

Editorial

For the past fifteen years the Natal Society Foundation Trust (NSFT) has published on average one monograph per annum, plus this journal. But the financial and other resources of the trust are limited and because demand has very rapidly disappeared, books are no longer printed. The latest titles, George Hughes's *Natal Parks Board* (published in April this year) and Patricia Merrett's *Frances Ellen Colenso* (publication due in January 2025) may be the last even in e-format because of high and irretrievable production costs. The NSFT is no longer actively looking for manuscripts. To date, seventeen volumes have been published in the following categories¹

Education history	4
Apartheid repression and resistance	3
Medical history	2
Biography and autobiography	2
General regional history	2
Economic history	1
Literary history	1
Conservation	1
Philosophy	1

In future the trust will focus on adding to and maintaining the website; and annual publication of *Natalia*. In recent years content has thinned and publication has been delayed. Although printing has been abandoned for reasons of low demand and cost, and the journal is now only online, this issue marks a revival.

Natalia is an unpretentious journal deliberately distanced from the university and academic bureaucracy that now disfigures the publication landscape. It is a forum for serious writers on regional issues who produce well-written, jargon-free articles that have scant chance of publication elsewhere. It seeks to occupy a space that overlaps accessible academic writing and high-quality journalism, both under threat in the modern world. The great virtue of *Natalia*, as was pointed out on its fiftieth anniversary, is its wide range of contributors who want to write (as opposed to having to for career reasons) and the format options available.²

With this revival come some changes. The long-standing distinction between articles and notes & queries is no more. It harked back to a time when the latter were exactly that and compiled by one individual posting brief, informative inserts or requesting information and encouraging further research. In recent years it has simply become a repository for articles of less than 4 000 words. So now there will be one sequence of contributions followed by book reviews. If appropriate, there will be a separate discussion section for open-ended articles designed to elicit further debate. And obituaries are back as part of the main sequence of articles. They cannot pretend to be representative, but will be sought as widely as possible.

The website is maintained by NSFT trustee, Michelle Bartlett. It provides access to all the work published by the trust since 1971 in accordance with its commitment to the creative commons. This important research resource attracts about 200 hits per month. To increase its value other data is being added. It already includes a complete run of the journal *Ikhwezi* published in the early 1950s by the Local Health Authority that administered Edendale (and Clermont and a few other communities). This was unearthed by Marc Epprecht and the university archives at Wits kindly granted permission for us to make this resource available.

Work is currently underway to add the records of the Pietermaritzburg Detainees Support Committee, details of over 2 000 individuals held in detention without trial during the State of Emergency of June 1986 to October 1990.

What of the future? It is hoped that a wide range of writers on regional issues will see *Natalia* as an attractive place to publish their work. In January 2024 a meeting was held with staff of the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository and it was anticipated that among other outcomes this might lead to connections with potential writers who would broaden the demographic profile of the contributors. But nothing has so far come of this.

The contents of this issue of *Natalia* speak for themselves and need no further introduction. The article by Marc Epprecht on Robert Keable might raise a question about geographic remit as Keable is strongly associated with Lesotho. However, he was familiar with both sides of the Drakensberg and some of his fiction is set in Natal. In future, topics that overlap neighbouring areas such as Lesotho, eSwatini, Griqualand East, Pondoland and even southern Mozambique may be considered on their merits.

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1 To consult any of these titles go to https://www.natalia.org.za/nsf_books.html.

2 Christopher Merrett, 'Natalia at 50: an overview and appreciation' *Natalia* 50: 59.