

Notes and Queries

THE AURORA AUSTRALIS (OR THE “SOUTHERN LIGHTS”) IN KWAZULU-NATAL (1855–2011)

by P.G. Alcock

THE AURORA BOREALIS or the Northern (Polar) Lights are a well-known phenomenon at high latitudes in the northern hemisphere.¹ The southern hemisphere equivalent is the Aurora Australis or the Southern (Polar) Lights. An aurora is visible as a luminous glow in the upper atmosphere. The two essential requirements for observing aurorae at night are clear skies and long periods of darkness. Light pollution in urban areas as well as twilight and bright moonlight obscures or prevents the sighting of such events. An aurora can also occur during the hours of daylight, but is then not visible.

Aurorae appear as “shifting curtains” or other fixed or moving patterns of white and coloured lights in the sky. Aurorae occur mainly at high latitudes, but can very occasionally be seen at lower latitudes. Aurorae are usually

observed at lesser latitudes during a geomagnetic storm.¹ Aurorae visible closer to the equator (away from the poles) are powerful, high-energy events which would otherwise not be seen at such latitudes.² Aurorae are most frequently evident at certain times during the 11-year solar cycle which correspond with the period of maximum particle emissions from the sun.¹ Sunspots and solar storm activity tends to peak approximately every 11 years, although varying from 7.5–16 years. These events result in intense explosions of gas, termed solar flares, which are so powerful that they split the atoms of gas into positively and negatively charged particles (protons and electrons respectively). Huge volumes of the charged particles, propelled by the solar blasts, shoot outwards in all directions. These

especially large “gusts” of solar wind (with more particles at higher energies than the “average” solar wind) can reach the earth in about two days.¹ Aurorae are seen mainly in the higher latitudes because the magnetic field of the earth converges at the north and south magnetic poles.² The solar particles follow the orientation of the magnetic field, and are thus deflected towards the two magnetic poles. Aurorae form when the solar particles collide with gases in the earth’s upper atmosphere (the ionosphere), resulting in bursts of visible light.³ The colour (wavelength) of this emitted light is determined by the type of gaseous atom or molecule and the amount of energy very briefly transferred to the now “excited” or impacted atom or molecule.⁴ This energy is released, as indicated, in the form of light. The most common auroral colours are green, red, blue and white (apparently colourless).

The incidence of aurorae in the southern hemisphere (excluding Antarctica) may perhaps be slightly more frequent than the data suggest.² The reason is that there is a relatively small landmass in the southern hemisphere (again excluding Antarctica) in comparison with the northern hemisphere, with much of the southern hemisphere consisting of ocean. A complicating factor in South Africa is that aurorae, according to the very limited information available, may occur at various times of the night, including the early hours, when most people are asleep.

Some historical data on the rare instances of aurorae in South Africa as a whole were published in 2010.⁵ Only a few events were recorded in KwaZulu-Natal, in particular, in the years 1855–2011. Possibly the first reported sighting was that of a newspaper correspondent

(J.S.) of Durban, who stated that he had seen an aurora at about 21:30 on 29 April 1855, and again in the evening on 17 September that year.⁶ J.S. saw a further aurora at 01:00 on 30 March 1856, and continued his observations until after 03:30. He witnessed an aurora once or twice shortly thereafter, with another (unnamed) observer seeing an aurora at approximately 02:00 on 4 April 1856. An aurora of “unusual splendour” was seen at the Royal Observatory in Cape Town and in many parts of the Cape Colony on the night of 4–5 February 1872^{7,8} which considerably alarmed the African population. The aurora was likewise observed in Bloemfontein,^{7,8} Natal,⁸ Mozambique,⁹ Mauritius,^{8,10} Réunion^{8,11} and Australia.⁸ An eye witness in Mauritius described the aurora as dark red in colour.¹⁰ A later aurora occurred on 25 September 1909, which was seen in the Cape and in Bloemfontein.¹² It is probable that the aurora was also seen in Natal, at least along the northern parts of the Drakensberg, and in adjacent areas to the west. A more recent aurora was on 13 March 1989. This event was observed in Durban,¹³ mid-KwaZulu-Natal,^{2,14} around Johannesburg,^{2,14} and in southern Namibia.^{2,14} A subsequent aurora was seen in Durban and the Western Cape on 29 October 2003.^{2,14} The advent of manned spaceflight and a permanent presence in space has resulted in the sighting of aurorae which would not necessarily always be seen at ground level. One example was evidently in 2011 when a green-coloured aurora was observed over South Africa from space.¹⁵ It is unclear whether this event included KwaZulu-Natal, since no other information was provided. Attempts to obtain further

details in South Africa and from NASA were not successful.

Solar activity at present (2012–13) is at a maximum¹⁶ and this will last for about four or five years. More aurorae will therefore be visible in places further away from the poles than is the case during solar minimum years.

NOTES

- 1 Dennis, J. *It's Raining Frogs and Fishes: Four Seasons of Natural Phenomena and Oddities of the Sky* (New York, HarperPerennial, 1993) pp. 223–7.
- 2 Personal communication: 15 November 2008. D. Laney, Senior Astronomer, South African Astronomical Observatory, Cape Town.
- 3 Moore, W.G. *A Dictionary of Geography* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975) pp. 19–20.
- 4 <http://www.spaceacademy.net.au/env/terra/aurora/aurora.htm>, accessed on 10 June 2013. This Australian website is a useful, general guide to aurorae. It should be explained that the solar wind constantly strikes the earth's atmosphere. The intensity of the wind is variable, however, as indicated in the text. The atmosphere of the earth is homogenous up to an altitude of about 100 km, and consists of approximately 80% nitrogen in the form of molecules (two atoms of nitrogen joined together) and 20% oxygen also in the form of molecules (likewise two atoms of oxygen joined together). Oxygen molecules begin to dissociate or separate at altitudes above 100 km, resulting in increasing concentrations of individual atoms of oxygen. Significant numbers of hydrogen atoms (derived from the sun and not the lower layers of the earth's atmosphere) are evident at altitudes in excess of about 500 km. Most aurorae form at altitudes ranging from around 100–300 km, although the solar particles may sometimes have sufficient energy to penetrate further down into the atmosphere to a height of about 70 km. At the opposite extreme are very high altitude aurorae which can form up to approximately 600 km above the surface of the earth (see below). Green is the colour most evident at and near the poles, with these aurorae usually occurring at altitudes of 100–250 km, and involving the excitation of oxygen atoms. Red-coloured aurorae are less common, form at an altitude of some 200–500 km, and are again due to the excitation of oxygen atoms (although occurring at a different wavelength). These aurorae are those often seen in the mid-latitudes, such as South Africa. The rare type of high altitude red aurora apparent at around 600 km is caused by the excitation of hydrogen atoms. Blue aurorae are seen when solar particles penetrate down to altitudes below 100 km, and involve nitrogen molecules emitting light at two slightly different wavelengths. A yellow colour which is occasionally observed in bright aurorae is the result of a combination of red and green auroral emissions. Most faint aurorae appear as a white colour. This effect is due to the inability of the human eye to differentiate colours in conditions of low light intensity. Colour can nevertheless be determined in photographs of such faint events.
- 5 Alcock, P.G. *Rainbows in the Mist: Indigenous Weather Knowledge, Beliefs and Folklore in South Africa* (Pretoria, South African Weather Service, 2010) pp. 375–6. A further published report of an aurora in South Africa briefly described an event seen near Vryburg at 22:55 on 17 April 1943 (Fysh, M.N. "A striking aurora", *Monthly Notes of the Astronomical Society of South Africa*, 2, April 1943, pp. 33–4). The horizon at the time of observation consisted of a soft white light, above which was a soft blue light which became darker and brighter with increasing elevation towards the zenith (i.e. a point directly overhead). The sky, viewed against this blue background, was covered with regular stippling or mottling, which had a "lovely sunset rose pink" colour. All colouring faded after a while, although some colourless mottling was still evident overhead. Two pyramid-like shafts of soft white light appeared from the south-west and south-east during the auroral display and merged south of the zenith. The white light had no clear edge and was very broad.
- 6 *Natal Mercury and Advertiser*, 11 April 1856. The newspaper letter was dated 4 April 1855, which is clearly a typographical error. The first-sighted source of the information was Barnes, P. "The great flood of 1856", *Natalia*, 14, 1984, pp. 33–41.
- 7 Anonymous. "Aurora Australis", *South African Journal of Science*, 7, 1910, p. 121.
- 8 Stewart, C. "Aurora Australis in low latitudes", *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society*, 36 (156), 1910, pp. 384–6.
- 9 Erskine, St. V. "Journey to Umzila's, South-East Africa, in 1871–1872", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 45, 1875, pp. 45–128.

- 10 Meldrum, J. "Aurora Australis", *Nature*, 14 March 1872, pp. 392–3.
- 11 Vinson, A. "Note sur l'Aurore polaire de la nuit du 4 au 5 février. 1872 et sur phénomènes qui l'ont suivie à l'île de la Réunion", *Compte Rendu Hebdomadaire des Séances de l'Académie des Sciences*, 74, 1872, pp. 721–2 and 75, 1872, pp. 36–8.
- 12 Anonymous. "The Aurora Australis in low latitudes", *South African Journal of Science*, 6, 1909, pp. 68–9.
- 13 Personal communication: 10 June 2013. M. Kosch, Associate Dean of Research, University of Lancaster, Lancaster, United Kingdom.
- 14 Personal communication: 4 April 2007. C. Turk, an amateur astronomer, member of the Astronomical Society of Southern Africa, and a writer on the southern skies. The informant lives in Cape Town.
- 15 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cC5IJ4MMAeM>, accessed on 5 June 2013. The 0.13 s video clip entitled: "South Africa and Aurora Australis" was loaded on the Internet (YouTube) on 13 October 2011.
- 16 <http://www.gi.alaska.edu/AuroraForecast/TravelersGuide>, accessed on 8 June 2013. The website is that of the Geophysical Institute of the University of Alaska in Fairbanks.

I thank Professor S. Maharaj for confirming the scientific details of aurorae as explained in this paper. Any errors, however, are the author's responsibility.

MANDELA AND MARITZBURG: "STRONG ASSOCIATIONS"

by Robert F. Haswell

UPON RECEIVING the Freedom of Pietermaritzburg, on 25 April 1997, President Nelson Mandela said: "For me personally the city has strong associations that make this a moving occasion." But just what are these strong associations?

The purpose of this article, therefore, is to identify, and document, other important Mandela sites in Pietermaritzburg and to propose that, together with the Mandela Capture Site Museum, they should form a Mandela Trail.

In March, 1961, Mandela delivered the keynote speech at the All-In-Africa Conference, held in the Plessislaer Arya Samaj Hall, which is now part of the Zibukezulu School in Imbali. More than 1 400 delegates from all over South Africa attended, and despite the fact that Mandela spoke after midnight, his speech and the conference were well reported in *Drum Magazine* (May 1961), *The Natal Witness*, and even in the *New York Times* (27 March, 1961).

Mandela made a clarion call – which was unheeded for some 30 years – for a "non-racial, democratic constitution", to be drafted at a national convention of elected representatives of all adult men and women on an equal basis, irrespective of race, colour or creed. If the government ignored this demand, the conference resolved that country-wide stay-at-home demonstrations would be held. It was to be his last public speech until 1990, as he went underground to avoid arrest.

In July 1961, *Drum* published Mandela's assessment of the campaign, which closed with the following historic and prophetic statement: "As for myself I have made my decision. I am not quitting South Africa. This is my country and my homeland. The freedom movement is my life, and I shall strive side by side with the brave sons and daughters of Africa until the end of my days."

Mandela's ability to avoid arrest, by moving around in disguise, resulted

in his being dubbed “The Black Pimpernel”. He, and Walter Sisulu, visited Pietermaritzburg often, staying over in the home of Dr “Chota” and Mrs Rabia Motala at 433 Boom Street.

One of Mandela’s favourite stories is of the time he came to the house wearing overalls and a cap. Even Mrs Motala did not recognise him, and asked what he wanted. He asked to see Dr Motala, and when told that the doctor was not at home, Mandela said firmly, “I’ll wait.” After several minutes, a suspicious Mrs Motala told him that the doctor was at his surgery, and she didn’t know when he would come home. Undeterred Mandela again replied, “I’ll wait.” A now worried Mrs Motala phoned her husband and told him that a stranger was waiting for him. Wisely, Dr Motala entered the house from the back door, and had to look through the front window several times before recognising Mandela. The discipline and determination shown by Mandela on this occasion

was to stand him in good stead for his long imprisonment.

I was privileged to arrange a one-day programme of events for Mandela in the run-up to our 1994 elections, and had asked him if he would be able to identify where he was arrested, north of Howick, on 5 August 1962. He had no hesitation in describing the incident and location in detail, and so, followed by a media entourage, and an officious traffic officer, we drove slowly along the road. Mandela soon identified the site, but was clearly overcome by the memory, and asked for a few minutes to compose himself, before telling the story, over the traffic officer’s car microphone, of his arrest. A filmed recording can be seen and listened to at the Capture Site Museum.

After his arrest Mandela was driven to Pietermaritzburg. In his *Long Walk to Freedom* autobiography, Mandela writes that he spent the night in jail, and that Fatima Meer brought some food to



Mandela photographed on the City Hall balcony during his 1990 visit to Pietermaritzburg with (from left) Keith Nicol (town clerk), Pat Rainier (mayor) and Rob Haswell



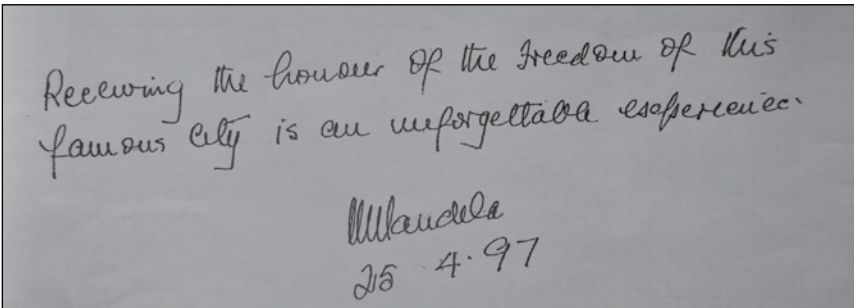
Nelson Mandela signs the visitors' book in Pietermaritzburg, watched by Mayor Omar Latiff and Deputy Mayor Rob Haswell

him there. He was taken to Magistrate J. Buys's office, in the old Magistrate's Court Building in Commercial (now Chief Albert Luthuli) Road, and was remanded for trial in Johannesburg. Fortunately, both the old prison, now a museum, and magistrates's building have recently been restored, and are therefore well worth visiting.

Like everyone else, Pietermaritzburg had to wait until 1990 to see Mandela again. He paid a courtesy visit to Mayor Pat Rainier in the City Hall on 7 October 1990, before addressing a rally at Wadley Stadium in Georgetown. On 6

June 1993 he attended the unveiling, by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, of the Gandhi statue in the city's main street and, in addition, Mandela addressed numerous forums in both the central and northern areas of Pietermaritzburg prior to the 1994 elections.

After the election, Mandela addressed a stormy regional conference of the ANC, held in the Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre, during which he tried unsuccessfully to persuade Harry Gwala to relinquish his chairmanship of the Midlands, which automatically accorded him membership of the ANC's



Mandela's comment in the visitors' book

National Executive Committee, in preference to his elected seat on the National Executive Committee of the ANC. Mandela pointed out that, in terms of the ANC's constitution, one could not sit on the National Executive Committee in two capacities. He also argued that he wanted and needed Gwala to play a larger national, rather than regional, role. The Lion of the Midlands replied sternly, that he had been elected as the regional chairperson by the members, and it was they who should decide. He therefore asked those present if they wanted him to resign. A resounding no was the answer from the packed hall and, to his credit, a stoical Mandela accepted the decision.

Much, perhaps too much, has been made of how often Mandela and Gwala disagreed, both on and off Robben island. Yet, as the main speaker at Gwala's funeral, in July 1995 at the Jan Smuts (now appropriately the Harry Gwala) Stadium, Mandela acknowledged that their interaction had always enriched the debate and outcome, and, graciously said that "perhaps we should have listened more to him".

On 25 April 1997 Pietermaritzburg came to a standstill when President Nelson Mandela was awarded the Freedom of the City in the City Hall and, thereafter, on behalf of the city, he bestowed posthumous Freedom of the City on Mahatma Gandhi at the railway station where Gandhi had been evicted from a train on 7 June 1893.

In his speech Mayor Omar Latiff stated: "We think it is entirely appropriate that here, where your freedom came temporarily to an end, your freedom should be amplified by this award. We are deeply honoured and immensely proud, that from this day forth you are NELSON ROLIHLAHLA

MANDELA, FREEMAN OF PIETERMARITZBURG-MSUNDUZI."

Mandela responded in his customary self-deprecating manner: "I accept the Freedom you bestow on me with humility, knowing that through me, you are honouring the whole South African nation. It is a tribute to their achievement in building democracy, peace and unity upon the ashes of apartheid." When invited by Mayor Latiff to sign the Mayor's Visitors Book, Mandela wrote: "Receiving the honour of the Freedom of this famous city is an unforgettable experience."

For the people of the city, especially the schoolchildren who lined the streets in their thousands, it was a truly memorable, and unforgettable, day. "When I see him I feel strong and free which is a great thing," wrote Happy Makhathini, while Surina Guder recorded: "As President Mandela drove past, my flag fell so I went to pick it up and he turned around, looked straight into my eyes and waved. I felt a chill of excitement go through me, while everyone around screamed. This feeling was so big I can't describe it." For Sarah Haswell, "That day will go down in history books and I can say that I was part of it. It is an experience I shall never forget and I will certainly tell it to my children."

Clearly then, even this somewhat cursory review reveals that there are indeed many sites in Pietermaritzburg which resonate his words and recall his selfless service and sacrifice, and there are few cities which have such a rich Mandela legacy. Surely it is high time these sites are marketed as an educational and tourism product.

PRIMARY REFERENCE

Pietermaritzburg-Msunduzi Transitional Local Council: Special Meeting For The Purpose of Conferring Civic Honours, 25 April 1997.

Dr Peter Alcock has brought to the attention of the Editor two snippets that he came across in archived copies of The Natal Witness. Moray Comrie investigated.

SWEETWATERS IRON MINE

IN A SHORT article in the *Natal Witness* of 12 July 1967, former *Natalia* editor Dr John Clark noted the existence of a defunct ironworks at Sweetwaters above Pietermaritzburg. Some 70 years earlier, which would have been in the late 1890s, one Samuel Green had discovered deposits of iron ore and traces of copper in a disused quarry on his farm Mooivlakte in what is now Sweetwaters. Dr Clark reported that through the agency of Mrs D. N. E. Kain, the wife of long-serving *Witness* newspaperman Derek Kain, he was introduced to Green's daughter (identified only as "Miss Green") and taken to the site.

By 1967 the ironworks had given way to a factory that made small engineering parts and water had filled the old quarry, but some of the adits of Green's mining operation were still visible and the factory owner, Mr Crawford-Marks, remembered the smeltery. In the course of setting up his factory he had come across a square brick structure with a metal screen upon it, beneath which was a deposit of ash and clinker. He had also dug up an oval iron bar and presented it to the Natal Museum. Perhaps the specimen is still there.

Apparently Green had started with a small furnace, but later built one large enough to produce 10 tons of pig iron, and had also made his own coke and refractory bricks. In time, however, iron manufacture declined through the lack of suitable flux, and the enterprise folded. This would not have surprised Miss Green, who remarked rather acidly that her father, who contributed

"learned articles" to various journals, should have been a writer but "wasted his time on prospecting".

Dr Clark points out that while this might have been the first attempt to process iron by European methods, black people in the region had been working the metal for generations (more recent research indicates that iron age settlements in KwaZulu-Natal date back to about AD 300). He notes also that R.G. Topham had recently found a lump of half-smelted ore on his Pentrich Grange farm.

Fire at the fort

In an almost breathless column on Monday 16 June 1902, *The Natal Witness* reported on the fire that had broken out at Fort Napier the night before. The flames were first noticed by the guards on duty at about 9 pm, by which time they had taken good hold. The blaze was in a corrugated iron store shed at a railway siding, and two goods trucks were also on fire, one loaded with hay and the other with soldiers' kitbags. The Second Anglo-Boer War having only recently ended, numbers of troops were doubtless in transit through Pietermaritzburg's military camp.

It seems from the somewhat confused newspaper report that the soldiery managed to uncouple the truck carrying kit, move it away, extinguish the flames, and salvage much of its load, but the hay truck was too close to the centre of the blaze and burning too fiercely. Efforts to douse the flames with bucketfuls of water were frustrated by the lack of a

convenient source, and the town Fire Brigade was summoned.

According to the *Witness* reporter, the response was commendably, even miraculously, swift. The call to the Fire Station was made at 9:30. By 9:31 the “steamer” was galloping forth. Four minutes later it was at the scene of the fire and cleared for action. One wonders whether today’s firefighters could possibly do better. No doubt, however, the firemen had been anticipating the call. The glow of the fire in the night sky above the looming mass of the brewery could be seen from the town, even from the Market Square, and the night shift of “ricksha boys” (*sic*) was already ferrying interested townsfolk to the scene.

Hastily as the man from the paper must have compiled his account, he had time to wax lyrical about this part of the action: “It was a fine sight – the flying fire engine, manned by a full complement of stalwart men in brazen helmets, and the lurid glow from the boiler furnace falling upon the resolute faces of the men and glinting upon the bright metal of their uniforms ...”

Unfortunately, however, the Fire Brigade encountered the same difficulty

as the soldiers had met – not enough water. The nearest hydrant, in the road below the shed, emitted only a feeble flow. Despite the combined efforts of the town Fire Brigade, the Natal Government Railways firemen, the troops and the police (together, no doubt, with eager volunteers from amongst the onlookers), attempts to save the burning shed were abandoned and attention turned to preventing the spread of the flames to the adjacent, brick-built, buildings.

In this they were successful. By morning the corrugated iron shed was razed to the ground, but the remaining stores had been saved. The *Witness* man described this in terms of yardage: 50 yards of stores destroyed, but 100 yards saved. And he noted that among the charred remains of soldiers’ kit were such touchingly personal items as photographs.

The source of the fire had not been traced at the time that the paper went out, but men had been working in the shed that day and perhaps one of them had been careless. Two days later the *Witness* reported that the damage had been estimated at £3 000.

THE PIETERMARITZBURG READING CIRCLE: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR RESEARCH?

Sally Bamber writes

IF DETAILED documentation is a pre-requisite for scholarly research, then surely the Reading Circle is a ripe fruit waiting to be plucked by a student of history.

The Reading Circle had its first meeting on Thursday 23 September

1926 at *Parkside* in Pietermaritzburg and, apart from three years during the Second World War, has met monthly since then. The first committee members were Miss Margaret Murchie, headmistress of Longmarket Street School (and also a member of the

Theosophical Society), Miss Webb-Johnson, headmistress of Girls' Collegiate School, Mrs S.W. Pape, Mrs Lawlor and Mrs Owen Walters. Attendance registers have been kept as well as membership lists and financial statements. (The subscription was two shillings and six pence per annum.) Members were required to wear hats and gloves until comparatively recently! Detailed minutes of each meeting still exist, in the Killie Campbell Collection as well as the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, and, besides reflecting the events and issues of the meetings, are a revealing commentary on Pietermaritzburg society.

Matters for discussion at the time are telling. In 1932 the programme for just one meeting included three-minute papers on:

- Good and bad points on the present system of voting
- Vryheid and Utrecht
- Position of natives in Natal
- Foreign policies of Great Britain and USA
- Calendar reform, and
- The necessity of constructive thought.

Although the structure of the meetings has evolved somewhat over time, the purpose of lively discussion of matters of import still remains. Whereas in earlier times meetings included music appreciation and performance, as well as talks on contemporary matters, today the Circle's focus is almost exclusively on literature – and non-fiction at that. At each meeting

a member is delegated to read and “present” a book to the members. The titles are selected by a special committee from recommendations by the members.

Students would find it enlightening to analyse the titles that have been spotlighted over the years, and perhaps, also, some that that might have been, but were not. Notable omissions are always revealing. Some recent titles include *Princess Masako: Prisoner of the Chrysanthemum Throne* by Ben Hills, *The Ninth: Beethoven and the World in 1824* by Harvey Sachs, *Inside the Kingdom: Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists, and the Struggle for Saudi Arabia* by Robert Lacey and *Thank-you, Judge Mostert* by Carmel Rickard.

In addition, the list of members might prove interesting and their achievements in other spheres revealing. Other contemporaneous societies such as the Natal Society itself might well make an enlightening parallel. Not only is the documentation impeccable, but there still remain a number of elderly members who recall the foibles and behaviour of earlier members. Oral historians might well want to avail themselves of this opportunity while it still exists.

Of course, the context of the Reading Circle will determine the project's ultimate worth. As a group steeped in colonialism, and with exclusively white membership, the contemporary historian may well find its present existence anachronistic and revealing of “isms” beyond the conscious scope of its membership.

GERMAN POWS REBURIED

Stephen Coan writes

A REPORT IN the *Natal Witness* of 5 August 1965 headlined “2 German POW’s re-buried” details the reinterment of the remains of two German prisoners of war in the military section of the Mountain Rise Cemetery, and thus provides a footnote to my earlier *Natalia* article, “A war crime in Pietermaritzburg”, *Natalia* 40, December 2010, pp. 77–84.

In October 1946 two German POWs were sentenced in the Pietermaritzburg court to five years’ hard labour for murdering a fellow prisoner, Helmuth Haensel, at the Durban Road POW Camp in June 1942. The two men and their victim were among the 6 800 German POWs who passed through South Africa during World War II and were held in transit camps prior to being sent on to Canada. Haensel was murdered because it was thought he was a British spy and would reveal the whereabouts of two German officers who had hidden in the camp prior to an escape attempt. His murder was disguised as suicide and the authorities accepted this explanation of his death until 1945, when an eyewitness to Haensel’s “execution” following a kangaroo court turned informant.

Haensel was subsequently buried in Mountain Rise cemetery. The other German POW buried there was Carl Xavier, who died of infective endocarditis in November 1942.

In the 1965 *Natal Witness* report of the reinterment, the anonymous reporter spells the names of these two men

incorrectly as “Private H.C. Henkel” and “Corporal Xaver”. But why the need for reburial? A sub-heading in the article provides the answer to that question: “Found in non-White area”. According to the short report the “dilapidated and partly-obscurd graves of the two men were recently spotted in the non-European section of the cemetery, and the matter was reported to Major A. Cilliers, secretary of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission”.

“Mr Cilliers, together with leading ex-servicemen in Pietermaritzburg, decided to arrange for a reburial of the bodies.”

“Among the dignitaries present at the solemn ceremony” that took place on August 4, “were the consul for the German Federal Republic in Durban, Mr A. von Falkenhausen, and the Mayor of Pietermaritzburg, Col H.C. Franklin”.

In the photograph accompanying the article Franklin is to be seen scattering flower petals on the graves of the two German POWs.

At the risk of stating the obvious, it should be added that the reburial is unlikely to have taken place but for the dictates of apartheid extending to the resting places of the dead.

Acknowledgment is due to Peter Alcock for spotting this article in the Natal Witness while researching an unrelated topic.

THREE OLD AGE HOMES IN PIETERMARITZBURG

by *P.G. Alcock*

A BRIEF HISTORY is provided of the Emma Barter Home in Retief Street, the Victoria Memorial Home (also in Retief Street) and the Allison Homes Trust complex in the vicinity of these two premises, which are all situated in the older parts of Pietermaritzburg. Emphasis has been placed on the early years of the three old age homes. All the homes are registered non-profit organisations.

Both the Emma Barter Home and the Victoria Memorial Home had humble beginnings. Emma Henrietta Arabella Barter née Butler (1827–1888) was born in Ireland and came to Natal in May 1855 as one of Bishop Colenso’s missionary party. The plan was that she would be a “lady visitor” at the Anglican Cathedral in Pietermaritzburg. She married Charles Barter in February 1856 and lived for 20 years at Karkloof near Howick. After a brief interlude in Verulam in the late 1870s, the Barters moved to Pietermaritzburg in 1880 when Charles was appointed resident magistrate. Emma Barter had a strong social conscience and became active in the Pietermaritzburg Benevolent Society. One of her special interests was destitute children. Her name lives on, however, because of her involvement in the building of almshouses in Pietermaritzburg. She called a meeting to discuss the subject with a committee being elected to assist her to achieve this objective. Its first meeting was held on 13 April 1882 and was chaired by Sir Theophilus Shepstone. Both Charles Barter and his brother George served on the committee in an important capacity for a time.

The next step in the establishment of almshouses was the donation by the Corporation of Pietermaritzburg to the mayor and councillors of the city of a rectangular block of land bordering the current Burger, Retief, Prince Alfred and Collier streets (Deed of Transfer No. 682 of 1883). The land was to be held in trust as a site for the purpose of erecting almshouses. The first building to be constructed soon after the grant of land was registered was the Emma Barter Almshouses (currently the Emma Barter Home). The foundation stone was laid on 29 August 1883 by the Mayoress, Mrs Samuel Williams. A regimental band was in attendance on the day along with several leading citizens of Pietermaritzburg. The first resident (a woman) moved in during December 1883.

It was apparently not the intention that the almshouses should be reserved exclusively for women, although all the applicants in the early years were women. A man applied in 1896 but was rejected on the grounds that the almshouses could not then admit men. The original building consisted of 12 bedrooms, at least one outside storeroom, a kitchen and perhaps a lounge. The entrance to the home was in Burger Street. (It is now in Retief Street.) Further additions to the home were built in two main stages in later years. The Collins Wing consisting of seven bedrooms was completed in 1955, which was paid for by a former mayor of Pietermaritzburg, Harry Collins. A Chapel Wing followed in the late 1980s consisting of a chapel, a lounge and several bedrooms. An adjacent cottage in Burger Street was bought in the late 1990s to provide



The Emma Barter Home

extra bedrooms for residents. The home presently accommodates a maximum of 31 residents but does not have a frail care facility. A 24-hour nursing service is available.

It appears that almshouses for men were contemplated in the 1880s, with a number of years elapsing before this became a reality. The committee and trustees of the Emma Barter Almshouses and the mayor and city council subsequently gave permission for the building of further almshouses on the remainder of the land, although it was only in 1896 that the council agreed to the registration of a sub-division of the property. The actual construction of an almshouse for men was evidently proposed in 1901 by the women of the Maritzburg Ladies' Memorial Fund who approached the trustees of the Emma Barter Almshouses in this regard. It was decided at the annual general meeting of the trustees in February 1902 that the subdivided land would be leased

to the Maritzburg Ladies' Memorial Fund. The new home would also serve as a memorial for the recently deceased Queen Victoria, and was to be known as the Queen Victoria Memorial Home.

The foundation stone of the second almshouse was laid on 23 August 1904 by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Natal, Sir Henry Bale, who was then acting as the Administrator of Natal in the temporary absence from office of the Governor. The name of the builder, also recorded on the foundation stone, was F.W. Lawrance. The architects, likewise listed, were Stott and Kirkby. The home was officially opened on 29 March 1905 by the Governor of Natal, Sir Henry McCallum. The first committee meeting of the new home was held on 29 April 1905 and was attended by several prominent citizens of Pietermaritzburg.

A Deed of Trust was drawn up and registered in 1908, whereby trustees of the home were appointed to administer



The Victoria Memorial Home

the trust and to make rules and regulations for the home. The word “Queen” was then dropped from the official name of the home for reasons unknown. The original objectives of the trust included providing a home for aged and infirm European males, and board and lodging for those in this category who were unable to support themselves financially. It seems that amongst the first residents of the home were veterans of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902 and the Bambatha (Zulu) Rebellion in Natal which occurred in the period February–July 1906. Later residents included ex-soldiers who had fought in the two world wars. A feature of the home in the early days was a room furnished in loving memory by the sisters of the late Captain Bruce Steer DSO, who died in South Africa on 21 September 1904. Likewise noteworthy is a room bearing a plaque of the South African Legion (British Empire Service League) which is dated February 1924. An outside summer house was completed in 1955

which was funded by friends of the late Francis Charles Rodd, a former Master of the Supreme Court of Natal and a member of the committee of the home.

A constant reminder of the connection with royalty is the large and imposing picture of Queen Victoria dated 1885 as well as other pictures of royalty which hang in the present-day lounge of the home. One wing of the home is called the Elizabeth Wing, with others bearing the names of Charles, Diana, Albert and Beatrice. The Royal Family paid a visit to the home during their tour of South Africa in 1947, accompanied by the Prime Minister of South Africa Jan Christiaan Smuts. A scroll commemorating this event was signed, strictly in order of rank, by the five visitors.

It appears that the home originally had 19 bedrooms, a kitchen, a store-room and possibly a lounge, although this cannot be confirmed. A room to accommodate a single resident was added on to the existing building in March

1953, and was presented by the above-mentioned Harry Collins. Generous donations made by Pietermaritzburg citizens during the 1970s enabled the home to build two major extensions, one housing a 14-bed frail care facility and the other additional bedrooms, toilets/bathrooms, an office and a flat for a member of staff. The home currently has space for a maximum of 50 residents with 24-hour nursing care available.

The Emma Barter Home and the Victoria Memorial Home were probably the first “official” old age homes in Pietermaritzburg for white women and men respectively. Both homes, interestingly, observed the Victorian prohibition of mixed residences for many years. The first men were only admitted to the Emma Barter Home in 2010, with the first women being admitted to the Victoria Memorial Home in 1989. An amalgamation of the two homes was initiated early in 2012 and at the time of writing is still far from complete. The combined facility is likely to be known in the future as the Emma Barter Victoria Home.

Built in a later era, but still retaining a link with royalty, were the King George V Memorial and the Queen Mary Place homes. The King George V Memorial Home for Aged Couples Trust was established in 1937. The objective was to raise funds to provide accommodation for elderly couples, and which would serve as a living memorial to King George V, who had died in January 1936. The facility was opened on 22 June 1937 by the Governor-General of South Africa, Sir Patrick Duncan, and consisted of a hall, a flat and six cottages. A flag pole, flying the Union Jack, was erected in front of the hall. Further cottages were built over the years. There

are currently 89 cottages constituting the King George V Memorial Homes complex (the name applied to the entire facility). Each cottage has a bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, lounge/dining room and veranda. The home adjoins Burger, Retief and Prince Alfred streets.

Suitable accommodation for widows and other single women remained an issue, leading to the establishment of The Homes for Women Trust in 1940. The name of the trust was changed to the Queen Mary Place (Homes for Women) Trust in 1944. The first residents were admitted in 1945. The original cottages consisted of a lounge/dining room, an alcove functioning as a bedroom, kitchen, bathroom and veranda. A bedroom replaced the alcove in cottages built in more recent times, with all the other amenities as stated. The Queen Mary Place Homes presently consist of the Ruby Allison Hall and 183 cottages in sometimes discontinuous blocks of land situated in Burger and Prince Alfred streets and extending as far as Lytton Street. The “Cookery” was started in 2002 where frozen meals are prepared and sold by volunteer residents. Residents can buy certain commodities from a small shop situated in the grounds. Medical care is available at a clinic during the day on weekdays, but there is no frail care centre. The home now accepts single men, single women and couples.

The two homes were run as entirely separate entities, each with its own trustees and committee, until 1987 when the two trusts were amalgamated to become the Allison Homes Trust, which today has 318 cottages in total. The trust was involved in one further development in 1987 when 44 cottages were built on land immediately above and within the perimeter of the Sunny-



The King George V Memorial Homes, forming part of the Allison Homes Trust

side Park Home in Sweetwaters Road. Two cottages were built later by private individuals but are now owned by the trust. The facility is known as the Albert Allison Haven.

The catalyst for the building of the King George V Memorial Homes and the Queen Mary Place Homes was a well-known Pietermaritzburg resident, Albert Thurlow Allison (1893–1979). His father J.W. Allison, a butcher and an astute businessman, had a farm in the Ladysmith district, and made a considerable amount of money selling cattle, horses and saddles to the British Army during the Anglo-Boer War. The father, probably realising that peace was at hand or was a reality, opened a saddlery business in Pietermaritzburg in 1902, before building more suitable premises at the upper end of Church Street in 1904. J.W. Allison died in 1936 with his son taking over the business (<http://www.saddlery.co.za>, accessed on 1/12/2012). The firm, though no longer owned by the family, is today known as Allison's Saddlery and is currently

situated in Victoria Road (in what was originally Joseph Baynes' Pietermaritzburg warehouse).

Albert Allison, clearly financially secure, retired from the business world in 1930 at the age of 37 to devote his life purely to charitable endeavours. He was involved in raising money for children's homes in the United Kingdom even before he retired, but later concentrated on good works in Pietermaritzburg, beginning with the King George V Memorial Homes. Aply assisted by his wife Ruby, he could see the need for additional accommodation for the elderly apart from the Emma Barter Home and the Victoria Memorial Home. Allison was very active in seeking funds through private donations and bequests. Land was bought and the construction of cottages began, all using the same architectural plan. Allison used some of his own money for the building and maintenance of the cottages. One of the criteria for admission was that residents must not own a vehicle, obviously to avoid "free-loaders". A number of

slightly more wealthy elderly people, in the early days, paid a certain sum of money to have a cottage built for them at the King George V Memorial Homes, and were then entitled to live there rent-free (and rates-free) for the rest of their lives.

The Allison family lived for many years at 173 Alexandra Road, near the intersection of Alexandra and College roads. The property had extensive grounds enabling them to plant fruit trees and grow vegetables. Allison regularly donated his own fruit and vegetables to residents of the Queen Mary Place Homes and also bought produce from the market for this purpose. It is said that he used to stand in the centre of Pietermaritzburg giving away fruit to anyone who appeared to be in need. Allison was mayor of Pietermaritzburg in 1935 and again in 1939–1943, and was also an elected member of the Natal Provincial Council during the years 1933–1965. He served on the board of several schools and was involved with the welfare of the coloured residents of Pietermaritzburg. He also helped a number of war veterans to obtain military pensions.

There is little doubt that Allison used his civic connections and his position as mayor to promote and facilitate his charity work, but which was always undertaken on the basis of his deep concern for the elderly. His motivation was simply “love and kindness”. His contribution was acknowledged by the Royal Family during their visit to Pietermaritzburg in 1947, when a Common Camellia or Japanese Camellia (*Camellia japonica*) was planted by the King at the entrance to the King George V Memorial Homes in Retief Street. In 1950 Allison received civic honours (the freedom of the city), had a road in the

suburb of Scottsville named after him, and was a Justice of the Peace for more than 45 years. He was instrumental in establishing a bird sanctuary (which bore his name) on the opposite side of the N3 freeway from the present-day Liberty Midlands Mall. He requested that his name be removed when the bird sanctuary later fell into a state of neglect and disrepair. It is the proud declaration of the Allison Homes Trust that all funds for the building of accommodation for the elderly were obtained from private sources. The cottages stand today as a monument to the foresight and tenacity of Albert and Ruby Allison.

The information provided here can perhaps be termed “quiet history”. This category of history does not involve the thunderous and well-trodden path, for instance, of the Anglo-Zulu War or the Anglo-Boer War, but concerns ordinary yet compassionate men and women who made a difference to the lives of their fellows. They deserve to be remembered. It is in this spirit that the present brief account has been written.

The author sincerely thanks the management and staff of the three homes for information supplied for this note. Special thanks are due to Mesdames D. von Mayer and J. Polkey as well as Messrs G. Harrison, J. Lingard and P. Payne, all of Pietermaritzburg, who provided data in respect of the Allison Homes Trust. The biographical details of Emma Barter, her husband and her brother-in-law were derived from type-written carbon copy notes found in a folder at the Emma Barter Home. It is strongly suspected that the information was sourced from material compiled at some stage by Dr Shelagh Spencer, the author of a series of books on early English settlers in Natal.

NOTES

- 1 There is a row of eight almshouses, built to an English design, at 102 Longmarket (now Langalibalele) Street. The almshouses, known as the Charlotte Drew Bale House of Rest for Aged Women, were erected by William Ebrington Bale in memory of his wife, who died in 1898. On Bale's death, the Bale Trust was created in terms of his will and a new block was added to the House of Rest, which bears his name.
- 2 Robert John Barnes was a wealthy Pietermaritzburg butcher who died in Liverpool in 1890. He left money for six almshouses in Pietermaritzburg and Durban. The almshouses in Pietermaritzburg were situated at 443 Longmarket Street.
- 3 A member of the *Natalia* editorial committee observes: "A.T. Allison was a true philanthropist, and also a charming eccentric in his way. He was one of the prominent figures in Pietermaritzburg when I was boy, an acquaintance of my parents, and I was often the recipient of his oranges, and of offerings from his stock of jokes and riddles. As he was mayor during the war years, he had a special line of juvenile Hitler riddles which appealed to us (e.g. 'Why does Hitler wear two pairs of socks?' 'Because he smells defeat.')

He was always seen in a suit, as one would expect in those days, though his was usually rather rumpled, and always in a felt hat with turned-up brim that my mother referred to as 'Mr Allison's rain-catcher hat'."

HENRY LYSTER JAMESON, ZOOLOGIST AND EDUCATIONIST

Contributed by Elwyn Jenkins, based on an article by Stephen Craven

THE full extent of the activities of the remarkable zoologist Henry Lyster Jameson during his stay in South Africa, 1902–1908, has been researched and published by Dr Stephen A. Craven in a recent biographical article in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa*.¹ He held a post in Natal for a while, his first daughter was born in Pietermaritzburg, and he acquired property at Hilton Road which was still in his possession when he died in England in 1922.

Jameson was born in Ireland in 1875. After studying at Trinity College he worked as a zoologist and published many research papers in Ireland. He obtained his doctorate at the University of Heidelberg and held various posts in England and Scotland. A year at a pearl fishery near Papua New Guinea led to a book on pearl formation which made his reputation as an authority on the subject. Craven continues:

Unfortunately Jameson suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis so moved to the Transvaal Education Department

later in 1902 in the hope that the warmer and drier climate would effect a cure. He married Millicent Lucy Parker at Krugersdorp and organised new schools in Wakkerstroom and Pilgrim's Rest.... In 1903 he was appointed Inspector of Schools in the Natal Department of Education in Pietermaritzburg. Here his daughter Norah Elizabeth Lyster was born. A second daughter, Joan Margaret Lyster, was born in 1908.

Towards the end of 1904 the Natal Colonial Government nominated a Technical Education Commission to enquire into higher and technical education in the Colony, and appointed Jameson as its Secretary. Between 20 December 1904 and 11 May 1905 the Commission held 10 meetings in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, and one in Johannesburg. At the end of its report, dated 11 May 1905, the Commission, obviously impressed by his administrative and academic skills, hoped that "Dr Jameson's valuable service would not be lost to the Colony". The report was never tabled in Parliament; no action was taken for want of the necessary funds.

The meeting in Johannesburg was a similar conference with representatives of the Transvaal Technical Institute, the Orange River Colony Technical Education Commission and the Natal Technical Education Commission, of which Jameson was one of three joint secretaries. The conference met on 21 and 22 March 1905 but, as with the Natal conference, nothing came of it because of the three governments' apathy.²

In September 1905 he was appointed the first Professor of Biology at the Transvaal Technical Institute, forerunner of the Transvaal University College. He soon displayed his gifts as a leading intellectual:

Jameson was an active member of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science, with a particular interest in education Following the failure of the relevant colonial governments to act on the recommendations of the March 1905 conference, the Association's Johannesburg branch Council asked Jameson to lead an inter-Section discussion on the future of university education in South Africa. At the Association's fourth meeting in Kimberley on 13 July 1906, Jameson obliged by describing in detail the history of higher education in the four colonies ... and the current situation. He identified the many institutions of varying standards which called themselves "colleges", and stated the advantages and disadvantages of federation, affiliation and separation before inviting discussion from the floor.

Perhaps the most interesting of Jameson's activities in the Transvaal was his forward-looking motivation for the foundation of a politically and financially independent ethnographic bureau for South Africa. This was at the time when the dominant racial political issue was the status of the

Afrikaners. This was presented and well received at the 1907 meeting of the South African Association, of which he was again Vice President, this year of Section D. He noted that the indigenous "Bushmen" and "Hottentots" were fast disappearing, and that the little previous ethnological work had been done in good faith by untrained missionaries and government officials. Its functions would be pure research and university training for all officials who have to deal with the indigenous races. Students would need to have knowledge of native languages, biology, psychology and comparative philology which would enable them to properly investigate:

- native traditions, art, folklore, beliefs and customs
- experimental psychology and mental growth statistics
- physical observations, cranial growth and school progress
- study of the mixed races.

Such applied research would be essential for raising the disenfranchised native races to the status of the Europeans.³

In South Africa Jameson pursued his scientific interests. "In 1905 the British Association for the Advancement of Science held its annual meeting in South Africa, visiting all the major cities. At the Johannesburg meeting on 30 August, Jameson delivered a report about terrestrial planarians which he had collected and studied while resident in Natal."⁴ He was also a member of the Geological Society of South Africa, and visited caves.

While in the Transvaal he became a very active member of the Johannesburg Field Naturalists Club, which no doubt would have facilitated his fieldwork.... Jameson was the first to describe what became known as Jameson's red rock hare, *Pronalgus*

randensis Jameson 1907.... The accession register of the Transvaal Museum records 747 items associated directly or indirectly associated with Jameson.... While in South Africa ... [he] collected about 410 specimens of 66 species of mammals from Natal and the Transvaal. He took them to England and described them at the British Museum.⁵

Jameson's time in South Africa was not to last: "[His] post at the Transvaal University College was, despite his teaching skills, abolished in 1908 because of student apathy, there having been in 1906 only 14 students in the Arts and Science Department, compared to 57 in Mining and Engineering."⁶

Returning to England, he worked as a civil servant in Sea Fisheries. He became a Marxist, and the Plebs League, a Marxist organisation, published his textbook *An Outline of Psychology*, which ran to 10 editions. He died of his

chronic illness in 1922 at the age of 47. His wife was present at his death.

The London executor of his estate retained A.T. Tatham of Pietermaritzburg as the South African "Executive Dative". Jameson left fixed property in South Africa: five pieces of land, all portions of the farm Groen Kloof at Hilton Road, Pietermaritzburg County. Three had been purchased in 1903 and two in 1904. They were sold at public auction to Hugh Godfrey Payn for £700 in September 1923.⁷

NOTES

1. Craven, S. A. "Henry Paul William Lyster Jameson, MA, DSc, PhD (1875-1922) – a polymath: zoologist, Transvaal educationist, entrepreneur, civil servant and Marxist", *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa*, 67(3), Nov. 2012, pp. 127-134. The original references are given in Craven.
2. Craven, "Jameson", p. 129.
3. Craven, "Jameson", p. 130.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Craven, "Jameson", pp. 129, 130.
6. Craven, "Jameson", p. 130.
7. Pietermaritzburg Archive Repository, MSC 001 8012/1922.

PANDAS IN THE FORESTS OF KWAZULU-NATAL?

Adrian Koopman writes

IT WILL surely come as a surprise to many to hear that there are pandas lurking in the forests and bush of KwaZulu-Natal.

The first one I came upon is the tree *Philenoptera violacea* (earlier *Lonchocarpus capassa*), for which Boon (2010:164) gives the English vernacular name Apple-leaf. Coates-Palgrave (2002:394) adds the vernacular name Rain-tree,¹ one of several so called because of the "cuckoo-spit" exuded by frog-hopper nymphs which suck the sap from the tree. Van Wyk *et al*

(2011:518) confirm the names Rain-tree and Apple-leaf (cf. Afrik. *Appelblaar* and German *Apfelblatt*), and say that in Namibia the tree is known as the "northern omuphanda". It is Hutchings (1996:142) who gives **Panda Tree** as one of a number of English names for this tree, and I assume she got this name from Smith, who says (1966:363) "the vernacular name [Panda Tree] is derived from the native name 'UMBANDA'." It is possible that Smith is referring to the Zulu word for this tree – *umphanda*. Doke and Vilakazi (1958:645) give as

one of the meanings of the Zulu noun *umphanda* “Species of ornamental tree of the pea and bean family. *Lonchocarpus capassa*.” The name “Panda Tree”, however, may have come from a different Bantu language, as the tree does not only occur in KwaZulu-Natal. Van Wyk *et al* (2011:518) give the following cognate forms for this tree: *mupanda* (Kwangali), *mupanda*, *mupandapanda* (Ndau), *ip(h)anda* (Zimbabwe Ndebele), *mupanda* (Tonga) *mufhanda* (Venda) and *omupanda* (Herero and Wambo).

Whatever the source language, it is clear that the panda in “Panda Tree” is a result of the linguistic process known variously as “adoption”, “loaning” or “borrowing”. Words from one language are adopted (usually in a re-phonologised form) into the vocabulary of another. A number of tree names in both South African English as well as Zulu are a result of this process and we can note the well-known English examples Tambootie (from Zulu *umthombothi*) and Umzimbeet (from Zulu *umsimbithi*), and the perhaps less well-known Zulu examples *isitingawothi* (from Afrikaans *stinkhout*, “stinkwood”) and *umsilinga* (from English *syringa*).

Our second panda enters the forest via a different route. Boon (2010:482) gives for the tree *Strychnos decussata* the English vernacular names Cape-teak and Cape-teak Bitterberry. He gives four Zulu names, of which one – *umphathawenkosi* – is relevant, as we shall see in a moment. Again, it is Hutchings who introduces the panda, giving as English vernacular names for this tree both “Chaka’s Wood” and “**Panda’s Walking Stick Tree**”. Smith (1966:363) says

Harvey in 1868 described ... [this tree]

... as S[trychnos] baculum (baculus = a staff or walking stick) from the report that the native Chief Panda had his regal staffs cut from the tree.

Hutchings names both “Chaka” and “Panda” as chiefs who cut their ceremonial sticks from this tree, but the Zulu name for the tree – *umphathawenkosi* – is less specific, as it simply means “that which is held by a chief” (from *phatha* “hold in the hand” + *wenkosi* “of the chief”). Coates-Palgrave (2002:926) gives a similar more general interpretation:

In the 19th Century ... [the tough, pliant sticks from this tree] ... were made into ceremonial sticks for Zulu chiefs; the plant’s local name, “king’s tree”, derives from this practice.

Smith’s “native Chief Panda” is, of course, Zulu king Mpande kaSenzangakhona, who was frequently recorded as “Panda” in the writings of earlier explorers and settlers in KwaZulu-Natal. French naturalist and explorer Adulphe Delegorgue, for example, who travelled through the area which is now KwaZulu-Natal in the late 1830s, consistently refers to Mpande as Panda, as in the following:

On 20 September 1839, we heard mention for the first time of Panda, a man of distinction among the Amazoulous. Half-brother to Dingaan, who was king at that time, and full brother of Djacka,² whom Dingaan had assassinated in order to come to power, Panda had, according to the Cafres, incontestable rights to the throne.” (1990:82)

According to Doke and Vilakazi (1958:509) the Zulu noun *impande* (“root”) from which King Mpande takes his name, also refers to “species of undershrubs of the forest, *Calpurnia*

*lasiogyne*³ and *Calpurnia sylvatica*,⁴ with racemes of golden showers”, giving us just one more little wrinkle in the links between pandas and trees in KwaZulu-Natal.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Used mainly in Zimbabwe.
- 2 C De B Webb, in the entry for Panda in the index, explains, “Mpande kaSenzangakhona, who succeeded to the Zulu kingship in 1840, was, contrary to A.D.’s statement, ... half-brother to Shaka, the founder of the kingdom, as well as to the latter’s successor, Dingane.”
- 3 Now *Calpurnia aurea* subs. *aurea*.
- 4 Now *Calpurnia aurea*.

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PREPUCE PROTECTION AND THE IKHAMANGA

by *Adrian Koopman*

FATHER A. T. Bryant, in his well-known work *The Zulu People*, in describing the “morning toilet of the adult [Zulu] male” (1967:134), says this began with “the attachment of the penis or prepuce-cover (*umNcedo*)”. The *umncedo* described by Bryant was made by “a special craftsman out of strips of the skin of the wild banana-stalks (*strelitzia augusta* [sic]), so woven together to form a small round box” (1967:134). After giving further details, Bryant continues:

The above fashion of penial attire was no Nguni invention. It reappears all the world over, and takes us right back to the beginnings of clothing and the birth of human shame. The Tembe Tongas, abutting on the Zulus to their north-east, sported a sheath of plaited palm-strips, an inch or more in diameter and one to two foot in length [!] according to taste. (1967:134)

It seems that even when the influence of Euro-Western missionaries encouraged Zulu and Xhosa men to wear trousers, the use of the prepuce cover persisted. Böhme (1976:21) quotes Hammond-Tooke (1958:17) as saying

... among the Mt Frere Bhaca, especially the older generation, a penis sheath was worn even under European trousers, for without it “it is as if you are naked”. It was sometimes made from the hollow fruit of the umthombothi tree (*Spirostachys africanus*).

Bryant talks of the Zulus using the skin of wild banana stalks, and of the “Tembe Tongas” using strips of palm leaves. Hammond-Tooke has referred to the hollow fruit of the *umthombothi* tree. In between these there exists a range of botanical items used as penis covers by men living in eastern South Africa in the nineteenth century. A

combing of the literature refers to the use of the fruits or leaves of the following:

The *imfingo* plant: A source in the James Stuart Archives (JSA)(II:131) states “[more important people] went naked, wearing only a penis cover made of the fruit of the *imfingo*.” Editors Webb and Wright, in an endnote, explain this as “a variety of cycad”. It is the name that Pooley (1998:500) gives for the cycad-like *Stangeria eriopus*. From the illustration it seems impossible that the fruit of this plant (a cycad-like cone) could be used as a penis-sheath. Yet another source says of the Bhaca and the Mpondo (JSA IV:5):

These people used not to gird the loins (*binca*), but to use the red fruit of the *imfingo* fern. If this fell off they would tie up the tip of the penis with grass. A man would then be regarded as wearing a penis-cover. They would sit before women in this condition.

The *ilala* palm: Informant Sivivi in the James Stuart Archives (V:369) says “*I ncweda*¹ with the leaves of the *ilala* palm, these are black and found on the seashore.” The *ilala* palm (*Hyphaene* species) is used for a considerable range of craft purposes among the Zulu, and it is not surprising to hear of the flexible leaf strips being used to weave penis “boxes”.

The *umthongwane* tree: this is one of the Zulu names given by Pooley (1993:326) and Boon (2010:376) for the tree *Oncoba spinosa*, known in English as the Snuffbox Tree. Pooley and Boon, as well as Hutchings (1996:206), mention the use of the fruit of this tree as snuffboxes, rattles for dancers, and penis covers. Significant here is the evidence of Mageza kaKwefunga to James Stuart (Webb and Wright, 1979:72):

An Mntungwa was descending from the north and ... he wore as a penis-cover the shell of the fruit of the *itongwane* tree, such as are used for snuff-boxes ...

... This Mntungwa was Shaka.

The plant *Lagenaria siceraria*: The gourd or calabash, the fruit of the plant *Lagenaria siceraria* has been used worldwide over the centuries as a penis cover. Böhme (1976) describes the use of calabashes for this purpose among the Cape Nguni (1976:20,21), the “Natal Nguni” [i.e. Zulus] (1976:46), and the Swazi (1976:57) and the “Transvaal Ndebele” (1976:71, where we find the statement, “In previous times a man was regarded as not fully dressed without one”).

Heiser devotes a whole chapter of his 1993 *The Gourd Book* to the use of gourds as penis covers,² ranging from the small spherical gourd similar to the fruit of the *umthongwane* tree, to the two-foot-long “snake gourd” worn by men of Papua New Guinea. His distribution map (1993:148, 149) makes it clear that gourd penis covers were once worn by men over the whole of southern Africa.

Various species of *strelitzia*: these are described in more detail below.

Non-botanical materials: In addition to the use of botanical material for the construction of penis covers, Krige (1950:373) says “sometimes the umfece cocoon is used as a prepuce cover”,³ and it would appear that at and before the time of Shaka a skin bag was used. A source in the James Stuart Archives (JSA III:161) refers to the *imbayi* “which was a covering for the penis about six or seven inches long, made of softened hide, sewn together into a kind of bag” as being previously used in Tongaland, and another source (JSA

III:11) says, “Formerly a piece of ox-hide would be sewn into a penis-cover; this practice was discontinued in Dingana’s reign.” Various sources disagree as to whether the skin bag disappeared during the time of Shaka, of Dingane, or of Cetshwayo. It appears that it was worn by circumcised males, and when circumcision became discontinued, the skin bag gave way to the fruits of trees or to the woven “box”. Sivivi kaMaqungo, one of Stuart’s sources (JSAV:369) tells of how Dingana, and Shaka before him, used an *isiziba*, a piece of well-softened ox-hide sewn into a penis cover. It was, he says, Cetshwayo who brought in the use of the *isigude*, the wild banana tree.

An *umncedo* (also *umncwado*) made of strips of the wild banana (*Strelitzia nicolai* in Boon 2010:60) is known in Zulu as an *ingceba* or an *inkamanga*. For *ingceba*, Doke and Vilakazi (1958:235) give the three meanings: “1. Thick, lower stalk of the wild banana leaf, which when dry is torn into thin strips for making the *umncwado*; 2. Tassels of banana fibre used as ornaments above the knees and elbows by men of rank; and 3. Wild banana plant, *Strelitzia augusta*.” For *inkamanga*, their entry is (1958:377): “1. Wild banana plant, *Strelitzia augusta*; 2. Thick, lower stalk of the wild banana leaf, which when dry is torn into strips for making prepuce covers; 3. Prepuce cover of banana leaf.”

It can be seen from the above that the word *inkamanga* is used as a name for the plant itself, for plant parts which provides material for making prepuce covers, and for the prepuce covers themselves. It is interesting to note that Bryant, in his dictionary (1905:289) says the words *ingceba* and *inkamanga* mean the same thing, but that *ingceba* is “the politer term to use”.

Boon (2010:60) gives *igceba*, *isigude* and *inkamanga* as Zulu names for the wild banana (for which he gives the English vernacular names Natal Wild Banana and Coast Strelitzia, in addition to the botanical name *Strelitzia nicolai*). For the same plant he gives the Xhosa names *isigceba* and *ikhamanga*. Curiously, Pooley (1998:46) gives neither a Zulu nor a Xhosa name for the Bird-of-Paradise-flower or Crane Flower (*Strelitzia reginae*), but Hutchings (1996:64) gives Zulu *isagudu* and *isigude*, as well as “wild banana” for *Strelitzia reginae*, showing that, at least in terms of vernacular nomenclature, there is a confusion between the two species.

***Strelitzia reginae* and *ikhamanga* today:**

The national flower of South Africa is the Giant or King Protea (*Protea cynaroides*), as confirmed by “official” websites, such as

<http://www.dac.gov.za/aboutDAC/nationalSymbols.htm> and

<http://www.southafrica.info/history/national-symbols> .

For some South Africans today, however, the Bird-of-Paradise Flower (*Strelitzia reginae*) is the national flower of South Africa. For example, Theresa Schultz writes:⁴

I’m confused. Which flower is the National South African flower? Some websites are showing the protea ... as the SA National flower, while other websites are showing the strelitzia as the national flower.

As far back as she can remember, she says in her blog, when she was at school, the strelitzia was the national flower of the country. There are no doubt many more South Africans whose memories see *Strelitzia reginae* as a national symbol. Certainly it appears in

a national symbol, or rather, in the insignia and in the name of a national order. The Order of Ikhamanga is awarded annually by the President to those who have excelled in arts, culture, music, journalism and sport. The “pointed-egg” or “teardrop” shaped badge of the order contains a rising sun, a Lydenburg Head, two strelitzia flowers, a drum, three circles, and two roadways, all of which have their own symbolism. The website <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutgovt/orders/ikhamanga.htm> says,

The Ikhamanga (Strelitzia) plant symbolises the unique beauty of achievements by men and women who carry colourful South Africa aloft in the fields of creativity, arts, culture, music, journalism and sport.

Another website (<http://www.the-presidency.gov.za/orders/092705/part4b.pdf>) says,

The ikhamanga is the central motif of the Order of Ikhamanga and symbolises the unique beauty of the achievements of South Africans in the creative fields of arts, culture, literature, music, journalism and sport.

Clearly, in the Order of Ikhamanga, this strelitzia species is used for its iconic beauty, i.e. its appearance. The function of various strelitzia species, in providing the materials for the construction of woven penis sheathes over a considerable period of South African history, and indeed giving the names *ikhamanga* and *inkamanga* to such items of cultural attire, seems to have been forgotten. Given that the Order of Ikhamanga celebrates achievement in the field of culture (among other things), perhaps it is time that the official information on the use of the strelitzia in the insignia of the Order of Ikhamanga included these other uses and the symbolism of the flower.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The verb *ncweda* here means “to wear a prepuce cover”.
- 2 Chapter 12: Uses: Penis sheaths. pp. 145-160.
- 3 Doke and Vilakazi (1958:201) explain *umfece* as the “cocoon of a certain caterpillar (*unomangcikiva*) found on mimosa trees, used for snuff-boxes, ankle ornaments and prepuce cases”.
- 4 <http://teresaschultz.blogspot.com> accessed on 13.05.2013

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