

THE BARRACKS AND MILITARY HOSPITALS OF THE CAPE PENINSULA IN 1825 - 1826*

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In the preamble to my article on 'The Barracks and Hospital of the Cape Corps in Grahamstown in 1826' I described how I had traced in London several volumes of official reports written by various medical officers stationed with their respective regiments in British colonies, including the Cape, among which was the Grahamstown one to which I have alluded.

Since then, however, I have been privileged to obtain photostatic copies of 2 more of these reports, both of which emanated from Cape Town itself. The first of these, which is the subject of the present paper, consists of a meticulous description of the Barracks and Military Hospitals of the Cape Peninsula during 1825 - 1826.

The second report, which probably concerns pharmacists rather than medical practitioners, consists of a detailed discussion of the medicinal properties of *Arctopus echinatus* (the *Platdoorn* of the Cape of Good Hope), a little thorny plant which grows at the Cape and elsewhere in South Africa. It is of particular interest to South Africa, for it was written and signed by Dr James Barry!

THE REPORT

The present paper is confined to a consideration of the first of these reports, and it reveals quite vividly the conditions under which British regiments were quartered and

rationed while stationed at the Cape during the early years of the 19th century. The full report, of course, contains notes on the various types of cases treated throughout the year, together with statistics regarding them, but these I have not included here. I would, however, emphasize one very important point in connection with this report, which is that at the time at which it was written and for many years after—even so late as the period of the Crimean War—both Barracks and Military Hospitals were designed and constructed by the Engineers of the Army, generally without consulting the Medical Department. The only way, therefore, whereby military medical officers could exert their influence was by introducing into their reports criticisms of the state of affairs in the hospitals under their charge, in the hope that when these eventually reached the Director-General in London he might possibly use what influence he had with the War Office in an endeavour to remedy matters.

Not until Dr Andrew Smith—when he was Director-General of the Army Medical Department during the Crimean Campaign—insisted upon drastic reforms was Netley Hospital established; and all the thanks he got for it was the iconoclastic criticism of Florence Nightingale!

In editing Assistant-Surgeon Armstrong's Report, I have not altered his text in any way beyond revising the punctuation and deleting some of the unnecessary capital letters

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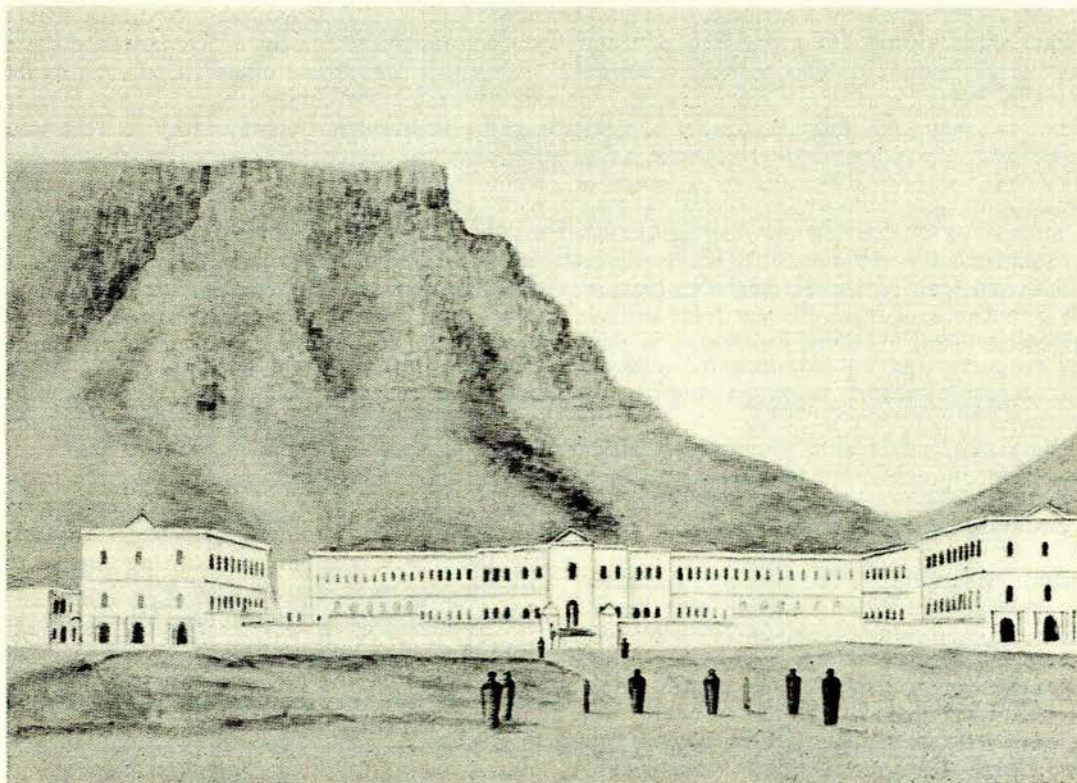


Fig. 1. Cape Barracks originally the Groot Hospitaal aan de Cabo de Goede Hoop (Epidemicque Huijs).

which, after the custom of the time, he applied to a number of nouns. And I have left untouched his occasional Scotticisms, with which I cannot help sympathizing! *Annual Medical Report of Assistant-Surgeon Armstrong, 98th. Regiment of Foot, from 21st. December, 1825 to 20th. December, 1826. Cape Town, Cape of Good Hope.*

'In forwarding the following observations on the prevailing diseases of the 98th. Regiment, I beg leave to observe that the medical charge of it devolved on me only within the last six or seven weeks of the period which this report embraces, and that for seven months previous, I had been in charge of a Detachment, 55th. Regiment, at Simon's Town. I shall, however, endeavour by reference to the Register kept by Surgeon Fidler to give as full information as the records and documents will permit, together with what has fallen under my own observation on the causes, nature and treatment of the diseases treated in hospital.

'The Quarters of the Regt. here reported on last year by Surgeon Fidler were in the Great Barracks, but in consequence of a Govt. Order of the 2nd. Feby., 1826, they were removed to the Castle, which they since continued to occupy with a few of the Royal Artillery. The Castle Barracks is a large irregular building, about a quarter of a mile distant from the Great Barracks before occupied and to the eastward of them and Cape Town, surrounded by a deep ditch and a high rampart as high as the top of the officers' and soldiers' rooms; consequently preventing a free current of air and rendering them extremely warm and oppressive, in particular when the S.E. winds blow, which at this season is very frequent. On its west side, in the ditch, is a constant stream of ("excellent" added later) water from the foot of Table Mountain, running in a northern direction until it empties itself into Table Bay.

'There are but two entrances into the Castle; a public one on the west and a private one on the eastern side. The Castle is divided into two Squares by a range of Officers' Quarters running in a direction from W. to East. In the front Square, or that which the west gate leads into, are the Commandant's and Principal Officers' Quarters. Every attention is paid to the keeping these Squares clean, by daily attendance of black Pioneers* for the sole purpose of cleaning them. Washing in general is done outside of the ramparts, and no lodgement of water of any description allowed to collect, being removed by convenient under drains.

'The Castle Barracks is abundantly supplied with good and wholesome water brought from the bottom of Table Mountain by metal pipes. Pumps are also sunk in various parts of the Castle Squares which the men have access to at all times.

'The Regiment, 530 strong, with the regular compliment (*sic*) of women and children, occupy nine rooms, several of which on an average contain 70 men each. One is allotted to the Band, and another to the married men and their families. Of the above-mentioned seven, four form the north-east angle of the front Square; two of the rooms are up stairs, each of these having four windows in front, two feet from the floor, commanding

a S.W. aspect. The circulation of air is imperfect, there being no windows or ventilators in rear. Floor boarded. Of the two below stairs the same number of windows in front, and also without proper means of through ventilation. Floor stone. Of the other three rooms occupied by unmarried soldiers, two have seven windows in front, aspect N.W., with five ventilators in rear. Floors boarded. The other has eight windows with an equal proportion of ventilators. Floor brick and stone. The room allotted to the married soldiers, equally large as the others, contain(s) only twelve men with their families. Floor stone. This is the only well-ventilated and airy Barrack room in the Castle. Off each of the first-mentioned seven rooms is a small one which is in general given to the Color- or Pay-Serjeants of Companies.

'The Interior Oeconomy of the Regiment continues the same as last year without any alteration either in point of clothing or in messing, with the exception of their mode of lying at night. It was formerly the custom in this Garrison for Companies of Regiments which occupies rooms with boarded floors to have no stretcher ("or platform" inserted above); but I am happy to say that since June last each man has to himself an iron bedstead six feet long and three in breadth, a flock mattress, pair of sheets, one blanket and one rug, a covering sufficient in all seasons of the year to keep them warm and comfortable.

'Provisions of all kind, supplied by contract, of good quality, and in sufficient quantity. No spirits or wine allowed in the soldiers' ration.

'Drills have not been so frequent, nor corporal punishment had so much recourse to during last year; but more solitary confinement in Amsterdam Cells, which are visited once a week and oftener if required by the Surgeon appointed for weekly duty.

'The Regiment has continued all at Headquarters with the exception of one Subaltern and fifteen men at Stellenbosch; the sick of this Detachment has been treated by Doctor Shand, Half-Pay Royal Navy, but now under medical charge of Dr. O'Flynn, private practitioner. There has been another small Detachment stationed at a place called Musenberg, fourteen miles from Cape Town and seven from Simon's Town. The sick of this Detachment were taken into the Detachment Hospital, Simon's Town, then under my own superintendence. Any other little detached parties in the vicinity of Cape Town sent their sick into (the) Regimental Hospital and were themselves relieved weekly.

'The 98th. Regiment occupies the same part of (the) Lines Hospital which they did last year. The kitchen is in common with the 49th. and 98th. Regts., tho' each has their (*sic*) own boilers, cooking utensils, and fires separate.

'Health Inspections have been held weekly by the Surgeon or Assistant, frequently by both, particularly for the detection of Venereals, Ulcers, Ocular and Cutaneous Diseases; and when the season would permit the men bathed in the sea once a week.'

REFERENCES

1. Kirby, P. R. (1969): *S. Afr. Med. J.*, **43**, 53.
2. Voyle, G. E. (1878): *A Military Dictionary*, 3rd ed. London.

*A small body of men (one per company) attached to each infantry regiment for the purpose, while on the march, of clearing the road, etc.²