



CHAPTER 5

Clubs, societies and secret orders

The clubs served socially to unite farmers, professionals, businessmen and officials of the state. In this process, the Midland ONFs met, married and socialised with the coastal sugarcroftocracy, in so doing expanding the class and its influence, and spanning the social and geographical gap between Pietermaritzburg and Durban. In providing limited entry points to immigrants, the clubs gave some whites affiliation to the ONF class. In this sense, the clubs were important in class expansion and reproduction.

The clubs were also active in spreading class power. This is evidenced in the nature and extent of their membership, in the phenomenon of overlapping or shared membership and the operation of old boy networks. The further influence of clubs was visible and publicly manifested by ritual, by the status and behaviour of members. The moral codes which the clubs upheld provided men 'both with the basis for claims of individual distinction and a collective warrant for certifying superiority and exclusiveness of their class' (Nye 1993:8). On the one hand, these codes created hierarchies internal to the ONF class. On the other hand, the codes of distinction were often only known, understood and mastered by club members, which meant that they served as mechanisms of exclusion. In addition, however, the ostentation and solemnity of public club behaviour and display were integral to the mythical representation of the class character of the ONFs.

The clubs provided continuity between the juvenile world of school and the adult world of work and leisure-time use. On leaving school, boys often joined the old boys' society. This projected the power of the schools (identified in chapter 3) into wider society. The old boys' societies and other clubs also served as entry points and locations for social mixing. By joining a club, a man confirmed his racial and class belonging. He might also thereby

move up the social ladder – clubs were a means of upward mobility. ONFs joined clubs as a matter of course. They used clubs to foster networks, to forge links with the urban elites, and to spread the family name. Beyond this instrumentality, men joined and frequented clubs to associate with men, to play card games, to drink, read journals and newspapers and to discuss politics. These were considered to be masculine pursuits. Within the clubs was developed a ‘politics of taste’ which marked class and intra-class boundaries. The politics of taste (discussed below) acted in concert with a variety of other mechanisms to distinguish (to make distinct, to give distinction to) the ONFs from others social classes.

In Natal there was a mania for clubs. Old boys’ clubs were created to serve the school and to spread its influence. These clubs made it possible for links forged at school to be maintained into adult life. The Victoria Club was a leisure club, a gentleman’s club, designed to serve a group with the highest social aspirations. Membership of the Victoria Club marked one as a leading member of society for its exclusivity meant that only a small proportion, the pinnacle of ONF society, were admitted. Freemasons belonged to a secret order. Membership was not confined to specific classes. Any white male could join, and the criteria of admission was moral standing, itself an aspect in the politics of distinction. And with-



The Victoria Club, Pietermaritzburg

in the military, regimental associations were established to provide a locale for recreation for members and their families, as well as watering holes for men when not on duty. Rifle associations, religious and dramatic organisations and a wide variety of sports clubs could be found in even the smallest Midland hamlet.

But farmers distant from Pietermaritzburg and the larger towns were less likely to be members of the types of club discussed here. They were likely to be more dependent on extended family for company and support. The improvement of transport in the twentieth century allowed farmers from remote areas to make better use of the clubs (Kimber interview 1994). The clubs were all-male, racially exclusive institutions. In this respect they mirrored the gendered form of the social institutions already discussed.

Club membership, distinction and the politics of taste

In becoming a member of a club a man became classified. He gained an additional identity. This was important because classifications work to mobilise social groups. When we categorise, we include members who then identify themselves as belonging to that group. Similarly, when we categorise someone as belonging, at the same time we categorise people as not belonging.

[W]hat individuals and groups invest in the particular meaning they give to common classificatory systems by the use they make of them is infinitely more than their 'interest' in the usual sense of the term; it is their whole social being, everything which defines their own idea of themselves, the primordial, tacit contract whereby they define 'us' as opposed to 'them', 'other people', and which is the basis of the exclusions ('not for the likes of us') and inclusions they perform (Bourdieu 1984:478).

Once classified, a member has certain attributes bestowed upon him. 'Attributes, in the sense of predicates, thereby become *attributions*, powers, capacities, privileges, prerogatives, attributed to the holder of a post' (Bourdieu 1984:480). Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the limits of the classification system 'are frontiers to be attacked or defended with all one's strength' (Bourdieu 1984:477).

A group becomes a group when a spokesperson, 'speaking on behalf of a group, surreptitiously posits the existence of the group in question, institutes the group through that magical operation which is inherent in any act of naming' (Bourdieu 1991:250). This process of collective representation imposes 'the representation of their existence and their unity,

both on their own members and on other groups' (Bourdieu 1984:480–481). It also, however, produces fine gradations between members themselves. These are also relations of power, designed to extend the notion of hierarchy implicit in the construction of the group in the first place.

Taste is central to what Bourdieu calls symbolic capital. This chapter focuses on symbolic capital as an explicit attempt to move away from reductionist arguments which establish close economic ties between cultural class locations and accumulation. It must be remembered, however, that Bourdieu understands class in terms of other capitals too: educational, economic and cultural. Symbolic capital does not sit alone, it is propped up and complemented by the other capitals, yet is not reducible to them.

Symbolic capital – another name for distinction – is nothing other than capital, of whatever kind, when it is perceived by an agent endowed with categories of perception arising from the incorporation of the structure of its distribution ie when it is known and recognised as self-evident. Distinctions, as symbolic transformations of de facto differences, and, more generally, the ranks, orders, grades and all the other symbolic hierarchies, are the product of the application of schemes of construction which ... are the product of the incorporation of the very structures to which they are applied; and recognition of the most absolute legitimacy is nothing other than an apprehension of the everyday social world as taken for granted, an apprehension which results from the almost perfect coincidence of objective structures and incorporated structures (Bourdieu 1991:238).

People acquiring taste, according to Bourdieu, actively produce exclusion, actively operationalise mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion.

The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile ... implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane. That is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences (Bourdieu 1991:7).

It is therefore 'the judge of taste (a)s the supreme manifestation of the discernment which, by reconciling reason and sensibility ... defines the accomplished individual'. '[U]pper-class propriety ... treats taste as one of the surest signs of true nobility' (Bourdieu 1991:11).

Taste always operates functionally to exclude and include, to locate people towards one or other pole. In this sense, Bourdieu also slides towards reductionism, seeing taste always as

a relationship of power, reducing it (with however much sophistication) to a reflex of deep class or life origin. His schema thus has limitations in examining intra-class forces and relations, because he tends to reduce these to movements towards one or other of the binary poles. A different understanding of taste, in this case the masculinist distinction of honour, offered by Robert Nye assists in breaking down the seamless, contradictory-less surface of Bourdieu's analysis.¹ Nye stresses the significance of social minutiae and the relations of power which underpin them, but shows that power is not a one-way relationship and that the French code of honour (examined in chapter 6) did not just act against the excluded, women or the working class, but could be tyrannical for those who actually subscribed to it. The *ensemble* of formal and informal codes that regulated the relations between bourgeois men did so in 'both prosaic and life-threatening matters' (Nye 1992:127-128).

The clubs and their members

Old boys' societies were a common feature of the British public schools upon which the Midland schools modelled themselves. John Honey points out that in the second half of the nineteenth century the public schools created the idea of the 'old boy' which bound the alumnus to the school for his entire life via old boys' societies, annual dinners and competitive games. 'Probably in no other country in the world has the conception of the "school" been so fully and so powerfully developed, to the point of creating an institution of enormous pretensions and self-consciousness, ready to take upon itself tasks in relation not just to the formal schooling but to the whole lives of the pupils' (Honey 1987:155). Within the empire, schools following the metropolitan elite model also developed such societies (Daly 1988:166).

Old boys' societies

Hilton College was the first to form an old boys' society. In 1892 masters and former pupils came together to found the Hiltonian Society. Its object was to maintain 'during the years of early manhood ties of friendship and intimacy formed at school, and keeping past Hiltonians in close touch with the Hilton of the present'.² It immediately drew up a constitution which set out the goals and rules more fully. 'To associate for mutual aid and encouragement Hiltonians who seek to advance the work of Hilton, both in the School and in the Colony at large.' According to the rules, a member had 'to do all in his power to help any fellow member who may need help, particularly one with whom he is at school or with whom he is in correspondence'.³



*Hilton College display of Swedish drill and physical exercises. Old Boys Day, 1932.
Campbell Collections*

Meetings were held quarterly and large amounts of energy were spent on refining procedures, especially rules of debate and decision making. In addition it was agreed that members should identify themselves by a silver *fleur de lys* badge worn on a watch chain. The rationale was clearly stated: 'It is desirable that some distinctive badge should be chosen which members who wish to do so can wear, that after leaving school members may be able at once to recognise other members.'⁴

The society was successful. Membership rose rapidly. At the first annual general meeting in 1895, headmaster Ellis's speech included the following self-congratulation. 'We have kept together so far, and if we continue to keep together, always enlarging our borders, we may look forward to the time, not a very distant one, when we shall fulfil the hope our President expressed at our foundation, and become a political and a social force in Natal'.⁵ A close watch was kept on the fortunes of old boys, this being the barometer of school success.

Membership was limited to old boys at an annual subscription of five shillings. A vetting process ensured that not all were admitted. Some men applying for membership had only been at the school for a short time, often having been forced to leave when the school became unaffordable. The idea that the society should be held worthy by those to whom it belonged and the fear that it would be abused by undeserving ne'er-do-wells caused admissions procedures to be tightened. In 1897 the minutes reflect this trend. 'If every member exerts himself to introduce his old school chums whom he knows to be worthy, we ought soon to form as powerful a society as any in Natal. But we must of course be careful as to whom we admit. For this reason the Council has decided that all proposals for admission of local men must be approved by Local Committees before being submitted to the Council.'⁶

In 1898 the Hiltonian society had 164 members and was active enough to have its own rugby club in Pietermaritzburg.⁷ The South African War did little to slow its impetus. It provided an instance of how successful the society was in transcending political partisanship. In one case, the former pupil Uys retained his links with school despite being on active service with the Boers. This was held to be evidence of the supreme success of the Society. 'M J Uys, an old boy fighting on the Boer side, had managed to communicate to Mr Ellis the death of Erasmus (another old boy) at Pretoria.'⁸

In 1901 the society launched *The Hiltonian* to chronicle 'the doings of Hilton and Hiltonians'.⁹ Just over a year later, in 1903, 140 old boys founded a limited liability company and purchased the school and its estate from Ellis for £10 000 (Nuttall 1972:31). From this point on, Hilton's old boys would have a tight grip on the affairs of the school.

The Hiltonian Society continued to be active, arranging balls, dinners and sporting events. It attracted such notable Hiltonians as H A Hime to the office of chairman (in 1905) and offered honorary membership to prominent locals such as the Dean of Pietermaritzburg. It extended its influence by establishing local committees from London to Salisbury and from Johannesburg to Durban. The recession in the late 1900s slowed progress for the first time. An annual dance was called off for lack of interest, though membership remained just below the 300 mark.¹⁰ In 1927 membership stood at 1 200 members.¹¹

At the time that Hilton was spreading its influence via its old boys, Maritzburg College was going through a lean patch. Its pupil numbers fell below 50 in 1893 (Haw & Frame 1988:126). In 1896, however, it established the Old Boys' Association. It was expected that 500 would join but by 1898 there were only 30 members (Haw & Frame 1988:146). The association found it difficult to induce old boys to become members and reduced subscriptions to encourage more enthusiasm. Little, however, came of this. The old boys' din-

ner was held most years, but this was the only activity of note. As the editor of the school magazine noted, this was 'very unfortunate because the Annual Old Boys' Dinner is one of the chief means of keeping Old Boys in touch with the school and its doings'.¹² MC's association remained ineffectual until after the First World War despite having men such as Sir Henry Bale (former Attorney General, Minister of Education and Chief Justice) as honorary president (in 1909). It was resuscitated in 1921 and kicked off its new life by raising money for a war monument (Haw & Frame 1988:219).

Within four years of being founded, the headmaster of Michaelhouse (James Todd) called for an Old Boys' Club to be established. Three years later, in 1903, this was achieved. Membership was limited to boys who had been at the school for at least two years. Subscriptions were 7/6 per annum or five guineas for life. The constitution outlined its purposes: to 'promote friendly intercourse among Old Boys, to organise them for sport, to help Old Boys in pecuniary distress and to further the interests of Michaelhouse' (Barratt 1969:184). The headmaster was also the head of the club, but the early committees boasted prominent old boys such as Estcourt farmer C F Moor and lawyer C E Tatham.¹³ The school magazine, which came out regularly, gave a full account of the achievements of old boys, thus breathing life into the club. As with Hilton, there was an active old boys' branch in London. From 1909 annual dinners were held. These frequently coincided with sports matches against such old rivals as Hilton, MC and DHS. As with all old boys' societies, such events were marked by hearty self-congratulation. In 1909 the headmaster addressed the 20 old boys who came to the dinner: 'He did not wish to make odious comparisons, but he might say that for themselves at least Michaelhouse was the best school in the Colony. Michaelhouse was, for them, too sacred to allow any other school to compete for their affections. ... The school had been founded on English public school ideals.'¹⁴

Michaelhouse differed from Hilton in that many of its old boys were resident in Durban. In 1913 the decision was taken to elect a Durbanite as president, acknowledging this fact, though functions continued by and large to be held at the school or in Pietermaritzburg.

The Victoria Club

The Victoria Club was founded in Pietermaritzburg in 1859. It is not easy to get a sense of its history because the society has always been closed and its dealings have been behind closed doors. Its close cousin, Johannesburg's Rand Club, puts into words what the Victoria Club prefers to keep unspoken. 'Committees have always disliked any reference to it in the newspapers; and all references to its doings were followed by an effort to discover the

source of the publicity and by a reminder to the offender that it was the unwritten law of the Rand Club that its proceedings were never to be reported' (Neame 1957:1).

The founder of the club was Lushington Phillips, a High Court Judge, who was very active in public circles. Amongst other things he was president of the Pietermaritzburg Agricultural Society, which hosted the Royal Show. Hattersley describes Phillips as a 'man of imposing physique and forceful personality, Phillips was immensely popular in Natal ... (and a) noted marksman and excellent horseman' (Hattersley 1959:17). He used the courtroom to make moral pronouncements. Frequently these echoed his particular understanding of what it was to be a real man. In one case he sentenced a prisoner with the words that he had 'never, in his experience on the Bench, heard of a more dastardly, unmanly or cowardly assault' (Spiller 1986:71). He was not a stranger to controversy. He was forthright in his opinion both in the court and out. He was sued by Philip Allen, the Colonial Treasurer, for libel after he had accused Allen of dishonesty (Hattersley 1959:24).

The men who launched the club along with Phillips were mostly Pietermaritzburg residents drawn from the senior echelons of colonial society – mainly the judiciary and government. Amongst their number were Colonial Secretary Erskine, Theophilus Shepstone of Native Affairs and Colonial Treasurer Allen. Foundation members included a few of voortrekker stock (P A R Otto & P H Zeederberg ('reputedly (the club's) most wealthy member' (Hattersley 1959:25)), lawyers, civil servants and merchants.

It was from its conception a 'gentleman's club' with accommodation, coffee, billiards, a news room and a high annual subscription of five guineas plus same amount for entrance fee (Hattersley 1959:14). In Cape Town the equivalent club had been sharply divided on the issue of the admissibility of commercial men. As in Britain, merchants and businessmen were considered too low for admission to status as gentlemen. In Natal the white population was small and socially and ethnically heterogeneous, so such debates did not occur. Needless to say, there were no black or female members.

Club membership was always exclusive, but changed over time. Initially most members came from Pietermaritzburg though 'a narrow circle of executive officials and ... the regimental officers who formed the immediate entourage of the lieutenant-governor formed the influential core' (Hattersley 1959:44). The professional and commercial classes began to assert themselves in the 1890s, and by the end of the 1920s most new club members were businessmen. For most of this time, the connections with the military remained close, especially with the garrison. A special regimental subscription entitled all commissioned officers to honorary membership (Hattersley 1959:35). During wartime these ties were extended and strengthened. Only wealthy farmers who had political or business interests in

Pietermaritzburg were members in the early days. For example, farmer politicians (like Charles Barter) and farmer businessmen (like G M Sutton) were members. Continuity in membership was ensured by the practice of a family being able to retain its membership by passing it on to the son after the death of the father (Tatham interview 1994).

The club was run by a committee which in the early days was dominated by legal and military types. One of its most impressive (but by no means atypical) chairmen was Ashe Windham, magistrate of Greytown and first commander of the Umvoti Mounted Rifles, who presided in the late 1880s. The prominent Hime family were also well represented on the committee as were most of the ministers of government. These included farmer politicians T K Murray, G M Sutton and E M Greene. The military were heavily represented with many senior officers (mostly from the Natal Carbineers) on the committee – for example C E Taunton (Michaelhouse old boy), and G J Macfarlane. The most eminent legal men of the colony regularly were elected to the committee, including F S Tatham¹⁵ and advocates like Fergus Hathorn. Even when the membership was changing, the committee remained dominated by the founding elite. ‘Men like Henrique Shepstone and Arthur Hime, who were forced to resign from executive office, found themselves with more leisure at their disposal, a notable portion of which they were ready to devote to the Club’s affairs’ (Hattersley 1959:44). In 1913 Shepstone ceased being chair and professional men for the first time began to dominate the committee. This coincided with the declining importance of the senior bureaucrats whose political influence had been profoundly reduced by Union.

In 1895 the club bought its present site, having rented up until this time. With the erection of a permanent clubhouse, the heyday of the club dawned. ‘Though the Victoria was never a political club, its relations with the colonial parliament were always intimate. From early days members of the legislative council had sought membership in order to secure comfortable quarters and congenial company during sessions. Receptions were held and dinners given, not only by the Club as a corporate body, but by the members of the legislature when Council was sitting’ (Hattersley 1959:30). It is difficult, on the basis of this evidence, to make a statement about the influence of the club on colonial politics. It was certainly true that most of the senior government ministers right up until Union were members. It is also highly likely that they discussed politics and developed political strategies.

The Freemasons

Of all societies, freemasonry is amongst the oldest and the most secret (Knight 1984; Cooper 1986). Its cause and operation is widely regarded with suspicion, though its influ-

ence, for want of evidence in this regard, is difficult to determine. As with the Victoria Club, freemasonry attempted to keep out of the public eye, and expected of masons who inadvertently came under its gaze to stand down rather than tarnish its name.¹⁶

Two recent accounts of freemasonry argue for their influence beyond crude instrumentality. Rich (1989) argues that the close association of freemason lodges with public schools facilitated the transmission of imperialist rituals throughout the empire. In turn, these rituals supported an almost absurd self-confidence amongst the public school freemasons themselves, while providing aspirant elites in the colonies with an inappropriate model after which to aspire.¹⁷ Van Dülmen (1992) argues that the importance of freemasonry in Europe was that it was part of a modernist challenge to a religious and secular status quo which upheld the authority of the church, royal families and landed elites. The emphasis on rationality and free association were, according to Van Dülmen, critical in producing an intellectual and social climate for the construction of a modernist political order. In this chapter this direction of enquiry will be followed in the hope of demonstrating the contribution of freemasonry to the development of unequal, hierarchical and sexist relations in the Colony.¹⁸

The major secondary source on South African freemasonry is A A Cooper's 1986 work. Cooper, himself a freemason, charts the development of lodges throughout South Africa. He makes little assessment of the social or political impact of freemasons and takes at face value the freemasonry's own statements about their doings.¹⁹ In short, his study accepts that the two major goals of the freemasons are to assist its own members and to spread higher moral values through teaching.

The first lodge to be established in South Africa was set up in the Cape in 1772 (Cooper 1986:16). Natal's first lodge was established in Durban in 1858. Pietermaritzburg's first lodge, the Prince Alfred Lodge, opened in 1864 (Russell 1884:22). Progress was initially rapid, but with the depression of the late 1860s non-paying members were 'erased' (the freemason term for terminating membership and/or expelling members). This was only a slight hiccup, for in 1877 and 1878 Pietermaritzburg gained another two lodges, while the Carnavon Lodge was established in Richmond (Russell 1884:44, 45, 47). In 1880 and 1881 the freemasons stretched their influence to Greytown and Kokstad respectively (Anon 1916:7). These lodges were all of the English constitution. Pietermaritzburg gained its first Scottish lodge (St Andrew) in 1884 (Alexander 1947:9).

After the South African War freemasonry (English constitution) experienced rapid growth. The number of lodges increased from 18 (1898) to 27 (1906) and membership rose from 787 to 1 368 (Cooper 1986:92). In the same period, Scottish lodges proliferated even more quickly. Lodges developed at Dundee (1903), Ladysmith (1904), Weenen county (1905),

Maritzburg county (1905) and Mooi River (1914). The lodges sprang up along the major transport routes to the interior, drawing in men not of the landed classes but of the business and artisan classes (Alexander 1947?:25, 26, 35). Frequently these lodges drew together white men who were bound together by professional or institutional location. Newcastle's Coronation Lodge, for example, was dominated by employees of the coal mines, iron foundry and railways, while Durban's Thistle Lodge was made up largely of Natal Government Railway employees (Cooper 1986:93). Another depression (which began in 1906) reduced numbers: in 1906 in the English lodges 68 members were erased and 135 resigned (Cooper 1986:94).

The membership of lodges varied a great deal. Historically, freemasonry in Europe primarily attracted the intellectual middle class, while also gaining support amongst landed elites (Van Dülmen 1992:55). In Natal this pattern seems initially to have existed. Many of the early lodges were founded and headed by senior civil servants including schoolmasters and magistrates. The Tathams, Edmund and Robert, for example, joined in 1860 (Russell 1884:12–13). As with the Victoria Club, lodges attracted a large following among the military as well (McIntyre 1935:30). Another notable pattern was the overlap between freemasons and those prominent later in promoting the sport of rugby. Here the Durban families of Bigby and Beningfield (the former a prosecutor, the latter a JP) deserve mention (see chapter 4).²⁰

Another freemason with strong rugby connections was C W P Douglas de Fenzi (see chapter 4). We know more about Douglas de Fenzi than many other masons, though I suspect that his position was typical. His father (of German birth, but a British subject) came to South Africa as a professional soldier in 1860 to serve on the Kei River Frontier. Hereafter he unsuccessfully attempted farming and then failed to obtain employment that would support his lifestyle.²¹ Charles William Perks Douglas de Fenzi, his son or nephew, received a public school education before coming to Natal in 1881. He became an active member of the civil service (clerk of the Legislative Council in 1893) and the freemasonry. In the latter institution he was chair of the St Andrews lodge in Pietermaritzburg (1904) and rose to become district grand secretary for Natal (Anon 1909:14). In the military sphere he was very active as well, being a lieutenant in NRR.²² Douglas de Fenzi was single (he married only in 1916), without land or independent means, but with the advantages of military connections (through his father/uncle) and a public school background. These appear to have been enough to make him into an influential person in the colony. He was a very energetic protagonist of rugby in the colony and rubbed shoulders with senior members of government. He was cited in *Natal's who's who* for 1906. Within freemasonry, his energies are noted with approval by chroniclers. He was an originator, for example, of the Natal Scottish Benevolent Fund in 1904 (Alexander 1947?:23). Douglas de Fenzi represented the

new brand of freemason: a man with impeccable credentials, a man without much money, a man looking for contacts and a way into the white, colonial establishment. From the 1890s onward it was this kind of person who dominated membership, not the colonial elites who had been more notable in the earlier period.

Membership included prominent men but '[a]ll social classes' were represented.²³ Generally, the older English constitution lodges attracted members who were better-off, while the Scottish constitution lodges, many formed around the turn of the century, attracted many artisans and skilled working people.

The allure of freemasonry attracted the interest of whites who had few social pretensions and hoped that racial solidarity would secure their inclusion, and the order's influence would ensure their prosperity. This could produce difficult situations which went quite contrary to freemasonry's stress on secrecy and procedure. A rare public example was a letter from James Bray to the Governor General, Lord Gladstone.

Will it please you: your most Excellency that your servant request of your kind Excellency to let me join on to some Lodge of Freemasons. I wish to be a Freemason and to get to this stage I must ask your Excellency to advance me the necessary admittance fee, and that your Excellency introduce me to a Good Christian Order.²⁴

The social composition of Natal's lodges reflected the interest of the white working class in freemasonry. Durban's Scottish Caledonia Lodge, for example, included a jockey, clerks, bricklayers, railway workers, carpenters, engravers, shopkeepers, labour agents and engineers (Cooper 1986:93). The understanding that white men had something in common, regardless of class, made such polyglot membership possible. But problems also resulted. In the industrial unrest of 1913 and 1914 some freemasons in the Transvaal joined the strikers. They were admonished that this was not the way to go: the mason has a 'bounden duty to assuage, to pacify and advocate constitutional means of obtaining redress of would-be grievances'.²⁵

Rules existed precisely to prevent the dilution of membership with socially inappropriate men. It was a source of concern to the early leaders of freemasonry in Natal that such rules were not closely adhered to. As the movement developed, stricter application of rules, particularly of the non-payment of subscription clauses, ensured that the status of membership was elevated. At the same time, freemasonry's emphasis on support for brothers in distress saw increasing amounts of money being channelled to widowers or financially embarrassed members (Russell 1884:52).

The leadership of freemasonry in Natal was dominated throughout the nineteenth century by expatriates. These were men in senior and influential government positions. The founder of the first lodge in Durban is a good example. Henry J Mellor was resident magistrate of Durban and a founder member of the Durban Rifle Guard, the first volunteer unit in Natal (Anon 1958:4). Lushington Phillips, High Court judge and founder of the Victoria Club, was Worshipful Master (head) of the Prince Alfred Lodge in 1883–84 (Russell 1884:63). When Natal became a freemason district (English constitution) Robert Finnemore, a JP and Durban's resident magistrate, became the district grand master. Peter Spiller describes Finnemore as a 'popular prosecutor' who had served competently in almost every department of the Natal government. He was also secretary of the Pietermaritzburg Agricultural Society from 1879 to 1880. He later joined the Supreme Court Bench (Anon 1916:6; Gordon 1984:131; Spiller 1986:50). The equivalent Scottish Grand Lodge was formed in 1897. Its first grand master was Robert Douglas Clark, headmaster of Maritzburg College (Alexander 1947?:1) (see chapter 3). Clark was a member of the Victoria Club. It was only in 1921 when Natal-born Hugh M Thompson became district grand master that the domination of expatriates was ended (Alexander 1947?:48). Throughout this period farmers maintained their involvement with freemasonry. Farmers in remote districts found the demands of membership (for example attending meetings) difficult to meet, but concessions were made to them. The Ixopo branch, for example, held its meetings according to the lunar calendar, so that members could ride back to their farms by moonlight.²⁶

The most obvious and significant fact about these three institutions is that they shared a huge overlap in membership. They had no formal ties, yet the extent of shared membership suggests that they were closely associated with one another. Apart from those already mentioned, Lloyd Evans Mesham was a freemason and a leader within the Victoria Club. Barns, headmaster of Maritzburg College, headed the school's old boys' society, was a Victoria Club member as well as a freemason. A W S Brown, headmaster at Michaelhouse was a Victoria Club member and headed his school's old boys' association. And there were prominent connections with the military too. Major T Menne was commanding officer of the Umvoti Mounted Rifle (1892–98).²⁷ He was also worshipful master of the Umvoti Lodge in 1886 (Anon 1916:38–39). Similarly, the Regimental Sergeant Major of NC, William Burkimsher, was a freemason. He began with the NC in 1900 and served as RSM for 22 years, becoming something of a local institution.²⁸

The overlap of membership allowed for groups which might otherwise have been isolated by reason of geographical location or work affiliation to be constantly integrated into the living body of the class. Without these mechanisms, the class might have become fragmented, splitting along lines of town and countryside, colonial service, business and agriculture,



R D Clark, District Grand Master, 1897-1902

'home-born' or Natal-born, judiciary and military, and so on. Here we are talking about lateral mobility. In addition, the overlap of membership facilitated vertical mobility. Many immigrants were not middle class (Beall 1982:107), yet the clubs channelled them into settler society. In some cases this meant expanding ONF ranks, but in general it promoted racial cohesion. Membership of one club permitted entry into other realms which might otherwise have been closed. Club membership, for example, could be translated into business connection, sport participation and family creation (clubs being the place where sons, daughters, nephews and nieces were paired with appropriate partners).

The influence of the clubs

The influence of the old boy network is difficult to establish for two major reasons. Firstly, it operates informally via a set of codes which members recognise and to which they respond. Secondly, it does not operate alone or in isolation.

It is well documented in Britain that public school boys dominated government, the imperial service, business. What is not so clear is how this came about. One theory notes that public school boys went to Oxbridge and it was as much the influence of these tertiary institutions which explains professional success as the influence of the schools themselves (Bishop & Wilkinson 1967). Other theories suggest that old boy networks nepotistically found positions for their members. In Natal there is some evidence of the latter process. When Dennis Fannin (a Hiltonian) began his law career, for example, his father encouraged him and set up articles with a Pietermaritzburg lawyer who was also a Hiltonian. His law career then took off with the help of his brother who facilitated a partnership with Jim Hathorn (a classmate at Hilton) (Fannin interview 1992).²⁹ The informal way in which the network operated joined a host of organisations to one another and facilitated transfusion. Membership of the Royal Agricultural Society, for example, was often an entrée into the Victoria Club. Being a member of both would allow one to establish business contacts, gain market information and have access to state officials with knowledge of state regulations and opportunities (Foster interview 1994).

The extent of the network provided by the Victoria Club was massive. A perusal of its 1907 and 1917 membership lists read like a who's who of Natal. Arnott, Sir J G Dartnell, Greene, Leuchars, Macfarlane (NC), McKenzie, Rethman (NMR), W S Shepstone, W E Tanner, J S Wylie were all in the top echelons of Natal's regimental hierarchy (see chapter 6). Education was represented by Barns, A S Langley and Loram (MC), C J Mudie (headmaster, Estcourt School), Oberle (MC and DHS) Oxland (MC); members and former members of government included William Beaumont, C Bird, Sir A H Hime, Sir Thomas Hyslop, Sir F R Moor, Sir T K Murray, W S Shepstone, C J Smythe, Sir George Sutton, Sir T Watt, H D Winter. The law was very well represented, the following being Supreme Court judges: Justice W Broome, T F Carter, J C C Chadwick, J C Dove-Wilson, C G Jackson, AW Mason, F S Tatham. Sitting members of Parliament or provincial council were Dr RA Buntine, R M Chadwick, W F Clayton, J Dyson, J McAuslin, A J McGibbon, J W Moor, T Orr, J Schofield, W J Slatter, P H Taylor. If you add to this a host of ONFs (for example Baynes, Hathorn, Kimber, Mackenzie, Shaw, Woollatt, Woods, Woollatt) the full extent of networking possibility becomes clear.³⁰

Within freemasonry there are rare suggestions of how informal networking operated. When freemason officials travelled around the country, their hosts used their official office to smooth their passage and ease their pocket. In 1889 an eastern Cape visitor was very grateful for this generosity. He was given a free railway pass for a month by the general manager of the NGR (apparently a mason) at the behest of the district chairman, R I Finnemore.³¹ On another occasion, masons came together in a business venture, the one investing in his friend's company.³²

There were other channels too. The school magazines, directed primarily towards the old boys, often contained information necessary for successful networking. The detailed accounts of old boy doings promoted interaction, identifying the career paths and professional locations of old boys. It sometimes went further. School magazines could run stories on opportunities. In 1912 the Michaelhouse magazine urged old boys to take up farming in eastern Uganda. 'If any past or present Michaelhouse boy intends trying his luck up here, I will gladly supply him with any information he should desire to the best of my ability.'³³ Hilton College's practice was to obtain its provisions from old boys. Contracts to supply food and provisions generally went to parents with sons at the school or to old Hiltonians themselves.³⁴

There was great overlap in membership between the various clubs and the military, the sporting establishment, government and schools. Many informants testified to this: in the Karkloof, Hilton College, polo playing and membership of the UMR often went together (Solomon interview 1992). In Creighton, the overlap was between 'old school tie' and the NMR (Smith interview 1992). Coming from Hilton, Michaelhouse or MC assisted one in initially gaining entry into the regiments and then in obtaining a commission (Fannin interview 1992). Similarly, such backgrounds assisted in gaining public office: in 1916 the mayors of Pietermaritzburg, Durban and Greytown were all old boys of MC.³⁵

Membership of freemasonry and important and influential political and military positions was also significant. Harry Escombe, Natal prime minister (1897), was head of his Durban lodge on five occasions between 1866 and 1872 (Anon 1958:17). G T Hurst, later commander of NMR, was a member of the Rothesay Lodge (Durban) from 1912 (McIntyre 1935:21). In 1909, amongst Natal's freemasons were J Ellis Brown (mayor of Durban), Pietermaritzburg's sanitary inspector and Newcastle's chief of police (Anon 1909:7-9). Members of ONFs were also freemasons: R H Raw (Nottingham Road farmers), John Black (Boston farmer). In addition the well-known MC teacher and rugby enthusiast John Stalker (see chapter 4), Natal police inspector W D Campbell and John Watt, the manager of Bank of Africa (Durban). Four other prominent freemasons were members of the Victoria Club: R I Finnemore (was a Victoria Club committee member in 1881 (Hattersley 1959:52)); Skelmersdale Lodge head (1893) WJ

O'Brien;³⁶ J McKellar (general manager, Natal Bank) and Thomas Watts, government minister and delegate to the National Convention (Anon 1909:11).³⁷

Nor was this just a Natal phenomenon, though in Natal it was particularly marked. At the very apex of power in Southern Africa, Cecil Rhodes was a freemason and member of the Rand Club (Rich 1989, 88). In the empire at large, Rich argues that trend was similar: 'Imperial leaders climbed the masonic and government ladders at the same time' (Rich 1989:82). When they came together, they produced an extraordinary concentration of political authority. At the 1897 meeting of the Imperial Lodge in London, prime ministers from Natal, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, New Zealand, plus the Duke of Abercorn, Lord Saltoun and the Earl of Lathorn were present (Rich 1989:88).

This overlap obviously facilitated informal influence. But, in addition, there were moments when connections were more obvious and come to light in the official record. One such (rare) piece of evidence concerns a communication from Douglas de Fenzi to Attorney General Labistour, in 1906. Douglas de Fenzi thanked Labistour for his support in general, but particularly 'in connection with the movement and sect in Pietermaritzburg and Masonic Benevolent Home for Aged and Indigent Freemason and the Widows of Freemasons in Natal'. Labistour replied on the same day, 'It will always be a pleasure to me to assist your Institution in any way I can.'³⁸ On the face of it the issue is of little significance – a little government generosity (and not necessarily of the financial kind either) is all that is alluded to. But Natal's ruling class apparently operated ceaselessly to consolidate and perpetuate their positions through networks. Without these possibilities, the nature of their class power would have been different and more limited.

The clubs and distinction

The clubs were established by men with a conscious sense of who ought, and ought not, to be members. This act of distinguishing, Bourdieu reminded us, produces distinction. We know nothing definite about the motivations of Lushington Phillips, Mellor and the respective school old boys, but it is possible to deduce from early membership what the target was. In the Victoria Club, for example, foundation members included a liberal representation of public school and Oxbridge men – the gentleman ideal. Many of the early members were so described: John Macfarlane was viewed by the diarist Dobie as 'quite the highland gentleman and chief of the clan', while his brother, Walter, was 'a scholarly man with much natural dignity'. Members were frequently prominent in sporting or military circles (Hattersley 1959:16). But the colony as a whole contained a small pool of potential

members whose social environment did not easily lend itself to the constraints of club life. As Hattersley puts it, in the 1880s and 1890s settlers were imbued with a 'stubborn persistence and a spirit of selfresource that produced a type of frontiersman unaccustomed to governmental (or social RM) control' (Hattersley 1950:27-28).

One way of ensuring that members were distinguished was to charge membership fees. In the freemasonry, the initiation fee in 1903 was £10 10s (ten guineas) and annual subscription £1 1s (one guinea). These rose in 1904 to £15 15s and £1 10s respectively (McIntyre 1935:27). The Victoria Club charged a five guinea entrance fee plus five guineas subscription (Hattersley 1959:28).

The societies all had clear ideas on who could not join. No blacks or women were members. Race is not mentioned at all in records of the Victoria and old boys' clubs; it was simply assumed that they were not desirable. The international nature of freemasonry made its position more explicit. In a careful editorial, its official newspaper subtly bypassed the issue. It criticised the bigoted practice of United States freemasonry: 'no coloured man can be admitted into any regularly organised lodge'. It then claimed that British freemasons would no more blackball 'a man because his skin was black than because his eyes were blue'. It continued, 'We in South Africa have not yet been brought face to face with the question. Our coloured people are barely emerging from barbarism, but were they as advanced as the American negro ... the British spirit of fairplay would carry us as far at least as permitting coloured men to have lodges of their own.'³⁹ The attitudes of freemasonry in the colony are probably better assessed from comments about the colony's Indians. Considering them a threat to English domination of trade, they were described as dirty and 'vigorously in opposition to modern hygienic ideas'.⁴⁰

The Victoria Club preserved its male exclusivity until the 1990s. Hattersley smugly described the situation as it pertained in the 1950s.

A traditional attraction of club life has been the sense of satisfaction with which a member could feel assured of immunity from female company. In this respect, the Victoria Club was notably conservative (Hattersley 1959:41).

Early efforts to make inroads into the ban failed. In 1907 the suggestion of a monthly ladies evening was defeated. In 1911, as winds of change borne of social flux and dislocation began to reach Natal, a compromise allowed a ladies night once a month. In 1925 this was increased to two a month. But women still had to enter the club by the back door! The freemasons had a similar position which was that 'the best Lodge for women is the domestic Lodge by the family fireside'.⁴¹

Membership was prized, and social capital could be made out of it. Even in the most secret of the clubs, the freemasonry, membership was sufficiently important to allow for the names of office-bearers to be publicised in prominent colonial publications.⁴² Within the parameters of membership understood by the founders and subsequently enlisted members, there had to be ways of deciding on organised entry. Procedures were clearly laid down by all societies. Within the Victoria Club members had to be proposed and seconded, whereafter a ballot would be held. The black ball system operated, ensuring anonymity and the ability of members to keep somebody unwanted out of the privileges of membership (Hattersley 1959:37). In addition, reciprocal membership was granted to like-minded clubs, and honorary membership to men (for example the governor and officers in the British army or navy) who would enhance the standing of the club (Hattersley 1959:18–19).

Such was the importance of membership that fierce debates were waged even within the selected stratum of men eligible for membership. Amongst old boys at Maritzburg College, the debate was most fierce when it concerned posthumous membership. In 1900, after the conventional part of the South African War was concluded, old boys met to decide how to 'honour fallen heroes'. The meeting hinged on whether old boys who had fought on the Boer side would be included in the proposed memorial. On the one hand, the governor and Henry Bale (attorney general and later president of the MC Old Boys' Association) put the view that 'these misguided men had been offending against the Colony'. Opponents of this view appealed to old boys 'to be Englishmen in the truest sense of the word, and not sully o(u)r national reputation by an act narrow-minded, mean and petty, in short "un-English"'.⁴³

The issue of loyalty was of supreme importance and war evoked it. In the First World War both the Victoria Club and Natal freemasonry brought up the issue. In 1916 the club requested the three members of Austrian or German extraction not to use the premises and they complied. The ban was lifted later that year. In other clubs in the country the situation was not so amicably resolved. The Durban Club and the Rand Club expelled 'hostile' members in 1916 (Neame 1957:100). In 1917 freemasons of 'alien enemy birth' were requested not to attend any lodge meetings. A more extreme position, which did not prevail, was introduced to exclude all South Africans of military age unless they could satisfactorily explain why they had not enlisted (McIntyre 1935:29–30).

There were other reasons for exclusion. In the early days of the Victoria Club, Chief Justice Walter Harding did not become a member. 'He was said to lack refinement.' Similarly, F Napier Broome, colonial secretary in the 1870s, was blackballed because of his history of mistreating servants and a 'somewhat choleric temperament' (Hattersley 1959:16, 36). In

admitting members, freemasonry was also driven by two types of concern, the social and moral stature of the candidate and whether he was congenial. Strict admission criteria and procedures were stipulated and it was frequently a source of regret amongst senior freemasons that undesirable or unsuitable members were admitted (Russell 1884:iv; Anon 1909:4; Anon 1916:46). In one instance these dual concerns came together when a 'gay lothario' was admitted. He eloped with the daughter of a prominent businessman and in the process alerted members to his promiscuous past. The editorial of *The South African Freemason* described him as a 'very unpleasant member'.⁴⁴ The exclusion of men who were suspected of being disruptive and difficult and of being likely to threaten the easy and friendly interactions of the club alerts us to the importance of friendship within the clubs (discussed below).

Within the clubs hierarchy was important. The men elected to lead were representative of their ideals and standing. If the clubs *per se* conferred distinction, their office-bearers consolidated and bore testimony to that distinction.

The Victoria Club's early committees featured colonial notables, frequently senior government officials who were often landowners too. It was important that such people had 'names' – so for example when a relatively unknown person like Charles Glyn came onto the committee, it was made known that he came from a 'well-known London family of bankers' (Hattersley 1959:29). The importance of having a family name of distinction privileged metropolitan lineage over colonial, so that it was not until 1900 that the Victoria Club got its first colonial-born chairman, Colonel E M Greene, commander of NC (Hattersley 1959:38). Amongst the freemasons it was the same, the first colonial-born district grand master, Hugh Thompson, took office in 1921 (Alexander 1947?:48).

Two principles underwrote the procedures of committee selection. One was seniority – the duration of service for and membership in the club were necessary conditions of selection. The second was merit. Clubs were keen to avoid all suggestion of nepotism or irregularity. Two examples of many taken from freemason records demonstrate this. Explaining in 1889 how he selected office-bearers, the head of a lodge said, 'I have endeavoured to act solely with a view to the best interests of the fraternity and to sink all personal preferences.'⁴⁵ At a meeting of the Prince Alfred Lodge, Pietermaritzburg, in 1892, Worshipful Master Ferneyhough stressed: 'Your selection for this high position in the Lodge has been the result of merit. Your attainments masonically reflect credit upon your perseverance and prove how you have appreciated and valued the institution of Freemasonry.'⁴⁶

It was not enough simply to be a member of a club. One had, in the course of life, openly to demonstrate one's membership if the distinction attached to membership were fully to

accrue. There were a number of ways in which the full weight of membership could be conveyed to non-members. Ritual was the most important. Ritual is an act of repetitive performance. Since the social importance of membership is always threatened, never stable, it is via repetition that the distinction of membership is perpetuated (Bourdieu 1991:58). There is another aspect of ritual, that which is associated with initiation. Ritualistic entry into membership of a club, according to Bourdieu (1991:117), separates 'those who have undergone it, not from those who have not yet undergone it, but from those who will not undergo it in any sense, and thereby instituting lasting difference between those to whom the rite pertains and those to whom it does not pertain'. Rituals thus realise symbolic capital. People who are routinely part of the pageantry, or who participate in it for the first time, thus come to see themselves differently and act accordingly, and are also seen differently, seen as bearing distinction. Rituals (and what Bourdieu calls 'acts of institution') preserve elites because they discourage all attempts to 'cross the line, to transgress, desert or *quit*' (Bourdieu 1991:122).

The freemasons developed the most intricate of rituals and placed greatest stress on their importance.

No object can be more laudable than the ambition on the part of young Masons to become perfect in Ritual; it is the stepping-stone to Masonic excellence, for without it they are nothing, but if we confine ourselves to that and that only, ours will be but lip Masonry at the best ... We owe it to ourselves to endeavour to enforce by example as well as by precept, those glorious principles which are nowhere more clearly inculcated than in our beautiful lectures, and nowhere more forcibly impressed than in the working of our ceremonies (Anon 1909:3-4).

Throughout this period, freemasons opened their lodges with shows of great ostentation. Frequently, governors, resident commissioners, mayors and senior military men were in the procession (Anon 1958:16). No deviationism was permitted. The inclusion of 'sundry bits of levity' into the 'sober English and Scottish ritual', admonished a freemason reporter, tended 'rather to provoke a smile than to burn the great lessons of the craft into the minds of candidates or bystanders'.⁴⁷

The impression of freemason ceremony was hugely enhanced by the very expensive regalia worn by members. Uniform had meaning for those within freemasonry, indicating hierarchy. As Rich points out, making the link with public school custom clear: 'The Imperial reliance on an identifying uniform recalled school life, where the number of unbuttoned buttons was fraught with meaning' (Rich 1989:57). For non-members, the effect of uniform confirmed exclusion, while dazzling at the same time. Rich describes the uniforms as

talismans and totems, the 'props of a unique stagecraft' (Rich 1992:66). The ritual produced both awe and insecurity.

Public ritual was not as pronounced in the Victoria Club and old boys' societies, yet it was present at every moment in the etiquette. The toasts, the singing of the anthem, the ways in which senior members were addressed, the place where pipes could be smoked and cards played, all these were ritualised, producing a feeling of unity as well as inspiring fear at the consequences of contravention.

A second way of demonstrating membership and establishing distinction was by fulfilling the duties which membership bestowed. Freemasons and old boys' societies stressed the importance of assisting members in distress.⁴⁸ In all clubs, members were obliged to attend meetings punctually. The freemason hierarchy lectured members thus: 'Among the first and plainest duties of a fraternity member is that of attendance at his lodge with regularity and punctuality. Punctuality and regularity are prime elements of success in business, whether individual or corporate; and when these elements are absent we are certain to find loss and confusion as a result.'⁴⁹

Beyond the clearly stated duties and obligations of members was an unwritten code of honour in terms of which members were expected to conduct themselves. Only if one adhered to this could one really be true to the broader mission of the club. In an 1892 freemason speech this was made absolutely clear. A junior warden was instructed 'to be in yourself a veritable plumbline of sobriety, morality and justness in the midst of your brethren and to be a pattern before them of Truth, Honour and Virtue, unless you are such, it is impossible for your to fulfill your duties as you ought'.⁵⁰ The societies thus contributed, formalised and disseminated the gentleman's code as an integral part of settler masculinity. The schools certainly laid the foundations for this requirement, along with toughness and athleticism, but it was the societies which stressed it and took it into adult life.

The code of honour had, inscribed within it, a particular reading of masculinity. Members were expected to be gentlemen: considerate, gracious, generous, wise and with powers of discernment. This was not just an expectation external to members. As Robert Nye points out, 'honor was embodied in bourgeois men as a set of normative sexual characteristics and desires ... A man who deviated from these standards ... dishonored himself and brought shame to his family' (Nye 1993:9). Consequently the clubs all stressed gentlemanly behaviour. Freemasons were expected to be gentlemen. 'The uppermost grade among Masons is that of *gentleman* ... There are certain unerring tests by which to decide whether or not one has been exalted to this uppermost range. Is he forbearing and gentle? Is he careful of the feelings of others? Is he above meanness and vindictiveness? Is he courteous, magnani-

mous, and considerate? If he shows these and other like qualities he may be regarded as a true gentleman.⁵¹ Similarly, past and present scholars of MC were expected to have good manners. This meant having 'greater respect for others – for women, for old people, for those who are worthy of honour, for those who have been given authority which it is in the interests of the community to maintain ... the well-mannered boy shows neither the assertiveness of familiarity nor the awkwardness of timidity. He is quietly natural, with a gentle nature – in other words, he is a gentleman.'⁵² The language which was used to describe gentlemen pointed to something else, something that was the opposite of 'gentle'. It was through the behaviour and the naming of that behaviour that the power of being a gentleman vis-à-vis others was established. By invoking something less – 'trivial' phrases, 'vulgar' expressions, 'facile' style' – society members could claim the status of 'well-chosen, 'elevated', 'lofty', 'dignified' or 'distinguished' gentlemen (Bourdieu 1991:60).

Generosity to one's subordinates was considered important, not just as an obedience to biblical injunction to give alms, but as an expression of largesse. Many of the ONFs kept open house between certain hours on a Sunday when friends would be welcome (Tatham interview 1994). Where such gestures were reciprocated, they served the purpose of uniting members of the group. Hospitality was, in short, 'a vehicle for class organisation and capital accumulation' (Gilding 1991:33). Where the act of giving was directed at the poor, it bore the name of charity, altruism. Here it served to confirm the status of the giver. Bourdieu offers a critique. 'Strictly "disinterested", "clean" activity, free of all "compromises" with politics, is ... the most perfect form of social recognition, that is more or less secretly pursued by all associations, petit-bourgeois movements par excellence, which ... secure the profits of dignity and respectability for undertakings "of general interest" while promising to satisfy particular interests' (Bourdieu 1984:451).

The expectations of members to be gentlemen were sustainable most easily in relation to a black population whose appreciation of such distinction was partial and whose critique of which was external to it. It was an altogether more difficult task to maintain distinction in the face of metropolitan critique. An example of this is provided by the account of a visitor to the Victoria Club who in 1885 complained of Pietermaritzburg's dirt roads and the unavoidable consequence of arriving to dinner 'with *common* [my emphasis] apologies for clothes covered, and mouths filled, with dust'. He also noted, with distaste, that the colonial gentry lacked refinement. 'Many members of the club did not seem to feel comfortable at dinner unless the windows were open enough to blow the menu off the table,' he reported (Hattersley 1959:28). Such criticisms were galling, and only spurred members all the better to master the art of being true gentlemen.⁵³

In the eighteenth century, societies were 'moral institutions of the educated middleclass elite, which not only preached morality but also taught their members a standard of civilised behaviour that was in keeping with their moral claims of transcending the culture of the court and feudalism. This implied not only practising reasoned speech but also a form of social intercourse free from hubbub, suggestiveness and coarseness as well as frivolity, play and eroticism ... An atmosphere of solemnity prevailed, and this was the reason for the prohibition of alcohol and parlour games' (Van Dülmen 1992:141). In our period, changes occurred. In the Victoria Club games of chance were prohibited and bets limited. Conversation was considered to be an art and overseas magazines were provided to raise the standard thereof. Indiscreet language and boastfulness were frowned upon. Yet, as we shall see in the next section, the solemnity of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gave way to greater stress on pleasurable leisure-time use: games, alcohol and sports all gained prominence and provided opportunities for levity.

The clubs as locations of friendship

What did the clubs do for their members? Did members only join to become part of networks, to gain advantage of one kind or another? The following passage, referring to Ixopo freemasons, suggests otherwise.

Such was the enthusiasm of Brethren that they even had a Lodge meeting during the siege of Ladysmith with the members making up regalia from bedsheets dipped (sic) with ink.⁵⁴

The clubs were meeting places for men. They provided venues for socialising, drinking, and other leisure-time activity which the family home was seldom able to provide. Where they had a spatial existence (the old boy clubs did not), they were places where men could come together as friends. While hierarchies and difference marked the world of work, behind the doors of the Victoria Club and the freemason lodges all were united by institutional belonging. Men generally went to the clubs not consciously to foster some class project or to seal some political or business deal, but to be in the company of other, like-thinking men.

The clubs facilitated contact, not just of people with one another, but with the world of the ONFs. News and information which constantly located the ONFs in relation to one another and the outside world was avidly communicated. The importance of this can easily be seen by the insistence by people in the countryside on having the post-cart service running

efficiently and reliably.⁵⁵ One can see it in correspondence of the period too. An extreme example is Alfred Henderson apologising for delaying, by a day, writing to his father. He had narrowly escaped death at Isandhlwana! (Hathorn [n d]:228).

In the nineteenth century men were in geographically or bureaucratically isolated jobs. In the course of a working day they might see fellow workers, but would not have the time and space to develop casual (non-professional) relationships. It was here that clubs came into their own. At lunch time or after hours, the Victoria Club, centrally located, provided the venue for the informal interactions of like-thinking men. Professionals from around Pietermaritzburg town would meet members of parliament, officers of the military establishment and a variety of senior public figures. Here matters could be discussed without the intrusion of conventions which governed the workplace. Without such a central meeting place, friendship networks could not easily have grown up.

The clubs were also attractive for other reasons. Rich (1989) argues that the rituals of freemason lodges reminded members of schoolboy life and were thus comfortable and familiar. A contemporary observation from a public school boy captures the allure: He 'loved the life of the House, the silliness and all the gossip about sex and about masters. I liked my friends to be good-looking, gossipy and to share my kind of jokes. If you are in an institution like that you form friendships which are not based on anything else which is held in common other than the fact that you all happen to be there' (Devlin & Williams 1992:153–154). Van Dülmen argues, similarly, that the lodge allowed members to 'enjoy a cultist experience of fraternal association' (van Dülmen 1992:60–61).

For the clubs to function as places of emotional security, members instituted a range of protective measures. Women were excluded. Hattersley explains this phenomenon in apologetic terms: 'In nearly all social clubs there still prevails the feeling, however chivalrously it may be cloaked, that men must keep their womenfolk out, if the comfortable atmosphere of the club is to be preserved' (Hattersley 1959:42). Remy offers a different explanation: 'The men's hut traditionally rigidly excludes women. This reflects its function ... as the actualisation of the desire for separation from women and children and their world' (Remy 1990:49). Men sought both fraternal support and intimacy. Within the nuclear family, men may have found sexual intimacy.⁵⁶ This did not necessarily go hand in hand with a sharing of work problems, sexual anxieties or a range of other interests which the sexual division of labour in the home and at the workplace placed beyond the wife's experience. Within the extended family, material support was often available, but not necessarily friendship (Wellman 1992:91). Men tended to air these concerns in the clubs where, too, they could disport their knowledge of politics and world affairs, also considered to be beyond the ken of women.⁵⁷

The importance of congenial relations within the club caused the 'traditional values' to prohibit the discussion of party politics or anything else which would threaten such relations. Tolerance of different opinion was insisted upon (Neame 1957:85). The Victoria Club never became the 'stronghold of a political party or of particular professions, but it was decidedly the most appropriate place where visitors could be entertained, or colonial opinion measured on any subject of public interests' (Hattersley 1959:31). The club became a place of stability, predictability – a place which offered a quiet haven as well as a dependable source of companionship. In the lodges this was also the case: friendship was held to be the 'cement that brings men closer to one another and teaches us to realise what the true brotherhood of mankind should be'.⁵⁸

The major activities of the clubs reflect their social (as opposed to political) function. Cards, snooker and billiards were all begun in the early years of the Victoria Club. Later the club organised cricket matches against Durban and Richmond sides, while golf and squash became popular in the inter-war years (Hattersley 1959:39). The old boys' societies were primarily involved in organising sports matches. At the annual speech day, old boy sides would frequently be arrayed against current school First XIs and XV's.

Drinking was another important activity. Publicly, the club and lodges presented themselves as models of sobriety. This is difficult to disprove, though highly unlikely. The bar at the Victoria Club was the centre of its activities. And an informant confirmed that Ixopo freemasons returned from lodge meetings in a drunken state.⁵⁹ The Victoria Club was formed at a time when drinking habits in Britain were changing. The separation of middle from working class extended spatially to locations of leisure time usage, and 'no respectable middle-class man would enter a public house'. Instead 'Gentlemen took to their clubs, and the non-temperance part of the middle-class took to drinking at home in their increasingly large and comfortable houses' (Thompson 1988:308).

Descriptions of the Victoria Club in this period stress ease and relaxation. Men sat until the early hours, reading, playing cards, talking and drinking. The club became involved, from the late nineteenth century, in amateur drama and, from the turn of the century on, renowned for its balls. 'When, in October 1904, the Moody Manners Company brought to Scott's theatre a season of grand opera, special late suppers were provided on two nights of the gay week, to which members could invite their friends' (Hattersley 1959:34). Strict convention and formality which could produce stuffiness, gave way to 'a warmth and friendliness' (Hattersley 1959:45).

The atmosphere in freemason meetings was not dissimilar. Accounts of lodge meetings stress singing, toasts, and companionship. While the public view was of ritual solemnity,

reports are spliced with anecdotes and jokes.⁶⁰ There was a conscious effort to produce friendship and a sense of unity. In 1893 the incoming worshipful master of a Pietermaritzburg lodge hoped 'that good feeling might long continue and that the good-fellowship and unity which had hitherto been a special feature of the Lodge might never cease to be the distinguishing characteristic of the Prince Alfred Lodge. (Applause)'.⁶¹ When a fellow mason suffered emotional catastrophe, he was supported. In 1893, Ferneyhough, the head of the St Alfred Lodge lost, within a week, his wife and son to disease. Sympathy was expressed for his 'domestic affliction and suffering' and his steadfastness and friendship within the lodge were toasted. Expressing his gratitude Ferneyhough said 'there was a feeling of regret when parting with anything we love and he could say the Prince Alfred Lodge was indelibly imprinted upon his heart'. He continued that the lodge had allowed him to come to terms with his grief. 'He had taken pleasure in the work of the Lodge and it had helped him to divert his thoughts.'⁶²

It is commonly supposed that the clubs had clear political agendas that mirrored the class-nature of their membership. The concentration of elites and the opportunities for politicking must obviously have cemented class rule. This view is not, at first sight, correct. In all the clubs, the discussion of 'politics' was taboo. The weakness of the party political system in Natal and the fact that so many of the Victoria Club's members were actually in government meant that difficulties around this issue did not surface. Elsewhere, in the Rand Club for example, matters were more complicated. Most of the conspirators for the 1896 Jameson Raid were club members and many were sought and arrested there. The club itself, however, managed successfully to protest its innocence (Neame 1957:50, 53). In the same plot, two prominent Rand freemasons were centrally involved, leading to debates within freemasonry about their continued suitability (Cooper 1986:66). The societies were, however, clearly suited for the informal discussion of business and politics. As Donald Sinclair put it, in the Victoria Club 'farmers met their bank managers in a cordial atmosphere which cemented trust' (Sinclair interview 1993).

Friendship could not, of course, be guaranteed. In the early days, when the colonial honour code was still powerful, matters frequently became heated. The founder of the club, Lushington Phillips, was sued for libel by Philip Allen (colonial treasurer) after Phillips had accused him of dishonesty. When the court found against Allen, he resigned his government post, took a demotion as resident magistrate in far-off Newcastle where he committed suicide three years later (Hattersley 1959:24). The metropolitan codes of honour imported into the colony began to lose influence as the colonial gentry established their own codes. These included belonging to particular families, going to the elite secondary schools, participating in sports (especially rugby, cricket and polo) and serving in particular regiments.

The forty years under review constituted the heyday of clubs and societies. There was little effective resistance by women to men spending many hours at the club. There was no peer censure either. For the gentry, the clubs confirmed standing in relation to peers and solidified status in relation to the ineligible. The clubs were not open, and access only became easier (and membership expanded) once Natal's white male ruling class was more integrated. This occurred through the creation of a common educational base, the growth of an independent accumulation base, the development of political autonomy and bureaucratic capacity and the ambivalent distancing process from the metropole.

As places of prestige and exclusion, it is hardly surprising that the clubs were the objects of hatred. In Johannesburg, the Rand Club was attacked in 1913 and threatened again in 1922 by striking white workers, who held it to be the informal seat of power of the Reef's capitalists (Neame 1957:89-95, 108). The views of those excluded from membership in Natal has not come to my attention, but for the *kholwa* in particular, seeking a place in colonial society as landed gentry, their exclusion must have been a painful reminder of the futility of their cause. This must particularly have been the case as they strove independently to acquire the marks of distinction established as the norm in these clubs and by these networks.⁶³

Belonging to an ONF, or being a white, was no guarantee of individual distinction; nor was it enough to assure social acceptance and inclusion in class institutions. Crossing the line could mean ostracisation. The creation of taste went together with the establishment of distaste. In the collective interests of the class, an individual could find himself cast out. He might be denied membership of the clubs and respect. He might be *persona non grata* at tea and dinner parties. He might no longer be favoured with business opportunities, jobs or political office. (These misfits will be discussed in chapter 9.)

The ostracisation was not simply a display of class revulsion or an expression of moral outrage. It was an effect, too, of the choices routinely made by members of the clubs about whom they would like to befriend. Club members created for themselves places where friendships could happen, and leisure time be enjoyed. Men who did not share their convictions about friendship, about enjoyment, about relaxation, were not admitted. Not being admitted meant being excluded.

Notes

- 1 In the debate around understandings of 'The patriarchal law', feminist Judith Butler has attempted to get away from seeing it as purely a discourse of repression. Her view is that it is a system that makes certain things possible, that produces other as mirror of same and which throws up contradictions. She thus avoids the linear, bipolar tendencies inherent in Bourdieu's work (Butler 1990: footnote 52 at 156).
- 2 Hilton College Archive, Hiltonian Society minute book.
- 3 Hilton College Archive, Constitution of the Hiltonian Society.
- 4 Hilton College Archive, Hiltonian Society minute book, general meeting 16 April 1893.
- 5 Hilton College Archive, Hiltonian Society minute book, annual general meeting, 24 May 1895
- 6 Hilton College Archive, Hiltonian Society minute book, annual report, 3 July 1897.
- 7 Hilton College Archive, Hiltonian Society minute book, annual report, 28 June 1898.
- 8 Hilton College Archive, Hiltonian Society minute book, annual meeting, 20 December 1900.
- 9 Hilton College Archive, Hiltonian Society minute book, annual report 27 January 1902.
- 10 Hilton College Archive, Hiltonian Society minute book, half yearly meeting, 9 May 1908.
- 11 Hilton Archive Depot, Hiltonian Society minute book (2), annual report for year ending 31 August 1927. The minute book from 1911 to 1926 has been lost.
- 12 *Pietermaritzburg College Magazine*, 1 (6) March 1901:10.
- 13 *S Michael's Chronicle*, II (5) October 1905:40.
- 14 *S Michael's Chronicle*, II (12) June 1909:17.
- 15 F S Tatham's brother, Charles, married Lily Leuchars, cousin of George Leuchars, Greytown farmer and commander of the Natal Carbineers. Among Tatham's numerous cousins and uncles were Pietermaritzburg lawyers, colonial land surveyors and Midland farmers. The family was steeped in a military tradition, with most of the men serving in the Natal Carbineers (Tatham nd).
- 16 *The South African Freemason*, 5, 1892:240.
- 17 I have not found evidence of the public school/freemason connection beyond a computer reference to an Old Etonian branch in Durban in 1922. Unfortunately the file on this branch could not be located by Pretoria Archive staff. CAD, GG 1703, 7/71.
- 18 In a recent article on late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Cape society it is argued that, amongst other organisations, freemasonry was critical in supporting an imperial, modernist project which was underpinned by notions of class and racial superiority (Merrington 1995).
- 19 Cooper acknowledges that freemasons held high government positions which 'enabled them to predispose the administration in favour of the Craft.' Sir Hercules Robinson, Cape governor in the 1880s, Sir Richard Southey, Cape Colonial Secretary (1860s–1870s), Louis Botha, Field Marshal Lord Roberts, Commander-in-chief for SA (1900–1902) and Lord Kitchener, Chief of Staff to Roberts were all senior freemasons (Cooper 1986:38, 48, 64). Quite what the implications of these overlapping positions were is not further explained.
- 20 Samuel Francis Beningfield was one of the first freemasons in Natal, being a junior deacon in Durban in 1858 (Russell 1884:6). He was appointed a JP in 1894. His sons and grandsons achieved fame in Natal. Reuben founded the Natal Field Artillery, and his six sons excelled at sport. They attended Maritzburg College, Weenen County College and an English public school, Lancing. Cyril James was perhaps the best known. He farmed sugar and later became an auc-

- ioneer. He was renowned for his all-round sporting skills, playing representative cricket and soccer. He was also very competitive at athletics, tennis, rowing and yachting (Natal, *Index to the Government Gazette for the year ended December 31, 1894*:211. Gordon 1988:16–18; *Cape Times*, [n d]:239). Frederick Thomas Bigby became a freemason in 1862 (Russell 1884:18). His son, Captain W S Bigby, was a magistrate and secretary of the Natal Rugby Union from 1902.
- 21 CAAD, CO 4146, 88; CO 4151, 180.
 - 22 *Natal's who's who* 1906.
 - 23 *The South African Freemason*, 2, 1889:122.
 - 24 CAD, GG 201184, 28/129, James Bray to Lord Gladstone, 18 June 1912.
 - 25 B M Vogts, Provincial Grand Master for Dutch Lodges in Transvaal, cited in Cooper 1986:123.
 - 26 Private communication, Michael Johnson, Ixopo.
 - 27 Natal Carbineers Archive, Pietermaritzburg, file: 'Umvoti Mounted Rifles and associated regts'.
 - 28 Burkimsher was very keen on tent-pegging, a mounted martial skill developed in India and loved organising gymkhanas. He was a keen shotist and captained the NC team, 1902–14. He won springbok colours in 1912. In this period he also trained the Hilton College cadets. On retirement in 1922 he became proprietor of the Horse Shoe Hotel. He continued to serve as president of Pietermaritzburg's Rifle Association. In addition he was president of the Maritzburg Boating Club and an executive member of the National Bowling Committee. He judged horse jumping at the Royal Show. Burkimsher loved Hilton College and sent his sons there. When he died he was given a Masonic funeral service, whereafter the NC gave him a military funeral. Natal Carbineer Archive, Pietermaritzburg. File 'Burkimsher': Reminiscences of Burkimsher Jnr b 1916.
 - 29 The Hathorns were a numerous and influential Pietermaritzburg clan. From 1876 until 1921 K H Hathorn (who became a Supreme Court judge) was mostly on the committee of the Victoria Club. In that same period, Fergus Hathorn chaired the committee for six consecutive years (1893–98), and from 1923 A A Roy Hathorn became a committee member as well.
 - 30 *List of members of the Victoria Club, Pietermaritzburg, Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, Vause, Slatter & Calvert 1907); *Victoria Club, Pietermaritzburg, list of members, 1917* ([s l], [n d])
 - 31 *The South African Freemason*, 2, 1889:150.
 - 32 *The South African Freemason*, 6, 1893:342.
 - 33 *S Michael's Chronicle*, III (5) December 1912:10.
 - 34 Hilton College Archive, Head Master's Letter book, October–November 1905. Nicholson, Todd and Co supplied Hilton's potato requirements, while Randles Brothers and Hudson supplied the flour.
 - 35 *Pietermaritzburg School Magazine*, III (42) July 1916: 3.
 - 36 Anon 1893:39.
 - 37 The list here is definitely limited. Unlike the Victoria Club, whose membership was publicly known, I have found no list of freemasons in Natal. Most freemason articles are secretive or uninformative, providing either no details of members at all, or only information as to the status of men in relation to freemasonry itself.
 - 38 AGO 1/9/31, 219A/1906, Douglas de Fenzi to Attorney General 20 November 1906; Attorney General to Douglas de Fenzi, 20 November 1906.
 - 39 *The South African Freemason*, 3, 1890:289–290.
 - 40 *The South African Freemason*, 2, 1889:130.

- 41 *The South African Freemason*, 4, 1890–91:154.
- 42 For example, in *The Natal almanac, directory and yearly register for 1881* (published 1880).
- 43 *The Pietermaritzburg College Magazine*, 1 (5) December 1900:15, 19.
- 44 *The South African Freemason*, 5, 1892:102.
- 45 *The South African Freemason*, 2, 1889:110.
- 46 *The South African Freemason*, 5, 1892:162.
- 47 *The South African Freemason*, 4, 1890–91:191.
- 48 Hilton College Archive, Hiltonian Society minute book, annual meeting, 28 June 1898.
- 49 *The South African Freemason*, 5, 1892:331.
- 50 *The South African Freemason*, 5, 1892:163.
- 51 *The South African Freemason*, 6 1893:227.
- 52 *Pietermaritzburg College Magazine*, III, 30, June 1910 (sic):15.
- 53 The ambiguous relationship with the metropole is explored in chapter 6.
- 54 Private communication from Michael Johnson, Ixopo, 31 August 1995.
- 55 For example, MJPW 87, LW 4606/1901.
- 56 We know little about the secret sexual lives of the ONFs, though in Britain their research sheds doubt on the extent to which married people shared sexual intimacy (Hall 1991).
- 57 It is important to stress that socialising, drinking and so on were not gender-neutral activities. A study of drinking in contemporary South African society shows, for example, that social drinking is framed in terms of norms which marginalise other (non-drinking) masculinities, while supporting hegemonic masculinity (Kaminer & Dixon 1995).
- 58 *The South African Freemason*, 2, 1889:191.
- 59 Personal communication, June Farrer, February 1995.
- 60 *The South African Freemason*, 5, 1892:298.
- 61 *The South African Freemason*, 6, 1893:178.
- 62 *The South African Freemason*, 6, 1893:179.
- 63 The *amakholwa* set up societies and schools, attended church, followed the dress codes of the colony (Hughes 1988; Marks 1975; Meintjes 1988). Called 'Black Victorians', they nevertheless failed to be acknowledged or included in settler society.