

THE LOG-BOOK OF WILLIAM PATERSON

BY DENNIS DUCKWORTH

The discovery of the manuscript log-book of William Paterson may be regarded, I think, as an event of importance to South African historians. I think it best to begin by telling just how and when the book was found. It was discovered on 19 September last year in the strong room of the General Conference of the New Church, in the basement of their headquarters at Swedenborg House, Bloomsbury Way, London, W.C.1. I was at work there with a lady colleague, cleaning and tidying-up the strong room shelves. The book came to light on the topmost shelf, among a collection of manuscript sermons, and it had probably lain there undisturbed for years. It nearly went back among the sermons—for cleaners and dusters have little time to spare for curiosity. A casual glance revealed that the manuscript volume was "An Account of Four Journeys into the Southern Parts of Africa," by William Paterson, and the date of the first journey—1777—was clearly shown. It was this date that caught my attention, and I decided to take the book home for further examination.

The examination was interesting. The book possessed every sign of genuineness, and was in Paterson's hand-writing throughout. (A description of it, and a summary of its contents, is given later in this article). It contained the day-by-day adventures of William Paterson on his four journeys from Cape Town into the inner parts of South Africa between the years 1777 and 1779, and it gave much valuable topographical and botanical information. It mentioned people famous in the early days of the Cape, and in its rather terse and factual style was obviously a most faithful record.

From the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* I learned that Paterson was one of the early South African explorers—who had, moreover, published a book with the title, *A Narrative of Four Journeys into the Country of the Hottentots and Caffraria* (J. Johnson, 72 St. Paul's Churchyard: 1789). This book was the first of its kind in the English language. I began to realise that I possessed, perhaps, a treasure—and I telephoned South Africa House. In a little room overlooking Trafalgar Square I displayed my "find" to Mr. Roy Macnab, Cultural Attaché, and to a correspondent of the *Johannesburg Star*. A report appeared in the *Star* of Thursday, 27 September, and as a result a number of interesting enquiries came through to me from organisations in South Africa: from the Africana Museum, Johannesburg; the South African Public Library, Cape Town; the South African Biological Society; and a personal visit from Mr. Vernon S. Forbes, of Rhodes University, Grahamstown—well-known geographer and authority on early South African exploration and travel. An article was published in the *London Times* of Saturday, 24 November, and I was invited to give a recorded interview for broadcast by the B.B.C. South African Service on Sunday, 6 January. Thus the interest in the newly-discovered Paterson manuscript seemed to rise up like a tidal wave. In the end the book was sent, by request, to the Chief Archivist of the South African Archives, for thorough and expert examination.

I felt that it was necessary to compare the manuscript with Paterson's

published *Narrative*—a copy of which is in the British Museum. The *Narrative* is a handsome volume, beautifully printed, and containing a few fine illustrations in colour, mainly botanical. Paterson dedicated it to Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society, the father and friend of British exploration in the latter half of the eighteenth century. To my delight the manuscript and the *Narrative* were not identical, though it was obvious that the latter was based upon the former. Nor was the manuscript, in my view, a mere first draft for the *Narrative*: it seemed to be more original than that. Further study confirmed me in my opinion that the manuscript was Paterson's direct transcription of daily notes and jottings set down by him "on the spot" while travelling. If this opinion is correct, the manuscript may be regarded as unique, and as the first written document in English on South African exploration.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE MANUSCRIPT

The book is ten and three-quarter inches long and eight and a half inches wide, and is bound in leather. On the leather cover there is written, very faintly, what would seem to be, "Expenses of (or at) the Cape." On the inside front cover is the word *Grose* in pencil (Major Francis Grose, of the New South Wales Corps: see below), and in ink 16/6—this latter possibly written by Paterson. There are eighty-nine leaves, each bearing a watermark of a horned crown, fleur-de-lis, and the letters GR (King George the Third); also the name J. Whatman. The first page has the name "William Paterson" in the top right-hand corner.

The contents of the book are as follows—

1. An Account of four Journies (*sic*) into the Southern parts of Africa, by William Paterson (the name has been added by Paterson later).

Journey 1st. October 5th, 1777 (10½ pages).

Journey 2nd. May 22nd, 1778 (20½ pages).

Journey 3rd. December 23rd, 1778 (12 pages).

Journey 4th. June 18th, 1779 (26 pages).

2. Observations of the Thermometer kept on Second Journey from the 22nd May 1778 to the 18th November 1778 (Cape of Good Hope, 22nd May 1778: W.P.).

There are twenty-seven numbered pages of these.

3. Observations of the Thermometer, etc. on a Voyage from False Bay towards New South Wales, 1791.

There are nine unnumbered pages of these.

4. Observations of the Thermometer, etc. at Port Dalrymple, 1804—1805.

There are fifty-three unnumbered pages of these.

These meteorological records by Paterson, giving temperatures, direction of wind, and comments upon the weather, are of value and interest, for they are surely among the first ever made in South Africa and Australia. The first of them (no. 2 above) is printed as an appendix to the *Narrative*, but nos. 3 and 4 have probably never been made available till now.

The manuscript is in ink, slightly browned with age, but still very legible. Paterson's handwriting is clear but unstylish. His mode of expres-

sion is dry, repetitive, and even clumsy. It is obvious that he was not a well-educated man—for, though one may ignore his frequent mis-spellings of unfamiliar names of places and people, one may hardly overlook his almost total lack of punctuation and his elementary grammatical blunders. Here is a specimen, chosen at random from the manuscript—

(17th August 1779) “. . . we here unsaddled our horses and refreshed ourselves by the side of the river under the shadow of a willow which hung over the banks, and afterwards made an excursion along the river to the Eastward expecting we should see some signs of our companion who had been seven days absent from the waggons, There we saw several old uninhabited hutts where were a number of Baboons bones and other different wild beasts about one Thousand yards from the banks of the River the country is exceedingly barren and to the Eastward mountainous these Mountains are almost naked hardly a plant to be seen, but in the plain part of the Country to the westward I found variety of the most beautiful plants I had ever seen of the sorts particularly Geraneums and aschepias and but few succulent plants . . .”

Yet Paterson certainly possessed more than a smattering of botanical knowledge; indeed, such knowledge is rather remarkable for a young Scot of barely twenty-three years.

The published *Narrative* of 1789 has few blemishes of the kind mentioned above. It has some gracefulness and style, and bears the marks of a literary hand. So pronounced is the difference, that I am compelled to think that Paterson did not write the *Narrative* at all, but that it was the work of a “shadow” writer who used the manuscript as his basis. This view is strengthened by the fact that the *Narrative* has certain inaccuracies (mostly wrongly transcribed place names) which do not appear in the manuscript. Presumably the “shadow” writer—as is not unnatural—made certain slips in copying, and the newly discovered manuscript can now be used to correct them. If this assumption is correct, it adds to the importance of the discovery of Paterson’s own untouched record.

THE LIFE OF WILLIAM PATERSON

He was born on 10 August 1755 in Montrose (Parish of Kinnettle, by Forfar), Angus, Scotland, and was the son of a gardener in the employ of a Mr. Douglas of Britton.¹ This conflicts with Vernon S. Forbes’s statement that “he was of gentle birth and accustomed to move in good society.”² When still in his ’teens, he was favoured with the interest and patronage of Lady Mary Lyon of Glamis, Countess of Strathmore,³ “that strange and eccentric woman,”⁴ who sent him to South Africa “to collect rare plants and natural curiosities of every description.”⁴ He sailed in the *Houghton* at the beginning of 1777, and reached Cape Town in May. He stayed in South Africa a little over two and a half years.

It is not the purpose of this article to describe the four famous journeys recorded in the manuscript and the *Narrative*: they have been excellently summarised and expertly examined elsewhere.² Let it be said briefly that on the first and fourth of these journeys Paterson was in the company of Captain (later Colonel) Robert J. Gordon, a Dutchman of Scottish descent;

and was with Gordon on 17 August 1779 when he discovered the mouth of the Orange River and named the river in honour of the Prince of Orange. The manuscript describes this historic event. There is also some evidence that, on the second journey, Paterson discovered gold—thus being the first to find gold in South Africa.⁵ The manuscript makes no mention of this. It is pretty clear, however, that Paterson had no gold at the completion of his fourth journey, for he found himself in serious financial difficulties. “Her Ladyship, instead of fulfilling her engagements, suffered his bills to be protested and returned, thereby exposing him to great difficulties; and had it not been for the assistance of Colonel de Prehn, who advanced him money (£500) to settle with his creditors, he would have been thrown into gaol at the Cape.” So says the ever-talkative William Hickey, in his famous *Memoirs*.⁴ Paterson also had £400 from James Adcock, Hickey’s go-getting factotum. The explanation of poor Paterson’s *impasse* is seen in the fact that Lady Mary Lyon had recently married her second husband (Andrew Robinson Stoney, on 17 January 1777), who promptly began to discourage her schemes. He was to treat her with abominable cruelty later.

In 1780 Paterson sailed home via Amsterdam in the *Held Woltemade* with the Hickey party. There was some unpleasantness over money matters, as both De Prehn (a German Jew) and Adcock began to demand a speedy settlement of the debt. An obliging Mr. Wilkinson liquidated Paterson’s debt to De Prehn, and Hickey stood surety for his debt to Adcock. Paterson reached London, no doubt feeling that his South African adventures had ended on a rather unsatisfactory note.⁴

In October 1781 he accepted a commission in the new 98th regiment “raised by Colonel Fullarton from his own tenants in Scotland—the Colonel having a knowledge of and regard for Paterson’s family.”⁴ Here I must briefly mention the theory put forward by some historians that Paterson had been in South Africa as a spy. Forbes says, “It has been suggested that Paterson’s true mission to the Cape in 1777 was one of espionage, and that he was therefore sent with Johnstone’s fleet to Saldanha Bay in 1781”—as a pilot to the invading British force. Forbes’s comment upon this is as follows—“It is not unlikely that when in 1781, after his return from the Cape, he took a commission in the army, his knowledge of the colony was recognised as being of potential value to the troops assigned for the contemplated landing and invasion. Acting under orders, he had no other choice but to obey, however repugnant to his feelings may have been the prospect of guiding an invading force to the conquest of a people who had so lately treated him with such hospitality.”² It is difficult to pass judgment, as the known facts are scanty, and in some cases conflicting. My own view is, that in spite of his presence at Saldanha Bay in 1781, he was innocent of espionage at the Cape at the time of the four journeys. Forbes’s conclusion is probably not far from the truth, though there are difficulties of dating.

Paterson’s subsequent adventurous and colourful life must be summarised very briefly: it is perhaps of greater interest to Australia than to South Africa. For a year or two he served with his regiment in India,³ then returned to England. In 1789 he published his *Narrative* in London.

In June of that year he was made a captain, and given the job of recruiting for the newly-formed New South Wales Corps—probably sponsored in this by Banks. He married “a good cosy Scotch lass, fit for a soldier’s wife,”⁶ and on 15 March 1791 sailed for New South Wales from Spithead on one of the transport ships accompanying the *Gorgon*, taking his wife with him.⁷ By way of Teneriffe and the Cape Verde Islands the fleet reached the Cape towards the end of June.

Paterson was able to renew old acquaintanceships, and introduce his wife to old friends (e.g. Gordon). They lodged with the mother of the merchant Peter de Witt, and were visited by the Dutch governor, “the reluctant Mynheer van Graaf.”⁸ There was much feasting, and dancing to regimental bands. Paterson “discussed his discovery of gold in 1778 with Sebastiaan van Reenan (*sic*), and the possibility of finding a harbour from which to work a goldmine.”⁹ (It is significant that, after Paterson’s departure, Willem van Reenen, brother of Sebastiaan, made a journey north in search of gold, with official backing; but he went north of the Orange River to the Rehoboth district, where Paterson apparently had never been¹⁰). The fleet sailed from the Cape on 31 July.

Paterson’s experiences as an army officer in the Australian convict colony were amazing. He served in Norfolk Island—that tiny dot, “a little pine-clad world, remote in the Pacific Ocean”—and later in Sydney and Tasmania. The government of the colony came more and more into the power of the army, and after the departure of the commanding officer, Grose, “for reasons of health,” Paterson found himself—perhaps surprisingly—Lieutenant-Governor of New South Wales. His difficulties were many, and became increasingly irksome as laxity, immorality, and rebelliousness grew among convicts and soldiers alike. Yet he found time for exploration and scientific discovery. After a furlough in England (1796—99), he returned to find the colony riddled with intrigue and corruption. After a disastrous duel with John Macarthur, the famous pioneer breeder of merino sheep, in which Paterson nearly lost his life,⁸ he was sent by Governor King to form a post of occupancy at Port Dalrymple, Tasmania. Here, on this lonely shore—which must have reminded him of his native Scotland—he spent the latter years of his life—returning to Sydney in 1809 to administer the government after the deposition of William Bligh, the unpopular governor, of the “Mutiny” fame.⁸ Paterson died on 21 June 1810 on the ship *Dromedary*, sailing to England.

Mrs. Paterson came home in the *Dromedary*. She married Francis Grose, her late husband’s former army chief, but was soon widowed again. She spent many of her remaining years at the fashionable spa of Bath.⁷ No doubt, this second marriage explains the presence of the pencilled word *Grose* on the cover of the newly-found manuscript.

THE MYSTERY OF THE STRONG ROOM

How did the manuscript log-book of William Paterson’s South African travels come to be in the strong room of the General Conference of the New Church in London? This is as yet an unsolved mystery. Perhaps the most obvious question to ask is—was Paterson a member of the New

Church? I have found no trace of his connection with the New Church organisation, or indeed with any Church body (apart from the eulogistic memorial inscription on the cenotaph in the church-yard of the Parish Church of Kinnettles, by Forfar¹—which it may be of interest to quote at the end of this article). Yet it is just possible that Paterson was remotely connected with the New Church. The New Church is a Christian body accepting the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). Small groups of adherents began to meet in London in 1783, and the Church became organised in a very small way about 1787, when Paterson was in London. It is therefore possible that he was in touch with the Church at this time—though it should be remembered that he was an army man, a recruiting officer, and on the point of sailing from England. The Church records of this time make no mention of any William Paterson.

There is, however, an interesting paragraph in *The Rise and Progress of the New Church*, by Robert Hindmarsh (London, 1861, p. 49), which may be a link in the chain.⁹ "When the first vessel sailed with convicts from this country to Botany Bay, under the care of Governor Phillip, in 1787, Mr. John Lowes, a surgeon, who was employed by the government in that expedition, and with whom I (Hindmarsh) was particularly intimate, was entrusted with a large assortment of books, as a present for the use of the new colony. As he was himself favourable to the writings (of Swedenborg), it was reasonable to expect that he would take care to distribute them in the most judicious manner, both among the officers, his companions, and among such of the crew and convicts as he might think most capable of profiting by them. I had reason afterwards to believe that he discharged the trust reposed in him with care and punctuality: for in a letter received from him after his arrival at Botany Bay, he informed me that several officers approved of the writings, and cordially embraced their contents." Here then is proof that the New Church was, at least, known in Australia at the time of Paterson's residence there. Was he one of the officers who approved of, and cordially embraced, the New Church teachings? And did he, in turn, bequeath his writings—the manuscript *inter alia*—to the New Church organisation?

But when all is said, I feel certain that the likeliest link in the chain is Mrs. Paterson—later Mrs. Grose—and her years of widowhood in Bath. A society of the New Church existed in that city as early as 1829, and had members with interests in America, Australia, and South Africa.¹⁰ Though the name of Mrs. Grose does not appear, it does not seem unlikely that the lonely and ageing widow should turn to the Church for comfort and consolation, and leave her possessions to the Church by will. During the last war the church premises in Bath were severely damaged, and almost the whole of the society's fine library was brought to London. In the *History of the New Church in Bath* (London and Bath, 1895), is the following paragraph: "Sometime during the year 1844, Mr. Sammons, who attended the services of the Church, and was a frequent contributor to the *Bath Journal* under the nom-de-plume of "Sam Sly," left Bath for the Cape of Good Hope, and became the proprietor of the *South African Journal*.¹⁰"

The fact remains that the Paterson manuscript was found in the strong

room of the New Church headquarters; and unless its presence there was purely accidental—which is unlikely, there must be some link between William Paterson, the South African traveller, and the New Church organisation. It may even be that other Paterson relics lie hidden, waiting to be found.

Here, in conclusion, is the cenotaph inscription—

“Sacred to the memory of Colonel William Paterson, Fellow of the Royal Society, Member of the Asiatic and Linnean Societies, Lieutenant-Colonel of the 102nd Regiment, and for many years Lieutenant-Governor of New South Wales. He served thirty years in the Army, twenty-five of which were passed in the East Indies and in New South Wales; and in fulfilling his duty to his country he twice circumnavigated the globe. His taste for natural history induced him in the earlier part of his life to travel from the Cape of Good Hope into the interior of Africa, into which country he penetrated farther than any European had ever done before him. His unwearied assiduity in the pursuit of science, supported in an unusual degree by talent and zeal, enabled him to collect and bring to England specimens of plants and other curiosities, till then unknown. He discharged with honour and fidelity the trust reposed in him as an officer; and his services were particularly valuable in New South Wales as Lieutenant-Governor of that settlement. Nor did he there neglect his favourite pursuit, but continued to enrich both public and private museums by employing his leisure hours in useful researches. His life was not less amiable than useful, and his happy disposition endeared him to his dependents, to society, and to his friends. After a long period of ill-health he attempted to return to his native country, but it pleased God to take him during his voyage. He was born in this parish on the 10th of August 1755, and died on the 21st of June 1810.”¹

REFERENCES

- ¹*The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, Vol. XI, p. 215—Parish of Kinnettes, by Forfar.
- ²*The South African Geographical Journal*, 1948, pp. 52-70—Article on Paterson by Vernon S. Forbes.
- ³*The Dictionary of National Biography* (British)—reference under “Paterson.”
- ⁴*The Memoirs of William Hickey*, 4th ed. Vol. II—index references to Paterson.
- ⁵*New Travels*, by F. le Vaillant. London, 1796.
- ⁶“The Journal and Letters of Ralph Clark” (ms.) in the Mitchell Library, Sydney.
- ⁷*The Governor's Lady* (Mrs. Philip Gidley King), by Marnie Bassett. Oxford University Press, 1940.
- ⁸*Rum Rebellion*, by H. V. Evatt.
- ⁹*The Rise and Progress of the New Church*, by Robert Hindmarch. London, 1861.
- ¹⁰*The History of the New Church in Bath*, by David Chivers (London and Bath, 1859).