

DUNN, Robert Newton

Tuesday, June 26, 2018

Born 26th February, 1796, Ware, Hertfordshire. Died 5th of September, 1847, Durban.

Trader. Zulu name: Misdoni. The names of Dunn's parents have not been discovered. His mother was still alive in England in Oct, 1850. He had a brother, Hannibal, who in 1850 was an auctioneer in Saffron Walden, Essex, and another brother Henry, who in April 1851, was in America with his wife and 9 children living in circumstances of 'great distress'.

Dunn came to South Africa as an 1820 Settler on the 'Duke of Marlborough' in Daniell's party. It was an independent party of 40 from Devonshire. Dunn was an auctioneer when he immigrated. By 1824 Dunn had established himself in business as a merchant in Port Kowie (Port Alfred). On the 8th of September of this year he married Anne Harold Biggar, the daughter of Alexandra Harvey Biggar. The ceremony took place on the Biggar farm Woodlands. By March 1825 Dunn own Hope Farm near Port Frances (later named for Port Alfred). In July of this year he bought land at Port Frances, viz. lot 57 paying £15 for it when all the others were sold for £11 each. One of the conditions of the sale was that a house not less than 30 ft by 15 ft be erected within two years. At one time Dunn had two plots at Port Frances and the house at Bathurst. In 1826 he was granted the farm Newton on the east bank of the Karirga river, adjoining Woodlands. The Biggars left Woodlands in 1828, having sold it, and the Dunns also left the area. By November 1836 they were at Algoa Bay. In this month William Hart, a merchant of Lombard Street, London, consigned to Dunn 19 barrels of gunpowder, for sale by Dunn as an agent, and in March 1837 shipped him a further consignment of 100 barrels. By July 1838 Dunn had not rendered any account to Hart of the sale of the gunpowder, nor had he remitted any money and Hart made a declaration on the matter at the Guildhall in London, before the Lord Mayor.

What follows is Captain R.J.Gardens version of events. The 'mercantile firm' not receiving any remittances, sent someone to the Cape to enquire into the matter. When Dunn heard of this, he loaded 5 wagons with goods and sent them under charge of a trustee person to the Orange river. There after he proceeded to Grahamstown, to his brother-in-law Charles Maynard. Here he procured fresh horses and rode on to Colesberg, from whence he crossed the Orange, and was joined by his wagons. He stayed there until 1838 [sic] and then came to Natal with certain 'boers'. While in Transorangia he disposed of three of his wagons and their contents, bring only two and their goods to Natal.

As seen above, there is certainly some truth in the story, but the timing is wrong. Various dates have been proffed for Dunn's arrival in Natal, e.g. 1834 1836 and 1838. Presumably it was after the arrival of Harts second consignment of gunpowder at Alcoa Bay c. May / June 1837. Dunn in a letter written c. Jan. 1846 to the government stated he had been in Natal 8 years, i.e. since 1837. He appears to have preceded his family as stated by Garden. They left sometime after the 26th of October 1837, the date of the certificate authorising their departure from the Cape Colony.

Dinya, one of James Stewart's informants, whose evidence is recorded in the Stuart Archive states Dunn came with James Collis and was probably a relation or clerk of Collis's. The latter's date of arrival, however, was 1831. Also he died in 1835. The association in Dinya's mind with Collis probably stems from the fact that Collis was the Natal agent for the Grahamstown mercantile firm of Maynard &

Norden, in which Dunn's brother-in-law, Charles Maynard, was a partner. Dunn, in fact, describes Collis as a partner of 'Messrs Maynard' of Grahamstown. Another connection was the fact that Dunn purchase the deceased Collis's farm, 'Sea View' from the Maynards. Dunn's residence, (Sea View) Dinya places at South Coast junction (now Rosburgh) and he relates that Dunn had 'many Hottentots and native followers'. Statements in the Kit Bird Papers made in 1896 by some of Dunn's contemporaries differ as to his background. S.W.B. Griffin, also an ex-Port Elizabeth resident, wrote that Dunn came to Natal on the Dove, (no date quoted), while Thomas Green and Jesse Saveall, both ex-soldiers, describe him as a doctor on the gunboat HMS Fawn, which came to Natal in 1842. There does not seem to be any truth in this latter notion.

The Dunn family had not been united for long when in quick succession Piet Retief and his burgers were killed at Dingane's capital Mgungundlovu (Feb. 1838), the boer camps were attacked by the Zulus, and the English at the Bay sent two expeditions against the Zulus (Mar./Apr. 1838) - the second, culminating in the first Battle of Ndongakusuka in which of the 17 whites who sallied fourth, only four survived, and of their 800 black followers, 600 perished. Both of Anne Dunn's Brothers were killed in these action-pack 3 months. On the 24th of April a week after Ndongakusuka, the Zulu army attacked the settlement at the bay. The whites had previously taken refuge on the Comet, owned by Maynard Bros., which had arrived in Port shortly before. From there they watched the settlement being pillaged. After 9 days of destruction the Zulu army withdrew. On the 11th of May the Comet sailed for Delagoa Bay and ultimately Algoa, leaving behind only about nine of the port hotel residence. The Dunn family had been among those who had gone aboard the Comet, and it seems as though Mrs Dunn and their children sailed in her. It is possible that Dunn himself was one of the few who remained at Port Natal - certainly his father-in-law Alexander Biggar did. The date given for Mrs Dunn and the children's return in the DSAB article on one of the children, John Robert is Dec. 1838. Should this be the case Dunn could not have accompanied them to the Cape, as according to his own writings he bought Seaview in July 1838 while his widow in her correspondence with the government on land matters in the late 1840s, dates it's purchase to November 1838 and other farms to October 1838. One must take into consideration, however, that Dunn does seem to be somewhat hazy in dating events.

Dunn was certainly at the bay in early December 1838 when Major Charters landed with the British force, and commandeered his storehouse at the Point, compelling him to remove the contents, with the exception of the ammunition. Charters had being sent to Natal to try to restore peace between the Zulus and the Boers, and part of his brief was to prevent the Boers getting arms and ammunition through the Port Natal, the drying-up of the supply being seen as an effective means of preventing any attempt at establishing an independent Boer government. Besides appropriating Dunn's stone building, known by the name of the previous owners is 'Maynard's store', Charters took over a small two-roomed building adjacent to it, also the property of Dunn, and a wooden structure belonging to J.O. Smith of Port Elizabeth. He also impounded the ammunition in Smith's store, as well as some found in the temporary magazine on the other side of the Harbour. This ammunition belonged to the Boers, having been purchased by them from Dunn.

The British troops were withdrawn in December 1839. In the following month Dunn purchased from the Boer authorities a licence to deal in wine and spirits. Hence S.W.B. Griffin's description of him, in the Kit Bird Papers, as a wine merchant from Port Elizabeth. While on the subject, Dinya's evidence mentions 'there was plenty of liquor at his place' (ie Sea View). Whether he meant for retailing or for home consumption is not clear. Capt. Garden describes Dunn as a loose debauched man and greatly given to drink'.

In September 1841 Dunn complained in a letter to the Pietermaritzburg Landdrost that he was not in possession of various properties he owned. The first mentioned was Maynard's store at the Point, which he said he had purchased in 1839 [sic] and had handed over in 1840 [sic]. Second was Sea View, bought in July 1838 and paid for in 1839. Then came the farms of James Stubbs and Charles Blanckenberg, both together measuring 6000 acres. Both these men had been killed at the Battle of Ndongakusuka, and Dunn had bought the land at public sale thereafter. He now understood that these two farms were being inspected for a young man Odendaal, 'to his great detriment and injury if true'. Next there were the farms of Thomas Carden and James (should be Robert) Russell, together 6000 acres, lying along the road to the Umlazi River and adjoining Stubbs and Blankenberg's properties. Camden and Russell had also been killed in Ndongakusuka, and Dunn had purchased the land at the same auction. Also as executor of his father-in-law Alexandra Biggar and his brother-in-law Robert Biggar he objected to the farms been given to others.

Written 8 months after his writing this letter the British were back. This time Capt. T.C. Smith and his men of the 27th regiment marched to Natal to establish British authority. On the 4th of March 1842 the camp on the Hill near Dunn's residence at Sea View, which bugler Joseph Brown records as 'a magnificent house and premises, and a splendid garden'. The events of 1842 seem to have left Dunn unscathed. He was not one of the number of English settlers who were imprisoned by the Boers in Pietermaritzburg.

In mid-1843 Dunn was in the Zulu country, at the time when King Mankomo annihilated his only brother Gqungqu and his entire family and followers, because he had reason to believe he was plotting against them. The result was the flight across the Tugela river of Mankomo's aunt Mawa, seeking British protection and bringing with her a lot following and great numbers of cattle. Dunn, (who was in Zululand Trading for every at the time), at Mankomo's direction, wrote to Major Smith (by this time he had been promoted), to complain of Mawa's action and to request that Smith compel her to return with her cattle. In reporting these to the Hon. John Montagu, the Cape Secretary to the Government, Smith remarked that 'interested feelings sometimes operate on such occasions' - Dunn who must have none of the Gqungqu massacre (the real reason for Mawa's flight) had not hinted at what had taken place, nor made any allusion to it whatever. Dunn he describes to Montagu as a 'trafficker in ivory'.

Under the British administration Dunn once more pursued his right to Maynard's store and the surrounding land. by this time the property has been appropriated for military purposes. In a letter to the Natal's Surveyor General Dr William Stanger from the Cape Secretary to Government of 17th February 1845, it was stated that the Secretary of State for the Colonies admitted the claims of both Dunn and J.O. Smith, unless the land be required for military purposes, in which case he authorised the claimants being allowed to select allotments of equal value elsewhere. Also they would be entitled to a small compensation from the board of Ordnance for the real value of the buildings erected - ' which, however, are represented to be in very dilapidated condition'.

In August 1846 Dunn again wrote to the Government on the subject, bargaining for other land in exchange. From this letter one finds that his ground ran for 250 ft along the shoreline. On the 2nd of November he renewed his bargaining - he asked for £5 rent a month since May 1844 (Maynard's store Was being used by the government as a Customs House), Plus £150 for the value of the store, plus in erf in Durban. Eventually he did not make headway with the proposition, so on the 22nd of December he presented a new proposal - no rent, £100 for the store, plus on erf. It would seem that the erf was also dropped before a final agreement was reached. Two days later, the Natal Secretary of Government, Donald Moody, explained to the Cape Government (Natal was then a district of the Cape Colony), why the Lt.-Governor had felt it necessary to spend £100 to purchase Dunn's Point land, despite being

directed not to do so. The ground is very important both militarily and for trade, and should not remain in the position of a single individual. The present Customs House was rented from Dunn by Major Jarvis (Major Charters's successor) at £8.5s. a month, for which much rent was outstanding. The building had fallen down but it still remained the only spots suitable for a Customs House. Furthermore its purchase did away with the necessity for paying rent.

Dunn was killed at the age of 51. The Natal Witness noted that he had been found dead 'near the edge of the bush'. He had left Durban for Seaview on September 4th 1847 and had failed to arrive. His family and Durban residence started searching for him the following morning and he was found at 8 a.m. on the 6th it was thought that he had been thrown from his horse after out had been surprised by elephants. Another contemporary account is that of Captain Garden who states it was drink 'which ultimately brought him to an untimely end'. S.W.B. Griffin, who was living in Durban at the time, wrote in 1896 that Dunn had been found dead at Congella - the cause 'a supposed apoplectic fit. Nowhere in contemporary sources has any mention been found of his being trampled by an elephant, a fate sometimes ascribed to him.

Just over two months after her husband's death Mrs Dunn started to try to sort out the question of her husband's land. She laid claim to five 3000 acre farms between the Umlazi and Umbilo rivers, viz. Sea View, Carden's farm Summer Hill, Balackenbergs farm on the banks of the Umhlatuzana, Russell's farm east of the Umhlatuzana, and Stubb's farm (which had been taken position of by Odendaal in 1840, despite the Dutch promising that this would not happen and ignoring the fact that Dunn had bought it and paid for it.) She was informed on the 25th of September 1848 that the land commission recommended that, apart from Sea View and the further 1 670 acres included with it making up 3 540 acres, and the farm Sander Kraal (5 170 acres), already granted her, the remaining 5 560 acres she claimed, words to be divided between herself, 2 514 acres, J.J. Uys, 1 046 acres and Odendaal, 2 000 acres. (There was insufficient land on the coast between the Umbilo and Umlazi rivers containing the farms registered to Dunn, Henry Ogie and J.J. Uys, to satisfy the claims of each - the land totalled 11 571 acres while the claims amounted to 24 000 acres.) On the 13th of March 1849 Mrs Dunn wrote to the Government, accepting this extra acreage in full settlement of a husband's claims. The land she was given finally was 2 644 acres not 2 514 acres between the Umhlatuzana and Umlazi rivers., adjoining Sea View. It appears on later maps as either Dunn's Grant or Dunn's property. On the 22nd of March Mrs Dunn's son-in-law William Kuhr, with her power of attorney sign for the title deeds to this land. The grant, however, was back-dated to the 1st of March 1848 Sea View's deeds had been signed for in February 1849 by G.C.Cato on Mrs Dunn's behalf, this grant dating back to 1st of February 1848. Mrs Dunn's power of attorney to Kuhr dated 13th of March 1849 also included the power of to obtain the title deeds of Erf 52 Burger Street in Pietermaritzburg and Erf 5 Block 1 in Durban.

Another of the Dunn properties was Sander Kraal, renamed Bell Air (5 170 acres), to which title was issued in Dunn's name on the 1st of December 1847. Dan had claimed this form as early as 1839. In December 1845 he sold it to Thomas John Eaton who almost immediately disposed of it to J.A.Ross. Ross retained it for some years thereafter.

After Dunn's death Mrs Dunn continue to live on Sea View. When Alfred Southam came from Manchester in August 1848 to investigate the possibilities of cotton growing in the Natal, we found that the three people who had most extensive plantations with one of the Milner brothers, W.R.S. Wilson and 'Dunn' [sic] - i.e. Mrs Dunn. These were amongst the largest landowners in the Natal, each with not less than 6000 acres and yet none of them had more than about three to five acres under cotton, and we without any intention of extending the acreage. Back in England, Southam presented a report in

1857 on his findings to the Cotton Supplier Association, detailing the above. He concluded that the object of these cotton growers was not to cultivate cotton as such but to show how well it did grow so that prospective planters might be induced to buy the land at good prices.

From Byrne's Emigrants' Journal we know that c. 1849 - 1850 Mrs Dunn had pineapples, bananas, plantains and many other fruit growing on her farm, while the Natal Independent in March 1852 describes her as having been one of the pioneers of coffee planting in the Natal.

Mrs Dunn leased parts of Sea View to various settlers e.g. 100 acres to James Bell and his friends (who actually dubbed themselves the Sea View Syndicate), 100 acres to William Sowell and W.R. Whitehorn (Apr. 1850), 100 acres to B.M. Smart (Nov. 1850) and 182 Robert Spencer (Nov. 1850).

Mrs Dunn visited Alcoa Bay towards the end of 1850 or early 1851, returning to Durban in March. She died of fever in June. Her death took place at Bel Air. On the 22nd of June she was buried in the Church of England Cemetery (West Street) and on the 26th her husband's remains were interred with hers 'by desire of his family'. He had originally been buried in the Camp Cemetery, the Church of England one not being in existence when he died.

The Dunns' deceased estate papers provided what little is known of Dunn's parentage and siblings. Also here are Hart's declaration made at the Guildhall in 1838 and the supporting invoices for the gunpowder. Here too one learns that Robert owed his brother Hannibal over £1,000 for goods sold' but then Hannibal would be prepared to accept £400.

In November 1851 Seaview Road advertised for letting but James Brickhill, the executor dative of Mrs Dunn's state. In October 1854 Kuhr sold half of it to Henry Nourse (presumably the Henry Nourse who was the cousin of Mrs Dunn's brother-in-law Charles Maynard). A few years after Kuhr's death, in 1885, remainder of Seaview was divided one third to Henry Nourse of London and two thirds to Kuhrs executors.

Children

Mary Elizabeth (born 1826 - still alive 1852) m. May 1849, ?Ebb, Herman Conrad Wilhelm (known as William) Kuhr (c. 1818, Hamburg - c. 1880, ? London). Kuhr was a PE merchant. By May 1873 he was living in England at 38 Addison Gardens, North Kensington, London, while by Oct. 1876 he was at 7 Cleveland Road, Castle Hill, Ealing, Middlesex.

Louise Anne (c. 1827 - still alive 1852).

Matilda Jane (c.1839 - still alive 1852).

Agnes Francis (born c. 1831) unmarried by 1895. Agnes was in CT by February 1856. In 1895 she was living in Rondebosch, Cape. According to brother's will (dated March 1893) she was to receive the proceeds of the sale of 100 cattle.

John Robert (c. 1833, Cape Colony - 5 Aug. 1895, Moyeni, Zululand).

m. (1) Catherine Pierce (c. 1832, Cape Colony - 27 Jan. 1905, Emangeti, Zululand). d. Richard Pierce. Catherine Zulu name was Gadeni.

m. 48 Zulu wives.

John's Zulu names were Jantoni or uJandoni, or Jantoni Simdoni. After his mother's death and the departure of his sister's for the Cape, John was left to fend for himself when still in his teens. He did some transport-riding and then moved into Zululand where he was found and befriended by Captain Joshua Walmsley, the Zulu Border agent. He became Walmsley's Zulu interpreter and private Secretary, and at the second Battle of Ndongakusuka in 1856 between the Zulu princess Cetshwayo and Mbulazi,

Dunn and a force of Walmsley's police intervened on Mbulazi's side - the losing side, and Dunn barely escaped with his life. In 1857 he met Cetshwayo for the first time. Cetshwayo was so impressed with him and in due course he became his white advisor. From then until 1879 Dunn's position in Zululand went from strength to strength. When war with the Bruce Lee end up in 1878 Dan advised against confrontation. However when the die was cast, and he realise he would not be able to maintain his neutrality, he crossed the Tugela with his family and adherents - 1 650 of them, plus 3 000 cattle. During the Anglo-Zulu war he rendered invaluable service to the British and afterwards was given one of the Thirteen chiefdoms into which the country was divided. (see DSAB vol 1)

Charlotte Sarah Harriet (born c. 1835) m. 21 Feb. 1856, CT, Johannes Joachim Maynier of CT. In Mrs Dunn's the state papers is a letter from her son-in-law William Kuhr dated July 1850 reporting that Harriet was departing for London the following day on the Cuba - does this reference refer to Charlotte? Also from these papers one finds that Charlotte was about to leave Natal early in May 1854. She sells later in the month with Kuhr. Presumably, therefore, she was the Miss Dunn who had arrived with Kuhr on the Natal in the previous month.