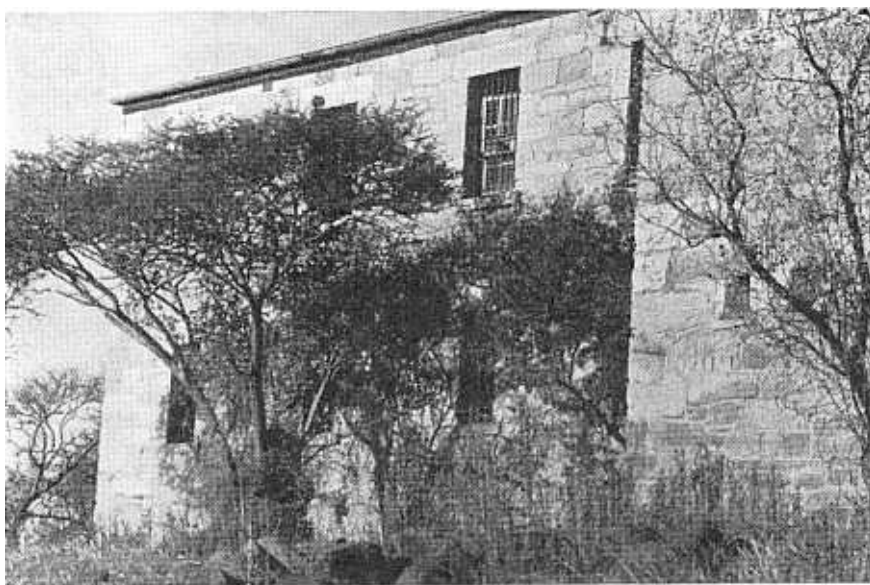


TOUR OF HISTORICAL SITES IN NATAL AND ZULULAND: NATAL EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATION

One of the problems which face teachers of history, and to which the solution is most elusive is that of making history interesting, alive and of immediate importance. However one strives to make the presentation of past deeds, ideas, ideals and problems vivid by a dramatic and forceful presentation, the visual element is still lacking. Maps, charts, pictures, diagrams and descriptions conjure up an imperfect impression of the reality which one wishes to convey. Some element is missing, however skilled the teacher may be. The answer to this problem would soon be obvious to a chemistry teacher in a similar predicament: the actual process described must be repeated with apparatus used in the original experiment. This is obviously not possible in teaching history, but one may go part of the way towards solving the problem by a partial reconstruction of the past: the scene of some historic deed may be visited or the remains of a culture may be studied. In this way the pupil's imagination may be stimulated so that these things will move into focus and animate his knowledge of history derived from books and verbal narration.

Being aware of the need for more work of this nature among school-children, history teachers in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and environs enthusiastically received the invitation issued by the Natal Educational Activities Association to join a pilot tour of Natal and Zululand in June, 1965. The

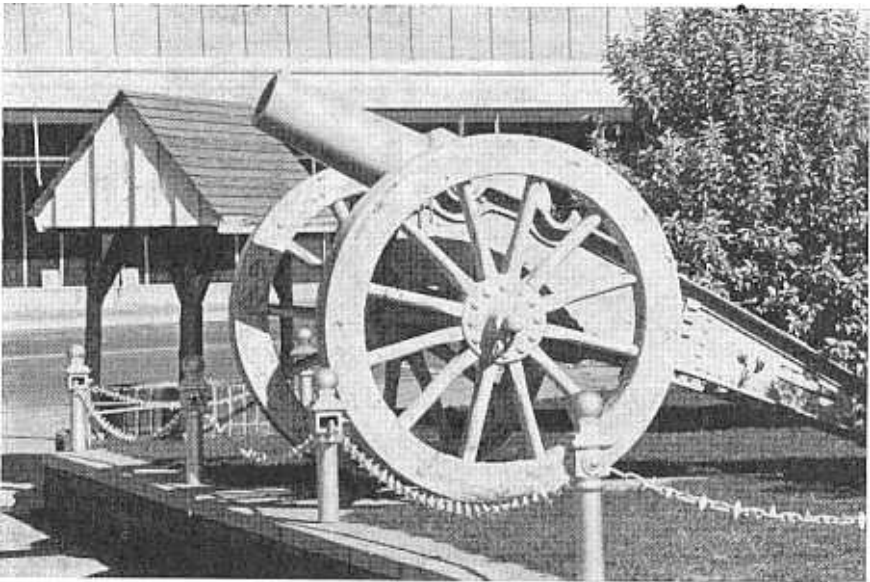


Fort Dunford, Estcourt.

object of this tour was to take teachers to many places of historical interest so that in planning future tours of their own with school-children they could select some of these places to investigate more thoroughly. The tour occupied three days, and since a great deal of ground was covered, a fairly sound knowledge of Natal history was required by those on the tour if they were to gain the maximum benefit from it. To this end Inspector Mr. G. Chadwick of the Natal Education Department, who acted as a most able guide on the tour, provided us each with a booklet containing maps and information to which we could refer.

The places visited could be divided into three main groups: those concerned with the British in Natal, the Voortrekkers in Natal and with the Zulus; and, in addition, many sites were visited where conflicts took place between them. Since many of the teachers on the tour had made a special study of some aspect of Natal history, we were able to draw on their intensive research. In this respect, for instance, Mr. Chadwick himself was particularly informative and interesting on the route taken by Pretorius's Wenkommando in 1838, which route he is at present engaged in tracing for the Historical Monuments Commission.

Our tour began in Durban with a visit to the Old House Museum. This gave us some idea of the setting in which the early British pioneers lived, for we saw portraits of the men themselves, their diaries and letters, pictures of the ships in which they sailed, the houses in which they lived and the streets they frequented (marvellously different from those of modern



The gun "Castor", Ladysmith.

Durban) and we examined their household goods and their remarkably small dresses and uniforms.

The Old Fort came next, with its memories of the Waterloo veteran, Capt. Thomas Charlton Smith and his fortifications, and we thought of Dick King setting off with Ndongeni after the Battle of Congella on the first stage of his famous ride to fetch reinforcements from Grahamstown six hundred miles away.

We then travelled northwards along the coast to Fort Pearson on the Tugela, and saw not only the remains of the earthworks of this fort built by Col. Pearson on his advance into Zululand during the Zulu War of 1879, but also Ultimatum Tree under which the lengthy ultimatum to Cetshwayo was read in 1878. Going even further back in history we heard of other battle sites nearby where Englishmen and native levies from Port Natal fought Dingane's Zulus in 1838, to relieve the pressure on the Boers and divide Dingane's strength, and where in an action between the followers of Cetshwayo on the one hand and his brother Mbulazi on the other in 1856, there was a great slaughter of thousands of warriors, and Cetshwayo's power was assured.

At Gingindlovu we turned inland towards Eshowe, Zululand's present capital, to which Col. Pearson marched during the Zulu War at the head of his coastal column. Fort Eshowe first claimed our attention. Here only the earthworks are visible. The site recalls missionaries and a martyr. In a cemetery at this spot lie buried Norwegian missionaries many of whose descendants are prominent in other walks of life in Natal today. Near here an early Zulu Christian was put to death for his faith.

Fort Nongquai on the outskirts of Eshowe is now a museum. It is small and unpretentious, but contains such interesting items as Zulu wearing apparel, beadwork, weapons and pottery, and in the courtyard there is an authentic Zulu beehive hut, with a clay-lined hearth and no opening apart from the door. The European settlement in Zululand is not neglected, and we saw relics and photographs which recorded this.

The second day of our tour started from Eshowe, and we travelled through the Nkwaleni valley with its sugar cane and citrus, past Melmoth where the once familiar wattle trees are being gradually replaced by other trees grown for their timber, and by sugar cane.

Beyond Melmoth we stopped at Dingane's Spring, from which that potentate obtained his drinking water. To reach this spring from the Emakosini valley where Dingane's Mlungundhlovu kraal was situated, the Zulu girls whose daily task it was to fetch the water, must have walked four or five miles across undulating country.

Soon we were approaching Emakosini which is steeped in history. Here the Zulu kings and their nation rose to greatness, and here lie Zulu (or Nkosinkulu) whose name lives on as the name of the tribe he helped to establish, and Senzangakona, father of the mighty and bloodthirsty Shaka and of his half-brother, the sunning Dingane.

Dingane's great kraal Mgungundhlovu was well established, a mass of neat beehive huts with beaten earth between them, when the Rev. Francis Owen arrived to ask to be allowed to teach the Zulu people about Christ. Dingane agreed to his setting up a mission station on the ridge opposite Mgungundhlovu on the other side of the Mkumbane stream, but he hoped that Owen would give lessons on guns and not on the Gospel; for Dingane



Zulu's Grave, Mgungundhlovu.

dearly wished to be taught to handle firearms. Here Owen was established when Piet Retief first rode in to ask Dingane for land in 1837 and from this ridge Owen later saw the Boers die.

Piet Retief rode in for the second time in February, 1838, with nearly seventy Boers and thirty agterryers, having delivered his report to the Trekkers that Dingane would grant them land. This time, however, Dingane, fearful of these men with their horses and firearms, screamed the order to his warriors to kill the wizards, and Retief and his followers were dragged out of the kraal to die on the Kwamatiwane ridge where the vultures hovered. The monument to Retief and his men, and their common grave is to be found there.

Leaving the Emakosini valley we travelled via Babanango to Isandhlwana. On the way sites were pointed out to us, each claimed by various authorities to be the place where the Vlugkommando was defeated and where Dirkie Uys fell after he had turned back to aid his father against Zulu attackers.

By the time we reached Isandhlwana it was getting late and we were unable to climb to the top of the Isandhlwana Hill. This is shaped like the sphinx on the badge of the 24th Regiment who fought and died so bravely at its foot during the Zulu War of 1879. Lord Chelmsford, in command of the troops, was out of camp some twelve miles away when the Zulus struck. He had underestimated his opponents, had neglected to form a laager as he had been advised to do, and when he and his men returned to the camp after their reconnaissance they found it deserted by all living men. They bivouacked on the battlefield among the dead. Before dawn next day they set out for Rorke's Drift to find that Zulu impi of possibly 4,000 men had been driven off there in the night by a hundred men so brave that eleven Victoria Crosses were won for valour in the engagement.

The next day, starting out from Dundee, we turned our attention to sites of Anglo-Boer War battles, beginning with the foolish frontal attack



Piet Retief Monument, Mgungundhlovu.

on Talana Hill, where the British wore khaki for the first time in a major South African battle. Here, too, the route taken by Andries Pretorius's Wenkommando was pointed out to us.

At Elandsplaagte we saw the sites of the skirmishes that raged about the railway station, and the plain across which Maj.-Gen. French led his Lancers and Dragoons in a deadly cavalry charge against the Boers.

At Ladysmith we were taken to a vantage point from which we could reconstruct in our minds the siege of Ladysmith and its relief. Near the Ladysmith Town Hall we saw Castor and Pollux, two British guns used in the Crimean War and again in the Anglo-Boer War. At Colenso, too, another great clash of the War was recalled.

Before we reached Estcourt we stopped to see the sites of the Blaauwkrantz massacres of 1838 where Voortrekkers, their suspicions lulled, had spread out along the Bushmans and Blaauwkrantz Rivers to await Retief's return from Dingane with a treaty granting them land. Retief never came back, and Digane's impis swept down upon them.

Fort Durnford, overlooking Estcourt, although in a very bad state of repair, proved interesting. Built on the model of an Indian hill fort, it was erected after the revolt of Langalibalele in 1873, to command the surrounding countryside in the event of further native risings. Intriguing tales are told of an escape tunnel from the fort down to the Bushmans River, but exploration of this would be too dangerous to attempt. From the fort one can see the site of the old Maritz farmstead, Saailager, on the far bank of the Bushmans River.

By the time we had seen Fort Durnford it was getting too late for us to stop again before reaching Durban, but we felt we had already seen so much that it would take us some time and much reading to consolidate our impressions. The tour had been infinitely worth while and had made history live for us, and my only regret was that we could not have spent as many weeks as we did days in exploring and investigating. I feel sure that those who went on the tour returned to their history classes with renewed enthusiasm and greater insight.

I. M. Perrett