



# South African National Society

History - Culture and Conservation. Join SANS.

Founded in 1905 for the preservation of objects of Historical Interest and Natural Beauty

<http://sanationalsociety.co.za/>

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## NEWSLETTER & PROGRAM FOR November 2017

**Members and Friends are reminded that there is no meeting in November because this is AGM Month. Paul Mikula will be the guest speaker at the AGM lunch - talking about the *Phansi Feel Good Museum*; a presentation we anticipate with delight.**

**Last date for booking a place at the AGM lunch is November 15, the meeting being on 18<sup>th</sup>.**

### **The AGM and the end of year Raffle**

At last year's AGM great fun was had by everyone present because of the wonderful generosity of members which allowed a great many 'prizes' to be distributed in the raffle.

Can we again ask members to contribute items which can be raffled at this year's AGM but can members also think of some fun items as well as shortbread, biscuits, Christmas cake, mince pies and such, please. We will put together Christmas hampers, but remember – the greater the variety the greater the entertainment!

Some folks may prefer to drop items off with Angela St George well before the event, or if they are unable to attend but would still like to contribute, so please give Angie a ring on 083 555 5705 and arrange a suitable drop off time with her.

### **December meeting on Tuesday 12 December**

The December meeting will be held at our usual venue of KwaMuhle Museum when Society member Alison Bastable will be our guest speaker. Alison's title is **HEROD THE GREAT** – a great, and possibly **the** greatest builder of all time.

**Report Back – Inaugural Ken Gillings Memorial Lecture presented by Robin Smith.**

### **The Allied campaign in the Holy Land 1917 – 1918**

***General Sir Edmund Allenby's entry into Jerusalem and Damascus***



**General Sir Edmund Allenby**



General Sir Edmund Allenby was described as Britain's Greatest General after his successful campaign in Palestine and Syria in 1917-18. However without his disagreement with his

Commander-in-Chief Douglas Haig in May 1917, and his replacement with a more pliable general, the Allies might not have seen and benefitted from his remarkable ability.

David Lloyd George became British Prime Minister in December 1916 following the unsatisfactory progress of the war resulting in the resignation of PM Asquith and First Lord of the Admiralty Churchill. Lloyd George was intensely disliked by his generals but equally his mistrust of Haig meant that he correctly anticipated no spectacular gains from the imminent Third Battle of Ypres.

Lloyd George's hopes were therefore pinned on the Middle East front. An able, aggressive and experienced general with a reputation for getting things done was needed to lead an advance in southern Palestine; an advance that would end triumphantly in the capture of Jerusalem which would cheer a war-weary Britain and encourage its allies.

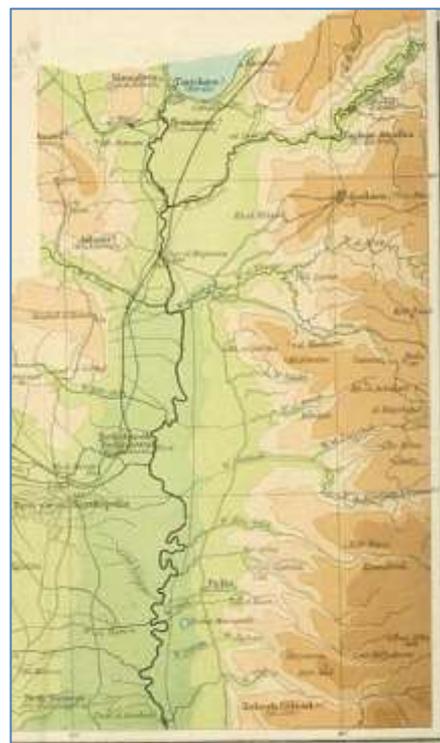


**Joffre & 'Sceptical' Lloyd George**

On 7 June 1917 Allenby, accompanied by Chief of the Imperial General Staff Field Marshall Sir William Robertson, heard Lloyd George's plans for a Palestine offensive – Jerusalem by Christmas. A doubtful Robertson agreed to support the campaign but Lloyd George presented Allenby with a copy of Sir George Adam Smith's *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* remarking with a side-swipe at Robertson, "that it probably contained more of practical use than could be found in War Office surveys".

Broad political issues were involved. The Prime Minister and several senior colleagues were convinced that the stalemate on the Western Front could never be broken. Elimination of Germany's allies offered a better chance of victory and Turkey was the most fragile of Germany's props.

Allenby arrived in Cairo on 28 June. Within three weeks he had completely revitalised his army. Realising that the physical gap between GHQ in Cairo and the front lines facing Gaza caused misunderstandings he chivvied his staff from their snug quarters in Cairo and sent them to Rafah within range of the Turkish guns. "Staff officers" he said, "are like partridges – they are better for being shot over." No longer was Allenby required to conform to the plans of Haig and his staff. He could now fight the sort of battles that, as a cavalryman, he instinctively understood.



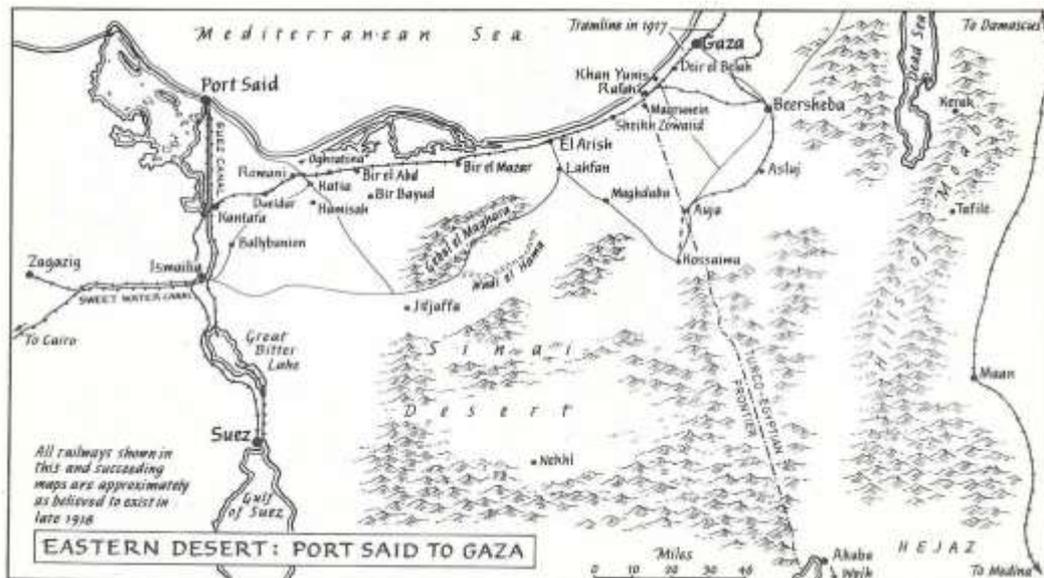
**Lloyd George's parting gift - Sir George Adam Smith's Atlas of the historical geography of the Holy Land**

### **The Attempt to Take Gaza**

A Turkish attack on Romani was beaten off. South African Colonel "Galloping Jack" Royston commanded the 2nd Brigade of the Anzac Mounted Division. He was wounded in the action but rode back to encourage his men with yards of blood-stained bandage from his flesh wound trailing behind him. A huge man, he wore out at least twelve horses that day.



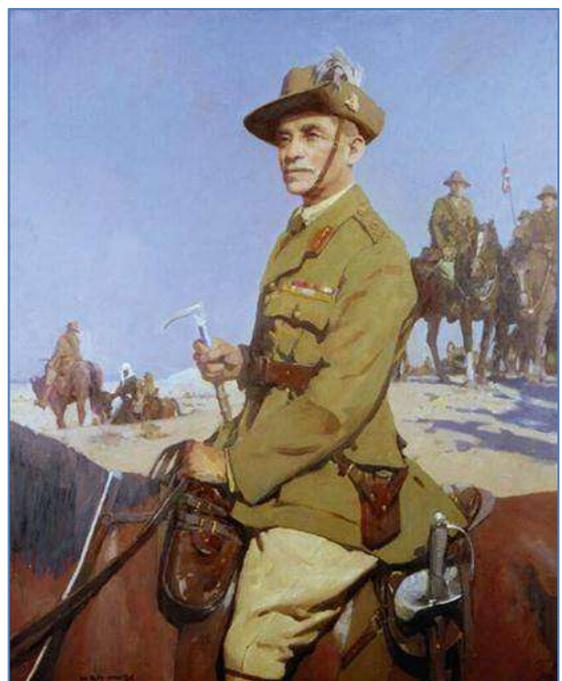
**Lieutenant-Colonel J.R. Royston:  
"Galoping Jack" at Romani  
3-5 August 1916**



Allenby quickly overhauled the staff in Cairo, finding many of them to be too junior. He brought with him Major-General Sir John Shea and wired the War Office for additional staff officers. At the end of July he restructured his command, creating three corps and appointing new commanders.

**Lieutenant-General Sir Harry Chauvel  
One of the three new commanders**

On 12 July Allenby met with Captain T.E. Lawrence whose dramatic capture of the port of Aqaba six days earlier had made him the man of the moment in Cairo. Lawrence attended the interview in Bedouin costume and sensed that Allenby was uncertain whether or not his guest was a charlatan – this doubt would remain for the rest of Allenby's life.



The 'Arab Revolt' up to now had been a disappointment and the Turkish garrison had easily held Medina against the half-hearted attacks of the Arabs. Allenby pledged material support which radically changed the nature of the Arab movement and he found Lawrence to be charming and learned. Colonel Meinertzhagen suspected that behind the facade was a glory-hunter with 'a trick of inflating the truth so that one cannot tell which is basic fact and which is embellishment'. (A charge which was later levelled at Meinertzhagen so possibly a case of it takes one to know one – Editor).

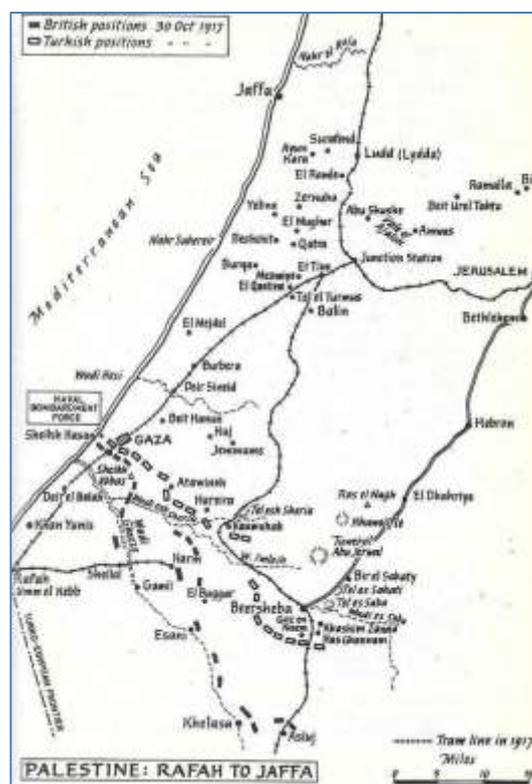
Tragically at this time Sir Edmund Allenby received a War Office telegram advising of the death of his only son Michael. His secretary, Lord Edward Dalmeny wrote, "He read it, put his hands to his eyes for a moment and said 'My son' and then to me 'Go on'. I thought it a great example of self-discipline. My heart went out to that man then."

The Turks had made Gaza into a strong modern fortress. Between Gaza and Beersheba, 27 km to the east, their line consisted of five strong points. In the everlasting search for water, it was discovered that Asluj and Khelasa had been populous centres in ancient times. The Turks did much to destroy the Asluj water supply but the 2nd Australian Brigade was sent to repair this vital resource and build long rows of horse troughs. Allenby himself paid them a visit – "We thought a lot of him," wrote Trooper Idriess "coming out all this distance and seeing with his own eyes what is being done."

While the troopers were working on the wells at Asluj, a detachment of a new, surprising ally appeared. They were Hijaz Arabs based at the recently-conquered Aqaba. The Australians were wary of the Sinai Bedouins after a number of incidents and had been ordered to avoid tangling with them because they were potential allies. This contingent of 70 camels under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Frank Newcombe, one of the men involved in Allenby's stepped-up association with Prince Feisal, was the first proof of that. Newcombe's Arab detachment moved in a wide detour to the east and set up a road block on the Hebron road.

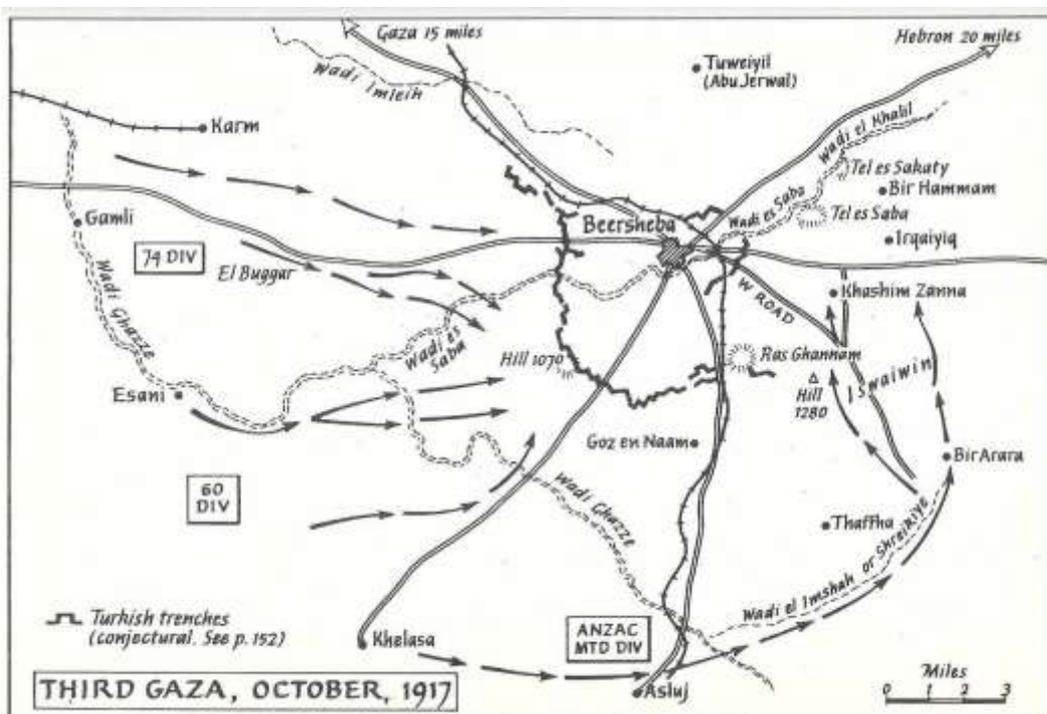
Chetwode's plan was drawn up with much input from his Chief Staff Officer, Major-General Guy Dawnay and presented to Allenby in June. The plan in outline was to feint at Gaza, then to employ most of the mounted troops in a vigorous thrust designed to capture Beersheba. The success of the plan depended on deception, surprise, swiftness of execution and water; for the horses could not be watered at all until Beersheba had been captured. For water they must depend on the rapid capture intact of at least some of the 17 wells thought to be in the town. This had to be achieved in a single day or the whole operation would fail. The similarities between Chetwode's plan and Roberts's for the relief of Kimberley are striking.

By 30 October some 12,000 mounted men were assembled at Khelasa and Asluj. To each saddle were attached two nosebags holding two day's forage with a third day's supply in wagons. Neither greatcoats nor blankets were allowed and three days' rations were carried in saddle-wallets. By 22:00 on 30 October Major-General Edward Chaytor's Anzac Division had cleared out of Asluj followed by Major-General Henry Hodgson's Australian Division which had already covered the 16 km from Khelasa. Chetwode's XX Corps infantry were marching to the left of the mounted troops and by 08:30 the next morning had captured a strong enemy outwork, Hill 1070.



One of the most amazing night marches of the campaign was under way. The two mounted divisions were negotiating some of the wildest, most featureless country of southern Palestine. Near Thaffha, the 2nd Anzac Brigade, which was to form the right of the attack on Beersheba, advanced northwards to Bir Arara, and thence to Tel es Sakaty on the road to Hebron. The rest of the Anzacs and the Australian Division turned left towards the Iswaiwin area 10 km east of Beersheba. From here at dawn the town came into view on the open plain in which runs the broad, shallow Wadi as Saba. This was possibly the biggest night march ever to have taken place in time of war, made entirely across country.

The steep-sided wadi beds provided good shelter for the horses and the New Zealanders were able to advance to within 700 metres of Tel es Sakaty. Chaytor put in the 3rd Regiment of the 1st Brigade and attacked the hill from the south-east. The New Zealanders gained the bank of the wide wadi immediately opposite the Turkish position which was now under intense converging fire. They captured sixty prisoners and three machine guns which they turned on their late owners who were fleeing towards Beersheba.



The ground ahead was difficult and time was pressing, it was now approaching 16:00 and it would be dark soon after 17:00. Chauvel knew that slow methodical progress must now give way to a swift mounted charge in an attempt to enter the town from the east. The closest units were the 4th and 12th Light Horse Regiments with the 5th Mounted Brigade of Yeomanry in support while the 7th Mounted Brigade was to their left.

**Lieutenant-General Sir Harry Chauvel and the staff of the Desert Mounted Corps**

Allenby, away from GHQ, acting in a typically peremptory manner, sent a telegram to Chauvel, "The Chief orders you to capture Beersheba today in order to secure water." Chauvel told Hodgson "Put Grant straight at it".

Brigadier-General William Grant was 1.94 metres tall, 47 years old and a superb horseman. He was a civil engineer from Victoria who owned the Bowenville Station on the Darling Downs. His skill as a guide on night marches over sand dunes in Sinai had been honed on the wide plains of his home territory where survival depended on bush craft.

Grant's troopers were scattered in groups over a wide network of wadis to avoid giving the German aircraft easier targets. They had been all day in the Iswainin area, about 6 km from Beersheba, and were frustrated that they had not had the order to saddle up.

Moments later the order came down the lines: "Form squadrons, line extended." It was 16:30 before the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment on the left and the 12<sup>th</sup> Regiment on the right could draw up all their men behind the ridge north of Hill 1280. From the crest of the ridge they could see Beersheba down a long slight slope. They were two squadrons wide and three deep, the lines about 200 metres apart, keeping a distance of 5 metres between each man and ordered to ride with a drawn bayonet. The horses were "Walers" named for their New South Wales origins and standing no more than 13 hands tall. All eyes were on the tall, striking figure of Grant out in front of the line. Short of the crest he pointed towards Beersheba and gave the order "Forward!"

Almost immediately the horsemen spurred their horses into a trot, then a canter and finally a gallop, shouting at the top of their lungs and waving their bayonets. Accustomed to fighting mounted infantry, the Turkish officers ordered their troops to hold their fire until the enemy dismounted, but the horsemen did not slacken their pace. When they closed to within 800 metres of the enemy's trenches the Turkish rifles and machine guns opened up. A British artillery battery on the left of the charging Australians spotted the source of the fire and a shower of shells killed many of the Turkish gunners.

One of the troopers had galloped on to a reserve trench. The Turks shot his horse and when the dazed Australian found his feet he was surrounded by five Turks with their hands up. The audacity of the Australian horsemen brought an abrupt and dramatic change of fortune to the Turks. They had hoped to rely on the onset of darkness to enable them to make an orderly withdrawal having completed the destruction of the wells.

The engineers bolted with the crowd leaving behind the demolition charges which they had laid at the wells. Beersheba was captured and the wells were secured. Of the 17 wells only two were completely destroyed. Nearly all the Turks surrendered immediately. One dazed German field officer commented on his captors' bold, headlong charge: "These Australians are not soldiers, they are madmen." Troopers and animals swarmed into the town. At the Turkish horse-troughs the men fell on their knees to drink beside their thirsty mounts.

Two German planes flew in low and bombed C Squadron of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade. They hit several men and horses, including one of the great Anzac legends, Lieutenant-Colonel L.C. Maygar who had won his V.C. in the Boer war. His horse bolted and Maygar was missing until he was found late that night having lost a lot of blood from several wounds. He died the next morning which was depressing news for the entire Light Horse. Maygar had been the last man taken off the beach at Anzac Cove in Gallipoli in November 1915.

The Beersheba charge is especially remarkable in the annals of mounted soldiers; the very idea of mounted infantrymen, which is what the light horsemen really were, indulging in a cavalry charge

against entrenched, unbroken infantry supported by artillery and machine guns, was until then unknown in history. Allenby was elated.

On 1 November, Allenby ordered Bulfin to hit Gaza which he did at 03:00 on 2 November. His artillery had been hitting Gaza for 72 hours by then. The big guns from British and French warships joined in the effort to smash the line that had held up the desert campaign for more than a year. Gaza had been weakened by the uncertainty of the German commander, von Kressenstein, confused by the smashing of Beersheba that had defied his intelligence. Newcombe's force was thought to be an advance guard for the Desert Mounted Force and three divisions were sent to tackle it. The British combination punches had the Turks reeling and before midday on 2 November Gaza was under British control.

On the same day, the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, sent a letter to Lord Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community. Rothschild had been lobbying on behalf of the Zionist Federation for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Soon after his friend Allenby had been appointed commander of the Palestine campaign, Rothschild sent a letter to Balfour about the issue. With Palestine about to be in British hands, Balfour replied: "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people..." This letter, henceforth known as the Balfour Declaration became an important document after the war.

Though the pursuit of the mounted troops had fallen very far short of Allenby's and Chauvel's hopes, the moral effect of the Australian and yeomanry actions was startling. On the afternoon of 9 November a major panic occurred at Et Tine, the Turkish headquarters. Kressenstein wrote, "Suddenly, news spread that hostile cavalry was moving against Et Tine. Although this rumour was false and fantastic, yet it caused such agitation that many formations began to retreat without orders...a great number of officers and men could not be stopped until they had reached Jerusalem or Damascus". On 13 November the ridge at El Mughar was stormed by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Dorset Yeomanry and in the early morning of 14 November the infantry of XXI Corps captured Junction Station.

Allenby took the bold decision to make straight for Jerusalem. In spite of fighting in country where large armies have no room to fight and the defenders can remain hidden it took only 21 days to reach the great moral and political prize of the Holy City. Allenby, a keen student of military history was aware that throughout history Assyrians, Romans and Crusaders had recoiled baffled and broken from numerous assaults on the western bulwarks of Judaea. Bulfin's XXI Corps moved north of Jerusalem, with the XX Corps to the south. The rains came in the middle of November and the temperature plummeted. The British troops did not have greatcoats or blankets, most supplies being sent to the Western Front. Camels, a long way from their natural habitat collapsed and died and only the hardy mules and donkeys could be used to carry supplies for the men. Chetwode's attack from the south on 8 December expected fierce resistance but the Turks had disappeared.

The Turkish governor dictated a formal letter of surrender and handed it to the mayor. He was the first Turkish governor in four centuries to capitulate and left the city via the road to Jericho. In the early morning of 9 December the mayor, Hussein Salim al-Husseini wearing his traditional fine robe, marched out of the main gate flanked by two Turkish policemen each carrying a white flag. They were met by two British sergeants, Sergeants James Sedgewick and Frederick Hurcomb of the London Regiment from the 60<sup>th</sup> Division and the letter was passed to Major-General Stuart Shea who formally accepted the surrender. 674 years after the Sixth Crusade the holy city passed again into the hands of a Christian power.

Allenby's orders were that on no account was the Holy City to be fought over. This order had been rigorously adhered to and on 12 December he made his entry into the city. He passed through the Jaffa Gate on foot, traditionally opened only to a conqueror, to show his great respect and humility. Robertson was responsible for suggesting this so as to contrast with the Kaiser's flamboyant entry on horseback wearing a white cloak and a plumed helmet nineteen years previously. He was followed by Chetwode and by French and Italian representatives. T.E. Lawrence was also present.

On the terrace of the ancient citadel, Allenby read a short proclamation placing the city under martial law. A local official then read French, Italian, Arabic, Hebrew and Russian versions. It emphasised the protection of all sacred places and institutions. Lawful business should continue. When Bonar Law announced the news of Jerusalem's capture (Lloyd George was sick that day), it had an electrifying effect on morale. It followed the German counter-offensive at Cambrai in France, the elimination of Romania from the war, the Italian reverse at Caporetto and, above all, the collapse of Russia. To his wife Allenby wrote: "it was a great feat; our losses were light."



Space has forced us to stop here and some way before reporting the end of this highly successful campaign.

Thank you Robin for giving members such an in-depth superbly researched and lavishly illustrated presentation. It was a fitting way to mark and remember Ken Gillings and the immense contribution he made to history and the SA National Society.

For those who would like to follow Robin's research the website will show three books which were used as reference to create the presentation made to the Society.

### **Escombe Railway Station – PRASA - Amafa**

Deeply concerned at the sadly neglected and dilapidated state of Escombe Station, Paul Raw a local resident recently wrote to Amafa because of his concern about the state of the Station.

His letter said he recently I visited the old Escombe Railway station Queensburgh, built in 1904, with the purpose of taking photographs for inclusion in an article on Queensburgh Rail transport and Railway Stations to be submitted to the Queensburgh News; *Unique Queensburgh Stories*.

He added he was stunned to observe the derelict and neglected state of this historic building which is in full view of the hundreds of rail commuters that traverse this line daily. Structurally the building appears to be sound, but in dire need of restoration, and has been the target of deplorable ugly graffiti applied all over the corrugated iron wall cladding.

The building has been in existence for 113 years, which by its age is protected in terms of heritage legislation and it fulfils the criteria of heritage legislation of the KwaZulu Natal Heritage Act (Act 4 of 2008).

Transnet-PRASA-Metrorail are required in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act No. 25 of 1999 to conserve or improve any heritage building structure which might also necessitate constructing a fence around the building to prevent vandalism..

The owners need to be made aware of the historic importance of this irreplaceable and precious old building and to restore it to its original state before it is totally lost to future generations. Every generation has a moral responsibility to act as a trustee of its National/Provincial Heritage for succeeding generations and the State has an obligation to manage heritage resources in the interest of all South Africans.

*Escombe Railway Station (12 km – 218 m asl) built in 1904 was formally known as Bowker's Halt or referred to as "soap box siding" and is situated alongside Main Road opposite a number of shops including Morrison's which has stood the test of time. The original wood and corrugated iron ticket and goods office which still exists after 113 years, is regrettably now sadly neglected and in dire need of restoration and is now surrounded by the new Police building and other facilities.*



Paul is now asking his local ward Councillor Chris van den Berg Ward 63:

Please would you kindly consider conducting a site inspection of this Historic Queensburgh station building in consultation with and arranging for Michelle Dennis, Editor Queensburgh News to publish a suitable report with photograph depicting the present state of the historic building?

### **Comment from the SA National Society**

1. Hats off to Mr Raw for highlighting this issue for he sets an example of what we as a society should be doing and thank you to Adrian Rowe for sharing this correspondence which was initially copied to Highway Heritage Society.
2. The other observation is that removing graffiti can discourage graffiti so is there someone in Queensburgh who might tackle this operation, in conjunction with and the support of PRASA.

*Hardy Wilson - Chair 2017*

### **Members will shortly receive an invitation to a double book launch at Campbell Collections**

But in the meanwhile book a place in your diary for Wednesday 8 November 17:30 for 18:00 for

***Illustrated Dictionary of Architectural Terms*** English-isiZulu by Franco Frescura and Joyce Myeza Plus

***isiShweshwe*** A History of the indigenisation of blueprint in southern Africa by Juliette Leeb-du Toit