

The Strange Story and Remarkable Adventures of King Cetshwayo's Cup

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On 5 October 1998, a ceremony was held on the site of King Dingane's royal residence, eMgungundlovu, to inaugurate an interesting new Zulu heritage project. Amafa KwaZulu Natali, the KwaZulu/Natal heritage body, announced its intention to acquire the farmland that comprises the emaKhosini valley, south of the White Mfolozi River. This is the heartland of the old Zulu kingdom; emaKhosini means 'the place of the kings' and this is where the original Zulu chiefdom lived, and where the ancestors of the royal house are buried. King Shaka's father, Senzangakhona, lived and is buried there, and Shaka spent part of his childhood there. Later, Dingane established eMgungundlovu there – surely the greatest and most magnificent of all the Zulu royal homesteads.

The intention of the project is to buy up the farmland which comprises the valley, and turn it into a historical reserve – as has happened at Isandlwana, for example. The emaKhosini project is more ecologically challenging, however, in that the intention is to stock the reserve with both game, and traditional Zulu Nguni cattle. Local people will also be allowed to practise a limited amount of traditional agriculture within the reserve. The idea is that the emaKhosini will carry something of the traditions of Zulu land use forward into the twenty-first century, and therefore become something of a loving ecological museum. So far about 6,000 hectares of land have been acquired, and fund-raising is in progress to enable Amafa to purchase the rest.

Clearly, such a project has enormous significance to the Zulu people, and to the Zulu Royal House, and both H.M. King Goodwill Zwelithini and Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi were present at the inauguration ceremony. During the course of the event, a number of gifts were presented to the royal party by sponsors and well-wishers, and at least one of these harkens back to the dark days of the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879. Chief Buthelezi presented to the king a copy of the silver mug that Queen Victoria had first presented to King Cetshwayo in 1882. This was just the latest of a series of prestigious presentations involving either the original of this cup, or replicas of it.

At the end of the Anglo-Zulu War, King Cetshwayo was captured, and placed under arrest in Cape Town. From there, however, he continued to take an interest in Zulu affairs, and, as the post-war settlement of Zululand slipped into chaos and anarchy, he petitioned to be allowed to return home. His dignified manner, coupled with a sense of unease about the justice of the British intervention in Zululand, won him many influential friends in the British establishment, and in August 1882 he was given permission to visit London, to discuss his position with the Colonial Office. During the course of his visit, he was invited to an audience with Queen Victoria at Osborne House, on the Isle of Wight. (1) The meeting took place on 14 August, and by all accounts the atmosphere was cool. The Queen had had a number of friends among the officers of the 24th, and had not forgiven the Zulus for Isandlwana; moreover, many of her advisers had been staunch supporters of the war, and had been reluctant to see Cetshwayo visit London. Nevertheless, the exiled king apparently impressed Victoria with his manner, and she concluded the meeting by remarking that she respected him as a brave enemy. As a souvenir, Queen Victoria presented him with the silver mug, and requested her portrait painter, Carl Sohn, to paint Cetshwayo's portrait. Indeed, by the time Cetshwayo left England for Zululand a few weeks later, he was laden with presents heaped on him by members of London Society.

The cup itself is of an interesting design. It is large – 195mm high and 155mm diameter – with three handles. This type of mug is often referred to as a 'loving cup', and the idea of the British Queen presenting it as such to the Zulu king does have a certain charm; the official explanation was rather more coy, however – that the cup was designed to be presented by a servant holding one handle, while the king received it by the other two! The cup was made by the London silversmiths, R. and S. Garrard, of Pantons Street, and bears both the royal mark and a silvermark for 1880. It is inscribed on the open face. (2)

*Presented to
CETSHWAYO
by
Queen Victoria
August 14 1882*

Sadly, neither the cup itself nor King Cetshwayo enjoyed much good fortune thereafter. Cetshwayo was indeed restored to part of his former territory the following year, and rebuilt his oNdini (Ulundi) residence, not far from the original complex destroyed by Lord Chelmsford four years before. But the post-war settlement imposed on Zululand had unleashed powerful destructive forces within the Zulu political system, and civil war was brewing even before the king's return. In particular, royalist supporters had quarrelled bitterly with Chief Zibhebhu kaMaphitha, who had been one of Cetshwayo's most talented generals in 1879, but who had

subsequently been set up as one of the post-war rulers by the British. Encouraged by the king's return, the royalists made an attack on Zibhebhu, but were roundly defeated; in retaliation, Zibhebhu made a night march across country and fell on oNdini on 21 July 1883. Cetshwayo's forces were utterly defeated, and many of his most powerful councillors killed; Zibhebhu's forces looted oNdini, and set it on fire. (4) It was during this looting that many artefacts associated with the king were taken. Among them were a fine carved stick, said to belong to Cetshwayo himself, and recently acquired by Amafa from a distinguished private collector, and a number of presents collected by the king during his visit to London. These included Queen Victoria's silver cup, which must have seemed a fine prize to the warrior who salvaged it.

At that point, the cup disappeared from history until 1938. Then, one day, a Zulu named Gobi was walking across the country below the site of the final oNdini homestead. The story has it that although the weather was fine, there had been rain in the hills, and the dongas and rivulets were full. Gobi reached a donga that was then in spate, and decided to wait for the stream to abate. As it did so, he noticed a metal handle sticking out of the side of the muddy bank. Using his stick, he worked the object out, and sure enough found himself the new owner of Cetshwayo's cup. Since the donga was on the line of retreat of Zibhebhu's forces, the assumption is that it was dropped during the withdrawal, and in the heady atmosphere of victory, was not missed.

Gobi mentioned the cup to a white trader, Cecil Harris, who has a store on the Mahlabatini plain, opposite oNdini.⁴ Although Gobi was reluctant to sell it, he parted with it several years later in return for a military great-coat, a cow, and a new galvanised bucket. Mr Harris, of course recognised the inscription, and kept the piece as a curiosity at the back of his store; apparently, he used to challenge visitors to toss a coin into it – something of a trick, as the only way to do so was to bounce the coin off the shelf above! - and to use it to toast family occasions.

Eventually, Mr Harris felt that the cup should be restored to the Zulu kingdom. On 26 January 1971 he presented it to Chief Israel Zulu, representing the Zulu royal house, at a ceremony at Eshowe. Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi and the historian, C.T. Binns, were both present. (5) The cup was then passed over to the Zululand Historical Museum at Fort Nongqayi, Eshowe, for safe keeping, since at that time there was no other museum in existence which collected on behalf of the Zulu kingdom.

In 1988, however, the KwaZulu Monuments' Council, acting on behalf of King Goodwill – King Cetshwayo's great-great grandson – moved to have the cup displayed at the oNdini museum, at Ulundi, on the ground that this now fulfilled the criteria of a national Zulu collection. The Borough of Eshowe refused – a situation exacerbated at that time by the fact that Ulundi and Eshowe fell on either side of the old apartheid divide between KwaZulu and Natal – and guardianship of the cup was contested in court. For five years the issue was the subject of legal debate, until in December 1993 the Pietermaritzburg High Court decided in favour of Ulundi's claims. On 13 October 1994 the cup was handed over to a representative of the royal house. It is now on display in the on-site museum at the reconstructed oNdini residence (sadly, behind a protective steel screen).

It was at this point that the first official copies of the cup were made. Interestingly enough, it was discovered that a private copy had already been made, in 1979, presumably to commemorate the centenary of the Anglo-Zulu War. Two further copies were now made, however, one for King Goodwill, and one for the Nongqayi Museum, (to replace the original in their displays).

The story does not end there, however. When the current British Queen, Elizabeth II, visited Durban in August 1995, King Goodwill presented her with his copy of the cup. Thus the story had almost come full circle; a cup made at the request of a British Queen, and presented to a Zulu king, had been returned, in replica, by a Zulu king to a British Queen! This was surely one of the most poignant exchanges of the royal visit, given the history of the two nations, though it went largely unremarked by the media at the time.

Almost full circle, but not quite; this, of course, left King Goodwill without his copy. A new copy was made to replace his, and this was the item presented to him at the emaKhosini ceremony in October last year.

Clearly, the cup has achieved an enormous symbolic significance as an icon of the resilience of the Zulu royal house, and of its complex relationship with the British. That the final twist in the story should take place on an occasion designed to initiate the rebirth of the Zulu heartland could not be more appropriate.

References.

1. This meeting was recreated – with considerable licence – in the TV drama *Shaka Zulu* (1985).
2. The old spelling for Cetshwayo. Many 19th century writers used 'ty' – supposedly pronounced 't-yer' – to represent the fricative sound now represented by 'tsh'.
3. For an account of this battle see Ian Knight's *Great Zulu Battle*, Arms and Armour Press, 1998.
4. The best account of the movements of the cup after 1883 can be found in the catalogue to the *Zulu Treasures* exhibition, published by Durban Local History Museums, 1996.
5. Binns used the story of the cup as an introduction to his classic book, *The Last Zulu King* Longmans, 1963.