

CHAPTER 9

The forgotten and the excluded – the secret history of the ONFs

Part of the myth of the ONFs is that they were a cohesive grouping, supportive of one another, a big happy family, you might say. In this chapter, this myth is exposed. Writing in a different context, Corrigan and Sayer argue that claims of unity involve the development of an integrative vocabulary which in turn produces the 'active disintegration – dilution, disruption, denial – of alternatives' (Corrigan & Sayer 1985:198). The major mechanism by which the ONFs presented unity was to silence dissident voices and deny their existence. This involved withdrawing economic support and social recognition, seeking and using legislative power to isolate and marginalise and, subsequently, to tamper with the historical record to make the 'blobs of shame' disappear.

Three descriptive categories have been used to try and make sense of processes of exclusion. The degree of exclusion varied, depending on the nature of the breach. The mildest sanction was reserved for those struck by misfortune. Misfits were handled in various ways, depending on the nature of the impropriety or defect and the power which the alleged misfit had. By far the most unacceptable transgression was miscegenation (an outdated and normative term, used here for convenience and alliterative allure).

Misfortune

Many ONFs were supported through difficult times by family members, but occasionally family members chose not to help. The result could be very serious. If by misfortune you lost your land and your home, you could find yourself socially and geographically isolated. And forgotten.

The Slatters were the aristocracy of Greytown. They owned huge lands, an impressive stone house. They were very active in civic organisations, including the Umvoti Agricultural Society. Twin brothers Walter John and David Clarke Slatter (b 1855) set up the farming operation in Greytown. Walter did well on the diamond mines, which allowed him a luxurious lifestyle, including regular overseas trips. On one such trip he left the farm and his affairs in his brother's hands. Without consultation, Clarke invested in the Barberton/Pilgrim's Rest gold fields. The result was disastrous, and although Walter did not lose his farm he had virtually to start from scratch. This resulted, not unnaturally, in a lot of ill-feeling between the brothers and their offspring. Family legend has it that Clarke then married and lived at 'Holmesdale' (another portion of the original farm). Unsuccessful with ostrich farming, he emigrated to Rhodesia around 1930 (Slatter interview 1993). The official record suggests at the least an unrecorded chapter in the story. In 1903 Clarke was allotted a 66 acre plot in the Weenen irrigation settlement. This settlement was reserved for men without capital or means. His progress was pitifully slow, with a report from the surveyor general in 1915 commenting that progress had been 'unsatisfactory'.¹ In 1917 he was warned of impending action by the Lands Department unless he made better use of the plot. Unable to advance his cause alone, he informed the inspector that he would seek assistance from his twin brother. This was clearly successful, for the following year, he was granted the plot freehold.² For nearly forty years Clarke Slatter had been shunned by his successful brother. It was perhaps only the passage of time that healed the nineteenth-century wounds. Clarke was tolerated but not assisted until absolute calamity stared him in the face. And assistance did not bring reintegration either. His surname could only echo past glories; it could not conjure up the material luxury with which it remained associated in Greytown.

Misfits

A person of 'feeble intelligence' was a misfit. Darwinist ideas of racial purity and the survival of the fittest meant that men, particularly, who did not meet social expectations around intelligence endangered the ONF myth.

Edric Smythe (b 1888) was the sixth child (third son) of Charles John Smythe. In 1911 he married Kathrine, daughter of a local farmer, George Ross. In time they had nine children. From 1911 onward, Edric farmed a family farm, 'Dwalen', with the help of his father. In 1918, on the death of his father, he inherited the farm. The conditions of his inheritance were different from those of his brothers – the farm was held in trust for him by some family and family friends.⁵

One of the reasons for Charles to insist on this form of inheritance was that Edric demonstrated himself to be an incompetent farmer. Despite substantial assistance from his father, he consistently farmed at a loss, having to borrow money from his father (over and above the other assistance freely given) to keep the farm going.



Mungo and Edric Smythe

By 1928 his brother Mungo, one of the trustees, noted: 'My brother now owns no livestock and has practically no assets, and I believe he is considerably in debt to tradespeople and others. His property is not being properly managed or farmed, and there is very little income from it.'

'My said brother is weak-willed, and is prone to acts which are not in the interests of himself or his family ... I declare that it is in the true interests of my said brother, his wife and his children, that someone should be appointed to manage, control and conduct his affairs on his behalf.'⁴

To support his contention, Mungo Smythe approached a doctor, who declared Edric, 'feeble-minded'.⁵ Mungo's application was granted, and the drain on family funds rapidly stopped with the leasing of the farm to the Arbuthnot family. Edric continued to live on the farm but some time around 1950 he was admitted into a mental hospital. In February 1993 I interviewed Pat Smythe, nephew of Edric. When I recounted the sad tale of Edric's decline, he questioned its veracity vigorously (Pat Smythe interview 1993). The story of Edric in the aristocratic Smythe family seems to have been sanitised so that the family name avoids the opprobrium of 'madness'.⁶

Duncan McKenzie's family had the difficulty of accommodating and explaining the eccentric behaviour of Billy (b 1898), Duncan's eldest son. Today he is remembered as the black sheep of the family, who failed dismally to follow in the glorious footsteps of his father. He never married. He was held responsible for losing the family farm. He was known for drinking and womanising. He was frequently observed at the Howick magistrate's court to face charges of assault – he had a penchant for beating up Africans.⁷ After serving in France in the First World War, he scorned his father's military reputation by saying that he saw more action in one day in France than his father had seen in his whole career! Not surprisingly, when he returned after living for a while in Britain, his father threw him out of his house (Barbara McKenzie interview 1993; Pat McKenzie interview 1994). Billy did not snugly fit the mould of settler masculinity. His displays of aggression were out of step with the times. He failed to meet his manly obligation of marriage and protecting and developing family property. Yet, as the son of Sir Duncan with control of the family farm, he could not be wished away or ignored. The family history has come down with Billy in it – testimony to rugged diversity and 'character'.

Families did try to fit awkward members into a family narrative that was consistent with the values which they upheld. This was often necessary as family members, even in prominent families, were not immune from scandal. In two families noted for public-spiritedness and achievement, the blight of having leading male members found guilty of fraud left its mark.

Herbert Murray, son of government minister Sir T K Murray (and my great-grandfather), and chairman of the Natal Law Society, was found guilty of fraud, as was the Ixopo lawyer Knighton Chadwick, who came from a family which had provided many justices of the peace and which featured regularly in the social pages.⁸

Another awkward case affecting a prominent family involved the public conduct of Ralph Tatham, brother of F S Tatham, Judge President of Natal. Two Tatham brothers, one a surveyor and the other an adventurer/sailor/soldier, emigrated from London in 1850. The fortunes of the elder son, Edmund, and his family were good, while those of the younger, Robert Bristow Tatham, were mixed. The latter spent much of his life soldiering, had a spell on the diamond mines, and when he died in 1881, left nine children and no money (Tatham [n d]). The Tathams were numerous and spread through Midland society as farmers, lawyers, and military men. Perhaps the best known of the family was Frederick Spence Tatham, Ralph's brother. He was described in the family history as 'a very great man' who has been called 'The Ceasar (sic) of Natal' (Tatham [n d]). On the other hand, Gillian Tatham, the family historian, knew very little about Ralph, despite dedicating many years to researching the family (Tatham interview 1995). It was known that he had made and lost a fortune, lived for a while in Britain, and married twice. In recent researches Gillian has discovered the existence of a third wife, previously unacknowledged. She continues her researches in this area. In addition there were vague tales of his having been involved in the 1914 or 1922 Witwatersrand strikes. On this score, I was able to add some illumination. Having researched Ralph in the Central Archive Depot in Pretoria and elsewhere, I was able to inform Gillian that Ralph had championed the cause of white labour in his stretch as Natal parliamentarian (1906–07) and in the Transvaal from at least 1914. He approached government with a variety of schemes to open gold and diamond mines and work them entirely with white workers.⁹ In 1915 he was struck off the Transvaal lawyer's roll for professional misconduct and unprofessional conduct (overcharging, gaining evidence in an underhand way, representing clients with conflicts of interest).¹⁰ He recovered by becoming director of the Rand Sporting Club, but became increasingly involved in radical politics. In the words of the Deputy Commissioner of the Transvaal CID, he became 'Anti-British' and professed to be 'a revolutionist and a republican'. The policeman thought Ralph an 'inconsequential and shallow man, without deep thinking power' and 'not altogether of sound mind'.¹¹ Ralph was very far from being a 'very great man', and his history has consequently been pared down in the collective family memory to a number of exciting anecdotes which do not challenge comfortable family nostrums. Only the patient endeavours of a member of later generations has been able to prize the secrets, carefully concealed by familial amnesia, from the past.

Family amnesia was also useful in coping with 'loners'. Quite contrary to the normal practice of finding every detail of the lives of the famous and important, the lives of 'loners'

were simply allowed to disappear from memory. In the Alcock family, such a case came to my attention. Joseph Alcock included all his children in his will. When I interviewed the Alcocks, there was no record of Thomas. Family members suspected that he went off to the Transvaal, but described him as 'a mystery'. Disappearance could save families from explaining 'loners' or 'ne'er-do-wells' and was convenient when protecting their good name (Daphne Pennefather interview 1992).

Sexual misfits are not easy to find in ONF history. This was not because there were none, but because of the great stigma attached to sexual misdemeanours such as homosexuality and incest and or even *mésalliances*. In chapter 3, the evidence suggests that clandestine sexual liaisons between men would have continued into adulthood.¹² But no interviewer could or would identify an ONF member as having been homosexual. Amongst the men, I interviewed, any question that suggested that sex between men had ever occurred between white Midland men was treated with incredulous disdain.¹³ Evidence of incest is even more difficult to find. On condition of anonymity, an informant told me that it was a well-kept family secret that the second-last-born child in a prominent Midland family was fathered by the mother's son-in-law.

What was sexually (and procreatively) permissible changed over time. In the 1850s Captain John Chadwick came to Natal with his wife and his servant, Jane Lloyd. Shelagh Spencer has unearthed the fact that Chadwick had children by both his wife and servant/mistress. The naming of these children was complicated, but most took the biological father's name in adulthood (Spencer 1987:64–65). I came upon this strange situation when I interviewed the great-grandson of Alice Maud Mary Perdita Lloyd/Chadwick. He knew of the Chadwick connection, but was totally unaware of its complex nature (Power-Wilson interview 1995).¹⁴ What was on the fringes of acceptability in the middle of the nineteenth century became unacceptable during the next century. Now, with the passage of another half century, the genealogical truth is becoming palatable.

Miscegenation

Sexual relations with Africans was an inflammatory issue in the Midlands by the 1880s. It may not always have been so. The early settlers in Natal were single men. It was common for them to have black mistresses and, in the case of John Dunn, to marry and establish families with black women. In the Midlands, some sense of the isolation which was a factor promoting sexual intimacy with African women can be gleaned from the following: 'Off the main wagon tracks visitors would be few. One family (the Ralfes at Bergvliet) resided

fourteen years in the neighbourhood of the military post at the Bushman's River without seeing a European woman' (Hattersley 1936:155). Isolation gradually become less severe, but between 1880 and 1900 white men still outnumbered white women in large numbers (Beall 1982:209). In the colonial context, skewed sexual demography and the expectation that men would increase their sexual experience resulted in high levels of sex between white men and black women (Hyam 1990:5, 201).¹⁵

Sex between white men and black women remained common, despite growing concern and condemnation.¹⁶ Evidence to the Native Affairs Commission in 1906 and 1907 is replete with moral concern for the increase in 'illicit intercourse between Europeans and natives'.¹⁷

Throughout the Midlands the chorus was echoed. There was little disagreement about the phenomenon or its moral effect, though some disagreement about responsibility. William Nicholson of Richmond is reported to have said: 'It was said that low white people had recourse to this illicit connection, but the witness was of opinion that the native women were more to blame than the poor white people.' On the other hand, Greytown's magistrate, held that although white policemen were mainly blamed it was 'young farmers (who) were, to a large extent, the principal offenders'.¹⁸

While the temptation endured, by the second and third decades of the twentieth century casual sex with black women was taboo. Derrick Braithwaite, Seven Oaks farmer, spoke candidly about his memories of the temptation of a sexual relationship with black women. He said that he had resisted the temptation because 'it would have broken my mother's heart'. Derrick said such action would have been 'dishonourable' and 'dirty' (Braithwaite interview 1993). Where it happened, it was increasingly secret.

A blind eye might have been turned to occasional sexual 'error'. I have not come across any lasting exclusion or family sanction inflicted on transgressors. But having sex with a black woman was one thing, while living with or marrying her was quite another. As late as the turn of the century some white farmers were still entering permanent relationships with black women. In Richmond and Greytown, witnesses to the Native Affairs Commission confirmed that cohabitation and marriage were, if anything, becoming more frequent.¹⁹ Very often such unions were struck in terms of African custom. One of the reasons for this was the refusal of white clergymen to perform marriage ceremonies for mixed couples. Rev Algernon James Fryer, Vicar of Richmond, said he 'refused to perform any religious ceremony of marriage between the two races, because he dared not pronounce God's blessing upon what he did not believe God blessed'.²⁰ This meant that white men were drawn into the process of bridewealth. J T Marwick of Richmond said that on the Illovo River (near Richmond) 'a number of farmers (were) living with black women whom they had lobola'd'.²¹ While this might

have been costly, it was not without material benefit in the longer term. Apart from the well-known fact that obtaining a wife in this way gained access to her labour, it also placed her reproductive capacity within the realm of accumulation.²² Rev Fryer recalled a case in which a white man ('of loose reputation') married an African woman in a Christian ceremony. He refused to let his daughter marry a white man because he intended 'to get this lobolo (of a wagon and a span and a horse and saddle) for his daughter from a black man'.²³

But the situation was not so simple. It was not the case that there was a sudden upsurge of collective libidinous energy directed towards African women. Rather there was a long tradition of white men living with African women which was being challenged by a new moral climate. William Nicholson gives eloquent testimony to this history: 'I am a Colonist of 1859 ... From the first, to the present day, I have lived amongst the natives. I would never employ a Coolie ... More than half my life I have lived alone with my native servants, and they look after me very well, and have nursed me most carefully through several illnesses.'²⁴ I heard this theme of caring articulated once by one of my oldest informants, Woodrow Cross. After attending Michaelhouse for five years, beginning about 1914, he worked a ranch in what is now Zambia. He never married and lived alone with Africans. When I interviewed him at age 90, he was living with a number of African servants. Exchanges were gentle, kind and mutually respectful. He explained that he had lived with his servants for twenty-five years and expected to die with them. He explained at length how he had been brought up by *Ntombis* (African girls), learnt to speak Zulu at an early age and had African playmates. He then commented on current racial prejudice by saying, simply, 'I treat that person like I would like to be treated myself' (Cross interview 1993). It is impossible to know whether these relationships had a sexual content, but they were increasingly suspect. Cross-racial sex could only be monitored or prevented if intimacy itself was proscribed. Men like Nicholson and Cross, with 'good' ONF names and independent resources, escaped exclusion and censure. They did not flaunt their social status or preferences. They remained within the ONF fold, though I doubt whether they would have been acceptable at the Victoria Club.

In the 1880s in Britain a purity campaign was launched to end moral laxity. Directed primarily at the working class, its effect was to expand restrictive legislation and to reduce sexual opportunity (Hyam 1990:65). A similar hysteria swept Natal. European prestige and the purity of the Midland community was in jeopardy. Settlers and energetic clergymen set out to eradicate depravity.²⁵ They proposed to illegalise inter-racial marriages and sexual intercourse, disenfranchise men guilty of such action and categorise the progeny of mixed marriages as 'black' (and therefore subject to customary (African) law).²⁶

At this time there were no laws in Natal outlawing either sex or marriage with blacks. Despite public pressure, laws were slow to come. In the absence thereof, judgements in the

Supreme Court began to confirm the marginalisation of 'coloured' children. By 1911, judgments in the Cape Supreme Court confirmed that children of mixed parents were to be categorised in terms of the darker parent (Zaal 1992:386). It was only in 1927 that the Immorality Act made it illegal for whites to have sex with blacks (Horrell 1978:8). And it was to be another 21 years before apartheid brought a grim and logical conclusion to this trend with the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (Horrell 1978:18).

So why was there this punitive attitude towards blacks and sex? Love is subversive, as Joan Meyer says, 'It is no coincidence that societies seeking to preserve the power differential between subdivisions of the population discourage the forming of love ties between members of different groups' (Meyer 1991:24). Love attacks and undermines convention. 'The contradiction between the project of erotic love and the requirements of patriarchal institutions – marriage, property and kinship relations – also has to be recognised as a permanent tension in patriarchal society' (Connell 1987:217). Ann Stoler suggests that the response of white men was to monitor 'their' women closely as any breach in the codes of social separation which had developed would have dented the prestige of settler society (Stoler 1989). White women thus became themselves the source of neurotic concern – that they would go off with a black man. This fear is brilliantly evoked by Doris Lessing in her novel about Rhodesia in the 1940s, *The grass is singing*. In general, cross-racial social and sexual relationships were placed under ever-tighter surveillance, with ever-heavier legal and social sanction being levelled against them.

In 1918 Otto Scott Mackenzie was one of the many people who died in the influenza epidemic. He was 39 at the time, unmarried, the son of a miller. He had bought his 407 acre farm in 1907 with a loan from his mother. When he died, the net value of his estate was calculated at £1 828. It was his will which caused the problem. In his will of November 1910 he left everything to his mother. But, in a codicil made in December 1915, he altered his will. 'I give to my illegitimate child Bonfire [sic] Johnston 20 (twenty) black oxen together with wagon and gear complete.' The document is messy and not clear, but it was clear that Bonfire's mother was Maisie-Ka-Mbudula and that he had thought of leaving her 'the remaining oxen and wagon at Otto's Kop with gear complete' but had changed his mind and left 'The remainder of my property to go to my two brothers Lorne and Eric McKenzie (sic) respectively'.²⁷

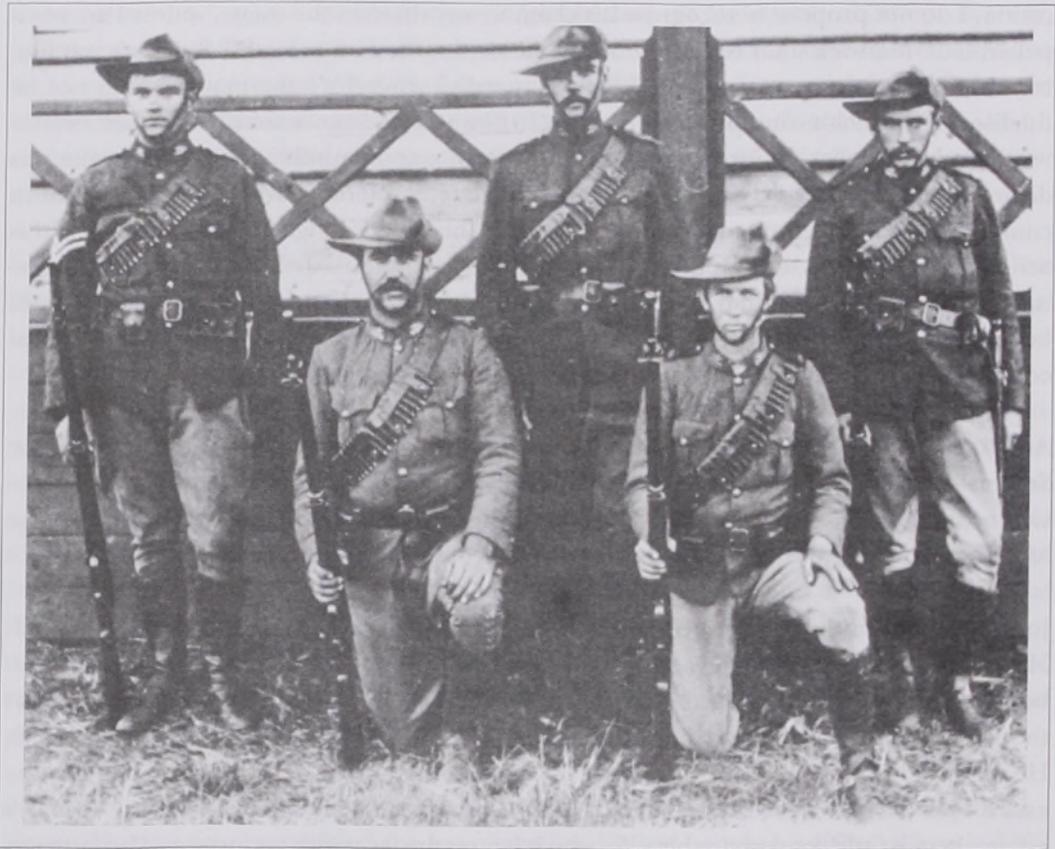
In trying to give effect to the will, the Master of the Supreme Court suggested to Richmond solicitor R A Marwick that Bonfire (b 1908) be given maintenance and education costs. Following this, Marwick did his best to undermine the intention of Mackenzie's will. He said all the black oxen had been sold. Secondly he noted that 'the child is a male, and not a female, and as he is under the control of his mother, who is a native, and who would squander any money which might be allowed to her for the child's maintenance and edu-

cation, I do not propose to recognise his claim to any share in the estate, unless I am compelled to'.²⁸ Marwick then reported to the Master that he had met with Bonfire's mother, but she had not been accompanied by her guardian, therefore the matter could not be finalised.²⁹ Marwick's triumph came in April 1919 when he discovered that Bonfire's mother, 'Nokulunga, alias Maisie, was the lawful wife of one Sikundhla, from whom she was divorced at her own suit, during June 1916'. This, he noted, removed any obligation in common law for the estate to support the child.³⁰ The Master lodged a moral protest at this action, but it seems as though Bonfire was effectively disinherited of his birthright and eternally cut off from his father's line. There was thus a close correlation in the Midlands between coloured children and poverty. In this way the divide between white and black was consolidated with respective associations of wealth and poverty.³¹

Another example of brutal exclusion comes from the Braithwaite family of Seven Oaks. Settlers since the nineteenth century, they had farmed productively and given yeoman service to the Umvoti Mounted Rifles. Not all of them, however, fitted comfortably into the Midland community.

John William Braithwaite (b 1881) died on his small 199 acre farm at Otto's Bluff in 1931. He was very poor, his estate eventually yielding £383. He left no children and no will, but he left a wife. He had married Nongla Bessie Comane in December 1930. It appears as though he paid *lobola* for her, because he borrowed £250 from a W J Sadler in July 1930. He was owed some money by his brother E M Braithwaite, but this was never paid into the estate because E M went insolvent. In the file which documents the winding up of John's estate, there is little concern for his wife, who is left on the farm with no income. The farm was apparently sold from beneath her and she was left homeless.³² I was able to enquire about this case from Derrick Braithwaite, whose father was John William's cousin. Derrick remembers that John William was ostracised by the family. He was never invited to their house, and when he arrived on one occasion, was kept standing in the rain at the front door, specifically prohibited from entering the house. After his death, the family would not allow him to be buried in the family graveyard. He had committed an unforgivable social crime (Braithwaite interview 1992). This was not uncommon behaviour. Frank Alcock of Polela, in other ways generous and liberal, refused to greet Kenney, an assistant at the shop 'Highbury', Bulwer, because he had married an African. Frank ostracised him (Daphne Pennefather interview 1992).

To this day, the Midland community remains lily-white. This is entirely due to a vicious and rigorous process of exclusion. But skeletons do rattle around in the cupboard. Midland lore has it that there are three branches of the MacKenzie/McKenzie family – the good, the mad, and the bad. But if you happen to get talking to loose-tongued Midlanders, they might add a fourth branch – the black McKenzies.



Braithwaites from Seven Oaks: all members of the UMR

Silencing

Midland families passionately collect and preserve their histories. These are found in numerous self-authored, privately published books and booklets as well as in more ambitious celebrations of local culture and history. In Charmian Coulson's *Beaulieu-on-Ilovo*, the story of Richmond and its early settlers is extolled. In the book are accounts of two McKenzie families in Richmond (Coulson 1986:153–160). One family is that of James and Jacoba McKenzie of the farm 'New Windsor'. Coulson tells us that they were Byrne settlers and that their offspring had varied and exciting lives. The following account is not contained in her history.

In 1880 the McKenzies brought a complaint against the resident magistrate, Arthur C Hawkins, for being unfair and biased. In his efforts to defend himself, Hawkins brought the attention of the examining officer to three cases involving the McKenzies. In the first Jacoba laid a charge of assault against her husband, John. Although she withdrew it, he was bound over to keep the peace on his own recognisances and ordered to pay £50 to his wife.³³ In the second case, Jacoba placed a charge of assault against 'Hlozi'. The matter arose when young Arthur Marwick, aged nine, told 'Hlozi' not to pull a pole out of the ground. An African witness described what followed: 'The defendant said "Why does a little boy like you come to speak to me. Df [sic] then hit him on both cheeks, he hit him hard and the boy cried".' In his defence, 'Hlozi' justified his actions saying 'the boy often used to swear at me'. The McKenzies were outraged at the 'not guilty' finding.³⁴

The following year, the McKenzies were involved in another case, this time when the sons, James and Thomas, assaulted their father. The father withdrew his complaint and the magistrate dropped the case. He reflected philosophically, later: 'I perhaps erred on the side of kindness as Mr McKenzie, the father, was black and blue from the blows inflicted by his sons when he was tied to the tree.'³⁵

This was by no means the end of the contact which the McKenzies had with the law. There is a reference to another case in 1880 where the two brothers were found guilty of assaulting an African.³⁶

It is a little surprising that a record of Jacoba and James ('John' or 'Black Jack') McKenzie exists at all. This is probably because they settled early and their numerous offspring married prominent Richmond families like the Payns, Fletts and Comries.

The official history of the Midlands is the expurgated version. The unexpurgated version omits, fashions, shapes, silences, excludes. It was only by these processes that the myth of homogenous community could be sustained. There were white people (insiders) who disrupted the neat representations preferred by Midland patriarchs and matriarchs. And there were those, the products of mixed union, who fell into no clear category and were troublesome for people trying to forge a comprehensive view of the world with their own identity at the centre.³⁷ For the most part, these people were silenced, explained away and, at a later point, conveniently forgotten.

Notes

- 1 CAD, LDEN 20310, 202912, Surveyor General to Secretary for Lands, minute, [n d].
- 2 CAD, URU 355, 891, ([n d]).
- 3 MSCE 2645/1918, Estate of Charles John Smythe.
- 4 MSCE 13394/1928, Estate of Edric Murray Smythe of 'Strathearn', Weenen County, Affidavit of Mungo Charles Smythe, 26 April 1928.
- 5 MSCE 13394/1928, Estate of Edric Murray Smythe of 'Strathearn', Weenen County, Dr N Egerton Brown to Master of the Supreme Court (Affidavit dated 18 April 1928).
- 6 Another uncomfortable category of family history is the suicide. This is also seldom spoken about or recorded. It is only with the modern craze of discovering family history that suicides become clearly visible as part of the family record. In a tragic case, three out of the ten Gold brothers committed suicide (Christison 1986:69–70).
- 7 Notes kindly lent to me by Nan Slade, Howick.
- 8 These events have come down to me from some of my relatives in Natal. I am personally related to the Murrays (my grandmother was Herbert's daughter) and the Farrers (my grandmother's sister married a Farrer).
- 9 CAD, MNW 261, MM 3787/14; PM 1/1/275, 20PM 148/24/1916; MNW 338, MM2086/16; MNW 487, MM 2624/19.
- 10 CAD, JUN 220, 3/949/15 2020Attorney General v Tatham.
- 11 CAD, SAP 36, CONF 6/596/18/2, Deputy Commissioner, CID, Transvaal to Deputy Commissioner, SAP (Transvaal), 25 April 1918.
- 12 Homosexual activity was common in the metropole and in the empire at the turn of the century. The (white) men involved seldom admitted it, even to friends (Hyam 1990:37).
- 13 This is hardly surprising. Settler masculinity was stridently heterosexual, and any suggestion of homosexuality therefore threatened that masculinity (Edwards 1990:114).
- 14 See MSCE 32/147, Estate of Alice Maud Mary Perdita Farrer (née Lloyd), of 'Scaleby', Boston.
- 15 This was also the case for Johannesburg at the turn of the century (Van Onselen 1982, volume 1:104).
- 16 In Daphne Rooke's novel (1990) of planter families in the Natal sugar belt, set in the period including the South African and First World wars, little doubt is left as to the prevalence of such sexual encounters.
- 17 *Native Affairs Commission 1906–7, Evidence*, evidence of John Marwick, Richmond:337.
- 18 *Native Affairs Commission 1906–7, Evidence*, evidence of William Nicholson (341) and Arthur D Graham (534).
- 19 It was rare for white women to form permanent relationships with black men. Advocate John Jackson of Richmond gave evidence to the effect that 'He knew two European women who were married according to native rites to native men, and they had lived together for the last 20 years.' *Native Affairs Commission 19067, Evidence*:343.
- 20 *Native Affairs Commission 1906–7, Evidence*:350.
- 21 *Native Affairs Commission 1906–7, Evidence*:338.
- 22 This argument is developed by Jeff Guy (1990) with respect to precolonial society where he argues that women produced value and men appropriated it.

- 23 *Native Affairs Commission 1906-7, Evidence*:350.
- 24 *Native Affairs Commission 1906-7, Evidence*:342-343.
- 25 At about the same time campaigns against 'vice' were being waged in the Transvaal (Van Onselen 1982, volume 1:105), and a decade later a similar crusade was launched in Durban (Posel 1989).
- 26 *Native Affairs Commission 1906-7, Evidence of Rev P Burges (Highflats) (96), Harry Frank Hayes (Howick) (198), J T Marwick (338), John Frederick Jackson (343), Fryer (359), Cannon Pennington (542).*
- 27 3229/1918, Estate of Otto Scott Mackenzie of Otto's Kop, Richmond, Will, 23 November 1910; Codicil 11 December 1915.
- 28 MSCE 3229/1918, Estate of Otto Scott Mackenzie, Master of Supreme Court to Marwick, 31 January 1919 and undated reply.
- 29 MSCE 3229/1918, Marwick to Master of Supreme Court, 12 February 1919.
- 30 MSCE 3229/1918, Marwick to Master of the Supreme Court, 1 April 1919.
- 31 Stella Varty, who grew up in Bulwer in the 1930s, confirmed that mixed race families (white father and black mother) were destitute, living in the poor (black) quarters of town (private communication).
- 32 MSCE 17669/1931, Estate of John William Braithwaite.
- 33 CSO 759, 1880/2403, Assault: Mrs Mckenzie, copy of record of case, 18 April 1879.
- 34 CSO 759, 1880/2403, record of the case, Jacoba McKenzie vs Hlozi, 24 April 1878.
- 35 CSO 759, 1880/2403, minute by magistrate Hawkins, 7 July 1880.
- 36 CSO 759, 1880/2403, John McKenzie to Colonial Secretary, 17 July 1880.
- 37 A major gap exists in the historiography of KwaZulu-Natal where 'coloured' people are concerned. In the Cape there have recently been two offerings on the construction of a 'coloured' community (Goldin 1987, Lewis 1987). In KwaZulu-Natal we only have Charles Ballard's study (1985) and this is located within the context of Zulu politics and does not consider the issue of identity politics. Some indication of the contradictory position of Natal's coloureds may be gleaned from two views expressed before the Natal Native Affairs Commission (1906-7). F E Foxon, Ixopo magistrate renowned for his support of draconian measures against errant blacks, believed that the state had been very remiss in not 'elevating' coloureds who were 'good fighting men and absolutely loyal' (367). Cannon Pennington, on the other hand, believed the increase of 'bastard children' was 'a great danger eventually, as they would have so much sympathy with the native, and hatred of the European' (542).



CHAPTER 10

Conclusion

I shall end this study as I began, with two quotations, this time concerning white settlers in Africa.

[T]he settlers produced little. No art, no literature, no culture, just the making of a little dominion marred only by niggers too many to exterminate ... (they were) parasites in paradise. (The) settler with his sjambok, his dog, his horse, his rickshaw, his sword, his bullet, was the true embodiment of British imperialism (Ngugi 1981:29, 30, 40).

[The settlers were] an extraordinary mixture of blinkered complacency and racial prejudice on the one hand and a basic decency and friendliness on the other (Mitchell 1993:20).¹

The former quotation represents, albeit in extreme form, a popular view of settlers in revisionist literature. It attributes exploitativeness, brutality, and philistinism as essential traits to settlers and can find little or nothing in settler society with which to empathise. But this view is static and partial. Understanding settlers and the society in which they functioned, the society which they built, demands that we abandon essentialist and moralistic perspectives. Understanding their world requires an examination of their institutions, in ways which reveal the processes which operate therein and the contradictory life experiences of settlers within those institutions. Using this approach, we can get beyond the settler stereotypes.

To understand class fully, we need to understand it in its gendered (and racial) context (Messner & Sabo 1990:9) and address the question, 'What shaped the dominant or hege-

monic practices of masculinity in any given society?' (Tosh 1991:199). Just adding masculinity to historical analysis will not necessarily render a richer, fuller understanding of history. We need to consider masculinity as an integral part of class identity, and masculinity as an integral aspect of class.

Departing from the dominant approach to South African white farmers in South African historiography, I have not given pride of place to the state.² Nor have I placed an understanding of ONF power purely on an economic seating. While both were important, a more convincing way of exposing the basis of their power lies in examining their social institutions.

I examined a series of institutions which have often been overlooked by South African researchers, and more particularly, have failed to be integrated into the national master narrative.³ The family was the most important institution, constituting the building block of settler identity and community. The ONF family was a bulwark for men and women against the isolation of rural life. It was also part of a region-wide network which channelled to its members, jobs, favours, credit, contacts and a range of less obvious material benefits. The network was also a means by which the ONFs converted themselves into a racially exclusive community.

The ONFs possessed political influence and economic power.⁴ This power was as much evident in the social sphere and was more enduring there. But their political influence and economic power cannot be explained without reference to the project of class construction in which they engaged. Within the Midlands, the ONFs developed a cultural universe. In it they established and mobilised values, creating as they did so a cultural hegemony throughout the region. The hegemony so established incorporated an ongoing attachment to 'home'/Britain. In the context of United Kingdom, Corrigan and Sayer explain this attachment by noting that bourgeois conditions of existence were 'idealized as national character. Here, as in a hall of mirrors, requisite forms of behaviour, attitude, aspiration, feeling are held to be properly English – providing 'Englishness' with a substantial content – while their claimed Englishness is exactly what gives them their transcendental legitimacy' (Corrigan & Sayer 1985:195).

The social institutions were sources of power. This power could not be gauged in pounds sterling or counted in votes or estimated as military potential. It was a social power, which worked ceaselessly to reproduce the class, a process which involved keeping other classes, races and groups out. In this process, settlers utilised racial identity as a communitarian cement. Whites who were prepared to meet the prescriptions of social conformity, who associated themselves with settler institutions, were admitted to the fold. While many of the

institutions were for men only, a balance was struck between men and women which ensured that gender tensions did not jeopardise the overall social stability of the class.

My understanding of Midland community has been dual: as social achievement (the creation of a class and race community) and as mythology. In fact, the distinction is somewhat misleading. The community could not exist without its mythology. A tour today through ONF houses will invariably turn up a dusty oil painting of a grey-bearded old patriarch. These pictures are part of the ONF myth. For the owners, the pictures give meaning to the past. They make the past a fact and serve as proof of a particular version of it. These pictures (and family histories and mementos) connect the ONFs to their past and affirm what they believe, that they have a special connection to a rich metropolitan heritage. Of course, there are many other family forebears who have not been immortalised in paintings, whose histories are forgotten, whose memory erased. But this is not important. The important thing is to have an ancestor (and preferably a family tree as well).⁵

Another important means by which the Midland community reproduced itself, cleansed itself, policed itself, was by keeping out or casting out unwanted or would-be members. This was necessary because the settlers did not make up 'an easily identifiable and discrete biological and social entity; a "natural community" of common class interests, racial attributes, political affinities and superior culture' (Stoler 1989:635). The community's strict prescriptions were directed primarily at black people, though persons who failed to live up to community codes on account of unmanly conduct or deviant behaviour (often deemed to emanate from the lower classes) could be excluded. Exclusion came in many forms: being cold-shouldered, ignored, silenced, disinherited.

In trying to explain what the ONFs were and were not, I have probably over-stressed community and given a more uniform impression of their cohesion than the facts warrant. I have tried to disrupt this by showing how individuals struggled with aspects of the gender order, how they tried to make sense of themselves as boys/men in institutional contexts that bloodied, beat and humiliated them. In defying the gender system, however, the boys/men invariably propped up settler masculinity. They could never escape their formative experiences, though in adulthood they could exercise choice. To me, the life history of Alan Paton captures this dilemma or tragedy wonderfully well. He is remembered internationally for his compassion, his sense of social justice, his defiant opposition to apartheid. Yet he was also a pupil at Maritzburg College and teacher at Ixopo High School. He was remembered at MC for his intelligence, bad temper and physical tenacity and at Ixopo for his cruelty towards students, particularly his liking for corporal punishment. In later life, although he had been exposed to and espoused far more enlightened values, he still remained intensely concerned about the physical, going on arduous walks, pushing

himself to the limit. He remained a believer in strict discipline, an inflexible exponent of the virtues of corporal punishment. He was a man at odds with his sexuality particularly in so far as it related to black women. He was also a devoted supporter of institutions, particularly the school and the family (Alexander 1994). In Paton we find exceptional and rare qualities, as well as those which were quite common in Midland men.

This study has neither emphasised nor gloried in dissidence. It has focused on the everyday, the products of repetition and ordinariness. And, in one sense, it started with that ordinary event from which none of us is immune: the act of dying. I shall never know what my grandmother actually tried to say to me as I stood next to her frail form fifteen years ago. But in reaching for my heart, she pricked my curiosity. In these pages maybe I have answered some of the questions which her inaudibility posed. I hope to have achieved some sense of the world from which she came, even as that world was coming to an end and she herself was leaving it.

Being unable to speak to her, I have spent many, mostly happy, hours talking to some of the old people of the Midlands. I have been aware that oral testimony of this kind can yield only a particular kind of truth. But behind the stories and the idiosyncracies there are social realities which I have tried to capture. The ONFs were synonymous with a powerful rural class. This class is best understood by examining the way it reproduced itself. The reproduction, set within institutional contexts, always contained specific race, class and gender components. These in fact can only be separated out artificially, because they were amalgamated in settler identity.

The development of settler masculinity was a key aspect of settler identity as a whole. Its development was marked by strong social prescription, not for the ONFs alone, but for the settler population as a whole. In this sense, settler masculinity was hegemonic masculinity. Settler masculinity prescribed for the whole of colonial society, ordering and excluding as it did so.

Settler masculinity was never static, it never included all men, or all of a man. It was a contradictory experience for the individual. At some time or other, all men find prescriptions about masculinity, which are themselves never totally consistent, difficult to meet. In this sense, there is never a neat fit between hegemonic masculinity and the men who carry its message. On the other hand, even for those who battled 'to fit in', the experience of hegemonic masculinity could deliver moments of supreme triumph – scoring the try, enduring the beating, being elected to public office – all these acts bestowed prestige and bolstered class and gender notions of achievement, competition, manliness.

Without having examined the period before 1880, I can but sketch the rise of settler masculinity. In a period before the colony had a settled white population, when frontier conditions effectively prevailed, the lines of gender, class and race were weakly drawn. In this period, white men lived and had children with black women, white women undertook dangerous tasks and 'lived like men'. The steady influx of settlers from Britain, the development of colonial government and law, but most importantly, the establishment of a range of settler institutions, gradually shaped a tight mould for race, class and gender appropriate behaviour. To police this, mechanisms of exclusion were developed. To ensure the integrity of this gender order, mechanisms of recognition (distinction) were equally elaborated.

Settler masculinity was disseminated through the institutions discussed in this study. The most prominent of these were the schools, the volunteer regiments and sports organisations. The Midland schools became the defining educational institutions in the colony, while the regiments and sports codes wove a vast web across the colony into which virtually every boy/man fell.

Settler masculinity was not the product of the state. Throughout this period, ONFs used the state when necessary (particularly in gaining assistance with production, transport and more complexly with labour) but sturdily defended their personal autonomy and right to make decisions without outside intervention. In the field of labour relations, the conduct of farmers towards resident farm labourers was particularly striking in its insistence on the personal dimension being retained.

ONF women were an integral and supportive part of settler society. At first sight this is anomalous because they were excluded 'from opportunities for the accumulation of wealth on a scale usable as capital, or from career paths that would lead to the control of significant capitals' (Connell 1987:104) and were responsible for the children. They were further constrained because settler masculinity positioned them as ladies with social graces and organisation skills. Yet ONF women were not just the playthings of men – they had power and prestige from their position within the household and family where their work of social organisation was critical for the status and reproduction of the family. They were also often possessed of independent means as a result of inheritance or other transfusions of family money. For this reason, ONF women were very strongly committed to the family. To be outside the family was disastrous.

By 1920 the economic and political situation had much changed. Natal was geographically much larger, having taken a large chunk of Zululand in 1897 and gained parts of the former ZAR after the South African war. It was, after 1910, part of the Union of South Africa.

Economically this improved its situation. Employment and investment patterns were stabilised, property values increased, public debt and rates of taxation were held down, and damaging inter-colonial trade competition was obviated (Guest & Sellers 1994:3–5).

Politically, Natal lost its independence. This was traumatic for many of its white settlers. In government, many of the functions formerly exercised by Natal-born civil servants were taken over by bureaucrats appointed by, and obedient to, Pretoria. No longer could a good Natal name, schooling from a good Natal school and connections with good Natal clubs and sport associations automatically secure a government post or access to government aid. With Pietermaritzburg the only colonial capital deprived of any national function in the Union, it was left to Natalians to entrench their influence in the civil institutions which they had built up in the quarter century before Union. The state was an enemy to this process: not only was it now geographically centred elsewhere, but it was expanding and becoming ever more bureaucratised. Some of these institutions, like the volunteer regiments, were threatened with absorption into the unified South African defence force. These threats were vigorously and successfully resisted.

In 1920, the ONFs may have been engaged in a rearguard action, but they were still prosperous, they still had influence. Their farms and villages were vigorous centres of social interaction and their institutions were healthy and energetic. It is not so any more. The character of the Midlands is changing, the old families are leaving, breaking up.

Now that the twentieth century has come to an end, the Midlands finds itself in turmoil. Since the 1960s patterns of land ownership have changed. Much of the Midlands has been bought by large timber companies and is no longer in the possession of the old settler families. Historically there were not many African-owned farms in the Midlands but in the 1960s, government planners declared these to be 'black spots' and set in motion a process of eradicating them. Africans from these farms were bought out and moved into reserves, often in remote parts of KwaZulu. At the same time, labour tenants on white farms were being evicted. Evictions were particularly numerous in Greytown and the Weenen district (SPP 1983:290–291). To accommodate landless and homeless Africans, the state attempted to expand and consolidate the KwaZulu homeland. Some white-owned land was expropriated in the late 1960s and 1970s for African occupation. The family farm of HD Winter (former minister in the Natal government), Loch Sloy, was expropriated and, in 1969, renamed Wembezi, serving as the African township for Estcourt (SPP 1983:182). Some thirty farms along the Mkhomanzi River were expropriated between 1976 and 1978 as part of the consolidation of KwaZulu. Twenty-one farms in the Highflats area were also earmarked for consolidation. By 1982 thirteen had been bought by the South African Development Trust, but the entire process was so unpredictable that farmers lived under a constant cloud

of worry and uncertainty (SPP 1983:152). Settler families resident on the affected farms were forced to move, some leaving farming altogether. Gradually, as white families leave the land, the critical mass necessary to support small farming communities is no longer available. Small farm villages disappear and sport and social clubs close down (Mingay interview 1988). A world is disappearing.

As many of the informants attest, it's not like the old days. There is no sense of community. The tales I listened to thus frequently bore 'an overwhelming sense of loss' (Samuel & Thompson 1990:8-9).

But while we may doubt the current status and future of an ONF class, a Midland community, there is no doubt that the project which had been so central to the ONF mission, the creation of a myth, has been an enduring success.

Notes

- 1 I'd like to thank Jeremy Seekings for drawing my attention to the Ngugi reference. Ngugi is describing Kenya's white settlers; Mitchell is describing Rhodesia's settlers in his review of Godwin, P and Hancock, I 1993. *'Rhodesians never die' – the impact of war and political change on white Rhodesia c1970-1980*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2 In one respect, I have borrowed from Goran Therborn, who answers his own question: What does the ruling class do when it rules? by answering: 'Essentially, it reproduces the economic, political and ideological relations of its domination' (Therborn 1978:161). On the other hand, I reject his further argument that ruling class power is primarily to be understood in relation to its access to, operation in, and influence upon, the state.
- 3 The examination of Midland institutions is far from complete. A particularly important omission within the present study is the church (Davidoff & Hall 1987). Churchmen like Colenso and Callaway were publicly prominent and influential. While the histories of both of these men are well known, a study of the church's role as social institution is awaited.
- 4 This is not under contention: referring to prominent Midland farmers, Lambert writes 'These families had close links with the City and with the colonial authorities. From their ranks were drawn justices of the peace, members of parliament, and, after 1893, cabinet ministers. It was partly through their influence that the white agricultural interest was able to triumph over its African counterpart by the end of the century' (Lambert 1989:133).
- 5 For a superb account of this project on a national scale, see Corrigan and Sayer 1985:193.



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Secretary for Native Affairs SNA

Prime Minister's Office PM

Principal Veterinary Surgeon's Office PVS

Surveyor General's Office SGO

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3 Central Archive Depot, Pretoria CAD

Office of the Governor General GG
Chief Entomologist CEN
Department of Justice JUS
Department of Agriculture LDB
Department of Lands LDE
Department of Lands Natal LDE-N
Secretary of Mines and Industries MNW
Department of Native Affairs NTS
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Secretary for Native Affairs SNA
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Executive Council Minutes URU

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Transcripts of interviews with:

Bantu Mncwabe
Atchia
Govindsamy Chetty
Mr Kiedhlwane
M B Foubister

2 Fort Durnford Museum, Estcourt

Collected histories on forty of the oldest, public and influential families of the area, including Moor, Ralfe, Woods, Stockil.

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Files of cuttings, letters and other documents on Giles, Handley, Hellett, Kirkby, Leuchars, Tatham families
Copies of *The Greytown Gazette*

4 Howick Museum

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Mary Slatter alias 'Touch Line Trembler', polo tournament impressions

13 Mrs Moira Tarr

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Personal remembrances of the Mingay family of 'Highbury'

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John and Ann Black at 'Elandshoek', Elandskop on 1 June 1988
Derrick Wilson Braithwaite at 'Westcliffe', Seven Oaks on 26 February 1993
Laurie Christie at Karkloof on 21 February 1993
John Woodrow Cross at Winterskloof on 13 January 1993
David Fannin in Durban on 20 January 1993
Victory Fly at Hilton on 25 February 1992
Raymond Thomas Foster at Ixopo on 21 April 1994
Peter Francis at 'Milestone', Caversham on 30 June 1992;
Andrew 'Zulu' Harry Green at Hilton on 4 March 1992
Madge Ireland at Pietermaritzburg on 4 March 1992
Frank Isaac at 'Mooifontein', Balgowan on 16 September 1989
Hugh Jonsson at 'Spring Holm', Nottingham Road on 29 April 1992
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Kathleen Kay Morrell at Pietermaritzburg on 30 April 1992
Ravenor William Powell Nicholson at Richmond on 3 March 1992
J M 'Skonk' Nicholson at Pietermaritzburg on 24 February 1993
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Roger Palframan at 'Water Mead', Underberg on 28 April 1992
Donald J Paterson at 'Ad Rem', Mooi River on 4 August 1992
Daphne Jane Pennefather née Alcock at 'Shangri-La', Creighton on 18 January 1992
Agnes Pennefather née Foster at Eastwolds on 28 April 1992
Barbara Pennefather at Pietermaritzburg on 7 September 1993

Ruth Pennington at Howick on 5 March 1992
Ivan Pepper at Greytown on 14 April 1994
Ione Pepper née Tatham at Greytown, 14 April 1994
Adrian 'Digger' Michael Power-Wilson at Durban on 1 August 1995
S M Rahman at Merebank, Durban on 20 August 1992
Phyllis Reed née Smythe at Merrivale Heights, Howick on 25 February 1993
Douglas Robertson at 'Aird', Dargle on 22 May 1988
Donald Clifton Sinclair at 'Beinn Mheadhon', Dargle on 25 February 1993
AJS John Slatter at 'Holme Lacey', Greytown District on 26 February 1993
Mary Slatter née Hobson at 'Holme Lacey', Greytown District on 26 February 1993
Raymond William Smith at 'Lowlands', Creighton on 28 April 1992
Pat Smythe at 'Allandale', Nottingham Road District on 25 February 1993
Otto Solomon at 'Bucklands', Otto's Bluff on 30 April 1992
Moirra Tarr née Moor at 'Beacon Banks', Estcourt on 15 September 1989
Gillian Tatham at Pietermaritzburg, 21 June 1995
Joy Taylor née Simmons at Pietermaritzburg on 30 April 1992