

Memoirs of Clement Geoffery Nettelton - 14th April 1993

I really do not know how one starts a biography, so I will just say there are times when, having nothing better to do, 'tis then I love to just sit and dream and bring back memories of my life of 80 years, a life full of many and varied experiences in many parts of Africa and Overseas. Yes, I have had a most interesting life - at least I think so. Yes, a life that I would willingly relive even though I knew of its many pleasures and at times, hardships. The whole world is today in a turmoil and would that we could again have those good old days free from racialism and political intrigues - but they will never return. But if they could, this would be a happy world for all and not just the few. Present day life, with all its amenities cannot compare with the old, when we had to make do with what little we had and very pleased to do so. There were no motor cars until early in the century, and then only a few, no movies, no television and no wireless. The first movies were silent with captions and I can remember the first film my Dad took my brother Gerald and I to was well advertised in the local Mafeking Mail. This was in 1904 in Mafeking - the "Great Train Disaster". It was a long film showing the journey of two trains. The end comes when the two trains, obviously toy, approach each other as the caption reads "at great speed", though to me they seemed to be moving very hesitatingly. Eventually, they meet head on on a high embankment and at the same moment a paraffin tin is dropped onto the stage at the back of the stage. Screams from the nervy types. That was my experience of a sound film.

As I have mentioned, there were very few cars, but still we had the good old reliable ox wagon and Cape Cart for transport which very seldom let one down. See how our early parents got about this country - slow but sure. Of wagons we had the open goods, the full tented and half with a cartle in front on which the driver sat and in which we stored our goods. There were the riny cartles to sleep on, hard but comfortable. It is interesting to record that in this Eastern Province - or Kaffraria, many of the wagons were built by two well known firms which have now ceased to operate - Balantyne of Keiskama Hoek and Symons of Kingwilliamstown, using local timber. At Keiskamma Hoek the Military had dug a sluit, leading water from the Wolf River through the village, and one of these lead water to the large water-wheel at Balantyne's mill. This has, however, not been in use for years and I believe it has been suggested that it be preserved at some museum. When I was with the Union Castle Company, which I joined in 1913, I can remember many of these wagons were shipped to Kenya, as was trout ova, packed in ice, from the Trout Hatchery near Kingwilliamstown.

Turning to another type of amusement was music, not as today - just press a button on your wireless, but the old fashioned gramophone with the hand wind and large trumpet as illustrated in His Masters Voice advertisements.