

Pietermaritzburg — the Missing Decades

The 1920s and the 1930s are the missing decades in Pietermaritzburg's history. The inter-war years make up that grey area which, for the very reason that it is still within living memory, appears not to need a documented history. The result is that we are lulled into negligence when, in fact, we are poorer in first-hand evidence of these decades than of Victorian or Edwardian times. The pages that follow are the result of a series of informal interviews with a group of persons whom I shall refer to hereafter as 'my panel'. They were assured all along of the licence that is proper to an oral testimony. So if research subsequently finds that dates are wrong, that personages are misquoted or events misplaced, our principle was that we would rather take those risks than lose altogether a first-hand sense of the times. Nevertheless, corrections or emendations of this corporate testimony would be most welcome, and could perhaps be noted in the next edition of *Natalia*.

1925. Dutiful sons and daughters of the Empire are marched up in droves to the station, there to welcome Prince Edward with his least favourite piece of music, 'God bless the Prince of Wales'. Those in the know discover that the personage in question does not fulfil all the expectations of a future monarch. Edward's renown as a small eater has not, it seems, caught up with him in Pietermaritzburg. The Victoria Club is hurt to the quick when the Prince arrives from polo to a banquet in his honour, takes one apple and loses interest in the meal. But greater scandals follow: at the Reception in the City Hall, he neglects to dance with the Administrator's daughters, since he finds a young reporter from the *Witness* more to his taste (and entertains her, some say, on the royal train . . .)

Maritzburg was certainly host to some illustrious visitors in the inter-war years. One of my panel was called by her father to the front window to watch a straight-backed George Bernard Shaw strolling up Loop Street from the Imperial Hotel, and on another occasion to hear the child prodigy Yehudi Menuhin practising in Dr MacKenzie's Loop Street house. Rosa Ponsell, Madame Galli-Curci, Jascha Heifetz, Harry Lauder, are others in a catalogue of visitors which, if it were still intact, would make a veritable history. Homework must be abandoned one evening in order to go and listen to the 'fourth greatest orator in the world' (who were the other three? — Hitler, Lloyd George?) and indeed Srinivasa Sastri, the Indian Agent-General, had a command of English so enthralling that one could justify skipping homework on the grounds of learning the art of public address.



1933. The centre standards are down but the trams still run. Rickshas are in evidence, and a magnifying glass will show a mule wagon outside the Colonial Building. 'Traffic control' is a permanent fixture at the city's busiest intersection!

(Photograph: From *Pietermaritzburg the Progressive Capital* 1933)

What sort of street scenes would these much-travelled visitors have observed in Pietermaritzburg? The main Maritzburg thoroughfares in the twenties and thirties had an astonishing variety of conveyance raising the dust from the hard-topped roads. In a single street one might at any moment see electric trams, petrol-driven cars, hissing steam lorries, horse carriages, mule wagons, rickshas and even the occasional ox-wagon (though they became steadily rarer as the twenties progressed). Not that there was any danger of congestion. Tommy Boydell could stand on a soap-box in Church Street pronouncing hotly for the Labour Party without anyone noticing that the traffic was a hazard. (Or was it the smallness of his audience that made this possible? In Durban a bout of fisticuffs brought crowds to listen to him!) Despite such a varied traffic only the most rudimentary rules prevailed; intersections were subject to genial laws of give-and-take (but then, as one of my panel said, 'you never met anyone at intersections'.) Traffic signs and traffic lights came in the late thirties, and until then there was only one exception to the leisurely disorder, the traffic control that you found at the city's chief intersection, that of Church Street and Commercial Road. Here a uniformed personage on a podium with an umbrella swung a painted bar to signal the right of way. It was a performance awesome enough to warrant an audience, and one of its executants got to be known as 'Kewpie' in respect of his rotund and doll-like figure.

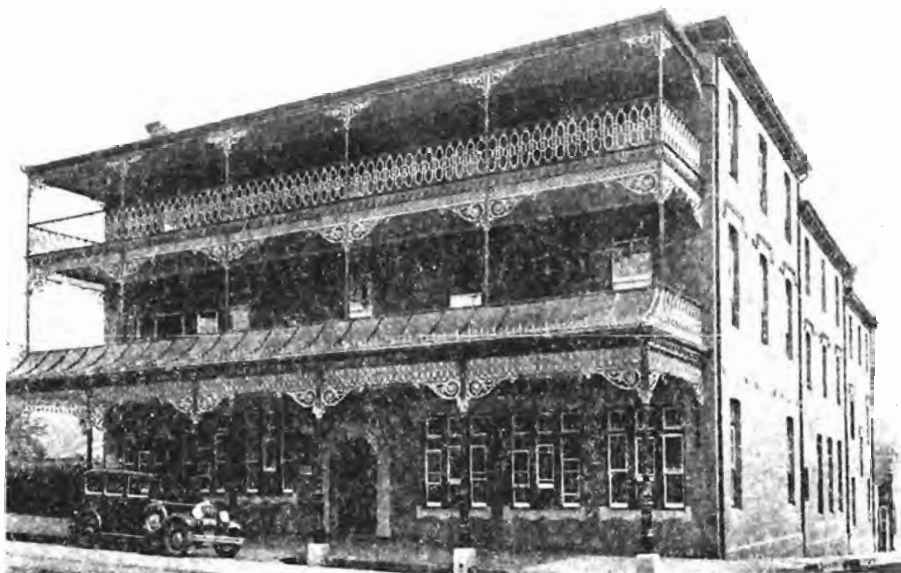
The survival of draught traffic meant that many sites were set aside for the watering and feeding of animals. Sheds of corrugated-iron on the Market Square were filled with hay for replenishing horses and mules, and much queuing had to be done for the next turn at the water trough. Many

Maritzburg shops had their mule teams stabled on their premises, which meant of course that they had yards in which you could turn a cart and team, an exercise that was no longer possible in Church Street itself. So the delivery cart from P.R. Murphy, Grocer's, would require pedestrians to stand aside as it ground across the pavement into Church Street — a ritual still in practice after the Second World War. The bulk of wagon traffic issued from G.W. Hollins Cartage Co. up near the station, which had the Maritzburg contract for railway deliveries. The teams that jogged through the streets needed a whole brigade of corporation officers to sweep up and scrape up after them — one performed his valuable work only seconds before George VI's car glided down Church Street in 1947.

Perhaps the most dramatic by-product of draught haulage was the forge of Mr W. Alexander, blacksmith, a gentleman renowned almost more for his beard than the shoes he produced for the city's mules and horses. On a vacant plot of land next to his Chapel Street premises the animals queued up for attention. This was a favourite place for schoolboys' dalliance — and also for schoolgirls, insists one of my panel. At Lewis's Sweet Corner you bought a penny 'poke' of sweetcrumbs — a newspaper cone filled with the leftovers from sweet jars — and then you lounged sucking and watching a trade that was fiery and dramatic and scarcely ever let up. Mr Alexander had another site nearby for wheelwroughting, but the chief wagon builder was Merryweather's in lower Church Street, still in business at a time when a good wagon could cost £300, as much as a small car.

Probably the main unit of traffic was the ricksha, with some 2 000 or more operated by the Maritzburg Ricksha Co. They were much too essential to the city's commerce to be in any way tarted up or decorated for tourists. They could be booked for market-day sessions, but they tended to 'nest' outside the Teachers' Training College, waiting for custom from the station. You took your chance on the rickshas — one panel-member can remember a 'spill' as a child, when his man found the Chapel Street decline rather too much for him, and his attempts to brake the vehicle had the effect of depositing his young passenger on the grass verge. Some rickshas operated by night, when they were scarcely discernible except for a rhythmic creaking of springs and a single dim lamp slung beneath the seat. Another conveyance of the twenties — in the hierarchy of vehicles from the ricksha to the taxi — was the pony ricksha, an altogether classier affair, horse-drawn and with a white driver. The rank for pony rickshas had its own telephone, and so was more accessible for suburban orders. (If the Garden of Eden is by definition pre-motorised, the Principal of the Training College in the early twenties, Alexander 'Sandy' Reid, confirmed it by arriving at his own wedding on a bicycle, there to meet his future wife who had come by ricksha. Mind you, his motorised successor, Prof. A.E. Allsopp, had a chain-driven Trojan, with the noise and the shape out of mechanical antiquity.)

Though rickshas were taken for granted throughout these years, it was eventually discovered — a sign, surely, of some investigative conscience — that many ricksha men ended their days with emphysema. Obviously this had much to do with the hilly conditions of Pietermaritzburg. A certain humanitarian reaction set in, and the municipality greatly restricted the practice.



Was there a better facade in Pietermaritzburg than that of the Norfolk Hotel, ideally placed in the days when the majority of the city's visitors arrived by train? There were balconies at both back and front of the building, affording 'a view which it would be difficult to better from any other vantage point in the city'.

(Photograph: Walter Linley)



More opulent and atmospheric, surely, than the Victoria Club, the entrance hall of the Horse Shoe Hotel had a wonderful aroma of leather and hide, and of course, was open to ladies as well as gentlemen!

(Photograph: Walter Linley)

Further colourful additions to the general street scene were the small omnibuses, first horse-drawn and later motorised, which several hotels — the Ansonia, the Imperial, the Horse-Shoe — sent up to the station to meet the main trains, with much hallooming and shouting and ambushing of passengers. (The Norfolk Hotel, being nearer the railway, could economise by sending along a painted handcart.) But no street event was more dramatic than a Maritzburg funeral. Into the streets would emerge Mr Dove or Mr Chatton leading on foot a slow procession, its bier hauled by magnificent black horses with white plumes. This solemn sight brought all other road-users to a respectful halt, and there was much removing of hats and bowing of heads. Of course when the Mountain Rise cemetery came into use such a domestic drama was no longer possible.

Trams certainly contributed to the 'city' atmosphere of Pietermaritzburg, having the same clanging bell and production of sparks that made them familiar from Berlin to San Francisco. Local tram-driving was not a comfortable occupation; the drivers open-air position made him vulnerable to a drenching by a Maritzburg sub-tropical downpour. (A certain unsung heroism here . . . getting his tram through as he stood in a dripping sou'wester, facing the rain, must have tested the toughest constitution.) Photographs of this era show Maritzburg with its tramified look — poles and catenary down the middle of the streets on a system that spread (so the citizens used to boast) to all four points of the compass. Scottsville and Botanic Gardens were the main routes, but there were also services to Retief Street and the Showgrounds. The latter route, not getting a great payload except in Show Week, had a single-deck tram. A branch that was



A remarkable view taken from the hill where the Rock Gardens are now situated, with the Umsinduzi concealed by trees on the lower right and the old Grey's Nurses Home and, further on, the city hall, centre left. This is perhaps the only surviving photograph to show the tram line to the Alexander Park, a route that branched off the Scottsville line at the Victoria Bridge Swimming Bath, and was used only on special occasions.

(Photograph: Walter Linley)



Tramway Construction. This valuable photograph from the Vere Harte Collection takes us earlier than our period — probably 1906-7 — but shows what an upheaval the coming of the electric tram caused in Maritzburg streets. The solid granite stones used as track foundations (there in the foreground in front of the city hall) explain why the lines still re-appear through the tar some fifty years after the trams have been discontinued.

(Photograph: Vere Harte Collection)

used only on special occasions went to the Mayor's Garden in Alexandra Park. You would use this to get to the Empire Day sports, or the 'five-a-side' finals on Union Day. At the Oval you would see another favourite Maritzburg vehicle, the A1 ice-cream pony cart, manned by Charlie White, with its ingenious trays that slotted into the ice chest, and which was doing service well into the forties.

There were many rituals associated with trams — the furious swinging of the brake or the accelerator wheel by the driver (who used his foot, by the way, for that incessant bell), or the conductor leaning out from the top under the furled green canvas to see if you had boarded. All this could be observed on Maritzburg's favourite treat, a family ride by tram to Prestbury if you were from Scottsville, to Scottsville if you were from Prestbury (either way you'd see familiar faces from the other side of town). From the top deck you could watch the conductor shifting the pantograph with a long pole to the appropriate cable at a junction. Also, the first generation of Maritzburg trams had padded cane seats with swivel backs; so another conductor's duty was to stroll through the tram at the terminus, throwing all the backs over and announcing with a gesture, as it were, that the direction had now changed. One occupational hazard of night-riding was the flying-ants: trams did not have glass windows, and one was reluctant to pull down the canvas blinds that would darken the ride. Another excitement in the Christmas season, schoolboys would put devil-crackers on the tracks to cause huge explosions as the vehicles passed over. A more chaste exercise (reported by a lady of my panel) consisted in laying two pins on a tram-line to make a cross. After the tram had gone you had a pair of scissors.

One can't leave the tram era without recalling a terrible accident that deeply shocked innocent Pietermaritzburg, namely the 1932 level-crossing accident at Mayor's Walk, when a train smashed into a tram of school-children causing many serious injuries and at least one death. (The site of the crossing was actually nearer the Railway Workshops than where the bridge exists today.) Nor should one leave the subject of trams without remembering an ingenious modification that was performed by the City Engineer's department — the construction of a tram for spraying. Dust-laying, you see, was one of Maritzburg's street rituals, as was the daily parade of prisoners from the Jail to the Quarry, or the pathetic troop of sheep bundling along to the abattoir behind a single goat (which portentous animal returned alone after it had delivered its charges.) The exciting parade for children was the dust-laying machine, and very necessary it was in the pre-macadam era. In most streets this was done by a water-cart behind two horses, but the tram routes were traversed by the amazing tram spray, a tank car built up on a tram chassis.

But we must contrast the dusty streets of winter with another regular Maritzburg event — the flooding that took place with almost every rain storm. The gutters of the streets parallel to Church Street were primitively shallow, while the transverse gutters were so deep as to be regular sloods, taking rain in a flood down West Street or Chapel Street. The lower part of the town became a great sheet of water; in a Boom Street house you might watch the family ladders floating in the back garden. The Dorp Spruit flooded so easily, and caused so much disruption in the Indian areas, that the City Council eventually embarked on what was called the 'Deviation of

the *Dorp Spruit*'. This was essentially a straightening exercise, and Mr James MacGibbon, Town Clerk in the thirties, considered it the best single contribution to city life undertaken by the Council.

Talking of the Council — when the Maritzburg trams were eventually replaced by buses, the tracks were, in most places, laboriously dug up. But in certain areas it was decided that it would be cheaper to bury them — a Council economy that had an unforeseen consequence: to this day the tramlines seasonally resurrect themselves and become once again visible. Another economy: the deputy-mayor at the time, Mr A.T. Allison, suggested that the obsolete granite blocks which had supported the rails be used for walling in the Carbineer Gardens next to the City Hall. There they stand to this day, a tribute to the post-Depression economics of Pietermaritzburg.

Before we get on to motor cars, we must notice yet another thrilling, if noisy and terrifying entrant on the Maritzburg street-scene, the Brewery steam lorries. The splash of colour these vehicles offered was not merely because of their fiery interiors but because of the famous 'red devils' who rode up behind, dressed in brilliant colours, and making a great spectacle as they loaded and off-loaded the crates from the lorries. They had a glamour sadly missing from their colleagues on coal deliveries, dressed in two dusty muid sacks with slitted apertures for arms and neck.

Who owned the first car in Pietermaritzburg? There are various candidates: was it Dr Russell Strapp or Dr Hill or Dr Buntine or Dr Woods? In either case, Maritzburg had cars well before 1920, since the youngest of these, Dr R.A. Buntine, of 151 Pietermaritz Street, was drowned when the *Galway Castle* sank in 1918. Certainly it seems likely that the first car-owner was a doctor, since the medical profession took up with the new transport before anyone else. We must remember that doctors were required to call in those days in a manner that was, to say the least, socially ambiguous! And we must remember that the first cars shared the roads with every sort of transport — steam, electric, two-footed, four-footed — all acting with a *laissez faire* that made any attempt at traffic control strain one's credulity. Dr Woods's successor, the superbly turned-out Dr Oddin-Taylor, complete with pin-stripe suit, was once stopped by a policeman for speeding. On being asked how he spelt his name, Oddin-Taylor drove off, saying grandly 'If you can't spell it, get lost'. (Incidentally, the lack of solid traffic rules did not entirely apply to parking, where a sort of social law held good: it was taken as an impertinence, especially in residential areas, for a stranger to park his car in front of your house.) Dr Baikie was the first doctor with a Buick; Dr Burman held out to the end with horse stables behind his Longmarket Street house. (I notice that four carriages were licensed in Pietermaritzburg in 1938, one in 1941.)

The coming of motor-cars greatly increased the range of outdoor expeditions, though my panel agrees that it was scarcely heard of before the war for anyone to go to a Natal Game Reserve, and that even the Drakensberg was mostly seen as a distant vision from the train. The state of Natal roads and the threat of malaria restricted one's ambitions. For all that, the late twenties saw picnickers setting off on rides that would be considered risky even today, such as the one to Table Mountain. (One parked in the Windy Hill area and walked up top to pick armfuls of pink everlastings.)

More manageable was the annual Training College picnic to Henley Dam, dustily reached on open lorries. Any car setting out from Pietermaritzburg in these years would carry not only the standard canvas and celluloid roof folded at the back but the wheel chains and shovel that were indispensable if it should rain. (Dr Akerman needed chains just to get up to his house below Cordwalles.) If you used the Greytown road the chances of punctures was so great that you would festoon your car with extra tyres, tied on the back and along the sides. And even in the suburbs, there was so much dust raised by the first generation of windowless cars that drivers and passengers would often wear driving coats. Gradually weatherproof sedans and coupés started to come in, and soon most Maritzburg children knew the joys of riding in the dicky seat — and also, indeed, in a motor-cycle side-car, since Douglasses, BSAs, BMWs, Harley-Davidsons and above all Nortons were now becoming familiar in the streets.

But motor-cars didn't put an end to some favourite outings by public transport. For instance there was the popular Sunday tram ride to the Botanic Gardens. At the wood-and-iron Gardens Tearoom the curator would put out several rows of wooden chairs and set up his huge HMV Gramophone, with only its shell-shaped horn for amplification, to pass the morning with records of light classical music. The seats were invariably all taken. Nor did Maritzburgers give up the splendid train-rides to Sweetwaters or to Howick. I would guess, listening to accounts of these expeditions, that thermos flasks got here comparatively recently — no picnicker set off without a kettle and a small bundle of wood to make a fire.



The original Botanical Gardens tea room, which one might patronise on a Sunday morning for light music, or visit at azalea time for a spectacle 'more vivid and flamboyant' than 'in its far eastern habitat'.

(Photograph: Walter Linley)

Nor did motoring supersede another form of locomotion that we haven't yet mentioned, the boats for hire along the Umsinduzi river. You set off upstream from the Boat House in the lower Bulwer Street area — the starting-place, by the way, for that handful of intrepid souls who pioneered the Pietermaritzburg-Durban annual canoe race, taking, in those days, about a week to do it.

Aeroplanes, of course, were at the apex of twentieth century technical mysteries, but in the twenties, and before Oribi was developed, Howick seems to have been the preferred place for landings. With a progressive conscience, busloads of schoolchildren were taken up to Howick to see Major Miller, the doyen of early South African flying, coming in to land, though a gruesome propellor accident on one occasion rather dampened enthusiasm. (Some memory-scratching here. Was it Major Miller who landed on the Pietermaritzburg Polo grounds in 1917, guided by bonfires, on a wartime recruiting exercise?) Flying was in its dangerous infancy: one block of children who lined up at Oribi to watch an early landing were told, after some hours, that the plane had crashed in the Drakensberg.

With private motor transport came the advent of motor racing, a sport that was very much suited to that mixture of adventure and under-bonnet know-how that the car brought with it in the twenties and thirties. Not a few Maritzburg boys brought up in this milieu would be mending, some years hence, tanks and troop-carriers in the Western Desert. Pietermaritzburg had a stake in two of the country's best-known races. One of my panel was a scholar at Merchiston (then, of course, over-looking Commercial Road) when crowds of boys lined the school fence every year to see the Durban-Johannesburg motorcycle race go through. The leaders would have all passed by 8.30 a.m., and then of course lessons would be disrupted through the morning as boys rushed to the windows to see the stragglers go by. A great fan was the young Roy Hesketh, who even as a boy made his fanaticism clear by coming to Merchiston Sports Day in a model racing-car decked out in house colours.

He would soon take part in another racing event that was Maritzburg's very own, the annual motor-races, run on a circuit of streets around Parkside, Maritzburg College and the Girls' High School. This drew a nation-wide interest: the hotels were full, and various corners and bends became national bywords, such as Angels' Angle (at the corner of Topham and College Roads) and Devils' Bend near the Umsinduzi — which had to be well padded with sandbags. There were drivers from overseas, like Lord Howe with his Bentley, and the line-up included Auto-Unions, Maseratis, Alpha-Romeos, and of course MGs, the staple fare for drivers like Roy Hesketh.

Let's leave the streets, now, and get on to the pavements for some reminiscences of Maritzburg shops. There seems to have been a good deal of choice, especially in ladies' shops, in an era when ladies would not venture out of a house without hat and gloves, when silk stockings had to be repaired in matching thread, when veils were still in regular use, and when corsetting amounted to a sort of closet-industry. The duller male, with hair as short as women's was long, and with only two colours of shirt to choose from, had only the glamour of tie-pins or cufflinks or (more grandly) watches on chains to make any effect. Ladies had options — schoolgirls

could decide whether to go to Mackenzie's or to Williams & Lambert's for their panama hats, or to get the cheaper variety from Saville's. (The ultimate hat shop — in days when every event demanded a new production — was that of the Misses McFarlanes in Church Street.) Another quality shop for women was Sowden and Stoddart's, up past St Peter's, presided over by the cultured tones of Miss Moir, who would personally conduct you upstairs to see to the cutting of your dresses. For children who craved entertainment both Ireland's and Topham's had an apparatus of overhead cables that were always worth a visit. Little trucks wafted your money up to some aerial officer who attached your change to the next down runner. These were the days when you were served by male assistants at drapery counters — the business of fetching down huge rolls of material (while you sat demurely on a bentwood chair next to the mahogany counter) needed some muscle. At Ireland's the draper-in-charge was Billy Johnston, who had emigrated from Britain as a sufferer from TB (no rare story in the later Empire.) This brought to Maritzburg a particularly fine tenor voice; Billy Johnston was perhaps better known as a singer than as the expert he was on styles and colours.

Other memorable shops were Simmer Jenkins for silverware and cutlery, Shalimar's for craftware from China, and Ross's for family shopping under one roof, on the model of the American departmental store. At Ogilvie's, ladies' shoes (always in Genuine Leather) would never cost more than 35 shillings. At Merrick's groceries were individually wrapped for selection — and, of course, delivered (no lady being seen carrying goods or parcels through the streets of Pietermaritzburg!) Delivering was a huge industry,



The interior of the Mesdames McFarlanes' hat shop, or 'millinery establishment' as they would prefer to call it. 'Fashion's latest decree in millinery' they claimed 'is received by every week's mail from London and Paris'.

(Photograph: Walter Linley)



A well-remembered Maritzburg shop, Sowden and Stoddart's, on the intersection of Chapel and Church Streets, occupied a site that was first used by the Natal Bank. Here the centre-road tram standards down Church Street are still in place, and a platform is ready for the busy hour when 'traffic control' will be required even at this lesser intersection.

(Photograph: Walter Linley)

with butchers' 'boys' and grocers' 'boys' and chemists' 'boys' bringing loads to your door, and then presenting you with a much-travelled book for your next order. (You wrote in it with one of those indelible pencils which children believed caused instant death if you sucked them.) To add to the good life, there was a great deal of shopping done on approval: delivery 'boys' would struggle out to the suburbs with huge crates of shoes or metre-wide boxes of dresses on their backs so that some 'missus' somewhere could spend a day or two trying out samples. (In the light of the delivery industry, some might think that a humanity towards canines was somewhat misplaced, but drinking-troughs for dogs were fitted round most shop-entrances. Another theory: they stopped the lifting of legs in respected portals.)

Some windows or doorways invited dalliance on the way home from school. Chemists invariably had carboys, huge decanters of red or green coloured water that stood in their windows restfully advertising hygiene and tranquillity. More exciting was Eddels' shoemakers in Buchanan Street, whose doorway was filled with leathery smells and the dim sights of belt-driven machinery, but where a stern warning to loiterers ('And That Means You') added to the risk of waiting. However, those brave enough to climb the spiral staircase to the upper floor were rewarded with large waste reels for making *gandagandas*, toy tractors propelled by twisted rubber bands. But were any premises so terrifying as the taxidermist in Loop Street, not far from the museum, through whose door dimly-lit horrors gazed back at

you with glassy eyes? The dream shop for children was that of Mr 'Cockney' James in Church Street, a regular warren of rooms that were crammed with toys and gifts that one could browse through for hours — masks, fireworks, tin soldiers, celluloid dolls. (The only rival was Stacey's Tobacconists, who sold white clay pipes for blowing bubbles.)

The familiar shops of Pietermaritzburg were eventually challenged by giants of capitalism from outside Natal. When, in the late twenties, J.W. Schlesinger bought the Commercial Road block opposite the City Hall for his new African Theatres showpiece, the Grand Theatre, he cleared away a whole network of temporary shops and businesses that had not enhanced, it was generally conceded, the looks of the town. It soon became clear, though, that he was setting up not only a theatre, but an African Life Building and a Colonial Bank — a colony in fact of the Schlesinger Empire, so that Maritzburg began to get that 1930s vertical look that had changed cities across the world (not always for the best, as I think lovers of old Cape Town would agree.) But Schlesinger's big challenge was still to come. In the 1930s he bought the Church Street shop of Steel, Murray & Co. to house yet another branch of his fabulously successful O.K. Bazaars. Whether the protest that followed came from offended sensibility, from snobbery about bazaars, from vulnerable small businesses or simply from cursed parochialism, it nevertheless sounded out loud and strong, and the sitting Council refused him his licence. But they hadn't reckoned with the resources of Mr Schlesinger. Soon afterwards there appeared in his new newspaper, the *Sunday Tribune*, a picture of him at his Church Street site indicating where he planned to establish his new home for hoboos! Protest quickly melted away, and the new O.K. was duly installed.

By common consent Maritzburg was at its busiest and most bustling on Friday nights during the 'Monkey Parade' (a name that was derived, perhaps, from the short, back and sides much in demand from barbers at this hour.) In the era of the six-day working week the best shopping time was on Fridays after work, and shops would stay open till 9.00 p.m. Friday was payday for workers and artisans, and the four or five second-hand marts in town, such as Silburn's or Linforth's in upper Church Street, were thronged with people well into the evening. The Salvation Army band took up vigil on various street corners and attracted good crowds. All too obvious from the upperdeck of a tram would be the drunkenness that prevailed every payday; the sight of horizontal bodies was too typical to cause comment.

Let's leave the shops, then, and retreat into the homes, lit by electricity of a somewhat tenuous supply — you still needed a good stock of candles well into the thirties. As there was not, as yet, much electric gadgetry in the kitchen, the typical household would perhaps be more familiar to Victorians than the generation that lay round the corner, with its 1940s Americanised kitchens. Yet the Victorians probably didn't have (as, indeed, neither do we) the late-imperial efficiency of two postal deliveries a day! Milk, too, was delivered twice a day, but (despite Mr Baynes's 'model dairy' revolution in Durban) it was not, as yet, delivered in bottles. The milk cart attendant simply dipped a pint measure into his can and filled your jug. A very welcome round was that of the Ice Cart, run by the Pietermaritzburg Cold

Storage Co. in North Street. If your ice chest was well insulated, you only needed part twice a week with a sixpence for a huge block of ice. This would be carried, dripping, with great iron calipers from the mule wagon outside (where the ice lay under sacks) right to the chest itself. In the days before fridges, certain familiar smells gave atmosphere to the rear of a house. There was the meat safe, for instance, often standing in tins of water to stop invasions of ants, with the dwindling cold roast behind its gauze.

Behind the house, too, one must have open fires for the primary heating of water, giving a medieval tinge to domestic life. Monday was washday, Tuesday was ironing day. On Mondays a huge cauldron would boil away outside, ready to give powerful treatment to heavy clothes worn in the sub-tropics. On Tuesdays the coal-stove must roar away to keep a succession of flat irons hot for rapid pressing. In the years before electricity moved into the rear of the home there was a range of intermediate inventions, like copper geysers that burned paper and wood and saved you having to prepare your bath in the zinc tub outside. Later came Laurel paraffin stoves which were made to fit neatly on the top of a packing case, and also petrol-burning laundry irons with small fuel-tanks attached to them. The image remains, though, of the hard-scrubbing, hard-ironing black washerwoman, earning 2/6 for her day's work, including 6d for bus fare, and whose main business was commenced and concluded in two days of the week. Of course, many homes had 'permanents' — up to 3 or 4 servants who would all live on site. This would include a full-time garden worker in what was an age of beautiful flower gardens in the front, vegetables and fowls at the back.

In the suburbs the lady of the house would typically hold a monthly 'at home' from 4.00 p.m., and this event entailed an even more finicky pecking order than the one endured by the servants. A newcomer to a neighbourhood of pretension would be spied upon (as though for scab or rickets) for several weeks, and then called upon in a ritual visit of some fifteen minutes. Tea must not be offered; social immunisation was not yet complete. The newcomer had passed her first test if, on departure, some engraved visiting cards were casually left in her tray in the hall (the cards must not be printed, you understand, else the game is over. More than that, by some extraordinary variation, concerning the fact that a lady never leaves a card for a gentleman, there had to be three of them. 'Why not two?' I asked, but my witnesses are getting rusty.) After more weeks of appropriate quarantine, the 'newy' returned the visit, depositing three cards in *your* tray. That was Graduation; she had now made it to your monthly tea-party to eternity, so to speak, though censure could still be hinted at, both ways, by non-attendance.

Social hygiene is one thing, actual hygiene another, and the ladies who played this elaborate game were probably fast asleep when the most necessary of Maritzburg's processions took place, the nocturnal visit of what was called the soil cart or — even more delicately — the night cart. Water-borne sewage got to the suburbs last, so the procedure of removing and replacing pails survived there longest — which explains the general preference for outside latrines.

Victorian heaviness lingered on in oak furniture and coir mattresses and thick leather suitcases. (Since the annual family holiday might well take the form of a trek by train to a rented house on the coast, the weight of luggage was a major factor, demanding much calculation as to the size of compartments and the muscle-power available at the coastal halt.) It was the age of heavily lacquered furniture, and there were regular callers to do the job. Those who couldn't afford new pieces (as for example from Reid's Cabinet Works, which had a countrywide reputation) could make do with standard packing cases which were of a surprisingly high quality. There was a home industry in packing-case furniture, especially since the final varnish came up so well.

The supreme new gadget in the homes of the twenties was of course the wireless, the mystical equipment which brought King George's Empire closer together. Huge clumsy outfits they were, those Marconis, Telefunks, Atwater-Kents, with their tuners and amplifiers in separate components sprawling across large tables. The home of one of my panel was neighbourhood leader, in its day, for the installation of wireless, which arrived one Sunday in 1924, a one-valve crystal set with headphones, built by Mr Calvert, the printer. With mounting excitement, the new set was tested by listening to the 7.00 p.m. Sunday service from Durban, and indeed at that hour 'Rock of Ages' sounded clearly through the headphones. When Mr Calvert was telephoned and informed of this success, it produced in him a sort of euphoria — 'Rock of Ages', he knew, was emanating from Cape Town, proving him a greater engineer than he himself had fancied. One duty of the new radio-owner was to give his neighbourhood the result of the Durban July before it came out in the papers. Favourite programmes in the twenties were Children's Hour with Aunt Tabitha, and the News plus 8 o'clock chimes, which latter were relayed from Durban by the process of holding a microphone into West Street near the Post Office clock (a ritual rather spoiled when ambitious members of the public attempted to have themselves broadcast by yelling up from below.)

The holiest moment on the wireless was the Christmas broadcast of King George, sounding so faint across the oscillating waves that the monarch seemed whole oceans and hemispheres away. A missed holy moment came in 1926 when it was announced that the miraculous invention would actually get America live for the Dempsey-Tunney fight at 2.00 in the morning. The men of the house kept vigil to that hour and, switching the set on, were thrilled to hear 'Stars and Stripes' sounding loud and clear from the speaker. The whole household was woken, only to hear the local Durban announcer chip in and regret that the Studio couldn't get America!

The University was perhaps still too small to make much impact on the cultural life of Pietermaritzburg. Of course, personages such as Professors Bews, Bayer and Petrie were much respected figures in town, but children brought up in the twenties got to know the inner precincts of the NUC when they wrote their public examinations. There one sat in the Main Hall, which then served as the Library, surrounded by books and wondering whether one's efforts would earn a permanent entrée to this forbidding interior. A more cheerful University occasion was the annual departure of the 'grads train'. In the days when university colleges formed a single collegiate entity,

degrees were of course conferred in Pretoria, and so Maritzburg's yearly graduands were given a big send-off on the evening train — some in such a state as made it difficult to believe that they knew what they were about. One of my panel remembers a 'grads train' leaving Maritzburg with a saxophonist leaning far out of the window, playing loudly to the vanishing platform.

The idiosyncrasy of University types seemed amply confirmed when, in the 1930s, the newly-appointed History lecturer, Mr Mark Prestwich, managed to miss his boat from Southampton, with the result that the year's History course started several weeks late. In an academic society of somewhat Scottish tone (thus 'Sandy' Reid to his ne'er-do-well students: 'Ye're a thorrn in my flesh') the debonair and very English Prestwich — who had black satin sheets on his bed, who burned incense in his rooms (or so the rumour went) — arrived like a sort of time-bomb. His suits of slender cut contrasted with the padded-shoulder style that was the rage from America and made Maritzburg men look like lesser Al Capones. He confirmed his reputation by announcing that the only barber who could manage his hairstyle lived in Durban, and also by insisting on getting off buses before ladies and not after them — a pushy behaviour that turned out, of course, to be copybook manners from the days of coaching.

Outside the university the intellectual life of Maritzburg was served by the City Parliament, a sort of debating society on parliamentary lines, organised by such devotees as Mr Newsom, the city Valuator. The motions up for discussion were advertised in the *Natal Witness*, and the Parliament met weekly above Christie's and later above Perks's tea-rooms. The sessions were well supported; there was much enthusiasm, for instance, over a comparatively unknown young speaker — Denis Hurley.

Then there was Scott's Theatre which could count on visiting stars of international repute. It was the venue for instance, for a touring Macbeth with Sybil Thorndyke and her husband Lewis Casson in the lead roles. A distant relative of one of my witnesses was, alas, subject to inebriation, and contrived to fall out of a box of the Scott's Theatre into the orchestra. And it was here that another family black sheep fulfilled a bet to 'slap a lady's back' in the course of an evening (a temptation provoked, it must be admitted, by the new backless dresses which had just become the rage.) Scott's Theatre managed to cater for every social rank in its small domain, having not only boxes and stalls and a dress circle, but also a 'gods' high in the rear of the building. You climbed up to it by dark wooden stairs and sat on hard wooden forms, but you could avenge yourself on the affluent below by chucking down toffee-papers during the course of the show.

What the intelligentsia of Maritzburg might not have conceded was that the chief passage of talent through the town came to the picture-houses, and that not because of the films they showed, but because of the international quality of the vaudeville troupes who did the circuit of bioscopes right through the Empire. Admittedly these were often the soapbox virtuosi who conjured and yodelled and played any tune on request but along with them there came such durable stars as Harry Lauder, the De Groot string trio, and Heifetz himself who fiddled to the Grand in 1933, some five years after talkies had arrived.



A rather oblique shot of the entrance to the 'Rinko Bio-Vaudeville', really to advertise the locksmith cum chocolate-seller, Mr James Banks, next door, whose shop rather obscures the theatre, but where the display pictures for forthcoming attractions can nevertheless be seen. The low building further along has been identified as the original premises of Voller's signwriters. Note the diagonal parking permitted down the centre of Longmarket Street. Mr Bank's business was obviously well-placed: 'Chocolates for the lady? Tobacco and cigarettes for yourself? This is the place to obtain same!'

(Photograph: Walter Linley)

There were two picture houses in Maritzburg through the silent era, the Rinko (so called because it was converted from a Victorian roller-skating rink) and the Excelsior. The latter, the 'bughouse' — built, it was said, out of wattle and daub — held the agency for MGM ('Makes Good Movies') but couldn't match the Rinko for the quality of its vaudeville. (Nor could the King's Theatre which came later, and whose gimmick was to place two huge blocks of ice in front of fans on either side of the stage and advertise itself as air-conditioned.) The Rinko catered for a noisy junior clientele in the afternoon (order sometimes restored by one of Maritzburg's best-known characters, the Mental Hospital inmate 'Tom Mix') but in the evening it took on a metropolitan respectability so great that Mr Line the stockbroker (who imported lace curtains from England and carnation plants from France) could hire his own permanent row of seats for the entertainment of his friends. Mr Line himself slept peacefully through the film; when the talkies came he gave up his row, because he couldn't sleep through the show.

At the beginning of a Rinko evening you would be handed a programme announcing an overture to be performed by the Rinko's own orchestra. This was not a large ensemble, but its names engraved themselves on Maritzburg's memory — Stanley Ricketts on piano, Tommy Cragg on cornet, A.G. Lugsdin (later a city councillor) on clarinet, and so on. In the silent era a good cinema orchestra varied the music with the action on the screen. The great master of fitting the tune to the film was William Bohm, playing on the Wurlitzer at The Prince's in Durban. Otherwise many a Natal cinema hired the local piano teacher, who simply played unending

syncopation for the length of the film. The vaudeville circuit included names of such prestige as the British baritone George Baker (who, after failing with opera, 'wowed' his audience at the Grand with the nightmare song from *Iolanthe*), Amelita Galli-Curci, Mark Hambourg, John McCormack, Richard Tauber, the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, and Maritzburg's own 'girl made good', Garda Hall, daughter of the proprietor of Hall's Cycle Works in upper Church Street, who was now so illustrious that she recorded for HMV and lived in England.

Loud hammering accompanied the last silent film shown at the Rinko as the speakers were fixed in place for the first talkie, Al Jolson in 'The Singing Fool'. This was cinematic progress, no doubt, but it was doom for the Rinko. Its great iron roof meant that the merest patter of rain drowned any talkie. Certainly it didn't survive the coming of the Grand, which opened in 1928, and was quite the most opulent building that Maritzburg had seen. One of my panel remembers being shown over the theatre (he had gone to book for the New Year show, 'Love Parade' with Maurice Chevalier) by a manager whose chief pride was not the plush seating or the ornate panels but the twin projectors — now you could show a film without stopping to change reels. To the Grand in the thirties came the dance bands of Jack Payne and Debroy Somers, and the military band of the Grenadier Guards.

The most memorable *non*-cinematic entertainers that passed through Maritzburg belonged to fairs and circuses, which usually camped on the Market Square or in Victoria Road. Pagel's Circus hardly needed a show inside the tent, since Mr Pagel's ride through town with a lion was spectacle in itself, and the antics of Mrs Pagel — who had diamond rings on every finger, who sold the tickets but never gave change, who swore like a trooper and was more terrifying than the lions — drew an audience at the gate just to watch her alone. The fiery Pagels were apparently not daunted, in Maritzburg, by the proximity of that splendidly eccentric society, the Order of the Golden Age, which used to wring public conscience with a poster on which a tiger uttered pathetically, under the ringmaster's lash, 'How long, Oh Lord, how long?'

With the picture houses went a whole ritzy sub-culture of before-and-after-show snacks and teas. One got one's sweets at Lewis's Sweet Corner on the way to the theatre, but on the way back one had the choice of Christie's, the Creamery, Kean's or Perks', all of which stayed open till 10 o'clock (the white waitresses being only too pleased to get the late-hour jobs in the years of the Depression.) Excellent live music could be had from 'The Red Hungarian Band' which played on Fridays and Saturdays in the classy décor of the upstairs lounge of the Creamery. (A change of personnel later required that they rename themselves 'The Lisbon Gypsy Orchestra'.) Their *coup* was to legalise after-church concerts on Sunday nights by charging a shilling for entrance. No wonder Mr J. Withers Carter, who gave the organ recitals in the City Hall, had a variable audience. The Athenaeum and Christie's, tea-lounges in Church Street, both employed, at various times, their resident bands. (Mrs Christie had another modest gimmick; she dressed her waitresses in the same colour as each day's table-linen.) The sub-culture in theatre music spilt over into a demand for sheet music and gramophone records, Simkins's for HMV, Kemp's for Columbia.



Perhaps Maritzburg's favourite meeting point, Christie's Cafe-de-luxe made a great impression with its *art nouveau* glass partitions between the tables. Here one could sample the products of the Soda Fountain, 'admitted by some of the most distinguished authorities to be one of the finest in South Africa . . .'

(Photograph: Walter Linley)

Maritzburg did not spend all of its time in front of a screen, though it is perhaps symbolic that the King's Theatre took over the Buchanan Street premises of Mr Bennett's well-used Gymnasium. (The Buchanan Street area produced a hardy type — they turned up at 6.00 every morning for a swimming session at the small public Baths.) The chief sports contests were held on Empire Day at the Alexandra Park — an occasion that was highlighted, in alternate years, by the arrival of the 'up' Comrades' Marathon. One wonders if this zealous association of Sport and Empire had anything to do with Lord Baden-Powell's visit in 1927. At any rate, such activities produced for Pietermaritzburg its very own Olympic gold medallist in the person of Marjorie Clark, who broke the world hurdling record in the late twenties. (She was reported not to use the front gate of the family house, but merely to leap over the fence.)

Listening to the reports of these chaste exercises and pleasures, I began to wonder if Pietermaritzburg was a somewhat strait-laced Georgian capital. Not according to a 1930s equivalent of *Private Eye*, Mr Black's scurrilous newsletter *The Sjambok*. To the amazement and secret triumph of its citizens, Maritzburg figured in this production as wicked beyond its size, with reports of pyjama parties and high jinks that left great metropolises considerably in its wake. Besides, when life in Maritzburg became too strait-laced, the well-to-do could slip out to the Star and Garter, some kilometres out on the Durban Road, and indulge in junketings that would hardly recommend themselves in the upper floor of the Creamery. One party, returning the worse for wear from the Star and Garter, broke into Jesse Smith's mason's yard, stole a marble angel, and set it up in Commercial

Road where it was discovered next morning. But for lesser mortals, bacon and eggs at the market square Pie-cart was the satisfactory conclusion to an evening's entertainment.

The Great Depression that spread through the Empire in the early thirties made an indelible impression on those who lived through it, and Maritzburg certainly had its share of first class matrics walking the streets for work. Shops closed down; sons of once-wealthy farmers queued for jobs as medical orderlies at Grey's Hospital. The perspective, here, is inevitably a 'white' one; it was felt that the 'natives' could retreat into some tribal heartland away from the iron laws of supply and demand. I've no doubt this is an ethnocentric view, but people are seldom sociologically accurate when the struggle is on to get any sort of grip on the bare threads of a sterile economy. Any city of the Empire knew only too well, even before the Depression, the 'poor white' bottom of the economic pyramid. Many caught at this level knew how to make a respectable living out of humble circumstances, such as the solderers who called to fix your zinc baths, the scissors sharpeners, the shoelace sellers, the paraffin-tin vase makers, the men who lacquered furniture, and even those who (assisted by an *umfaan*) still did the dirtiest job of all, chimney sweeping. (One of Maritzburg's characters, Mr Pym the shoelace seller, neatly dressed in a frock-coat and a top hat, was typical of the stratum washed up in the colonies. He would recall a more illustrious youth, singing as a choirboy in Westminster Abbey.) But after 1930 the retinue of tramps calling at your door swelled to a regular stream, and the hobo influx was as evident here as in the United States.



With the Depression about to start biting, the girls in this 1929 photograph were probably fortunate to have shop-floor jobs in the newly established 'Clothing Factory' of Mr H. Withey, situated at 255 Pietermaritz Street.

(Photograph: Walter Linley)

The Depression does not seem to be remembered as a period of despair or bitterness; in fact it brought out a certain public inventiveness to try and help its victims. Building Societies decreased their bond rates, railway staff went on to a four day week to avoid lay-offs. Mrs P.H. Taylor, mayoress at the time, thought of turning the bare veld next to the Alexandra Swimming Baths into rock gardens, and men were employed there at 3/6 a day through most of 1932-6, with what results we can all now see. (Incidentally a Victorian grave was covered over by the rock gardens — that of a youth who drowned in a gala when galas were still held in the Umsinduzi.)

One sign of a new economic realism was that young ladies were much more likely to apply themselves to commercial subjects. They might sign on with Mrs Kobrin's 'School of Commerce' in Harwin's Arcade, or learn to type with Mrs Sates in Buchanan Street. It was quite a revolution, though, when the new headmistress at Girls' High School brought in bookkeeping for her girls in 1933, a subject which had been considered, hitherto, not sufficiently academic. Miss Lindsay had done a degree at Columbia University in New York, and so was probably wiser than most about the state of the times and what they needed. But her teachers were not trained in bookkeeping — poor Miss Eve Grundy had to learn the subject by night that she would teach next day to her pupils.

As if the times were not difficult enough economically, Pietermaritzburg was subject to successive epidemics, in 1932 and 1934, of malignant malaria, and there were many deaths from the disease. In the first wave, dozens of tents were put up in the Grey's Hospital grounds; in the second the hospital itself could no longer cope, and patients had to be nursed at home. A sinister fact about the disease was the rapidity with which it descended — a boy would go on to a soccer field in perfect health, and half an hour later come off in a feverish fit of shivers. One of my panel was taken ill with malaria while standing in the school crocodile at the station, awaiting the arrival of Prince George. The epidemics led to a high level of public awareness — we find a sort of twentieth century confidence, now, that science can fight back. So if mosquito nets were unpacked from drawers, Citronella was now available to be applied to blankets and cupboards. Lectures and charts taught one how to distinguish anopheles mosquitoes (they 'stood on their heads') and how to make liberal use of the new wonder spray, Pyagra.

The Maritzburg Market was the place where all races met, where all peoples stood patiently shoulder to shoulder, where they hired rickshas, bargained with auctioneers, and saw publicly and plainly how the money flowed. One wouldn't say that the lack of Group Areas Laws meant that there was no race feeling — after all, absolute segregation leads to a lack of feeling altogether. The casualness with which residential areas were defined was probably the obverse of an utter confidence in the imperial hierarchy. And certainly there were quite a few grey areas in the residential structure of Pietermaritzburg. One of my panel lived as a boy in Boom Street and can remember a great stir in the neighbourhood caused by a royal visit. At least three black families (significantly with the surname Dunn) owned houses that fronted on Boom Street. One day in the early twenties a whole crowd

of white and black neighbours congregated to witness the visit to the Dunns of Solomon, King of the Zulus, who arrived grandly in his chauffeur-driven car.

The people who progressed materially in these decades were the Indians, archetypally remembered as the symbolic hawker 'Sammy' — with two baskets over his shoulders on a long bamboo cane that creaked as he walked — and the basket-carrying 'Mary' who came on alternate days, both having trudged the long path from the city to the suburbs. The occasional sight of immaculately dressed Moslem women in upper Church Street always raised the question as to how much Indians were acculturated. When the Infectious Diseases Hospital was built in 1937 Indian women were prevented by strong taboos from offering themselves as nurses. In fact the difficulty of enlisting nurses from any other race (a problem not solved, in the case of the Indians, until the late fifties) had, in the South African perspective, an interesting corollary. Grey's Hospital was open to all races, and so white nurses nursed everyone, being the only ones available to do so. There was one exception: the birth of children often took place at home, with the result that there was quite a society of midwives, some of the very best of whom were Coloured women. It was certainly not unheard of for a Coloured midwife to attend a white mother at the time of a birth.

Indian shops were colourful affairs, tight on floor space but with high vertical shelving that needed hooked rods to fetch down the fabrics that were almost out of sight. On the streets in front were piles of army coats, blankets and metal boxes to entice the miners who had some hours to kill while passing through by train. But of course they were mixed in with some well-established 'white' shops: Fairman's Fishmonger's, Turnbull's Bakery, Arnold's Chemist — in fact P.R. Murphy's mule team came out into Church Street not far from the gate of the mosque. There was undoubtedly a feeling concerning the success of Indian commerce, but in a sense it was a prejudice of class rather than of race, since the Indians did their best business with the artisan class of the white community. Nevertheless, the white traders of Maritzburg were not a little upset when, in 1928, the sitting mayor opened the Paramount Stores in upper Church Street. It was claimed that, because the Indians lived above their own stores, they didn't have to pay rates twice as did the white shopowners. But in fact when Indians *did* begin to buy houses in what was still the intact residential area of the West/Pietermaritz Street block, a great stiffening took place, the class issue became a race issue, and the spread was eventually limited by the Indian Penetration Act of 1941.

No doubt a good deal of the idyll that was white life between the wars derived from the well-nigh feudal system of servants and labourers that supported it. It takes probably a century or two of political heat to decide whether the underdogs, in the feudal pyramid, were content or not with their daily existence. The retinues of black servants, delivery 'boys', assistants, launderers, harnessers, wagoneers, coal shovellers, grass cutters, who worked for a pittance and were never seen in shops or streets except on errands were probably too close to primitive laws of supply and demand to consider the issue. The ricksha industry is the controversial area here — in retrospect it seems the most man-impounding and enslaving sort of job, but

there was great rivalry for licensed vehicles, especially as, with fares ranging between 6d and 2/- you might, in two or three days, earn as much as the 'head boy' of a household in a month, which was usually £2.00. (Incidentally the starting pay for a white nurse was then £1.10 a month. For those who had to pay board and lodging, like a brand-new schoolteacher, the starting pay was £11.3s.4d. Of this the board would be about £5 to £6. The first block of flats in Pietermaritzburg, 'Strathallan', was not yet built and there was a great collection of minor hotels and boarding houses — the Thanet, the Oaks, the Summerville, Warrington House, Palmdene.) One doesn't imply an inveterate contentment, then, if one recalls the colourful picture of the suburban off hours period between 3.00 and 5.00 p.m. when servants and domestics would sit along the pavements, feet dangling in the gutters, chatting, listening, playing Jews' harps, mouth organs, squash boxes or home-made banjos. What did they think of the curfew bell that sounded from the tower above the police station (today's Publicity House) every evening at 10.00 p.m.? (You often heard it, said my panel — who quite saw the irony — as you came out of a film.) That smacks of the old South, and yet . . . the railway station was the exit gate from undesirable employers, just as it was the disembarking point for dozens seeking work. (Which reminds one of another Maritzburg procession: black mothers-to-be, getting off trains and walking slowly and grandly a few hundred yards down to the Bale Street Maternity Home.)

The servant population who withdrew into invisibility at 10.00 p.m. rewarded their employers with a touching honesty. Oxenham's Bakery (owned by Roy Hesketh's father) used to pile each day's takings into huge pots in easy public view and reach, and yet they were never the object of theft. The locking of doors of Maritzburg homes seems hardly to have occurred; only the annual holiday would warrant it. Yet the serene life could take a violent turn, as on Sunday afternoons, when 'kitchen boys' formed gangs to have *skebenga* stick fights. In those days of municipal police forces, the Maritzburg foot patrols were usually composed of a white officer and a black, the latter dressed as the former except for puttees and bare feet, and with a knobkerrie instead of a truncheon. These modest troops were useless to quell the stick fights, and a special *posse* of mounted police had to be formed to control them.

Many white housewives took an active interest in the uplift of their servants. One of my panel remembers her mother making her house *umfaan* recite his homework as he stood on the ladder hanging curtains, before sending him off to night school at the old Colenso Church on Commercial Road. The black serving population was not a-political in a 'Southern' sort of way. My panel confirms how the ICU, the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (though they recall it almost to a man as the International Coloured Union) reached through to all layers of black labour, even to farm workers who, to all appearances, seemed utterly a-political. (To move to Greytown for a moment: one witness remembers lying in bed excited and frightened of a Friday night as horsemen came to the town in droves from outlying farms for the weekly ICU meeting.) In Maritzburg the ICU headquarters were below Scott Street at the upper end of Church Street and invariably there was a milling crowd thereabouts on Saturday nights. Yet two of my panel remember preferring to walk through this crowd, and in

fact often doing so, since the alternative, Pietermaritz Street, was dimly lit and dangerous. The ICU obviously provided an important social outlet; but all was not well with its management of funds, which were made up of subs carefully collected every Friday evening from kitchen and garden staff through town and suburbs. The story is that when one of the Maritzburg ICU officials bought a motor car (an entity beyond the wildest dreams of the ordinary members) many withdrew in disgust.

Afrikaners might be the most pleasant neighbours, but the post-Boer War generation were seldom generous about 'the Dutch'. One of my panel used to seek help with his homework from a charming and talented Afrikaner family, and yet hardly dared mention the fact to his parents. On the other hand a certain guilt feeling about letting down the Union must have set in by 1938; you don't have to browse long through the Pietermaritzburg Centenary eulogies and programmes to discover how 'Voortrekker City' is trying its level best to woo the other white race, using Dingaan, of course, as an appropriate historic villain and not mentioning the English at Port Natal at all.

There was, it seems, a blessed innocence in Pietermaritzburg as to the grim way that the thirties would end. On President Hindenberg's 80th birthday in 1932, a pianist on my panel accompanied a German schoolgirl violinist at a celebration in the Womens' Club, above Ackerman's (opposite Somtseu's statue in Longmarket Street). Next year Germany had a new chancellor. At the debating society at Girls' High School, a German girl offered a passionate vindication of Hitler, but left in tears when she got no sympathy — it seems that the *putsch* behaviour was already offending children of the Empire. I'll end my portrait of a happy but stressful decade by recalling a small incident. 1938. One of my panel, a junior clerk in the Town Clerk's Office, is sent post-haste from an afternoon sitting of the City Council. He wends his way past Somtseu's statue to the Post Office, and sends off a special telegram — congratulations to Neville Chamberlain from Pietermaritzburg for having achieved 'peace in our time'.

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