

Our Ancestors from South Africa

Paul Francis, 2010

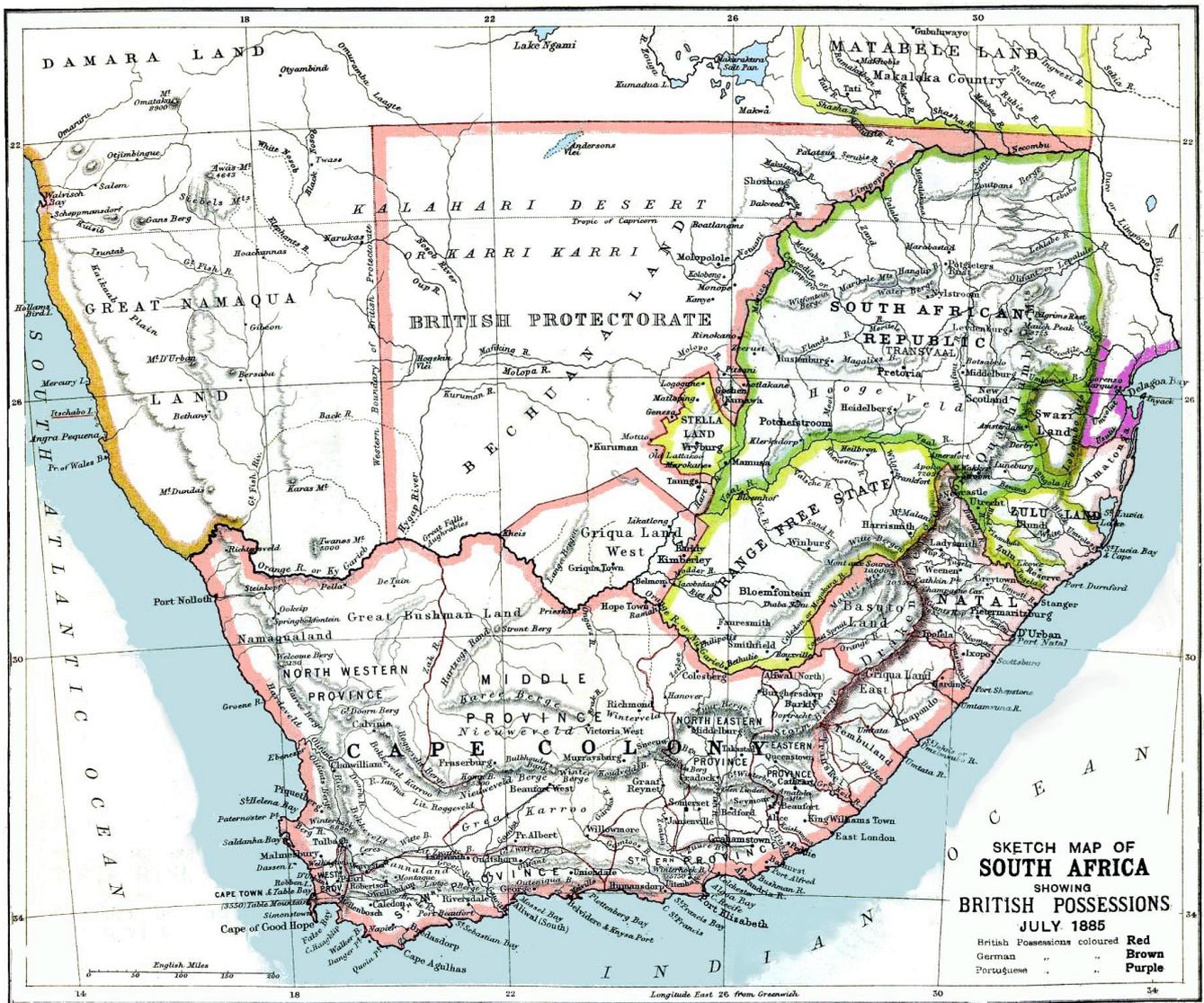
The Dutch Colony

Our story starts in the mid 18th century, when the Cape was owned and run by the Dutch East India Company. As far as the company was concerned, the sole purpose of the Cape was to protect their lucrative trading routes to the Far East. Everything was geared towards supplying and protecting the ships. Colonists were useful in growing produce to resupply the ships, but otherwise were an unnecessary

distraction from the serious business of making money through trade.

The first of our family to visit the cape were French sailors on ships run by the French East India company, stopping at the Cape to resupply en route between France and Mauritius (see Mauritius section). Many must have passed through Cape Town, whenever there was a state of peace between the French and Dutch Governments, and we know that Antoine de Chazal briefly stopped off at the Cape in 1788 en route from his home in Mauritius to be educated in France.

In 1795 the Government of Holland was overthrown by a French-inspired revolution, and the Prince of Orange fled to England in a fishing boat. The British government were afraid that the Cape would fall into hostile



(French) hands, and threaten their vital trade routes to India. So they resolved to get in first, and in June 1795 a small British army landed, and after a brief engagement, accepted the surrender of the the colony.

Two years later, the British sent out of governor. Travelling with him was his secretary, Andrew Barnard, and Andrew's remarkable wife, Lady Anne Barnard (née Lindsay). She was the first of our ancestors to spend any substantial time in South Africa.

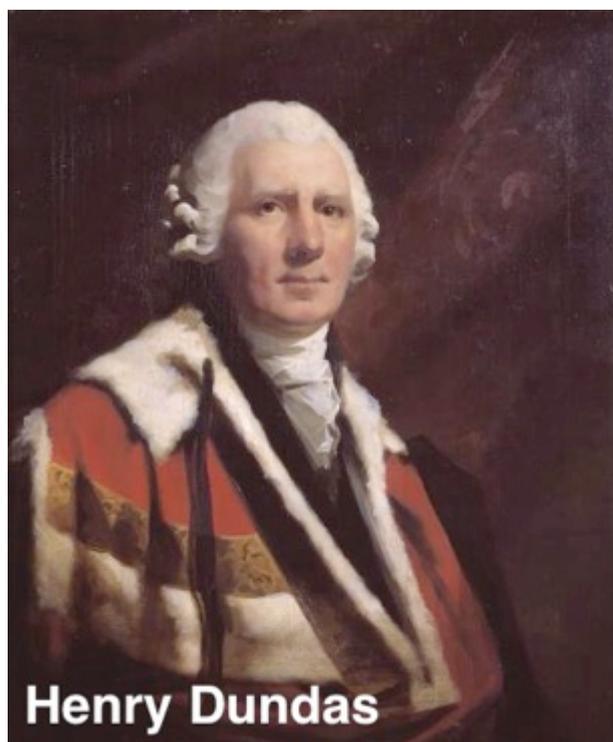
Lady Anne



Lady Anne was a remarkable lady, and you can read much more about her in a separate section of these notes devoted to her alone. She was the daughter of the impoverished Scottish Earl of Balcarres, and grew up in a rambling decaying castle in Fifeshire. In her early twenties she wrote a ballad "Auld Robin Gray" which became wildly popular and is still played today. She was also quite a talented artist, and all the pictures of South Africa in this section are her own work.

In her twenties, she moved to London, sharing a small house in Berkeley Square with her widowed sister Margaret, who was a famous society beauty. The "Lindsay sisters", as they were called, enjoyed a unique position in London society. Margaret's beauty, and Anne's charm, wit and generosity made them extremely popular, and their house became a social centre, and a favourite resort of some of the most famous literary and political men of the day. Pitt, Burke, Sheridan, and Windham were a few of those who availed themselves of the sisters' hospitality; the Prince of Wales was also one of their frequent guests, and his friendship with Lady Anne lasted all his life. They also enjoyed a considerable share of Court favour from King George and Queen Charlotte.

Lady Anne must have received many proposals of marriage, but by 1790 had reached the age of 40 still single. From hints in her letters, it appears that she had been in love with Henry Dundas, a Scottish politician she had first met in her early twenties, who had risen to become one of the foremost lawyers in Scotland, and then moved to London where he became a cabinet minister, and ended up as Secretary for War, a crucial post in the midst of the Napoleonic wars.



Henry Dundas seems to have reciprocated her feelings, but chose to marry for money and

influence instead. His marriage was very unhappy, his wife flagrantly unfaithful, and he spent many evenings escaping from this domestic discord at the house of the Lindsay sisters.

When he divorced his wife, Lady Anne must have felt that her chance had come. But in 1793, he married again, and once more chose a wife of wealth. We don't know how Lady Anne took this, but within a matter of months, she stunned all her friends by marrying Andrew Barnard, a man 15 years younger than her. The marriage was by any standards highly imprudent; Andrew was in poor health, and neither of them had much money.

Their only hope was for Lady Anne to use her social connections to get Andrew a good job, and for three years she tried in vain. But finally, her old flame Henry Dundas came good, and Andrew was given the post of Secretary to the newly appointed governor of the Cape.

In 23rd February 1797, Lady Anne took sail at



Plymouth with her husband on HMS Trusty, and on 4th May, they arrived at Cape Town.

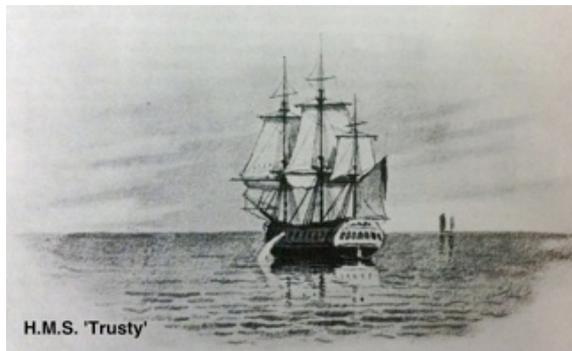
Here is how she described the arrival (taken, like almost all the quotes in this section, from letters she wrote to Henry Dundas):

"But to return to our voyage. The heat decreased as we passed the Tropic of Cancer, and, after having quitted our blankets and cloth habits, we all took to them again. Our course was pretty direct by the chart from the time we passed the Madeiras (where you made us go into a fine scollop to avoid certain French cruisers which we have since heard you had intelligence of) till we got into the latitude of the Cape, where contrary winds vexed us much, and blew us very nearly into the latitude where the 'Guardian' was lost by mountains of ice. However, five or six days produced a favourable change, and the joyful news of land being seen was announced, though in truth it was so enveloped in fog that we did not enjoy its appearance till we were exactly placed in



the bay opposite to Cape Town. Then, as if by one consent, the Lion's rump whisked off the vapours with its tail; the Lion's head untied, and dropped the necklace of clouds which surrounded its erect throat, and Table Mountain, over which a white damask table-cloth had been spread half-way down, showed its broad face and smiled. At the same time guns from the garrison and from all the batteries welcomed His Majesty's Government, and the distant hills, who could not step forward to declare their allegiance, by the awful thunders of their acquiescing echoes, informed us that they were not ignorant of the arrival of the Governor, who was at that moment putting his foot on land. Nothing could be finer than the coup d'oeil from the Bay; yet nothing can have so little affinity with each other as the bold perpendicular mountains, bare and rocky, and the low white card houses, which from

the distance seem even smaller than they are, and scarce large enough to hold an ant. But this is only appearance, in reality they are excellent.'



The first thing that struck me, strongly and disagreeably, was a very offensive smell in the air, and I afterwards found it in some of the houses: I was told it proceeded from the oil with which the slaves grease their hair. Waggons of wood next appeared, driven by one man, eight and ten horses moving with perfect docility to the crack of his whip. Next we saw more melancholy evidences of the far distant classes amongst human creatures — slaves returning from a seven or eight miles' distance, each man

loaded with two bundles of sticks slung across his bare shoulders. It made one sigh at first in looking at the weight of the bundles; the only comfort was that one of them only was for the master, the other was for the private benefit of the slave. We walked up the town, which I found much superior in appearance and area, and in the size and accommodation of the houses, to what I had expected.



Lady Anne was the most senior wife present in the colony, and had been specifically entrusted by Henry Dundas with the task of making friend with the Dutch. With her husband she settled into the castle, and was soon throwing



balls where the British officials and officers could mingle with the suspicious Dutch residents.

Here is how she described her first ball:

“I have given a most capital party on the 3rd of this month, and shall have one the first Thursday in every month. It is true, some of the Dutch fathers of families were sulky and stayed at home, being lukewarm, I suspect, to the English Government ; but the mothers and daughters came, and to plough with heifers has always been reckoned a good means to improve reluctant soil. By-and-by I shall get the fathers, you will see. I had a fiddle or two and a bit of supper after; all went most friendly. The 'hop' gave me also the opportunity of obliging the juvenile part of the Army and Navy, who, as I have told you, have been kept much in the background by their commanding officers. The invitations were conveyed through the mediums of the colonels of the Army and captains of the Navy to the subaltern officers, and thus all of them who were best behaved and most gentlemanlike were sent, and I think enjoyed themselves thoroughly, flirting a good deal with the Dutch ladies, who did not seem to share their fathers' dislike of English officers.”

For the first few years, she had a wonderful time, climbing Table Mountain, going on excursions up-country in a wagon train, working hard to befriend and conciliate everyone. The contrast with her old life in London was sometimes stark, as she noted when getting out candles to explore a tiger-infested cave, and finding that they had last been used in a society dinner in London:

“We had fortunately brought a tinder-box, and the gloom of the cave was soon illuminated by some wax candles which I packed up after my last party in Berkeley Square — you will remember! They little thought, those candles, when their tops had the honour of shining upon some of their Royal Highnesses, and in your right honourable face, that their bottoms would

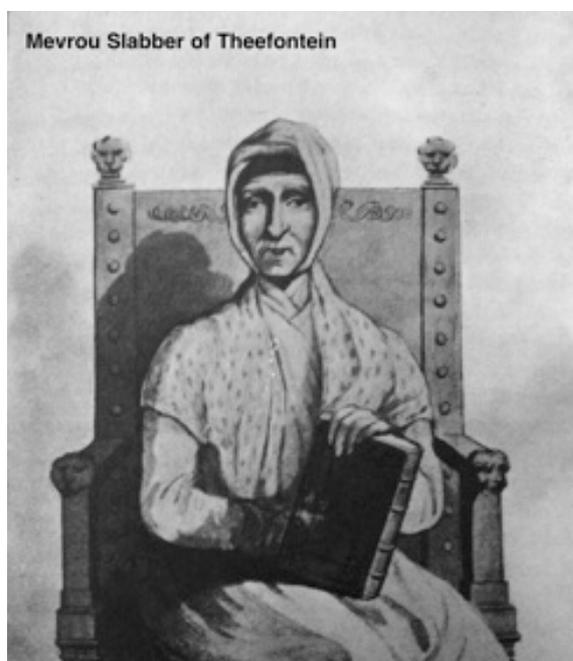
next illuminate the Drup Kelder in South Africa.”

She was struck by the diversity of races at the Cape, and tried to sketch all the different groups. She even tried to attend a slave market, but was told it would be improper for a lady to do so. Here is her account of meeting with a Bushman chief:



“I went with Mr. Barnard to Cape Town yesterday to see the chief of one of the tribes of what is called here the right Bushmen. What a courageous fine fellow that young man must be, who, after having gone on plundering a neighbouring nation (the Hottentots) for such a length of time, trusts himself with a band of them to come down (the first time a Bushman ever came voluntarily so far) to see the English Governor at the Cape ! His brother only accompanied him. The chief, whose name was ' Philan ' — I am willing to hope a contraction of philander — was covered with old military ornaments of different regiments, some of which we had brought with us from England, having stored ourselves from an old shop for such things with all the ornamental brass we could pick up. Different people had given him some very old clothes before he came to

pay me a visit at the Castle, so I did not see him quite in his unadorned state of loveliness. But over these clothes he wore his own, the skin cloak and all his decorations — gorgets, belts, and pouches. His countenance was good-humoured to the greatest degree, with more character in it than the Hottentot face, which has rarely more than gentleness to boast of. His hair was perfectly different from the hair of any other human creature I have seen, as it was like fringes of fine knotted black worsted — such knotting as old ladies do for beds. In the front of his forehead he wore a little button, hanging down, somewhat like a pagoda, and behind he had a queu (I don't



think I have spelled this word aright), that is a pig-tail, which hung down an inch, with two shells to it. I was quite delighted with the dress of the tail — it showed he was no democrat ; but it is not exactly such as is worn by our captains in St. James's Street. As they speak no Dutch, and as the interpreter (a Hottentot) was obliged to leave them to fetch the rest, I could not get so much of their minds as of their faces. But they seemed much pleased with the English, and are to bring their vrows to visit me this winter. The Gonagua man took great pains to tell Mynheer Barnard what pretty girls there are in that country ; theirs is the country described by Valliante,

so perhaps there may have been some truth in his representation of 'Narina.' They have some ideas of marriage — the chief and his brother had two wives each, but one or two of the Hottentots who accompanied them only one apiece. We gave to all coarse handkerchiefs, knives, scissors, needles, thread, and beads. To the chief I gave a very fine button, which he instantly tied round his neck, and Mr. Barnard gave him a coat and waistcoat, which he also put on, throwing off his clothes to do so.

Fortunately, Mr. Barnard at that time gave these two articles only, else I know not to what lengths the chief would have carried his toilette in my presence. There is something singularly delicate in the make of the Bushman — his arms are so finely turned and hands so small (one of the fingers of this one was withered off by the bite of a serpent). His wrist was as delicate as that of a lady's, yet when he bent his bow it seemed to be strong, and the wildness of his figure was striking — but their tones ! Oh, how strangely savage ! They have all the clucking noise of the Hottentots, each word being so divided, but accompanied by sounds, or rather groans, quite uncouth.

We gave them some brandy, which they greedily took, and, previous to their departure, some gimlets, and an old sword, and to each some tobacco and a new pipe. They were quite happy, and, bidding us farewell, made each a sort of bow with his hat or handkerchief in hand. The chief, rapid in his motions, made a low one ; a table was near, and the tobacco-pipe (stuck in his hat), knocking against it, was shivered to pieces. Never, no never, did painting convey such an attitude, or the feelings of nature speak so plain. He did not gaze at it, or pick it up. He covered his face at once with his hand, desolation was in his heart, and he stood there till, ready to burst into tears, he could just turn aside to prevent them from dropping. Meantime we had sent for another pipe. The Hottentots clucked to him that here was another ; he took his hand from his face — saw the pipe — received it — but the remedy to his sorrow was too sudden for the transition of

joy to follow it — the pain of the broken pipe stuck, though the new pipe was in his hand. He then picked up the fragments and placed all once more in the hat, of which he seemed very proud, and with a deep sigh and a consoled 'Tankee,' went off. By the bye, I asked him if he had any objection to giving me a little of his queer hair and his queue — giving him a fine large shell to tie in its place, which enchanted him. He was greatly flattered by my request, and held down his head to have it cut off, which the brother seeing, came forwards with his fringed top also. I had meant this modern relic for Lady Jane, and had written her a note, but it looks so odd and uncouth that I think it would rather frighten than please her. Perhaps, as you are a bold man, and not easily scared, I may send it to you, or a little of his hair."

As time went on, however, life became harder. A new governor arrived, one who sidelined Andrew Barnard, and was eventually recalled for corruption and embezzlement. Infighting within the British community became rampant under this new governor, and the whole British community was demoralised by the news that peace with Napoleon was in the offing, and that when it came, the Cape would most likely be handed back to the Dutch.



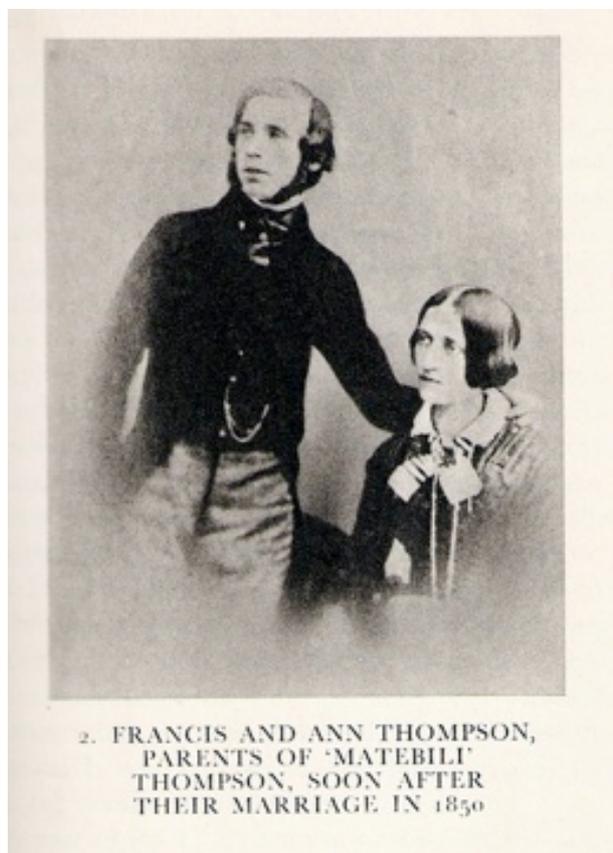
Donald the tailor and my lady's greatcoat

In February 1803, the Cape was indeed returned to Dutch control, the English flag was hauled down, a Dutch garrison replaced the British troops, and the Barnards came home. Dutch rule was to be short-lived, as war soon broke out again, and the British re-took the Cape in 1806. Andrew Barnard came out to

resume his old job of Secretary, and Lady Anne had intended to join him, but in 1807, after only a few months at the Cape, Andrew died.

In her widowhood Lady Anne returned to Lady Margaret's house in Berkeley Square, where the sisters resided together, and she took up the thread of her life very much where it had been broken by her marriage. Among her best friends at this time were Sir Walter Scott and the Prince Regent.

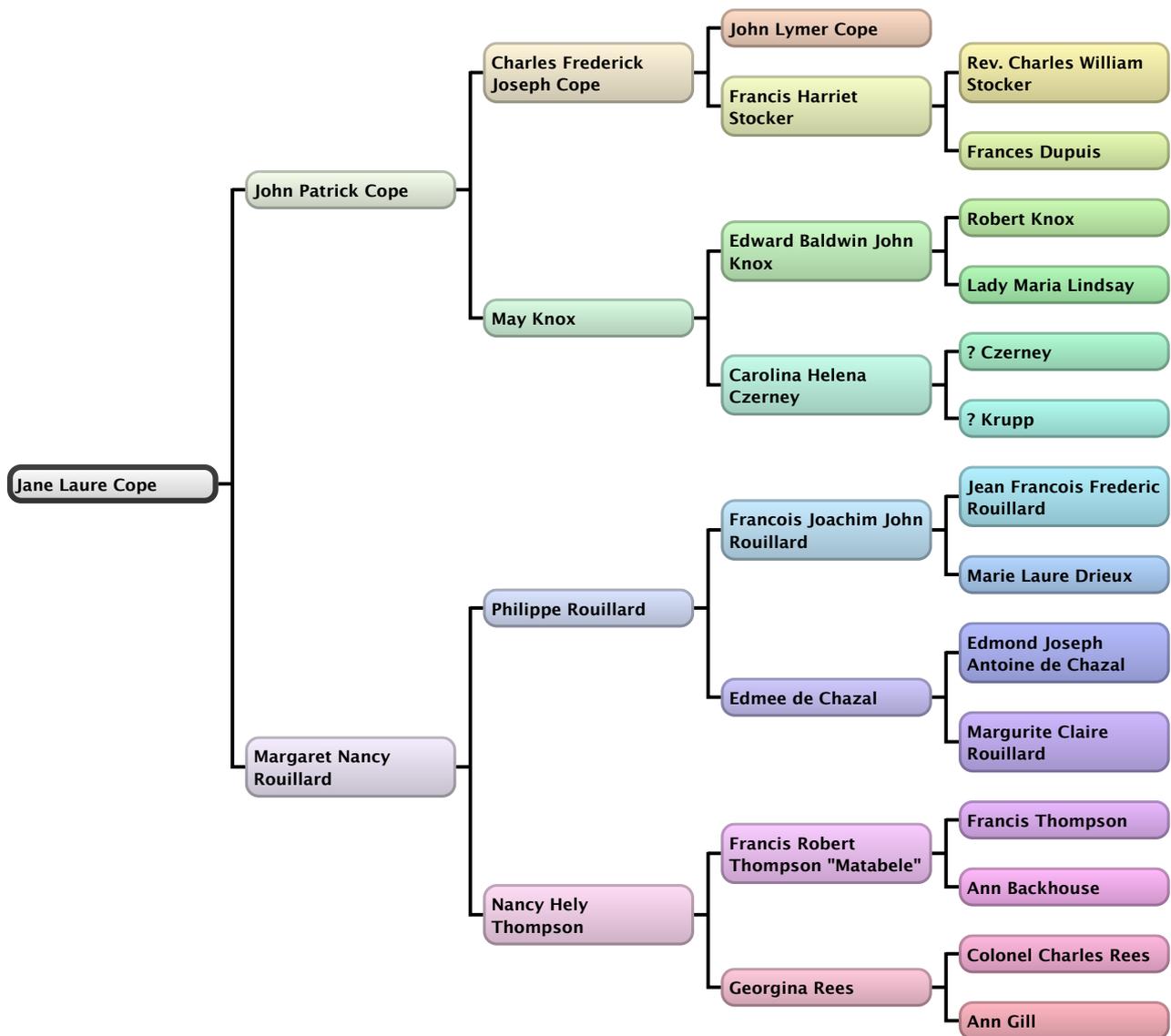
Lady Anne had no children. But about fifty years after her death, her nephew's grandson, Edward Baldwin John Knox, would settle in South Africa.



2. FRANCIS AND ANN THOMPSON, PARENTS OF 'MATEBILI' THOMPSON, SOON AFTER THEIR MARRIAGE IN 1850

The Great Safari

In the first half of the 19th century, the British presence at the Cape steadily expanded, particularly around Port Elizabeth and nearby Grahamstown. Many of the Dutch farmers (Boers) resented this and decided to move further inland away from the British government, setting up independent states in lands that had been temporarily devastated by Zulu invasion.



In 1850, the first of our ancestors to settle permanently in South Africa arrived, newlyweds Francis and Ann Thompson. Francis came from a line of Yorkshire squires who had lived on their own land for six centuries. There were members of the family who had served their country as soldiers and sailors, but the only remarkable distinction achieved through the years was that of being the best horsemen in their county. His wife Ann came from the Cumberland family of Backhouse, well-known bankers of their time. Her family had strong leanings towards the Church, and there was a large sprinkling of clergy among her relatives, but she had also a strong Quaker strain.

Ann seems to have had quite a strong and independent streak - while little more than a schoolgirl she fell in love with a man of whom her parents disapproved, and ran away to Gretna Green to marry him. Unfortunately he

died within a year and she returned to her family.

Despite the family tradition of staying comfortably at home, Francis had long had an ambition to become a big game hunter. When his father died and left him £7000, his chance had come. Egged on by his fiancé Ann, they married in June 1850 and almost immediately set out for the wilds of the Cape Colony. They landed at Port Natal, and headed inward to the new Boer settlement of Pietermaritzburg, where Ann was to stay while Francis ventured into the wilds.

Before long, Francis was venturing far and wide into the wilds of Africa, hunting and bartering. He ventured as far as the Zambesi, met David Livingstone, and was able to make a quite reasonable income.

Ann must have been less happy. She was stuck in the dusty frontier settlement of

Pietermaritzburg, where her first child was born. As more children arrived, her son says that she began to think that the shooting and exploration had gone on long enough, and when Francis was home from his expeditions they began to talk about settling down and buying some land in South Africa, and making it their permanent home. But during one of Francis' trips, an event happened which completely changed their outlook.

Francis' elder brother, who had come out later to Natal, talked Ann into investing their money in a project to salvage a wreck in the harbour at Port Natal. This was said to be worth a considerable sum, and their fortune should easily be doubled. The deal was put through, but before the work began a storm sent the wreck and most of Francis and Ann's money into the Indian Ocean, beyond the reach of salvage. It was a pretty bad tale to have to tell the returning traveller, as it changed the whole aspect of their African plans. Something was saved from the debacle, but certainly not enough to provide for a growing family. Trading, of which Francis had gained some experience, offered a solution; and he buckled down to the uncongenial routine of a partnership in a shipping and trading concern at Port Elizabeth.

It was here that their son, also named Francis Thompson was born in 1857. In later years he acquired the nickname "Matebili Thompson" but I will use it throughout to distinguish him from his father. As he grew up, the Thompsons were establishing themselves as important members of the Port Elizabeth community. Here is how Matebili Thompson describes his youth:

"I grew up with boys of whom some became famous in the history of South Africa. I can remember being popped over a garden wall one afternoon by a boy who became a justice of the Supreme Court. I was the youngest and most agile of the gang, and it was required that I should steal a fowl from the neighbour's yard and hand it over to my friends. It was needed for a stag picnic the next day, and the fact that the owner of the bird was to be a guest only made the adventure more exciting. Besides the companionship of my boy

friends, and the many devious escapades which are part of any healthy boy's existence, I found special pleasure in wandering about and watching the growth of the town. Building and other development was going forward, and I soon became a friend of the artisans. I think I must have been more than usually alert in acquiring general information of all kinds, as I certainly gained a store of practical knowledge that was to be of the utmost value to me in later years. I always found making friends with people of all classes an easy thing. I inherited a gift of languages from my mother, and thus quite naturally became proficient in Dutch, and in the various native languages that I came across.

Had it not been for my mother's influence I have no doubt that I should have become a very rough small diamond indeed, but she was adamant in morals, manners and the necessity of education. Just because the dangers of contamination in a new country of mixed population were ever present, she and many like her were much stricter than would have been necessary in a more settled community...

I had discovered in my talks with builders that copper nails were hard to get in the country, that the supply had run short, and that Europe and the nail makers were very far away. A small boat was the beloved possession of myself and some of my boy friends. One calm day I commandeered the boat and rowed out to one of the wrecks that lay not far from the shore at Port Elizabeth. With a small chisel I prized out the copper-headed nails from the hull, and filled a little bucket. I then made my way back to town and sold them. I think I was aged ten, and I remember that the sum I realized gave me more joy than any money I ever earned afterwards."

In 1870, diamonds were discovered in the Kimberley, and the 13 year old Matebili Thompson set out on foot over the mountains to try his luck. Here is how he describes it:

“Life on the diggings was hard work for a boy. I hired a native for ten shillings a month and his food, and together we toiled from sunrise to sunset. My food was mealie meal and a little tea and coffee. Meat was rare. The life had its compensations for in each bucket of gravel I hoped that I might come upon a diamond. Most of those round me had some luck, but nothing came my way. At length the day arrived when food and money were almost exhausted and I nearly gave up in despair. Then, to my delight, my trusted native brought me a beautiful stone. This was on a Thursday. I dissembled my excitement and worked until the Saturday, when I went into Klipdrift to sell my treasure. I realized 40 pounds, and with a great sense of importance I laid in a further stock of provisions and returned to my camp with 25 pounds. I put the money carefully into my little box, determined that this should constitute my capital for eventualities. I toiled on for another month, but with no luck of any kind. Then one day, feeling heartsore and despondent, I returned to my tent and found that my box had been broken open and my money stolen. I was only a lad and the blow seemed almost overwhelming. I had nothing left, and food on credit, especially for a lad of my age, was not to be had. I decided to give up this dream of wealth before I got into debt, and try something else.”

For the next three years, he worked as a trader, went hunting far into the interior (roaming around Bechuanaland and reaching the Limpopo river), and learned to speak several native languages. He became a friend of Cecil Rhodes and several other people who were to be of great importance in later days. And then in 1874, using money made from selling feathers and ivory, he bought a block of land on the frontier, on the Hartz River in Griqualand West, where he was one of the first pioneers on the far northern borders of the Cape Colony, right up against the borders of the uncivilized and little explored interior. He named the farm “Cornforth Hill”, after the home of his ancestors in Richmond, Yorkshire, and over the next four years amassed a quite respectable three thousand sheep and six hundred head of cattle.

Meanwhile his father Francis, who had also moved to the Kimberley with the rest of his family, became involved in politics, and was elected as one of the first members of the legislative council of Griqualand West.

We will come back to the Thompsons after meeting the next ancestors to arrive in South Africa.

The Disgraced Vicar's Daughter

We must now turn to the quiet English parish of Dreycott-on-the-Moors in Staffordshire, and its vicar, the Reverend Charles Stocker. The Stockers were university people, parsons doctors, lawyers etc for a good many generations. Charles took holy orders at Oxford in the early 19th Century and became a don at St. John's College. The college at that time was strictly celibate and when Charles got married he had to leave Oxford. His wife was from a French (Huguenot) family settled in England and her father was Vice-Provost of Eton College. Charles was found a living on Guernsey Island but eventually wangled a much more lucrative living at Dreycott-on-the-Moors in Staffordshire. They lived in an enormous double-storey house with about twelve bedrooms which was necessary in those days. The parish was wealthy and a lot of the country people were free-holding yeoman farmers owning their own land and not tenants or labourers under the squire as in most of England.

Frances Harriet Stocker, one of the younger daughters, did the unmentionable thing of falling in love with a yeoman farmer, John Lymer Cope, and the old rector refused her his permission to marry him as he was “beneath her station in life”. Frances was twenty-eight when they eventually decided to elope and get married without Papa's permission. They did this and sailed off to Canada in 1862. In retaliation Charles in his will cut Francis off with one shilling. They settled at lakeside near Toronto and three boys were born there, the last being Charles (Carol).



Drawing by Frances Harriet Stocker

About this time the old Rector died and Frances was duly paid 1s. out of his estate. Her older sister Emily had married and lived in Natal at Warley Common. She offered to share her inheritance with Frances, but Frances was so hurt by what her father had done that she refused to accept a penny. So Emily bought a farm at Rudolfs Hoek and gave it to the latest baby (Carol) as a christening present. Just at this time while John Lymer, Frances and the family were in church one Sunday something frightened their horses which were tethered outside and they bolted with the trap and plunged into Lake Ontario and were drowned. The family were finding farming in Canada hard and winters freezing and they took the accident as a sign from God. So they accepted Auntie Turner's plan and left Canada to settle on the Hoek, 1874, the owner of the farm, Carol, being three.

The Native Raid

We now return to "Matebili" Thompson. In July 1878, he had been farming at his homestead at Cornforth Hill for four years, and had become moderately prosperous. But in that year, a concerted rising of the natives began across the frontier regions, culminating in the Zulu war (the battle of Rorke's Drift was featured in the movie "Zulu"). Cornforth Hill, being on the extreme frontier was extremely vulnerable, and Matebili Thompson's father Francis was so worried about his son's safety that he decided to come and visit him.

On 18th July, hearing rumours of attacks, the father and son (together with a cousin just out from England) decided to begin preparing their stock in case an evacuation became

necessary. I will let Matebili Thompson take



4. HOMESTEAD AT CORNFORTH HILL

up his story:

"I rose at the first streak of dawn and with my natives was going to the kraals when I saw in the distance a native lad named Mangale coming towards the house. I thought this strange, as all natives in the surrounding country had fled northward. When the boy got to the homestead he told us that his father had sent him to warn us that we would be attacked almost immediately. He had overheard a conversation some twenty miles away the night before, and as he and his father had previously worked for me, they showed their gratitude by giving me warning — one of the few instances of the kind I know of. I warned my cousin and also my father, who was just getting out of bed. We ordered the three natives to get their guns ready, and scarcely had we done so when we saw in the distance a body of thirty mounted Kaffirs galloping down on the homestead. These, as it turned out, were merely the advance party. Most of them were mounted on grey horses and wearing European helmets and soldier's coats. They had surprised a detachment of our troops at Klein Boetsap and defeated them, our men making off in the darkness as best they could and leaving the bulk of their ammunition, horses and clothing, to the enemy. This troop, as was generally the case with our men, had not taken precautions against surprise, and had even neglected to post outlying pickets. The Kaffirs halted about a hundred and fifty yards from the homestead and there

awaited the arrival of a hundred more men. The whole force then concealed themselves in a donga, or dry river bed, which ran round the homestead at a distance of a hundred yards. My father and I agreed that I should attempt to parley with them. I put down my gun in the house behind the door, and stepped out in front, although I must admit that I was very nervous. On my calling that I wished to speak to them they immediately replied with a volley of bullets, but fortunately I was not hit. I went back for my rifle and returned their fire. My father, who had taken up a position on the left hand of the house, behind a little portable blacksmith's forge, repeatedly called to me to keep cool and shoot straight, as our only chance was to make a good stand. He was using an elephant gun loaded with slugs, and was the first to draw blood, hitting one of the leading attackers in the abdomen. A moment later I brought down the second man with a shot through the left shoulder, and then the firing became general.

Owing to the concentrated fire of the natives none of our party was again able to expose himself so the fighting went on, we for dear life and the Kaffirs for murder, loot and revenge on the white man. We were but six, while they were about two hundred. After fighting for about three hours, we discovered that the natives, by gradually creeping up under cover of the kraal had got to within thirty yards of the homestead. Some had loaded their muzzle-loading guns with greased rag, and by this means eventually succeeded in setting fire to the thatched roof of the dwelling. Bad as our position was, we kept up the fight for two hours longer. Then the flames began to appear inside the house, and our situation became desperate. My cousin, who with two of the Korannas had been defending the rear of the house, was now compelled to retreat. We lifted him through a small window into the front portion of the building. I snatched a muzzle-loading musket from one of the boys and for a time succeeded, by firing blank powder, in keeping down the flames as they appeared

in the thatch. Every moment the heat was becoming more intense and the smoke thicker. We could hold out no longer; something must be done, and that very soon. Calling to my father I explained how matters stood in my part of the house, and I could see from where I stood that the roof at the back was falling in. There was soon no alternative: we had to run the gauntlet or be burned alive. My father, exposing himself fearlessly, coolly walked from his position carrying a revolver, an elephant gun and a butcher's cleaver. On reaching my part of the building he opened the small window I have mentioned, and was then able to see the extent and progress of the flames, which indeed singed his whiskers as he looked through.

"We must run for it," he said. "Keep about fifty yards apart and everyone for himself."

My father was the first to leap out of the burning house, and I followed. I had got but a short distance when I was struck by a ball fired by the native chief Galishwe at twelve yards range. It hit me near the point of the lowest rib on the left side, breaking the rib and coming out at the back. By this time my father and cousin and two of the Korannas had got well ahead of me, I having been turned completely round like a top by the force of the bullet. Up to this time no one else had been hit, but when crossing the donga about a hundred and fifty yards away my father received a shot in his heel which crippled him, although he was still able to run. In getting over the donga I placed my hand against my wound, which had become painful. In doing so I stumbled, and as I fell my middle finger was driven into the opening. The broken rib from either side closed on the finger, which thus remained fixed in the wound up to the middle joint. I had only one cartridge left in my gun, my pouch having been shot away; but I resolved to fight to the last. I was a good runner and did not at first feel the full effects of my injury. I thus soon began to overtake my father and cousin, but as I approached them thirty mounted men charged down

on our left flank and galloped between me and my father.

I saw my cousin captured and my father surrounded, and several shots fired into him at close range. I draw a veil over the tragedy then enacted. It sickens me to recall it, and my grief and rage even at this interval of time awake afresh at the remembrance. It is easy to talk of forgetting and forgiving, but only those who have suffered a cruel wrong can know how hard it is to do either.

Knowing that my father was dead, and realizing my all but helpless condition, I suddenly remembered that there was a well with some five feet of water close by. Quick as thought I ran to this, jumped in and hid myself with only my nose and eyes above water. One of my three Korannas was captured. The other two, after leaving the house, had run down the donga and on seeing me leap into the well called to me to get out, as there might still be a chance of escape if we could creep into the long grass on the opposite side of the donga. They helped me by holding the end of my rifle, which I had dropped into a bush, and by much pulling and struggling, enduring agonies from my wound and imprisoned hand, I managed to get out. The pain was now terrible, and the loss of blood was weakening me. My finger was still embedded fast in the wound.

I told the boys that it would be a mistake to go into the long grass, and that it would be better to keep down the dry bed of the river. This we fortunately did, for it turned out that some of the natives had taken possession of this same long grass, and had we entered it we should have certainly fallen into their hands. By this time, having completed the mutilation of my father's body and the torturing of my cousin, they had turned their attention to me. We had got about a mile down the donga and had almost reached a thick clump of bushes, when they saw us and gave chase. I continued to run fairly well and still retained my loaded rifle, but at the sight of

the coming horde of savages I felt my spirits begin to sink. Turning to the Korannas I said, 'Boys, I'm done for. You had better make away as fast as you can.' While they continued their flight I sank from loss of blood, almost fainting, to the ground. I had, however, the presence of mind before losing my senses to crawl a short distance into the bush off the track, the enemy being, I should judge, about a mile away. I lay hidden in the bush and in a faint for some time, and only regained consciousness as the natives were on the point of reaching the spot where I was concealed. Fortunately for me, at that moment they saw the two Korannas crossing a piece of open ground and resumed the chase, no doubt concluding that I, who was a renowned runner in the country, must have outstripped my companions. On losing sight of the two boys again, four of the natives returned to where I had last been seen, about twenty yards from where I then lay. To my intense relief, while they were taking up the spoor, a loud shout of 'Kebali' (There they go!) caused them to return to the chase. With difficulty I managed to rise and get a little farther into the bush, my wound paining me considerably, for I was quite unable to extricate my finger from between the ends of my broken rib.

Although I had escaped thus far, my danger was not over. I had hardly got another hundred and fifty yards into the bush when I found myself at no great distance from a transport waggon, laden with goods intended for a trader in the north. The natives had seen it too, and with bated breath I watched them, sixty yards away, galloping down to loot it. As soon as they reached it they dismounted, leaving their horses to graze as they liked, native fashion, with the bridles thrown over their heads. Then each of the natives helped himself to whatever article on the waggon struck his fancy. The white men who had been in charge of the waggon, having seen the attack on my homestead, had made off into the bush. The horses grazed in all directions, and some came close to the

bush which hid me from view. By breaking off small branches to use as switches, and by throwing sand at the animals, I managed to drive them away some little distance. After the natives had completely looted the waggon, their leader gave the signal to remount. In rounding up the horses two natives passed within ten or twelve feet of me. I held my breath and could hear the beating of my heart. I had determined, if seen, to kill one man at least, but provided I escaped notice, I was content to leave matters as they were. All the natives moved back to the wrecked and burning homestead and looted my sheep, cattle, waggons and horses.

Weak as I was, I managed to scrape out a hole in which I buried my rifle, feeling it too heavy to carry further, and as I was unable to rise I started to crawl. I had crawled about half a mile when the country opened out into a plain, some nine miles in length without a vestige of bush, grass or cover of any kind. I saw a party of natives, who had evidently left the main body to search for cattle, coming directly towards me. Helpless, wounded and unarmed, the thought came over me that this time I must yield to the inevitable and submit to my fate; and then came the desire to live. The country was of that red, sandy soil so well known to travellers in South Africa, and as I looked helplessly about in search of some hiding place what was my joy to discover, only a few yards from me, an antbear hole large enough to admit a full-grown man. These holes are well known to South African hunters. I lost not a moment in concealing myself, feet foremost, and for two hours remained quite still in the hole without daring to move. At length, fearing that if I remained much longer I should perish from thirst, I struggled forth and, having crept a considerable distance, succeeded in getting on my legs and walking in a bent and crouching attitude.

After struggling on for what seemed an age, but was in reality only a few hours, I came upon a waggon driven by a native boy who had at one time been in my

employ. He had been certified as insane and had been for some months under lock and key, but having recovered he was now returning to his home. He consequently was not in any way connected with the local troubles and was quite willing to help me on my way. At six o'clock that evening I arrived at a farm called Spitzkop, some sixteen miles distant from Cornforth Hill.

At Spitzkop I found my neighbour - Robert Spalding, with his wife, a son of sixteen, an aged Scotsman named Donald Martin and seven or eight young children. I leave the reader to imagine my feelings. Although I was in a desperate plight, the knowledge that I was safe for the present and in the company of friends greatly restored my spirits. The house was a substantial one under an iron roof; surrounded by a loopholed stone wall six feet high. The Spaldings were quite unaware of what had happened at my farm, and on seeing me and hearing my news Mrs. Spalding was naturally scared. The lady and old Donald Martin gave me kindly help, and by drawing my broken rib apart succeeded in liberating my finger from the wound where it had been embedded for ten hours. I suffered intense pain during this operation. As the finger was released and extricated it brought with it a long thread of congealed blood, half an inch in diameter and twelve inches long. There was no time to have my wounds even roughly dressed. All promptly set about preparing to defend the house. The party was so small that even I, although quite unable to stand, could not be spared, and it was arranged that my bed should be raised to the level of a loophole at one of the windows, and that I was to command the window with a rifle. The pain of my wound increased every moment.

Hardly had the arrangements been completed when, at a distance of seventeen hundred yards, the same natives who had attacked my homestead were seen approaching. The evening was fast closing in, and only a desultory fire was kept up on both sides during the night. Mrs. Spalding

loaded my rifle for me and I fired whenever a flash from one of the natives' guns offered the chance of a hit. So excited and nervous was my state that I was unable to take any food. None of our party had time to think of eating, and a drink of water from time to time was all I had. Thus the long weary night passed, and daylight revealed the situation. The natives were surrounding us, and were now about twelve hundred yards away. Knowing how well the house was fortified, and probably uncertain of the strength of the garrison, for at times we had kept up a pretty smart fire, they were afraid of approaching too near. Throughout the whole of that day, by firing a few shots from time to time, the attacking party was held in check; but it was with an anxiety approaching dread that we contemplated passing another night of siege.

As the sun began to sink, my excitement and pain made me rambling in my speech, and everyone thought me delirious. No doubt I was a little light-headed, but I remember all that went on. About midnight, when I had closed my aching eyes for a moment and fallen into a painful, half-waking state, I distinctly heard the distant sound of a bugle. I roused myself instantly and called to Mrs. Spalding, telling her what I had heard. She immediately went to her husband at the other end of the building and told him what I had said. He replied: 'Don't encourage Thompson; he is becoming delirious. Keep him up and don't let him go away, as it will mean one gun less.' We only had three all told.

Another five minutes elapsed, I listening attentively, and then I knew I was not mistaken for I distinctly heard the 'Advance'. There is nothing like life on a border ranch to sharpen one's sense of hearing. Mrs. Spalding had also heard the bugle call, but probably fearing another snub from her husband said nothing. The natives drew off rapidly, and in a few minutes there appeared a force of five hundred soldiers and we were safe."

The army surgeon operated on Matebili Thompson (without anesthetic), and over the next few months, nursed by his mother, he recovered. His father's mutilated body was recovered and buried. Here is how Matebili Thompson described his parents fate:

"Hundreds of people from all parts of Griqualand West attended my father's funeral. Many who did not know him went to show their sympathy in an uncommon visitation of fate. So ended the hunting expedition of 1850. Africa had claimed him as a victim of her evolution from barbarism, affording him no other memorial than a humble share in that task, and the irony of being murdered by those he had befriended. Yet such are among the authentic memorials of Africa, from which alone her story can be truly told.

My mother had been twenty-eight years in Africa when this crushing blow fell upon her. England and Home and the hills of Cumberland were far behind her at the end of a stony road, over an horizon long grown dim in African dust. She turned in her affliction to nursing me. She lived on to a ripe old age and we were fast friends to the very end."

The natives had captured his cousin and, after stripping him naked, had tortured and mutilated him in a peculiarly fiendish manner. They left him for dead, but he almost miraculously survived and was picked up by troops fifteen miles from the scene of the fight. He never completely recovered, however, and died in England five years later.

The Aristocrat and the Gun Tycoon's Cousin

About the time that Matebili Thompson was recovering from his wounds, Edward Baldwin John Knox was arriving at the Cape. E.B.J's great-great aunt was Lady Anne Barnard. He had unquestionably blue blood, his father being the son of the Earl of Dungannon and Ranfurly (see the Ireland section) and his mother being the daughter of the Earl of

Balcarres and Crawford (see the Scotland section). According to his daughter, Edward never put his own boots on in his life and always had a valet to do it for him. Despite his ancient ancestry, E.B.J. was the seventh son of a seventh son, which meant that he inherited little and had to earn a living for himself. He was an architect and engineer and came out to the Cape to do architectural work for Rhodes. He lived in one of the houses on Groote Schuur estate and must have done some of the restoration on the old Cape-Dutch houses bought by Rhodes.



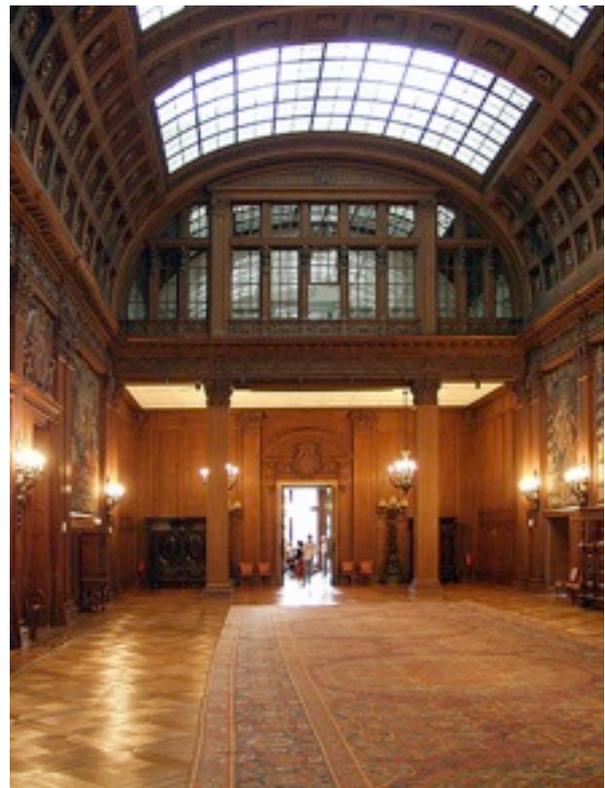
Edward Baldwin John Knox

He met his wife Lena Czerny when she was on a health trip from Germany to Africa and they were married in the old Lutheran Church in Cape Town. Lena (Carolina Helena) was a cousin of Alfred Krupp, the paranoid but brilliant German weapons tycoon. The Krupps had lived in Essen for centuries, making their initial fortune by buying up houses abandoned by plague victims. By the time Lena's parents were born, however, the family had fallen on hard times, and the Krupp steel-works was near bankruptcy. Alfred Krupp painstakingly rebuilt the firm, initially selling steel railroad wheels to the US, but increasingly turning to armaments, as the Kaiser's Germany became more militaristic. Alfred's breech-loading artillery won Germany the War of 1870, after which orders came rolling in from armies and navies around the world. He became the richest man in Germany, and he built a monstrously ugly vast mansion (Villa Hügel) in Essen.

Lena's parents both died when she was young, and she grew up in Villa Hügel and its predecessors. Essen was badly polluted at this time, everything was constantly covered in specks of ash from the steel plants. Alfred's estranged wife refused to set foot in Essen, and Alfred himself was a hypochondriac. So it is not surprising that Lena was sent away for her health. Alfred was an anglophile, and so must have smiled on her marriage to a British aristocrat.

Lena's grandson Jack says that:

"Grossmütter was a lovely old lady, about 5ft tall and we all adored her. To her dying day she spoke terrible English and she used to laugh away when we kids teased her about it."



Villa Hügel

After the discovery of Gold on the Rand E.B.J. arrived on the diggings with his coachman and valet in a Cape Cart. For a short while he was the Town Engineer of Johannesburg, being called in when the first Town Engineer turned out to be a crook who had bolted with the cashbox. As an engineer he was much in

demand and he bought and lived on the farm Booyens which is probably worth hundreds of millions today. E.B.J. is said to have made and lost two fortunes. At the outbreak of the Boer war he and other British were evacuated from Johannesburg to Lorenzo Marques in open cattle trucks and he fell ill and died there.

The Perilous Visit to King Lobengula



1. 'MATEBILI' THOMPSON

Meanwhile, Matebili Thompson had lost his farm, and was left almost penniless. He soon obtained government work, however, using his skill with native languages to help persuade the defeated natives to disarm. As the frontier settled down, he was able to move back to Cornforth Hill, and soon it was flourishing again.

In 1881 he met and married Georgina Rees, daughter of Colonel Charles Rees, an Imperial surveyor who had come out to South Africa to do some work on the forts at Capetown and Simonstown. The colonel and his wife Ann

Gill came from Great Clacton in Essex. His father was Welsh, but his mother's ancestors had lived in Essex for generations.



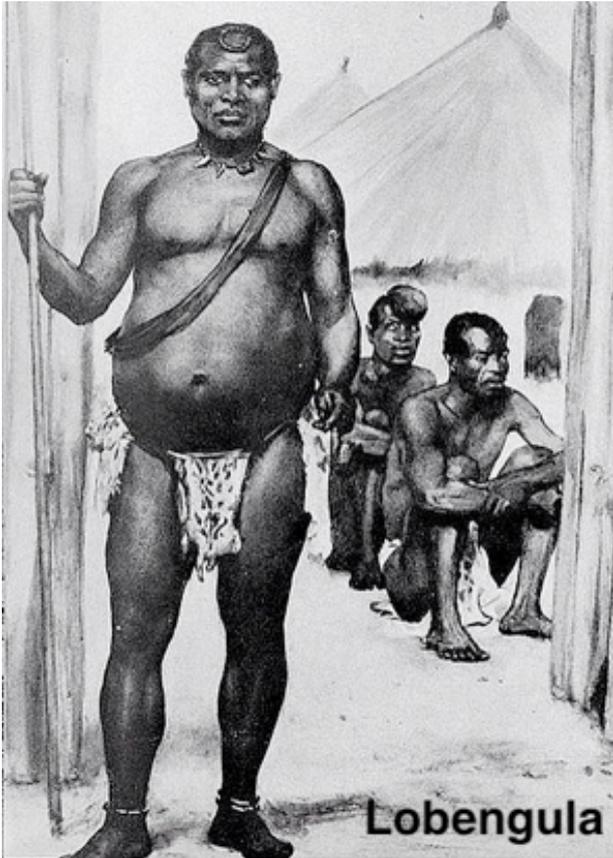
5. MRS. 'MATEBILI' THOMPSON

Over the next few years, in addition to running his farm, Matebili Thompson helped set up native work compounds for diamond miners in the Kimberley, and assisted in negotiations with the Boer republics.

It was in 1888 that he began the adventure which was to literally make his name and fortune, and lead to the foundation of Rhodesia. These were the years of the "scramble for Africa", with different European countries squabbling over who got which parts of the continent. Cecil Rhodes wanted a continuous belt of British colonies from "The Cape to Cairo". The missing link was what is now Zimbabwe, and was then the native kingdom of the Matebili, ruled by king Lobengula.

As a first step, Rhodes set up a company, comprising him, Charles Rudd and Francis Thompson, to try and negotiate to get mining and prospecting rights to the Matebili kingdom. Rudd, Thompson and their colleague Maguire set out to try and persuade King Lobengula to sign this "Rudd

Concession". After a long and dangerous journey they arrived at Lobengula's capital Bulawayo. I will let him continue the story:



"On the evening we arrived we went to greet His Majesty. The interview was necessarily short as the law among the Matebili was that no native-man, woman or child-should be out after dark, as only wolves and witches were then supposed to be abroad. So strict was this law that anyone discovered prowling near a village after dark could be killed at sight without question.

We found Lobengula to be just such a figure as I had expected. A man of about twenty stone, tall, stout, well built, looking every inch a king. His palace consisted of a pole stockade with about a dozen huts for the queens who were with him at the time. He had two hundred wives in all. Within the enclosure was a private sanctum constructed of poles known as the 'Buck Kraal', which accommodated at night about five hundred goats. It was in this place that all the plans were concocted for

smelling out and killing people, when the sacrifices had to be made for rain. The rain maker was the king.

Lobengula was seated on a block of wood, surrounded on all sides by goats and dogs. We had agreed that we should greet the king as an ordinary gentleman, and that by adhering to this line of conduct we could not go far wrong. We had been told that we should have to approach him by crawling on our hands and knees, and remain in a recumbent position while in his presence. This was the custom, and the whites who had thrown in their lot with the natives were wont to observe it. We decided, however, to walk boldly up to him in the ordinary fashion, and this we did, to the evident surprise of his entourage.

He kept us waiting for some time. Then he enquired who we were, and put many commonplace questions which we answered. We handed him a bag containing a hundred sovereigns by way of a greeting gift. We were then told to return to our camp and sleep nicely, a piece of advice which we lost no time in following."

The Matebili Kingdom was an incredibly dangerous place to visit. The King would frequently order whole villages wiped out because of some perceived slight. Witch doctors were on constant alert for Mtagati (witches and wizards), and anybody they accused was immediately killed (together with all their relatives) and their goods confiscated. During the almost two years he spent in Lobengula's capital, Matebili Thompson was countless examples of extreme cruelty and barbarism, as well as witnessing impressive barbaric rituals. Here is his description of one feast:

On the first day of the annual feast thus inaugurated, about two thousand men appeared at six o'clock in the morning with long sticks, the tops made to look like the head of Kaffir corn when it is growing. This was called the corn dance. These two thousand men stood and sang a slow solemn hymn imitating at intervals the winter winds, and then you saw their

sticks waving like corn. It was really a grand picture, and I could not imagine anything in nature being better imitated.

For the great dance warriors were dressed in ostrich feathers and otter caps. Their sharpened assegais were burnished like silver. They stood round the half-moon ten deep. They began the dance with a war song, to which they beat time with a heavy tramp. They never changed their ground but kept a perfect line. The thud of their feet made the earth ring, and they sang at the top of their voices. Then the queens appeared, some dressed beautifully although barbarically in beads and silk sashes of all colours and shades. The beads on each of them must have weighed about fifty pounds. They carried long wands, and walked from the king's harem in single file according to their rank and the length of time they had been married. After walking round the circle to curtsy to the regiments the queens joined in the song. This ceremony opened the dance and then the common women, all singing, joined the procession. The men kept their places. This went on for two hours, and then the sacred oxen were turned loose. They bolted for the north gateway, running fast as they had been trained to do. Up and after them went the five thousand warriors. The oxen ran the distance into the veld to which they had been trained, and then returned at full gallop to their places, bellowing all the way.

The charge outwards and the return of the oxen lasted about an hour. The women scattered as the oxen returned, and then the warriors came back to their places.

Up to this time the king had not appeared, and silence prevailed while the people awaited him. As he came out on to the verandah of his house a great cheer was raised. The noise was deafening. He came out with his spears and shield and gave three or four leaps like a madman. When he appeared the queens scattered as if running for their lives. He stayed for two minutes. The singing was resumed for half

an hour and then the warriors stood at ease.

Soon after the bravest of the brave were called out. They danced and leapt, describing the brave deeds they had done and boasting of the number of enemies they had killed. This pantomime lasted a long time, and according to their declarations each must have killed twenty or thirty of the enemy.

At four o'clock in the afternoon the king appeared again. He made a rush, and as quick as lightning the half-moon closed round him. They moved back, and he led a procession out on to the veld. He took up his assegai and eager eyes watched which way he would throw it, for from that direction war was to be expected. He came out in 1889 on the south-east side of the stockade, a hint of his aim, and in that direction he threw. Two thousand men then knew they would go that way on a raiding expedition.

Here is his account of how he persuaded the King to sign what became known as the Rudd Concession, granting the syndicate exclusive rights to mine gold in Matebililand:

"Three days having passed, we presented ourselves before the king and I opened our business to him. He listened attentively and showed considerable intelligence. I explained that we were not Boers, and were not seeking for land, but only asked the right to dig the gold of the country. I told him that all eyes were turned to his dominions, which I likened to a dish of milk that was attracting flies. I said that the Boers were evincing signs of pushing their way from the south, alluding at the same time to the death of the Transvaal emissary, Mr. Grobler. I gave him to understand also that the Portuguese were pressing in on the east, or Mashona side, where the vast ocean washed past.

On hearing this the king at once observed: 'You are only a boy. How do you know that

there is a sea on the east side? You have never been there?’

He thought that the only way to the east coast was through his country. I replied that I knew by the books of my fathers that the great waters were round there. But in vain did I endeavour to convince him, for he persisted in saying that I must have travelled through his territory if I knew of the Mapunga (rice—eaters, meaning the Portuguese).

Our conversation was carried on in Sechuana, a language only he and a half-dozen Matebili understood. Fortunately the white men at Bulawayo did not understand it. Very little headway was made at the interview, but he was much interested. Among other things I described the Zulu War of 1879, and the engagements in which I had taken part in 1878. Until then white men had been regarded by the Matebili more or less as dogs, but the king took an extraordinary interest in examining the scars of gunshot wounds on my body. I believe he would have preferred to talk of anything rather than discuss giving away the gold concession, a subject he carefully avoided. I as diligently referred to it, with the result that to be rid of us he at last said, ‘Well, go and talk to the councillors’.

I asked him when I should be able to do so, and he replied that he would summon them to discuss the matter shortly. With this we were obliged to be content.

Before this interview I had spoken to Lotjie, who occupied among the Matebili a position equivalent to that of Prime Minister, and to Sekombo, the Induna who in 1896 was to meet Rhodes at the Motopos, and put our scheme carefully before them.

I promised them gifts if they assisted us. Rudd and I discussed the feasibility of obtaining a thousand Martini-Henry rifles and ammunition for Lobengula. We felt certain that nothing else would obtain us the concession. We agreed that we should

promise these, and in addition a gunboat for the Zambesi. This new temptation was rendered necessary owing to the light estimation in which gold coin was held by natives. Money had no value.

We had £10,000 with us in sovereigns, but the natives referred to them as ‘lumps of metal’ and ‘buttons’, and said they were fitted for no better use than to make bullets.

When first I went to Matebililand I could buy an ox for three pounds’ weight of beads, costing 1s. 6d. a pound. A sheep could be bought for a yard of calico worth sixpence. A sovereign would not buy an egg, but an empty cartridge case would buy two fowls. A cartridge case was worn as the tribal token in the slit made in the ear. Guns and ammunition, in short, were considered the only things really worth having. This being the case, it will readily be understood how useless it would have been to offer only a monthly payment of so many sovereigns. If we had not obtained guns and ammunition to give as well, all our efforts would have been in vain. The natives had seen the effects of shooting by hunters, and naturally coveted such efficient treasures. When the time came, of course, we made the most of our ability to supply rifles.

Nobody can conceive the weariness of the ensuing days. It was simply a matter of waiting and watching. The native mind moves slowly, and for reasons of his own Lobengula did not wish to be hurried. He was willing enough to meet us, but did not wish to discuss a concession.

We were reduced to spending every day in our little camp, most of the time playing backgammon or reading. We did not dare to go far afield in case we might be called by Lobengula.

Our anxiety and impatience increased day by day, but at last, at the end of October 1888, a month after we had arrived at the king’s kraal, we met one hundred Indunas

in an indaba. These Indunas constituted a full council of the Matebili nation. Mr. Helm (a missionary) represented Lobengula, and explained our proposals. The indaba assembled at a spot fifty yards from the king's headquarters and took place on two consecutive days.

I first addressed the meeting and entered fully into the question. The Indunas sat perfectly quiet and listened intently. They heard from me all about the Boers pressing into the country which I likened to a dish of milk; about the Portuguese encroaching; about the thousand Martini-Henry rifles and hundred thousand ball cartridges; about the gun-boat for the Zambesi. They heard all this, but when it came to asking them for the sole right to the gold throughout the whole country, the cry arose from one and all, 'Maai Ba Booa.' This may be translated, 'Mother of Angels, listen, listen.'

By way of explaining the idea of 'sole right' I told them that I was not going to have two bulls in one herd of cows. All discussion with natives on grave matters was in my time carried on more or less in metaphor, a style carrying much weight when skilfully used. On my alluding to bulls on this occasion one Induna observed that I was right, for the bulls would certainly fight instead of looking after the cows. Thereupon another Induna said, 'Yes; I can see he is frightened of other men in the country.'

'He is greedy then,' said a third. At this Samapolane, an Induna who was also to meet Rhodes in the Motopos, rose and said, 'No; we will give you a part of the country.'

This was not what we wanted, but I had created an impression, and my talk about rifles had produced the effect intended. So my reply was to turn to Rudd and say, 'Come, we will go. These people talk only about giving us a place to dig.'

Rudd, speaking for the first time, said, 'All right, let us take a piece'; and then in an

aside to me, 'We can gradually ingratiate ourselves with the people.'

Maguire, also opening his mouth for the first time, seized Rudd by the coat tails and said, 'For heaven's sake, Rudd, sit down and don't interfere with Thompson.'

I jumped up and made it appear that we would not discuss matters further. I said, 'Yes, Indunas, your hearts will break when we have gone. And you will remember the three men who offered you moshoshla (Martini rifles) for the gold you despise in this land.'

The farewell 'Good day to you' was half out of my mouth when Lotjie, the Prime Minister, caught me by the little finger. 'Sit down, Tomoson,' he said; 'I thought you were a man when you began to speak. We as old men know about the Portugese to the east, and the ocean running past where the sun rises, but truly I see you are only a child.'

Lotjie then went into the king's private enclosure where he and Lobengula remained in close conference for half an hour. When he came out he called 'Tomoson, come in here. The king wishes to speak to you alone'.

I stepped inside, and Lotjie asked me to sit down and relate to the king all I had said outside to the Council. This I did, emphasizing what I had said about the sadness of Matebili hearts when we left; and how absurd it was to think we did not mean to do what was right. 'Who gives a man an assegai', I said, 'if he expects to be attacked by him afterwards?' This was my answer to the fear that in giving the Concession the Matebili would open the door to white aggression, for rifles would then be the best defence they could have. This made an obvious impression on the king, and after pondering it for a few moments he exclaimed, 'Give me the fly-blown paper and I will sign it.'

Once the concession had been signed, Rudd rode back to the Cape, and Cecil Rhodes took it to London to get it ratified by Queen Victoria. Meanwhile Matebili Thompson and Maguire had to stay in Bulawayo, and try and hold things together until everything was ratified in London.

For a year and a half, Matebili Thompson and Maguire camped on the outskirts of Bulawayo. Initially things were friendly, but as time went on different factions within the Matebili, and rival white concession seekers started spreading rumors that King Lobengula had signed away more than just mineral rights. Tension rose, different factions threatened violence, and on several occasions they had to intervene to prevent the treaty from being overturned. They were frequently called in for cross-examination:

“I found myself forced to sit and answer such questions as these;

‘Have you got a brother named Rhodes who eats a whole country for breakfast?’

‘Is it not true that Maguire is a magician who rides wolves at night time?’

I was insulted in every way by the Indunas, and the white men threatened to shoot me. It was no child’s play, but after being cross-examined for nearly ten and a half hours I emerged satisfactorily.”

Once his companion Maguire, who spoke no native languages and was relatively ignorant of their customs, was so desperate for a wash that he tried to brush his teeth and bath in a sacred fountain. He was captured by the custodians of the fountain, who reported to the king that they:

“had beheld Maguire approach the king’s sacred fountain; how the white man began to undress himself; how he washed his teeth with some red stuff; how he then took water from the fountain, gargled it in his throat and spat it forth into the pool, which became blood red; how he repeated the process, but this time the water turned white. Tabeni then described how, unable

longer to endure the sight, he and the others descended upon the evildoer and seized the stuff with which the king’s water was being poisoned; how one man had taken up the bottle of eau-de-Cologne and smelt it; how a Zulu boy who had travelled with white men said that the odour was one white men loved, which accounted for their horrid smell.”

This time they escaped with a fine (virtually everything they had with them), but a few months later Maguire left to go home, and on his way took pity on an escaped slave and gave him a ride on his wagon. The slave was shortly re-captured, and Matebili Thompson summoned before the king to explain why his “brother” had stolen the king’s property (the slave). He tried to bribe the Matebili warriors who had recaptured the slave, but this backfired:

“On my arrival at the royal kraal I sat down and waited, but on this occasion the men of the impi began talking of how they had walked one hundred miles to catch the slave boy who had been taken by Maguire. Their ominous scowls, their angry words and threatening manner, boded ill for me. Although it is customary, to impress a visitor with a sense of the king’s dignity, to keep him waiting, Lobengula did not delay the proceedings as long as usual. Calling to me in a sharp tone he said, ‘Thompson, where is your neck?’

I remained very quiet.

‘You hear me?’ asked the king.

‘If’, said I slowly, ‘a child has done wrong, does its father kill it, oh king? Does not a horse stumble though it has four feet? I have but two. I have no answer to make, for you will not believe me, because I said that Maguire did not steal the slave. I am found out in what the impi reports to you, and must conclude that I must bear the consequences. But I can tell you this, oh king, that I did not know the child had gone with Maguire.’

'But, Thompson,' said the king, 'now you are lying again. Why did you try to buy the Induna with these things?'

He solemnly produced the knife and spoons.

'You said they were not to tell the king. Are you the king? Do you wish to undermine my authority?'

'The Induna', I replied, 'had taken much trouble, and it was to reward him that I gave the things, being thankful that the slave was restored. I am afraid to speak now that I am stated to be a liar, and certainly events seem to bear that construction, for the slave was found at Maguire's waggon. I can only crave forgiveness as a son from his father.'

This latter part of my address produced a marked impression in my favour, and after a silence of some moments the king decided, to my intense relief; that for the present he would pardon my offence. But his decision caused great dissatisfaction to the impi. In their opinion my body was not good enough for hungry dogs. As I left the kraal I was greeted by curses long and deep, and they came from all sides. I was called liar, thief, magician; I was told they would have my blood yet."

The situation continued to deteriorate.

"As time went on the Matebili became more and more excited. Thousands came from all directions to ask the king if it were true that the white dog Thompson had bought the land. Among the Matebili I was now the most notorious person in the country, and among a section of black and white schemers the most hated. My main difficulty arose from the false interpretation of the Concession by white men at Bulawayo. They told the king to study the word land. It was true that the word occurred in the Concession, but in a very different sense from that imparted to it by these men. In misrepresenting the Concession to the Matebili they relied

chiefly on the passage reading: 'Whereas I have been much molested of late by divers persons seeking and desiring to obtain grants and concessions of Land and Mining rights in my territories'.

A copy of the document was produced at a council of three hundred Indunas, and one of the whites asked me to interpret the word 'land'. He covered up the other words of the paragraph. I asked the Indunas which of them could tell me whether a beast was male or female when only part of the hide was shown. They answered, 'None, unless he saw the remaining part of the body.' 'I, too,' I said, 'cannot interpret that word, for you allow this man to cover up the rest of the sentence.' I stoutly refused to discuss the word out of its context as the whites would have had me do.



This meeting lasted from seven in the morning until five in the afternoon. I was asked by every Induna in turn from whom I had bought the country. My answer was, 'Matebili, did I not tell you when first I came into this country, about a year ago, that we were not farmers and wanted no

land, cattle or grass, but that we wanted the gold in the stone?’

It had been my policy to deal only with the king himself I took up the attitude with him that he alone was the judge of my conduct, and that I did not mind the opinion of others as long as he approved of what I did.

Thus I sat from early morning till late in the afternoon in a broiling sun, most of the time on my haunches, not being allowed to move. I had a terrible headache, from which I was then suffering daily. It was caused by worry, anxiety and wretched food. I had covered my eyes with my soft felt hat, having determined not to answer another question, when I heard a general salute. I took no notice, thinking that from where the Indunas were sitting they had caught sight of the king. Then to my surprise I heard close in front of me: ‘Tomoson, why do you cover your eyes like a son-in-law when his mother-in-law is near?’

Among the Matebili to gaze upon or stand in the path of one’s mother-in-law is a crime. The custom is designed, presumably, to obviate one’s becoming too familiar with her.

I ripped off my hat with apologies. ‘King, I did not know that you were here.’

‘What are they asking you Tomoson?’

‘They ask me from whom I got the land.’

‘What have you told them?’

‘If they say I have the land, let the man stand before me and tell me from whom I got it.’

‘Pogee,’ said the King; meaning, ‘Very sound answer, what more is there to say?’

He was apparently well satisfied as he walked away, and I felt much relieved. His confronting me at this meeting of his

Indunas surprised me, and when I thought it over I saw much cause for anxiety. I had had many long conversations with him, and I had no doubt that the Indunas were anxious to know all he had ever said to me. He had seen me under the strain of a long cross-examination, and I assumed he had wondered whether I had misinterpreted him or implicated him. He had seemed uneasy, and so I hoped that my answer to the crucial question had assured him that wild horses would never drag from me anything he had to say. There was really nothing to drag from me, because I knew that he had neither the wish nor the power to give his people’s land away. But his evident desire to vindicate himself in the eyes of his Indunas showed how serious the agitation among the Matebili was becoming, and that the Indunas were prepared to suspect even the king himself. In their eyes he had become far too friendly with me. The serious trouble all this foreshadowed was not long in coming.

The old Prime Minister Lotjie, who was seated beside me, was within a few minutes accused by the Indunas of having advised the king to take the thousand rifles in exchange for gold. The two leading Indunas, who held offices roughly equivalent to the Serjeant at Arms and Black Rod in Parliament, went in to report to the king in his private sanctum. They returned with a declaration that the affairs of the nation rested in their hands, and whatever they did would be right. Two minutes later the decree was passed that Lotjie and his followers were to look on light no more.

I saw the poor old fellow stand erect. He handed his snuff box to a man standing near. He was taken outside the council kraal, and on kneeling down he said, ‘Do as you think fit with me. I am the king’s chattel.’ One blow from the executioner’s stick sufficed; one smart blow on the back of the head.

I turned to the half-dozen white men who sat away to the right, scum as I regarded

them, and I said, 'Who is responsible for this? You, who have told all these villainous lies of what will happen when the Charter is granted.'



**Matebili warrior,
sketch by Baden Powell**

My distress may easily be understood when I thus saw my friend and ally put to death. The ostensible reason for his execution was that he had advised the king to accept the rifles and sign the Concession. But in reality he had been made the scapegoat to protect the king from the rising tide of suspicion among the Matebili that their king had traded away their rights in their land.

That night was spent by the Matebili in putting to death the men, women and children of Lotjie's family. It was the most terrible night in my experience. Charlie crept close to me in the darkness for protection and softly exclaimed as each dull thud of the executioning stick came to our ears, followed by the shrill cry 'Ay yi yi'. Some three hundred men, women and children were killed—Lotjie's whole kraal with the probable exception of the sucking child.

Early next morning I decided to drive over to Hope Fountain, the mission station, to

discuss the turn of events with Mr. Helm. I had just started when I heard a native following me. He was riding a grey horse. 'Tomoson,' he called quietly, 'the king says the killing of yesterday is not yet over.' Knowing Lobengula as I did, believing as I had every reason to that he had a certain friendliness towards me, I took this as a well-meant hint; as, indeed, the last service he could do me. As I stopped to consider the message, I saw a crowd of young Matebili in war dress advancing. Their actions left me in no doubt of their intentions. I had decided, in the long thoughts that came to me on Lotjie's death, what I should do in such an eventuality. I should make a bolt for it.

I cut the fastest horse from the traces, jumped on its back, and rode hard to the ford in the Umgusa River, which was the very place to get through to the south. I was soon lost to the hunt in the wildness of the country.

I had no saddle, only the improvised bridle from the trap harness, and in the scurry I lost my hat. After riding for hours in the blazing sun I had to make a hat by tying four knots in my handkerchief, and stuffing it with grass. Towards sundown I found myself in unknown country in the middle of the Kalahari Desert. I had neither food nor water, and might be attacked by lions. I tied my horse, climbed into a tree and there spent the night. The next day I rode until the horse knocked up, and then I walked. Walking and running I covered thirty or a forty miles. My tongue became swollen, and towards evening stuck out of my mouth. My eyes were so bloodshot that I could scarcely see and my breath was short.

At nightfall on the second day I came to a waterhole. I lay down at the edge of the water and bathed my head. My tongue was protruding with thirst and I very painfully drank and drank, the water going into me like water into a hot kettle. As a result I got dysentery next morning. When feeling very weak I met some Makalaka natives cooking

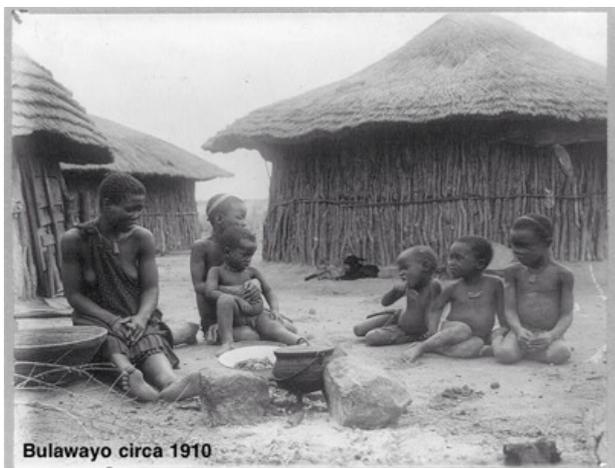
a pot of mealies, and from them, in exchange for my pocket-knife, I bought some mealies to eat.

I contrived to struggle on, and then luckily came upon a trader with a mule waggon. He gave me a lift to Shoshong and from there I travelled to Mafeking."

Even then he was not finished with the Matebili, but on Rhodes' request went back one last time to present Lobengula with the signed concession.

Matebili Thompson always maintained that the concession was only for mineral rights. But that was not how things worked out. Rhodes used the "Rudd Concession" to get the British Government to allow him to set up a chartered company for the purpose of exploiting the minerals of Matebililand and any other trading opportunities that might arise in this part of Africa. The British Government gave this company exclusive trading rights in this region.

A large party of settlers, supported by heavily armed company police, set out for the region just north of Matebililand, where they established the settlement of Salisbury (Harare). This was not what Lobengula had thought he had agreed to, but as the settlers were not in his territory, peace was maintained for a while. But soon the natives near Salisbury appealed to the company for protection against Lobengula's raids. This was more than Lobengula could stand - if the natives could thumb their noses at him with impunity, his empire would immediately disintegrate.



He sent his troops to massacre the rebellious natives, who called on the company police to protect them. With the aid of machine guns, a tiny group of company police slaughtered the attacking Matebili warriors. The first Matebili War was underway. Despite their vastly superior numbers, this was not a war the Matebili could win, against superior British technology, and in short order Bulawayo had been captured, Lobengula killed, and the Matebili lost their independence and were incorporated into the new British colony of Rhodesia.

Arguably this is what Rhodes had intended from the start. Matebili Thompson makes it clear in his autobiography that this was not what he had thought he was involved in, and that he deplored this outcome. Though it is hard to believe that he didn't have some idea of where the concession might lead.

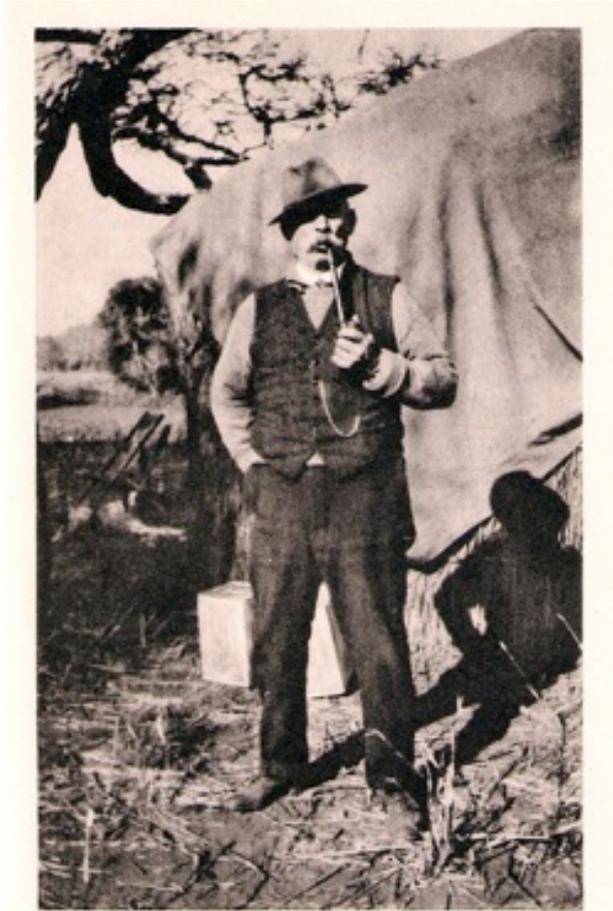
"I can truly say, and all my dealings with natives bear me out, that up to the very last moment of my residence with Lobengula I acted honestly towards him as a friend, and in the conviction that the Concession would bring immediate prosperity to him and his people. Fate willed it otherwise.

Rhodes always assured me that he personally did not want the gold per se, or the land, but rather territorial administrative powers. He wrote to me that he wanted no rights in land, nor did I at any time imagine that we were entitled to them.

Situations developed which were contrary to the spirit in which I had regarded the whole thing, and situations I should not have been able to accept.

Only once did I again visit Rhodesia. It was in 1904, as a member of the South African Native Affairs Commission. I was standing on the railway platform at Figtree when I was accosted by one of Lobengula's Indunas. 'Ou Tomoson,' he said, 'how have you treated us, after all your promises, which we believed?'

I had no answer.



16. F. R. THOMPSON ON A SHOOTING TRIP IN ZULULAND, IN 1924

Matebili Thompson sold his shares in the company, making a tidy fortune. He went to England, did a degree at Oxford and bought a house, Clay Hall, at Great Clacton in Essex, where his wife's family were from.

He entered the Cape Parliament, but was not a great success there. He retired to his estate at Cornforth Hill. One of his sons was killed on the North West frontier of India during the first world war. Another became a senator. We are descended from his daughter Nancy, who compiled his autobiography. For much more detail, I've included extensive excerpts from his autobiography in a separate set of notes.

The French Arrive from Mauritius

Far off the East coast of South Africa lies the Island of Mauritius. Originally a French colony, it was conquered by the British during the Napoleonic wars. See the separate notes on

Mauritius for far more about the island and our ancestors who lived there. The original French colonists still ran the island, overseeing vast sugar plantations farmed by armies of indentured Indian labourers.

By the late 19th century, Mauritius was decadent - cut off from the world, overpopulated, economically depressed, malarial and recently devastated by a number of cyclones and cholera epidemics. Many young Franco-Mauritians decided to emigrate, and their favourite destination was nearby South Africa. Between 1900 and 1939, 16,000 moved to the Transvaal or Natal.

Among them was Philippe Rouillard. He was a younger son of one of the Island's most distinguished judges, Francois Joachim John Rouillard, but despite this, as a younger son in a very large family, there was little future for him in Mauritius. He trained as a mining engineer (probably at the London School of Mines), and then moved to South Africa in 1911. On the ship he met Nancy Thompson, Matebili Thompson's daughter, and they were soon married. She was only 17, 14 years younger than Philippe.

Philippe's elder brother Richard had moved to South Africa before him, fighting in the Boer War. Richard had then been one of the pioneer farmers along the Pongola river (near the Swaziland border), and became known as "the man who tamed the Pongola" by introducing sugar and fruit. Philippe and Nancy also moved to the Pongola where they set up a huge farm. Indeed a whole community of Mauritius expatriates settled this tropical region, where they grew many of the crops familiar from home. Their grand-daughter Jane remembers visiting the farm as a girl, her main memories being the enormous heat, thorn trees and the crocodiles in the river.

Unfortunately Philippe died young, aged 52, in 1932, "of a disease now easily treatable". This left Nancy to run the vast farm and bring up the children.

Coming Together



John Cope

E.B.J. Knox and Lena Czerny had a daughter May, who married Charles (Carol) Cope, and brought up a large family of boys on their farm at Rudolfs Hoek. One of their sons, John Patrick Cope ("Oupa") married the Margaret Nancy Rouillard ("Gogo"), the daughter of Philippe Rouillard and Nancy Thompson.

Margaret Nancy Rouillard was a star pupil at school, winning every prize going. She did an English degree at the University of Cape Town, studied opera singing, and was about to make her debut when she met John Cope and got married.



Margaret Rouillard

John had been sent to a posh private school at Grahamstown but hated it. He started studying Engineering at the University of Witwatersrand, but hated it too and because the family were hard up and supporting him, he dropped out to become a journalist. While at school he'd written a story about an Eagle. The editor of the Rand Daily Mail came to give a prize, and liked the article and said "if you ever need a job come to me", not really meaning it. When reminded of this fact, he said that "if you get an article published I'll give you a job", with no intention of publishing anything. John got an article published by using a pseudonym and hence got the job. For many years he worked for the Rand Daily Mail and Natal Mercury Durban. For 15 years he edited Jan Hofmeyer's weekly journal 'The Forum'. He was a war correspondent during Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia, and during the Second World War reported from China, at one point disguising himself as a cook on the Yangtze.

He was a political correspondent in the South African Parliament on various occasions between 1930 and 1953 when he was himself elected to Parliament, serving the wealthy and influential constituency of Parktown in

Johannesburg until 1961. He was a member of the United party, which tended to represent the English rather than the Boers (blacks and coloured people couldn't vote). But the United Party was fractured about whether to oppose Apartheid. Those who opposed Apartheid, including John, broke away from the United Party and helped to found the Progressive Party in 1959.



Margaret with her youngest daughter Pippa, on a Johannesburg street.

Fleeing to England

In 1961 he stood for re-election as a member of the Progressive Party for the first time, and narrowly lost (by 85 votes), after a campaign marked by dirty tricks against him. After losing his seat, he tried to keep the cause going by setting up an anti-apartheid printing press. He sank all his money into this venture, but the publisher's board was infiltrated by communists and he lost his seat on the board.

Deeply disillusioned, John, Margaret and their youngest daughter Pippa moved to England in 1963, where John hoped to start again as a journalist. But John was too old to get much work, and they were beginning to think of returning to South Africa, when their two elder daughters Hilary and Jane unexpectedly arrived in London. By 1966 both Hilary and Jane had married Englishmen and were starting families, so John and Margaret decided to stay.



Margaret Cope with her grandson Paul Francis at his graduation from Cambridge in 1988.

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