Cover illustration

Some of the well-known individuals to whom the Zulus gave names, as discussed in one of the articles in this issue of Natalia.
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Editorial

NATALIA 43 appeared last year without an editorial. Any such essay would have done no more than tell readers what the journal contained, information which they could have acquired simply by consulting the index.

But Natalia 44 is different as, in a way, it marks the end of an era with the retirement, on grounds of poor health in each case, of two long-serving stalwarts of the editorial committee – Dr Shelagh Spencer and Dr Bill Bizley.

Shelagh Spencer’s membership of the editorial committee goes back as far as the sixth issue of the journal in 1976 under the editorship of the late Dr John Clark. Indeed, she is now the only survivor of the team of those days which produced the journal. Basil Leverton, Margery Moberly and June Farrer have also died. Her life’s work, in which she is still engaged and for which she has been recognised by the University of KwaZulu-Natal with the award of an honorary doctorate, has been the compilation of a biographical register of the early British settlers in Natal. It has given her an encyclopaedic knowledge of the province in the second half of the nineteenth century, from which Natalia has benefited immeasurably. Many a time her editorial colleagues have been astonished by her picking up and correcting errors in obscure references buried deep in the endnotes of an article.

But the journal has benefited in another way from her skills. As a qualified librarian, she has used her expertise to compile the annual list of Natal publications. The issue of Nos 36/37 which appeared in 2007 was the first in which the compiler was acknowledged, but Shelagh Spencer was at work years before that, ever since the retirement of June Farrer as deputy director of the Natal Society Library (in which capacity the latter was a member of the very first Natalia committee in 1971 and the secretary of the committee for many years). We are grateful to Mrs Jewel Koopman, another qualified librarian and until her retirement the director of the Alan Paton Centre, for now undertaking our bibliographic compilation.
Bill Bizley’s name first appears on the list of the editorial committee in issue No.11 of 1981. In the 33 years which have followed he has provided the journal with a number of substantial articles, the last of which was published in No. 43. His article “U-boats off Natal: the local ocean war 1942-44” made the issue which featured it, No 23/24 of 1994, a sell-out. Bizley’s speciality was poring over old newspapers in what was then the Natal Society Library collection to evoke an incident or a more substantial historical event as seen through contemporary eyes. Sadly, ill health has necessitated his retirement from the editorial committee of Natalia. The contribution by Professor Paul Thompson in this issue – “The outbreak of the Great War: How Pietermaritzburg reacted” – is a tribute to him in consciously employing the Bizley technique.

A regular contributor to recent issues of the journal has been Duncan du Bois. In this issue we have “A sketch of colonial Umzinto”. His articles have sprung from the research in which he has been engaged for the past three years. He has now been awarded a doctorate for a thesis entitled “Sugar and Settlers: the colonisation of the Natal South Coast 1850-1910”, which is due to be published under a modified title.

Another indefatigable contributor is committee member Professor Adrian Koopman. This year we carry his “Zulu nicknames for whites”, and we already have an article from him ready for our issue No. 45 in 2015.

Two years ago we published an article by Stephen Coan entitled “A tale of two phoenixes: the Colonial Building and its architect William Powell”. This year he carries the Powell story further with a piece on William’s son, Sydney, entitled “Sydney Powell’s adventures in Natal”.

Another contributor of two years ago is Anil Nauriya. Counsel at the Supreme Court of India and the High Court of Delhi for many years, he is currently on sabbatical and, arising from his historical researches, offered a note on the little-known visit of Willie Pearson to Natal. This we have decided to upgrade to a short article.

After a couple of issues in which our unpublished piece/reprint slot was unfilled, we are grateful to Pietermaritzburg resident Val Ward for putting together a package culled from the Government Gazettes of 1853 and 1871 on “Roads over the Drakensberg”.

For the rest, our mixture is much as usual: notes, obituaries, book reviews and the list of recent publications already referred to. We hope that our readers find it all of interest and value.

JACK FROST
Early proposed roads in the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg

Introduction

I RECENTLY came across two interesting reports on roads in the Government Gazettes of 1853 and 1871. Research has been published on the early Natal railways and harbours, but our early roads seem to have been ignored. The publication of these short reports may inspire someone to fill this missing aspect of KwaZulu-Natal’s colonial history.

The first report, that of Captain R.J. Garden of the 45th Regiment, relates his experiences in 1853 while searching for a wagon road over the Drakensberg in the Underberg area.

The wagon road over Van Reenen’s Pass was already in use in 1870. With the opening of the diamond fields in the late 1860s an alternative, shorter route was being sought. A wagon road over the Olivier’s Hoek Pass was considered. The arguments for and against are presented in the second report published here.

A table of distances, found in the Natal Almanac of 1871, is included. The reports are produced here with the approval of the National Archive, Pietermaritzburg Archive Repository. I have included endnotes for clarity.

VAL WARD
Early proposed roads in the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg

NCP 6/1/1/4.
Government Gazette No 246, Aug 23, 1853.

GOVERNMENT NOTICE No 37, 1853.
The Lieutenant Governor directs the publication of the following Report. For general information.
By Command of the Lieut. Governor.
(Signed) W.C. Sargeaunt, Colonial Secretary.
Colonial Office
August, 16, 1853.

***

Fort Napier, Natal
August, 10th, 1853.

Sir,

I have the honor [sic] to inform you that I proceeded on the 9th June last, with one wagon, seven soldiers 45th Regiment, and one civilian (Mr Williams[1]) to take the command of an exploring party, which had started the previous month, to find a road over the Drakensberg.

I joined this at the Umzimkulu River on 15th, and started from thence again on the 17th June, 1853.

On the 31st July, on my return to the camp, near the sources of the Umzimkulu River, after a patrole (sic) of thirteen days duration, I found the supplies of the expedition almost consumed, the soldiers having been on a reduced and scanty allowance for some days. I therefore broke up my camp on the 3rd August, and directed my course towards Pietermaritzburg. On arriving at the nearest kraals, belonging to a branch of Amahlubi tribe, under the petty chief Umkombini,[2] and being entirely destitute of every description of food, we fortunately met with Mr Toohey.[3]

From the benevolent and kind hearted gentleman we received coffee, sugar, tobacco, etc, through his intervention, meat and mealies from the Kafirs [sic], and subsequently at his farm of Good Hope, on the Elands River,[4] abundant supplies of coffee, sugar, meal, bread, potatoes, and pumpkins which were most grateful to men reduced as we were from hunger and the want of the necessaries of life.

I reached Pietermaritzburg on the afternoon of the 8th instant.

G. D. Greaves, Esq, Government Surveyor, will furnish a plan of the country, which he has surveyed; the acquisition of which will be most valuable and interesting, showing as it will the direction taken by the Patroles [sic], and the country through which the expedition has passed.

Both the Government and the public are alike totally ignorant of the difficulties, toilsome labour, and suffering from hunger, the members of the expedition have undergone.

Ignorance of the country, absence of guides possessing local knowledge, coldness of the weather, bad quality of the grass, impossibility of procuring supplies of mealies and vegetables from the Kafirs [sic], burning of the grass by persons either ignorant of or hostile to the party, badness of the draught cattle, the rocky
and precipitous nature of the country, and the breaking of the fore wheel of one of the wagons are the causes which tended greatly to delay the expedition.

The vastness and steepness of the spurs of the Drakensberg, the innumerable kloofs which had to be ascended, descended or avoided, the difficulty and toilsome labour of walking through long and slippery grass, the smoke arising from the country being on fire, which obscured the view, the pitiable and foot-sore condition of the horses from want of good food, and the stony nature of the country, and scanty daily quantity of our own provisions, at times barely sufficient to sustain life, are the obstacles which impeded the movements of the patroles [sic].

The line of the Drakensberg has been carefully examined from the source of the most South Western tributary of the Umzimkulu River, to the Giants Castle on the North eastern side, and I can honestly and conscientiously state that between these points there is no place where a wagon can be driven up the mountain without the construction of a road, and which latter could only be effected at considerable expense [sic].

The kloof at the source of the little Umcomanzi River is the nearest point at which a road can be made, and which I am confident has never been visited by any human beings, except Bushmen, murauding Kafirs [sic] from the Sovereignty, and natives forced to fly thither for refuge during the reigns of Chaka and Dingaan.

Of the country over the Drakensberg I know nothing.

I am of the opinion further that the Bushmen inhabit the country forming the immediate spurs or buttresses of the Drakensberg on the Southern side, and from whence from time to time they make incursions upon the frontier farms – whither they retire at the approach of a foe – and into which the pursuing parties have never yet sufficiently penetrated.

I have, etc, etc, etc,

(Signed) R.J. GARDEN
Capt. 45th Regt.

To the Honorable
The Colonial Secretary.

NCP 6/1/1/22.
The Natal Government Gazette, January 17, 1871.

L.C. No 5, 1871.
The following report of a Select Committee of the Legislative Council appointed to consider the correspondence respecting the Olivier’s Hoek Road, and the postal communication with the Diamond-fields is published for general information.

By order of the Legislative Council,

THOMAS FOSTER.
Clerk.

11th January 1871.

****
Early proposed roads in the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg

Report of a Select Committee appointed to consider the correspondence respecting the Olivier’s Hoek Road, and the postal communication with the Diamond-fields.

Your committee had before it the following documents referring to the proposed new road to the Diamond-fields.

1. A Letter from the Lieutenant Governor8 to President Brand, enclosing Address No. 44 of the Council.
2. The reply of President Brand there-to.
3. The report of the Colonial Secretary9, which is not dated, but which the Colonial Secretary informed the committee had been laid before the Lieutenant Governor on or about the 10th October, and which was laid before the committee on December 30th, 1870.
4. Report of the Civil Engineer10 for the colony, dated December 30th, 1870, and laid before the committee January 6th, 1871.
5. Report of Mr Allison, Border Agent, residing at Olivier’s Hoek, not dated, but presented on the 6th January 1871.

The gentleman who furnished these reports gave evidence before the committee, in explanation of their several reports, and evidence was obtained from other gentlemen acquainted with the district, or who had travelled by the route along which it is proposed to make the new road.

The point of departure of the new road, it is agreed, should be at Estcourt. The committee would, in the first place, compare the two roads from their point of divergence to the frontier of the colony on top of the Drakensberg.

The Colonial Secretary, in his report, estimates both these portions of the roads to be exactly the same length. He stated the distance from Estcourt to Good Hope11 to be 59 miles, and as it is just six miles more to the top of the mountain, the entire distance from Estcourt to the top of the Drakensberg by Van Reenen’s Pass is computed to be 65 miles. The reports of the Civil Engineer and Mr Allison state the distance to be 66 and 65 miles respectively. The Colonial Secretary estimates the distance from Estcourt to the top of Olivier’s Hoek Pass to be also 65 miles, while Mr Allison and the Civil Engineer say it is but 63 miles. It is therefore evident that the greatest saving in distance which can be effected by the new line of road to the top of the mountain will be two to three miles.

But to effect this your committee was informed a new piece of road would have to be made from Loose Kop,12 to Oosthuysen’s Spruit,13 which would have the effect of shortening the existing road to the foot of Olivier’s Hoek Pass three to four miles.

Though the actual distance to be saved is small, it was alleged in favour of this route, that the pass is much less steep, and that therefore a considerable saving of time would be effected in making the ascent, as the wagons could travel faster than they can up Van Reenen’s Pass.

The Civil Engineer informed the committee that about £1600 would be required to make the road from Estcourt to the top of Oliver’s Hoek Pass suitable for heavy traffic, and that to bridge the three streams which would occasionally be unfordable – namely the Sterk Špruit,14 the Little Tugela,15 and the Great Tugela16 – would require...
Early proposed roads in the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg

an additional sum of £3 200. But he also stated that this road when made would be a good road, comparatively level, would be sound and hard, and would be easily kept in repair, as there is good material in the vicinity of the road for that purpose. He also stated that the road up Van Reenen’s Pass, though at present in good repair, was not naturally so firm, that the ascent up the mountain was steeper, and would therefore make the road at that part more liable to injury from heavy rains, and that there was no good material near the road suitable for mending it.

The only other evidence the committee took on this point was from Mr J.N. Boshoff, who was of opinion that the road up Van Reenen’s Pass is as hard as any road over the mountain, and that there is plenty of suitable material near for repairing it. But Mr Boshoff stated that he had not seen Olivier’s Hoek Pass.

Mr Boshoff and the Civil Engineer agreed in stating that were the road by Olivier’s Hoek Pass made, that by Van Reenen’s Pass would still have to be maintained, and that a bridge over the Tugela at Colenso would be as much required as at present.

Your committee found that though only three miles would be saved between Estcourt and the top of the mountain, to obtain so small an advantage a first outlay of £1 600 would be required, and if the three steams were bridged £3 200 additional would be needed, and that a considerable annual extra expenditure would be required to keep the new road in repair.

It became necessary, consequently, to ascertain whether any large saving of distance could be effected beyond the mountain – in the territory of the Orange Free State – to justify so large an expenditure as had been stated to be required on the Natal side.

The Civil Engineer clearly described to the committee the road he had examined. This road commences at the top of Olivier’s Hoek Pass, and joins the present upper road from Harrismith to Bethlehem near the drift over Eland’s River. The length of this piece of road the Civil Engineer estimated at 28 miles, while the distance from the top of Van Reenen’s Pass to the same point by way of Harrismith is 44 miles, thus showing a saving of 16 miles. But the Civil Engineer stated that by making a road from the top of Van Reenen’s Pass along the left bank of the Wilge River, not only would a saving of four miles be effected, but that wagons would be saved the necessity of crossing the Wilge River twice. If this piece of road were made the saving of 16 miles, which the Civil Engineer showed to be possible, would be reduced to 12 miles. The entire saving from Estcourt to Eland’s River would consequently be 15 miles, or until the road by the left bank of the Wilge river is made, 19 miles. The report of the Civil Engineer states the saving to be only 18 miles, but this slight difference arises from a clerical error in the computation.

The Colonial Secretary and Mr Allison together inspected a road in the same locality. These gentlemen seem to have taken a course a little to the south of that explored by the Civil Engineer, and after travelling the same distance as that gentleman, nearly 20 to 30 miles, found themselves six miles from the Eland’s River, and about the same distance from the upper road between Harrismith and Bethlehem.
They returned at this point without having seen Eland’s River, or ascertaining by actual inspection whether there was any drift over the river in that locality, except the ordinary one about six miles to the north. This ordinary drift is the one near which the Civil Engineer’s proposed road joins the wagon road at present in use. So that under any circumstances the road travelled by the Colonial Secretary and Mr Allison was at least six miles longer between the top of Olivier’s Hoek Pass and the Eland’s River, than that explored by the Civil Engineer.

The evidence given by the Colonial Secretary and Mr Allison of the district beyond the point where they stopped is based upon statements made by a Mr De Jager and the outrider of Mr Allison, and is not of such a character as to justify the committee in attaching much important to it. In illustration it may be mentioned that Mr Allison, though he did not see Eland’s River, was under the impression that it flowed to the eastward, whereas the evidence of Mr Mellersh, who has resided in that locality for some weeks, and all the maps before the committee, showed that it flows slightly to the west of north. Also that the Colonial Secretary and Mr Allison state in their reports that they were informed that the distance from where they stopped to Bethlehem was only 18 miles, whereas the Civil Engineer states the distance from Eland’s River to Bethlehem by the upper road to be 42 miles, in the accuracy of which statement he was corroborated by other witnesses, and as the Colonial Secretary and Mr Allison were six miles east of that river, they must have been 48 instead of 18 miles from Bethlehem, unless another drift and road were made than that ordinarily used. No evidence was given before the committee of the practicability of such a drift or road, but on the contrary that the district through which such a road would have to pass to join the ordinary road at Leidenberg’s Vley was hilly and swampy.

It seems, therefore, that the advantages to be gained by the proposed new road are,

1st. A saving distance between Estcourt and Bethlehem of 15 or at the very most 19 miles.

2nd. That the ascent of the mountain at Olivier’s Hoek would be easier, and probably the road firmer than at Van Reenen’s Pass, though the latter is capable of much improvement.

To obtain these advantages an immediate outlay of £1 850 to £1 900 is said to be required. Your committee are, however, afraid that the 28 miles of road on the other side of the mountain which is represented by the Civil Engineer, as well as the letter of President Brand, to be swampy, would cost more than the amount estimated to make it fit for heavy traffic. If the three large streams on this side of the mountain were bridged £3 200 additional would be required, so that the entire outlay would be from £5 100 to £5 500. Nor would this be all, as the maintenance of the entire length of the new line of road, extending over 91 miles through a stormy district, would be imposed on the colony, involving a large annual expenditure.

The committee, in estimating the cost of this road, have computed that the construction, and keeping in repair, of that part of the road which is within the territory of the Orange Free State would devolve on Natal, as President
Brand has intimated, in reply to the Lieutenant Governor, that his Government cannot construct a road through so swampy a locality.

The committee has not ascertained that any reports, or evidence respecting the proposed road, except the letter of President Brand and the report of the Colonial Secretary, accompanied by a sketch of the district (which the committee has not seen), and a table of distances prepared by Mr Allison, were before the Government at the time when the Lieutenant Governor in his opening speech informed the Council that the Government had not “desisted from pushing forward the repairs of the pass by Olivier’s Hoek, and the completion of the road leading to it, by which line of route I am persuaded, after full enquiry, a very considerable saving of distance may be effected”.

Your committee is of opinion that the advantages expected to be gained by the proposed new route are insufficient to justify at present the large outlay which would be required for the construction of the road, and for keeping it in repair, especially as the expense both of making and maintaining it, on both sides of the mountain, would fall on this colony. The committee would, however, recommend that as the road on both sides of the mountain is to some extent practicable for wagon traffic, that a sum not exceeding £300 be expended in improving the Pass, so that transport riders may have an opportunity of testing the suitability of the road.

The committee would point out that no reference is made in President Brand’s letter to the line of road beyond Van Reenen’s Pass, which by keeping along the left bank of the Wilge River, would enable wagoners to avoid that river, and thus prevent the necessity of crossing it twice, as well as shorting [sic] the distance which was mentioned in the address to the Lieutenant Governor from the Council on the 8th September last, and would recommend that negotiations should be entered into with the Government of the Orange Free State, with a view to making the road available.

Your committee has carefully considered the correspondence on the subject of improved postal arrangements with the Orange Free State, and the report of the Postmaster General thereon, and is of opinion that the plan proposed by the Postmaster General, as improved by the Lieutenant Governor, should be carried out as early as practicable.

ENDNOTES
1 Mr Williams - not identified.
2 Umkombini - not identified.
3 Mr. Toohey – Daniel Charles.
4 Eland’s River is a tributary of the Upper uMkhomazi River.
5 The south-western tributary of the Umzimkulu is probably the Mlambanja River on which the Drakensberg Gardens resort is situated.
6 The uMkhomazana River
7 Now the Sani Pass.
8 Lieutenant Governor of Natal, His Excellency Robert W. Keate. Lincoln’s Inn barrister admitted 1844. Came to Natal as Governor in 1867. Previously Commissioner of Seychelles Islands 1849; Lt-Gov. of Granada in the West Indies 1853; Lt-Gov of Trinidad 1856. Arbitrator in boundary disputes South African Republic and Orange Free State 1870 – for Republic; South African Republic and Griqua chiefs 1871 – for the Griquas.
9 Colonial Secretary, Hon. D. Erskine.
10 Colonial Engineer, P. Paterson.
11 Good Hope, six kilometres from top of Van Reenen’s Pass.
12 Loose Kop, probably Loskop.
13 Oosthuysen’s Spruit, probably near Bergville.
14 Sterkspruit, Champagne Valley south of Winterton.
15 The Little Tugela, near Winterton.
16 The Great Tugela at Bergville.
17 J.N. Boshoff, Resident Magistrate, Klip River (later Ladysmith); Legislative Council member for Klip River
18 Elands River, Orange Free State.
19 Mr de Jager. Unidentified, there were several farmers in the area with this name.
20 Mr Mellersh. Legislative Council member for Klip River.
21 Leidenberg’s Vley. Not identified.

DISTANCES THROUGH NATAL TO THE VAAL RIVER DIAMOND FIELDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Via Harrismith</th>
<th>Miles</th>
<th>Via Olivier’s Hoek</th>
<th>Miles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From P.M.Burg to Estcourt</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>From P.M.Burg to Estcourt</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estcourt to Colenso</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Estcourt to Little Tugela</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colenso to Dodds’</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Little Tugela to top of Drakensberg</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodds’ to Good Hope</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Top of Drakensberg to junction of road to Harrismith</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Hope to Wilge R.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>thence to Bethlehem</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilge R to Harrismith</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrismith to Bethlehem</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Natal Almanac 1871.
The Long Weekend
There had been no rain for some time. The trees in the park were showing it. The Borough Engineer warned of possible water restrictions, which meant that people would have to curtail watering their gardens – but this was not unusual at this season. Friday 31st July 1914 was typical of a dry Natal mid-winter day. Temperatures during the week rose to 88, 87, and 90° F, [30–32 °C] but the nights were still cool. There was a long weekend ahead – Monday August 3rd was a bank holiday – and, as might be expected, the weather took a turn against sport. On Friday the 31st strong berg winds drove dust into shops, offices and houses, even carried off the roof of an Indian’s house and deposited the debris in the telegraph wires nearby, and the sky was overcast. The temperature fell from 82 to 75 on Saturday and 70 on Sunday, there were heavy frosts in town and snow fell on the Drakensberg. Expect rain, the Natal Mercury correspondent said, but there was no rain, although it stayed in the mid-seventies [about
The outbreak of the Great War

23°C] for the next few days. So the sports went on. On Saturday afternoon there was a Currie Cup match between South-Western Districts and Rhodesia played at the Show Ground. The other matches were played elsewhere, and more of them over the long weekend, but, of course, they received full coverage in the daily papers for a good fortnight. Also for those who could afford to travel to Durban, there were two Races on Thursday and the Stewards Cup on Saturday, the 1st of August.

The weather had to be right on Monday the 3rd for the Bank Holiday competitions at the Maritzburg Golf and Country Club. There were about the same number of motor car and cycle shops in Maritzburg as there were wagon- and carriage-makers now, and motor vehicles presented a new challenge to the corporation’s maintenance of roads. More compelling for aficionados of the modern, the Motor Cycle Club had arranged an all-day endurance test for Monday. It started at 8.30, with legs from Maritzburg to Weston, Weston to Greytown (lunch), and Greytown to Maritzburg, all carefully planned and timed by members in advance. Solo machines were not to exceed twenty miles per hour, those with sidecars eighteen. The organizers were disappointed that out of 120 club members, there were only eighteen entries (sixteen solo and two sidecar). The Natal Witness gave the event front-page cover, with a detailed map of the course. “The route is certainly one which presents many difficulties.” At Weston there was not enough petrol and contestants had to go in to Mooi River for it. The race should have lasted about eight hours, but one entrant got back to Maritzburg at 9.30 that night.

There was also the fortnightly dance at the Oddfellows hall on Saturday evening, and the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra, on a countrywide tour, would give two concerts in the Town Hall on Monday and Tuesday evenings.

One old timer, a keen shottist who deplored the decline of interest in shooting, blamed the young men about town for apathy and self-indulgence. “The latest turn at the Rinko, or perhaps the newest socks, ties or motor bicycles are more in their line.” Indeed, modern technology brought not only motor vehicles but the bioscope. There were two of these in town, the Rinko in Longmarket Street and the Excelsior (“The Cosy Little Bio-Theatre in Chapel Street”). They were very central, like the majority of businesses and offices in town, situated within a ten-minute walk of the Town Hall. The Rinko had film and vaudeville shows, the Excelsior films. Both had evening performances at eight, and Saturday matinees at three o’clock, and both changed the programmes on Mondays and Thursday.

The Rinko was finishing a programme including the The Cyclery Buffoons and the Hersleb Brothers, “two of the greatest comedy acts yet to visit this City”, plus a dramatic “photo play” entitled “An Officer and a Gentleman” and a variety of six short films. The Excelsior was concluding “Another Grand Programme” which included a twenty-minute Keystone Company comedy entitled “Mabel’s Strange Predicament” and the “Star Drama” entitled “The Luck of Life”. (Both theatre houses included Gaumont’s Graphic, evidently a newsreel of contemporary events and scenes.)
Monday brought new programmes to both. At the Rinko there were Jarvise and Martine (novel comedy jugglers); Maudie Ford, singing and dancing; and the female duettists the Minnesingers. There was also the usual Pathé Gazette, and several comic short films. The *Times of Natal* reviewer noted that the gazette included Joseph Chamberlain’s funeral. Maudie Ford was good, if one liked “the ragtime craze in sound and dance”, and she was well received. The Minnesingers were almost too good: “There is nothing ‘music-hally’ about them.” At the Excelsior there was a “Sensational Feature”, “When The Lights Went Out”:

The Film is in 3 Parts, and rarely has there been such a combination of thrilling incidents with a powerful plot on the screen. The story of this film is exceptionally dramatic, and so skilfully presented that one’s attention is held spellbound from start to finish.

The audience was told there would be scenes of a shipwreck and the blowing up of a lighthouse. Pathé’s Latest Gazette, another newsrel, and three comic shorts would also be shown. The *Times* reviewer had little to say about all this, except that the shipwreck was a “fine photographic picture” and the blowing up of the lighthouse was “very realistic”.

There was also a municipal election campaign in progress. The city was divided into eight wards – the main line of division was Church Street, and the wards were separated by Chapel, Commercial and Boshoff cross streets. Almost everyone lived in town, but the wards extended outward to take in the few suburbs. The Town Council comprised the bourgeois elite of a class-conscious British community. Elections were fairly humdrum, if they occurred at all, and a popular incumbent could feel safe about his seat. There were two councillors for each ward, and one was elected every other year. In 1914 candidates contested only Wards 2, 4 and 5, but the contender for ward 4 dropped out before nominations were filed. “Tom” Reid, formerly of Ford Brothers’ ironmongers, stood forward in Ward 5 to replace Hugh Parker, who was retiring because of ill health. Councillor G.B. Laffan, an architect and civil engineer, stood for re-election in Ward 2. They were opposed by men associated with the Labour Party, M.E. Piesold, a watchmaker, and W. Clowes, respectively. One might have expected a lively campaign, especially because women could vote in local elections for the first time; but instead the fortnight’s campaign was “quite the usual tame affair”. Public meetings were few; Labour candidates proved less articulate than their opponents; and both sides played safe and talked about saving ratepayers’ money.

Yet there was more than this to stimulate the public’s interest. The news of the preceding week was increasingly about war in Europe. At first it jostled for position on the front and feature pages of the papers with news of the Currie Cup, local parliamentary elections, and the like, and, of course, the Irish trouble seemed closer to home and quite as bad. On Monday July 27th the *Witness* heralded “Austria declares war on Servia. *[The names Servia and Serbia were both used at the time.]* Ambassador withdrawn. Troops moved to the border. Russia intervenes. Five army corps mobilized. Great sensation in Europe. Fall in Consols.” Three out of the five columns of the front page carried war news. That evening the *Times*, which was usually
more restrained than the *Witness*, was still talking about Ireland, but there was a headline box: “A CONTINENT IN ARMS? Clash of Armageddon. Britain Watching at her post.” The editor commented:

War has been tentatively declared between Austria and Servia, and both countries are hastily mobilising. Russia is also mobilising on behalf of the Serbs, and it is feared that Germany may take sides with Austria, and France with Russia. Italy has already expressed her intention of adhering to the Triple Alliance. England is watching the course of events with the utmost anxiety. Readers are referred to p. 6 for the week-end news of the crisis.

From that point on it only got worse. No one really thought much of Serbia, perhaps rather more about Austria, with some sympathy after the killing of the Archduke Ferdinand by a Serb nationalist the previous month. Then things had been fairly quiet. People had grown used to crises among the great powers during the previous few years. When things got hot someone stepped in to cool them off. But not now. It really looked like war. Not only Austria, but Russia, and Germany, and France, too. And what would Britain do? Every day there was more about the war looming in Europe. It was Friday and the long weekend was coming up. Yet the fearsome headlines continued: “The clash of arms. Gathering war clouds burst. Belgrade in flames. British fleet sails. Sealed orders. Hosts of Russia and Germany. On the march.”

Newspaper sales jumped. Between Saturday July 25th and Saturday August 1st the *Witness* circulation increased by 2,272 copies. Street sales soared. Country orders poured in by telephone, telegram, and letter – hundreds a day. News agents were told to put in orders before 5p.m. for the next day, and regular supplies would be increased “in proportion to standing orders”. On Thursday the *Times* announced that it would run daily specials in red, white and blue, but, of course, they would “deal only with news of such gravity that immediate publication becomes necessary”. The *Witness*’ “Topics of the Town”, on Saturday, August 1st, spoke of “wars and rumours of war”. The press promoted them, and now no one really believed that the last-minute negotiations would achieve anything.

Saturday’s *Witness* front page carried photographs of Archduke Charles of Austria and Prince Alexander of Serbia, with the headline: “Young Heirs to Thrones Now Shaken by War: Where the Armies of the World will be Let Loose.” The latter referred to a large map of the putative theatre of operations. Other columns had detailed news. The *Times* was just as bleak: “Black Shadow of War. Creeping Over Europe. A General Call to Arms. Mr. Asquith’s Statement.”

By Monday there could no longer be any doubt about the Great War. On the *Witness* front page the headlines were: “Germany draws the sword. Declares war against Russia. Triple Alliance shattered. Italy remains neutral. France prepares to face its old enemy. Tremendous Parisian enthusiasm. Europe in battle array. Smaller states anxious.” (At least there was the local motorcycle endurance test for distraction.) The *Times* said: “Germany and Austria versus Russia and France. Britain Vigilant.” Also: “British Cabinet meets. Ominous Signs. ‘Stand by France.’” “Stop Press News” carried.
The outbreak of the Great War

The outbreak of the Great War

Tuesday, 4th August 1914

The Witness’ headlines ran: “The tide of war. Russian advances into Germany. German forces pour into France. Kaiser loses two officers. Britain calm but practical. Dominions rally to the flag. Important British statement awaited.” The front page was all war news, except for a four-column photograph at the top, captioned: “The Currie Cup tournament: the Western Province team”, and there were two photographs of play. That evening the Times was hardly as informative: “The Empire in Suspense! No War News. Cables Interrupted. Messages Held Up. Censors Appointed.” Readers had to be content with some speculative reports and local news, and perhaps some useful advice: “Cablegrams for Germany. Stopped Until further Notice.” (The second pages of both papers carried advertisements for German steamship companies as usual.)

Of course, no one could know about the British ultimatum to Germany, demanding withdrawal from Belgium, and it would be the middle of the night when it expired. The weekday passed as it usually did. That evening there were the same features at the Rinko and Excelsior. The Cape Town orchestra’s second and last performance in the Town Hall featured Tchaikovsky’s Fifth Symphony, some pieces by Grieg and Grainger and, ironically, preludes from Wagner’s Lohengrin, Parsifal, Tristan and Isolde and The Flying Dutchman. The four candidates for the Town Council made their last election speeches at different venues. None had anything new to say, and the one incumbent probably attracted the smallest audience.

Wednesday, 5th August 1914

The news that Britain (and therefore the Empire and South Africa) was at war came later in the day. The Witness’ front page declared: “Naval battle between Germany and Russia. Russian fleet driven into Gulf of Finland. British Fleet Cleared for Action. South Africa and the War.” There was even a framed communiqué in column 2: “A reassuring statement. Britain still aloof. Official announcement: ‘Be calm and confident.’” But it was dated Pretoria, 6.15p.m. Tuesday.

Shortly after eleven the news was received. Both newspapers issued specials and the news spread like wildfire, as may be imagined. Small groups of men who were in the streets talking about the war received it first, and cheered. Most people did not. The majority were shocked; some leading citizens seemed quite nonplussed. Evidently some hope had lingered with government’s last bit of reassurance. And the news came piecemeal. The complete speech by Sir Edward Grey justifying Britain’s declaration was not received in full until late in the afternoon. With it, the Times dispelled any lingering hope and doubt: “Britain Intervenes At Last. The Declaration of War. Message at Midnight. England, France, Russia v. Germany and Austria. Official Announcement.”

It was a day of disruption, as the Times observed: “Suffice to say, the news has caused a great feeling of restlessness everywhere, and there...
seems to be an inclination for everyone to temporarily suspend everything pertaining to the ordinary routine of life.” Evidently early in the day the organising committee of the West Country Dinner, scheduled for the 10th at the Creamery Hotel in Longmarket Street, decided to postpone the event: “It is felt that rejoicings and jubilations would be entirely out of place at the present juncture when Britain may be involved in war.” Purchasers were nevertheless advised to keep their tickets, as a long postponement was not expected. The Women’s Enfranchise-ment League was more realistic. Its committee met later and suspended public meetings for the duration of the war: it would henceforth “undertake any other kind of work that may be helpful to the country in the meantime”. It is not clear if the Oddfellows postponed their annual ball and the Overseas Club postponed their bridge drive that evening, but apparently the entertainment houses were open as usual. The disruption of the day was temporary, as the Times explained: “Business men, lawyers, tinkers, tailors, in fact every one, accepted the inevitable with the calm, so characteristic of the average Britisher at a time of great national tension.”

The municipal election turned out to be a damp squib. Not many electors turned out, and there was no last-minute rush to the polls. At the Town Hall, Tom Reid had a fleet of motor cars to fetch voters, and they gave a bit of bustle and brightened up Church Street with their colourful decorations. Reid defeated Piesold 176 – 34. At the Oddfellows there was apparently more action. The candidates’ tables flanked the entrance, and lady greeters hugged voters and pinned colours on them (red for Clowes, blue for Laffan) as they arrived. Clowes was trying hard, and there were probably more real “work-ers” in Ward 2. Nonetheless he was defeated by Laffan 296 – 159. Polls closed at six, and forty-five minutes later the results were announced. The candidates thanked their loyal supporters; they all gave three cheers for the Returning Officer (the Town Clerk), and went home. The Witness observed: “Had it not been for the fact that the tragedy of war hangs over everyone, the contest would possibly have assumed a more important place in the public eye.”

Anticlimax

The programme at the Rinko was not changed on Thursday – Jarvise and Martine, Maudie Ford, and the Minnesingers remained on stage, perhaps because they really were drawcards – but the photoplay was changed, with a drama entitled “Child of My Heart” and three comedy and two educational shorts, including “Russian Mountains and Tour of the Caucasus”. At the Excelsior there was something new: “Too Many Brides”, another Keystone comedy starring Ford Sterling; a Crystal comedy “His Vacation: The Adventures of a Seaside Tripper with the Eyes of Love”; and a two-reel drama “Throne or Wife?” Plus the newest Gaumont Graphic.

The Currie Cup tournament finished at the end of the week – on Saturday over 3 000 spectators at Lord’s Grounds in Durban watched Western Province defeat Transvaal. The August Handicap and eight other races were run the same day.

The one topic that did not come and go was the war. On Thursday the Maritzburg correspondent of the Natal
Mercury commented: “The greatest patriotism is in evidence on all sides, but the news has been received with characteristic British calmness.” On Friday he elaborated:

Naturally enough, scarcely anything finds a place in local thought or conversation except the war, and numerous dinners and functions have been postponed in view of the situation. All news is enthusiastically and greedily received, and except, perhaps, among a few Socialists in the place, a thoroughly patriotic spirit pervades the public.

The next few days were anti-climactic in respect of news. The morning Witness caught up with the evening Times on the full news of the declaration of war, and both newspapers carried Lord Grey’s speech and full commentaries. There certainly was no falling off of interest on the part of local readers. During the week August 1st – 8th the Witness printed 11 863 more copies than in the previous one. The problem – if it can be called that – for the newspapers was that the war itself did not move fast enough and supply front-page drama. Petty combats were magnified. Of course, there was much on the Royal Navy moving into the North Sea – but to do what?

Official censorship now applied – even locally, and for the first time sentences and paragraphs here and there in the press were blacked out, presumably because they told of intended troop movements. The South Staffordshires – the Imperial garrison at Fort Napier – returned from annual manoeuvres. Nothing was said, but naturally orders for their departure were expected. There were many rumours in the air, not least the one about militia being called up for service in British or German East Africa – depending on which rumour one heard. They were, however, promptly scotched by the authorities. Durban Active Citizen Force units were mobilised, but not Maritzburg ones, and one wonders why. Reservists of the Union Defence Force received orders to report for duty at Roberts Heights. No one knew how many of them there were in Maritzburg, but it was thought many of them must be railwaymen. All leave was cancelled for the local unit of the South African Mounted Riflemen.

The run-up to war in the press had many references to disruption of international and national markets, loss of investments, and attacks on shipping which might affect exports and imports – such as Australian wheat for South Africa. There was an early official assurance that South Africa had enough maize to feed itself. Yet when the war came there was a rush on food stocks – not only in Pietermaritzburg, but all over South Africa, as well as in England itself. It was about a week before the panic subsided and shopping and prices returned to normal.

On Tuesday the 4th there had been a rumour in town that Durban merchants, in view of a shortage of supplies in consequence of the crisis, had met and decided to raise the prices of foodstuffs. The Times interviewed the secretary of the Maritzburg Chamber of Commerce, Robert Dunlop, about this, and he dismissed the rumour. A change in the prices of foodstuffs was unlikely, barring some extraordinary event, he said; but he conceded there was a shortage of rice, which had risen in price by about 2s.6d. [two shillings and sixpence] a bag. The chamber was going to meet on Friday and discuss the situation.
Of course, war is an extraordinary event, and so there was indeed a change in the prices of foodstuffs. There was a rush on local stores on Wednesday, and grocers checked their stocks. The rush continued on Thursday, and some items ran out. Flour and paraffin became almost unobtainable, and consignments were booked a week in advance. One householder, who normally bought two bags of flour at a time, suddenly ordered twelve. Some others laid in six months’ supply. Africans and Indians joined Europeans in the rush. Local Indians appealed to the chamber to see that the price of rice, their staple diet, would not rise beyond the means of the poor. The price of rice went from 25s. to £2 a bag in two days. Indians apparently were laying in as much of it as they could afford. Muslim shopkeepers told the *Witness* that they could not prevent the increase in price because Durban merchants imposed it on them.

The price of petrol rose to £1 a case, and supplies quickly gave out, because a by-law limited the quantity that could be stored on premises. Some wholesalers tried to lay in more coal and wood, but when one offered coal at 27s.6d. a ton, few storekeepers responded. It should be noted that whatever processed foods were selling for in the shops, food prices on the local produce market remained fairly steady, e.g. maize sold for 4s.3d. – 4s.7d. per 100 lbs on Tuesday, 4s.6d. – 4s.9d. on Wednesday, and Tuesday a week later at 5s.; while sorghum sold for 4s.6d., 3s.3d. – 5s., and 3s.6d. – 5s. During the same period the price of fresh beef remained steady at 3d. – 6d. per lb.

A number of shopkeepers reserved stock for their regular customers, and refused to supply others, except limited amounts for cash. This produced an outcry, and by the end of the week there were reports of consumers blaming greedy shopkeepers for profiteering, and shopkeepers blaming panic consumers for hoarding, and the result was a great inflation of prices. The merchants said that if only public demand would return to normal, so would prices. Indeed, they expected a slump soon. The press urged the merchants, wholesalers and retailers, to get together and tell this to the public. They also called on the government to intervene to regulate prices.

There is no record of the Chamber of Commerce’s meeting on Friday, but it would be surprising if the members did not follow the suggestion, for there quickly appeared various notices in the papers promising to keep down prices, especially for valued customers. One leading citizen, G.F. Macfarlane, did ask officials to intervene to regulate prices, but got no response. Then he wired General Smuts, the Minister of Defence, saying that Durban and Maritzburg merchants had held back supplies and raised prices by 25% and upward: the government must investigate and regulate! Again there was no response.

**A Patriotic Demonstration**

The election of the new Town Council, even though it involved only two council seats, pre-empted official municipal activity on Wednesday, when the declaration of war was announced. The “new” council had to meet, and then elect a new mayor and deputy mayor, and this had to proceed in a measured, lawful manner. Thus there was no immediate or spontaneous re-
The outbreak of the Great War

A response on the part of the council or its officials to the crisis. After some reflection “A Citizen” wrote to the *Witness* that it was ungracious, if perhaps understandable, that when the mayors of Durban and several other cities in South Africa had wired expressions of support to the government almost at once, the mayor of Pietermaritzburg had not done so. The letter appeared in Saturday’s paper, when a patriotic demonstration was scheduled that evening. Even so, on Monday, the editor churlishly asked “Why is Maritzburg so backward?” Many expressed surprise in public or private that no action had been taken earlier.

One reason that the mayor did not act at once was because there was uncertainty whether the incumbent or his successor should take the initiative. The new council had its factions: one wanted Percy Taylor to continue as mayor, and the other wanted his predecessor, the current deputy mayor Daniel Sanders, to be mayor again. Apparently Thursday was taken up with politicking between them. On Friday morning the council met in caucus and decided there would be no change. Taylor would be mayor and Sanders deputy. The formal election, however, would only take place at noon the following day.

The editor of the *Times* could not wait. On Friday he telephoned Taylor to ask what he, Maritzburg’s leading citizen, was going to do in the crisis. Taylor said that after Saturday’s election he intended to make an appeal to his fellow citizens to attend a public meeting, presumably the following week, so that they could present a united front in support of the Empire: he would ask them to contribute to a Widows’ and Orphans’ Fund for the sufferers of the war. Of course, between now and then other leading citizens might come up with other suggestions of merit. He mentioned that he also was in favour of levying a special “war tax”, but since that was a national and not a local question, it would be pointless to bring it up just now.

This the *Times* imparted to the readers on Saturday morning, when fresh news of the war was embarrassingly scarce. The man in the street waited for specials. A rumour spread that there had been tremendous battles, great French and Belgian victories, bloody German defeats, and some German spies had been captured in Durban – but there was no confirmation in print. The paper’s phone rang with calls from people wanting to know the latest. By afternoon callers to the *Witness* were practically accusing it of not conducting the war properly!

Towards four o’clock some wires did come in: there had been German reverses in Belgium, a desperate attack had been made on Liège, the cavalry had been wiped out and a whole battalion had been blown up by a mine. The green special was snapped up eagerly. Then came more: a great naval battle had been fought, twenty-six German ships had been sunk, and only six British cruisers had been lost. The pink special sold well. Then another special reported that there had actually been no battle at all. Sales of Specials dropped off.

In any case it was late in the day, time for supper, and then came the great public gathering in the Town Gardens. The morning papers had a front-page notice urging all of Maritzburg to assemble that night, when an opportunity would be afforded of “exhibiting the patriotic feelings of the community
The outbreak of the Great War

in regard to the war.” The band of the Natal Carbineers would perform. The programme would begin with the national anthems of Britain, France and Russia. These would be followed in sequence by Elgar’s “Land of Hope and Glory”, a march (“Old Comrades”), and three medleys of the airs of England (G. Godfrey), Ireland (H. Basquit) and Scotland (F. Godfrey). Appropriately, the musical programme would end with the regimental march and “God save the King”.

The evening was cool and dry, the moon was full. Long before eight o’clock crowds were moving through the streets towards the Town Gardens. They assembled around the bandstand; by the time the time the band began to play there were about 4 000 people. A large Union Jack was produced and paraded about, to the accompaniment of loud cheers.

The programme began with the national anthems, each followed by three cheers. The march (perhaps considered too German?) was omitted. There were the medleys of regional airs. Then Deputy Mayor Sanders climbed on to the bandstand and announced that schoolboy soprano Eddie Palmer would sing “God save the King”. The band and audience joined in the second verse, and cheered. By this time Bandmaster Keilly no longer tried to keep to the printed programme. “What the people wanted and what they had was ‘God Save the King’ and ‘Rule Britannia’ – and plenty of it.”

The baritone Mr Glasspoole mounted the stand and sang “Land of Hope and Glory”. All joined in, and cheered. A procession went around the bandstand, led by the flag. A past president of the Sons of England, Mr Kingston, sang “Soldiers of the King”, and the crowd joined in the second verse. There were more cheers, and shouts for the army and the navy. The band played the French and Russian anthems again. Mr. Sanders shouted “Vive la France”, and everyone cheered. Someone else called “Cheers for Russia”, which were duly given.

The programme came to an end when the crowd massed close round the band stand, and cheered the Royal Family, Canada, the Overseas Dominions, and (loudest of all) “plucky little Belgium”. They sang “God save the King” and (a fourth time) “Rule, Britannia”, gave three cheers, and went home.

So began in Pietermaritzburg the four-year period that would see patriotic fervour and excitement give way to unimagined suffering and loss.
ROM a municipal point of view the town of Durban gives little cause indeed for complaint, and may justly claim the title, often applied to it, of the model borough of South Africa. For this not only the energy and enterprise of the Town Council, but the keen interest which the burgesses as a body take in public affairs, must be held responsible.”

A glowing paragraph taken from the introduction to Durban – The Sea Port of the Garden Colony of South Africa, said to be the first guidebook to Durban, priced at one shilling and published in 1899. The 99-page, soft cover book provides a history of the city as well as featuring places of interest in and about Durban – Mariannhill monastery gets a chapter to itself – as well as a guide to “Hotels and Boarding Houses” and “Statistics as to the Progress of the Town and Port during the last Twenty Years”. Curiously, despite the evident industry that has gone into the book’s production, not to mention its fulsome prose, no author’s name appears on the title page.

The book is also extremely rare. There is only one copy to be found in a public collection in Durban – and possibly the country – at the Don Africana Library. The cover image accompanying this article is that of the copy belonging to the Powell family in England who have always understood the book to have been written by their relative, Sydney Walter Powell.

Powell’s writing featured in an earlier volume of Natalia where his unpublished memoir, Each to His Taste, furnished much of the background to
Sydney Powell's adventures in Natal

Sydney Powell was born in London in 1878 and came to Durban in 1892. Two years previously his father, William Powell, had arrived in the city to start a new life after his role as corespondent in a much-publicised divorce case ruined his reputation and ended his successful career as an architect in London.

Sydney Powell, who died in 1952, wrote several novels and two memoir-cum-travel books, and it is in the 1986 reissue of one of the latter, *Adventures of a Wanderer*, that his nephew, Geoffrey Powell, recording that his uncle “contributed to a Durban paper” adds that he “also wrote the first guide-book to Durban”.  

Powell himself does not lay claim to the guide-book’s authorship either in *Adventures of a Wanderer* or the unpublished *Each to His Taste*. But author of the guidebook or not, Powell’s unpublished manuscript provides a fascinating glimpse of Durban and Pietermaritzburg in the 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century.

“I divide my youth into two periods, the sacred and profane. Of the first I have not written and am not likely to write,” says Powell, writing in the late 1920s. In fact he would write of it in the early 1940s in *Each to His Taste*. Here, as well as writing about his boyhood in England and the impact on his family of his father’s affair, Powell also recalls his youth in Durban when the Powell family lived in a house in Ridge Road on the Berea and the teenage Sydney attended Durban High School.

On arrival in Durban in 1890 Powell senior had set up an architectural practice in Durban, where he was joined by his elder son, also named William. His wife Anne, together with Sydney and his two younger brothers, Owen and Stewart, followed two years later. Another son, Norman, was later born in Durban.

Max O’Rell in his book *John Bull and Co*, speaks of Durban as “the prettiest and most coquettish town in the South African Colonies,” and few compliments were surely ever better deserved. The epithet “coquettish” seems exactly to express the peculiar charm of Durban, with the blue Indian Ocean washing her feet, and a bay that might dispute the palm of beauty with the Bay of Naples embracing her like a glorious arm, which no other town in the southern (or, for that matter, any) portion of this continent possesses.

*Durban – The Sea Port of the Garden Colony of South Africa*, page 9
Sydney Powell’s adventures in Natal

Sydney Powell

Sydney recalls his arrival by sea from England: “Our ship could not cross the bar, so we lay out; and a tug came to us, to convey the passengers ashore. On its deck I saw my father and elder brother. We waved to them, my mother and I, and then I saw a look of sudden anxiety come over his face. It became a look of anguish. He made signs to us, and my mother and I in the same moment glanced in the direction he was pointing. Absorbed in greeting him we had forgotten the two small boys … they, having also recognised my father, had climbed the rail, on a rung of which they were dancing as if they would fly to him. My mother and I rushed up and pulled them down.”

By the time they were joined on board ship by his father and elder brother all were “in a more or less excited state” which led to Powell making a “dreadful faux pas. When my father came aboard he kissed me, and then – I kissed my eighteen-year old brother! For a boy of fourteen to do such a thing – in public! – was inexcusable, and he showed the deepest embarrassment.”

The Powell family lived in a “low white bungalow” with access to Ridge Road on the top of a steep hill and “on the extreme edge of the Berea, the residential hill suburb, and at the back of our house was thick bush.” Beyond the bush Powell claimed the “southern flank” of the Drakensberg could be seen while the front of the house faced on to a garden with a view of the Indian Ocean: “Below us was a terraced garden, and the whole place was bowed in bush and trees. I could see large clumps of banana and bamboo.”

“Among all the luxuriance of green stuff and blossoms I was in heaven …. Everything charmed; not merely the hot sun, the caressing air and the surroundings, but the manner and mechanism of this new existence. Nor was there any disillusionment afterwards … I throve mentally and physically.”

Though the weather in summer is somewhat too warm to be quite agreeable to our English constitutions, at no time in of the year is the town unhealthy to live in. During the winter months … the climate is certainly as delightful as any in the world. Cloudless blue skies from week’s end to week’s end, with now and then a shower of rain to relieve any possible monotony, cool breezes from the south-west, the fresh salt smell of the ocean, an equable temperature day and night – Durban, through these months has a climate that could scarcely be excelled.

Durban – The Sea Port of the Garden Colony of South Africa, page 10
Powell attended Durban High School – “with my father and brother I walked of a morning to a bus terminus; and we took first the bus and then a tram for town. I brought my lunch with me and sometimes had it at my father’s office [at 29 Field Street], which was a large block that he had built. His reputation was growing.”

Back home on the Berea, Powell spent his time exploring the bush behind the house “just for the fun of the thing” with a friend. “Sometimes we would put up a small buck, or have to deal with a snake. I became an expert in dealing with snakes, not only out of doors but indoors.” Powell shared an outside room with his older brother and a nightly ritual was “turning the bedclothes down to the bottom” to check there were no snakes. A stick was kept in the room especially to deal with any snakes that might be found. “The snake that was not so easy to deal with was the one that stood up and disputed your path. If you had no stick it was best to retire, for nearly every snake was venomous. If you had one, you had to strike quick and aim straight. I was never afraid of snakes, though always careful of them. They belonged to my new life and my new environment, and were looked on accordingly. I found fault with nothing in my new life. There was nothing I could find fault with.”

On one adventure the two ventured beyond the bush at the rear of the house. “It did not go very far back, we found, and beyond it we came to a dip where there was a settlement of Indian market-gardeners. One could not call it a village; it was no more than a collection of biscuit-tin huts. But for me it had one important feature: a long, narrow pond.” The ideal place for Powell to sail the model yacht given to him several years earlier in England by his father. However the first attempt to do so was partially frustrated by a group of Indian boys on the far side of the pond who, led by an older boy – “less a youth than a young man” – threw stones at the boat and shouted abuse at Powell and his friend. When the yacht sailed to the other side of the pond Powell was forced to cross a narrow foot bridge over the water in order to retrieve it. The bully advanced onto the bridge towards him but when Powell kept walking the other boy backed down and Powell and his friend were allowed to fetch their boat and sail it unmolested, both then and on subsequent visits.

Another incident featured an Indian cook with a liking for “Natal rum … a raw and powerful spirit, which should never have been sold”.

On one occasion there was a “disturbance at the servants’ quarters one night, which my father went out and quelled. It appeared that the Indian gardener was at fault, though the cook was more the drunker of the two. My father sacked the gardener. The gardener…
dener was a bachelor, the cook a married man. The cook was an excellent cook, clean, cheerful and respectful, and we did not want to lose him. He celebrating pay-day pretty regularly, but carried his liquor not badly as a rule."

However one evening “the rule went to smithereens” and the cook, instead of “staying and drinking at the grog shop”, brought a bottle home. Around nine o’clock he “was shouting and parading up and down at the back of the house. My father went to the back door, and told him to quieten down and go to bed. I went too, and saw a shadowy figure in the darkness. It moved off, muttering.”

Five minutes later the cook returned uttering “maniacal howls” and began to try and knock down the back door with a coal-hammer. Within the Powells demonstrated an almost absurd English sang-froid: father William continuing to work at his drawing board, the elder son “doing something with a specification”, Sydney reading, and his mother reassuring the two younger boys in the drawing room that “it was only Ramsammy, who had too much to drink: he would be ill in the morning, and it was very silly of him.”

“Thumps and howls succeeded each other. The house reverberated; otherwise all was calm. I don’t mean that nobody was apprehensive; probably we all were; but our parents had set the tone, and the rest of us followed it … My father had a revolver, but I can understand that he did not wish to use it, which he might have to do if he met the man face to face.”

After a parental conference William Jr. was sent to the local police station. Meanwhile “the performance continued” though Sydney was more worried about his brother running into snakes in the dark. Finally, “under my brother’s guidance, the police arrived … a European constable and two natives” and following a “brief set-to in which one of the native police had a taste of the hammer. It was ended with a crack on the head from a knobkerrie.”

Durban was also the setting for the trials and tribulations of Sydney Powell’s adolescence which brought him into conflict with his father, especially when he “reached the calf-love age”. The object of his infatuation was a girl who went for music lessons to her aunt who lived next door to the Powells. “I loved her passionately. There was not the smallest danger of any complications arising, but my father assumed that there was. It was a not unnatural assumption in a grown-up man, as the climate of Durban favoured sexual precocity. I was not quite fifteen and she thirteen, and girls no older did sometimes find themselves in trouble.”

When his father, informed by his wife of the romance, took Sydney aside for a talk and raised his concerns of where matters might lead Sydney was “shocked at the suggestion that I could soil my love in such a way”. His father ordered him to end the association; he didn’t, though he became more discreet. “It was our first serious disagreement, and it stuck like a thorn in my mind.”

Nothing came of the romance. “It ended, as such affairs must end, sooner or later, when the fires of idealistic passion die down and there is nothing to replace them.”

“Round about this period I had another love affair. There were no meetings, no love passages. I fell in love with a boy.” A fellow pupil at DHS,
whom Sydney worshipped from afar. Indeed, the only time the two actually met outside school they simply “nodded and passed on”. The adult Powell recorded that “it was an infatuation, which I knew was a very odd one, but which I did not attempt to check or argue with. It, too, in time died down.”

For Powell these two incidents represented “the first landmarks of my adolescence. I was passing through a belt of strange country which lay between me and youth.”

In 1894, at the age of 16, Powell intended becoming an architect like his father, with whom, having “reached the ‘difficult stage’”, he was now having “frequent disagreements.” But when the time came for him to be apprenticed “my father told me that he feared we were too much alike in character – by which he meant too self-willed, I think – to pull together in the same office. He would apprentice me, he said, to another man”.

THE BEREA

Once there the pleasure-seeking visitor will find broad macadamised roads bordered by trees and flowering hedges, charming residences and well-kept gardens.

The Musgrave Road, especially, where are to be found the dwellings of most of Durban’s “aristocracy”, is a paragon of well-groomed comeliness. Soft green masses of foliage form a subdued and soothing background to the brilliant hues of flowering shrub and creeper which dazzle the eyes on either hand, and exquisite glimpses of the sea are caught here and there through the trees and at cross-roads. The Berea is a district ever fruitful of surprises, and an intimate acquaintance of many years only increases one’s admiration for the unique and wonderful loveliness of these wooded hills. Go where we may new beauties display themselves to our eyes at every turn, nature and art, those two so often opposing forces, being here most happily wedded. The distinctive note of the scenery is richness of colour, the soft and varied greens of the foliage in contrast with the red ochre hue of those roads which still remain unmetalled being especially striking. An artist might indeed spend a life-time among the nooks and bye-ways of this leafy region and yet not exhaust one tithe of its treasury. Were the Berea in Europe instead of Africa, a school of painters such as made famous the Forest of Fontainebleau must have assuredly settled in its midst. Seated on a wayside bank in one of the less populated parts, with a red patch of road and some great flat crowned tree for a foreground, swelling thickly-wooded slopes in the middle distance, a glimpse of the Indian Ocean stretching far away, and the bluest of blue skies over all, the most unimpressionable of mortals could scarcely fail to be impressed by the idyllic beauty of the scene. No description can do justice to the loveliness of these suburban hills. A cheap and withal very comfortable way of making a circuit of the Berea is by tram. Starting from the Town Hall, and alighting at the Musgrave Road terminus, a ten minutes’ walk brings one to Marriott Road, where a Florida Road car may be boarded, and so back to town; the entire journey being accomplished at the small cost of one shilling.

Durban – The Sea Port of the Garden Colony of South Africa, page 44.
But Powell refused to be articled to another architect: “This was not from filial affection — though I had much affection for my father — but because I knew that as an architect he had no equal in South Africa.”

Powell then decided to try for an exhibition to gain entrance to Oxford University, but this came to nought as “over some trifle I set my back up against the headmaster. He told my father that things had reached such a pass that he could not have me under him any longer.”

This coincided with a period in which Sydney was having violent quarrels with his father, on one occasion walking out of the house “saying I would get a job in a shop and never come back.”

During this time of emotional upheaval Powell had begun writing, both prose and poetry. His father was so proud of a sonnet by his son published in the London magazine, Temple Bar, that he had copies of it printed for his friends at the Durban Club. “It was a happy incident,” says Powell, “and I can’t remember that we ever quarrelled afterwards.”

Despite that, “the vision of Oxford was gone. I had just left the school, where the headmaster, for good reasons, would not have me, and it was too late in the day to send me to another.”

Powell’s father then decided to put his son into the Natal Civil Service. “It was not a hard-worked one; the hours were from nine till four, and it did not do a great deal in them; it offered a career of sorts, and it was gentlemanly. My father knew something about it, for he was engaged in building the new Colonial Offices in Pietermaritzburg, the capital” and the father persuaded the son that “here was the very occupation in which to indulge my literary tendencies …. In the Civil Service I should not only have the time but the surplus energy to write.”

Powell read up for the Civil Service examination while his father obtained a promise from the Principal Under-Secretary that if his son passed he would be given an appointment in the Colonial Secretary’s office. Powell obligingly passed third “out of about twenty and got the appointment. I was just eighteen.”

“I found the Civil Service much as we had judged it to be. With rare exceptions, nobody overworked himself, and often four o’clock was a release from boredom – the boredom of putting in time. It was overstaffed on principle, the principle being that if there was a rush there should be plenty of hands to deal with it. Once I had to work all night, but only once, and usually I left the office on the stroke of four. I can only speak with knowledge of my own department, but I should say that in the others it was much the same. We took a pride in being leisurely; it was our cachet. It distinguished us from bank clerks, business people and others of the common herd.”

Meanwhile Powell “wrote by fits and starts” and enjoyed the “gaieties” of Pietermaritzburg, “but there was a not too subtle difference between them and the gaieties of Durban, which were less socially hidebound and more cosmopolitan.” Nevertheless he “wined and wenched like other young men” and with an older friend went walking and riding. “I got into plenty of mischief when I was not with him, but he kept me out of plenty more.”

Powell also continued writing, occasionally selling his “literary efforts lo-
cally or in other parts of South Africa, but I failed in further attempts on the English magazines.”40 He presumably also found the time to write the Durban guide book.

“But writing was not my chief interest; life itself was that: and I already longed to explore it more fully than I could do here.” Life in the Civil Service began to chafe “but I saw no escape … unless I simply walked out of it. But I was not prepared to do that – yet.”41

The advent of the Anglo-Boer War in 1899 provided the opportunity. “Here was a chance of breaking through my confines, if I could find a way of utilising it. I belonged to no permanent volunteer corps, and could not now have joined one, with any hope of getting away yet; but I knew a man in the Public Works Department who had been granted leave to organise an Indian ambulance corps, and he wanted leaders for it. He said he would take me if I could get leave. I applied for it and got it.”42

Powell served in the campaign to relieve the siege of Ladysmith. “I saw the fighting in Natal … (but) it would be wrong to say I took part in it. Belonging to an ambulance corps I could not, but I found plenty of opportunities for observation, and I got some experience out of it.”44

This period of Powell’s life is also recorded in Adventures of a Wanderer where he recalls that an “Indian ambulance corps that wanted leaders was my means of going to the front, and in it I made the acquaintance of a young barrister whom I chiefly remember on account of his devotion to duty and his loving care for his men. His name was Gandhi.”44

In Each to His Taste Powell adds slightly more detail regarding his brief encounter with one of the most famous names of the twentieth century: “The poorly nourished Indian bearers suffered greatly but a young Indian barrister pulled them through. He was one of our leaders, and he took my attention at once by his gentle, bright manner, his aliveness, and his complete unselfishness. His name was Gandhi. I met him afterwards in Durban, and – believe it or not – we had a drink together. In a public bar. What he drank I don’t remember, but I drank a whisky.”45

When Ladysmith was relieved, the ambulance corps was disbanded. “I had seen battles and retreats. We had some heavy work to do after Spionkop: a carry of twenty-five miles. I had seen things that surprised me: British officers losing their heads and their tempers; British soldiers broken up with
fright, who had run miles from the firing-line. I saw one sitting by the roadside who had thrown away his rifle and equipment. One of us, an old Irish soldier, gave him a tongue lashing, but he was too abject to be affected by it. And I saw what pained me, middle-aged Reservists, so soft that, unused to the heat, they could not march. They were wretched with the feeling that they had disgraced themselves, but the disgrace, I thought, was not at their door.”

Powell returned to Pietermaritzburg and his job and for “a while resumed the life I had dropped. But I had had a taste of what I wanted, and I wanted more.”

As it happened there were no “stabilising influences that might have counteracted this” Powell’s former friend had left town and his father was in poor health. He died on 7 June 1900 at the age of 50. Work on the Colonial Building continued under the direction of William Jr. and was completed in 1901.

William Powell’s widow, Anne, returned to England – “[she] had never liked Natal” – taking the younger children with her. “That left my elder brother only, and he and I had never had much in common.”

Powell grew increasingly restless. Even his writing outlets were curtailed when the premises of a Durban newspaper for which he had been writing a daily letter was destroyed by fire, thus bringing “this work to an end”.

Bored and frustrated, the 23-year-old Powell resigned from the Civil Service and “joined a mounted irregular corps” in Durban in late 1900. Alas, despite his ability to ride and shoot, he was given a post in the recruiting office thanks to his civil service experience. Three months into the six-month enlistment period he “felt I could not spend another three months here, and I made up my mind to desert.”

And so, “very early one morning”, Powell dressed in his civilian clothes and left. When a tent mate woke up and asked him where he was going he responded that he “was taking a day off. I had once before been absent without leave, so he probably thought no more about it.”

Powell’s plan was “to walk to East London, through East Griqualand and British Kaffraria, a nice little tramp of four hundred miles.” Once in the Cape Colony he intended to re-enlist. In the meantime he would keep “out of the way for a little while” putting in time in Kokstad and Umtata “while this affair blew over”.

That he had little money “merely added sauce to the adventure. I meant

THE BLUFF

Few more pleasant spots, indeed, are to be found in the neighbourhood of Durban in which to loiter away a few hours or even an entire day. At the Bluff Retreat … one may make one’s repast in a cool arbour with a roof of boughs, and the blue waters of the Bay before one’s eyes. From this hostelry to the summit of the Bluff is an easy climb of some ten minutes’ duration. A battery of two guns of modern construction pointing seawards from the summit are of some interest even to a civilian, and must impress fairly emphatically upon his mind the fact that Durban would not be wholly at the mercy of any foreign invader who might pay these coasts a visit.

_Durban – The Sea Port of the Garden Colony of South Africa_, page 46.
to pick up a job of some sort in Kokstad, and do the same in Umtata. Jobs were not hard to get anywhere in South Africa. If a man starved it was his own fault.”

By the time he had covered 120 of the 150 miles to Kokstad Powell was on a bread-and-water diet. When rain threatened he took shelter in a barn but the farmer kindly allowed him to sleep in the farmhouse, fed him up the following day and gave him a sovereign to send him on his way.

Two days later and “within ten miles of Kokstad” Powell was overtaken by a mounted Natal Police sergeant. Was he being followed, he wondered? They talked for a while, the sergeant slowing his horse to walking pace, before riding on after bidding Powell a “friendly farewell, saying that he expected to see me in Kokstad.”

The two met again at a hotel in Kokstad. When Powell indicated he was interested in joining the town guard stationed at the Cape Mounted Rifle camp on the hill the sergeant told him there were Boer commandos in the area. Accordingly, the next day, Powell enrolled under a false name happily anticipating a “scrap sooner or later”.

Powell met the police sergeant “whose station was on the border … on several occasions afterwards.” On one of them the sergeant revealed he knew his real identity and had recognised him when they first met – “if I hadn’t known all about you, I should have pinched you – or seen that you were pinched in Kokstad.”

The sergeant had recognised Powell because of his likeness to his elder brother whom he had met at horse race meetings – “my brother’s passion was racing” – and had been informed of Powell’s desertion. “I’d had word of you as a deserter and there you were. I had two minds what to do about it, but I said ‘no.’ Your brother’s not a bad sort, is he?”

Powell told him the reason why he had deserted and the sergeant was sympathetic indicating that he would be safe in the Town Guard under an assumed name. However the scrap the sergeant promised never materialised. “There were Boer commandoes [sic] about, but the mounted troops were keeping them at a distance.”

Powell spent five months in Kokstad which he found “a pretty little place, anything but stagnant under its quiet surface, and I lived pleasantly enough here, gaily even. The climate was perfection, the air sparkling.”

When the Boers were no longer considered a threat the Town Guard was disbanded and Powell was discharged. After saying goodbye to friends Powell “set out to walk to Umtata … a journey of a hundred miles through native territory.”

“There were no farms, and wayside stores were few. I bought what I wanted at the stores and wasted no time, for I had to get through this country as quickly as possible.”

He found the local people unfriendly, refusing to sell him “even a drink of kaffir [sic] beer”. A new experience for Powell, as previously he had found “the native hospitable and forthcoming wherever I had met him; but these people were utterly aloof.”

Not so their dogs. “From the moment I entered the territory until I left it, they took an intense and unpleasant interest in me. From every kraal they rushed out as soon as I was sighted. They came in packs, big black mongrels, barking furiously. At first they alarmed me considerably, especially as
their masters made no attempt to call them off. They would snap at my heels and try to encircle me, and I had to fight them off with a stick I was luckily carrying.” 

He soon found it was more effective to pick up a stone when they were still at a distance: “they at once turned tail and dispersed.”

“About the middle of the year 1901 I stood upon the rim of a cup of hills, looking down on the township of Umtata in British Kaffraria” – the opening sentence of Adventures of a Wanderer at which point the published book and unpublished manuscript proceed along similar if not exactly parallel lines.

Powell worked for a month in Umtata as a clerk to the Commissioner for the Territory before proceeding to East London where he joined the Queens-town Mounted Infantry. After a brief spell as paymaster based in Tarkastad he joined the squadron in the field where “little scraps” were “bright little incidents that broke the tediousness of continual riding.”

When the squadron was paid off due to the Cape Defence Force being reorganised Powell returned to East London and joined Damant’s Horse. Two months after joining he found himself in hospital with fever and was sent to Johannesburg, where he spent three months in hospital convalescing on “chicken and bottled stout”. Returned to his regiment he took part in a “little hard riding on one of those big sweeps that gathered in the Boers in a net, and the next thing I heard was that peace was to be declared”. The regiment headed for Kimberley to be disbanded but Powell’s fever recurred and he was hospitalised before being sent on to Cape Town to be paid off. “What I should do next, where I should go next, I did not consider. It was enough for me to feel that I was without a tie.”

This was the beginning of Powell’s wandering years. They would take him to Southern Rhodesia – and service in the British South Africa Police – then to Australia, Thursday Island, New Zealand and Tahiti.

In 1914 Powell returned to Australia and enlisted with the 4th Battalion of the 1st Australian Division. He fought at Gallipoli, where he was badly wounded. During his recovery in England he fell in love with Margaret, “the quiet and gentle Highland nurse who … cared for him as he recovered from his Gallipoli wounds”. Powell subsequently returned to Tahiti before joining Margaret in Australia, where they married. Powell earned an income writing potboilers for the New South Wales Railway Bookstall series.

CONCLUSION

… when we consider the well nigh perfect climate that the town enjoys in winter time, its charming situation and surroundings, its varied sources of amusement and its proximity (as distances are reckoned in this continent) to that great centre of wealth and industry which may surely be nominated the metropolis of SA, the causes of Durban’s increasing popularity as a health and pleasure resort demand no explanation; and the time is not far off, we venture to prognosticate, when she will be recognised and formally enthroned as the Queen of South African sea-board towns.

Durban – The Sea Port of the Garden Colony of South Africa, page 82.
According to Powell’s nephew, Geoffrey, with “a small legacy they bought an isolated cottage in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales, where their nearest neighbours were Norman Lindsay, the artist and writer, and his wife.”78 The two men “both in their way recluses, became intimate friends although they could quarrel fiercely, usually on literary questions. Like Lindsay, Powell easily took offence.”79

Powell began working on a literary novel and an impressed Lindsay recommended he send the manuscript to a London publisher where, says his nephew, “it was accepted with enthusiasm. A literary career beckoned, and England seemed the only place to develop it. In 1925, he and his wife sold up and left, a decision Powell was to query until the end of his days.”80

In England Powell and his wife led a migratory existence moving from cottage to cottage, “sometimes around Salisbury, sometimes in Bournemouth”. Powell did reviewing work for the Times Literary Supplement and wrote novels, most of which “had as their background either the South Seas or contemporary England”81. For three or four years Powell “wrote leading articles and reviews for Poetry Review, but something went amiss, and he severed his connection one day in a rage.”82

According to his nephew, Powell’s life “drifted gently towards its end. Happy enough in the society of his wife, he could blossom when any member of his family broke into his seclusion. Otherwise his pen was his outlet …. He died in 1952, a few months after losing his wife.”83

ENDNOTES

1 Durban – The Sea Port of the Garden Colony of South Africa, published by P.Davis & Sons, Pietermaritzburg and Durban, 1899.
2 The story of William Powell is told in “A tale of two phoenixes: The Colonial Building and its architect William Powell” by Stephen Coan, Natalia 42, pp.33-44. A photocopy of a section of the unpublished manuscript of Each To His Taste – An Autobiography by Sydney Powell was sent to the author in 2003 by Geoffrey Powell, Sydney Powell’s nephew, and provided the basis for the article “A Victorian Affair” published in The Witness on 29 July 2004 of which the Natalia article was a revised and enlarged version. The original manuscript, as well as books and other material relating to Sydney Powell, was donated to the National Library of Australia in 2003 by Geoffrey Powell where they are held as Papers of Sydney Powell, Bid ID 3646265. Each To His Taste is thought to have been written about 1942 and is a sequel to the earlier Adventures of a Wanderer published in 1928.
3 Sydney Walter Powell, Adventures of a Wanderer, Century Hutchinson, 1986, p.x. The book was first published by Jonathan Cape in 1928. The 1986 reprint published in The Century Travellers series is introduced by Powell’s nephew Geoffrey Powell. This quotation is from Geoffrey Powell’s introduction to the 1986 edition published by Hutchinson, p.x. Geoffrey Powell (1914-2005), soldier, author and historian, was the only child of Owen Powell, the son of the architect William Powell, and his wife Kitty. During World War Two while serving with the 1st Airborne Division he took part in the battle of Arnhem in September 1944 where he won a Military Cross. After the war Powell served in Java, Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus. He transferred to the Civil Service and for 12 years worked for MI5, on security policy and counter-espionage. On leaving MI5 in 1977, he founded the Campden Bookshop in Chipping Campden and also helped to establish the Campden and District Archaeological and History Society. Among his books are The Kandyan Wars: The British Conquest of Ceylon (1973), Men at Arnhem (1976) and Suez: The Double War
Sydney Powell’s adventures in Natal


Adventures of a Wanderer, p.21.
Ibid., p.21.
Ibid., p.23.
Ibid., p.41.
Ibid., p.22.
Ibid., pp.21-22.
Ibid., p.23.
Ibid., pp.23-24.
Ibid., p.32.
Ibid., p.34.
Ibid., pp.27-28.
Ibid., p.28.
Ibid.
Ibid., p.29.
Ibid., p.30.
Ibid., p.31.
Ibid., p.24.
Ibid., p.25.
Ibid., p.25.
Ibid., p.27.
Ibid., p.35.
Ibid., p.36.
Ibid.
Ibid., p.37.
Ibid.
Ibid., p.38.
Ibid., p.39.
Ibid., p.39.
Ibid., p.40.
Ibid., p.40.
Ibid., pp.40-41.
Ibid., p.41.
Ibid., p.41.
Ibid., pp.49-50. Colonel T. Gallwey, principal medical officer of Natal, who instituted the Natal Volunteer Ambulance Corps (NVAC). At the same time Indian lawyer Mohandas Gandhi raised an Indian Ambulance Corps that was incorporated into the NVAC.
Ibid., p. 50.
Adventures of a Wanderer, p.18.
Each to His Taste, pp.51-52.
Ibid., p.51.

In Durban William Powell senior designed a building at Durban Boy’s High School and the public swimming pool, both since demolished, and the dining room of the Durban Club. In Pietermaritzburg he designed the Victoria Hall at Maritzburg College and the recently restored Colonial Building in Church Street. He also designed St James Anglican Church in Dundee.
Ibid., p.52.
Ibid. Sydney’s elder brother, William, returned to England a few years later.
Ibid.
Ibid., p.52.
Ibid., p.53.
Ibid., p.54.
Ibid., p.54.
Ibid.
Ibid., p.58.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid., p.59.
Ibid.
Ibid., p.60.
Ibid.
Ibid., pp.60-61.
Ibid., p.60.
Ibid.
Ibid., p.62.
Adventures of a Wanderer, p.17.
Each to His Taste, p.69.
Ibid., p.75.
Ibid.
Ibid., p.76.

Powell also wrote poetry but had difficulty getting it into print. “Despairing of his work ever being published, in 1932 he entered his epic poem Gallipoli for a festival of poets under forty years of age which John Masefield, the Poet Laureate, was organising. Awarded the prize, Powell well over the age limit, then 54, admitted to the deception by return of post and gave back the prize cheque of £25. Masefield was understandably annoyed, but the ruse succeeded. The following year the Poetry Review published the poem, and in 1934 Harrap brought out a collection of Powell’s poetical work, One Way Street.”


77 These books, published by the N.S.W. Bookstall Co., Sydney, included *The Maker of Pearls* (1920), *Hermit Island* (1921); *The Great Jade Seal* (1922); *The Pearls of Cheong Tah* (1922) and *The Trader of Kameko* (1923).

78 Norman Lindsay (1879-1969), major Australian artist, sculptor and writer.

79 *Adventures of a Wanderer*, p.ix.


The name Umzinto derives from the Zulu *Umuziwe Zinto* – the home of things or events. Patrick J. Maxwell and his wife were probably the first settlers in the Umzinto district in 1849, growing coffee and cotton. However, Bunting Johnstone’s residence in the district may have pre-dated that of the Maxwells. In 1861 he claimed to have been living in what was generally called Lower uMkomazi for thirteen years. As a settlement, Umzinto was little more than a hamlet until the 1880s. When he made his second tour of the South Coast in 1870, *Mercury* editor, John Robinson, described Umzinto as a “cluster of homesteads within gunshot of each other” which gave the “impression of a township”. Nonetheless, it was the chief area of settlement in what from 1865 was called Alexandra County.

Umzinto sprang into prominence in 1857 as a result of two apparently unrelated developments. One was the decision to open up the area south of the uMkomazi river by inviting applications for grants of Crown land. The other concerned the establishment of the first public company to operate in Natal, namely, the Umzinto Sugar Company.

**Crown land applications**

In 1853 the *Mercury* remarked in an editorial on the need for a scheme “for throwing open the unoccupied Crown lands” in the Lower uMkomazi district. In 1856 the Resident Magistrate, Henry Francis Fynn, urged that such a policy be embraced, particularly as he desired what his colleagues in other counties enjoyed: a central office and
a house. The absence of settlers – there were only three, namely Bunting Johnstone, John Higham and John McKenzie – obliged Fynn to “locate myself with a wagon central to the few Europeans occupying the south bank of the Umkomaas”.7

Following the election of the first Legislative Council in March 1857, a committee was appointed to promote settlement of the coastal counties by means of Crown land grants. Although the idea was to attract British immigrants, dissatisfaction with the existing Byrne grants and news of the success of sugar on the coastal belt prompted many to take their chances and make a fresh start.8 Within a year Fynn’s sparsely populated world changed dramatically. There was a spate of applications for Crown land grants south of the uMkomazi river. Robert Mann, in his book The Colony of Natal, stated that by 1859 the number of colonists had grown to 93.9 As a result, Fynn informed the Colonial Secretary that he would be purchasing land and building a house near Umzinto “as the most central locality in the division” for his magistracy.10 Two other developments indicated that officialdom endorsed Umzinto as the node for development: the estimates for 1858 indicated that £10 was allocated to a post office in Umzinto. This was followed by official sanction for the establishment of a cattle pound.11 The Supply Bill for 1859 reflected a sum of £50 for a school in the Umzinto district.12 Fynn also had additional support. A Justice of the Peace, James Arbuthnot, was appointed in November 1858.13 After seven years in the Richmond area, Arbuthnot took up a 600-acre grant on the north bank of the Mzinto river which he named Umzinto Lodge.14 The first social gathering to take place in Umzinto was a farewell public dinner hosted for Fynn in March 1860 to mark his retirement from the civil service. No details were stated in the Mercury report as to where the function was held or the attendance.15

Umzinto Sugar Company
When it was formed in 1857, the company’s directors were all based in Cape Town. According to its prospectus, the company had a capital
stock of £30 000. In terms of its Deed of Grant, Alexandra Farms, as it was registered, was granted 9 000 acres in the Umzinto area. Its plan was to lease those lands for cane growing and to crush the harvest at a central mill. In 1858, Umzinto became the first place in Natal to employ oriental labourers when a group of Malays and Chinese arrived to work on the sugar estate. But their stay was short-lived. Working for 10 shillings a month did not appeal to their hopes for a quick fortune. Despite the loss of their mechanical expertise, the sugar factory, as it was called, started operating in March 1860, producing sugar yields which, it was claimed, were unrivalled in the Colony. By 1861 the company had 150 acres under cane, of which 100 acres were ready for crushing. Following his tour of the South Coast in 1861, Mercury editor John Robinson described the factory as the biggest building in the Colony. With walls 20 feet high, an iron roof spanned the 150 feet length of the building which housed machinery “whirling around at the rate of innumerable miles per minute” and emitting a “deafening uproar”.

The sugar enterprise also initiated the arrival of indentured Indian labour. Within weeks of the arrival of the first of these labourers in Natal in November 1860, the Umzinto Sugar Company was assigned 30 indentured Indians. Robinson noted that indentured Indians were also employed by Captain James Greetham and John Pearse of the Umzinto area, who had modest 30-acre cane fields. Early in 1862 the Acting Resident Magistrate, R.B. Struthers, reported the first incident of suicide by an Indian labourer. Bootoo hanged himself on
an estate in Umzinto. According to Struthers, the incompetence of the Indian interpreter made it impossible to record intelligible depositions from Bootoo’s fellow labourers.24 Reference to the incidence of suicide amongst indentured labourers in the Umzinto area, which reached critical levels in the last 20 years of the colonial era, is made later.

Travel and transport
From Reunion to Port Shepstone the South Coast is traversed by 26 rivers. From the outset, settlement and development of the region was hampered by the absence of bridges and proper roads. As early as 1860 an editorial in the Mercury noted that “no part of Natal is so much in need of passable roads as the district about the Umzinto”. Concern at this state of affairs resulted in the first public meeting in the Umzinto district. Chaired by James Arbuthnot of Umzinto Lodge, it was noted that the cost of transport from Durban to Umzinto was three times more expensive than transport from Durban to Pietermaritzburg, even though the distances were similar.25 But 37 years would pass before the arrival of the railway at Park Rynie, some six miles from Umzinto, solved the area’s travel and transport dilemma.

Untamed environs
Along the sparsely settled South Coast game, particularly buck, were still plentiful in the 1860s. Shooting for the pot was part of the lifestyle. Charles Hamilton, who travelled extensively around Natal in the 1860s, noted that at one planter’s estate in the Ifafa area, probably that of William Joyner, supplying the household with meat by shooting game was a full-time job for two of the planter’s sons.26 The business of shooting required gunpowder. In 1866, 45 residents in the Lower uMkomazi area petitioned for the establishment of a powder magazine at Umzinto. Their request was granted and Harry Wylde-Brown, clerk of the court at Umzinto, was appointed as dispensing officer.27 In 1866, more than 5 000 pounds of gunpowder was sold to 61 permit holders in Alexandra County. A permit was required where purchases exceeded 10 pounds per annum.28 The significance of that extensive use of gunpowder may be explained by Law 8 of 1866, which encouraged the destruction of “noxious animals”, namely those which caused losses to livestock and crops. Heading the list was the leopard. A reward of £1 per leopard killed was offered. Hyenas, jackals and crocodiles rated 10 shillings per kill.29 The death of Richard Pennington of the Umzinto district in February 1865 as a result of having been mauled by a leopard indicated the threat such predators posed.30

Progress to 1866
The growth of the Umzinto settler population may be gauged from the fact that the Blue Book for 1862 recorded a membership of 80 belonging to St Patrick’s Anglican parish.31 However, as the only Anglican church in the district, it is reasonable to assume that not all 80 members resided in the Umzinto area. Reverend Joseph Barker, who commenced his ministry in the area at the chapel on Umzinto Lodge at the invitation of James Arbuthnot in January 1861, presided over St Patrick’s from 1866 to 1886.
The church building was completed only in 1869. A notice in the Government Gazette in August 1862 on the sequestration of the estate of John Pearse provides a further indicator of the evolving social structure of the area. Pearse was a hotel keeper in Umzinto. The growing significance of the settlement was also reflected in the fact that by 1864 Umzinto enjoyed a thrice-weekly postal service from Durban. By 1866, the colonial budget reflected a sum of £24 for adult evening classes in Umzinto.

Official interest in Umzinto was indicated by the personnel appointed to the court. Although there was no official building, the staff appointments were as follows: Resident Magistrate, James Dunbar Moodie, appointed 7 August 1860 at an annual salary of £300; clerk of the court, Harry Wylde-Brown, appointed 27 May 1861 – salary £155 per annum; interpreter, W.J. Arbuthnot, appointed 3 October 1862 at £125 per annum; Moonsaumy, Indian interpreter, appointed 2 May 1861 at £48 per annum. In their fashion of doing things, the colonial administration prioritised the construction of a gaol ahead of a court room, calling for tenders in 1863 for the project to be undertaken on the Ida Vale property of Bunting Johnstone near the Mzinto river. The gaol, completed in September 1865, was the first public building erected not only in Umzinto but in Alexandra County, as the region was formally known after August 1865. But five years later magistrate Moodie was still enquiring about the erection of his court house. Not until 1873 was official mention made of the provision of offices and a court room for Moodie in Umzinto.

Social cohesion manifested itself via the formation of the Umzinto Rifle Club in February 1860, the first of its kind on the South Coast. Such organisations were regarded as essential to the security of colonial settlements and were established across the length and breadth of Natal. In 1903 there were 59 officially registered rifle associations. Shooting competitions became convivial occasions. In 1865 the Umzinto Mounted Rifles came to be known as the Alexandra Mounted Rifles, headed by Major James Moodie. Second in command was Captain Lewis Reynolds. Alexander Brander was the quartermaster. Despite this element of organisation and social cohesion, Umzinto residents were reticent about the formation of a town board. In his reports for 1864 and 1866, magistrate Moodie expressed disappointment at...
being unable to make headway in that regard.44

By this time annual horse race meetings were being held at Umzinto. They attracted punters from Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Held over two days, they featured handicap, hurdle and flat pony races. Evenings were spent dancing, singing and drinking, according to Charles Hamilton, who attended one such occasion. As accommodation was very limited, many of the women slept in wagons.45

The retirement of the manager of the Umzinto Sugar Company, Mr Maclean, in 1863 resulted in a farewell function which lasted until the small hours of the morning and was described as the “happiest of all happy meetings which had ever been held at Umzinto”. 46

Hard times

The recession which took hold in Natal in 1865 did not manifest itself on the South Coast until 1866. Requisitions for indentured labour were cancelled because of the state of the economy as debt began to close businesses and force planters to dispose of their farms. A correspondent for the Umzinto area noted that life was “almost at a standstill” and that “trade has been unusually dull”.48 In January 1867 W.J. Aiken’s haberdashery and grocery store in Umzinto was declared insolvent.49 Arrears on quitrents owed to the government by farmers in the district increased from £303 in 1865 to £550 in 1867.50 As the diary of David Aiken showed, the tardiness or inability of one farmer to settle his debts potentially jeopardised the financial liquidity of others.51

The most serious setback to the Umzinto district’s economy was the liquidation of the Umzinto Plantation and Trading Company, the name the Umzinto Sugar Company had been given after its Cape owners sold it to British investors in 1863. The financial slump in Britain discouraged the British parent company from further investment and in 1868 the company was placed under court supervision in London.52 On his tour of South Coast estates in 1870, John Robinson described the Umzinto Trading Company’s estate as a “monument of desolation and failure”.53 In 1873, Lewis Reynolds bought the entire estate for a mere £5 000. After his death in September 1875, the Umzinto estate formed the basis of the company known as T. Reynolds and Sons, which was established by Lewis’s brother Thomas and his two sons, Frank and Charles, in 1877.54 As such it proved a forerunner of the corporate structure which came to dominate the sugar industry from the 1890s.

Later years – politics

The absence of a bridge over the uMkomazi River not only retarded the development of the South Coast but contributed significantly to the isolation of the Umzinto district. Following Robinson’s tour of the South Coast and his enthusiastic support for the construction of a bridge over the uMkomazi,55 John Bazley of Nil Desperandum estate on the Ifafa river, a man of considerable mechanical ability, made a prototype of the bridge needed to span the uMkomazi and exhibited it in Black and Baxter’s store in Umzinto in 1871.56 But his efforts were in vain, the absence of a directly elected representative possibly adding to the neglect of the region’s infrastructure needs. Only in
September 1897, nearly six years after Bazley’s death, was a bridge over the uMkomazi completed.

As the central settlement, Umzinto was witness to all the politics of the county. In terms of Law 1 of 1873, Alexandra and Alfred Counties became eligible for the election of a single representative in the Legislative Council. Since the inception of representative government in 1857, the South Coast had been represented in the council by the Durban County representative. Initially it appeared that two candidates would contest the new seat: a Captain W. Lloyd and James Burnett Aiken. Polling arrangements were the responsibility of Resident Magistrate Moodie who, despite the vast size of the constituency, requisitioned the residence of Alexander Brander in the Umzinto district as the sole polling station. August 25, 26 and 27 were the designated voting days. But Captain Lloyd withdrew his candidacy and so, based on a requisition endorsed by 35 locals, Aiken was elected unopposed.

At his first public meeting in Umzinto, he described himself as “very diffident and unworthy to represent this important constituency” and expressed the view that Alexander Brander should have been the candidate. Despite those modest words, Aiken lost no time in making a name for himself in the council as a result of his controversial remarks on the proposed Welborne railway scheme. His penchant for controversy reached a climax as a result of remarks he made during a two-hour speech at a banquet in Umzinto on 3 June 1874. On that occasion he made derogatory remarks about his “up-country” colleagues in the council, recommended himself as being worthy of a top government position and accused newspaper editors of having unacceptable power to influence public opinion. As a result the Mercury branded Aiken as “unfit for public life”, while the Witness condemned his speech as “gasconading conceit”. After his tumultuous first year in politics Aiken’s political career slipped into obscurity. The insolvency of his Maryville sugar estate obliged him to resign from the council in April 1877.

Umzinto’s political annals included a fleeting visit by Britain’s top soldier of that time, Sir Garnet Wolseley, on 29 July 1875 in his capacity as Administrator of the Colony of Natal. Appeals by Alexander Brander, who chaired the meeting, for Wolseley to expedite the infrastructural needs of Alexandra County came to naught. Brander was a stalwart of the Umzinto district having settled there in 1859. From 1865 to 1882 he served as Field Cornet. His involvement in civic matters, which included agitating for Alexandra County to have its own, directly elected representative in the Legislative Council, earned him the epithet “Father of the District”.

Thomas Reynolds, who represented the South Coast from 1880 to 1885, was the first elected member whose residence was in Umzinto. Originally from the North Coast, he sold his Oaklands estate there in 1881 and made Umzinto his permanent home. His investment in the district laid the foundations of the Reynolds Brothers empire, which came to dominate the sugar industry on the South Coast after his death in 1885.

Robert Montgomery Archibald was undoubtedly Umzinto’s most distinguished political son. He moved
from the Isipingo area to Umzinto in 1872. By 1875 he had established his own trading store, Archibald and Co., which later had branches in Equeefa, Ixopo and Highflats. In time he came to own five farms in the Umzinto district and established a reputation for reliability and integrity.69 From 1890, when Alexandra County was first permitted its own representative in the Legislative Council, until 1910, when Natal became part of the Union, Archibald represented his district and county. From 1903 to 1910 he held the post of Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. A correspondent in the Mercury described him as follows: “There is no man in Alexandra County more esteemed than the senior MLA, Mr R.M. Archibald. His kindness and courtesy to everyone, his interest to all that concerns the county are too well known.”70 In the 1906 election, his final one, Archibald received the highest number of votes any candidate ever achieved on the South Coast – 208.71 He passed away in 1913 and is buried in the cemetery at St Patrick’s along with his wife, Mary.

Although Frank Reynolds was prominent and indeed dominant in the sugar industry, the same cannot be said of his role in the Natal Legislative Assembly, where he represented Alexandra County alongside his fellow Umzinto resident, Archibald, from 1902 to 1906. In 1903 he recorded the second worst attendance record – 49 absences from the assembly. His final two years in the assembly were no better.72 His failure to contribute in the assembly debates resulted in the following unflattering observation: “The member for Alexandra County has apparently taken a vow of perpetual silence. It would seem he has no opinions on any subject.”73

Gold fever
From February 1887 until 1890 there was ongoing speculation about investment in auriferous prospects in the Umzinto district. A “golden valley” on a farm belonging to the Reynolds brothers triggered a huge interest in gold speculation. By April 1887 a business called Alexandra Central Syndicate had been formed. The Royal Hotel in Umzinto announced that it was making “considerable additions” to its capacity in order to accommodate prospectors and “other curious types” who were venturing down to Umzinto.74 In Durban the Exchange Mart in West St advertised a variety of camping gear, marquees and tents for those headed to the “Umzinto Gold Fields”.75 In September 1887 another company was floated, the Alexandra Gold Mining Company, with a capital
of £35 000. The Reynolds brothers were among the major stakeholders. Although no substantial gold yields were forthcoming, speculation continued, reaching a peak when it was reported in 1888 that a “well-defined auriferous reef” had been located at Dumisa in the Umzinto district. Natal Lt-Governor Sir Arthur Havelock attended the opening of the mine along with 100 guests. But production was disappointing – a mere half ounce per ton of crushed ore. As a result, by September 1891 the mine was closed and its equipment auctioned off. However, small-scale prospecting continued for a time in the area.

Social life

The first attempt at holding a public ball took place in the Umzinto school in 1874. The dance, attended by about 100 people, commenced at 8pm and “was kept up with unabated vigour till day light did appear next morning”. As an indicator of progress and prosperity, the venue for the 1875 ball was Umzinto’s newly erected Royal Hotel. Social cohesion manifested itself on the occasion of the death of Lewis Reynolds. There was a large turnout for his funeral and burial at St Patrick’s. By 1879 St Patrick’s had a membership of 100 white worshippers with an average of 60 attending the Sunday service.

At the time of the Anglo-Zulu war in 1879, Umzinto was one of seven designated defence districts in Natal. As a result, a defence laager was built containing two ammunition magazines. A review of arms conducted in late 1878 found that Umzinto had the only weapons on the South Coast – a collection of 50 carbines. Some 30 settlers from Alexandra County were drawn off “to the front” during the hostilities. At an entertainment evening in the school room in Umzinto in March 1879 in aid of the War Relief Fund, £6 was raised. When the volunteers returned after an absence of eight months, 170 colonists came to Umzinto on 27 August 1879 to celebrate the return of their men. Festivities commenced with horse races and athletics. Supper was served at 10pm and described as an unprecedented spread. The dance which had commenced at 8pm went on until very late.

Besides horse racing, cricket was an integral part of the recreational calendar. Although Denis Barker in his book *Umzinto Cricket – the first 100 years* cites 1878 as the year in which the club was formed, a report in the *Mercury* on 11 January 1877 referred to the Alexandra Cricket Club as having been founded around 1873. Amongst the 19 founding members were three of the five sons of the late James Arbuthnot. The Volunteers’ Memorial Hall was built alongside the cricket ground. It was officially opened on 1 January 1883. Two days later, it was the venue of a ball attended by 100 locals. “Dancing kept up with unabated spirit until daylight” thanks to the efforts of the pianists, who included Mrs Mary Archibald. The building was 50 feet in length, 24 feet in breadth and
A sketch of colonial Umzinto

16 feet in height. It had four large side rooms and verandahs and could seat 150 people. It cost £1 600 and was entirely funded by the local Umzinto community on ground donated by the Reynolds family. Completing the hub of the county’s social and sporting life were the tennis courts.

A report published in January 1886 noted that “lawn tennis has become quite an institution…. Indeed there is so little excitement or pleasure for the ladies in a country place…. The proper carrying out of a tennis club becomes an inestimable boon to the whole district.” The report went on to state that large numbers of ladies came out to play on Wednesday afternoons and that the tennis club had over 70 members. A visitor to Umzinto in 1884 remarked on the fullness of the social calendar. Balls, parties, picnics, cricket and tennis matches, fishing excursions “follow each other with amazing rapidity”. The ladies of Umzinto were the first in the Colony to form a Revolver and Rifle Club. In May 1895 40 ladies signed up for shooting practice. Following the ending of the siege of Mafikeng during the Anglo-Boer War, a week of rejoicing and recreation took place in Umzinto. It featured cricket and tennis matches including a grand finale cricket match on the Saturday of that first week of June 1900 in which the men played left-handed against the ladies.

Umzinto was also the host of the first agricultural show ever held on the Natal coast. This occurred in February 1886 and saw 300 exhibits on show – all of them produced in Alexandra County. For that it received an accolade from the Mercury, which expressed pleasure at “what could be done in a district so far removed by natural configuration from the centres of the colony”. By the time the third show was held in 1894, the number of exhibits had grown to 580 and by 1899 as many as 720 exhibits were on show. Until 1904, when Victoria County staged its first agricultural
show, Umzinto’s show was the only one of its kind on the coast.96

**Telegraph and rail links**

In 1879 Durban had telegraphic links with Delagoa Bay and London (via Aden).97 Durban was also linked with Stanger up the North Coast.98 But there no such links with the South Coast and its chief settlement, Umzinto. During 1882 and 1883, four petitions were presented by Thomas Reynolds to the colonial legislature requesting the construction of a telegraph line linking Port Shepstone and Umzinto with Durban. Colonial Engineer Albert Hime, however, proved the stumbling block on each occasion claiming either that the expense involved was not justified or that there were other parts of Natal which were also awaiting a connection.99 Finally, in 1884 the Council agreed that a telegraph line should be constructed as far as Umzinto. Commenting on his achievement, Reynolds said: “Half a loaf is better than no bread.”100 In 1887 Umzinto’s telegraphic link became a reality. “We congratulate our friends down south at being brought in rapid touch with the civilised world,” opined the *Mercury*.101

Deprived as the area had been of roads, bridges and railways for nearly 40 years because the South Coast did not have the investment appeal which Northern Natal had with its coal fields, the arrival of the railway at Park Rynie in December 1897 was quickly exploited by one hotelier in Umzinto. Knox’s Hotel offered an ox-bus service, as it was called, for visitors disembarking from the midday train at Park Rynie station to be taken to Umzinto.102

The fact that the routing of the main South Coast line did not pass through Umzinto was the subject of considerable controversy during 1896. As the seat of the county magistracy and the hub of county commerce, local residents were outraged that the engineering survey for the railway showed Umzinto as being served only by a branch extension. At a public meeting in Umzinto on 12 March 1896 it was resolved that the South Coast line to Port Shepstone had to pass through Umzinto.103 As late as November 1896 Umzinto residents were still fuming at what they regarded as an insult to their status.104 But the engineering contractors, Messrs. Middleton Bros, made it clear that the hilly nature of the immediate coastal interior dictated that for engineering and cost reasons the line had to proceed along the seashore.105 Controversy continued to dog the establishment of a rail link to Umzinto. There was considerable opposition in the Legislative Assembly to the projected cost of £40 000 for the six-and-a-half mile extension from a point three-and-a-half miles south of Park Rynie through hilly terrain to Umzinto.106 Only in 1899 was an appropriation of £35 000 approved (Act 2 of 1899) for the construction of the branch line. On 8 August 1900, 60 special guests were aboard the first train to travel from Durban to Umzinto, a distance of 51 miles.107

**Unrest and abuse**

Reviewing the outcome of the referendum on the Union issue in June 1909, the *Mercury’s* Umzinto correspondent stated: “Alexandra County was almost solid for Union and everything passed off very quietly, as everything usually does in this place.”108 With reference to the
preceding three years, that statement was not entirely correct. For in 1906 Natal was convulsed by a backlash from sections of the African community which climaxed in the Bambatha rebellion. The imposition of a new poll tax as part of the austerity measures the government took to increase revenue in the face of economic recession was met by resentment among the African population. The killing of two white police officers during a confrontation with an armed impi near Richmond triggered a highhanded response from the colonial militia. A field force under Colonel Duncan McKenzie carved a swathe of destruction as it headed southward towards Umzinto in February 1906, burning kraals and seizing livestock.109

At Umzinto McKenzie confronted Charlie Fynn and his indunas over their refusal to pay poll tax. After imposing a fine of 1 200 cattle, sentencing 38 of Fynn’s men to fines, floggings or gaol sentences and imposing the death sentence on five of them, McKenzie’s field force withdrew.110 A report in the Mercury of 17 March 1906 noted that peace and quiet had returned to Alexandra County. Subsequent reports confirmed that trend and that “good humoured” Africans were paying their taxes.111 Nonetheless, the episode constituted the most serious scare which Umzinto experienced during its colonial existence.

Within the Reynolds Bros sugar estates in the Umzinto district at this time, a different kind of threat was occurring and had been occurring for over 20 years. It involved overwork of indentured Indian labour and poor diet. As a result, desertion, suicides and the death rate on those estates exceeded those on other estates. At its worst, a death rate of 60 per 1 000 occurred when the rate in the colony was 15 per 1 000.112 This case constitutes a topic in its own right in that it involves the attempts by the Protector of Indian Immigrants, James Polkinghorne, between 1902 and 1908, to expose and to halt the abuse of human rights on those estates. However, despite an official inquiry into Reynolds Bros’ treatment of its indentured labour in Umzinto and despite the eventual success of Polkinghorne in obtaining the dismissal of Charles Reynolds in 1908 from his position as manager of Reynolds Bros, socially and politically the whole saga was a non-event in the Umzinto district. What was a massive scandal involving the most powerful family on the South Coast passed as if nothing had happened, indicating the extent of the social, political and economic influence which the Reynolds exercised.

Indian presence

Indifference to the plight of Indians as labourers was matched by disdain for the idea that they should be regarded as settlers once their labour contracts were completed, or accepted as such because they had immigrated to Natal to establish businesses. As early as 1884, there were complaints about the commercial competition Indians presented to white store owners in Alexandra County.113 Although the Blue Books do not specify the number of Indian-owned shops in Umzinto, the fact that Indians owned nine of the 15 stores in the County in 1883114 meant that they probably owned the majority of the stores in Umzinto. Archibald, a store-owner himself, ascribed the proliferation of Indian traders to the purchases his fellow white colonists
made from Indian shops and hawkers. “They encourage them in every possible way,” he claimed.\(^{115}\)

Despite their marginalised and controversial presence and status, there were occasions when Indians put colonial society to shame. In April 1902, “an enthusiastic and enjoyable function took place at the Plough Hotel in Umzinto”. On the eve of his transfer from Umzinto to Harding, Indians of Alexandra County made a presentation to Sergeant E.P. Blake of the Natal Police. Blake was presented with a dressing case by the local Indian schoolmaster, Mr Paul. In his address, Paul expressed gratitude to Sgt Blake “for the several acts of kindness shown to us during your stay in Umzinto in which you blended justice with mercy”.\(^{116}\)

**Final colonial years**

In May 1894, promoting the Bill to extend the railway south of Isipingo, Thomas Keir Murray, the Minister of Lands and Works, stated with great accuracy, as things turned out, that “the beautiful spots along the seaside in a few years time will develop into favourite seaside resorts”.\(^{117}\) Although Umzinto as the hub of Alexandra County had enjoyed prominence in most aspects of South Coast life,\(^{118}\) the extension of the railway to Port Shepstone by 1901 produced a new focus of economic development. From Scottburgh to Port Shepstone a property development frenzy occurred as seaside resorts sprang up. Umkomaas, or South Barrow as it was known until 1924, already had four hotels by 1905 and had established itself as a destination of choice amongst holiday-makers. In 1905 it also became the first settlement on the South Coast to obtain town board status. Thus Umzinto came to be eclipsed as the hub of the region.

**ENDNOTES**

3. Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, (PAR), CSO 131, No. R491, 1 April 1861.
7. PAR, CSO 86, No. 522, 3 May 1856; CSO 96, No. 217, 12 August 1857.
10. PAR, CSO 105, 11 May 1858.
13. PAR, CSO 109, 12 November 1858.
20. Natal Mercury, 30 October 1860; 7 March 1861; 16 May 1861.
21. Natal Mercury, 16 May 1861. The machinery in the factory was imported from Messrs. Cook of Glasgow.
24. PAR, CSO 143, No. 210, 28 January 1862.
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27 PAR, CSO 244, No. 544, 3 March 1866; CSO 249, No. 1017, 2 May 1866.
28 PAR, CSO 264, No. 43, 28 February 1867. The dispensing of gunpowder was regulated by Law 11 of 1866. Africans were not permitted to purchase gunpowder unless they had been granted a permit by the Secretary for Native Affairs. That provision also applied to their ownership of firearms. PAR, CSO 178, No. 1360, 27 May 1863.
30 Natal Mercury, 16 February 1865.
34 PAR, CSO 214, No. 144, 18 January 1865.
38 PAR, CSO 242, No. 336, 31 January 1866; CSO 229, No. 1647, 10 and 21 August 1865. The County was named after the Princess of Wales.
39 PAR, CSO 369, No. 1079, 31 May 1870.
42 Natal Mercury, 10 January 1861.
43 Government Notice 121, 1865. At a shooting competition against the Natal Carbineers in Umzinto in 1863, Alexander Brander was the most successful marksman. Natal Mercury, 7 August 1863.
44 PAR, CSO 214, No. 144, 18 January 1865; CSO 264, No. 43, 28 February 1867. Only in 1950 was Umzinto finally proclaimed a township. Natal Government Gazette, Proclamation No. 9, 22 February 1950.
46 Natal Mercury, 23 September 1863.
47 PAR, CSO 244, No. 544, 3 March 1866; CSO 254, No. 1572, 18 August 1866. Captain James Greetham of Umzinto had requisitioned sixteen indentured labourers.
48 Natal Mercury, 1 December 1866.
49 Natal Mercury, 3 January 1867.
50 PAR, CSO 311, No. 1917, 18 August 1868.
51 Aiken, D.C., Diary, October 1867, p. 13, Old House Museum Collection, Aliwal St Durban, Ref 581.
52 Natal Mercury, 21 May 1864; Natal Mercury, 27 June 1868.
54 Osborn, Valiant Harvest, pp.77; 303.
55 Natal Mercury, 8 August 1871.
56 Natal Mercury, 12 September 1871.
58 Natal Mercury, 7 August 1873.
59 PAR, CSO 445, No. 1760, 29 July 1873.
60 Natal Mercury, 14 August 1873.
61 Natal Mercury, 2 September 1873.
63 Natal Mercury, 11 June 1874; Natal Witness, 16 June 1874.
65 Wolseley had served with distinction in the Crimean war, the Indian mutiny and most recently (1873-74) in the Ashanti campaign.
66 Natal Mercury, 3 August 1875.
68 A full account of the role of Thomas Reynolds appeared in the 2013 issue of Natalia.
70 Letter to the Editor, Natal Mercury, from “Progress”, 1 July 1908.
71 Times of Natal, 20 September 1906.
73 Natal Mercury, 29 September 1904.
74 Natal Mercury, 18 March, 8 April 1887.
75 Natal Mercury, 8 April 1887.
76 Natal Mercury, 15 September 1887.
77 Natal Mercury, 27 January; 23 October 1888.
78 Natal Mercury, 25 September 1891; Supplement to the Blue Book for the Colony of Natal, 1891/92, p. F87-88.
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79 *Natal Mercury*, 28 April 1874.
80 *Natal Mercury*, 11 July, 9 September 1875.
81 *Natal Mercury*, 30 September 1875.
83 Laband, J. and Thompson, P. *Kingdom and Colony at war*, (Pietermaritzburg, 1990), p. 230; *Colony of Natal Blue Book*, 1879, JJ15; PAR, CSO 685, No. 8, 7 December 1878.
85 *Natal Mercury*, 19 March 1879.
86 *Natal Mercury*, 1 September 1879.
88 *Natal Mercury*, 10 January 1883. Mary Archibald passed away on 1 February 1903.
89 *Natal Mercury*, 22 February 1886.
90 *Natal Mercury*, 28 January 1886.
91 *Natal Mercury*, 5 August 1884.
92 *Natal Mercury*, 18 May 1895.
93 The programme of events was advertised in the *Mercury* of 1 June 1900.
94 *Natal Mercury*, 20 February 1886.
95 PAR, CSO 1421, No. 674, 25 September 1894; *Natal Mercury*, 8 July 1899.
96 *Natal Mercury*, 17 June 1904.
98 PAR, CSO 728, No. 5190, 6 November 1879, encl. 6.
101 *Natal Mercury*, 4 February 1887.
102 *Natal Mercury*, 8 April 1898.
103 PAR, CSO 1495, No. 1497, 14 March 1896.
104 *Natal Mercury*, 14 November 1896.
105 *Supplement to the Blue Book for the Colony of Natal*, 1897, p. C37.
107 *Natal Mercury*, 9 August 1900.
108 *Natal Mercury*, 19 June 1909. The pro-Union vote in Alexandra County was 86%. *Natal Mercury*, 14 June 1909.
110 Ibid., pp. 50, 55. The Governor did not uphold the death sentences.
111 *Natal Mercury*, 10 April, 8 June 1906.
112 PAR, CSO 2854, No. 7790, 1906. Address by Polkinghorne to Committee of Inquiry, p. 2.
113 *Natal Mercury*, 23 January 1884.
116 *Natal Mercury*, 17 April 1902.
118 The first library south of Isipingo was established in Umzinto in 1885 at the Volunteers Memorial Hall. In contrast, the Verulam library in Victoria County celebrated its 25th year in existence in1881. *Natal Mercury*, 13 August 1881. In terms of the volume of telegraph messages issued, Port Shepstone with 3 553 in 1891 had already surpassed Umzinto with 3 285. *Supplement to the Blue Book for the Colony of Natal*, 1890/91, p. C80.

Introduction

Anyone interested in the history of Durban and Natal in the earlier years of the nineteenth century will be familiar with the names of Henry Francis Fynn and Lieutenant George Francis Farewell. Most readers will also know that Fynn was known to the Zulus as uMsifile (or uSifile) and as uMbuyazi weTheku, and Farewell was known as uFebana. But perhaps less is known about how these names came about.

Fynn’s names uMsifile and uSifile came about through confusing the title “mister” with the surname, and conflating, abbreviating and “Zulu-ising” Mister Fynn into Msifile/uSifile. This was for many years a common and regular practice, with or without the incorporation of “Mister”, and accounts for a considerable percentage of Zulu names given to whites in colonial Natal, such as uKolise (< Collis), uJekiseni (< Jackson) and uMkhize (< McKenzie). For reasons of space, they will not be discussed further in this article.

The Zulu name uMbuyazi, according to Lugg (1970:42) means “the hunter that returns empty-handed”.

Lugg says that “this was a name given to him by Shaka, intended without doubt as a sarcastic reference to the paucity of Fynn’s presents”. Fynn was usually referred to as uMbuyazi weTheku (“Mbuyazi of the Bay”, i.e. Durban) to distinguish him from uMbuyazi kaMpande (“Mbuyazi, son of Mpande”).

* Umahlekehlathini (lit. “he who laughs in the bush”): a heavily-bearded man; uMehlomane (lit. “four-eyes”): someone wearing spectacles; uMbokodo (lit. “grinding stone”): one who leans hard on his or her employees.
The name uFebana is a bit of a mystery. If we analyse it in terms of existing Zulu vocabulary, it would appear that the name is derived from isifebana, a diminutive form of isifebe ("prostitute", cf. the verb feba "carry on prostitution"). This seems an unlikely, if not actually bizarre, interpretation, so it must be assumed that uFebana is in some way a "Zulu-isation" of Farewell. This is not as strange as it may seem. The sounds "b" and "v" are frequently interchangeable and if Farewell’s name had been pronounced with a "v" instead of a "w" (as happened regularly in Cockney English), this might have triggered the “b” in uFebana.

It can be seen, then, that there are many factors to be taken into consideration when considering the Zulu names of white people in the earlier years of Durban and Natal, and in this article I attempt to describe some of these factors.

Sources of data for this article
The earliest source of Zulu names for whites is undoubtedly Carl Faye’s 1923 Zulu References, which gives the Zulu names of 45 magistrates who served in various districts in Natal and Zululand prior to 1922. Coupled with this is the Umvoti District Magistrates Court Historical Records [http://www.greytown.co.za/district_records/excerpts.htm#magistrates] which gives the names of 33 magistrates who served over the period 1854 to 1992, 31 of whom have Zulu names.

Lugg gives the Zulu names of many white characters in his 1970 A Natal Family Looks Back, and a further 16 such names in his appendix, including the Zulu names of seven of Theophilus Shepstone’s 10 children. My 1986 study of Zulu names gives a one-page list of Zulu nicknames for white government officials which I collected in the late 1970s; while the five volumes of the James Stuart Archive (Webb & Wright, 1976, 1979, 1982, 1986, 2001) give many Zulu names for early nineteenth century explorers, traders and missionaries. Turner’s 1997 article gives a considerable number of Zulu names for whites collected roughly in the 1980s, as well as in-depth discussion on the processes of naming involved. And then finally, Steve Burns has given the author access to his unpublished collection of Zulu names for white employees of the KZN Sharks Board (Natal North Coast area), for white farmers on the North Coast, and his own Zulu names and praises, all of these also dating from the 1980s.

The data discussed in this article, then, covers the period of the first white settlers in Natal from the 1820s to the period just before the first free elections of 1994. The names could thus be seen...
as representative of Zulu names for whites during the whole of the period of “colonial Natal”.

While Xhosa names for whites are not strictly the subject of this article, De Klerk’s two articles (1998 and 2002) provide useful theoretical backing to cross-cultural and cross-linguistic naming, and she provides an extensive data base of notable whites in the history of the Eastern Cape who have received Xhosa names. I include some of these in this article where they provide interesting counterpoints to the Zulu examples.

Names, identities and interpretations

Not all the Zulu names discussed in this article are linked to a specific person. The Zulu names are linked to specific, named individuals in the James Stuart Archive, Faye’s list of magistrates, the Umvoti Magistrates list, most of Lugg’s examples, and De Klerk’s list of notables in the Eastern Cape. On the other hand, the names given by Koopman, Turner and Burns are “anonymous” in the sense that they are not linked to any named individual, but are rather names for “a person with a hot temper” or a “person who always walks very fast”, and so on.

As to the interpretations of the name (in other words its underlying or literal meaning, and the perceived message it contains), these occur at three levels: the interpretation of the bearer (assuming that he or she knows his or her Zulu name), the interpretation of James Stuart, Carl Faye, Noleen Turner, Steve Burns, Vivian de Klerk and the other collectors of Zulu (or Xhosa) names for whites, and then the interpretation of the present author. These interpretations are not always the same. An excellent example is the name **uMbekodo**, which Faye (1923:22) gives for magistrate R.A.L. Brandon. The name is derived from the Zulu noun *imbokodo* (“grinding stone”), and it is easy to interpret this as a name for a person who is hard in his dealings with other people, who “grinds them down” in the work environment. Magistrate Brandon’s own interpretation of this name is that it refers to a man who is “polished and smooth and all round with knowledge”. There are a number of examples of Faye’s glowingly positive interpretations. One that stands out is the name and its linked praises which he gives for magistrate A.D. Graham: **uZombeyana, uZombeyan’ okwela ngoti, okwela ngezihlangu zamadoda**, for which he gives the interpretation “The warrior who climbs by a stick, yea, climbs over the shields of men”. The section “who climbs by a stick, yea, climbs over the shields of men” is perfectly accurate (apart from the insertion of the unnecessary “yea”), but his interpretation of uZombeyana as “warrior” is suspicious, to say the least. Doke and Vilakazi (1958:897) give the sole meaning of the noun *uzombeyana* as “evasive person, one not straightforward”. One finds a similar avoidance of a highly critical name in the Mvoti Magistrates list. In this list of 33 magistrates, 31 have Zulu names, and of the 31 Zulu names, 29 have a meaning given. The two that have no meaning given are **udhlovunga**, a name for magistrate J.W. Cross, who served from 1904 to 1907, and **usomnyanya**, the Zulu name of V. Smit, magistrate from 1986 to 1991. The noun *udlovunga* is glossed in Doke and Vilakazi (1958:160) as “ruf-
fian, wild, violent person”, and uSom-nyanya is almost certainly a compound of the name-forming prefix -so- with the meaning of “figure of authority” in this context and the verb nyanya “have an aversion toward, dislike”.

One can understand why Faye should have gone for glowingly positive interpretations, even if some of them were quite inaccurate. He was at the time of the publication of Zulu References a senior interpreter for the magistrates courts of Natal, and many of the men whose Zulu names he lists were still alive and in positions of authority.

As to self-interpretation, de Klerk points out (2002:150) of the Xhosa names for whites that while some whites, particularly farmers and missionaries (and this is true of the Zulu context), were fluent in Xhosa, a significant number were not and “simply had to accept their Xhosa nicknames at face value and hope it was not derogatory”. Often the name-bearer’s interpretation (or that given to him) was not the same as the interpretation of the coiners of the name. De Klerk gives an example (2002:161):

Professor Mtuze … told of a superintendent known to him whose Xhosa name was umlomo [mouth]. The bearer was told it was because he always had such wise words to say, but the coiners all knew that the real reason was that he was a “loudmouth”.

For an excellent example of creative reinterpretation of one’s own nickname, we need to look no further than Lord Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of the Boy Scout movement. Jeal (1989:177), in writing about Baden-Powell’s several night-time scouting excursions in the Matopo Hills “seeking to establish the precise whereabouts of a Matabele impi”, says:

He was delighted to discover that some Matabele had been heard calling him “Impeesa”: the hyena or creature that skulks by night. Thinking it sounded more complimentary, Baden-Powell changed the hyena into a wolf, producing “the wolf that never sleeps” as his own translation.

This re-interpretation has persisted. In The Scout Trail, published in 2004, more than 100 years after Baden-Powell’s nocturnal skulking, we read:

Later [Baden-Powell] was in Matabeleland … where he was given the nickname of “Impeesa”, the Wolf that Never Sleeps, because of the many night scouting trips he made, spying out where troops were hiding.

(Macey, 2004:33)

This was not the first of Baden-Powell’s African names to be subjected to his
creative impulses. In an earlier hunting expedition, in “Portuguese Mozambique” in 1885, Baden-Powell “acquired the nickname of M’hlalapanzi” (Jeal, 1989:119). The name is derived from Zulu hlala (“sit”) and phansi (“down”, “on the ground”), and Baden-Powell translated it as “the man who lies down to shoot”. He then explained in his autobiography that the nickname was a compliment since the word had the subsidiary meaning of “the man who lays his plans carefully before putting them into practice”. In fact, the word umhlalaphansi in Baden-Powell’s time meant “a lazy lounging around, with nothing to do” (see Bryant 1905:237). Bryant gives as example Badla ngomhlalaphantsi (“they enjoy a life of sweet indolence, merely lounging around”). Clearly, as with “skulking hyena” above, this meaning did not suit Baden-Powell at all.

The names and their categories
Zulu names for whites can conveniently be divided into three major categories: those names which refer to the physical features of the bearer, those which refer to the personality of the bearer, and those that refer to characteristic behavioural patterns (for example, typical speech patterns or ways of walking). To these three categories I add a special minor category of names based on Zulu bird names, and another where the names are Zulu translations of the bearer’s originally surname (“loan translations” or “calques”).

Physical descriptions
I will start here by looking at names which describe notably tall, short, fat, or thin people (i.e. overall body shape), and then go on to look at names which refer to specific parts of the body, starting at the top with names that refer to hair, and making my way downwards until we reach the toes.

First up is the name uNtamb’ende kalayini (lit. “Mr Long-String son of Mr Line”), where “line” refers to a railway line. This is an extremely well-known Zulu praise for an exceptionally tall person and it is discussed again below under the heading “Core Images”. Burns explains that the bearer of this name, a farmer near Balgowan, is 6ft 8 and “they say he looks like an electricity pylon”. This immediately brings to mind Turner’s example of a name for a very tall man: uMbhoshongo (“Mr Tower”). Turner also gives us the name uNyonende (“Mr Tall-bird”), another name common among the praise-names of Zulu youths, where it often occurs as Yinde lenyoni ayiboni izulu (“it is [so] tall this bird it doesn’t see the sky”).7 Lugg (1970:49) gives the Zulu name of Theophilus Shepstone’s second son William as uNsokonsokwana, glossing this as “the tall, thin and stately one”. While some people are exceptionally tall, others are noticeably short. The Mvoti Magistrates List gives the name uSinqamun for magistrate E.D. Hickman, who served from 1975 to 1986, and glosses this as “piece cut off”, but another meaning of the Zulu noun isinqamu is more likely – “short person”). JSII:267 refers to Captain James Saunders King’s return to Port Natal when he built himself a house on the Bluff. This house was later occupied by Thomas William Bower whom the “natives” called uMfitshane. This name is based on the Zulu adjective -mfishane (“short”) and the name is another reminder that the sound “sh” (as in uShaka) was in those early days pronounced “tsh”
(as in uTshaka, written by earlier writers as “Chaka”). An amusing Zulu name for an exceptionally short man is usmehlane (a slang word for a “nip” of Smirnoff or cane spirit, in other words a “short” of liquor). Burns, who gives this name, recalls the bearer of this name as “being only about 5ft tall”. The word is recognised by Zulu speakers of varying ages today (2014), and is one of the few slang words that lasts long enough to make it into a dictionary, appearing in Nyembezi (1992:298) as isimehlane, with the meaning “ibhodlela elincane likagologo” (“a small bottle of liquor”). Short and fat is seen in Turner’s example uNgulubencane (“little pig”).

Large and well-built people are seen in Turner’s example uGandaganda (“Mr Tractor” – a “large and physically powerful foreman”) and in uNkunzen-kulu (“big bull”), the Zulu name given to magistrate L.J.J.E. Bester, at Mvoti Magistrates Court from 1957 to 1964. Men with large bellies are referred to in uBhanelesaka (< ibhande “belt” + lesaka “of the sack”, where Burns explains that this farmer had a huge stomach and his belt literally looked like a belt tied around a sack), and uMaxuku (a Xhosa example from Mtumane [2005:43] derived from the verb ukuxukuzela “walk in oversized trousers” – a name for a man with a large belly requiring exceptionally large trousers).

From general shapes we move now to specific body parts, starting with the hair, as in uMdlodlombiya (< amadlombiya “long, untidy, dishevelled hair”). This name from Turner (1997:62) clearly has the same base as Burns’ example uMadlodlo (a man whose thin wisps of hair almost stood on end. Burns notes “an early balding guy from Phumula whose thin wisps of hair almost stood on end. He looked a little like a blond Charlie Chapman”).

Also referring to hair is the name uStadyami (<isitadiyami “stadium”. Burns’ explanation (pers. comm. October 2013) is:

This person has a shiny bald top to his head and hair growing around the sides. The hair on the side looks like the stadium seats and the bald patch looks like the playing field in a football stadium. In 2010, the year of the Football World Cup played in South Africa, this person was briefly referred to as u2010.

Turner’s example of a name for a bald person is less complex: uMashibilika (from the verb shibilika “be smooth, slippery”).

One of the officials who worked in the Municipal Bantu Administration when I was there in the 1970s was named uBusobendlazi (<ubuso “face” + bendlazi “of the mousebird”), a reference to his round face. Apparently when he first started working there, it was shortly after he had returned from a prisoner-of-war camp after the Second World War, and he received the name uBusobendlala (Mr Face of Famine), to be changed later to uBusobendlazi. De Klerk (2002:157) gives the Xhosa name uBusobengwe (<ubuso “face” + bengwe “of the leopard” – so named because of the freckles on his face) for William Thompson Brownlee, the second son of Charles Brownlee, chief magistrate of Transkeian territories in the 1920s.

From hair on the head we move to facial hair. It is generally accepted that facial growth comes more easily to men of European descent than it does to black South Africans. For this
reason, even moderate beards often elicit a call of *Ntshebe!* (“Beard!”)⁹ from passers-by. By all accounts, though, the bearers of the following names were exceptionally well-endowed with facial growth.

Bulpin (1969:247), writing about Estcourt in 1866, states

The original magistrate still lorded it over the place. He was John Macfarlane, a great character, known as iNdaba ineSilevo (the law with a beard) to the Africans, on account of the colossal whiskers on his face.

Thomas Jenkins at the eMfundisweni mission in Pondoland at the time of Dick King’s famous ride to Grahamstown¹⁰ was given the name uMarwanqana (“the little man with whiskers”). De Klerk (2002:158) says that uNdevu (Xhosa: “whiskers”) was the name of Sir Walter Currie and quotes Brownlee (1975:63) as saying “… him what the Xhosas called Ndevu because he had a long beard that came right down over his weskit, or rather where his weskit ought to have bin”.

Turner gives three examples: uMahlekehlathini (a commonly used Zulu word for a heavily bearded person, literally meaning “he who laughs in the bush”); uHlahlasikapelepele (literally “the chilli-pepper bush”) and the splendid uMadevuphulinkomishi (literally “he whose whiskers break the cup”).

Names referring to eyes are uMehlomane (lit. “four eyes”) as being used for a person wearing spectacles,¹¹ but Turner gives a different interpretation when she says this name was given to a manager who never tired of telling his employees that he was watching them all the time with the two eyes in the front of his head and the two eyes at the back. Turner also gives uDlubu (Mr Glass Eye, from udlubu “ground bean”) and uMehlembuzi (Mr Half-closed Eyes, from amehlo “eyes” + embuzi “of a goat”).

Still staying on the head, we note the four names uZikhalozembuzi, uKhalempongo, uThekwane and uChakide. Turner gives uZikhalozembuzi (< izikhalo “nostrils” + zembuzi “of a goat”) for a man with big nostrils. uKhalempongo (“Mr Ram’s Nose”) was the name of an official at the Municipal Bantu Affairs office in the 1970s, as was uThekwane (Mr Hamerkop – the bird *Scopus umbretta*, so named, I recorded at the time, “because of the shape of his head”). Turner and De Klerk’s examples of white people named uThekwane, however, refer to vain, conceited show-offs, and I will discuss these under the heading “Names referring to birds” below.

Burns explains the origin of the name uChakide (“mongoose”) as referring to “a thin guy with a very small head”. Turner gives two Zulu names for women with large breasts – uFriesland and uMabele. The first is derived from the *Friesland* dairy cow with large udders, and the second is more simply derived from *amabele* “breasts”, although as Turner notes, the woman so named also had the English name Mabel. Slightly less specific in terms of largeness is uNozinyathi (< no- + izinyathi “buffaloes”), the Zulu name of Theophilus Shepstone’s youngest
Zulu Names for Whites in Colonial Natal

daughter Florence, explained by Lugg (1970:49) as “because of being plump like a young buffalo cow”.

Our last examples concern legs and knees. Turner records the name **uMathangetshitshi** (Mr Lovely Thighs, *< amathanga “thighs” + etshitshi “of the young maiden”*) and she also gives the curious name **uMadolokatsotsi** (lit. “the knees of a tsotsi”) for a person with ugly knees. From my own collection of Zulu names for Bantu Affairs officials comes **uZinti** (“sticks”), a name for a man with very thin legs. If I remember correctly, **KwaZinti** (“the place of Mr Sticks”) was the name given to the building (now demolished) where the Influx Control section of Bantu Administration was housed. Another person with thin legs was magistrate C. Foxon, for whom Faye (1923:22) gives the Zulu name **uMcondo, uMcondo azimilele**. Faye, with his own agenda for positive interpretation, says that this means “He who stands out”, but in fact the expression **umcondo azimilele** is a well-known Zulu expression, with Doke and Vilakazi (1958:124) giving **umcondo** as referring to “thin, scraggly leg, e.g. of fowl”, and the expression **UMcondo kaZimelela** as meaning “Mr Thin-legs, son of Mr Walk-with-sticks”, a praise-name used for “leggy individuals”. Bryant (1905:80) says of this phrase that it is “used derisively of a person with scraggy legs”.

Still on the topic of legs, we note that William Bazley, a settler on the Natal South Coast in the second half of the nineteenth century, a man with a great love for dynamite (see Bulpin 1969:361) was named **uGwembeshe** (“the bow-legged one”). He was the son of John Bazley, a Byrne settler in 1850, known as **uMahalavu** (“Mr Spades”), probably, as Bulpin says (1969:159), because he built a mill and various other constructions and generally “became the mechanical life of the place”. JSAIV: 244 refers to the younger Bazley as **uGwembeshe kaMahalavu** (“Mr Bow-legs son of Mr Spades”).

**Personality types**

A considerable number of Xhosa and Zulu surnames for whites reflect their personality, such as the name **uZithulele** (“Mr Keeps-quiet to himself”). I recorded this name for a senior official in the Municipal Bantu Administration in Durban in the 1970s; Lugg (1970:58) gives this as the Zulu name of John Royston, originally a store owner at St. Faith’s, but later a soldier who served in “the Zulu War, the Anglo-Boer War, the Bambata Rebellion and the first Great War”. He was later known as Brigadier “Galloping Jack” Royston. The English nickname seems somewhat at odds with the Zulu name.

A name commonly found for a person with a hot temper is **uPelepele** (“hot chilli peppers”). There are several examples in my data lists. Turner (1997:55) says, “This name is a common nickname which was recorded in eight environments to describe a hot-tempered person”). Presumably the same connotation is found in **utshisiwe** (“one who burns”), a name given to E.T.J. Stowers, magistrate of the Mvoti Magistrates Court from 1930 to 1932. Based on the same verb **shisa** (“burn”) is Sharks Board official **ushisambango** (“burn up the dispute”), a man described by Steve Burns as a “short, aggressive field officer who would not agree with anything”. Using a plant-based metaphor in the same way as **uPelepele** is **uMhlakuva** (“castor-oil plant”), a name Lugg (1970:49) gives for Theophilus Shepstone’s third son.
Theophilus (known as “Offie”), with Lugg explaining this as “[a man] forever ‘going off pop’ like the seeds of this plant when expelled from the pod on ripening”. A similar type of person is referred to by a different metaphor from the natural world: uBhejane (“black rhinoceros”), a name which Turner says refers to “an aggressive person, always on the attack”. This sounds like the kind of person to avoid, as was obviously also the case of magistrate M. Stuart, serving at Mvoti from 1876 to 1877, who had the Zulu name uMcopela (“be careful of possible danger”). Also someone to avoid would have been Mvoti magistrate J.W. Cross (1904-1907), named uDhlovunga (“ruffian; wild violent person”). C.R. Saunders, chief magistrate and civil commissioner for Zululand in 1906, was given the name uMashiqela (“dictator”, “one who uses force in government”).

Quite different to these wild, violent ruffians and dictators was S.B. Beningfield, who settled in Natal in 1840 (JSAII:305 fn). His Zulu name uMangeingci is derived from the Zulu exclamation ngingi! (“how happy I am!”) and the related verb ngingciza “be happy, show delight, etc.”

Three sharp-minded magistrates are reflected in the names uMangotobana (“intelligent guesser”)

12, uMkhonto (“spear”) and uMbhabhama (“he who pounces, is quick to detect”). The first two are Mvoti magistrates, W.A. Burton (1951 to 1955) and J. van R. Pietersen (1969 to 1974) respectively; the third is a name Faye gives for G.V. Essery. Rather different in mental acuity is the person somewhat cruelly referred to as uLamthuthu (“battery chicken”), a name Turner records for a secretary considered not to be too bright. Battery chickens are considered to be far more stupid than farmyard chickens which have to deal with the realities of life.

Turner also gives the following four Zulu names which refer to character: uNtabaka-yikhonjwa (“the mountain is not pointed at”),

13 a reference to a person not easily confronted; uManga-fane (lit. “a burr that gets into sheep’s wool and pricks the skin”), a name for a cheeky, irritating person; uHlakan-yane (the well-known half human, half mongoose trickster character from Zulu folktales, a reference to a cunning person); and uNkunzikayihlehli (< inkunzi “bull” + kayihlehlehli “does not withdraw”, a person always willing to enter into a fight.)

Our last example of a name referring to personality is uMsimbithi (“ironwood tree” (Millettia grandis) – from his strong, steadfast character).
Characteristic behaviour

My first example here is **uMakhanda** or **uMakhanda-khanda** ("heads", "many heads"), a name given to Commandant Sighart Bourquin, head of Bantu Administration in Durban in the 1950s and 1960s. He was a renowned Zulu linguist and historian, with a superb library of books on Zulu history. When he was asked a question about Zulu history or culture for which he had no answer, he would say, “I’ll give you the answer tomorrow;” then go back home and find the answer in his extensive library. On giving the answer the next day, the Zulus would say, “Oh, he went home to consult with one of his other heads.” (See Gillings 2004.)

J.E. Fannin, magistrate at Mvoti from 1887 to 1899, was also given the name **uMakhanda**, but no reason has been recorded. Lugg (1970:49) says that Theophilus Shepstone’s youngest son Walter was named **uKhanda** because he was “the man with brains”.

Three other officials from the Bantu Administration at the time as Bourquin with names referring to habitual behaviour were **uGudlulwandle** ("skirt the sea", from his habit of riding his bicycle on the sea-shore every morning), **uMaqalaza** (Mr Keeps-glancing-around), and **uMphetiza** (“Mr To-and-fro”, from his habit of walking up and down his office whenever discussing a problem).

Walking and walking styles account for a surprising number of Zulu names for white people. Mvoti magistrate W.D. Wheelwright (1877 to 1887) was known as **uRoqoza** (“dragging feet while walking”) and Mvoti magistrate I.J. de Villiers (1964-1968) as **uMashe-sha** (“one who moves or acts quickly”). R.C.A. Samuelson, author of the King Cetshwayo Zulu Dictionary and a 1925 Zulu Grammar, was known as **uLubhembhedu**, which either means “person who walks with stiff, rigid gait” or “person of resolute determination”. Faye gives **uMqwakuza** (“he who walks actively, in spite of stiffness”) as the Zulu name for magistrate L.A. Crosse, while De Klerk gives the Xhosa name **uNoqakatha** (< feminising prefix no- + Xh. verb qakatha “to walk with a firm gait”), for Dr Jane Waterston, first principal of the Lovedale Girls School in 1868. Turner’s example **uNkalankala** (“crab”) for a person who never walked in a straight line is echoed in De Klerk’s Xhosa name **uNonkala** (Xh. “crab”) for early Queenstown businessman Mr E. Crouch, who “had a fast walk, leaning forward with one side rather in advance of another”. Faye gives the name **uMbhekaphansi** (< bheka “look” + phansi “down”) for H. Sangmeister, assistant magistrate at Mvoti from 1915 to 1920. Faye explains this name as “The Contemplative One”, adding that literally the name means “the one who
walks with bowed head”. Steve Burns has the same name in his list of Natal Sharks Board Officials, but treats it differently, saying “Our Senior Field Officer [named uMbhekaphansi] had the habit of looking at the ground wherever he walked. How he never walked into something amazed everyone”. Note there is no mention of “the contemplative one” here.

Turner’s “walking names” include uBhodloza (< bhodloza “smash through”, so named from his aggressive manner of walking); uMazenze (< amazenze “fleas”, a fast-moving woman), and uGundane (< igundane “rat”, a name which Turner interprets as “Mr Fast-Mover-Found-Anywhere”).

Turner’s “non-walking” personality-trait names include uGedleyihlekisa (“one who pretends to laugh” < gedla “gnash teeth” + hlekisa “cause to laugh”), an interesting name for a white person as it is also the personal name of the current South African president Jacob Zuma;15 uKhombanathingi (“one who points at nothing”, said of a manager who insisted on showing his workers every insignificant detail of jobs given to them); uMacoshamaphepha (“Miss Neat-and-Tidy” < cosha “pick up” + amaphepha “papers”) and uLwembu (Miss Spider), from her habit of wrapping her arms around all and sundry when greeting them. This boisterous greeting habit brings to mind Faye’s example uShay’emhlane (< shaya “hit” + emhlane “on the back”). Faye gives this for Mvoti magistrate G. Brunton Warner (1919 to 1923); the Mvoti Magistrates List gives the name as uMashayemhlane (“one who strikes backs”). The back-striking referred to here is surely of the “hail-fellow-well-met” type of back-slapping, a habit totally foreign to Zulu culture and thus remarkable enough to elicit a name. We must note, however, that Lugg (1970:51) gives the name uMashayemhlane (which he explains as “Mr Back Lasher”) for an unidentified magistrate16 because he was “prone to impose lashes”. Again, we have an issue of ambiguous interpretation.

The name uGwalagwala (“loerie bird”, because he always wore a feather from this bird in his hat), was given to Henry Francis Fynn junior, son of uMbuyazi weTheku.17 What is particularly interesting about Fynn junior’s Zulu name uGwalagwala relates to the praises of his father. Cope (1968:192-195) records 31 lines of praises for Fynn senior, of which the first two lines are uMbuyazi weTheku! (Mbuyazi of the Bay!)

UJoj’ ovel’ emaMpondweni (The long-tailed finch that came from Pondoland)

Cope (1968:192) explains “long-tailed finch” in a footnote as For many years Fynn always wore a bunch of tail-feathers of the sakabuli (Longtailed Widow bird) in his hat. He prized it because it had been presented to him by Shaka.

One wonders whether Fynn junior had similarly received his loerie feather from royalty. In Swazi culture the red feathers of the igwalagwala bird are de rigeur for royalty (worn in the hair rather than in a hat) and many royal family members of the Zulu clan do so as well.

To continue with names referring to habitual behaviour, let us consider three examples from Burns referring to officials of the Natal Sharks Board, beginning with uManduva (< induva “anything of little value”). Burns gives
a lengthy explanation of this Zulu name for this Natal Sharks Board official, which can be summed up in his (Burns’) own words: “On the whole he was a useless, lazy individual, who did as little as he could possibly get away with”. Also from Burns is the name uMatatazela (< tatazela “be agitated, act in a flurried manner”). Burns’ hilarious description of how this white Natal Sharks Board employee would try to launch a boat makes it all too clear why he received this Zulu name. A rather more positive name is uNkonka (< inkonka “male bushbuck”: a competent boat operator in the Sharks Board who (in Burns’ words) “bobbed and weaved his way out to sea, similar to the gait of a bushbuck ram”.

Returning to plant metaphors, Lugg (1970:51) gives uMbabazane (“Mr Stinging Nettle”) as the Zulu name for “a magistrate who meted out punishment in a quiet, gentle manner, but whose sentences always had a sting in their tails”. De Klerk gives the Xhosa name uZwinye (Xh. “one word”) for nineteenth century magistrate Mr Welsh, “so-named because he was known never to depart from his word”. Talking of words, some nicknames are given because a person continually uses the same words or expression. The first examples here are of Xhosa names. One such person was the Gaika Commissioner Charles Brownlee, father of uBusobengwe mentioned above, who in 1857 tried hard to stop the cattle-killing started by the prophecies of Nongqawuse. He would ride up and down the country saying, “Nongqawuse’s prophecies will never come true, never!” The Xhosas named him uNaphakade (< Xh. naphakade “never”). Another example concerns Michael Goss, trader near Idutywa in the Eastern Cape in the 1800s, who could not tolerate slowness on the part of his servants, and was in the habit of calling out “Banja Gou!” (in today’s Afrikaans this is baie gou). The closest Xhosa approximation was banja ru, and Goss was accordingly given the nickname uMbanyaru, a name which passed on to his son Eddie. Mtumane (2005:47) gives the Xhosa nickname uDyongwana (< Afrik. jong “youth” + diminutive suffix –ana). This nickname was given to a farmer who was always calling out “Mayiz’ aph’ eny’ idyongwana!” (“Let one of the young ones come here!”). Mtumane (2005:45) also records the Xhosa name unothusile for a woman who liked startling her employees and would then say “Ngo-kothusile!” (“I have startled you!”). The name uses the feminising prefix no-. Lugg (1970:50) says that uKhiphikasi (“Mr Remove the Thrash”) was the name of a “cane farmer whose knowledge of Zulu was limited to this phrase”. Lugg (1970:51) also gives the name...
uManzekhofi (“Mr Coffee Water”) for Sir Harry Escombe, whose first call in the morning (says Lugg) was “Manzi coffee, Charlie!”, “and so he acquired the name Manzekhofi”.

Farmer Rob Speirs, farming in the Boston area near Pietermaritzburg, has told me (pers. comm. 14.12.2010) that two of his cows have been given names which reflect utterances that he himself is known for. When he wants to indicate that one of his labourers is not pulling his weight, the farmer is wont to call out “Ijoka liyahaya”, a Zulu idiomatic expression meaning literally “the yoke is causing discomfort” (i.e. the yoked ox is not pulling hard enough). The cow is named uLiyahaya. Another cow is named uAngazi (< Zulu angazi “I don’t know”), a reference to Speir’s frequent habit of telling his labourers that “Mr Angazi is not welcome on this farm”.

Loan translations or calques
A curious way of forming Zulu nicknames for whites is translating the name (or what appears to be the name) into Zulu, a linguistic process known as a “loan translation” or a “calque”. Turner (1997:58) tells of a Mr. Bourne being given the nickname uMathambo (< amathambo “bones”). De Klerk has a similar Xhosa example, the name uThambo for Mr Bone. Turner gives four more examples of calques:

uMashimane (< isishimane “young man unsuccessful in courtship”), for a Mr Bachelor. uMashimane is also the clan praise for the Maphumulo clan, making Mr Bachelor an honorary member of this clan;

uMpungose (< the adjective –mpun-ga “grey”), for a man whose surname was Grey. uMpungose is also a common Zulu clan name;

uNkinsela (< inkinsela “important person”) for a Mr. Squires; and

uMthimkhulu (“big tree”) for a Mr Grootboom (< Afrikaans groot “big” + boom “tree”). uMthimkhulu is an existing Zulu clan name, and also the praise name for the common clan name Hadebe.

Sir Evelyn Wood (who was unhorsed by the Zulus at the battle of Hlobane in 1879, but defeated them later at the battle of Khambule) was known as uLukhuni, which could mean “The Tough One” (from the adjective -luk-huni “tough”, “hard”), but is more likely to be a calque (cf. u(lu)khuni “piece of firewood”). John Bird, resident magistrate in Pietermaritzburg from 1859 to 1876 was named uNyoniyentaba (“bird of the mountain”).

John Bird’s Zulu name may be the result of a loan translation, but many whites have been given names which refer to actual birds.
Names referring to birds
Faye gives the example uM pang e le (< impangele “guinea fowl”) for magistrate G.W. Adamson. Although there is no doubt that impangele means “guinea-fowl”, Faye chooses to explain this name as “The Man of Fine Parts”, yet another example of his “creative” interpretations. I recall recording the same name (uM pang e le) as a nickname for a Zulu youth who was known for walking along whistling and singing, so perhaps magistrate Adamson had the same habit.

The name uTh e kwane (< uthe kwane “hamerkop”, the bird Scopus umbretta) is a name frequently found. Although I gave it above as referring to a man with a head shaped like a Hamerkop, both De Klerk and Turner give it as referring to a vain arrogant man, with Turner pointing out that in Zulu oral traditions, the bird is pictured as staring at its reflection in water and complaining that were it not for the ugly crest on its head, it would be quite a good-looking bird.24 The James Stuart Archive (I:75) gives uThekwane as the Zulu name of a certain Paul du Pre, who took part in the battle of Ndon- dakusuka in 1856.

Faye gives ungqungqulu (< in-gqungqulu “Bateleur Eagle”) for magistrate J.W. Robertson. Doke and Vilakazi (1958:599) give the noun ungqangendlela for the Rufous-naped Lark (Mirafra africana) and say it means “what goes straight along the path”. Faye interprets it as “he who holds to the path, is acquainted with ways (e.g. Laws, etc.)”, which seems reasonable enough. Faye also gives the alternative form ungqengendlela, as well as uhhayi, and uzangqwash i, all for J.W. Robertson. Doke and Vilakazi have uzangqoshi, umangqwashi and unongqwashi for the same bird, as well as uhuyi and uhuye. (See also Godfrey (1941:71), who says that in Northern Natal this bird is known as uhoyi and ingqwayimba.) With all these various names for the same bird flying around, no wonder Faye needs to give magistrate Robertson four of them.

Faye gives uMngcelu as the Zulu name of magistrate G. Walker Wilson, and says it means “the early riser”. Doke and Vilakazi give both umngelu and umncelekeshe for the “road-lark”, correctly Richard’s Pipit (Anthus novaseelandiae). Clearly, what Faye had in mind was a man who “rose with the lark”.

Lugg (1970:50) gives the Zulu name unondwayiza for a “long-legged

clapped its wings above us at Mona’s”) and in Shembe’s praises as Ingqungulu eshay’ amaphiko phezu komuzi wakithi eKuphakameni (“Bateleur Eagle that clapped its wings above our house at eKuphakameni”).25 Amongst this august company of eagle-eyed, omen-filled, awe-inspiring eaters of men, Turner’s example of the man called uKhozi (Mr Eagle) because he had “forward stooping shoulders” seems very flat indeed.

Umngqangendlela is one of several Zulu names which Faye gives for magistrate J.W. Robertson. Doke and Vilakazi (1958:599) give the noun umngqangendlela for the Rufous-naped Lark (Mirafra africana) and say it means “what goes straight along the path”. Faye interprets it as “he who holds to the path, is acquainted with ways (e.g. Laws, etc.)”, which seems reasonable enough. Faye also gives the alternative form unGqengendlela, as well as uHhayi, and uzangqwash i, all for J.W. Robertson. Doke and Vilakazi have uzangqoshi, umangqwashi and unongqwashi for the same bird, as well as uhuyi and uhuye. (See also Godfrey (1941:71), who says that in Northern Natal this bird is known as uhoyi and ingqwayimba.) With all these various names for the same bird flying around, no wonder Faye needs to give magistrate Robertson four of them.

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Lugg (1970:50) gives the Zulu name unondwayiza for a “long-legged
gentleman with the stately walk of this bird”. Doke and Vilakazi (1958:585) record unondwayiza as the name of the “marsh-crake or lily-trotter” Actophilornis africanus.26 Also from Lugg (1970:51) is uNtungonono (Mr Secretary Bird), a name for “a tall, thin man with the stride of this bird”.27

I end this section on names derived from birds with an example from De Klerk (2002:156), who gives the Xhosa name uNqatyana (“sparrow”) for Dr Henderson of Lovedale,28 saying, “He was given the name for a ‘mossie’ because of his small stature.”

Names, praises and ‘core-images’

Faye (1923:21) says of the Zulu names he gives for magistrates that

it is interesting to note that some of these native names are borrowed from the praise names of amaqawe, ancient Zulu hero warriors: each of these is indicated by an asterisk.

Ten of his 46 magistrates are marked in this way, showing that a fair proportion (22 per cent) of his magistrates “inherited” already-existing praises. Unfortunately Faye does not identify the “ancient hero warriors” from whom these more modern magisterial warriors inherited the praises, and I have not been able to identify them myself. A number of these “borrowed” praises are given below.

For magistrate T.R. Bennett, whose Zulu name uNqungqulu (“Bateleur”) we discussed above, Faye also gives uBhelende la’Mazinyane; uTambo, utambo-tenyoka elamhlab’omzondayo. This extended praise is said by Faye to mean “The Sharp One”. I cannot trace “ubhelende” in any Zulu dictionary, and wonder if it is not an extreme adaptation of “Bennett”.29 If so, the whole praise translates as “Bennett of the young of animals, Mr Bone, the bone of the snake that stabs the one who hates him”.

Magistrate G.O. Cauvin, says Faye, was known as uLaduma, ladum’obala, kwacengece, lapo kungemunga, kungemtolo. Faye gives this as meaning “The awe-inspiring warrior, like Thunder”, but in fact there is an intriguing landscape in these praises, which translate as “The Thunderer, who thundered out in the open, on the open plateau, where there is no acacia, and no mimosa”.

Faye records for magistrate C.O. Griffin the praises uMhabula, uMhabul’ngwebu kwa’Mashobana, which he renders as “The warrior who scents war in distant lands, hence, he who is quick to detect, is soon on the spoor”. This is perhaps the most extreme of Faye’s imaginative interpretations. The Zulu words as they stand mean “The Sipper, who sipped at the froth on the beer at Mashobane’s place”.

The praises for magistrate R.M. Tanner offer intriguing possibilities. Faye gives uSibhaha, uSibhah’umangun’ulimi, which he interprets as “The warrior like strong medicine”. His “strong medicine” comes from the first meaning of isibhaha, given by Doke and Vilakazi (1958:20) as “fever tree, Warburgia breyeri, whose very hot and ginger-like root-bark is used for malarial fever and as an expectorant”. The whole praise means “Isibhaha tree that cuts off the tongue”. When we realise that isibhaha has a second meaning, namely “domineering, fiery-tempered person”, a whole new picture emerges of a magistrate who cuts off anyone who opens his mouth in his (Tanner’s) court. Our final example here concerns magistrate H.E. Wallace, who served at Mvoti from 1929 to 1930. The
Mvoti Magistrates List gives his Zulu name simply as Impunyuka; Faye expands this as uMpunyuka, uMpunyuka bempete ezandleni, which he translates (perfectly accurately, for a change) as “He who escapes, escapes from their very hands”. What is interesting about this is that uMpunyukabemphethe (“he who wriggles free as they hold him in their hands”) is a praise-name for current South African president Jacob Zuma, making this the second white person to share an onomastic identity with Zuma (see uGedleyihlekisa above).

In the late 1990s I did research into how certain “praise-phrases” or “praise images” transcend genre boundaries. I looked into how certain lines, certain images jumped from one set of royal izibongo to another over several generations, how they moved from the praise of kings to the praises of commoners over a hundred years later, how images in the clan praises of one clan ended up in the personal praises of an individual from another clan. This research was presented at a conference on oral poetry in Cape Town in 1998 and published three years later (Koopman 2001). I noted at the time only one example of how an image from the praises of a Zulu king had somehow become part of the praises of a white person:

In Shaka’s praises we find the line ondande ngankalo wabuya ngokhalo (“he who glided slowly along one ridge and came back on another”), repeated later in the poem as ondande ngokhalo olude (“he who glided along a long ridge”). Several decades after Shaka’s death the writer Rider Haggard visited Natal and was given the Zulu praise Lundanda undand’okhalweni (“tall one who glides slowly along the ridge”). At the time I saw this as a unique example of a white person inheriting a praise from an earlier “warrior hero”; Faye’s examples, however (and however interpreted!), show this to have been a much more common occurrence.

Gunner (1990:200) refers to phrases which appear and re-appear as “formulas” and says,

A formula may in fact begin by being simply a line borrowed from another praise poem, then borrowed again and so gradually becoming established as a widely-known and useful line.

Her concept of a formula, and what I like to call a “core-image” (a phrase or image taken from a “pool of images” held in Zulu society as a whole), explains Haggard’s Zulu name, as well as the names/praises/phrases uNtamb’ende kaLayini (Mr Long-string son of Line), Nyon’ende (Mr Tall-bird), and uMcondo kaZimilele (Mr Thin-legs son of Mr Walk-with-sticks) and others mentioned above.

A feature common to all genres of Zulu oral poetry (Zulu royal izibongo, the izihhasho of commoners, clan praises (izithakazelo), nicknames and nicknaming, and indeed, the giving of
Zulu names to white people), is that a name, once given, may be further qualified and expanded into a phrase. To illustrate this, let us look at the following extract from Lugg (1970:64), in reference to the Lugg family’s beach holiday in 1887:

At Ifafa beach we occupied a cottage owned by a man named Goldstone. He was a queer old stick, about four foot nothing, with a long yellow beard, always shabbily dressed, and from his habit of bobbing up when least expected, was known to the Natives as Jaz’ Manikiniki or Mr. Tatterdemalion, with the following praises composed in his honour:

Jaz’ manikiniki,
Wena ocatsha ekweneni njengenayidi.
(Rags and tatters, Who hides in long undergrowth like a needle.)

We see here that the name of this individual is Jaz’ manikiniki, but once this basic name has been extended by Wena ocatsha ekweneni njengenayidi, the name becomes “praises composed in his honour”.

If a person is given more than one name – and this happens frequently – each name may be expanded into a longer phrase. Once a person is known by four or five praise phrases, he or she no longer is identified by name, but by his or her own praise poem. Names and praise poems, it can be said, effectively belong to opposite ends of the single continuum of oral creativity.

In the final section of this article, I look at examples of white people whose individual Zulu names have been expanded into praise poems.

We have already considered a number of examples of white people with extended praise phrases instead of single one-word names, all taken from Faye’s 1923 list of names for magistrates. But as Faye pointed out, these were (or at least he considered them to be) praises “inherited” or “borrowed” from “ancient warrior heroes”.

The Zulu name of 1840 Natal settler S.B. Beningfield has already been discussed above. In the James Stuart Archive (II:305) editors Webb and Wright give “… Beningfield was called Mancingigi of the people of Saoti’s place, the knife that is sharp even among the ‘Kaffirs’.” The use of italics here suggests that in Stuart’s original notebook, this praise was given in Zulu, but Webb and Wright have chosen to give it in English translation. They keep the original Zulu, however, when referring to the praises of Nathaniel Isaacs (II:267):

Kamu Kengi [Captain James Saunders King] was accompanied by Mis Isisi [Nathaniel Isaacs], a young man afterwards called by natives “uDambuza m tabate, u zimema ze Ngome”.

Later, in footnote 17 on page 303, Webb and Wright explain the praise:

Isaac’s praise-name literally means “the one who waddles, off he goes at speed, the echoes of the cliffs at Ngome”. The occasion of him getting this praise was when he went to Zululand and was stabbed by the Kumalo people at the Ngome …

However, of all the early settlers at Port Natal in the 1820s, it was Henry Francis Fynn who was given extensive praises, almost certainly built up over a number of years, as it is the nature of praises to be added whenever something significant happens in the life of the person praised. Cope explains (1968:190):

Farewell was the leader of the first white settlement at Port Natal …
... However, it was Fynn who became the great favourite of Shaka and who was in closest contact with the Zulu people; hence his praise-poem.

There is no space in this article to look at any details of Fynn’s izibongo. Suffice it to say that for Cope (1968:190) Fynn’s praise-poem “represents the most primitive type of praise-poem, for it is simply a collection of praises, consisting for the most part of single lines or verses”, which is, in fact, as I have pointed out above, how the praises of an individual may accumulate.

It is probable that a number of the earlier white settlers accumulated praises in this way. Unhappily, they do not seem to have been collected. Cope only gives the praises of two white men in his 1968 book – Fynn and Sir Theophilus Shepstone. Cope (1968:191) considers Shepstone’s praises to be far more sophisticated and developed than those of Fynn, and even a cursory scan of them shows this to be the case. Again, there is no space for a detailed discussion of the contents of Shepstone’s praise, but I would like to look at just one stanza in the 84-line poem. Cope (ibid) says of this stanza, “The UKhozi praise … is a well-developed Shakan praise-stanza: statement plus extension … development … and conclusion.”

The reason I choose to look at this stanza specifically is to show how a single core-image may be a single name in one case, and a well-developed five-line stanza in another. Above we saw how Turner recorded the Zulu name uKhozi (“eagle”) for a tall man with forward stooping shoulders, and we compared this to the use of ungqungqulu (“Bateleur”). Compare now Turner’s unidentified stooped-shouldered individual to Theophilus Shepstone:

Theophilus Shepstone, known as uSomtewu

UKhozi lwakithi lumazipho,
(Our own eagle with the sharp talons,)
Ebelubal’ amadoda;
(That accounted for certain men;)
Ngoba lubal’ uCetshwayo kaMpande,
(For it accounted for Cetshwayo son of Mpande,)
Lwamithatha ngamazipho,
(It took him in its claws,)
Lwamphonsa phesheya eNgilandi;
(And threw him over the seas to England,)
Lwamudla lwamyekelela,
(It destroyed him, then gave him a respite,)
Lwabuya lwamkhafula.
(And eventually spat him out.)

Not quite as developed a metaphor as the above, but along the same lines, is the following extract from the praises of Fynn’s contemporary Dick King:31

ungqungqulu, udladla lwamafu,
(Bateleur eagle, plundering talons of the clouds,)
yashay’ amaphiko kwaduma
(That thrashed its wings)
Izulu ngokuthukuthela.
(And the heavens thundered with rage.)
I end this section on the extended praises of white men by looking at the praise of Steve Burns, who has contributed a number of names discussed in this article.\textsuperscript{32}

Burns joined the Natal Sharks Board in 1979 as a young “meshing officer” and was posted to Zinkwazi on the KZN North Coast. Having no money, he spent most of his time at the [Zulu] staff compound “sharing their food and listening to all the Zulu antics”. A master stick-fighter among them took young Burns under his wing and taught him the art of stick fighting, using the shorter blocking stick (\textit{ubhoko}) and the longer striking stick (\textit{isikhwili}). After some time he was challenged by a certain Zondi, who thereafter would fight regularly with him, and beat him every time. Eventually he won a stick fight with Zondi, and thereafter was known by the Zulu name \textbf{uSikhwili nobhoko}. After some years with the Natal Sharks Board Burns worked with Clover Dairies as a marketing development manager and worked in various townships and rural areas, accumulating praises as he went. The praises which he has sent me are:\textsuperscript{33}

\begin{quote}
\textit{USikhwili nobhoko,}
\textit{Uphume masango sango ukubamba mahlolo, umfana kaBurns.}
\textit{Enzansi eNhlaazuka wazalwa khona,}
\textit{Wakhile [phanse kwe]Nkosi Mkhize Khabazela Mavovo,}
\textit{Waphuza umfula waseLovu,}
\textit{Lapha khona izinkomo ziyokha amanzi ngophondo zithi ngqi.}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Sikhwili nobhoko (Mr Striking-stick and Blocking-stick),
He went out through gateway after gateway to take hold of “mahlolo”,\textsuperscript{34} this son of Burns,
Down south at Nhlaazuka is where he was born,
\end{quote}

He has built (established himself) under chief Mkhize Khabazelo Mavovo,\textsuperscript{35}

He has drunk [the water of] the Lovu River,
There where the cattle go to draw water with their horns and get stuck.

What is particularly noticeable about these praises is how much they draw from the \textit{maskandi} tradition. Maskandi musicians (the word is derived from the Afrikaans \textit{musikant} “musician”) sing ballads to the accompaniment of guitar, concertina or harmonica. The ballads are usually about the travails of life, and almost invariably each song starts with the singer identifying himself. He normally does this by including any or all of the following: his own name, the name of his father, the name of the \textit{induna} (“headman”) or chief under whom he has settled, the name of the river he drinks from, and the name of the mountain, in the shadow of which he sits. Note how many of these are present here.

\section*{Conclusion}

Zulu names and the Zulu naming system have been extensively studied over the last 40 or so years. They have been described as filled with meaning, intensely linked to Zulu culture, and in the case of nicknames and praise-names, sharp, witty, amusing, penetrating, and highly allusive. All of these attributes are true of the Zulu names given to white people since the earliest years of contact.

Zulu nicknames, praise-names, and clan praises are all characterised by extensive use of metaphor, and these metaphors are for the most part drawn from the natural world, with names referring to mountains, rivers, the sun, moon and rain. Metaphors referring to
animals and birds are particularly common. In the discussion of Zulu names above, I have shone a small light on names which refer to birds. But there are as many names which refer to animals, and in the names discussed in this article, we have found references to bushbuck, mongooses, crabs and goats among others.

While many of the names discussed above are benign or neutral in their underlying meaning and intent, others are distinctly critical. This again has its roots in the Zulu oral tradition, especially in the genre izibongo zamakhosi (the praises of kings and chiefs). Traditionally, the bard (imbongi) who composed and performed these praise-poems would concentrate on the good qualities of the person being praised. But he also had a duty to mention (however subtly) shortcomings and imperfections and so to air these publicly and in the hearing of the chief or king being praised. Many of the Zulu names for whites discussed above, particularly those referring to personality and character traits, are decidedly critical. Whether or not these criticisms were aired publicly in the same way as izibongo would depend on whether the (white) bearer of the critical names was aware he had such a name, was aware of what it meant, and whether it was used aloud in his or her presence. I think it is fair to assume that many of such persons would have been aware of their names, as the giving of a Zulu name to a prominent white person has been a common practice since the 1820s, and any prominent white person working in daily contact with Zulu speakers would have expected to be given a Zulu name. In many such cases, the original critical intention of the name-coiners may not have coincided exactly with the interpretation later given by the name-bearer to his white contemporaries, and where a third party was involved, as in the case of Carl Faye recording the Zulu names of magistrates, the published explanation of the Zulu names may have little or nothing to do with their actual meanings. Part of this may well have to do with the deliberate ambiguity in the Zulu names, allowing the Zulu-speaking coiners to smile quietly when they see the negative connotations of a name they have given to a white person being replaced publicly by a different interpretation with a much more favourable connotation.

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Umvoti District Magistrates Court Historical Records [http://www.greytown.co.za/districtrecords/excerpts.htm#magistrates accessed 03.01.2014]


ENDNOTES
1 Cope (1968:190) says that “although [Farewell] was simply a private trader, the Zulus regarded him as *Febana kaJoji* (Farewell, son of King George)

2 Derived from *buya* “to return + -ze [with] nothing”.

3 For example, Sotho does not have the sound “v”, and replaces this with “b” when borrowing words that begin with “v”, as in *benkele* from *winkel* and *boroso* from *wors*.

4 Director of Amabutho Marketing, based in KwaZulu-Natal.

5 Faye does not say where or when these men served as magistrates, only that his list contains the names of people who served up to 1922. Some of Faye’s magistrates have been more accurately identified through the Mvoti Magistrates List.
In its plural form izimbokodo, the base of the river name eZimbokodweni, recorded for many years on colonial maps as “Umbogintwini”. See Koopman 1987.

Presumably Burns means Charlie Chaplin here …

Turner gives uNtshebe as a Zulu name for a bearded white man, and it is quite a common Zulu name for a bearded person.

Dick King’s companion Ndongeni’s narrative in JSAIV:246 says, “We got beyond Mzimvubu to a missionary called Marwanqana.”

Faye, for example, gives this name for magistrates R.G. Boggs and H. Von Gerard.

I cannot trace the name uMangotobana or any parts of it in any Zulu dictionary, so must just take the interpretation given by the Mvoti Magistrates List at face value.

There are a number of mountains in KwaZulu-Natal with this name, denoting cultural respect for the mountain.

Steve Burns, pers. comm. 15.10.2013.

Turner (2000:135) also give uGedleyihlekiwa as a name for a dog. She translates it as “relaxed and laughing” as well as “two-faced person” and says the owner “named his dog to let his neighbour know that he suspected the neighbour of being the source of all his problems”.

But probably G. Brunton Warner.

All the Fynn family had Zulu names in those days. Frank Fynn, the younger brother of uMbuyazi weTheku, was known as uPhobana (“penis”, see JSAI:53), although there is no explanation for this name. He may have been a prolific womaniser.

In Xhosa orthography, “r” stands for the same velar fricative sound represented in Afrikaans by “g”.

Both examples from De Klerk 2002: 153, 158).

Premier of Natal in 1897.

This is not to say that Mr Speirs does not have his own Zulu name. An undated note from him, delivered in Feb 2014, says that his “childhood dancing name” was uFahl’ ufensi (“Crash! goes the fence”).

Note that as the Zulu vowel system does not have a sound directly equivalent to the “o” in English bone, the word “bone” is pronounced as “born” in Zulu.

Presumably a reference to the fact that Pietermaritzburg nestles in a hollow of hills.

Godfrey (1941:12), writing about bird folklore in the Xhosa culture, says: “The vain, conceited action of the hammerhead [i.e. hamerkop bird] by the pool is also interpreted proverbially as implying that ‘the eye that sees everything else does not see itself’”. De Klerk’s example refers to “a farmer near Kei Road who was a conceited show-off” (2002:159).

The current English vernacular name is African Jacana.

The Zulu name for the Secretary Bird (Sagittarius serpentarius) occurs as intungunono and as intinginono.

The Revd Dr James Henderson succeeded the Revd Dr James Stewart as principal of Lovedale College on the death of the latter in 1905.

The sounds “l”, “t”, “n” and “d” are all alveolar consonants, and are sometimes interchangeable when English and Afrikaans words are adopted into Zulu, as for example, when “lemonade” becomes unamanadi. Earlier we saw how “Fynn” became “[uSi] file”

UMangeingei, from Zulu ngingezi “how happy I am!”

Dick King was known as uDiki, and as uMlamulankunzi (“separater of the fighting bulls”). The praises are in Lugg (1970:52-54). The name uMlamulankunzi appears again, several decades later, in another stirring colonial scene: MacDonald (1994:137), in writing of the famous meeting of Cecil John Rhodes with the amaNdebele chiefs and “indunas” at the Matopos Hills in 1896, says that to the amaNdebele, Rhodes was known as “Umlamulanmkunzi [sic] he who separates the fighting bulls”.

The information that follows was sent to me by Steve Burns in emails dated 13.10.2013 and 15.10.2013 after I had quite accidentally met him in the small village of uMfolozi in KwaZulu-Natal at the end of September 2013.

I have corrected his Zulu spelling.

“Mahlolo” is obscure. He might mean mihlolo, which can refer to the beer reserved for the kraal-head.

Khabazela and Mavovo are clan-praises for the clan name Mkhide.
THE year 2014 marks 100 years since the arrival in Natal of two Englishmen, Charles Freer Andrews (1871-1940) and William (“Willie”) Winstanley Pearson (1881-1923), from India to assist in the concluding stages of the Gandhi-led Indian struggle in South Africa. Andrews is the better known of the two and there are biographies on him. Pearson was a decade younger than Andrews and also pre-deceased him by nearly two decades. Andrews’ published corpus is vast. His work involved him in discussions with, among others, high imperial functionaries in South Africa, India and England. There are few such high imperial interactions in Pearson’s life which otherwise had a focus similar to Andrews’. Not surprisingly, Pearson is much lesser known although on his death the Manchester Guardian described him as “the best loved Englishman in India”.

This article is primarily on Willie Pearson and his connection, a century ago, with Natal.

Willie Pearson’s father, Dr Samuel Pearson, was a well-known Congregationalist Minister in England, while his mother, Mrs Bertha Pearson, belonged to a famous Quaker family of London. Willie had studied at Cambridge and Oxford, majoring in the natural sciences and producing a thesis on the teleological aspects of evolution. Having joined the London Missionary Society (LMS), he had come out to India in 1907, inter alia, to teach botany at an LMS Institution in Calcutta. By 1909 he had also prepared an edition of Mazzini’s Duties of Man. Accompanied with a preface and biographical introduction by Pearson, this was published from Calcutta. For
various reasons, including ill-health, Pearson returned to England in 1911. But he was soon back in India with teaching assignments in Delhi and would later find his way also to the Indian poet-laureate Rabindranath Tagore’s educational institution, Shantiniketan at Bolpur, near Calcutta.

**To Natal and Back**

The trip to South Africa materialised rather unexpectedly for Willie Pearson towards the end of 1913. By the time C.F. Andrews and Pearson reached Durban by ship, on 2 January 1914, M.K. Gandhi (1869-1948) and many other passive resisters had been released from prison.³ Andrews was sent by the Indian statesman Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915) who had become anxious with Gandhi having been arrested and this having been followed by the harassment and unexpected arrest on 25 November 1913 of an English associate of Gandhi, Albert West (b. c1880), who was then Acting Editor of the Indian leader’s journal, *Indian Opinion.*⁴ West was charged with “harbouring indentured people”.⁵ Gandhi, who had been arrested earlier in November, would recall:

Mr West was in charge of the English section of *Indian Opinion* and of the cable correspondence with Gokhale. At a time like the present, when the situation assumed a new aspect every moment, correspondence by post was out of the question. Cablegrams had to be dispatched, no shorter in length than letters, and the delicate
responsibility regarding them was
shouldered by Mr West.⁶

That was the reason why

(as soon as the news of the arrest
of West was cabled to Gokhale, he
initiated the policy of sending out
able men from India . . . . No sooner,
therefore, did he hear of West’s arrest,
than he inquired of Andrews by wire
if he was ready to proceed to South
Africa at once . . . . His beloved friend
Pearson also got ready to go the same
moment, and the two friends left India
for South Africa by the first available
steamer.⁷

According to Gandhi’s journal,
before leaving for South Africa, Pearson
had already been “the spokesman
for the European community at the
great Delhi demonstration, addressed
recently by the Hon. Mr Gokhale,
against the ill-treatment of Indians
in South Africa”.⁸ Not surprisingly,
therefore, it was actually Susil Kumar
Rudra, the eminent Indian Christian
 Principal of St Stephen’s College in
Delhi, who suggested that Pearson
accompany Andrews on the tour; the
two then visited the Nobel laureate
Rabindranath Tagore to secure his
blessings before setting out for South
Africa.⁹ A farewell meeting was held for
the two and Tagore wrote: “Along with
Mr Gandhi and others, you are fighting
for our cause.”¹⁰ The Nobel Prize for
Tagore had also come in late 1913,
making the poet’s work, and Gitanjali
in particular, widely known. Andrews
and Pearson sailed from Calcutta via
Madras.

Although in his multifarious pursuits
Pearson seldom suffered from a lack

Pearson and Rabindranath at Santinikatan
(photograph courtesy of Modern Review, 1923)
of self-belief, he tended, especially in periods of solitude or on long voyages, to indulge an exaggerated sense of his own vulnerabilities. From the ship he wrote to Tagore: “The very thought that I go to South Africa as a messenger … will strengthen me and help me to herd the broken threads of my life’s purposes in that service of love.”\(^{11}\) In spite of this self-deprecating tendency, Pearson’s cheery temperament ensured that his company was sought after, especially on long journeys during which he would tend to liven things up, at least for others.\(^{12}\)

During the sea voyage, there was also indirect criticism of functionaries of the church: Pearson wrote, “Our time with the Bishop of Madras was very helpful. He is taking such a firm, uncompromising stand on the South African question …. He seems to me very unlike most Bishops!”\(^{13}\)

On their arrival in Durban, Andrews and Pearson explained their plans.\(^{14}\) Pearson referred to the Quaker background of his family and to their belief in spiritual force which he shared.\(^{15}\) Andrews expected to stay for at least six weeks, Pearson for a month. During this period they would, among other things, “endeavour to see the conditions under which Indians work on the estates, coal mines and factories” and they would also be taken to the districts where Indians worked “independently as gardeners and small farmers, as artisans and traders”.\(^{16}\) Visits to the Cape Colony and the Transvaal were also scheduled. On 18 January Pearson attended a reception given by G.M. Moodaley of Umgeni where he could meet farmers of the district.\(^{17}\) Pearson then visited the farmers of Sea Cow Lake before returning to Gandhi’s Phoenix Settlement.\(^{18}\) On 25 January there was a mass meeting of 3 000 Indians on the Indian Football Ground in Durban at which Andrews, Pearson, Albert West, H. Kallenbach (1871-1945), and H.S.L. Polak (1882-1959) were present along with Gandhi. The terms of the agreement reached with Jan Smuts in the negotiations at Pretoria, to which Andrews had also contributed, were explained. Before explaining the terms of the agreement, Gandhi referred to the letter that Andrews had received from England preparing him for the death of his mother.\(^{19}\) Andrews would leave for England later in February.

Pearson spent the bulk of his time in South Africa studying the labour conditions in the sugarcane plantations in Natal.\(^{20}\) He was at the Phoenix Settlement itself for no more than two or three weeks. He studied the working of Magistrates’ Courts and of the Office of the Protector of Indian Immigrants. In the period that Pearson spent at Phoenix, writes one inmate of the settlement, Pearson “became one with the children”.\(^{21}\) Prabhudas Gandhi, who was at Phoenix at the time, writes:

> While Mr Andrews spent his time discussing political problems with Gandhiji, Mr Pearson studied the life of the people. He walked for most of the day around Phoenix and saw how Indian indentured labourers lived. He also visited Africans’ homes and found out what their problems were.\(^{22}\)

At the end of January 1914, Pearson gave evidence before the Inquiry Commission that had been set up in South Africa to go into Indian grievances which had culminated in the famous 1913 agitation and strike led by Gandhi and his colleagues such as Thambi Naidoo (1875-1933).\(^{23}\) In his evidence before the Commission, Pearson sought
the removal of the £3 tax which, he told the panel, was levied unfairly and lacked justification.24 Pearson visited the coal-mining area around Newcastle in February.25 At Newcastle, which had been the nerve-centre of the miners’ strike, the local Passive Resistance Committee organised a reception in honour of Andrews and Pearson. The former had proceeded directly to Cape Town on account of his indisposition. In the event, Pearson attended the reception along with Kallenbach.26 The report of this occasion is important especially because it highlights the involvement of Newcastle’s St Oswald’s School in the struggle. The school appeared to have provided the passive resisters with a support system and some meetings had in fact been held in the school premises. On the occasion of the reception for Pearson, too, Indian Opinion reported: “Some 150 of the residents assembled at the station to meet the guests and there were also gathered here the children of St. Oswald’s School under their headmaster, Mr Ephraim.”27 The headmaster, Abdial Massieka Ephraim, had actively supported the struggle and the school’s hall had been the venue of a meeting of Newcastle Indians on 13 October 1913.28 At the place of the reception, where Pearson and Kallenbach were escorted, were present, among many others, Messrs Vawda, Joshie, Ballaram, and Dwarkasingh, Mrs S. Ephraim and Mrs D. Lazarus.29 Dossen Lazarus presided. The women had been active. Lazarus’s sister-in-law, Miss Thomas, and his wife, Mrs D.M. Lazarus, whose home in Newcastle at 37 Murchison Street had become the virtual headquarters of the struggle in the area, had been greatly praised by Gandhi for their contribution.30 Pearson’s report on his visit to South Africa deals substantially with the question of indentured labour in Natal. It is a sophisticated work containing insights that are all the more remarkable for the fact that Pearson spent no more than two months in the country.31 In his report Pearson drew attention to several defects of the indenture system, the law and the administrative machinery. A couple of these may be mentioned here. Of the Office of “Protector of Indian Immigrants”, Pearson remarked: “He seems to interpret the principles of British justice in a way that assumes all Indians to be guilty until they are proved to be innocent, and all the employers of Indians innocent until they are proved to be guilty.”32 If the indentured labourer has complaints against the employer and manages to pass the barrier of the interpreters, and thus reach the Protector himself, he has this initial prejudice to overcome, and then, if he manages to convince his official
guardian that there is justification for his complaint, he is ordered to go back to his employer pending inquiry and, if he refuses, he is handed over to the police for being absent without leave from his employer. This means that he is brought before the Magistrate, who is bound by law either heavily to fine the culprit or to send the unfortunate man to gaol for seven days with or without hard labour for a first offence, fourteen days with hard labour for a second offence, and up to thirty days with hard labour for any subsequent offence.33

Under the curious provisions of the law (Section 101 of the Law No 25 of 1891), absence would be punishable even if the complaint was justified and successful:

When all or a large number of the Indian immigrants employed upon any estate or property shall absent themselves from their employment without leave for the purpose or on the pretence of making any complaint against their employer, such Indians or any number of them shall be liable to be brought before any court and, on conviction, to be punished by fine not exceeding £2 Sterling or by imprisonment for any period not exceeding two months, with or without hard labour, whether such complaint shall or shall not be adjudged to be groundless or frivolous and notwithstanding that such complaint may be successful.34

[Italics Pearson’s]

For the condition of indentured labour, Pearson placed the primary blame on the Colonial Government of India.35 He appealed for mutual understanding between the communities. Having attended, along with other passive resisters, the funeral of Hurbat Singh, an Indian worker who had died in jail, Pearson recorded his impressions:

A short time after my arrival in Durban, I was walking behind the hearse of an old Indian labourer who died in gaol as a passive resister, at the age of 70. As we passed through the streets of Durban during luncheon hour, I was struck with the way in which hundreds of Europeans showed their respect for the dead body by removing their hats as the hearse passed. It seemed to me strange that this old man who, as a labourer, had for 40 years served this country, had to wait for death to claim his body before he could win the respect of the Christian public.36

While in South Africa, Pearson made known his support for the promotion of racial equality and the fostering of social and political protest in that country. Phoenix was situated in the midst of a Zulu area. On one occasion Raojibhai M. Patel, who was also at Phoenix, accompanied Willie Pearson to meet the African educationist and leader John Langalibalele Dube (1871–1946), whose Ohlange Institute in Inanda was situated close to the Phoenix settlement. In January 1912 Dube had been chosen as the first President of the African National Congress (then known as the South African Native National Congress). Gandhi was well acquainted with Dube.37 He had referred appreciatively to Dube as early as in 1905.38 In November 1912 Gandhi had taken Gopal Krishna Gokhale, then on a tour of South Africa, to Dube’s institution where the visiting leader was given a rousing reception.39 The significance of Dube in African history may be gauged by the fact that when democracy and freedom were restored to South Africa in the 1990s, Nelson Mandela chose to cast his vote in Ohlange, Inanda, expressly recalling the memory and legacy of John Dube.
One may obtain a sense of Willie Pearson’s extraordinary character and commitment to racial equality from the fact that on his visit to John Dube, he asked whether the Africans were ready to emulate the kind of passive resistance struggles launched by Indians. John Dube’s reply to Willie Pearson, as recorded by Raojibhai Patel, indicated admiration for the Indian struggle under Gandhi’s leadership and the endurance shown by even the unlettered among the Indians; he was doubtful, however, whether the struggle could be emulated by Africans without bringing forth severe retaliation from the ruling dispensation.  

Pearson left for India on 27 February. On his return journey, he spent 10 days in Mozambique. He has provided us with a rare account of Indians living in Mozambique at the time. Keenly observant, he makes tell-tale comparisons between the treatment of Indians in South Africa and the treatment they receive in Portuguese-administered Mozambique. As a Britisher, he found it “humiliating” that “the treatment which British Indians receive at the hands of the Portuguese is so much better than that which they receive in British Colonies”. He was pleasantly surprised to find a Portuguese boy strike up a conversation with Pearson’s Indian friends when they were travelling together on the railway, an experience which “was such a complete contrast to the behaviour of most European boys in South Africa towards Indians”. The Portuguese, Pearson went on to record in the article, “seem to mix freely even with the natives of the country, especially in the interior”. He analysed the reason for the contrast between South Africa and Mozambique as regards the Indians and concluded that “[t]here is amongst the Portuguese very little insularity or colour prejudice”. Pearson did notice, however, that the “Goanese element being largely Roman Catholic and consisting of Portuguese subjects helps to form a connecting link between British Indians and Portuguese.” Along with his growing association with Indian nationalist tendencies, Pearson’s experiences in South Africa and Mozambique had enabled him to cross many lines and several borders.

**Pearson’s later life**

Soon after returning to India, Pearson joined the staff at Tagore’s Shantiniketan not very far from Calcutta. His later life was not uneventful. In 1915 he accompanied C.F. Andrews on a trip to Fiji to study the indentured labour problem there. Apart from teaching at Shantiniketan, Pearson accompanied Tagore on his trips to Japan and the United States. Later, in 1917, he wrote *For India*, a little book published from Japan in which he advocated Indian independence. The book was proscribed by the British Colonial regime in 1917. Pearson was arrested in April 1918 in China while he was on a visit there and sent back to England. He was placed under restrictions in England. Though he was allowed to return to India in 1921, he remained under police surveillance. Later he again returned home to England apparently to recoup his health. While on a visit to Italy in 1923 Willie Pearson fell out of a fast-moving train on 18 September and died a week later on 25 September. He was cremated in Pistoia where his ashes are still interred.
ENDNOTES

1 See, for example, Benarsidas Chaturvedi and Marjorie Sykes, Charles Freer Andrews, [first published, 1949], Indian Reprint, New Delhi, Publications Division, Government of India, 1982 and Hugh Tinker, The Ordeal of Love: C.F Andrews and India, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979.


3 Gandhi recalled in 1924: “It was when almost all the leaders were arrested that Mr Gokhale … sent Mr Andrews and Mr Pearson. Whilst their help was invaluable, it was not necessary to keep the sacrificial fire going. They were useful for conducting negotiations”. “Interview to The Hindu”, 15 April 1924, The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Trust, 1958-1994, [CW], Vol 23, p. 441.


5 Indian Opinion, 26 November 1913.


7 Ibid., p. 291.

8 Indian Opinion, 7 January 1914.

9 Probhat Kumar Mukherji (Sisir Kumar Ghosh, Tr.), Life of Tagore, New Delhi, Indian Book Company, 1975, p.118.

10 Ibid.


12 Among attributes that Pearson valued highly are those expressed in R.L. Stevenson’s prayer which he cites in a letter to Tagore: “Give us courage, gaiety and a quiet mind”; he would, he writes, like to begin each day with it: Pearson to Rabindranath Tagore, 6 May 1913, Pearson Papers, Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan.


15 Indian Opinion, 7 January 1914. In a letter to Rabindranath Tagore on 2 March 1914, Andrews wrote: “It interested me much also to hear Willie say in one of his speeches, that he could understand the Indian situation in S. Africa because his family had been quakers …. That was significant!”. See C.F. Andrews, Andrews’ Papers: Bunch of Letters to Rabindranath Tagore and M.K. Gandhi, Deenabandhu Andrews Centenary Committee, op. cit., p. 25.

16 Indian Opinion, 7 January 1914.

17 Indian Opinion, 28 January 1914.

18 Ibid.

19 “Durban Supports Mr Gandhi”, Indian Opinion, 28 January 1914. Andrews’ mother had in fact died earlier in January soon after his arrival in Durban from India.


22 Ibid.

23 These events and Gandhi’s role in them have been written about by Pearson in “A Character Study of M.K. Gandhi” an essay included in W.W. Pearson, The Dawn of a New Age and other Essays, Madras, S.Ganesan, 1922, pp. 55-73. For Thambi Naidoo see also E.S. Reddy, Thambi Naidoo and his family, New Delhi, National Gandhi Museum and Library, 2014.

24 Indian Opinion, 4 February 1914.

25 Indian Opinion, 4 & 18 February 1914.

26 “Mr Pearson at Newcastle”, Indian Opinion, 18 February 1914.

27 Ibid.


29 “Mr Pearson at Newcastle”, Indian Opinion, 18 February 1914.


32 Ibid., p. 632.
33 Ibid., p. 633.
34 Ibid., p. 636.
35 “Mr Pearson’s Impressions”, Indian Opinion, 4 March 1914.
36 Idem.
38 Indian Opinion, 2 September 1905, Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, [CW], Vol 5, p. 55.
39 Ilanga Lase Natal, 15 November 1912.
40 E.S. Reddy, Gandhiji’s Vision of a Free South Africa, New Delhi, Sanchar Publishing House, 1995, pp. 23-6. Raojibhai M. Patel was an inmate of the Phoenix settlement who accompanied Pearson to his meeting with Dube. Patel wrote his account of this meeting in Gujarati in a work published in India in 1939 under the title Gandhijini Sadhana.
41 Indian Opinion, 4 March 1914.
43 Ibid., p. 45.
44 Idem.
45 Interestingly, another keen observer recorded a similar lack of racial feeling in mainland France of the 1920s: See K.M. Panikkar, An Autobiography, Madras, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 61. Panikkar wrote: “Only in Paris do we find a complete absence of colour bar. Everyone knows that the British look down on coloured people. The reverse was true of Paris.” Both the Portuguese attitudes noticed by Pearson and the French noticed by Panikkar would, however, come under strain in subsequent decades.
A REASON FOR A NAME

John Deane writes:

As generations follow one another, personal memories of ancestors who fought in the first World War give way to stories handed down in families. Sometimes what a soldier wrote at the time has survived – perhaps as a published memoir, a diary, or letters written home. But sometimes the connection between the fateful second decade of the 20th century and a person in 2014 is more tenuous and more unusual.

In 1915 the Transvaal Scottish Regiment had a young female springbok named Nancy as a mascot. Although treated very well, the poor animal must have led a rather unnatural life. Accompanying the regiment to Egypt and later to France, she became a casualty in the Battle of the Somme when the German bombardment so terrified her that she bolted and broke her left horn against a wall. When it regrew, it pointed downward. Then in the severe winter of 1918 she contracted pneumonia and died shortly after the Armistice. Her death was announced in General Orders, possibly something unique in British military history. All parades were cancelled, and a firing party attended the interment of all the remains except the skin, head and horns, which were preserved for later stuffing. Thus for many years Nancy graced the officers’ mess of the Transvaal Scottish. She has now been promoted to the War Museum.

A soldier in the regiment returned to South Africa, and married quite a long time after the end of the war. When he and his wife had a daughter, he named her Nancy, after the regimental mascot which had obviously meant so much to him amid the horrors of the Flanders trenches.

That daughter, Nancy Aucock, now lives in Hilton.
A YOUNG APARTEID EXILE’S DEATH REMEMBERED
Elwyn Jenkins writes

AT NAKASA, Durban-born journalist, was buried in Ferncliff Cemetery, Westchester, New York, in 1965. His remains were reburied in Heroes’ Acre in Chesterville, Durban, on 13th September 2014, following a memorial service in the Durban City Hall that was attended by the Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, Senzo Mchunu. To coincide with his return, the Old Court House Museum in Durban mounted an exhibition on his life and work. A plaque remains in the USA to mark his original grave.

Nathaniel Ndazana Nakasa was born in Chesterville in 1937 and educated in Durban. He started writing for Ilanga lase Natal in the 1950s before moving to Johannesburg, where he first wrote for Golden City Post. He soon became a regular columnist with a byline in the Rand Daily Mail, being its first black journalist. He went on to become a stalwart of Drum magazine in the company of writers such as Henry Nxumalo, Lewis Nkosi, Casey Motsisi, Can Themba, Todd Matshikiza, Es’kia Mphahlele and Bloke Modisane, who are remembered now as the extraordinary Drum generation.

In 1963, Nakasa was awarded a Nieman Fellowship to study at Harvard University for a year. The South African government declined to issue him a passport to travel abroad, and finally granted him an exit permit, which allowed him to leave the country – but by accepting it he had forfeited the right to return and became stateless.

After leaving Harvard he wrote articles for several newspapers, appeared in the television film The Fruit of Fear and was planning to write a biography of Miriam Makeba. Two days before his death, he told a friend, “I can’t laugh any more, and when I can’t laugh, I can’t write.” On 14th July 1965, he fell to his death from the window of a seventh-floor apartment in Manhattan. His death, apparently by suicide, was an apartheid tragedy and a tragedy of exile. He was buried close to where Malcolm X, whom he had met in Tanzania, had been buried five months earlier.

Of Nakasa’s increasing emotional turmoil, Nakasa’s biographer, Ryan Brown, has written:

Now he was caught in a precarious limbo, unable to return to South Africa but lacking citizenship in the United States, a place that he was beginning to feel offered little respite from the brutal racism of his own country. He was, he had written, a “native of nowhere... a stateless man [and] a permanent wanderer”, and he was running out of hope. Standing in that New York City apartment building, he faced the alien city. The next thing anyone knew, he was lying on the pavement below. He was 28 years old.

The journalist Mathatha Tsedu, who sat on the committee that negotiated the return of Nakasa’s remains, describes him:

Nat, to use the common parlance, was a die-hard liberal who believed that dialogue across the colour lines would dissipate the racism that he saw as propped up by ignorance. He wrote that way, and in those days, even just writing that way was seen as revolutionary. He was a young man with a lot of growing up to do, which unfortunately did not happen. While the politics of the time demanded
revolutionary fervour, he was into dialogue and finding the good people on the other side. His naiveté around race issues came to the fore when he reached America and found the bastion of freedom being nothing more than a seriously racist state that oppressed black people.\(^3\)

Nadine Gordimer wrote of him:

The truth is that he was a new kind of man in South Africa. He accepted without question and with easy dignity and natural pride his Africanness, and he took equally for granted that his identity as a man among men, a human among fellow humans, could not be legislated out of existence, even by all the apartheid laws in the statute book, or all the racial prejudice in this country. He did not calculate the population as sixteen millions or four millions, but as twenty. He belonged not between two worlds, but to both. And in him one could see the hope of one world. He has left that hope behind; there will be others to take it up.\(^4\)

Nakasa’s literary legacy is summed up by J. Brooks Spector:

Despite that untimely and early death, Nakasa still left a wide-ranging body of essays and reportage that have come to be regarded as a unique vantage point, looking at a Johannesburg that was ostensibly two entirely separate universes – but also with a small, “below-the-radar” cosmopolitan world – the space described by writers like Nadine Gordimer in her novel *A World of Strangers*. Nakasa’s wanderings allowed him to sample the demi-monde of the city’s largely black world that without Nakasa’s writing remained mostly unknown to his ordinary white readers. Some of Nakasa’s most enduring pieces are his acutely observed cameo profiles of figures like the legendary boxer King Kong, the famous penny whistler Spokes Mashiane and a young, vivacious Winnie Mandela – as well as Aunt Sally in her eponymous shebeen.\(^5\)

In honour of his memory, the South African National Editors Forum instituted the Nat Nakasa Award for Courageous Journalism in 1988.

**NOTES**


**Books and dissertation**


COMMEMORATION OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN HOWICK
by Elwyn Jenkins

HOWICK in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, like so many cities and towns around the world, has its public reminders of the First World War. One of its main thoroughfares is called Somme Street, and a cenotaph to the fallen stands outside the old Agricultural Hall.

In August 2014, the centenary of the outbreak of the war was marked in Howick in several ways. The large Amber Valley retirement community devoted its monthly pub quiz to the war, and its drama group presented an evening of readings and music as a tribute to the members of the armed forces in the trench war.

The evening of the quiz began with a concert of old-time songs by the Grade Threes of the Dinky Choir from Howick Preparatory School. The innocence of the children’s voices set against the horrors of the Great War and the wars that it set in train was heartbreaking.

The quiz, which had 180 contestants, ranged widely across facets of the war. Various nations were remembered: the British Tommies (by their trench newspaper, The Wipers Times); how an embarrassed royal family changed its name from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to Windsor; New Zealanders and Australians (at Gallipoli); Canadians (at Vimy Ridge), American Doughboys; Hemingway as an ambulance driver in Italy; South Africans (victorious in South West Africa and ignominiously defeated at Salaita Hill in East Africa); the African servicemen who perished on the SS Mendi; the Russians and the Bolshevik revolution; Serbia; ill-fated Bulgaria; T.E. Lawrence and his quixotic Arab Revolt. Different armed forces featured: the British navy at Jutland and the German navy at Scapa Flow; Baron von Richthofen; Biggles in his Sopwith Camel; and the Zeppelins. Women were represented by the courageous Edith Cavell and the notorious Mata Hari. Of course, the war poets were there, as well as Benjamin Britten’s War Requiem, which is set partly to the words of Wilfrid Owen.

What struck those present was that they were still of a generation whose family traditions remembered the war and how it had touched them. Stories were told of families who survived Zeppelin raids or grandfathers who were gassed, and treasured memorabilia were displayed. By contrast, when I told a young woman what our theme would be, she asked in a puzzled way whether “the old forts at Colenso” dated from the war.

The programme of readings and music began on a lively satirical note and ended solemnly. The first half consisted of a shortened version of the musical Oh, What a Lovely War! by Joan Littlewood. Dialogue conveyed aspects of the war such as war profiteers, the established church and the generals, the young women in the munitions factories, pacifists such as Emily Pankhurst, and the “Christmas truce”. Interspersed among these episodes were sound effects and songs that are mainly unfamiliar today, some of them with scurrilous words to hymn tunes.

The candlelit second half consisted of readings both familiar and unfamiliar, accompanied by the screening of photographs and ending with a video clip of the playing of the Last Post in
the nightly ceremony at the Menin Gate. Prose extracts came from the classic war memoirs of Robert Graves (Goodbye to All That) and Edmund Blunden (Undertones of War). Two early poems, Rupert Brooke’s “The soldier” and “In Flanders fields” by the Canadian John McCrae, were followed by frank, bitter and disillusioned verse by writers such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and a German Jewish soldier known only as Goldfeld; the women poets May Wedderburn Cannan and Vera Brittain; and, on the lighter side, an anonymous parody of The Rubaiyat from The Wipers Times. Catharsis came at the end with Sassoon’s “Everyone sang” (“My heart was shaken with tears; and horror/Drifted away”) and a less familiar poem by the American Carl Sandburg:

Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo.
Shovel them under and let me work —
I am the grass; I cover all.

And pile them high at Gettysburg
And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun.
Shovel them under and let me work.
Two years, ten years, and the passengers ask the conductor:
What place is this?
Where are we now?

I am the grass.
Let me work.

The third event in Howick on the centenary of the war took place on 2nd August, when by arrangement with the MOTHs the artist Owen Llewellyn-Davies removed from the cenotaph four metal plaques listing the names of the fallen in the First and Second World Wars and entrusted them to the custody of the Howick MOTHs Lions Shellhole. This was a regrettable proactive measure to protect the plaques from being stolen. (The bell of St Luke’s Church, one block away, was stolen from the churchyard a couple of years ago.) The names recorded on the plaques are those of 25 men from the district who died in the First World War, including one who perished on the SS Mendi, and eight from the Second World War. 1

NOTE

AN ADDENDUM
by Peter Alcock

Reference was made in footnote 59 of the paper “Snow in, or on the outskirts of, Pietermaritzburg (1851–2013)”, Natalia 43, 2013, pp. 73–83 to an addendum, in the event of further data relevant to the study area being discovered. The following information is provided in the same format applicable to the original paper (see Natalia 43, p. 75).

25–28 August 1911
Rain and then snow fell in many parts of the Natal Midlands and in Northern Natal. It was said that snow was “general in the north of Natal”. The inland hills overlooking Pietermaritzburg were covered in snow. Trains arriving in the city from the interior of Natal had snow-laden roofs. Snow (in some cases heavy falls) was reported in Kokstad, Ixopo, on the hills above Richmond, in Nottingham Road, Mooi River and Ladysmith, at Acton Homes and Dewdrop as well as in the neighbouring districts, on the Umkolombe Mountain near Weenen, in Greytown, Umsinga, Nkandhla, Babanango and Piet Retief. Snow likewise fell in Waschbank, Dundee, Newcastle, Vryheid, Utrecht, Charlestown, Van Reenen, Harrismith, between Swinburne and Brackwell, and in Wakkerstroom and Ermelo. Snow fell further afield at Dordrecht in the Eastern Cape. Subsequent snowfalls occurred in Northern Natal and the Southern Transvaal on 29 August 1911. The August 1911 snow episode was clearly a major event which took place over some days.

NOTES
1 Natal Witness, 28 and 29 August 1911.
2 Natal Witness, 30 August 1911.
3 Some of the place names mentioned use an earlier spelling.
Herby Sylvister Govinden (1928–2013)

Herby Sylvister Govinden was born on 25 May 1928 in Piet-ermaritzburg. He was baptised at St Paul’s Mission Church on 24 June 1928 by the Revd J.M. Sundrum. Herby attended St Paul’s Mission School and later Woodlands High School. He completed his science degree, with majors in chemistry (with distinction) and physics at Fort Hare. After a spell of teaching, he proceeded to Rhodes University, where he completed his honours and doctorate in chemistry (He was the first Indian in South Africa to complete a doctorate in chemistry). He returned to Fort Hare in July 1959 to lecture in chemistry. In 1964 he was awarded a post-doctoral fellowship and spent a year at the National Research Centre in Ottawa, Canada.

In 1965 he was appointed to lecture at Salisbury Island, which later became the University of Durban-Westville (UDW), where he also served as Dean of the Faculty of Science during 1989 and 1990. He was appointed the first president of the Convocation of UDW, and served in a leadership role on the Staff Association for many years.

In the life of the Anglican Church, Herby served as superintendent of the Sunday School, as lay minister, and as choir master at St Aidan’s Parish. He was on the Board of St Aidan’s Hospital and of the Durban Child Welfare Society. Herby participated in Diocesan
and Provincial Synods; was a member of the Diocesan Board of Trustees; and represented the Anglican Church in South Africa as a lay delegate at the 4th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) held in 1968 in Uppsala, Sweden. This was at a time when the South African regime did not take kindly to the anti-apartheid stance of the WCC. In October 1988, he went to Lusaka as part of a South African delegation to meet the ANC in exile. He met Thabo Mbeki and was embraced by Chris Hani, his former Fort Hare student. The delegation included members of the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) and Natal Indian Congress (NIC), together with 52 members of the Indian community, and held discussions with the ANC on a post-apartheid South Africa.

Alongside his academic career, Herby was long associated with music and with drama. He was a church organist and choir member for many years. He composed a musical setting for the 1989 Anglican Prayer Book eucharistic liturgy and observed that it was “one of those quiet highpoints in his life”. With Melvin Peters and Rufus Daniel, he wrote lyrics and composed music for “Five Barley Loaves”, based on the Biblical event. He also composed the music for the Durban musicals “It’s a Colourful World” (written by Guru Pillay, and directed by Benjy Francis and Maynard Peters), “Saras” (directed by Guru Pillay), and incidental music for a few plays at the Department of Speech and Drama at the former UDW.

Bishop Michael Nuttall, former Bishop of Natal, paid this tribute: “Professor Herby Govinden carried his many achievements, academic and other – those ‘quiet highpoints in his life’ – with an unassuming modesty and an inward sense of pleasure and gratitude. At the heart of this was his deep and lively Christian faith, enlivened by a passion for things musical and artistic, together with his love of science. To many he seemed to be at his happiest seated at the church organ, playing among other things his own composition for the liturgy of the regular Sunday Sung Eucharist. That, and his devotion to his wife Betty and their two daughters, Marylla and Delphine, and the wider family, held him enthralled. Herby Govinden was a very rounded person in his interests and involvements and a very lovable human being.”

On his retirement Herby completed a Masters dissertation at UDW on the history of St Aidan’s Mission, which he submitted in 2004. This is an invaluable record of the history of St Aidan’s Mission, where the founder, Dr Lancelot Parker Booth, and Mahatma Gandhi worked together in the city of Durban among the indigent during the early years of the 20th century. In 2008 Bishop Rubin Phillip conferred on Herby the Order of the Holy Nativity, an Award for Distinguished Lay Service in the Anglican Diocese of Natal.

Herby Govinden leaves his wife Betty, two daughters and four grandchildren.

(From the leaflet containing the details of Herby Govinden’s Requiem Eucharist and tributes paid.)
Frank Jolles (1931–2014)

RENAISSANCE man and beloved colleague Frank Jolles had the wit, wisdom and temerity to compare sending SMSs with making traditional Zulu beaded love letters. A self-invented, highly respected scholar of African material culture after he retired as professor of German literature and language, Jolles passed away from complications relating to a stroke.

“His work is about culture in transition,” says his colleague at KwaZulu-Natal Museum, archaeologist Gavin Whitelaw. “For years, he collected woodwork – milk pails and meat platters – from the Msinga area.”

Professor Karel Nel of Wits University, a long-time friend of Jolles, describes sharing Jolles’ passion for Zulu culture as a joy. “His contribution to writing about and understanding Zulu culture was major. Being a linguist, he went out in the field and identified a number of regional styles, reflecting on the visual as one would do on a language.

“His strength was his meticulous ability to understand how things were related to one another, rather than snatching things out of context,” says Nel.

Jolles enjoyed abiding interests in many aspects of Zulu culture, including ear plugs and beadwork. “He was a lovely person. He was super-enthusiastic about the material. He loved learning about it from the people who made it and the people who used it,” says Whitelaw, who speaks of Jolles’s empathy for young and old. “He laughed a lot.”

Nel concurs: “With his dry sense of humour, he showed great respect for people and what they said. His conversations went on and on and on but were never boring.

“Frank was taken seriously by peers in the field, even though he was relatively new to it and boasted no qualifications. Often he was approached to identify an object’s provenance. He believed that removing a provenance was a kind of unethical dealer strategy to render an African object outside of time, rather than attributable to an individual.”

Whitelaw adds: “He made archaeological observations about Zulu pots that changed how we think about them. He was the first to recognise that between 1850 and 1900 there was a shift from beer-containing and beer-brewing gourds and baskets to clay pots.

“Frank was very erudite and very perceptive. He had a great capacity to engage deeply. He was extremely well informed about economics, politics.”

Nel speaks of valuable time spent with Jolles in looking at objects: “He travelled with me to Micronesia and Papua New Guinea and the rapidity with which he grasped the syntax of a culture was astonishing.”
“His approach was ‘sciency’, different from that of the average scholar.”

Nel adds: “He came to the field of African culture late. Because of his training as a linguist, he had the capacity to observe deeply and make deductions.”

Born on May 9 1931 in Berlin to a Jewish family, Jolles was six when his family fled Europe before World War II. He studied chemistry at Manchester University and linguistics at the Sorbonne in Paris. After completing a doctorate in German and English at Goettingen University, Germany, he was employed at the New University of Ulster, Northern Ireland, heading the German Department, where he remained for 20 years.

When his university amalgamated with a polytechnic, eliminating German literature, Jolles took early retirement in 1986. That’s when he landed his job heading up the department of German at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He moved to South Africa with his son Philip, settling in the suburb of Hilton, near Pietermaritzburg.

Zulu objects re-ignited an interest in African artefacts that may have originated during time spent on secondment to the University of Nigeria in 1978. The experience encouraged him to accept an appointment to the Chair of German at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 1987. It was a passion that first began for him as a 23-year-old student in 1954 at the University of Bonn, when he attended seminars in classical archaeology.

From this vantage point he researched the Zulu hinterland – a world unknown to most of his colleagues. His retirement from the university in 1994 enabled him to continue working in this field as an honorary research associate. His recent publications centred on cross-cultural studies, including research on trade dolls and SMSs and material culture: carvings, ceramics and beadwork, particularly with reference to the information embedded within them.

His latest book, *Zulu Beer Vessels in the 20th Century*, is currently in production. Sadly Jolles did not live to see the book’s final proofs.

“He understood a lot about a lot,” says his son Stephen. “In studying literature, he was also an expert on philosophy of the periods he studied.”

“It doesn’t happen that the shoes of someone like this get filled,” added Whitelaw, referring also to the 2012 death of KwaZulu-Natal-based Africanist and ceramicist Juliet Armstrong.

Jolles leaves his children, Stephen, Philip and Anna, five grandchildren and a sister in Germany.

ROBYN SASSEN

*(With acknowledgments to the Mail & Guardian)*
John Morrison (1946 – 2014)

JOHN Morrison, former manager at the Bessie Head Municipal Library in Pietermaritzburg has died. He was 67.

Morrison was born in Germiston in 1946 and after attending a local primary school went to Queen’s High, a co-ed school in Kensington. In 1969 he came to Pietermaritzburg to do a BCom at the then University of Natal, then changed to a BA, which he completed in 1975.

That span of time was explained by Morrison’s other activities during this period. He was a member of the Nusas Wages Commission created in the 1970s together with David Hemson, Halton Cheadle, Charles Nupen and the assassinated Rick Turner. Morrison also helped edit, with John Aitchison, the newspaper produced by the Wages Commission, Isisebenzi (The Worker). Morrison was also involved with the formation of the first black trade unions that grew out of the Nusas-created Benefit Society.

Morrison was also chairperson of the Young Progressives (the youth arm of the Progressive Federal Party) in Pietermaritzburg as well as being a member of the Pietermaritzburg branch of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR).

Morrison also spent 18 months working as a research assistant to Natal Museum archaeologist Tim Maggs. In a 2011 interview with The Witness, Morrison recalled that it “was such a great privilege sitting around a campfire with people like David Webster, who was later assassinated, Shula Marks, Jeff Guy, John Wright, Martin Hall and Colin Webb. These were people with brilliant minds. It opened up a new world for me in way that I don’t think students get to experience in quite the same way today.”

How did Morrison become a librarian? “I was desperate to get a job,” he said. “I’d made myself virtually unemployable. And I knew some librarians – they seemed nice people and it seemed a nice thing to do.”

Morrison studied library science on the local campus, obtaining his degree in 1978 and then working for the provincial library service. He returned to Johannesburg in 1981 and, after assisting his father in a building project, worked for the South African Institute for Race Relations (SAIRR). “It was a great time to be there,” he said. “In 1983 the United Democratic Front had been formed and there was a surge of political energy that eventually changed South Africa.”

He also provided a home in transit for political exiles and their families.

When Morrison heard there was a job being advertised at the Natal Soci-
Geoffrey Soni (1925 – 2014)

GEFFREY Dixon Soni was born at Springvale on 28 January 1925. His parents were Elliott Soni and Annie Nzimande, who had been married at Springvale on 24 July 1917. Annie and Elliott brought Geoffrey for baptism at St Andrew’s Church on 15 February, eighteen days after he was born.

Springvale was one of the earliest Anglican missions to be established in the Colony of Natal. Henry Callaway started it in 1858, and it was developed in the usual way, typical at the time. Being a medical practitioner, Callaway opened a clinic, but a school was the first priority, and the extensive property was available for tenant farmers.

Springvale had been functioning for almost 70 years when Geoffrey Soni was born. Education was readily available for him, and his early years were immersed in an Anglican ethos which he would maintain for the rest of his life. He was baptised by the Reverend Walter Mzamo, the Priest-in-Charge of Springvale. In 1924 Mzamo had been appointed the first African Priest-in-Charge at Springvale, having been at the Umzimkulwana Mission for 12 years. Mzamo served the Springvale Mission until his death in 1932.

Mzamo was an accomplished musician, having four of his compositions in the current Zulu hymnal, *Amaculo Esheshi*. Although Geoffrey Soni was still a child when Mzamo died, the musical tradition left behind must have influenced the young boy. His great interests were in education and in church music, but he also gave much attention to church history and to young people.

Geoffrey Soni was primarily an educationist, and he was trained as a teacher in Umlazi, where he became a school principal. He was transferred in 1956 to Ladysmith, where he was School Inspector.

Making good use of his background in education, Dr Soni gave dedicated and sustained service, during his latter years, on the boards of three educational institutions in Pietermaritzburg.

“ghost runners”, black runners who ran the race, but were not officially recognised, and was among those white runners who would hand their medals to black runners who had “unofficially” qualified.

Morrison leaves a wife, psychologist Floss Mitchell, and children Emma, Alice and Guy.

STEPHEN COAN
(With acknowledgements to The Witness)
He chaired the Edendale Nursing College Council from 1985 to 2005, culminating in the merger of the college into the KwaZulu-Natal College of Nursing. He worked tirelessly and collaboratively with other key players in achieving this merger. A colleague, Mary Moleko, who was Senior Principal Tutor from 1982 to 1992 and kept an ongoing relationship with the college, says that his “high standard of performance”, always “careful of detail”, has left us with “an indelible memory”.

Dr Soni was a founding member of both the Council and Executive Committee of the newly established St Nicholas’ Diocesan School in January 1990. This was a school founded by the Anglican Church in KwaZulu-Natal primarily, but not solely, for black pupils in order to fill the terrible gap in church-sponsored education for black children since the introduction of the iniquitous system of Bantu education. Dr Soni remained a member of the Exco until 2003 and of the Council till 2007. His wife’s ill-health precipitated these resignations. In 2003 he was awarded a School Cap – the school’s highest award – in recognition of his long service during the critical opening years of the life of St Nicholas’.

Parallel with his involvement at both St Nicholas’ School and the Edendale College of Nursing, Dr Soni accepted an invitation to be on the Board of Governors of St John’s Diocesan School for Girls. His membership of this body lasted from November 1990 until March 2004. When he retired, the school’s headmistress, Jill Champion, wrote to thank him for his “outstanding record of dedicated, loyal service”. “You have enriched our school,” she said, “with your wisdom and experience,” and she added appreciation of “your gentlemanly manners and well-chosen words expressed with dignity and charm”.

He also served on the Archbishop’s Education Committee.

Geoffrey Soni also exercised great leadership in the Diocese of Natal with regard to music. When he was a member of St Augustine’s Church in Umlazi he was organist, choirmaster and lay minister. He was also organist and choirmaster at St John’s, Ladysmith and St Martin’s, Edendale. He composed several hymns which appear in the present Zulu hymnal, Amaculo Esheshi, and among the editors’ acknowledgements are these words: “Special thanks are equally due to Dr G.D. Soni whose skills and compositions are a tremendous contribution”.

Alfred Mkhize, who was elected Bishop Suffragan of Natal in 1979, grew up with Geoffrey Soni at Springvale and was an assistant priest at Umlazi when Soni was teaching there. Their paths continued to run parallel, and especially when Bishop Mkhize initiated the establishment St Nicholas’ School in Pietermaritzburg in 1990.

As a church historian Geoffrey served on the Colenso Homestead Restoration Committee. In his time he was a representative on the Anglican Diocesan and Provincial Synods, and a member of the Board of Trustees of the Diocese. In 2008 he was awarded the Order of St Simon of Cyrene, an award made by the Archbishop of Cape Town to laypersons of outstanding calibre.

IAN DARBY & MICHAEL NUTTALL
Gunther Hermann Wittenberg (1935 – 2014)

Born to missionary parents in what was then Tanganyika, Gunther Wittenberg grew up within the post-colonial struggles of Southern Africa. He was to make these struggles his own, identifying with and working with those on the margins.

Gunther Wittenberg’s many contributions to the struggle for liberation in South Africa were all shaped by his deep commitment to prophetic Christianity. From his undergraduate studies in Pietermaritzburg, to his postgraduate studies in Germany, to his first parish ministry in Belville in the Cape, to his involvement in the Christian Institute, and the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (Pacsa), prophetic Christianity provided the parameters for what he did and how he did it.

Because Gunther Wittenberg recognised the ambiguous role of Christianity in apartheid South Africa, he was committed to forms of theological education that would nurture what the Kairos Document (1985) referred to as “prophetic” forms of Christianity. He set about this project, which was to become the central project of his life, with careful consideration and planning. He spent three years preparing himself in Germany, and then returned to what was then the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg in 1973 with a vision to establish the first theological education programme in prophetic contextual theology at a university.

Slowly, under his leadership, what was to become the School of Theology (now part of the School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics) emerged in 1985, a nationally and internationally recognised pioneer in the area of prophetic contextual theology. And some years later, Gunther Wittenberg’s vision for a truly ecumenical theological education project was realised when the Pietermaritzburg Cluster of Theological Education was established in 1990, bringing together the many theological seminaries in the area, including the newly formed Lutheran Theological Institute.

But Gunther Wittenberg was not content with a form of theological education that remained restricted to educated elites. And so he began work on a related community engagement project, one that would forge an interface between socially engaged biblical and theological scholars and ordinary Christians in poor and marginalised communities. Having visited the base-community projects of Brazil in the mid-1980s, Gunther Wittenberg established a South African equivalent, the Institute for the Study of the Bible (what is now the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research)
in 1989. The Ujamaa Centre worked (and continues to work) with local communities, using scholarly biblical and theological resources for social transformation. The Ujamaa Centre remains an internationally recognised model of university-based community engagement and research.

Scholarship was central to Gunther Wittenberg’s vocation. Recognising that the Bible was a significant text in our South African (and African) context, Gunther Wittenberg sought to harness the considerable resources of academic biblical scholarship to show how the Bible could be a potential resource for liberation rather than a source of oppression. In taking up this task he combined careful and responsible biblical scholarship with a socially engaged and accountable immersion in context, becoming one of the pioneers of “contextual biblical hermeneutics”.

He was nationally and internationally recognised as one of South Africa’s leading biblical scholars, as familiar with the scholarship of Europe and the United States as he was with the contextual contours of South African life. He was a regular participant in the scholarly societies of his discipline, particularly the Old Testament Society of South Africa. He published regularly and widely, constructing an impressive and coherent body of work over more than thirty years. As an Emeritus Professor and Honorary Research Associate of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, he was still publishing academic work in the final years of his life.

Gunther Wittenberg mentored many, nurturing another generation of socially engaged scholars who continue to walk and work in the trajectory he charted. Everything he did he did with a gentleness of spirit, serving others with care and a deep commitment to justice. He died surrounded by his family, his wife, Monika, his children, Martin, Inge, Gertrud, and Reinhild, and many grandchildren. We mourn his passing, and we celebrate his life. *Hamba kahle, baba.*

GERALD WEST

*(With acknowledgments to The Witness)*
Book Reviews and Notices

DR HENRIK GREVE BLESSING: SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICINAL PLANTS FROM KWAZULU-NATAL: DESCRIBED 1903-1904
by PAULSEN, B.S., EKELI, H., JOHNSON, Q., AND NORUM, K.R., EDS.

HENRIK Greve Blessing was born in 1866 in a small town in Norway. After qualifying as a doctor in 1893, he spent a few years on the polar exploration vessel Fram. In 1901 he travelled to what is now KwaZulu-Natal, hoping to work as a doctor. However, the English colonial authorities did not recognise his Norwegian medical qualifications, and he spent the next four years staying with various relatives in eShowe, eKhombe and eQhudeni. He had always had an interest in botany and during his time in Zululand learnt some Zulu and spent much time with local traditional healers. They showed him how they used plants for medicinal use, and what the Zulu names of these plants were. Blessing recorded this information in two handwritten notebooks and took these back to Norway, where they remained in the hands of his family, unpublished until 2012. Blessing died of kidney failure in 1915, aged only 50.

It is not clear how Blessing’s notebooks found their way into the public domain. Two of the four co-editors of the 2012 publication – Hege Ekeli and Berit Semstad Paulsen – merely say in their introduction:

When we first learned about Blessing’s notebooks on medicinal plants from South Africa, we thought these were merely fascinating documents from 100 years ago. However, from discussions with Professor Quinton Johnson at the University of Western Cape (UWC), it turned out that, from the South African point of view, these notebooks were of the utmost importance. Thus far, they seemed to be the only written information on traditional uses of plants in KwaZulu-Natal from that period and so it would be of vital interest to make
the Blessing documents available in South Africa. (Vol. I:16)

What Kaare Nostrum, Hege Ekeli,Berit Paulsen (from Norway) and Quinton Johnson (UWC) have done with Blessing’s notebooks is rather unusual: they have produced a double publication – two boxed volumes of which one is a facsimile reproduction of the two handwritten notebooks themselves, with Blessing’s fine botanical illustrations, and the other a transcription of his original notes (mostly written in Norwegian), with a translation into English, and then for each species that Blessing recorded extra notes on traditional uses and “Scientific Documentation” on the chemico-medical properties of that plant. These additions expand greatly on Blessing’s original notes. For example, Blessing’s original entry (Vol. II Notebook 1 p 29) reads simply “Ibusana s. Ikambi is supposed to be very good for cold in the head. The leaves are used and prepared as tea.”

1 In the companion volume, the section Scientific Documentation occupies more than half the page. The following extract may be taken as typical of the scientific documentation additions throughout the book (Vol. I:92):

The hexanic extract of leaves from V. colorata increased blood glucose in normoglycaemic rats in a dose-dependent way, while acetone extracts prevented glibenclamide induced hypoglycaemia, suggesting that the extracts have the opposite effect on basal blood glucose in normoglycaemic rats. In addition to these highly specialised notes on the chemical and medical effects of each plant listed by Blessing, the editors have provided lavish full-page colour photographs of the foliage, flowers, fruits, etc. of each species. The result is a startling contrast between the “equivalent” pages for each species listed by Blessing, as seen in the illustrations below:
The value of this publication, in my opinion, lies not in all the extra material added by the four editors. The photographs are excellent, but similarly excellent illustrations can be found in other botanical reference works, such as Coates-Palgrave (1977, 2002), Pooley (1993, 1998) and Boon (2010). The chemical and medical information is impressive, but no more than can be found for example in Hutchings et al (1996) and Van Wyk et al (2009). For me, the value of the publication lies in the reproduction of Blessing’s original notebooks, and the processes involved in the updating and extending of the original notes. The editors have revealed a hitherto unseen stage in the interface between indigenous oral knowledge and modern, scientific published knowledge.

At the time Blessing was collecting plant names from traditional healers in Zululand, all botanical knowledge was held in the “group mind” of izinyanga (traditional healers), and to a lesser extent izangoma (diviners). This was oral knowledge, passed on from generation to generation, and only stored in memories. Blessing was one of the earliest (if not the earliest) “outsiders” in Zululand to attempt to collect this knowledge, and to transfer it to paper. The process whereby traditional oral knowledge becomes published “scientific” knowledge is a complex one. Firstly, in the earlier days (and until comparatively recently), plant collectors (and plant-name collectors) were white, non-Zulu-speaking individuals. The holders of the indigenous knowledge spoke African languages. The brief biography of Blessing in Volume I says “after about two years in KwaZulu-Natal, he learnt some native language”, but there is no denying the fact that a native speaker of Norwegian (who clearly spoke English as well), was collecting information from monolingual Zulu speakers.

The next step in the process is the writing down of oral information in the field: a major transition from language-as-sound to language-as-letters, with all the potential pitfalls this implies. Blessing wrote in notebooks, using pencil and a pen dipped into ink. Often such notebooks would have been exposed to rain, to sweat, to mud, although it must be said that Blessing’s notebooks remain in remarkably clean condition. Handwriting is notoriously individual, and often not clear to later readers, especially when written under difficult field conditions.

Before publication, the handwriting must be interpreted and turned into typeface, often at a much later stage, and often not by the original author. In Blessing’s case, this was done more than a hundred years after Blessing had recorded the information, in fact close on a hundred years after his death. In addition, as the editors point out (Vol. I:16), Blessing wrote in “Norwegian with the old-fashioned Danish-based grammar and spelling from that time, quite different to the language used today in Norway”.

When there are so many different stages in the transferring of information, there are bound to be some errors, and this publication is no exception. One very curious entry is on page 26 of Blessing’s Notebook 1, where Blessing has simply written “Ubanda used as parfume [sic].” On what was clearly a separate piece of paper inserted between pages 25 and 26 Blessing has written: “Umnama – til pill”, below that the word “Umnongwana” with a drawing of a leaf beside it, and below that the word “Hlwehlwe”, with a drawing of quite a different leaf below that. There is no indication that this inserted piece
of paper has anything to do with the entry “Ubanda used as parfume”, but the editors of the edited version have recorded all four names, as “UBANDA, UMNAMA, UMNAONGUANA, HLWEHLWE”, changing Blessing’s clearly written “umnongwana” into “UMNAONGUANA”, and then assigning all four names to the Tamboti tree (Spirostachys africana). How the editors got to Spirostachys africana is not at all clear: Doke and Vilakazi’s 1958 Dictionary recognises umbanda as the tree Lonchocarpus capassa, isinongwane as an [unidentified] shrub, umnama as the Silk-bark tree Celastrus cordatus, and umhlwehlwe as the Lemonwood Tree Lonchocarpus monospora. “Identification” of Blessing’s name “umbanda” as the Tamboti Spirostachys africana could surely not have come from the drawing of leaves on the inserted piece of paper, as there are two drawings, of quite distinctly different leaves. What makes this entry even more curious, is that on page 36 of the notebook Blessing has entered the Zulu name “Umtomboti” and has himself quite correctly identified this as Spirostachys africana. Didn’t the editors notice the connection (or non-connection, as the case might be)?

Again, one wonders how the editors of the edited volume got to Vernonia colorata from Blessing’s brief entry for “Ibusana s. Ikhambi” on page 29 of Notebook 1 (Illustration One). The closest existing Zulu word to “ibusana” is isibusane, a word which refers to Andropogon grass. Ikhambi simply means “medicinal herb” in Zulu. Backtracking Vernonia colorata in Hutchings et al gives the Zulu word ibozana for this species, and one can forgive Blessing, with his limited Zulu, for writing this down as “ibusana”. But it does not explain how the editors got to Vernonia colorata.

A different kind of problem can be seen in Blessing’s entries on page 16 of Notebook 1. In describing a type of Euphorbia, he has given the names “Umhlonhlo”, “Umhlolhwana”, “Umsolasola”, and “Umsolulu”. The problem is that on this page Blessing has written his “a”s and his “o”s in exactly the same way, with the tail neither coming off the top of the letter, as in an “o”, or from the bottom of the letter, as in an “a”, but halfway down the letter. Thus “Umhlonhlo” could easily be interpreted as “Umhlanhla”, and “Umhlolhwana” as “Umhlanhlwana”. The editors of the edited version have “solved” this by writing the first name as “Umhlonhlo” and the second one as “Umhlanhlwana”, a decision that makes no sense given that the second name, with the suffix –ana, is a diminutive of the first.

I could give several more examples of such problems, but space allows me only one more. Page 168 of the edited volume gives “ISIFULL” as one of two names for the Red Beech (Protorhus longifolia). Anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of Zulu will recognise this as incorrect – Zulu does not use a double “l” (as does for example Sotho), and all Zulu words end in a vowel. Certainly, at first glance Blessing’s handwriting could easily be read as “isi-full”. But checking with any Zulu speaker would immediately have shown that this interpretation is wrong, and Blessing’s own identification of this tree as “Rhus longifolia” would have led to the word isifuce, one of several dialectal variations (others are isifuca, isifuco and isifico) of the name of this tree. With this knowledge, one can go back to Blessing’s handwriting and easily re-read this word as “isi-
fuce”. (See illustration below). The editors simply did not take the trouble to cross-check.

This, then, remains my major quibble with this publication – the lack of checking the re-rendering of Blessing’s Zulu names as recorded in his notebooks. It is not as if the editors did not have access to a competent Zulu-speaking botanist. In noting that they managed to identify 95 of Blessing’s 98 plants in his notebooks (Vol. I:17), they say that they enlisted the help of Zulu-speaking botanist Mkhipheni Ngwenya, who is attached to the KwaZulu-Natal Herbarium based at the Botanical Gardens in Durban. It is not as if they did not have a budget – both the quality and the quantity of the photographic illustrations suggest that their budget was extensive. And surely they could not have had time restraints? Blessing’s notebooks have, after all, been published approximately one hundred and eight years after he had written them. Surely a few more months to check the Zulu would have been possible?

Having said this, I must reiterate that the publication of Dr Henrik Greve Blessing: South African Medicinal Plants from KwaZulu-Natal: Described 1903-1904 is of considerable importance, particularly for those interested in how oral indigenous knowledge is transferred to the world of scientific publication.

ADRIAN KOOPMAN

References

Blessing, Henrik Greves: See Paulsen.

1 This is one of a few entries written in English. The editors have transcribed the last word of the entry as “tea”, which makes sense, although in the original handwriting the word looks far more like “Bhl”.
2 Although the editors wrongly identify him as “Professor Mkhipheni Ngwenya at the University of Zululand”
A WORLD OF THEIR OWN: A HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN’S EDUCATION
by MEGHAN HEALY-CLANCY
Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013
312 pages, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index
ISBN: 978-1-86914-242-1

In this book Harvard graduate Meghan Healy-Clancy has undertaken the ambitious task of weaving the history of the Inanda Seminary for African girls into the wider context of South African education, and the complexity of factors which affected it, in the colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid eras. This simultaneous crafting of the local and the national requires skill in writing and skill in reading in order to maintain continuity, especially in relation to the narrative of the school.

The Inanda Seminary has long been recognised as a flagship of African girls’ secondary education in South Africa. Situated some fifteen miles (33 kilometres) north of Durban, it was opened by Congregational missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in March 1869. It was the first boarding school of its kind and provided a model which was followed by other missions in rural Natal. In fact, it was also influential in the founding of the Durban Young Ladies’ Collegiate Institution for white girls in 1877. Several of the missionaries’ wives had been educated at the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in Massachusetts, which the missionaries hoped could be replicated at the Inanda Seminary. They set out to produce Christian women, amakholwana (believers), who would be supportive wives at the heart of Christian families. To this end the seminary worked closely with its brother school, Adams College at Amanzimtoti. Thus the transmission of western Christian religion and culture to the Zulus would be ensured, constituting what the missionaries understood as “native agency”.

This book explains the development of African women’s schooling as an outcome of the politics of social reproduction in South Africa. Building on neo-Marxist feminist analyses, I define “social reproduction” expansively – as “the gendered processes by which workers and children survive and are reproduced”. The “politics of social reproduction in South Africa” thus refers to the contested social relations surrounding the sustenance of racialised, gendered people in a capitalist society…. (p. 2)

It is more than likely that some Inanda Seminary alumnae, expecting a history of their much-loved school, might turn aside from this heavily theoretical and academic treatise, as might the general reader.

The author has produced a mass of information based on extensive research. She has participated widely with academics in the field and has scoured the archival sources. In addition she has conducted interviews with numerous Inanda staff and alumnae, singly and in groups, and she has drawn on earlier interviews associated with the Killie Campbell Oral History Programme. Her endnotes and bibliography alone constitute one third of the book.

What, then, does the book tell us? It traces the fortunes of the Inanda Seminary through its long history and shows how it has responded to the challenges posed by South African society.
Complications of language and culture inherent in the missionary interface with indigenous peoples were gradually addressed. It is an inspiring record of courage, adaptation and survival. Teachers, principals, missionarities, pupils and Old Girls from this comparatively small and protected environment have produced women who have gone on to enjoy distinguished careers in a variety of professional spheres. However, the story presented here falls short of an institutional history as it ends rather unexpectedly and sadly in a few paragraphs when the school went into decline after the departure of Constance Koza as principal in 1986. Political disruption in KwaZulu, loss of funding from overseas, student unrest, an accidental fire in 1993 which destroyed Edwards Hall (named after the founding principal) all contributed to the near closure of the school in 1997. A brief account of its revival through the efforts of influential Old Girls of the seminary, involving, for example, Baleka Mbete, the present Speaker of the House of Assembly of the South African Parliament, and others, appears in the Epilogue. The author suggests that the renewed Inanda Seminary could provide a revised model for reviving affordable mission schools, especially in rural areas, and especially for African girls who, she concludes, feel more secure in single sex schools.

On the theoretical side, amidst a welter of analysis and opinion on the South African condition – as seen through a youthful American lens – one observation stands out. Why did the Inanda Seminary survive the closure of mission schools by the Apartheid Government in the late 1950s? Healy-Clancy contends that women’s opportunities in education expanded during this period of racial oppression because the Government followed a policy of ‘feminising’ African education. In short, African women could be educated without the threat of political activism posed by educating African men. But women were more subtle than this. In the author’s words:

I argue that African women’s historical association with core processes of sustaining society opened up space for them to challenge the social order during apartheid. Women were able to advance educationally, not despite racialised patriarchy, but by manipulating the contradictions within it – producing new gendered contradictions that have shaped post-apartheid society. (p. 2)

Put simply, Inanda Seminary was as well represented in the struggle for liberation as it has been by women who have achieved prominence in the new South Africa.

Meghan Healy-Clancy has written a challenging book which one hopes will generate further constructive scholarship. One final comment needs to be made. The title of the book is misleading. By calling it A world of their own, it is not obvious that it is about the Inanda Seminary, unless one can decipher the pale orange lettering on the flag in the cover picture. More serious is the subtitle. This book is not A history of South African women’s education. It is about a section of African women’s education and excludes the other population groups of the nation. Furthermore, it stops at 1994 and misses the opportunity to engage in a substantial discussion of the significant developments in girls’ schools and women’s education as a whole in the open era of democratic South Africa.

Sylvia Vietzen
A SCHOOL OF STRUGGLE: DURBAN’S MEDICAL SCHOOL AND THE EDUCATION OF BLACK DOCTORS IN SOUTH AFRICA
by VANESSA NOBLE

Perhaps South Africa’s most remarkable educational institution in the second half of the twentieth century was the University of Natal Medical School in Durban. Although it was established by the apartheid National Party government as a showpiece for its policy of separate development, it nurtured some of South Africa’s most important resistance leaders. The medical education that was offered was fraught with contradictions but, despite considerable difficulties, it turned out doctors of high quality. In reality it made nonsense of the notions of black inferiority that underlay white South African racism.

The University of Natal Medical School was founded in 1951, shortly after the National Party came to power, but the pressures for its creation came from very different sources. One significant group were the missionary doctors associated with McCord Hospital, notably Alan B. Taylor. This Christian impetus remained an important influence, especially for students, for many years. A second influence was that of the movement for social medicine originating from the University of the Witwatersrand in the 1940s and 1950s. The practice of social and community medicine, associated particularly with Sidney Kark, was incorporated into the syllabus, making the new Medical School the most advanced in the country but also putting greater pressure on students who were already suffering from an inferior educational system, poverty, appalling living conditions in the Wentworth (Alan B. Taylor) Residence, transport problems and the like. That so many students were able to graduate under these circumstances is a comment on their quality.

In the twentieth century doctors in South Africa enjoyed considerable status as the purveyors of modern scientific medicine. But for many years debates raged around the kind of black doctors that should be trained, since it was clear that whites could not produce enough doctors to care for the majority of the population. Early black doctors like Alfred B. Xuma were fiercely opposed to a cheap training of black assistants and, in the end, the school that was established was on a par, at the least, with other medical schools in the country. It is hardly surprising that such able people, studying under offensive conditions, became a spearhead of resistance against apartheid. Vanessa Noble explores their motivation and activities in some detail. While some of these more committed students were able to maintain their studies others, like Steve Biko, were forced out because of their lack of commitment. For all the students, the years from the 1960s to 1990 were punctuated with protests and shutdowns. Studying under these conditions must have been extraordinarily difficult.

Vanessa Noble examines the context within which students arrived at the Medical School. It is clear that those who came from more educated homes, where parents were teachers, for instance, were more likely to achieve the results that would gain them entrance
into the school. Once there, they were confronted by a variety of challenges. Residence conditions were awful and it is in the descriptions of cramped, overcrowded rooms and poor food that one is reminded most sharply of the degradation of apartheid. Students from very different backgrounds were thrown together and it was natural that there should be some conflict as they struggled to adjust to unfamiliar cultural practices. More daunting was the culture of medical teaching of the day, in which students were sometimes humiliated by their teachers. While the same treatment was meted out to white students in other institutions, the Natal medical students could not know this, and it must have contributed to their rising anger. MEDUNSA [Medical University of South Africa], when it was established, despite being even more tarred with the brush of separate development, offered a more caring learning environment. Clinical training was also problematic, especially at the King Edward VIII Hospital. Students felt that they suffered because, since they were not allowed to see white patients, they were not exposed to the full range of diseases, unlike their white counterparts. Moreover, white staff, especially nurses, sometimes did not accord them the same respect that they gave to white medical students.

While Noble does examine those students who were less politically active, most of her attention is given to the anti-apartheid struggles. The University of Natal Medical School produced some of South Africa’s most notable political leaders. Steve Biko is a striking example, but others, such as Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma and Mamphela Ramphele are equally significant. The students of the Durban Medical School formed a unique group in the history of resistance – highly intelligent, better educated than most of their counterparts, and vividly aware of the way in which apartheid policies affected the health of the nation.

The study continues into the post-apartheid era when students were confronted by new challenges. One was the emergence of HIV/AIDS, which strained the already inadequate resources of the local hospitals where the students received their clinical training. Jerry Coovadia – in 2003 – described it as a “brutalising” experience in which conditions were so bad that there was no space for the humane treatment of patients (pp. 310-311). At the same time, along with other medical institutions in South Africa, the curriculum was modernised to provide for a better understanding of the social context of the patients. Noble does not ignore some of the more recent tensions at the University of KwaZulu-Natal which have meant that, here as elsewhere, post-apartheid South Africa has not been a smooth ride.

If I have any criticisms of this fine book, they are minor. I should have liked to have known a little more about the later careers of some of the students who were less politically active. Did they contribute in other ways to their communities? Did they emigrate? There are a few graphs in the Appendices, providing gender and race profiles of the students, but it would have been interesting to have had more, perhaps on the origins of students, for instance. Nevertheless, this is carping. This book is a fascinating study of an outstanding institution.

ELIZABETH VAN HEYNINGEN
NATAL’S LITTLE DOCTOR: COLONIAL OFFICER PAR EXCELLENCE, P.C. SUTHERLAND
by JOHN CORMAC SEEKINGS

“A MATEUR” is often used as a term of disparagement, yet amateurs have a distinguished record in adding to the sum of human knowledge. For instance, it is thanks to the efforts of a host of so-called “citizen scientists”, none of whom is a trained ornithologist, that information about the range and distribution of South African birds has been added to immeasurably. Similarly, amateur historians have brought to light aspects of the past, ignored by the professionals.

Such an individual is the author of this slim volume. John Seekings, educated at Hilton College and the University of Cape Town, has spent his working life in Britain in the aviation and tourism industries as a business economist. But while still working, he completed the history of his family business, *Thomas Hardy’s Brewer* in 1988. Since retiring, he has completed the first detailed work on the life of Cecil Rhodes’ business partner, Charles Rudd in *Rudd: the search for a Cape merchant* (2009) and now, in this volume, the life of his great-grandfather, Peter Sutherland.

The name of Peter Sutherland does not resonate today. He is a forgotten man. The first major modern history of Natal by Brookes and Webb (1965) makes only a single, half-line reference to him; the next major history of the province, that by Duminy and Guest (1989), does not mention him at all. But in 19th-century Natal he was a significant figure in the colonial administration. In 1855 he was appointed head of the public works department and the following year became Surveyor-General, usually combining this with responsibility for public works, a post he held until his retirement 31 years later in 1887. After he retired he was elected a member of the Legislative Assembly for Pietermaritzburg, retaining his seat until Responsible Government (of which he disapproved) was introduced in 1893.

From these undertakings one might conclude that he had trained as an engineer or a surveyor. Not so. He had qualified in 1847 as a doctor from Edinburgh’s Royal College of Surgeons and it was as a doctor that he had first sought employment in Natal. But he was a Renaissance man in the extent and breadth of his interests. There are three blank years between Sutherland’s leaving school and the commencement of his medical studies and Seekings speculates that during this time he studied natural history at university in Aberdeen, although without acquiring a formal qualification. As a student he had gone on three lengthy voyages, one to Africa (in search of guano) and two to the Canadian Arctic (in search of whales). As a newly-qualified doctor he had gone on a further two Arctic voyages. By the time he returned (to write a 1 000-page, two-volume tome on the Arctic!) it was clear that he had acquired deep knowledge, both practical and academic, in a wide spectrum of the natural sciences, including zoology, botany, geology and geography. Hattersley described him as “the Sir Vivian Fuchs of early Victorian times”. He had also built up personal relationships with...
leading figures in the scientific world, men such as the famous Scottish geologist Sir Robert Murchison, President of the Royal Geographical Society and the equally famous botanists, Sir William Hooker and his son Sir Joseph Hooker, each in turn director of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew.

Thus, while he was gazetted as “regimental surgeon” when the Natal Carbineers was formed in 1855 (a post he retained for the following 22 years), Sutherland’s first government job the previous year was a commission to report on Natal’s mineral resources. The Admiralty was desirous of identifying a suitable coaling station on the route to the East and it seems highly likely that Sutherland’s appointment was prompted by the recommendation of Murchison. Sutherland duly found the coal deposits of northern Natal, but it was not until 30 years later that the railway made possible their exploitation – by which time they were strategically far less valuable thanks to the opening of the Suez Canal.

As Surveyor-General, Sutherland travelled the length and breadth of Natal, either on foot or on horseback, often alone. He built, or rebuilt, many of the colony’s main roads and laid out the townships of Newcastle, Colenso and Port Shepstone. He collected and sent to Kew a regular supply of previously unknown plants, several species being named after him, just as in his days in the Arctic he had brought back to Britain numerous marine invertebrates for classification and had had one of them, an ascidian or sea squirt, named Phallosia sutherlandii by the Victorian biologist Thomas Huxley. He also left his name on the map in the shape of Mount Sutherland (c. 2 300 metres), a major outlier of the Drakensberg. It originally marked the boundary between Natal and Adam Kok’s country. Today its long ridge separates the districts of Underberg and Swartberg.

Sutherland also left his mark on institutions which endure to this day. He was an active member of the Royal Agricultural Society and served a term as its president. He was a very senior member of the Education Board, often its chairman. Unsurprisingly, he was a founder member of the Botanical Society and a motivator for the establishment of Pietermaritzburg’s Botanical Garden. During his last years he became heavily involved in religious affairs. He was a founder member of St George’s Garrison Church. His contribution of £200 to the appeal fund for its construction (four times that of the governor!) was the largest of any individual. And hardly had the church been opened when the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War and the military set-backs suffered by British arms led to its conversion into a military hospital – a process in which Sutherland played a key role, organising the supply of all the beds, mattresses, bed-linen and crockery. This was to be his last public service as he died in November 1900 while war still raged. Among the many military memorials in the church are two stained-glass windows given in his memory.

It is curious that so significant a figure in colonial Natal has more or less disappeared from the pages of history. Seekings speculates that his lowly birth, the son of a Scottish cooper, meant that he did not quite fit into a social “class” of administrators largely drawn from the major English public schools and Oxford and Cambridge universities. Moreover, as Surveyor-General, Sutherland would have found himself in the centre of the struggle between the
need to protect the interest of Africans, especially in regard to land, and the demands of the colonists for both land and cheap labour. The records of the Executive Committee and of the several commissions which were set up to deal with land ownership matters show that he often found himself in the lonely position among senior officials of being “pro Native”.

Peter Sutherland was clearly a most remarkable man and John Seekings has performed a valuable service in lifting the veil of silence which has shrouded him in the century which has passed since his death.

JACK FROST

THEOPHILUS SHEPSTONE AND THE FORGING OF NATAL – AFRICAN AUTONOMY AND SETTLER COLONIALISM IN THE MAKING OF TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY

By JEFF GUY

ISBN 978 1 86914 249 0

According to Anglo-Zulu War historian Ian Knight, “Professor Jeff Guy is a towering figure in the field of Zulu historical studies, and his previous works – including The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom – largely redefined the historiography of the period.”

There are few who would disagree with this statement which is to be found on the back dust jacket of Guy’s latest book, Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal.

Since that earlier work mentioned by Knight, which dealt with the aftermath of the Anglo-Zulu War, all Guy’s succeeding books have broken new ground – a biography of Bishop John Colenso, The Heretic; another featuring the indomitable daughter, Harriette Colenso, The View Across the River; and two books dealing with the 1906 Bhambatha uprising: The Maphumulo Uprising and Remembering the Rebellion.

Shepstone has long remained without a biographer – admittedly Theophilus stood centre stage in Ruth Gordon’s Shepstone (1968) but her book was a study of the whole family and, in addition, though well-researched, tends to near-hagiography. While Guy was an obvious choice for biographer of this key figure in colonial Natal he had previously indicated a disinclination to address him as he felt no affection for Shepstone as a subject.

While we can be grateful Guy has overcome his feelings about the man, it would be a mistake to see this landmark study of Shepstone as a full biography. It isn’t. As the subtitle indicates Guy’s quarry is Shepstone and the role he played in shaping the nineteenth-century colony of Natal while Secretary for Native Affairs. There is nothing here about Shepstone’s tentacles (and those of his brothers) reaching out and manipulating the chieftaincies and royal lines of the Zulus, the Swazis and the Ndebele, while his spell as Commissioner in the Transvaal is lightly sketched.

In an interview in The Witness, Guy indicated that his lack of affection had been triumphed over by “tremendous
interest” in Shepstone. Shepstone’s centrality to nineteenth-century Natal and his seemingly deliberate inscrutability are ultimately challenges that could not be refused. “Aloof, secretive, intelligent and devious,” is how Guy describes this fascinating, frustrating figure who effectively compartmentalised his private and public lives.

During his research, as Guy points out in his introduction, “the man himself remained beyond my grasp”. Shepstone’s extant letters and diaries are few compared to other nineteenth-century figures of similar stature. And those available are reticent, enigmatic, and frequently opaque. Consequently, says Guy, Shepstone’s life “has to be reconstructed largely out of the contradictions and inconsistencies of the wordy reports and long memoranda that he chose to leave as a record of his activities – and their silences”.

Guy portrays Shepstone as a misunderstood figure, partly due to his own silence but also because his legacy has been reinterpreted and rewritten over time. Frequently vilified by settlers during his lifetime, Shepstone was later rehabilitated by his earlier critics. Historians’ views on Shepstone have also morphed over time. In the first half of the twentieth century he was promoted by segregationists, seen as significant but problematic in the second, and finally dismissed as being part of an irrevocably irredeemable colonial system.

Shepstone was credited with creating some of the key features of colonial administration, including indirect rule, customary law and segregation into locations. What was later dubbed “the Shepstone system” has also been credited with providing the prototype for apartheid. According to Guy, this is a later construction created by Natal settlers after Shepstone’s death to coincide with and provide an imprimatur for their own agendas.

In many respects *Theophilus Shepstone and the Forging of Natal* constitutes a new history of nineteenth-century Natal as it closely investigates the interactions between colonials and settlers and natives – terms Guy chooses deliberately, as being historically accurate, and as a way of avoiding the broad brushstroke adjectives of “black” and “white”, while also conveying the social complexities of the period.

Guy also makes clear the novelty that Natal provided: here was a colony where the indigenous peoples had never been conquered; white settlers, Boer and Briton, gradually infiltrated. Shepstone was aware of this and it provided him with a clean slate on which to order the relationship between colonials and settlers on the one hand, and the indigenous peoples – the natives – on the other.

The settlers insisted Africans were interlopers, refugees from Zululand, as well as a much-desired source of labour which Shepstone prevented them from accessing. With an intimate understanding of the position of Africans in a colonial situation Shepstone took neither the settler nor missionary line. His stance was one of conservation, buying time for Africans to grow into the future.

Guy makes much of Shepstone’s power over Africans coming from his understanding of the importance attached to land ownership and that for their traditional way of life to continue they had to have land. This understanding came from Shepstone’s
experience of growing up on the eastern Cape frontier, where he interacted with both the African world and the settler world. According to Guy, it is this period that provides the key to Shepstone’s character, growing up on a bloody, contested frontier masking his feelings as he moved between settler and native communities. Out of this came his silence and what Guy describes as “his notorious, formidable reserve”. Or as Shepstone’s contemporary, Sir Bartle Frere, would have him: “shrewd, observant, silent, self-contained, immobile”.

While Shepstone is the central figure of Guy’s book other figures who went against the grain of their times emerge as eminently in need of more extended studies. David Dale Buchanan, for one, founding editor of *The Natal Witness*, a consistent, critical voice. Another was magistrate George Ryder Peppercorne; competent and upright amidst a slew of corrupt officials, he fell foul of both the settler authorities and Shepstone, who would not brook others being as perceptive as he of African interests.

And, of course, there was Colenso. Shepstone and Colenso famously became great friends drawn to each other in part by a shared vision that saw them look to the values and actions of the past to help indigenous people cope with the future.

Their friendship shattered over the Langalibalele affair of 1873. When Langalibalele kaMthimkhulu, the Hlu-bi inkosi, was summoned by Shepstone to Pietermaritzburg to account for the lack of registration of guns among his followers, he feared treachery – a not unreasonable fear given an earlier incident involving Shepstone’s brother, John, and Matshana kaMondise which led to a brutal massacre. When Langalibalele fled across the border into Lesotho, a skirmish at Bushman’s Nek with a force sent to apprehend him saw five men killed, three of them whites. The retributive settler machine kicked into gear: the Hlubi were punished and Langalibalele arrested.

Shepstone stage-managed Langalibalele’s trial, conducted according to native law, largely made up on the spot, to secure the desired guilty verdict, the accused not even being allowed counsel.

Thanks to Colenso the injustices of the trial were brought to light. Colenso also found out about the earlier Matshana incident, which had been airbrushed out of the record by Shepstone and here one can see why Guy is unable to summon affection for his subject. The Matshana affair showed the worst side of Shepstone, his deviousness. When Colenso confronted Shepstone about the matter the latter said he couldn’t remember it.

But Colenso rendered Shepstone defenceless by connecting the two worlds he moved between – settler and native. Shepstone did this by capitalising on the fact that Africans relied on a spoken, oral culture, whereas whites looked to print. Shepstone manipulated these oral and written cultures, keeping them separate and appointing himself sole mediator. But when Colenso collected written evidence, Shepstone’s activities in one world were exposed in the other. Thus revealed, Shepstone simply lied and then took refuge in icy silence.

Another blot on Shepstone’s reputation was his ruthless betrayal of the Zulus – his Judas-like behaviour prior to the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 and his role in the subsequent civil war motivated in part, according to Guy, by
his need to reward and acknowledge the African chiefs who had supported him. While Shepstone remains an enigmatic personality there is no doubting the huge role he played in shaping nineteenth-century Natal and the reverberations of his actions continue into the present, not least in the vexed question of traditional leadership within a democracy. Guy, in a compelling blend of biography and history, illuminates both the man and his times, in the process setting another benchmark for South African history writing.

STEPHEN COAN

• This review is adapted from a feature article “The sounds of silence” by Stephen Coan, published in The Witness, September 20, 2013.

THE DURBAN LIGHT INFANTRY 1854-2011: AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY

By BRIAN KEARNEY

Durban, Headquarter Board of the DLI, 2013. ISBN 9780620589109.

This handsome book, in a limited edition, commemorates the Durban Light Infantry, which is entering its 120th year as a discrete military unit. Professor Brian Kearney, and the team of officers who have assisted him in the preparation of the work, deserve high credit for their scholarship as well as the standard of composition. The author admits that a drill hall fire in 1963 destroyed so many records that it shortened the period of research for the book by 10 years! The reader would scarcely know it, for the extant records have been sorted, searched and extracted selectively in such a manner as to produce a narrative and commentary which will serve as a model in the genre of regimental histories.

Much of the material which was destroyed belonged to an earlier era, which was described by another exemplary work, Colonel A.C. Martin’s two-volume The Durban Light Infantry, published in 1969. Indeed, Professor Kearney tells us that so authoritative, so meticulous was Martin’s work that it was a real question for the committee whether a third-volume update would not do instead of a complete new history of the regiment. Fortunately, technological advances in the methods of research and publication carried the day, and we have this work, well written and beautifully illustrated.

Irrespective of the great fire, there is a still a plethora of information available in the regiment’s archives which adds not only to what was available to Martin, but, of course, covers the period since. It is this later period that reveals much on the engagement of local citizen forces in policing and counter-insurgency during the Republic era. Inevitably this is what makes the book most useful and valuable.

The history of the regiment is presented in a way that makes it easy for the reader to follow its career and take note of its highlights. The Preface describes the methodology of the author and his committee.
An Introduction gives an historical overview of the regiment’s career. Thereafter this is dealt with in detail, in chapters arranged chronologically and divided according to the major events in the military evolution of the regiment. Each chapter is alike in its layout – first a time line giving the major events, then a narrative of the events, and finally, commentary by individual members on particular events. These latter may be anecdotal, but in some instances, most notably in chapters 21–23, where official records are classified or otherwise inaccessible, these commentaries provide narratives of operations which otherwise may be lost. The text is flanked by illustrations, usually photographs, of persons, places and events mentioned in the text. At certain points, usually between chapters, there appear one or two pages which focus on uniforms, weapons, and equipment of the times, but also on those officers (Brigadier-Generals J.S. Wylie and G.J.M. Molyneux certainly merit special attention) and men who made a difference in creating an efficient and disciplined regiment.

There are twenty-five chapters of varying length (and depth), each treating an epoch in the regiment’s development. The first three chapters deal with the antecedent colonial corps, and are relatively brief and fragmentary, more or less reflecting the scant sources on them. The Durban Light Infantry as a distinct unit makes its appearance in Chapter 4, which therefore is perhaps the most vital and interesting one in the book. The next two chapters, on the South African War and the Zulu Rebellion, rather suffer by comparison, not that they are insubstantial, but they are weak in the description of operational strategy. Chapters 7 and 8 are about the Great War. The first is the stronger, for the regiment operated as a unit in German South West Africa, which therefore affords greater coherence and detail; whereas the second suffers because the unit per se did not exist in the controversial German East African campaign, but largely made up the 6th South African Battalion, an ad hoc unit for which existing information is (or seems to be) inadequate.

The main body of the narrative is on the Second World War, which is treated thoroughly in eleven chapters, and notably six on the North African campaign of 1941-42. Since one battalion was captured at Tobruk, there are also two chapters on the experiences of its officers and men as prisoners of war. The surviving battalion returned to South Africa in 1943 and went on mutatis mutandis to fight in Italy as part of the 6th South African Division.

As indicated earlier, it is the reviewer’s opinion that the next three chapters are the most important contribution to our military history, for they depict in more or less detail the challenges facing the regiment with two changes of political regime. Moreover there was a prolonged (and not always coherent) transformation affecting its training and organisation as well as its equipment and weaponry. There was no conventional war, but on several occasions the regiment was called into service for internal policing (1960 and 1961) and counter-insurgency operations on the border (1976 – 84).

The up-to-date (23) and postscript (25) chapters ought to be integrated. They are fragmentary in content
and tentative in tone, e.g. the topical narrative (pp 354–66) depends rather too much on the supplementary commentary (pp 367–74). But how else can this fine book be brought to a close? It is never easy to splice the recent past with the present (and future) in an institutional history. Fortunately there is Chapter 24, on the Drill Hall and Regimental Headquarters, with a particularly good selection of photographs. This is the author’s forte and a most fitting end piece.

The book contains a succinct appendix including the roll of honour and lists of commanding officers and regimental sergeants major. There are a useful glossary and a bibliography but, while it might seem irregular, they would better have been placed at the beginning of the book, for the convenience of the reader. The reviewer does have two criticisms. Both pertain to format. First: the 10-point text is hard to read, especially if one is trying to hold up the two-kg 29 × 29 cm tome (or resting it on his/her lap). To which the answer is: This is a souvenir, of the coffee-table type. What else do you expect? The second criticism is technical. The maps are numerous and well placed, indeed some of them are almost works of art, but in the main they are photographs of originals, and many of these are very detailed (see the North African campaign map on pp 140–1) and the lettering is indistinct. The reader attentive to cartography is well advised to keep a magnifying glass close at hand.

PAUL THOMPSON

CHATSWORTH : THE MAKING OF A SOUTH AFRICAN TOWNSHIP
Edited by ASHWIN DESAI AND GOOLAM VAHED

R EADING Chatsworth, the making of a South African township, I find I inhabit several time zones at once. I am transported to the time, five decades ago when the Nationalist Government was on an intractable and seemingly irreversible course of Separate Development. Bantu Education had been firmly secured as government policy earlier in 1952; the tribal colleges were being inaugurated all over the country, and soon some of us would be wending our way to Salisbury Island and other bush colleges; the “Homelands” were caught in the carnivalesque of independence; Passive Resistance and the Defiance Campaigns, that blossomed in the first half of the 20th Century, were wilting in the face of the intransigence of the apartheid regime. The Treason Trial and the Rivonia Trial landmarked the late 1950s and early 1960s, and Nelson Mandela would be sent to Robben Island for 27 years. And it was at this time that Chatsworth came into being.

The apartheid city is built on the principle of proximity and social distance, and this is the rationale for the location of Chatsworth on the perimeter of the city, or “at the edge”, as Ronnie Govender would say. In this, Chatsworth is similar to other well-known South African townships, such as Soweto and Alexandria, synonymous, as they all are, with apartheid’s project of racist social engineering. As the editors,
Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed, point out, “Chatsworth was born at the height of apartheid’s madness when the government sought to ghettoise persons of ‘Indian’ origin into what it intended to be a frozen racial landscape”.

One of the unintended consequences of apartheid policies was the way a new sociological analysis of space, place and people evolved and matured, as attempts to understand what was happening in these apartheid spaces emerged as an important and necessary critical endeavour. This new book on Chatsworth is a worthy addition to this burgeoning scholarship.

In our reading of cities, both globally, and locally, and in the autobiographical writings of a host of writers, such as Ellen Kuzwayo on Soweto and Richard Rive on District Six, to name just two, we have learnt to appreciate that urban spaces are not inert backdrops. Urban spaces are actively produced by and, in turn, produce social processes. We have learnt to appreciate that physical locations are theatres of living where a range of elements mingle and interact. We have learnt to read a place like Chatsworth as both a symbolic landscape and an embodied, material landscape. Chatsworth, like its counterparts, is at once a metonymy for the larger history of divisiveness under apartheid, and a testimony of resilience against this very apartheid.

Indeed, this new anthology of stories on Chatsworth, with contributors from a wide range of fields, both locally and internationally, tells of a dynamic and multifaceted world, a world transforming itself and mutating over the decades. We are reminded again and again that human beings are not automatons and robots, and that Chatsworth “is a living, breathing landscape of people”.

Against the apartheid logic of homogenising and ghettoising racial groups, and stultifying them by imposing residential proximity and corralling them, people are endlessly inventive and creative. In addition, diversity of language, class, ethnicity and religion is not diminished and, if anything, flourishes. The notion of the “tyranny of place”, as posited by Mphahlele, where place is crucial in defining and constructing South African identities, is pertinent here; at the same time, there is every attempt to strain at the confining boundaries of such “tyranny”, and claim wider life worlds, beyond or even within the confines of ghetto-living.

The approach that Desai and Vahed use is both long range and immediate – telescopic and microscopic – and all with an energy and creativity that animates this collection. Against the broad, diachronic sweep of history, we have narratives – immediate and in flesh and blood – of individual actors [referred to as the synchronic]. We have fragments of biography and personal narrative, autobiographical micro-history, testimonies, fictional writing – all in a fine orchestration of divergent voices, and exposing layer upon layer of the palimpsest that is Chatsworth. The variety of genres, juxtaposed in the collection, and their diverse themes, exemplify Ali Mazrui’s statement that Africa is not homogenous but is a bazaar of people, some in-between; some living inside, others living outside [1986].

The stories in this collection describe a wide array of people going about the business of making Chatsworth “a habitable world”. Some
show the pain and trauma of uprooting and relocation, their lives the stuff of living history, living memory. Hannah Carrim presents a poignant story of loss and nostalgia, through her research with individuals who were removed through the Group Areas legislation from Magazine Barracks. The inheritance of loss, might be an apt description of their plight, to use the title of Kiran Desai’s Booker Prize novel.

Others, like the renowned playwright Ronnie Govender, write evocatively of Cato Manor, as he does in his story, “The Son of Matambu”. In those former places of abode, people were part of long-established, settled communities; they were then disturbed and uprooted, and the repositories and markers of their identity – temples and mosques, schools and community centres – were left behind. The old places either became ghostly remains of a past life rich in culture and tradition, or strange islands in a sea of increasing dereliction. Yet, as Ronnie Govender prophesies in his story, in the new places of relocation a resurgence of the human spirit is anticipated: “In the place of the intended ghetto, a phoenix is rising and the community of Chatsworth is reclaiming the soul that the arbiters of human misery tried to destroy in places like Cato Manor”.

Indeed, in the graphic stories of the iconic places of Chatsworth, such as the Temple of Understanding, the RK Khan Hospital, and The Aryan Benevolent Home – all vying to be the signature of Chatsworth – we see Govender’s hopes, in time, coming to pass.

Exacerbating the debilitating psychological experience of relocation and removal were gross physical inequities as well, such as the lack of proper transport or of organised sport. This is why the impossible stories of heroism emerging from Chatsworth, such as Judge Nicholson’s moving narrative of the legendary golfer, Pawpa Sewgolum, are repeatedly claimed and reclaimed.

We see this resilience manifesting itself among a variety of people from different spheres of existence, whether priests or religious leaders, educational leaders, sportsmen, traders, fisher folk, domestic workers, and those cadres keeping out of official view (the underground people, to use the title of Lewis Nkosi’s book). We appreciate the stories of struggles of the small traders against the titans, who enjoyed patronage. The picture presented here by Jo Rushby of the Bangladeshi market is a remarkable testimony of bravery among the traders to survive in the face of competition from the large chain stores.

The story of the flourishing of music in Chatsworth, as told by Naresh Veeran, from a long line of musicians, and the remarkable story of the Denny Veeran Music Academy, recall the monumental achievements of Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela in Soweto, and of Shunna Pillay, the Durban singer whose book, Shadow People, provides a portrait of Durban, District Six and Sophiatown of the 1950s. The stories show, again and again, the human ingenuity that pervaded a place like Chatsworth where, as David Coplan noted of Soweto, “a wasteland of oppression and neglect” was “humanised” [1985].

I was impressed with the way the voices and images of women pervade this collection. A number are women contributors, and the stories
of women are given equal currency. Reshma Sookrajh’s story, for example, illustrates the influence of her remarkable mother, as well as her own achievements as a Comrades Marathon runner, a professor of education at the University of Kwa-ZuluNatal, and her growing immersion in a life of Hindu spirituality.

It is not surprising that religious groupings rallied among themselves. The stories of the survival of Hinduism on rugged terrain (narrated by Brij Maharaj), the establishment of Islam and the work of leaders such as Mawlana Dr Abbas Khan (as told by Sultan Khan), and the phenomenal growth of Christian Pentecostalism, with leaders such as Dr Paul Lutchman (narrated by Karin Willemse and Goolam Vahed), are compelling.

With inroads into the traditional extended Indian family through the Group Areas Act, there are various other formations, including an array of civic organisations, with all their joys, as well as their faultlines. Finding “psychic shelter” in an alienating world is necessary and understandable, but also spawns tensions. We see competing forces at work as the contributors, in their varied and different ways, reveal not only continuities, but ruptures, in people’s lives.

Broader social processes and structural constraints from above intersect with internal divisions and constraints imposed from within and below. While the family, for example, might have provided an “inner sanctum” in an otherwise alienating world, it can also be one of those deeply oppressive places.

Thembisa Waetjen shows in the wrenching account of Mariammah Chetty, whose husband was detained and held in solitary confinement during the apartheid years, the destructive impact this had on her family life. Waetjen argues that “the zones of domestic life are portrayed as non-political spaces of struggle”, and that it is necessary to complicate “the often triumphal narratives of family solidarity”. We need to write women’s hidden struggles – often locked away in the private space of the home – into the liberation narrative as well which has generally extolled “masculine political agency”.

Chatsworth is presented then as both a site of social encounter and of social division. These tensions are also manifest through another blight on the social landscape – the prevalence of drugs – showing the social malaise that is just below the surface. As Ronnie Govender has written, “Cato Manor has paid its penance. Chatsworth is still doing so.”

Chatsworth was, and continues to be, a smorgasbord of political activity. Alongside the fearless struggles of extra-parliamentary resistance in the 1980s, chronicled by Desai in the collection, with the fighting spirit of activists such as Lenny Naidoo, Kumi Naidoo, Kovilan Naidoo and others, there was the work of the LACs, and the pro-apartheid champions, who grew tall by fighting for what should have been rightfully the people’s rights and due anyway. Documented too are little acts of political protest, such as those by Ganpat Foolchand, principal at Welbedacht School, who said, “I closed school as a mark of protest at the passing of the Group Areas Act in 1948.”

Desai and Vahed also explore what Chatsworth as a social space means.
today, more than 50 years after its formation and almost two decades after racial segregation has been dismantled as a formal policy. The overarching concern of their book is to examine what a space constructed as an Indian township by the apartheid government means half a century after it was established and almost two decades after apartheid has ended.

The stories depict contestations and collaborations with the local state in the post-apartheid period. Thembisa Waetjen and Goolam Vahed, in their chapter, “Gender, Citizenship and Power – the Westcliff Flats Residents’ Association”, tell of the incredible agency of those who run the residents’ associations, especially the women, and the “concerned-citizens groups” that preceded them, all of whom are in the forefront to co-ordinate struggles around housing, electricity and water, given that these basic resources are now privatised.

The problems of economic uncertainty remain, penury and unemployment have deepened, as Desai had also noted in his earlier book, *The Poors of Chatsworth – Race, Class and Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, “the poors” for whom it is “not yet uhuru”.

Vahed and Desai, and Waetjen and Vahed, in their contributions, show the coming together of various racial groupings, together with transnational migrants from other parts of Africa, to fight social problems. Does this offer hope of a post-racial community, or a melting pot, they ask? The authors show that there is both unity and friction, camaraderie across racial borders, alongside continuing and enduring dynamics of race and racial ideologies. The demolition of apartheid fences is, at best, uneven. Hardly the euphoria suggested in “SIMUNYE – WE ARE ONE”!

In his study of Chatsworth, Thomas Blom Hansen refers to the present state as the “melancholia of freedom” where, with the new democracy, there are also new uncertainties and anxieties that are experienced as the old securities, that were ironically buttressed by apartheid, now dissipate. This is an echo of Lewis Nkosi who speaks of the “shattered psyches” of the post-apartheid moment.

Imraan Coovadia is more direct, and observes that “we panic when the chariot of historical inevitability is following us too closely from one day to the next”, when some South Africans feel there’s a doomsday clock ticking for them.

Indeed, the earlier “resilience” that I noted has a darker side, as some of these stories show. The residential segregation of the old apartheid era, inducing ethnic insularity, and that brought a place like Chatsworth into being, forged a distinctive identity that separated and continues to separate “us” from “them”, and all from becoming “one of a living crowd”.

So while we engage in “reflective nostalgia” – which lingers on the ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dream of another place and another time, as Jacob Dlamini has reminded us in *Native Nostalgia*, evoking a golden age, living in the present and into the future might not be so easy, but must become the new imperatives.

At the end of the day, we have to ask: what is the purpose of “dwelling in the house” [as Edward Said would say] or the houses of the past – our apartheid past – as we do through books such as this. This “time of memory” is not, I
am sure, to constantly lick the wounds of the deep alienation wrought in the past, to inhabit the prisonhouses of the past.

Nor is it to retreat into impermeable, ethno-racial enclaves (colluding with an over-determining and persistent apartheid logic in this time of freedom).

It is rather, I would hope, to broaden and open the windows and doors of our houses of the past, as we live in the present moment, to re-define and give brave expression to what true community is. To overcome the dispossession wrought by apartheid, without perpetuating on ongoing dispossession of our very humanity, our very souls…. 

In their remarkable compendium, Chatsworth – the Making of a South African Township, Desai and Vahed have come to the zone of occult instability where the people dwell, and catch in these stories much more than the outer garments of a multitude of worthy Chatsworthians…. 

Indeed, this book is a good example of merging a “spontaneous sociology” of the people, that Pierre Bourdieu, the French philosopher/sociologist spoke of, where academics and intellectuals do not stand aloof, behind ivory tower walls, but bear on their shoulders, “the weight of the world” [Bourdieu et al, 1999].

BETTY GOVINDEN
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Notes on Contributors

STEPHEN COAN is a senior feature writer on The Witness, now based in Durban. He is the author of Diary of an African Journey: the Return of Rider Haggard.

DUNCAN DU BOIS is a retired teacher and a current eThekwini Metro ward councillor representing the Bluff who, in 2014, successfully completed a doctoral dissertation entitled “Sugar and Settlers; the colonisation of the Natal South Coast 1850-1910” which is being published by African Sun Media under a modified title.

ADRIAN KOOPMAN is an Emeritus Professor of Zulu of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

ANIL NAURIYA studied economics, qualified for the Bar and has, since 1984, been counsel at the supreme court of India and the High Court of Delhi. He has written on contemporary history and politics in India and has contributed to various books and journals, the latter including, apart from Natalia, the Economic and Political Weekly, Mumbai and Monthly Review, New York. In recent years, he has focused increasingly on struggles in Africa. Currently, he is on a sabbatical as Senior Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

PAUL THOMPSON is a retired associate professor of Historical Studies on the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
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