

Notes and Queries

Arthur Keppel-Jones

In March of this year, Arthur Keppel-Jones, sometime professor of history at the University of Natal, paid a visit to Pietermaritzburg, and Ms M. Moberly noted the event:

Although he was never a historian of Natal, Arthur Keppel-Jones will be remembered by many as a historian in Natal. He was Professor at the University in Pietermaritzburg from 1954 to 1959 and taught a number of the present generation of historians. Several of his former students, including three members of the Editorial Board of *Natalia*, entertained him to lunch when he paid a brief visit to Natal in March.

Although he has retired from teaching at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Professor Keppel-Jones is still active and writes frequently for newspapers and journals. His penetrating insights into South African affairs — startlingly presented in the famous *When Smuts Goes* (published 1947) have never been forgotten and he is still often asked to air his opinions on this country.

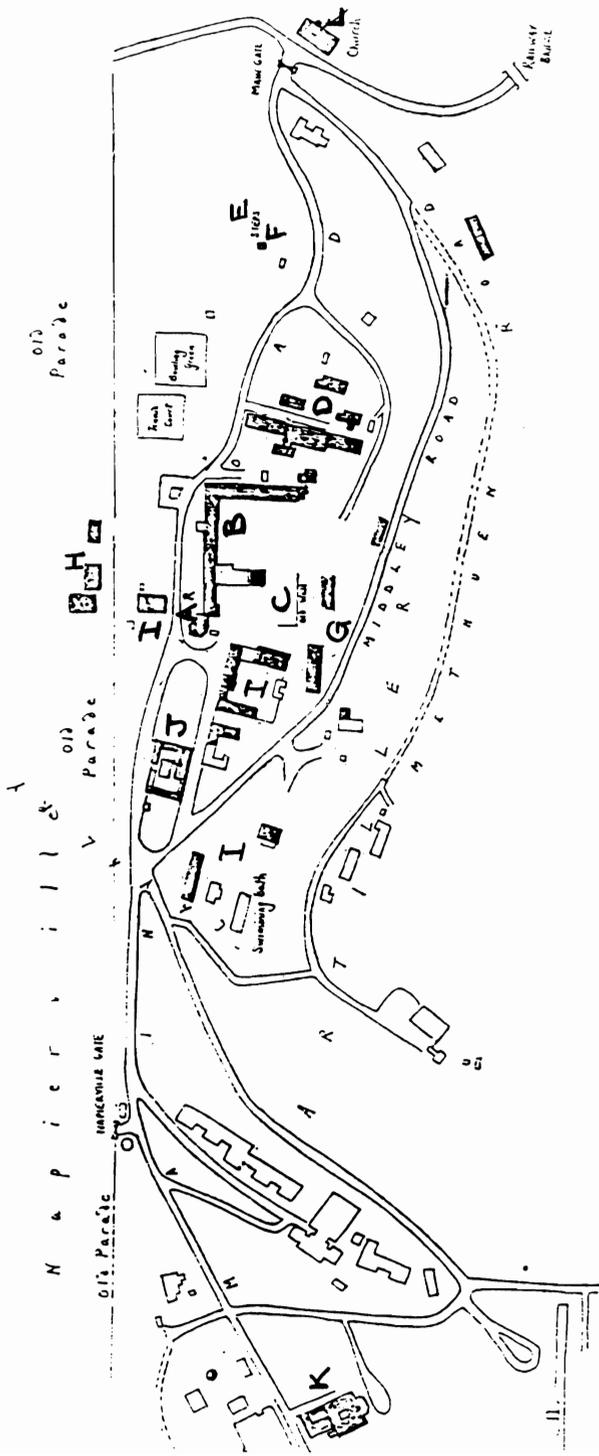
Professor Keppel-Jones's last book, *Rhodes and Rhodesia: the white conquest of Zimbabwe, 1884-1902* was published jointly by Queen's McGill University Press and the University of Natal Press in 1981.



Fort Napier

The Pietermaritzburg Society has made a formal proposal that a part of the buildings and grounds of Fort Napier hospital should be separated from the hospital and restored and developed as an historical park. The high ground commanding the town was the base of the British garrison of Natal from 1843 to 1914, and was then divided and passed over to the railways and public health departments of the Union government. Those parts of the fort which survive constitute perhaps the most extensive historical military work in the country outside Cape Town, and a number of the more significant buildings are so grouped that they could readily be detached as a block from the present hospital and developed as features of an historical park for which ample ground, stretching down towards the city and into the valley, remains open.

The surviving buildings are in various states of repair, but Dr Paul Thompson, secretary of the Society, estimates them all to be susceptible of restoration. A careful examination of detailed early maps of the fort — small scale maps of 1897/1899 and 1921 and even earlier large scale maps (1849, 1883 and 1896) — have enabled the identification and dating of these buildings with reasonable accuracy. At present only the water tank wall (A)



is a national monument. It is one of the bastions of the original rectangular fortification (B), and traces of much of the rest of the wall, traverse and bastions are still evident either in the surviving brick buildings or in the visible foundations of demolished ones. Most of these buildings appear on the 1883 map, and probably they are older. A shale wall across the downward slope also survives (C). Below and in front of the original fort is a complex of brick buildings which formed the military hospital (D). Buildings of different ground plans appear on the same site in the 1883 map, and one of these may well be incorporated in the surviving structures. The Officers' Mess (E), which lay further down the slope towards Government House has been entirely demolished, though the trees, levelled ground and a short flight of steps (F) give clues to its siting. Still surviving, however, and in one case still occupied, well tended and little altered even in the style of its garden, are examples of married soldiers' quarters on the slope running down towards the river (G).

Behind the fort lie its working facilities — the chapel and infant schools and library (now on railway property) (H), stores, barracks and canteens (I). Many of these seem to have been considerably altered from their original forms, but the old provost prison (J) resembles somewhat the civil laagers built in the colony in the late 1870s and 1880s and is a compound incorporating buildings of brick, shale, and corrugated iron.

Well away from the original fort beyond the main buildings of the present hospital stands the theatre (K), a remarkably fine and elegantly proportioned corrugated iron and wood structure standing on brick foundations. Its origins are a subject of continuing controversy, and since it appears only on the 1921 map it is probably of late construction. According to one story, it was brought in pieces from India and reassembled on its present site. Outside the hospital grounds and still used by the Anglican community is St George's Garrison Church (L) with its fine windows and wood carving.

The grounds surrounding the fort are shaded and well grassed, and there can be no denying the merit of the proposal for their conversion into an historical park at a time when considerable redevelopment is envisaged for the present hospital.

The accompanying sketch map has been adapted from one compiled and kindly supplied to *Natalia* by Dr Thompson, whose careful researches have provided the substance for this note.



A Notable Acquisition by the Natal Museum

Mr John Deane has supplied this note on a recent acquisition by the Natal Museum.

The *Portugaliae Monumenta Cartographica* is a set of six large volumes revealing and explaining the history of Portuguese cartography during the period of the great voyages of exploration from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. It was published in Lisbon in 1960 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the death of Prince Henry the Navigator. The authors are two distinguished historians, Dr Armando Cortesão and Dr Avelino Teixeira da Mota.

The volumes contain accurate facsimilies (including colour and gold-leaf work) of all known Portuguese maps of the period, with a commentary on each map in both Portuguese and English. They are in chronological order, and show the almost incredible rate and extent of Portuguese exploration and discovery which effectively brought the mediaeval period to an end and changed the course of world history.

Although the *Portugaliae Monumenta Cartographica* is invaluable for historical research, no copy has been available in South Africa until now. In recognition of the Natal Museum's work in maritime archaeology connected with the sites of early Portuguese shipwrecks on or near the South East African coast, the government of Portugal has donated a set to it. In a ceremony at the Museum on 8 June 1986, the Portuguese Ambassador to South Africa, Dr J.M. Villas-Boas, formally handed over this impressive set of books to the Museum's Director, Dr B.M. Stuckenberg.

Because of their nature and size, the volumes of the *Monumenta Cartographica* will not be on view to the public, but will be kept in the Museum's library, where they will be available to students and researchers on request.



Mines and Industries Museum

Mrs Sheila Henderson, chairman of the Talana Museum Committee, has provided this note on the progress being made with the Talana Museum:

Phase two of the development of Talana Museum is nearing completion and the opening by the President of the Chamber of Mines is planned for May 1987.

The new building has evoked favourable comment. Designed by Mr John King of Durban, and built of fine face brick, specially made by Corobrik Natal, the new Museum complex reflects the high style, solidity and traditional building skills of 'Coalopolis'. Its proportions and detail were taken from the grand Burnside and Northfield mines, now alas derelict or demolished. The contract was undertaken by Ivelo Investments and the meticulous workmanship throughout is a tribute to this pioneer firm.

The complex backs against the bluegum plantations and the old stone wall to the south of the graveyard. Its spacious foyer with wide glass doors, (donated by Pilkington S.A.), faces the historic cluster of Peter Smith's farmsteading and three of the four halls overlook the beginnings of Dundee's industries. The coal hall has a view of Talana Hill and the adit where Peter Smith dug his first anthracite. The brick hall looks down to the Steenkoolstroom where Tom Smith baked his first bricks, later the site of the Dundee Brick and Tile Co. The glass hall has a view of old Talana village and the historic Consol Glass works.

The broken mass of the building and the attractive roof line catch the eye but do not obtrude. When the Botanic Garden, already in preparation, has grown up, the complex will have considerable charm. The architect has carefully preserved several fine old thorn trees, where comfortable benches will invite the meditative visitor. The Mines and Industries Museum will be clearly visible from the new Dundee-Vryheid by-pass and will be easy of access to the traveller.

The builders have moved out and now the gangs of African unemployed have moved in to prepare the gardens, to restore the historic stone wall and to clear the parking and picnic sites. The war graves team have repaired the damaged headstones and re-erected the fallen ones in the cemetery and have given everything a good scrub. Talana begins to look spick and span.

Agricultural Display

Miss Pam McFadden, the curatrix, with her customary energy, ably assisted by Mrs Taute, the Secretary, and Mr Wouter, the caretaker, has spent some months researching, documenting and mounting an agricultural exhibit in the old stone milking shed. Once concrete platforms behind the shed have been cast to carry the heavy implements, it will be possible to house the sponsored displays being prepared by Rumevite, Natalse Landbou Kooperasie and Stockowners. Agriculture has an enthralling history of its own.

The Total Talana Concept; National Monuments Galore

The donation of 'Thornley' farmhouse and outbuildings, the Boer H.Q. and Hospital of 1899, by Mr Peter Grant, a descendant of Peter Smith, has broadened the total Talana concept. Mr Thys Botha, the proprietor of Talana Anthracite, has kindly agreed to the clearing by Government teams of weeds and rogue trees on his land below the Museum and on the hillside behind. He has agreed to the proclamation as a National Monument, of the triangle of ground as far as the cairn where General Penn-Symons was mortally wounded. With his co-operation Peter Smith's adit will be cleared and marked and Boer and British fortifications on the hilltop restored. Miss McFadden has just received from the Transvaal Archives splendid photographs that will allow of the detailed rebuilding of these forts, a project in which Dundee High School will play its part.

The hope is that the Dundee Town Council's planning will allow the mustering ground of the British infantry on the banks of the Steenkoolstroom and the line of their advance to the farmstead to be kept open as a park in the Indian area, thereby completing the protection of the entire battlefield.

It has been suggested that a memorial to the Madras sepoy who did such sterling work as ambulance corps, would be appropriate on the site of their dressing station.

Phase Three

Phase three faces two major problems; restoration funds are exhausted and sponsorship has run out. Three buildings remain derelict, the lovely double-arched coach house, the brick barn and the small workshop. Professional quotations reach a disheartening R120 000, including a startling R18 000 for the rough workshop. However, Talana has as yet had no grant from National Monuments Council towards its restoration costs and the Dundee Council has already made a request for funds. It is also felt that local labour and materials, especially for thatching, could materially reduce the estimates. Once restored the buildings can quickly and cheaply be brought into use, as the collections to be housed in them are ready and waiting.

Pollution is the second problem. Talana Anthracite (Pty) Limited must be working one of the oldest coal mine sites in Natal. Its road and weighbridge lie behind the Museum and the steady truck traffic is befouling the Museum

and its environment and doing severe damage to valuable and delicate exhibits. Moreover, the maintenance of the buildings is a constant headache. The public continually protests about the state of the Museum. Negotiations between the company and Dundee Town Council are under way to cure this nuisance.

Research

With the assistance of Mr Nick Ruddiman, the Natal Provincial Museum Service photographer, and of Mr Harry Lock of the 'Ladysmith Gazette', a photographic record of historic buildings and sites in the Biggarsberg is being compiled. It serves to underline the tragic neglect of our heritage and the wealth of material that is mouldering away. Four expeditions have only just begun to scratch the surface and have left the small staff at the Museum in a state of frenzy. 'So much to do — so little time!' One can only hope that National Monuments and the Province will redouble their efforts in the near future. For example, Dr Fred Clarke is presently striving to rescue Fort Pine.

The New Post

Another heavy work load for the staff is the preparation of audio-visual programmes for visitors. The new complex houses an auditorium, documentation centre and reading room and it is hoped to have a series of short films ready for 1987 to entertain schools and tourists. Unfortunately, the present slump has delayed the filling of the post created last year of Education Officer for this department. Talana desperately needs an historio-geographer or an archivist/historian before the end of 1986. Otherwise it will be impossible to open the new complex in 1987.

The work is rewarding. The visitor count is growing and new demands are always being made — a tearoom, more postcards, souvenirs, brochures. As I write Talana Museum is celebrating its fourth birthday — a pretty lusty infant, growing up fast.



A Durban Walk

K.I. Mackenzie of Durban has provided this note about walking tours through the part of central Durban that has been zoned for Indian trade. The walks have been organized by the Durban Publicity Association, which is mindful both of the contribution made to the character and economy of the city by the Indian people, who are twice as numerous as white people in the municipal area, in their 125 years there, and of the attraction that this part of the city could have for tourists.

Starting at the West Street end of the Indian Market you walk into the fish and meat section and your senses are assailed by the smell, the cheerful din, and the horrendous sight of a row of sheeps' heads. The enthusiasm of the sellers extends into the next part, where curios, spices and household goods are sold, and where curries are labelled 'Atomic', 'Mother-in-Law', and 'Baby's Breath'.

Across the road is the Squatters' Market, where fruit and vegetables are sold, some of the latter quite unknown to most white people. As you cross over the railway on the pedestrian bridge you find a constant two-way movement of hurrying people, even at eleven in the morning.

Here blacks on their way to and from the Berea Road Station predominate, and it is for them that the informal traders at both ends of the bridge spread out their grass mats and pile them with varied fruits and highly coloured cakes and sweets.

From the steps of the bridge you see the marvellous Durban mix of cultures — a small Muslim cemetery dominated by its white mosque with vivid green dome, and, immediately next to it, Durban's Roman Catholic cathedral. Two narrow arcades, one built in 1893, run between Cathedral Street and Grey Street, and are lined with the smallest shops in town, some of them barely able to admit three people at a time, and then it's a crush. Goods are packed from floor to ceiling and flow outside, where an assistant keeps an eye open for shoplifters while loudly shouting out what is on offer.

Into Grey Street next, where we find jewellers offering traditional 22 carat gold bridal earrings, necklaces and bracelets; clothing shops with gorgeous saris; and 'take-aways' serving bunny chow, samoosas, rotis, and a variety of curries, while at the end of the passageway is the occasional Indian restaurant. Grey Street is dominated by the two golden domes of the mosque which is the largest in Southern Africa. At midday on Fridays cars may be parked three abreast in the middle of Queen Street by those attending the main service of the week — quite a sight in a busy town. At other times visitors are welcome to take part in a guided tour of the mosque.

If all this sounds like a soft sell, well, a visit to Grey Street is certainly cheaper than a fare to Bombay!



Chelsea Houses on the Point

The problems involved in the conservation of Edwardian houses on the Durban Point were the subject of a study carried out by pupils of the Westville Girls' High School which reached the final round of the Natal Education Department's annual symposium on the conservation of the environment and of natural resources, and was placed first in its category. The unusual choice of a manmade townscape as the theme of a project on the conservation of the environment was prompted by the fact that 1986 was Durban's 'Architectural Heritage Year', and the study does full justice to its topic.

The Point today has the reputation of a rather sordid and derelict area that is conventionally attached to the older dockland districts in large ports, and indeed a number of buildings in the area were found to be abandoned and decaying, but the row of houses upon which the study focused was found still used for its original residential purpose, and, though sadly altered, in tolerably good repair:

The Chelsea Houses are early Edwardian, having been built in 1907. They were built under engineer J. Crofts by the Natal Harbour Department for its employees. The outstanding feature of these houses is their hierarchical pattern, a unique architectural concept. Different types of houses were built for people of differing social status. At the head of the hierarchy, at No 3 Escombe Terrace, was the Port Captain

in a single storeyed Natal verandah house; next down the line came the officers, occupying the five pairs of double storeyed semi-detached houses further along the road. Last in line socially and in the position of row houses were the workers. Theirs were terraced houses on smaller proportions and with a smaller floor plan. Very unusual double-storeyed outbuildings are to be found.

The houses show many features typical of Edwardian architecture. The verandah was on the decline, and this can be noticed as one moves down the hierarchy, the Port Captain being favoured. Cast iron verandah supports, imported from England, can be seen, and the houses would have been decorated with cast iron trellised work. Only one house still sports this today. The houses have bay windows and stained glass in and around the front doors. Decorative gables can be seen, but only one house still has the adorning timber on the roof.

The houses are notable examples of their period and are generally in a sound state. The Row houses have had their upper verandahs infilled with clapboard, and the original sash windows, typical of the period, have been replaced.

The study goes beyond a survey of the houses themselves to an appraisal of the whole area, its place in the history of the port, and its potential for rehabilitation, which is, for all the general dereliction of the neighbourhood, highly promising. The students observe that the residential area is separate from the more disreputable zones, and a small haven of domestic peace with ready access to the businesses and entertainment facilities of the city. Apart from their dislike of the reputation of the Point area, the residents who participated in the survey expressed themselves satisfied with their homes. The configuration of the wide streets in the area enables the row of Edwardian houses to be seen to advantage, while they in turn still enjoy views of the Bluff, the sea, and the harbour entrance. There is, the study observes, 'a highly unusual interrelationship of natural and man-made elements' which could easily be destroyed if sensitive consideration is not given to this remarkable set of buildings in the future development of the Point area.



Cathcart William Methven (1849-1925)

Mr Angus Rose has supplied the following Note.

We live in an age where specialisation rates higher than versatility, so perhaps we might profit from the recollection of a man so wide in his interests, so varied and so talented that he deserves to be remembered and honoured. That man was Cathcart Methven, and my sincere hope is that this brief recital of his amazingly productive life will spark off the enthusiasm and drive of a local scholar sufficiently interested to consider undertaking a full, up to date biography.

Methven was born in Edinburgh in 1849 — just two years before the Great Exhibition — trained as a marine engineer and artist and worked, eventually becoming engineer-in-chief, at Greenock on Clydebank. At the age of 39 he was appointed to a similar post in Durban, a city which still bears his stamp in the form of wharves, buildings and the fruits of various

schemes. His knowledge of harbours became widely known throughout South Africa to the extent that his report to the Cape Government resulted in huge extensions to Table Bay docks. Methven was also the first to realise — and state publicly — the enormous potential of Richards Bay as a major port.

Melanie Hillebrand has written:

Natalians of the 1880s were almost exclusively concerned with obtaining the bare necessities — i.e. making money and spending it. The poor concentrated on survival, and the well-to-do on building a nest-egg that would enable them to retire comfortably to their country of origin.

Methven appreciated the lack of cultural and social amenities of the time but, running contrary to type, remained here to do what he could to provide what was needed. One of his most significant actions was to found the Durban Art Gallery, in 1892.

While evidence of his architectural skills is still apparent in Durban, it may not be commonly recognised that he was a founder member — and President for many years — of the Natal Institute of Architects. He was also President of the S.A. Association for the Advancement of Science, and a member of the planning team which launched what is now the Durban Technikon.

As an artist, he stands high in Natal's annals, for his water colours and oils splendidly recapture not only glimpses of Natal's interior and the majesty of the Drakensberg, but also facets of an era we are only beginning to appreciate. He founded — and needless to say, presided over for several years — the Natal Society of Arts.

If further proof of his versatility is required, it surely lies in his accomplishments as a musician. Methven it was who designed and laid down the specifications for the organs in the city halls of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, and gave the first performance ('presided at the keyboard' is the contemporary idiom) on both. The Pietermaritzburg organ he played on was, of course, destroyed in the disastrous fire in 1898.

Methven was a fine shot and a keen angler, his interests in the latter sport prompting him to ensure that several Drakensberg streams were amply stocked with fingerling trout.

Such versatility and all-round talent, almost unknown in these days because of its rarity, deserves to be better chronicled and shared. Is anyone interested enough to honour and further record the life and work of this astonishing man?



Narrow Gauge Closure

On Saturday 12th July the closure of the narrow gauge railway line between Ixopo and Donnybrook was marked by the running of a return trip between those two towns by a 'Last Train', and a commemorative brochure compiled for the occasion by Mrs Marie-Anne Mingay of Donnybrook provides an interesting record of both the event and the line itself. The decision to link Donnybrook on the Natal-Cape line with Kelso on the South Coast line was taken in the early years of the century, with the voters opting for the narrow gauge (2 feet or 600 mm) which was advocated by both of the concerned



The 'End of the Line' train on its last journey from Donnybrook to Ixopo.

(Photograph: T.B. Frost)

members of the Legislative Assembly — Joseph Baynes and Robert Archibald — in preference to a broad gauge line which would have been much slower in the building. Construction began in July 1906 and the first train carried the Governor of Natal and other luminaries from Kelso to Ixopo where Sir Matthew Nathan declared the Stuartstown Railway open on 3rd June 1908.

Mixed passenger and goods trains, one up and one down, ran daily between Kelso and Ixopo — then known as Stuartstown — and the service from there to Donnybrook ran four days a week. Motive power first came from 4-6-2 side tank engines, nicknamed the Tea Kettle, designed by Mr Hendrie of the N.G.R., with the first narrow gauge Garretts coming into service in 1920. The selection of narrow gauge for the line permitted tighter curves than standard gauge would have done, but even so a track length of 97 miles (152 km) was needed to cover the 55 straight miles (88 km) as the line dropped some 4 500 feet from Donnybrook to the sea. Speeds were correspondingly leisurely, the Tea Kettle being capable of a mere 15 miles per hour (21 kph) at full throttle. This slowness probably saved the lives of those who now and then fell overboard — on one occasion a conductor swinging from coach to coach; on another a fireman whose seat, which could swivel out from the cramped cab, gave way under him — but it almost certainly doomed the line to extinction when the more flexible road transport became reliably swifter than the train.

Changes in land-usage and in the economy also contributed to the eventual redundancy of the line, with timber taking over much of the farmland and industries moving away from the smaller rural towns. With traffic declining, the line became unprofitable, and the last train between Donnybrook and Ixopo ran eighty years to the month after construction work had first begun.

By the time this issue of *Natalia* is published, the 'Banana Express' from Port Shepstone to Harding will also have ceased to run, and Natal will no longer be graced by either narrow gauge nor steam railways in regular operation. The activities of conservationists such as the Railway Society, and the line proposed at the Midmar resort, will be the last links with the lost majesty of steam.

A Prisoner of War in Pietermaritzburg

Gregorio Fiasconaro, who came to South Africa as a prisoner of war, married a Pietermaritzburg girl, and remained in the country to work in opera and earn an enviable reputation as both a singer and a producer, devotes a considerable portion of his autobiography to his experiences in Natal P.O.W. camps during the Second World War:

My arrival in Durban was one of stunned disbelief and intense interest. We disembarked and marched along the quay towards the cattle trucks which were waiting to take us to Clairwood. A most extraordinary thing happened to us on the short march. Many people sidled up to us and, glancing furtively round, hurriedly shook hands or patted our shoulders and congratulated us before melting away. Only much later did we learn that these were Afrikaners and other South Africans who had been totally opposed to the Union's entering the war on the side of the Allies.

After a short but jolting journey we were unloaded at Clairwood on a site overlooking the race course . . . The camp itself was awful, consisting of tents and red dust. Next door was a camp of Indonesian soldiers.

After five weeks at Clairwood, where the regular race meetings provided some consolation, the Italian prisoners were transferred to Oribi Camp in Pietermaritzburg. This was a transit camp, and a new one — 'all we found on our arrival were a few enormous huts, which were later used as dining halls and offices — there was nothing else whatsoever' — but Fiasconaro refused to be moved on to the work camps elsewhere in the country, where the conditions for the prisoners were better but where the work being done was, for him, a form of collaboration.

The train had stopped a short distance before the station, more or less in a straight line with Oribi, and we marched the four or five kilometres to the camp. The column of Italians was long with very few guards, only one for every two hundred or three hundred P.O.W's. Deliberately, everyone marched very slowly, and in a very ragged column, so that anyone straying to one side or another would not be noticed. Somehow we had all decided that this time we would not be moving on again for a long time, and immediately our thoughts turned to our comfort. We all possessed knives of various lengths which we had made in Egypt — mine was very small but very precious to me — and everyone who could, shot out of the column, hacked off a branch or two, or even uprooted a small tree, and rejoined his fellows, My knife was too small so I was one of the few who eventually marched into the gates of the camp with no timber festooning my person. We were halted and searched, and all knives and other possible weapons were confiscated, but the wood was ignored. I was desolate — I had lost my eating tool and I didn't even have a measly piece of wood to compensate for my loss. My friends took pity on me, and very soon, I also had a primitive camp bed like theirs.

After this very thorough search we were marched through the second gate and into the centre of the cage area, where we were made to drop our aluminum water bottles on an ever-growing pile. This was a real deprivation, but not for long. The U.D.F. thought that they

would cart this huge pile away in the morning and, after giving us some food and supervising the pitching of our tents, they left us to go to bed — a euphemism for dressing up in every available garment before lying down on the hard earth. The next morning there was not a water bottle to be seen; they were deeply buried, and only months later did the prisoners start to dig them up in order to make things out of them, as a hobby and for sale.

Many South Africans still possess the paper-knives, cigarette cases and lighters, bracelets and other jewellery which were made out of these aluminium bottles. Later, as the industry grew, they used to obtain wood and bauxite from the U.D.F. guards, which they carved into beautifully inlaid cigarette boxes and other items. These were then given back to the guards who sold them outside the camp, keeping a percentage for themselves. We never knew what they earned for themselves, but one thing we did notice about our guards, from the moment we laid eyes on them, was that they were far kinder, far more relaxed and more humane than those we had had in Egypt, and the first meal in Oribi was sheer heaven. It consisted of real thick soup which was *hot* — an unbelievable luxury — and butter, jam and *white* bread, which we had ceased to believe existed. We all agreed that we had come to Paradise.

Fiasconaro spent three years in the Oribi camp, shivering through the winters and thoroughly disliking the Pietermaritzburg heat in summer. The camp gradually took on a more permanent character:

In the beginning, most of the time was occupied by the building of various edifices. The first to be completed was an enormous hut cum hall, about the size of a small hangar. The walls were rock and the roof consisted of tarpaulins stretched over wooden beams. In this we ate on trestle tables. I had the idea of putting these tables together to form a type of stage, and this we did.

We continued building, this time a smaller hut of the same materials, which we used for rehearsals as the large one was in constant use during the day, either for meals or recreation.

We also built a post office, an infirmary, a little hospital and later a church. The U.D.F. built us separate bucket latrines, which gave us blessed privacy and dignity after our experiences in Egypt.

As Director of Entertainment, Fiasconaro produced plays and organised concerts, at first in the camp itself but later for the benefit of the public in both Pietermaritzburg and Durban. The Red Cross and the South African Italian community (the Italians in Durban being particularly helpful) provided the scripts and scores as well as material for the costumes.

As there were only men, the ladies' parts were taken by some of the less beefy men and again, through the Red Cross, we received lengths of cheap cotton and other materials, which we made into dresses for the 'ladies'. Unbeknown to the U.D.F. we cut up blankets to make men's suits. We were fortunate because we had in our midst craftsmen of all kinds — tailors, carpenters, painters, builders, chefs, engravers — every possible skill. The sets were made of sugar sacks sewn together and painted with paints and dyes which we made ourselves out of ground brick, iris flowers, etc.

Later, when the camp became more organised, P.O.W's worked at various jobs and got paid between one shilling and five shillings per day. Those who were cooks, waiters or cleaners in the U.D.F. officers' and N.C.O.s' messes earned the most. I decided that there would be a 'voluntary' entrance fee charged for attending our shows, and levied this on a percentage basis. The guys who earned five shillings paid more than those who earned one shilling, but everyone paid, and out of this we were able to buy water colour paints and some fancy materials, which was a vast improvement on our early, primitive beginnings.

For lighting we put ordinary bulbs into large tins, similar to the very big canned tomato tins, which helped to concentrate the light and achieve some reflection.

I directed the designs of the sets and costumes, and of course, the actors. We did about one different play each month, and every two months a kind of variety show, which included all the usual things like comic sketches and musical items. There were quite a number of musicians in the camp who had their instruments and so we formed a band of about thirty-eight people.

The nucleus was a regimental band which had been taken prisoner, *en bloc*, in Eritrea, plus a few other musicians who had been playing in small orchestras in places like Asmara. The band had all its own instruments and the others were supplied by members of the Italian community in Natal, and also through the Red Cross. This camp band made a very presentable sound and was later to give several concerts in Pietermaritzburg itself, in aid of Red Cross funds. As we had no music the conductor transcribed everything himself and they rehearsed for a month for every concert. Items like a Rossini overture, or *Poet and Peasant* by Suppé, or a pot-pourri of operatic numbers, were the staple fare and proved very popular. As soloists, either I or Economo, or both, sang, and Martucci played the violin. In the camp everything was fully scored, but for the outside concerts we interspersed items accompanied by piano, 'my' accompanist always being a Mr Badenhurst, whom I think is now organist in the big church in Bethlehem, Orange Free State. He also played for Martucci and was a wonderful chap, not only because he was a very good accompanist, but because he always gave us tea and something to eat when we rehearsed or performed together. Later he and I did some recitals in the City Hall and once or twice in the camp, although most of the prisoners preferred something more noisy.

When his talent as a soloist was recognised by the military authorities (who, by his account, maintained a reasonably tolerant and humane regime in the camp, despite the poor facilities and even worse food), Fiasconaro was introduced to Edward Dunn, then conductor of the Durban Orchestra: 'a pukka English gentleman and a wonderful person who, although by no means the world's greatest conductor, did an enormous amount to foster the growth of young talent in Natal'. This meeting led to the first of many recitals.

Colonel Louw had invited him up to hear me sing, and I was horror-struck because I was fearfully out of practice and very weak from years

of POW food. I sang an aria and Dunn said he wanted me to sing with his orchestra in the City Hall in Durban. Naturally I was overjoyed, but told him that it was one thing to sing one aria in a small room with only piano accompaniment, and quite another to sing three or four arias in a large hall with an orchestra. I simply did not have the strength. Colonel Louw immediately decided that I was to be allowed a glass of milk and an extra slice of bread every day and a little more meat than was usual. Dunn told me to start practising and in a month's time he would return to Pietermaritzburg to listen to me and to see how I felt.

All went well and so, after five and a half years of not singing, I gave my first unpaid professional concert in South Africa.

It took place in the middle of a very hot summer and I did not possess a dinner jacket!! Nothing daunted Colonel Louw, who had set his heart on my singing. He asked his friend, Captain Van Zyl, nephew of the Governor-General and later his aide-de-camp, to lend me his. Captain Van Zyl, who was a very nice chap, agreed immediately, but unfortunately, he was taller and much broader than I was. The trousers were useless so I borrowed someone else's, but the jacket had to be made to fit. All we could think of was for me to wear two pullovers underneath the shirt, and this I did. I nearly died. Not only does one generate a lot of heat while singing but, add to this my weakness, which made me perspire more, and the Durban City Hall on a January Sunday night, and it will be evident what torture I went through. By the grace of God I sang well and the evening was a success.

In return for his contributions as a soloist (the money raised by his recitals was often passed to the Red Cross), Fiasconaro received certain privileges, including excursions to films, plays and concerts in the town:

Then they told me they were taking me to see *Rigoletto*. I was almost beside myself with delight. Either Captain Shearing or Sergeant Rogers took me, I cannot remember which, and we sat in the best seats in the house.

Filled with anticipation I looked down and saw the orchestra. I couldn't believe my eyes. It consisted of three violins, one cello, one bass and a few wind instruments. Silently I said, 'Oh my God!' When the curtain went up I was even more appalled. Apart from the Duke, there were five people on stage, instead of the usual eighty to a hundred. Both the tenor and the baritone sounded terribly 'English' to my ears. The conductor was John Connell and the singers Lloyd Strauss-Smith, Redvers Llewellyn and Rose Alper. I was dreadfully disappointed, but naturally, could not be rude when everyone had gone to so much trouble on my behalf, so to all enquiries, including that of Colonel Louw the next morning, I was warm in my praise and thanks. Luckily no more operas were performed, because I very much doubt if I could have sat through another one.

It was on one of these excursions that he first met his future wife, Mabel Brabant, and, with the helpful connivance of his guard, began the difficult business of wooing someone with whom he shared no common language, from the confines of a prisoner-of-war camp. His amatory escapades make

entertaining reading, but there was another labour of love on which he and his fellow prisoners embarked:

As time passed and we realised that the war would eventually come to an end — although on one's darker days peace seemed an unattainable dream — our Italian camp commandant, an elderly naval officer, decided that we should leave some beautiful, permanent record of our many years in Pietermaritzburg. We had endless discussions and arguments but consensus was finally reached when we decided to build a church. We were determined to make it as beautiful as we possibly could so that people passing that way in decades to come would know that Italians had been there and had built there. It was further decided that it should be of stone and that no cement whatsoever should be used. Every stone block would be hewn to fit its surrounding fellows exactly, in the way the Etruscans, Romans and Italians had built for centuries.

The U.D.F. commander arranged for us to go to a quarry outside Pietermaritzburg in army lorries to choose and load the properly cut stones and, on our return to camp, to unload them and carry them to



A really lovely piece of architecture complete in every detail, even to a campanile with a bell.

This photograph of the Italian P.O.W. church was taken in the late 1950s when it stood in a state of some dereliction beside the Durban road. It has since been restored and is today surrounded by houses.

(Photograph: T.B. Frost)

the chosen site in the camp. Among us we had several true master builders who had no need of architects or quantity surveyors, and the project got under way.

It was a long, laborious labour of love, but everyone helped and put their particular skill to use to make it a fitting memorial. It took over a year to complete and stands there still in all its elegant simplicity. It is a beautiful design, a really lovely piece of architecture complete in every detail, even to a campanile with a bell. On the inside, the walls were plastered, and one of our number painted an excellent copy of a Raphael Madonna above the altar. There were no pews; we stood and knelt during services, but there was a little harmonium which was my special baby. Every Sunday I used to sing and play the Mass, usually Gregorian chant. When the church was finished the U.D.F. arranged a very special inauguration ceremony which included an invitation to the Apostolic Delegate in South Africa, to celebrate the first Mass.

Soon after leaving Pietermaritzburg on the national road to Durban, our little church can be seen still standing serenely as we left it so many years ago.

Dr Fiasconaro's autobiography, *I'd do it again*, is published by Books of Africa (Pty) Ltd of Cape Town.



The Natal College of Education

Colonial Natal did not embark on the training of its own teachers until 1874, when a four-year 'pupil-teacher' system — essentially one of apprenticeship supplemented by instruction in teaching methods — was introduced. In 1906 a Pupil Teacher's Entrance Examination was instituted, with successful candidates posted to the Model Schools in Durban or Pietermaritzburg for a two-year training programme, but three years later the Government Training College was established in the capital to offer full time pre-service training to prospective teachers. The first classes were conducted in the old Y.M.C.A. building in Longmarket Street, and the College was moved to the Legislative Council buildings before it came, two years after the formation of the Union in 1910, to its present campus on the premises vacated by the colonial governor. The sense of being custodians of Government House and of Natal's colonial heritage became indeed a significant element in the ethos of the college, now known as the Natal Training College. N.T.C. continued as the only teacher training institution in Natal, serving both language groups, until 1956 when a branch of the college was opened in Durban which, in time, bore as fruits the Durban Teachers' Training College (now the Afrikaans-medium Durbanse Onderwyserskollege) and the Edgewood College of Education.

In time the pre-service education of professional teachers became more sophisticated and elaborate, and when (in the late 1970s) the South African Teachers' Council for Whites demanded a three year diploma as a basic requirement for registration, a number of serving teachers found themselves under-qualified. In 1977, therefore, the Natal Education Department established the College of Education for Further Training to offer correspondence courses to enable these people, and, later, teachers of the

so-called Coloured group, to up-grade their qualifications. The college was housed in the buildings of the old Harward School in Pietermaritzburg, but in 1986 the Education Department took the considered decision to move it onto the N.T.C. campus and to amalgamate the two institutions. The combination of pre-service residential courses and in-service correspondence courses in the curriculum of a single bilingual institution was a novel development in teacher education in Natal, and the opportunity was taken to eliminate the archaic term 'training' from the name of the older college and to give what was in effect a new institution the title 'Natal College of Education'.



A Lost Post

On the corner of Musgrave Road and Grants Grove in Durban there stands an old, unpainted cast-iron pole, solitary amongst its contemporary companions and carrying neither streetlamp nor wires. It is marked with its maker's name

HAM BAKER & CO. LIMITED
ENGINEERS
WESTMINSTER

but bears no date of manufacture.

Is this perhaps a relic of Durban's tramway system, forlorn in its redundancy but happily overlooked by the pole-fellers of progress?



National Monuments in Natal

The following sites and buildings have been proclaimed national monuments during the past year:

1. *The so-called G.A. Riches Printer Building at 423 Smith Street, Durban:* This building, which is an excellent example of the Classical Revivalist style at the turn of the century, forms an integral part of the architecture of Smith Street, one of the most historic streets in Durban.
2. *The property with the Victorian double-storeyed house thereon, at 73 Musgrave Road, Berea, Durban:* This double-storeyed house, which was designed by the architect P. Piekas and erected in 1904-1905, is an excellent example of a Natal verandah house erected at the beginning of the century. The fine detailing to the timber verandahs is also noteworthy.
3. *The Narainsamy Temple, in the Newlands Township, near Durban:* The Narainsamy Temple was founded by one Narainsamy in 1895. It is controlled by a family trust created by him. The designer and builder of the temple was Kristappa Reddy, whose main contribution to temple architecture was this temple with its finely decorated spire and prominent pyramid-shaped dome, which was built from 1906 to 1908. The chief deities of the temple are Vishnu, Siva, Ganesh, Soobramaniar and the Nauw Graha.

4. *The property with the Victorian double-storeyed house thereon, at 151 Pietermaritz Street, Pietermaritzburg:*
This late-nineteenth century house with its elaborate cast-iron verandahs forms an integral part of the architectural character of Pietermaritz Street, which has remained predominantly Victorian.
5. *The Main Building (1925), the so-called North Floor Building (1927), the Gymnasium (1934), the Norma Burns Hall (1960) and the fountain at the entrance, all forming part of the Girls' High School in Alexandra Road, Pietermaritzburg:*
This group of buildings, erected in the neo-classical style, forms the nucleus of the Girls' High School that was opened on this site in the old house, *Morningside* on 4 August 1920. This latter building, although altered, still forms part of the complex. (*The fountain was demolished in 1985 as it was considered beyond repair. Ed.*)
6. *The Old Commandant's House and the Old Doctors' Quarters at the Weston Agricultural College, near Mooi River:*
These two wood-and-iron houses, which were erected in 1900, are relics of the British Military Remount Depot that was established at Weston near Mooi River shortly before the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902).
7. *The Lutheran Church Building with 20 metres of surrounding land, at New Hanover:*
This cruciform church was erected in 1867 by German settlers who moved to New Hanover from Bergtheil's settlement at New Germany. The tall steeple was added in 1885.
8. *The Upper Umgeni Presbyterian Church (St John's), at Nottingham Road:*
This wood-and-iron church, which was erected in 1884-1885 on land donated by the Byrne Settler John King, was the first church to be built in the Upper Umgeni area.
9. *The Property with the Library Building (also known as the Kruger Church) thereon, at 27 Smit Street, Paulpietersburg:*
This church building, the corner-stone of which was laid on 20 May 1899 by Ds. P.S. Snyman and which was used as a store-house by British soldiers during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), was only taken into use on 20 May 1904. According to tradition President Paul Kruger donated ten gold pounds towards the building fund. Owing to the lack of membership the church was disbanded in 1951 and was later used by the Evangelisch-Lutherische Gemeinde Paulpietersburg, which sold it to the Municipality in 1969. The building has since been restored and converted into a library.
10. *The Kambula Battlefield site on the farm Kambula 381, Vryheid district:*
During the Battle of Kambula a British force of approximately 2 000 men under the command of Colonel Evelyn Wood (later Field Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood, V.C., C.B.) successfully defended themselves against a Zulu impi of 20 000 men under Mnyamana Buthelezi. Approximately 2 000 Zulus perished here.