

## Sister Janet Part three

Abridged from *Sister Janet - Nurse and Heroine of the Anglo-Zulu War 1879*

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Sister Janet could now return home in the knowledge that her mission had been a complete success. She was excited about the prospect of her journey, especially as the boat, the same *Dublin Castle* that took her to Africa, would be stopping en-route at Capetown to enable the Stafford House team to reunite for the long sea voyage home.

When the boat stopped at Capetown on the 2 November, there was sufficient time for Janet to be received by King Cetshwayo, who was being held a prisoner at the Castle prior to being sent to England to meet with Queen Victoria. The Zulu king had become something of a tourist attraction for officers returning home and he rather enjoyed the respectful attention he received. Janet was very surprised by King Cetshwayo, he had already heard of her kind treatment of Zulu warriors at Utrecht and was pleased to meet her. Talking to Captain Ruscombe Poole, the officer commanding his guard, she learned something of his lifestyle. The king was a grossly obese man with a large belly who took very little exercise, his royal authority being based on strategy and diplomacy. He was still an imposing looking man and in his youth he had been a remarkable athlete and an outstanding warrior. His diet, in view of his regal position, was mainly meat. He had numerous wives who visited him at his command. His first wife, however, stayed at his side most of the time. Janet, like a true Victorian maiden, drew a veil over the king's, to her mind, unconventional domestic arrangements. When Janet met the king he was clearly suffering from an uncomfortable stomach complaint and, through the king's interpreter, Henry Longcast, the young nurse proposed a solution and was duly given permission to relieve the king.

The combination of a diet with little fruit and fibre and a lack of exercise were not conducive to a good digestive transit. Without further ado, and knowing exactly what to do, Janet collected some enema soap, rubber tubing, funnel and a bucket, and after mixing a large hot mixture of soap and water soon relieved the King of his discomfort. With the mission accomplished, she left him with a large bottle of castor oil to ensure the royal colon did not get blocked again. As a mark of gratitude for this and in recognition of Janet's work with the wounded Zulus at Utrecht, King Cetshwayo presented her with his matching necklaces and bracelets, which survive to this day.

The Stafford House team were the last of the nurses to leave South Africa as they were obliged to wait for both Chief Commissioner Ross and Dr Stoker, who had been closing the accounts of the Committee at their nurses' respective locations. It was later estimated that as many as 3,200 sick and wounded soldiers passed through Sister Janet's hands at Utrecht, ranging from the seriously sick and wounded to those suffering from minor complaints like sunburn and blisters. For Sister Janet, the South African experience had been rewarding and one that contrasted with her harrowing service in Bulgaria. She had been supervised by a kindly and efficient gentleman in Chief Commissioner Surgeon-General Ross and gained the respect of the two army doctors at Utrecht. Her patients had been grateful and some, like Harry Peterson, had become seriously devoted. Janet had loved South Africa, particularly the beauty of the wide-open veldt of Zululand.

The following day the Stafford House party was reunited on board the *Dublin Castle*, which sailed from South Africa on the 4 November 1879 for home. Sister Janet's nickname, *Mrs. Sekhukhune*, spread rapidly around the ship, which, combined with the tales and rumours of her exploits in Zululand, only enhanced her popularity with her fellow travellers. She later recalled how excited she became as the vessel entered the English Channel. This was to be her second homecoming from a major military campaign. She had returned home from the Balkans two years earlier, exhausted and undernourished but this time she was returning home suntanned, brimming with health and full of enthusiasm to tell exciting stories to her awaiting family – she was also looking forward to her twentieth birthday.

Official appreciation for the services of the Stafford House nurses, however, was mixed. In his report to the War Office, the Surgeon-General of Natal, J.A. Woolfryes, wrote:

The Sisters of Charity belonging to the Convent at P.M. Burg having rendered their services, 3 of them were employed at an early period of the war at Fort Napier Base Hospital. In March an application having been made to the Bishop of Bloemfontein, the Lady Superior & 3 Sisters of the Community of St Michael & All Angels were sent to Ladysmith and did good work in the Base Hospital there.

Towards the close of June, 2 Lady Sisters of the All Saints at Capetown, who had gained experience in the Franco-German war, were despatched to Durban with a trained nurse by Lady Frere, and performed excellent service in the Base Hospital at that station, being transferred to the Convalescents Depot at Pinetown on the arrival of Lady Superintendent Deeble and 6 nurses, and Surgeon General Ross, C.I.E, with 7 sisters of the Stafford House Committee in July. Of the Netley nurses, 4 with Mrs Deeble were posted to Durban and the remaining 2 to Newcastle. Of the Stafford House sisters, 4 remained at Durban, 2 were sent to P.M. Burg and 1 to Utrecht but this institution was subsequently modified according to circumstances.

Surgeon-General Woolfryes then delivered a deliberately worded snub to the civilian Stafford House team:

the nurses, but most especially those belonging to Netley, under the able superintendence of Mrs Deeble, and of the religious communities did much excellent work and contributed very materially by their tender care and skilful nursing to alleviate the suffering of the sick and wounded. I might add that by their example they stimulated the Hospital Orderlies to greater earnestness and zeal in the performance of their duties.

By singling out the army's own nurses and the local religious orders for praise, Woolfryes was able to diminish the role played by the civilian Stafford House medical team. Still smarting from Wolseley's criticism of senior medical officers and his insistence in sending the Stafford House House medical team to help, Woolfryes blatantly attempted to get his own back. The Army establishment ungallantly sought to withhold due recognition of the service rendered by Sister Janet and her colleagues by delaying the issue of their South Africa Campaign Medals. Mrs Deeble and her six nurses received their medals on 19 October 1880, while the Stafford House nurses and doctors had to wait nearly four years until 15 July 1884 before receiving theirs.

Surgeon General Ross was, however, enthused by the Stafford House nurses, he wrote:

I believe that while all the medical officers fully recognise the value of the Sisters in their nursing capacity, they also felt their presence a great aid in maintaining regularity in the hospitals. The respect in which the Sisters were held both by patients and orderlies was very noticeable; and I would add, that the more refined the lady the more her influence was felt. I consider the employment of trained Sisters is a great instrument in aiding the preservation of regularity and good order in military hospitals.

In contrast to the army's mealy-mouthed attitude, the local population, as represented by the Archdeacon of Natal, delivered a glowing testimonial dated 28 October 1879:

To Surgeon-General Ross, C.I.E, and the Ladies of Stafford House Committee who leave Natal this day for England. Much respected Christian Friends, - Were you permitted to quit these shores after all the kindness shown by each and all of you to the many wants of our brave soldiers, who have done so great service to their country by protecting the white inhabitants of South Eastern Africa from the invasion of their enemies, I may, I think, venture to say that the people of this Colony would, in this instance, be guilty of an omission which, to them, would be a cause of much regret.

May I then be permitted, as Acting Military Chaplain, to offer you all our warmest expressions of gratitude for the unvaried attention and kindness which, during your stay in Natal, have been shown to the sick and wounded, to whom your watchful care has been so tenderly extended, and by whom it has been so fully appreciated.

To the Ladies and Gentlemen composing the Stafford House Committee the Colonists need hardly say that no words of theirs can adequately convey their sense of the value of so noble an effort as that in which they are engaged in administering with so much generosity to the relief of suffering humanity.

May God's blessing continue to direct and prosper its most benevolent designs in the earnest prayer of those who have received so great a proof of their Christian sympathy.

I, on behalf of the Colonists at large, beg to thank the Committee and yourselves with all our hearts, and to subscribe ourselves,

Your very grateful servants,

W.H.C. Lloyd, Archdeacon of Natal and his fellow-countrymen

Sister Janet and her Stafford House Committee had treated many thousands of serving soldiers under difficult circumstances and they would certainly have endorsed this glowing testimonial.

The overall cost of sending the Stafford House team to South Africa amounted to £5,034, which was divided into the following percentages of the total:

Travel by sea	1.40
Travel by land	12.06
Board and lodging	4.76
Post	.12
Telegraph	.34
Banking	1.86
Sisters' salaries	3.84
Sisters' purchases	1.40
Cost of hospitals	73.74
Miscellaneous	.48
Total;	100 %

#### **Expenses of Stafford House team in South Africa.**

<u>Expended in:</u>	<u>£</u>	<u>Days under supply</u>	<u>Patients</u>	<u>Daily sick</u>
Base hospital Durban	2,607	103	23,736	230
Base hospital Pietermaritzburg	464	82	8,517	103
Field hospital Ladismith (sic)	306	142	11,652	84
Field hospital Newcastle	142	156	6,745	43
Field hospital Utrecht	83	52	3,201	62

Cork leg for Gunner Burslem      £14/5/0

The total expenditure for the supply of comforts, necessaries etc to the hospitals was £3,687. The sums made over to the medical officers were often usefully expended in repairs or sanitary additions. Overall, the Stafford House nurses conducted a total of 53,851 medical administrations, the average cost per patient being 1shilling and 4 pence though for officers it rose to just over £2.