

# *Notes and Queries*

## **MONITORING BOYCOTTS: BLACK CONSUMERS AND WHITE BUSINESSES IN PIETERMARITZBURG, AUGUST 1985**

*Christopher Merrett writes:*

AS the struggle against apartheid intensified in the 1980s, workplaces became major sites of conflict as trade unions rapidly expanded both membership and influence. A primary tactic, boycotts and stayaways, was monitored by the Development Studies Research Group (DSRG) at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg using volunteers to collect data. One such event was an offshoot of the long-running BTR-Sarmcol strike in Howick, a call for a boycott of white business throughout the Pietermaritzburg region from 15 to 26 September 1985.<sup>1</sup>

The strike was basically the result of a struggle for full recognition of the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) by BTR-Sarmcol against a background of mechanisation and downsizing of the work force. An industrial court case, negotiations,

two conciliation boards and arbitration failed to move intransigent management. A go-slow and ban on overtime brought in white schoolboy scab labour. After further negotiations failed, 1 000 workers went on an intermittent strike. More conciliation board hearings made no headway and on 30 April 1985 the strike resumed. On 3 May, 970 workers were sacked, BTR-Sarmcol claiming that their strike was illegal. The replacement workers were mainly Inkatha supporters.

A consumer boycott in Howick caused considerable hardship for shopkeepers. Demonstrations by dismissed workers took place in Pietermaritzburg in June followed by a stayaway organised by the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) on 18 July that reportedly reduced the city to a “ghost town”.<sup>2</sup> The boycott followed on 15 August.

It was called off six weeks later, but had effectively collapsed in late August in the face of organisational disarray, financial problems and police harassment. It was condemned by the business community and city council, which argued that it undermined efforts to mitigate unemployment and hunger.<sup>3</sup> A week later they produced an anti-boycott pamphlet and dropped thousands of copies over Imbali, Edendale and Ashdown from the air. Vitus Mvelase speaking on behalf of Inkatha rejected the boycott.<sup>4</sup>

Shopkeepers and managers were phoned or interviewed and asked how they felt in general about the boycott and whether trade was being affected. Businesses were divided into three geographic zones: Scottsville/Hayfields; Pietermaritzburg city centre; and the south-east end of the central business district, officially an Indian group area.

In Scottsville, Checkers claimed that only 5–7% of turnover related to black shoppers. On 19 August the manager said that he was not expecting the boycott to have any effect, which he confirmed on 25 August. Staff at Pick 'n Pay refused to comment, except to say that only 2% of shoppers were black. A butcher at Nedbank Plaza expressed sympathy with black shoppers, but said his clientele was small and only purchased one type of cheap meat, although he thought custom might increase as he used unmarked bags. Contacted at the end of August, he refused any further comment and his manner was evasive.

Observation suggested no decrease in the small number of black shoppers at Nedbank Plaza. They were mainly university staff, local domestic workers and labourers temporarily working

in the neighbourhood. There seemed to be no obvious fear of being seen with branded shopping bags. During the monitored fortnight a branch of Kentucky Fried Chicken opened and about 30% of the lunchtime custom appeared to be black. Three businesses were observed on nine occasions in August at 1.00 pm on weekdays and 9.00 or 10.00 am on Saturdays. The number of black shoppers at Checkers peaked at 20, at CNA at six, and at Fitzroy's Tea Room at five. These figures seemed to confirm low levels of black custom that had not altered significantly because of the boycott call.

A city centre liquor store manager claimed that its black custom was insubstantial and a boycott would not affect business, but referred the monitor to the Durban office. It painted a different picture saying that 30% of customers were black and turnover was down. This was attributed, however, to an economic downturn. A furniture store spokesman said that "blacks are too intelligent to join the boycott" and that he expected improved business because of damage to private property as a result of unrest. McNamees, another furniture store, declined to comment.

Contacted four times, Game, known to have substantial black custom, provided no comment. OK Bazaars behaved likewise, refusing to say anything without head office permission. Woolworths also failed to produce anyone with sufficient authority to comment, but cashiers volunteered the information that black shoppers were still using the store and there was no noticeable drop in takings. However, two large department stores, The Hub and John

Orr's, did report a drop in the number of black customers and purchases but preferred to attribute this to depressed economic conditions. One manager expressed bewilderment at the boycott, arguing that business had no influence over government.<sup>5</sup> A spokesperson for The Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) made the point that white traders and consumers had considerable political power.

Observation of the city centre on Monday 26 August at 12.30 pm provided no visible evidence that a boycott was in force. Numerous black shoppers walked in and out of stores in Church and Longmarket (Langalibalele) streets between Commercial (Albert Luthuli) Road and Chapel (Peter Kerchhoff) Street with parcels and bags. Tearooms and bakeries were also well populated, but many of these customers would have been purchasing on behalf of nearby offices. A rough count on the same day around noon produced 60 black shoppers at OK Bazaars, 20 at Woolworths, 15 at CNA and 12 at The Hub.

The most informative shopkeepers were from the Indian sector of the business district. A furniture store manager supported a short boycott in sympathy with the BTR-Sarmcol strikers, but felt it ran the danger of earning them resentment. He did not expect the boycott to affect his trade, a feeling confirmed at the end of August. A cash-and-carry store owner working on six months account expressed similar opinions and felt that by mid-month there was a loss of interest in the strike. However, he did report quieter business over the second half of the month, which he attributed to the economic slump. Press reports suggested that the

business of supermarkets in this part of Church Street had increased by 25% on average.<sup>6</sup>

The overall impression was that the consumer boycott call had not been widely heeded in Pietermaritzburg, although the edginess of business spokespeople suggested that the situation might be more complicated. Casual enquiries suggested some resentment amongst black people that their shopping habits were under scrutiny, a certain level of shopping by whites for blacks, and a rumour that liquor store purchases were not questioned. Press reports suggested that black-owned township businesses were taking advantage of the situation after taxis entering Imbali were subject to searches by youths. They were disowned by The Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU), but on 23 August a bus was torched at Mpophomeni after some passengers refused to have their bags inspected.<sup>7</sup>

The historical role of consumer boycotts has not been addressed in great depth even though they date back to the heyday of the South African Congress of Trade Unions in the 1950s. A revival was successfully instigated by the South African Council on Sport (SACOS) in the late 1970s against Simba Quix (potato chips) after sponsorship for non-racial school sport had been refused; and this was followed by the famous Fattis and Monis (pasta) and Wilson Rowntree (confectionery) boycotts in 1979 and 1981. The Black Christmas campaign of 1984 was followed by a series of consumer boycotts in the Eastern Cape, and then by the BTR-Sarmcol action.

In general, bad publicity was more of a threat than financial loss for larger

companies, although small retailers were highly vulnerable.<sup>8</sup> While township geography and the dominance of commuter transport by buses made consumer boycotts of white businesses an apparently promising tactic, it is clear that enforcement was not easy. Those same factors made security force counter-action feasible while boycott enforcers were highly visible and vulnerable to both police and angry members of the public.<sup>9</sup>

It is probable that the BTR-Sarmcol consumer boycott had limited impact in a political sense except to generate publicity that kept the industrial dispute in the public consciousness. Sustaining a broad campaign over a wide area in pursuit of very specific demands was inevitably difficult and focus and cohesion appear to have succumbed to more nebulous, general objectives.<sup>10</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 The DSRG was headed by Norman Bromberger and staffed by Yunus Carrim and Yusuf

Bhamjee. The monitors in this particular case were Marie Dyer, Fidela Fouché, Christopher Merrett, Pat Merrett, Leonie Prozesky and Pessa Weinberg, which suggests an organised link between the DSRG and Black Sash.

- 2 Peter Kerchhoff, "The role of the churches" in *Hope Beyond Apartheid: The Peter Kerchhoff Years of PACSA* edited by Lou Levine (Pietermaritzburg: Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness, 2002), 166–167.
- 3 Strini Moodley, "Boycott of city's white businesses begins today" *Natal Witness* 15 August 1985.
- 4 Zodwa Maseko, "Consumer boycott: mixed reaction", *Echo* 22 August 1985.
- 5 The press experienced the same problem in eliciting information.
- 6 Strini Moodley, "Boycott may spread to other Natal shops" *Natal Witness* 22 August 1985.
- 7 *Natal Witness* 27 August 1985.
- 8 Steven Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions, 1970–1984* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), 199–200.
- 9 Glenn Moss, "Stay-aways: mass strike or demonstration?" *Work in Progress* 25 (1983), 34.
- 10 Gail M. Gerhart and Clive L. Glaser, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882–1990: Challenge and Victory, 1980–1990* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013; v.6), 84–86, 411.

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## THE "DAWN OF VICTORY"

*John Deane writes:*

**S**EVENTY years ago, in 1945, the Second World War came to an end. In the previous year, after the D-Day landings in Normandy and the Americans' success at Okinawa, it was clear that the defeat of Germany and Japan was assured, even if not imminent.

In South Africa the Governor-General's War Fund existed to give additional help to those whose lives had been most severely affected by the war.

Chief among those were servicemen who had returned badly disabled, and the dependants of those who had died. There was a huge national campaign to increase the size of the fund, and that included the staging of "Dawn of Victory" Cavalcades in various parts of the country. From the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1944 the Cavalcade for Pietermaritzburg, the Midlands and Northern Districts was held in the city's Alexandra Park. It was the scene of



#### **THE WORK OF NATAL SCHOLARS.**

The work of pupils from 30 schools forms one of the most interesting exhibits at Cavalcade. Original pictures, designs and craftwork are represented in the Art section and the display of handicrafts shows work done by boys from seven to 15 years. Needlework by scholars is also on view and there is a fine selection of toys. Articles are not for sale and the primary purpose of the exhibit is to give a representative idea of the work of Natal scholars.

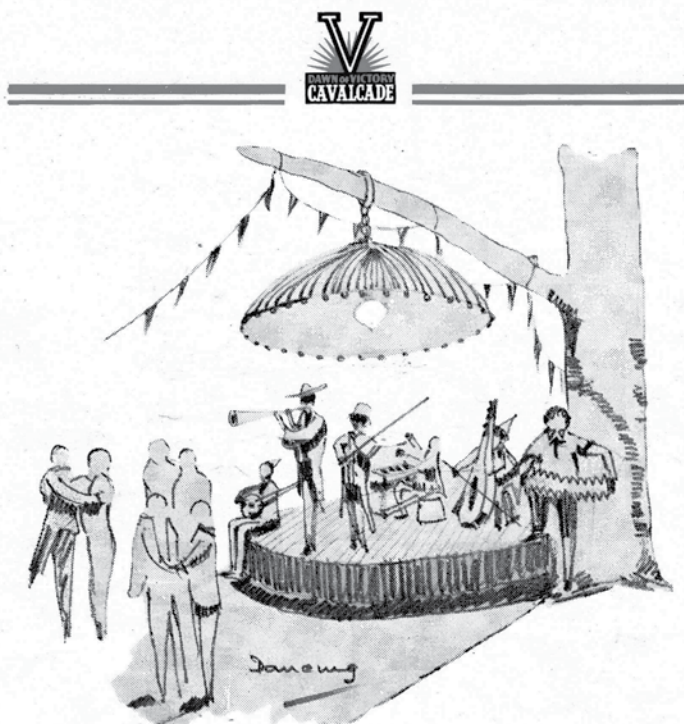
#### **INFORMATION BUREAU.**

Visitors to Cavalcade can have all their questions answered at the Information Bureau directly opposite the Croquet Club entrance to the grounds. Girl Guides will be in attendance.

displays and entertainments on a scale not seen during the preceding years of anxiety and austerity. Recently a 32-page souvenir programme of the event was discovered among old papers by a Pietermaritzburg resident, providing interesting details of the memorable event.

On the first two pages is a programme of the afternoon and evening events on the Oval itself: the SA Police Band, the Caledonian Pipe Band, a school choir, girls' and boys' PT displays, displays by the city's dance schools, a boxing tournament, a Zulu war dance, gymnastic display by the YMCA.





#### **SOFT LIGHTS AND SWEET MUSIC.**

A popular feature of Cavalcade is the two open-air dance floors, one attached to the Sugar exhibit and the other part of the "Romance of Leather." Excellent bands play gay music during the evenings and cabaret entertainments add to the fun.

#### **OLD BILL AND 'ERBERT.**

The Moths and B.E.S.L. have combined their efforts for Cavalcade and have devised a novel presentation of a trench scene complete with sniping and observation posts, sap heads and souvenirs of both World Wars.

The famous Bairnsfather character Old Bill and his half section 'Erbert are present and there is a replica of a dug-out in the last war. The trenches are illuminated, and are faithful replicas of the conditions in the 1914-1918 conflict.

Then there is a full-page portrait of the Fund's Acting President, the Rt Hon. N.J. de Wet, who was the "Officer Administering the Government" after the death of the Governor-General, Sir Patrick Duncan, in 1943. Then follow brief appeals for support of the fund by the Administrator of Natal,

the Hon. George Heaton Nicholls, the Mayor of Pietermaritzburg, Mrs Eleanor Russell, and Major-General Evered Poole, CB, DSO, Officer Commanding the Sixth South African Armoured Division. A portrait of the strikingly handsome 42-year-old general accompanied his message. The

introductory pages conclude with two optimistic and encouraging messages datelined "Italy, August 20", from an anonymous South African airman and soldier. "[On our return] many of us will have to start anew, and we will need all the assistance you can give us, but remember that in helping us you are helping to build a new and better South Africa." "The Rome-Florence campaign has been the best we South Africans have fought in. Brisk, purposeful, full of interest. More important still, we have found ourselves at last completely superior to the Germans in men, equipment, fire power and air strength. The Hun star is setting. We shall continue the fight until it sinks never to rise again."

The various attractions that awaited visitors are then described, each with a black-and-white "artist's impression" sketch. They included the main gateway, art and craftwork from the schools, places where refreshments could be bought, the St John's Ambulance and the Red Cross, a MOTH and BESL reconstruction of a First World War trench in Flanders, the History of Natal Sugar, Sheepskins for Sailors, exhibitions by the railways and the police, a temporary post office, an information bureau, an open-air dance floor, a Netherlands display with an almost full-size Dutch windmill, a Norwegian display, a provincial Roads Department exhibit, a funfair/amusement park, and many more. The site plan of the Oval and adjacent areas (by Ernest Rose MIA, who possibly also did the sketches)

shows 39 different stalls, exhibits or facilities. A description of the local leather industry's exhibit is accompanied by an advertisement stating "Leather for almost 3 000 000 pairs of army boots has been produced by the Sutherlands Tannery." For some reason the advertised Maze was not built, to the great disappointment of some schoolboys who had read Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* and thought they would be able to do better than Harris.

The souvenir programme itself, quite a lavish publication by wartime standards, was donated by the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Printing, but there is no indication of how much visitors paid for it. Advertisements – ten full-page and one half-page – make up about a third of the souvenir booklet, and clearly the advertisers had made considerable contributions to the Governor-General's War Fund. Some of the brands and firms advertised are still with us today – Sunlight Soap, Trotter's Jelly, Eddels Shoes, Baynesfield meat products – while others have long since disappeared. There is only one cigarette advertisement, and it has pride of place on the back cover: "Smoke 'C to C' for Quality. Enjoyed by the Million. Cape to Cairo."

The "Dawn of Victory" Cavalcade was probably the most extensive public display Pietermaritzburg had seen since 1939, and it seemed to hold out the promise of better times to come.

## EARLY EUROPEAN SETTLER HOMES IN KWAZULU-NATAL

*Val Ward writes:*

OVER the past few years I have read diaries and memoirs of the mid- to late 19<sup>th</sup> century. I began noting how the settlers had built their homes with what was available to them.

Franco Frescura in his *Rural Shelter in Southern Africa* shows how house forms underwent several distinct stages – from the earliest cave dwelling, through beehive, to beehive on cylinder, to cone on cylinder and eventually to houses with corners and hip roofs. This evolution involved the introduction of new materials and new building technologies. So it was not surprising that when European settlers arrived in KwaZulu-Natal they frequently started off with a beehive structure – a wattle<sup>1</sup> frame covered in thatch. This was followed by either a wattle-and-daub<sup>2</sup> house with thatched roof, or unbaked brick house and eventually stone and/or bricks, either home-made or from the brickworks, and iron sheeting. Availability of building materials was important. A dressed sandstone house would not have been built where sandstone was absent.

G.H. Mason, who arrived in Durban in July 1850 on the *Henrietta*, built his first shelter on the Vley (Pine Street/Winston Road area) in Pietermaritzburg. He cut timbers from the forest across the stream and made a frame onto which he nailed his tent. He lined the shelter with “common white calico”. Here he lived with his brother while they built their house with little help.

For their more substantial home, they quarried stone from across the

stream and carried it to the site in a home-made sling made from a box on two poles. It was such a laborious task that they decided to use stone for the foundations only. Intending to make the walls with mud bricks, they went to the brickworks to learn how to make bricks. The brickworks lent them moulds. Clay, mined near the bottom of Town Hill, they carried to their building site where they made the bricks. Embarrassed at trampling the mud themselves, they did this task under the cover of darkness. Soon they found a local man who was prepared to trample the clay. With experience, the Mason brothers were able to make 700 bricks a day. The walls were built of green mud bricks to a height of 12 feet, wood-framed windows and doors being set in as the walls were built. A roof frame was made, and placed on the walls. Verandahs, supported by thick posts, were added back and front to protect the green bricks from rain. The roof was thatched.

G.H. Mason stayed in Natal for two years, returned to England, and eventually returned to Natal as a clergyman.

Isabella Giles, in her diary written over two decades, wrote about moving to the farm *Blaauwkrans*, near Bushman’s River (now Estcourt), where they took occupation of a Dutch house in July 1863. Later she called it an “ugly Dutch house”. She did not describe its form, but she did mention the frequent fixing and sealing of the floors. Presumably these were dung floors.

Marianne Faure travelled with her husband Revd Faure from



Pietermaritzburg to Ladysmith and back in 1853. En route the party stayed overnight at Boer homes. She described Boer houses in her account of her first African excursion in 1853.<sup>3</sup> “Most Boers live in houses made of wood, plastered with clay, as when they first came to the Colony.” Presumably this was wattle and daub construction. There was a front door and the front room was the living room. Usually there were two bedrooms at the back where several generations slept. If there were windows they were small, and had wooden shutters as there was no glass. Except for the front door, doorways were closed with a curtain. Roofs were thatched and there was no ceiling. If there was a ceiling, it was made of timber boarding. This type of construction frequently gave way to brick or stone-built homes.

Robert Ralfe Senior, with his sons including Robert Junior, on arrival in Byrne in 1850 had a Zulu hut built, divided into three compartments. Later they engaged a man to help build a house. They made shuttering with 12-inch planks into which was placed mud mixed with dry grass to a height of 18 inches. Into this they stuck timber uprights, taken from the nearby bush, which they then wattled. Subsequently mud was “thrown on” to the wattling. When this wattle-and-daub wall reached a height of eight feet, a wooden roof frame was put on and this was thatched. The roof frame would have been made separately and lifted onto the wall much like today. I think the house might have been four-sided. When Mr Moreland, the settler agent, visited the Byrne valley in 1852, he wrote that the Ralfes had erected a substantial house and out-buildings on their town allotment. Mrs Ralfe

told Moreland that they had lived in a “common canvas tent” until the house was built.

When the Ralfes moved to Bushman’s River area, Robert Ralfe Junior built a turf- or sod-house. Later he built a house using unburnt bricks for Mr F.W. Moor. On his own farm *Heavitree* he built a “nice little stone room” in which he lived occasionally. His livestock had stone-built sheds. In 1864 Robert Junior built a house with three rooms – a sitting room, a bedroom and a kitchen – to which he took his bride, Emily Wilkes of *Mielietuin*. The house had a thatch roof, sod walls and yellowwood from the Karkloof. Isabella Giles, and Robert’s mother Mrs Moor, visited the house and in her journal Isabella Giles described it as “a bachelor’s establishment”. Robert Jnr records that he was grateful to his sister Annabella (the young Mrs Moor) for making it “very nice” for the bridal couple. Subsequently this house at *Heavitree* was given a calico ceiling and an iron roof was placed over the thatch.

At his brother William Ralfe’s farm *Knowle* they built a cottage with two rooms as well as a dwelling house with two bedrooms and four verandah rooms. This house had large, deep verandahs at front and back, with a kitchen at the back.

When Robert Ralfe Jnr moved to Bethlehem, Orange Free State, to set up a trading store he built a six-roomed wood-and-iron house with a kitchen. It measured “36 × 12 feet at the front and 12 or 14 feet at the back”, the latter divided for an office store and a bedroom for his clerk. Robert Ralfe Junior’s reminiscences included descriptions of most evolutions in home-building technology.

In 1852 Moreland, the settler agent, visited Richmond, Byrne and Illovo where he interviewed settlers who had arrived in mid-1850. Mr G.M. McCleod had built a neat cottage composed of two capacious rooms shaded by a verandah in front. William Jefferies had built a large house of bricks, made on the spot by himself, all completed except windows. Henry Tarboton had erected about the “best house in the neighbourhood, 36 feet by 15 feet”, with verandahs still under construction. Joseph Landers’ house of unburnt brick and outbuildings was in the course of construction. William Watson, who lost everything in the wreck of the *Minerva*, had a wooden house 30 x 15 feet built with a well-thatched roof as well as a kitchen, piggeries and other outbuildings.

John Baseley, who was the first settler in Richmond, where he pitched a tent in 1850, had by 1852 substantial stone buildings – a house with a large cellar, a dairy, a smith’s forge, a joiner’s shop, a large cattle kraal, stable etc. James Weir erected a pretty little cottage, of two rooms with a kitchen and pantry, on his country land.

At Illovo Anthony Pigg had, in the 18 months since his arrival in 1850, built a little cottage of two rooms, a cook-house and workshop, with outbuildings for pigs, calves and other stock in the village. On their country farm land they had built a similar house. Both Robert Aitken and Henry Newland intended moving to their country farms so had not built houses. Robert Aitken was living in “kafir” huts. Ambrose Voss had a mud-walled cottage, a cow shed and stable under one roof, and piggeries. John Crouch immediately on arrival built a grass hut and then erected a mud-walled

cottage and kitchen – the clay being mixed with cut grass to strengthen the walls. He did not consider it a lasting structure unless the walls were protected from the weather. Isaac Gordon, who also arrived with nothing 18 months previously, hoped to have a substantial house before long.

Dobie, a Scotsman who came to Natal from Australia to farm sheep, also recorded different building techniques. During his travels in 1862 to 1866 in the Natal midlands and the Eastern Cape he remarked that a Mr Armstrong’s house was in transition from thatch to iron roofing. At Mzimkhulu he visited a wattle-and-daub hut belonging to Joseph E. Hancock. The nearby mission houses were wattle and daub with “round roofs” and square doors, while in Queenstown the farmers had stone houses, stone fences and stone stock enclosures. Obviously there was a lot of stone about.

Back in the midlands of Natal, at Fort Nottingham foundations were made of sandstone while upper walls were of sun-dried bricks and roofs were thatched. The chimney did not go through the roof and windows were unglazed. At *The Dargle*, Fannin’s first house was made of sods.

Cow dung was used for plastering while a mixture of loam and fresh cow dung was used to finish off the plaster and for smearing floors. Apparently this treatment killed fleas and kept dust down. On his return from the Eastern Cape, Dobie was amazed to find locals papering the walls (presumably inside walls) of his corrugated galvanised iron wool-shed. In his absence, a lightning conductor had been installed on his roof to protect the house against a strike. He did not record what constituted the lightning conductor.

Dobie recorded seeing Africans carrying a hut frame on their shoulders – probably made where the material was harvested and then carried to the homestead.<sup>4</sup>

However inadequate, these few instances show how building methods changed over time in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Natal midlands, and how some remained the same.

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Spencer, Shelagh. File: *Natal Witness* cuttings on Moreland's visit to Richmond and Byrne, 1852.

#### NOTES

- 1 Interwoven twigs, not necessarily of the Australian *Acacia* sp., locally known as "wattle".
- 2 Interwoven branchlet structure covered with mud or clay.
- 3 The diary of Marianne Faure, *Mijne eerste Afrikaansche excursie*, is housed in the William Cullen Library of Witwatersrand University. Ref: A35 M (A) Faure. In the 1950s the diary, in an exercise book, was translated into English by her great-granddaughter Anna Maria Entrop-Le Poole. In 1987 I read a copy of this English translation, *My first African excursion*.
- 4 Almost a century and a half later while I was visiting Dundee in 2009, I saw, for sale, a silk-screened wall-hanging, made by an African. This showed a group of Africans carrying a hut-frame on their shoulders.

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#### ERGATES UNVEILED?

*Val Ward has been playing Sherlock Holmes ...*

FOR years I have puzzled about "Ergates". I realised it was a pseudonym and wondered who it was that hid behind a pen-name and what that pen-name meant. I tried E.R. Gates. I tried anagramming it. I tried reversing the letters but failed to find the author. At dinner one evening I asked my guest Michael Lambert what, if anything, Ergates meant. He wrestled with my pronunciation and then decided that Ergates meant "farmer", "worker". Later he confirmed this having consulted a Greek dictionary.

My first encounter with Ergates was a reference to an article on stock-raids published in the *Agricultural Journal and Mining Record* of 1905. Then I found another reference while searching for other material in a 1904 volume of the journal. This led to searching all the volumes of the journal for "Ergates" material. It dawned on me that these articles were probably written by a farmer. I felt, too, that they might have been "fillers" in a thin monthly volume of the publication. Perhaps they had been written by the

editor. The name of the editor was not included in the volumes from 1898 to 1902 but in Volume 6 of 1903 the editor was named as H. Ryle Shaw for the first time.

H.R. Shaw appears in the *Natal Almanac* of 1905 as living at Corylton, Winterskloof, as belonging to the Judges' Association of the Natal Agricultural Society and as Editor of the *Agricultural Journal*. Since he was so active in the Agricultural Society he may well have been a farmer. Was he also "Ergates"? My hopes were dashed when I found in the *Natal Who's Who?* of 1906 that H. Ryle Shaw of Corylton, Kloof had been educated in London, Holland and France before becoming an engineer in Germany. He was also a military man. There was no sign of his being a farmer. Then in 1874 he came to Natal and bought the farm Carshalton at Mooi River but dashed off to Barberton for the gold mining and when that rush ended he went to Johannesburg where he became mine manager for the Salisbury Mine. He returned to Natal and became editor of the *Times of Natal*, published from 1899-1912. He started the *Agricultural Journal and Mining Record* in 1898. It was first published in March 1899 as Volume 1. It then became the *Natal Agricultural Journal and Mining Record* in 1905 with Volume 8 and two years later, in October 1907, Volume 10, it was shortened to *Natal Agricultural Journal*.

Charles Barter's pen-name, "Hippias", was acknowledged in Volume 3 (1901) of the *Agricultural Journal and Mining Record*. Yet there is no mention in the editorial, in the same volume, of the name or pseudonym of the author of the interviews to be included in the journal thenceforth. Ergates turned out to be the interviewer, and he ranged far and wide from Port Shepstone in the south to Newcastle in the north. In over 80 articles between 1901 and 1907 he chatted to farmers about fruit problems, cane growing, "old times", stock-farming, Bushman raids, winter feed, farm machinery, soils, poultry, Mariannhill Monastery, "native drugs", cold storage and more. The farmers he interviewed included names still well-known in KwaZulu-Natal today. Since H. Ryle Shaw ceased to be editor at the same time the published interviews by Ergates stopped, I presume they were one and the same person. Were they?

H. Ryle Shaw seems to have been a crusty old colonist as far as officialdom was concerned. In 1899 he fought over his salary, which was £300 a year when he thought the original estimate for the editor's salary was £400. Later, in 1908 when his case against the Colonial Government for wrongful retrenchment was settled, to his satisfaction, he said he had expected £450 pa at the time he left the service in May 1907.

## CERAMICIST HONOURED

*Moray Comrie writes:*

THE University of KwaZulu-Natal has this year conferred an honorary doctorate on ceramicist and entrepreneur Fée Halsted-Berning, widely known for the work being done at her Ardmore studios. First established some 30 years ago on Ardmore Farm in the Winterton area where Ms Halsted-Berning lived after graduating from the University of Natal, the much-enlarged studios, together with a selling gallery and museum, are now situated in the Caversham Valley in the Natal Midlands.

Ardmore is internationally known for the remarkable ceramic pieces produced there, and this reputation has made the studio, together with its selling gallery and museum, an attraction for art loving tourists from all parts of the world. Typical Ardmore pieces are often utilitarian vessels – jugs, bowls, pots and so on – embellished with an array of creatures sculpted in clay and then decorated with complex designs in vivid colours.

Ms Halsted-Berning has herself remarked that the idea of adding moulded clay animals came to her as a way of covering unwanted cracks in the ceramic tiles that she would make, and Professor Ian Calder of the university's Centre for Visual Arts has observed that there were hints of her future work at Ardmore in her student production. He has pointed to a piece still on display in the UKZN ceramics studio as an illustration of this.



Ardmore pieces emerge from an unusual combination of artistic creativity, innovative technical skill, entrepreneurial enterprise and constructive philanthropy. Flowing from her award-winning collaboration with Bonnie Ntshalintshali, daughter of the housekeeper at Ardmore Farm, and profoundly concerned about the impact of HIV/Aids (which has taken the lives of Ms Ntshalintshali and many other Ardmore artists and workers) Fée Halsted-Berning has taken in many community members and equipped them with both the knowledge to protect their health and the skills to make the ceramic pieces. While she retains oversight of the themes to be developed and the overall design of the pieces made, the artists working in the studio influence those decisions and express their individuality in the decoration of the vessels.

In recent years Ms Halsted-Berning has extended the range of Ardmore's output to include printed fabrics of high quality, further increasing the value of the enterprise and its contribution to the local economy. The university's award of the honorary doctorate was made with the following citation:

Ceramicist Fée Halsted-Berning's contribution in nurturing artists in rural KwaZulu-Natal through Ardmore Ceramic Art has been hailed throughout the international arts world as a triumph of creativity and empowerment over

poverty, disease and lack of formal education. This recognition has enriched the communities from which the artists come, economically as well as through education, opportunity, and pride and dignity in their work. As part of a commitment to uplifting local artists, the Ardmore Excellence Fund was established in 1998 to help cover medical expenses for Ardmore artists suffering from HIV/AIDS and also to serve as an educational programme on the prevention of HIV.

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## A COMMEMORATIVE BOOKLET

*John Deane writes:*

IT is difficult to refer to this commemorative booklet about Italian prisoners-of-war in South Africa in the 1940s by name, as the words on the cover are a dedication rather than a title. The words "Alla Madonna della divina grazia. To Our Lady of divine grace" are accompanied by the figures "1944 70 2014" and two photographs, indicating that the publication marks the seventieth anniversary of the stone church, bearing that same inscription above its door, which Italian prisoners-of-war built in their camp on the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg. (cf. *Natalia* 18 article "Italians in Pietermaritzburg", *Natalia* 39 article "From metropolis to village" and *Natalia* 39 Notes and Queries item "Italian graves in Pietermaritzburg".)

The compiler of the booklet, Mrs Ilona Osso-Fairbrother, is the daughter of one of the 870 Italian prisoners-of-war who remained in South Africa or returned here after the Second World

War. In her Foreword she mentions her regret that she did not question her father more closely about his experiences during the war years.

Fifty-nine of the booklet's 65 pages are a facsimile Italian text of the 1944 booklet *In Attesa* and an English translation of it ("While waiting") by Milvia Verolini. It describes in some detail the life of the prisoners-of-war in the Pietermaritzburg camp, their sports and pastimes and the facilities in the camp. But the main focus is on the building of the church and its dedication in March 1944 by the papal delegate in South Africa, Archbishop Van Gilswijk. Surprisingly, since it was produced in wartime and in a prisoner-of-war camp, the text is accompanied by a number of photographs of camp buildings and activities. The compiler and translator deserve appreciation, not only for making this rare publication more widely known, but also for



making it accessible to those who cannot read Italian.

Apart from the reproduction of *In Attesa*, this booklet contains a brief history of the church building itself – from its completion, through years of neglect, dilapidation and vandalism, to a first and then a second restoration, to its present state as a well-tended place of worship in suburban Pietermaritzburg. One page tells the story of the altarpiece, a copy of Raphael's "Madonna of the Goldfinch", painted by one of the prisoners. There is also a page devoted to the sinking of the troopship *Nova Scotia* off the Natal coast by a German U-boat in November 1942. The death toll in that disaster included 650 Italian civilian internees being brought from Egypt to South Africa. There is a section dealing with the Zonderwater POW camp in the

Transvaal where Italian prisoners were also held, and there is reference to the Zonderwater Block Ex-Prisoners of War Association under the jurisdiction of the Italian Ministry of Defence, and to the graves of those who died while in captivity here. The Zonderwater prisoners also compiled a commemorative booklet, and its Foreword, written by the humane and popular Camp Commandant Col. H.F. Prinsloo, is reproduced.

Its compiler hopes this booklet will be of particular interest and value to South Africans of Italian descent, and to their connections in Italy. Others wishing to know more about the war years in South Africa will also find it a useful source of information. It is privately published: fairbrosso@wessa.co.za . 65pp. illus. R100.

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### **"SHE SAVED NATAL IN 1842": FROM "MAN O' WAR" TO HISTORIAN'S DESK. THE STRANGE FATE OF THE TIMBERS OF HMS SOUTHAMPTON**

*Graham Dominy writes:*

A RECENT episode of the popular TV programme, "The Antiques Roadshow", shown on South Africa's main satellite television channel, featured a curious item that piqued my interest. It was a wooden column, made from a large baulk of timber from Admiral Nelson's famous flagship, HMS *Victory*. The show's expert remarked that about a century ago, the manufacture of furniture and mementoes from the timber of scrapped and obsolete warships was very popular and initiated a fashion which spread across the then British Empire.

This note has its origins in a meandering conversation on our verandah looking across Pretoria to the Union Buildings, glowing mellow in the summer evening light. Our guest was visiting historian, Hugh Macmillan, who was in South Africa to promote his history of the ANC in exile in Zambia entitled, *The Lusaka Years 1963-1994*. We were discussing historical writing in general and Hugh idly remarked that his late father, Professor W.H. Macmillan, author of *Cape Colour Question* (1927) and *Bantu, Boer and Briton: The Making of the South African Native Problem*

(1929), had written his books while seated at a desk which had affixed to it a brass plaque stating, “She saved Natal in 1842”. Hugh added that the desk still stood in his study in Oxford and was made from the oak timbers of HMS *Southampton*.

This prompted Hugh and me to undertake a little research and I must thank Hugh for visiting the Bodleian library and tracing and perusing the 1912 catalogue of ship-breakers, Messrs Hughes, Bolckow & Co. Ltd.

First, the ship of war: HMS *Southampton* was built in 1820, in the dying days of sail as marine propulsion, a decade or two before iron, steel and steam changed ocean fighting and ocean travel for ever. She carried 60 cannons and was classed as a warship of the “fourth rate”. This means she would have been a little too small to have been effective in Nelson’s line of battle, but was large and imposing enough to serve as a flagship on a colonial station.

This became her main duty and she served in the East Indies for several years. There was a brief sojourn in the North Sea in the early 1830s, during which she was badly damaged after being struck by lightning. After extensive repairs she sailed to join the Cape Squadron at Simonstown in 1841, pausing *en route* to visit various ports in South America. Her commander when she arrived at the Cape, was Captain Stephen Fremantle (fifth son of Sir Thomas Fremantle, one of Nelson’s captains at Trafalgar). Stephen was also the younger brother of Captain Charles Fremantle, who annexed Western Australia to the empire in 1829.



In June 1842, *Southampton* was despatched in haste to Natal after Dick King and Ndongeni’s frantic ride to Grahamstown to obtain reinforcements to rescue Captain Thomas Smith and lift the siege by Andries Pretorius and the Voortrekkers of the British encampment now known as the “Old Fort”.

When *Southampton* arrived off Port Natal, she fired a few impressive broadsides into the sand dunes on the Point and into the base of the Bluff. The bombardment was to cover the landing of the reinforcements from the schooner *Conch*. The boats crossed the bar and the troops of the 25<sup>th</sup> Regiment landed on the inland side of the Point to pursue the retreating Trekkers and lift the siege of Captain Smith’s camp.

The rest of HMS *Southampton*'s lengthy career was relatively undistinguished, although she played an active role in anti-slave trade patrols in the early 1850s. However, it seems that the only time she fired her guns in anger was in 1842, at Port Natal. Eventually, after years of anchored service as an accommodation ship and after being downgraded to a hulk, she was sold for scrap in 1912.

Second, the hulk: This was a case of enterprising re-purposing and recycling. The hulk of the *Southampton* was sold to Britain's leading ship-breaking yard, Messrs Hughes, Bolckow & Co. Ltd, based at Blyth in Northumberland. The company had been formed in 1911, to "scrap" – today we would say "recycle" – obsolete ships from the vast Victorian Royal Navy. It seems that HMS *Southampton* was their first Admiralty commission. Their wharf was known as "Battleship Wharf" and was still in use at the end of the Cold War when some submarines of the Soviet navy were broken up there.

The ship breakers not only broke up old ships, but they had a good (and opportunistic) eye for business. The material from the hulks was reused (and marketed) in innovative ways. The recycling of HMS *Southampton* pioneered approaches they took with many a ship over the next few decades.

The seasoned teak of the *Southampton* was ideal for the manufacture of

indoor and outdoor furniture by master craftsmen. Hughes and Bolckow's promotional literature lauded the qualities of the seasoned teak and played on patriotic and sentimental feelings, encouraging buyers to acquire "a bit of old British sentiment", as the pieces have a "distinction quite of their own". Besides, the seasoned wood made the items of furniture impervious to weather.

It seems that Hughes and Bolckow also specifically aimed their propaganda regarding the timbers of the *Southampton* at the South African market, as the catalogue at the Bodleian refers to a South African catalogue, which I have not yet been able to trace. Not only has Hugh Macmillan inherited his father's desk (which has travelled back to England from South Africa), but the Durban Local History Museum has a wooden bench bearing a plaque indicating that it, too, was made from the timber of the ship that "saved Natal".

The desk supported the historical research and writing of one of South Africa's earliest and foremost "liberal" historians in the 1920s, and Hugh was still using it in his Oxford study when he published the history of the ANC in Zambia in 2013. This is just over a century since the old ship was turned into furniture and seven years short of two centuries since trees felled during the reign of King George IV were fashioned into a warship.

## STATUES OF QUEEN VICTORIA<sup>1</sup>

by Adrian Koopman

FROM her plinth in front of the Legislative Buildings in Pietermaritzburg, Queen Victoria gazes serenely over the speeding taxis whizzing just under her feet in Langalibalele Street. In Farewell Square, Durban, another Queen Victoria gazes just as serenely at the Post Office Building, originally the Town Hall of Durban. The traffic at her feet is a lot quieter, consisting mainly of pigeons gathered together to feed on the bread crumbs thrown by passers by.

These two Victoria statues are two of six such statues in South Africa, the others being in Cape Town, Kimberley, King William's Town and Port Elizabeth. There are, however, well over 100 statues of Queen Victoria scattered around the world, with 60 of them in the United Kingdom alone, and the others in various parts of the erstwhile British Empire. Smaller places like Jersey, Gibraltar and Malta only have one statue each, but Canada and Australia boast 10 statues each. There are seven in London alone, not counting the two at Windsor.

The two KwaZulu-Natal statues show Queen Victoria in her most characteristic pose: standing, while holding orb and sceptre. Some of the other statues around the world show her seated on a throne or mounted on a horse. The two statues in Pietermaritzburg and Durban are mounted on a simple plinth but statues of Queen Victoria can be part of enormous and complex monuments, like the Imperial Monument in front of Buckingham Palace, or Hampton's 1906 monument in Lancaster, England, described as follows:



*Statue of Queen Victoria, Pietermaritzburg*

The Queen Victoria Monument in Lancaster displays a sculpture of the Queen guarded by four monumental lions; beneath them are four allegories to freedom, wisdom, truth and justice, complete with a generous collection of putti<sup>2</sup> and four bas-relief friezes of fifty-three eminent Victorians, two of whom were women.<sup>3</sup>

Queen Victoria was born in 1819, ascended the throne in 1837, celebrated her golden jubilee in 1887 and her diamond jubilee in 1897, and died in 1901. A time-line of the hundred and more statues erected in her honour shows the



*Statue of Queen Victoria, Durban*

earliest being erected in 1837 (the honour going to Edinburgh), and the latest erected in London in 2007. The timeline shows two distinct periods of statue erection, one from 1887 to 1892, all celebrating her golden jubilee, and then another period of even greater activity from 1897 to 1906 where it is difficult to tell whether the statues were erected to celebrate the diamond jubilee or to mark Queen Victoria's death and the end of her long reign. It should be noted that it often took quite some time between the decision to erect a statue and its ac-

tual erection. The Nelson Mandela Bay Metro website says of the Port Elizabeth statue that a movement to raise money for the statue was started in 1897, but it was only completed and unveiled in 1903.<sup>4</sup> The renowned British sculptor E. Roscoe Mullins was commissioned to sculpt the statue, which is made of Sicilian marble. Mullins was also the sculptor of the Queen Victoria statues in Cape Town and Pietermaritzburg. Cape Town's statue was unveiled in 1903, and the Pietermaritzburg statue, commemorating the golden jubilee, in 1887 (good planning by the city fathers there!). The date of the unveiling of the Durban statue is unclear. The inscription on the plinth reads:

VICTORIA  
QUEEN AND EMPRESS  
THIS STATUE WAS ERECTED  
BY THE CITIZENS OF DURBAN  
TO COMMEMORATE  
THE SIXTIETH YEAR  
OF THE GLORIOUS REIGN OF  
OUR BELOVED SOVEREIGN.  
A.D. 1837 A.D. 1897

The inscription on the plinth of the Pietermaritzburg statue is far more laconic. It simply reads

VICTORIA  
QUEEN-EMPRESS  
20 JUNE 1887

Given that the Pietermaritzburg statue was erected well before the Durban one, it is possible that the Durban statue committee inspected the Pietermaritzburg statue, found the inscription much too brief and less than enthusiastic, and felt they could do far better.

Many of the statues around the world are placed in parks and squares with



appropriate names, such as Victoria Square (Birmingham, London, Montreal, Adelaide, among others), Queen Victoria Square (Ballarat), Queen's Square (Sydney), Victoria Gardens (Brighton), Queen Victoria Gardens (Melbourne), Queen's Gardens (Brisbane, Dunedin) and many more similarly named sites. In Valletta, Malta, however, the queen sits less comfortably in Republic Square. There is no appropriately named square or garden for the Pietermaritzburg statue, and in Durban the statue is one of several in Farewell Square, named after an early citizen of Durban. One wonders in the cases of the statues in the various Victoria Parks, Square and Gardens, whether the square (garden, park) was first named after Queen Victoria, and then the city fathers felt they needed a statue of the queen to justify the name, or whether the statue was acquired first, and officialdom changed the name of the location to suit the statue.

As we saw above, the Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Pietermaritzburg statues are all ascribed to British sculptor E. Roscoe Mullins. I have not, however, been able to ascertain the sculptor of the Durban statue. It is noteworthy that no less than 41 different sculptors between them created the hundred and more statues of Queen Victoria found around the world, some of them creating more than one statue. Sir George Frampton (1860-1928) was responsible for seven statues, as was Francis John Williamson (1833-1920). Charles Bell Birch (1832-1893) was the sculptor of five statues of Queen Victoria, and Sir Thomas Brock (1847-1922) was responsible for a splendid total of 10 statues. Many of the sculptors were knighted for their services to the arts. It was Sir Thomas Brock who

created the imposing Imperial Victoria Memorial in front of Buckingham Palace in London, and it is said that at the unveiling in May 1911, King George V was so moved by the excellence of the memorial that "he called for a sword and knighted Brock on the spot".<sup>5</sup> Clearly George V got into the habit of doing this, for Sir Bertram Mackennal (sculptor of a statue of Victoria in Blackburn, England in 1905) was created a Knight Commander of the Victorian Order in 1921 by King George V on the occasion of the unveiling of Mackennal's statue of Edward VII.<sup>6</sup> George V, it must be said, was only following an example set by his grandmother, Queen Victoria herself, who knighted Sir John Steell in 1876 immediately after she had unveiled his statue *The Prince Consort* in Edinburgh.<sup>7</sup> Steell was the sculptor who created the very first statue of Queen Victoria in 1837 (the year she ascended the throne), an astute move on his part as in 1838 he was appointed Sculptor to Her Majesty the Queen.

One sculptor, of two statues of Queen Victoria, did not need to be knighted as she already belonged to royalty – Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll, the fourth daughter of Victoria and her husband Prince Albert. Princess Louise was an accomplished artist and sculptor who studied under Sir Joseph Boehm, another person knighted for his services to the arts, which included three statues of Queen Victoria.<sup>8</sup>

How long will these hundred and more statues of Queen Victoria continue to gaze serenely over their respective corners of Empire? Two have already bitten the dust: the statue in Quebec, erected to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee in 1897, was blown up



by Separatist radicals in 1963, and the statue erected in Nairobi, Kenya in 1906 was destroyed by vandals as recently as February 2015. Following the uproar about the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on the campus of the University of Cape Town earlier in 2015, and its subsequent removal, are the statues of Queen Victoria in Pietermaritzburg and Durban threatened? Yes, say the Economic Freedom Fighters, in a News 24 report dated 30<sup>th</sup> April 2015. The EFF want to remove the Pietermaritzburg statues of Queen Victoria, Sir Theophilus Shepstone and (surprisingly) Mahatma Gandhi on the grounds that they (the EFF) “do not support the statues of oppressors”. Not only that, “these statues do not provide a solution in solving the poverty in South Africa”. Amafa-Heritage KwaZulu-Natal, however, has said that the removal of statues is a lengthy

public process which involves total public participation. It would seem, for the present at least, that in Pietermaritzburg Queen Victoria can be left to gaze at the taxis racing past on Langalibalele Street, and that her sister in Durban can continue to keep the Farewell Square pigeons company.

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 Most of the data used for this note were taken from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_statues\\_of\\_Queen\\_Victoria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_statues_of_Queen_Victoria)
- 2 Chubby boys, usually depicted naked and with wings.
- 3 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert\\_Hampton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Hampton)
- 4 [www.nelsonmandelabay.gov.za](http://www.nelsonmandelabay.gov.za)
- 5 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Brock](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Brock)
- 6 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertram\\_Mackennal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertram_Mackennal)
- 7 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Steell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Steell)
- 8 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Princess\\_Louise\\_Duchess\\_of\\_Argyll](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Princess_Louise_Duchess_of_Argyll)