

# Melmoth — the first ten years (1888-1898)

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MELMOTH IN THE Mthonjaneni district\* of Zululand has often been called the 'gold rush town'. But in fact it owed its establishment not only to gold-bearing reefs in the vicinity, but also to earlier events in Zulu history which led to the occupation of the area by Boer farmers. The first ten years of Melmoth are of particular interest providing as they do a microcosm of the happenings of the period for the wider area of British Zululand.

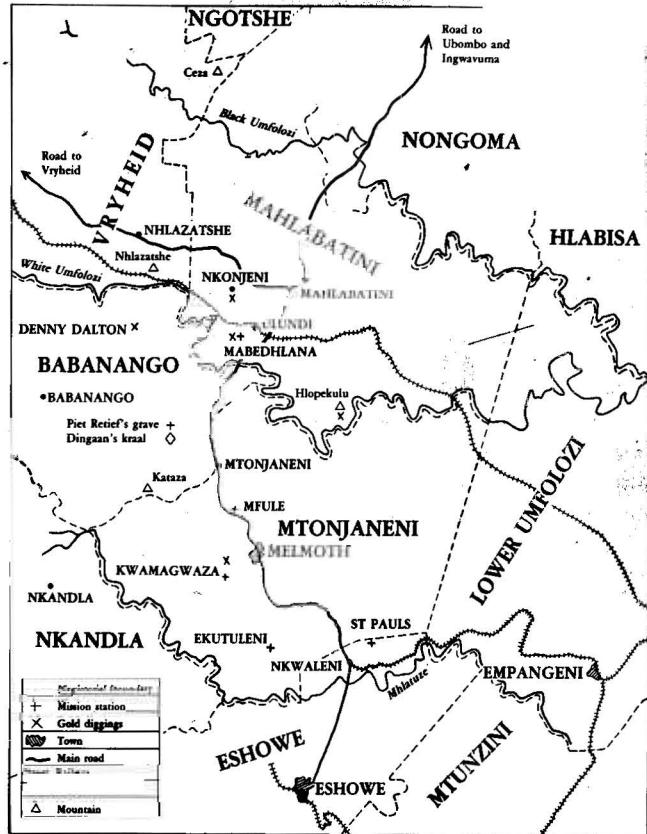
After the defeat of the Zulus in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 the British did not annex Zululand. Instead they deposed and exiled the Zulu king, Cetshwayo. In his place they appointed thirteen chiefs to rule over Zululand. With Cetshwayo's exile friction erupted among his supporters, the Usuthu, and the appointed chiefs, in particular Zibhebhu and Hamu. Soon a virtual civil war existed in northern Zululand with raids and counter-raids between the Usuthu and Zibhebhu's Mandlakazi. In January 1883 Cetshwayo arrived back in Zululand, having been released from exile. He was, however, only appointed chief over his own supporters, the Usuthu, in the central portion of Zululand. His great rival, Zibhebhu, became chief over north-eastern Zululand while the southern section between the Thukela and Mhlathuze rivers was proclaimed a British Reserve for those Zulus not wanting to be ruled by either Cetshwayo or Zibhebhu.<sup>1</sup>

With the creation of this reserve the British presence in Zululand became more permanent. In 1880 Melmoth Osborn was appointed British Resident to Zululand based at Nhlazatshe. In 1883 he was transferred to Eshowe in the Reserve Territory as commissioner. (He became chief magistrate of Zululand in 1887.)<sup>2</sup>

Cetshwayo's return from exile did not halt the civil war.<sup>3</sup> At the end of March 1883 Zibhebhu, at the Battle of Msebe, was able to trap and destroy the majority of the Usuthu forces. He subsequently launched a surprise attack on the royal kraal at Ulundi on 21 July 1883, forcing Cetshwayo to flee. Cetshwayo eventually sought refuge in the Reserve and died at Eshowe on 8 February 1884. (Some of his followers believed that he had been poisoned by Zibhebhu while others blamed Melmoth Osborn.) Cetshwayo's eldest son, Dinuzulu, was acknowledged as heir by the Usuthu but the British refused to recognize him as king of the Zulus. In an effort to assert his authority Dinuzulu approached the Boers of the South African Republic (SAR) for help.

With their assistance he was able to defeat Zibhebhu at the Battle of Tshaneni (near the present-day town of Mkuze) on 4 June 1884. In return for their support Dinuzulu promised the Boers compensation by way of land. In a treaty signed on 16 August 1884 he granted them a large undefined part of Zululand where they promptly began surveying and occupying farms.<sup>4</sup>

The British government, alarmed at the turn of events in Zululand, negotiated with the so-called 'New Republic' (formed from the ceded area of Zululand by the Boers led by Lucas Meyer) and on 22 October 1886 came to an agreement regarding the Boer occupation of western Zululand. In addition, on 5 February 1887 a British protectorate was proclaimed over the remainder of Zululand (this was extended to outright annexation by a proclamation dated 14 May



1887).<sup>5</sup> The boundary between the New Republic and Zululand, as set out by the agreement of 22 October 1886, left approximately 50 Boer farms on the Zululand side of the boundary. The Natal governor, Sir Arthur Havelock, would not allow these farms to be included in the New Republic as the road from Eshowe (in the Reserve) to Ulundi (the old royal capital) passed through them. The Boers were, however, allowed to remain in possession of their farms (occupation being on freehold lease) in the area known as 'Proviso B'.<sup>6</sup>

NB: All archival references are to materials in the Natal Archives Depot, Pietermaritzburg.

<sup>1</sup> For more details see C.T. Binns, *The last Zulu king: the life and death of Cetshwayo* (London, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> *Zululand Times*, 3.1.1957; *Dictionary of South African biography III* (Cape Town, 1977), p. 669.

<sup>3</sup> See J. Guy, *The destruction of the Zulu Kingdom: the civil war in Zululand, 1879-1884* (Cape Town, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> Binns, *Last Zulu king*, pp. 55-67.

<sup>5</sup> Magisterial records of the Mthonjaneni district, 1/Mel 5/1/10 Melmoth, Correspondence and other papers, 1887-1889: PB 31/1887, 24.5.1887.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*: PB 98/1887, Zululand Government notice (Proclamation 7/1887, 9.8.1887 and Proclamation 9/1887, 16.8.1887); *Natal Government Gazette*, 20.2.1888, pp. 229-230, (Proclamation 3/1888, 15.2.1888).

\*Up to 1898 the Mthonjaneni district included the Mahlabathini area, at which date the latter became a separate district.

Until the time when Zululand was opened to white settlers by the Delimitation Commission in 1905, these Boers remained the only whites who were allowed to own farms in British Zululand. It was these farmers who pressed for the establishment of a town in the Mthonjaneni district to serve their needs.

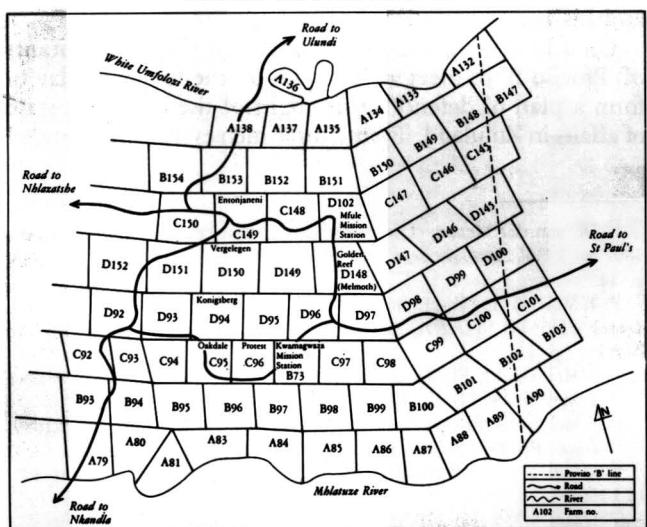
## THE FIRST MAGISTRATE

The boundaries of the Mthonjaneni district were set as the Nhlazatshe Mountain-Kataza-Nkandla line in the west; the Mona River and Black Mfolozi River confluence to the Mfule River and Mhlathuze River confluence line in the east; the Mhlathuze River in the south and the Black Mfolozi River in the north. (The district was only reduced in size in April 1898 when the White Mfolozi River became the northern boundary with the formation of the Mahlabathini magistracy).<sup>7</sup>

The first magistrate of the Mthonjaneni magisterial district was John Lock Knight who assumed duties as sub-commissioner on 6 April 1887. He left Eshowe for his district on 16 April and arrived at Nkonjeni where he set up camp on 19 April after having stayed overnight at C.D. Uys's farm Vergelegen. One of Knight's first official duties was to meet a deputation of Boer settlers who informed him that they had received notice from the New Republic authorities to pay quitrent on their 'Proviso B' farms to that government. Knight told them to ignore these demands and also assured them that they would in due course be given title to their farms in 'Proviso B'. However, the onus to prove their ownership of these farms was on the Boer farmers themselves and they had to substantiate it with documents before 16 April 1889.<sup>8</sup> (See map and annexure for farms and list of owners.)

On 27 May 1887 Knight moved to the Mfule Mission Station (run by the Rev. O.S. Steenberg) believing this location to be more central to the district. There he used the school building as an office and courtroom until April 1888.<sup>9</sup> On 25 June 1887 Knight was formally appointed assistant commissioner and resident magistrate of the Mthonjaneni district.<sup>10</sup>

## F FARMS IN PROVISO 'B'



mining of gold. A goldmine, the Golden Hat, was briefly worked in the neighbourhood but never became payable. Although Ortlepp's farm was named 'Golden Reef' the buyers of erven in Melmoth, after the first rush of mining speculators to Osborn, were mainly farmers. Melmoth therefore owed its survival not to gold mining but to the surrounding farmers who regarded it as a service centre. Eventually, in 1890, 565 hectares of Osborn were transferred to the Melmoth townlands.<sup>17</sup>

Melmoth itself experienced slow growth. In April 1888 Knight had moved his residency from Mfule to the Kwamagwaza Mission Station. A rough mud brick court-house was soon built in Melmoth although it was only in January 1890 that construction of the new brick court-house was started. Eventually, late in 1891, Knight called a meeting of all qualified voters of the Mthonjaneni district for the purpose of requesting the government to officially proclaim Melmoth a town. Nothing, however, came of this and Melmoth remained a private town until 1932 when a health committee was established. It only obtained town board status in 1971. By 1894 Melmoth consisted of a courtroom and offices, a gaol, two stores and ten houses. Almost ten years later the townlands were 1 285 hectares in extent.<sup>18</sup>

#### EARLY ADMINISTRATION AND THE 1888 DISTURBANCES

Knight had begun to organize his district at an early stage. On 11 January 1888 he appointed L.E.N. Tyrviell and W.W. Barker as border customs officials. Tyrviell was based near Nkande in the Nquthu district while Barker was at the spot where the road from Nhlazatshe crossed the boundary between the New Republic and Zululand.<sup>19</sup> Because of the number of whites in the district it was felt necessary to appoint a justice of the peace and on 2 February 1888 Knight recommended Dirk Cornelius Uys of the farm Vergelegen for the post.<sup>20</sup> There were also police camps at Ulundi under Sub-Inspector Charles Osborn and at Nkonjeni under Sub-Inspector C. Deare.<sup>21</sup> The first white police constable at Melmoth was J.S. McAlister who was appointed on 1 June 1889<sup>22</sup> while the first clerk of the court was G.N. Adamson. On 14 September 1888 Knight had appointed J.A.F. Ortlepp as the first poundmaster of the public pound, a post which he held until his resignation at the end of 1890 when he was succeeded by H. Johnston.<sup>23</sup> The first gaoler was C.S. Eastwood, appointed in May 1891,<sup>24</sup> while the first game supervisor for the district was only appointed in June 1895.<sup>25</sup> His duties involved patrolling the district to ensure that no game hunting was carried out without licences, and that no protected game (hippopotamus, rhinoceros or elephant) was killed.

The smooth running of the district's affairs was disrupted by the disturbances of 1888. On 15 November 1887 the governor of Natal, A.E. Havelock, gave permission to Zibhebhu and his people to return and re-occupy the lands which they had occupied before being defeated by Dinuzulu in 1884. Zibhebhu was however not restored to the chieftainship of territories to which he had been appointed by the British government at the close of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 or in 1882 just prior to Cetshwayo's return to Zululand. As British subjects, Zibhebhu and his people were only permitted to re-occupy their old tribal lands — an area bordered in the west by the Nongoma Hills, in the south by the Mapopoma River, in the north by the Mkhuze River and in the east by the Lebombo Mountains. W. Addison, the assistant-commissioner for the Ndwandwe district, was instructed to mark out a suitable location for Zibhebhu's people in the locality where their old tribal sites were situat-

ted. At the same time Addison was to remove from the area any Usuthu squatters who refused to come under Zibhebhu's authority as their chief. Addison provisionally marked out the boundaries and Zibhebhu moved from the Eshowe district to Ndwandwe. The governor, however, considered the provisional location too large for Zibhebhu's needs. Knight was then appointed to revise the boundaries which he did during April 1888. Zibhebhu's tribal area was to contain no lands not previously occupied by the Mandlakazi tribe prior to 1879. Knight was also instructed to, as far as possible, demarcate a neutral area between the Mandlakazi and the Usuthu.<sup>26</sup>

These measures proved inadequate. Addison's provisional Mandlakazi location had contained numbers of Usuthu who had occupied Zibhebhu's lands after his defeat at the Battle of Tshaneni in June 1884. Dinuzulu, feeling himself cheated, set in motion a chain of events which lead to the 1888 disturbances. At the beginning of that year he crossed over into the New Republic to ask for Boer assistance. He met a republican official, field-cornet Paul Bester, at Ceza Mountain on 15 February 1888 and later also landdrost J. Krogh of Wakkerstroom. By early March the authorities in Zululand had got to hear of these meetings and then informed Lucas Meyer that no interference in Zululand affairs by Boers from the SAR would be tolerated.<sup>27</sup> This did not deter Dinuzulu from stirring up trouble. In the Mthonjaneni district there were persistent rumours throughout March 1888 of tribesmen going off to join Dinuzulu's impis. On 7 April Knight reported to the resident commissioner and chief magistrate of Zululand, Melmoth Osborn, that Usuthu tribesmen were mustering at Tshingana's kraal near Hlopekulu.<sup>28</sup> By the end of April he reported 'natives in this district arming all over the place'.<sup>29</sup> Knight then proceeded to seize the cattle of all those who had already joined Dinuzulu. On 30 April Chief Quetuka defied the police while they were out seizing cattle.<sup>30</sup> As yet there were no open hostilities, although on 17 and 18 May a large body of armed men were reported to be moving through the Ulundi Valley. But soon afterwards Quetuka was arrested for stirring up unrest and, while being brought in to Melmoth by J.S. McAlister of the Zululand Police, the party was attacked by a group of approximately 300 Zulus attempting a rescue. The attackers were driven off with the loss of one killed and three wounded. McAlister and his men suffered no losses.<sup>31</sup>

On 4 June 1888 Knight requested all white inhabitants of 'Proviso B' to meet at Melmoth on the following day to form a plan of defence in the light of the unsettled state of affairs in Zululand. Twenty-three men eventually attended

<sup>17</sup> W. van der Merwe, 'Die vestiging van Blankes in Zoeloeland vanaf 1897 tot 1936', *Archives year book for South African history* 47 (1), 1984, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/4: PB 436/1889, 28.9.1889, and PB 29/1890, 13.1.1889; 1/Mel 5/1/5: PB 554/1891, 19.11.1891; Van der Merwe, 'Die vestiging van Blankes', p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/10: PB 23/1888, 11.1.1888.

<sup>20</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/3: PB 45/1888, 2.2.1888.

<sup>21</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/4: PB 571/1889, 17.12.1889, and PB 581/1889, 18.12.1889.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*: PB 558/1889, 7.12.1889.

<sup>23</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/3: PB 464/1888, 14.9.1888; 1/Mel 5/1/4: PB 24/1891, 12.1.1891.

<sup>24</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/5: PB 279/1891, 26.5.1891.

<sup>25</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/6: Melmoth, Letter book, 1894-1895, 17.6.1895, p. 704.

<sup>26</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/10: PB 111/1888, 20.3.1888; 1/Mel 5/1/3: PB 148/1888, 30.4.1888.

<sup>27</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/10: PB 89/1888, 7.3.1888.

<sup>28</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/3: PB 131/1888, 7.4.1888.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*: PB 147/1888, 29.4.1888.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*: PB 147/1888, 30.4.1888.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*: PB 195/1888, 31.5.1888.

and professed themselves willing to defend the district if provided with rifles and ammunition. Their commitment was soon put to the test. During the night of 7 June the kraals near Melmoth and Kwamagwaza were deserted en masse. On 9 June a messenger from the loyal chief Siteku reported that an impi had assembled near Kwamagwaza with the rumoured intention of attacking the magistracy. The whites of the area were called out but the impi moved off through the SAR to join Dinuzulu at Ceza Mountain.<sup>32</sup>

Eventually on 18 June, as the tensions increased, Knight set about raising a 'native' levy. These levies were given strips of turkey red material for identification purposes. Towards the end of June a number of clashes between the authorities and the Usuthu rebels occurred in the district. On 25 June Knight had received reports that armed Usuthu were crossing into Zululand from the SAR to join Dinuzulu and Tshingana. On 28 June Osborn ordered Knight to proceed with the levies to Hlopekulu and there to apprehend the Usuthu gathered under Tshingana. The following day Knight with 650 native levies under F.S. McAlister and F.E. Markham moved off towards Hlopekulu. During the night of 30 June they surrounded Tshingana's refuge on Hlopekulu Mountain and after a short encounter on 2 July they captured large numbers of Usuthu although Tshingana escaped.<sup>33</sup>

After this clash the disturbances and unrest in the area subsided and the district could look forward to a period of growth and prosperity. There was also hope that the signs of the presence of gold would translate into payable finds. Prospectors and speculators began coming into the district and a number of stores were established.

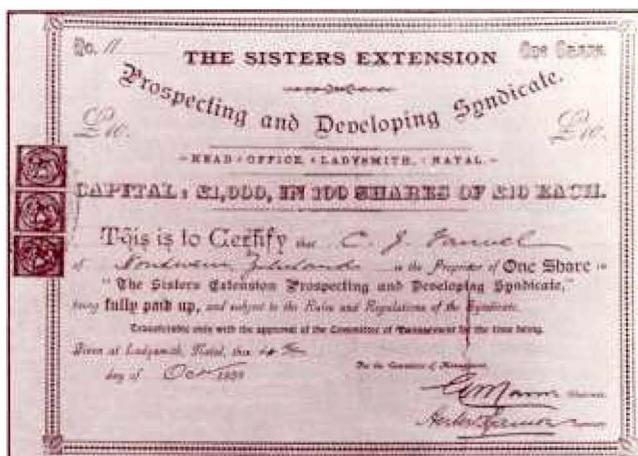
## ECONOMIC LIFE AND HARDSHIPS

The first to apply for a store licence for the Mthonjaneni district were Mann, Latham & Co. of Ladysmith in July 1887 while on 16 January 1888 A. Moore was granted a licence to sell liquor (but not to blacks) and opened a store in the Ulundi Valley. His main customers were the soldiers of the Royal Scots Battalion based at Enthonjaneni (Mthonjaneni). Bernard Cressey was granted a licence for his Jubilee Store at Nkonjeni on 16 November 1887 by the resident magistrate of Ndwandwe which licence was confirmed by the Mthonjaneni magistrate on 29 February 1888. The first store licence for Melmoth was granted to Thomas Allison on 9 June 1888. He was also given a liquor licence on the condition that he himself resided in Ortlepp's new town (Melmoth). Allison was soon followed by A.S. Mann & Co. of Mhlathuze Drift who acquired a bottle-store licence for Melmoth on 29 January 1889. Cressey transferred his Equatsha Store licence to F.E. Mann on 10 August 1891 and by October 1891 the following storekeepers had opened stores in the district: E.J. Smith, Melmoth; C.E. Symmonds, Melmoth; A. Moore with his Havelock Store and Ulundi Hotel at Ulundi; and F.E. Mann at Equatsha. By 1893 Bernard Cressey had opened his Mabedhlana Store to cater for the gold prospectors in that area while J. Fortuno had also opened the Mthonjaneni Store. The first chemist shop in Melmoth was opened by C.E. Symmonds in 1894. By the end of 1894 licences for eight stores, three canteens, two chemists and one auctioneer had been granted for the Mthonjaneni district. All were hoping to take advantage of the Zululand gold rush of 1894-1896, but by 1897, when the gold discoveries proved fruitless, there were still only two liquor licences as well as licences for twelve stores, two chemists, and one hotel for the district.<sup>34</sup>

For many years, there had been persistent rumours of the existence of gold in Zululand especially in the Nhlazatshe

area. But prior to the British annexation of Zululand in 1887 prospectors had been refused entry into Zululand although a number had penetrated the region in the guise of hunters, but with no luck. After the incorporation in 1886 of the New Republic (which became the Vryheid district) into the SAR the obstacles to prospectors were removed. There was considerable prospecting activity and numerous small finds of gold were reported.

The town of Osborn had been established as a result of substantial discoveries in the area. Ortlepp even named his farm 'Golden Reef' in the belief that the discoveries would one day rival those of the Witwatersrand. Both he and Kritzinger (of the farm Protest) had laid out their towns on the basis of showings of gold-bearing reefs on their two farms, Golden Reef and Protest, and a neighbouring farm, Konigsberg. To exploit these deposits the Harewood Gold Mining Syndicate was launched. It began working outcrops of gold-bearing quartz on the farm Konigsberg, and in December 1890 shipped a paraffin tin filled with gold-bearing quartz to A.S. Guillot of the New York Stock Exchange in an effort to arouse interest in the raising of share capital. But due to the supposed inaccessibility of the area and because the claims were in British Zululand where satisfactory titles to land were unobtainable, there was insufficient public interest to warrant a share flotation. The financial depression of the time also played a part in this lack of interest. There were other gold discoveries in the district. On 19 August 1890 R.C. Hartley informed the magistrate of Mthonjaneni that he had discovered a gold reef at Mabedhlana near Ulundi.<sup>35</sup>



A share certificate for one of the gold-mining syndicates operating in Zululand in the 1880s.

PHOTOGRAPH: TINA MARTIN (HSRC)

A good deal of prospecting also took place in the Vryheid district of the SAR. At the beginning of 1889 a syndicate of investors from Pietermaritzburg had been formed for the purpose of prospecting certain farms in the Vryheid district

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*: PB 207/1888, 4.6.1888, PB 215/1888, 5.6.1888, PB 228/1888, 8.6.1888, and PB 233/1888, 10.6.1888.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*: PB 250/1888, 18.6.1888, and PB 332/1888, 7.7.1888; 1/Mel 5/1/10: PB 287/1888, 25.6.1888, PB 308/1888, 28.6.1888, and PB 312/1888, 30.6.1888.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*: 1/Mel 5/1/3: PB 62/1887, 27.7.1887, PB 14/1888, 16.1.1888, PB 54/1888, 29.2.1888, PB 231/1888, 9.6.1888 and PB 381/1888, 2.8.1888; 1/Mel 5/1/4: PB 22/1889, 29.1.1889; 1/Mel 5/1/5: PB 483/1891, 7.10.1891; 1/Mel 5/1/6: PB 324/1894, 12.7.1894, p. 271, and 2.2.1895, p. 515; 1/Mel 5/1/8: 15.2.1898, p. 235.

<sup>35</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/11 Melmoth, Correspondence and other papers, 1890-1893: PB 370/1890, 19.8.1890.

(all near the Zululand border). The syndicate engaged a prospector who from time to time reported finding small deposits of gold. Eventually, after two years, he advised the syndicate of finding much richer deposits in a creek on the farm Tusschenbyde in the valley of the White Mfolozi River about 12 km south of the Nhlazatsho Mountain. In August 1891 the syndicate engaged a qualified mining engineer from Johannesburg, and after an examination of the site he submitted a very favourable report. During the first half of 1893 G.A. Denny, assisted by J.T. Carrick, carried out a thorough investigation as well as numerous assays on Tusschenbyde. On 3 April 1893 he released his findings on what became known as the Denny-Dalton Goldfields (Dalton being the first to start actual mining operations on the property some time in 1892). Denny estimated the value of the gold-bearing reef on Tusschenbyde at £16 516 500.<sup>36</sup> This optimistic report led to a gold rush and fortune-seekers streamed into the area.

After the release of Denny's report in April 1893 there was renewed activity in the Mthonjaneni district. In May 1893 the Melmoth Syndicate applied for four claims at Mabedhlana in the names of H.T. Sutherland, R.M. Bell, H.G. Symmonds and R.C. Hartley, while in June 1893 the Mabedhlana Syndicate headed by Carl Bryhn was registered. Prospecting spread throughout the district and on 15 July 1893 F.E. Mann, A.S. Mann and A.B. Shedlock applied for claims near Nkonjeni.<sup>37</sup>

At the beginning of June 1894 a blanket formation, similar to the one in the Denny-Dalton Goldfield in the SAR, but on the surface, was found on the southern slope of the Hlopekulu Mountain in the White Mfolozi River valley.<sup>38</sup> The rush was on and prospectors flooded the area. In the first half of June 1894, 37 prospecting licences for the Mthonjaneni district were issued which opened up Zululand to mining and laid down the necessary regulations. Another 40 licences were issued by the end of June 1894 (making a total of 111 issued since the beginning of 1894), while 31 prospecting areas were registered, bringing the total to 52 in the Mthonjaneni district. By mid-July 1894 there were 130 prospecting licences in force and 91 prospecting areas registered. But, on an inspection trip, the new magistrate, A.J. Shepstone, found only 21 prospectors working their claims which led him to report that the others had been pegged for speculation purposes. The government then decided to enforce the provision that licences were only valid if the claim was worked. Consequently there was a drop in the licences issued with only twenty licences and three prospecting areas being registered in the Mthonjaneni district for July. Eventually, for the whole of 1894, the magistrate of Mthonjaneni granted 183 licences, made 199 renewals and registered six licences on the Melmoth townlands. A sum of £266 1s. 3d. was paid in lieu of licence fees for that year.<sup>39</sup>

A limited amount of gold was also recovered. Up to 31 December 1893 royalties had been paid to the magistrate of Mthonjaneni on 90 oz of gold from the Harewood Gold Mining Co. and 45 oz from I.P. Jacobsz of the farm Konigsberg. By 31 September 1894 the Harewood Co. had paid royalties on another 201 oz making a total of 336 oz from the district.<sup>40</sup>

In December 1894 the first crushing with the ten-stamp battery of the Denny-Dalton Co. took place. The results were awaited with bated breath and there even appeared to be a slight revival in the pegging of areas at Mabedhlana where it was anticipated a rush would take place in the event of a good result being obtained from this crushing. The Denny-Dalton crushing results were, however, disappointing and

gold mining activity came to a standstill in the Mthonjaneni district. Eventually, in 1896, the Metropolitan Exploration Syndicate of Johannesburg purchased the Harewood Co. and had an option on the neighbouring Watkins Reef property. A trial crushing of 400 tons was undertaken by the Harewood Mill while development work was continued on both the Watkins Reef and the Carrick Syndicate claims. But in January 1897 the Harewood Gold Mining Co. went into liquidation with the magistrate, A.J. Shepstone, acting as chief liquidator. Proceedings had been instituted by A.R. Pierson for wages owed to black labourers (a sum of £234 4s. 1d.).<sup>41</sup>

In 1897 there was another trial crushing by the Harewood Mill, this time of 224 tons from the Watkins Reef. This, however, only yielded a mere 57,29 oz of gold.<sup>42</sup> Although it seemed as if the deposits were not payable, optimism still existed and in April 1898 Owen & Co. applied for a provisional store licence on the farm Oakdale, on the condition that 'gold properties on the farm prove successful'.<sup>43</sup> Another new company, The Times Gold Mining Co., was launched at the same time to exploit gold deposits in the district. But by June 1899 all activity on the Zululand goldfields had practically ceased. (Rushes at Mfongozi in the Nkandla district and at Nondweni in the Nquthu district in 1896 had also petered out.) What little prospecting and working of individual claims there was, ended with the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War in October 1899. Melmoth's hopes of being the centre of a new gold-mining area went unfulfilled.

During the mid-1890s the district, like the rest of Zululand, was hit by a series of natural calamities: drought, locusts, famine, bovine lung-sickness, nagana and finally rinderpest, all of which created immense difficulties for the inhabitants of the district.

After a number of drought years, swarms of locusts had entered the district during November 1894. In February 1895 large swarms of hoppers hatched out, causing considerable damage to crops. In April 1895 all the chiefs of the district were instructed to form work parties to help with the destruction of locusts. Sub-Inspector C. Foxon was placed in charge of these work squads. The method used was to dig long trenches into which the hoppers were directed, by means of screens, and then covered with soil. But in February 1896 dry weather favoured extensive hatchings and the locust swarms added to the magistrate's fears of famine amongst the black inhabitants of his district.<sup>44</sup> He had reported at the beginning of March 1896 that there would be many deaths from famine unless the government authorities provided extensive relief to those who were not in a position to buy food. At that stage those who seemed to be suffering most lived in the White Mfolozi River Valley and were surviving on fruits, roots and herbs, since their crops had been destroyed by locusts. They had also lost most of their cattle

<sup>36</sup> Natal Witness, 26.4.1893; G.A. Denny, *The Denny-Dalton gold fields* ... (Pietermaritzburg, 1893), pp. 1 and 6-7.

<sup>37</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/11: letter 23.5.1893; PB 267/1893, 30.6.1893; letter 15.7.1893.

<sup>38</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/6: 30.6.1894, pp. 260-261.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*: 15.6.1894, p. 248, and 30.6.1894, p. 260; PB 350/1894, 17.7.1894, p. 277, 31.7.1894, p. 296, and 30.1.1895, p. 492.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*: 30.1.1895, p. 492.

<sup>41</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/7, Melmoth, Letter book, 1896-1897: 15.2.1897, p. 822; 1/Mel 5/1/12: Melmoth, Correspondence and other papers, 1894-1898: PB 45/1897, 22.1.1897.

<sup>42</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/8: 15.2.1898, p. 233.

<sup>43</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/13 Melmoth, Correspondence and other papers, 1898-1900: PB 169/1898, 25.4.1898.

<sup>44</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/6: PB 105/1895, 5.3.1895, p. 560, and PB 183/1895, 20.4.1895, p. 618; 1/Mel 5/1/7: PB 141/1896, 3.3.1896, p. 302.

as a result of an outbreak of nagana. Several kraals in the area were deserted as the inhabitants had left in the hope of obtaining food elsewhere.<sup>45</sup>

The government soon responded to the magistrate's plea and in March 1896 had sold 290 muids of mealies at cost price to help avert the threat of famine, while 28 licences had been granted to traders to sell 28 wagon loads of mealies. Luckily good rains fell in April 1896 and the inhabitants of the district were able to make do with the crops left over after the locust depredations. Only 89 muids of government mealies were sold in the Mthonjaneni district in April while in May 10 muids were sold at Melmoth and another 33 muids at the White Mfolozi Drift.<sup>46</sup> But with the return of locust swarms demand began to increase, 99 muids being sold in the Mthonjaneni district during July 1896. Problems were however being encountered in distributing the mealies to the various depots because of the enforcement of the lung-sickness and rinderpest regulations. Owing to the transport problem no mealies were delivered to Melmoth in September and the magistrate advised the black inhabitants of the district to plant sweet potatoes and other tubers to avoid starvation and further depredations by locusts. Fortunately a trader, A. Moore, had 60 muids which he could sell, relieving the situation somewhat. But because traders were charging exorbitant prices (£1 15s. per muid), the magistrate became reluctant to grant licences for the trading of mealies. In October only 47 muids of mealies reached Melmoth and were sold at cost price immediately on arrival.<sup>47</sup>

In November 1896, by using mules, the authorities were able to deliver 621 muids to Melmoth of which 434 were sold during that month. In December 339 muids were sold while 139 were issued on credit (which was advanced for the first time during the famine crisis). The new year started off with good rains and the locust invasion seemed to have subsided; so hopes were raised for better crops in 1897. The total number of muids which the government sold in the Mthonjaneni district during 1896 was 2 575 (out of a total of 2 994 muids delivered). These mealies were sold at cost price as part of the government's famine-relief measures. Licences to trade 130 wagon loads and one cart load of mealies were granted. Storekeepers had also sold considerable quantities of mealies in their own right.<sup>48</sup>

The famine had been aggravated not only by the damage caused by locusts to crops but also by the outbreak of animal diseases. In May 1896 an outbreak of bovine lung-sickness occurred amongst I.J. Symmond's cattle. Soon afterwards there were further outbreaks amongst cattle on the Melmoth town lands and the inoculation of cattle against lung-sickness was instituted. On 6 June 28 government oxen which had not mixed with infected cattle were sent to the Ubombo magistracy for safekeeping. In addition, no Boers of the SAR were allowed to bring cattle or sheep into Zululand for their usual winter grazing. But the disease continued to spread during early 1897 and this led to stricter enforcement of the provisions of the lung-sickness laws in the district. A number of extra constables were appointed to enforce the restrictions.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to lung-sickness, the inhabitants had to contend with a renewed outbreak of the disease nagana which was an ever-present threat to cattle in Zululand, especially in the low-lying river valleys. Its incidence was cyclic and its severity depended on the regular increase and decrease of the tsetse fly population. However, in the early years of British Zululand, the popular belief amongst settlers and authorities alike was that large game (especially kudu, zebra and buffalo) were carriers of the disease. To ensure nagana-free cattle these big-game species had to be kept away from

farming areas. As a result, big-game hunts with their concomitant slaughter of game were instituted as a means of creating nagana-free areas. The first big-game drive in the Mthonjaneni district was held during March 1894. However, in 1896, when the spread of nagana began reaching crisis proportions, the magistrate, A.J. Shepstone, was authorized to 'organise hunts to drive the large game from the crown lands in the neighbourhood of farms or inhabited kraals'.<sup>50</sup> Accordingly, on 19 and 20 October 1896, a major game hunt was held in the Mthonjaneni area to destroy large game which was held responsible for the spread of nagana. On 25 October another hunt was held in the Nhlazatshe Valley. At a public meeting held in Melmoth on 29 October and chaired by D.C. Uys, farmers demanded that more hunts be undertaken. As a result, on 20 November, a further hunting drive was carried out in the valley of the White Mfolozi River near Hlopekulu.<sup>51</sup>

But these two problem diseases were soon eclipsed by the devastation caused by the rinderpest epidemic. Rinderpest had made its first appearance in Zululand in March 1896 (at Pola) and the magistrates were instructed to isolate, destroy and bury any infected cattle. A proclamation in April 1896 also prohibited the introduction of livestock into Zululand from the SAR or Portuguese territory. The SAR had reciprocated with a regulation, coming into effect on 8 September 1896, which stipulated that no stock from Zululand would be allowed into the SAR except if the owners could produce a certificate from a magistrate or a local rinderpest committee. Even this limited movement of livestock, however, came to an end in October 1896 when the Natal government prohibited the introduction into Natal of cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, dogs, buck, hides, horns, hoofs, bones or meat from the OFS, SAR or Zululand. In addition, all horses, donkeys or mules crossing the Natal borders had to be sprayed with a solution of sheep-dip or *Jeyes* fluid and water.<sup>52</sup>

In the Mthonjaneni district itself, various measures were instituted by the magistrate in an attempt to counter the spread of rinderpest. To prevent the movement of any stock, three white and 23 black rinderpest guards were appointed in February 1897 and stationed along the SAR-Zululand border. Furthermore, in response to a resolution taken at a public meeting held in July 1897, J.A.F. Ortlepp and F.W. White (accompanied by the government-nominated A.J. Oxborrow) travelled at government expense to Ladysmith to obtain all the information they could with regard to the treatment of the disease.<sup>53</sup>

During July and August 1897 rinderpest began spreading through the district. In August, Dr J. Petrie, A.J. Oxborrow and D.C. Uys were appointed rinderpest commissioners for the Mthonjaneni district, while an amount of £250 was spent in the same month on preventative measures. Several whites were instructed in the method of extracting and selecting bile for inoculation purposes. In addition, a bile-and-serum

<sup>45</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/6: PB 141/1896, 3.3.1896, p. 301.

<sup>46</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/7: PB 176/1896, 6.4.1896, pp. 331-332, and 6.6.1896, p. 429.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*: 10.8.1896, p. 553, 7.9.1896, p. 584, 8.10.1896, p. 631, and 5.11.1896, p. 672.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*: 3.12.1896, p. 709; PB 18/1897, 13.1.1897, p. 754, and 15.2.1897, p. 820.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*: PB 357/1896; 1/Mel 5/1/12: PB 67/1897, 3.2.1897.

<sup>50</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/12: PB 556/1896, 4.11.1896.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*: PB 532/1896, 19.10.1896, and 20.10.1896; 1/Mel 5/1/7: 5.11.1896, p. 673.

<sup>52</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/12: PB 206/1896, 20.3.1896, PB 232/1896, 1.5.1896, and PB 39/1896, 28.7.1897; 1/Mel 5/1/7: 8.10.1896.

<sup>53</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/7: 15.2.1897, p. 827; 1/Mel 5/1/8: 31.7.1897, p. 34.

station was established at Mthonjaneni. Inoculation, using the Watkins-Pickford method, was instituted. However, the rinderpest commissioners were soon faced with the problem of chiefs and headmen withholding information concerning the spread of rinderpest as the latter resented the fact that the authorities destroyed a whole herd whenever an outbreak was confirmed in that herd.<sup>54</sup>

Despite this problem, the inoculation of cattle continued and by the middle of September 1897 approximately 9 000 head of cattle (of which 4 000 belonged to black inhabitants of the district) had been inoculated. At the same time 1 200 cattle in the district had died from rinderpest, very few of these from those already inoculated. By the end of September a sum of £340 had been spent on inoculation while 11 000 cattle (7 000 owned by blacks) had been inoculated. Unfortunately by the end of October 1897 many kraals in the district, especially those refusing to have their cattle inoculated, had lost all their cattle and were destitute. Many black owners began selling their remaining cattle to white farmers for nominal prices, who then had them inoculated and were able to save a fair number.<sup>55</sup>

Owing to rinderpest, transport became a problem and there was a steep rise in all prices of goods sold by the storekeepers. In November 1897 locusts once again made their appearance in the district, adding considerably to the hardships already being experienced by the district's inhabitants. At the beginning of December the magistrate expressed fears of renewed famine. Losses from the rinderpest were high and in 1897 about 24 000 head of cattle died. Of these 21 000 were owned by black inhabitants of the district. Their losses were large mainly because of their refusal to accept inoculation until it was too late, i.e. when signs of the disease had already appeared in their herds. In addition, the disease had also spread to their goats as well as to large and small game. Owing to the high mortality of game from rinderpest, no hunting permits were issued for two years for the shooting of kudu or buffalo, all contributing to the suffering of the inhabitants. Eventually the disease ran its course in the district and in February 1898 the serum station at Mthonjaneni was closed.<sup>56</sup>

## COMMUNITY LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT

The provision of social services in the town of Melmoth was not neglected during this time notwithstanding all the difficulties and calamities experienced by the district. There had been a slow increase in the white population. In the first magisterial census in 1888 there were 132 male and 89 female whites in the district, while the blacks were estimated at 4 336 males and 6 804 females. The increase in the number of whites for the period 1888-1897 is shown in the following table.<sup>57</sup>

### WHITE POPULATION OF THE MTHONJANENI DISTRICT, 1888-1897

Year	Male	Female	Total
1888	132	89	221
1889	126	94	220
1890	123	113	236
1891	159	113	274
1893	—	—	334
1894	—	—	410
1895	—	—	460
1896	—	—	410*
1897	—	—	410*

\* Loss owing to decrease in number of gold prospectors.



Aerial view of Melmoth, 1939.

PHOTOGRAPH: AIRCRAFT OPERATIONS COMPANY OF SOUTH AFRICA

These white settlers, most of them farmers in the 'Proviso B' area, soon began demanding certain services. In 1891 a petition submitted by J.A.F. Ortlepp and signed by 40 others requested the appointment of a district surgeon. James Petrie, the missionary doctor at the Kwamagwaza Mission Station, was offered the position, which he duly accepted on 1 June 1891 (and held until 1926). He remained based at Kwamagwaza as the hospital, established with the mission, provided adequate facilities for the whole district.<sup>58</sup>

In 1893 there had been an outbreak of smallpox on A.L. Pretorius's farm. A number of deaths occurred and the disease remained rampant in the district until the end of October 1898 in which month the authorities had managed to inoculate 6 000 of the district's black inhabitants which helped to bring the disease under control.<sup>59</sup>

Communications also played a role in the development of the district and town. The first traders had pioneered wagon tracks but it was only in the early 1890s that the government set up work parties to repair and build roads. In 1893 R.H. McAlister was put in charge of the government work party in the district and saw to the repair of all roads. During the following two years he built a new road to Eshowe which improved road communications with the administrative centre of Zululand. Road communications of the district were further improved with the establishment in June 1895 of a ferry service across the White Mfolozi operated by A. Moore.<sup>60</sup>

A postal service was instituted when the district was established. For the first three years the magistrate acted as postmaster but in December 1890 F.J. Symmonds was appointed as the first postmaster of Melmoth. He was followed in February 1893 by C.S. Eastwood. The post was carried regularly from Allison's Umhlatuzi Store to the Melmoth Post Office where it was sorted. Some of it was sent

<sup>54</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/8, PB 392/1897, 7.9.1897, pp. 48-49.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*: 17.9.1897, p. 57, 6.10.1897, p. 80, and 11.11.1897, p. 123.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*: 9.12.1897, p. 164, 15.2.1898, p. 236, and 1.3.1898, p. 254; 1/Mel 5/1/13: PB 181/1899, 30.3.1899.

<sup>57</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/4: PB 140/1889, 29.3.1889, and PB 50/1890, 3.2.1890; 1/Mel 5/1/5: PB 93/1891, 13.2.1891, and PB 110/1891, 22.4.1891; 1/Mel 5/1/6: 2.2.1895, p. 513; 1/Mel 5/1/7: 15.2.1897, p. 819; 1/Mel 5/1/8: 15.2.1898, p. 231. No figures available for 1892.

<sup>58</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/4: PB 296/1891, 2.6.1891, and PB 298/1891, 2.6.1891.

<sup>59</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/8: 8.11.1898, p. 444.

<sup>60</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/6: PB 7/1895, 5.1.1895, p. 473, and PB 237/1895, 20.6.1895, p. 707.

on to Moore's Store at Ulundi, then all the way up to Ingwavuma via the Ubombo magistracy. The mail for Nkandla and Mahlabathini was taken to these two places (both approximately 48 km from Melmoth) by black post-runners. Each carrier had his bag of mail weighed as they were only allowed to carry 16 kg each. The construction of a telegraph line between Melmoth and Nongoma commenced on 26 April 1897 and greatly assisted communications between all magistrates in Zululand and the resident commissioner and chief magistrate at Eshowe.<sup>61</sup>

By 1894 there were five schools in the district; the three state-aided black schools at Mahlabathini, Kwamagwaza and Ekutuleni and the two church schools at St Pauls and Mfule. Education for whites was launched at a public meeting (attended by 21 people) in the magistrate's office in Melmoth on 1 June 1895. An educational committee, which included J.A.F. Ortlepp, D.C. Uys, Dr James Petrie and the magistrate, A.J. Shepstone, as chairman, was elected. They immediately set about establishing a school for whites in the area. The school building was only completed at the end of 1896 and the Melmoth European School opened in January 1897. In the same year the school received its first government grant. By the end of the first month there were ten white pupils attending classes on a regular basis. The pupil numbers rose to 26 during 1897 but owing to rinderpest there were withdrawals and the year ended with only twelve pupils in the school. The first certified teachers at this school were F.K. Atkinson and his wife. The Melmoth European School served the needs of the community until the first government school opened in Melmoth on 1 August 1907 under S.S. Voss.<sup>62</sup>

The Anglican mission station, situated on land granted by Mpande in 1859, was the first to be established in the district. The first missionary to take up residence there was the Rev. Robert Robertson in August 1860. Other mission stations soon followed. In late 1860 the Norwegian Lutheran Church opened a mission station at Mahlabathini and in 1865 another at Mfule. With the establishment of Melmoth in 1888 the state of missions (with the names of the ministers in brackets) in the district was as follows: the Anglican stations at Kwamagwaza (Robertson) and St Pauls (the Rev. S.M. Samuelson); the Norwegian Lutheran stations at Mahlabathini (the Rev. N. Braatvedt) and at Mfule (the Rev. O.S. Steenberg); and the Swedish Lutheran Mission at Ekutuleni (the Rev. F.L. Fristedt).<sup>63</sup>

The first 'nachtmaal' (Holy Communion) service for the white farmers of the district was held in the new court-house in Melmoth on 23 August 1889 and was attended by approximately 150-200 Boers from the surrounding district. A Melmoth Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) building committee was formed soon afterwards with the magistrate, J.L. Knight, as chairman. On 11 November 1893 the resident commissioner of Zululand, Melmoth Osborn, laid the foundation-stone for a DRC church building in Melmoth. On 15 June 1894 a crowd of about 400 Dutch people witnessed the ceremony during which this building was consecrated. On the same day the foundation charter of the Melmoth DRC congregation was signed. The first DRC church council which was elected included R.J. Ortlepp and D.C. Uys (elders) and J.J. van Rooyen, J.P. Koekemoet, H.A. Liversage and D.C. Uys (jr) (deacons). At first the congregation was served by a visiting minister and it was only in 1919, after a period of 25 years, that the first resident minister, C.J. Brink, was appointed.<sup>64</sup>

The early white settlers, although hampered by a lack of facilities, were still able to partake in some sporting activities. A sport much in favour and in keeping with the times was

rifle shooting. A Melmoth Rifle Association was established in the early 1890s and its first chairman was the magistrate, J.L. Knight. Numerous shooting competitions were held, often combined with cricket matches (the influence of the English-speaking store-keepers in the district). One of these events consisted of two days of cricket and shooting matches held on 8 and 9 March 1895 at F.E. Mann's Equatsha Store. The first inter-rifle-association team shooting competition held by the association took place at Melmoth on 29 September 1896. Teams of ten shots from the Richmond Rifle Association, the Nqutu Rifle Association, the Zulu Border Rifle Club and the garrison at Eshowe took part. The Melmoth Rifle Association finished up with the highest score.<sup>65</sup>

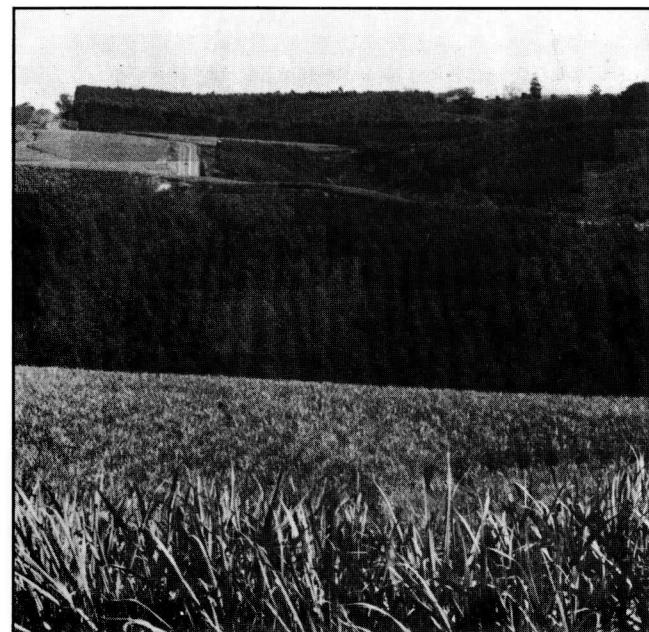
## CONCLUSION

Melmoth's establishment and first ten years were typical of earlier settler villages in Zululand, the only difference being that a large part of the district was occupied by white farmers a good fifteen years before the rest of Zululand was opened to white settlers. It was also a centre of one of the Zululand gold rushes of the mid 1890s.

Today Melmoth, well known for its healthy climate and with an average rainfall of 710 mm per year, caters for a farming community which derives its income mainly from sugar-cane and timber. □

*Sugar-cane and timber in the Melmoth district.*

PHOTOGRAPH: A. DE V. MINNAAR



<sup>61</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/5: PB 525/1890, 16.12.1890, PB 12/1893, 5.1.1893, and PB 65/1893, 28.2.1893; 1/Mel 5/1/6: PB 236/1895, 16.5.1895, p. 648; 1/Mel 5/1/7: PB 212/1897, 7.5.1897; *Zululand Times* 1.4.1971.

<sup>62</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/6: PB 510/1894, 16.10.1894, p. 384, PB 511/1894, 16.10.1894, p. 385, 2.2.1895, p. 517, 1.6.1895, p. 670, and PB 212/1895, 10.6.1895, p. 686; 1/Mel 5/1/7: 13.1.1897, p. 755, and 5.2.1897, p. 805; 1/Mel 5/1/8: 15.2.1898, p. 233, and 26.2.1898, p. 247.

<sup>63</sup> ZGH 692: 25.3.1885; ZGH 694: RC 26/1885, 30.7.1885; 1/Mel 5/1/3: PB 37/1888, 27.1.1888; 1/Mel 5/1/4: PB 79/1889, 11.2.1889, and PB 85/1889, 16.2.1889; 1/Mel 5/1/5: PB 35/1892, 28.1.1892.

<sup>64</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/4: PB 372/1890, 24.8.1890; 1/Mel 5/1/5: PB 245/1892, 17.6.1893; 1/Mel 5/1/6: Annual report 1893, 12.3.1894; 15.6.1894, p. 248; *Zululand Times*, 1.4.1971.

<sup>65</sup> 1/Mel 5/1/7: 15.2.1897, p. 826.