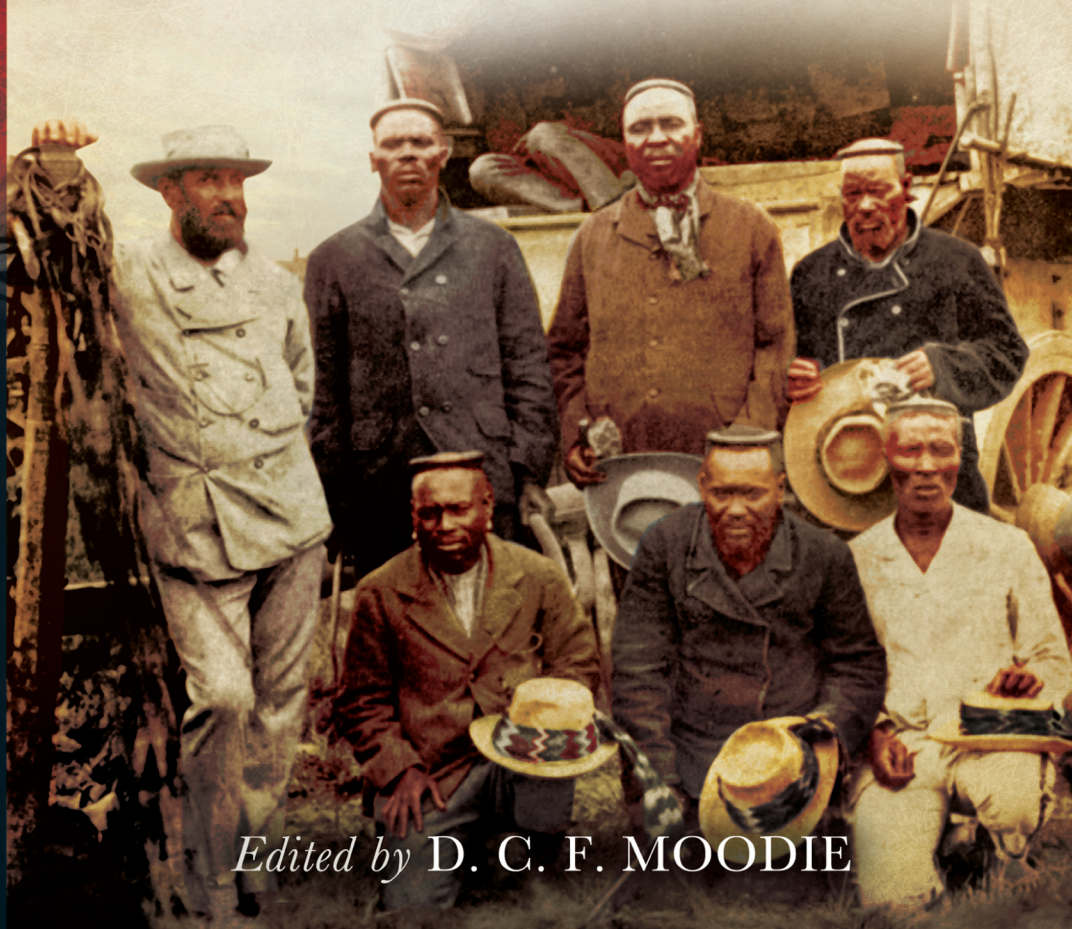


JOHN DUNN CETYWAYO

— AND THE —
THREE GENERALS
— 1861-1879 —



Edited by D. C. F. MOODIE

**John Dunn,
Cetywayo, and the
Three Generals**



John Dunn. (Courtesy Mr Dan Dunn)

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Edited by D. C. F. Moodie

Pietermaritzburg, Natal, May, 1861–1879



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Foreword

Archbishop Desmond Tutu has described the people of South Africa as ‘The rainbow people of God’. In doing so, he was referring to what many thoughtful people all over the world regarded as the miracle of a democratic transition to democracy in 1994 after decades of strife.

Racial interaction over more than four centuries conjures up a veritable kaleidoscope of images to millions of South Africans and people from all over the globe. One of the most fascinating centres around the rather legendary ‘white chief of Zululand’, John Dunn. Dunn, a Scotsman, became a confidant of the last and powerful king of the Zulu, King Cetshwayo kaMpande, and married forty-eight of the King’s subjects after taking a young 15-year-old daughter of a Durban businessman as his first bride.

What is sad is that there are so few South Africans who know much detail about the life and times of this remarkable man. Hopefully, this small but important re-print will change that.

John Robert Dunn, described as entrepreneur, politician, arms dealer, trader and hunter, whose loyalties were said to lie where self-interest and gain prevailed, was arguably a central and controversial figure in nineteenth century Zulu history.

Advisor and confidant to King Cetshwayo; Natal Colonial Government labour recruiter; Lord Chelmsford's military and political adviser during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879; Sir Garnet Wolsley's post-war political advisor and the holder of vast tracts of land north of the Thukela* River (grants by both the Zulu monarch and subsequently the British as a consequence of the post-war settlement), Dunn's role in shaping both destiny and events of the time was significant.

To this day his legacy lives on surrounded, as in his lifetime, by controversy. His progeny of well over one hundred and twenty, today many thousands, are involved in bitterly contested land claims, areas that in the nineteenth century, came under his direct control and referred to by him as '*Dunnsland*'.

The great tragedy is that his copious writings and recordings of events that may have thrown greater light on the events that shaped Zulu history were destroyed. At the outbreak of the Anglo-Zulu War in 1879 the Zulus, provoked by a perceived betrayal of their monarch Cetshwayo by Dunn when he sided with the British, torched his homestead of Mangethe, the dwelling where his manuscripts were housed. Tragically, eighteen vital years of recorded Zulu history were lost forever.

Who then was this 'White Chief', hated and reviled by many, including the liberal Bishop Colenso of Zululand, yet loved and adored in equal numbers by his followers and who, in significant ways, influenced the history of Zululand in the nineteenth century.

Of Scottish ancestry, Dunn's father, Robert Newton Dunn, was born in Inverness, Scotland, in 1795. In his mid-twenties, he left the shores of Scotland to settle in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. In 1824, Dunn married Anne Biggar, the daughter of Alexander Biggar, an ex-military man of dubious reputation who was reputed to have embezzled Regimental funds and subsequently suffered the indignity of being cashiered. Both the Dunns and Biggars moved to Port Natal where the call of adventure proved alluring.

John Robert Dunn was born in 1834, either shortly before the move from the Eastern Cape or in Port Natal, the exact place and date have not been determined. He was the third of four children, the others all being girls. Robert Dunn thrived commercially as a trader and hunter and, in 1839, in an expression of his new-found wealth, built a substantial dwelling on the ridge overlooking Durban Bay named 'Sea View' on two and a half thousand acres of land.

John, or '*Jantoni*', his given Zulu name, was from an early age exposed to local culture and language. His nursemaids were Khoi women and 'Sea View' was staffed by Zulus.

Bright, intelligent, physically strong and quick on the uptake, Dunn had little formal education. His youth was spent in the saddle learning to shoot and hunt. This not only gave him the opportunity to hone his language skills, but also to observe and accept Zulu customs and social behaviour that in turn led, in due course, to his acceptance by the Zulu as a 'white Zulu'.

Robert Dunn died in 1847, trampled to death by an elephant on a trading expedition in the Natal interior. John was but 13 years old and his father's death came as a shock as he was witness to the event. The fortunes of the Dunn family declined and 'Sea View' was disposed of to settle debts. The family returned to the Eastern Cape, but John decided to stay and tried his hand as a transport rider. However because of his age he was not paid, despite having performed the duties. This was the turning point of his life. *'This so disgusted me that I determined to desert the haunts of civilization for the haunts of large game in Zululand.'*

And so Dunn crossed the Thukela River into Zululand, commencing his long association with the Zulu nation, taking with him a young 15-year-old bride, Catherine Pierce. Her father was a Port Natal businessman and her mother of Cape Malay origin. He in all probability spoke only Zulu and lived a somewhat nomadic life, forsaking both his European upbringing and clothes. He must have

astonished the local population, who saw in him a white youth who spoke fluent Zulu and observed local customs.

For two years, from 1852 to 1854, Dunn and his young wife lived amongst the Zulu. He hunted, bartered and lived off the land. It is doubtful if Dunn could read or write properly at this stage of his life. Whether he would have progressed is open to conjecture had fate not intervened. Life was to take a dramatic turn when he met Joshua Warmesley, a retired British Army Captain. Dunn had been absent from European civilization for two years and was considered by settlers to be 'lost'.

Walmsley, accompanied by his associate Harry Milner, heard tales of a European boy, dressed like a Zulu in the aMatigulu River area of Zululand. Walmsley takes up the tale:

'Milner examined the boy and said at once his name was John or Jack Dunn, and that he had been missing for several years, no one knowing what had become of him.'

Walmsley then decided to make him captive and gave Dunn two choices.

To consent to live at Nonoti, Walmsley's home near the Lower Drift of the Thukela River, or alternatively be sent back to Durban.

Dunn chose to stay with Walmsley, and it was during the following six years that Dunn was thoroughly educated in western ways of life that included reading, history and social graces. There emerged a remarkable combination of a man who could pass for a Zulu or be entirely at ease in a European environment such as the Durban Club.

In 1856, civil war broke out in Zululand. King Mpande's two sons, Cetshwayo and Mbuyazi fought for the succession to the Zulu throne. Dunn became involved and sided with Mbuyazi, who was soundly defeated at the bloody battle of Ndongakusuka.

Cetshwayo generously forgave Dunn for his perceived treachery in supporting Mbuyazi. Their first dramatic meeting was in 1857, and recorded by Cetshwayo when in captivity, following the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879.

'One very cold and stormy night in winter I was seated before a large fire in my hut when there was a noise without as if someone was arriving. I asked the cause from my attendants and they told me a white man in a miserable state of destitution had just arrived and claimed my hospitality. I ordered the servants to bring him in, and a tall, splendidly made man appeared. He was dressed in rags, for his clothes had been torn to pieces in fighting through the bush, and he was shivering from fever and ague. I drew my cloak and asked him to sit by the fire, and told servants to bring food and clothing. I loved this white man as a brother, and made him one of my Indunas, giving him land and wives, daughters of my chiefs.'

Cetshwayo's support and subsequent grant of land rights elevated Dunn into a position of both power and wealth. He assumed the position of both friend and political advisor to Cetshwayo and made a permanent move into Zululand in 1858. He married Zulu women from a variety of different clans, always paying the going rate of dowry for each of his recorded forty-nine wives. He established three main residences at Mangethe, Emoyeni and Qwayinduku. (See map page vii and owned large regions of land from the Thukela to the Mhlathuze river (grants made by Cetshwayo), together with control of some six thousand subjects. He never lost the urge to hunt, and ivory, hides skins, together with thousands of accumulated cattle, were his primary source of income.

As pressure by Cetshwayo to be supplied with weapons increased, so Dunn and the British merchant houses located in Durban were directly responsible for the dramatic rise in the number of firearms imported into Zululand. Between 1873 and 1878 no less than fifteen thousand weapons of all descriptions, both antiquated and modern, together with some ten thousand barrels of gunpowder found their way into Zululand. When the Government refused to grant import licenses, both Dunn and the merchant houses circumvented the law by shipping the guns north to Lourenco Marques and thence into Zululand.

At the outbreak of the 1879 Anglo-Zulu War, Dunn faced an acute dilemma. His continued wellbeing and prosperity lay in the hands of Cetshwayo. His natural inclination was to remain neutral, but neutrality was not possible in view of the direct pressure applied by Lord Chelmsford. The third major crisis of his life beckoned. He made the decision prior to the outbreak of hostilities, to move his wives, children, followers and cattle to the South bank of the Thukela River, siding with the British and arguably betraying Cetshwayo for a second time.

His autobiography, published in 1886 and edited by contemporary historian Duncan Moodie, includes the political and military role played by him during the invasion of Zululand, together with his subsequent post-war manoeuvring to re-establish his power base in Zululand. He expresses his views on the cause of the conflict and is forthright in his opinion of the three generals, namely Sir Garnet Wolseley, Lord Chelmsford and Hope Crealock who, together with Cetshwayo, form the title of his autobiography. What follows is a fascinating insight into one of the most powerful and influential characters of nineteenth century Zululand.

Dunn's eyesight failed in 1894 and, after a brief illness, he died on 5 August 1895, aged 65, of dropsy and heart disease at his eMoyeni home, near Gingindlovu.

Today, it is a source of great pride to belong to the thriving '*Dunns Descendants Association*' and a visit to his well-kept grave, lovingly attended, reflects the high esteem in which this extraordinary '*white Zulu*' is held.

Arthur Königkrämer, Ron Lock and Peter Quantrill
Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, 2006

* Modern Zulu orthography is used in this foreword. Original spelling is retained in the manuscript

Preface

IT has been stated in a review of the manuscript from which the following pages have been printed that this book will prove of deep interest throughout the English-speaking communities of the world, and a perusal of the work will, I venture to think, confirm such an opinion, as therein will be found important political facts known but to a very few exalted personages; interesting accounts of Zulu Kings, Chiefs, &c, &c; readable tales of hunting, containing many hints useful to the modern hunter; and many other curious odds and ends, all from the pen of Mr Dunn, a man in a very unique position.

I must premise by saying that whilst I am now writing Mr Dunn is fifty or sixty miles away, and the production of the book has been left entirely to me, so that I must apologize to the quiet and retired disposition of the author for giving a slight sketch of him in order to disabuse some of the Home public of the bogie idea they have formed of our Author. Some of the accounts of him in the English papers are very amusing, and he is there described as a perfect gorilla; whereas in point of fact he is, as I have said, a quiet, retiring, and hospitable gentleman, of pleasant appearance and manners, of good

family, and much esteemed by all those who have the privilege of his acquaintance. As will be seen he was much hurt at an early period of his life – when he had lost his father – by being defrauded of his just rights, and he therefore shook the dust off his feet against what we call civilization, and retired to Zululand, where he simply established himself upon the model of King Solomon, the Wise.

That he was afterwards deeply wronged by being deprived of his country and his chieftainship, after having been of the utmost use to the British cause during the Zulu war, will also appear. But what could he expect of a Liberal Government under Gladstone, who seemed and seem to revel in heartlessly abandoning devoted loyalists, as in the case of the loyal Boers of the Transvaal, General Gordon, and John Dunn, just as Liberal Government abandoned Poland, Denmark, and latterly, Greece.

Sir Henry Bulwer, the last Governor here, who, with all his rather ridiculous autocracy, was the – proverbially – hesitant and timid tool of a set of vacillating, invertebrate, weak-kneed and unprincipled political poltroons, whose craven spirit and flaccid attitude has brought our beloved empire to the verge of ruin, implored John Dunn to stay peacefully on his land near the Tugela in order to act as a buffer between Natal and Zululand, and he would see to his rights. At this time, Mr Dunn, having beaten Sitimela, had the Zulu country at his feet, and a grand career before him. How the promise was kept we have seen.

No wonder that under a Government of this sort Mr Dunn could not get justice. The headstrong and pernicious sophistry of Mr Gladstone prompts him – as has been said – to wreck an empire rather than surrender – not a moral – but a self-evolved principle, and according he has brought Ulster and Home Rule face to face, with sword in hand in the first instance, and dynamite and boycotting in the second.

As far as the fair, fertile, but unfortunate Colony of Natal is concerned, as if she had not enough in hand with her ‘Bar’ at the

Durban Harbour and Native and Boer disturbances around her, she, in common with other British Colonies, must needs be throttled by the same pernicious influence, proceeding from the heater harangues of a Premier who, it is well known, often erects a superb, elaborate, and most taking structure, upon what he is very well aware is a basis of deliberate falsehood. What the growing Colonies want is home representation, or a Permanent Colonial Board of Control in London – something like the Council of India. Their decisions, though not final, would command the attention of the London Press, and thus be forced into public notice. The Premier is against, this kind of thing, alleging, indirectly, if not directly, that there is a disloyal spirit abroad. Of course this remark is characteristically devoid of that particularity which relates to fact. In 1880 I had the pleasure of caning a Victorian Minister of the Crown in Australia for libelling the Queen in a paper which belonged to him, and the loyalty of the people was strongly evinced by the showers of loyal and congratulatory letters that I received and which – by permission – were afterwards printed. I state it not boastfully, but because the case is peculiarly *apropos*.

It is quite an insular idea – now fortunately being dissipated – that the Colonies are disloyal, and it has been actively kept alive by the wonderful oratory and malevolent, though masterful mendacity, of that high priest of hypocrisy and, Ananias of anarchy, Gladstone. Palmerston's saying about the latter gentleman bringing on war and ruin and then stepping into a madhouse is becoming verified. In the meantime it might – in conclusion – be said with Byron,

‘Even Satan's self with thee might dread to dwell,
And in thy skull discern a deeper hell.’

The book is perhaps smaller than we calculated upon, but we must bear in mind the celebrated Holkot's remarks upon the evils of a great book – he says ‘The smallness of the size of a book is always its own

commendation, as, on the contrary, the largeness of a book is its own disadvantage as well as a terror to learning. In short, a big book is a scarecrow to the head and pocket of the author, student, buyer, and seller, as well as a harbour of ignorance. Small books seem to pay the deference to the reader's quick and great understanding; large books to mistrust his capacity, and to confine his time as well as his intellect.'

The editor