

## The many faces of King Cetshwayo

By Ron Sheeley

On 11 February 1879 the news of the crushing defeat of British troops at Isandlwana on 22 January reached London via the Madeira cable. The unsettling report stunned the political and military establishments who in the coming weeks rushed to formulate a suitable explanatory response. Investigations into the disaster coupled with accusations of responsibility and blame were the fodder for the institutions of the day.

Also set into motion was the journalistic establishment, which clamoured for more information to meet the appetite of a news-hungry public. Readers yearned for more detail and background into this massacre on a faraway battlefield in a place called Zululand – which most readers had never heard of. This little war was going to be front-page material.

The popular illustrated weeklies, the *Graphic* and the *Illustrated London News*, scrambled to fill their pages with articles embellished with engravings depicting all aspects of the campaign. Military officers on the spot, such as Captain William Penn Symons of the 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment and Colonel John North Crealock from Lord Chelmsford's staff, as well as the ubiquitous press correspondents, contributed authenticity to distant happenings. Books, no matter how vaguely related to the topic, were hastily reprinted with fresh prefaces or additions. The reprint of General Sir Arthur Cunynghame's *My Command in South Africa* added a dedication 'To the Memory of those Gallant Officers and men who fell on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1879 at Rorke's Drift and Isandlwana'. H.M. Walmsley's *Zulu Land – Its wild sports and savage life* added a new cover featuring an inaccurate, romanticized portrait of the Zulus' King Cetshwayo. Inexplicably, there was no mention of either the war or the king in the text.

Much of the public's imagination soon focused on the Zulu monarch, King Cetshwayo kaMpande, who had ordered his impis to confront the invasion of his homeland and had masterminded its defence. Finding existing images and details of the king was difficult but a necessity in order to capitalize on the fervent interest of the day. Files were searched and past publications examined. It was known that John Dunn, the white trader and former confidant of the Zulu king had hired a photographer for the king's coronation in 1873, however, the photographer had failed to take a good picture as Dunn sadly noted – see John Dunn – *The White Chief of Zululand* by Charles Ballard p.103. Only a photograph of the king in the distance was taken and that did not provide enough detail to effectively depict his visage. Apart from this distant coronation group, there would prove to be no genuine photographic portraits of King Cetshwayo available before his captivity. In all probability, the first true photographic portraits were taken after the king's capture and when aboard the Natal en route to Cape Town. Therefore, other sources had to be found and a new image captioned Cetewayo. King of the Zulus appeared in the *Graphic* on 22<sup>nd</sup> February and was attributed to Lieutenant Basil Hall Woodward, who was stationed in Natal at the time and was probably one of the officers of the 75<sup>th</sup> Regiment who attended the coronation. Somewhat surprisingly, the king is shown with Caucasian features and rather unusual headgear, which may perhaps be an attempt to represent the crown ordered for the event by Shepstone.

There were plenty of other images of Zulu warriors in the various files and archives. If these were captioned so as to appear to be King Cetshwayo, would the public know the difference? So, whether by accident or calculation, images that could be presented to the public as the Zulu king were located and put to pragmatic use. Almost any Zulu image would fit the bill. As a result, the commercial photographic companies printed a great many erroneous portraits said to be the king. There is a *carte de visite* captioned *Cetewayo – The Zulu King* and said to be photographed on 3 March 1875 by W. Hughes & Co. Obviously not King Cetshwayo, this photograph is thought to have been taken at the coronation ceremony in 1873 with John Dunn's wagon in the background. Others are titled *Cetewayo – King of the Zulu* and were produced by the London Stereoscopic and Photographic Company. Another *carte de visite* labelled *Cetewayo from Life* is a good study of a warrior but not the king.

The Anglo Zulu War progressed to its conclusion with King Cetshwayo being captured and imprisoned at Cape Town. In 1882 he was allowed to visit London to plead with those in power that he be permitted to return to his homeland. By this time more accurate depictions of the Zulu monarch had become available and his face had become familiar. However, the damage had been done. Even in the early 1900s the old mistakes were repeated. There is a 1904 postcard captioned *The Zulu King 'Cetewayo' meeting with the white chief John Dunn* published by Sallo Epstein & Co of Durban. The Zulu warrior astride the horse is actually Prince Dabulamanzi kaMpande, the brother of King Cetshwayo, who had been in charge of the assault at Rorke's Drift. Another postcard circa 1910 captioned *Chief Cetewayo at his royal Hut* and was printed in Saxony. This actually depicts an individual, possibly Ntshingwayo kaMahole, the Zulu general who led the Zulu impis at Isandlwana.