

THE BARRACKS AND HOSPITAL OF THE CAPE CORPS IN GRAHAMSTOWN IN 1826*

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Detailed information about the construction and equipment of the Barracks in which the regiment known as the Cape Corps was accommodated, and of the Military Hospital which was provided for it while it was stationed at Grahamstown in the early years of the City, is comparatively scarce, though a good deal is known about it since 1835, the year in which it was christened 'Fort England', in honour of Lieutenant-Colonel Richard England of the 73rd Regiment (the Gordon Highlanders), who was in charge of the fort in that year.

A few years ago, however, while I was in London, I endeavoured to follow up a clue afforded me by a passage in the supplementary chapter in *The Autobiography and Services of Sir James McGrigor, Bart., late Director-General of the Army Medical Department* (London, 1861), in which it was stated that 348 folio volumes of manuscript medical reports from every station in the world where British troops had been quartered, all bound, lettered and indexed, and covering the years 1816-1850, were in existence at that time.

Since it was obvious to me that these volumes must contain medical and other reports transmitted to England not only by Andrew Smith but also by Drs. James Barry and Robert Knox (the latter remembered for his unfortunate association with the Edinburgh 'body-snatchers', Burke and Hare) while they were serving in South Africa, I determined to try to trace them if possible. An additional stimulus was the fact that seven of the volumes were entitled 'Topography, with Maps', and I had found conclusive evidence that Robert Knox had prepared a map of the frontier which he had sent to Sir James McGrigor, who had duly acknowledged receipt of it.

After considerable inquiry I found that these precious volumes had been kept at Netley Hospital, but that after World War II they had been transferred to the Royal Army Medical College at Millbank in London. The librarian there informed me that a number of bound volumes from Netley had certainly been received some time before, but as there was no suitable room in which they could be stored, they had been deposited under the roof of the College!

I obtained permission from the Commandant at Millbank to have the books brought down and placed in rows on the floor of one of the lecture-rooms, and then I began the dreary and dusty job of going through and catalogueing them, and examining their contents. At the outset I realized with dismay that many of the volumes were missing, since their total number was only 128, of which a mere 25 belonged to the period during which McGrigor was

Director-General, and only 2 to that of Dr. Smith, his successor. Moreover there was no trace of the 7 volumes of 'Topography, with Maps'.

However, I did discover a few volumes which contained official medical reports sent to London from the Cape of Good Hope, among them being several of Andrew Smith and of James Barry. The former I found most useful for my biography of the Scottish doctor. In addition I came across a long report descriptive of the Barracks and Hospital of the Cape Corps in Grahamstown, later known as 'Fort England', the writer being William Parrott, then surgeon of the Cape Corps, and the date being 12 March 1827, just 2 years after Dr. Andrew Smith had been in charge of it. Dr. Parrott's report is of such importance that I consider that those portions of it which deal with the Hospital and its equipment should be put on record. I have, however, omitted from the present article that part of it in which the cases of various patients—Coloured men—were dealt with.

The importance of the report lies in the fact that between 1814—when the first Military Hospital in Grahamstown consisted of a hut near to those in which Colonel Graham, who had set up his establishment there, had his headquarters—and the early eighteen-forties when, according to Burrows,⁷ a Military Hospital was established at the Drostdy, there have been no particulars available of how or where military patients were accommodated and treated in the 'City of the Saints'. Parrott's report was prefaced by the following letter:

'Graham's Town, 12th. March,
1827.

Sir,

The enclosed Sheets which I have now the honor of transmitting to you, relating to the structure and condition of the Cape Corps Hospital, the means of its accommodation, etc.,

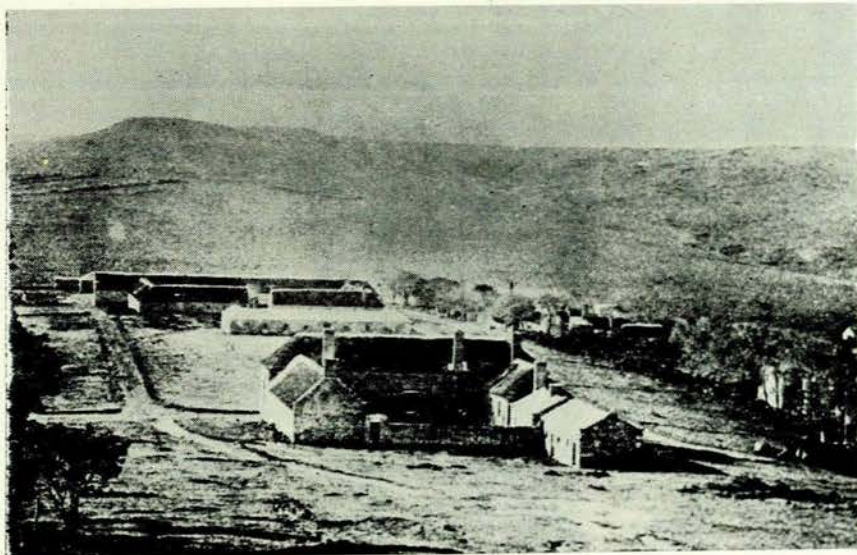


Fig. 1. An early photograph of the hospital. This gives some idea of what it must have looked like during 1826.

*Date received: 12 March 1968.

conclude all the remarks I have considered it necessary to make in the Annual Report, which I hope may meet with your approbation, while I beg to claim your indulgence, in overlooking any imperfections you may discover therein.

I have the honor to be
 Sir,
 Your obedient humble
 servant,
 William Parrott,
 Surgeon,
 Cape Corps.

J. Arthur, Esqr., M.D.,
 Principal Medical Officer, etc., etc., etc.,
 Cape Town.

After a brief survey of the comparative ages of the men on the strength of the Cape Corps, both European and Non-European, which at that time amounted to 158 Cavalrymen and 151 Infantrymen, Dr. Parrott proceeds thus:

'Under the head of Interior economy of the Corps, are to be comprehended 1st. Messing, 2ndly. Clothing, 3rdly. Accommodation in Barracks, and 4thly. Duties to be performed.

'The Messes are ample in quantity, of excellent quality, and regularly supplied. Each man's Mess consists of two Pounds of Meat and one Pound of Bread with two Ounces of Rice or Flour and a proportion of Vegetable per Day.

'The Clothing is good, and the Men's Kits are kept complete in necessaries agreeable to His Majesty's Regulations.

'The Barracks are erected on the summit of a Hill, somewhat more than a mile from the Town. This Hill has a plane surface of considerable extent, running from S.E. to N.E., and terminates by gradual declivities in rivulets, or, what are here deno-

minated "Drifts", by which it is bounded on the N.E. and Western extremities, and it is surrounded by Hills rising one above the other, of greater altitude than itself.

'The site of the Barracks is open, airy and pleasant, having a commanding view of the Town and circumjacent Country, some parts of which are in a state of high cultivation, producing some species of Corn, Vegetables and esculent Roots, as also varieties of Fruits. They are divided into Cavalry and Infantry Barracks, both of which are built in the form of a square, besides having other rooms distant therefrom and belonging to each.

'The Cavalry Square comprises seventeen Rooms of various sizes, built of Brick. They are for the most part small, and appropriated to the accommodation of the Staff and Troop Serjeants, who have Families. Two are occupied as general Barrack Rooms, one as a School Room and Church, two as Orderly Rooms, one as a Tailor's Shop, one as a Saddler's Shop, one as a Guard House and one as a Black Hole, the remaining eight being occupied as above stated. Contiguous to this Square are the Cavalry Stables, which consists of two capacious well-constructed Buildings of Stone, running parallel with the S.E. side of the Square, and at a considerable distance from each other, between which is the Parade Ground.

'Beyond the second range of Stables is a large Barrack Room, having three smaller ones at one end, and four at its other end, which run in the same direction. These are constructed partly of soft Brick and partly of what is here termed "Wattle and Dab", and are occupied by the Cavalry part of the Corps.

'The Infantry Square consists of twenty-nine Rooms of different dimensions, and are thus distributed. Three larger Rooms are occupied as general Barrack Rooms, eight smaller as Serjeants' Rooms, sixteen smaller Rooms as married Rooms, one Cook House and one Guard House. The East end of the

33

Return of Bedding, Linen, Furniture and Utensils in possession of the Cape Corps Hospital, at Graham's Town, 24th December, 1826.

	Wards, Kitchen, Serjeants Room and Store.																			Articles belonging to the Medical Dept.					
	Chairs	Tables	Stools	Blankets	Shirts	Shirts	Shirts	Shirts	Shirts	Shirts	Shirts	Shirts	Shirts	Shirts	Shirts	Shirts	Shirts	Shirts	Shirts	Shirts	Blankets	Blankets	Blankets	Blankets	
Serviceable—	4	12	20	20	10	2	13	14	1	2	1	2	1	1	4	2	2	1	1	7	1	33	33	27	1
Repairable—	5	1																							
Unserviceable—	5	1	7	5	11	3	11	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1						
Total—	14	14	27	25	21	13	24	24	2	2	2	2	2	2	5	3	3	2	2	7	1	33	33	27	1

Fig. 2. A list of hospital supplies.

Square is formed by a Stable for the accommodation of the Infantry Horses. Near to these is another small Room occupied by married Persons. The whole of these Buildings are constructed of Wattle and Dab, and the Floors both of the Cavalry and Infantry Rooms consist of Mud.

From the nature of their construction, it frequently happens that the Walls of these Buildings are washed away, during the continuance of heavy rains, and the inmates are afterwards left exposed to the vicissitudes of the weather.

The Rooms are not supplied with Barrack Furniture, the Barrack Master having prohibitory orders against issuing anything to the Corps.

Each Man is furnished with one Blanket, and as far as they will go, with a Palliasse and Bolster Case, there being (as I am informed) but two hundred and fifty of those Articles in the Corps, which are not filled, the intention being that they should be filled with Straw furnished by the Barrack Department.

The Barrack Rooms not being furnished with Bedsteads, the Men are necessarily obliged to lay upon the Floor, and the general practice is, for them to sleep upon a Mat laid thereon, with which each Man provides himself. Many of the cavalry Soldiers sleep in this manner in the Stables at their Horses' Feet.

With such bare accommodation and from exposure to damps and partly unsheltered Rooms, much sickness might be expected. Such however is not the fact, which may be accounted for from the description of Persons forming the Corps being inured to all these privations and accustomed to lay down in any situation (sheltered or unsheltered) at all seasons, from their earliest infancy. Disease however may be looked for, and often is induced by the too free use of ardent spirit, to which both Men and Women are strongly addicted.

The Duties to be performed consist in the mounting a Barrack Guard, Picquet Duty, Fatigue Duties, and principally Patrol Duties, which latter are frequently very harassing and severe, both to Officers and Men.

At this point Dr. Parrott gives an account, covering 28½ pages of his report, of the treatment of the diseases for which various members of the Cape Corps were treated during the year, and then proceeds to describe the Hospital.

The Hospital is situated nearly in the centre of the Hill on which the Barracks are erected, and is at a good distance apart from any other Building. It is built of Brick, and the Walls are plastered within and without. It consists of six Rooms, which are thus occupied:— One as a Surgery, one as a Serjeants' Room, one as a Kitchen, one as a Dead House, and two as Wards. To these a Privy is attached.

The following is the length and width of each Room.

	Length		Width	
	Feet	Inches	Feet	Inches
Surgery	16	6	12	—
Serjeants' Room	20	6	16	—
Kitchen	11	—	10	—
Dead House	11	—	10	—
Wards, each	26	6	16	—
Passage between the Wards	16	—	3	9

The Rooms are of a middling degree of height being rather lofty than low.

Those which are occupied as Wards will accommodate ten Patients, and in case of much necessity, twelve Persons might be accommodated in each. They admit of being well ventilated, having two Windows in front, and two in the rear of each Ward. They have no Fire place, which I am disposed to consider as a necessary improvement, for the purpose of enabling a Fire to be kept, in wet and cold Weather, especially during the Winter Months.

The Hospital is extremely ill supplied with the Furniture and Utensils requisite for such an Asylum. It will be seen by a reference to the accompanying Return of Articles in possession, that the Surgery is without either a Chair or a Table, and that it is deficient in every other respect.

So also in the Wards, there is neither a Table, a Form or

a Towel for the convenience and accommodation of the Patients. There is likewise a deficiency of Bedsteads, and those in use are in great measure unserviceable. In respect of Bedding, the means of supply are tolerably good; but the reverse would be the Case, were it not for the number of Articles of that description which belong to the Medical Depot here.

It will be observed further, that the Kitchen is equally badly supplied with necessary Articles, and that the majority of those enumerated in the Return for general purposes are more or less unserviceable.

This state of things is attributable to the circumstance of the Barrack Department having strictly enjoined the Barrack Master of the Frontier, not to issue any Article of Barrack Furniture for the use of the Cape Corps, nor to exchange such Articles as are in a state of spoliation.

Each Man on Commission into Hospital brings with him a Quart Tin Pot, a Tin Plate, a Spoon, Knife and Fork, and one or more Towels, all of which he would otherwise be destitute of.

The following improvements have been suggested and approved of by the Commanding Engineer here (viz.) The erection of Shelves round the Surgery and a small Shelf contiguous to the Bed of each Patient, sufficient to contain the Bread and other Articles necessary for his use.

In cases of Death, there is no Table or other convenient thing in the Dead House, on which to lay the Corpse.

By a General Order, dated Cape Town, 15th. September, 1826, it is directed that the Works and Buildings enumerated therein as having been inspected by Boards of Officers appointed for the purpose, by order of the Major-General commanding the Forces, shall be considered as Military Buildings, and under the charge of the Ordnance Department.

In this Order, the Hospital, Barracks and other Buildings occupied by the Cape Corps at Graham's Town and the Outposts, are included. But, I believe it only refers to the keeping them in a state of repair, and not to the supply of Furniture or Utensils, which are expected to be furnished by the Colonial Government, except at Fort Willshire, which Post being garrisoned by Troops of the Line, is provided with all such Articles as are allowed by the Barrack Regulations; while nothing is permitted to be issued or exchanged at any of the Cape Out Posts which are occupied by the Cape Corps.

William Parrott,
Surgeon,
Cape Corps.

There follows a 'Return of Bedding, Dresses, Furniture and Utensils in possession of the Cape Corps Hospital, at Graham's Town, 24th. December, 1826', all the articles accounted for being set out in tabular form, and classified as 'Serviceable, Repairable and Unserviceable'. It is a dismal list, and Dr. Parrott was deserving of great credit for his courage in submitting it to the authorities.

For it is a fact that the Surgeon in charge of the hospital had no personal power to requisition anything whatever; everything had to be approved by the military officers. Even the designing of hospitals was the prerogative of the Engineers' Department, which generally went ahead with such work without consulting the Medical Department. Dr. Parrott did his best to work into his report his highly justifiable complaints, presumably in the hope that his superior officer at the Cape might be able to effect some improvements.

The fact, however, remains that right up to the Crimean War the military hospitals were still being planned by the Engineers' Department, and not until Dr. Andrew Smith (before Florence Nightingale) kicked over the traces and created Netley was the position changed.

REFERENCE

- Burrows, E. H. (1958): *A History of Medicine in South Africa*. Cape Town: A. A. Balkema.