

HAZARA

Elegy for an African Farm

JOHN CONYNGHAM



Occasional Publications of the Natal Society Foundation
PIETERMARITZBURG
2016

Hazara: Elegy for an African Farm
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Published in 2016 in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa by the Trustees of The Natal Society Foundation under its imprint 'Occasional Publications of The Natal Society Foundation'.

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Natal Society Foundation website: <http://www.natalia.org.za/>

ISBN 978-0-99217-668-6

Publishing manager: Peter Croeser
Editor: Christopher Merrett
Proofreader: Sally Hines
Indexer: Christopher Merrett
Maps: Marise Bauer of MDesign
Design and layout: Jo Marwick

This book was set in 11.5/15 pt Bembo, a classical serif typeface designed by Francesco Griffo for Venetian printer Aldus Manutius, and first used in 1495 for an essay, *De Aetna*, by Italian Renaissance scholar and poet Pietro Bembo, after whom it is named. It was revived and modified in 1929 by Stanley Morison of the Monotype Corporation in London.

Printed in South Africa by Pinetown Printers, Pinetown

For my mother and father, in memory,
and for my sister

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A book about people whose stories are largely unrecorded relies heavily on the memories of those who were there, and on experts on various byways of history. For these, and other reasons, I am indebted to Paul Baillie, Anthony Balcomb, Marise Bauer, Diamond Bozas, Robert Ian Caldwell, Maurice Calleja, Len Chiazzari, Patsy Cleworth, Stephen Coan, Mark Coghlan, Tom Donovan, Jenny Duckworth, Luce Dunlop, Anthony Durrant, Stephen Fenichell, Gerald Fitzpatrick, Suzanne Foster, Geraldine Freese, Christopher Garnett, Brett Hendey, Nigel Hemming, Sally Hines, Nan Keightley, Jimpy Kilburn, Adrian Koopman, Christine Leighton, Sue Light, Richard Lister, Rory Lynsky, Masontaha Mahlatsi, Gilbert Maingard, Beric, Monica and Lara Mansfield, Jo Marwick, Jonathan Moffatt, Redmond Orpen, Angus Petrie, Bruce Rookens-Smith, Lieutenant Colonel Mario Schembri, Linda Searle, Graeme and Paddy Shuker, Eshana Singh, Ralph and David Tanner, Jennifer Thorp, Julian von Klemperer, and the late Bill Bizley, Désirée Martin, Pam Weatherley, Clive Conyngham and Dennis 'Pat' Conyngham.

With his extensive knowledge of Natal and Zulu history, Jeff Guy was an invaluable ally, scouring the manuscript in its latter stages and suggesting numerous improvements. That his sudden death prevented him from seeing it published I particularly regret.

I also owe a special debt to the chairman of the Natal Society Foundation, Christopher Merrett, for his enduring faith in this endeavour, and to its administrator, Peter Croeser, and their fellow trustees, for underwriting it.

Thanks also to my family – Heather, Richard and Sarah – who directly or indirectly made space for me while I pieced this story together.

J.H.C.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is not a political book, or even a conventional history, but simply an impressionistic account of a farm and some of the people who lived on it. Every character is the double of a real person, and every action is rooted in fact, although assumptions have sometimes had to be made. And because no piece of land or group of individuals exists in isolation, it is also the story of a diaspora of men and women who were borne across the globe on an imperial tide that has since receded. As a child and youth I caught the era's afterglow, as one sees at twilight the salmon-pink suffusion of a sun that has already set.

He alone is left to do the thinking. How will he keep them all in his head, all the books, all the people, all the stories? And if he does not remember them, who will?

— J.M. Coetzee, *Boyhood*

The question now inevitably asks itself, whether the lives of great men only should be recorded. Is not anyone who has lived a life, and left a record of that life, worthy of biography – the failures as well as the successes, the humble as well as the illustrious? And what is greatness? And what is smallness?

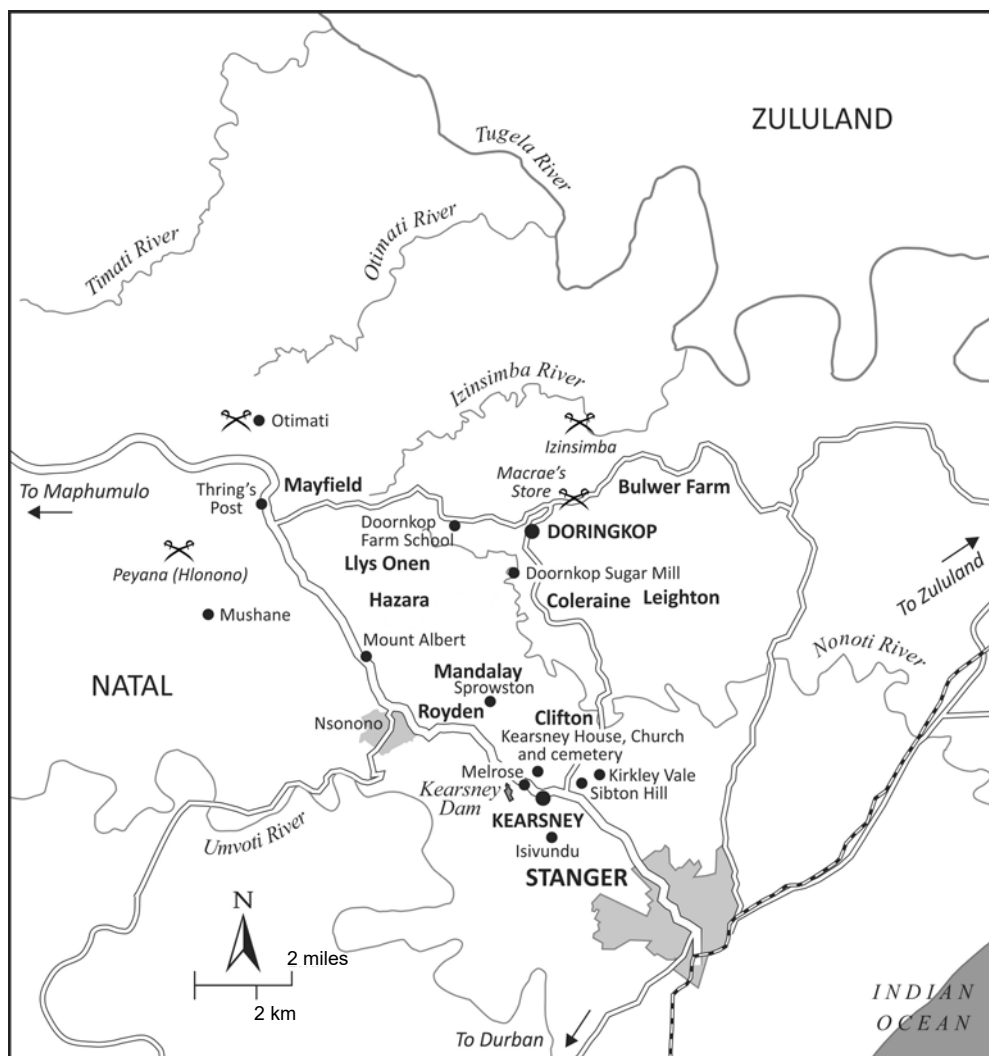
— Virginia Woolf, 'The Art of Biography'

NAMES AND PLACES

Zulu names in the English text have been spelt largely as they would have by the characters in the story. Natal and Zululand, being at the time separate regions, have been treated as such. While maps indicate the Nonoti as a stream, then a river, for tidiness both descriptions have been conflated into the 'Nonoti River'. The terms 'native' and 'settler', now usually deemed pejorative, have been used merely to describe different communities. And while several first names are repeated over generations, where each bearer appears in the narrative should distinguish him from the others.



Map 1: Province of Natal, c.1965



Map 2: Kearsney and Doringkop districts, c.1965

PROLOGUE

From the veranda I could see the sugar fields tumbling into the haze. The sky was huge and cloudless, but the air was heavy and a storm was nearing. Even if now the cane was calm, swaying liquidly, soothingly, as though caressing the rolling hills, I knew that soon it would become agitated, tossing hither and thither in the face of a winnowing wind. And then the storm would pass, and slowly, softly, the caressing would resume, with everything looking crisp and bountiful after the consecrating rain.

As a child I discovered that if I stared hard at the multitude of cane stalks they had an almost hypnotic motion; and that if I closed my eyes and really listened, they made a husky, whispery sound, half hum, half music-of-the-spheres. If ever it ceased, I asked myself, would I be able to live without it?

But weighed down by anxieties, my parents had done the unimaginable, selling what I had always considered to be my home for life. And so, in the interregnum between my family's departure and the arrival of the new owners, from university I had made the long journey back to say goodbye. Looking after me during my leave-taking were our servants, who too were being left behind. Whatever their concerns, they maintained their decorum, hovering silently as I sat alone at the head of the dining-room table, in a pose of the plantation owner whom I would now never become.

The three days passed in a bitter-sweet daze. I moved listlessly through the rooms, already largely empty of furniture, telling myself that because of my parents' faithlessness the familiar spaces would soon be reduced to memories. I paced the garden, taking special note of the lawns and trees and flowerbeds, so as always to remember them. I inspected the workshop and sheds, where ranks of tractors and trailers waited silently for a new regimen, and the stables and the milking parlour where once there had been life. From the hub of the homestead I followed dirt roads into the surrounding cane, seeking in the green matrix those sites I had chosen particularly to memorialise: the valley of forest, with its lofty canopy of treetops; the dell of umdonis with its adjacent spring; the dams with their flotillas of waterfowl; the swamp where water oozed in bronze

and purple mirrors; and the cleft in a field where, so folklore had it, local people had cowered as Zulu king Shaka's raiding parties laid waste to their world. And then, slumped by the momentousness of the occasion, in my sleek, silver-grey Alfa Romeo, courtesy of the farm's largesse and my parents' generosity, I drove away.

That was in March 1977, when I was twenty-two. And as much as life has swept me onwards, there has always been an undertow, nagging and insistent. For why else am I so compelled to look back?

That we had been there at all was because of our forebears. That we had chosen to stay was because it was home, or as much of a home as interlopers we could hope to have. In the topography of memory I can still see it clearly: the house and its garden, the outbuildings, sugar-cane fields, and the ocean in the distance. Visible too are my family members, all going about their lives, and behind them, in a succession of palimpsests, earlier generations, each set in its world.

PART ONE

The story of James and Mia
and their daughter Anne

Each of these family homes, with its stables and farm
and gardens deep in trees at the end of long avenues,
is an island – and, like an island, a world.

— Elizabeth Bowen, *Bowen's Court*

It began with a dowry. When twenty-four-year-old Mia Keith-Fraser married twenty-eight-year-old James Woollam, her father bought her a farm. It was more generous than he had first intended, but he was particularly fond of his elder daughter, and her husband had no land of his own. And because she was gamine and horsey rather than feminine and decorative there were moments when he and her mother Kate had wondered if she would marry at all. So gratitude may also have played a part, as well as the expectation that she would soon provide them with grandchildren.

The wedding took place on 1 March 1924 at Hillcrest, a farming area inland from Durban. Mia wore a gown of brocaded satin with a pearl ornament hitching the drapery on her left side and a cascade of lace falling from her right shoulder. Lent by a relative was a train lined with shell-pink silk that had been worn by her great-grandmother on her wedding day. Also borrowed for the occasion was a lace veil which was held in place by a wreath of orange blossom, while the bouquet was made up of carnations and white agapanthus.

Formerly a captain in the British Indian Army, James wore field service uniform, an ensemble of khaki, as did Major Davis, his brother officer and best man. Ted Davis was the son of Major-General Gronow Davis who as a young artilleryman had won the Victoria Cross at Sebastopol for leading an audacious attack to spike the Russian guns, and for braving withering fire to carry a wounded comrade to safety.



Mia and James, c.1924, the year of their marriage

The wedding reception was held at Dehra Dun, the Keith-Frasers' farm outside Hillcrest, where a sudden thunderstorm sent the guests scurrying indoors and servants out onto the lawn to move the tables to the veranda. The bride's health was proposed by the Reverend Francis Stead, formerly of the diocese of Zanzibar and latterly vicar of Ladysmith and chaplain to His Majesty's Forces. Captain Woollam replied with a brief speech before the wedding cake was cut by the bride with her husband's sword. Indoors were tables piled high with gifts.

Among the guests were familiar surnames from that small settler world, such as Binns and Eustace and Pope Ellis and Wheelwright, and Sir Benjamin Chave, a relative of Mia's who had been knighted for his services as a mail ship captain. Seven years earlier, under his command, days out from Plymouth and headed for the Cape, the steamer *Almwick Castle* had been torpedoed by a German submarine and sank rapidly by the head. Forty lives were lost, and for a week the survivors had drifted, crazed by exposure and thirst. Of the six lifeboats two vanished, but the captain's was spotted by a passing ship. To the wedding guests in the know this must have been a talking point or a subject to be avoided.

One of the bridesmaids was Mia's sister, Jean, who too would soon marry a former serviceman. An Anglo-Irishman of independent means, Robert Leycester had won the Military Cross in the Royal Flying Corps, and after World War I had ranched at Eldoret in Kenya where one morning his first wife had gone for her customary ride and bolted. Robert and Jean lived on several continents before drifting via Johannesburg to Rhodesia and settling in the Eastern Highlands, not far from the Mozambique border. Peripatetic as ever, they later migrated to Natal where they owned successively two properties in the midlands: Adamshurst, outside Howick, once the home of a relative of Sir Arthur Evans whose excavations at Knossos had unearthed proof of the Minoans, and Kilimani, outside Pietermaritzburg, which for some association Robert named after an area near Nairobi. Being back in the province of Jean's birth, the Leycesters became frequent visitors to the home to which, more than a decade earlier, the Woollams had returned after their honeymoon.

From its position on an escarpment, James and Mia's farm looked eastwards across undulating hills to the Indian Ocean. Out of sight ten miles away was the town of Stanger, founded fifty years earlier to serve the fledgling sugar industry and named after the colony's first surveyor general, William Stanger, who in the mid-1800s had overseen the cutting up of the countryside into farms and plots. At first, the pioneer patchwork had been communal but in time racial sectors took shape, with Stanger's small, formal European business district abutted by the informal bustle of the Indian quarter, with the African location straggling beyond it. The town's Indian community was proportionately larger than anywhere else in South Africa, being predominantly the descendents of indentured labourers who in the second half of the nineteenth century had been imported from India to work on Natal's sugar fields, and who, once their term of indenture had ended, had chosen to stay on.

Earlier, Stanger had been KwaDukuza, the royal homestead of King Shaka, who had forged the Zulu nation's martial tradition, and where in 1828 he had been murdered by his half-brothers Dingane and Mhlangana. A century later, after Mia and James's arrival, a monument was built in the Indian quarter, ostensibly on the site of Shaka's huge

cattle kraal, which was encircled by thousands of beehive huts, and began to be used as a rallying point for Zuluness.

When it came into the family, the farm was a portion of a bigger entity named Waterbosch, meaning ‘water forest’ in Dutch. Demarcated in 1852 by the colonial government, it was decades later the property of the Waterbosch Wattle Syndicate from which Colin Keith-Fraser and several minor shareholders made their purchase. What this meant in essence was a proclamation of ownership over a tract of virgin grassland and forest which previously had been considered by tribal groupings to be their land, but which the settlers claimed was only nominally so, and which was then used by various titleholders for stock farming before being planted successively with wattle and sugar cane.

In this venture, Mia’s father Colin played a valuable role because he was by nature energetic and entrepreneurial. Years earlier he had requested permission to build an electric tramway across the Umgeni River and into Durban, but was refused because the route skirting the riverbank was in places too narrow to accommodate the track, and the excavations would have intruded into the betel-nut fields of Indian market gardeners. Undeterred, he made another application, requesting authority to harvest bastard cabbage trees from forests along the coast. With the Lion Match Company having recently been established in Durban, he hoped to sell the wood for matches, but on discovering that someone had beaten him to it he backed out of the race. His bustling also had a benevolence, for he assisted a neighbour who had lepers on her farm who refused to be institutionalised, among them a woman who had absconded to Durban and become a prostitute, and he helped one of his indentured workers cable money to his mother in the zillah of Chittoor in North Arcot in India.

But the most telling of his interactions was a request to the Chief Native Commissioner for his sirdar to carry a shotgun to protect his bananas from baboons. The commissioner’s reply was unsympathetic, dismissing the apes as ‘mythopoeic’ and the product of an over-developed imagination. So, embellishment by Keith-Fraser may have led to the rebuttal, or a bureaucrat’s bloody-mindedness, but most likely it was that a settler society balked at the idea of firearms in the hands of anybody who wasn’t one of its own.

Shortly after the Woollams' arrival, at James's instigation the farm was renamed Hazara, after his old regiment, the 106th Hazara Pioneers. It was common then for settlers to associate somewhere local with a place elsewhere, and throughout the district were signposts whose inscriptions were nostalgic: Llys Onen, Mayfield, Mandalay, Coleraine, Clifton, Royden and Leighton. On ordnance survey maps were other names, like Armadale, Rosmead and Cleveland, no longer used, which also harked back to a time when the African landscape was being fragmented into a colonial patchwork. A few exceptions had Dutch and Afrikaans origins, among them Doornkop, meaning 'thorn hill', the name of the sugar mill and its estate, and the similarly named district of Doringkop in which it was located; or were Zulu names such as Nsonono and Mushane in the nearby Umvoti Valley which was demarcated as a native reserve.

James Woollam's birth in Chester in 1896 had been perfectly timed for World War I. No sooner had the son of a coal merchant, bright as a button and with a beautiful singing voice, completed his studies at the Cathedral School than war broke out. He enlisted in the Manchester Regiment and was sent to Belgium and France. After serving briefly in the ranks with a trench mortar unit, he was commissioned as a subaltern, and the following year received his second pip. Then, inexplicably, in 1917 he made the lateral leap to the Hazara Pioneers, an Indian Army infantry regiment deployed primarily in the construction of roads and entrenchments. Later promoted to captain, he remained until his retirement an 'attached officer', probably because he never attained proficiency in Farsi, the language his men spoke.

No history has been published of the 106th Hazara Pioneers, although lodged in the India Office Library in London is a slight manuscript written by one of its former officers in 1949, sixteen years after the regiment's disbandment. Then living in retirement in Chelsea, Brigadier Bunbury had felt compelled to tell, before his memory faded, the story of the 'splendid men' with whom he had served.

The Hazaras were Tartars who settled in Afghanistan in the thirteenth century with Genghis Khan, congregating west of Kabul in an area since known as the Hazarajat. Mongols among Pathans, and Shias among Sunnis, they were a persecuted minority. First linked with the British

Army around 1840, when a number served with Broadfoot's Sappers, a hotchpotch of Hindustanis, Gurkhas and Afghans, they were excellent soldiers, and with their fair complexions and high spirits were thought by their officers to resemble Englishmen.

Traditionally, Hazaras sought migrant work in India as labourers, but during a period of heightened persecution in Afghanistan in the early 1900s, refugees poured southwards. Having mercilessly concluded the Anglo-Boer War, and been rewarded with the military command of the Raj, Horatio Kitchener directed that from the fugitives a battalion be raised. Drafts from two regiments of Baluchistan infantry formed the nucleus, and in 1904 the 106th Hazara Pioneers was born, its full dress being drab, a light olive-brown colour, with red facings, and its home base Quetta, on India's North-West Frontier.

A photograph of the regiment's officers, all seemingly martinets, shows each with his moustache and sword and no hint of a smile. Twelve Europeans in light khaki, most holding their pith helmets, are assembled with fourteen Hazara *subadars* and *jemadars*, in darker uniform, wearing striped turbans. If the monochrome fails adequately to convey the bantam-cockish finery that so typified Indian Army soldiers, there is the glitter of medals and other insignia, and against the light grey of the khaki the red facings are slashes of blackness. Seated in the centre beside the colonel is the magisterial figure of Dost Muhammad, the Subadar Major, who served with the regiment from its formation until shortly before James's arrival. Third from the right in the middle row is a Lieutenant Blackwell who, decades later, was a visitor to the Woollams' African farm.

In World War I, having as a sideshow to the Great Game been used in a cordon across Western Baluchistan to prevent enemy infiltration from Persia into Afghanistan, some Hazaras were sent to France and others to Mesopotamia, on the Tigris north of Baghdad. It was around then that James Woollam, the former chorister, his paleness seared ruddily by a rampant sun, joined them, never dreaming that in seven years he would be a planter in Africa.

Why that particular farm some thirteen miles inland from the Indian Ocean had been bought for the newlyweds was because it had wattle, Colin Keith-Fraser having long owned similar plantations across Natal.



Officers of the 106th Hazara Pioneers, Quetta, British India, c.1915

Someone working for the Waterbosch syndicate must earlier have introduced the scraggy Australian tree whose tannin is used for the softening of leather, ripping up the grasslands and planting the rows of seedlings that soon tamed the landscape.

But in time the sterile forests were erased, with teams of oxen used to dislodge the stumps. At the gentle coaxing of herd boys, the majestic beasts with pendulous dewlaps would approach in a wide arc, dragging a plough behind them. Sometimes it took several attempts to extract a single bole with its tussock of roots. Thus, in an elaborate pattern of concentric and interlocking circles, laboriously the hillsides were traced free of foreign timber to make way for the new invader, sugar cane, and within years the estate and its neighbours resembled a wide and undulating sea of green. Particularly, this was so when the wind swept down from the hinterland and set the millions of cane stalks trembling in their raspy sheaths. When this happened, the foothills came alive with a liquid motion as if the breakers along the shoreline had broken ranks and were unfurling themselves across the fields.



The earliest version of the house at Hazara, c.1930

The house then on the farm was made of corrugated iron, having been manufactured in kit form in Canada and decades earlier lugged across the oceans to a tentative clearing in the vegetation. Embellished over the years, photographs reveal a picturesque bungalow on piers, surrounded by verandas and scrutinised by palms. Behind it, like dishevelled sentries, towering Norfolk Island pines appear to be gesticulating at the sky.

If images of the successive Hazara houses are laid side-by-side, they make a telling progression. Before long festooned with creepers and encircled with shrubs and borders, the kit-house became part of its surroundings. But no sooner had it truly integrated than it gave way to a bigger building that for all its embellishments appeared yet more at ease with the park-like profusion in which it had been set, for the drive for improvement was instinctual.

2

Being handsome rather than beautiful, Mia Keith-Fraser would not have seemed an obvious catch. But in that parochial settler society her family was well connected, with among her relatives some of the leaders of the sugar community, and an uncle who counted among his acquaintances the governor-general. Brought up with her sister Jean on their parents' wattle plantation at Hillcrest, Mia spent her schooldays as a boarder at Wykeham, a private girls' school in Pietermaritzburg, the provincial capital in the midlands.

On their arrival on the farm the newlyweds had much to do. For James it was a major adjustment, foregoing soldiering and under the watchful eye of his father-in-law learning first about wattle and then about sugar cane, and settling gradually into the rhythm of planting and nurturing and harvesting that is the essence of botanical husbandry. That the enterprise was underwritten by his parents-in-law made it doubly difficult for him, although having gained entry into that tight community, in which all the players fitted neatly and instinctively like tooled components, James appears never to have wanted to return to the England that more than a decade earlier he had abandoned, even after what was soon to befall him and his wife.

Yet sugar farming held many challenges. Imported from Mauritius, but originally from the New Hebrides in the Pacific, and still tainted by its associations with slavery, the cane thrived in the fertile soil and the heat and humidity of Natal's coastal lowlands. So vigorously did the giant grass with its honeyed pith embrace its new surroundings that farmers

on their verandas on hot evenings would profess to hear it growing. But the cultivation of cane is notoriously labour intensive and each stage of the growth cycle makes its demands. First, the stalks have to be planted, by laying cuttings in trenches, although in subsequent years they ratoon. Then they have to be fertilised, and hoed or sprayed to control weeds. Then, at around thirteen months, when they are tall and heavy with sucrose, the stalks have to be harvested by teams of cutters wielding cane knives, or pangas, and stacked and loaded and transported to the nearest mill.

In James's earlier years the cut cane was loaded onto *golovans*, or cocopans, which were pulled by a locomotive along the tracks that traced the contours of the hills before descending to the Doornkop mill in its valley. That this arrangement didn't always go smoothly is reflected in the transcripts of a court case between James and the Doornkop Sugar Company over the rates and apportionment of payment. And although the trains were later replaced by tractors and trailers, whose noisy accelerations along the dirt roads through the fields became a feature of sugar-farm life, less progress was made in labour economies of scale, primarily because the rolling nature of Natal's coastal topography prevented wholesale mechanisation. And James, it seems, never acquired the skill to reconcile the cost of a large body of workers with the need to make a profit.

From the start the question of labour had plagued the sugar industry in Natal. When in the mid-1800s the crop began to be cultivated, African men, being disdainful of manual labour for settler landowners, declined employment on the terms offered. Compelled to look elsewhere, the settlers turned to India, and soon shiploads of indentured labourers began to arrive from across the ocean. Later, by the time James and Mia settled on the farm, Africans had changed heart and were predominantly performing the acts of planting, weeding and cutting that they had previously disdained, and the descendants of the indentured Indians were generally sirdars, chauffeurs, tractor drivers or mechanics. And because of their skill at growing flowers and vegetables, others were employed as gardeners.

But despite offering a cornucopia of produce, Natal was not always generous. Every decade or so the summer downpours ceased and over months the streams and dams dwindled to muddy hollows patterned with cracks. Denied the moisture it needed, the cane wilted in the relentless heat and began to lose its lush greenness and to assume a drier and harsher appearance. With the withering of the stalks came the danger of fire, when an act of carelessness or arson exploded the landscape into a sheet of flame, maddened by the hot winds that late each winter would scour down from the hinterland.

Added to this, in the 1930s, when the Woollams had been at Hazara for a decade, were the plagues of locusts. Arising like great whirlwinds in central Africa, swarms would sweep southwards, gyring on their axes. And suddenly James or Mia or their neighbours would look up and see huge clouds pouring like smoke over the hills and cascading into the fields. Pandemonium followed as everyone was mobilised to confront the invaders, beating sticks on metal to frighten them onto the next farm, where the noisy reception was repeated. Thus would the roiling waves be kept crashing over successive fields, until they vanished from sight. Desperate to urge the stampede onwards, farmers sometimes set their fields alight, preferring to burn the crop than to have it consumed by the enemy. Whenever this happened, a column of smoke rose from the cane, and, as if in some great courtship display, entwined with the column of locusts, the one pursuing and the other fleeing the pursuer's embrace.

Wherever farmers' responses were too tentative, the plague would take hold, and millions of mandibles would make quick work of the cane leaves, leaving only the midribs and financial loss. From the air, the path of destruction was discernible as a brown slick across the greenness. But not only were these invasions an insect phenomenon, for their victims ascribed to them metaphorical properties, as if in biblical terms a confederacy of planters was being targeted and tested. And for James and Mia, the arbitrariness of the locust plague, which decimated some regions and left others untouched, confirmed the unfairness of fate.

For Mia, the adjustment to married life on the farm was relatively easy. Having grown up in similar circumstances across Natal she understood, albeit unconsciously, how a home in that place at that time

was not only a home but also a cultural refuge from the reality of the surrounding countryside with its foreignness and dangers, both real and imagined. From her parents in that colonial setting she had imbibed this responsibility, much as her mother had earlier been entrusted with providing a space for her family that in its very essence was different from the world in which it had been planted.

One of her first tasks was to make more homely a house that for years had been occupied by employees of the Waterbosch Wattle Syndicate, sojourners who had never truly invested in the place. About this activity there was an air of excitement because what lay ahead was the prospect of a comfortable life as plantation owners, surrounded across the rolling hills by the scattered homesteads of people like themselves.

With his stories of faraway campaigns, James provided the exoticism and romance that Mia was seeking, and soon the house at Hazara reflected the competing influences of Europe and the East. Within months, Mia's Chippendales and Sheratons began to be infiltrated by the dark and intricate Chinese furniture that James preferred, among it the sitting-room cabinet that housed the gramophone, and a set of dining-room table and chairs and sideboard. Resplendent was an oriental screen with panels depicting birds in mother-of-pearl and lapis lazuli and backed with gilt-inscribed verses by poets of the T'ang Dynasty. With him James had bought other accoutrements, like brass shell-cases which he deployed as spittoons, cut-glass decanters that were filled with sherry and used to marinate chillies, and ivory figurines of elephants which he arranged along the mantelpiece in his snug. Also with him came meals of kedgeriee and curry and mulligatawny soup, and games of mahjong, as well as the embellishment of Mia's Natal vocabulary with words like salaam and *jaldi-jaldi* and sirdar, which in recent years had come to spice his speech.

Furthermore, a new routine was established, with formal meals. Servants were kitted out in white livery and instructed to provide the basis on which a life of decorum could be lived. There were hot baths, three formal meals a day, and music on the gramophone in the evenings, when Mia habitually wore a blouse and long skirt, and James put on a dress shirt and dark trousers, but forwent a bow tie and dinner jacket in

a concession to the heat. Clothes and sheets and towels too needed to be crisply clean, some softened and others starched, and cakes of imported soap distributed among the bathrooms, even if the water from the taps had been pumped up the hillside from a stream in the bush and was at best discoloured, with a musty taste that spoke of the reed roots and water lilies through which it had flowed.

And from Mia's perspective another routine merely needed revival. Throughout her teens, each day after breakfast a horse had been brought to her by a groom, and alone, or with her sister Jean, in her jodhpurs and riding boots, and with her face shielded from the sun by a jaunty hat, she had ridden through the natural bush or the wattle plantations. Now that she had a farm of her own, her husband James could be included in this daily ritual, which they used not only to stamp their authority on the land that they had been given but also to converse and to increase the intimacy of their relationship.

In forging this new momentum, Mia had periodic help from her mother Kate, while on regular visits her father Colin contributed not only his farming expertise but also his skill at earning a good living, to ensure that his son-in-law learnt how to provide the appropriate lifestyle for his wife, and for the children that would inevitably soon arrive.

But knowing nowadays of the tenacity of trauma, perhaps James had been scarred by the slaughter of the Western Front. Indeed, his sudden switch to the Indian Army may have been flight from the charnel house of the Somme. Even if he had no obvious jerks or twitches, perhaps under cover of darkness demons shrieked and gibbered while beside him his wife lay sleeping and the African night slid effortlessly on its chorus of cricket song. And as a young man from urban England, notwithstanding sojourns in Flanders and Picardy and Mesopotamia and India, he may have found it difficult to assimilate himself into a new settler community. For Stanger was neither Chester nor Quetta, and even if Africa's and India's fauna and flora are cousins, here was another world to be grappled with and mastered. To this unfamiliar spectrum were added not only new domestic relationships but also neighbours who crucially buttressed the imposed society of which they were a part, and who needed to be engaged with and befriended.

With separateness being a hallmark of settler existence, whenever interlopers commandeer land so the life they forge is at odds with its ambient world. With this sense of racial and cultural separation, Natal's settlers socially ignored the Africans and Indians around them, as indeed they were expected to, and for companionship looked to their like from neighbouring farms. They lived, therefore, isolated existences broken by bouts of sociability, as in tennis or dinner parties, or having guests to stay, when the company of planters asserted its uniqueness and was nourished by its own kind.

3

The key to James and Mia's social life was a visitors' book that chronicled the ebb and flow of their friends to Hazara. Caught in the names and addresses was a web of Europe and Africa, and of town and country, which then characterised the sugar community on South Africa's north-eastern seaboard. Despite Hazara's isolation, or because of it, every month friends would come to stay, usually for several days, but sometimes longer, and their particulars were recorded in the volume on the hall table.

In 1932, eight years after their marriage, and the year in which the book's entries begin, of the twenty-three visits most were by friends from Durban, the metropolis fifty miles away, with others from Zululand and elsewhere in Natal. Mia's parents, Colin and Kate, arrived days apart in April and each stayed for a week. Only two sets of visitors came from outside South Africa: a couple named Bradford, his Christian name indecipherable and hers Georgiana, from near Canterbury, and a D. Carey Morgan from Shawford in Hampshire. The remainder were from farms in the nearby Kearsney and Doringkop districts, but who on each occasion stayed for several days.

The reasons for the overnight stays were probably mundane, like when a downpour had made the roads impassable, even if chains were wrapped around tyres and tractors were on hand to help, but it was the insular life that each family lived that made link-ups with friends and relatives so necessary.

Of the eighteen visits the following year the pattern was the same, with again only two sets of visitors from outside South Africa: one from England and the other from St Denis on the island of Reunion,

probably a sugar expert whose help had been solicited for the new crop. As before, Mia's parents stayed on several occasions, to spend time with their daughter but also to keep an eye on the investment that had been made on her behalf. And among the visitors in the years that followed began to emerge James's military friends, like the Davis's, then living in England, and the Blackwells, and Major and Mrs de Gale, who too had settled in Natal. Even if to some arrivals the decor of the house seemed incongruously Eastern, to the old India hands it was filled with memories of their former world.

Closer scrutiny reveals patterns of arrival and departure, like over the festivities of Christmas and New Year, and of others whose timing could, with corroboration, be attached to birthdays or anniversaries, or even crises in the lives of the visitors or hosts on the farm. Unrecorded are the regular social occasions, like tennis and croquet games, and lunches and dinners, and dressing up in the evenings, and playing Pelmanism and backgammon and charades.



An extended version of the early house at Hazara, as seen from the lower lawn, c.1938

Always, just offstage, the rituals of cane farming would be maintaining their momentum: the teams of women hoeing the weeds; the mechanic and his staff repairing the tractors and implements; and the gangs of cutters slashing at the cane with their pangas, and loading the stalks onto cocopans, or onto trailers that were hauled by tractors along the dirt roads that threaded through the cane fields to the mill. On the side, not linked to the enterprise that powered the farm but integral to its world, grooms were curry-combing horses, and Mia's small herd of Jerseys and Guernseys were scrunching Kikuyu grass and providing in that corner of Africa an illusion of rural England. And if anyone took the trouble to listen, intermittently through the night the distant sound of the mill hooter could be heard in the darkness.

Over the years, regular visitors were Jean and Robert Leycester whose addresses in the visitors' book formed a paper chase across the globe: England, Ireland, British Columbia, Rhodesia, South Africa. Moneyed and leisured, she febrile and garrulous, he wheezy-chested and taciturn, they drifted. Yet if there was something linking their residences it was horticulture, for wherever he chose to tarry Robert conjured a garden, and on his trips to Ennismore, his family's seat in Ireland, in that *laissez-faire* era took with him African seeds to propagate in the balminess of the Lee estuary. And so, as from their headland his parents watched the ships of the Cork Steam Packet Company plying upstream and downstream, they did so across an Eden that reflected the odyssey of their green-fingered son.

Among James and Mia's local friends was Henry Jonas, reputedly a remittance man, and his Irish wife Kitty who lived in an isolated house that faced northwards across broken country to the Tugela River and Zululand. Decades earlier the area had been a hotbed in the Bhambatha Rebellion, when sections of the Zulu people had risen up against the colonial authorities and been mercilessly crushed. As a young man fresh out from England, Henry had found work with the Doornkop Sugar Company as a muleteer, the tough and compliant mules being much in demand to scarify slopes that were too steep for tractors. Fragments from local memory have him as slight and oriental-looking and sporting a goatee, and Kitty small and plump. Remembered too is that the house

had bats and a thunder-box lavatory when other farms had long installed water closets. Yet despite their isolation, the Jonases lived comfortably, with silver cutlery, liquor aplenty, and funds enough for Henry to make lengthy trips to Japan to visit relatives.

Regularly, when his remittance arrived, he and Kitty drove to the bank in Stanger, afterwards making a beeline for the Victoria Hotel for a bender. Late one night, being oblivious that heavy rains had fallen inland, they headed home as usual, their headlights sweeping across the cane stalks. Some miles from town the road branched right towards Doringkop and their Bulwer Farm, and as always the Jonases took it, descending into a valley where the normally composed Nonoti River was somersaulting across the low-level bridge. Blindly, into the maelstrom Henry accelerated, and the car was swept away. The following morning, on a sandbank strewn with debris, he and Kitty were found, bedraggled but unscathed. But so cosy was the settler world that a solicitous policeman dismissed even the possibility of inebriation, seeing only misadventure, and in his appraisal of what had happened provided the district with much to titter about, and to whisper down the party line.

Although the Jonases lived only half an hour's drive from Hazara, the visitors' book records Henry once staying for a week, and Kitty staying over Christmas and New Year, both occasions suggesting circumstances out of the ordinary, but now lost to the past.

Another friend of the Woollams was Henry Palairret, a retired Royal Navy lieutenant-commander who farmed at Leighton Estate, near the Jonases, on the opposite side of the mill from Hazara. The only son of Lionel Palairret, a Somerset and England cricketer whose lanky elegance Spy caught for *Vanity Fair*, Henry, like James, was a veteran of World War I. Afterwards he had had a further adventure, hurrying British troops by sea to Murmansk to bolster the White Russians against the Bolsheviks in what was later tagged the North Russian Expedition. In 1923, not long before James and Mia's marriage, he had immigrated to Natal and settled in the Doringkop area.

Mia remembered the commander with affection, and particularly his obsession with the Battle of Jutland, in which he had taken part. So overwhelming had been the spectacle of the densely ranked battleships,

streaming grey smoke from their coal-stoked boilers, squaring off in the vast sombreness of the North Sea, that it haunted its veterans for the rest of their lives. Whenever Henry attended dinner parties at Hazara, therefore, Mia had to splice the meal's courses with the battle's stages. If the starter had been eaten by the time the battlecruisers *Indefatigable*, *Queen Mary* and *Invincible* had been sunk, and the main course was underway when the British and German dreadnoughts began shelling each other, all was on track. Once the Germans disengaged, leaving the British nominally victorious but with more ships sunk, pudding and cheese needed to be completed, so over coffee and brandy in the sitting room the hours could stretch away into the night while the strengths and weaknesses of admirals Jellicoe and Beatty were dissected and considered and concluded.

Henry Palairet may have been born a maverick, or his solitary life on his isolated farm, surrounded by servants and far from his fellows, had propelled him into eccentricity. For Mia remembered with James once finding him using water to dismantle an embankment. Even if hydraulic mining was familiar elsewhere, to the Woollams it seemed unorthodox and comical. As a veteran of the Pioneer Corps, James had more conventional views on excavation, but with his nautical bent the commander had plumbed for water, and as a pump chattered so a hose with a sweeping jet liquefied an earthen bank into torrents of mud. Mad, his neighbours may have thought him, but Henry was delighted to have found a method that precluded the use of prosaic picks and shovels.

His oddness had other guises, for the wife of a neighbouring planter remembered him as a misogynistic recluse with a penchant for nudism, and how as a bride she had been warned against approaching his homestead. Perhaps he customarily wandered naked about the house, and even into the garden, with the sighing sugar stalks as bystanders, even if servants were perennially so underfoot.

Other than to parties at the homes of select neighbours, the commander ventured out each month on the Wednesday evening closest to full moon for a conclave at the Masonic lodge in Stanger. Yet if Freemasonry was paramount, it was not his only allegiance, for a former director of a sugar company remembered him as a zealot of the

Dominion Party, a collective of anglophiles which enjoyed some support in Natal, even if it was never a real contender. So unwavering was his jingoism that when late in life he sold his farm but stayed on in his house, he insisted that the purchaser be an Englishman or Scotsman, and only by using a Scotsman as a front was a South African able to buy it.

But notwithstanding his quirkiness, Henry Palairet was dependable for he represented the farmers of his district at the South African Sugar Association. At congresses at Mount Edgecombe, outside Durban, from the 1930s to the 1950s he expounded on the field methods of cane cultivation and endorsed the usefulness of caterpillar tractors in the ploughing of steep inclines. Once, he presented a paper for a fellow farmer who was away in Puerto Rico, when other planters and millers were attending a congress in the British West Indies, attesting to the collaboration between the sugar hemispheres. And beyond matters of sugar, and ahead of his time, he was a pioneer of methane production, constructing on his farm a contrivance that replicated the rumen of a cow, into which was fed cane chaff and water to produce a flammable gas for fuel.

Cherished were his memberships of the MCC and Naval Society, signifying his enduring allegiance to a past life in which his father had graced the cricket pitch and he had ruled the waves. His estate he bequeathed to the Freemasons, who on his death held an auction at which Mia bought Irish linen, and other neighbours a variety of booty, such as crystal decanters and antique chests of drawers, all testimony to the genteel origins from which inexplicably the commander had chosen to escape.

But among the details that Henry Palairet provided for the 1933 Natal *Who's Who* there is seemingly a falsity. If he stated that in addition to the Royal Naval colleges Osborne and Dartmouth he had been educated at Repton, the school claims no record of his attendance. His father Lionel is listed as an old boy, as are two other Palairets, but there is no sign of a Henry. Embedded in this discordance is perhaps the reason why an officer and a gentleman, most certainly with prospects, chose to spend his life like a castaway on an isolated farm in Africa.

Some miles inland from Stanger, on the road to Hazara, is the district of Kearsney where in the late 1800s sugar baron Liege Hulett built a mansion in the cane. With its tower, twenty-two bedrooms, and stacked verandas fronted by delicate columns, Kearsney House, like other baronial homes across the sugar belt, is colonial Natal's equivalent of the plantation houses of the American Deep South. And under the aegis of its patriarch, the Hulett family established for itself a plantocracy, erecting on hills on the sea of green an archipelago of residences with the names of Kirkley Vale, Isivundu, Sprowston, Melrose and Sibton Hill, each in its way imposing but none as grand as Kearsney House. By the time Mia and James arrived at Hazara, Sir Liege had in his dotage moved to Manor House, his colonnaded mansion in Durban, but on his death four years later his body was bought back to Kearsney and buried in the cemetery beside his private chapel at the foot of the avenue leading up to his country seat.

For the son of a Kentish teacher it had been a triumph of will. In response to an advertisement in the *Dover Mail*, he had arrived in 1857 in Durban, then little more than a settlement in the bush, and worked as a chemist's assistant before going it alone. Experimenting first with cotton, indigo, arrowroot and coffee, he had little success. But on noting that tea flourished in the Kearsney area, he established an estate, and in middle-age became prosperous. Forever restless, however, he saw that around him planters were experimenting with sugar cane and so too embraced the grass in which so much hope had been invested, and thus struck gold.

Within a decade his name was synonymous with the region's primary crop, like the Codringtons in Barbados and the Beckfords in Jamaica, and has been ever since.

On their journeys to and from Stanger, Mia and James drove through Liege Hulett's residual fields of tea bushes, with their characteristic emerald blaze. And among the rows they saw working the Indian men and women, themselves either the indentured labourers who had been imported, or their descendants, who together with the now more compliant Zulus were providing the labour on which such fortunes were built.

Before long the Woollams climbed onto the social whirligig, entertaining the later generations of Hulett's and being entertained by them. Most occasions were tennis games and dinner parties, over within the day, but repeatedly in 1932, as Mia's visitors' book attests, Sybil Hulett of Kirkley Vale spent nights at Hazara, as later did a Margery. Just beyond Hazara's boundary, on a ridge with a commanding view of the



*Kearsney House surrounded by tea fields, c.1890, viewed from near where
Kearsney Church would later be built*

surrounding countryside, and of the sea beyond it, Liege's youngest son Edward had a circle of trees planted in anticipation of constructing a homestead within them. Although it was never built, the trees remained, like an arboreal Stonehenge in the cane. And in the early 1960s, when a library depot was established on the Kearsney estate, on the hillside above it brooded the fading presence of Sir Liege's big house, and beside the road that skirted his chapel was the derelict tea factory, by then roofless, its cavernous ribcage of high walls and exposed rafters like the arms of supplicants importuning the sky.

During the following decades, across the surrounding countryside other families arrived and departed, and in their movements provided a barometer reading of the settler reality. Among them was a community of French Mauritians, themselves the inheritors of a sugar culture, who had sought lives as planters beyond the confines of their island. On gateposts, names such as Lavoipierre, De Charmoy, Souchon, De St Pern and Maingard were to their predominantly English neighbours evocative of another world: of panache and Catholicism, with sometimes an exotic tint of duskiness. Later there were Hollanders, like the Van der Pols, whose families had exchanged the austerities of post-war Europe for a place in the sun. And later still there were Belgians, like the Motteaus, refugees from an exploded Congo, whose arrival coincided with Sharpeville and whose story convinced some planters, like the Hindsons of Clifton Estate, on whose low-level bridge a decade earlier the Jonases had been swept away, that it was time to move to Canada.

For all its similarities as a sugar-cane culture, the Caribbean was not a source of immigrants for the Kearsney-Doringkop district. But in the mid-1930s there arrived a young man named Heath Garnett, who, like Henry Jonas, found work with the Doornkop Sugar Company. Although born in England, where late in her pregnancy his mother had been dispatched, Heath was the son of an English manager of an American sugar estate in Cuba, and on that island, which in the heyday of slavery had been stripped of its mahogany, cedar and ebony forests for the cultivation of sugar cane, had spent his formative years. Because his birth had been difficult, he had the stigmata of a spasticity that belied his intelligence and wit. And because as a boy there had been concerns

about his health, he had been fed a diet of bananas and beer to bring on a robustness which never came. But if life for the Garnetts was good in Cuba, there were intimations that it would not always be, for having freed itself from centuries of Spanish domination the island was now in thrall to the United States and there were moves afoot to break those shackles too. Years away, but not yet anticipated, was Fulgencio Batista's collusion with big sugar interests that effectively only delayed the inevitable, so the Garnetts retreated to England and cast about for another sugar world where life would be congenial.

After working for the Doornkop Sugar Company and finding his feet, Heath bought a farm at Thring's Post, inland from Hazara, where the sugar estates give way to the native reserve. The piece of land where he chose to put down roots had in 1906, the year of his birth, like the Jonases' Bulwer Farm been in a vortex of the Bhambatha Rebellion. Hearing from the Umvoti valley the stutter of rifle fire and the chatter of Maxim guns as the colonial irregulars took on the rebels, its previous owners would have feared for their safety, but by the time of Heath's purchase a veneer of calm was holding. At Mayfield, as the farm was named, Heath and his English wife Dorothy joined the settler mosaic of which Hazara was another piece, and soon James and Heath were playing chess together on steamy afternoons, savouring their gins and drawing reflectively on their Cuban cigars.

But of all the planters in the district none played a greater role in the Woollams' lives than their immediate neighbours, the Mansfields of Llys Onen. In 1924, the year of James and Mia's wedding, Charles Bertram Heyworth Mansfield, formerly of the 3rd Cavalry, Indian Army, and his wife Patricia, née De Wilton, settled on another fragment of the former Waterbosch Estate which bordered Hazara to the north.

Nearly twenty years older than James, Charles had been born at Llys Onen in Carmarthenshire in Wales, and educated at Cheltenham, one of the Victorian public schools that provisioned the Empire with officers, where with unerring consistency he had finished bottom of his class. Opting for the military, he had served in the Anglo-Boer War with Lumsden's Horse and the 19th Hussars, before transferring to the Indian Army cavalry and attaining the rank of major. Being so much older than

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his neighbour, a rank higher, and a cavalryman rather than a prosaic pioneer, Charles was unquestionably the senior partner in what turned out to be a long and complex association.

But shortly after the Mansfields and their three young children – Mona, Ronwen and Beric – settled in the Doringkop-Kearsney district, Patricia absconded. Having endured in India the early death of his first wife from a burst appendix, Charles weathered the loss of the mother of his children and before long married the family's governess, Ethel Joliffe, who became the children's surrogate mother. The great-granddaughter of a Bishop of Carlisle in Cumbria, Naffy, as she was known, had been born in Ceylon and arrived at the farm a year after the family's arrival.

Despite their shared link with India, and for all their comradeship and conviviality, James and Charles's friendship had an undertow of competitiveness. In this subtle and unspoken contest Charles had an advantage beyond his age and seniority in rank, because in India he had been a celebrity of sorts. While the reason for his renown may nowadays appear immaterial, even nonsensical, back in that milieu it



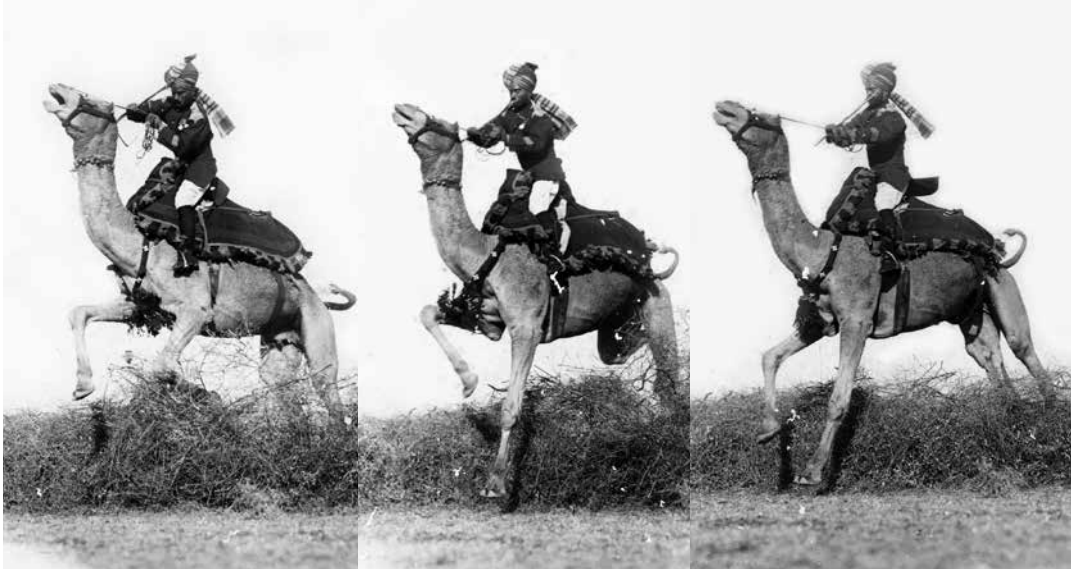
Charles and Ethel 'Naffy' Mansfield of Llys Onen, c.1930

was considered remarkable. That its nature verged on vaudeville was no detraction either, because for those in the know Charles Mansfield had miraculously rewired millennia of instinct by devising a method to teach camels to jump.

Notwithstanding other singularities, like in sweltering conditions being able to forgo water for more than a week, the one-humped dromedary and two-humped Bactrian camel, in common with elephants and rhinos and a handful of other animals, cannot vault even modest obstacles. That the sandy wastes of their traditional habitat have little to jump over may have contributed to their loss of dexterity, but whatever the reason, and it was no doubt of great puzzlement to Charles and the focus of considerable deduction, at some point in his career in India he took it upon himself to give camels buoyancy. The extent of his task is hinted at in a Kurdish proverb: 'It is easier to make a camel jump a ditch than to make a fool listen to reason.' And yet, undeterred, he set to work.

An indication of his success is provided by a sequence of three photographs which Charles submitted to an exhibition of the Durban Camera Club in 1927. In no apparent order, the images portray a rearing and grimacing dromedary, with a be-turbaned sowar perched precariously astride its hump, seeming to hurdle a low row of brush. In one photograph, the camel's hind legs are on the ground behind the barrier and its forelegs raised above a tangle of branches; in another, its hind legs seem on the point of lift-off and its forelegs on the point of landing; and in the third, one of the hind legs appears to be crooked and airborne while, above the sand in the foreground, the forelegs remain as similarly poised as they were in the previous frame. Had they a voice, the images could well be declaring that the major had achieved the impossible, but instead they are mutely ambiguous.

Being an enthusiastic photographer, Charles took a variety of photos in India that provide a glimpse of the world he had inhabited: a snowy vista of the hill station of Mussoorie, its roofs straddling a ridge of the Himalayas; scenes of the Nao Talao, the guesthouse of the Maharajah of Gwalior, where he and his first wife had spent their honeymoon; and several of his now-forgotten spouse on an elephant at Gwalior Fort. Also, there are snapshots in Delhi of the great mosque of Jami Masjid and of



Charles Mansfield's photographs of a cavalryman coercing a camel to jump

the statue at the Kashmiri Gate of General John Nicholson, a hero of the Raj, who had been mortally wounded leading the victorious assault on the mutineers. Inevitably, there are views of the Taj Mahal and the fort at Agra.

Other images reveal what was then the Mansfields' new African reality: the house at Llys Onen with its jerry-built pergola and rudimentary garden; Charles standing among wattle trees; the family, playing games or picnicking or at the races. One portrait is of the errant Patricia, looking severe, prior to her elopement to the Seychelles with her airline-pilot lover.

Yet others bear witness to the closed world of Indian Army men, and how their shared experiences in India had been replicated in Africa. Dated 1911, in India, one image shows four men, mounted on horses and with polo sticks in hand, their names listed as Blood, Lane, De Gale and Hudson. Another shows the De Gales at a swimming pool: a child in a pith helmet, Mrs de Gale in a white dress, and the remaining family members and their European nanny in swimming costumes. They must

be the same De Gales who in the mid-1930s were regular visitors to Hazara, as no doubt they were to neighbouring Llys Onen, and who wrote in Mia's visitors' book that they were living in Kloof, outside Durban.

Most strongly, the association between the Mansfields and Woollams is evident in two particular photographs. The first, taken on New Year's Eve 1931, is of a group on the veranda at Llys Onen. Standing beneath Chinese lanterns are six men, five in dinner jackets and one in a dark suit. Seated in front of them is a row of eight women. Sitting cross-legged on the floor in the foreground are a girl and two boys. Between the boys is a cat.



New Year's Eve group at Llys Onen, including the Mansfields, Woollams and Henry Jonas, 1931

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Among the men at the back is James, with Mia in front of him. He is looking furtively to his left, where Charles, at the other end of the row, appears either to have just joined the tableau as the shutter was tripped or to be leaning forward to address Naffy. Almost midway between them stands Henry Jonas, with Kitty surely one of the women in the centre. Of the children in the front, Ronwen has Beric beside her. Whether by design, or chance, everyone appears to be looking in a different direction.

New Year being at the height of summer in Natal, it was probably sweltering, and a number of faces are sheened with perspiration. Some of the men, James and Charles among them, have the characteristic two-tone face, pale above and ruddy below, that is a hallmark of fair-skinned people who wear hats in the sun. If it was on the cusp of midnight or thereabouts some merriment would surely have been evident, but it is a sober-looking group, suggesting that it was taken early in the evening, before the children went to bed.

The second photograph, undated but with many of the same faces, was taken in daytime on the lawn off the same veranda. Once again



Daytime group at Llys Onen, including the Mansfields, Woollams and Henry Palairret, c.1931

the Mansfields and Woollams are closely aligned, the men in jackets and ties and the women looking summery but formal. In a sleeveless dress in the centre sits Naffy, flanked by Mia, who is wearing a necklace of white beads. With them is an elderly woman whose resemblance to the dumpy major makes her probably his mother, out on a visit from Wales. Sitting cross-legged in their customary position in the foreground are the Mansfield children, Ronwen, Beric and Mona, all bare-footed and with their knees exposed.

In the back row with James and Charles, but dressed most formally of all in a cream jacket and black bow tie, stands an elderly man with white hair and a handsome, angular face, looking directly at the camera. Because no caption has survived, he would inevitably have become one of the shadowy presences who in old photographs fill the gaps between identifiable faces, but both the planter's wife and the retired sugar-company director, who back then were children, are adamant that he is Henry Palairet.

Not long after Mia and James settled on the farm, Mia fell pregnant, and with fortitude and great expectations bore her pregnancy through the heat and humidity of their first Christmas as a married couple. On receiving a letter with the news, the Woollams in Chester were jubilant, and with their emotional investment in their daughter and her future the Keith-Frasers at Hillcrest too eagerly awaited the arrival of their first grandchild. Had the visitors' book begun several years earlier it would have contained evidence of a mother's visits to the farm to assist her daughter with the rite of passage she was about to undergo.

In March 1925, Mia gave birth to a daughter whom she and James named Barbara. But no sooner had the rejoicing begun to subside than concern arose about her condition, for she was wan and peevish. Eventually released to Hazara, Barbara was soon, in the arms of her mother, being driven back along the dirt road to Stanger and then along the bigger road which unravelled itself southwards down the coast to Durban, and admitted to a nursing home where doctors puzzled over her condition. Yet whatever their interventions, all were in vain, for several days short of her fourth month, Barbara Woollam died.

Grief-stricken but buttressed by family and friends, Mia and James returned to the farm and resumed their routine, yet the cloud of mourning refused to clear. And so, encouraged by others to have another child to put the tragedy behind them, Mia again fell pregnant, and just over a year after their daughter's death gave birth to a son whom they named David. Again there was rejoicing, and thanks for a safe arrival, and for the

fact that he appeared to be more robust than his sister had been. But no sooner had he lived for several months than he too began to ail. Once again, Mia and James drove from Hazara to Durban to consult general practitioners and specialists, but once again it was in vain, for in Phemula Nursing Home on the Esplanade, the crescent of palms that skirts the harbour, with its view of the sails of yachts and funnels of liners, aged seven months, David Woollam died.

Reeling at their second tragedy, Mia and James retreated to the refuge of the farm, wracked by what the cause could be and which of them was to blame. About the rambling bungalow with its eclectic furnishings, and its mission to impose on an alien landscape a template of civilised living, there began to circulate rumours of ill omen, for why else, would the cane cutters and gardeners and grooms have asked, are a healthy man and a healthy woman unable to produce children who live? And if the humblest among them in their cottages could produce a child each year, why in the luxury of their big house on the hill could the *nkosana* and *nkosazana* not do likewise? To such a question, surely, there could only be a sinister answer.

In traditional Zulu society, with its emphasis on the collective, whether of family, clan or tribe, to be childless is to be particularly blighted. Zulu customary law even prescribes that a barren bride can be returned to her parents, like a defective purchase, and all or part of her *lobola* repaid. In the patriarchal tribal structure a woman's task is to bear children and to care for the home under the authority of her husband. Within such a value system, fertility is so closely related to womanhood that childlessness reduces its sufferer's status and demeans her womanliness. All these factors played a role in the workers' perception of the woman with her tailored dresses and her parasol who on two occasions already had had her midriff swell, to no avail. Why, the question was asked in the compound and cottages, did the *nkosana* not send his wife back to her parents and replace her with another? And somewhere deep in his consciousness James must have been asking himself the same question, for with each tragedy Mia was retreating further into herself and the intimacy between them was diminishing.

Benumbed, James and Mia refrained from trying to have another child. Attempting to pick up the pieces of their lives, they resumed their social routine with its roundabout of visitors, and its tennis and dinner parties, and James's games of chess against fellow planters in his snug in the afternoons. And once Mia had recovered from each birth they resumed their morning rides, to stamp again their imprint on the land and to show that even if they had not, so far, been blessed with children, they were still the owners of their estate and therefore people of consequence.

On the New Year's Eve that the tableau was photographed on the Mansfields' veranda, Mia had already lost Barbara and David and was deciding with James whether or not to try yet again to have a child. Being New Year, a time for looking ahead and articulating wishes, she was surely hoping that soon, by some miracle, they would be gifted with the status of parenthood that so far had eluded them. That is why in the photograph she looks so pensive.

Overseas travel was a feature of Mia's Hazara years, and as if to escape the lingering pall of Barbara's and David's deaths she decided to get away. Leaving James on the farm, in Durban on New Year's Day 1928, with a now unknown companion, she boarded the *Euripides*, a steamship travelling from Sydney to Southampton, with a stopover in Tenerife. As the liner plied northwards, riding the swell, she was too fragile for quoits or tennis, or to contemplate a shipboard romance. But she found solace in natter, whether on deck or at mealtimes while she picked at her Rangoon curry and the ship's orchestra played a selection from Wagner.

At Aintree, Mia watched the Grand National in what turned out to be an historic race. The conditions were murky and the going very heavy, and, after a pile-up at an early jump, of the forty-two starters only two horses finished: Billy Barton, whose jockey had fallen off and remounted; and rank outsider Tipperary Tim, which had kept on its feet to win. Next she travelled to Switzerland, staying at the Grand Hotel in Engelberg, and thence to Vienna to see at the Spanish Riding School the Lipizzaners prancing gracefully beneath the chandeliers. With her thoughts cleared and her spirits lifted, she then headed back to Hazara and the steady, slow, agrarian rhythm of life on the farm.

Nearly a decade after Barbara's birth, when Mia was in her mid-thirties and even her reduced chances of ever becoming a mother were dissipating, and when everyone with whom the Woollams had contact had come to regard them as a childless couple, yet again she fell pregnant. All the parental and sisterly support that she had enjoyed in her previous confinements were galvanised once more, but with greater consideration given what had happened, and with an inevitable sense of apprehension. And in March 1934, Mia was again in a Durban hospital where she gave birth to a son, who was stillborn, yet whom they named Francis as if willing him to live.

With fate as immutable as ever, he joined his two siblings among the Natal mahoganies and palms on a knoll in Durban's Stellawood Cemetery, with its view down the hillside to the harbour, and with the Indian Ocean glittering on the horizon. On the marble slab embedded in the cropped and wiry grass, and sprinkled with the red sand that is such a feature of that sub-tropical littoral, the grieving parents had an epitaph inscribed: *'Who plucked these flowers? I, said the Master, and the Gardener held his peace. To the Glory of God and the memory of the children of James and Mia Woollam'*.

Once again there was bereavement, and anger at the unfairness of it all. But having had such support from family and friends, and with the staff on the farm having seen another pregnancy come to nothing, Mia felt a sense of shame that yet again she had let everyone down. And about the house that had already endured whisperings there developed a pall of barrenness that remained unacknowledged but was very much present.

It is difficult to gauge the impact of these successive tragedies, but whatever hopes James and Mia may have had for their marriage, and which thrice already had been put to the test, began to ebb, and with them the attraction that had bonded a Natal woman to her English husband, and him to her. James showed little enthusiasm for conventional religion and was by nature irreverent and sceptical, but faced by these calamities Mia sought spiritual solace, as in its deference to God the Master the tombstone's inscription attests. Part of the rift that was forming between them was the lingering question of who was to blame, for it was said later that Mia had submitted herself for tests and was found in all respects

to be fit for motherhood, but that James had refused to take the matter further.

Of the children's death certificates, only David's has survived, and records the cause as splenic anaemia, with a codicil that the diagnosis had been confirmed by scientific tests. At the time, the *British Medical Journal* noted that the disease, known also as Von Jaksch's anaemia, occurs in the first three years of life, and that among its symptoms is the insidious debilitation of the child, who takes on a pale-lemon pallor. Also, the spleen, tasked with filtering and refreshing the blood, becomes errant and enlarged. The liver too expands, and generally there is a mild but prolonged fever. While the condition was chronic, medical expertise professed that many afflicted children could survive for months or even years, although the chance of death from pneumonia remained high.

Back then, treatment involved good nutrition and doses of arsenic and iron, but because such remedies were generally unsuccessful it was recommended that in advanced cases the spleen be excised, particularly as it was considered inessential. To reduce the size of the organ and so help facilitate its removal, before surgery a massive dose of X-rays was prescribed, as were blood transfusions to offset the anaemia. After the spleen's excision, it was recommended that the residual blood be squeezed from it and infused back into the patient via the jugular vein. Because the operation was so traumatic, particular care was demanded of the clamping, to minimise the loss of blood. If these preliminary preparations were carried out adequately, so the instructions ran, post-operative shock could be reduced significantly.

Why David did not have a splenectomy can only be surmised. Perhaps the procedure was then only performed by surgeons in the metropolitan first-world and not on the medical periphery. Or perhaps the option was discussed with James and Mia but they declined, the thought of their pale little boy being cut open so monstrously being too much for them.

Although the cause of the deaths of the Woollam children was never conclusively determined, with hindsight the symptoms of pallor, jaundice and severe swelling suggest the Rh factor. Assuming the death certificate's veracity, and that Barbara and Francis were similarly afflicted, it must be deduced that Mia and James had a blood incompatibility which

medical science had yet to determine. For, more than a decade after the deaths of Barbara and David Woollam, and five years after the still-birth of Francis Woollam, in experiments with rhesus monkeys and rabbits two American doctors first described the Rh factor in humans. And seven years later, another doctor determined that the babies of affected mothers could at birth be saved by a transfusion of Rh negative blood, and so broached the possibility of a cure. And twenty years later still a vaccine entered the market that could prevent the anaemia that snuffs out certain lives before they have really begun, and in an instant the Rh factor lost its malevolence and receded into history. So neither James nor Mia was to blame, or both of them were.

Throughout these protracted tragedies the Mansfields remained stalwart friends, offering solace and support from across the miles that separated Llys Onen from Hazara. Following each death there were commiserative visits, and, once the Woollams had regained their equilibrium, gradual attempts to ease them back into the small world of social gatherings and solidarity of which they were a part.

But beneath the surface of the enduring friendship, like a tremor agitating through a stratum of rock, the comradely rivalry that from the outset had characterised James and Charles's relationship persisted. As much as it was the sharp-witted and acquisitive James's attempt to impress upon his more senior colleague their equality as sugar planters, and Charles's desire to retain his seniority in the military hierarchy of which they had once both been members, one of the pivots around which their one-upmanship revolved was the matter of artificial light.

At a time when candles and oil lamps were making way for electricity, both the Woollams and Mansfields had acquired lighting plants. Each diesel-powered generator was housed in an outbuilding where, at sunset, after being cranked, it thundered into life, its current coursing along lines through the darkening garden to the main house, which was soon aflame with a buttery glow. On hot summer nights the haze of light was animated by a candyfloss of swirling insects, while on the lawn and in the flowerbeds lurked frogs and snakes, the next successive links in the predatory chain. Each homestead with its buzzing halo seemed also to

be a beacon that across the sugar-cane fields swathed in darkness was declaring that progress had not circumvented that corner of Africa.

To provide lights for a cluster of buildings a generator needn't be large, but in their competitiveness both James and Charles purchased engines with sufficient strength to illuminate a village. One night, while thundering away in the confines of its shed, either the Woollams' Lister or the Mansfields' Armstrong Siddeley, as if infuriated by its master's conceit and maddened by the monotony of its task, shook itself free of its mountings and attempted to escape through the masonry, where it became embedded. In an instant, its settlement was plunged into darkness, much to the anger of its owner and the stifled mirth of his neighbour. As to whose generator had rebelled became the prerogative of the story's teller.

Because, back then, light was accompanied by noise, the evening's rituals were performed to a distant rumble through the dark shrubbery. Only at bedtime, when James followed his torch beam to the shed, or later flicked a switch in the hallway, did a quietness well up in which the night sounds were audible again. Years later still, the farm was linked to the national power grid, and at Hazara the engine room with its Lister and backup Petter, both coloured British racing green, assumed a sepulchral silence.

The electric light seemed symbolic for it arrived not long after Francis's still-birth, when Mia and James realised that they would never have a child of their own and so had begun to look for a substitute. Once one had been found, and Mia had set off for England to take delivery of the teenage girl, as a surprise for their return James had the first light-engine installed, as if to declare that their dark age had passed and enlightenment was entering their life as a family.

In the adoption transaction, the need of a couple on a sugar farm in Natal navigated the matrix of the colonial diaspora until it came to the attention of the headmistress of a girls' school in England, who appeared to have the answer. For among Miss Joan Wilmington Byrne's charges at Burwood Park in Walton-on-Thames was the thirteen-year-old daughter of a British rubber planter in Malaya and his Maltese wife whose marriage had collapsed and whose future was uncertain. Like other children of Empire, the girl had been staying in England with her grandparents while she was being educated. That she was at Burwood Park at all was because her aunt taught eurhythmics there and had secured for her a place. Similarly cast adrift was her brother David, four years her senior, who had completed his schooling in Hertfordshire and was now preparing to join the British Army.

What confirmed to the headmistress that Anne Martin was the ideal candidate was that during a meal in the dining room she had asked the essentially parentless pupil what she would most like to do with her life, and with disarming spiritedness the girl had replied: 'To go to Africa



Anne at Burwood Park school, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey, England, c.1934

to study birds.’ Quite where the teenager, who had been born in the Federated Malay States, and spent her childhood successively there and in Malta and England, had got the notion of ornithology in Africa is unclear, although she later recalled that it was probably because she had been reading books on birds and had come to realise that many of the most alluring were to be found on that continent.

And so the connection was made. The parents, one in Malaya and the other in London, somewhat coldly and matter-of-factly, but under the guise of seeking what was best for their daughter, gave her up for a new life in Africa with a man and woman who were seeking to fill a void in their lives. What followed next were declarations and undertakings signed in a lawyer’s chambers in London’s Chancery Lane before Anne Sheila Martin became Anne Sheila Woollam and was handed over by her biological mother Edwarda to her adoptive mother Mia.

There is an account of the handover. It was in mid-1935 in London and it was raining. They met, reputedly at Fortnum’s, where they had tea and cakes, the girl and the two women who had transacted over

her future. The atmosphere was restrained: the women spoke tentatively about each other, and what lay ahead. Then her mother kissed her on the cheek and left.

Within minutes, the girl with her new mother realised that her former mother had forgotten her umbrella, so the newly minted Anne Woollam ran through the shop, past the displays of Darjeeling and Assam and Nilgiri, and into the street. The rain had stopped, and some distance up Piccadilly she could see a figure receding. 'Mother, mother,' she cried, scampering through the throng. The woman stopped and turned. The girl presented the umbrella and the woman accepted it, leaning forward and kissing her daughter. And then she was gone forever.

Embarking at Southampton, the new mother and daughter sailed down the Atlantic in a mail ship, rounded the Cape of Good Hope, headed up the east coast to Durban, and thence to the farm on the gentle escarpment with its view of the sea. As the *SS City of Hong Kong* crossed the Equator a photograph was taken of thirteen-year-old Anne as a participant in the fancy-dress competition that traditionally accompanied the switching of hemispheres. Dressed as a Dutch girl, with clogs and a white cloth cap, in the withering heat she looks small and sad.



Anne (back, left) aboard SS City of Hong Kong, en route to Durban, 1935

What could Anne have made of her new parents: the tall and plainly handsome mother who with great fortitude was seeking to rise above the tragedy that had befallen her, and the twinkle-eyed ex-soldier father who masked himself with his charm and wit? But if her arrival in that blighted household was intended to herald a reconciliation, it failed, for she later remembered the recriminations and tears. And even if the tension was underpinned by James and Mia's childlessness, it spoke also of other incompatibilities, for they slept in separate bedrooms and, before long, so it was surmised, reached an accommodation that he could discreetly seek gratification in other women.

But lest it seem all tooth and claw, Anne had many memories that spoke also of a normal and predominately happy home. Because the Woollams were gregarious, there were the dinner parties and tennis parties, at Hazara and on neighbouring farms; and even within the tighter circle of their own domesticity there were moments of jollity that were fondly recalled. Like when James, held by his legs, was lowered headfirst into a pit latrine to rescue a kitten, and in their mirth Mia and Anne nearly let go of him. And when James needed to effect an electrical repair beneath the house, and Anne, poised with a candle above the trapdoor, dropped hot wax onto his head. And when Anne, having returned from boarding school for the holidays, was asked by James and several of his drinking pals what she was learning in history, and she replied 'The Papal Bull', and they erupted in laughter.

Mia and James maintained the routine of their morning rides, and having ridden in England Anne joined them, and the three on sleek horses weaved their way along the cane breaks, or up and down the steep tracks that divided the fields from the capillaries of riverine forest. To the end of both women's lives the memories of those rides held a special place, together with the clean smells of the earth and of horse sweat, and the sightings of particular birds.

Although still on brick piers, the house had by then evolved to the extended corrugated-iron version just prior to its replacement by brick, with white-painted walls and a reddish roof, and a veranda with railings, and broad steps leading down to an expansive lawn which ended with sugar fields that tumbled away into the hazy distance. Several years

after Anne's arrival, and shortly before World War II, as in the erasure of a palimpsest the structure she had come to accept as her home was subsumed by its successor that in its greater solidity spoke of an increased investment in the farm, even if the bricks had been made locally and were inadequately fired, and crumbled to the touch. This assertion of permanence was aided by its size, for the house was now long-limbed and commodious, with multiple reception rooms and bedrooms and bathrooms, and as an entity fanned out between a straggle of palms which like watchtowers loomed over it.

In a crook of the bungalow's imprint was a deep veranda which in summer doubled as a dining room for lunches, but which at dusk, when the servants hooked large wooden portcullises into its archways, turned inwards again. Issuing from that dappled space towards the sitting room was a dark passage, off which was the dining room with James's Chinese furniture, and opposite it a wine cellar whose tiers of bottles in fretted wooden racks, stretching from wall to wall and floor to ceiling, and painted a gleaming white, was to visitors a grotto of wonderment.



First brick house at Hazara, c.1938

As Anne eventually noticed, the more James and Mia's marriage unravelled so each of them claimed additional space of their own, respective bedrooms and bathrooms and dressing rooms that abutted each other but were essentially apart. On the house's northern side, in the direction towards Doringkop, where the land slid into the forested gully, and the stream that provided the homestead with water threaded through the undergrowth and on into the valley of the sugar mill, there was a loggia contained by bricked balusters and balustrade that had the feel of battlements. And it was there each evening that Mia and James had their sundowners as they listened to the radio news and the classical music that followed it, while around them the cane fields dissolved into darkness, scattered loosely with the twinkling lights of settlement. If at the sound of a gong they moved indoors for supper, in their formal clothes sitting opposite each other across the table as liveried servants glided about reverentially with the food and drink, and if afterwards they retired to the sitting room for coffee and to listen to more music or to read, as a barometer of intimacy it was a choreographed charade. For, when it came time for bed they went their separate ways, she to a spacious room overlooking the valley and he to a smaller one beside it, outside which towered several palms whose fronds scratched and sighed in the night breeze. But if the proximity of their suites suggested normality, as it would have to all but their closest friends, this was a subterfuge for they had their own bathrooms and like fellow tenants occupied different worlds.

As if as a counterweight to the valley side of the bungalow, a wing struck back towards the upper slope of the knoll, and along it were the kitchen and laundry and a room with a milk separator. Alongside them but separate was James's snug and study, off which was a shower and a lavatory that in their exclusiveness was a further declaration of self-containment. There, in the gloom of leather chairs and sepia prints and ivory elephants, where the harsh light from outside was caught by the burnished bronze of the shell-case spittoons and reflected in bursts like miniature heliographs, each day he whiled away hours reading and listening to the radio. In a vista that to him was opaque with familiarity, through the window stretched another lawn, long and level like a bowling

green, at the end of which stood a singular gum tree with its white trunk. And beyond it, protectively, like sentinels, stood a belt of mahoganies and figs, behind which, down the slope, was the dam where at dusk in summer the frogs struck up their chorus.

To a young girl just out from England the house seemed light and airy and spacious, and as she had left Malaya before her second birthday, and so had no clear memory of that tropical world, Anne marvelled at the effusiveness of the park-like garden, with its palms and flame trees, and myrtles and magnolias, as well as its floral borders which were electric with colour. And more than she could ever have imagined at Burwood Park, she was mesmerised by the birds, as in the dense foliage starlings and louries and hoopoes and flycatchers bobbed and fluttered as if vying for her attention.

Because her arrival coincided with the onset of summer, she soon experienced the humidity and the heat and the daily cycle of steaming sun in the mornings and explosive thunderstorms in the afternoons. If there had been a purgation, the nights were cooler, with a medley of unfamiliar sounds thrusting in through the open windows: not only the frogs, but the shrilling of crickets, the metallic sonar of fruit bats, and the plaintive wailing of bushbabies in the forest. And even if there were occasions, because of the strangeness of things, or the marital strife, when she felt like returning to England, generally she was content.

As it was felt that there was no suitable school in the district, she was packed off as a boarder to Wykeham, Mia's alma mater, a hundred miles away in Pietermaritzburg. There she met another breed of girl, different from her former classmates in England, with their flatter vowels and their settler vigour. Dressed in navy-blue uniforms with broad-brimmed straw hats, she and her new colleagues were on occasions allowed into the centre of the province's capital, where in the lanes and shops she found many echoes of her British former world. But not long after her arrival at Wykeham there was a to-do about her Catholicism, which was a legacy of her years in Malta with her mother's family, and which she readily renounced, moving instead as an Anglican to St Anne's Diocesan College at Hilton, on the plateau above the city, where in time she completed her schooling.



*Anne (right) and fellow Wykeham girls in
Pietermaritzburg, c. 1936*

During the holidays Anne returned to Hazara and gradually integrated herself into the rituals of the farm. She became used to the formality at meals and to dressing up in the evenings. After breakfast each morning she rode with her parents along the contour roads or through the smaller breaks that divided the cane fields, and on her return, at an easel on the veranda, sketched what still seemed to her then to be exotic birds. She also spent hours alone in the forest, in the wooded gully north of the homestead, lying back on a mattress of humus beside the stream and scanning the leafy canopy high above her, recording her sightings in a copy of Leonard Gill's *A First Guide to South African Birds* which on her arrival she had been given as a welcoming present. And with time

she came to know all the friends and neighbours, and the visitors from Durban and Pietermaritzburg, and from overseas, whose comings and goings were their social life.

There were regular trips to Stanger for provisions and less frequent forays to Durban for everything that couldn't be found in a country town. To Stanger they drove themselves, but when fortnightly they pushed on to the metropolis it was with a Zulu chauffeur named Meshack, who dropped them off in the city centre and sat out the hours until late in the afternoon when he drove them home again.

In the city, Mia and James usually went their different ways, she visiting her dressmaker, or having tea with a friend in one of the large department stores, where she scoured the shelves of the grocery section for imported jams and condiments and chocolates, while he had a fitting with his tailor, or deliberated with lawyers, or busied himself with some farm-related matter. To this template Anne appended herself, at first accompanying Mia and then setting out on her own, replacing in her mind the idea of London as the centre of everything with this new city with its mix of peoples and its humidity. Traditionally, they met for lunch at the Royal Hotel, where James and Mia had first encountered each other at a dance years earlier, and where they left parcels with the porter to be collected afterwards. And while they ate, they unconsciously enacted a ritual, for around them were other farmers and businesspeople whom they knew, and in their greetings and exchanges there was an assertion of who they were, and what they stood for, that reinforced their sense of self.

Sometimes they split up for the day, with Mia and Anne using the Royal Hotel or the Marine Hotel for lunch while not far away along the Esplanade James replenished himself in the masculine preserve of the Durban Club, with its colonnaded reception rooms and mullioned windows, and its gleaming white-tiled cloakroom, and its view of the harbour. But if it was sunny there among his companions, and he was suitably kowtowed to by the Indian waiters with their crisp tunics and their turbans, and if the curry was good, and the gin induced a sense of well-being, there were shadows too, for nearby was the nursing home where David and probably Barbara had lost their struggles to live.

Midway through the afternoon, after their purchases had been bundled into the Packard, they set off on the fifty-mile journey homewards. While Meshack navigated the narrow road that weaved northwards out of Durban and across the Umgeni River, where years earlier Mia's father Colin had sought to build his electric tramway, and on through the fields and past villages and sugar mills, replete after their lunch Mia and James would doze in the back seat as the sun slipped into the hinterland and the first shadows of twilight hardened the cane tips into arrowheads. At Stanger they branched inland, and ascended slowly, past the turn-off to Doringkop, and the settlement at Kearsney, and on to Hazara, where the servants had already begun preparing the evening meal. Later, once they had had their rejuvenating baths and dressed in their evening clothes, the habitual ritual of sundowners and supper played itself out before they moved through to the sitting room for coffee and to listen to music on the gramophone.

Even if the hovering presence of servants had startled Anne at first, before long she got used to them. The housework that had been part of her English years evaporated, for among the two men and a woman in their livery there was always somebody to do even the slightest chore. Outside in the garden there were, seemingly endlessly, more men mowing the lawn and women weeding the flowerbeds or sweeping up windfalls of leaves. And beyond the garden, in the workshop and stables, were yet more staff whose responsibility it was to keep the tractors running or the cows milked or the horses groomed. Beyond them too, as though in the spread of concentric ripples, there were the cutters and the weeding gangs. For, even if this mesh of activity was in the beginning incomprehensible to Anne, she soon learnt that it was all part of a carefully orchestrated system to sustain a life of comfort.

As the working day ended so scores of men and women workers melted into their cottages in the valley, or the compound alongside them where the migrant cane-cutters were billeted, except for the month each year when the men from Pondoland in the Transkei returned home to the women and children whom they were supporting. If James and Mia thought nothing of this social dislocation, Anne too soon saw it merely as a feature of life on such farms, where men seemed happy enough as they

sang while slashing the cane stalks with their pangas, and where in the evenings the steady thudding of tom-toms set up a charmingly African riposte to their very European dinner. And if afterwards, while they were playing Pelmanism or bridge, the thudding became too intrusive, they would move to the gramophone in the oriental cabinet and drown it with the huge crashing waves of Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung*.

It was during this process of assimilation that Anne got to know the Mansfield children – Mona, Ronwen and Beric – who had all been born in India and who lived only several miles away along a dirt road through the cane. The girls too were boarders, at St Mary’s Diocesan School in Kloof, outside Durban, and Beric was at Michaelhouse, at Balgowan in the midlands. Yet like all the planters’ children who spent much of their youth away at boarding school, they would return for the holidays to the sugar fields. There, once settled again in that familiar world, being teenagers they would find the isolation galling and look for companionship to their contemporaries on other farms.

Having both been excised from the larger Waterbosch estate, Hazara and Llys Onen had a similar topography of rolling hills divided by watercourses and gullies of indigenous bush. Their soil was similar too, being dark and loamy and fecund. But whereas Hazara had merely a network of streams, Llys Onen had the Nonoti River, which weaved across the farm’s northern reaches and tumbled over a waterfall before threading its way past the sugar mill and on through the hills to the sea. And in the years before either homestead had a swimming pool, Anne would ride across to the Mansfields and spend the day swimming with them in the Nonoti. It was a sylvan setting: a river of clear water bearing swiftly in a wide arc through a tunnel of trees, dipping and eddying over a bed of gravel and dark stones, and then emerging into sunlight where a low weir had thrown back a deep and pellucid pool. Downriver, but out of sight, was the waterfall, and the sound of its tumbling rush added an effervescence to the sense of beauty and tranquillity.

There is a photograph of one of these occasions, of laughing teenagers sitting along a makeshift diving board anchored by a rock-filled drum. Young and carefree, they are in swimming costumes and Beric is sitting on the board beside Anne, with Mona afloat in a tube at his feet, and Ronwen standing in the water beside them. With them are three other bathers, a girl of their age and a younger boy and girl, the children of an employee of the Doornkop Sugar Company, all laughing too. For the participants they were halcyon days, never to be forgotten.

Also apparent is how the Mansfield children had taken after their respective parents, both Mona and Ronwen having a blend of the Mansfield and De Wilton genes, with the dumpiness of the major elongated by the angularity of their now absent mother. But it was in Beric that the amalgam was happiest, for he was tall and striking like a dreamy Rupert Brooke. Other photographs confirm how much their father and stepmother doted on them, with the girls always framing Beric, in whom the most had been invested.



Anne (centre back), the Mansfield children and friends bathing in the Nonoti River, Llys Onen, c.1937



Mona, Beric and Ronwen Mansfield, c.1938

In the image of the bathers it is remarkable to think of the course that Anne Woollam's life had already taken: Malaya, Malta, England and South Africa, to that beautiful glade in the sub-tropical forest some thirteen miles inland from the Indian Ocean. It was an itinerary of Empire, and if her young life had been enriched by the variety of her odyssey it had also been infused with an enduring sense of rootlessness, for she had repeatedly been uprooted, and been passed from parents to grandparents and then on to new parents, each a world away from the others.

So if Mia had been moulded on various farms in Natal and at school in the provincial capital, and James had been forged in England and France and Mesopotamia and India, as a mere teenager Anne was the most imperially wrought of them all, having already had sojourns not only in England and the Far East but also in the Mediterranean world that was her mother's legacy. And even if, wanting her to be exclusively their child and to come to regard Hazara as the only slate on which her story was inscribed, James and Mia discouraged Anne from dwelling on her earlier life, it was too much a part of her to be wished away.

For, although as a young teenager she was not yet familiar with the significance of her fractured origins, irrevocably a foundation had been laid. What Anne did know was that her father was Eric Martin, with whose parents she and her brother had been staying in England, and whom she had seen only fleetingly because he was always far away managing rubber plantations in Malaya. She knew too that her mother was Edwarda Martin, and that she was Maltese, for Anne had stayed with her and her parents near Valletta before moving to England. Further, she had been told that her birthplace was Kuala Lumpur and that her birthday was the third of March. Among these far-flung reference points, one of her few moorages had been her maiden aunt Désirée Martin, the eurhythmics teacher at her old school Burwood Park, but she now was in distant London. Another moorage was her brother David, whose life story had followed the usual pattern of outpost and home, and who was a soldier in the British Army. But in a flourish of legal signatures all that had been cut adrift and she was now with her new parents: Captain and Mrs Woollam.

That would have been the identity of the young girl swimming with her friends in the long, clear pool in the Nonoti River, within earshot of the tumult of the waterfall, several miles from Hazara, on neighbouring Llys Onen. And even if the birthplaces of the three children of the Doornkop mill employee are unknown, that Mona had been born in Secunderabad, Ronwen had been born in Mussoorie, Beric had been born in Quetta, and Anne had been born in Kuala Lumpur, gave that isolated African glade, for the duration of their splashing and their laughter, a cosmopolitan air.

But no sooner were Anne's and the Mansfield siblings' schooldays ending than momentous events were unfolding elsewhere, for when Hitler invaded Poland, and days later Britain and France entered the fray, little would Anne then have understood how perilously her former worlds were poised, or how intricately events had enmeshed her in their tracery: for her biological mother would soon be braced in a bombarded London, as would her beloved aunt; her father interned in Singapore; and her brother in Burma facing the relentless advance of the Japanese.

It was said in the district that to protect him from harm the Mansfields had contrived for Beric to join the British South Africa Police in Southern Rhodesia. Like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the erstwhile Natal Mounted Police, such bodies were in colonies the first line of civil defence, and their members considered too essential to be released for active service. After attesting, Beric moved northwards to Salisbury, for training and deployment in Cecil Rhodes's former fiefdom, patrolling on horseback across the grasslands and mopani bushveld, and in the safety of Southern Africa keeping the peace.

If Charles Mansfield was too old to serve, James Woollam soon found himself in Egypt as a non-combatant with a South African Maintenance Unit. And it was there that he was promoted to major, at last elevating him to the same rank as his neighbour. In the manner of the time, on James's return both men were addressed by their military honorific, partly in deference and partly in jest, and Major Mansfield and Major Woollam acquired an ambiguous status in the little world of farms and clubs that they bestrode.

While life continued among the sugar fields, elsewhere the world was at war. As the cane grew, and the weeding gangs hoed between the rows, and the cutters slashed the stalks, and the *golovans* lugged their loads to the mill, and in the stables the grooms were busy with their currycombs, and in the milking parlour the cowhands were drawing rhythmically on the teats of Mia's Jerseys and Guernseys, so beyond the blue distance huge, ponderous armies were manoeuvring against each other, spilling blood and taking lives.

With a semblance of what was happening being reported in radio broadcasts, and in editions of the *Natal Mercury* which every few days would be collected by car from the post office at Kearsney, or Anne would retrieve on horseback, life at Hazara maintained its customary tempo. Yet despite their geographical detachment, many South Africans, given their links with Britain, were determined to play their part. If their men had gone north to fight, on the home front a sorority of wives and daughters, supported by those fathers and husbands who were too old to bear arms, had mobilised to extend to allied servicemen a home from home. As Mia's visitors' book attests, from mid-1940 onwards a succession of young men spent days or weeks at Hazara. Having by then finished school, Anne was back at home with Mia, two white women on a farm in Africa, with an elderly manager to ensure that the enterprise didn't falter. And if from afar the radio, newspapers and letters gave them a sanitised version of the unfolding cataclysm, so the visits by the naval officers and ratings provided firsthand accounts of what was really happening.

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Over several years, sailors from more than twenty ships undergoing replenishment or repair in Durban harbour made the journey up the coast and into the hills. The names of the vessels are variously evocative, for not only did they commemorate links with heroes and places and battles and plants, but also mythological figures and abstract nouns of a martial kind. The first two sailors were from HMS *Royal Sovereign*, a battleship escorting convoys in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean. Next came a duo from HMS *Colombo*, a light cruiser in the Eastern Fleet, followed by ratings from HMS *Nelson*, another battleship on escort duty, which went on to take part in the Normandy landings and to host two surrenders: that of the Italians in 1943, and, two years later, of the Japanese in Malaya. Next was HMS *Dido*, another light cruiser, which had been damaged in the Mediterranean and had limped to Durban for repairs.



Mia in a Hazara sugar-cane field, c.1940

With the visits on average six weeks apart, so a pageant of His Majesty's ships sailed through the pages of Hazara's visitors' book: *Primula*, *Galatea*, *Ilex*, *Revenge*, *Valiant*, *Ramillies*, *Resolution*, *Catterick*, *Mauritius*, *Quality*, *Raider*, *Rotherham*, *Ceylon*, *Arctic Explorer*, *Gorleston* and *Howe*. Men from certain vessels paid multiple visits, those from *Nelson*, *Ramillies*, *Resolution* and *Howe* staying twice, and those from *Revenge* and *Ilex* staying on three occasions. A destroyer which had been crippled by dive-bombing near-misses in the Mediterranean, *Ilex* had had temporary repairs done in Haifa, Suez, Aden and Mombasa before arriving in Durban for a two-month-long stay, and then proceeding to the United States for a full refurbishment.

At Leighton Estate, in the distance from Hazara, beyond the Doornkop mill, the names *Revenge* and *Valiant* would for Commander Palairret have had a particular resonance, for, like him, they were veterans of the Battle of Jutland.

All the ships had been blooded, or were soon to be. HMS *Valiant* was in Durban because she had been mined by Italians in Alexandria harbour and needed patching. HMS *Resolution* had been badly damaged by a torpedo from a Vichy French submarine off West Africa and, like *Ilex*, was being repaired before proceeding to the United States for a complete refit. And HMS *Catterick* had rescued one hundred and fifty-seven survivors from the SS *Llandaff Castle*, which had been sunk by a U-boat off northern Zululand. Even if most of the ships were to survive the war and be scrapped many years later, or sold on to other navies to have their names changed and to begin new lives, some were doomed. Most dramatic was the fate of HMS *Galatea*, a light cruiser which, like most of the naval vessels docked in Durban, was escorting troop and supply ships on their route around the Cape, for several months later, off Alexandria, she would be hit one night by a torpedo and in pitch darkness sink within minutes. Most of her crew were drowned, including her captain and one of the two young men who had stayed at Hazara and had written in the visitors' book that it had been 'Just like home'.

Photographs recall these calms before the storm: young men in naval uniform mingling on sugar farms with their colonial kin, making semaphores and playing games.

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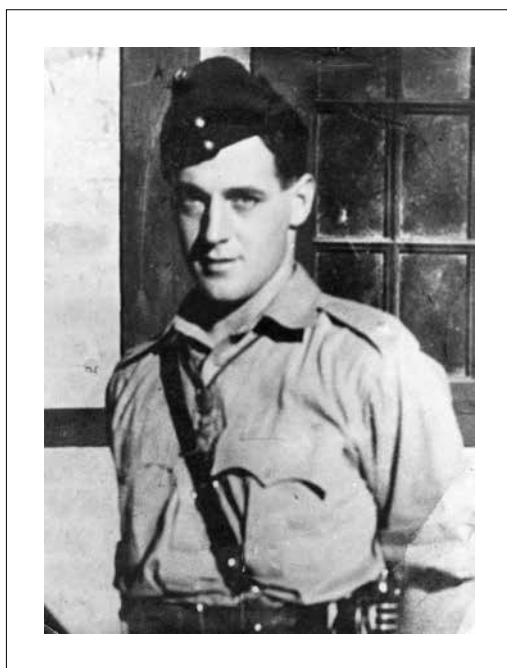
One shows a group watching tennis, although the players are out of the frame. On the left, sitting on a bench, are two men, one a stern-faced young naval officer dressed in a white uniform, with beside him a fellow officer in mufti, holding a racquet between his knees. In the centre sit two women, one in a patterned dress and the other in white, and standing behind them is Anne, also in white, who with one of the women is looking at something a largely obscured boy is doing on the right of the picture. In a wicker chair sits an older woman, formally dressed and wearing a hat, peering over her shoulder at the boy. In the foreground, on the lawn among scattered cushions, two dogs lie sleeping.

For Anne it was a heady time. Being in her late teens and early twenties, and vivacious and attractive, and for whom life in England was still vividly familiar, she now found herself the centre of attention for a succession of English servicemen. But beneath the gaiety and laughter there was anxiety because the young ratings knew that soon they would again be running the gauntlet of enemy seas. As a non-combatant in Egypt, James was probably safe, but Anne's brother David was not.



Royal Navy officers and local women and a boy at a tennis game, Stanger district, 1943

Shortly after the attacks on Pearl Harbor and Hong Kong, the Japanese 15th Army had thrust rampantly through Siam and into the tail of Burma. As an officer in the Second Battalion of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, one of the two garrisons of regular British infantry in the colony, David Martin was among troops on a training exercise in the north-east of the country, near the Chinese border, which were hurriedly deployed southwards. Seasoned but not jungle trained, and without air support or wirelasses or entrenching tools, and with their ranks thinned by malaria, the KOYLI, as they were known, joined the 17th Indian Division, a hotchpotch of disparate units which early in 1942 took on the invaders near the Salween River and was driven back. And thus began the longest retreat in British military history, with the Japanese advancing westwards towards Rangoon and the Allied force attempting to stop them, particularly at rivers like the Bilin and Sittang, before the combatants wheeled northwards, the one chasing the other in a deadly chain of demolitions and skirmishes.



David Martin, King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, c.1938

Several months later, half a world away at the Kearsney Post Office, among hillsides of tea bordered by sugar fields, and within sight of the steeple of Sir Liege's chapel, a letter was collected that had been franked in India. At Hazara, on tearing open the envelope and having her presentiments confirmed, Anne ran from the house and climbed into the white-trunked gum tree on the middle lawn. There, concealed in the foliage, she wept inconsolably and in her paroxysm of grief tore up the official notification and the kind words written about her brother by his commanding officer, as if seeking to obliterate the reality they contained, and flung the pieces like finches through the lattice of leaves. Never having met David, Mia was an onlooker in this drama of blood, hovering helplessly and attempting to provide what solace she could.

Given the break-up of their parents' marriage, and her scattered and rootless childhood, Anne had found some stability in the existence of her brother, even if David was four years older than her and from Malaya had headed directly home to Britain, without a sojourn in Malta, and they hadn't seen each other for nearly a decade. Not only was theirs a kinship of blood, but in the fluidity of their lives they were bonded too by their bank of shared memories. It was probably these that prevented Anne from delving further, for she sought no details about his death and instead assigned his memory to a private Valhalla of her own. Whenever asked, she would preclude any reference to the nature of his loss and instead relate stories from her childhood, particularly a memorable holiday to the Isle of Wight, with him and their grandmother and aunt. There were other recollections too: of when he provided solace on the death of their half-sister, and came to her rescue after she had fallen from a tree, which cast him not only as a beloved sibling but also as the protector that she needed so desperately.

From David's commanding officer's eulogy, before she impetuously tore it up, Anne established that her brother had been killed doing something heroic, volunteering to perform a perilous demolition. And so, for more than half a century, the circumstances of his death were not interrogated. Obituaries in his old school's magazine and his grandparents' parish newsletter attested to his gildedness: that he had been head boy, captain of the 1st rugby team, and loved by all. Copies of

the foxed and yellowing pages were kept as her most prized possessions, for by her, his little sister, he was most deeply mourned. As to where he had been killed, it was said near Mandalay, and so Kipling's ballad of the same name, with its pagodas and palms, and temple bells and riverboats, for all its mawkishness and geographical inexactitude flowed like a requiem through the texture of Anne's consciousness: 'Come you back, you British soldier, come you back to Mandalay.'

If at Llys Onen the Mansfields had prayed that their stockade of cane stalks would screen them from the bloodshed, they too were winkled out. For after serving two years in Rhodesia with the British South Africa Police, in mid-1941 Beric was unexpectedly deployed to Abyssinia where the capitulation of the Italians had created an administrative vacuum that the Allies were seeking to fill. There, essentially away from the theatres of bloodshed, he helped impose law and order; and back on the farm, thousands of miles to the south, both the Major and Naffy, and Mona and Ronwen, felt comforted that with the hostilities over in that region his duties were essentially civilian. But one night in Addis Ababa drunken Ethiopian soldiers went on the rampage and twenty-two-year-old Assistant Inspector Beric Mansfield and several African constables were sent to disarm and arrest them. And in that classic set-piece of colonial administration, of the kind so romanticised in the literature of Empire, the youthful and seemingly blessed Beric, while doing his duty, was shot, and died later from his wounds.

For doting parents like Charles and Naffy, so appalling is the loss of a child that it is impossible to fathom the depths of grief into which Beric's death plunged them. Like countless other fathers and mothers, including the distant and seemingly neglectful Eric and Edwarda Martin, at every moment they had been braced for the blow that far away on some disputed field the child that was in essence an extension of themselves, and the object of their deepest affection, and in whom so much hope had been invested, was being maimed or killed. And now, for the Mansfields, the spectre was real.

On the reception of the news, at Llys Onen the bright greenness of the sugar cane leached to monochrome, and for Charles particularly his patrols to check the planting and weeding and cutting suddenly seemed pointless. In a flash he had been pitched into a nightmare in which his military resolve was tested to the limit to maintain the pose of authority and decorum on which the whole delicate mechanism of the farm depended. But behind closed doors and out of sight and earshot of the staff there must have been occasions when he broke down and wept and railed against the horror of it all.

Mia and Anne too were devastated by the news, for Beric's life had been so enmeshed with theirs. There were few memories of milestones



Beric Mansfield as a schoolboy at Michaelhouse, c.1938

at Hazara without the Mansfields' presence, and Mia remembered the arrival of the newcomers from India, and the three young children whom Patricia would abandon and Naffy adopt as her own. At the tennis parties she had watched with delight, but also with mixed envy and sadness, the youthful antics of Beric and his sisters, seeing them not only as the children of her friends and neighbours but also as the shades of the sons and daughter that had they survived she would be the mother of. When Anne arrived, as the photograph of the swimming in the Nonoti attests, she found in the Mansfields the siblings that in Africa she never had, even if in England she had her beloved brother. And if to Mia, with James away in North Africa, there was anything secretly positive to be taken from Beric's death, it was the macabre and inverted reality that her own childlessness had insulated her from being so viscerally devastated.

When they heard of Beric's loss, Anne and Mia had staying with them two crewmembers from HMS *Valiant*, which after having been mined in Alexandria harbour was in Durban undergoing repairs. And when news of David's death came through, having been delayed by the chaos of the British retreat up Burma, they were hosting two sailors from HMS *Ramillies*. Reports of the sinking of the *Galatea*, therefore, would have been added to their growing necrology, for they had fond memories of their guest who was among the drowned. Who among their friends and relatives, they wondered, would be next?

Surrounded as she was by young men who in weeks could be wounded or dead, and in whom the desire to live fully was insistent and instinctual, Anne inevitably sought romance. And once David and Beric were gone, and she was probably emotionally needier than at any other time in her life, one attachment proved more than a dalliance. Over several months a young Royal Navy lieutenant named Rodney Bowden, linked successively to HMS's *Mauritius*, *Raider* and *Resolution*, paid the farm three visits, and an enduring bond was born. That he had spent his early childhood in the Burma that had just claimed her brother added a bitter-sweetness to their mutual attraction.

Not long afterwards, Bowden found himself on the destroyer HMS *Zambezi* on a mercy mission off German-occupied Norway to rescue civilians. Later, when an American liberty ship was sunk by torpedo-

bombers, with a bowline around his waist he leapt into the sea to save two unconscious sailors. Making a career in the Royal Navy, he captained the frigate HMS *Llandaff* and was commander of the Royal Yacht *Britannia* on a voyage to the Pacific Islands. Later still, in homage to Ernest Shackleton, he captained the ice-patrol ship HMS *Endurance*, landing an expedition on Elephant Island in Antarctica, before rendezvousing with circumnavigator Chay Blythe, and for the Chilean Navy relocating reindeer from South Georgia to an island in the Beagle Channel.

Notwithstanding the different paths that fate had prescribed for them, the young couple who had met at wartime Hazara maintained a long-distance attachment, buoyed up by occasional letters and a meeting before his death more than sixty years later.

In a conciliatory gesture, the British South Africa Police awarded Beric Mansfield a posthumous Commendation for Bravery, which was presented months after his death as an adjunct to a parade in Durban,



*Rodney Bowden of HMS's Mauritius, Raider
and Resolution, c. 1942*

several thousand miles from Addis Ababa, and more than a thousand from the BSAP headquarters in Salisbury, but convenient for his next of kin who would obviously have wanted to attend. Significantly, that for all his years of soldiering, with its inevitable prospect of violent death, and with all the buttoned-up control that military discipline necessarily inculcates, Charles Mansfield could not bring himself to accept the medal personally, but had his younger daughter Ronwen, the tougher of Beric's two sisters, accept it on the family's behalf. For this apparent abrogation of a father's duty there can be only one explanation: that he feared his composure wouldn't hold.

For the next four years Charles continued to run Llys Onen, even if much of the purpose for doing so was gone. In January 1946, with the war newly over but with himself having been maimed irremediably by it, he died, aged sixty-six, and was interred in Sir Liege Hulett's little cemetery at the foot of the avenue leading up to Kearsney House.

Without Beric, the farm was inherited by Ronwen, who while serving at a radar station on the Bluff in Durban had met a dapper former Royal Navy officer and married him. Not long before, Robert John Sanger, or 'R.J.', as he was known, had had his ship torpedoed in the Mediterranean and spent hours clinging to flotsam, breathing in oil and damaging his lungs. Latterly in the merchant navy, he had been shipping mules to Karachi when his vessel called at Durban and the meeting took place. Mia's visitors' book bears witness to Ronwen's change in marital status, early in 1945 recording her as 'Mansfield' and five months later as 'Sanger'. But about her sister's inheritance Mona was aggrieved, for on returning from a nursing course in London she had found the gleaming Mrs Sanger already resident on the farm. In lieu of Llys Onen, Mona inherited the family's town house in Durban and cottage at Salt Rock, a beach resort thirty miles north of the city.

Naffy lived on at the farm, and when she died, far from her Ceylonese birthplace as Charles had been from his Welsh one, she too was buried in the Kearsney cemetery, midway between Llys Onen and Stanger, and near the road that, over decades, the Woollams had taken on their journeys between Hazara and the wider world. By all accounts she had been a devoted wife and mother to another woman's children and

for all her reputed chattiness had a dignity and poise. Nowhere is this more evident than in a photograph showing her sitting at a roll-top desk, her angular face caught admiringly by the light. From pigeonholes, letters protrude like fantails, with beside them a vase of flowers and a silver candelabrum and framed portrait. Between the sisters and their stepmother, however, there was a disjuncture, and in moments of anger, considering her previous role as their governess, they labelled her an opportunist and gold digger.

Embedded in the layout of the Kearsney cemetery is a secret code. Flung like an expansive picnic rug across a slope, the enclosure of graves falls away from the chapel to a ribbon of bush with sugar cane beyond it. In the uppermost corner, almost in the building's shadow, are the prime positions, dominated by the plots of Sir Liege and Lady Mary, with their prominent headstones and iron railings. Around them, like acolytes currying favour, are other members of the Hulett family who by



Naffy Mansfield at her desk, Llys Onen, 1936

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their proximity to the patriarch and matriarch appear to be proclaiming a pecking order. Midway down the slope lie more settler inhabitants of the district, mostly farmers but also Stanger residents who claimed some affinity with the Kearsney area.

At the bottom of the incline, and therefore almost beyond the pale, are several tombstones which have since been joined by others. One is the grave of a Reverend John Rangiah, who at the end of the nineteenth century was summoned from India by Sir Liege to minister to the Baptists among his indentured labourers. Zealously, Rangiah had set up churches and schools, and was revered by his followers. But for all his lifelong praiseworthiness, so set in stone were the boundaries of settler ascendancy that on his death in 1915 he was denied the radiance of the central enclosure and allotted with his fellow Indians the shadows beside the perimeter fence.



Kearsney Church and cemetery, c.1976

In contrast, Charles Mansfield's grave is in the heart of the cemetery and has an imposing memorial that declares a man of prominence. Not content with names and dates, an inscription records his birthplace, rank and regiment in the Indian Army. But beside him is an earthen mound that on the cemetery's plan is marked as 'unknown', and which appears strangely incongruous in the pincushion of granite and marble pins, as if its intended occupant is yet to arrive or had a change of heart. Of its occupancy, however, there is no doubt, for beneath the hump of earth covered patchily with grass is Naffy Mansfield, once Ethel Joliffe from a tea estate near Kandy, whose stepdaughters had respected her wish to be buried beside their father but who had declined to give her a tombstone to perpetuate her memory.

Towards the end of the war, but when crewmembers from several Royal Navy ships had yet to stay at Hazara, Anne volunteered for the Women's Auxiliary Naval Service, becoming a Swan, the South African equivalent of the British Wren. That she was able to leave Mia was because after the victory at El Alamein James had been demobilised and had returned to the farm as Major Woollam.

Anne spent two years in uniform, first in Durban and later in Simonstown, passing a harbour defence course and becoming a sonar operator and lorry driver. A photograph shows her and two other Swans, in a rosette of young femininity, sitting in a rickshaw on the Durban beachfront, with their African puller with his horned headdress standing resplendently beside them. In another, she is alongside a lorry at the Umhlanga Naval Station, just north of the city, where, among the casuarinas, using an Asdic, an early sonar device that emitted the pulses of sounds and listened for echoes, she scanned the ocean for enemy craft. Once, with a frisson, she detected what was thought to be a U-boat, but it turned out to be a submerged barrel. During her secondment to the Cape there were visits to Robben Island, then a link in a chain of naval defences and not yet the infamous political Alcatraz it was soon to become. But with the armistice, like other military formations the Swans shrunk in complement, and so Anne returned briefly to Hazara before taking wing again.

Having since her Burwood Park days been interested in drawing, as a teenager at Hazara Anne had been sketching the birds that flitted and preened in the garden and forest. So once the war was over, she enrolled



Anne (right) and fellow Swans on a rickshaw on Durban beachfront, c.1944

for an Art course, each morning taking the trolleybus from her lodgings on the Berea to the Durban Tech in the city bowl. It was then that the Pre-Raphaelites caught her fancy, Burne-Jones and Rossetti, but chiefly John William Waterhouse. Enchanting she found his young Adonises and the willowy young women, with long tresses, sometimes clasped into buns, and breasts like bicycle bells, by whom they seemed transfixed. Sometimes the assignation was in an enchanted garden, full of colour and light, and sometimes deep in a wood, with stark trunks and a dark foreboding. In her drawings of the bowers can be detected the migration of Anne's palette, for the serried boles of temperate trees appear to be

giving way to the denser matrix of sugar-cane stalks and the tangle of the Hazara forest.

Among her papers is a contract for an ex-servicewoman's loan, revealing that James didn't pay for her course, either because he felt she should be supporting herself or because his errant management had reduced the family's circumstances from affluent to comfortable. That on her demobilisation Anne hadn't tarried long at Hazara was because the Woollams' marriage had relapsed into the chilly antagonism from which their wartime separation had relieved it. Anne spoke later of how James would needle Mia, and how she would endure it silently, sustained by the spirituality that on the death of their children she had begun to seek.

With the resumption of peace came a frenetic conviviality. Having lost their early adulthood to war, young men and women, their ranks thinned by the arbitrariness of fate, sought each other out like flying ants after a swarming. Caught up in the network of friends and acquaintances that so blithely she had accumulated, Anne rushed from the Tech to play squash at the Osborne Hotel, and then on to dances at the Caister or Royal or Marine, with often a nightclub afterwards. And even if the memories of David and Beric and others in faraway cemeteries, with their graves yet to settle, added sadness to the laughter, in the soft embrace of the heat and humidity life was good. Yet the high jinks were not just spiritedness, for underpinning them was the urge to seek life partners, and in that swirling world the dice were falling capriciously and futures were being determined.

On completing her course, Anne got a job at the Durban Museum, which occupied part of the imposing bulk of the City Hall. Across the street was the Royal Hotel where decades earlier her adoptive parents had met and unknowingly set in train the coincidences that would later engulf her. Like other such institutions across the former Empire, the museum was a general repository, conceived in the ideal of London's Natural History Museum and British Museum, with a selection of mammals, insects, reptiles and fish. On display was a replica of the Taung skull that in 1924 had been unearthed in the north-west of the country and was said to confirm the evolutionary leap from ape to human. With it were casts of the original skull fragments of Piltdown Man, found in

Sussex in 1912 and yet to be debunked. Among the prize exhibits were the mummy of an Egyptian priest and an almost complete skeleton of a Dodo, with a restored model beside it.

Incongruously for a museum in Africa, there was a cabinet of Greek and Roman coins, bequeathed by the British relative of a Natal judge. Also on display was a medal that Napoleon had had designed in anticipation of his defeat of Britain. And half-hidden were examples of Jewish currency, including coins of Herod and Pontius Pilate.

Arrestingly there was a hive with a glass panel through which bees could be viewed, and a model of a mangrove in the shallows of Durban bay, showing how its falling fruit ingeniously spears into the mud and takes root. Further, given the prevalence of diseases like sleeping sickness and malaria, and East Coast fever and nagana, of particular relevance were diagrams illustrating the life cycles of parasites.

Amidst this eclectic jumble, Anne was the assistant to the long-standing curator, Ernest Chubb. The ornithologist son of ornithologist Charles Chubb of the British Museum, who had written *The Birds of British Guiana* and described Cobb's wren, Ernest Chubb had devoted his career to the accumulation and cataloguing of specimens. That Anne remembered him so fondly was because he encouraged her art and provided fatherly advice. Among her assignments was to draw the pictorial keys which on display cases replicated the entombed animals and provided their details. Thus it was from Anne's handiwork that visitors learnt that what they were viewing in an imitation glade was a purple-crested lourie or black-headed oriole or paradise flycatcher, whose kindred at Hazara she knew so well.

During those golden days, Anne received seven proposals of marriage. One suitor was a middle-aged architect with an open-top sports car in which they careered along the streets of flamboyants and mahoganies. Another has a presence only in absence, for in a photograph of her sitting on a beach he is just off-frame. She is looking directly at the camera, with a solitary white breaker unfurling in the background. In front is a wicker picnic basket, and between her and the sea is a low quiff of brush. But proportionately the image is lopsided, because immediately to her left someone has been cropped out, leaving only the outline of

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Anne at Umdloti beach, c.1948

a muscular arm. On the back, written before the pruning, she recorded for a recipient that her age was twenty-six and that the ‘comely young man’ was someone to whom she was engaged. As an image of Anne, it is among the best of her youth, for her face has an Italianate cast which others found so mirrored in a portrait by Pietro Annigoni that a copy was bought for her.

It was around then, on the Berea, at a drinks party at a friend’s house, with its garden of glossy-leaved trees and its view down the slope to the ocean, that she was introduced to a tall young man who walked with the aid of a stick. Feeling a tremor of interest, she established that he had served as a pilot in the Royal Air Force and been mangled while crash-landing his crippled aircraft.

PART TWO

The story of John Deane and Anna and their
children: John Ely, Annie Bertha, Amy Blanche,
Lewis, Dennis Bartle, Alice Beryl, Beatrice Mary,
Birdie and Dalton

Most of us were imperialists in the end, however gentle our instincts, and hardly a reader of this book will feel altogether aloof to its narrative, or impartial to its judgements. Mine is an aesthetic view of Empire, and there is no denying that as the flare of the imperial ideal faded, so its beauty faded too. It had not always been a pleasant kind of beauty, but it had been full of splendour and vitality ...

— Jan Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*

In a rectory eight miles north-west of Norwich, among flatlands segmented by hedgerows and lanes, a father and son had an ungodly row. Portly and bearded, the older man was the rector of Weston Longeville, a sought-after benefice in the gift of New College, Oxford. Decades later the parish's name would be burnished when the jottings of an earlier incumbent, James Woodforde, were published as *The Diary of a Country Parson* and lauded as a classic of pastoral life in eighteenth-century England, and ranked with the diaries of Pepys and Evelyn.

Reputedly, the dispute was over the disbursement of a family trust or the son's refusal to follow his father into the Church, and it created an unbridgeable chasm between them. That the rector's father too had been a country parson, but in the Church of Ireland, indicates a pattern, but that he and his father had been educated at Winchester and New College, where as descendants of William of Wykeham they had been favoured as Founder's Kin, while his only son hadn't, suggests a familial fracture. It may have been the son's contrariness, or lack of aptitude, that broke the chain of scholarship, or merely that the early death of his mother had left his father with a young family whom he wished to keep close at hand.

Whatever the reason, one winter morning early in 1864, John Deane Conyngham, barely out of his teens, walked away from the Georgian rectory with its stables and parkland and walled garden that for all his life had been his home, down the avenue and along the road through Weston Longeville, passing the ancient stone church of All Saints with its tower

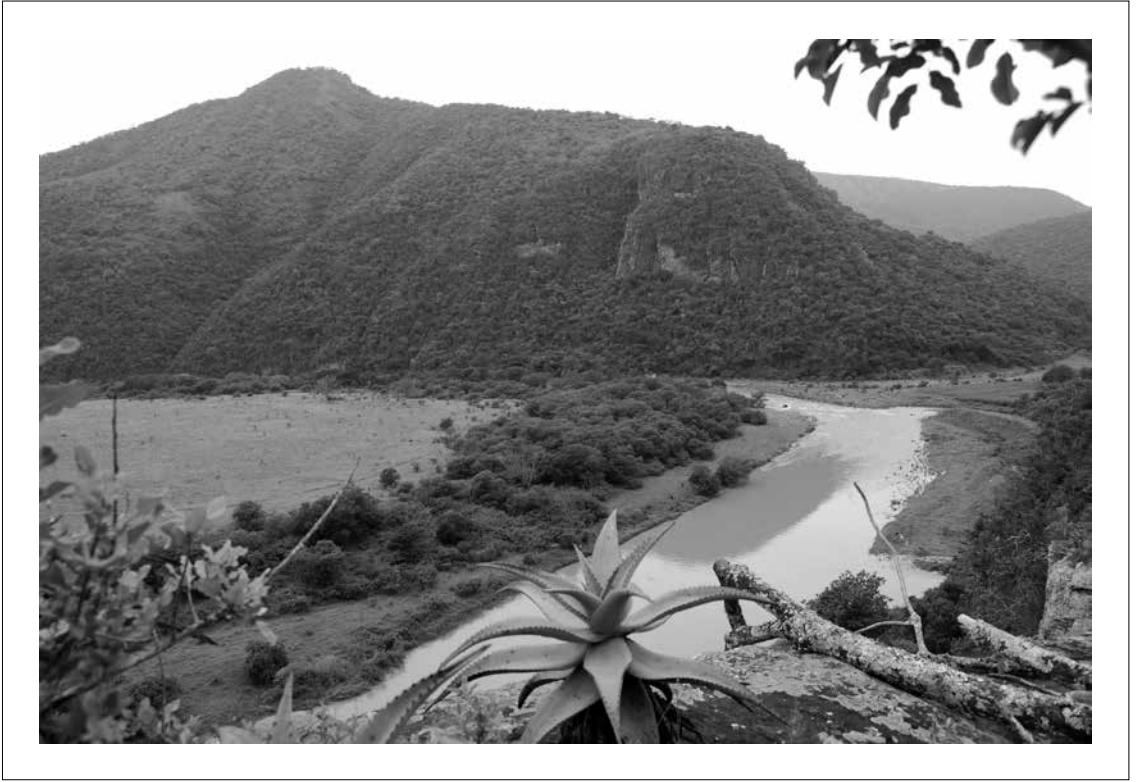
and five bells where each Sunday for thirty-one years his father preached, never to see any of it again.

Perhaps Natal had always been his destination, or he had been aiming for the Antipodes and fallen short. But, having taken a ship down the west coast of Africa to Table Bay, within days he was among the third-class passengers and bags of mail on the steamer *Norman*, a pioneer vessel of the Union Line, which a decade earlier had been commandeered as a transport in the Crimean War, slicing through the swell to the port of Durban.

There, beyond the sweep of shoreline with its coastal forest, he ventured into the grid of dusty streets with their corrugated-iron-roofed buildings, noting the mix of Europeans and Africans and the scattering of Indians, because indentured labourers had already begun arriving from India to work on the sugar fields. Above the flatness of the small commercial hub he saw too the cambered ascent of the Berea, spying through its canopy of foliage the shimmer of scattered roofs. And with the winter coldness of Norfolk still in his bones, for all his trepidation at venturing into a new world he rejoiced in the balminess, little knowing that it was autumn and that the swelter and humidity which had only recently receded would soon be back.

Before long he was farming near Richmond, an inland village that had been established a decade earlier by English settlers enticed to the colony by a speculator named Byrne. Sweeping around the alluvial plain that he was seeking to cultivate was the Umkomaas River, engorged in summer by rains in the hinterland, and limpid and sand-banked in winter when the skies were vast and blue and cloudless. It was a majestic landscape, for in full view of the house that he would build was Spitzkop, a hump of red sandstone with whittled flanks, and all about, expansively, was a tumult of hills and valleys matted with thorn trees and euphorbia and aloes.

Although there had been attempts to grow cotton in the colony, they had failed. But when the American Civil War halted the supply of Southern bales to Lancashire's mills, trebling the price of what could be gleaned from elsewhere, a group of Natal colonists seized what appeared to be an opportunity. With its particular microclimate, the Umkomaas



The Umkomaas River in 2008, curving around the open flatlands where John Deane and Anna once farmed, with the red sandstone cliffs of Spitzkop behind

Valley was chosen for the venture, and soon the community of pioneers, with the help of African labour, was clearing the brush for what they hoped would make their fortune. Historical accounts have John as the principle planter, which suggests that he had found his *métier*, whether his family ever knew of it or not. However, that among his neighbours were the Rhodes brothers, the swashbuckling Herbert and enigmatic Cecil, whom he taught to grow cotton, may not have been a coincidence for their clergymen fathers were both the rectors of country parishes in south-eastern England.

By all accounts they worked hard, rising with the sun and toiling all day with their labourers to prepare for the cotton bushes that in months promised to bear bolls with powder-puff hairs. As Cecil wrote to his

mother, it was good, hard work, even if he was always covered in dust and his clothes had more holes than patches. From this relentless routine of clearing, planting, nurturing and harvesting the settlers had little respite, other than a service on Sundays at Springvale Anglican mission on the plateau beyond Spitzkop, occasional trips to Richmond for provisions or a cricket match, and less frequent forays across the uplands to Pietermaritzburg, for official business or a ball. Otherwise, the location they had chosen was remote.

Yet in a manner that belied his origins, John appears to have rejoiced in his harsh new African world. When most farmers wilted in the summer heat, he assured the compiler of a settler guidebook that a breeze blowing upriver made it bearable, and that whenever the sun was too relentless he and his workers sheltered indoors and only in the early mornings and late afternoons ventured out to resume their toil. But the settlers' homes were rudimentary, being mud-walled and grass-roofed, and there were snakes and mosquitoes from which the ramshackle structures offered little protection. Even if around him were servants sweeping the compacted-mud floor and compliant to his every whim, as he looked out at the bulk of Spitzkop, from whose fastness the baboons barked their admonishments, there must have been times when he regretted his impetuosity and longed to be back at the rectory with its gilt-framed portraits and ticking clocks, and its house maid and scullery maid and groom whose ministrations were so established and accomplished.

What helped John financially was that the drift across the Umkomaas was on his property and that he doubled as the ferryman and exacted a toll. That the river had a mind of its own, however, the Rhodes brothers soon discovered. One day, with their load of maize meal from Richmond ferried across safely by boat, their empty cart followed and was swept away. As Cecil related in a letter to their mother, Herbert courageously plunged into the torrent and cut the oxen free. When a neighbour's wagon and oxen were lost in similar circumstances, Herbert's daring was lauded in Pietermaritzburg's newspaper, the *Natal Witness*.

At first the enterprise flourished, with John's and the Rhodes brothers' farms singled out for plaudits in the guidebook, but before long a combination of factors conspired against it. Among these were vagaries

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The former rectory, Weston Longeville, Norfolk, England, as a private residence in 2009 and (below) an early settler dwelling in the Umkomaas valley



in the weather, and the marauding monkeys and baboons that pillaged the cultivated fields. And once the American Civil War ended, and even in defeat the Southerners revived their cotton industry, the bollworm arrived and delivered the *coup de grâce*. Although the distant siren-song of Kimberley's diamond fields had long been heard in the valley, it became irresistible, and many of the planters, Herbert and Cecil among them, headed north, leaving the cotton venture unravelling in their wake. John, instead, stayed in Natal, moving eastwards to the coast.

Through all this he had a fulcrum in his wife Anna whom he had married in Richmond, where earlier her parents had arrived as settlers. That her family, the Elys, were from Mistley, on the River Stour, and in the same corner of England as his childhood home, would have strengthened their bond. To this partnership were added nine surviving children, all but one born south of Durban where after a spell as a manager John bought two tracts of land, Kingsdale and Morewood Glen. Having learnt his lesson with cotton, he chose sugar cane, maize and cattle, with some success. The new farms straddled the Ifafa River, and from their rustic bungalow the family had a commanding view of the sea.

A photograph, taken *circa* 1904, shows the parents and their children. With a waistcoat and fob watch and heavy white moustache, sitting in the front row is John, resembling an ageing Arthur Conan Doyle. The eldest sibling, another John, in his thirties, stands at the back with his sisters, Amy Blanche, Birdie, Annie Bertha, Beatrice Mary and Alice Beryl, all in their twenties. Sitting on the right beside Anna is Lewis, the second son, sandy-haired and moustached, later to become Anne Woollam's father-in-law, and between the parents are Dennis and Dalton, both still boys. Hinted at in the mien of the daughters is the hauteur that would prescribe for all but one of them a life of spinsterhood.

Although nowadays covered by sugar cane, in the late 1800s the coastlands around Ifafa were still largely virgin grassland with forest-fringed rivers and wooded valleys. One estuary was particularly wide and deep, extending inland for several miles, and up it plied a little steamer, first to a drift where the coast road crossed it, and then, if the draught allowed, to a newly established sugar mill. Some rivers had crocodiles and hippos, and on farms there were elephant wallows, the last elephant having been



John Deane and Anna with their four sons and five daughters, Durban, c.1904

shot not long before. In the grass and thickets teemed game birds, and through the dappled shadows of the surrounding forests slipped leopards, wild pig, and a variety of antelope. And as in the Umkomaas Valley, there were troops of monkeys and baboons, who with their chatter and antics were the most capricious of the humans' feral companions.

Across this landscape settlers were scattered. Most were English, although there were communities of Germans and Norwegians. Among John's and Anna's closest friends were the Luggs, Mary and Henry, both from Devon, she from Barnstaple and he from Okehampton. The link with Mary was through her sister Fanny, who was the longest-serving of the Conyngham children's governesses. Henry was a magistrate, and a veteran of the Battle of Rorke's Drift in the Anglo-Zulu War. That as a Natal Mounted Police trooper he was at the mission hospital when the Zulus attacked was because his knee had been crushed when his horse had fallen while crossing the Buffalo River. Seated beside a loophole, he

had used his carbine to good effect, and in hand-to-hand fighting had resorted to his hunting knife. After the war, he tried trading, but disliked it, preferring outdoor pursuits like soldiering and hunting. With an eye to settler security, he helped found the Umzimkulu Mounted Rifles, a regiment of volunteers, before making a career in the civil service, moving every few years from one outpost to another.

Another friend was William Tritton, the doctor at Umzinto, fifteen miles away, whose patients included the Ifafa settlers. In 1878, with his hands scrubbed and sleeves rolled up, into the world he ushered a boy whom his parents John and Anna named Lewis, to perpetuate his paternal grandmother's maiden name. Four years later Dr Tritton facilitated another Ifafa arrival, when Mary Lugg gave birth to a son whom she and Henry named Harry. Both boys later joined the civil service, and in their postings across Natal and Zululand found themselves sometimes in neighbouring magistracies. And the Trittons too would have a son, whom they would name Edgerton, and who would marry one of Lewis's sisters.

Yet another friend was Gould Lucas, the son of an Under-Secretary of State for Ireland, who as a teenage British Army ensign had been sent to the Cape's eastern frontier for the war against the Xhosa. En route, the paddle steamer HMS *Birkenhead*, the Royal Navy's first iron fighting ship, had struck a reef off Danger Point, near the southernmost tip of Africa, and sunk, claiming four hundred and forty-five lives. Although battered and half-drowned, Lucas and three others survived, clinging to wreckage and being washed ashore. Once fit, he served out the frontier war and was posted to Pietermaritzburg as district adjutant. There he befriended a Reverend William Newnham who had been encouraged by his former Cambridge tutor, John Colenso, the Bishop of Natal, to start a school in the colony. So in 1872, on a plateau above Pietermaritzburg, on land donated by Lucas and with Newnham as headmaster, Hilton College was founded, and years later, when John and Anna were farming at Ifafa, where Gould Lucas was now magistrate, it seemed the right school for Lewis.

But no sooner had the family settled at Ifafa than monkeys and baboons again became a menace, laying waste to John's maize fields and to the sugar cane which as a new departure he had begun to

plant. As secretary-treasurer of the local rifle association, with Tritton's support he beseeched officialdom to allow one of his workers to carry a firearm, as Colin Keith-Fraser would later do. After repeated refusals, Lucas intervened and a permit was granted. Later there were further concessions, but each for only several months. Although the Zulu army had recently been vanquished, and the kingdom was being dismantled, the settlers' sense of insecurity had eased only marginally, as if presciently they knew that the seeds of another conflict were already taking root.

During their Ifafa days, the children were left largely to their own devices, careering around the countryside on ponies which had been purchased locally from Africans. They thought nothing of walking barefoot long distances, primarily to the beach, which was four miles from the house and where they spent as much time as possible. And if snakes posed a danger, particularly in the coastal bush, boys and girls in such circumstances developed an alertness that usually prevented them from being bitten.

Of this peril Anna would have been only too aware, for her younger brother George had died aged five from a puff adder bite. Too frightened to suck the fang punctures herself, her mother had ordered a servant to do so, but with noteworthy assertiveness he had refused. And her older brother James had died aged fifteen of tetanus, after being injured in an accident with a wagon with which he had been entrusted. Both deaths would have been harrowing, full of anguish and guilt, with the little graves side-by-side in the Richmond cemetery as a constant reminder, so it is no wonder that in the family portrait Anna looks so stern and resolute. Yet even if life was precarious, such was the nature of pioneering that children had to take their chances.

As was customary, the brothers had as companions Zulu boys with whom they conversed in the vernacular, and laid traps, and shot birds with a catapult before they were allowed to use a shotgun. In imbibing the ways of the bush, they too were unknowingly being admitted into a world of African folklore and wisdom that had percolated down through generations but was generally withheld from the settlers.

Scalies, or Natal yellowfish, were then abundant in the Ifafa River but sometimes refused to bite. On one such occasion, Lewis's companion

gathered a bundle of roots and pounded them with a rock. Locating a pool in the river, the boy placed the pulped pith at the inlet, and the surplus under rocks. Presently, fish began to rise, and floated on the surface in an expanding pattern of silver fragments. Once a sufficient number had been scooped into a bag, many still remained, but the following day all were gone, having regained their senses and swum away. On slow fishing days thereafter this method was used, and Lewis noted that the closer to the sea the drug was gathered the stronger it was, with roots unearthed half a mile from the shore having no potency at all. Without knowing it, he was becoming more African.

Not long afterwards, debilitated by a headache the family's Zulu cook asked Lewis to accompany him to seek an antidote. Near the Ifafa River, the cook picked leaves from a small plant with yellow flowers, pounded them into a pulp, added water, and squeezed several drops of the mixture into each nostril. Explaining that he would pass out briefly, he lay down on the riverbank, and asked Lewis to prevent him from rolling into the water. He soon went limp, and after an hour Lewis became alarmed. Then as suddenly as he had subsided the cook regained consciousness, and proclaimed that his headache had gone. Lewis was made to promise to keep the secret, and once again was drawn further into the African world into which his father's flight from Weston Longeville had cast him.

Over the years John's status is mirrored in the *Natal Almanac and Register*. In 1881, after the failed Umkomaas cotton venture, and while seeking to regain his footing, he is listed at Ifafa as a 'manager'. Several years later, he is a 'planter' and several years later still he is living in Greenwood Park, just north of Durban and not far from the betel-nut fields that with his tramway Colin Keith-Fraser would soon seek to transgress. And in his retirement, before his death in 1905, the register pronounces him a 'gentleman'.

In a way, he had come full circle, having mostly regained the gentility that as a youth he had abandoned. And when the Anglican settlers on the northern bank of the Umgeni River sought to establish a place of worship, in an echo of his father's ministrations he threw open the family home until a church was built.

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But all was not entirely rosy in John's reconfigured world, for in the year before his death an indentured Indian servant lodged a complaint against him with the Protector of Immigrants. Having for a pittance to do kitchen and dhobi work for a household of eleven, toiling from four-thirty in the morning until seven-thirty at night, the servant's request was merely that his rations be supplied on a fixed day each week and his pay on a fixed day each month. That a life so subsumed by toil was taken for granted was perhaps typical of the times, but John's unconcern is damning. Not far away, Colin Keith-Fraser was assisting one of his indentured workers to cable funds to his aged mother in India.

Why, for the names of their daughters, did John and Anna repeat an alphabetical sequence for the first three, modify and transpose it for the fourth, and give the fifth no second name at all? Perhaps the urge to replicate was John's because he shared two Christian names with his father, although the older man had 'William' thrown in for good measure. That their first child, a girl whom they named Annie Bertha and who died in infancy, had her name given to the next daughter suggests a determination to rebuff the Grim Reaper's attentions. And the slow erosion of their initial resolve, from AB to AB to AB to BM and then just B, suggests either an inability to keep on thinking of suitable AB combinations or a desire to break out of the confines that they had set for themselves. But why only Birdie was given a solitary Christian name is peculiar; perhaps its oddness made it unnecessary to choose another.

That there were no such fripperies in the names of their sons – John Ely, Lewis Hamilton, Dennis Bartle and Dalton Parry – which owe whatever oddness they have to a desire to memorialise forebears, suggests that the process was something of a lark. For John and Anna surely knew that whenever their elder daughters wrote their initials it would be ABC, a parody of the alphabet, or perhaps that too was considered amusing. Whatever the reason, that three daughters had identical initials and each was called by her second name beginning with B introduced an element of farce, confirmed when they named their home Bees' Rest.

Other than Dalton, all the surviving siblings were born when the family was living on the farm at Ifafa. Like their brother John, Bertha and

Blanche were educated by governesses, the most long-standing being Fanny Camp. While the three eldest children were being taught Reading and Writing and Euclid, as Arithmetic was then called, and possibly Geography and Latin, the younger ones would have been enjoying a carefree existence until they too reached the age when they were enslaved by schoolwork.

All except John completed their education formally: Bertha and Blanche at The Girls' Collegiate in Pietermaritzburg and Lewis at Hilton College. Having ridden at first to school in Richmond, Dennis later attended Durban High School, where Dalton followed him; and Beryl, Beatrice and Birdie went to Durban Girls' College, or Durban Ladies' College as it was then named. That John was taught only by governesses, and at seventeen joined the Natal Mounted Police, suggests either that he wasn't given the opportunity to progress academically or didn't warrant further tuition.

In the mid-1870s, other than the Catholic convents in Durban and Pietermaritzburg there were no secondary schools for settler girls in the colony. So, feeling that Pietermaritzburg needed a girls' school that wasn't papist, a Reverend William Campbell convened a committee to found one. Premises were obtained in Chapel Street, a main thoroughfare, and another Campbell, a Miss Mary, a graduate of St Andrews University, was appointed the first Lady Principal.

Thus was born the Evangelical Protestant Day and Boarding School for Young Ladies, with Miss Campbell, newly arrived from Scotland and dressed formally in black alpaca with white accessories, shaking hands with the small group of foundation pupils and their parents. Before long the cumbersome name had been shortened to The Girls' Collegiate School, and the girls were taught a variety of subjects, with Calisthenics added for deportment and physical tone. At the inaugural speech day the guest speaker was Sir Henry Bulwer, Governor of Natal, and among the guests was Sir Henry Bartle Frere, High Commissioner for South Africa, who was in the colony's capital to prepare his ultimatum to the Zulus which would precipitate war two months later.

During the next decade Bertha and Blanche arrived, having travelled by post-cart from Ifafa to Durban and then inland by train. By then the

school had moved to larger and quieter premises in Burger Street but still numbered fewer than a hundred girls.

The Board of Governors and Lady Principal, however, were frequently at loggerheads. Among the Board's grievances was that the girls' handwriting was poor, and that excessive funds were being spent on food. Too much fruit in jam was considered an extravagance, as were too many vegetables and too much meat. Wearied by the interference, Miss Campbell resigned, and there was debate as to whether her headstrong nature or the Board's meddling was the reason for her departure.

A photograph shows several girls in ankle-length bustle dresses, wearing boaters and holding rectangular-shaped racquets, playing tennis, with an African youth as ball boy. Another shows the cast of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, thirty girls in robes and extravagant headdresses, the one playing Bottom wearing the head of the ass. With the cast comprising a third of the school's complement, none of the faces reflects Bertha and Blanche's angular features or incipient haughtiness.

When the family moved to Durban, the need for a governess fell away. Each day, the children caught the train at Greenwood Park, heading southwards across the Umgeni River and into town. The three youngest sisters then walked to the Durban Young Ladies' Collegiate Evangelical Institution, or Durban Girls' College, as it later became, in Russell Street, and the two youngest brothers took a horse tram to the Durban High School, which had recently moved to the Berea. As they did later at Hazara, swarms of locusts periodically swooped from the sky and infested the undergrowth, sometimes carpeting the railway tracks where the locomotive's wheels churned them into a buttery paste and so lost purchase.

Beryl, whose schooldays straddled 1900, was followed successively by Beatrice, who became Dux, and Birdie, who was chosen for the tennis team. Shortly before, the principal had been none other than the wilful Mary Campbell, who on her resignation from The Girls' Collegiate in Pietermaritzburg had become headmistress of the Young Ladies' Collegiate in Durban, only once again to depart in acrimony.

Although at first there was no specific uniform, the girls wore navy-blue skirts and white blouses, with black stockings and black shoes, and

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straw boaters, and carried their schoolbooks in what looked like picnic baskets. Their lessons included Reading, Writing, Euclid, Latin and French. They were also taught piano and singing, and for drawing classes walked to the municipal art gallery, where half a century later, in the adjoining museum, Anne Woollam would be the curator's assistant.



Birdie (back row, second from right) in the Durban Young Ladies' Evangelical Collegiate Institution, now Durban Girls' College, tennis team, 1904

Meanwhile, the girls' two eldest brothers were combatants in the war against the Boers. Britain was at loggerheads with the Transvaal and Orange Free State republics, ostensibly because Paul Kruger had refused to give foreigners, or Uitlanders, the vote, but lodged firmly in the British sights were the Witwatersrand goldfields. Among the wheeler-dealers precipitating conflict was Cecil Rhodes, a mining magnate and premier of the Cape, his days as a greenhorn cotton farmer in the Umkomaas valley now a distant memory.

John was deployed in one of the small Natal Police detachments which fanned out along the colony's western border to look for probing commandos. Aged twenty-nine, he was proud to be a veteran of the old Natal Mounted Police, having signed up before the appellation 'mounted' was officially dropped in 1894.

As a fellow Natal Police trooper, Lewis was nearer the centre, being one of General Buller's gallopers, or dispatch riders, in the latter stages of the Natal campaign. He had joined the thirty-strong bodyguard after the Relief of Ladysmith, when the Natal Field Force was cock-a-hoop but sobered by its high casualties. In a photograph of the contingent he looks slight and fair and disarmingly young.

It was a difficult time for Buller, for several months earlier, in what was branded Black Week, British forces had suffered three decisive defeats. While the battles of Stormberg and Magersfontein had taken place in the Cape, as commander-in-chief Buller was indirectly responsible, but at Colenso in Natal he was the battlefield commander and so held directly

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to blame. Weeks later, after a further defeat at Spioenkop, he was replaced by Field-Marshal Roberts, with General Kitchener, at whose instigation the Hazara Pioneers would soon be constituted, as his chief of staff.

Following an interlude of reorganisation, the field force adroitly outflanked the Boers' defences in the Biggarsberg and cautiously took the towns of Dundee, Newcastle and Utrecht. Progress was slow, with the damaged Johannesburg-Durban railway line needing to be repaired and secured. When the Drakensberg loomed, in brief engagements at Laing's Neck and Alleman's Neck Buller's troops breached the burghers' positions and entered the Transvaal. Being winter, it was biting cold, and as the Boers retreated they set fire to the frosted grass, veiling themselves



Lewis (middle row, eighth from left) in General Buller's bodyguard, composed of mounted members of the Natal Police, Pietermaritzburg, c. 1900

in smoke and staging sporadic counter-attacks. Nevertheless, Buller's juggernaut was unstoppable as it crossed the plateau to link up with Roberts's central column, for the push on Pretoria.

Relations between Buller and Roberts were strained, and not just because one had been superseded by the other. Remarkably, before they shook hands in Pretoria on 7 July 1900, the veterans had never met. With the British high command divided into African and Indian camps, Buller, with his Victoria Cross from Hlobane in the Anglo-Zulu War, was second to Wolseley of the Africans, and Roberts, with his Victoria Cross from Kandahar in the Indian Mutiny, was leader of the Indians. To complicate matters, Roberts had earlier denied Buller the reinforcements he had requested, and under Buller's command at Colenso Roberts's only son, Freddy, had been killed. Of both men's demeanours no record has survived, but as one of Buller's bodyguards Lewis surely witnessed the frosty handshake. And when, more than half a century later, he was living at Hazara and there was ample opportunity to preserve for history a moment now lost, nobody thought to ask him.

Like most rank and file, Lewis was unstintingly supportive of Buller, even if the general was wracked by self-doubt and had lost the confidence of many of his fellow officers. Underpinning Lewis's loyalty was not only the gravitas that his commander's ruddy-faced, John-Bullish bulk projected, but also his personal bravery, and solicitude for the common soldier, visiting field hospitals and the lines to see how his men were faring.

While John had been searching for the enemy, and Lewis had been escorting the general, Blanche had been tutoring several sisters on a farm at Nottingham Road, some thirty miles inland from Pietermaritzburg, but the sight of a reconnoitring Boer commando sent her and her charges hurriedly by train to Durban. When Ladysmith was relieved, Beryl at Durban Girls' College remembered a high-spirited girl holding a Union Jack above her head and striding to the staffroom to request a half-day holiday, which was granted. At Girls' Collegiate in Pietermaritzburg, which Bertha and Blanche had recently left, the girls were similarly overjoyed by the news of the relief, especially as the parents of several pupils had been among the besieged. Alerted by the cries of newsvendors,

the girls rushed out into the street, shouting and waving the miniature Union Jacks that surreptitiously they had been making. But for all the jingoism in the colony at the time, the staff were scandalised by such unrestrained behaviour, and made the culprits write lines.

With the fighting only a hundred miles away on the Natal Front, casualties were soon flowing into Pietermaritzburg's Grey's Hospital, whose entire staff consisted of two surgeons, a matron and five nurses, one of whom was Bertha, supported by four probationers. Wounded British soldiers were crammed into the wards, with the overflow accommodated on mattresses in the passages and dining room. For the duration of the war the small complement of Grey's nurses, in their ankle-length, dark blue cambric dresses, with starched collars and cuffs, and long white aprons and small white caps, were absorbed into the Army Nursing Service Reserve of England, which later became the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, and for their dutifulness were allowed to wear scarlet Netley capes with a rosette at the back.

The hospital's superintendent was Dr James Allen, a nephew of Gould Lucas's, who had arrived from Ireland decades earlier. Finding what he described as a sorry structure, appropriately positioned beside the cemetery, Allen had reformed Grey's, and later became prominent in local medical circles. His copybook, however, had a blot, for he had punched a colleague in an argument on the platform at Pietermaritzburg Station and been prosecuted for assault. In a further indication of how small the settler world was, Allen's wife Jane was the sister of the same Mary Campbell who had been principal of Girls' Collegiate, and who happened to be staying with the Allens when she heard that she had been dismissed as headmistress of Durban Girls' College.

Years later, Bertha confided that Dr Allen had allowed her to extract the teeth of outpatients. Was this acceptable practice? Did she clamour for the pliers and did the mercurial Irish doctor smilingly hand them to her as if to a favourite nurse? Perhaps a clue lies in an earlier photograph of the hospital staff. In the centre of a ring of nurses, decorative in their white pinafores and white caps, sits a tweed-suited Dr Allen, with a trim moustache and clipped beard. To his left, with her voluptuousness squeezed into an hourglass dress, is the matron, an Elizabeth Macdonald.

And between them, looking disarmingly demure, sits Bertha, with her skirt lapping against the doctor's leg.



*Bertha (middle row, fourth from left) as a nurse at Grey's Hospital,
Pietermaritzburg, 1890*

After the Anglo-Boer War, Lewis joined the justice department and was posted as clerk of the court to Hlabisa, a magistracy in central Zululand. With the railhead then at Bond's Drift on the Tugela River, not far from what would become the Jonases' Bulwer Farm, train passengers from Durban continued by post-cart to Eshowe, the capital of Zululand, and thence on horseback to their outlying stations. It took Lewis three days to get from Eshowe to Hlabisa, and as he rode through the landscape, rocking gently to the gait of his horse, the drumming heat and the chatter of birdsong, and the faint parabolas of distant voices, lifted his spirits, reminding him why he was most at home in the countryside.

That he had switched to a civilian career was because, unlike his elder brother John, he chafed at the regimented life of a trooper. Yet of his years in the Natal Police before the war he had happy memories: of scrapes in Pietermaritzburg and Durban, and sleuthing in villages like Richmond and Underberg, but mostly of patrols on horseback across the countryside to isolated farmhouses and tribal authorities. Sometimes he found himself in areas of settlement and sometimes in Old Africa, which seemed pristine and primordial and yet to be cowed. In the frontier districts were farmers, hunters and traders, and itinerant sheep-shearers and woodcutters who hawked their services from farm to farm. And everywhere there were the country people, whose norms and customs for decades he had unconsciously been imbibing. In this crazy-paving of cultures Lewis had earned his living, keeping an eye on a gamut of characters, most salt-of-the-earth but some rapsallions, with notable among them a con man named Fayedwa.

As miners returning from Johannesburg's goldfields were ripe for the picking, Fayedwa had his informers infiltrate the throng at Pietermaritzburg railway station to establish where some were heading. Then, with an entourage appropriate for a man of status, he would follow at a distance, and arrive at dusk at the same homestead where his prey had sought shelter for the night. No sooner had everyone settled down to sleep than shrill, childlike voices would emanate from the apex of the hut's roof. After a suitable interval of silence, as the senior guest Fayedwa would call out to the *amadlozi*, or spirits, and ask what was troubling them. Again a shrill babble would emanate from the shadowy vertex, but now demanding that a financial tribute be paid to Fayedwa. At once he would remonstrate, denying any wish to despoil his fellow guests of their earnings, but the voices would insist, and if any traveller demurred the spirits would become hysterical, demanding payment on pain of retribution.

For years, in this manner, using his skill as a ventriloquist that he had acquired while employed by a circus, Fayedwa swindled a good living, operating out of sight of the colonial authorities. Only when his predations became intolerable were the police informed, and before long he was arrested and sentenced to a prison term. Yet no sooner was he released than he resumed his chicanery, so Lewis detailed two African detectives to proceed to the Sydenham area of Durban, where Fayedwa was then operating, to arrest him again. That night, while returning with their captive through the forest on the Berea, the detectives heard a voice, seemingly coming from high in a tree, which denounced them for apprehending a man of such consequence and ordered his immediate release. So accomplished was the ghostly remonstration that although forewarned the detectives removed his handcuffs and ran headlong back to the police station.

Not long afterwards, however, Fayedwa was arrested yet again, and tried and found guilty, but no sooner had he served his sentence than he charged Lewis for stealing his sjambok. Having been an exhibit, the whip had lain untouched in the police station since the court case. That it hadn't been appropriated was because Fayedwa had used it to chastise the *amadlozi* whenever they became unruly, and it was said to have

talismanic powers. Yet notwithstanding repeated arrests and substantial sentences, Fayedwa proved incorrigible, and years later Lewis heard that he was travelling with a retinue through a tribal reserve in the Eastern Cape where a chief was receiving him with great deference.

On his arrival at Hlabisa, finding no accommodation, Lewis boarded with the police until a wattle-and-daub hut was built for him in a nearby copse. Because of the rinderpest, cattle were scarce, so in the closed season each household among the officials was permitted to shoot one small antelope a week for the pot. But because of its gaminess, venison soon palled, so fishes were caught in nearby streams, and vegetables planted wherever the soil would sustain them. Fruit was prized, particularly pineapples and pawpaws, which were plentiful, and on which Lewis and his fellows came to rely. Horses didn't survive long because horse-sickness was endemic in Zululand, as was malaria, from which everyone suffered periodically.

If in the circumstances Lewis's career seems ill-chosen, like his brother he was merely another minor player in the vast network of the British Empire, each sustained by a grander vision. While European staff at magistracies could expect some companions of their own culture, whether civil servants or traders, or hunters and prospectors passing through, Natal policemen were even more isolated. And even if at their outpost deep in the countryside a sergeant and his two trooper colleagues had some autonomy and excitement of a wilderness sort, inevitably a number became unhinged, although John appears always to have been sanguine.

Notwithstanding his junior rank, Lewis had varied responsibilities. With two game guards, he had been allocated the territory of the Umfolozi, Hluhluwe and St Lucia game reserves, which several years earlier had been proclaimed to curtail hunting, and was tasked with dealing with rogue animals whenever they posed a danger. Among these was a crocodile that was preying on pedestrians at the old wagon drift across the Hluhluwe River, a buffalo who was charging passersby on a footpath in a dell of riverine forest, and a black rhino which had attacked a kraal at milking time, goring several cows and demolishing a hut. In each case, appeals were received by the Hlabisa office, and Lewis, armed with a rifle or shotgun, would venture out.

Once, while in search of a leopard that had been picking off goats, Lewis found himself on a rocky outcrop with ranks of beaters driving towards him. After it became clear that the leopard had eluded them, he noticed draped across a nearby ledge a large python. Disconcertingly for a wildlife official, he decided to shoot it as a trophy. So as not unduly to damage its skin, he replaced the heavy cartridges with lighter shot, aimed at the python's head, and fired. Throwing itself upwards, the snake looped back on itself, exposing a length of underside.

Clambering up to where the python was lying, Lewis grabbed its head, whereupon it lashed out with its sharp, dog-like teeth, angled inwards to secure its prey, and ripped off the sleeve of his shooting jacket. Knocked off balance, he fell backwards, sliding down the slope. Composing himself, and inserting cartridges with a heavier shot, he climbed back up the krantz and dispatched the snake, which was borne to the courthouse by a conga of joyous bearers. Once the skin had been removed and pegged out to dry, it was found to be almost twenty feet long, and two feet wide at its widest part.

For years, workers at Hazara and on neighbouring farms had reported seeing gargantuan serpents crossing cane breaks, and how in mid-passage the snake would have its head in one field and its tail in another. Such sightings were at first dismissed by farmers as the exaggerations of revellers weaving home at night after a beer-drink who had stumbled over an adder or mole snake and had attributed to it mythic proportions. Until, one day at Hazara, gardeners shovelling compost from a heap near the manager's house unearthed a young python. Notwithstanding its protected status, instinctively they killed it, in a blow corroborating their sightings and providing proof at last that even in the face of monoculture, pythons were holding out in the cane fields, where in cane rats they had abundant food.

Next, Lewis was posted to Msinga, in southern Zululand, not far from the Natal border, where the magistrate was Henry Lugg, the Rorke's Drift veteran who had married Fanny Camp's sister, and the father of his friend Harry. Two years later he was sent northwards again, to Eshowe, set in its forest on a high plateau. Sensing a growing restlessness among the rural people, he signed up with the local militia.

When rebellion broke out in the Colony of Natal in 1906, thrusting a skewer of fear through the hearts of the small settler community, scores of young men, from farms or nascent towns and villages, joined local militias to defend hearth and home. Fearing attacks, the beleaguered colonists began to congregate and form laagers and erect barricades. Of one thing they were certain: what was needed was a swingeing response that impressed upon the subject peoples, once and for all, that the settlers were ascendant.

For more than a year, across the countryside, surreptitious orders had been circulating that all white goats and chickens should be slaughtered and all utensils of European origin destroyed. Those who disobeyed, so the murmurings decreed, would have their homes struck by a thunderbolt or razed by a tempest of unsurpassed ferocity. And, as it happened, in the preceding year the colony was stripped by the worst hailstorm in more than a generation. This expression of elemental fury was interpreted as portentous, especially as it followed other occurrences over the previous decade which had intimated that providence was displeased: plagues of locusts which appeared ravenously out of nowhere; outbreaks of stock diseases that decimated the herds which were so integral to tribal society; and years of drought that parched the landscape and withered the crops. Added to this was the recent memory of an intrusive census, and anger at the imposition of a poll tax, levied to replenish the colony's coffers after the Anglo-Boer War. With times so out of joint, the scene for rebellion was set.

Before long, sections of the Zulu people under the leadership of a minor chief named Bhambatha rose up against the colonial authorities. At Maphumulo, on the border of Zululand and not far from the piece of land that two decades later would be renamed Hazara, tensions were combustible, with local chiefs said to be recalcitrant. Near Richmond, and a day's ride from where the estranged son of a Norfolk parson had once sought to grow cotton, another group of boycotters was similarly defiant. To restore order, a squad of Natal Police was dispatched, and in the fracas a sub-inspector and trooper were killed. In response, the authorities lashed out, executing twelve men and destroying homesteads and crops. Then a convoy at Mpanza, some thirty miles from Maphumulo, was ambushed, and four more Natal policemen were killed. At Hillcrest near Durban, Mia's father, Colin Keith-Fraser, by then a Justice of the Peace, was busily seeking protection for farmhouses which had been abandoned by their settler owners.

Scattered as they were throughout the colony, and responsible for law and order, the Natal Police in their outstations took on the rebels before the militias were mobilised. Needing far less provocation than they had already been subjected to, the colonial authorities deployed troops into various districts, with the main force crossing the Tugela River into Zululand, heading specifically for the Nkandla forest into which Bhambatha and his followers had retreated. Among the young men in uniform were three siblings, John and Lewis, veterans of the Anglo-Boer War, and Dennis, aged twenty-five and yet to experience his baptism of fire. Only their youngest brother, Dalton, who had just turned nine, remained at home, being too young to fight.

To Bhambatha and his followers, with the militia in pursuit, the Nkandla forest would have seemed welcoming and aflutter with kindred spirits. Yet to the settlers, even the farmers' sons who had been born in the colony and had grown up in the countryside, the wooded fastness with its tangled groins and clefts was dense and forbidding. So before they swept it, the troops shelled the dark labyrinth, sending ordnance thundering through the treetops and shrapnel scything through the undergrowth. At night, using field glasses, they scrutinised the valleys for

campfires, and if a flicker was sighted, artillery pieces would hurriedly be manoeuvred and a firestorm unleashed.

Being among the nearly three-hundred-strong contingent of the Natal Mounted Rifles, both Lewis and Dennis would have been in the column that marched to Maphumulo in its simmering magistracy some fifteen miles from the future Hazara. In the days that followed, actions were fought nearby at Otimati and Thring's Post, trading stations along the road to Stanger, and near what was to become the Garnetts' farm, Mayfield. In one, the rebels ambushed a convoy of ox wagons, wounding a Natal Mounted Rifles sergeant who ran five miles to Maphumulo for assistance, and killing a trooper whose body was mutilated. In another, a corporal who was riding to the coast was attacked and his horse skewered with an assegai. At the same time, the telegraph line between Maphumulo and Stanger was cut, a stock inspector assaulted, and a storekeeper stabbed to death.

In retaliation, the Natal Mounted Rifles sent a force of sixty-six men to sweep a nearby valley, where they were attacked by two hundred rebels, who charged in waves but appeared to be paralysed by the volleys of gunfire. In the action, which lasted less than an hour, a hundred and fifty attackers were killed with no loss to the colonial forces.

Five days later, in the vicinity, there was another engagement, referred to as the action at Peyana, or Hlonono. In broken country near Thring's Post, where the plateau falls away precipitously into the Umvoti River valley, several thousand rebels were provoked into a charge by several hundred militiamen, among them troops of the Natal Mounted Rifles. Faced by a withering fusillade, the rebel phalanx broke into three parts, one coming within yards of the Natal Mounted Rifles' position before it was checked. Once the firing was over, the death toll was similarly one-sided: some seventy rebels and no militiamen.

Other than rifles, the colonial forces had fifteen-pounder artillery pieces and Maxim and Rexer machine guns, while the impi had little more than assegais. As in the recent Matabele War in the territory north of the Limpopo, named Rhodesia after Cecil Rhodes, and the Battle of Omdurman in the Sudan, with Horatio Kitchener commanding, to such firepower the indigenes had no answer.



Colonial militia entering the Umvoti Valley during the Bhambatha Rebellion, 1906

A week after Peyana, a supply column heading from Zululand to Maphumulo was ambushed near a trading post called Macrae's Store but the attackers were repulsed, leaving forty dead at the cost of one militiaman. Across the hills from the site of the skirmish, beyond where the Doornkop mill would in decades be built, was the future Hazara. Nearby was Bulwer Farm, later the home of the Jonases, and within earshot was Leighton Estate, later the home of Commander Palairret.

Several days after the Macrae's Store engagement, and still in the vicinity, a combined force of three columns, including a squadron of the Natal Mounted Rifles, pressed home their advantage, moving at night into an area called Izinsimba and encircling several valleys where a large

body of rebels had been sighted. From dawn, sweeps through the thorn country and wooded gullies elicited a spirited response, with the tally turning out to be the most skewed of all: five hundred and forty-seven rebels killed with no loss to the militia.

A month earlier than this concluding bloodbath, the main column, with John in it, had had similar success in its operations in the Nkandla forest, trapping the rebels in the wooded Mome Gorge and mowing them down. Among the dead was Bhambatha, first decapitated for identification purposes and then buried whole, but wishfully resurrected by a grieving populace and propelled into legend.

Sixty years later, when Lewis and Beryl were living at Hazara, in the former manager's house several hundred yards from the main house, beyond the palms and the magenta explosions of bougainvillea, it was either Peyana to which Lewis was referring when he said it was a slaughter, or Izinsimba, some eight miles north-east of the farm, the biggest bloodbath of all.

In the engagements at Thring's Post, among the rolling hills to the west of the coastal strip that had already begun to morph into sugar fields, leading a team of stretcher bearers was Mohandas Gandhi, a Durban lawyer, who would later, as the Mahatma, take on the British Empire and prevail. Given the intimacy of the skirmishes, Lewis and Dennis must surely have interacted with the scurrying band of samaritans and their leader, and Gandhi himself must have seen among the milling victors the young trooper brothers, sweating after their exertions, and with their rifle barrels still hot to the touch. What, did it appear to him, was their demeanour: were they suitably reflective or full of unseemly bravado?

Late in 1906, by when the rebellion had been crushed, the overlord-underdog polarity was as stark as ever. Across Natal, in traditional homesteads and on farms and in squatter settlements, families were grieving and angry. That not all the Zulus had rebelled, and some had even collaborated with the authorities, added to the confusion. And if, as after the Mutiny in India fifty years earlier, the chasm between the colonists and colonised had widened, so another rift had grown between the settlers and metropolitan authorities. In London, officialdom was appalled at the extent of the bloodshed, but the colonials' riposte was

that armchair critics so far from the action couldn't grasp the highness of the stakes and the extent to which firmness was imperative.

With their services no longer required, John and Lewis returned to their outposts, each no more than several buildings on a hilltop, with a flag flying, and Dennis resumed the urban life that to take up arms he had put aside.

While Bertha was at Grey's Hospital in Pietermaritzburg, her younger sister Beryl was in Durban, nursing at the Natal Government Hospital, a low building with a columned facade and a cupola, set among sand dunes near the Indian Ocean. Like the nurses at Grey's, those at Addington, as it later became known, worked tirelessly to contain the outbreaks of diphtheria, enteric and malaria that were then so prevalent, but having no resident doctor they had in emergencies to dispatch runners to summon assistance. Both the Anglo-Boer War and Bhambatha Rebellion had necessitated expansion, and it was during these emergencies that in their long skirts and pinafores, and with their ruffs and caps, Beryl and her colleagues were busier still. A portrait of her at the time shows a striking young woman in a crisp white uniform, with a whippet waist.

Later, she trained further in Johannesburg before spending a year at Grey's and then moving to Cape Town for her first military stint. While in a hospital below Table Mountain, she applied to join the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserve, citing as a referee a Mrs Lydall, whom she added persuasively was the sister of General Sir John French, commander of the British cavalry during the Anglo-Boer War.

Her elder sister Bertha's career had similarly been on the move. After tending British and colonial wounded in the Anglo-Boer War, she had sailed to England with military wives and patients, in London doing a stint at the Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital and being decorated by the War Office, before returning to South Africa and nursing privately.



Beryl as a nurse at Addington Hospital, Durban, c.1900

But when in June 1914 Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip assassinated the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir apparent to the Habsburg dynasty, the gunshots in Sarajevo echoed even in faraway Natal. For no sooner had Austro-Hungary declared war on Serbia and in quick succession Germany had declared war on Russia and France, and invaded Belgium, and in reply Britain had declared war on Germany, so the extremities of the British Empire too were drawn into the conflagration.

To secure the Cape sea route for Allied shipping, London requested the South African government to invade German South West Africa to silence its radio stations and capture the towns of Swakopmund, Luderitzbucht and Windhoek. With the memory of the Anglo-Boer War still smarting, the South Africans prevaricated, fearing that many Afrikaners would balk at attacking the dominion of an ally. But former Boer generals Jan Smuts and Louis Botha did finally accede, needing first

Part Two

to put down an insurrection among their own forces before pushing into the territory. And when, as medical support, a squad of nurses was dispatched by ship from Cape Town to Walvis Bay, among them was thirty-one-year-old Beryl.

The South African attack had four prongs, each with nurses and a field hospital, and Beryl found herself in support of Botha's column, at the Prinzessin Hospital in Swakopmund, between the Atlantic and the Namib Desert. Unknown to her, the naval transport officer down the coast at Luderitzbucht was Benjamin Chave, who once, in dense fog, piloted Botha safely ashore. A photograph shows the general disembarking from the tug *Sir Frederick*, with Chave in the background. To the month, two years later the *Almwick Castle* would be sunk from under him, and so expansive was the web of imperial association that seven years later still he would be a guest at James and Mia's wedding in distant Natal.



Louis Botha (left) with Benjamin Chave partially obscured in the background, Luderitzbucht, South West Africa, 29 March 1915

As the retreating Germans had poisoned the wells, fresh water was scarce, and its paucity, and the heat and dust, were greater challenges than the *schutztruppe* and their askaris, who for all their mettle were outnumbered and outmanoeuvred and soon capitulated. For Beryl, however, the campaign was not only an adventure but also a preparation for her next posting: the South African General Hospital, outside the village of Abbeville, above the valley of the Somme.

Dennis also volunteered for service, as did Bertha, who from the Eastern Front serialised her diary to Beryl on the Western Front and to Blanche, Beatrice and Birdie at home in Durban, instructing each to share it with the others. Included was their mother Anna, by now a widow, who had moved from Greenwood Park to the Berea. About this pooling of news there was something distinctly feminine, as if John and Lewis in their outstations in Natal, and Dennis in his bivouac in Picardy, and the young Dalton, just out of school and readying himself to fight, were little more than eavesdroppers.

Bertha began her serial when aboard the SS *Aquitania*, a Cunard liner which had been transformed into a hospital ship. Dazzled by its size, she noted how elegant it must have been before it was crammed with thousands of cots and its deck partitioned off as wards. Nothing seemed to her more sad-looking than the expectant beds, and she could understand why the captain had wept when his vessel had been commandeered and stripped of its embellishments.

Being a hospital ship, the *Aquitania* had no escort, with all aboard entrusting themselves to the mercies of their enemies. There was cause for fear, however, because seven months earlier, off southern Ireland, a German U-boat had sunk their sister liner, the SS *Lusitania*, with the loss of more than a thousand lives. And only days before Bertha's opening entry, another ship, the *Ancona*, had been torpedoed at the very co-ordinates they were passing when they heard of its fate.

After leaving Southampton, the *Aquitania* entered the Mediterranean, threaded through the Straits of Messina and the islets of the Cyclades, and reached the Aegean island of Lemnos. With them in the harbour at Mudros were a hundred warships and hospital ships, including two Castle liners, with their links with home. About the *Aquitania's* destination

there was uncertainty, so for several windswept and snowy days the nurses waited aboard until they were transferred to another ship, the *Messilia*, which was tiny, and in which they were crammed into a hold with triple-layered bunks and piles of baggage and bedding. Taking stock, Bertha realised that it was eleven weeks since she had left Durban, of which fewer than five had been on land.

Without warning they were ordered to Gallipoli, several hours away, where British, French, Australian and New Zealand troops were bloodily engaged with the Turks and their German high command, to take on Allied wounded from Suvla Bay. On their arrival the importance of the *Messilia*'s smallness became apparent, because there were no jetties, and the replenishment ships and hospital ships had to edge as close to the beaches as their draughts would allow. But no sooner were they about to weigh anchor than they were ordered offshore so that gunboats could draw the enemy's fire. From their anchorage Bertha and her colleagues had a commanding view of the beaches and the surrounding countryside, including a low-lying plain backed by a long ridge where the Turks were entrenched.

All day they listened to the roar of the guns and watched the shells bursting. The Turkish shells fell on the beaches, sometimes in the water, and several arced over their boat. The shells from the Allied gunboats off the coast broke on the hills, with huge columns of smoke. As evening fell, on both sides they could see the flashes from the batteries. A British battery, on the beach between two hospital ships, was silenced by a Turkish shell.

Next morning men began to arrive in barges. Although she had nursed battlefield casualties in the Anglo-Boer War, Bertha was unprepared for the numbers of maimed and dying men who were brought aboard, some crawling, some on stretchers, some piggybacked by orderlies. All day the grim procession continued, and by evening the *Messilia* had eight hundred patients, double its capacity, lying on mattresses or blankets, in every available space.

What Bertha and her colleagues didn't know was that a staged withdrawal was underway. Outnumbered and outgunned by the Turks and Germans, and facing mounting losses, the British commanders had

concluded that for overall victory more force was needed on the Western Front rather than needlessly expended in the East. The decision had been difficult to reach, for among the deliberators some were adamant that a final unwavering push could breach the Dardanelles. But General Kitchener, Secretary of State for War and progenitor of the Hazara Pioneers, was resolute. So while Bertha was being run off her feet by the wounded and dying on the *Messilia*, each night selected men along the hillside trenches were surreptitiously abandoning their posts and being rowed out to waiting ships.

From their patients the nurses heard of a deluge that had drowned men and swept away ammunition and rations. So violent was it that the Turkish and Allied soldiers had scrambled out of their trenches and stood in full view of each other, having neither the means nor will to fight. Recalling their icy days at Lemnos, the nurses realised that the men at Gallipoli had suffered far worse, hence their blisters and gangrene from frostbite.

Heavily laden, the *Messilia* headed back to Mudros, but the hospitals were overcrowded so it was ordered on to Malta. Food was scarce, the holds stifling, and body lice were everywhere. Each day men died and funerals were held for them. Bertha felt most for the pneumonia sufferers, who stood little chance, and was particularly shaken by the death of one young officer, much-loved by all, who remained cheery to the last.

All this Bertha recorded in her diary, feeding it to her mother and sisters, with instructions that her brothers be kept informed. And across Europe and Africa this filigree of news created a familial bond, linking siblings separated by war.

At Malta, all but the most gravely injured were sent on to Gibraltar, while Bertha and her colleagues were transhipped to a P&O liner, the *Morece*, and ordered eastwards again. With its narrow entrance and towering walls, Valletta's Grand Harbour looked magnificent, and the Maltese buildings glowed arrestingly in the winter light. But unknown to anyone, random events were poised to coalesce, for one bay beyond the Valletta skyline, among the honey-coloured buildings in the suburb of Sliema, an English captain and veteran of Gallipoli would soon marry the daughter of a Maltese politician, and in faraway Malaya they would

have a daughter who would later be passed on to new parents in Natal and marry Bertha's nephew.

Twice that night the *Morece* picked up survivors from torpedoed ships, but reached Alexandria, where the nurses were transhipped yet again, to the RMSP *Asturia*, bound for a hospital at Salonika. No sooner had they embarked than they were harried by U-boats, but at full speed the *Asturia* zigzagged, gashing the water, and made good its getaway.

At the front, British and French troops were reinforcing the Serbians against the advancing Germans and Bulgarians, but the retreat from Serbia was underway and desperate men were sweeping southwards. As the nurses travelled in motor ambulances to the hospital, which for nine months was to be their home, dejected-looking Greek soldiers with horses and donkeys filed past them.

Being in a tented camp not far from the front line, not only were the nurses and patients vulnerable to the elements and the diseases which shadowed the combatants, but also to enemy attacks and a sullen populace of uncertain allegiance. The first night was truly a baptism for it rained torrentially and in their mackintoshes and oil skin caps and boots the nurses were soon floundering by the light of their lamps to find the entrance flaps of the four tents that each had been allocated. As they discovered, nursing in tents required a special ingenuity because as walls billowed and medicine cabinets toppled there were delirious patients to pacify and candle flames to cosset for fear of the darkness.

One morning, while Bertha and a colleague were walking on a hill near the camp, there was a sharp whizzing beside them and a burst of dust and smoke, followed by another and yet another. As they ran back to the hospital they noticed, high above, an aircraft. Bertha's white apron was blamed for the attack and she and her colleague were castigated by their matron.

Thereafter, air attacks became commonplace. One occurred while Bertha was preparing for bed after a night shift, when through the tent canvas she and her colleagues heard once again the now familiar whizzing sounds which heralded the first explosion, followed by the usual hours of bombardment, with bombs exploding on the ground and machine guns chattering in dogfights overhead, and the ships in

the harbour and the anti-aircraft guns on the hills all pounding away. Above the hospital a *taube* was hit and glided like a winged francolin before it crashed. A bomb fell near the tent but failed to explode, and others landed throughout the camp, making large holes in the ground. Afterwards, the air was filled with guncotton, and the nurses amused themselves by trying to catch the floating fragments.

One day, Bertha and her colleagues had an encounter with a French pilot who had been circling overhead and at whom they had been waving. When he landed in a nearby field, the nurses ran out to him, the clean linen, which had just been issued, still under their arms. Professing engine trouble, he expounded on the mechanics of bombing and declaimed that since his arrival at the front he had dropped no fewer than a hundred and eighty bombs over the Bulgarian lines. Eager to see the controls and the manner in which the bombs were vented, Bertha climbed into the cockpit and imagined herself aloft. Once airborne again the pilot saluted several times and almost looped the loop before heading away. Regularly in the following weeks he appeared over the hospital, performing a variety of antics, some so daring that the nurses collectively held their breath. To Bertha it seemed that the French pilots could teach the British a thing or two.

With death in the air, jackals were everywhere, howling in the night and skulking around the mortuary, and were chased away by orderlies. And with the camp having been the site of an earlier battle, human remains were regularly unearthed.

After the baptismal deluge it became bitterly cold, with snow on the mountains, among them Olympus, visible in the distance. At first the sunrises and sunsets were glorious, but then it started to snow, and the nurses, muffled in a variety of garments, were sequined with flakes as they hurried between tents. Being a child of the sub-tropics, Bertha was enthralled at first, even when at breakfast one morning she was dusted with whiteness through a hole in the tent, but soon the winter took hold.

Early in 1916 news was received that in the face of a Bulgarian and German advance the doctors and nurses in Skopje had needed to flee for their lives. Pre-empting an attack, scores of Allied aircraft flew northwards with their bombs, and the booming of the heavy guns became so loud

that Bertha and her colleagues had to block their aching ears. Soon the wounded began to arrive, and the nurses were run ragged, some being sent to bolster clearing stations, and others, like Bertha, retained in the hospital itself.

Then, one night, they had their first encounter with a Zeppelin. On noting a faint shadow slip across the interior of their tents, some nurses ran outside and saw a bright light in the sky above them. Immediately the camp's lights were doused, but no sooner was there darkness than the cannonade began. Allied aircraft scrambled in pursuit but the Zeppelin made good its getaway, although another was shot down nearby. As troops guarded the site, circling *taubes* bombarded them, seeking to obliterate the details of the airship's construction. Twelve survivors from the Zeppelin were captured and there was talk of others on the run.

Even if no staff at the hospital had been killed by enemy action, illness took its toll. The nurses were inoculated for typhoid and cholera, which intermittently swept the area, and several were invalided out to England with nephritis. Then dysentery killed one; and another, her mind fragmented by shell shock, became delusory and died. Half the night staff had been sick, and after eight weeks of uninterrupted night duty Bertha went down with a chill that was compounded by sepsis.

Hopes were raised by the first surge of spring, and the colour-burst of poppies, daisies, violets and forget-me-nots. In groups, the nurses went out for walks and picnics in the countryside, and in a valley Bertha discovered a spring which reminded her of home, and where she and a colleague brewed tea without the need for chloride of lime. But even if relations with the Greeks were said to be improving, a nurse seeking to bargain with a shepherd for a sheep bell had dogs set on her. Elsewhere a shepherd had been shot for doing likewise, and Allied soldiers were prohibited from buying liquor from villagers because a number had been poisoned. The local people seemed more a mixture of Turks and Bulgarians than Greeks, which for Bertha explained their treacherousness. They were, she concluded, far inferior to Zulus.

With the summer came mosquitoes, and screens were erected and quinine administered. Even after a childhood in Natal, where malaria was prevalent, Bertha was taken aback by the virulence of the strain,

for patients raved like madmen and died very quickly. At the front line men were said to be falling dead while marching. British reports, Bertha noted, took solace in the claim that French soldiers were dying in greater numbers because of their insanitariness.

And with the heat and mosquitoes came the snakes, which suddenly were everywhere, in the tents and dugouts. Orderlies were summoned to kill them, but still people were bitten, although with minimal effect. If the malaria at home seemed no match for the Grecian strain, the Greek snakes, for all their repellence, paled beside the mambas and cobras at Greenwood Park and Ifafa. In a show of colonial robustness in the face of such creatures, she was surprised that for the English girls even the insects held horrors. Countering the mosquitoes and snakes were the tortoises, animated after months of hibernation, which the nurses adopted, having holes bored in their shells for leashes which they tied to tent posts.

But slowly, relentlessly, the heat increased. All day the night-staff nurses lay tossing on their beds and at dusk had to drag themselves back into the wards. As more nurses fell ill so the number of patients each was responsible for increased, reaching over a hundred. Untended, delirious men escaped on crazed perambulations and had later to be retrieved from beyond the lines. Even the night sky seemed transformed by the heat, for after the usual thunder and lightning that brought no rain, shooting stars exploded in the heavens, each with its comet-tail difficult to distinguish from the restless traffic of aircraft. And in the darkness to avoid the heat, the nurses heard British, French and Serbian troops, thousands of them, their horse harnesses jingling, marching on their way to the front. Among them, in a further coalescence of events, was a Royal Malta Artillery officer whose granddaughter would in decades become Bertha's niece by marriage.

As Bertha's letters became less frequent and more fragmentary, she wrote of losing weight and being ill in bed and her matron saying that she would send her away for a break if only she could spare her. Confessing that she was at the end of her tether, she undertook to serve out her secondment, but fell just short. Invalided out of Salonika in 1916, she returned to South Africa, where, after convalescing, she resumed nursing.

The Big Push had just begun when Beryl and her colleagues reached their tented encampment. Already arriving were ambulance-loads of men, their brokenness so at odds with the bucolic scenes of harvesters in the surrounding wheat fields, and with the joyous blaze of red poppies whose symbolism was yet to be conceived. By chance, Beryl's arrival coincided with another event that was to have consequences for her family, for barely fifty miles north-east of her, in the normally sylvan countryside, her younger brother Dennis was about to have his first taste of non-colonial action.

If Jutland was by then the biggest naval engagement ever, the first day of the Battle of the Somme was the bloodiest encounter in the history of warfare. In hours, tens of thousands of men would be scythed by machine guns or dismembered and fragmented by the artillery shells whose percussions set up a steady thunder across the woodlands and fields. And among the doomed battalions assembling for that suicidal rush, with the Manchester Regiment was a fresh-faced subaltern and a former chorister at Chester Cathedral School named James Woollam.

As darkness fell on the opening day of slaughter, the clearing of casualties increased in tempo. Along the trenches through the valley of the Somme, and in the no-man's-land that abutted it, shadowy figures hurried about retrieving the dead and wounded. Because the toll far exceeded what had been anticipated, the stretcher bearers couldn't cope, and squads of artillerymen, engineers and pioneers were summoned for support. Neither were there sufficient stretchers, so many of the

wounded had to be carried in blankets to tented clearing stations near the front line. There, bloodied surgeons attempted to waylay the dying, while casualties with a better chance were shuttled in ambulances and trains and barges to nearby hospitals, or to ships which ferried them across the Channel for treatment in England.

In her hospital in Abbeville, Beryl was overwhelmed by the wounded, and in her fractured-femur ward was frenetically attempting to save those men who had survived amputations in the clearing stations but whose condition through shock and loss of blood was perilous, or who had begun to haemorrhage en route, or whose shattered limbs had yet to be removed because the front-line surgeons had been too busy to attend to them.

The deluge that engulfed her that summer in France was beyond her wildest imaginings. Even on the Eastern Front, where Bertha had more than a hundred patients to care for, conditions were preferable, because as the slaughter of the first day was replicated in the weeks that followed so the hellish avalanche continued. As in many other hospitals, the wards at Abbeville became a purgatory where maimed and dying men, their minds warped by chloroform and dislocation, cried out deliriously while exhausted surgeons pressed on doggedly with their scalpels and saws, and exhausted nurses rushed about with their bandages and shrouds.

In Britain in early July 1916 there was initially elation at what was considered the success of the Big Push, but as processions of stricken men began to disembark from ships, some in open-backed ambulances and others limping and staggering from the quaysides to waiting trains, so the public realised that whatever gains had been made had come at a terrible cost.

Witnessing the processions was Miss Ellen Moore Smith, the headmistress of Durban Girls' College, whose arrival at the school more than a decade earlier had narrowly preceded the entry of the three Bs – Beryl, Beatrice and Birdie – and who at the time of the Big Push was on a visit to England. So appalled was she that on returning to Durban she prohibited the girls from singing 'It's a long way to Tipperary', having heard thousands of troops singing it as they marched off to fight, many never to return. In solidarity with the mood of sacrifice, some girls gave

up sugar for the war's duration and others stopped wearing ribbons in their hair.

As in Salonika, sepsis was rife, and the sisters at Abbeville had often to wash and dress wounds through the struts of splints, being careful not to disturb the fracture that had already been aligned. Sometimes this took multiple nurses hours at a time, particularly when the leg had been blasted by shrapnel and the splint needed to be dismantled piecemeal to cleanse the purulence and apply a salve.

Hurrying about the wards, ministering to patients and seeing only too vividly the horror of it all, Beryl each night collapsed into bed in her tent among tents. Before being anaesthetised by sleep, she mouthed a prayer for her mother and her siblings strewn across the hemispheres, with a special codicil for Dennis, who only miles away had been pitched straight into the cauldron.

Having exchanged Durban for Longueval, a normally picturesque village in Picardy, and Delville Wood, the normally sylvan agglomeration of oaks and birches beside it, the Natal Mounted Rifles were encamped and expectant. And among them was the little brother of Beryl's prayers, for whom a mixture of patriotism, peer pressure and flight from the monotony of court interpreting had compelled him to again take up arms. Just as a decade earlier in the Bhambatha Rebellion his erstwhile adversaries had faced barrages of artillery, so now, on the Somme, was his turn.

At first the English and loyalist Afrikaner volunteers of the South African Brigade, with their Zulu war-cries and easy informality, were held in reserve, as was customary with troops unfamiliar with trench warfare, while the Royal Scots advanced through a firestorm towards the cluster of trees. And when the Scots faltered, as any such attackers would have, the South Africans were ordered to advance. Cannily, to avoid the salvoes of shells that preceded the Springbok attack, the Magdeburgers and Bavarians retreated, and in their absence appeared to invite the three thousand young men from cities like Durban and Pietermaritzburg, and Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, and Johannesburg and Kimberley, and towns and farms across the Union, into the splintered canopy and tangle of undergrowth on the western fringes of the wood.

Yet what looked at first like a bridgehead lightly taken soon turned into a trap as seven thousand Germans counter-attacked, and for the next five days relentlessly beset the dug-in South Africans with shells and gas and sniper fire and successive waves of infantry with their bayonets fixed. Reaching a crescendo of four hundred shells a minute, the artillery bombardment transformed the wood into a nightmare of shattered trees and burning stumps, and craters, and mounds of corpses. Across this killing field, as if possessed, the South Africans and Germans raged, and caught up in the maelstrom was Dennis. As if oblivious of the madness that was being enacted, the sun and rain dispensed their respective bounties, first heat with its attendant thirst and hastening effect on putrefaction, and then deluges that leached the corpses and transformed the bomb craters into reservoirs of run-off tintured with blood.

But it must have been the fear and the panic and the noise that was the worst of it. And the fatigue that had men, even in the face of death, falling asleep on their feet; and the relentless need, in the midst of thundering distractions, to focus on the next attack, as the wounded lay everywhere, lowing, to paraphrase a diary entry, like cattle at a spring fair. For how much horror can a soul endure before, like a mirror, it cracks?

Among the few survivors was Dennis, with his shrapnel wound and other as yet unfathomed infirmities. Whether he knew it or not, aged thirty-three he had just experienced the defining moment of his life, for in the twenty-one years left to him the swirling memory of that hellish encounter would be his most intimate companion.

While at Gallipoli the Australians and New Zealanders each forged in their sacrifice a sense of nationhood, at Delville Wood the South Africans were less successful. Given a fractious past, deep animosities still fissured the idea of a national consciousness, and unlike those identities bestride the Tasman Sea, the Union remained divided. For even if Delville Wood had made blood brothers of men who sixteen years earlier, at Magersfontein and Colenso, had been seeking to kill each other, back at home there were still Afrikaners whose anger had not abated, and sullen subject peoples, forever on the periphery, whose lot as helots had remained unchanged.

Part Two



Dennis in uniform, not long after the Battle of Delville Wood

If John and Lewis were too old or indispensable to fight, Dalton, the baby brother, who at nine had been too young to take up arms against Bhambatha's rebels, reached the age of enlistment. Sailing to England on the RMS *Walmer Castle*, he joined the Royal Flying Corps, and was training on Bristol fighters when the war ended. Developing somehow an aversion to flying, he flew only once again, when years later on a sea voyage to the Seychelles he was taken ill and had hurriedly to return home. This phobia extended further, for he declined ever to learn to drive.

Back from France, Dennis settled in Pinetown, a borough ten miles inland from Durban. Resuming the life that twice he had left to bear arms, he became a clerk in a legal firm. Once again he commuted to work, returning at dusk to his suburban house where a breeze lapped at the curtains as if seeking to scarify the residual heat. But he was edgy and

restless, partially because of the drudgery of his employment, but largely because at Delville Wood a discordance had entered his soul.

Beryl nursed at Passchendaele where a bombardment of millions of shells and repeated rushes by the infantry gained the Allies five hundred yards at a cost of three hundred thousand casualties. But no sooner was the armistice signed than she received a telegram saying that her mother was dying. After nursing briefly at the South African Military Hospital at Richmond Park in Surrey, she boarded HMHS *Carisbrooke Castle* for the journey homewards. She had been mentioned in dispatches and awarded the Royal Red Cross, Second Class. Among the Allied forces, the award in the first class was the premier decoration for British and Commonwealth military nurses.

Early in 1919 at Anna's bedside in Durban were all the World War I returnees: Beryl and Dennis back from France; Bertha back from Salonika; and Dalton back from England. Also present were John and Lewis, both veterans of earlier conflicts, for of the family of nine that had congregated to bid their mother farewell, only three sisters – Blanche, Beatrice and Birdie – had escaped the call to war.

When Anna died, the ages of her children ranged from forty-seven to twenty-one, a span in which men and women customarily take spouses. By then, however, only Lewis had married, having chosen an Anglican parson's daughter named Mary Chaplin. That at the time of her mother-in-law's death Mary was pregnant is significant, because in her womb was the foetus of a boy who one day would become master of Hazara.

In his outstations John remained a bachelor, although Dennis and Dalton both later married. Why of the five sisters only one found a husband was long a subject of conjecture, for, although dowerless, all in their youth were attractive and several were striking. It was posited that perhaps they had been too discerning. Or that, brought up in the countryside at Ifafa, with limited contact with others of their kind, and where like scamps they had roamed the coastlands and beach, there was between the siblings such a strong bond that it had been difficult to break away. Or that their parents had played a role, for being adrift in a new world themselves they may unwittingly have nurtured an abnormal cohesion. And when Birdie did marry, it was to Edgerton Tritton, son of William Tritton, the doctor at Umzinto who had ushered Lewis and Harry Lugg into the world. And, like Lewis, Edgerton would become a magistrate.

In a 1914 edition of the *Windsor Magazine*, an illustrated monthly published in London, there was a photograph of Edgerton Tritton. Taken at Nongoma in Zululand, it shows him early in his career when he was clerk of the court at Ndwedwe, a magistracy near Durban. The

occasion was a visit to Zululand by Henry Rider Haggard, author of *King Solomon's Mines*, whom Tritton was accompanying on a leg of a Royal Commission tour. With them is Chief Mpikanina, son of Chief Ziweddu, grandson of King Mpande, and nephew of King Cetshwayo, and they are engaged in an indaba.

In a row on the courthouse veranda are four figures, all seated: Tritton, wearing a light-coloured suit with a white shirt and a tie; Captain Matravers of the Zululand Police, in uniform, with his pith helmet and knee-high leather boots; James Gibson, Native Commissioner at Eshowe and author of the *The Story of the Zulus*, in a suit and trilby; and Haggard, in knickerbockers and wearing a Stetson. Facing them, in a chair in the open, is Mpikanina, his bulk ballooned by a greatcoat, holding a pith helmet. Behind him sit a row of headmen.

In the headgear of the interlocutors are the hallmarks of the colonial reality. With the confidence of ascendancy, Matravers, Gibson and Haggard are each wearing a hat or helmet that they have not deigned to



Edgerton Tritton (left) with colleagues and Henry Rider Haggard (fourth from left) in discussion with Chief Mpikanina and retinue, Nongoma, 1914

remove, their gaze directed at the man sitting opposite them. Looking in from the outside is Mpikanina, kinsman of kings, who had chosen to sport a pith helmet in the hope that it would appropriate for him some of the authority of the settlers, but in whose presence feels unable to wear it, instead holding it like a football in his lap.

For the authorities, Gibson was the spokesman, and the focus of the deliberation was land. 'If you can exercise any power as to these lands which have been given away to the white men,' pleaded one of the elders with Gibson, 'you would indeed be ruling us for our good.' Haggard was sympathetic, but in his diary noted that Gibson would have had to fob off such an entreaty, for acceding to it would have meant the dismantlement of the settlers' world. Then, decorously, the visitors bade the delegation farewell and headed off to Mahlabatini, a village some thirty miles to the south.

That the deputation's entreaties had made an impression on Haggard is clear from his report back to British Colonial Secretary Lewis Harcourt. It was, he claimed, a great mistake to suppose that a native doesn't feel, or forgets harsh treatment. In fact, at the bottom of the native's secret mind, which so few settlers have the imagination and sympathy to understand, he feels a great deal. And, Haggard added, the native's memory is so long that he can quote specific words and deeds from as far back as when Shaka and Dingane were king and when his nation was great and ruled the land:

No syllable, no gesture is overlooked. It is all there written upon the book of his mind, and much else is there also, of which he does not speak to the white man – as yet. But a day may dawn when he, or his son, or his grandson will do so and then it will be found that no single blow, or curse, or humiliation or act of robbery or injustice has been overlooked.

Having flown the nest, Birdie lived with Edgerton at scattered postings as he climbed the civil service ladder. Being after 1910, when the British colonies and Boer republics were conflated into the Union of South Africa, his deployments were predominantly outside Natal, but he was angling to return.

Most rooted in Durban were Blanche and Beatrice, who owned a house in Ferndale Avenue, which for all its name was a lane, where other siblings stayed whenever they were passing through. Nearby on the seaward slope was Mitchell Park, with its lawns and large sub-tropical trees whose canopies gleamed in the humid heat, and where a variety of exotic animals, like a tiger and Indian elephant, and giant tortoises and antlered deer, were caged amid the shrubbery. For the residents in whose suburb it was set, the park was a bower for picnics and games, or where children were taken, either in prams or bound snugly to their Zulu nannies' backs, for slow and chatty perambulations among the dapples. Across the dell, with a perspective from below which suggested that it was built on foliage, was Manor House, Sir Liege Hulett's city mansion, where he died and whence his body was returned to Kearsney for burial in his cemetery among the sugar fields.

For most of her working life, Blanche was a secretary at Hunt, Leuchars and Hepburn, a long-established timber company. If the bungalow in Ferndale Avenue was effectively her castle, Beatrice's was Durban Girls' College, where for decades she taught and was treasurer of the Old Girls' Guild. Each sister had only a short commute, one across the Berea and the other down it towards the city and sea, and effectively these were the co-ordinates of their world.

On her return from Salonika, Bertha bought a piece of land in Pinetown and had a house built on it. Some of her hard-headedness she channelled into politics, becoming with her sister Beryl and Elizabeth Middleton, headmistress of Durban Girls' College, a founder member of the Black Sash in 1955, protesting at the removal of coloureds from the voters' roll by holding vigils of silent protest outside the city hall. Regretting her childlessness, she fostered a young girl and nurtured her into adulthood.

Up in Pietermaritzburg, Dalton was employed in the deeds office, navigating the labyrinth of legal documents while dreaming of yorkers and seamers. As a medium-pace bowler for Zingari, he was selected for the 1921 Natal team, taking forty wickets for fourteen runs apiece, but had little success with the bat. Watching him play in Durban were his sisters, in their cotton dresses and sunhats. When in the following season



Dalton in Natal cricket colours, c.1921

he was picked for the Springbok side, the B's in Ferndale Avenue were abuzz with excitement.

The fifth and final Test against the MCC was the second ever played at Durban's Kingsmead ground. Being February, it was sweltering, with the casuarinas and flannelled figures afloat in the humid haze. Among the spectators were Blanche, Beatrice, Bertha and Dennis, and probably John and Lewis, down from Zululand.

England batted first, making two hundred and eighty-one. Dalton or Conky, as he was known, bowled thirty-one overs, with ten maidens, taking one wicket for sixty-five runs. South Africa answered with one hundred and seventy-nine, of which Dalton made three not out. In the second innings, the MCC consolidated their lead, adding two hundred and forty-one to the Springboks' two hundred and thirty-four. Dalton bowled thirty overs, twelve of them maidens, and took one wicket for forty runs. His scalp was Frank Mann, the English captain, whom

he trapped leg before wicket. The MCC's rubber-winning victory concluded the series, three matches to two. With one hundred and forty runs in the first innings and one hundred and eleven in the second, Jack Russell made history as the first English batsman to score a century in each innings of a Test.

Before Dalton could build on his debut, ill health intervened. Overlooked for the Springbok tour of England the following year, he played for a South African team against Solly Joel's English touring side, and at various times represented Natal, Transvaal and Western Province, before regressing to club games. Entries in *Wisden* and a road name in Port Elizabeth bear witness to his brief success.

In 1927, Durban Girls' College had its golden jubilee and Beryl and Birdie joined Beatrice for the celebratory dinner at the Durban Country Club, near the Umgeni lagoon and the sea. It was a glittering occasion with long tables decorated with carnations, and with ribbons in the school's colours festooned on the wood-panelled walls, with overhead lights in green shades resembling banana leaves, striped in gold. Newspaper articles savoured the most fetching outfits: one, silver and black charmeuse; another, April-green georgette with a dainty scarf. A colleague with whom Beatrice had organised the event was the master of ceremonies, and the headmistress, Miss Harriet Robinson, co-hosted it with one of the oldest old girls. Well-known arias were played by the Rialto Orchestra, and so effervescent was everyone that there were outbursts of song.

There were speeches about tradition and spirit and tone, and how thrilling it must be for a young girl to enter the gates knowing that her mother had done so before her. The following morning, at the red-brick buildings on the Berea to which the school had relocated, the Administrator of Natal and the Mayor of Durban spoke, followed by a thanksgiving service at which an archdeacon officiated. Noted with satisfaction was that when the college was founded Durban's whites had numbered four thousand, and now totalled fifty-four thousand.

Being old girls of The Girls' Collegiate, which had begun in the same year as Durban Girls' College, Blanche and Bertha had their own celebrations in Pietermaritzburg, where too they were reminded of how

fortunate they were. But in the whirl of affirmation, of old girls kissing and hugging former school friends, and each bringing the others up to date with her news, there must have been sadness that none of the sisters had a daughter who too could celebrate in the years ahead. For although married, but aged thirty-seven and still childless, Birdie would now never produce a child to continue the family tradition that decades earlier had been so vigorously established.

From the residency at Barkly East, she and Edgerton travelled to Europe, sailing the Norwegian fiords and in London visiting Miss Ethel Moore-Smith, her former headmistress who had been so appalled by the sight of the wounded returning from the Somme. And when Beryl moved to Nairobi to help start a nursing home, Birdie took wing again, holidaying with her in England and on the Continent. Before long, Edgerton made it back to Natal, becoming the magistrate at Babanango, with Lewis similarly employed at neighbouring Nqutu.

In World War II, when a contingent of South African nurses was dispatched to East Africa to establish casualty-clearing stations in Mombasa and Gilgil, and a hospital at Nyeri, Beryl was its commander. While battlefield casualties were few, malaria was a killer, so quinine and nets were distributed. Placed in Beryl's charge were other hospitals, so she shuttled from the Rift Valley to Madagascar, where the torpedoing of HMS *Ramillies* would lead circuitously to Hazara. And when in Abyssinia the Italians surrendered, more hospitals were added to her list, among them one that would attempt unsuccessfully to save the life of a young assistant inspector named Beric Mansfield, who had been shot in the line of duty.

As in World War I, Beryl was mentioned in dispatches and awarded the Royal Red Cross, this time in the First Class. To Durban Girls' College she gave her medal, cast in gold in the shape of a Maltese cross, with a citation in the name of Douglas Haig but signed by King George V, and another signed by Winston Churchill as the Secretary of War. Insulated from the humidity, Beryl's trophies were displayed behind glass, first in a corridor, with girls sweeping past, and later in a musty archive, with the shrieks and laughter of young lives audible through the locked door.

The first sibling to die was John, the eldest. On retiring from the Natal Police he had joined the roads department and was based at Hluhluwe in Zululand as a supervisor, presumably of a maintenance gang, filling in potholes and restoring washed-away embankments, his face brick-reddened by the sun. There, one day in May 1927, in circumstances now mostly forgotten, he was crushed in a wagon accident. Rushed sixty miles to Empangeni along a dusty road through the thorn trees, with gates to be opened and closed, and dongas to be negotiated, he succumbed to his injuries in the War Memorial Hospital, aged fifty-five. The Reverend Charles Aylen, later Bishop of Zululand, conducted his funeral, and he was buried in the town's cemetery. Arriving from Pinetown the day afterwards, Dennis tied up his affairs. On hearing of the manner of their brother's death, his siblings recalled their mother relating how as a teenager their uncle James had died after a wagon accident.

In the family portrait taken twenty years earlier, John stands on the left of the back row, a tall figure with a longhorn moustache. That only his outline doesn't merge with anyone else's hints at a detachment. And that he was born in the early days at Ifafa, when after their ill-fated venture in the Umkomaas Valley his parents were finding their feet, and that he alone of the siblings had to make do with home schooling only, adds to his otherness.

For fighting the Boers and Bhambatha's rebels, and keeping the peace, he had received the Natal variant of the Colonial Long Service and Good Conduct Medal, with its crimson ribbon with a yellow stripe. Awarded to warrant officers, NCOs and other ranks in the Indian and

colonial forces, it saluted 'commendable action in the field, and long and meritorious service and good conduct'. With him on the medal roll were fellow colonials and former cavalrymen from British regiments. That unlike the others he had no rank can only mean that he lacked the attributes that earned preferment, or spurned it.

An obituary, written by a former colleague, appeared in Durban's *Natal Mercury*:

Just a modest death notice ... marks the passing to the Great Beyond of dear old 'Joe', as he was known by his many friends of the old Natal Mounted Police. It is probably just as he would have liked it to be, as no man could have been more modest than he. His sterling qualities, his generosity, his fearlessness, won for him the love and admiration of all who had the pleasure of knowing him. Descended as he was from some of the best stock in the land, to one of his sires fell the lot of informing our late Queen Victoria of her ascension to the throne at Kensington Palace. Joining the NMP somewhere about 1887, he served with that good old Corps until he retired on pension, and then took up his abode in Zululand, where he evidently, poor fellow, met his doom. He was a good linguist, a good horseman, and a good soldier, and above all, a white man through and through. He will be sadly missed by many old Natalians. 'Rest on, Joey'.

The 'sire' referred to by the obituarist was Francis, 2nd Marquess Conyngham, Britain's Lord Chamberlain, who in his painting *Victoria Regina* Henry Tanworth Wells depicts with the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Knowley, informing a young woman in a gossamer dress and in whose silhouette there is already an incipient plumpness that her uncle has died and she is now Queen of Great Britain and Ireland. In his claim of kinship with his ennobled namesake, John was either aware of a relatedness that the destruction of genealogical records in Ireland's Civil War has since made unverifiable, or in Natal Police barracks had grandiloquently been declaiming a linkage that could have occurred as far back as the Plantation of Ulster.

A decade later, Dennis, who on behalf of the family had laid John's life to rest, left his clerical job and set up a nursery on the banks of a stream in Pinetown, resolving to earn his living growing plants. In that quiet and nurturing environment he found some fulfilment, and

the venture blossomed. Yet just as decades earlier capricious weather had helped precipitate the Bhambatha Rebellion in which he had been blooded, so again it intervened. In sub-tropical Natal, heat and humidity combust into thunderstorms whose sound and fury is a feature of summer afternoons. Sometimes there is hail, but most often a deluge that drums on roofs and turns streets into runnels which pour themselves successively into streams and rivers, until a raging torrent is disgorged into the sea.

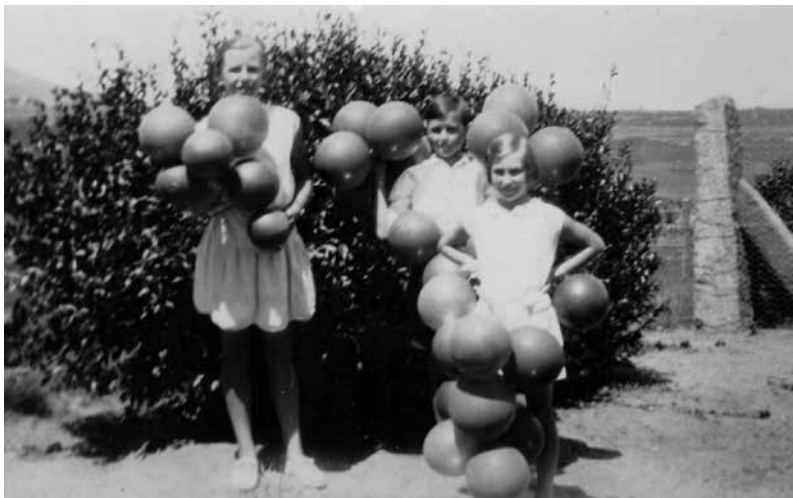
In one such downpour the stream bordering Dennis's nursery broke its banks and rushed headlong through the multitude of plants that so assiduously he had been nurturing, sweeping them all away. But as important as the poinsettias and bougainvilleas and mahoganies had been, and the financial value they represented, it was the symbol of what the nursery had become for him that was most important of all. For, with his seeds and slips and sleeves, at some deep and undefined level Dennis had been recreating a Delville Wood as a memorial to his comrades. Adding urgency to his quest was his guilt at having survived, and his need to put his nightmares to sleep. That his attempt at absolution had been thwarted, delivered the fatal blow. And that nothing was insured added a grim finality to the equation that Dennis was doing in his head; for once he had fathomed the extent of his loss, there seemed only one option, so he took a gun and shot himself.

Left behind were his widow and two sons. The elder, maintaining the family's link with the Natal Mounted Rifles, as a teenaged rifleman caught the endgame of World War II in Europe, advancing up Italy with the South African forces. In Milan, finding himself among troops protecting defeated fascists from a vengeful populace, he saw hanging upside down from the girders of a petrol station in the Piazzale Loreto the bodies of Benito Mussolini and his mistress Claretta Petacci. The younger, inheriting his father's fragility, died prematurely from drink.

As fate continued to tick off the siblings on a death register, Birdie, the second youngest, was next, cut down by illness in her early sixties. To Beatrice, Blanche and Dalton were granted longer spans, and to Bertha, Beryl and Lewis, longer still.

For their sons' childhoods, Lewis and Mary lived at Nqutu, a village in the Zululand interior, where Lewis was magistrate. That the area had once been contested was evident from the nearby Anglo-Zulu War battlefields of Isandlwana, where fewer than fifty years earlier the Zulus had routed the British, and Rorke's Drift, where later the same day the redcoats, with Henry Lugg among them, had grittily struck back. Not far north-east of Lewis's courthouse was the donga where Louis, the Prince Imperial, had been speared to death, bringing to an end the Napoleonic dynasty. And, thirty miles to the west was Dundee, site of the Battle of Talana, the opening engagement of the Anglo-Boer War.

Although Natal was technically no longer a British colony but part of a nascent South Africa, the earlier template had endured, with English- and colonial-born overlords and Zulu vassals. With Deane, Michael and Dennis growing up in a hamlet surrounded by farms, so their perspectives were invested with space and remoteness. And if the brothers' earliest schooling had been provided by a governess, as had their parents' and uncles' and aunts', Lewis and Mary determined that for their sons to be integrated into the wider society of which they were a part, they needed to be taught among their peers. So at great cost and much sacrifice, they sent them, by horseback and train, as boarders to Lewis's old school, Hilton College, a cluster of Cape-Dutch-style buildings on a plateau outside Pietermaritzburg. And when, in 1926, the school's ownership passed from the headmaster to the body of old boys, Lewis was a signatory to the covenant that symbolically assumed custodianship.



Dennis (Mick) with friends at a birthday party, Nqutu, c.1927

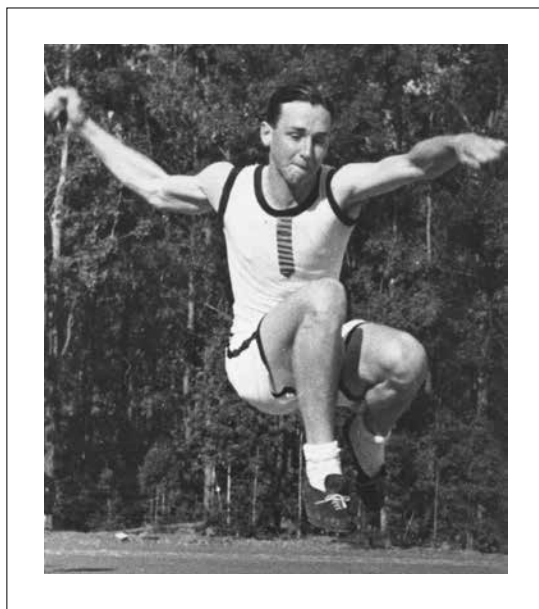
The first to attend was Deane, the eldest, who made his mark as a cricketer. Next was Michael, the quietest one, who into the classrooms and dormitories took with him the silence of the countryside. And last was Dennis, almost a decade after his eldest brother, and who in that colonial replica of an English public school shone most brightly.

But just when it seemed that Lewis and Mary had successfully resolved the matter of their children's education, during the school holidays in 1929, Michael, their taciturn country-boy of a son, and always a picture of health, contracted a virulent fever and died. Because for parents the loss of a child is fathomless, and the manifestations of grief so labyrinthine, probably from that devastating blow came the love of animals that characterised Mary's later years. She had a birdbath placed on Michael's grave in the Dundee cemetery, but nowhere was her grief displacement so apparent as at Ingwavuma, Lewis's next posting, where she had birdbaths and food tables erected at the Residency, and acquired among the country people a reputation as someone to whom distressed animals could be taken for care. For all her reputed toughness, photographs of her at the time show a wraith-like figure with an air of dishevelment.

Part Two

But for Dennis, who was still at Hilton, and who on Michael's death was accorded the nickname Mick, the move to Ingwavuma had other consequences, because to get home for the holidays he now had yet further to travel, and would need to do so alone. It meant too that Lewis and Mary seldom visited the distant school at which their youngest son was unremarkable in the classroom but electric on the sports field, playing three years for the first XV, two as captain, and captaining the athletics and shooting teams, and opening the bowling for the first XI. That rather than head boy, the position he coveted, he was appointed a school prefect and head of house was attributed to his hardness, for he was flinty and unforgiving.

From his schooldays there are various photographs of Mick: sitting sternly at the centre of the seated row, beside the headmaster or housemaster or coach, and surrounded by his peers, all scions of settler society and aglow with assurance. In one photo particularly, of him doing the long jump, in mid-flight in his white vest and shorts and running spikes, and with his legs thrusting forwards and his arms extended, he has the cast of a kouros.



Mick doing the long jump at Hilton College, c.1937

That on his departure his headmaster and housemaster had high hopes for him was affirming for Lewis and Mary, even if to them he was almost a stranger. Seeking adventure, he considered a stint in the British Palestine Police, but when in a local newspaper a recruitment notice for Royal Air Force pilots caught his eye, he applied and was accepted. As he prepared to depart, war broke out, so he hurried from Ingwavuma to Cape Town and caught a ship northwards.

Signing up at Uxbridge, outside London, where among the throng he was an outsider Zululander, he began his training. All around was war, with across the Continent armies advancing and retreating, and Dunkirk being evacuated, and the skies above England stitched by droning skeins of Luftwaffe bombers and the agitations of Royal Air Force fighters. At RAF College Cranwell on the flatlands of Lincolnshire, Mick was having terms like ‘aileron’ and ‘yaw’ and ‘altimeter’ added to his vocabulary, and flying biplane Tiger Moths and monoplane Oxfords, with seemingly endless interruptions for the funerals of airmen killed in combat.

No sooner had he earned his wings than he assumed operational duties. From airfields along the English coast, with a succession of squadrons he flew light-bomber Beauforts and Blenheims in attacks on enemy ships, and scoured the cold northern waters for the German battleship *Tirpitz* and battlecruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. On sighting an enemy vessel, torpedo-bombers knew the drill, making a beeline for the silhouetted hull, diving in low over the sea and through the barrage of anti-aircraft fire, holding a line, and then, as the target loomed, discharging their torpedo and pulling up and away.

After stints in England as a test pilot, and taking on German bombers, in North Africa and the Levant he flew Mosquitoes and Spitfires in photo-reconnaissance missions over enemy targets. A photograph shows him as a flight lieutenant, standing beside his Spitfire in the desert. He is in full Biggles regalia, with flotation vest and leather flying helmet, with his goggles pushed up over his hairline. Another shows him in Cairo, drinking at the Gezira Club with his cousins Gough and Ralph Chaplin, his mother Mary’s brother’s sons. Within months Ralph was dead, shot down while leading a flight of Spitfires in an attack on an Axis supply depot at Ancona harbour. In yet another, three men are standing beneath

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the rearing fuselage of a Mosquito: Mick, a squadron leader, Charles 'Bud' Tingwell, a flight lieutenant, and Bill Hunter, a flying officer.

In the North African desert with the South African Artillery, firing shells at Rommel's Afrika Korps was his brother Deane. Far away in Zululand were their parents, Lewis and Mary, holding thumbs.



Mick beside a Spitfire, North Africa, c.1943

As the most northern and isolated magistracy in Zululand, Ingwavuma abutted Swaziland and Portuguese East Africa. Being on the escarpment of the Ubombo Mountains, the hamlet with its police post and courthouse had an expansive view eastwards, down to the Makhatini Flats, with its thorn trees and fever trees, and on to the outline sixty miles away of the sand dunes at Kosi Bay, behind which thundered the serried breakers of the Indian Ocean.

Known as Maputaland, or Tongaland, the northern parts of Zululand had long been a place of diversion for the Zulus, who with impunity had plundered the border tribes. The British and Portuguese too had sparred over its ownership until a compromise borderline was prescribed: from the Ubombo Mountains, along the Usutu River to its confluence with the Pongola River, and then in a straight line eastwards to Ponta do Oro, on the southern limit of Portuguese territory. And from the mid-1930s until 1950, first as magistrate and then as native commissioner, and later as a retiree who had stayed on, the sandy malarial plain with its scattered pans fringed by reeds and marshland, where bream and tigerfish shimmered through the shallows, and where flocks of waterfowl seemed perpetually to be wheeling, was the centre of Lewis's reality.

To one early settler, the region was 'a howling wilderness of sandy flats and swamps – the deadliest hole for civilized men to get into'. And to a former magistrate at Ingwavuma, looking down from his Ubombo aerie, it was the 'biggest snake pit and drinking den in Africa'. But for all its heat and reputed dangers, to Lewis it was a paradise. As always in his

career, but with greater authority, at this last and longest posting he was fulfilling his role as controller and custodian, applying the law and, with an assuredness and tact built up over decades, helping to keep the peace. And because most of his postings had been in deeply rural tribal areas, he had acquired the reputation as someone attuned to Africa.

Among those who sought his counsel was Africana collector Killie Campbell, who in her home on Durban's Berea was accumulating documents and artefacts of old Natal and Zululand. Ferreting out places of historical interest, she wrote to Lewis for directions to a large cave in the upper Umhlali district, just south of Hazara, which after the war she intended to have photographed. Of its existence she had learnt from the daughter of the Reverend Josiah Tyler, an American missionary and the author of *Forty Years Among the Zulus*, who had spoken of her father using it as a chapel a century earlier, when elephants, lions and other big game still abounded. Folklore had fugitives using it too, fleeing Shaka's purges, for it was said to be heaped with skeletons.

Someone else who sought his guidance was Inez Verdoorn, the niece of polymath writer and naturalist Eugene Marais, and the doyenne of South African botanists. Hearing of Lewis's botanical interest and his familiarity with the Swaziland-Zululand borderlands, she asked him to guide an expedition to verify what she considered to be a new species of cycad, and to determine definitively that it was distinct from another endemic to the area. Along the spine of the Ubombo range, with the land falling away inland to the Nsongweni River and seawards to the Makhatini Flats, they scrutinised the prehistoric palms which spouted like fountains from crags and rocky outcrops, until they found what they were looking for. It *was* a new species, and *Encephalartos lembomboensis* was named.

As the world was at war, and the main supply route to the Allied forces in North Africa and the Mediterranean ran up the east coast of Africa, Zululand's security was paramount. Part of a Royal Air Force squadron was deployed to the eastern shore of St Lucia, an estuary a hundred miles south of Ingwavuma, and a cluster of Catalina flying boats were tasked with patrolling the Mozambique Channel in search of U-boats.

Armed with machine guns and depth charges, the large flying boats with their ten-man crews bounced noisily across the waters of the estuary, dodging hippos, before arcing upwards and outwards, over the bush and dunes. Once airborne, for up to a day they traced patterns of aerial reconnaissance across large swathes of ocean, in time harrying numerous submarines, even if only one, that shortly before had sunk a neutral Swedish tanker, was notched up as a kill. As a corollary to this deadly game was another of espionage and counter-espionage, and the eastern littoral was abuzz with rumours of blackouts and arms caches and of lights being flashed at night from concealed coastal lookouts to watchers offshore on the dark horizon.

During the war some one hundred and fifty vessels were sunk off South Africa, predominantly off Zululand, although a news blackout shielded the public from the carnage. Most costly was the transport ship *Nova Scotia*, with hundreds of casualties, predominantly Italian internees. That for weeks afterwards corpses were washing up on beaches must have brought home to Lewis that the war, hitherto an abstraction, was now part of his world. But however much he knew, he was compelled to conceal it. Yet the secret was impossible to keep, for at Durban, hundreds of miles to the south, for weeks after the sinking of the *Nova Scotia* the breakers dumped corpses onto the holiday beaches.

Elsewhere, too, the Allies' prospects looked grim. Months before the flying boats were first moored to the makeshift jetty protruding from the mangroves, Singapore had fallen, and suddenly it seemed that the unstoppable Japanese had Africa in their sights. Galvanised, Winston Churchill, as Britain's First Sea Lord, ordered the bolstering of the Royal Navy's fleet in the Indian Ocean.

A photograph shows Lewis, as native commissioner, paying a visit to the St Lucia base. He is wearing a pale cotton bush jacket and trousers, with a tie, spectacles and trilby, and holding a pipe. Over one arm is a coat, and he is carrying an attaché case. Beside him are two RAF personnel, informally dressed, one holding a pith helmet. In the background are the thatched roofs of huts, and a stockade.

He could never have imagined that caught up in events in the Far East, whose reverberations were now being felt even in Zululand, were



Lewis (left) with Royal Air Force personnel, St Lucia, Zululand, c.1943

individuals who soon would be part of his family. For among the captured British in Singapore was the rubber-planter father of the woman who would marry his younger son. And her brother, having been blasted through Burma by the rampant Japanese, and of a comparable age to his own sons, was already dead. And that soon these strands of narrative would be stitched to his own, at a sugar farm where he and his sister Beryl would live before their increasing frailty drew them into nursing homes.

Yet if events had connected Lewis to the world, others would soon connect him to the central axis of Zulu history. For, more than a century earlier, at the royal homestead at KwaDukuza, site of the future Stanger, having murdered his half-brother Shaka, Dingane had assumed the kingship. What followed for the Zulus was a troubled decade, with encroachments by Dutch and British settlers, and the increasing paranoia of their monarch.

Seeking guarantees of land ownership, Boer leader Piet Retief led a party to Umgungundlovu, to where the Zulu royal homestead had been moved, not far from Hlabisa where years later Lewis would take up his first posting. Once the negotiations were concluded and the Boers ready to depart, infamously Dingane had jumped to his feet and shouted *Babulaleni abathakathi!* ('Kill the wizards!'), at which Retief and his men were cudgelled to death. Months later, having sought God's providence, the Boers exacted their revenge, killing at the Battle of Blood River thousands of Zulus with no loss to themselves. With his army smashed, Dingane was deposed by his estranged brother Mpande, who had ready allies in the Boers, and fled to Swaziland, where because of his past predations he could expect no refuge. One morning, not far from where the Ingwavuma Residency would later be built, he was murdered and buried, and branches of *mphafa*, a tree associated with burials, and three large stones, placed on his grave. Because the king's remains could be used in muti against them, the assassins kept the grave's whereabouts the deepest of secrets.

Settlers too were kept in ignorance lest they contrive some magic of their own. But more than a century later, when Harry Lugg was doing a locum in the Ingwavuma district, exceptionally he was shown the site. Untouched among the roots of the large fig were the three stones placed there by the assassins. Beside the grave Lugg discovered an *mphafa* tree, probably an offshoot of an earlier tree that had taken root from the branches thrown across the mound after Dingane's interment. In his *Historic Natal and Zululand*, published shortly afterwards, Lugg includes a photograph of himself with Lewis, Acting Chief Zibunu Nyawo and magistrate James 'Buller' Fenwick, standing near a large tree with the grave at its base. Lewis is wearing his pale-coloured bush jacket and characteristic trilby.

In another link with Dingane, Lewis and Mary's eldest son Deane married a young Afrikaans woman named Alida Cilliers, a descendant of Sarel Cilliers, the Boer's *predikant* who before the Battle of Blood River had made a covenant with God against the Zulu king.

When, in the late 1940s, the Natal Wildlife Society sent three expeditions into Maputaland to conduct scientific studies and gather data



Lewis (second from right) with (from left) James 'Buller' Fenwick, Acting Chief Zibunu Nyawo and Harry Lugg at King Dingane's grave, Ingwavuma district, 1947

for a conservation plan for the territory, Lewis was asked to guide them. By then retired, he and Mary had moved from the Residency to a house nearby, where the base camp was established. Leader of the expeditions was George Campbell, a Durban doctor and conservationist, with a particular interest in fish. Centrally rooted in Natal's settler society, he was the son of Sam, who commanded the militia in the skirmish at Macrae's Store, brother of Roy, the poet, cousin of Killie, the ethnographer and historian, and perhaps even a relative of the headstrong Mary, former lady principal of The Girls' Collegiate and headmistress of Durban Girls' College.

A photograph shows the base camp being assembled. Against a backdrop of tents and boxes is Campbell, in a khaki bush jacket, with the flaps of his forage cap tied down over his ears. In the shadows, solitary and apart, stands Lewis, wearing his trilby and a blazer rather than his

customary bush jacket. In his breast pocket appears to be a handkerchief, but is more likely a notebook off which sunlight is reflecting. On his feet are heavy boots, a necessity in such a harsh and snake-strewn terrain. In the background loom fig trees.

After their stopover at Ingwavuma, the party of archaeologists, geologists, zoologists, entomologists, plant pathologists, ichthyologists and ornithologists, accompanied by cameramen and journalists, and with Lewis as helmsman, descended in lorries and jeeps from the escarpment to the plain. Other than numerous hippos and crocodiles, what struck them at the outset was the astonishing absence of game, for they saw only a single herd of elephants and four antelope. About the scarcity the expedition members deliberated, with some blaming local tribesmen who coursed habitually with their whippets, while others recalled seeing the wagons of hunters, piled high with hides.



Lewis (right), George Campbell (centre) and other members of the first Maputaland Expedition at Ingwavuma camp, 1947

Part Two

Decades earlier, succeeding rinderpest as the scourge of herbivores, nagana had swept the area. To contain it, the authorities had declared open season, sparing only rhinos, hippos and the perilously rare nyala. Hunters had streamed into Maputaland, and from dawn to dusk, as in distant Flanders, the sound of killing had drowned out the birdsong. And yet, as later it was determined, the carrier of the disease had not been ruminants after all, but the tsetse fly.

Whatever their expertise, the expeditions' members soon became enamoured of the bushveld with its ubiquitous thorn trees, and the lime-green and seemingly incandescent fever trees in their malarial groves. Similarly striking were the necklace of pans along the Pongola River, beside one of which Lewis and Mary were photographed with Patricia Chiazzari, wife of Len Chiazzari, the second expedition's ornithologist. Striking too were the swamp forests with their giant raffia palms, the glittering freshwater mirror of Sibaya, and the chain of lakes, and estuarine



Mary and Lewis with Patricia Chiazzari (left, with dog) at a Maputaland pan, 1948

basin at Kosi, where the ochre dunes ran northwards along the coastline to Ponta do Ouro. Amidst this botanical splendour, however, could be gauged another depredation, for the Manguzi forest, with its giant trees, that decades earlier had been recorded, was gone, having been razed by subsistence farmers seeking more land for cultivation.

Before the convoy set off across the flats, Lewis led it to either Makane's Pont or Shumula's Pont, where on rudimentary pontoons local men punted the vehicles across the Pongola River. A photograph shows a jeep in midstream, with Campbell wearing a panama, and Lewis, his trilby. Next he took the party to Ndumu to see the fossil beds of ammonite shells, each coiled like a defensive millipede, which aeons earlier had been stranded when the sea receded from the plain. Visited too was a Stone Age factory site, with its hammers and anvils and piercers, before the convoy wheeled eastwards towards the sea.



Lewis (partly obscured) and George Campbell with a Maputaland Expedition jeep being poled across the Pongola River at Shumula's Pont, 1948

If the mammals were depleted, birds were plentiful, for being wedged between the tropics and sub-tropics Maputaland claims the outliers of both regions. Among these were flamingos, rising from the pans in great bandannas of pink and white; and marabou storks, with their scrotal chest-pouches and spindle-legged gait; and fish eagles, perched above the water or riding the thermals, whose clanging scream would soon be appropriated as a bird anthem of Africa. Rarer sightings included the banded harrier eagle, with its pale chest ribbed with grey-brown bars, and the African open-bill stork, in lagoons and marshes, with a straight upper mandible and curved lower one. But most notable was the palm-nut vulture, with its white-feathered head and its eyes set in crimson areolas, for remarkably it had forsaken carrion for the fatty husks of the oil-palm nuts, although sometimes, allowing its vegetarianism to regress, it snatched a crab from the mudflats or a fish from the shallows.

Yet every Eden has its serpent, and in the swamp forest, among the yellowwoods festooned with creepers, and the raffia palms with their languid fronds, the expedition stumbled on a black mamba, although in the consternation no one was bitten. Being shy and territorial, when confronted a mamba will seek to flee, but should its way be barred, as the expedition members knew, it will attack without hesitation, striking repeatedly, with only two drops of venom needed to kill each of them.

Snakes were certainly no strangers to Lewis. From his days as a child at Ifafa, through his months on campaign against the Boers and Bhambatha's rebels, to his years at outstations, with circuits on horseback through the veld, they had earned his respect with their unexpectedness and liquid stealth. Of their potency he had direct experience, for a man pushing through the low-slung branches of a tree to seek his counsel had been bitten on the head and died within the hour. So to rationalise and regulate his fear, he had devised a code, even if years earlier with the python he had failed to honour it: if he encountered a snake in the countryside, far from human habitation, he would let it be, but if it was near a homestead and posed a danger to people and animals, he would dispatch it summarily.

That at Ingwavuma snakes were plentiful was long-established. One day, while tending her pot plants, the wife of Lewis's predecessor had

come across a black mamba on the Residency veranda. Whipping across the polished cement, the snake had sought refuge under a charcoal safe, of the kind used for refrigeration before the advent of electricity. Watching it from a distance, she sent a servant hurrying to the courthouse for assistance, and within minutes an official came running with a shotgun and killed it. When measured, it was nine feet long. And several days later the magistrate shot its mate, near the tennis court.

Lewis and Mary had been similarly assailed, once killing before breakfast a clutch of juveniles that had hatched under the Residency and emerged through the airbricks like fingerlings swimming in the heat. Neither was Hazara exempt, for a large black mamba once took



The former Ingwavuma Residency, as a satellite office of the Jozini Municipality, 2010

up residence at the bottom of the main lawn, beside a compost heap beneath a fig tree, where it could be seen basking in the dappled sunlight. Gardeners insisted that they could smell its malevolence, and were reluctant to work in its vicinity. And in deference to its potency, among the perishables in the fridge was a red tin containing syringes and phials of snakebite serum.

Not long after the mamba scare on the Maputaland Expedition, an ornithologist following a birdcall through dense undergrowth was snagged by a python. As in Lewis's earlier encounter, it tore his clothing, but in an instant threaded its tail around his leg and began coiling and tightening. Fortuitously having with him a firearm to bring down his specimens, the ornithologist shot it and unwrapped himself from its coils.

As the scientists confirmed, the area was not uninhabited but the home of the Tonga, a people who for centuries had lived off the lakes and estuaries around which their homesteads were scattered, constructing great loops of palisade across the shallows. Each day, thrusting in from the sea, the tide drove fish through openings in the stockade, and later, when it receded, drew the fish seawards into the traps which had deftly been woven into the matrix of sticks. On this daily rhythm the Tonga depended, as they did on the lala palms from which they tapped juice that they fermented into *busulu*, or wine. For generations, like lotus-eaters, they had subsisted on this bounty, supplementing it with maize and potatoes that they grew on the forest fringes.

After combing the lakes and coastal forests, around the campfire at dusk the scientists shared their observations, passing around for inspection the specimens they had collected. It was then that Lewis marvelled at their expertise, for he was merely an amateur with local knowledge. And as in the darkness the tide pushed silently into the lake behind them, submerging the sands that during the day they had crossed, they spoke too of the shoals of sea pike and rock salmon and kingfish that they had seen in the crystal water, and of how little was known about them, and resolved there and then, under the aegis of Campbell, to set up in Durban an aquarium for the study of marine biology.

So, twelve years afterwards, on Durban's Marine Parade, with its beaches and bathers and umbrellas, and within sight of the cupola of

the hospital where Beryl had learnt her nursing, and where two decades earlier corpses from the *Nova Scotia* had rolled in like logs on the tide, a large circular building was built to house the fishes that through glass panels visitors would watch in wonderment. Of all the ideas that were conceived beside the campfire, that of the aquarium and marine research centre was the most conclusively brought to life. Yet the dream of turning Maputaland into a sanctuary foundered because it was too populated to be cleared. Instead, as proof of its singularity, reports, films and photographs captured by the academics, journalists and cameramen were duly added to Killie Campbell's collection.

If the final Maputaland Expedition was Lewis's last hurrah as a Zululand guide, a year earlier a seismic election among white voters had brought the National Party to power. Within months, apartheid was ratified, with whites in one compartment and blacks in another. But the divisions weren't only racial, because the animosity between the settler groupings, which in living memory had erupted, assumed a renewed vigour. With the new government force-feeding the civil service with Afrikaners at the expense of English-speakers, Lewis was vulnerable, but fortuitously his working days were over.

His elder son Deane, however, bore the brunt of the new imperative. Having chosen a military career, even with a wife with an impeccable Afrikaner pedigree his prospects as an English-speaker were negligible, so he looked to Northern Rhodesia, becoming a crown agent in Ndola on the Copperbelt.

On returning from the war, Lewis's younger son Mick was also seeking to forge a career. Armed only with his prowess as a pilot, but loath to return to the cockpit, he became a travelling salesman for Lever Brothers, hawking soap and washing powder through Natal and the Eastern Cape. At first he boarded with his maiden aunts, but later linked up with friends in a digs on Durban's Berea. And it was there, on the slope with its white-walled houses, in sub-tropical gardens bursting with colour, that with his war wounds and walking stick he one day crossed paths with a sugar farmer's daughter named Anne.

PART THREE

The story of Mick and Anne, and
how they took over Hazara
from James and Mia

Here was an unchanging world – so it would have seemed to the stranger. So it seemed to me when I first became aware of it: the country life, the slow movement of time, the dead life, the private life, the life lived in houses closed one to the other. But that idea of an unchanging life was wrong. Change was constant. People died; people grew old; people changed houses; houses came up for sale.

—V.S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*

The marriage of twenty-eight-year-old Anne Woollam and thirty-year-old Mick Conyngham took place at All Saints Church, Stanger, on 17 June 1950. Congregated in the small brick building with a steep corrugated-iron roof were not only James and Mia and their relatives but an agglomeration of fellow sugar-farming families and other friends. Officiating was the Anglican vicar, the Reverend Walter Webb, and in a front pew was Mia's mother Kate, her father Colin having died several years previously. Conspicuously absent were Mick's parents, Lewis and Mary, either unable to make the long journey from Ingwavuma or excluded by their son because of what he perceived to be their frontier rusticity.

The nuptials were recorded on film, and for decades the small roll on its metal reel was kept by Anne in a pigeonhole in her Regency bureau. Only several minutes long, the footage shows congregants leaving the church after the service, predominately beaming matrons wearing hats, the jerkiness of their gait offset by the static blaze of flamboyants and frangipani. The setting then shifts to Hazara, where the reception was held, having skipped the ten-mile journey to the farm.

For the celebrants the route would have been numbingly familiar: the climb inland from the bowl of Stanger's commercial district, past the scattering of Indian houses with their mango trees and prayer flags on tall bamboo poles, and into the sugar fields. Not long after it crested the first plateau and began to wind sinuously through the cane, the road passed the Kearsney Post Office, where eight years earlier Anne had received

the bombshell about her brother, and the cemetery that more recently had received the body of Charles Mansfield, with beside him the space reserved for Naffy.

Within sight too were the wooded hills which rose like volcanic islands from the sea of waving stalks, each crowned by a Hulett mansion with its hallmark verandas and cast-iron filigree. And so the conga of cars would have advanced, following the dusty track past a trading store and signboards to Sprowston, where Sir Liege's son Jim had lived, and Mandalay and Royden estates, before it dipped into one forested gully and then another, each with a stream tripping through it. On the final ascent, in the cane on the celebrants' right was the circle of trees where Ted Hulett had intended to build his home. Below them then, beyond a gentle slope tilting westwards, they would have spied against the ambient green of sugar fields the darker splash of indigenous and exotic foliage that embraced the house and outbuildings of the settlement at Hazara.

The film resumes with Anne and Mick standing in the garden as the guests file past them, the women kissing Anne on the cheek but only shaking Mick's hand, for he was the outsider. Behind them is the tennis court, its burnt-sienna surface purloined from anthills, and beyond it a palisade screening the paddocks and stables. In her wedding dress and veil, Anne is petite and demurely animated, while standing tall beside her in his morning coat, with his RAF moustache and his dark hair receding, Mick is stiffly courtly as he engages with the queue of well-wishers.

The camera then flits to the house's northern side, where the land slips down the lawn and into the cane fields and on towards the sugar mill in the distance. Panning across the loggia with its low brick balustrade, where each evening Mia and James enjoyed their sundowners and classical music on the radio before being summoned indoors by the gong for supper, it catches the gathering of guests as waiters in white livery weave among them with their trays. And if the memory of Mia and James is shadowed by their bickering and the tragedy of their lost children, they seem ebullient, Mia svelte in a russet outfit with a matching hat, testaments to her dressmaker and milliner, and James in a morning coat with its grey waistcoat, and with the inevitable cigarette clasped between his fingers. Both are talking animatedly, and Mia displays

none of the wistfulness that is so apparent in the photograph taken at the Mansfields decades earlier. Even if Anne wasn't their blood daughter, they had suspended this irrelevancy for the celebration of her nuptials.

Vivid in the background is the garden: the tall jacarandas guy-roped with lianas, the azaleas and bougainvillea, like humped elephants festooned with blooms, and the towering palms whose fronds each night sighed their lullabies to Mia and James in their separate bedrooms.

And just as twenty-six years earlier at the Woollams' wedding the names of the guests had provided a glimpse of the small settler world in which it had been set, so the surnames of Anne and Mick's fellow celebrants did likewise: Booth, Dymond, Franklin, Garnett, Jex, Sanger, Saunders, Smeaton, Watt, Wilkes, and others now rendered anonymous by the passage of time. In the week of the wedding not only Mia's mother Kate stayed, but also her sister Jean and her husband Robert and their daughter Julia, down from their midlands home, Adamshurst, with its tenuous link with Knossos and the Minoans.

Concluding the footage are scenes of the bridal couple's send-off, with Anne and Mick in their travelling clothes easing through the merrymakers to Mia and James's Packard, which they were borrowing for the occasion. Tied to the boot and bonnet are stalks of sugar cane which sway and flutter like totems as the newlyweds accelerate down the driveway and into the greenery.

Of the thirty-three years recorded in Hazara's visitors' book, 1950, with seventeen guests, was among the least sociable. Partly this was because after the wedding Mia left for an extended holiday, probably to escape the marital tension which like a miasma was welling up again. Flying with a now unknown companion on a hopping trajectory from Durban to Southampton, and then on to Ireland for the Dublin Horse Show, she watched in sunny weather the four-man English team defeat twenty-three rivals to regain the Aga Khan Trophy. As Jean and Robert's home at Castletownroche had burnt down by then because of a mishap with the kitchen range, and they had gravitated back to Africa, no sooner was the event over than Mia and her companion returned to England for a sojourn, before flying home.

HAZARA



Mick and Anne's
wedding, 17 June
1950

*(Left) The bridal couple
emerge from All Saints
Church, Stanger, after
the marriage service*

*(Right) Greeting guests at
the reception at Hazara*

*(Below) The best man
gives his speech from the
loggia with its bricked
balustrade*



Part Three

(Right) Guests on the lower lawn, with the slope descending through garden and forest into the valley of the Doornkop sugar mill



(Left) Mick and Mia in conversation, with Anne behind Mia and James in the background

(Right) Decorated with sugar-cane stalks, the newlyweds' Packard prepares to depart



Shortly after the honeymoon, Mick was offered a job in Rhodesia, so Anne resigned from the Durban Museum. To begin with, they lived in a hotel in Salisbury, which on a brief visit to Hazara the following year they entered in the visitors' book as their home address. Among the forty-three other guests in 1951 was Colonel Ted Davis, best man at James and Mia's wedding, who had since met on a liner travelling from Bombay via Mombasa a Natal girl who had been teaching in Kenya, and married her. After years in India and England, they had moved to Pietermaritzburg where on the western slopes they were living in an elongated thatched house called Long Barn with their pet dachshund named Longfellow. As was customary, Mia's mother Kate made multiple visits. Although in their entries the guests lauded the beauty and peacefulness of Hazara, and how much they had enjoyed the games of backgammon and badminton and croquet, conjuring an insular world of decorum and laughter, one noted how he had brought the rain that was needed, and another, in a cryptic counterweight to the bounty of bouquets, concluded her entry with the single word: 'Rats!'

Before long the newlyweds rented a cottage on the outskirts of Salisbury, Anne found work with a firm called Jolson Brothers, and they both joined the Much Binding Tennis Club. Although money was short, it was a carefree time, and later in life, when thanks to Hazara's largesse they were living very comfortably, in moments of reflection they cited it as proof that wealth wasn't a prerequisite for happiness.

But one incident in Rhodesia cast a shadow. While gynaecological complications made it difficult for Anne to fall pregnant, eventually she conceived. During her pregnancy, repairs were done to their cottage, and while an opening in an exterior wall remained unsealed she was surprised in the bathroom by a cobra and fell badly, losing her child. Detecting a network of holes in a flowerbed outside, Mick doused them with petrol and dropped in a match. There was a subterranean rumble, and the snake scourge ended, but the harm had been done. And given the horrors that Mia had endured in her attempts at motherhood, the blow induced a sense of ill omen.

To provide support, Mia flew to Salisbury. Coinciding with her stay was a Royal visit, and in a manner that recalled their earlier excursions,

whether riding at Hazara or on shopping sprees to Durban, mother and daughter travelled to Bulawayo to see Elizabeth the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret open the Rhodes Memorial Exhibition, to celebrate the centenary of Cecil Rhodes's birth. Had Mick mentioned it, the association between his grandfather and the youthful Cecil would have been a talking point.

After Mia's return to Hazara, James wrote several supportive letters to his daughter and son-in-law, and through a doctor-friend in Durban arranged for Anne to see a reputed gynaecologist in Salisbury before she again attempted to have a child. In his cramped script on embossed Hazara notepaper, he wrote of life on the farm, stating that the old loco and *golovan* system of haulage had been replaced by tractors and trailers, and how deliveries to the mill had so improved that he was still looking for the catch. In her reply, Anne mentioned that Mick was being promoted, which seemed to galvanise James, who offered him instead the manager's position at Hazara, with a monthly salary of fifty pounds, an annual bonus, a free house and servants and milk and vegetables, and the use of the Packard whenever he and Anne had need of it. In a footnote he asked his son-in-law to find another way of addressing him, as 'Sir' was too formal, suggesting instead either James, or Wool, the moniker which his teenaged niece Jennifer Leycester had conferred on him.

After consideration, they accepted, and James expressed his delight, undertaking to retain Rynders, the manager, for a month after their arrival so that Mick could learn from him the rudiments of sugar farming. He applauded Mick's proficiency in Zulu, for in his view such fluency was imperative to see into a native's mind, something which he, with only his English and rudimentary Farsi, had been unable to do. Natives, he felt, needed both a master and confidant to whom they could turn. They should also be treated kindly but firmly, and because the days of whipping were over Mick should never have reason to hit a 'boy'.

On their arrival by train in Durban in late 1953, Mick and Anne were met by James and Mia and driven out to Hazara. At first they stayed in the big house with the Woollams, and Mick shadowed Rynders and began his tutelage as a sugar farmer. That he was eager indicated his delight, for he was unsuited to a mercantile career and relished being back in the province of his childhood and youth. And even if some acquaintances looked askance at him as the opportunist husband of an only daughter, he was single-mindedly determined to transform a ramshackle operation into a model estate.

Through a bookshop in Durban he ordered a copy of *The Botany of Sugarcane* by Cornelius van Dillewijn, a sugar expert in Java, and in the months ahead, in his office near the sheds or in the manager's house, he imbibed its contents, learning about the giant grass's structure and its needs and preferences. He discovered that most of all cane required heat and water, and a dark loamy soil of the kind with which Hazara was blessed, and that because sugar farming was labour-intensive he would need to learn how to manage a large force of workers. Soon, with his application and his doggedness, he impressed other farmers, and slowly, as a member of their fraternity, his stature grew.

From early on, however, all was not well in Mick's relationship with James. If at the outset there was a dissonance, it was exacerbated by his growing assuredness. That he was not just another manager, but the husband of the *umnumzane's* daughter, and therefore a member of the presiding family, added to the disjuncture. And that from his upbringing

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in outlying magistracies he had learnt the ways of Zulu people, being conversant with their language and customs, gave him an advantage over an Englishman whose experience of exotic cultures was military stints in Mesopotamia and India. So when for interactions workers chose Mick, James began to see in his son-in-law a usurper of his primacy. And because as an adoptive parent he was more of an older male companion to Anne than a traditional father, and one from whom his wife had withdrawn her intimacy, there too was a suppressed and unspoken competition for Anne's affection.

During those early months, Mick and Anne established themselves on the farm, beginning a new routine that soon became the rhythm of their lives. They were woken each morning by the sounds of the servants' arrival, and a tray of tea was brought to them in bed. At the outset Mick was up early, heading into the fields to impose a template of punctuality and industriousness that would make the operation profitable, even if



The manager's house at Hazara, c.1960

later a system of bonuses reduced the need for vigilance. After returning for breakfast, he headed out again, to the fields or his office, returning mid-morning for tea, or sometimes only for lunch. The sight of his tall figure in khakis and slouch hat, and habitually with a walking stick and a glowing-tipped cheroot, became as much a feature of the farm as the cane itself, for he took long circulatory walks, observing and supervising. In his shirt pocket was a notebook, which he would remove and endorse with a biro, and this almost involuntary action, endlessly repeated, led to him being given the Zulu sobriquet of *Maphaketheni*, 'He of the Pocket'.

Through an open window in his office he consulted with indunas and other workers about their tasks or personal matters, later moving into an adjoining clinic to dress cuts and abrasions and to dispense pills and ointments. Regularly there were trips in the truck to Stanger to buy provisions, although later this was largely delegated to a sirdar named Sankar. Unlike many farmers, Mick steered clear of the workshop, convinced that from too much mechanical tinkering some lost their way. His focus was clear: he ran the entire estate. To keep the tractors and caterpillar running was the mechanic's duty.

In those early years, afternoons too were spent circulating and observing, and honing and improving, although later, by which time his system of tasks and bonuses had established a momentum, he customarily had a short siesta before resuming his vigilance.

While all this was happening, in the manner of a planter's wife Anne was supervising house servants or gardeners or generally busying about. More gregarious than Mick, she commandeered the telephone, braving the party line for chatty exchanges with friends and neighbours, among them Ronwen Mansfield, now Ronwen Sanger, whose husband 'R.J.' was running Llys Onen.

Up in the main house, James and Mia lived by their own tempo. Having long forgone his patrols through the fields, James effectively held an executive position, needing only to sanction major changes or those requiring extraordinary expenditure. By now nearing sixty, he had begun to withdraw into a world of his own, playing chess in his snug with select neighbours, Heath Garnett among them, or reading, predominantly Westerns. Sometimes he moved through to the sitting room to listen to

records on the gramophone, usually Wagner and Dvořák. Several gin and tonics at lunch necessitated a nap, and at dusk, after bathing and dressing more formally, he and Mia, whose preferred drink was lime juice or bitter lemon, would sit on one of the verandas or on the loggia as the sun sank glowingly into the cane.

As chatelaine, Mia would busy herself supervising house servants or gardeners, or arranging vases of flowers, or embroidering, or seeing to the steady flow of guests who each stayed for several days and needed to be engaged with and entertained. And as both James and Mia grew older, so the rituals of meals and listening to music, and reading and playing chess or bridge, expanded to displace the time that separated them, until the responsibility for running the estate had passed entirely to Mick and he was firmly the *nkosana*, or heir, with James the fading *mnumzane*, or head of the homestead, in the shadows behind him.

For trips to Durban, the Woollams had Meshack as chauffeur, or if Mick and Anne were accompanying them, Mick drove. But when Meshack drunkenly wrote off the Packard and was sent packing, in a flourish Mia and James bought two Humber Super Snipes, with walnut dashboards, and fold-down tables on the back of the front seats. Commandeered to drive them was Sankar, in his white, cricket-umpire uniform, and every fortnight, with Mia and James in the back, he would nose one of the Humbers past Kearsney to Stanger and then down the coast to Durban. To his slow and deliberate driving style Sankar added a fatalism, for whenever he overtook a vehicle he seemed reluctant to accelerate, and perilously Mia and James found themselves cruising in the wrong lane until eventually Sankar pulled ahead.

Once they reached the metropolis, the car was parked in the Devonshire Garage where space would be found even if all the bays were full. Sankar was given money for lunch and whiled away the day under the palms on the Esplanade. Formally dressed, Mia and James would once more engage with the wider world to which theirs was appended; and over lunch at the Royal Hotel or the Marine Hotel, or at the Durban Country Club, or, for James, at the Durban Club, yet again have their place in it reasserted and confirmed. On the occasions when Anne and Mick joined them, they too would form part of the lunch party, and

afterwards, laden with parcels, the four would head home, first up the coast to Stanger and then inland towards the hills where, as ever, Hazara was waiting.

During one such trip in 1959, Mick and Anne visited the Durban Aquarium that a decade earlier had been conceived by the scientists and Lewis at the fireside at Kosi Bay, when in the dark the tide was rushing its harvest of fish through the gaps in the palisade traps, and the eagles and vultures and louries were asleep at their roosts. And when Anne led Mick through the turnstile there was a flurry, and Alan Simpson, chairman of the South African Association for Marine Biological Research, with the association's director David Davies looking on, presented her with an inscribed copy of J.L.B. Smith's piscine bible, *The Sea Fishes of Southern Africa*. A photograph was taken that appeared the next day in the *Daily News*, for although the aquarium had been open for less than two months, she was quite by chance its one-hundred-thousandth visitor.



Anne as the Durban Aquarium's 100 000th visitor, with Alan Simpson (left) and David Davies, 13 August 1959

A routine that Anne and Mick established early on and maintained over the decades was a walk together at dusk. Leaving the homestead, they would follow one of the gravelled roads through the cane fields, sometimes turning onto the smaller breaks that allowed greater access for tractors and trailers. Padding beside them in the gathering darkness would be Jock, their beloved bull terrier, which they had brought down with them from Rhodesia. Because in those pre-television days the radio or books or playing cards would in the evenings vie for their attention, the twilight ritual was a special time, free of distractions, when they would talk to one other and listen to one other.

Sometimes the day's mundanities intruded, like the need to instruct the handyman to repair a leaking roof, or a gardener to pollard an ailing tree. And sometimes life's greater pageant forced its way into the compartment of their world, as when in 1953 the Nationalists were returned to power with an increased majority, and Hilary and Tenzing conquered Everest. Once, while walking along the road across the dam wall, flanked on one side by lily pads and flotillas of duck, and on the other by a hedge screening the forest and the outlying paddock, Anne had a narrow escape. With its back having been broken by a passing tractor, in the middle of the road was a boomslang, swaying like a metronome and with its mouth agape. With a voluble Anne about to blunder, in a flash Mick lunged, sending her spinning sideways. In seconds it was over: he dispatched the snake with his walking stick, Anne's indignation gave way to relief, and they composed themselves and resumed their progress,

reminded yet again that within life's apparent tranquillity there is always malevolence.

Also with them during those interludes of intimacy were the knowns and half-knowns that made them who they were. That in World War I Anne's biological father Eric Martin had as a lieutenant in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry been mentioned in dispatches in the fighting at the Piave River on the Italian Front. That he had been wounded twice, and had met and married during one of his convalescences a Maltese woman named Edwarda Savona. That she already had a daughter, named Mercedes, from an earlier liaison. And that after the armistice Edwarda gave birth to a son in London, whom she and Eric named David, before the family headed out to the Far East to start a new life.

It was probably Mick who from Anne's few documents discovered that she hadn't been born in Kuala Lumpur, as she had always thought, but in Batu Gajah, a town in a rubber-planting and tin-mining district in central Perak, which had a hospital with a maternity ward exclusively for Europeans. He too probably uncovered that she hadn't been born on the day she had been celebrating each year, but three days later. Around her second birthday, either because the climate was considered insalubrious for a European child or because her parents' marriage was already beginning to unravel, Anne recalled being sent to Malta to live with her maternal grandparents.

A single photograph is the sole visual remnant of the Martins' Malayan world. With 'Perak' scribbled on the back, it shows the family arranged along a rattan sofa with a rattan screen behind them. Sitting on the left is David, aged about five, in a white sailor suit and with a page-boy haircut. Beside him sits Edwarda, dark-haired and pretty in a flapperish sort of way, wearing a checked dress, and with Anne in a nappy on her lap. Next to her is Mercedes, a dusky, serious-faced little girl with strings of beads around her neck. On the right, with his hair swept back like a matinee idol, and with an open-necked white shirt, and a cigarette in hand, is Eric. Through the rattan screen can almost be heard the howling and whistling of gibbons.

Also known or half-known was that the Savonas were an Italian family who had emigrated to Malta centuries earlier. That as a precocious

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Infant Anne with her parents and siblings in Perak, Federated Malay States, c.1923

youth Anne's great-grandfather Sigismondo had been admitted to the gallery of London's House of Commons by historian Thomas Macaulay, and had gone into politics and been appointed Malta's Director of Education. That her grandfather William had been founder-leader of the Malta Labour Party, and become a government minister, and Colonel of the Royal Malta Artillery, and been awarded a military MBE for his service in France and Salonika. That her grandmother Angelica, née Rosenbusch, was German, and that *her* engineer father Edward had helped design Malta's railway system and lay the trans-Mediterranean communications cable. And that Edward's brother Heinrich, or Harry, was Professor of Mineralogy at Heidelberg University and considered a father of microscopic petrography, the science of studying rocks in thin sections.

Further, Anne recalled from somewhere that her mother Edwarda had three sisters, Eva, Augusta and Lola, who never married, and that one of them had lived in Kenya and had a love child there. And that there

were two brothers: Edgar, a surgeon with the colonial service in British Honduras, who was drowned when his ship was torpedoed; and Victor, who had been dishonourably discharged from the Royal Malta Artillery, and during World War II had joined the British Union of Fascists and been interned in Uganda.

All these were no more than ghostly fragments, for when, aged seven, Anne was sent to England to live with her paternal grandparents, she had been encouraged to forget her Maltese past and to regard herself purely as English. Among the few shards of her island childhood that from memory she later excavated was that her grandparents had a villa in Tigne Street in Sliema; that with the children of other guests she had played in the nursery at Government House; that she had been taken to see Anna Pavlova dance in Valletta; and that her appendix had burst and she had been rushed to the Blue Sisters' Hospital where there was consternation and the last rites administered to her.

A snapshot shows the playground of the British garrison school on Sliema headland, with the fort in the background. It is May Day in the late 1920s, and beside the may pole and a building of pale, dressed stone is a group of British and Maltese children, the boys in white shirts and white shorts and striped ties, and wearing plimsolls, and the girls in dresses and bonnets. Facing the camera, left of centre, holding her skirt and seemingly about to curtsy, is Anne. To her right, seemingly about to bow, is Gordon Trepas, the son of a Royal Navy officer, who seven years later was inexplicably present when Anne first met her adoptive mother Mia.

In England, Anne joined David, who had been sent home directly from Malaya, and both lived with their paternal grandparents in Harpenden in Hertfordshire. Kind but ineffectual, Walter Martin was a retired stockbroker, and his wife Ada, altogether more forceful, a housewife and homemaker and zealously musical. David was sent to St George's, a co-educational public school, built in the late nineteenth century in the Victorian Gothic style, and Anne was sent to its Montessori junior school. That it had been chosen for both siblings was because their grandparents lived nearby and that for day scholars the fees were affordable to their father in faraway Malaya.



Anne (third from left) at the British garrison school, Sliema, Malta, on May Day, c.1929

Much in their lives was their maiden aunt, Désirée Martin, formerly a pupil of composer Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, who taught eurhythmics, a blend of music and ballet, in the London area. Once David had left school for a military crammer, and then joined his father's regiment, it was Désirée who had arranged for Anne's move to Burwood Park at Walton-on-Thames. And it was while Anne was there that word was received from distant Natal that after losing three children of their own a Mia and James Woollam were looking for another, and with seemingly heartless insouciance Eric and Edwarda Martin had given them their daughter.

For the Martins and Savonas, 1935 was a year of reduction. Shortly before they jettisoned Anne and she forsook England for Africa, her enigmatic half-sister, Mercedes, who too had been sent to England and was a boarder at a convent in London, died, aged seventeen, in St Thomas's Hospital. Inscribed as the cause of death was streptococcal meningitis and acute mastoiditis, and, as next of kin: Eric Martin, stepfather, Malaya.

Because the elder Martins had by then moved to Buxted in Surrey, her funeral was held there, and among the small group of mourners was Anne, who ran weeping from the graveside and was retrieved by her brother David, to whom she was devoted. Mercedes's death caused an irreparable rift between the two sets of grandparents, the Savonas accusing the Martins of negligence, or even wilful neglect, and the Martins dismissing the accusations as preposterous.

Within months of their move to Hazara, Anne and Mick tried again to have a child, and after a regimen prescribed by a gynaecologist Anne fell pregnant. Once more on the farm expectations were raised that at last the presiding family would produce an heir of its own. With growing interest, the house servants and gardeners, and mechanic and workshop assistants, and grooms and cowherds, and the tractor drivers and ranks of cutters and weeders, watched as Anne's midriff swelled and her dresses became increasingly diaphanous. That the child was conceived in January was for Anne a blessing because as her body became ever more cumbersome so the heat and humidity were giving way to the balminess of autumn and winter. But behind the growing excitement, in the thoughts of those who could remember, or who had had it told to them, was the spectre of the deaths of Mia and James's children, and in Anne and Mick's minds was the memory of their first child that in Rhodesia a cobra had snatched from them.

Then in September 1954, a year after their arrival at Hazara, high on Durban's Berea, in Parklands Hospital, with its glistening wards and purposeful doctors and nurses, Anne was delivered of a son to whom she and Mick gave the names John Hamilton. There was celebration on the farm for he was robust and rotund, and soon Mia was cradling him in her arms and enacting the mother role that fate had so cruelly denied her. As was customary, a nanny was employed, and before long John was being taken on long perambulations, either in his pram or strapped by a blanket to his nanny's back, his head lolling lazily to the roll of her gait. During this daily embrace the cadences of her voice must at some level

have infiltrated his consciousness, for although he never spoke Zulu as well as his grandfather and father did, the complexities of pronunciation posed no problems for him. As the first-born male in an almost feudal society, he was given due deference, and among his most fervent admirers was the Woollams' brindle bulldog, Tito, who for some perceived facial resemblance James had named after the Yugoslav leader. Of this devotion there is evidence, for a photograph shows John sitting in his pram and the grizzled and slobbery face of Tito peering solicitously over the rim at him.

Of the safe arrival of Anne's son, word reached the Martins in England, and a flurry of letters passed between her and them. Among the correspondents was her aunt Désirée and her aged grandmother Ada, but most importantly it revived her relationship with her biological parents, with whom, over the decades since they had seemingly so fecklessly cast her adrift, she had had no contact. Maternal pride must have been her primary motivation, but underpinning this bond of blood was also a call for affirmation and affection. 'Look,' she appears to be saying to the family who had turned away, 'I have given you a grandson. Am I not still your dutiful daughter?'

To this gesture of linkage both parents responded, and for the rest of her life Anne stored their letters among her treasured belongings. Married for the third time and living on a smallholding outside Geelong in Australia, her father wrote her the first of four letters. In it he misspelt her name, omitting the 'e' in the Anne which he and Edwarda had christened her, and shamefacedly confessed that because he didn't know her married surname he would send his letter to his sister Désirée in England for her to forward to South Africa. That Anne was prepared to engage with him, he said, was a joy as she was his only surviving child. He attempted too to absolve himself of her abandonment, explaining that with his marriage collapsing and him being so far away in Malaya he had feared that Edwarda would get custody of her. In the circumstances, so he said he had concluded, there was little option but to surrender her to other parents and better prospects.

He confessed too what a blow David's death had been, made more so because when he heard of it he was a 'guest of the Mikado' in Singapore's Changi Prison. That he had survived the privations was because he had

tended the camp's vegetable garden and surreptitiously eaten roots and leaves. Not long before the Japanese invasion, so he recounted, from his base at the hill station of Maymyo in northern Burma David had visited him in Malaya, and as father and son they had had a jolly time together. Then came the invasion, and being a member of the Negri Sembilan Local Defence Corps he had been incarcerated. What he didn't mention was that among the few to escape successfully from Singapore by sea was his second wife, Edwarda's replacement, from whom he soon parted, who had made it to Batavia on the minesweeper HMS *Scott Harley* before it was sunk by a Japanese destroyer.

He was now, so he related, married to a 'poppet' named Betty. On their few acres they had an old stone bungalow and a thousand chickens, whose eggs he collected each morning, and which Betty washed, and that this sideline 'helped with the Exchequer'. They had a Peugeot shooting brake and a German shepherd. His days he spent tending the chickens or going to the horse races or drinking at a local pub with his Australian pals. Melbourne he and Betty avoided because of the traffic jams caused by the Olympics. For his grandson John he sent a book, *The Story of Sarli, the Barrier Reef Turtle*, inscribed with his salaams. Later he sent David's medals to Anne, and they too were added to her little cache of precious possessions. And then, as suddenly as it had begun, the correspondence snagged, until it was resumed more than a decade later.

In celebration of John's birth, Anne also received a letter from her mother, Edwarda, then living in Bina Gardens, a square of reddish buildings off London's Brompton Road. Of her Anne had only distant memories, in Malaya and Malta and England, and inexplicably a silver cup that Edwarda was said to have won in a badminton tournament in Perak. Also recalled were instances of her mother's vivacity, for through the filters of relatives she had heard, or herself had conjured, that in Malaya Edwarda had been the life and soul of parties.

Having got wind somehow of Anne's confinement, and being delighted at the safe arrival of her first grandchild, Edwarda explained away her neglect as a correspondent through her need to make ends meet. An aversion to putting pen to paper, she concluded, must be a Savona trait for she seldom heard from her sisters Augusta and Eva in Malta, although Lola wrote regularly from Kenya. That none of her siblings had

shown concern over an accident that had effectively crippled her, but about which she provided no details, she said was galling.

What in Anne's letter she had found particularly enchanting was the description of John having his bath, for it rekindled memories of Anne bathing as a child, particularly at the house in Tigne Street in Sliema before she, Edwarda, had returned to the East. Remembered too was that she and Eric had nicknamed their 'best-beloved little girl-daughter' Pau Amma, after Kipling's 'Crab that Played with the Sea'. With the setting of the Perak River surely resonant, the *Just So Stories* must have been the Martin children's bedtime reading in their bungalow among the rubber trees.

In his first letter to Anne, Eric mentioned that whenever he was in London he made a point of meeting Edwarda for a drink. He mentioned too that she was ill and had recently been in hospital and was not expected to live much longer, so he had written her a valedictory note and sent her some money.

In September 1956, two years after her grandson's birth, in St Mary Abbots Hospital, Anne's biological mother died. Writing from London, Anne's aunt Augusta said that Edwarda's liberation from pain was a blessing, although in what appeared to be an act of penance she had denied herself morphine to the end. There had been a requiem mass with her body present before she had been borne to St Mary's Roman Catholic Cemetery at Kensal Green, where at her graveside her father confessor had said kind things about her. The flowers that Anne had sent, Augusta added, were beautiful, even if Edwarda's gravesite was in a bleak and treeless extension of the cemetery.

Among the thousands of tombstones in the Catholic adjunct to the huge Protestant necropolis at Kensal Green are the final resting places of conductor John Barbirolli and essayist Alice Meynell, both in their ways sites of pilgrimage, and a multitude of other graves that are tended by descendants and friends. Yet no one visited the grave of Edwarda Martin, for as a family her Savonas had withered, as had the Martins, who were never truly hers, and her only surviving child, her daughter Anne, whom she had forsaken, was thousands of miles away in Natal, among sugar fields, and had other matters on her mind.

Inexorably the cane was growing, and daily Mick decreed which fields should be weeded and which should be cut. As the cutters advanced through the greenness, slashing the bases of the stalks and stacking the trailers until they were full, so with snorts of acceleration the drivers positioned their tractors and coupled on the loads. With a roar, the tractors then sped away down the network of dirt roads to the mill, a loaded trailer jangling behind each of them. Plumes of dust charted their progress, billowing above the green tips and silvery arrows.

Even if Mick and Anne were still living in the manager's house, Mick's growing control of the farm and his reputation for steadiness and fairness were increasing his stature. And for all her light-heartedness, Anne was growing too, with the role of estate chatelaine now clearly in sight. But cast across this slow assumption was a shadow, for as much as they tried to provide a sibling for their son, Anne would not conceive. After repeated visits to Durban to see the gynaecologist in whom they had such faith, they learnt the truth: Anne was now barren. Blamed was the damage caused by the burst appendix that as a child she had had in Malta, and bilharzia, from which she was found to be suffering.

At low altitudes in the tropics and sub-tropics, bilharzia is endemic. Contaminated with the host snails and their flukes were the two dams at Hazara, and the streams between the cane fields. Similarly infested was the stream in the forested gully beside which Anne had spent many hours scanning the treetops and endorsing her guide to South African birds. Contaminated too was the long and pellucid pool in the Nonoti



A cane cutter, attended by his wife and son, at Hazara

River where she had frolicked with the Mansfield children. But because it was believed that the parasite couldn't survive in running water, or in expanses of water away from reeds and weed, its dangers were largely overlooked.

By fishing in the dams at Hazara, or with small beach nets scooping minnows from the streams that tiptoed through the undergrowth, John and his Zulu boy-companions had also placed themselves at risk. Of such an occasion there is a photograph: the master's son and workers' sons, in a code replicated down generations, from John's grandfather's childhood at Ifafa to his father's at Nqutu, all dressed in shorts and barefoot, fishing at one of the dams. Lily pads pattern the foreground, and reeds skirt the perimeter, all subterfuges for the flukes. Dividing the image horizontally is the road where Anne had had her encounter with the boomslang, and beyond it, bursting like an explosion of foliage, as if seeking to prise the earth from the sky, is the prow of the forested gully.

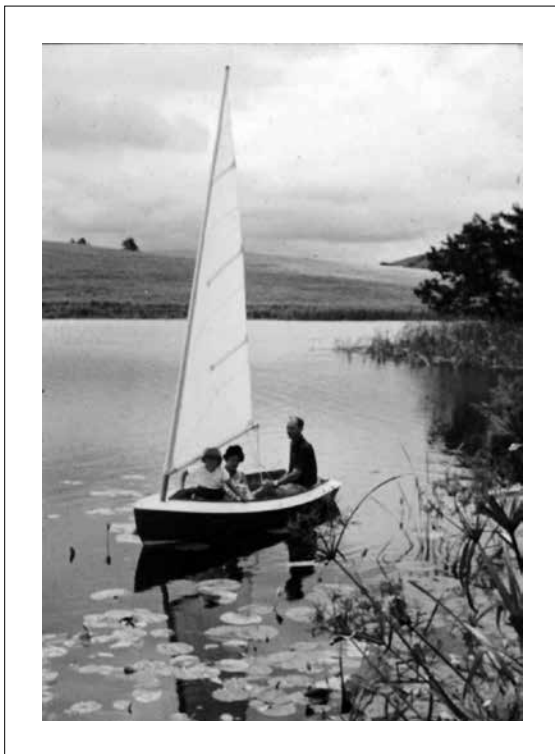
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John and companions fishing at a Hazara dam, c.1965

But elsewhere too John and his parents were vulnerable, for with the families of mill managers and fellow planters they had picnics at a large dam at Kearsney, not far from Sir Liege's big house with its chapel and cemetery. Across the open water, in their yachts they rode the wind, and sometimes they tacked against it. And when variety was needed, they sliced from the expanse of glassiness into inlets where gallinules and moorhens nested, and where from perches on dry trees, dark and angular cormorants, like grotesquely magnified mosquitoes, eyed them beadily. But even if the deep water was out of reach of the peripheral reeds and weed which the snails were said to inhabit, there was no jetty and the yachts needed to be launched and afterwards pulled ashore.

So before long the whole family began to exhibit lassitude and blood-laced urine, and Anne and Mick and John were each subjected to the prolonged and nausea-inducing treatment that was then available. Yet the microscopic parasite is tenacious, for although cured, in the years ahead whenever either parent or their son had a blood test, in the results would be its residual signature.



Recreation at the Kearsney Dam ... Mick sailing with Ronwen and her daughter Ray; and with Ronwen, flanked by friends c.1965

But if in the dams and streams bilharzia posed a danger, another threat emerged from a distant quarter. Because of surplus sugar on the world market, the price plummeted and South African growers found themselves unexpectedly in jeopardy. With their livelihood threatened, farmers strategised, and after much confabulation it was concluded that the best alternative was coffee. Sugar companies led the way, ploughing up tracts of cane land and planting them first with rows of flat-crown trees to provide the shade that coffee plants needed. Concurrently, coffee seeds were germinated and seedlings nurtured in nurseries, so that when the canopies were ready the young bushes could be transplanted into the shadowy spaces. From Kenya, experts were flown down to supervise, and before long on many estates the green expanse of sugar cane had beside it a glossy-leaved neighbour with a red-berried fruit.

Hazara too adopted the strategy, allocating blocks of land adjoining the homestead. And soon it became commonplace to see African women advancing along the glittering corridors, plucking berries and dropping them into bags. To process the harvest, a factory was built, where in a waterborne method the berries were fed into a machine that extracted their beans. Next, the beans were mechanically washed, and spread on long trestles in the sun. Once dry, they were bagged and sent for sale.

Although delight was expressed at the quality of the crop, it soon emerged that there was insufficient demand locally for good coffee, although some was exported, so within years the experiment foundered. But then elsewhere in the world sugar crops failed, and South African planters had buyers again. So the flat-crowns were felled and the coffee bushes ploughed up, and the factory razed, and the cane resumed its monopoly.

Up in the main house, Mia and James continued with their lives, aloof from the farm's everyday routine but nevertheless still nominally in charge. But if James had all but withdrawn from the growth cycle that powered the enterprise, and Mia no longer rode, she was still actively attentive to the welfare of the horses that along the cane breaks a groom and the growing John took on canters and gallops. She involved herself too with her small herd of Jerseys and Guernseys which were milked in a parlour below the sheds and grazed on adjacent paddocks or herded to an

outlying enclosure beside the forest. There, in a sub-tropical replication of picture-postcard England, the cows would disperse decoratively across the steep hillside, migrating into the shadows beside the stream when the sun became too merciless. Near them, under several spreading bird-lime trees below the dam's slipway, was a hydraulic ram, to whose incessant beat water was forced up a pipe to a reservoir in a copse of litchis above the main house. But as much as the shadowy valley was infiltrated by milkers, it was always primarily Anne's haunt, for years earlier it was where she had scanned the canopy of foliage and come to learn the names of the pigeons and louries and flycatchers with which she shared the forest.

Also in need of James and Mia's attention were the guests, whose arrivals and departures ebbed and flowed. They were largely from nearby, like the Sangers and the Jonases and the Garnetts, who arrived for lunch or tennis or dinner and then drove home again, but from further afield came others who stayed overnight or sometimes for as long as several weeks.



Women picking coffee berries at Hazara

Most frequent was Mia's mother Kate, but also there were the Leycesters and the Listers and the Lintners and the Hadinghams and the Fellowses and the Pottses and the Herberts and the Orpens. And from Britain came a steady stream: from London, Cambridge, Chester, Salisbury, Worcester, and Bidborough in East Sussex. Maintaining the link with Ireland were Leycester relatives from Drimina, their home on the shores of Sneem harbour, with its noted sub-tropical garden. Regularly from Rhodesia came others, and yet more from Addis Ababa in Ethiopia and Barakat in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. In 1962, the Hindsons, formerly of Clifton Estate, at whose low-level bridge the Jonases had been swept away, and who after Sharpeville had emigrated to Canada, stayed for a week, listing their new home as Salmon Arm, British Columbia, and adding that it was 'wonderful to be back'.

But in the decades after World War II came an English guest who by her presence circuitously linked the farm with the regiment after which it had been named. A longstanding friend of Mia's was Adela, the dowager Viscountess Broome, whose late husband was the nephew of Horatio Kitchener at whose command on India's North-West Frontier the Hazara Pioneers had been constituted. On a later visit came her younger son Charles, then a schoolmaster in Nairobi, whose immense tallness was a source of wonderment to the young John. And years later still, by which time Mia had moved from Hazara to a house in Pietermaritzburg, Adela Broome returned with her elder son Henry, a bachelor, who after the early death of his father had succeeded his grandfather to become the third Earl Kitchener of Khartoum and of Broome and, as it turned out, the last.

On one of the verandas or on the loggia, or in the sitting room, someone among them must have traced the links through the tapestry of Empire and made the connection: that decades earlier, by forming a regiment, the imperial icon Horatio Kitchener had unwittingly provided a name for a farm in Africa, and that long after his death his nephew's widow and a former officer in the same regiment and his wife would find themselves together at that very place. While afloat on their sundowners and adrift in the glow of the sinking sun, they would have paused, and reflected, and marvelled at the improbability of it all.

Wanting a sister for their solitary son, Mick and Anne began to consider adoption. And so, when John was nearly eight, through a welfare society in Durban they acquired a toddler of Afrikaner stock who was named Mavourneen but whom they renamed Linda. She was sickly, but with care and Hazara's bounty soon took on a ruddiness and vigour. The facts of her origins, it was decided, should be withheld from her until she was older, and that Anne should break the news, having first prepared the ground with the fortuitousness of her own switch in parents. From nurturing a young girl who like her was once lost, Anne derived comfort and a sense of meaningfulness.

But if there was joy at Linda's arrival, they were anxious times, for in a campaign against the apartheid state subversive forces were hard at work. And even if at Hazara there was a disdain for Afrikaner Nationalism, the estate benefited from the system and so was a target. Of this, Mick, particularly, had no illusions, being fearful of the prospect of a liberated Africa with its pent-up anger and clamour for a socialist system that he knew would be ruinous, but aware of how swingeing laws were blighting the lives of his workers.

He knew too of how anger was finding expression in arson, for each night, particularly at the end of winter when the cane was dry and tetchy, banks of orange would be seen advancing menacingly through the darkness. Beside the sheds, tractors and trailers would be at the ready, and the party line would be clamorous with voices seeking assistance. And because there had been attacks on homes, there was concern that

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Linda, not long after her arrival, outside the manager's house, c.1964

whenever a farmer was out fighting fires his family would be vulnerable. With his hacking cough and increasing frailty, James could no longer be relied upon, and in his pyjamas and dressing gown John was too young to play the settler stalwart. There was, therefore, about the sugar fields then a climate of fear that by selling up and leaving the Hindsons had presciently avoided.

It was during this simmering insurrection that John began attending the farm school, for which Anne had been preparing him for months. With a blackboard and globe she had arranged his bedroom into some semblance of a classroom, and with much enthusiasm and some ineptitude had sought to teach him the rudiments of arithmetic and geography. And before long he had become a pupil, being among the sons and daughters of the white employees of the Doornkop Sugar Company the only child of a private farmer.

Each weekday morning, after an early breakfast, Anne and John would set off by car along the gravel roads through the cane fields. Crossing onto Llys Onen, they passed the bungalow of the reconfigured Mansfield-

Sangers, Ronwen having persuaded 'R.J.' to adopt a double-barrelled surname as the deaths of Beric and the Major had erased 'Mansfield' from the district. Descending into a valley, Anne passed a gantry, crossed the Nonoti and skirted the long and pellucid pool of happy memory, before ascending through cane fields to a T-junction. There she and John joined the wider district road and before long, in a clump of trees, reached the shed-like building of the Doornkop Farm School.

With twenty children and one teacher, three classes were taught simultaneously in the same room. And because each class was of a different year, it learnt to respond to its instructions and ignore those for the others. At break-time all the children burst outside and climbed the frangipani trees in search of lizards' eggs, or swapped silkworms, or played tops or marbles, or engaged in far-ranging and noisy territorial clashes, full of whoops and ululations, in which the girls were bartered as booty. Punishment for foul language was being made to eat a piece of soap. One day a pretty girl named Sharon didn't come to school because her father had died of a heart attack while playing polo. In December, when it was sweltering and cicadas were shrilling in the trees, Father Christmas appeared and handed out presents. One year all the children were herded across the district road to the railway line where he arrived in a loco that had a retinue of *golovans* trailing behind it.

Thus John spent his first years of schooling, Anne dropping him off each weekday and she or Mick collecting him at noon to retrace the morning's journey — to the T-junction, down the hill, across the Nonoti, past the gantry, up the slope near the Mansfield-Sanger's homestead, and on through Llys Onen's and Hazara's cane fields, to be home for lunch.

In the afternoons, he would join his Zulu boy-companions, for whom at best the system provided several years of rudimentary schooling, to fish or set bird traps in the forest or cane-rat tunnel-traps in the leaf trash among the rows of stalks. Frequently, he and the groom would exercise the horses, thundering along the cane breaks. And because of his closeness to his grandmother Mia, often he would wander up through the garden to the main house to read *The Little Prince* with her, and to have tea and rock cakes. Usually, James would be having a siesta, or reading, or playing chess with a visitor in the gloom of his snug, surrounded by kukris and

ivory elephants and burnished shell-case spittoons. It was clear to John that his grandfather's cough was worsening and that his military bearing had all but subsided. Much to Mick's chagrin, the ailing James developed a craving for French champagne, drinking a bottle daily, and the boxes of empties, stacked on top of each other, rose like a wall of giant Lego beside the Humbers in the garage.

Away in her maisonette in Pietermaritzburg, Mia's mother Kate too was unwell, and when her condition worsened she was brought to Hazara to die. Hired to attend to her was a nurse, the daughter of another planter, who moved into the main house, and whom Mia and Anne took turns to relieve. And before long Kate died, and from Durban came a long black hearse, nosing sinisterly like a shark through the waves of cane. As her corpse was being carried down the passage, in his bedroom James could be heard retching, and to Mick one of the undertakers whispered: 'We'll be back for him soon'. And they were, for in weeks he was dead, felled by the consequences of a lifetime of smoking. Out from Durban came a hearse for him too, ferrying his remains to Stellawood Cemetery to join Barbara, David and Francis.

For James Woollam it had been an odyssey: son of a Chester coal merchant, chorister at the Cathedral School, soldier in various theatres of the Great War, husband to Mia, surrogate father to Anne, and squire of a sugar estate in the hills above Stanger. Life had been comfortable, even if periodically land had to be sold off to sustain it. But offsetting the credits had been three children lost and decades of marital discord. If at times his spirits had flagged, there were always the guests, to play chess with, or just tinkle with and talk to, and the sallies to the Durban Club where turbaned Indian doormen greeted him with 'Good morning, Major' and added, irreverently although good humouredly, 'Are the chillies still hot in Stanger?'

The bad blood between James and Mick had persisted, although at a level that was generally tolerable, but in his will James fired a parting shot. In what was interpreted as intentional he bequeathed a burden of death duties that could otherwise have been avoided. From the vantage of this final sting could be seen afresh his earlier attempt to encourage an English relative to take over the farm. The young man had travelled out

to Natal, and on James's instruction spent weeks shadowing a simmering Mick, but had found the prospect of farming in Africa uncongenial and had returned to England.

As soon as she could reasonably do so, Mia moved to Pietermaritzburg where a house was purchased for her in a suburb on the wooded western slope, not far from Long Barn where the Davis's had lived, and near the Listers and Fellowses and other friends and relatives whose stays at the farm had been so diligently recorded in her visitors' book. And much as she sought to erase her unhappy associations with Hazara, there were also happy memories to be savoured. So, Mia replaced her mother Kate as a frequent guest, several times a year in her Hillman Minx driving down from the hinterland and into the familiar swell of the sugar fields.

Moving from the manager's house to the main house, Mick and Anne, and John and Linda, sought to make it their own. As a chain of



Later version of the main house at Hazara, painted white, as seen from the top lawn, c.1966

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workers carried their furniture up through the garden and into the shadowy coolness of the rooms, so they had items placed in the gaps left by what Mia had taken, creating another ensemble with a younger feel to it. Mick and Anne moved into the spare bedroom, in which Kate Keith-Fraser had died, with its dark passage, adjoining bedroom and two bathrooms, and French doors that opened out onto one of the verandas. Through the window, in the side garden in the direction of the dam and forested gully, could be seen the white-trunked gum into which, twenty-one years earlier, unhinged by news of her brother's death, Anne had clambered and wept. That over the decades the tree had thrust upwards and outwards, coming to dominate a corner of the garden, was a reflection of her loss.

Linda moved into Mia's large and airy bedroom, with its adjoining bathroom, and John into James's smaller corner room, with its shower nook, both with their views down the sloping lawn and across the cane fields to the valley where the mill was hidden, and on to the blue stripe of the Indian Ocean. Outside their windows, the two large sentinel palms whose fronds had provided Mia and James with a soft and husky lullaby, especially at night when the day's noises had receded and only the shrill of crickets and the sonic-soundings of fruit bats formed a counterpoint, sang for them too.

In Pietermaritzburg, Mia lived an extension of her life at Hazara but on a smaller scale, with a cook who doubled as a waiter, and a single gardener. Watched by James's Chinese screen and ivory elephants, she busied herself reading the *Illustrated London News* and *Country Life* and taking her aged pug Mittens for walks. Never a bridge player, she took to tea parties and watching tennis and attending amateur theatricals at the Cygnet Theatre and orchestral concerts in the City Hall. Being free of James's British Israelitism, with its madcap insistence that Christ was an Englishman, she immersed herself in Christian Science, becoming a practitioner, and on her trips to Canada to stay with the Hindsons taking detours to Boston to visit the Mother Church.

By chance, Mia's arrival in Pietermaritzburg coincided with her sister Jean's departure, for just as she settled in at her newly named Tamela so the Leycesters moved from Kilimani, their home on the old road inland

from the city, to a flat on the ridge of Durban's Berea, with its crow's-nest view of the Indian Ocean. There, with their tallboys and davenport and gilt-framed portraits, which over the decades had accompanied them through a carousel of countries, yet again they put down roots. Although now both elderly, Mia and Jean continued to meet regularly, and Robert, until his health failed, maintained his daily routine of a swim in the sea, accompanied by a friend whose life had been similarly peripatetic and privileged and with whom he had things to talk about.



Jean and Robert Leycester in their flat on the Berea, Durban, c.1967

If their twilight walks through the cane fields had been opportunities for Mick and Anne to learn more about each other, for this they were largely unsuccessful, and not only because Anne's knowledge of her family was so fragmentary. For all the intactness of his origins, Mick's natural reserve shrouded much of his life. That there had always been about him an opaqueness Anne realised not long after their wedding when her father-in-law Lewis confided that she must already know more about his son than he did. Yet even if Mick's reticence was less evasiveness than a horror of conceit, Anne, being frivolous rather than serious-minded, in decades of marriage uncovered only scatterings about her husband's earlier life.

But given the confines of their social world, during their courtship, when each was sounding out the other, from mutual friends she had gleaned that Mick had spent his childhood in Zululand, his schooldays at Hilton College, and his war service in the RAF. And from his former classmates and teammates Anne learnt that notwithstanding his authority and sporting prowess he had always been more respected than hail-fellow-well-met.

Yet, inevitably, other fragments filtered through: that his elder brother Michael had died in his teens, and that there was another brother named Deane with whom he had little contact. About her mother-in-law too she gathered only fragments, Mary being an invalid by the time she met her. But for her father-in-law she developed a special affection, particularly after his move as a widower with his sister Beryl into the manager's house at Hazara, for unlike his son he was rooted and contented.

Had Mick shared any martial details with Anne, they would have been of little interest to her. Other snippets, had he chosen to reveal them, would have had greater resonance: that early in his years of combat he had suffered his only bout of asthma, and with fellow pilots whose nerves were perilously frayed had been dispatched on recuperative leave. Had he told her, she would have filed away as ammunition that at Heliopolis he had contracted hepatitis, and from the fleshpots of Cairo, urethritis. That so many personnel were infected that a general warning was issued would not to her have been mitigation. And because when she met him he was cadaverous and walked with a stick, she would have heard how he had ditched his crippled aircraft in a field in southern England, and been lambasted by a farmer for killing his sheep. And because, in the early years of their marriage, while playing tennis he would sometimes collapse, she would have known that he had broken multiple bones and spent months in hospital in a body cast.

Even if later he walked around Hazara every day and appeared the picture of health, she knew that he received an RAF disability pension because he spent it on whisky and gin and brandy for the two of them. Somehow he let slip that there had been a particular girlfriend, a receptionist at London's Savoy Hotel, but at Anne's insistence tore up her letters.

Further, as Anne, John and Linda soon learnt, he should never be given a fright, for whether surprised from behind, or while sleeping, he sometimes lashed out, seemingly involuntarily. Blamed were ack-ack and the Hun in the sun. And for unspoken reasons he was determined to erase the war, never answering letters from former aircrew seeking to re-establish contact. Had he bothered, he would have found out that Charles 'Bud' Tingwell, with whom he had been photographed under the rearing fuselage of a Mosquito, had become a famous actor in his native Australia, so hallowed that on his death he was given a state funeral. He would have found out too that in *Breaker Morant*, a film about the Anglo-Boer War, his erstwhile friend's character presides over a court martial which sentences two Australian lieutenants to death, allegedly on the orders of General Kitchener, so yet again, however circuitously and tenuously, the Kitcheners were touching the story of Hazara.



Mick (left) in his RAF days, under a Mosquito with Charles 'Bud' Tingwall (centre) and Bill Hunter

Mick's drinking too was attributed to tension, for the image of young RAF pilots roistering in messes and careering along hedgerows in open-topped sports cars still had a mythic quality. But while in Natal sugar-farming circles it was then de rigueur to drink, with Mia Woollam among the few abstainers, Mick's tippling had an edge to it. Late each afternoon, as darkness began to settle and the servants put out the drinks tray with its ice bucket and glasses, accompanied by the radio news he would pour a brandy for Anne and, depending on the temperature and season, a whisky or pink gin for himself. And throughout each evening,

before and after the interruption of dinner in the dining room, which was accompanied by wine and eaten early to allow the servants to leave, the tableau of bottles and decanters, suffused with the warm glow from a lamp, shone like an altarpiece on the drinks cabinet in the hallway.

During those pre-television evenings, Mick read, sometimes light fare by Sapper and Zane Grey, and sometimes histories by Robert Graves or John 'Pasha' Glubb, commander of the Arab Legion, to whom he was distantly related, while Anne played patience or immersed herself in family sagas of the kind written by Hugh Walpole and Winston Graham. Two books, however, he returned to repeatedly: *Men of the Last Frontier*, a paean to Canada's backwoods by Englishman-turned-Red-Indian-trapper Grey Owl; and *Robbery under Arms*, Rolf Boldrewood's classic novel of bushranging and gold digging in pioneer Australia. Each evening, while he and Anne were lost in separate worlds, outside on the lawn crickets would be shrilling, and from far away at the dam a frog chorus would just be audible, providing a platform of sound on which the squalls of a bushbaby and the chatter of monkeys would bounce momentarily and then be gone.

Alcoholic largesse would be extended to anyone, for no sooner had John and Linda reached their mid-teens than they were encouraged to have a drink. And thus was liquor demystified, as long as on weekdays it was kept to the evenings, even if at lunchtime on weekends a beer or a gin and tonic were permissible. But there was to Mick's consumption something more than just sociability, for if Anne had several drinks and then headed for bed, he would stay on in the sitting room, reading and drinking deep into the night.

It was then, if his lucidity held, that he would reflect on the tragedy of the settler condition: how in the land of his birth he and his family were outsiders. For to both the ruling Afrikaner Nationalists, and the African nationalists whose ascendancy was surely only decades away, his offshoot of Englishness was at best an irritation. With conflict between the antagonists inevitable, Natal would become a battlefield. The old Eastern Cape frontier of the Fish River, across which settlers and natives had long thrust and parried, he concluded, was a symbolic borderline in the country's mind, so at best only the Cape of Good Hope offered the

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chance of a future. If these demons were displaced by sleep, they were not dispelled, for slowly, year after year, as he saw his forebodings take shape, they would return, invigorated and insistent.

At parties, when most men and women soon subsided into jolliness, at the end of the evening Mick was among those unsteady on their feet. Among the cars parked along the driveway there was hilarity, with starting and stalling, and reversing and hooting, as each Mercedes or Ford or Jaguar edged past the others, or around palms or bougainvillea, to begin its journey homewards. And no sooner had the vehicles dispersed and begun to make their ways through the cane in the moonlight than Mick and other inebriates would be weaving across the rutted roads and brushing against the stalks, while their wives and children sat anxiously beside them.

If buffing James Woollam's tarnished farming operation was Mick's primary objective, genealogy became his diversion. Once efficiencies had been sought, and the labour force been cut from over a hundred to around sixty, he found other loose edges to trim. And, by when, with its buildings and paddocks and avenues Hazara had become a model estate, bankrolling a life of comfort that covered Mia's needs in Pietermaritzburg, private educations for John and Linda, and trips overseas, for his gratification Mick could look elsewhere. So, late most afternoons he would withdraw into his outbuilding office, where earlier he had consulted with his workers, to research his forebears.

Being now middle-aged, intimations of mortality helped drive his delving. Also fuelling it was his fear of the future, for as repression and agitation threatened his world so his ancestors became all-conquering avatars. At play too was the compulsion that decades earlier had made his uncle so prattle on about an ancestor and the young Victoria that one of his Natal Police colleagues had included it in his obituary.

From his roll-top desk in his office, some hundred yards from the main house, Mick wove a web of correspondence, linking Hazara to Edinburgh and Belfast and Dublin and London and towns and villages across the British Isles. And as the years passed so he wove his web wider, into the New World, adding a parallel lineage.

First he pushed back through the two generations in Africa, past his father, the magistrate and native commissioner, and his grandfather, the farmer, but they held little interest for him. Next he excavated his

great-grandfather, the longstanding rector of Weston Longeville, from whose world his grandfather had escaped to Africa, and who formed the only purely English link in the chain. Next he excavated deeper still, into Ascendancy Ireland, uncovering successively a rector of Ratoath in County Meath, an officer in a regiment of foot, generations of landowners in County Donegal and, back through the Plantation of Ulster, when the surname morphed into its variant form, to more landowners in the lowlands of Scotland.

To achieve this, in those pre-Internet days, was both laborious and remarkable. Written in his office among the cane fields, Mick's letters would be posted in Stanger, whence they travelled by train to Durban, whence they were bundled on a mail ship for a journey around Africa, or on an aircraft for a hopping trajectory across it. Worlds away in Edinburgh, in the Court of the Lord Lyon, they would be slit open by a Falkland Pursuivant Extraordinary of Arms, or in Dublin by the editor of the *Irish Genealogist*, both of whom, for a consideration, would sleuth in dusty tomes in musty vaults and garner further gleanings which laboriously would be transcribed and then dispatched southwards to a distant sugar estate.

Each weekday a bus bound for Maphumulo grumbled from Stanger into the hills, and at the turn-off at Mount Albert its conductor would toss Hazara's leather postbag to one of the gardeners who had cycled from the farm to collect it. No sooner had the bag been dropped on the kitchen table than John would set upon it, searching for his *Hotspur* magazine which arrived erratically each week. Periodically, addressed to Mick, would appear volumes like Sir John Barrow's *The Mutiny and Piratical Seizure of HMS Bounty* and James Hogg's *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner* from the Folio Society, and brown-paper parcels secured with string and sealing wax. Sensing their singularity, John would run with them to his father, and watch as old, battered books like Paterson's *History of Ayrshire* or Robertson's *Families in Ayrshire* or Mina Lenox-Conyngham's *An Old Ulster House*, were opened reverentially. From these Mick established that a millennium ago, when any claims to consanguinity are little more than guesswork, the fountainhead of the family was a Norseman named Wernebald, who had swept into Scotland

with the forces of a Norman named Hugh de Morville and put down roots.

From Irish research Mick learnt of rapparees and balliboes, and place names like Kildrum in the parish of Tullaghobegly, and Killybegs and Killaughtee, and of glebes and plantation houses, and of the Honourable Major Otway's Regiment of Foot. Clues of kinship were provided by repeated Christian names like Gustavus and Hamilton, which pointed to a link with the Boynes of Ducarrick. And there were friends and relatives with preposterous monikers, like Wybrants Olpherts and Clotworthy Lenox. And wives and sisters who were fragrantly christened Letitia and Matilda and Alicia and Florinda. From the transcriptions of wills were listed the heirlooms to be distributed: dwellings and outhouses, and pigeon house kilns, and stables and gardens, orchards and parks. And movables like pistols, jewels and plate, and coaches and horses, and cattle and sheep. And there were daughters who specifically were to be restrained from marrying without their widowed mother's consent.

What the researchers also uncovered were glimpses of the ancestors themselves. Like Mick's great-great-grandfather Lancelot, the Church of Ireland rector whom his own second name sought to commemorate, who nearly two centuries earlier had been censured for allowing his terrier to bite a visiting bishop, and for being evasive when probed why he had forsaken his parish to spend sojourns in England. Similarly vague was Lancelot's explanation why he had surreptitiously spent a year on the Caribbean island of St Lucia, where no doubt the comforts of a slave-owning sugar plantocracy had been more congenial than the flatlands of Meath where the tithes were paid so begrudgingly. That he had chosen this tropical diversion was probably because his older brother, John, aide-de-camp to General Sir Charles Grey, Britain's commander in the West Indies, had recently been a signatory to the French surrender on nearby Martinique, and the Windward Islands were in the family's ken.

But Lancelot seems always to have been a contrarian, even during his schooldays at Winchester when he was a sponsor of a book of verse by Helen Maria Williams, a blue-stocking celebrant of the French Revolution, which was then underway. That Wordsworth had written a sonnet about her, and she was a friend of Mary Shelley, would have

added to her allure. And when in solidarity with the ructions in France the boys of Winchester staged their own rebellion, planting a red cap on the Founder's Tower, Mick would have delighted in the thought of Lancelot, as a Founder's Kin, being in the thick of it.

As several kinsmen had crossed the Atlantic, an American trail was followed. Along it was Lancelot's father, an earlier John, a captain with General Braddock's column hacking through the Ohio backwoods towards Fort Duquesne, near present-day Pittsburgh. When the French and Indians sprung their trap, the British officers on horseback were particularly exposed. Braddock was hit in the chest and died soon afterwards. Captain John had his mount shot from under him and his arm split open. George Washington, a volunteer with the column, had two horses downed but remained unscathed. In disarray, the British retreated to Philadelphia, where Captain John's brother Redmond had shipping interests, to lick their wounds. What they had just survived was the opening engagement of the French and Indian War, or, as the Europeans would know it, the Seven Years War, but which historically had yet to coalesce.

As Mick discovered, too, a decade later Captain John's nephew Gustavus arrived from Donegal with his parents. Set on a career at sea, the teenager joined the merchant marine, looping through the Caribbean and along the American coastline. When war broke out between Britain and her errant colony, Gustavus chose the rebels, was given his first command and dispatched to Holland to procure gunpowder. When his ship was impounded, he turned to America's commissioner in Paris, Benjamin Franklin, who took a shine to the young privateer and granted him a commission.

Gustavus's hawkishness Mick soon began to relish. How, as captain of the lugger *Surprise* and cutter *Revenge*, each flying the nascent American navy's ensign of a rattlesnake, with the cocky injunction 'Don't step on me', his forebear sunk or commandeered sixty British merchant ships. But then, in 1779, off New York, unknowingly in thick fog the pocket-sized *Revenge* drifted alongside the hulking Royal Navy frigate *Galatea*, one of whose successors would a hundred-and-sixty-two-years later have crewmen stay at Hazara, and was captured. Accused of being a pirate

rather than privateer, Gustavus was taken in irons to England, tortured, but saved from execution by threats of retaliatory executions. Seeking to escape, he eventually succeeded.

Whenever the postbag disgorged further evidence of his forebear's daredevilry, Mick's sleuthing became more febrile. For hours at a time, sometimes even rebuffing Anne's chivvying for a walk, until long after the sun had set and the night consolidated, with bats zigzagging between the myrtles and flamboyants, and the thudding of tom-toms rising out of the valley, matters of sugar husbandry and marriage and fatherhood, and the country's increasing turmoil, were pushed aside as he flicked between reference books and letters, linking and corroborating.

Even if John Paul Jones was the most hallowed of America's naval commanders in the revolution, Gustavus has a niche in the pantheon, with three destroyers named after him: the first USS *Conyngham* doing convoy duty in World War I; the second shooting down Japanese aircraft at Pearl Harbor and shielding carriers at Midway and Santa Cruz; and the third in 1983 providing cannonade cover for the Marines in Beirut. Also named after him was a village in Pennsylvania with whose postmistress-historian Mick established a correspondence.

From all these gleanings Mick drew sustenance, as he strode through the sugar fields, or drove to Stanger, or endured farmers' meetings. But if underpinning his delving were hopes of aggrandisement, they were inconclusive. If research had unearthed that his last Scottish forebear was the younger son of a baronet laird, nothing could be made of an extinct earldom which various branches of the family had sought to resuscitate. And with the namesakes at Springhill, a Jacobean plantation house in the Derry countryside, the destruction of Dublin's record office had dashed any hope of proving a specific link. Most exasperatingly for him, unverified remained the connection with the marquessate, with its seat at Slane Castle in County Meath, to which his uncle John in outposts across Natal and Zululand had been claiming relatedness, either spuriously or because he had evidence that had since been lost. Intact, however, was the kinship with the Barony of Plunket, for Captain John's sister was the first baron's mother.

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In his reformation of Hazara and his compilation of a centuries-long pedigree, therefore, can be seen Mick's life achievement. To create a paragon of a sugar estate, with a gracious lifestyle, was for him something paramount for it reasserted his sense of a familial illustriousness which he felt had been frittered by fecklessness and ill-fortune. And central to this ideal was the image of himself, for whenever he wasn't in his customary khakis and slouch hat his tall figure was sculpted by suits and blazers and sports jackets crafted by Lerwill, Pope and Wills, his tailors in Durban. And to protect his baldness from the sub-tropical sun, but also to assert his sense of gentility and Englishness, on trout fishing jaunts into the Drakensberg he took to wearing a flat tweed cap.

Although never claimed as role models, but admired and emulated, were Anthony Eden and Harold Alexander, whom in ways he resembled. Of both he had firsthand experience, having met Eden when the future British prime minister visited his squadron in Heliopolis, and having hosted Alexander at an airfield in Cyrenaica when the general was delayed between flights. More than anything, he admired Alexander's reserve and sangfroid.

Once James's death duties had been paid off, Mick and Anne decided to demolish the big house and in its place build another that distinctly bore their stamp. Even if the rambling bungalow's home-fired bricks had always been disconcertingly friable, and if rats scuttling in the walls had for years set ornaments trembling, there was structurally no need to tear it down. But in the additions and alterations that over the decades had stretched and remoulded a kit-form, corrugated-iron cottage into a sprawling brick farmhouse there were the memories of arguments and dead children that they wanted to exorcise. For John, now a boarder at Hilton College, and Linda, now a boarder at Wykeham, however, there was about this drive for obliteration a poignancy, for their association with the homely labyrinth of rooms was sunny and uncontaminated. But such decisiveness by Mick and Anne had another reason, for when viewed beside their vision for Hazara the house looked timeworn and tired, and so had to go.

Commissioning an architect, they set to work, flipping through magazines and journals for ideas and pacing the garden to ensure that the new edifice would fit snugly into the cluster of palms that awaited it. With regret they realised that the huge magnolia which loomed protectively over the inner veranda, where James had staged his boozy lunches, would have to come down, and that with its disappearance would fade the memory of its fleshy cream blossoms that were such a spectacle.

As the plans progressed, so it became clear that the new residence would be long and white and linear, like an upturned pleasure boat, with

abutting it a smaller wing containing the dining room and kitchen and pantry and laundry, and with the garage moored beyond them. Adding to its sense of lightness would be white sash windows with white shutters and an encircling veranda with slender wooden pillars, similarly painted white. Down the centre of its length would be a wide passage, along which, on hot summer nights when the humidity was as dense as mohair, it was designed that breezes would provide relief. Replacing the magnolia would be a swimming pool, set on the middle lawn, within sight of Anne's gum tree with its ghostly pale trunk. And so, as the architect conjured, if one mounted the twin flights of steps that splayed from the middle lawn to the top lawn, and cast an eye over one's shoulder, so the house below would be caught partly from above, revealing all its elongated elegance. On its other side, at the top of the bottom lawn, within sight of the tennis court, and the sea in the distance, so he determined too that James and Mia's sentinel singing palms would need to stay, for without them, in the occupants' minds, there would be too large a hole in the sky.

Architecturally, the design was derived from Cape Cod houses in America, but with modifications for sub-tropical Natal. Brick would replace clapboard, and height would be forgone for length and airiness. That the white louvred shutters which the servants would open each morning and close at dusk were considered secure enough was because the endgame of apartheid had still to come. On the matter of security, so Mick and Anne reassured themselves, there was also the nightwatchman patrolling among the palms, even if his primary duty was to detect the glows of cane fires in the darkness.

Away in Pietermaritzburg, Mia was philosophical, for she too had much to forget. Even if the family's very presence on the farm was thanks to her parents' generosity, the decades that she had spent there had been bitter-sweet. As she settled into Christian Science, with its pragmatism and guiding hand, so she realised too that temporal matters needed to be kept in perspective. If Hazara provided her with the means to live comfortably and travel regularly to England and Europe and North America, who was she to prescribe what happened there? From afar, therefore, she embraced the changes, and on her visits marvelled at how a model estate was taking shape.

As Lewis and Beryl were now living in the manager's house, Mick and Anne had beside it a cottage built that they could occupy while their new dwelling was under construction. And it was while they were in this state of suspension, and John and Linda were home on holiday from boarding school, that one night Neil Armstrong stepped onto the moon, and the three generations of the family moved out onto the lawn and stared up into the heavens in wonderment.

But before the building could start, the site had to be prepared, so the furniture from the old house was packed and stored in sheds, and the roof was removed, and the doors and windows were wrenched from their embracing masonry. Then the tractors were let loose and with excited snorts and roars and manoeuvrings on the lawns, with chains pulled down the walls. And as the dust rose and then dissipated so a world dissipated too, and the slate was cleaned.

Next the professionals arrived, the architect with his clipboard and his teams of bricklayers, carpenters, plumbers and electricians, who over much of a year created a resplendent centrepiece for the entire enterprise, to which the waving fields of sugar cane appeared to be paying homage. At first the house seemed too clinical and geometric to be a home, but as each item of furniture was allotted its new space so a sense of continuity was established. But even if, when compared with its sprawling predecessor, the new habitation seemed unnecessarily precise and angular, so the impact of its beauty and its airiness soon took hold, and the surroundings that had been waiting for it, embraced it, and it was home.

Not to be forgotten was the water system, lest it sully the transformation. No longer tolerated was the saffron-coloured liquid from the stream below the dam, so beyond the reach of the dolerite stratum which underpinned much of the farm a borehole was sunk and soon crystal water was scooting for miles along a pipe through the cane fields and into the house. Had they seen the clarity of what was now filling the baths, James and Mia's guests would have marvelled.

Mick and Anne then switched their attention to the garden, and at dusk, after their customary walk, strolled purposefully across the lawns and into the inlets between the jetties of beds and borders, and along



The new Hazara house, with Mick in the shadows on the left, c.1972

the bricked driveway with its froth of flanking flowers, assessing and planning. Summoned to help was a veteran of Kew Gardens and former chief of parks in Johannesburg who made regular visits to dispense his expertise. And even if there was already in the demesne a loftiness of trees laced with lianas and splashed with colour, there was excitement at the possibilities for expansion and improvement. On the hillside overlooking the forest they had sugar-bushes and proteas planted, and on a terrace above the tennis court a pergola constructed that was soon dripping with jade vine and its phallic blooms. Unbeknown at first, boomslangs delighted in the tangledness, insinuating themselves into the lattice of stems to catch the sun that poured down like syrup through the humid haze, and luxuriated only feet above Mick and Anne and whomever else had joined them for tea in its shade. Once discovered, they were deemed

too close for comfort, so the structure came down. And the tennis court itself was upgraded, the reddish earth that had been purloined from anthills being replaced by green-painted asphalt that looked altogether more appropriate.

Whenever John and Linda returned for their school holidays they would see changes, and there was tangibly about the estate a sense of progress and advancement. For them too, spared the responsibility of maintaining and managing the momentum, it was a haven, cloistered and secure. As they appreciated only later, they were remarkably carefree, John reading on the veranda or collecting birds' eggs, religiously leaving at least one in the nest, or descending into the bush in the valley with a shotgun to shoot the monkeys that had so proliferated that they were considered vermin, and Linda finessing her tennis against the practice wall beside the court or leading Anne's two dachshunds on lizard-hunting expeditions in the rockeries.

Even if as an adolescent John relished the seclusion, there were socials, usually in the big houses at Kearsney, with their grand staircases and cavernous verandas. In one mansion, tall and towered, from its glass-domed tomb a stuffed owl observed the bopping and pairings disapprovingly as songs by the Hollies and Bee Gees and Peter Sarstedt followed each other in a bank of sound, with Jane Birkin's breathy 'Je T'aime' always saved for last. And even if about the clasping and shuffling there was a frisson and an ache, and if the occasions were concluded with an exchange of talismans, like a string of Zulu beads or a bangle of plastic shark-netting, and a promise to write when back at boarding school again, for John it was always a comfort to return to Hazara, with its feudal afterglow and its sense of peacefulness.

Even if now she was mistress of a gleaming new home, for Anne life continued as usual, with regular trips into Stanger and fortnightly expeditions to Durban, and a string of chatty book-club and garden-club meetings with the wives of millers and fellow planters. There were parties too, but no longer the homespun gatherings of her years with Mick in the manager's house, when friends and neighbours would bring contributions, and supper would be slapped together in the kitchen after the servants had gone. Now things were grander, with sleek saloon cars

parked along the driveway and the house ablaze in light, with a hubbub and peals of laughter. Sometimes the dinners were a circle of conviviality around the mahogany table in the dining room, with silver candelabra and candles, and fine cutlery and crockery. But if the gathering was large, arrangements would be made in the veranda room, its French doors flung open to the swimming pool with its sheen of moonlight and to the swell of cricket song. Made for the purpose were deal tables, arranged end-to-end and draped in damask, seating up to thirty people, the men in dark suits and the women in long dresses.

The largest of all the regular gatherings were in the festive season, when the heat and humidity were ferocious and the tempos of the mills and farms lessened slightly before picking up again. The first was the Garnetts' Boxing Day party at Mayfield, bordering the native reserve and within earshot of the clashes at Otimati and Peyana that years earlier had thrown together the rifle-toting brothers Lewis and Dennis and the stretcher-bearer Mohandas Gandhi.

Being a lunch party, everyone congregated under spreading trees near the pool, with the men in pale flannels and the women in floral dresses, and some wearing hats as a protection from the sun. When he was younger, John joined the other children, roaming the expansive garden like a band of midget vagabonds, throwing tennis balls for a persistent collie, or prodding for kois under the lily pads of a secluded pond, or admiring the sports cars of the scions of the plantocracy, particularly an MG and Ford Mustang. Flirting around the swimming pool were the teenagers whose looming adulthood the younger set envied, and on whom, for noteworthy pairings, the mothers kept a watchful eye.

The climax of the social year was the New Year's Eve party at Sprowston, the Van der Pols' transfigured former-Hulett bungalow several miles inland from Kearsney. With their parents having escaped to South Africa from the austerities of post-war Holland, Kees and Fleur had done well, with puckish and astute Kees near the pinnacle of the Hulett hierarchy and emblazoned with the perks of his office.

At dusk on old year's day, as if magically scores of formally dressed men and women appeared from the surrounding cane fields, parking their cars on the lawn and mounting the steps to the long white house where



*The Garnetts' Boxing Day party at Mayfield, with Kees van der Pol (left),
and Mick partly obscured in the background, c.1970*



*Mona Gould, née Mansfield, and Heath Garnett at a gathering at Llys Onen,
c.1970*

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soon they were milling in the reception rooms and talking animatedly and laughing. Holed up near the kitchen would be the Zulu nannies and their pyjamaed wards, and in a room of their own would be the teenagers, all familiar to each other from previous such occasions, or from being at the same boarding school, and who would drift listlessly about the periphery. As midnight approached with its heightened excitement, so the teenagers would tumble into the swimming pool, romping and cavorting in the turquoise glow of the underwater lights. Then, on the veranda, would follow the customary ritual of chimes, and the singing of 'Auld Lang Syne', with hugs and kisses made more intimate by the tang of alcohol and sweat and perfume. And finally there were the journeys homeward, the teenagers less tolerant of their fathers' cane-swiping swerves than as children they had been.

For Mick too, even if the new house brought its own blessings, it was business as usual, patrolling the cane fields and holding court in his office and dispensary. And although from this routine he now filched yet more time for his genealogical research, he still pressed on with his



Kees and Fleur van der Pol and Anne (right) at a Kearsney Dam picnic, c.1965

mission to hone and buff the estate: giving instructions for the planting of avenues of planes, and borders of Australian satinay trees, and dells of clivias, and copses of mahoganies and flamboyants, and decreeing that this field should be replanted and those sheds conjoined. But even if there was pleasure to be had in this polishing, before long it began to seem that there was little else to do, and so for Mick, driven as he was, Hazara's hundreds of acres began to feel confining.

Gradually, therefore, he began to seek opportunities for expansion, sounding out neighbours with offers of purchase. But in those balmy, prosperous days before the political storm, when all landowners knew that dissent was widespread but who convinced themselves that the government would contain it, there were no takers. Most of the adjoining land belonged to the Doornkop Sugar Company, which was still firmly entrenched. And Llys Onen was flourishing, even if R.J. had absconded with the wife of a veteran of the Sudan colonial service, and Ronwen had dumped her double-barrelled surname to become a Mansfield again, taking the children with her. For a period, Mick helped run Llys Onen, driving over daily from Hazara, but Ronwen's son Beric, who had been named to memorialise his much-lamented uncle, was being groomed to take over. On the southern side of Hazara too, where in lean years pockets of land had been sold off by James, and near where each day one of the gardeners cycled to collect the newspaper and the post from the Maphumulo bus, the neighbours were similarly immoveable.

But then, as if in response to a need to find a different focus, out of the blue came something utterly unexpected. Now in his mid-fifties, Mick took a niggling cough to a doctor-friend, the superintendent of the Hulett hospital at Kearsney for sugar-estate workers, who referred him to a specialist in Durban, who sent him for tests. The findings were unequivocal: he had throat cancer, but it was in its early stages.

Immediately he ditched his cheroots, but for a week kept the news to himself. Then, on one of their twilight walks, he told Anne, playing the matter down. Soon afterwards he had an operation in Durban that sought to remove the malignant buds, followed by radium treatment. The resultant disfigurement was barely noticeable and he returned to his routine, but his restlessness had magnified for in a single blow his

horizons had been foreshortened. When deep into the night, long after Anne had retired, he drank and read, with a new clarity he saw that the life they were living was precarious and unsustainable, and that a tide of resentment and anger would soon sweep it all away. And during these epiphanies, before the drink befuddled him, he saw yet again that only south of the Fish River, which had remained his symbolic stockade, lay the possibility of a future.

In his acuity it came to him that he and Anne should sell Hazara and buy a Cape vineyard instead, for if they hurried he may still have time to master a new form of husbandry before his health gave way. If such a retreat proved unfeasible, he decreed that Africa should be forsaken altogether and that the family should return to its northern roots, where a cycle of history could be completed. That there was rioting in Soweto, near Johannesburg, where the police were gunning down teenagers to contain an insurrection, seemed to him a vindication of his fears. And so, the cancer having focused his mind and galvanised him, he began to formulate a new strategy.

So rooted was the family at Hazara that Mick knew he had to proceed carefully. For a start, after a childhood of wrenchings and relocations, Anne had in the farm a ballast that she would be loath to lose. And being caught up largely in matters of the house and garden and social gatherings, she had never bothered herself with what lay ahead. But because it was only through her that he had a farm at all, Mick resolved to tread gently, and gradually to convince her that the status quo was as brittle as barley sugar.

At parties he sought out others with whom to share his fears. Most decried introspection and were wilfully nonchalant, but in Kees van der Pol he found a fellow strategist. Was there hope for the future, they posited? If handled firmly, Kees thought yes. Yet Mick was sceptical, given the realities of Africa and the anger that he knew was welling.

And so the days and weeks and months passed, with Mick quietly but resolutely seeking to bring about the unthinkable: the abandonment of the family's Eden. As word spread of his intentions, some individuals in sugar circles whispered that as a son-in-law he had no right to meddle with Anne's inheritance. His accountant, brandishing the farm's profits, chided him for being foolish. Other farmers, seeking solace in solidarity,

also sought to dissuade him. Anne and John and Linda, who looked around and saw only a beautiful house and garden, and a life of decorum and comfort, with a special tree here and a special walk there, and a glitter of shared memories, may have sensed his prescience but found it inconceivable to consider a life elsewhere. But deep inside Mick the cancer was multiplying, and as one rearguard medical procedure followed another, so he knew that his time was running out.

Then, one afternoon, in a telephone call on the party line, an operator from Stanger read out a telegram for Anne. It was from a Lloyd's Bank trustee in England with the news that her father, Eric Martin, was dead. Her aunt Désirée, who alone among her biological family had kept in contact with her, was arranging his cremation, but there would be no service or flowers.

Even if her mother Edwarda, and her brother David, and her half-sister Mercedes were long gone, their absence was an enduring presence. And now Eric, the distant father, forever away in Malaya, whose raciness and conviviality she had probably exaggerated, was gone too. Of the nuclear family of which she was once a part, only she remained. If she didn't weep at the news, it wasn't because she didn't care. And so the feeling of lostness, that had always been central to her sense of self, was rejuvenated. In the matter of blood, all she now had left was John, and an ageing Désirée a hemisphere away in West Porlock in Somerset, with Hazara as her security.

In the fourteen years since the flurry of letters that had followed John's birth, she had heard from her father twice. Written from Australia, the first letter had been little more than a note accompanying David's medals, which he had sent to her for safekeeping. The second, written several years later, was from Tenterden in Kent, where on returning to England he and Betty had settled. That he hadn't been well, he mentioned, but provided no details. Having spent all his adulthood in the Far East and Antipodes, he had taken time to acclimatise, but as the regulars in the local pub had 'taken to the cut of his jib' he now joined them each day for a tipple.

What had prompted his letter, he confided, was the news that South Africa had left the Commonwealth, and that Australia was braced for

a deluge of refugees. Adding to his concern was a report that Kenyan pioneer Ewart Grogan had sold his estates because he had concluded that Africa was finished for Europeans. That Grogan was eighty-six could mean that his judgement was impaired, Eric conceded, but was it?

Something else, so he explained, had unsettled him. His best friend, a fellow former rubber planter from Malaya, and his wife had paid them a visit. They had had a convivial time, drinking and reminiscing, but the wife had taken him aside and confided that her husband was awash with cancer and not expected to live much longer. How, Eric asked his daughter rhetorically, could someone seemingly so vigorous be so close to death? And now he himself was dead. As if stricken with grief, Betty, whom Anne had never met but who had seemed so devoted to her father, was soon dead too.

On hearing of Eric's death, Anne re-read her little cache of letters, for they were all she had of him. While gaining some comfort from those tenuous links, she noted her father's alarm about South Africa's future, and began to mull over it. Also to be considered, if she had joined the dots, would have been the shootings eight years earlier at Sharpeville and the Hindsons' departure for Canada. She would have discussed it with Mick, probably on their twilight walks. Sensing an energy that could be put to good use, he confessed that these had long been his concerns and that it would be wise to discuss them further.

Also, at around that time, beset with thoughts of mortality brought on by her father's death, Anne persuaded Mick to have a portrait taken of the two of them. Mick was reluctant, dismissing the notion as a frippery, but at Anne's insistence they sought out a studio in Stanger's Indian quarter, and posed. Inherent in the image is their sense of eminence, and perhaps an intimation that it would soon all be over. Despite his foot-dragging, Mick looks amenable, with his direct gaze and his moustache and his RAF tie. Anne, with her pale shirt and pearl earrings, looks bemused. Later, on receiving the finished image, she determined that her eyebrows and eyelashes were not distinct enough and so accentuated them with a pencil.

Having already planned a holiday to England, followed by a genealogical excursion to Ireland, Mick and Anne undertook to collect



Portrait of Anne and Mick, taken in a studio in Stanger, 1971

the several pieces of furniture that Eric had bequeathed to his daughter. Heading northwards on a daylight flight, Mick had an unexpected bonus, for over North Africa he could discern through the porthole the familiar coastlines of his wartime flying. From Tenterden, the inherited antiques were sent home to Hazara, as was a grandfather clock which they had purchased in Canterbury, its face age-old and gilded, and with a painted moon and stars. Months afterwards, when they were long back at home, the clock arrived in a coffin-like box, and with due care was lifted out and positioned in the hall.

So inheritances and acquisitions cast their respective spells over the house, the one characterised by items like Eric's Regency desk and James's Chinese screen and burnished shell-case spittoons, and the other by Mick and Anne's grandfather clock, and an antique chest of drawers that, serendipitously, they had found in a trading store in Swaziland. Thus while it appeared that the dwelling was confidently being embellished, Mick was resolutely seeking, with soft coercion, to get the family to forsake it and to start afresh somewhere else.

The first stage of this strategy was a trip to the Cape. As he had done with Van Dillewijn for sugar, he bought a manual, *Practical Viticulture* by

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Desideruis Pongracz, a Hungarian winegrower who had settled in South Africa. Next he and Anne flew to Cape Town, hired a car, and looked at vineyards. On the market were various gabled homesteads with avenues of oaks and legions of vines that could be had for less than the value of Hazara, but notwithstanding the allure of their Old World beauty, to Anne particularly there was something alien about them. Even if Hazara was deep in rural cane country, and its weather was hot and damp and cloying, if she was to stay in Africa, she concluded, it was there that she wanted to live.

If at an airfield in Cyrenaica Mick had spent an hour speaking to Harold Alexander and had his admiration confirmed, someone else who crossed paths with the general was Anne's brother David, even if he didn't live to tell of it. And if in her anguish Anne had impulsively torn up the letter from David's commanding officer, with its condolences and sanitised account of his death, and if in the ensuing years she had shied away from establishing precisely what had happened, John later took up the search. To find the facts, so he discovered, took little delving because David's regimental history sketched the outline, and the memoirs of two of his former comrades shaded in the details.

John first found David Martin in the fighting at Mokpalin, a village on the eastern bank of the Sittang. With a section of the railway bridge having been blown up to impede the Japanese advance, and as enemy fighter planes strafed at will, hundreds of British, Gurkha, Indian and Burmese troops found themselves cut off on the wrong side of the river. Amidst a heavy mortar bombardment, with the village burning, and wounded and dead men and mules strewn across the approach to the damaged superstructure, and the ammunition supply of a mountain battery alight and exploding, Japanese bombers were fuelling the conflagration by dropping their bombs into the flames.

While this was happening, so John discovered, two KOYLI companies became isolated, and from battalion headquarters his uncle sprinted jinkingly across the battlefield to find out how they were faring. One company then began to retire, being harried as it did so. The other



David Martin (far right), Geoffrey Chadwick, later battalion commander (second from left) and fellow officers in Burma, c. late 1941, not long before the retreat

wavered, so again David ran the gauntlet, conveying orders. The only route was along the railway line to the station, and then through the burning village and across paddy fields to the river.

Once the village was lost, the mile-long crossing began in earnest. Frantically, water bottles were collected to add buoyancy to rafts and make water wings. Most men started to swim, holding onto anything that floated. Several, too exhausted to brave the current, took a sub-machine gun between them and began to walk back towards the enemy. While scouring the riverbank for stragglers, a fellow officer found David making a raft for a soldier with a head wound. When launched, the structure couldn't support the injured man's weight, so David and two others helped him cling to it as they paddled through the surging water.

The crossing took more than an hour, and as the tide was coming in it carried the fugitives towards the severed bridge which they thought was in Japanese hands. On reaching the far bank, they moved cautiously,

fearing being fired on by their own troops, who were said to be there in numbers. Being unable to swim, and under attack from the advancing enemy, several parties of Gurkhas were attempting to scramble across the broken girders, and David ran back to assist them.

On his return, assuming a command post must be near the railway line, he led the party along it in the direction of Rangoon, with the wounded soldier, whom they had helped across the river, behaving oddly. Having jettisoned all impedimenta to make the crossing, many of the survivors were without weapons and boots, so they kept together to avoid being preyed upon by Burmese who, sensing a Japanese victory, were murdering British stragglers.

Faced with disaster in Burma and with little hope to avert it, Winston Churchill dispatched Harold Alexander, his rising star, to assist generals Wavell and Slim. With his reputation buffed by his salvaging of Dunkirk, Alexander acted decisively, ordering the abandonment of Rangoon, and, to save what was left of the 17th Division, its direct withdrawal to India.

Assuming that the British would defend the city, the Japanese were encircling it. And so, along dusty roads and jungle paths, in a fateful choreography the infiltrating forces, one retreating northwards and the other advancing westwards, failed meaningfully to engage. Among these blind manoeuvres was Alexander, who miraculously wasn't killed. Among them too was David Martin, who on a days-long diversion with a fellow officer and a party of men was helping to secure the British flank.

Far away in Zululand, Lewis heard how in Burma the Japanese had the British by the throat. And as if the predations of the German U-boats were not enough, with the corpses from the *Nova Scotia* still rolling in on the tide, he soon learnt how in Madagascar the battleship HMS *Ramillies* had been gashed by a Japanese submarine. From the veranda of the Residency at Ingwavuma, with its view eastwards across the malarial plain, the hazy horizon of the Indian Ocean would suddenly have seemed menacing, as if poised to fragment into an enemy armada.

Caught up with Harold Alexander and David Martin in the confusion north of Rangoon were two young KOYLI lieutenants who had recently arrived. In a memoir written decades later, Gerald Fitzpatrick excoriated

Churchill for sacrificing a forgotten army, and levelled such damning accusations at several of his fellow officers that he was expelled from the regimental association. David Martin, however, escaped his censure, first appearing as commander of the depleted battalion after his predecessor had been killed by a Japanese sniper, leading his men in shimmering heat to occupy a *chaung*, or dry river bed, not far from the Irrawaddy.

Ralph Tanner, who too would write his memoirs, had once been Evelyn Waugh's batman. David Martin he first encountered at Yenangyaung, where the oilfields were disabled and the reduced ranks bolstered by men from the hospital at Maymyo. Tanner remembered with David watching General Alexander conferring with Colonel Geoffrey Chadwick, who had recovered from malaria and resumed battalion command. Chadwick and David later reconnoitered in the dark, before the depleted companies bivouacked for the night, forming a square to enclose their lorries. Tanner recalled an encounter in the darkness with a Japanese patrol, and how afterwards he and David caught their breath in a palm-leaf shack. Once the retreat was resumed, they were among the last to leave, leading mules in single file through the night, the only sound being the muffled hoof-falls and jingle of harnesses.

On they walked in the darkness, periodically losing their way, with Tanner realising how lucky they had been to survive. A mule broke loose and disappeared into the distance before returning and galloping backwards and forwards. With the men exhausted and thirsty, a Bren gunner threatened to discard his weapon if no one helped him carry it, and David warned that he could be shot for dereliction of duty, before ordering others to take their turn. After more marching in the darkness they came across a *chaung* containing water, and the men fell on their stomachs and drank, and scooped water in their hats and poured it over their heads. Behind them was the glow of the village they had vacated, its huts having been torched by the enemy.

The next day, as Tanner recounted, they came under mortar attack and several trucks were hit. One careered onto the grass verge, burning, with much of its driver's body blown away. For future reference, David took the dead man's identity disc. Through the withering heat, mounting towards the monsoon, they pressed on, and later were bombarded by

artillery. During a brief halt, Tanner, who remarkably had a camera, took several photographs, one of David resting against a bamboo wall, and another of him with Colonel Chadwick and a fellow officer.



David Martin (left), Geoffrey Chadwick (centre) and a fellow officer during a brief wayside halt south of Yenangyaung, Burma, 16 April 1942

Heading northwards across the baking plain, in extended order so as to present less of a target, and with refugees streaming past them, the fewer than a hundred survivors reached Mount Popa, an extinct volcano. On its forested slopes there was plentiful water, but no respite from the snakes whose venomousness would have raised the eyebrows even of residents of Natal, where David knew his sister was living. In the cooler shadows the survivors rested, shaving off their beards and washing the greasy filth of the oilfields from their clothes and bodies. It being the first opportunity for the original officers and the recent arrivals to get to know each other, a new pecking order was established, with the old guard taking precedence.

Fitzpatrick remembered a discussion about future command and promotion and medals. With general consent Colonel Chadwick was put up for the Distinguished Service Order, and in the bonhomie all the officers were awarded Military Crosses. But then, as Fitzpatrick recalled, David Martin, the adjutant, who in weeks had risen from lieutenant to major, and who before Chadwick's return had briefly commanded the battalion, proposed himself for the Victoria Cross, and there was 'considerable support'.

At first, John was shocked by what seemed to be his uncle's hubris, but in time convinced himself that David was being ironic, or that Fitzpatrick's memory was playing tricks. Thus reassured, he decided not to tell his mother. But at Mount Popa the Fates had been listening. Of the officers, Fitzpatrick and Tanner among them, someone had taken a photograph. On the right of five figures in a dappled glade, in his rumpled khakis and with his dark hair combed slickly back, and with his slouch hat hanging by its strap from his fingers, stands Anne's beloved brother. It is his valedictory portrait.

On 27 April 1942, when worlds away at Hazara Mia and Anne had had Kitty Jonas to stay for the night, the dwindling remnants of the KOYLI battalion stopped briefly at the village of Myingyan, near the confluence of the Chindwin and Irrawaddy rivers. Among the buildings was a former cinema that had been used as a supply depot, and from it Fitzpatrick and Tanner took several tins of food. Unbeknown to them, it had been decided to blow up the supplies to prevent them from falling into enemy hands, and David Martin had volunteered to do it, taking four men with him.

On what happened next, Fitzpatrick and Tanner differ.

Fitzpatrick recalls an explosion and the building bursting into flames. Three men were incinerated inside, but blasted out of the door with their clothes alight were David Martin and a corporal, both of whom babbled before dying. Having little time or equipment, Fitzpatrick remembered bayonets being used to dig a shallow grave, and David and the corporal being laid side-by-side in it. The site was marked with a wooden cross, and the retreat northwards was resumed.



The last photograph of David Martin (right), at Mount Popa, central Burma, 20 April 1942. Geoffrey Chadwick is in the centre foreground with Gerald Fitzpatrick (left) and Ralph Tanner (centre back)

Tanner heard a dull roar, and outside the building found a corporal, staggering and on fire, and too hysterical to speak. Pulling off the man's clothes, he helped him to the makeshift headquarters. David and two men, all badly burned, he saw being loaded into a vehicle. Of the three, David seemed the least injured. Using diagrams and photographs, and his diary written not long afterwards, like the regimental history Tanner recalled the incident taking place at Taungtha, a village some distance from Myingyan. Later, he heard that ten days afterwards, on 7 May 1942, at Kalewa, on the banks of the Chindwin a hundred miles to the north, only days before the monsoon broke and weeks before the survivors reached India, 24-year-old David Martin had died, presumably of burns and sepsis, and been buried on the outskirts of the village. Back at

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Hazara, Anne and Mia had just had two ratings from HMS *Valiant* to stay for a week.

John relayed this selectively to Anne, who declined to replace the hazy and gilded account that earlier she had conjured. Someone in the demolition party had blundered. Was it one of David's men, John wondered, or was it he himself?

Fitzpatrick lauded David for being energetic and inspiring, always to the fore, but chided him for his reckless boldness, as he did David's predecessor as battalion commander, who too had been killed. Tanner remembered that David's father was in Singapore, that his mother was Maltese, and that he had a conch tattooed on his left shoulder. He confided that he had named his own son David in his memory. After the war, he alerted the authorities to the vicinity of David's grave, but it was never found.

John discovered that on wooden panels in the hall at St George's, David's old school in Harpenden, his uncle is commemorated. And that in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry regimental chapel in York Minster, beneath the Gothic vaulting and the faded battle standards, his name is listed. And that north of Rangoon, in the Taukkyan War Cemetery, among the graves of thousands of men whose remains were disinterred from battlefield cemeteries or from scattered roadside mounds, or from deep in the jungle itself, and consolidated into neat rows, there is a memorial to all those whose graves have never been found, and that his name is inscribed there too.

If, like millions of fellow fallen David Martin was slipping from living memory, among Natal's sugar fields he had a little sister who revered him. And John too began to see his lost uncle in heroic terms, whether on the sports field or battlefield where his distinctive voice rang out resonantly above the tumult of engagement.

As the cancer grew in Mick, so he upped his resolve to fight it. Further bouts of surgery were followed by more blitzes of radium, but year after year, relentlessly, his enemy kept sidestepping his defences. If at first the excisions were imperceptible, gradually under his jaw-line and in the crook of his neck a lopsidedness set in, not pronounced, but there.

As late into the night Mick drank and pondered, in his mind he conflated his body's struggle with the country's struggle, and became ever more determined to be rid of them both. So, as much as he sought to have cut away those parts of himself that had been infiltrated, he wanted to escape too from a diseased society. And now that Anne had spurned the option of a vineyard behind the moat of the Fish River, he would press on with getting her and the children out of South Africa to somewhere where their future was secure. Only a new life in another country could capitalise on the gains made at Hazara and reclaim the family's heritage.

Alone in the sitting room, in the glow of a standard lamp and with a cut-glass tumbler at hand, and with outside sounds muffling in through the bolted shutters, Mick whittled away the options and chose the Isle of Man. Even if consciously he didn't realise it, the island's location was significant, being suspended between the lowlands of Scotland and the downs of Ulster onto which centuries earlier his ancestors had sprung. But if to those settlers the prospects had seemed rosy, unwittingly they had exchanged a secure world in which they were rooted for another where as interlopers they would always be vulnerable, and so a pattern

was set. Slowly to the prospect of emigration Anne warmed, not only because of an excitement at returning to the metropolitan world of her pre-adolescence, which she had romanticised, but also because the Cape with its diluted Englishness had seemed so forbidding, and because Mick kept on reminding her of the cataclysm that was looming. And even if Mia's compliance had still to be confirmed, Anne knew that her mother's faith in Mick was steadfast and that she would let his decisions ride.

As part of the withdrawal, Mick made a genealogical assertion. If for centuries his family had had a coat of arms, the Natal branch lacked one specifically for itself. So in an extension of his research he provided the Chief Herald of Ireland with evidence of a century-long foothold in Africa, and using the link of his great-great-grandfather, the errant rector whose terrier had bitten the bishop, arranged to have one granted. Eventually, the illuminated scroll arrived, beautifully inscribed in English and Gaelic, and stamped in wax with the chief herald's seal. In the centre was the prototype coat of arms, with its unicorn's head and shake-fork and helmet, embraced by sprays of mantling. Strung below was the motto, 'Over fork over', echoing the thane's injunction to cover with hay King Duncan's son Malcolm, who was being pursued by Macbeth, so saving Scotland's royal heir.

Because to these arms a greater tribe could lay claim, Mick wanted something specifically for the offshoot that his grandfather John had planted. So, into the Y of the shake-fork was inserted the Star of the Nativity, to commemorate Christmas day 1497 when from his caravel Vasco da Gama had spied a lush coastline and in deference to the Christ Child had christened it 'Natal'. Striking with this quixotic gesture a blow for permanence, Mick was at last reassured that wherever his family one day was scattered, lodged in code in its coat of arms would be a declaration of its settlement in Africa.

But the Isle of Man's proximity to the family's fountainhead was not the only reason it was chosen; it was also a tax haven. In a way that would be impossible on mainland Britain, Mick and Anne had determined that on the island they could live comfortably off the portion of Hazara's sale money that the apartheid government would permit them to expatriate. To be allowed to settle, however, a Britishness was required

that notwithstanding his ancestry and service in the RAF Mick didn't officially have, so proof of Anne's birth in British Malaya was found, together with proof of her father's birth near London, and eventually she passed muster. And, being her spouse, Mick was allowed on sufferance to settle too.

But to do all this they had first to sell Hazara, and so notwithstanding Anne's vacillation and the district's disapproval they put it on the market. Much was made in advertisements of how infrequently such sugar farms came up for sale, and of Hazara's infrastructure and productivity, and the beauty of its house and garden. And so, before long, it was sold. The new owner was the director of a sugar company who on retirement wanted an estate of his own, and Hazara fitted the bill. As if hypnotised by the deliberations, Anne felt the deal coalesce around her, and John at university and Linda at boarding school watched benumbed as their world was cut adrift.

After the deal was clinched, the *Natal Witness* saw the sale as an endorsement of the sugar industry, and even of the country itself, for why else, an article by its industrial editor intimated, would a sugar insider make such an investment if his world was set to explode?

Buying a suburban property in Hilton, outside Pietermaritzburg, Mick and Anne relocated, leaving for an interregnum the house at Hazara half-furnished and uninhabited, but with the servants looking after it. During this state of transition, John stayed for several days, enacting a long goodbye. Mostly for him it was a joy to be there, even if his pleasure was made painful by the imminence of his loss. Just to be embraced once again by the airy rooms and passages and verandas, all protectively surrounded by trees and shrubs and borders, and aerated by expanses of lawn, and to luxuriate in the vista of cane fields undulating to the distant ocean, and to hear the companionable hush of millions of stalks in their raspy sheaths, was for him bitter-sweet, but to be savoured nonetheless. In the ceremony of his leave-taking John reminisced with Moses, Joseph and Angelina, the Zulu house servants who had surrendered themselves to a European world and had cosseted and nurtured him. He took himself also on long runs through the cane fields, tracing one childhood milestone to another, from the avenues to the dams to the dells of

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umdonis to the valley of forest with a stream running through it, where, decades earlier, as a teenager imported to save a childless marriage, his mother had ventured with her binoculars and bird books.

And then the deal went through, and the new owners arrived, and in its immemorial story the piece of land that had been named Hazara moved on.



A last view of Hazara, up the valley from the direction of the Doornkop sugar mill, March 1977

Once they had vacated the farm, Mick and Anne took more than a year to leave South Africa. At first they lived in their house in Hilton, but in the final countdown moved in briefly with Mia at Tamela, her home in suburban Pietermaritzburg. Faced with separation from her mother, Anne was guilt-ridden and remorseful, but Mia was stoical, having come to accept the inevitability of loss. As a balm Anne undertook with Mick to fly out annually, and arranged with Mia what in those pre-digital days was a novel mode of correspondence, recording warm and conversational 'letters' onto cassettes which they sealed in envelopes and sent to each other by airmail. Not far from Mia's home Mick and Anne bought a simplex, which as their sole remaining property in South Africa could on their annual visits be used as a base.

When the time came for departure, John had already left. With a life at Hazara no longer an option, he had exchanged the University of Natal for Trinity College, Dublin, studying Anglo-Irish literature, immersing himself in the works of Swift and Yeats and Synge and re-forging links with an institution that before the switch to Oxford had been his family's alma mater. And so, after stoical goodbyes and palliative promises, Mick and Anne and a teenaged Linda flew from Durban to Johannesburg, and on lift-off from that airport's expansive runway bade Africa farewell.

On the Isle of Man they bought a utilitarian house with double glazing in Andreas, a village in the north of the island. As if pursued by the world from which they had escaped, among their neighbours was a retired sugar planter from Antigua, and across the postage-stamp landscape was a

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network of men and women of British origin who like them had trekked homewards after years in the sun. Among these was a former governor of Swaziland and his wife, who became good friends, for they too, having Africa in their blood, metaphorically spoke the same language. Through a mutual friend, Mick met Frederick, the 7th Marquess Conyngham, who had bequeathed Slane Castle to his eldest son and was a tax refugee on the island, and together they sifted conversationally through the detritus of their shared heritage, bemoaning the destruction of records that had left so many questions unanswered.

Linda was sent to finishing school in England but returned home to Andreas for breaks. From Dublin, John paid two visits, ever conscious of the disparity between the soulless suburban house and his glowing memories of an Elysium named Hazara. One visit coincided with the TT races when each summer the island becomes a motorcycle mecca where riders seek glory or death. Just as fifty years earlier Mia's Grand National had been singular, with the field decimated at an early jump and Tipperary Tim enduring to win, so the 1978 TT was singular too,



Anne at the front door of the house in Andreas, Isle of Man, c.1978

for back from retirement was the legendary Mike Hailwood. Along the tortuous circuit his Ducati led the pack, screaming past hedgerows and grumbling agitatedly through chicanes, whether the switchbacks of Snaefell, the mountain that dominates the island, or the hump-backed Ballaugh Bridge where the machines proned momentarily before being flung zigzaggedly through the hamlet. And notably too, the course claimed its usual sacrifice, for within minutes of each other three contestants were dead.

Seeking space, during his visits John escaped up the flanks of Snaefell, and with rabbits lolloping around him jogged a course that beckoned, as before he had done through the sugar fields. From that vantage, on three sides he could see the sea, but in his heart he dismissed it, knowing that it was a colder quilt of frothy lips and eddies than the bank of blue with its crashing breakers which from Hazara could be seen so alluringly.

After their decades on the farm, Mick and Anne came to enjoy the genteel conviviality of their differently insular world, with its drinks parties and dinners with fellow members of an imperial tide that in their lifetime had receded. As part of their routine, they took to walking, and in an echo of their odysseys through the cane explored the glens and hills that with time became their new landscape. Among their routes was Jurby, several miles west of their house, whose aerodrome Mick remembered from his RAF days.

But the apartheid government still kept tabs on them, releasing in tranches only limited funds and withholding the rest. John too could not escape its grasp because two years of compulsory military service beckoned. Faced with exile or this rite of passage for white male South Africans, after a leave-taking in Andreas he flew southwards. And once her finishing-school days were over, Linda flew southwards too, leaving Mick and Anne alone in their little island world. Even if the objective to relocate the family had failed, all was not lost for they decided to stay on until Mick became a British citizen. To do so wasn't onerous for there was much to be enjoyed in their parties and walks, and trips by car into Scotland and England. And free from the foreboding that had clouded their final days at Hazara, the orderliness and sense of permanence were therapeutic.

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Anne and Mick on a driving trip through Scotland, c.1978

But as much as they tried to jettison the past, it was resolutely tenacious, for at some subterranean level both of them had a longing for a precariousness and isolation that now seemed more beguiling than ever. And within and beyond these imperatives, time was burning the days, driving Mia into a nursing home in the hills above Durban, not far from the farm of her childhood where she and James had formalised what was to become their blighted marriage.

On the Isle of Man too, Mick's cancer was growing and spreading, foreshortening his horizons. So with Mia far away entering her final days, and their children far away entering adulthood, after four years of island idyll, but with no British citizenship for Mick, they headed home.

Yet again they bought a house, in suburban Pietermaritzburg, not far from Mia's former residence that had since been sold. But before long, as an investment, and in a need perhaps to re-conjure their Shangri-la, they purchased a smallholding at Hilton, near the school where nearly half a century earlier Mick's health and athleticism had seemed so immutable.

There, in a white house with shutters, and with an avenue and grapevine pergola and vista of distant hills, they established yet another routine, in the mode of Hazara's but more contained, drifting with their secateurs through the beds and borders, pruning and nurturing. Being at a higher altitude than Hazara, autumn's goldenness was beautiful, but, for all its intimations, chilling too.

With the impetus of farming still in him, Mick had rows of granadillas planted, the vines threaded through trellises, but a black frost put paid to them. In the evenings in the sitting room they edged closer to the Adam fireplace, with its glowing and murmuring logs, and read and talked, even if now television was an intruder. But what they could sense also was that beyond the banks of foliage, in the distant townships, the clamour for freedom was deafening and that soon the apartheid government would no longer be able to stifle it. From what John had confirmed after his stint in the military, they knew too that in the civil war that was surely imminent people of their kind and inclination would essentially be bystanders, although their colour and privilege would make them targets too.

And then, after several spells in hospital, one night in her nursing home, neatly and quietly, Mia died, and for the first time since Hazara came into the family more than sixty years earlier the person for whom it had been bought was not alive. In line with her wishes, her ashes were interred alongside James's and the graves of their children, Barbara, David and Francis, in Durban's Stellawood Cemetery.

Not long afterwards, the cancer that for more than a decade had been playing cat-and-mouse with Mick, tired of playing, and in Pietermaritzburg's Grey's Hospital, in whose previous premises sixty-seven years earlier he had been born, and where earlier still in yet other premises his aunts Bertha and Beryl had nursed, it ended his life, the issue of where he felt he truly belonged still unresolved. Permission was granted for his ashes to be interred in the little graveyard at Hilton College, with its view across the Umgeni Valley to the Karkloof Hills. Far below flowed the Umgeni River, near whose mouth at Durban once stood a house called Bees' Rest, the home of his grandfather who had forsaken England for Africa, and once stretched an alluvial plain with

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its betel-nut crop that in his tramline scheme Colin Keith-Fraser had sought to transgress.

Then the country changed, miraculously, and in spite of its pain and woundedness began to recreate itself. While this was happening, Anne lived on in a succession of simplexes, moving finally to a retirement complex in the nearby town of Howick, where every week John would visit her, and periodically from her home in the Cape Linda would visit her too. And there one day, after an interlude of limbo, with her sense of lostness still unassuaged, she died, ending a fractured journey that had begun nearly a century earlier, and closing yet another door on the world that was Hazara.

EPILOGUE

That I have not sought to see Hazara again is because the real farm would contaminate the mythological one that for years I had been piecing together. Yet for all my decades of absence, whenever I find myself among sugar fields my spirits lift, so some visceral bond must still be holding. And still I have sugar dreams: jumbled, half-remembered sequences of unfathomed significance. But no sooner had I finished writing this story and begun tweaking and polishing it than the pull of its world became so strong that I had to make a pilgrimage to the environs of Hazara, if not to the farm itself.

At Llys Onen, the sense of being surrounded by sugar cane was overwhelming. Encircling the homestead, the stalks appeared to be watching and poised to advance. Beyond the lawn and swimming pool, and the vista of cane fields tumbling into the haze, was the sea, assertively blue, just as from neighbouring Hazara I remembered seeing it. In a ghostly procession I saw the Mansfields arrive from India, and Patricia depart and Naffy replace her. I saw fate snatch Beric, and then draw Charles down. And when 'R.J.' took flight, leaving Ronwen to play regent until young Beric could take over, I saw Mick drive across daily from Hazara to help her, with me in tow.

On leaving, I drove into the valley and crossed the bridge over the Nonoti. Alongside was the long and pellucid pool, just as before. At the waterfall nearby, so Beric had just told me, Ronwen's ashes had been scattered. Taking the district road, I saw the shed-like former Doornkop Farm School, where a lifetime earlier my schooldays had begun.

Everywhere, the cane was swaying, liquidly, soothingly, caressingly. From it came the husky, whispery sound, half hum, half music-of-the-spheres, that had bewitched me as a child. But the mill had long been dismantled, and its crushers and centrifuges lugged away through the hills, leaving the district's crop now to be trucked northwards for processing. And gone with the mill was its hooter that from Hazara had sounded so wistful.

At Doringkop, the houses of the company's employees had been sold to random purchasers. Near them was the former post office and telephone exchange, puppeteer of the party line, and down the hill was the trading store of Ding, the Chinaman. In the distance was Bulwer Farm, once home of Henry and Kitty Jonas, and the site of Macrae's Store, where more than a century earlier the colonial militia had repulsed Bhambatha's rebels. Nearby, in the direction of Zululand, was the fastness of Izinsimba, where the colonists, most likely with Lewis and Dennis among them, had grimly pressed home their advantage. Seawards was Leighton Estate, whence Henry Palairat, with his tinnitus of Jutland, had set out at full moon for conclaves in Stanger.

If there were troubles then, so were there again. With the tables turned, descendants of the dispossessed were demanding restitution, and landowners with settler heritages were braced for expropriation. And with bureaucracy torpid, the temperature was rising. About their blameworthiness, farmers were nonplussed: was it criminal for them to inherit or purchase land? Taxed now for their estates, they saw around them place names bestowed by their forebears, and which had always been their points of reference, being changed. Stanger had become KwaDukuza again, even if to their workers it had always been. As if seeking to eradicate their presence, the landscape was being indigenised. Some resolved to stay; others thought of leaving.

That I never became master of Hazara saved me from such anxieties, yet they haunt me too. Over the centuries since my family exchanged a home where it truly belonged for somewhere purportedly sweeter, we have borne the stigmata of settlers. No one felt this dislocation more than my father, Mick, brooding late at night in his armchair in the glow of a standard lamp, with the metallic sonar of fruit bats pulsing softly through the shutters. Galvanised by whisky or gin, and ancestors who seemed so intrepid, he saw in his soul-searching the blind alley into which history had inveigled us, and resolved to escape. But if before bed he had a plan, by dawn it was cross-cut with loyalties and responsibilities that needed to be heeded. And so, at his bidding, the return to the long-lost state of grace was undertaken, but it failed, leaving me to tell this story.

Epilogue

As I sped from Doringkop to Kearsney through the cane-covered hills, irresistibly my eyes were drawn inland. There, in the distance, on the horizon, ablaze with sunlight, was the homestead at Hazara. Issuing from the darker greenery I could see in miniature the silhouette of the plane tree avenue that as part of his Arcadian vision Mick had had planted. Then the road tipped into a valley, and the vision was gone.

Re-crossing the Nonoti, I surmised that the water I had seen upstream at Llys Onen had yet to arrive. Below was the riverbed where the Jonases had been swept away, and behind a screen of foliage was Clifton Estate, home of the Hindsons, before their flight to Canada. Reaching Kearsney House, now a hotel twinning with its chapel as a wedding venue, I looped through its grounds and parked at the foot of its driveway. Beside the cemetery towered araucarias, their spiky pods like hedgehogs on the grass. With their imposing headstones, Sir Liege, Lady Mary, and Major Mansfield, were still declaring their prominence, and Naffy was still anonymous beneath her grassy space. Down the slope, the Reverend Rangiah, having been joined by yet more graves, was less alone.

Originally through tea plantations and later through sugar fields the road past Kearsney cross-stitched farms and worlds. And in the days before it was arranged for the Maphumulo bus to trundle Hazara's postbag to Mount Albert, where a gardener would be waiting with his bicycle, the mail and newspaper were collected from the Kearsney Post Office, either by James or Mia by motorcar or Anne on horseback. And, momentarily for Anne, it was in the small bricked building, still standing but no longer functional, that among the letters and parcels one day was a buff-coloured envelope, franked in India, with its letter from her brother David's commanding officer.

Watching me impassively from surrounding hills were the other plantation mansions, with their deep verandas and rearing staircases, and their montage of memories: of dinner parties, drinks gatherings, teenage socials, monkey shoots, yachting picnics. And always, like musical accompaniment, there was the shrilling of cicadas, the clamour of heat, and the whispering of the cane.

Passing the turn-off to the former polo club, where the district had held its gymkhanas, I descended from the hills into Stanger. Once pin-neat, the white commercial district of my childhood had been overrun by the ambient clamour that for so long it had sought to repel. Nosing through jaywalkers and clotted traffic, I looked for the general dealer where Anne had bought her groceries and the wholesaler where Mick had purchased the workers' rations. Not far from a butchery that displayed sheep heads like gargoyles was the studio where, feeling time sifting through her fingers, Anne had persuaded Mick to have their photograph taken. Nearby were the Raj Mahal and Picture Palace, two cinemas whose Indian owners had compelled apartheid's apparatchiks into a multiracial compromise, with Europeans on one side of the aisle and Africans and Indians on the other. There, as a family we had watched *Mary Poppins* and *Up the Junction*, and other now forgotten films, and as teenagers my friends and I had seen the Troggs, on tour from England, belting out 'Wild Thing' and 'With a Girl like You' to an audience of astonishing variety.

Leaving KwaDukuza's steamy trough, I rose towards the coast. In a clump of trees in the middle distance was the homestead where seventy years earlier Mia Woollam had taken the photograph of Anne and other local women and a boy watching tennis with two Royal Navy officers. The image has an arresting composition. Neither of the sailors looks interested, and the three women in the centre form a triangle of summery frocks behind which must be a radiantly green background. With what appears to be a book on her lap, the older woman seems to have been reading rather than watching the tennis, until the boy with the tousled head attracted her attention. Other than the boy and the visiting servicemen, there are no men; all are away, fighting for a way of life.

As an image, it could be in England, but it isn't.

I turned onto the coastal highway. To my left was the sea, and to my right were sugar fields stepping haphazardly into the hills.

GLOSSARY

- amadlozi*: ancestral spirits (Zulu)
assegai: slender, wooden-shafted spear with a sharpened iron tip
boomslang: highly venomous southern African tree snake
bushbaby: small, nocturnal, tree-dwelling, African primate; galago
busulu: wine made from the fermented sap of the lala palm (Zulu)
cocopan: small v-shaped tip-truck, usually on rails (see *golovan*)
donga: dry gully formed by water erosion
flat-crown: tree with a spreading, umbrella-like canopy
golovan: small wagon on railway tracks, used for transporting sugar cane
indaba: tribal conference, or parley between opposing parties (Zulu)
induna: headman, supervisor (Zulu)
jaldi: injunction, 'be quick'
jemadar: junior Indian officer in a sepoy regiment
krantz: sheer cliff face
lala palm: tall, coastal palm tree with dark brown, ball-like fruit
lobola: gift to parents to secure their daughter's hand in marriage (Zulu)
location: area set aside for occupation by black African people
loco: locomotive for pulling trucks loaded with sugar cane
lourie: touraco, brightly coloured, crested, parrot-like forest bird
mamba: highly venomous African snake (Zulu)
mnumzane: respectful title for head of a family (Zulu)
mopani: tree found in northern regions of southern Africa
mphafa: buffalo thorn tree, used in ceremonies of the dead (Zulu)
muti: African medicinal or magical charms (Zulu)
nagana: often fatal disease of herbivores in southern Africa
nkosana: respectful title for a young man or heir (Zulu)
nkosazana: respectful title for girl or young woman (Zulu)
nyala: Southern African antelope with lyre-shaped horns
panga: heavy cane knife with a broad blade, machete
pawpaw: sub-tropical fruit, papaya
Pondo: Xhosa-speaking Nguni people from the Eastern Cape

predikant: minister of a Dutch Reformed church
ratoon: the re-growth of sugar cane from the stalk's base after harvesting
rinderpest: virulent, highly infectious disease of ruminants
schutztruppe: African colonial troops of Imperial Germany
sepoy: Indian soldier serving under British or other European orders
sirdar: overseer, leader
sjambok: long whip, traditionally made of leather
sowar: soldier in an Indian cavalry regiment
subadar: senior Indian officer in a sepoy regiment
taube: a prototype German monoplane
thunder box: earth-closet lavatory
umdoni: water-berry tree, found near watercourses and lagoons (Zulu)
zillah: administrative district in India

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- Bertha Conyngham's diary of nursing experiences in the Gallipoli and Salonika campaigns is in the possession of the author. A letter from the Adjutant-General to the Forces, British War Office, London, to Miss A.B. Conyngham [Bertha], Ormond Home, 8 Durham Place, Chelsea, dated 26 July 1901 and referenced 68/South Africa/A.G.I.[or I].a., informs her that 'on the occasion of the presentation of medals on the 29th inst she may wear either ordinary civilian dress or nurse's cloak, whichever may be most convenient to her.'
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