

Natal South Coast: The 1870s - A Decade of lost opportunities

This want of labour and transport not only retard operations and paralyse progress, but they damp a man's energy and cow his spirit.

– Alexandra County correspondent, *Natal Mercury*, 17 February 1874.

These sentiments by the correspondent to the *Natal Mercury* provides an apt summation of the state of affairs in the South Coast during the 1870s, as this chapter will outline. The historical record of conditions on the South Coast at the onset of the 1870s owes a huge debt to the published accounts of John Robinson and John Widdowson Welborne, following the extensive, independent tours that each made of the region. Welborne, a British slate quarry proprietor, who was eager to promote a railway scheme in Natal, spent eight months exploring Natal in 1869. His travels took him down the South Coast to the Mzimkulu river. He noted that the belt of coastline was 'almost uninhabited, a few colonists only being located at considerable distances apart....So sparse is the population that for two days whilst travelling through Alexandra County I failed to meet a single human being, white or black.'¹

Likewise, Robinson also noted that scattered, isolated settler communities remained a feature of the region, as he had observed during his visit in 1861. Umzinto, which was yet to be established formally as a township, was the chief settlement within the area. He described it as a 'cluster of homesteads within gunshot of each other' which gave 'the impression of a township.' It also had a church, St Patricks (Anglican), which Robinson described as 'one of the prettiest and most orthodox little churches in Natal,' a court house and a gaol.² Small farming communities were to be found in the districts of Umkomaas and Ifafa in Alexandra County. Alfred County, which Robinson did not visit, was described by a government commission in 1876 as a territory which lay 'waste and uninhabited,' unchanged since it was annexed to Natal in 1866.³ As a region for European settlement, Robinson believed that Alexandra County was particularly fragmented as a result of the presence of several mission reserves.⁴

This chapter focuses on the economic development in Alexandra and Alfred counties in the decade of the 1870s. What stands out is the almost complete lack of an infrastructure drive which could have created a virtuous cycle, stimulating both supply and demand, and linking the area more intimately with the Colony. This was mostly because the South Coast was still regarded as a barely populated backwater of the Colony. Labour was invariably in scarce supply; unlike Northern Natal, there was no coal or other natural commodity in the area; the lack of infrastructure presented a major hurdle to economic growth. In every sense, the South Coast was the backwater of the Colony and settlers in the area had to overcome major political hurdles to get the government to take infrastructural development seriously in order to get the economy moving. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part examines Alexandra County and thereafter Alfred County is discussed.

Alexandra County

¹ Document No. 27, 1870, presented to the Natal Legislative Council on 6 July 1870: JW Welborne to William Mansell, Under-Secretary of State for Colonies, 22 March 1870; BJT Leverton, 'Government finance,' 146.

² *Natal Mercury*, 14 March 1871.

³ Report of Select Committee on proposed European Immigration, Natal Legislative Council No. 15, submission of DC Aiken, 3 October 1876, *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1613, 17 October 1876.

⁴ These included the Amahlongwa, which occupied 7,464 acres; Ifafa (7,500 acres), Mtwalumi (13,407 acres), Mzumbe (8,000 acres); and Equeefa College (3,000 acres). *Natal Mercury*, 8 August 1871.

For the most part, Alexandra County could scarcely be described as a work in progress. While settlers had designs on the County becoming a “developed” part of the Colony, bridge, road, rail, port, and other infrastructure was non-existent. For the economy of the region to take off, the priority was to improve infrastructure so as to reduce transportation costs and also make it possible to send and receive goods from other parts of the Colony. Such concerns consumed much of the settlers’ attention.

Bridge over the Mkomanzi

Robinson’s account made reference to Alexander Brander of Belle Mont estate, near Umzinto, as ‘ the Father of the District;’ to Lewis Reynolds as the ‘presiding genius’ of Canonby estate; and to the ‘mechanical ingenuity and enterprise’ of John Bazley of Nil Desperandum Estate.¹ However, these pioneer settlers and sugar planters, along with the Landers of Mpambinyoni, the Joyners of Ifafa, Hawksworth of Equeefa, the Aikens of Maryville, George Robinson of Craigie Burn, and others were hostage to a common shortcoming which severely inhibited the economic potential of the region, namely, transport. Aside from the ongoing belief that the Mkomanzi and Mzimkulu rivers needed to be developed for shipping² – ‘if the district is to make any progress at all,’ as Robinson saw it - a bridge over the Mkomanzi was regarded as the most practical solution to the easing of transport difficulties. Robinson was convinced that ‘the traffic would provide a revenue more than sufficient to cover the whole cost of the bridge.’³ There was such enthusiasm for the project that Bazley made a prototype of the bridge needed to span the Mkomanzi, which he exhibited at Black and Baxter’s store in Umzinto in 1871.⁴ In February 1871, the *Mercury* remarked in an editorial ‘that year after year has slipt by without any practical effort being made in the legislature to supply so pressing and obvious a requirement.’ To underline the need for a bridge, the editorial estimated that during the 1871 season 1,500 tons of sugar would have to cross the river to reach Durban, while 2,500 tons of goods would have to be transported from Durban across the Mkomanzi.⁵

Under austerity measures which Lieutenant-Governor RW Keate had imposed during the depression of the 1860s, Natal’s economy had stabilised by the early 1870, its expenditure having been met by revenue and its arrears paid off.⁶ Within a broader context, Natal’s economy was set to benefit from two external developments: the recovery of the British economy from its slump and the discovery of diamonds in the northern Cape which had greatly stimulated the overberg trade.⁷ But Keate prioritised the payment of

¹ J Robinson, *Notes on Natal*, 111, 108, 120.

² Durban Port Captain Alex Airth inspected the south coast as far as Ifafa for shipping possibilities and noted that transport ‘occupied the minds of inhabitants.’ See: *Natal Mercury*, 4 February 1871.

³ *Natal Mercury*, 8 August 1871.

⁴ *Natal Mercury*, 12 September 1871.

⁵ *Natal Mercury*, 11 February 1871. Sugar production for Alexandra County in 1871 was 1,287 tons. See: *Natal Blue Book*, 1871, X4-5. Bridges were also urgently needed at Howick and Mooi River which were on the route of Natal’s growing overberg trade. See: BJT Leverton, ‘Government finance,’ 123.

⁶ *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XXII, No. 1232, 23 June 1870. Cited by Keate in his address to the opening of the Legislative Council.

⁷ WG Hynes, *The Economics of Empire: Britain, Africa and the New Imperialism*, (London, 1979), 13; BJT Leverton, ‘Government finance,’ 176. Australia, however, absorbed more British capital investment than any other part of the British Empire and came to be known as the ‘best poor man’s country.’ See: J McAloon, ‘Gentlemanly capitalism and settler capitalists: imperialism, dependent development and colonial wealth in the South Island of New Zealand,’ *Australian Economic History Review*, Vol. 42, No. 2, July 2002, 17-18. The relative wealth of Natal settlers compared to those of Queensland, Australia, is also reflected by the amount of money on deposit in banks as at 31 December 1870. Queensland banks held £319,702 which represented £2 per head of the settler population while Natal’s equivalent amounted to just two shillings per head of the white population. See: *Times of Natal*, 17 May 1871.

public servants above infrastructure development. Thus, the Colonial Engineer, Peter Patterson, found himself bereft of adequate resources for even essential maintenance work.¹ Thus, in 1870, five years after the prison had been built at Umzinto, the resident magistrate, Dunbar Moodie, was still awaiting the construction of a court house, magistrate's office, and quarters for prison warders.² Yet, taxes collected from settlers in the County had increased from an average of £760 for the period 1866-1868 to £1,046 for 1869-1870.³

Hopes for a bridge over the Mkomanzi in 1871 came to nought. To their credit, despite transport difficulties, planters in Alexandra County continued to increase agricultural production. Sugar production increased from 1,287 tons in 1871 to 1,309 tons in 1872, while coffee production increased from 22,234 lbs in 1871 to 34,425 lbs in 1872. The County also produced a cotton crop of 14,172 lbs in 1872.⁴ As the author of a petition signed by 52 Alexandra County residents in June 1872, George Robinson claimed increased agricultural production as a pressing reason to expedite the construction of a bridge over the Mkomanzi. The petition received a sympathetic response from Colonial Engineer Patterson, who estimated that it could be constructed for £5,000. However, nothing came of this.⁵ In August 1873, George Robinson renewed his efforts for a bridge by submitting a petition to the new Governor, Benjamin Pine, reminding him that £5,000 had been earmarked for a bridge in the 1872 Estimates. The 32 memorialists expressed great disappointment at the failure of the Government to act as the absence of a bridge was a 'great obstacle to the progress and prosperity' of the County.⁶ Colonial Secretary David Erskine replied that the Governor would sanction the construction of the bridge when he could procure an engineer.⁷ This delay points to the persistent treatment of Alexandra County as a backwater with the need for a bridge superseded by other issues such as the Welborne railway scheme, labour shortage in the Colony, and the Langalibalele affair.⁸

Roads

The success of the diamond fields in the Northern Cape provided a spur to Natal's economy and exports increased rapidly. Sugar found a ready market on the diamond fields while wool shipments from the interior increased in value from £120,776 in 1870 to £389,285 in 1875.⁹ This change in economic fortunes focused attention on transportation in Natal, in particular the poor condition of the Colony's roads and its lack of railways. Poor roads meant that longer time periods were required to move freight which, in turn, resulted in higher freight rates.¹⁰ A *Mercury* editorial on 7 June 1873 condemned ox-wagon transport as 'the very worst known to any civilised country,' adding that it was 'impossible to conceive any description of carriage which involves more delay, risk of breakage, wear and tear and general inconvenience than does conveyance by ox-wagon along the rough, stony, muddy, dusty and heart-breaking roads of Natal.'¹¹

¹ BJT Leverton, 'Government finance,' 122-123.

² CSO 369, No. 1079, 31 May 1870.

³ CSO 381, No. 740, 28 March 1871.

⁴ *Natal Blue Book*, 1871, X 4-5; *Natal Blue Book*, 1872, X 4-5.

⁵ CSO 413, No. 200, 26 June 1872; 2 August 1872.

⁶ CSO 448, No. 2008, 20 August 1873. The annual review of Alexandra County published in the *Mercury* on 18 February 1873, claimed that a bridge was about to be erected over the Mkomanzi. The Estimates for 1874 reflected £5,000 for the Mkomanzi bridge. See: *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XXVI, No. 1453, 20 January 1874.

⁷ *Natal Mercury*, 23 September 1873. The Colonial Engineering Dept Return for 1874 showed that a bridge over the Mkomanzi was sanctioned. See: CSO 486, No. 2703, 22 January 1875.

⁸ Reference is made to these issues later in the chapter.

⁹ BJT Leverton, 'Government finance,' 127 ;159.

¹⁰ BJT Leverton, 'Government finance,' 167.

¹¹ In an editorial on 2 October 1873, the *Mercury* stated that it was 'unfair and improper to invite immigrants to Natal while our roads remain in their present condition.'

Alexandra County magistrate Dunbar Moodie complained to the Colonial Secretary in March 1873 about the condition of the County's roads which he referred to as 'mere wagon tracks.' His observation that overloaded wagons ploughed up the tracks which became impassable in wet weather¹ was echoed by Governor Pine in his address to the opening of the Legislative Council in July 1874. Pine stated that 'wagons ...travel on wheels with narrow tires and when a wheel is chained, going downhill, it acts like a plough and creates a deep furrow. No road, however well made, can stand this usage. Until it is checked, it will be hopeless to keep the roads of the Colony in repair.'² Although fifty African labourers were reported working on roads in Alexandra County in July 1873³ and £1,400 was budgeted for road maintenance and repair in 1874,⁴ there was no improvement and settlers submitted another petition, signed by 51 inhabitants, to the Legislature in September 1874.⁵ Arising out of these concerns, John Robinson moved for the appointment of a Select Committee to consider and report on measures to bring about relief from the existing transport conditions. He cited in particular Alexandra and Victoria counties where 'hundreds of tons of sugar had been locked up for weeks and months' because of transport difficulties and feared that Natal would lose business as a result of competition from the Cape.⁶

JB Aiken and the Railway Bill

Neglect of the South Coast's infrastructural needs may, to some extent, have been ascribed to its lack of direct political representation. This changed with the passage of Law 1 of 1873 which increased the proportion of coastal representation in the Legislative Council from a third to two-fifths, and included the election of one representative from Alexandra and Alfred counties.⁷ James Burnett Aiken of Maryville Estate at Ifafa put his name forward as a candidate. Endorsed by just 35 of the local eligible voters, his candidacy was unopposed.⁸ At a public meeting in Umzinto he indicated, inter alia, that the promotion of coastal shipping from the Mpambinyoni and the Mzimkulu were foremost among his political objectives.⁹ The *Witness* described him as a 'shrewd and energetic colonist who has a large and varied experience....He is as anxious for railways as any man in this Colony ...'¹⁰ The *Mercury* noted that Aiken's constituency was one of the largest in Natal and that 'he had his work cut out for him.'¹¹ Though a newcomer to the Council, Aiken quickly showed that he was not reticent about participating in the cut and thrust of debate, his assertive style earning him editorial comment from the *Mercury* which described him as 'pertinacity itself when fairly roused into opposition.... The keenness with which the gentleman

¹ CSO 436, No. 857, 31 March 1873. Exasperation with the condition of roads was also reflected in a petition signed by 222 Durban residents who asked that the road through Addington to the Point be hardened. See: CSO 454, No. 2601, 3 November 1873.

² *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XXVI, No. 1483, 31 July 1874. Sugar planter Ralph Clarence of Clare Estate urged the use of lighter wagons limited to 2½ tons and not six tons as the solution and deplored the cruelty to oxen being whipped to drag overloaded wagons. See: Letter to the Editor, *Natal Mercury*, 17 February 1874.

³ CSO 445, No. 1725, 8 July 1873.

⁴ *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XXVI, No. 1453, 20 January 1874.

⁵ *Natal Witness*, 25 September 1874. With reference to its failure to develop a harbour on the Mkomanzi and to build a bridge, a report in the *Mercury* on 21 November 1874 accused the Legislative Council of 'passing laws that are seldom carried out, voting sums of money that are never spent for the purposes for which they were intended.'

⁶ *Natal Witness*, 7 August 1874.

⁷ BJT Leverton, 'Government finance,' 156; *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XXV, No. 1421, 15 July 1873.

⁸ *Natal Mercury*, 14 August 1873. In comparison, John Hunt of Durban Borough received 207 signatures of endorsement for his candidacy. From that the fledgling state of electioneering on the South Coast may be gauged. See: *Natal Mercury*, 9 October 1873.

⁹ *Natal Mercury*, 30 August 1873.

¹⁰ *Natal Witness*, 12 August 1873; *Government Notice* No. 190, 1 September 1873.

¹¹ *Natal Mercury*, 4 September 1873.

follows his scent when he thinks he has got it, is worthy of a better cause than that now espoused by him.¹

The ‘cause’ in question was railway development. Aiken made his mark during proceedings of the Railway Bill which preoccupied the Council from 27 October to 15 December 1873. As matters subsequently turned out, Aiken would be proved correct. Railway agitation had reached fever pitch in the election of 1873. At the civic reception held in Durban to mark his arrival as Natal’s new Governor, Pine was informed that railways and labour (the renewal of Indian indentured immigration) were the essential needs of the Colony.² Ten of the fifteen elected members of the Council supported the Welborne railway scheme which had been approved in 1872. In terms of that scheme, 345 miles of railway was to be constructed from Durban to Newcastle, and from Durban to the Mkomanzi river by the Welborne Company which was required to deposit £400,000 as security. In return, the Company was to receive a subsidy of £40,000 per annum for twenty years and 2,5 million acres of Crown land. Reservations about the scheme on the part of the Secretary of State for Colonies, Lord Kimberley, as well as the difficulty that Welborne appeared to be having in raising the deposit, resulted in the tabling of a new Bill on railways.³

Aiken was castigated by Charles Barter, Ralph Ridley and John Robinson for being ‘obstructive’ during the initial readings of the Bill. This was because of his relentless questioning of aspects of the Bill. One was that the line to the South Coast was to be reduced in length to reach only Isipingo. Aiken was supported by JR Saunders of Victoria County who also felt that the South Coast would be ‘left in the lurch’ as a result.⁴ The second issue was the grant of 2,5 million acres of Crown land to the Welborne Company, mainly in Alfred County. Aiken, supported by Saunders, refused to relent as both men argued that it was an ill-advised concession that could result in the Company taking over the South Coast. Aiken’s attempt to amend this clause was defeated by nine votes to four.⁵ Their opposition was reproved by both the *Mercury* and the *Witness* as threatening the passage of the Bill.⁶ When the Third Reading of the Bill was put to the vote on 21 November 1873, Aiken opposed it again, citing ‘a dangerous position in disposing of the Crown lands’ which he feared might be converted into ‘kaffir locations.’⁷ Confident that the Welborne scheme would receive the assent of the British Government, following the scheme’s formal approval on 15 December 1873 by the Natal Legislative Council, the *Witness* scorned Aiken as representing only some thirty voters in Alexandra County and having ‘an inexplicable hatred to the leasing clauses in the Bill.’⁸

But a change of government in Britain, together with concerns about the rights of the Zulu following the Langalibalele affair,⁹ frustrated railway development under the Welborne scheme. The new Secretary of

¹*Natal Mercury*, 1 November 1873.

²*Natal Mercury*, 17 July 1873. In an editorial on 20 March 1873, the *Mercury* stated: ‘What Natal has wanted for years, still wants, and will continue to want until they are provided may be stated in two words – Coolies and Railways.’

³DH Heydenrych, ‘Natalsespoorwegbeleid,’ 51-52; 54-55.

⁴CSO 464, Proceedings in Committee of the Whole House on the Railway Bill No. 1, 1873, 2-4; ‘Mercator,’ in a Letter to the Editor, *Natal Mercury*, 6 November 1873, accused Aiken of being an ‘antagonist of railways.’

⁵CSO 464, Proceedings in Committee of the Whole House on the Railway Bill, 11 November 1873, 18.

⁶*Natal Mercury*, 13 November 1873; *Natal Witness*, 14 November 1873.

⁷*Natal Witness*, 25 November 1873.

⁸*Natal Witness*, 6 January 1874.

⁹A crisis developed in 1873 when the Resident Magistrate of Estcourt instructed the local chief, Langalibalele, to hand in all unregistered firearms which his Hlubi tribesmen had obtained as a result of working on the Griqualand West diamond fields. Langalibalele had failed to comply with the law on gun registration and had refused an order to appear before Shepstone, the Secretary for Native Affairs. Sensing that he was about to be deprived of his land,

State for Colonies, Lord Carnarvon, opposed the Bill because of the financial burden that it would place on the Colony and he was also against land concessions. Aiken thus found support at the highest level. Carnarvon was concerned that the Company could impose ‘a heavy rent’ on African inhabitants because, as he argued, those lands were ‘useless to the Company unless it could be made to yield a money profit.’¹ The scheme was officially dead in December 1874 when Carnarvon declared that the British Government would not assent to it.² While most of Natal was dismayed at the news,³ for the South Coast, which had been excluded from the scheme, this raised hopes of a solution to the problem of facilitating access to Durban. But it would be a long wait before anything materialized.

Seawise transport

Although an 1870 report on Alexandra County noted that the stonework at the mouth of the Mkomanzi was ‘gradually disappearing,’⁴ optimism about the prospects for a harbour did not fade. Following his tour of the South Coast in 1870, John Robinson remained convinced that a harbour on the Mkomanzi could become a reality.⁵ In 1871, Durban Port Captain Alex Airth inspected the coast as far as Ifafa for shipping prospects but little came of that visit.⁶ Worse still, after inspecting the mouth of the Mkomanzi in 1872, Surveyor-General Dr Sutherland informed the Colonial Secretary that until South Barrow (Umkomaas) had grown in size, there was no urgency to tackle the project.⁷ But the annual summary of news from Alexandra County for 1872 noted that a steam launch was being constructed which, in due course, would provide a service from the Mkomanzi.⁸

The *Anthony Musgrave* made its first voyage to the Mkomanzi on 8 August 1873, discharging fourteen tons of cargo and taking thirty tons of sugar back to Durban. The ship transported in six hours what would have taken fourteen wagons at least four days to do.⁹ The *Anthony Musgrave* made three more successful trips to the Mkomanzi before her keel struck rocks in the river mouth and caused her to be stranded near

Langalibalele and a number of his people fled to Basutoland pursued by a force of settler volunteers. Langalibalele was subsequently deposed from his chieftom, captured and put on trial in January 1874 for treason and rebellion. He was found guilty and banished for life to the Cape Colony. The affair generated adverse publicity in Britain thanks to the efforts of Bishop Colenso and the Aborigines Protection society. Colenso motivated an appeal of the sentence based on procedural irregularities, the absence of any evidence proving a Hlubi rebellion and that the sentence exceeded the powers conferred on the Governor, Pine, as the ‘Supreme Chief.’ Politically the Langalibalele affair proved ruinous to Natal’s pursuit of responsible government at that time since it raised grave concerns in the Colonial Office as to the Colony’s capacity to exercise responsibility over its own administration and those of the African majority. See: W Guest, ‘Colonists, confederation and constitutional change,’ in Duminy and Guest, *Natal and Zululand from earliest times to 1910*, 151-156; J Guy, *The Heretic*, 205-210.

¹*Natal Witness*, 4 December 1874 citing correspondence from Sir Julian Pauncefote of the Colonial Office to Welborne.

²DH Heydenrych, ‘Natalse spoorwegbeleid,’ 60-61.

³*Natal Mercury* and *Natal Witness*, 8 December 1874.

⁴*Natal Mercury*, 22 January 1870.

⁵J Robinson, *Notes on Natal*, 107.

⁶*Natal Mercury*, 4 February 1871.

⁷CSO 426, No. 2403, 7 December 1872. Sutherland’s reference to ‘small sums’ was with regard to the amount of £222 in the Public Works Budget of 1872 earmarked for work at the mouth of the Mkomanzi. See: *Natal Blue Book*, 1872, H2-3.

⁸Published in *Natal Mercury*, 18 February 1873. There was also renewed interest in navigation prospects on the Mzimkulu river in the light of railway companies being offered land concessions in Alfred County. The *Mercury* (4 January 1871) speculated that settlers could be attracted to the area and that the close proximity of the marble quarries to the river could spur the promotion of river shipping.

⁹*Natal Mercury*, 12 August 1873.

the shore.¹ Uninsured, she was deemed beyond salvage and abandoned as a total wreck in February 1874.² 1874.² In expressing sympathy with the ‘suffering district,’ the *Mercury* urged that ‘every nerve should be strained to remove whatever obstacles may exist’ to enable the Mkomanzi to become a port from which produce could be sent ‘with regularity and certainty.’³ The setback which the loss of the *Anthony Musgrave* represented to Alexandra County produced two positive developments, however: £1,500 was allocated for work on the mouth of the Mkomanzi, which commenced in June 1874,⁴ and an informal commission was established, comprising of John Milne, Durban’s harbour engineer from 1849-1858, and local residents Alex Brander, John Bazley, George Robinson, and Lewis Reynolds to investigate suitable points for beach shipping.⁵

The commissioners inspected five river mouths between the Mkomanzi and the Mzimkulu and in March 1874 settled on the Mpambinyoni at Scottburgh as most suitable for beach-based shipping.⁶ They engaged the services of Captain G Walker of East London to oversee the conveyance of cargo through the surf off the Mpambinyoni river mouth to a waiting ship.⁷ It was also announced that a shipping company was being formed and that regular seawise transport from the Mpambinyoni would commence in August.⁸ The need to establish reliable alternative transportation had become urgent as the cost of overland transport to Durban, at £7 per ton, had become ‘ruinous,’ as one local correspondent noted.⁹ This noted.⁹ This was in part due to the fact that red water disease had decimated cattle herds and resulted in a dire shortage of draught animals which had caused freight rates to increase by 100 percent.¹⁰

The formation of the Alexandra Shipping Company in July 1874 marked the determination of locals in Alexandra County to resolve their transport difficulties. Field Cornet Alex Brander JP of Umzinto was managing director of the company. Directors included Lewis Reynolds JP, the new owner of Umzinto Sugar Estate; James Aiken MLC, of Maryville Estate in Ifafa; Robert Black who had business interests in Umzinto, Equeefa Estate and in Durban; A Fass of Pietermaritzburg and JR Couper, manager of Glasgow Natal Sugar in the Tugela Division of Victoria County.¹¹ The involvement of Couper reflected the fact that the North Coast was similarly troubled by transport difficulties and that he saw potential in the Alexandra Shipping Company as providing some relief. In October 1874, a petition signed by Couper and fifty other planters of the Tugela Division was submitted to the Legislative Council requesting ‘assistance in furthering any scheme which may have for its object the shipping of produce direct from the beach north of the Umvoti river.’¹²

¹The voyages were reported in the 16 September, 30 October and 20 November 1873 issues of the *Natal Mercury*. See also: *Natal Mercury*, 25 November 1873; CSO 458, No. 3003, 22 December 1873.

²*Natal Mercury*, 17 February 1874.

³*Natal Mercury*, 13 and 18 December 1873.

⁴*Natal Blue Book*, 1874, H4. The expenditure involved was in line with Dr Sutherland’s earlier recommendation.

⁵*Natal Mercury*, 18 December 1873.

⁶ On 26 March 1874, Black and Baxter, the Umzinto store owners, stated in a letter to James Walker, formerly the manager of Umzinto Sugar Estate, that they were ‘now almost certain’ to have their produce shipped from the Mpambinyoni. See: James Walker Family Papers, File 17, KCM 03/3/17/8; *Natal Mercury*, 27 May 1874.

⁷*Natal Witness*, 26 May 1874. Captain Walker actually swam out through the surf to the backline waves to prove the ease with which cargo could be sent out to a vessel. See: *Natal Mercury*, 27 May 1874.

⁸*Natal Mercury*, 27 May 1874.

⁹*Natal Mercury*, 17 February 1874.

¹⁰*Natal Mercury*, 31 January 1874; 12 May 1874; *Natal Witness*, 26 May 1874.

¹¹CSO 511, No. 869, Alexandra Shipping Company, Limited.

¹²Natal Legislative Council, *Votes and Proceedings*, Vol. XXII, 1874, 279. The upper North Coast, like the South Coast, was excluded from the proposed railway development in that the rail head was planned to extend only as far as Verulam.

On 30 September 1874, Brander, in his capacity as managing director of the Alexandra Shipping Company, submitted a petition to the Legislative Council requesting financial aid.¹ This coincided with a report by a Select Committee on transport which had been published on 29 September and which, after noting that ‘no provision was made in the system of railways... for the business and produce of Alexandra and Alfred Counties,’ recommended ‘liberal Government assistance’ to the ‘establishment of shipping facilities at certain points along the seaboard (for) the conveyance of produce.’² The Select Committee, when it reconvened, was unanimous in its recommendation that a loan of £3,000 at five percent interest be provided to Alexandra Shipping; and that for a period of two years a subsidy of ten shillings per ton be paid to the Company for produce it shipped to and from the coasts of Alexandra and Alfred counties and the coast of the Tugela Division.³ The Legislative Council approved these recommendations on 18 November 1874.⁴

It seemed that the South Coast would finally address its transport woes. In its prospectus, Alexandra Shipping confidently asserted that over a six month period it had proved that merchandise could be ‘safely, speedily and economically shipped from and landed on the beach at Scottsburg’ and that once it had subscribed the requisite capital, a ‘a suitable coasting steamer’ would be purchased from England.⁵ Seawise shipping had commenced from the Mpambinyoni in August 1874 when a cutter,⁶ the *Phoebe*, successfully transported 419 bags of sugar to Durban after loading them from the beach at Scottburgh.⁷ Another vessel, the eighty ton *Adonis*, also made regular visits to Scottburgh, proving as a *Mercury* report stated, that such shipping was ‘quite practicable.’⁸ But just as seawise shipping appeared to be succeeding, reduced cattle disease resulted in wagon transporters reducing their prices by 25 percent. Several sugar planters opted for the overland transport routes, thereby dealing a setback to Alexandra Shipping.⁹ Although the *Adonis* made occasional trips to Scottburgh during 1875, Alexandra Shipping’s warehouse at Scottburgh was reportedly languishing.¹⁰

When Sir Garnet Wolseley, who was Administrator of Natal in 1875, visited Umzinto in July, Alexander Brander chaired a public meeting in which he stressed that while roads, railways and bridges were being built in other parts of Natal, the lack of this in Alexandra County threatened the economic security of the area.¹¹ By the end of 1875, the shipping enterprise quietly passed into the hands of Messrs Crowder of Durban.¹² Promises of improved roads and works at the mouth of the Mkomanzi failed to materialise.¹³ Of £1,500 budgeted for 1874, only £283 had been spent in over a year.¹⁴ The lack of Government interest in seawise shipping was reflected in the Colonial Secretary’s negative response in February 1876 to a new request for aid in establishing seawise shipping between the Mkomanzi and Durban which was submitted by 178 planters and merchants of Durban and Alexandra counties.¹⁵ Preoccupation with railway

¹Natal Legislative Council, *Votes and Proceedings*, Vol. XXII, 1874, 184.

²*Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XXVI, No. 1492, 29 September 1874.

³*Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XXVI, No. 1500, 10 November 1874, LC No. 18.

⁴Natal Legislative Council, *Votes and Proceedings*, 1874, 439.

⁵CSO 511, No. 869, 1875, 1-2.

⁶A cutter is a small single-masted boat with two or more headsails.

⁷*Natal Mercury*, 29 August 1874.

⁸*Natal Mercury*, 26 January 1875.

⁹*Natal Mercury*, 26 January 1875.

¹⁰*Natal Mercury*, 2 February, 16 November and 26 January 1875.

¹¹*Natal Mercury*, 3 August 1875

¹²*Natal Mercury*, 22 January 1876.

¹³The Resident Magistrate’s report for 1876 for Alexandra County noted the poor condition of roads and in particular the non-existence of roads between the Mzumbe and Mzimkulu rivers. See: *Natal Blue Book*, 1876, JJ11.

¹⁴*Natal Blue Book*, 1875, H3.

¹⁵CSO 534, No. 3375, 29 February 1876; CSO 534, No. 3373, 27 November 1875.

development, which had increased the public debt considerably, and the fact that Alexandra Shipping Company had not realized much success, in all probability, influenced official thinking.

Communication with Durban remained hostage to geography and the colonial budget. The Resident Magistrate's report for 1879 noted that there were no public works taking place in the County.¹ With resources concentrated on the Zulu war of 1879, it meant that promises of road and bridge development had petered out.² Hopes of seawise transport had all but disappeared. Early in 1877, the boats of the Alexandra Shipping Company were reported 'lying on the beach bleaching in the sun.'³ In April that year a petition winding up the Company was filed in the Supreme Court.⁴ The *Adonis*, which had made coastal calls in 1875 and 1876, spent most of 1877 in Durban harbour. A new ship, TN Price's 47 ton *Somtseu*, which arrived from London in May 1878,⁵ made one trip to Scottburgh in June of that year.⁶ But there were no other South Coast callers for the rest of the decade.

In 1878 when South Coast MLC William Hawkesworth asked for an improvement in the postal service, the official response was that the demand was not high enough to support a tri-weekly post cart.⁷ In the race to establish telegraphic communications, the South Coast lagged behind the North Coast. In his address to the opening of the Legislature on 6 November 1879, Governor Bulwer noted that the telegraphic line from Durban had already progressed as far as Stanger.⁸ Seven years later, in 1886, the magistrate's report for Alexandra County noted that the telegraph line to Umzinto was under construction.⁹

Sugar and Labour production

Peter Richardson has remarked that following the speculative growth of the sugar industry up to the recession of the mid-1860s, 'a more highly capitalized and extensive system of large milling and planting concerns' emerged during the 1870s. In crushing cane for outside growers, they displayed features of the central milling system which would dominate the industry in later years.¹⁰ William Campbell of Muckleneuk argued in 1874 that central milling was being forced on planters because of 'the effect of competition and the exhaustion of the soil.' He believed that acceptance of the process was logical as it was necessary to separate the business of the grower from that of the manufacturer.¹¹ Three pioneers of this larger, corporative approach to sugar emerged on the South Coast during the second half of the 1870s. They were Lewis Reynolds, William Hawkesworth, and Samuel Crookes.

¹*Natal Blue Book*, 1879, JJ14. 'There is little or nothing new out this way,' noted a correspondent from Umkomaas in the *Mercury* on 3 May 1878.

² CSO 737, No. 4724, 15 January 1880, Colonial Treasurer, JT Polkinghorne, put the total cost of the war at £76,263.

³*Natal Mercury*, 1 February 1877.

⁴*Natal Mercury*, 12 April 1877.

⁵*Natal Witness*, 16 May 1878.

⁶*Natal Witness*, 25 June 1878. The *Somtseu* made two trips to Port St Johns in 1878. See: *Natal Witness*, 29 August and 31 October 1878.

⁷*Natal Mercury*, 10 August 1878.

⁸ CSO 728, No. 5190, Encl., 6. In April 1878 the telegraphic line from Cape Town via King Williamstown reached Pietermaritzburg and in 1879 Durban was connected with London via Aden. See: BA Le Cordeur, 'Natal, the Cape and the Indian Ocean 1846-1880,' *Journal of African History*, VII, 2, 1966, 249,261; *Natal Mercury*, 23 April 1878.

⁹*Supplement to the Blue Book for the Colony of Natal*, 1886, B14.

¹⁰ P Richardson, 'The Natal Sugar Industry, 1849-1905: an interpretative essay,' in Guest and Sellers (eds.), *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony*, 192-193.

¹¹ Article titled 'Central Sugar Factories,' in *Natal Almanac*, 1875, 127-128.

By purchasing the 8,500 acre Umzinto Sugar Estate, including its mill and machinery in March 1874 for a then cut-price £5,000,¹ Lewis Reynolds established a platform for what would become one of the giants of the sugar industry. After his death on 18 September 1875,² his brother, Thomas of Oaklands Estate in Victoria County, together with Thomas' sons Frank and Charles, established T Reynolds and Sons in 1877. Based in Esperanza, they consolidated their holdings by absorbing smaller estates such as William Grant's Ifafa Estate, William Arbuthnot's Greenwood Estate, and the 4,500 acre Equeefa Estate so that by 1907 Reynolds Bros, as the firm became known from 1892, commanded 13,134 acres.³ In March 1875, Hawksworth brothers opened the Equeefa Central Mill on their Hawkwood Estate. It boasted a 36 horsepower engine, one of the largest in the colony, which could turn out four tons of sugar every twelve hours. When John Robinson visited Equeefa Valley in 1870, he noted that none of the estates there was older than three years,⁴ and predicted that Hawkwood would flourish.⁵

The third pioneer of an expanded sugar operation was Samuel Crookes, who was just 21 when he arrived in Natal in September 1860 with his brother Charles. Unskilled, he initially took a job as labourer on a North Coast estate. After completing an apprenticeship as a wheelwright, he moved to the South Coast where he rented a site from Thomas Landers for his wagon-building business. In November 1865 he began planting cane.⁶ In 1876 with the dissolution of the partnership between Joshua, Joseph and Samuel Landers of Renishaw in the Mpambinyoni valley,⁷ Crookes purchased Renishaw which he added to his Ellingham estate.⁸ By 1882 Crookes had added Thomas Landers' Maryland Estate and Charles Sinclair's Restalrig Estate, which were also in the Mpambinyoni valley.⁹ The three estates formed the basis of Crookes Bros Limited which, like Reynolds Bros, came to dominate the South Coast before the turn of the century.

Aside from capital, the other problem that planters faced was the labour shortage across the Colony. This crisis became acute as Natal's economy shook off the effects of the depressed years of the 1860s and benefited from increased trade resulting from the opening of the diamond fields. Indentured immigration had been terminated in 1866 because of the economic downturn and by 1870 fewer Indians were available to planters as their contracts came to an end. Planters in Durban and Verulam held meetings to discuss the labour situation. Suggestions varied from offering inducements to Indians to remain on plantations to procuring Amatonga labour by sea from Delegeo Bay.¹⁰ The situation was exacerbated in 1871 by the withdrawal of 250 Indians from the labour market because they had chosen to claim their free return passage to India.¹¹ In Victoria County, sixteen planters formed a Labour League in an effort to find a solution to the labour shortage.¹² In August 1871 the Chamber of Agriculture resolved that steps should

¹*Natal Mercury*, 14 April 1874.

²*Natal Mercury*, 23 September 1875. Lewis Reynolds was held in high esteem by his fellow residents of Alexandra County. In his funeral eulogy, the Reverend Barker compared Reynolds to James Arbuthnot referring to them as 'exemplary men' of the County. See: *Natal Mercury*, 30 September 1875.

³ RF Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 316, 324-325; P Richardson, 'The Natal Sugar Industry in the Nineteenth Century,' in Beinart, Delius and Trapido, (eds.), *Putting a plough to the ground*, 155.

⁴ William Arbuthnot and John Kirkman were neighbours of Hawkwood. See: CSO 463, No. 379, 26 January 1874.

⁵*Natal Mercury*, 11 March 1875; 22 January 1870; J Robinson, *Notes on Natal*, 122-123. In Victoria County, the Effingham Central Sugar mill opened at Avoca in July 1878. See: *Natal Mercury*, 8 July 1878.

⁶A Hocking, *Renishaw*, 50, 59, 62.

⁷*Natal Mercury*, 6 July 1876.

⁸ RF Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 320.

⁹ RF Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 321.

¹⁰*Natal Mercury*, 1 September, 8 September, 18 October 1870.

¹¹*Natal Mercury*, 10 January 1871. A decrease in the number of Indians on plantations in Alexandra County was also noted. See: *Natal Mercury*, 17 February 1871.

¹²*Natal Mercury*, 11 April 1871.

be taken for the re-introduction of indentured labour.¹ From Alexandra County it was noted in 1871 that 'the capriciousness and want of continuous labour (had) become the... great evil of the district.' The result was that only one operation at a time, either milling or weeding and planting, could be carried on plantations.² In late 1872 it was reported that the cry for labour was coming 'from all parts' of Natal.³ John John Bazley of Ifafa emphasized the seriousness of the situation when he stated that 'no man can keep up with sugar without a very great alteration in the labour question.'⁴

A specific insight into the plight of planters is provided by correspondence between William Hawksworth of Hawkswood Estate and the Colonial Secretary. Hawksworth cited Governor Pine's claim in his address to the opening of the Legislature in October 1873 that as the Supreme Chief of the Zulu he had the right to order them out to work where required.⁵ Accordingly, Hawksworth asked that the Resident Magistrate compel fifty Africans who resided on Hawkswood to enter employment as he had placed an order for a mill and required African labour to erect it. The negative response of the Government enraged Hawksworth.⁶ The County's correspondent remarked in the *Mercury* that 'this want of labour and transport not only retard operations and paralyse progress, but they damp a man's energy and cow his spirit.'⁷ When Sir Garnet Wolseley paid a fleeting visit to Umzinto in July 1875, Alexander Brander stated at a public meeting in Wolseley's honour that the inhabitants of Alexandra County looked forward to regular Indian immigration for labour as 'the native population has almost entirely failed us.'⁸

Despite the vagaries of labour supply, drought conditions in 1873 and floods in March 1874,⁹ sugar production averaged 1,200 tons for the years 1871 to 1875 in Alexandra County.¹⁰ The re-introduction of indentured Indian labour in July 1874 would ease the labour situation in the long term, but a report in late 1875 noted that 'the supply of coolies is not yet nearly equal to the requirements of planters.'¹¹ In his Annual Report for 1878 Alexandra County Resident Magistrate Gould Arthur Lucas remarked that the use of indentured labour exceeded that of African labour, with the former found to be more reliable, less troublesome, and not much more expensive.¹²

Commercial life

Commercial developments reflected the growth of the County. In 1878 Umzinto and Umkomaas each had three supply stores; there were two in Ifafa, and one each at Equeefa and Umtwalumi. Both Umzinto and Umkomaas had licenced houses of accommodation.¹³ By 1879 there were seventeen sugar mills, three corn/grist mills, and two distilleries in the County which produced 8,000 gallons of rum in that year.

¹*Natal Mercury*, 22 August 1871.

²*Natal Mercury*, 17 February, 1871.

³*Natal Mercury*, 16 November 1872.

⁴ Letter to the Editor, *Natal Mercury*, 13 May 1873. 'The grand want is labour,' reported the County correspondent in the *Mercury* on 31 January 1874.

⁵*Natal Witness*, 10 October 1873.

⁶ CSO 455, No. 2726, 15 November 1873; CSO 463, No. 379, 26 January 1874.

⁷*Natal Mercury*, 17 February 1874.

⁸*Natal Mercury*, 3 August 1875. John Lambert states in *Betrayed Trust: Africans and the State in colonial Natal* (18) that until the 1870s Africans enjoyed a ready market for their produce which meant that fewer of them were dependent on wages.

⁹*Natal Mercury*, 31 January and 10 March 1874.

¹⁰*Natal Blue Books*: 1871, X4-5; 1872, X4-5; 1873: X4-5; 1874: X4-5; 1875, X4-5.

¹¹*Natal Mercury*, 16 October 1875.

¹²*Natal Blue Book*, 1878, JJ19. The Indian population increased from 430 in 1874 to 1,589 in 1878 in Alexandra County. See: *Natal Blue Books*: 1874, R10; 1879, V4. In 1879, Equeefa Estate employed 187 indentured Indians. See: RF Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 314. Canonby employed 200 Indians. See: CSO 684, No. 621, 29 January 1879.

¹³*Natal Blue Book*, 1878, JJ19.

Crop production realized 1,377 tons of sugar (down by nearly a third from the 1878 crop of 1,941 tons because of drought), 7, 235 lbs of coffee, 2,500 lbs of tobacco and 13,800 lbs of cayenne pepper.¹ Agricultural growth was due in part to the increasing use of indentured Indian labour. By 1879 there were 1,502 Indians dwelling in the County.² Contract-expired Indians were eligible to acquire land. By 1874, two such Indians had made enquiries about land in the Umzinto area. Goodoo Saib, who had completed ten years of indenture in 1874, enquired about exchanging his return passage for a piece of land, as he was entitled to do in terms of section 51 of Law 2 of 1870. He was informed that he was entitled to land to the value of between £8 and £9, which was the cost of a return passage. A similar enquiry was filed by Cassim Saib.³ However, the only recorded grants of Crown land were in 1883 near Braemar in Alexandra County to 52 Indians who had indentured between 1860 and 1866.⁴

Political representation

As the first representative of the South Coast (1873-1877), JB Aiken was a controversial figure whose most significant contribution to the region, arguably, was made after his term in public office had ended.⁵ Addressing a public meeting in Umzinto shortly after his election, he described himself as a struggling planter who felt ‘very diffident and unworthy’ to represent the South Coast and that he would have preferred Alexander Brander to have been the candidate.⁶ Yet in the Legislative Council he displayed a sound knowledge of parliamentary procedure and assumed prominence in the business of the chamber.⁷ But his fellow Council representatives found him to be a source of annoyance, particularly during the marathon Committee sessions on the Railway Bill of 1873 when he persisted in his attempts to revise key clauses. A frustrated Ralph Ridley, editor of the *Witness*, branded Aiken ‘obstructive.’ John Robinson MLC also took exception to Aiken’s unrelenting questioning, saying that it seemed ‘impossible to satisfy his insatiable craving’ for information ‘or to satisfy his scruples.’⁸

Aiken’s loquacious tendency also resulted in him making contradictory statements on settlers’ prospects in the South Coast. During the Railway Bill debate, he cast doubt over the worth of the South Coast as a place of settlement. He spoke of ‘the improbability of much colonisation in Alexandra and Alfred Counties except by capitalists and that on the coast.’ He described most of the land in the two counties as ‘too rugged and wild for European colonisation and fit only for location of kafirs.’ He was castigated by Ridley who wanted Aiken to spell out which of his statements on region he would like the House to ‘swallow’ as Aiken had previously lauded Alexandra County as possessing ‘lands unequalled by any in the world for the growth of sugar.’ Aiken did not respond.⁹

While these contradictory statements in a committee meeting in Pietermaritzburg went unnoticed by the press, Aiken’s remarks at a dinner banquet in Umzinto on 3 June 1874 earned him damning editorial commentary in the local press. The *Mercury* gave Aiken’s two hour speech extensive coverage, because,

¹*Natal Blue Books*, 1878: AA4-5; 1879: B26-30; AA4-5. The Alexandra correspondent for the *Natal Witness* reported on 5 October 1878 that there was ‘not a particle of green’ in the County and that the rivers were drying up.

²*Natal Blue Book*, 1879, V4. A medical circle for Indians was established in the Umzinto area in April 1876 headed, initially, by Dr Joseph Hooper until September when Dr Lancelot Booth was appointed. See: CSO 548, No. 964, 20 April 1876 and *Natal Mercury*, 28 September 1876.

³CSO 495, No. 3577, 23 October 1874; No. 3578, 5 November 1874.

⁴JB Brain, ‘Natal’s Indians, 1860-1910,’ in Duminy and Guest, (eds.), *Natal and Zululand from earliest times*, 251. The option to exchange a free return passage to India for land in Natal was scrapped in 1874.

⁵ Aiken’s initiative in opening the Mzimkulu to shipping is discussed in the final part of this chapter.

⁶*Natal Mercury*, 2 September 1873.

⁷ See account of Council business in the *Mercury* of 25 October 1873.

⁸CSO 464, Proceedings in Committee of the Whole House on the Railway Bill No. 1, 1873, 27 October, 2,4.

⁹*Ibid.*, 10 November 1873, 17.

it claimed, ‘Alexandra suffers much from unfortunate isolation.’¹ In his wide-ranging address Aiken made derogatory remarks about ‘up-country men and up-country doings,’ and about newspaper editors (referring to Ridley and Robinson, editors of the *Witness* and *Mercury* respectively) who, he said, should be placed ‘under considerable restraint’ as he found it unacceptable that they had such power to influence public opinion. Ridley and Robinson were incensed by Aiken’s claim to being worthy of a seat on the executive of a future cabinet headed by Charles Barter.² The *Mercury* dismissed Aiken as ‘thin-skinned’ and ‘unfit for public life.’ His ‘detraction and abuse for the men he worked with...materially injured his usefulness as a member and prejudiced the cause of his constituents.’ It urged Alexandra County to guard ‘against being betrayed into a semblance of an antagonistic attitude towards the Colony at large.’³

The *Witness* condemned Aiken’s speech as ‘bunkum’ and ‘gasconading conceit.’ Accusing him of ‘swaggering disdain for correctness,’ it reminded him that the up-country folk had never spoken against expenditure on making the Mkomanzi navigable. In satirical vein the *Witness* mocked Aiken’s claims to greatness: ‘Often lately it has been asserted that the hour would bring the man, yet few thought the fulfillment was so near at hand.’ Referring to Alexandra County, the editorial continued: ‘It is in this neglected Nazareth that the great teacher and leader of South Africa has been found. How grateful the heart of every colonist ought to be that in this her hour of direst need, Natal has found her savior.’⁴ Aiken offered no response to these withering critiques. A year later Natal’s Administrator, Sir Garnet Wolseley, in a diary entry, described Aiken as ‘a most silly and vain fellow.’⁵

Aiken’s political career as the South Coast’s first representative slipped into obscurity after its tumultuous first year. In fairness, though, he and the rest of the Legislature took a back seat in political terms following the arrival of Wolseley in April 1875. As Basil Leverton has remarked, Wolseley’s brief seemed to be to reduce control of the Legislature while he examined ways of settling “Native policy” in the wake of the Langalibalele affair.⁶ In any event, local politics took a backseat because of the presence of Wolseley, Britain’s top soldier at the time who, by means of champagne, sherry, dinner invitations and flattery managed to push through political reforms which strengthened the Executive, thereby serving the ends of Carnarvon’s confederation plans for Southern Africa.⁷ Remarking on the dearth of news about the South Coast in 1876, a *Mercury* correspondent wrote that he was afraid readers would have ‘forgotten there is such a place as the Lower Umkomaas.’⁸ In March 1877, however, Aiken was instrumental in the formation of the Alexandra Association. Modeled on the Victoria Planters Association, which had been established a short while before, it was intended to embrace all residents. Aiken was installed as president with William Hawksworth as secretary.⁹ In due course the Association evolved into the Umzinto Agricultural Society.¹⁰

¹*Natal Mercury*, 11 June 1874.

²*Natal Witness*, 16 June 1874; *Natal Mercury*, 11 June 1874.

³*Natal Mercury*, 11 June 1874.

⁴*Natal Witness*, 16 June 1874.

⁵ A Preston (ed.), *The South African Diaries of Sir Garnet Wolseley*, 229.

⁶ BJT Leverton, ‘Government finance,’ 172-173.

⁷ W Guest, ‘Colonists, confederation and constitutional change,’ in Duminy and Guest (eds.), *Natal and Zululand from earliest times*, 158-160. Confederation, as John Robinson saw it, meant relieving the home government from its responsibilities by devolving greater self-government on the colonists (*Natal Mercury*, 19 November 1874). From 1874, the Secretary of State for Colonies, Carnarvon, attempted to pursue confederation within southern Africa as a means of consolidating imperial interests and bringing about political stability within the region.

⁸*Natal Mercury*, 30 December 1876.

⁹*Natal Witness*, 27 March 1877.

¹⁰ RE Gordon, *Honour without riches: the story of an Archibald family*, (Durban, 1978), 252.

The insolvency of Aiken's Maryville sugar estate obliged him to resign his seat on the Council in April 1877.¹ William Hawksworth of Equeefa Estate, as the sole candidate, was duly declared the new MLC for Alexandra and Alfred Counties.² Described as 'unobtrusive' by the *Mercury*,³ Hawksworth's contribution to the political profile of the South Coast was negligible. Indeed his only contribution within the Council was in July 1877 when he participated briefly in a debate concerning drunkenness amongst Africans, advocating the removal of liquor licences from stores.⁴ Whereas elections in the rest of the Colony took place in October, the election on the South Coast had to be deferred by 60 days as a result of an administrative oversight in which the Resident Magistrate did not receive the election requisition papers timeously.⁵ William Arbuthnot opposed Hawksworth for the seat but in the election held in December, Hawksworth prevailed by a single vote - 35 votes to 34.⁶ The poll of less than 40 percent, although poor for a constituency which for years had complained of its lack of direct political representation, was in keeping with a general lack of political interest around the Colony at that time.⁷

Whereas during Aiken's tenure the South Coast experienced a short-lived media prominence, albeit perhaps for the wrong reasons, the region seemed to go off the radar during Hawksworth's watch. In mitigation, public interest was consumed by railway construction and the 1879 Zulu War during this period.⁸ The extent to which official interest in the South Coast was sidelined was reflected in a memorandum that Governor Bulwer presented to Colonial Secretary Mitchell in 1878. Referring to the coal deposits of northern Natal, Bulwer indicated that he was most anxious to develop the coal fields so that 'we should secure the means of providing for our future coal supply.'⁹ With railway construction destined to grow in the years ahead, a local coal supply was of critical importance, and the South Coast had even less reason to enjoy official attention.

The Anglo-Zulu War

Politically, Alexandra colonists were in tune with public opinion elsewhere in Natal as regards the Langelibalele affair. In April 1874 a petition signed by almost every male settler in the County was submitted in support of Governor Pine for 'quelling the revolt of the Chief...and in restoring peace and security to the Colony.' The petition was also highly critical of Bishop Colenso's efforts on behalf of Langelibalele.¹⁰ In 1878, as the issue of a confederation of southern African states engrossed attention and press coverage, members of the Alexandra County Association expressed support for confederation provided there was no 'hasty legislation on the matter.'¹¹

¹ Clause 18 of the Natal Charter of 1856 obligated a member of the Legislative Council to resign his seat in the event of bankruptcy or insolvency. See: GW Eybers (ed.), *Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History 1795-1910*, (London, 1918), 191; *Government Notice*, No. 129, 29 April 1877; RF Osborn, *Valiant Harvest*, 313.

² *Government Notice*, No. 171, 22 June 1877.

³ *Natal Mercury*, 11 December 1877.

⁴ *Natal Witness*, 13 July 1877.

⁵ *Natal Mercury*, 28 September 1877.

⁶ *Natal Witness*, 14 December 1877.

⁷ *Natal Witness*, 25 September 1877. In several constituencies, members were elected unopposed.

⁸ The Zulu war completely dominated the news as reported by the press. Even the business of the Legislature was deferred, initially from May to June and then to October and finally to November when the session commenced.

⁹ CSO 646, No. 2149, 18 June 1878.

¹⁰ *Natal Mercury*, 9 April 1874

¹¹ *Natal Mercury*, 29 November 1878. The Association met at Knox's store in Umzinto on 26 November.

The Zulu War had a significant impact on the County, as it did across the rest of the Colony with active service lasting ten months. Thirty men from the Alexandra Mounted Rifles were drawn off to ‘the front’¹ which meant that the unit’s local strength, which averaged around forty, was severely diminished. The Resident Magistrate noted in his 1879 report that planting operations were adversely affected by the absence of planters. He found only two planters present among the ten plantations in the Equeefa valley. Exacerbating the labour shortage was the fact that the bulk of ‘able-bodied natives’ had also been drawn off to ‘the front.’² In April 1879, 300 members of the Alexandra Native Contingent under the command of Captain George Pigg were reported marching down West Street in Durban on their way to Thring’s Post on the Zululand border.³

Defence matters were the foremost concern around the colony from late 1878 and throughout 1879.⁴ A defence laager was built at Umzinto containing two ammunition magazines.⁵ Exemplifying this focus was a Colony-wide review of arms late in 1878 which found that Umzinto had the only weapons stock on the South Coast – a collection of 50 carbines.⁶ Despite the great distance of Alexandra from Zululand, following the British disaster at Isandlwana, the local Commander of the Home Defence Corps, Stephen W Bent, expressed alarm at the inadequate preparation of the South Coast to withstand an attack, describing the issue of fifteen rifles and 2,500 rounds of ammunition to local settlers as ‘quite inadequate to our requirements.’ Bent also believed that buildings on Canonby Estate on the Mpambinyoni river offered an ideal defence point for the County. Noting that upwards of 200 Indians were employed there, he claimed they would be available to assist in defence. Based on that assumption he requested an allocation of 100 firearms and ammunition.⁷ But Alexandra County was in no way threatened during the hostilities which rocked Natal and the British Empire in 1879.

Nonetheless, Alexandra County displayed considerable spirit during that time which, if press reports are to be relied upon, was not reflected in similar fashion in other parts of Natal. A War Relief Fund was established in Umzinto. At an entertainment evening in the school room in March 1879, the sum of £6 was raised.⁸ At a public meeting on 5 June in Umzinto, Sir Bartle Frere, the British High Commissioner of South Africa, was thanked for ‘saving the Colony from devastation.’⁹ When the volunteers returned after an absence of eight months, 170 colonists came to Umzinto on 27 August to celebrate the return of their men in festivities that commenced with horse races and concluded with a dance that lasted well into the night.¹⁰ They reflected in some ways what Governor Henry Bulwer had to say when he remarked in his address opening the Legislature on 6 November 1879: ‘I cannot but refer with pleasure to the public spirit shown by the Colony generally during the war....nor can I pass the most loyal behavior of our Native population.... the unbroken good order maintained throughout the Colony.’¹¹

Social life

¹*Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XXXI, No. 1794, 25 November 1879: Return of Colonials. The Resident Magistrate claimed that 80 percent of Alexandra County’s colonists were drawn off to the war. See: *Natal Blue Book*, 1879, JJ15.

²*Natal Blue Book*, 1879, JJ14-15.

³*Natal Mercury*, 14 April 1879.

⁴The CSO files for almost 100 volumes from Vol. 666 are dominated by defence issues.

⁵*Natal Blue Book*, 1879, JJ15.

⁶CSO 685, No. 8, 7 December 1878. The Verulam area in Victoria County was found to have 100 Enfield rifles.

⁷CSO 684, No. 621, 29 January 1879.

⁸*Natal Mercury*, 19 March 1879.

⁹*Natal Mercury*, 16 June 1879.

¹⁰*Natal Mercury*, 1 September 1879.

¹¹CSO 728, No. 5190, Encl., 3.

Despite its isolation or perhaps because of it, Alexandra County's small white settler population, which numbered only 514 in 1876,¹ had developed several social institutions by the mid-1870s. This was reflected in a number of ways. The first public ball in the County took place at the Umzinto school in April 1874. More than a hundred locals attended and, according to one report, dancing 'was kept up with unabated vigour till daylight did appear next morning.'² As an indicator of progress and prosperity, the venue for the 1875 ball was Umzinto's newly erected Royal Hotel.³ Settlers around Umkomaas held their first musical evening on 7 April 1874. Reported as a 'rich and rare treat' which afforded 'gratifying proof of social advancement,' an audience of seventy was entertained by the 'Umkomaas Amateurs' in Price's store.⁴ As Charles Hamilton witnessed in the mid-1860s, horse racing was already an established pastime in Umzinto.⁵ By 1871 a racecourse had also been established at Park Rynie.⁶ The Umzinto Cricket Club was formed in 1878 with three of James Arbuthnot's five sons (St George, William, and Fitz-James), as well as Charles Reynolds, son of Thomas and nephew of Lewis Reynolds, among the nineteen founding members.⁷

Church attendance remained regular with the *Blue Book* for 1879 noting an average of 60 settlers attending the Sunday service at St Patricks Anglican church in Umzinto, while average attendance at services in Ifafa and Umkomaas were 40 and 50 respectively.⁸ From 1878 Anglicans were also able to attend services in a church built on the estate of Hubert Arbuthnot in Equeefa valley.⁹ In October 1879 the church building, which could accommodate 150 people, was gifted to the Church of South Africa. Mrs Jane Arbuthnot played a key role in mobilising funds needed to build the church.¹⁰ Despite an unhappy start in 1860 when 47 settlers had submitted a petition stating their opposition to the appointment of Dunbar Moodie as Resident Magistrate,¹¹ 62 residents signed a letter thanking him for his sixteen years of service when he was transferred to Ladysmith, in March 1876.¹²

ALFRED COUNTY:

John Robinson, as noted in chapter two, was dismissive about Alfred County in writing of his tour of the South Coast in 1870. 'There is no European enterprise requiring notice further south,' he stated with reference to the territory beyond the Mzimkulu river.¹³ For most of the first twenty years after its annexation in 1866, Alfred County languished politically, socially, and economically. Murchison, its only settler community, was situated on a high table six miles from the coast. The magistrate's court in Murchison was sole reason for its existence. The court house itself had collapsed in heavy rains in February 1870. Consequently, court proceedings were held in the magistrate's house, which was one of

¹*Natal Blue Book*, 1876, V4. The settler population remained virtually unchanged for the rest of the decade listing 508 and 505 white settlers for 1878 and 1879, respectively. See: *Natal Blue Books*, 1878, 1879, V4.

²*Natal Mercury*, 28 April 1874.

³*Natal Mercury*, 13 July 1875; 9 September 1875.

⁴*Natal Mercury*, 14 April 1874. A dance was held on 19 May 1875 in the school room at Umkomaas. See: *Natal Mercury*, 27 May 1875.

⁵ C Hamilton, *Sketches of life and sport in South East Africa*, 150. Horse racing was a popular sport from the earliest days of colonial life in Natal. See: AF Hattersley, *Portrait of a Colony*, (Cambridge, 1940), 99.

⁶ C Joyner Anderson, *Reminiscences and memories of early Durban and its pioneers*, (Durban, 1946), 28.

⁷D Barker, *Umzinto Cricket, The first 100 years*, (Durban, 1979), 2-3. A report in the *Mercury* of 11 January 1877, referred to Alexandra Cricket as having been founded circa 1873.

⁸*Natal Blue Book*, 1879, H23.

⁹*Natal Mercury*, 27 April 1878.

¹⁰*Natal Mercury*, 3 November 1879.

¹¹ CSO 125, No. 937, August 1860.

¹²*Natal Mercury*, 18 April 1876.

¹³ J Robinson, *Notes on Natal*, 126.

only three wattle and daub structures in the hamlet, the remainder being African-style huts. There was one general store, a branch of Charles Knox's store of Umzinto. In the whole County there were six stores in 1870.¹ Between 1870 and 1875 the settler population grew from 43 to 120.² The only produce was coffee production of which increased from 200 lbs in 1870 to 900 lbs in 1875; also small amounts of Indian corn.³ JB Aiken remarked in 1873 that only a small area of the County's 1,400 square miles was suitable for sugar, 'the rest being suitable for grazing and growing mealies.'⁴ The report by Resident Magistrate James Giles for 1876 corroborated that view, noting that few settlers were farmers and, of those, most were stock farmers.⁵

The most conspicuous evidence of settler presence was the destruction of Crown forests. Resident Magistrate Henrique Shepstone warned in 1871 that 'unless supervision of some sort is exercised, the Crown forests will ere long become valueless.' He was referring to the unchecked operations of sawyers who were decimating timber in the Ingeli range, and recommended the appointment of a supervisor to reside locally and put a stop to the 'careless and wanton destruction.'⁶ Such hopes, however, were futile in light of the colonial administration's frugal approach to governance as exemplified by its failure to replace the collapsed court house in Murchison and absence of a cattle pound. Shepstone had at his disposal very limited law enforcement resources. In 1872 there was one white constable assisted by eight Africans.⁷ Three years later the size of the police force remained unchanged.⁸ In any event, tree felling seemed a popular occupation. During July and August 1873, for instance, seventeen sawyers' licences were issued.⁹ Shepstone's successor, James Giles, also voiced concern for the 'denuding of bush' in the vicinity of the Mzimkulu river and recommended the planting of Australian gum, wattle and blackwood which, as fast-growing trees, would compensate for the thinning of the forests.¹⁰

Following Giles' appointment as Resident Magistrate in August 1874, the Government authorized its first substantial expenditure in Alfred County when £679 was spent on a new magistrate's office and lock-up. This was necessary following the relocation of the magistracy from Murchison to Harding in 1871. Giles also received a perk in the form of a forage allowance of three shillings per day for two horses.¹¹ But despite the fact that it was collecting an average of £1,400 per year in hut tax from Africans in the County,¹² actual Government expenditure on infrastructural development such as roads, as was the case in Alexandra County, was disappointing in terms of delivery.¹³ Instead the colonial administration seemed more interested in what monies it could claw back from the County. A circular entitled 'Return of the

¹ CSO 351, No. 304, 9 February 1870; *Natal Mercury*, 2 April 1870.

² *Natal Blue Books*, 1870, R10; 1875, R10.

³ *Natal Blue Books*, 1870, X4-5; 1875, X4.

⁴ CSO 464, Railway Bill No. 1, 11 November 1873, 18.

⁵ *Natal Blue Book*, 1876, JJ11-12. The lack of agricultural produce in Alfred County was indicated by Magistrate Giles in 1876 when he informed a road overseer who wanted to obtain maize meal for his labourers, that there were 'no contacts for the supply of meal in this County.' See: CSO 563, No. 86, 8 November 1876.

⁶ Document No. 11, 1871, presented to the Legislative Council on 2 August 1871.

⁷ CSO 409, No. 798, 22 April 1872; CSO 455, No. 2753, 15 November 1873.

⁸ CSO 505, No. 201, 14 January 1875.

⁹ *Natal Witness*, 15 August and 9 September 1873.

¹⁰ CSO, 494, No. 3416, 4 December 1874. Giles held the rank of Major. He was a veteran of the Indian Mutiny having served in the 14th Light Dragoons. Africans in Alfred County called him 'Umjwayeli,' meaning 'Ever ready.' See: *Alfred County Centenary* brochure, 15.

¹¹ *Natal Blue Book*, 1874, H2-3; M32-33. A prisoner lock-up was first requested in 1867. See: CSO 274, No. 1043, 1 June 1867.

¹² *Natal Blue Books*, 1872, C2; 1873, C2, 1874, C8; 1875, C9.

¹³ £850 was listed in the Colonial Estimates for 1874 for road improvement and maintenance in the County. See: *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XXVI, No. 1453, 20 January 1874.

Savings,' which was sent to all departments in the civil administration by Colonial Secretary Napier Broome in 1875, claimed £170 back from Alfred County. This was based on £75 for a District Surgeon, which the County did not have, and travelling expenses including the 'conveyance of lunatics,' none of which had been incurred.¹ Almost ten years after its annexation, Alfred County did not have a pound master or a school.²

Although there was a large African population which numbered 19,000 in 1876,³ the level of crime in the County was low, averaging 65 offences per annum during the period 1871-1878.⁴ Giles was, however, alarmed by the ongoing smuggling of guns and gunpowder in Pondoland, south of the Mtamvuna river, and suggested that a reward be offered in an attempt to expose those involved.⁵ But with Wolseley's administration nearing the end of its short tenure (April to September 1875) and with Carnarvon's intended federation scheme for Southern Africa regarded as having the solution to, inter alia, issues such as lawlessness in Pondoland, nothing came of Giles' suggestion.

The first non-agricultural development on the South Coast occurred in Alfred County. In March 1875 the Aiken brothers, James and David, proposed erecting a kiln (furnace) some seven miles up the Mzimkulu to burn lime. In 1866 Surveyor-General Dr PC Sutherland had reported the existence of a large deposit of marble,⁶ but almost a decade later no attempt had been made to exploit it. The Aikens noted that all the lime then used in Natal was imported from Britain and that their project would contribute to the development of the Mzimkulu for navigation.⁷ By 1878 a marble quarry was reported as being in operation⁸ but its operations were restricted by road access and transport difficulties.⁹ Another initiative which differed from land-based agriculture was a seine-net business operation near the mouth of the Mzimkulu. Managed by Robert Woolley and G Anderson it harvested a variety of fish, amounting to ten tons in 1876. Salted and sold at £20 per ton, fish found a ready market amongst the growing numbers of indentured Indians employed on the sugar estates around Umzinto.¹⁰ But high transport costs and poor roads put paid to this venture when it was found that fish could be obtained more cheaply from Cape Town.¹¹

A decade after annexation, Alfred County remained a backwater. By 1879, the only semblance of social cohesion that existed amongst its population of 225 settlers was an attendance by 28 of them at the Lutheran church in Marburg.¹² The County had no school, no volunteer corps, and no civic association such as the one formed in Alexandra in 1877¹ and no hotel. There are no records of social functions such as dances, musical evenings, or horse races, the likes of which featured in Umzinto and Umkomaas.²

¹ CSO 526, No. 2594, 28 August 1875.

² CSO 526, No. 2565, 28 August 1875; CSO 485, No. 2550, 28 July 1874, Miss EM Joyner to Supt of Education Brooks.

³ *Natal Blue Book*, 1876, V4.

⁴ CSO 654, No. 111, 24 July 1878, Colonial Minute Paper. An average of 149 offences was recorded in Alexandra County for the period 1871-1874. CSO 504, No. 149, 15 January 1875.

⁵ CSO 523, No. 2275, 31 July 1875.

⁶ Report of the Surveyor-General on Alfred Quarries, Select Document No. 27, 1866, presented to the NLC on 9 July 1866.

⁷ CSO 511, No. 895, 15 March 1875.

⁸ *Natal Blue Book*, 1878, BB30.

⁹ *Natal Blue Book*, 1876, JJ11.

¹⁰ *Natal Blue Book*, 1876, BB36-37. The number of Indians residing in Alexandra County in 1876 was given as 1,149. See: *Natal Blue Book*, 1876, V4. There were no Indians resident in Alfred County in 1876. Even by 1879, only a single Indian was resident in the County. See: *Natal Blue Book*, 1879, V4.

¹¹ *Natal Almanac and Yearly Register*, 1878, 103.

¹² *Natal Blue Book*, 1879, V4; H23.

The only agricultural produce of note was coffee,³ with a crop of 2,650 lbs produced in 1879.⁴ Despite the lack of economic development Alfred County was the subject of much positive speculation during the last years of the decade. Among the submissions made to a Select Committee on European Immigration in 1876 were four from colonists who saw great potential in Alfred County. Richard Higham, who had resided there since 1866, urged the granting of hundred acre plots along the coast as the best incentive for development. Robert Woolley of Lower Umzimkulu saw potential in maize and poultry farming, but opined that real development hinged on the opening of the Mzimkulu river to shipping. His thoughts were echoed by David Aiken who cited the resources of the County – lime, marble, fishing, timber – as being closed to exploitation on account of transport logistics. David's brother James, the Member for Alexandra and Alfred Counties, described the lack of development on the South Coast as 'most lamentable.' He asserted that 'if the Umzimkulu were in any other country but Natal, there would be running in and out of it steamers and sailing vessels.'⁵ In his report for 1877, magistrate Giles stated that the opening of the mouth of the Mzimkulu was the key to prosperity in the County, adding that such a development would enhance trade with the interior as far as Kokstad.⁶

Positive rhetoric notwithstanding, the champion in initiating shipping on the Mzimkulu was JB Aiken who matched words with action. In letters to the Colonial Secretary in 1877 and 1878 he impressed upon the Government the untapped potential of the river for the lower South Coast and emphasized that unless the government was proactive in developing the Mzimkulu, Natal might lose the interior trade to the Cape as a result of the development of Port St Johns.⁷ In 1879 Aiken hired William Bazley to survey the river mouth and to quote on the cost of removing obstacles to shipping. He then asked for £350 in state assistance for Bazley to remove the rocks which, the latter claimed, would create an entrance thirty yards in width with a depth of four feet at low tide. When the Government declined to consider the proposition,⁸ Aiken submitted a petition signed by 51 local residents asking for the removal of the rocks and noting that a steamer named the *Somtseu*, owned by TN Price of Durban, was ready and capable of servicing the Mzimkulu.⁹ In his address to the opening of the Legislature on 6 November 1897, Governor Bulwer referred sympathetically to the need to develop the Mzimkulu for seawise traffic because of the absence of a railway extension and the importance of inland trade. He noted that he had only recently toured the South Coast and was impressed by 'the enterprise and energy which promised at no distant day to compete with...Victoria County.'¹⁰ Yet the Government was not forthcoming with any concrete commitment on the matter.

In January 1880, when Aiken asked Colonial Engineer Captain Albert Hime to take over and complete the blasting work that Bazley had done at the mouth of the Mzimkulu, Hime declined, saying that Bazley

¹*Natal Witness*, 27 March 1877.

²The first musical concert in Umkomaas was held on 7 April 1874. See: *Natal Mercury*, 14 April 1874. Annual family weekends at Park Rynie were held from 1866. See: *Natal Mercury*, 9 July 1866. A ball was held at the Royal Hotel in Umzinto in September 1875. See: *Natal Mercury*, 9 September 1875.

³The Alexandra County correspondent for the *Mercury* (1 February 1877) felt that Alfred County was better suited than Alexandra for the cultivation of coffee.

⁴*Natal Blue Book*, 1879, AA5.

⁵*Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1613, 17 October 1876.

⁶*Natal Blue Book*, 1877, JJ9.

⁷CSO 578, No. 295, 17 January 1877; CSO 663, No. 3868, 16 October 1878. Between them, the *Somtseu* and the *Congune* made three trips to Port St Johns from Durban during the latter half of 1878. See *Natal Witness*, 29 August, 26 October, 21 November.

⁸CSO 704, No. 2747, 23 May, 5 June 1879.

⁹CSO 712, No. 3528, 24 July 1879.

¹⁰CSO 728, No. 5190, with enclosure, November 1879, 7-8.

should complete the work and then make a submission for consideration by the Government for financial assistance.¹ Aiken informed Hime that he had made the necessary monetary arrangements to continue the works and ‘bring them to successful issue.’ Nonetheless, in the light of Bulwer’s remarks on the subject in November, Aiken requested that the Governor be informed of the private initiative that was underway and that the Government should issue an appraisal of the work once it had been completed.² In his report for 1879, Giles noted that satisfactory progress was being made on the removal of rocks from the mouth of the Mzimkulu. He expected the first steamer to enter the river by April 1880.³ The *Somtseu* made its historic first entry of the Mzimkulu in May 1880 and began a new era in the history of the South Coast.

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¹ CSO 739, No. 488, 30 January, 6 February 1880.

² CSO 743, No. 834, 23 February 1880. Although declared insolvent in 1877, Aiken joined the Durban accounting firm of William Palmer in 1878. It subsequently came to be known as Palmer and Aiken. See: *Natal Mercury*, 7 January and 17 September 1878.

³ *Natal Blue Book*, 1879, JJ21.