

## “Keep your town sweet and wholesome” The inspector of nuisances: a narrative of culture and sanitation in nineteenth-century Durban

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### **Introduction**

The office of the inspector of nuisances emerged in Durban in the second half of the nineteenth century and embodied a wide range of duties.<sup>1</sup> This narrative, relying almost exclusively on primary source material, is an account of the extraordinarily varied work of the inspectors in a pre-segregated colonial Victorian context; conflicts between urbanising cultures; sanitation problems and the provision of basic services; housing; and the resultant controls, some quite far-reaching. In the process a niche in the scholarship on early Durban is filled.<sup>2</sup>

Sanitation became an important dimension of life in Victorian Britain. With a rapid increase in the population of towns and cities, and a slowly growing scientific understanding of the probable relationship between diseases and their causes, concerns developed for the health of urban people and the quality of the environmental conditions in which they lived.<sup>3</sup> When this Victorian sanitation culture was planted on the soil of the colony of Natal it met headlong with different attitudes of African and Indian people who had come into urban life from rural origins. So it is not altogether surprising to note that the town of Durban instituted a Sanitary Department within the first decade of the existence of the borough.

[This was] inaugurated in January 1861, when Mr W.H. Stonell was appointed ... as Town Constable, Street Keeper, and Inspector of Nuisances, and more especially for the purpose of enforcing the bye-laws. His salary was fixed at £2 per week and it was decided to supply him with a summer and winter suit.<sup>4</sup>

### **Early sanitary problems and the earliest inspectors**

At this time the small population of Durban was still predominantly European in character but was being steadily added to by the arrival of Africans, some as refugees, seeking employment and habitation, as well as the first groups of Indian workers freed from their indenture contracts.<sup>5</sup> Though there were probably some parts of the town

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1. The quotation in the title is from Durban Archives Repository (hereafter DAR): 3/Dbn 5/2/5/1, Durban Town Council Sanitary Committee Report (hereafter DTCSCR) 4 May 1875. Some of the material for this paper was assembled as part of a much larger and forthcoming publication which deals with the colonial history of the Port of Natal and specifically the Point where the inspector of nuisances played a significant role in the life of Bamboo Square.

2. J. Popke, “Managing Colonial Alterity: Narratives of Race, Space and Labour in Durban, 1870–1920”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 2003, for example includes not a single citation of a primary source but relies exclusively on previously published secondary and tertiary sources. The result is that it perpetuates for example the belief that the Indian Location was the Grey Street area of Durban, while it was actually situated between Magazine Barracks and the beach.

3. There would have been particular fears of outbreaks of cholera such as had occurred in Britain in 1831 and also of the continued prevalence of typhoid which was still fairly common there in 1875.

4. W.P.M. Henderson, *Durban: Fifty Years of Municipal History* (Robinson & Co, Durban, 1904), p 46.

5. Among the root causes of refugees were major conflicts, such as the Zulu civil war of 1856

where a few persons lived close together, the settlements were essentially scattered and the overall density was a very loose one.<sup>6</sup> But the sub-tropical climate and a high summer rainfall, together with many places which had inadequate drainage, like the Western and Eastern Vleis, contributed to several environmental problems. Water of an indifferent quality for drinking, cooking and washing was drawn from rivers and wells around the town and there was no formal system for the treatment of sewage. Furthermore, like the European settlers only a decade before, many African and Indians built their dwellings using traditional materials and techniques such as wattle and daub and thatch. For many this would probably have been their first experience of urban life and their limited resources often led to overcrowded conditions. It also appears that what was often implied by the use of the word “nuisance” was the socially unacceptable practice of defecation in bushy or wooded areas. Thus the inspectors were appointed to safeguard the public health of the settlement, to be building inspectors and general conservators and policemen of the urban environment, representing a distinctly British model of sanitation within a multi-cultured town.

The statutory authority for the preliminary measures came from colonial legislation which not only encouraged and facilitated the birth of municipalities, such as the town of Durban in 1854, but enabled them to have instruments of control such as a police force, a Police Board being formed that year.<sup>7</sup> This rudimentary force functioned spasmodically until 1861 when the municipality took over complete control. The Town Council, of course, was composed entirely of European councillors. Stonell, the first inspector of nuisances, took over the role of sanitary and environmental officer of the town.<sup>8</sup> The relationship to the police force of this unique office would continue and eventually it had a dual relationship with both the Municipal Police and a Sanitary Committee which began to supervise the inspector's work from 1867.<sup>9</sup>

### The Council Sanitary Committee and the inspectors

This committee came into existence against a background of considerable internal conflict and severe economic restraints in the Town Council. At its first meeting it dealt at some length with a report on drainage in the town. Early in 1868 the matter of sewerage came up when they examined a report from India on the Rev. Moule's “Dry Earth Conservancy System” and there must therefore have been some dissatisfaction with the night-soil system then in operation.<sup>10</sup> Within the next year, numerous issues came before the committee including: flooding at Addington (12 September 1868); an application by the Natal Railway Company to build a “coolie barracks” on town land

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between Mpande's sons, where many thousands died on one day in the battle of Ndondakusuka, the ongoing conflicts in the Eastern Cape and the war between the Orange Free State and the Basuto.

6. B.T. Kearney, *A Revised Listing of the Important Places and Buildings in Durban* (Durban City Council, Durban, 1984), p 21.
7. R.L. Hitchins, *Statutes of the Colony of Natal, 1845–1899, Volume 1* (P. Davis, Durban 1900/1902).
8. A full account of the formation and development of the municipal police and their history is to be found in J. Jewell, *A History of the Durban City Police* (Durban City Council and Rotary Club of Durban Musgrave, Durban, 1989), chapter 1.
9. The first recorded meeting of this Sanitary Committee was on 12 November 1867. See DAR: 3 Dbn 5/2/7/1/1, DTCSR, 12 November 1867. The office of inspector of nuisances continued for well over a century. In 1971, I called on the police to assist me in ejecting a large and particularly aggressive vervet monkey from inside my house. A highly skilled inspector (the last) promptly arrived and quickly and humanely disposed of the aggressor with a high calibre rifle fitted with a silencer.
10. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/1, DTCSR, 1 April 1868.

because the previous one had been destroyed by the recent floods and there was concern about the huts which the workers had erected near the Umgeni River (15 September 1868). Following this, permission was granted for Vitalingum to squat on townlands “on the payment to the Corporation of £2 ... near the mouth of the Umgeni River ... for one year”. But he was not permitted to cut timber or wattles for house-building from the bush.<sup>11</sup> This immediately established the wide spectrum of concerns it dealt with and in all such cases it would be the responsibility of the inspector of nuisances to supervise and execute the committee’s decisions. At times the local medical officer of health was invited to join the committee and accompany the inspector on his rounds. For example, in 1877 Dr Schultz attended by request and endorsed and supported various reports by the inspector.<sup>12</sup> One councillor who came to develop a strong and almost apostolic approach to local sanitation was Robert Jameson who was elected chairman of the committee in September 1879, remaining in the position for nearly three decades.<sup>13</sup>

There can have been no other committee of the Town Council at the time which dealt with such a wide ranging set of urban problems and which reflected the daily concerns of the inspector of nuisances. Through most of the nineteenth century, the inspections and control measures obviously enjoyed the full support of a town council which saw itself as the “guardians of the public health” though by 1880, sanitation had begun to be as much a concern for the colonial government, especially through the office of the resident magistrate. Thus bye-laws could be enforced and contraventions punished in a court of law.<sup>14</sup>

#### **The wide-ranging work of the inspectors<sup>15</sup>**

The regular reports which the inspector of nuisances provided to the Council Sanitary Committee give us fascinating glimpses of urban life in a growing colonial town in the second half of the nineteenth century. Stonell was replaced in April 1865 by H.G. Simpson, who was probably the inspector who met with the town’s doctors in June 1873

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11. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/1, DTCSCR, 12, 15 and 27 September 1868 and 26 July 1871. The control over the cutting of bush around the town had been exercised by the colonial government even before the borough came into existence. See, for example Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository (hereafter PAR), Colonial Secretary’s Office (hereafter CSO) 1946, Cato, 11 July 1853. In 1855, the resident magistrate of Durban issued licences for cutting wood on ‘Crown Forests’. See PAR, CSO 1/1/1/3, Vol. 33, 16 February 1856.
12. The Sanitary Committee became a standing committee of the Town Council. See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/1, DTCSC Report, 18 January 1877.
13. In 1875, Jameson took a keen interest in the welfare of St Helena immigrants and attempted to set up a night school for children who had been expelled from local schools because of their colour. See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/2. DTCSCR, 25 February 1875. In 1877, he proposed an extensive tree-planting programme for the borough. See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/1, DTCSCR, July 1877.
14. Durban Mayor’s Minute, 1879. In 1880 a Select Government Committee called for cooperation between the different authorities in matters concerning sanitation. See *Natal Government Gazette*, XXXII, 1 838, 10 August 1880. Bill No. 10 of 1883 on the public health of the colony provided for sanitary districts in Natal. See *Natal Government Gazette*, XXXV, 2 023, 18 September 1883. In 1890 the resident Durban magistrate expressed a strong view with regard to cases under the sanitary laws: “that the authorities were determined to put a stop to habits and practices detrimental to public health”. See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, Durban Town Council, Inspector of Nuisances Report (hereafter DTCIONR) 6 November 1890. Various amendments to the relevant bye-laws were made on a continuing basis right through into the twentieth century. See for example, DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 7 March 1901.
15. There is an inexplicable gap in the archival records of the inspector between May 1882 and January 1887.

to discuss a serious outbreak of diphtheria.<sup>16</sup> By January 1875, the post was unoccupied and advertised in the *Natal Mercury*. The salary was to be £250 per annum and the incumbent was to “be prepared to keep a horse at his own expense ... the office will be attached to the town office”.<sup>17</sup> One applicant, Steele, was unsuccessful because he let it be known that he wished to carry on with a private practice, perhaps a medical one. In February Ellis, who had previously worked in Glasgow took up the position.

In April, Ellis produced a comprehensive report on the sanitary conditions of the borough, noting the inadequate rainwater gutters and pipes to many buildings which resulted in the destruction of footpaths. He also noted many cows and dogs in the town and the “carrying of fowls head down”; the burial of animals; the quality of well water, fat-boiling and the provision of the night-soil system to the houses of the poor. In all of these his concern was the potential causes of epidemics and contagious diseases.<sup>18</sup> He dwelt in some detail on the problems of overcrowded housing at the western end of West Street by Indians, St Helenites and others and the “mean construction of bad materials”. He described the overcrowded conditions as dense and “unfit for human habitation”, and made reference to a textbook by Dr Parkes, where recommendations were made for the cubic feet of space per person for both military barracks and British housing.<sup>19</sup> He went on to question why such people were “allowed a latitude not granted to Europeans” before turning his attention to the night-soil system and the number of boxes needed; the filling in of disused cesspools; dust and manure removal; rubbish consisting of tin and glass, hedge clippings and garden waste, kitchen slops, slaughter houses and hide stores. He had found the government’s Indian Barracks to be in a highly unsatisfactory state and noted “the immense difficulty of changing, in one stroke, the habits and customs of one of the most conservative people of the whole world”<sup>20</sup> At this time the inspector attended all the meetings of the Sanitary Committee and on 7 April 1876, having only been in office for a year and probably despairing of his lack of progress, he resigned but this was not accepted. A few months later, as there seems to have been problems with council finance, he suggested the complete abolition of the office of inspector of nuisances and a month later his resignation was accepted and he was given a vote of thanks for “his valuable services”<sup>21</sup>

Since it appears that the work of the inspector was ineffectual and there were problems in filling the vacant position, Superintendent Alexander of the Municipal Police took over and instituted a number of new procedures. He immediately reported on a new approach to the removal of rubbish and the collection of nightsoil. In 1878 the Sanitary Committee drew up a revised set of duties and an outline of the work of the inspector. It also noted the urgent need for “some expeditious medical reforms in the town”. During the following year the inspector was supplied with a horse to enable him to ride around the town, but the new man, Joseph W. McCutchley, also disillusioned with the work, then called for a complete reconsideration of the post and sanitary reform and

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16. Henderson, *Durban*, p 61; and DAR: 3Dbn 5/2/6/1/1, DTCIONR, 6 June 1873.

17. *Natal Mercury*, 12 January 1875.

18. DAR: 3Dbn 5/2/7/1/1, DTCIONR, 6 February 1875.

19. E.A. Parkes, *A Manual of Practical Hygiene* (J & A Churchill, London, 1874), chapter IV. The publication was initiated as a textbook on hygiene for army surgeons in response to the Royal Commission of 1857 into the sanitary condition of the army in England. It ran into several editions and probably became the ‘bible’ for all subsequent inspectors as it contains many of their concepts and practical recommendations.

20. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/1, DTCIONR, 8 April 1875.

21. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/2, DTCSCR, 26 May 1875; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/1, DTCIONR, 4 July 1876; 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/1, DTCSCR, 8 November 1876.

recommended: “That the services of the inspector be dispensed with and that the whole matter of sanitary reform be referred to the immediate consideration of the incoming council”.<sup>22</sup> Thomas Petersen became inspector in September 1879, and brought a measure of stability to the office for some years, although he acknowledged the assistance of Supt Alexander in much of his work, emphasising the way this was often dependent on an effective police force. At this time the two men began to conduct extensive examinations of Bamboo Square at the Point and the Indian Immigration Barracks at Addington. By July 1880, Petersen could tell the committee that after some re-arrangements of duties, the “sanitary condition of the Borough continues to show favourable progress”. In 1881 an assistant inspector was appointed.<sup>23</sup>

In the 1880s and 1890s there were many references and complaints about the Sanitary Committee and that the reports of the inspector were not receiving due attention. However in 1895 the inspector, Daugherty, could state that “From the almost entire absence of notices of infectious diseases by the medical practitioners and also from the medical officer of the Borough I am inclined to believe that in general the health of the Borough is satisfactory”.<sup>24</sup> Over the previous several decades these men had dealt with a number of important and recurring problems and probably only resolved some.

Firstly, there was the issue of overcrowding, in what we today would describe as slums. The main problem areas were the Western Vlei, Bamboo Square, and the Indian Immigration Barracks, though there were many others of lesser significance. Secondly, they had fulfilled the role of building inspectors, not only examining new constructions but also existing dilapidated dwellings. The third category of nuisance included a wide range of problems: public toilets and urinals or the lack thereof; butcheries and slaughter houses; unacceptable food; water and drainage; bush cutting and a myriad of other urban difficulties. Their fourth major concern was “loafers and togt workers”, though they were aided in this work by other municipal departments such as the police and specifically the togt sergeant.<sup>25</sup> The last set of problems were the collection and treatment of nightsoil and rubbish, which probably occupied more of their time than any thing else. Let us examine each of these in some detail.

#### **Overcrowding and slum removals: inspections of the Western Vlei**

Between 1870 and 1880 a great deal of the inspector’s attention was devoted to the shack dwellings and huts which began to appear on the Western Vlei and at the foot of the Berea. These were built and occupied primarily by Indian people and the sanitary concerns focused on the size of bedrooms and the number of occupants. In November 1870, the Town Council requested the mayor, J.D. Balance, to communicate with the mayor of Port Louis in Mauritius about the way they handled similar problems and to procure from England “the best work published on the health of towns”.<sup>26</sup>

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22. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/1, DTCIONR, 18 November 1876; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 30 August 1878, 17 December 1878; and DTCIONR, 28 July 1879.

23. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 23 September 1879; 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCIONR, 1 June 1880; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 5 July 1880 and 4 June 1881.

24. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 4 May 1892 and 7 March 1895. P.C. Bennett was appointed assistant sanitary inspector in 1898. See DAR: 3/Dbn 1/1/1/24, Durban Town Council Minutes, 27 September 1898.

25. A “toga” worker was a casual or daily worker. See the section “Loafers and togt workers” below.

26. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/1, Durban Town Council, Town Committee Report, 22 and 29 November 1870; DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/2, DTCSCR, 20 March 1871.

In 1874 the Sanitary Committee endorsed the idea of building a new “Indian location” beyond the limits of the town to the north of the old military camp.<sup>27</sup> The formal Town Council response to the emergence of squatters and sub-standard buildings was therefore to apply a policy of segregation and to provide an alternative place for Indian occupation and house building. The site chosen was not far from the site of the corporation Indian Barracks (Magazine Barracks) on slightly higher land close to the Eastern Vlei. Eighty lots measuring 20 feet by 50 feet were to be laid out and submitted to an open competition amongst Indian people. An upset price of £2 per lot per annum was to be payable in advance. The terms of the leases were to be for five years with power to transfer or sub-lease the whole plot but no portion thereof, subject to the permission of the Town Council. It was also a strict provision that none of the lots could be subdivided, and no more than one dwelling house was to be permitted to be erected on each lot. The Town Council engaged the services of an engineer, Collins, to inspect the land and to carry out an examination of “three sample bottles of water”, presumably for purposes of sinking a well.<sup>28</sup> This proposal provided a specific location for Indian people only and gave controls over housing density, but fears continued to be expressed on the nature of the buildings and thus further conditions of June 1875 included a specification of materials to be permitted which included “iron and wood, brick, wood, and wattle and daub”. No thatch roofs would be allowed. A positive proposal was to permit each lessee to occupy an additional “one acre of Vley land for cultivation”.<sup>29</sup>

In May 1875, Thomas Petersen enthusiastically said that it was “time to introduce the Indians to better and more cleanly habits and to avail themselves of better quarters”. He went on to describe the miserable style of dwellings, and “that a good or wholesome block of buildings might be put up and let to them”, but he also noted that

overcrowding does not confine itself as an evil to the Indian population ... an increase in numbers of Europeans is not matched by an increase in the number of buildings ... the result is mischief to the physical and moral health of the town.

The concept was taken further with a clear call for segregation and he asked

whether the large increase of Indians in the Borough does not make it desirable to separate them entirely from the white population, placing them all (with exception of domestic servants living on their master's premises, store keepers and others whom the Council might see fit to except) under surveillance in a location without [i.e. outside] the town.

While reporting simultaneously on a problem of frogs in a pool in front of Lumsden's Hotel on Smith Street and pleading for all butchers “to be located in one quarter”, he said that notice had been served on various property owners and that there should also be a location “... under surveillance, without the town for Indians and Natives”.<sup>30</sup>

The Indian Village, however did not put an end to the building of shack

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27. By this time a larger number of indentured Indian workers were completing their periods of contract work on sugar plantations. Those who remained in Natal had begun to move into towns such as Tongaat, Umzinto and Durban. “Passenger” Indians had also begun to arrive in the colony. See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/1, DTCSCR, 11, 25 November 1874 and 25 June 1876.

28. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/2, DTCSCR, 11 November 1874.

29. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/2, DTCSCR, 25 June 1875; and 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/1, Durban Town Council, Townlands Committee Minutes, 11 November 1874.

30. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/1, DTCIONR, 26 May and 3 June 1875. Further details for the Indian Village were developed by a special committee. See DAR, 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/1, Durban Town Council, Indian Village Committee Minutes, 25 June 1875.

settlements on the Western Vlei. In 1879, questions were raised about the impact this would have on the supply of potable water from Currie's Fountain at the foot of the Berea. Early in 1880, Dr Schultz and Petersen made a thorough inspection of a now much enlarged settlement, where they examined the houses, their sizes and took the names of the squatters. The population represented Indian families, "... native women, hottentot women, half castes and a few whites" who "did not look unhealthy "but there was some evidence of gonorrhoea".

Buildings were made of tin lining, boxes and packing cases, corrugated iron, thatch and sacks, most were in a state of dilapidation and decay and in "chaotic confusion". There was often no room for a yard, and a window was a rare occurrence. There was no ventilation, small cooking places were located outside made of old tin with no chimneys. The water supply was very imperfect, and open water holes were used for drinking, cooking and washing. These also provided risks of drowning. A few covered in wells were to be found, though a filter was unknown. There was a complete absence of closets, people squatted down on the ground anywhere and they met the evidence of this frequently. "In places a hole in the ground surrounded with short sticks and old sacks sufficed". In all, they noted the "very miserable existence these people lead ... prostitution is practised by open doors". They also said that "we are bound to protect the children, the neighbourhood and the whole town from one of the most formidable diseases, a disease rife there". In addition they recorded that dogs were excessive in number and in a starved and utterly neglected condition. *Cannabis indica*, or Indian hemp grew in abundance and "in general, health ... is greatly endangered". Their report was accompanied with a table of all buildings, occupants and notes on the above-mentioned details. Each wrote a separate report, although oddly, Schultz noted 431 occupants while Petersen counted 613.<sup>31</sup> All of this was presented to a full meeting of the Town Council on 3 March 1880. The reaction to these reports was to re-open the whole question of the Indian village or location.<sup>32</sup>

Not far from the settlement on the Western Vlei was another mushrooming "village" on land at the foot of the Berea. This had first been reported in 1871 when it was noted that there was a need for adequate surveillance; that there were questionable "leases which were in the hands of trustees of insolvent estates", but that squatting would be permitted for plots of land "varying from one to three acres for a maximum of three years and at £2 per acre with power to sublet plots not less than ¼ acre, with only one dwelling thereon". By 1880, the land was owned by Aboobaker Amod and Petersen reported on the area in May, noting the similarities with the settlement on the Western Vlei and the way the "houses were built close together". No plans had been approved for the buildings. By June several had been demolished and Petersen commented that this was a very unsettled situation because the "excuse of many [was] that the lease would expire in eighteen months time and they will therefore not go to the expense of building proper houses". Once more he saw a solution in the further development of the Indian location. However by July, a great improvement was noted: "several hovels and huts have been taken down and hundreds of coolies have left there and settled down on the other side of the Umbilo River, where there are now several acres of land planted with vegetables". Many others now had building plans approved.<sup>33</sup>

31. DAR, 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCIONR, 6 August 1879; and 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 4, 16 and 17 February 1880.

32. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 3 March 1880; and 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCIONR, 16 March 1880.

33. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/1, DTCIONR, 2 March 1871; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 14 April,

### Bamboo Square and the Point<sup>34</sup>

There is some confusion about how the inspector of nuisances came to exercise his authority over Bamboo Square and the Point because they fell outside the Borough of Durban. From 1870 until 1903, the inspector made regular visits, inspections and wrote numerous reports on the nuisances there, but only in 1883 was there any partial hint of clarification about his status when the secretary of the Natal Harbour Board informed the resident engineer, Edward Innes, that “The Municipal Law and the By-laws of the Borough give to the Inspector of Nuisances a jurisdiction over the Harbour Works yard as being within the Borough”. How this argument was constructed with respect to Bamboo Square remains obscure.<sup>35</sup>

For three decades the inspectors were concerned about this fascinating area which had a large and mixed population of Tsongas, Indians, St Helenites and various other people. The focus included the squatters; poorly constructed shanties; overcrowding; illegal burials; latrines; water wells and the poor quality of the water; the lack of refuse removal; the growth of weeds like the castor oil plant; and completely inadequate sewage facilities. Together with the Water Police and Supt Richard Alexander of the Borough Police, many detailed reports were drawn up and recommendations made both to the colonial secretary and the Natal Harbour Boards who had jurisdiction over the area.<sup>36</sup> The results were many demolitions and removals of people, although new shacks often sprang up overnight. The official response, though painfully slow, was to set up a new settlement close by, although mistakenly with sites that did not accord in size with the borough’s bye-laws and thus no building plans could be approved. By 1880, there were many prosecutions and fines for contraventions of these bye-laws.<sup>37</sup>

A notable feature of Bamboo Square was that besides offering a home to many thousands of marginalised people such as togt workers, it also provided a number of prominent commercial companies with a very inexpensive way of housing their employees. The same companies were usually the major transgressors. Gradually, however, through the energetic work of the inspector of nuisances and the superintendent of the Water Police, Irwin Nolan, matters began to improve. During the 1880s a night-soil system was introduced; better buildings were erected; and surrounding “brushwood” cut down, although complaints of “overcrowding and insanitary

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7 June, 5 July and 21 September 1880. In August 1895 there were reports of shanties on the Western Vlei with veranda rooms. See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 27 August 1895. The areas south of the Umbilo River into which these people moved may have been either Clairwood, Rossburgh or both.

34. Bamboo Square was an informal settlement at the Point which originated as a Tsonga kraal hidden among the sand dunes and about midway between the Bay and the sea. The settlement existed from c. 1870 to 1903. A detailed account of the involvement of the inspector of nuisances has been published as B.T. Kearney, “Bamboo Square: A Documentary Narrative of the Indian and Native Cantonment at the Point, 1873 to 1903”, in *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 20, 2002, pp 29–63.
35. PAR, NHD II/2/1, Natal Harbour Board, Correspondence, 17 November 1883. The land on which Bamboo Square was settled belonged to the War Department in London.
36. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/1, DTCIONR, 7 June 1876; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 7 January, 28 July 1879, 1 May, 5 July and 31 August 1880; 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCIONR, 17 December 1878, 4 November 1879, 26 August and 7 September 1880.
37. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 5, 19 and 26 October 1880, 17 January and 2 March 1881; 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCIONR, 17 September, 18 October, 3 November and 20 December 1880.

conditions” were ongoing until the 1890s.<sup>38</sup> After the outbreak of plague late in 1902, the entire settlement was demolished by the Town Council which had cleverly acquired the land in 1897.

Besides his extensive involvement with Bamboo Square, the inspector conducted many inspections of the nearby harbour works, especially the various barracks built to serve different groups of workers. Many were found to be seriously deficient as far as their latrines were concerned and his efforts resulted in several new sets, as well as public toilets, being built by the Port Department and the Natal Government Railways (NGR).<sup>39</sup> The NGR barracks were described as giving shelter to thirteen families, but were judged to be “insanitary and unwholesome ... floors of sand below ground level, perfectly dark at all times, the worst description of habitations and are not fit for human habitations”. While he found much to praise in the design of the new Togt Barracks which was built by the Town Council on Bell Street in 1892, a few years later he condemned the Union Castle Company Barracks and his report succeeded in effecting its closure. The “the inmates [were] ejected and the place shut up”. It was not only the commercial world with which he found much wanting, because in 1902 he also found a government compound at the Point to be seriously overcrowded.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Indian Immigration Barracks at Addington**

The interest shown by the inspector in official barracks might well have been the result of many years of observations on the sanitary state of the Indian Immigration Barracks on Point Road in the Addington district. Here many thousands of newly arrived indentured Indian workers spent weeks, sometimes months, waiting to be allocated to work on sugar plantations or railway construction. The fairly crude buildings surrounding an open court were hastily built in the 1860s by the colonial government on open land, but by the 1870s it began to be surrounded by the residences of Europeans who complained to the Council about the conditions there. In April and May 1875 the inspector reported on “the sanitary deficiencies”, stating that the immigrants ought to be informed of the colony’s “attitude to personal cleanliness” and of the bye-laws. Petersen, the inspector at the time, when accused of transgressing his powers in making such reports on government property, explained to the Town Council that his enthusiasm arose from “his endeavours to keep your town sweet and wholesome”. Nothing was done and by 1880 he again found the closets to be in a “most filthy and unwholesome condition”.<sup>41</sup>

During the following year a public dispute broke out between him and Dr L. Bonnar the medical officer of health of the Immigration Department. The *Natal Mercury* carried several columns of the argument which came to a head when the Natal Harbour Board requested that the barracks be removed. The inspector reported on the growing number of European dwellings which now surrounded the barracks; that nightsoil had been continuously buried on the site; and that there was a real risk that

38. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 4 April, 17 May, 5 July and 6 October 1881; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 5 January, 7 November 1887 and 4 June 1890.

39. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCSCR, 20 March 1871; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 6 May, 2 October and 30 September 1879, 18 July 1881.

40. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 4 June 1890 and 7 May 1900, 7 October 1901, 7 January and 4 April 1902.

41. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/1, DTCSCR, 8 April, 3 and 4 May 1875; DAR, 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 20 December 1880.

a foul and pestilential effluvia may arise from the foetid excrement buried in the ground ... the manner and customs of the natives [sic] are not conformable, but even repugnant to Europeans ... and there was a mutual unpleasantness in every way.

Bonnar refuted this, although admitted that there had been sanitary problems in the past. He claimed that nightsoil had never been buried; he had introduced a sewage pail system; that cutting down the surrounding bush had introduced fresh air; and the Indians had never used the bush as toilets. He went on to say that the barracks were “secluded, orderly and wonderfully clean” and praised Petersen’s enthusiasm. However, a *Natal Mercury* reporter had the last word when he reported on an inspection which found the latrines to be in a filthy condition.<sup>42</sup> A number of public meetings and memorials followed in the 1880s with the Harbour Board and the newspapers fuelling the flames. Despite several offers of an alternative site with “a sea frontage” the barracks remained there until the twentieth century.<sup>43</sup>

### Inspections in other areas: barracks and dwellings

A keen eye was also kept on the various new barracks and compounds which had been built to house Indians working for the municipality. One was “north of the cemeteries”, and another “to the rear of the vagrant house”, and a comprehensive report was also provided on the large Magazine Barracks in use by 1876. Two years later, a proposal was made to move this barracks to the Indian Location although it remained in its position until the 1960s. New blocks of buildings were designed in 1879 and the inspector was able to view and comment on the plans. He recommended that a long open kitchen be provided such as the one at the Indian Immigration Barracks. Continuous reports appeared about these extensive barracks on Depot Road right up until 1900.<sup>44</sup>

In 1875, Supt Maxwell of the Borough Police established a new policy with an arithmetical approach to the problem of overcrowding. He quoted a Board of Works report of 1868 on the Poplar district of London where 300 cubic feet of space per person was decreed to be the absolute minimum for lodging houses. Most dwellings in Durban fell short of that figure.<sup>45</sup> Armed with this number, the inspectors of nuisances then dutifully sought out other problematic housing in the town. Among these were several dwellings declared unfit for human habitation where a number of Indians were ejected, perhaps causing them to move to Bamboo Square. In 1875 the inspector noted that there was overcrowding amongst all population groups as a result of a greater increase in residents compared to the number of available buildings, thus “causing mischief to the physical and moral health of the town”. One, belonging to Varney, had eighteen occupants in a few rooms. On returning to this house in Field Street in 1877, the inspector found it was still overcrowded, had filthy outhouses and no water. While he was in office, Alexander found “nuisance dwellings” at Cato Creek where 21 cottages were occupied by 95 persons with no closets. There were cesspools and houses were

42. *Natal Mercury*, 19 July, 20 August and 7 September 1881.

43. *Natal Mercury*, 6 October 1881 and 12 January 1884. PAR: NHD I/2/6, Natal Harbour Board, Correspondence, 3 January 1889 and NHD I/1/9, Proceedings, 14 and 21 June 1889.

44. In 1877, Magazine Barracks was placed under the watchful care of the inspector. See Mayor’s Minute for 1877. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/2, DTCIONR, 25 November 1874; 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/1, DTCSCR, 1 September 1876; 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCIONR, 17 December 1878; 9 May and 9 July 1879; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 7 November 1900.

45. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/1, DTCIONR, 4 August 1875. In 1876 it was noted that there was a housing shortage for white workers and that rentals were high. DAR, 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/1, DTCSCR, 8 February 1876

close to a water well and “the water at this well is filled with their own excrement”.<sup>46</sup>

Reports in the late 1870s and early 1880s included several “Coolie locations” in the town which Alexander said he was trying his best to keep “tidy and clean”; eleven more thatched dwellings had been built on the Eastern Vlei in 1880; and huts at Pinetown Bridge were removed for fear of the risk of pollution. Problems were found close to the centre of town, such as some “thatched hovels” behind the central Railway Station which were reported in August 1880 and others further away, like the dwellings at the brickfields close to the mouth of the Umgeni River in 1888. These were probably the worst ever recorded. Here Indians employed in making bricks for Messrs Hallowell Bros lived in “a long hovel with six compartments 12ft by 10ft, 5ft to 6 ft high with doors 3ft to 4ft high, no window or chimney, fires lighted, soot blackened roof, sand floors, occupied by about 16 persons”. Close by was another belonging to Messrs G. Swales, F. Vincent and T. Crowder, where Indian families lived in a similar situation, “all unfit for human habitation”. Notices were served, but by October had not been complied with.<sup>47</sup> Another slum in Cemetery Lane was built of “dilapidated structures of iron, wood, felt and paraffin tins, flat roofs”. The hovels had partitions and windows of sacking, the air was stagnant and offensive; there was no water supply; a row of six kitchens had no chimneys; and the privies were dilapidated and insanitary. He described this case as “a continuing problem”.<sup>48</sup> In 1897, Lloyd’s Ricksha premises at 404a Point Road, with 26 occupants, were also found to be “unfit for human habitation”.<sup>49</sup>

The last decades of the nineteenth century was a period when the overcrowding of rooms by impoverished families dominated the extensive range of problems. Dr Schultz also found this to be so in a number of boarding houses in 1880, and that too many discharged Railway workers occupied a building in Block E the same year.<sup>50</sup> One result was a stiffening of the bye-laws which controlled the minimum spaces permitted for “sleeping apartments for Native and Indian servants”, together with a request for a regulation to control the limewashing of interiors several times a year. It was suggested that this method of disinfection should be applicable to all Indian dwellings in Durban.<sup>51</sup> This took until 1898 to become a reality.<sup>52</sup>

Another result was that in the 1890s a strong call came once more from various Town Council sources for the segregation of Indian people on sanitary grounds. Jameson, the apostle of sanitation, made this his particular gospel. The mayor stated in his annual report for 1895/1896 that the death rate among Indians in Durban was unacceptably high at 37.65 per 1 000 and that the primary cause was “the insalubrious localities in which the greater part of the Indian population are compelled by force of

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46. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/1, DTCIONR, 27 April, 26 May, 5 and 16 November, 7 December 1875, 18 November 1876, and 22 February 1877.

47. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 16 August 1880; and 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 3 October 1888.

48. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 5 November 1889.

49. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCSCR, 28 August 1877; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 26 October 1880, 4 September 1890, 7 January 1897. In 1900, shanties were demolished at Albert Park. See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 7 May 1900.

50. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 3 March 1880.

51. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCIONR, 30 January 1880; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 5 July 1880; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 3 May 1888. Limewashing or whitewashing of the interiors of rooms was recommended by Parkes who said that ‘In white-washed rooms the walls should be scraped, and then washed with hot lime to which carbolic acid is added’. See Parkes, *A Manual of Practical Hygiene*, p 517.

52. DAR: 3/ Dbn 1/1/1/1/24, Durban Town Council Minutes, 27 September 1898.

circumstances to live, and also the imperfect and insanitary barrack accommodation provided by some public departments for their servants". While this appears to have been a sympathetic view, it was especially noteworthy that he did not mention the municipal compounds nor the actual reasons why Indian people occupied "insalubrious localities".<sup>53</sup> A pro-active policy was adopted in 1900 when pamphlets in several Indian languages were distributed to property owners in an attempt to improve the regular maintenance of their buildings. Simultaneously, a procedure of night inspections was introduced. The inspector of nuisances, Daugherty, explained:

Overcrowding is only to be discovered at night ... it is not possible for five sanitary Inspectors to ensure that it does not take place ... and the Inspectors who would go about their duty in a kindly manner will meet with little or no opposition from the poorer coloured classes generally.<sup>54</sup>

### Building inspectors

One area of responsibility which the inspectors of nuisances clearly did not enjoy was the role of building inspector and the control of new buildings. In the 1860s and 1870s the Sanitary Committee dealt with several applications from residents for the construction or the extensions of buildings of timber, and most were refused.<sup>55</sup> They then established a sub-committee to examine all aspects of wooden buildings, especially the bye-laws, and in October 1875 decreed that these would be forbidden and that, in addition, a new building bye-law for the town would not allow a dwelling house to be built on a plot of land smaller than 3 500 sq. ft.<sup>56</sup> Many were then forced to build in wood and iron, a system where a wooden frame was covered with corrugated iron walls and roofs and one which was fast becoming popular among people who enjoyed no proper security of tenure. But even then, there were examples where the Town Council wished to disguise the iron construction and required the fronts of the buildings to be in brick. This was the case with Appursammmy's application of July 1875. They recommended wood and iron as a building technique for a group of houses for St Helenites in 1875: "because of the importance of encouraging the St Helena people acquiring property and building their own houses" and suggested that a "block of land be laid off north of Victoria Street with lots in extent [of]  $\frac{1}{4}$  erven to be offered on freehold at a price of £40 each, payable in annual instalments with an interest rate of 6% ...".<sup>57</sup> Strangely some applications to build in wood and iron were turned down without reasons. Others like Aboobaker Amod persisted in building with wood and the inspector was censured by the Sanitary Committee in 1878 for offering him an alternative set of plans.<sup>58</sup> Wood and iron buildings also featured as problems on a regular basis, such as Pickering's African kitchen in West Street and Venkedachallam Pillay's snuff and bread shop in Field Street.<sup>59</sup>

53. Mayor's Minutes for 1891 and 1895/96.

54. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 7 May 1900 and 7 March 1901.

55. These included applications by Baboo Naidoo in February 1873 and Samlal and Sevasengh in 1876. See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/2, DTCSCR, 24 February 1873; and 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/1, DTCIONR, 7 January 1876.

56. See Kearney, *A Revised Listing* and DAR, 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/1, DTCSCR, 12 October 1875.

57. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/2, DTCSCR, 30 July 1875; and 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/1. DTCSCR, 13 December 1875. In March 1880 the Sanitary Committee recommended that a new wood and iron building in Smith Street have a front brick wall as high as the first wall plate and a gable of an ornamental character. See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCIONR, 9 March 1880.

58. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/1, DTCSCR, 14 January, 23 February and 24 March 1876, 17 August 1878.

59. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 4 September 1890.

Another cause for concern with such buildings was the height of floors above the surrounding ground levels, because it appears that the inspectors suspected that “miasmic effluvia” could easily make its way from surrounding areas into lower buildings. Even traditional buildings presented problems, like Eusebe Suzor’s wattle and daub house with calico ceilings in Pine Street. This was probably built by a British settler in c. 1850 and had survived for 40 years. Its crime was to have floors below street level, though clearly indicative of the changes in the street itself.<sup>60</sup> A new bye-law of 1878 had decreed that all floors be built at least nine inches above the surrounding ground level. One advantage of wood and iron was that the system facilitated this with the entire frame sitting on brick piers or wooden stumps at least two feet above the ground as termite proofing. In 1879, Inspector Petersen had reported on a shanty housing the railway gate keeper at the east end of West Street; numerous new houses and huts built in the town without plans, “some erected within twenty four hours”; thatched buildings near the railway barracks; and by November he complained that “he hardly thought that buildings should be part of his duties”. A few weeks later he requested that the Municipal Police take over the responsibility for the inspection of new buildings.<sup>61</sup>

But this did not happen and the inspector pursued this work reluctantly without any assistance for a few more years. He paid special attention to building applications from the Indian community and especially Aboobaker Amod with whom he met regularly from 1880 to 1882 to discuss his new shop with a veranda over the pavement in West Street.<sup>62</sup> In one case the inspector found that a building had been built on the wrong site – Punditt had built on Lot 6 and not Lot 16 of Block HH.<sup>63</sup> Even the government did not escape his close attentions such as his report that the new school being built in Smith Street in 1881 had no approved plans. By May 1882, however, this facet of the inspector’s work came to an end when he successfully argued for the inspection of buildings to be taken over by the Borough Surveyor’s office and that his assistant be transferred to that department. This was a logical move since they had approved building applications from 1877. The issue had come to a head when a portion of a building under construction in Point Road collapsed and the inspector requested better bye-laws to control wall thicknesses and roof fastenings. One also suspects that the inspector felt somewhat out of his depth in matters of building construction, though there were a few instances in later years when he still reported on misdemeanours, such as one in 1890 which achieved a satisfactory judgement against Charles Argo for an addition of wood and iron without plans being approved.<sup>64</sup>

### **A variety of “nuisances”**

This pre-occupation of the inspectors with living conditions and buildings, especially overcrowding, brought them into daily contact with urbanising cultures, mostly impoverished, which did not share the same sanitary standards or ideals. But there were many other types of nuisance among the several cultures in Durban which attracted their

60. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/3, DTCIONR, 24 November 1890.

61. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCIONR, 28 August 1878, 28 July, 20 October, 6 and 28 November 1879.

62. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCIONR, 14 April and 31 August 1880, and 24 March 1882. Verandas over street pavements became an important feature of the townscape of those parts of Durban where Indians lived and traded.

63. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 5 July 1881.

64. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 13 September 1881 and 23 May 1882; and 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 6 November 1890.

keen attention.

Public toilets and urinals were one such “nuisance”. To reduce the prevalence of the population defecating in the natural bush which surrounded the town and its infant suburbs, the inspectors regularly called for public toilets and urinals to be provided in specific localities. This began in 1875 with a request for four such sets. Another approach to the problem was to remove the bush which provided a degree of privacy. The beach along the Bay was one place where the “brushwood” was used as a large public toilet. In 1880 the inspector described this and the garbage washed onto the shore, as a daily occurrence, and pleaded for African staff to help him police the area. Rutherford, the collector of customs and chairman of the second Natal Harbour Board, stated that the edge of the Bay and the Point were in an “extremely unsanitary condition”. This, he said, was primarily because of the “non-existence of public toilets and latrines”. Some establishments were noted which did not even provide their own toilets, an example being a boarding house at the Point run by Umdulusi, where the residents were expected to use the surrounding undergrowth. It seems that where there were public urinals, such as those in Pine Street, these were dry systems as it was noted that they were being converted to water urinals in 1887.<sup>65</sup>

Butcheries and slaughter houses were another problem in an age before the development of officially controlled places for the preparation of meat. Problems with such private abattoirs arose periodically. The inspector's natural solution was to request that they be removed altogether from their locality or that at the least they be grouped together. Concerns were expressed in October 1876 and again in July and December 1880. In 1881 it was recorded that the number of “slaughter houses” was increasing by the year. There were also difficulties with farm animals roaming around the outskirts of the town such as the pigs which belonged to butcher Greaves which were found “in the bush on the Eastern Vlei”.<sup>66</sup>

While there does not appear to have been any form of regular examination of food as one would expect from a contemporary municipal health department, the inspectors of nuisances nevertheless became concerned with decaying or inedible foodstuff.<sup>67</sup> In June 1879, the stench of rotting mealies rose from the wreck of the *Ziba* which had come ashore on the Back Beach near Addington on 13 March, carrying a cargo of horses, sheep and maize from Buenos Aires. Since many weeks had passed, the inspector was worried about the possibility that “disease will eventually arise”. In 1881 he reported to the Sanitary Committee about a cargo of 500 bags of damaged rice at the Point; some was being loaded onto trolleys ready to be conveyed to town. He stopped the process and decided that all the rice was to be carried over the sandbar out to sea. The next morning he found that only 31 bags were unfit for human use and these were taken out in the tug Sir Garnet at a total cost of £4 7s 6d. Unfortunately the agent, Acutt, declined to give him the names of the buyers to reclaim the costs. Thereafter he requested the Custom House landing officers to report any food landed which was unfit for human consumption, so as “to avoid nuisance in any locality”.<sup>68</sup> Damaged potatoes

65. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/1, DTCIONR, 27 April 1875; 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/1, DTCSGR, 17 January 1878; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 7 October 1879, 1 May and 16 August 1880; Blue Book for Natal for 1880; and 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 5 January 1887.

66. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/1, DTCSGR, 13 October 1876; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 5 July and 20 December 1880, 4 April 1881; and 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 26 September 1889.

67. Although he did examine bread for sale in October 1897. See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 6 October 1897.

68. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 7 January 1879 and 18 July 1881.

for sale at the market were also reported in November 1880.<sup>69</sup>

Some years later the inspectors became infatuated with the problem of “persons sleeping in shops where food is stored”.<sup>70</sup> Commenting on a proposed bye-law to prevent this, he said that he presumed this was:

intended to affect Indian storekeepers, but am of the opinion it is not sufficiently comprehensive, as there are numbers of such stores where food is stored or sold, used as sleeping rooms, and which also require to be included ... such special bylaw should apply to every Indian store and habitation in the Borough; providing for the regular cleaning of such building and fix the number of persons which should occupy it, as well as the rooms which would be considered unfit to be occupied as sleeping rooms.

He proposed a very comprehensive bylaw which included opening windows, ventilation, floors, washing clothes, partitions, fires and domestic animals. These would have presented many problems, however, since many clauses relied on the individual judgement of the medical officer of health.<sup>71</sup>

As far as water and drainage were concerned, there was as yet no complete understanding of the causes of malaria or typhoid at this time, but the natural instincts of the inspectors was to correctly link disease with problem areas of undrained water.<sup>72</sup> Many reports were made of cesspools, even in such unlikely places as Addington Hospital in 1880 and at the end of Field Street in the town centre where “impure waters from two drains emptied into the Bay”.<sup>73</sup> Insanitary conditions caused by water which could not flow away were found in Plowright Lane off West Street in 1887. Poor drainage conditions were noted at Cato Creek in 1889 where the inspector found “effluvia rising at low water” and, not far away, waste water coming from L. Baumann’s Bakery where the “washings, rinsings and waste water runs into the street and stagnates into a pool ... causing inconvenience and a nuisance”. In 1891, Attorney G.D. Goodricket complained of a problematic drain coming from the prestigious Durban Club in Smith Street.<sup>74</sup> By 1890, the inspector could confidently claim that “a large number of cases of fever in Durban” were linked with “a want of drainage of back yards and premises of surface water ... the owners cannot be made to understand the necessity for improvement”.<sup>75</sup>

69. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 16 November 1880.

70. The inspectors were also concerned about Indian *dbobis*, i.e. washermen, sleeping in the same rooms where their customers’ clothes or linens were stored. In September 1898 thirteen *dbobis* were convicted of this offence under a new bye-law. See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 6 September 1898. In 1900 complaints were made about Indian tailors “making up garments in the bedrooms of their houses”. See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 7 September 1900. There were also concerns about paraffin being stored in Indian shops where food was sold. See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 7 July 1891.

71. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 4 July 1888. Strangely, the inspector became involved with an application for a liquor licence by Wilson in April 1880. See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCIONR, 14 April 1880.

72. Parkes as well as Notter and Firth, linked the spread of typhoid, cholera and dysentery with “polluted water conveying the specific micro organisms”. See Parkes, *A Manual of Practical Hygiene*, pp 47–49; and L.C. Adam and E.J. Boome, *Notter & Firth’s Hygiene* (Longman’s Green & Co., London, 1940), pp 58, 62.

73. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 5 November 1880 and 18 July 1881.

74. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 7 November 1887, 26 September 1889, 4 June 1890 and 5 June 1891.

75. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 18 December 1890.

Animals were also seen to cause a “nuisance” under some circumstances. At an early date, inspector Ellis noted that there were three festering sores in Durban – “the Admiralty reserve with floating debris from certain beach erven; the Ordinance Reserve with dead cattle; and the Indian Barracks with careless Coolies”. In 1880, besides the continuing concern with the pollution of the Bay, many dead animals were found to have been buried on the Eastern Vlei. This kind of problem as well as the issue of keeping cattle in the town rose inevitably from a population which until fairly recently had lived in the country. Many had horses which were stabled in back yards so why not cows? The inspector even became involved when an outbreak of glanders appeared among the local horses in 1895, but these were problems for veterinary specialists.<sup>76</sup>

The transport of animals by sea and rail came to the inspector’s attention in 1897, when he was notified of cruelty to donkeys which had become evident when many dead animals arrived on the *SS Avery Hill* in May. There had been deaths of a large proportion during the voyage. Sixteen dead donkeys had to be taken off the vessel because “some of the carcasses were offensive”. The ship could not be berthed alongside the wharf due to port congestion and the inspector refused to convey them through town. So he had the option of arranging with the agents for a rail truck so that they could be despatched to the Depot Road siding, or have the bodies taken out to sea. The latter was chosen as the best course of action, but on 29 May it was reported that “fifteen carcasses had come ashore on the Back Beach, several on the Bluff sea beach, two were under the wharf, one floating on the Bay and three were on Point Road”. There were also 60 donkeys that had died on the ship while it was in harbour. At about the same time mules which had been entrained from *SS Julia Park* were landed in good condition. However, even before reaching Estcourt a large number were dead. The inspector noted dramatically how the trucks were crammed full, and that as the train was

ascending and descending hills and rounding curves on the journey, the crushing weight of the animals swaying to and fro would be thrown with killing effect onto the animals at the ends of the trucks, and once an animal lost its footing on the smooth and slippery floors of the trucks it would be practically impossible for it to recover its legs, and it would in a short time, be trampled to death by the other animals.<sup>77</sup>

Miscellaneous other problems came before the inspectors, some serious, such as the discovery of seven graves found in 1878 off Shepstone Street at the Point and that “carcasses from Addington Hospital were buried in the bushes near Hospital Road”. There were twelve graves, four recent. But the inspector said he could not interfere as it was obviously a matter for the police.<sup>78</sup> Bush presented an ambivalent set of problems. On the one hand the inspectors were charged with protecting the natural bush and preventing traditional African activities such as bark-stripping, which took place in Albert Park (Delegorgue’s Forest) in 1879. Anyone wishing legitimately to cut bush or burn lime in the early 1870s required a municipal licence. Yet the inspector was also responsible for clearing bush from the “edge of the Bay between Cato’s Creek and the Glebelands” in 1879 and during the following year made complaints about weeds growing on vacant land.<sup>79</sup>

76. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/1, DTCIONR, 4 May 1875; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 25 August 1880 and 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 7 March 1895. In 1901 there were problems with the build-up of manure at the Veterinary Compound at the Point. The inspector requested that yards and penned areas be hardened. See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 7 March 1901.

77. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 6 May 1897.

78. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 17 December 1878 and 3 March 1880.

79. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/1, DTCSCR, 7 September 1877; 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCIONR, 30

The miscellany of difficulties faced over several decades included some unusual ones, such as the question in 1871 of the firing of the 9 o'clock gun which set the time for the town; the state of the bridge over Cato's Creek "on a line with Prince Alfred Street" on the road between Durban and the Point in 1874; town pumps and suburban roads a few years later; an offer in 1876 by the colonial government to the Town Council of the Lazaretto on the Bluff as a hospital for "residents with infectious diseases"; and nuisances, presumably smoke, from chimney shafts in 1881.<sup>80</sup> Over and above the possibility of local causes of disease, the inspectors were constantly on their guard against the importation of serious diseases from abroad, especially from other ports in Africa and from the East. In January 1882, there was great concern when a group of Amatonga workers from Mozambique were landed without the normal process of pratique, when the port medical officer would examine the ship, crew and passengers before granting permission to dock. Typhoid or enteric fever was discovered to have broken out in the district around Cato's Creek in 1896. Even the Police Stations were considered suspect. Several workers fell ill in 1901 at a commercial firm in Pine Street where it was found that there was "an open drain from a yard and urinal carried under the floor and into the street drain [and] open catch pits in the store".<sup>81</sup>

### **Loafers and togt workers**

A recurring difficulty for colonial European society was the emergence from the 1860s of a group of newly urbanised people known in South Africa as togt workers. The etymology of the word togt tells us something of the origins of the daily worker system. The word was used in the Cape for many years to describe workers employed by the day and comes from a variation of the word 'dag' for day. Many freed slaves took to a daily form of employment in the Cape after emancipation in 1834. Evidence exists of a number of casual or daily workers in Durban before the 1870s and there were many who preferred the independence of the daily contract to longer periods of work. This was the hallmark of the African togt worker – a distinct preference to be free to sell labour on a short-term basis to allow for many other options in life. The growing popularity of this approach to labour was to lead to increasing attempts on the part of various colonial and municipal authorities to reduce those options and to limit the independence of such men and control the system. There may be several other aspects to the development of this form of labour. Firstly, there were significantly different perceptions in such dimensions as time between traditional African societies and European attitudes. Atkins has drawn attention to the varying computation of time between European employer and African worker, such as the difference between a calendar month and a lunar month: "The complications arising from the two systems of time notations were enormous". There

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September, 15 October 1879 and 1 May 1880. Delegorgue's Forest was named by early settlers after the young French naturalist Adulphe Delegorgue who lived there in 1842. The Durban Municipal Health Department had inherited the Victorian idea that the growth of weeds on vacant land is unhealthy, although no official has ever been able to explain the reason.

80. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/1, DTCSR, 5 December 1871 and 16 October 1874; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/1, DTCIONR, 25 January and 6 June 1876; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 6 December 1881. The inspector corresponded with the Natal Harbour Board about the need for a new Epidemic Hospital in the town in 1882. See PAR: NHD 1/2/3, Natal Harbour Board, Correspondence, 9 November 1882.

81. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 24 January 1882; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 6 January 1896 and 7 March 1901. Throughout the nineteenth-century colonial period there was a constant fear that smallpox and yellow fever might be introduced to Natal from the East African and Asian ports.

were even difficulties with the mutual understanding of the concept of a year. Both of these were to lead to many serious misunderstandings between employer and employee. But at least a day, between sunrise and sunset, was not really controversial.<sup>82</sup>

Secondly, the cyclical rhythms of crop production and animal husbandry in subsistence farming by local peasants made intermittent familial demands on migrant labourers which conflicted with monthly or contracted labour. Thirdly, togt workers earned more per day than the pro rata earnings of monthly contract workers and this must have appeared attractive, though obviously they could not count on the provision of rations, accommodation or any medical expenses from an employer. From the 1870s special consideration was given in Durban to “loafers” or togt workers and the provision of a building to shelter such homeless persons.

It is quite likely that some of the earliest groups of togt workers to appear in Natal towns during the 1860s came from among the refugees described above, but were probably soon joined by others from different origins. The first formal reference to the existence in Durban of such workers was embodied in a petition of 1865 by the Town Council to the secretary for Native Affairs to control the expansion of this type of labour which suggests that it had been prevalent for some while. They were specifically concerned about the way such togt workers were living off monthly servants. In 1869, Theophilus Shepstone implemented Law No. 15: “For the punishment of idle and disorderly persons and vagrants within the Colony of Natal”. In terms of Law No. 21 of 1862, the onus was placed on the local authorities to control vagrancy among persons of colour:

... every coloured person found wandering abroad after and before such hours as such Corporation may fix, and not giving a good account of himself or herself; every person being found at any time in or upon any dwelling-house, warehouse, shop, stable, kitchen or out-house, or in any enclosed yard or garden, and not giving a good account of himself or herself; every person publicly behaving in a riotous or indecent manner within a borough, and every person apprehended as an idle, disorderly or suspicious person ... shall be deemed an offender within the true meaning and intent of this law, and it shall be lawful for any Magistrate to commit such offender, on conviction, to the gaol, there to be kept to hard labour for any time not exceeding three months ...<sup>83</sup>

In addition, all boroughs were to erect suitable buildings for “such natives” where they “shall obtain shelter for the night”. Boroughs could also fix the hours of curfew. In 1869, Durban fixed the time at nine pm.<sup>84</sup> The building of a special Togt Barracks was first proposed within a report on “loafing” by the Town Council on 7 November 1871.

The Sanitary Committee then became the agency through which the Town Council provided accommodation for the togt workers and so reduced their nuisance value, although ultimately the provision of housing would bring with it several other controls, including licensing and regulation. Both the Committee and the inspector of nuisances as their eyes and ears then became involved with togt regulations and licensing. New regulations came into being in 1873 after the sanitation guardians of the borough had been given an opportunity to make comments.<sup>85</sup> Thereafter the inspectors regularly reported on the misdemeanours and dwellings of this group of workers including the large sets of barracks built by the Town Council to house them in Victoria Street in 1877,

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82. K.E. Atkins, “Kafir Time: Preindustrial Temporal Concepts and Labour Discipline in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Natal”, *Journal of African History*, 29, 1988, pp 229–244.

83. DAR: 3Dbn 5/2/7/1/2, DTCSC, Minutes, 7 November 1871.

84. Durban: Mayor’s Minutes for 1869.

85. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/2, DTCSC, Minutes, 14 November 1871 and 1 July 1873.

and on Bell Street at the Point from 1890. By that year they totalled about 1 600. In 1890 an inspector had found togt workers living under Robinson's bottle store at Addington and two years later he said that McArthur Street was "thickly populated with togt workers and shanties ... paying ten shillings a month for wretched shanties into which they can crawl".<sup>86</sup> There were other groups of vagrants in Durban and in 1889 a report was provided on Indian beggars of whom "several were wandering around homeless and begging from shopkeepers ... a dozen collected together on certain premises to sleep ... many left because of the search for lepers ... some are arrested and punished".<sup>87</sup>

### Garbage collection

When H.G. Simpson replaced Stonell in April 1865, he was given the title inspector of nuisances and street keeper. This would have been intended to describe his role in maintaining clean streets. In the same year the council commenced important innovations with the collection of rubbish using dust carts. On 14 June 1875 "a new system of removal of rubbish was implemented" and new pits were dug at the corner of Pine Terrace and Grey Street and near the gaol on Stanger Street, but no details were provided. When Supt Alexander took over the duties in November 1876 he reported on further changes and that instead of the two carts and six dustmen he had introduced "three carts going eight hours daily under a street keeper to clean the Borough of filth and rubbish".<sup>88</sup> One dimension of the process was the collection – the other was disposal, and besides burying rubbish an incinerating kiln was used which was increased in size in 1877 from 10 ft in diameter to 35 ft so that it could handle five times the quantity of rubbish. But disposal continued to present difficulties and in 1879 a site near the Old Camp (Old Fort) was selected "for a heap" and another dustcart requested. Not much more was recorded about the collection of rubbish during the rest of the century, suggesting that the system worked smoothly, although in 1880 another system known as "Carter's patent disintegrator" was being considered for reducing the overall volumes of rubbish. In 1902 there were complaints made by the inspector about the problems of "scavenging of rubbish at the Point because of piled up goods on roadways". This problem was a direct result of the "blockage" at the harbour brought on primarily by vast quantities of goods which came into Natal before and during the Anglo-Boer War.<sup>89</sup>

### The night-soil system

Within less than three decades the entire culture and technology of collecting and treating sewage in Durban changed from a quasi-medieval one of collecting, manufacturing and selling "manure" for agricultural purposes, to a fully-fledged water-borne sewerage system with steam-driven pumps for disposal into the sea. In many respects this rapid

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86. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 4 September 1890 and 4 May 1892. Togt workers occupied shanties in Prince Street not far from the harbour in 1895. See 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 6 May 1895. The inspector also reported on the condition of his own Council's barracks in 1900, noting the need for repairs to roof, floors and windows. See 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 7 November 1900.
87. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 5 November 1889.
88. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/1, DTCIONR, 3 June 1875; and 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/1, DTCSCR, 18 November 1876.
89. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/1, DTCIONR, 4 May 1877; 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCIONR, 28 July 1879. In January 1879 the inspector struggled to find an appropriate dumping site "for shoot iron and clippings" and settled on Cato's Creek. In 1880 "a dustman was caught stealing wood and grapes". See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 6 December 1880; and 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 7 January 1902. It is interesting to compare the composition of nineteenth-century rubbish with that of today. Most was made up of ash, animal waste, paper, tin, glass and cloth.

change represented an entirely new attitude to sanitation, derived largely from the growing concern for healthy urban environments and the avoidance, through engineering means, of possible causes of disease.<sup>90</sup>

In 1865, the Town Council had entered into a contract with Brunton for three years for “the removal of nightsoil from privies, householders being required to supply boxes, while suitable conveniences were provided for natives”.<sup>91</sup> It is not entirely clear how this system actually operated. Brunton would have employed staff who used a horse-drawn cart and the boxes would be collected from individual properties and stacked on the cart for the disposal of the soil outside the town. This box was probably replaced with an empty one, perhaps both had the name of the resident for identification. The system was to continue for many years in the town and the inner suburbs and by the 1870s the planning of many residential lots and street blocks incorporated special nightsoil lanes which ran midway along the blocks and served the privies or necessities located at the boundary of the lot and the lane. Thus a few times per week the night-soil cart would make its way down such lanes after dark and perform the collection process out of sight. During the following three decades the entire process was taken over by the municipality and the inspectors became involved and especially with the problem of disposal.

There were many reports written on nightsoil between 1870 and 1874 by the inspector of nuisances and minuted by the Sanitary Committee. By 1874, a decision had been made to change from boxes to metal pails, probably for ease of cleaning.<sup>92</sup> A tender advertisement for the Town Council of May 1875 informs us that the disposal of the soil was considered to be a productive resource because the successful tenderer was to purchase from the Council the “whole of house and stable refuse and nightsoil [and] must be prepared to manufacture the same into a dry portable manure”.<sup>93</sup> Continuing a long tradition from Europe and Britain this “manure” would have been used on farms as a fertiliser. In many British towns the initiatives of sanitary reformer Edwin Chadwick had encouraged the setting up of “sewage farms” on their outskirts where the sewage was spread out and crops grown. Leicester and some major European cities still had such systems for most of the twentieth century. However there were several factors which caused problems with this procedure in Durban. Firstly the quantities of soil increased rapidly. Secondly much difficulty was experienced in properly drying the “manure” so that, as Supt Alexander explained: “in Natal where the agriculturists are far and wide, the manure must be dried and made portable for easy transport”.

It was noted in 1876 that a new system of disposing the nightsoil had commenced but no details were provided. More than half the town’s ratepayers now benefited from the service. In that same year the Town Council brought in from Mauritius and India a number of “topuses” – a special caste of Indian worker “for various sanitary services”. More arrived in 1882 and Inspector Lewis of the Borough Police “gave instructions for them to build huts for themselves at the depot”.<sup>94</sup> The inspector’s report of October 1876 provided useful information and data about the

90. Especially, cholera and enteric fever (typhoid).

91. Henderson, *Durban*, pp 60, 61.

92. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/1, DTCSCR, 13 September 1870; 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/2, DTCSCR, 4 July and 7 September 1872, 20 February and 7 July 1874.

93. *Natal Mercury*, 11 May 1875.

94. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/7/1/1, DTCIONR, 7 June 1876; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/1, DTCIONR, and 4 July 1876; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 4 March 1882; 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/1, DTCSCR, 8 November 1876.

night-soil system. A population of 3 000 produced 200 full pails which arrived daily at the depot each weighing 31 lbs, totalling 891 tons per year.

[Excluding] the slopwater, the valuable part is 700 tons, made up of 75 tons of solid faeces giving 20 tons of solid; 25 tons of paper and 600 tons of urine all providing 85 tons of valuable fertiliser, each pail takes 50 lb absorbent ... a total of 1 397 per annum; blood from slaughter houses would provide 100 lbs daily which added to absorbant would give 55 tons; total 85 + 1397+ 55 + 63 bags and rags provides 1 600 tons of manure ... [the] absorbant contains straw, straw ash, wood and wood ash, horse dung, bones, vegetable matter, fish offal, fatty matter and bags.<sup>95</sup>

When Supt Alexander temporarily took over as inspector in November 1876, he made several changes. In a lengthy report he described the rubbish and night-soil removal systems and alterations required to be made to the department. At the time there were three “heavy night-soil carts ... two small carts, one broken, six horses ... [the] night-soil carts are so heavy they require three horses”. Much time was lost in unloading the carts so he suggested converting them into tip carts which could then be worked with two horses. He provided a drawing which showed the simple change in the position of the cart axle to enable this to work. He commented on the “difficulty of manufacturing first class manure, [the] prevention of mixing sand with it and digging it thoroughly”. He recommended three sieves and boxes on wheels to remove the absorbant materials. Again he provided a drawing and quoted from an English source which recommended that the manure should be taken away moist to preserve the full strength. But it was impossible to dry the manure in the kiln at the depot, as the kiln was “too small and useless”. So the manure was dried on open ground. This presented a problem in that the ground was damp and very sandy, “and the sand damages the manure”. His solution was to place it on iron, zinc or tin plates raised above ground. Thus “it can easily be moved under cover in case of rain”. This would enable the brick kiln to be taken down and by this means he guaranteed “to manufacture the best manure possible” and to save labour. While this may have produced some advantages it seems that drying and selling manure would continue to be problematic as by 1880 some was being buried.<sup>96</sup>

The process was one line of duty where the inspectors could exercise some creative innovation. Having said that a “complete reform [is] required of the night-soil system, [as the] present [one is] very unsatisfactory”, Inspector Petersen began to search for a solution to the problem of urine within the nightsoil.<sup>97</sup> Thus he set about experimenting with a small urinal filter “duly charged with carbonated sweepings”. The liquids could then be separated from the solids with a sieve, poured into a barrel and mixed with sulphate of iron and thus partially disinfected. This was allowed to stand for some hours to settle and then passed into a filter filled with carbonaceous material. Another receptacle below, also with sulphate of iron, received the resulting liquid. His report included a diagram of the system which he considered successful. He also recommended a new type of pail with an inner and outer container. A few weeks later he

95. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/1. DTCSCR, 10 July 1876; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/1, DTCIONR, 31 October 1876.

96. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/1. DTCSCR, 18 November 1876; 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCIONR, 26 August 1880. In 1878 it was noted that there was a “refinement of nightsoil processing” and that the Sanitary Committee was “continuing to refine and improve the nightsoil treatment and process”.

97. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCIONR, 5 April 1880. In April 1880, Petersen commented on the “problem of the public using closets as urinals and the nuisance they commit”. This implied that the soil was thus rendered useless for using as manure. See DAR, 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 5 April 1880.

again noted the success of his experiment and asked the Sanitary Committee if they had made a decision on the implementation of the idea by the Town Council.<sup>98</sup> Fired with enthusiasm, Petersen applied for a patent for his invention described as a method “for the treatment of human excreta and the manufacture of manure therefrom”.<sup>99</sup>

Constant attention was given to one of the main elements of the night-soil system, namely the pails. In 1879 there was a short supply and they were tarred and disinfected using a lead solution and carbolic acid. Two years later 2 000 of a new pattern were ordered from Britain and it was recorded at the time that there was a shortage of sulphate of iron for disinfecting, about fifteen tons being required each year. By that time a Mr Louis was in charge of the depot.<sup>100</sup> In 1887 Archibald Henderson of Durban took out a patent application for “an improved sanitary pail” but there are no records of how it was an improvement.<sup>101</sup>

Alternative methods of moving liquid waste were in place by 1887 when cylinder vans were noted for the use of slops in quantity. The night-soil service was extended to the Point area in 1877 where “the Ratepayers ... have been supplied with pails and the soil removed every second day by our corporation coolies since 12 April”. Two additional staff were thus needed. In 1881 the Western Vlei was incorporated in the daily rounds and by 1889 Congella and a portion of the Berea. Two years later Umbilo and Florida Road were included.<sup>102</sup> The suburban service in 1892 involved 896 pails supplied to 716 premises, twice weekly, although the service was more frequent in some places. Furthermore, a large expansion had been noted in new suburban areas.<sup>103</sup>

#### A water-borne sewerage system

By then a decision had already been taken to install a comprehensive new water-borne sewerage system for the town with the water assisted soil flowing by gravity through a large network of pipes and drains to a processing plant at Bamboo Square at the Point. Law No. 21 of 1890 facilitated the large undertaking for which a loan of £100 000 was floated on the London market. The scheme combined the generating of electricity for the pumping of collected sewerage, the destruction of garbage and for electric lighting. At the same time an extraordinary survey was begun of the town and its main suburbs to a scale of 1 inch to 40 feet. This scale enabled individual buildings and plots to be recorded showing how they were each to be connected with the piped system. Before the collected sewerage reached the pumping station at the Point, seawater was first admitted to the intercepting main near Cato’s Creek. At the Point it was discharged into a deep screening chamber and then a pump well from which it was raised by centrifugal pumps and then through three fine screening chambers. Large floating matter was removed and burnt in

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98. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 31 August and 25 September 1880. He also noted that the excreta alone was buried with ashes, and that he needed two brick kilns to add to the existing three, for carbonating the sweepings.

99. PAR: Attorney General’s Office (hereafter AGO) 17/2, Patents, Vol. I/17/2, 5 April 1880. Another patent application of April 1896 was for “A new wc for use by natives”. See *Natal Government Gazette*, XLVIII, 2 796, 28 April 1896.

100. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/2, DTCIONR, 28 July 1879; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/2, DTCIONR, 26 August 1880 and 2 March 1881.

101. PAR: AGO, Patents, Vol I./17/2, 2 February 1887. Unfortunately the detailed descriptions, drawings and models of patents have not been kept by the Archives Service. See DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, Durban Town Council, Inspector of Nuisances Report, 7 November 1887.

102. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/6/1/1, DTCSCR, 9 April 1877; 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 26 September 1889 and 7 July 1891. .

103. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/5/3, DTCIONR, 4 May 1892.

the garbage destructor. From the receiving storage tank at Bamboo Square the effluent was then pumped out along the North Pier through the outfall main into the entrance channel for the first two hours of ebb tide. The entire technology of depositing and treating sewerage in this way was justified by the borough engineer, John Fletcher, who stated: “If organic matter is discharged into a large river or the sea, under the proper conditions for rapid distribution, complete purification will be effected by natural agencies ... due to the action of minute organisms”.<sup>104</sup> The sewerage outfall works was put into full operation on 1 July 1896. The inspector of nuisances played no part in all of these modern facilities, but it must be noted that the new scheme could not serve the entire borough and the night-cart soil system was still operating in the Umbilo and Umgeni areas in 1936.<sup>105</sup>

### Plague

The very worst fears of the inspectors became a reality in 1901 when plague spread through Indian Ocean states and the sanitary department prepared for a local outbreak. Many inspections were conducted especially of Bamboo Square; a circular was distributed to employers of large numbers of workers; and many barracks were limewashed. Numerous rats were caught on the wharfs and at the Point. But when plague did arrive in November 1902, and was first found inevitably at Bamboo Square, it became the serious concern of the Colonial Department of Health and its director Dr E. Hill and the inspectors were tasked with carrying out many duties determined by his office.<sup>106</sup> In April 1902 Daugherty, the inspector of nuisances, said somewhat pessimistically that the town had not yet reached a sweet and wholesome state:

I regret to say, and I say so respectfully, that in my opinion there is not nearly sufficient sanitary progress and improvement to meet the growing necessities of the Borough, [there has been] slow progress during the last twelve to eighteen months.<sup>107</sup>

The work of the inspector still continues, but not through one man and a few assistants, because there are now numerous municipal departments, such as Health, Building Inspectorate and Housing that undertake much the same work but with hundreds of employees.

### Abstract

The nineteenth-century colonial town of Durban became a place where a growing British sanitation culture met headlong with the different attitudes of other urbanising people. The inspector of nuisances and the municipality's Sanitary Committee played a significant role in this context and tried to deal with a great variety of environmental problems. Some, such as overcrowded slums, led specifically to far-reaching consequences such as formal segregation policies. The inspectors were also concerned with many other types of nuisances including the need for hygiene; loafers and togt workers, barracks and compounds and the inspection of buildings. They played an important role in the development and refinement of urban services such as the night-soil system and the manufacture of fertilising manure.

104. Henderson, *Durban*, pp 285–286; and Durban: Mayor's Minute for 1896.

105. Durban: Mayor's Minute for 1936.

106. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/3, DTCIONR, 7 March 1901. Fears of plague were first voiced in the 1890s. The account of the plague in Durban in 1902/1903 is another story.

107. DAR: 3/Dbn 5/2/5/3, Durban Town Council, Inspector of Nuisances Report, 4 April 1902.

**Keywords:** Durban; inspector of nuisances; Sanitary Committee; disease; overcrowding; poverty; segregation; locations; public nuisances; building inspections; collection and treatment of nightsoil; rubbish collection.

### Opsomming

#### **“Hou jou dorp skoon en gesond” - Die inspekteur van steurnisse: ’n narrasie van kultuur en santitasie in negentiende eeuse Durban**

In die negentiende-eeuse koloniale dorp, Durban, het die ontwikkelende Britse sanitasiekultuur lynreg gebots met die diverse sieninge van ander groepe in die proses van verstedeliking. Die "Inspekteur van Verontreiniging" en die Municipale Sanitaire Komitee het 'n betekenisvolle rol in hierdie konteks gespeel en moes 'n verskeidenheid van omgewings-probleme hanteer. Sommige, soos oor-besette krotbuurte, het vêrreikende gevolge gehad: 'n Formele segregasie beleid. Die Inspekteurs was ook gemoeid met verskeie ander stoornisse: die behoefté aan higiëne; leeglêers en togarbeiders; barakke en kampongs en geboue-inspeksie. Hulle het 'n belangrike rol vervul in die ontwikkeling en verfyning van stedelike dienste soos die nagvuil stelsel en die vervaardiging van misstof vir bemesting.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Durban, "Inspekteur van Verontreiniging", Sanitaire Komitee, siektes, oor-besetting, armoede, segregasie, lokasies, openbare stoornisse, bou-inspekteurs, versameling en behandeling van nagvuil (sanitaire afval), afval-verwydering.