

John Sellers was co-editor and co-author of two books, *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony* (1985) and *Receded Tides of Empire* (1994), both dealing with the economic and social development of Natal and Zululand in the wider South African economy. He was the editor of *Natalia* from 1978 to 1980, and was a long-serving member of the *Natal Witness* leader-writers' panel. He was a lifelong collector of books and had an extensive private library, from which he made generous donations of books to the

Natal Society Library (now the Bessie Head Municipal Library).

He is remembered with affection by many of his colleagues, past students and pupils, and shortly before his final illness was delighted to receive a visit from representatives of the Maritzburg College Old Boys' Association on his 90th birthday.

John Sellers was married in 1957 to Kay Davies, who predeceased him. There were no children.

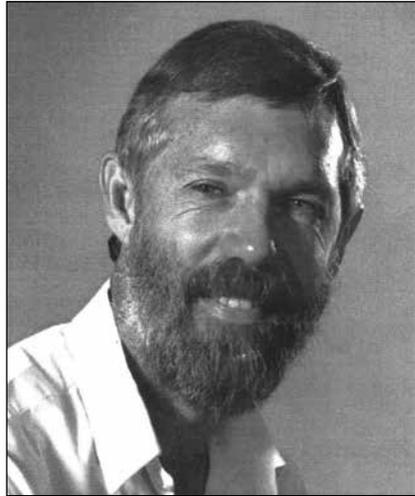
JOHN DEANE

**Natalia* 44 was already with the printers, and the inclusion of a timely obituary was unfortunately not possible.

Gilbert Peter Torlage (1948–2015)

GILBERT Torlage will be remembered as a prominent historian in the field of military history, especially that of the Anglo-Boer War, in KwaZulu-Natal. He passed away on 9 April 2015, a few weeks short of his 67th birthday, after a 15-month battle with cancer.

He was born in Greytown on 26 April 1948 and attended Deutsche Schule zu Hermannsburg and Greytown High School, where he matriculated in 1967. Gilbert's father, Erwin, a one-time member of the Umvoti Mounted Rifles (UMR) farmed outside Greytown before relocating to the town. It was in a Greytown High School magazine that this writer spotted a rare photograph of Gilbert without his trademark beard! It was a photograph of a school shooting team! This photograph was also strangely incongruous as, although he was primarily a military historian, he could by no means be personally associated



Gilbert Torlage

with violence. Gilbert was one of the gentlest of men. He was also a deeply religious man, with a deep respect for life and morality. During the years of his residence in Pietermaritzburg he worshipped at the City's Anglican Cathedral of the Holy Nativity. From

1997 to 2007 he served as a lay minister, and from 2007 as a deacon.

Gilbert enjoyed a typically industrious and successful professional career in several fields of endeavour. His first position was that of articled clerk with the accounting firm of Craib, Winterton and Turner, from 3 January to 30 June 1970. The first change of course came with a shift to teaching. One of the schools he taught at was St Charles College (1 January 1976 to 31 December 1978) where he taught up to Matric (Grade 12) level and headed the History Department.

From teaching Gilbert embarked on a new and challenging career course, that of Professional Officer (Ranger-Historian) with the Natal Parks Board (now Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife) at Spioenkop Nature Reserve near Winterton. He served with the Parks Board from 1 December 1978 to 30 September 1989. Here teaching and education continued to be a priority, and included the development of an historical display at the Spioenkop Resort.

Dr John Vincent, also a Natal Parks Board veteran and Gilbert's senior during his years with the Museum Service, commented: "It was there [at Spioenkop] that he developed an interest, first in the battle that took place there, and then in the Anglo-Boer War as a whole. He eventually became an international figure in this field." On the Spioenkop mountain-top battlefield, where on 24 January 1900 a force of British and colonial troops under General Sir Redvers Buller seeking to raise the siege of Ladysmith, clashed with Boer forces, Gilbert was responsible for laying out a self-guided trail that is gratefully followed by visitors to this day.

The then Natal Parks Board sub-

sequently closed its military and battlefield history component, and the post of ranger-historian fell away. Fortunately, it was at this time, in 1989, that the post of Head of Research at the Natal (from 1994 the KwaZulu-Natal) Provincial Museum Service fell vacant. On 1 October 1989 Gilbert took up this new post.

Pam McFadden, the curator of Talana Museum, Dundee, recorded in her tribute to Gilbert that in his years at Museum Service "he came to know all the museums and their curators and they all had tremendous respect for him. He was much admired for his personality, capabilities as a historian and his ability to work with people." Gilbert served from 1997 on the Talana Museum Board of Trustees and was a long-serving vice-chairman, travelling from Pietermaritzburg to attend meetings. She observed, furthermore, that he "was a man of many talents and his skills as a researcher were superb. He could ferret out all sorts of information and would always do the job precisely and well."

At Museum Service Gilbert joined a veritable invasion of ex-Parks Board officials. Gilbert's primary job was to supervise several staff members, including the present author, and research, compile and erect the displays and exhibitions that the organisation was called upon to complete. In doing this he embraced the post-1994 policy of introducing the history of previously marginalised peoples and events to established museums.

Among the numerous projects he expertly and thoroughly supervised and managed was a display on Mahatma Gandhi at the Talana Museum, as well as the province-wide exhibitions in affiliated museums for the centenaries

of the Anglo-Boer War (1999-2002) and the Natal or Bhambatha Rebellion (2006). Another particularly notable project that Gilbert worked on, in conjunction with Mrs Joanne Wilson, was a travelling exhibition on the life and work of the renowned weaver Reuben Ndwandwe. For many years Gilbert also augmented his Museum Service salary by acting as an accredited battlefields guide specialising in the Anglo-Boer War in KwaZulu-Natal.

As part of his involvement in the centenary commemorations of the Anglo-Boer War throughout KwaZulu-Natal he chaired the Anglo-Boer War Centenary Commemorations Committee Research and Publications Subcommittee from 1993 to 2002. One of the projects that bears his indelible stamp was a Ravan Press series of books on the battles of the Anglo-Boer War in KwaZulu/Natal, recently reprinted with one additional title. Apart from personally compiling one of the books (*The Battle of Spioenkop*), and co-authoring a second, *The Battle of Colenso*, with S.B. Bourquin, Gilbert also took on the task of editing the entire series to ensure consistency and accuracy. He also compiled, together with Steve Watt, an Anglo-Boer atlas, *A Guide to the Anglo-Boer War Sites of KwaZulu-Natal* (1999).

Another of his contributions to mark that centenary was a six-part series of full colour supplements on the war which appeared in *The Natal Witness* from 15 March to 23 August 1999. He also co-edited, with Professor Frans-johan Pretorius, *The Hall Handbook of the Anglo-Boer War* (University of Natal Press, 1999). Major Darrell Hall, the author, and an expert on gunnery, had completed the initial draft of this book shortly before his death in No-

vember 1996. Gilbert also contributed to *The Sounds of War*, a dramatised history in sound of the Anglo-Boer War, and he appeared in British television documentaries, such as one on the Anglo-Boer War produced by 20/20 Television.

Gilbert also contributed to journals such as *Soldiers of the Queen*, as well as conferences and workshops. He also periodically contributed to environmental impact assessments, notably those involving fuel pipelines in KwaZulu-Natal.

In January 2010, after a 20-year sojourn at Museum Service, Gilbert began the last stage of his career as Deputy-Director at the Msunduzi Museum, the successor to the Voortrekker Museum which had been founded in 1912. During this period he played a prominent part in co-ordinating that institution's 2012 centennial commemorations.

Gilbert had a distinguished academic career and could have achieved even more were it not for his decision not to embark on a doctoral dissertation because it would impinge too much on his precious family life. Nevertheless, apart from qualifications in accountancy, he read for a BA degree at the University of Natal and the University of South Africa, followed by a University Education Diploma, and then a BA (Honours) in 1984. In 1993 he graduated with a Master's degree, *cum laude*, from UNISA with a thesis on the topic: "The British Advance and Boer Retreat through Northern Natal, May-June 1900." He was offered a scholarship to embark on a PhD but declined for the reason mentioned. There is no doubt that with his skill, dedication and commitment as a researcher, his would have been an outstanding thesis.

It is also not surprising to learn that in 2007 he obtained a certificate in theology by part-time study.

Another skill, and one that served him well in his various careers, especially at the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Museum Service, was his fluency in no fewer than four languages: English, Afrikaans, Zulu and German. In 1986 he passed a Zulu proficiency test at the University of Natal.

Gilbert somehow also found the time to serve for many years on the committee of the KwaZulu-Natal Branch of the South African Museums' Association (SAMA), including two stints

as Chairman, from 1994 to 1996 and 2006-2009. During these years he also served on the Council of the South African Museums' Association. During his periods of office the branch thrived and Gilbert convened several successful provincial conferences. In Pam McFadden's words he "gave total devotion to serving on these committees in the interests of protecting and expanding museums and the service they could deliver to the public".

Gilbert leaves his wife Jenny, two sons and a granddaughter.

MARK COGHLAN

Barbara Tyrrell (1912–2015)

THE artist and ethnographer Barbara Tyrrell died on 23 September 2015 at the age of 103. She was born on 15 March 1912 in Durban, one of three children. Her father worked for Native Affairs, and early in her childhood they moved to Eshowe. She was immersed in Zulu language and culture from birth. At the age of two, she was present at a performance of Zulu dancers given in honour of Henry Rider Haggard.

She trained at the Natal Technical College Art School and obtained a BA (Fine Art) from the University of Natal, after which she worked as a fashion artist and art teacher. In 1944 she bought an old van, which she converted it into a camper and christened "Nixie", after an Irish wild spirit. It was the first of several similar vehicles that gave her the independence to roam gypsy-like around Southern Africa.



Barbara Tyrrell in a portrait commissioned for her 100th birthday

She undertook her first unaccompanied trip in 1944 to work among the amaNgwane people of the Drakensberg. From then on, she dedicated her life to researching and recording the