

**STELLA AURORAE: THE HISTORY OF A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY: VOLUME 2: THE UNIVERSITY OF NATAL (1949–1976)**

by BILL GUEST

Pietermaritzburg: Natal Society Foundation, 2017; 476 pages.

ISBN 978–0–9921766–6–2

If one were to identify a single figure whose name evokes memories of the University of Natal in the late 1960s, that person would probably be Owen Horwood, the principal who served out a controversial term of office from 1966 to 1969. He had been appointed following a dubious selection process in which only 25 out of 69 Senate members firmly supported his appointment. Among his actions as principal, he withdrew recognition of the Durban campus SRC – an action which a subsequent inquiry deemed to be ‘not legally competent’ – as well as suspending the Durban student newspaper. During his term of office he increasingly alienated staff and students. In 1969 he tendered his resignation and soon declared his support for the National Party government, in which he would go on to hold ministerial positions in the years ahead. Visiting the Pietermaritzburg campus after announcing his resignation he was greeted with boos and hisses.

This is one of the stories told in the second of Bill Guest’s multi-volume history of the university, a volume covering the years 1949–1976 – years marked by political tension and turbulence, but also by significant infrastructural expansion on campus, and by an increase of over 400% in student numbers, rising from a total of 1 840 in 1949 to 7 962 in 1976 (the latter number still minuscule compared to current enrolments).

Guest has produced a comprehensive account of another phase in the university’s history – an account remarkable for its thoroughness and attention to detail. Anybody who served on the academic staff during these years will most likely have been given a mention – hence an extensive index of 37 pages.

There are some fuller portrayals of individual academics – the star performers; the outstanding researchers whose achievements and publications are detailed; and those who rose up against the odds, such as Ken McIntyre, who, after losing his sight in the Second World War, served at various times as head of the Durban history department, dean of Arts, and chairperson of the lecturers’ association. There were also the more eccentric figures, such as a classics professor who was ‘given inadvertently to spraying front row students with drops of saliva during his almost frenzied exposition of Greek grammar and syntax.’

Special attention is given to the three principals who presided during this era. Malherbe was widely praised by his contemporaries for overseeing the establishment of new departments, promoting research and writing seven books on education while in office, but who was also criticised for acquiescing in racial segregation. From the start he did not favour the appointment of his successor, Horwood, whom his wife, Janie Malherbe, came to loathe. Horwood’s successor, Francis Stock, is given some praise by Guest, but is also shown up for his overly cautious

political stance and for his opposition to the admission of black undergraduate students to whites-only universities.

During this period the University of Natal was a segregated institution, not one for whites only. In the 1950s it continued to run its own 'Non-European section' in Durban, but away from the main campus, until it was closed down by the government following legislation enacted in 1959. The university did, however, retain with some difficulty its black medical school, successfully resisting the government's attempt to wrest control of it in the late 1950s. But in the 1970s the government rejected the university's request to be allowed to admit some white students to the medical school and in 1977 prohibited any further admission of black African students into the school.

Guest provides coverage of some of the key political episodes, activities and trends during these years. There was Robert Kennedy's visit to the Durban campus in June 1966. Staff and students found themselves subjected to banning orders, detention without trial, or judicial imprisonment – among them, John Aitchison, Ken and Jean Hill in the 1960s, Rick Turner, Raymond Suttner, Fatima Meer and Charles Simkins in the 1970s.

For the most part the white student body as a whole was much more conservative than liberal in character, there being constant wrangling over whether to maintain a central affiliation to NUSAS. It was a different story at the medical school, where Biko was a student for a while. The school's Alan Taylor residence became a major centre of the black consciousness South African Students Organisation (SASO),

which Biko had played the primary role in founding.

One consequence of the rise of SASO was to turn the attention of some left-leaning white students, guided by Rick Turner, towards black worker issues. Their involvement in the NUSAS wages commission assisted in the growth of worker organisation and action in the 1970s.

There are other themes addressed in this wide-ranging, lengthy study of a 27-year period in the university's history: the steady growth of a research culture from quite slow beginnings in the 1950s; the university's finances, with a particular focus on financial crises in the late 1940s and mid-1970s; student life, characterised by changing mores and codes of behaviour; community engagement and the provision of adult education, first promoted by Mabel Palmer and later developed further by the likes of Tony Morphet and John Aitchison.

The great strength of this, Bill Guest's second volume, derives from his painstaking research and meticulous attention to detail. The book will be of special interest to anyone who was a member of the university community during these years, perhaps evoking fond (or not so fond) memories. The book will also have appeal for those with an interest in the history of tertiary education, bearing in mind that a broad knowledge of this history is an important prerequisite for developing a proper understanding and grasp of the transformation imperatives that universities are currently trying to address.

PAUL MAYLAM