company to arrange [his] affairs in accordance with [his] wishes".¹¹⁹ The financial depression of the mid-1860s saw him compelled in 1868 to sell off the *Reunion* part of his estate, some 600 acres in extent.¹²⁰ He was still growing cane at the time of his death in 1871. Two years earlier, Robert Mack, the second settler after Jeffels to plant sugar on the *Isipingo* flat, passed on at the age of 69.¹²¹

An early death at just 50 years of age was the fate of Michael Jeffels, the greatest pioneer of sugar in Isipingo and in Natal after Edmund Morewood.¹²²

One of the better-educated settlers, Jeffels had a Cambridge MA degree. (He had attended Queen's College.¹²³) He showed forward thinking on the issue of central milling whilst his views on the labour question had commanded authority. Described as "an exceedingly nice man" by James Ecroyd, his immediate neighbour,¹²⁴ Jeffels was widely respected. In 1859 he was appointed a Justice of the Peace for Durban County.¹²⁵ Shortly afterwards he was appointed to assist the resident magistrate of the county with cases held in the branch court which took place in the school-room at Isipingo.¹²⁶ His interest in sugar production saw him visit Mauritius in 1860 and he recounted his observations and comparisons with Natal in a series of detailed articles in the *Mercury*.¹²⁷ Unlike Babbs, he was careful with money and once stated that he "owed no man a sixpence".¹²⁸ His last will and testament reflected his solvent state of affairs in that he bequeathed to his wife Mary the sum of £50 per year chargeable to his farm, *Albion*.¹²⁹ He left his 130-acre farm to his son Frederick William together with all his machinery, cattle and implements. The remainder of his property he divided between his son and his sister, Laura E. Munro. In 1899 *Albion* was sold and became part of the Prospecton Sugar Estate.¹³⁰

Jeffels died on 12 February 1862. His passing was ignored by the *Natal Witness* and barely noted by the *Natal Star* and the *Natal Mercury*,¹³¹ which were preoccupied in reporting the news of the death of the Prince Consort, the husband of Queen Victoria, in December 1861. The cause of Jeffels's death was not stated but the fact that his will was drawn

up only months before, on 5 October 1861, may suggest that he was ill. That assumption is corroborated by the fact that correspondence he had been conducting with the Colonial Secretary's office on behalf of the Isipingo community for the formation of a volunteer corps ceased after June 1861. Further exchanges of correspondence on this matter bore the signature of another Isipingo planter, Adolphus Noon. Furthermore, Jeffels's name was not among the 30 signatories of a letter dated 20 September 1861 requesting the government to supply arms and ammunition to the Isipingo Volunteer Corps.¹³² Nonetheless, with the passing of Michael Jeffels in 1862 the initial era of the history of sugar and settlers on the South Coast came to an end.

NOTES

- 1 Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository (PAR), CSO 56, Part 4, p. 9: Register of Deeds, 2 February 1857. Jeffels forfeited 112½ acres on the Lovu near Byrne.
- 2 Robert F. Osborn, *Valiant Harvest: the founding of the South African Sugar Industry*, (Durban, 1964), 275; *Natal Mercury*, 4 February 1858.
- 3 Letters of James Ecroyd – emigrant to Natal 1850-1853, 19 January 1851, 102, MS ECR, Killie Campbell Collection.
- 4 Osborn, *Valiant Harvest* 283.
- 5 PAR, CSO 13, Part 2, No. 136, 12 April 1849.
- 6 Hattersley, *British Settlement of Natal*, (Cambridge, 1950), 134-135. A record of licences issued by the Resident Magistrate of Durban in 1853 showed John Galloway as having a retail shop in West Street. See: PAR, CSO 63, 30 September 1853.
- 7 Hattersley, *British Settlement of Natal*, 227; Slayter, Eric, *Isipingo: village in the sun*, ?Durban, 1961), 29.
- 8 Letters of James Ecroyd, 19 January 1851, 102.
- 9 Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 279.
- 10 Hattersley, *British Settlement of Natal*, 163.
- 11 Slayter, *Isipingo*, 33; 36-37. Tiger Rocks at Isipingo beach received that name after settlers shot a leopard there in the 1850s, mistakenly describing it as a tiger (Slayter, 33).
- 12 Letters of James Ecroyd, 6 February 1851, 132.
- 13 *Natal Mercury*, 23 October 1882.
- 14 Letters of James Ecroyd, 19 January 1851: 108, 132.
- 15 John Robinson, *Natal: a practical guide*, (London, 1862), 42.
- 16 C. Barter, *Dorp and Veld or Six Months in Natal*, (London, 1852), 165-167.
- 17 B.J.T. Leverton, *The Natal Cotton Industry 1845-1875: A study in failure*, (Pretoria, 1963), 25.
- 18 Hattersley, *British Settlement of Natal*, 228-229.
- 19 B.J.T. Leverton, *The Natal Cotton Industry*, 38.
- 20 Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 8.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 40, 44.
- 22 *Ibid.* 41.
- 23 *Ibid.* 275.
- 24 *Ibid.* 275-276.
- 25 Peter Richardson, "The Natal sugar industry in the nineteenth century," in W. Beinart, P. Delius and S. Trapido (eds.), *Putting a plough to the ground*, (Johannesburg, 1986), 133.
- 26 Letter to the Editor, *Natal Mercury*, from Michael Jeffels, 14 October 1858.
- 27 *Natal Mercury*, 28 June, 1854.
- 28 Letter to the Editor, *Natal Mercury*, from Michael Jeffels, 14 October 1858.
- 29 Letter to the Editor, *Natal Mercury*, from Michael Jeffels, 11 November 1858; Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 276.
- 30 *Natal Mercury*, 14 March 1855; Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 276.
- 31 Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 277.
- 32 Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 48. Between the Umhlatuzana river and Isipingo 130 acres was under cane by 1854.
- 33 A.F. Hattersley, *More Annals of Natal*, (London, 1936), 25.
- 34 *Natal Mercury*, 17 January 1855.
- 35 Letter to the Editor, *Natal Mercury*, from Robert Babbs, 31 August 1855.
- 36 Letter to the Editor, *Natal Mercury* from Robert Babbs, 5 October 1855.
- 37 PAR, CSO 56, Part 3, 19 January 1856.
- 38 *Natal Star*, 14 November 1855.

- 39 C. Ballard, *John Dunn: the white chief of Zululand*, (Johannesburg, 1985), 38-39. The number of Zulus living in Natal during the 1850s was estimated at between 90 000 and 100 000. See: M. Palmer, *The History of Indians in Natal*, (Cape Town, 1957), 10.
- 40 *Natal Mercury*, 23 June 1855.
- 41 Slayter, *Isipingo*, 35.
- 42 *Natal Mercury*, 14 March 1856.
- 43 Revd P.E. Goldie, *Parish of Isipingo – Centenary Record 1856-1956*, (Isipingo, 1956), 5; Slayter, *Isipingo*, 52; 62.
- 44 This was the figure the Revd William Clifford Holden noted in his *History of the Colony of Natal*, (London, 1854) 251.
- 45 PAR, CSO 85, 27 March 1856; 21 April 1856.
- 46 Natal Legislative Council, *Votes and Proceedings*, Vol. IV, 1859, 146.
- 47 PAR, CSO 130, No.356, 11 March 1861.
- 48 Slayter, *Isipingo*, 42.
- 49 *Natal Star*, 26 January 1861; PAR, CSO 129, No. 260, 15 February 1861.
- 50 PAR, CSO 135, No. 1080, 26 June 1861.
- 51 PAR, CSO 131, No. 596, 1 May 1861; 2 May 1861; 27 April 1861.
- 52 *Natal Mercury*, 23 July 1861.
- 53 *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. 13, No. 681, 19 November 1861; *Natal Government Notice* No. 139, 1861.
- 54 *Natal Blue Book*, 1862, G7.
- 55 *Natal Mercury*, 12 October 1855.
- 56 Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 277.
- 57 *Natal Mercury*, 7 December 1855.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 8 February 1854.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 1 February 1854.
- 60 PAR, CSO 78, No. 143, 10 July 1855.
- 61 Natal Legislative Council, *Votes and Proceedings*, Vol. 1, 1857, p. 7.
- 62 *Natal Mercury*, 18 April 1856.
- 63 Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 54.
- 64 Anthony Hocking, *Renishaw: The Story of the Crookes Brothers*, (Bethulie, 1992), 40; Slayter, *Isipingo*, 43.
- 65 PAR, CSO 85, No. 328, 31 March 1856; *Natal Mercury*, 18 April 1856.
- 66 *Natal Mercury*, 25 July 1856. The *Natal Star* of 30 July 1856 described Jeffels' sugar as being of a "very superior quality for colour and dryness."
- 67 *Natal Mercury*, 8 August 1856.
- 68 Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 129.
- 69 *Natal Mercury*, 4 February 1858.
- 70 Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 57-58.
- 71 Peter Richardson, "The Natal sugar industry in the nineteenth century," in Beinart, Delius and Trapido (eds.), *Putting a Plough to the Ground*, 136.
- 72 *Ibid.* 138.
- 73 *The Cape Monitor*; quoted in the *Natal Mercury*, 10 December 1858.
- 74 *Natal Star*, 15 December 1860.
- 75 S. O'Byrne Spencer, *British Settlers in Natal: A Biographical Register*, Vol. 2, (Pietermaritzburg, 1983), 1-2.
- 76 *Natal Mercury*, 11 April 1861.
- 77 *Natal Star*: 11 January 1862.
- 78 Spencer, *British Settlers in Natal*, Vol. 2, 2.
- 79 *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XIV, No. 724, 16 September 1862.
- 80 Statement by Carl Behrens, KCM MS Sou, 1799.
- 81 *Natal Mercury*, 4 February 1858. Referring to African labour, James Ecroyd stated that "the habits of the kaffirs are generally indolent". See: Letters of James Ecroyd, MS ECR, Killie Campbell Collection, 183.
- 82 *Natal Mercury*, 11 February 1858.
- 83 *Ibid.*, 2 May 1855.
- 84 PAR, GH 32, Natal No. 1, Lytton to Scott, 25 June 1858.
- 85 *Natal Mercury*, 20 January 1859
- 86 Natal Parliamentary Papers, Vol. 236, 1859.
- 87 PAR, CSO 119, No. 38, 8 January 1860; No 68, 16 January; No. 69, 16 January; No. 83, 20 January; No. 121, 28 January; No. 143, 13 March 1860. CSO 120, 24 March 1860. These applications were lodged in terms of Government Notice No. 1 of 1860 which invited "persons desirous of obtaining coolies" to submit formal requests.
- 88 PAR, CSO 119, No. 69, 9 March 1860.
- 89 *Ibid.*, CSO 128, No. 104, 16 February 1861.
- 90 P.E. Goldie, *Parish of Isipingo*, 7.
- 91 *Natal Star*, 26 March 1859; 23 and 30 April 1859.
- 92 *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol.12, No. 581, 3 January 1860
- 93 *Natal Blue Book*, 1871, M.22.
- 94 *Ibid.*, 1862, T.2.
- 95 *Natal Mercury*, 4 August 1863.
- 96 *Ibid.*, 7 March 1861
- 97 *Natal Star*, 18 January 1862.
- 98 *Natal Mercury*, 23 July 1861.
- 99 *Natal Star*, 22 February 1862.
- 100 PAR, CSO 133, No. 842, 13 June 1861. Statement from Coolie Immigration Agent, Edmund Tatham.

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- 101 *Natal Star*, 8 June 1861.
102 PAR, CSO 131, 9 April 1861.
103 Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 41.
104 PAR, CSO 139, No. 1664, 13 November 1861.
105 *Natal Star*, 11 January 1862.
106 Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 66.
107 See advertisements in *Natal Mercury*, 8 March 1860.
108 Rough Sketch of Isipingo Estate, 1864, Killie Campbell Collection, KCA224.
109 Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 282.
110 PAR, CSO 128, No. 104, 16 February 1861.
111 *Natal Mercury*, 8 December 1859.
112 Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 284.
113 *Natal Mercury*, 12 April 1864.
114 Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 284; *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XVIII, No. 997, 13 March 1866.
115 H.F. Fynn had owned it in the 1820s and early 1830s.
116 Slayter, *Isipingo*, 35.
117 Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 283.
118 *Natal Star*, 25 May 1861.
119 Letter to Carl Behrens, 26 October 1864. KCM 9540.
120 *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XX, No. 1108, 24 March 1868.
121 *Natal Mercury*, 1 July 1869.
122 This compliment was paid to him by the *Natal Mercury* in its edition of 30 September 1858.
123 *Natal Mercury*, 18 February 1862.
124 Letters of James Ecroyd, MS ECR, Killie Campbell Collection, 102.
125 Government Notice No. 91, 31 October 1859.
126 Government Notice No. 100, 12 November 1859.
127 Ibid.
128 Letter to the Editor, *Natal Mercury*; from M. Jeffels, 11 November 1858.
129 PAR, AGO 1/8/5, No. 145A, 5 October 1861.
130 Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 277.
131 Ibid.
132 PAR, CSO 137, No. 445, 20 September 1861; PAR, CSO 138 No. 1635, 19 November 1861.