

SARNIA

by Arthur Gammage

CAPTAIN Spencer French Drake, a descendant of Sir Francis Drake, sailed to Durban in his own ship the *Justitia* in 1847, settled there and bought farmland at Sarnia, now a suburb of Pinetown. T.V. Bulpin records that he named this after his birthplace in England. Elsewhere it is stated that Sarnia is an old Latin name for the island of Guernsey, which has an anthem, ‘Sarnia Cherie’ (Dear Sarnia).

T.P. James then bought a 50-acre portion of the property and named it Fairydene. In turn, this was purchased by Frank Stevens who had arrived from Truro, England, in 1881. He started a boot and shoe business with a shop in Pietermaritzburg, followed by others in Natal and Transvaal. Stevens planned to build a hotel, but the Anglo-Boer War intervened. He offered the use of his property with two existing buildings for a military hospital. Alfred Moseley donated prefabricated buildings and equipment.

This was the Princess Christian Hospital: Helena, a daughter of Queen Victoria became, by her marriage, Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein in Denmark. (This long-contested region of Jutland is now part of Germany.) A ceremonial opening was held on her birthday in 1900. A hospital train, also called the Princess Christian, operated from Sarnia station, then called Pinetown Bridge. This was a mobile extension of the hospital. Casualties from the battlefields were taken by horse-drawn Red Cross ambulances to railway stations, then on this medically fitted train to Pinetown Bridge for the hospital.

Post-war, Stevens’ hotel project was revived and the Fairydene Hotel opened in 1905. An interpretation of medieval architecture, it features a highly decorative parapet above the upper floor on all sides. Undulating pediments and ornamental corner turrets punctuate a castellated band, evocative



*Fairydene Hotel from Underwood Road, Pinetown; with detail of the parapet
(Arthur Gammage)*

of defensive battlements. The front elevation has a full-length verandah with a central stairway entrance. At present, the detailing is accentuated by a colour scheme of light and dark grey. The shoe company having been handed over to Stevens' sons, he founded a brickworks, the brand names being Terra Cotta and Sarnia. Some of the bricks were used to build the hotel.

Jack Pastoll purchased the hotel in 1933 and laid out a golf course as well as other embellishments. He had stables and was well-known for his collection of vintage carts and carriages.

These were eventually donated to and displayed in a hall at Midmar Village. His house on Underwood Road remains intact. The hotel closed in 1985 and became a retirement complex that retains the name.

SOURCES

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