

Photograph album of old central Durban



Michael Pierre de Villiers

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Title page: A 1970 photograph toward the Bluff in a blustery north-easterly with the Rachel Finlayson swimming pool in the foreground and the North Beach groin. Windermere flats on the right. The building from which the photograph was taken has since been demolished and the groin replaced by a pier. The distant lighthouse on the Bluff has been replaced by the 37 metres high Millennium Tower. It is not a lighthouse, although when lit at night can be used as a landmark. It houses the port control signals operations vessel tracking service system. Just visible is the old crane on the south breakwater, since removed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Pierre de Villiers was born in Durban, South Africa. He was trained to World Meteorological Organization class one meteorologist and multi-discipline weather forecaster in the South African Weather Service where he reached the rank of Director. He served on a weather ship in the South Atlantic. He served on World Meteorological Organization expert teams and was World Meteorological Organization rapporteur for the Africa region. He was also a commercial pilot and flying instructor. More recently he was a weather forecaster in the United Arab Emirates, then in England. Now retired.

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2023-11-06

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Introduction

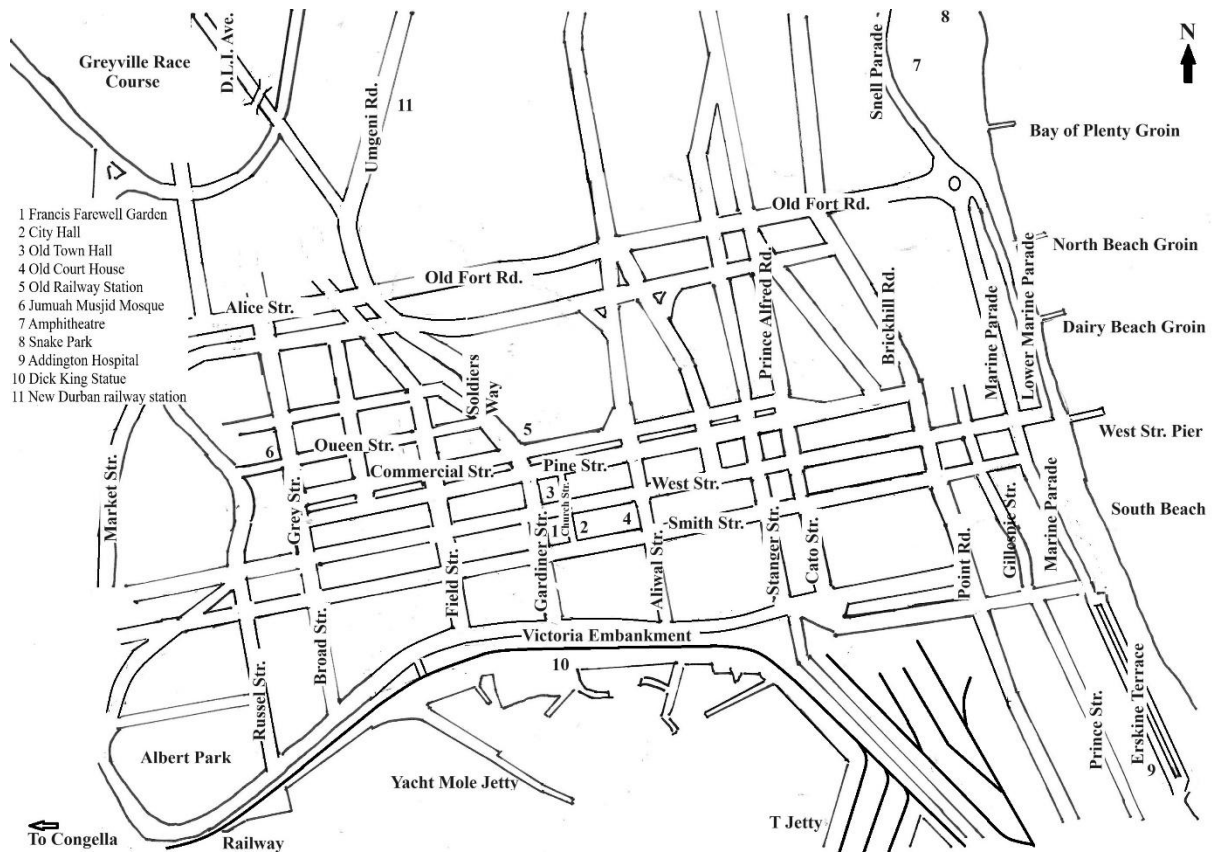
The first European settlement in what came to be known as Durban was in 1824 by a small group of traders under the leadership of Henry Fynn and Francis Farewell. The aim being to trade with Shaka, the king of the Zulus for elephant ivory. Henry Fynn, accompanied by someone known only as Ogle, arrived first, followed by Francis Farewell and about 26 others. He and Henry Fynn established a trading station. In 1835, with a population of around 35 a meeting was held to proclaim a formal township. The Bay of Natal, as it was first known, then Port Natal, was changed to D'Urban in honour of Sir Benjamin D'Urban, Governor of the Cape (1834 to 1838), simplified to Durban in 1870. In 1854 Durban township was declared a Borough. 1885 Durban's first Town Hall was completed and in 1910 its new City Hall. Today Durban is known as eThekweni meaning bay or lagoon. It also refers to the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, which includes the city of Durban and surrounding towns.

A collection of old photographs of central Durban give an idea of Durban's appearance in the earlier part of the 20th century. It includes information about buildings and places at the time, as well as the author's memories.

The photographs form a small collection that have been handed down through the family. Consequently, the author has no knowledge of who took the photographs and is unable to give credit. Although unsuccessful attempts have been made. Except two. The author found two in a book in the author's possession, African Keyport by Captain Tony Pearson, these are acknowledged in the text. A few were taken long ago by the author's mother. Some more recent photographs by the author have been added better illustrate the topic in question. These are of buildings that have remained unchanged through the years.

Rather than clutter the text with many, admittedly deserved references, all references have been listed in the bibliography. I hope this does not cause offence. The Facts about Durban website founded by Alan Jackson has been extremely useful, in particular articles by Alan Jackson, who sadly died in December 2020, as well as Gerald Buttigieg and Frank Beeton at the same website.

The map below is by no means comprehensive. Its aim is to enable the reader to determine the location of the photographs in Durban. Only significant roads and basic features have been provided with a key to some of the places. There are many other roads, particularly side roads that are not indicated. The map is not necessarily an indication of roads as they are at present, nor as in the past. Changes have been made, particularly along the beachfront where the Lower Marine Parade is no longer open to traffic and the junction at Old Fort Road is now different. Church Street is no longer open to traffic. The map shows commercial road to Prince Alfred Road. Until recently it did not extend beyond Soldiers Way. This change happened when the old Durban main railway station at Soldiers Way and Pine Street was replaced by the new main station at Umgeni Road in the early 1980s and the old site developed for other use. Most street names have changed from those in this map. See the bibliography link at Drive South Africa for the new names.



Central Durban

Durban Francis Farewell Garden and the old Town Hall



It is difficult to date the photograph with certainty. Certainly post 1910 when the City Hall was completed, but prior to 1926 when the Cenotaph was erected, while taken at 10 in the morning seen on the tower clock (10:00 SAST). The garden is bounded by West Street to the north, Smith Street to the

south, Gardiner Street to the west and Church Street to the east. The photograph was taken from the right front corner of the City Hall with canon in the foreground and part of the cement fencing in front of the City Hall. The view is across Church Street to part of the Francis Farewell Garden toward the old Town Hall, which became the General Post Office (GPO) building. To the left of the old Town Hall, on the north-west corner of West and Gardiner

streets is the Natal Bank building, long since demolished, as is the building on the left of the photograph. Behind the canon is an ornate Victorian fountain that was already in existence from 1887. It was later moved to the beachfront children's paddling pool on North Beach. To the left of it, behind the gun barrel, is the Volunteers Memorial. Further to the left is the statue of Harry Escombe. To the right is the statue of Sir John Robinson seen under the cupola on the right of the Natal Bank building.

The Volunteers Memorial was erected by public subscription in memory of volunteers who fell in the South African War of 1899-1902. Also known as the Second Boer War (English), Tweede Vryheidsoorlog (Afrikaans for Second Freedom War) or the Anglo-Boer War. A statue female figure of Victory with flowing dress, spread wings and arms extended forward to below waist height, holds an olive branch in her right hand. The statue stands on a plinth facing the City Hall. Panels in the plinth list the names while interspersed bronze plaques commemorate battles at Elandsplaagte, the Chieveley Armoured Train Disaster, Lombard's Kop and Pieter's Hill. All in 1899 except the last one in 1900.

Harry Escombe (1838-1899) was a lawyer, Privy Council member (a formal body of advisors to the sovereign of the United Kingdom), South African statesman and Natal Prime Minister 1897-1899. Sir John Robinson KCMG (1839-1903) was the first Prime Minister of Natal in 1893 to 1897, also known for being the owner and devotee of the Natal Mercury newspaper started by his father. KCMG is an Order of St Michael and St George. They are with facetious meanings: CMG (Call Me God), KCMG (Kindly Call Me God) and GCMG (God Calls Me God).

The neo-classical style Town Hall in West Street, with its colonnaded, large pedimented portico and clock tower above, remains an impressive building. In later years it was extended rearward to Pine Street. The foundation stone was laid in 1883. Building finished in 1885 it served as the town hall until 1910 when the present City Hall was completed. It then become the home of the GPO. There is a plaque at the front steps commemorating Winston Churchill's address to the crowd in 1899. This was after his capture at the Chieveley Armoured Train Disaster and his escape from imprisonment in Pretoria eastward to Lourenço Marques (Maputo since 1976) then southward by ship to Durban. In 1908, the hall was the venue for the first meeting of the National Convention to formulate the Union of South Africa.

Old Town Hall and buses in Church Street

A similar view to the previous photograph except from a higher elevation and taken at 5 past eleven in the morning by the tower clock (11:05 SAST), is believed to be circa 1926 to 1935 due to the presence of the Cenotaph in existence from 1926 and the absence of trolley bus wires when trolley buses were introduced. The Cenotaph is visible in the far left of the photograph and the early buses parked in Church Street that look like a 1929 Thornycroft model A2/FB4 and the longer ones Karrier buses, possibly Chaser 4s built 1928-32 or 6s built 1930-35. The statues of Harry Escombe and John Robinson can be seen while the Volunteers Memorial is indistinct between the two statues. The Victorian Fountain seen in the previous photograph is absent. Also not visible in the photographs, because they were erected in the garden at later dates, are statues of Queen Victoria (1837-1897), Queen and Empress. Erected in 1899 to commemorate 60th year of reign and Jan Smuts (1870-1950). Field Marshal and South African Prime Minister soldier, statesman, philosopher. Architect of the Union of South Africa and the British Commonwealth of Nations.



The Cenotaph honours the dead of World War I. Standing about 11 metres high, it is built of granite covered with glazed ceramic tiles showing two blue coloured angels raising a semi nude dead soldier. Above is an inscription that reads “Tell it to the generation following”. Below, in front of the monument, is a

mausoleum surmounted by a fallen soldier lying on his back with boots on, covered with his army coat and helmet on his chest. An inscription reads “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit”. The Cenotaph faces the east toward Gardiner Street where there were, perhaps still are, ornamental gates that were opened by King George the Sixth and wife Queen Elizabeth during the 1947 Royal Family visit.

Durban City Hall National War Fund 1943-1947



The National War Fund banner across the 1st floor part of the portico indicates the photograph dates from 1943 to 1947. It was an appeal for money for the United Service Organisations and the United Seaman's Service. The motor cars are indicative of the period. Trolley bus wires are also visible in the lower right of the

photograph

By the early 1900s, the Town Hall was becoming too small. Built by 1910, the new Edwardian neo-Baroque architecture City Hall building is a near exact copy was of the City Hall in Belfast, Northern Ireland, complete with towering pillars, soaring dome and many stone sculptures representing art, music and literature. Apart from its role as the municipal chambers and the

venue for meetings of Council committees and of the full Council, the building continues to house the Durban Art Gallery, City Library and Natural Science Museum.

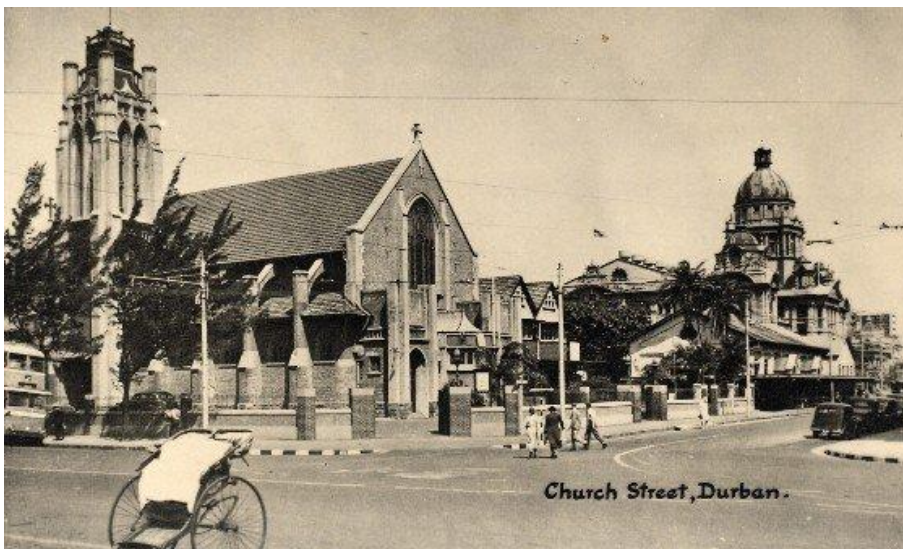
Francis Farewell Gardens and Gardiner Street buildings



Another view of Francis Farewell Garden circa early 1940s. This time from the corner of Church and Smith streets looking toward Gardiner Street. The Cenotaph can be seen on the right. The tall building on the left was the home of Old Mutual insurance. The tall one on the right was the Trust Bank building.

Sandwiched between, to the left of the Trust Bank building was the Woolworths store, its name twice indicated below the top storey. On the roof is a smoke Springbok sign. In the 60s Woolworths was relocated to a newer building between Smith and Pine streets, more or less midway between Gardiner and Field streets.

Corner of Pine and Church Streets, St. Paul's Church and old Town Hall.



The photograph is from the other end of Church Street seen in the previous photographs. Church Street was from Smith Street passed the City Hall and across West Street to Pine Street. The view is from the north side of Pine Street, next to the old Durban railway station, toward the City Hall

in the background. The church is St Paul's, a Gothic revival design built in 1909. Although I was from time to time in the area, I never entered the church. Apparently, apart from the visible stained glass windows it has Durban historical memorial tablets. The building still exists. Church Street is no longer open to traffic. Judging by the motor cars and the people's attire it is probably later 1940s early 1950s and trolley buses were used in Durban from 1935 until 1968.



An example of a trolley bus from the same period. It is a Wolverhampton Corporation 1949 Sunbeam F4. Photographed 2013 at the Transport Museum, Worcestershire.

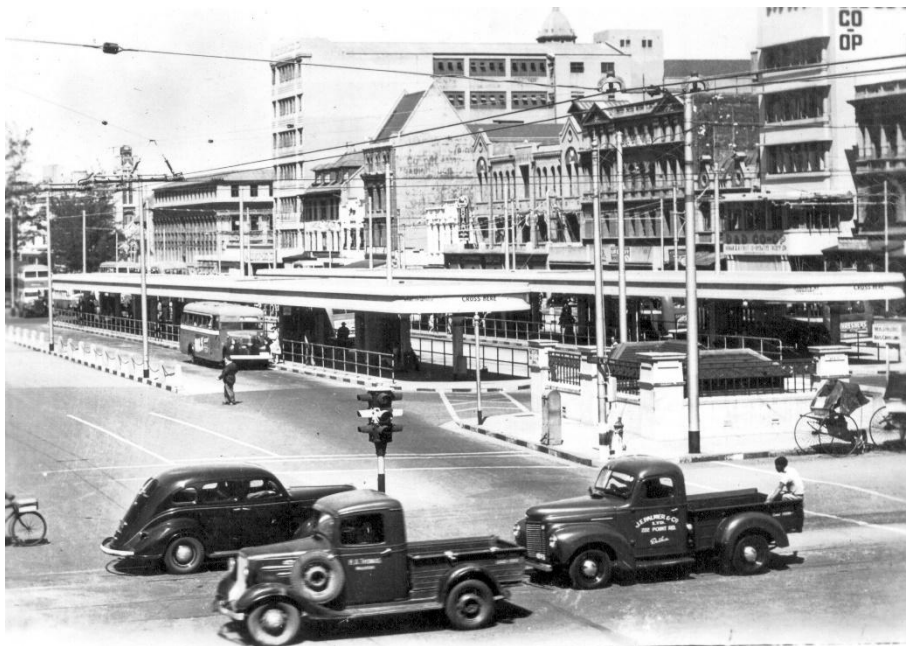
Durban eventually had a total of 116 imported trolley buses. They were withdrawn in 1968. Manufacturers were Sunbeam, Leyland and AEC. They had one front axle and one or two rear axles depending on the model. I liked to sit at the front and watch the driver, especially to see when he accelerated too fast and the motor would trip. He would then have to reset the fuse box above and behind to the left of his head. It was also interesting when one of the poles detached from the overhead wire. To keep tension on the wire the pole was sprung to push upward. When the pole detached it would spring skyward. The driver or the conductor would then have to extract a long pole with a hook from under the bus, snare the pole, pull it down and get the adjustable attachment to straddle the wire again. This usually happened when at an intersection changing from one route to another. The bus would

then be stuck in the middle disrupting traffic until it was fixed. Fortunately, traffic was not like it is these days. The trolley buses were unique in that they had fishing rod racks fitted on the outside rear of the bus. Fishermen used to head to the North Pier to fish and bring their catch home on the bus. I cannot remember if the motor double decker buses had the rack as well.

Two seat rickshas were very popular and taken for granted at one time. Particularly before the motor car. They were pulled by obviously physically fit Zulu men. In 1899 there were 740 rickshas, increasing ten years later when there were 2170 registered rickshas. Some wandered the streets looking for customers, others waited at stands at places of increased demand at a number of spots in the centre of town, the beach front or on the Berea. They were particularly useful for people who could not afford a horse or carriage and had difficulty walking. Some households had a private ricksha. Usually, they were plainly dressed in short trousers and bare feet. Later they wore more exotic uniforms with colourful beads, ankle bracelets that rattled while they ran and headgear consisting of a pair of cattle horns with feathers and colourful beads. These were usually the ones that patrolled the beachfront in the quest for tourist fares.

Old Durban Bus Terminus between Pine Street and Commercial Road

The old Durban railway station mentioned above was on the corner of Pine Street and Soldiers way. It is now further out from the city centre at Umgeni Road. More about the station later. In the meantime, across Soldiers Way from the station, between Pine Street and Commercial Road was the bus terminus. The two trucks and a car in the foreground date the photograph as late 1940s to mid 1950s. Certainly by 1960, I do not remember it still in existence. Around the 1970s, it was replaced by a large parking garage with a connecting bridge over Pine Street to a new high rise building at 320 West Street. The bus route starting points became distributed along the roads nearby, such as West, Smith and Gardiner Streets. In particular, the trolley buses departed from West Street to the west opposite the GPO building and opposite the City



Hall near Church Street to the east to the beach front and Point. I do not recall the single decker bus in the photograph. The double decker is very familiar.

The first busses I remember were diesel double-deckers painted maroon with cream trim, white roofs and NDC licence number plates. NDC stood for Natal Durban

Corporation. Double decker buses made their appearance in 1938. The buses were a mixture of Daimlers, AECs and Leyland. The AEC Regent III was first built in 1939. Still in use in the 60s. The successor, not used in Durban, was the AEC Routemaster of London Transport fame in service from 1956 to 1968. I remember in 1966 a mechanic, on a test drive, took the top deck off a bus by driving it under a low bridge at the Greyville Racecourse. I remember seeing a



An AEC Regent III photographed 2013 at Douglas on the Isle of Man. Part of their classic collection.

photograph in either the Daily News or the Natal Mercury. When 11 or 12 years of age, Durban Transport had a Travel At Will ticket purchased on the bus and not expensive. This enabled one to travel on as many busses as one wished for the day. I used them whenever I could, that is during weekends and school holidays. I would board a bus at the bus stop at the corner of Beacon and Bluff roads into town and travel for the day. One could safely do that sort of thing in those days. I believe I travelled every route in Durban. I could sit on my bed and visualise every trip. The last double-decker operated in 1967 then only single-deckers were used. I distinctly remember one single-decker type was the Leyland Royal Tiger. Later they were all painted pale blue.

View from the 11th floor TAFTA building in Aliwal Street.

The following three 2009 photographs were taken by myself from my mother's flat on the 11th floor of the TAFTA (The Association For The Aged) building in Aliwal Street. The first photograph shows the rear of the City Hall with the GPO, or old Town Hall to the distant right. Just visible to right of it, behind the trees, is the St Pauls Church mentioned earlier. This side of the GPO building on the right side of West Street is where trolley buses used to depart to North and South beaches and to the Point. Just visible, next to the road, between the trees is



the City Bath, or one should say was. The municipal public swimming pool dating from 1892, has been closed since 2000. It was a swimming pool where one could take a cooling swim and relief from the humid sub-tropical summer heat. Office workers and others of course, could have a quick swim during their lunch break. Now the pool is abandoned, empty and weed

strewn. Next to it and adjacent to the brick building lower right among the trees, is the small Medwood public garden. It did have a reputation in later years as a hangout for outies (vagrants), as they were called. A few of them would sit on benches drinking from brown paper bags. A bottle was concealed therein. Often drinking blue train (filtered Meths). The press began to refer to them as the Medwood Wine Appreciation Society.

View of the Old House Museum 2009-09-02



Taken from the same position is the old Court House. Some sources say built in 1866. However, the central pediment bears the date 1863. Irrespective, the central part was in existence in 1866. It originally comprised the central gable section and extended to three windows either side. The building with two gabled wings, faithfully reproducing the

original building, were added something prior to or in the early 1900s. It was used until 1912, when the Law Courts moved to bigger premises on the Victorian Embankment. It was then used by the Durban Council, eventually becoming home to the Durban Old Court House Museum to this day. The title is somewhat of a misnomer, because it houses a wide range of

artifacts, photographs, documents, etc., relating to the history of Durban. I spent considerable time there.

View of the Playhouse, Princes and new Royal Hotel 2009-09-02



The view from this third 11th floor photograph in 2009 is to highlight the Playhouse theatre and next door to the right, the Prince's Theatre in Smith Street opposite the Durban Museum and Art Gallery section of the City Hall. The historical landmark Playhouse building opened in 1935. Still looking the way I remember it in the 60s and 70s, it was designed to resemble

a castle with some mock Tudor features, complete with turret windows, undressed stone blocks with black wood beams and even imitation loop holes for shooting arrows or guns. To further the impression of a castle is an imitation portcullis above the top of the steps at the entrance. Inside when the lights were down, the ceiling was lit with hundreds of little lights with imitation castle turrets along the side walls giving a picture of a castle at night. Marvellous! It is still a venue for live shows, either musical, plays, opera, ballet or comedy, as is the next door Prince's Theatre. The Prince's Theatre opened in 1926. It was renovated in 1964 and renamed the Colosseum.

Moving to the left out of the photograph on the same side of the road, at the corner with Aliwal Street, was the Metro cinema. Still on the same side of the street, but on the opposite corner, was the 20th Century cinema and next to it the Embassy cinema. A gentle downhill walk along Aliwal Street nearing the Esplanade, on the left side, was the Piccadilly cinema. I once spent a school holiday break working at the Embassy selling ice cream and cool drinks to patrons before shows and in the interval, catching a trolley bus home late in the evening to the corner of Penzance and Evans Roads where the family lived. I really got an overdose of the film Mary Poppins.

Returning to the photograph the tall brown coloured building, between two greyish buildings, is the Royal Hotel. It started as a thatched building in 1845. In the 1890s, it was a two storey tile roofed building known as the Masonic Hotel, visited by people such as Cecil Rhodes, Rudyard Kipling, Mark Twain and the Prince Imperial. The later prompting the name change to the Royal Hotel. If memory serves me correctly, the present building was built in the 1960s. Certainly in the 70s our social group used to stop at the Royal for drinks at the ground floor lounge before heading to the cinema (or bioscope, or slang flicks), sometimes a show.

Sometimes going to the Top of the Royal for drinks afterward and its excellent view of the harbour.

West Street looking west, trolley bus wires and tramlines still in place



The view is to the west with a trolley bus just visible in the far distance and the higher ground of the Glenwood area behind it. Most likely 1950s judging by what looks like a 1947 to 1953 production Standard Vanguard car in the lower left corner of the photograph. Overhead trolley bus wires are clearly visible as are

tramlines still embedded in the road. Trams were before my time. However, I do remember tram tracks still being in place in some of the roads such as West and Smith Streets before they were lifted and having my steering affect by them when driving my Morris Mini.



The first electric trams came into use in 1902. Prior to this, from 1881, they were horse drawn. The picture left Goodbye Old Faithful, Durban's last tram, was taken on 2 August 1948 in Musgrave Road outside Jameson Park, next to Mitchell Park on the ridge behind Durban. This photograph has appeared in numerous publications.

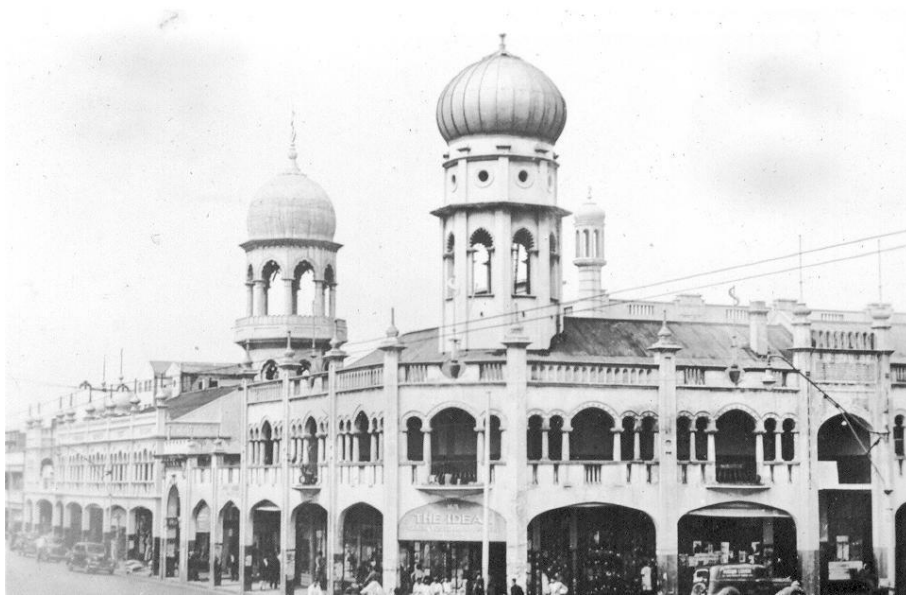
Back to the photograph, the road became a one way road toward the photographer in the 70s if I remember correctly. The building behind the car in the lower right is worthy of

mention. This housed Henwood, an essential hardware store at the time. The logo was a chicken in profile standing on a section of wooden log. It can be seen in the two circular signs positioned at either corner of the building. It is also worth noting that all the buildings had verandah like frontages that extended to the road side. It was possible to walk along most of the sections of West and Smith streets between Gardiner and Broad streets without getting wet in any rain, except when crossing intersections.

During the Christmas and New Year festive season, the Durban Corporation Electrical Department erected coloured light decorations across West Street stretching from Broad Street to Gardiner Street. When small children, our parents would take the three us to see them in the evening after dark. We would get off the bus at the Broad Street and walk to Gardener Street

looking at the lights and window shopping. I think my parents used it as a guide to see what we liked for Christmas presents. At the start of the walk, at the corner of Broad and West Streets, was the Polar Bar where we bought ice cream. The important department stores were The Hub, John Orrs, OK Bazaars, CTC Bazaar, Greenacres, Payne Bros., Stuttafords and Woolworths, the hardware store Henwood, shoe shops Cuthberts, ABC Shoe Store and Dodo's. My favourite, getting close to the Gardiner Street intersection was Kings, outdoor and gun shop. Then on the bus back home.

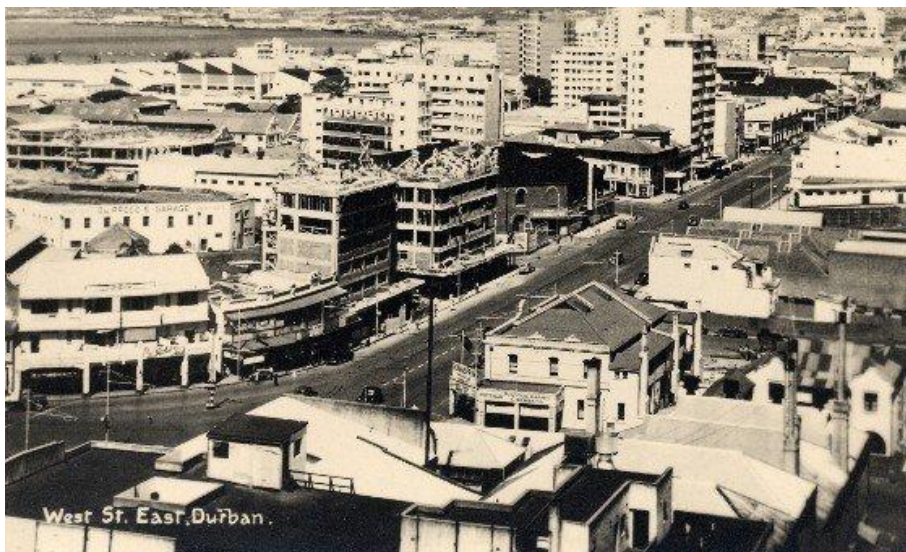
The Jumuah Musjid Mosque



Toward the western of West Street at Board Street, if one turns to the right one entered Grey Street and the Asian commercial part of central Durban. The Jumuah Musjid (meaning Friday) Mosque at the corner of Grey and Queen streets was Durban's first mosque with a claim that it is the largest in the Southern Hemisphere. The site for a mosque at the

corner of Grey and Queen streets was purchased in 1881. The existing and rather small brick and mortar building was extended 1884. An adjoining site was purchased with elaborate expansions added during 1903 and 1904. A wudhu-khana (ablution facility), two shops and two minarets were added, seen in this circa 1950 photograph.

West Street east with Point Road to left



Returning to West Street, this time well to the east almost to the beach front where this circa 1950 photograph was taken at the corner at Point Road. To the left. On the opposite side, not visible, is Brickhill Road. Notice the lack of traffic. What appears

to be traffic lights with black and white horizontal stripes can be seen in the road.

Lower West Street



Unlike the other Durban main street, namely Smith Street, West Street extended past the junction with the Marine Parade to the shore of the Indian Ocean, as seen in this early colour photograph. Colour photography was available at the time, although rather expensive. Once again judging by the

cars it is circa late 1940s. The view is toward South Beach and the Bluff in the distance. The road on the left is the Lower Marine Parade. It does not extend past the corner tea room/restaurant. A radio mast is visible in the top right of the photograph inland of the Marine Parade. There is a reference to it being one of three military radio masts between Natal Command and the Salisbury Island Naval Base.

Durban lower West Street



A more recent photograph of the same end of West Street beach end circa later 1960s. I had a Morris Mini Minor 1000 in the late 60s. Registration ND 1023, identical to and same colour as the Mini seen behind the family crossing the road. Drove numerous model Volkswagen (VW) Beetles, two of which are visible

either side of the Mini, as well as VW Kombis like the one parked to the left with the rear door open, as well as later 70s and 80s models. The car on the far right, next to the VW, looks like a Ford Zephyr or Consul, another car I have driven. The tea room/restaurant in the previous photograph has been replaced by a newer building, which I think, was called the Model Dairy. The words teas, cakes are written on the ground storey parapet. If my memory is correct the

rectangular building next to the West Street jetty with the pipe beneath was a pumphouse to drain water out to sea from further inland and possible storm water.

The Beach Front

Lower West Street a broader view north and south nearest the camera



Yet another 1940s view of West Street crossing a curving Marine Parade nearest the camera and the straight Marine Parade beyond. In the foreground are the municipal bowling greens that were still there in the 1970s. Beyond the beachfront tea room buildings straddling West Street is the children's paddling

pool, next to it the boating pond. Beyond is the Kenilworth Amusement Arcade, that I knew in later years as Newton's Amusement Arcade in the 1950s and visited as a child with the rest of the family. Newton's because it was owned by the Newton family. I think it was demolished in the 1970s. Past it is the swimming pool that in 1959 became the Olympic size municipal Rachel Finlayson swimming pool. This photograph was before the groins at Dairy Beach (approximately opposite Newton's), North Beach (opposite the northern end of the Rachel Finlayson swimming pool) and Bay of Plenty (further north) were built. The groins, built perpendicular to the shore line, consisted of large concrete blocks. They were intended to

prevent erosion caused by longshore drift. They have now been replaced by piers.



Another view (left) at similar location as the previous photograph, except a lower elevation and closer to the bowling greens. It also appears to be an older photograph. The motor cars look distinctly 1930s.

There are also less and smaller street lights and the ground nearest West Street looks less developed. Both photographs have a series of unexplained tall masts extending into the distance, presumably radio masts.

As long ago as 1907, it was known that the warm water (about 20-25°C) along the coast is ideal for sharks and as a result, shark attacks. This, combined with the need to protect bathers from the surf and strong backwash currents, resulted in the construction of a 180 metres semi-circular enclosure in the sea opposite the tea room/restaurant on the far side of West Street and the children's paddling pool. It was made of steel piles with vertical steel grids between them. There was also a walkway on top. For a small fee people could walk along it. It was demolished in 1928 due to damage by the surf, corrosion and high maintenance cost.



Left, a 1940s photograph of the boating pond and children's pool beyond and the Bluff beyond. In later years it was better developed with small four seat motor boats that one could drive for a fee and specified time. The path along the landward side with covered benches existed for many years. The unexplained masts present again.

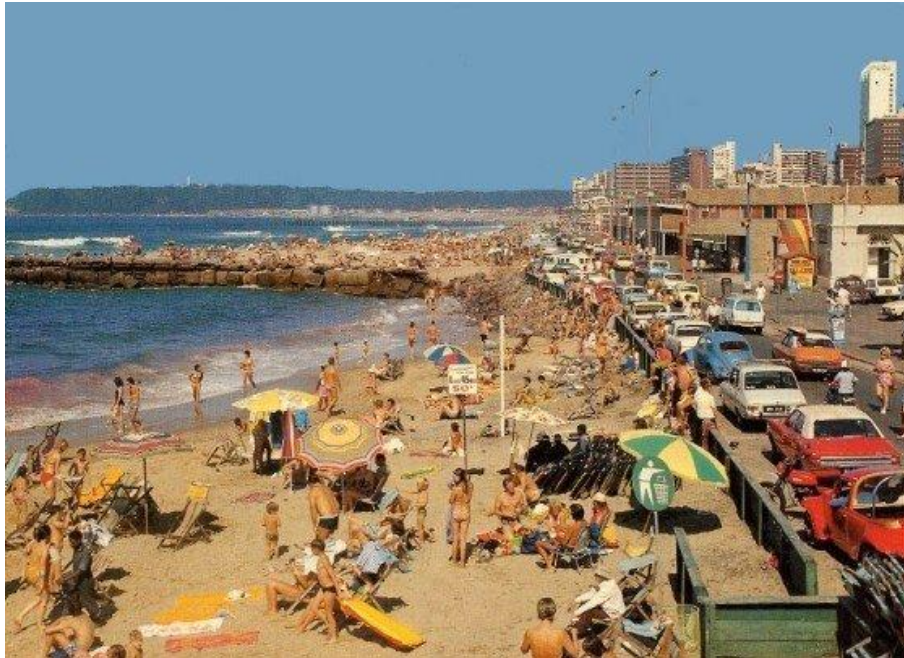


Left, a circa 1935 to 1940 early morning view at North Beach toward the south. The swimming pool became the Olympic size municipal Rachel Finlayson swimming pool by 1959. It became entirely enclosed with a wall along the Lower Marine Parade side and a large stand on this side and at the

northern end for spectators during swimming galas. A scaffold stand was added on the landward side. The shade building, seen at the southern, remained unchanged and as I

remember it from the 60s and 70s. The motorbike and sidecar (bottom left) reminds me of the one my maternal step-grandfather had in the late 40s to early 60s. A Norton if memory serves me. He loved it. It was with great sadness that he eventually disposed of it. The motorbike was sold, but the sidecar scrapped.

North Beach my favourite beach



The motor cars and bikini costumes indicate circa 1965 to 1975, about the time I was frequently there. I along with others used to walk along the groin in the background with divers' flippers and fin clips, past the danger keep off sign, to the end. Fit the flippers and fin clips then dive off into the sea to body surf. The fin clip was a triangular rubber

band that fitted around the ankle and flipper to prevent them coming off in the surf. One could see exactly where the side of the groin was under water and dive clear of the edge. The end of the groin was approximately where the waves began to build when the water "felt" the rising slope of the sea bed. An ideal spot to catch the wave a ride it beachward. All the while staying on the shoulder of the breaking wave, usually breaking to the right sometimes riding just inside the tube, pulling out before it crashed over you and you were dumped. If you were dumped one held one's breath until one resurfaced. Sometimes it felt like a long time. Sometimes you hit the sea bed. Three to four metres waves were a good height, anything higher was usually too rough. One then swam toward the groin to catch the counter backwash that was always present and almost glide back to the start position. The lifesavers ignored us, even though we did not stay between the bathing beacons and were not supposed to be on the groin. The assumption being that we knew what we were doing and did not need rescuing. The spot also had the advantage that it was next to the swimming pool. If the surf was not good, for a small fee one could swim in the pool and use the changes rooms at its northern end (next to the car park) to safely leave one's clothes. You were given a rubber band with a number on that you could wear on your ankle. This allowed you to use and pool and/or leave to swim in the surf.

Prior to 1952 there were no shark nets to protect bathers at Durban's beaches. This was in spite of numerous shark attacks. Five in 1940, twenty-one between 1943 and 1951, seven fatal. In 1952 seven 130 metres gill nets were erected along the Durban beachfront. Sharks were caught in the nets, but no serious shark injuries. Apart from being unsightly, they did not last long due to sea action and needed high maintenance. They were removed. In 1962, the current type of shark nets were installed along Durban's beaches and at other larger resort areas along the Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal) coast and maintained by the Natal Anti-Shark Measures Board, now the KwaZulu-Natal Sharks Board. In the 70s, due to forecast services provided by the

South African Weather Bureau (now Weather Service) to the Sharks Board, I was fortunate to be invited to visit their premises and see their operation at Umhlanga Rocks. Very interesting. Especially that the nets, supported by buoys that one can see from the shore, did not extend all the way to the sea bed. The principle being that sharks are essentially near surface swimmers that do not venture to any great depth.

North Beach, the Nest and Cuban Hat circa 1970s



At the Lower Marine Parade, next to the swimming pool, were the Nest and Cuban Hat roadside diners. One could park the car. A waiter would come to the car, take your order and return with it on a tray. The tray had two L brackets that fitted over the lowered window with a rubber tipped arm below the tray

that acted as a brace on the car door. One could then sit in comfort in the car and eat. There was also the option of sitting at a table outside or inside the diner. I ate there fairly frequently.

Judging by the bigger tail lights and stronger bumper on the VW Beetle in the foreground and the VW Kombi in the background, the photograph was taken around 1975. Probably a 1974 model Beetle.



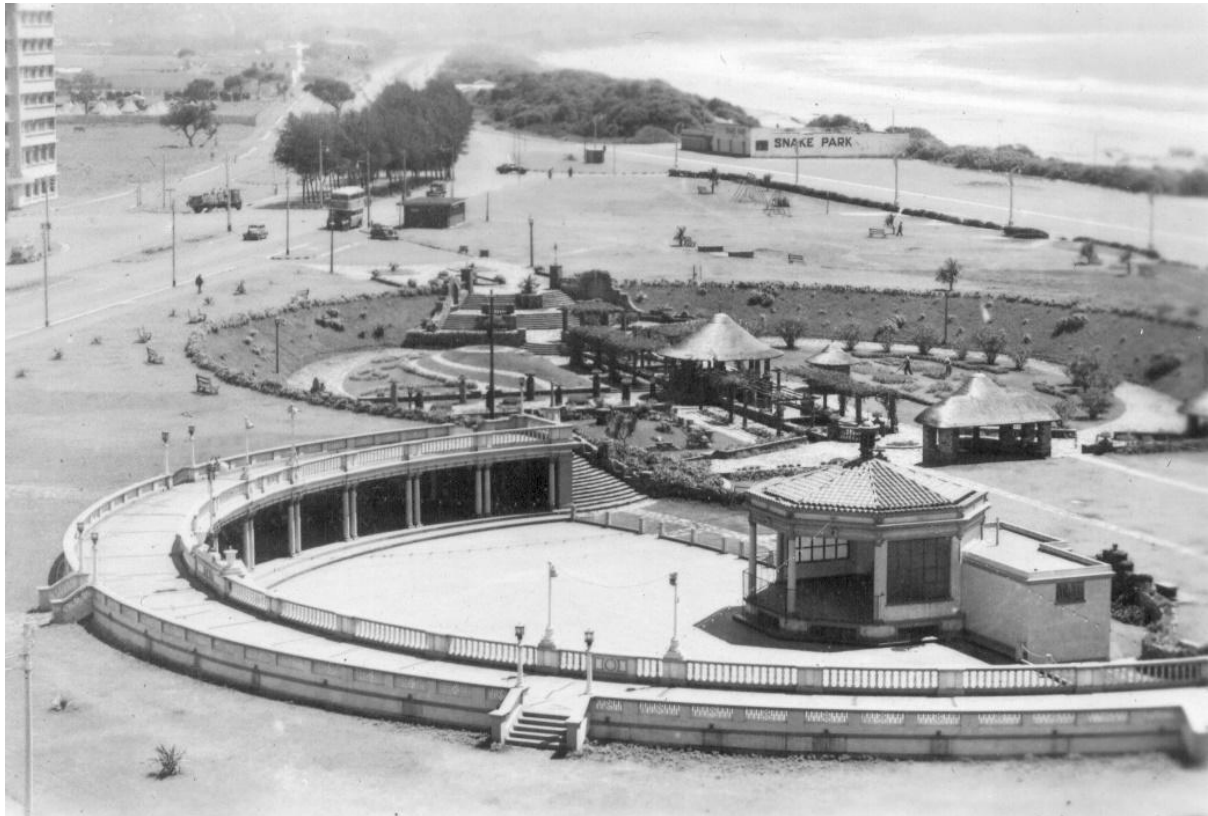
How long have the diners been there? I have not been able to establish. However, the photograph left, circa 1950s, shows two buildings in a similar position with a car park to the right of the swimming pool complex. They are no longer there. The area has been redeveloped.

Upon closer inspection, the photograph could be

from the later 1950s when it became the Rachel Finlayson swimming pool in 1959. The swimming pool appears as I remember it from the later 60s and 70s. The scaffold stand is

visible on the inland side, the open building at the far end is there, as is the stand and changerooms complex at the northern end. Only missing is the seaward spectator stand. One can see where the Lower Marine Parade curved to join the Marine Parade at the junction with Old Fort Road. The buildings along the Marine Parade are hotels and residential flats.

The North Beach Amphitheatre and Sunken Garden circa 1950



The Amphitheatre and Sunken Garden was constructed in 1934 as an infrastructure project by the municipality to provide employment during the 1930s Great Depression. I have a photograph of my brother and I there when about 4 and 5 years old, respectively in 1953. Nestled in a man-made circular depression, it was a peaceful place with a pond, fountain and sub-tropical plants. A recent satellite image shows that buildings associated with the amphitheatre and all before it toward the beach have gone. It is now grass. Of the garden, nothing beach side of the gazebo building avenue exists and the rest looks neglected.

In the distance, the building to the right with the words snake park, is the Fitzsimons Snake Park. The family, father and two sons were famous for their study of snakes and Fitzsimons's anti-venomous serums. The Durban Fitzsimons Snake Park was established in the 1939 by the younger son, Desmond Charles Fitzsimons. It also proved to be an excellent tourist attraction. One could purchase snake bite kits. My father had one. The snake park is no longer in business.

Also visible is a double decker bus at the northern terminus of the North Beach route. Beyond the building in the top left corner and beyond an empty field, is a very hazy view of the walled South African Defence Force Natal Command, established in 1937, on the Snell Parade. One can just make out tents and what appears to be a row of lorries. A place in the later 70s I went to for commercial pilot's medicals. Buildings gradually encroached to the camp, the last being the Blue Waters Hotel. National service conscription friends that were based there referred to

Natal Command as the Blue Waters extension, it apparently being regarded as a cushy posting. Natal Command was closed in 2020. Barely visible beyond Natal Command was Durban's Stamford Hill Aerodrome, in existence from the early 1920s, it was simply a field with grass runways and a control tower/passenger terminal building. From 1951, Durban's new Louis Botha airport to the south of Durban was used, although only officially opened in 1955.

South Beach and the Mermaid Lido



Now to South Beach. Judging by the buildings and cars it looks like a mid 1950s photograph. Looking at the crowded beach it was summer holiday. Built on the beach, the Lido, or Mermaid Lido, was half circular. Curved side facing the sea and straight on the landward side with a broad and tarred walking area, or

pavement. I never went inside. I have black and white photographs with the family on the beach to the right of the building in 1958 or 1959. Along the pavement side were small shops selling items such as souvenirs, post cards, sweets, ice cream, rock candy and candy floss. Also go karts inside according to a sign at the top of the Lido in the background of one of the family photographs. There was also a beach photographer called Scotty who had wooden boards with figures painted on in various comical shapes and scenarios and a round hole for the head. You chose which one you wanted, stuck your head through and he took your photograph. Some had two figures with two head holes, such as a big, fat woman with a small skinny husband.

The building behind, on the other side of the Marine Parade, is the Claridge Hotel. In the late 60s early 70s there was a nightclub at the back on the corner of Smith and Gillespie streets called Cookie Look. We thought everyone new Cookie Look and went there. The El Castilian on West Street between Brickhill Road and the Marine Parade was another haunt. The Bats, as well as Dickie Loader and the Blue Jeans were popular then. Best known for their hit song Exclusively Yours in 1963. Much later, in the late 70s, my wife and I met him and his wife Coleen.

South Beach Little Top open theatre

The Little Top was a beachball-shaped structure with a small stage, was on the beach next to the Lido. The first Little Top was a wood and canvas old bandstand like structure that had to be assembled every time before use. I never saw it and it is not in any of our 1950s photographs. The Little Top was made reinforced fibreglass sections on a steel frame. It was erected in 1970 or 1971. The 1970s photograph shows it in its original colour scheme. About ten years later, approximately 1980, it was coloured blue and white. Entertainment was provided free of charge



for visitors to the beach during the holiday seasons, particularly the summer Christmas season. There was entertainment, often with audience participation, such as lucky legs competitions, who could eat or drink something the fastest. Although I was sometimes in the area, I never paid it much attention.

South Beach circa 1950 and the XL restaurant



Further along toward Addington Hospital (not in the photograph), the road name changed to Erskine Terrace. Before reaching the hospital there was another beach. I visited it on the odd occasion in the 1970s. Looking at the probably 1950s photograph, I remember the long and low beach side structure, particularly the

central almost kiosk like building in front with the clock on a tall pole like tower, also the covered benches to the left of the building. There was also a tea room come restaurant called the XL where, in much later years, I had lunch with my mother on two occasions.

Victoria Embankment and harbour

Dick King statue and the old Durban Station in the far distance.

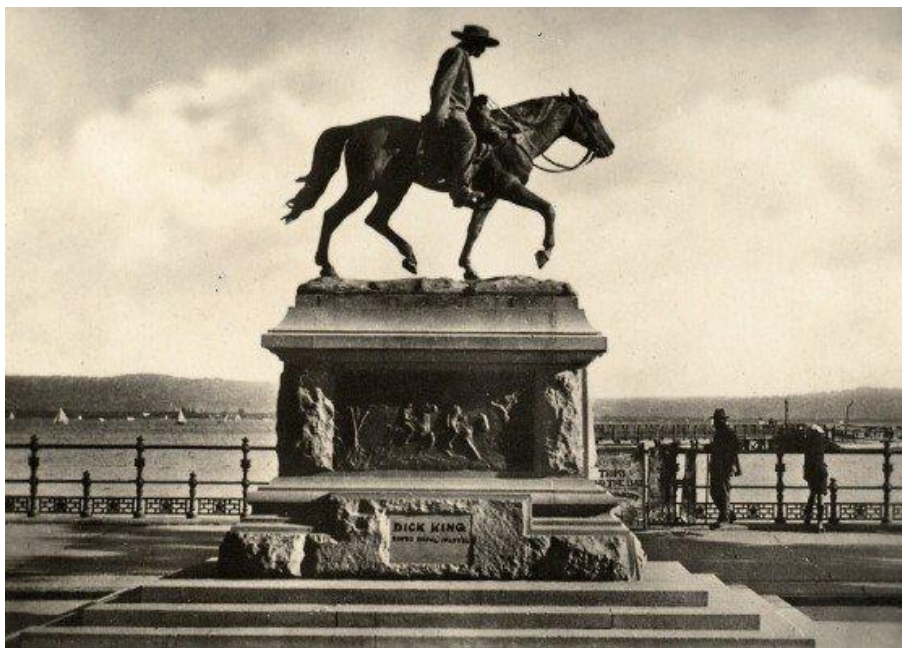
The motor cars indicate the photograph was taken in the 1940s. The photograph looks northward from the Esplanade across the Victoria Embankment Road and Gardiner Street



junction to the old the railway station in the background on the corner of Commercial Road and Soldiers Way.

The Baroque style Durban railway station was built in 1894, initially a two story structure, it had two more storeys added in 1904, as seen in the photograph.

The Esplanade and Victoria Embankment was developed between 1896 and 1902. Twine's Hotel was built in 1902 followed by the Marine Hotel in 1903. Twine's Hotel was demolished in 1962 and the Marine ten years later. A failed attempt was made to more accurately determine the date of the photograph by searching the Internet for information about The National Mutual Life Association of Australasia painted on the side of the tall building on the distant right of Gardiner Street. All that could be determined is that it started business in Australia in 1869.



The statue to commemorate of Dick King was in place in 1915. The second photograph (left) of the Dick King statue shows it in a slightly different location and on a different base. This time the view is toward the south facing the harbour and closer to the embankment edge. It is believed that this is the earlier of the two photographs before

land was reclaimed in order to build the railway line along the harbour's edge to the Point, completed in 1936. Recent satellite imagery shows it still at the end of Gardiner Street but further from the road which became a dual carriageway before the 1960s.

Early in the morning of 25th May 1842, Richard (Dick) King and his servant, Ndongeni, set off southward from the Bluff on two horses on a 960 kilometres, ten days, ride to Grahamstown to seek military help for the British settlement at Durban under siege by the Voortrekker republican forces. They obtained fresh horses from mission stations along the way. Some

sources say he did not change horses. This is doubtful. 960 kilometres in 10 days means 96 kilometres (59 miles) per day for the horse is pushing it somewhat. He returned by ship with reinforcements in June and the garrison was relieved. Records of the trip and siege are sparse. Legend has it that Ndongeni only rode halfway. Modern historians are in some doubt whether he accompanied Dick King at all.

Durban harbour c1947 to 1950 due to yacht mole jetty construction



This general view of the north-eastern part of Durban Harbour is believed to be circa 1947 to 1950 due to the state of the yacht mole jetty still under construction in the right of the photograph. It may be about one or two years later because in 1950 the new T jetty was completed on the far right of the distant wharf. Evidence of its

presence can be seen in the change in wharf direction between the two ships on the left and the others to the right. Prior to the T jetty it would have been a straight through wharf. The photograph is definitely prior to 1957 when building the new passenger Ocean Terminal begun and completed in 1962.

The photograph also shows the railway line that was opened in 1936 between the Point and the Congella marshalling yards that opened in 1931. Previously the railway line followed the original route from the Point along Point Road to Pine Street and the Durban railway station,



then westward to alongside Market Street and Williams Road to Congella. The remodelled esplanade with gardens, left of the railway line in the photograph, were completed in 1937 and the new Point Yacht Club building, with the three unidentified T marks on its side, was completed by 1937. The Gardiner Street

jetty is visible in the distance beyond the club house. In the far left of the photograph, where the railway line curves to the right, can be seen the vehicle level-crossing and subway buildings.

Staying in the same area, this time looking to the west is this older circa late 1930s photograph one sees the new Point Yacht Club building, but no new yacht mole jetty. The level-crossing and subway buildings are more clearly visible. Further in the distance in the top left of the photograph are the small boatbuilding yards and fishing boat wharf. This photograph appears in the book *African Keyport* credited to Mrs D. Thackray.

Union Castle mail ship leaving Durban

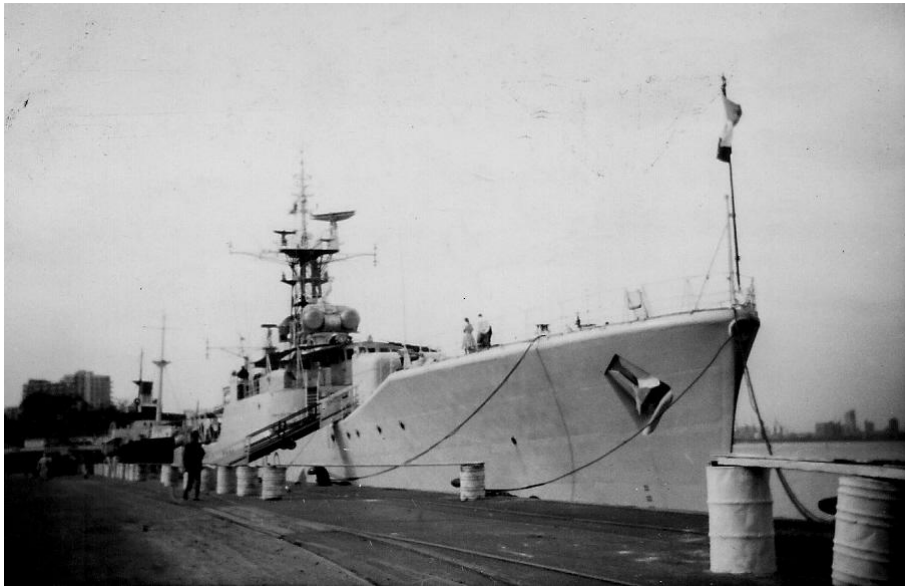


A view of the Point docks and a Union Castle mail ship departing late in the day. Notice the long shadow cast by the crane. A mail ship arrived once a week and docked at B berth. This was prior to the Ocean Terminal that was in use after 1962. When I was a scholar at Bushlands Primary school in 1959 and 1960, I could see

when the mail ship was in port from upstairs in the bus when we passed over Marlborough hill along Bluff Road in the morning going to school. On one occasion, with the family, we went on board a mail ship to see off friends. I remember the announcement for all visitors to disembark. Cannot remember which mail ship.

A copy of this photograph was found in the book *African Keyport* with the caption that the ship is the *Stirling Castle* departing on a Friday evening 1949. The photograph is from a postcard, courtesy of Captain I. W. Edwards. It also says the tug on the right is the *Buffalo*. It was towed to sea in 1955 and sunk. However, a third copy of the photograph appears in *Facts about Durban* in which it is stated that it could well be the *Carnarvon Castle*. Both ships were built by Harland and Wolff. The *Stirling Castle*'s maiden voyage was in 1936 and scrapped in 1966. After a break for World War II service, she returned to the South Africa route in 1947. The *Carnarvon Castle* (22 554 tons) made its maiden voyage in 1926 and scrapped in 1963, She was built with two funnels. 1937 and 1938 she had an extensive refit. Engines were replaced with a single funnel installed. She resumed sailing to South Africa in 1938. After World War II service she also returned to the South Africa route in 1947. I have carefully studied online photographs of the two vessels and must conclude that the profile in the photograph closely resembles the *Carnarvon Castle*. The only difference I notice from other *Carnarvon Castle* photographs is the raised derrick at the stern mast. Photographs seen online of the two vessels show them lowered.

South African Navy visit to Durban



The two ships were photographed in 1969. The SAS President Kruger at a Mayden Wharf berth, was one of three President class frigates in the South African Navy (SAN). The others were the Presidents Pretorius and Steyn. The President Kruger was built in 1962. It sunk in 1982 after collision with

the SAS Tafelberg a SAN replenishment ship with the loss of 16 Kruger crew. The ship had a rear helicopter deck and carried one Westland Wasp helicopter.

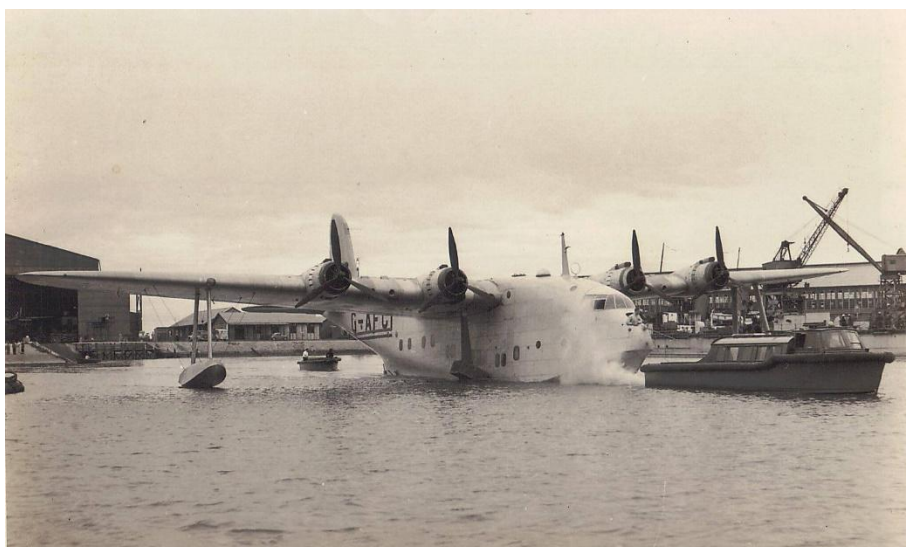


The other SAN ship visiting at the time was the SAS Pietermaritzburg, an Algerine class minesweeper. Before joining the SAN in 1947 she was the Royal Navy HMS Pelorus. In World War II she was part of Atlantic convoy escort J-291 and in 1944 took a leading part in the D-Day invasion. She was scuttled 12 November 1994 to make an artificial reef at Miller's Point near Simon's Town.

While a teenager and in my early twenties, I was allowed on board and shown around a number of warships that were allowing visitors on board, including one of the SAN's Daphne class submarines. It was very cramped. One often had to queue.

Durban's flying boats

Imperial Airways (from 1940, British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC)), operated Short Empire C class and stretched G class flying boats from Durban in 1937. The difference between a flying boat and a seaplane is that a flying boat has a hull while a seaplane has floats. At first, landing and take-off was next to Salisbury Island. Passengers were ferried from the Gardiner



Street jetty shown in an earlier photograph to the aircraft moored near the island. Later they operated at Congella. From 1939, maintenance was done at a Bayhead slipway and hanger.



As a teenager, I frequently bicycled in the area from our home in Glenwood in the early 60s and definitely remember the slipway and one hanger. By then the area was devoted to shipbuilding.

The last BOAC flying boat passenger flight was in 1947. For a while, the South African Air Force (SAAF) 35 Squadron operated from Congella with

Short Sunderland GR Mk.5 flying boats, apparently until 1957.

The photographs show Short S-23 G Class flying boat G-AFCI Golden Hind being towed from the slipway before a flight. Its first flight was in 1939. It was destroyed in 1954. The hanger is visible in the first photograph so it is post 1939 and before 1954. Most likely post 1947 due to the air force uniforms in the second photograph bottom left. The reason G-AFCI was destroyed is not known for sure. There is reference to it being in a gale or while being towed to an anchorage. The photographs were sent to me by friend and ex-colleague, Darryl Myburgh, source unknown.

Durban point and harbour 1960

The date of the aerial photograph is believed to be circa 1952 to 1958. The T jetty shown going off the centre left was completed in 1950. The completed yacht mole jetty in the upper centre. Meanwhile, there is no sign of the elevated road network over the extensive railway lines and marshalling yard at the approach to jetty. The roads and Ocean Terminal were constructed between May 1959 and March 1962.

At the time of the completion of the Ocean Terminal construction, it attracted world attention. Telescopic gangways extended above the railway lines to the ship's side door so that



Portnet Pilot helicopter ZS-PRN Agusta A109K2 at the Ocean Terminal circa 2000.

passengers could walk directly to the customs hall then into cars or buses waiting outside, or in a parking area, brought there by the raised road. I remember visiting there in the late sixties in my Morris Mini 1000. There was also a tall Port Control building with an excellent view of the harbour from the top. In later years, instead of the pilot going out to ships by pilot boat to guide the ship safely into harbour, they would depart from the Ocean Terminal by helicopter. Circa 2000 the helicopter was an Agusta A109K2

Back to the big picture, in the foreground, facing the beach is car parking for visitors to Addington Hospital on the other side of the dual carriage road. Addington Hospital, on its present site, dates back to 1878. Additions to the hospital continued through the years to its present about 15 stories high rise building in 1967. A two rear axle trolley bus is at the bus stop. Central Durban is in the centre right of the photograph with the Berea ridge behind. The Bayhead, mentioned earlier with the flying boats, is off to the left in the top of the photograph.

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