

## Orange River Station Post-office revisited: a letter to Mrs George A Moore

"There is nothing new under the sun but there are lots of old things we don't know" <sup>1</sup>.

Whilst much of the wealth that was South African postal history has migrated from our shores, our archives are replete with fascinating histories waiting to be unearthed. For those of us that do not have a surfeit of research material nor access to unlimited financial resources to acquire such material, exploring social history as an adjunct to numismatics and philately can be challenging and as rewarding as the primary hobby itself.

A few years ago, I presented my research regarding the Orange River Station post-office <sup>2</sup> (illustration 1) which was situated in close proximity to General Lord P S Methuen's encampment on the Orange River and the farm, Doornbult, the site of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) refugee and concentration camp <sup>3</sup>.



1. Orange River Station Post-office 1899 [AG 7129]

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<sup>1</sup> Ambrose Bierce. The Devil's Dictionary. Publ. Courier Dover Publications. 1993 and The Collected Works Ambrose Bierce (Vol. VII of XII). 1911.

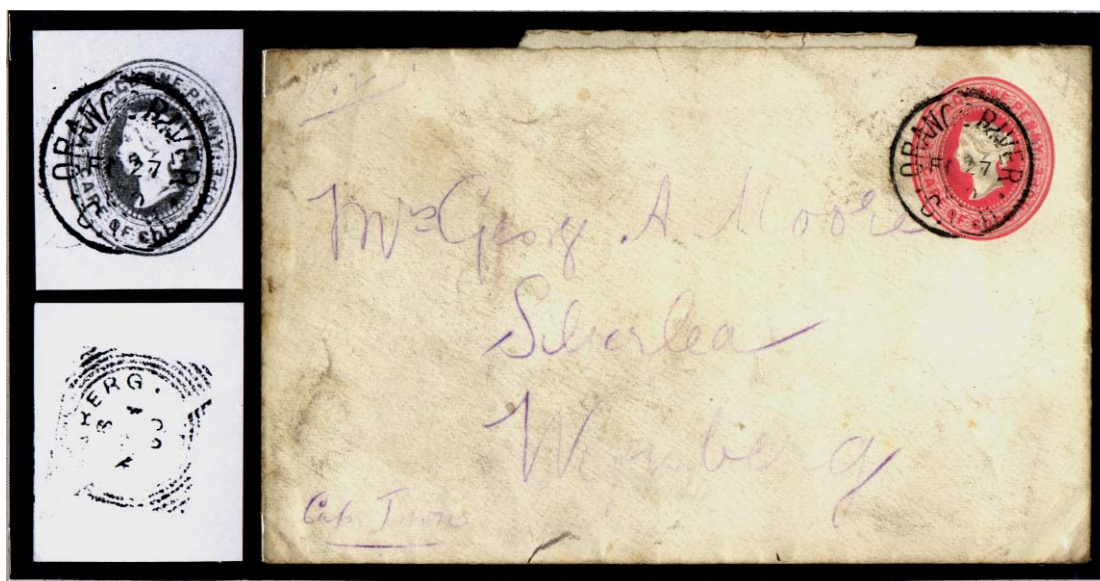
<sup>2</sup> Orange River Station, near Hopetown, South Africa, the post office and its postal history, including that from the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) Concentration Camp on the farm Doornbult. It is able to be read on [www.pelteret.co.za](http://www.pelteret.co.za). Pelteret R M. Orange River Station SA Philatelist 2000:76(5);124-127

<sup>3</sup> Doornbult at Oranjerivierstasie, the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) Concentration Camp, Hopetown, South Africa. It is able to be read on [www.pelteret.co.za](http://www.pelteret.co.za). Pelteret R M. Doorbult : Annual J of The Africana Society 2000 (17); 1-3

In 2004, I purchased a cover bearing the cache "ORANGE RIVER CGH" and at the time thought that it would be of interest to collectors of postal history should I record its existence; and, at the same time, possibly entertain some readers relate some of the background I uncovered associated with this scrap of history.

The pre-paid envelope of laid-paper (illustration 2) is embossed with a 1d. carmine Cape of Good Hope stamp. It bears the canceller "ORANGE RIVER CGH" on the front (Putzel No.3) and "WYNBERG" (Putzel No.8) on the reverse <sup>4</sup>. To contextualise it, the canceller on the envelope is dated two weeks after the Relief of Kimberley and the last day of the Battle of Paardeberg. The envelope is addressed to Mrs. George A Moore; and the door-to-door delivery took 10 days.

The Post Office at Orange River Station is recorded as having two different types of single circle Oval Date Stamps (ODS) which appeared alongside the Barred Oval Numeral Cancellor (BONC) 525; they were "ORANGE RIVER STATION" and "ORANGE RIVER T.O.". A third canceller, "ORANGE RIVER CGH", appears to have been used alone. An informal survey conducted at the time of last writing brought to light very few examples of postal stationery which bore any of the three known cancellers used at the post-office <sup>5 6</sup> .



2. Envelope addressed to Mrs George A Moore, Silverlea, Wynberg and bearing the scarce canceller ORANGE RIVER C.G.H and the date FE(BRUARY) 27 (19)00

<sup>4</sup> Ralph F Putzel and Alex T Visser. The Postmarks of South Africa and Former States and Colonies. Vols. 8 (2001) and 10 (2003)

<sup>5</sup> F Frescura & M Nethersole. "The Postal Cancellers of the Cape of Good Hope". Vol I: The Barred Oval Numeral Cancellor of 1864. Publ: PFSA 1991

<sup>6</sup> Catterall J. "The Runner Post". The Bechuanaland and Botswana Society 1989:17 (December)

Who were Mr. and Mrs. George A Moore?

George Augustine Moore was born circa April 1868 in Marylebone [Hackney] <sup>7</sup>, London, the son of Joseph and Mary Moore. At the time of the 1881 British Census, the family was living in 17 John Street, [Holborn], incidentally in close proximity to Charles Dickens's House and Gray's Inn. His father's occupation was described as a "Fancy Slipper Maker", that of his elder brother, Arthur, as a journeyman/upholsterer; and George, then in his 13<sup>th</sup> year, and his two younger siblings, Ada and Alfred, were scholars.

A certain George Moore disembarked in Cape Town from the *Duart Castle* CRMS. on 9 January 1884, having travelled from London. The manner in which he was listed suggests that he was a youth and I think it likely that this was he. At this stage one loses track of him until 1891.

Aged 24 years, he married Hendrika Susanna Maria Cornelia van Schalkwyk, 26 years of age, (aka. Harriet Susan Maria Cornelia) in St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church, Rondebosch on 8 January 1893 in the presence of Louis John and Magdalena Chaplin <sup>8</sup> and T D v Schalkwyk <sup>9</sup>.

George Moore was employed as a Storekeeper by the Table Bay Harbour Board from August 1891 until (at least) 1907. His starting salary was 6/6 per diem and had escalated to £400 a year by 1903. Clearly, he was industrious and efficient in his work. Reminiscent of most bureaucracies over the centuries, the following note appears in his personal folder following his drawing attention to the 121 extra hours worked voluntarily between July 1900 and January 1901. I quote: "as it is most undesirable that an officer in the position of storekeeper should receive overtime, the Engineer(-in-Chief) suggested a bonus would meet the case"; whereupon, on 23 April 1901, "His Excellency, the Governor, in Council, in terms of Section 30(e) of Act No. 36 of 1896" awarded him a once off payment of £14/5/-. Later, in 1907, the retiring General Manager and Engineer-in-Chief of the Table Bay Harbour Board, R(obert) H(enry) Hammersby-Heenan, by way of a testimonial, paid written tribute to Moore's impeccable managerial acumen.

At some stage, George Augustine Moore purchased significant tracts of land near the "Claremont Racecourse, Wynberg and Plumstead village". Sequentially, from 1896 until 1910, he raised substantial bonds on these properties with George Tatlow (£385), Francis Evelyn Porter of Kokstad (£100), Sir David Tenant (£950) and the Docks Mutual Building

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<sup>7</sup> The 1881 British Census states it as being Marylebone [Hackney], London Middlesex; on the 1920 Death Notice Hackney is written as Henckley

<sup>8</sup> No records appear to exist for the couple. They had a son, 535 Pvt. Louis Augustine Chaplin bc. May 1891 who died in France on 9 April 1918 predeceased by his father. He is buried in the La Targette British Cemetery, Neuville-St. Vaast.

<sup>9</sup> She signed herself Harriet Derkse van Schalkwyk. Her father T(heunis) D(erkse) van Schalkwyk was the third witness. Copy of Register: Mrs. D. Lewis, St. Michael's Catholic Presbytery, Roukoop Rd, Rondebosch

Society (£610). However, by February 1915 he was being sued by Messrs. Robert Christie Sellar and James Anderson Sellar (trading as *Sellar Bros.*) for £32/10/- he owed the Royal Hotel, Paarl. The famous Mr. Justice Kotzé<sup>10</sup> declared that "the Defendant having failed to enter an appearance, the Court in the motion of the Plaintiff's counsel grants judgement, as prayed, with costs". Shortly thereafter, and in response to an order of the Chief Justice, the Hon. Sir Henry Hubert Juta KC., "goods and chattels of the value of £50 (in lieu of the original debt, plus interest and costs) were attached under writ wherefore the defendant testified his intention to surrender and his estate has been accepted as insolvent".

On 15 December 1915, A7748 Private George A Moore was attested as a Full Time Volunteer in the South African Signal Corps attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade. During the First World War, the 1<sup>st</sup> South African Infantry Group served with the 9<sup>th</sup> Scottish Division on the Western Front in France, including Delville Wood<sup>11</sup>. In June 1916, he was promoted corporal. Sergeant G A Moore, then of the S A Service Corps<sup>12</sup> was discharged unfit for all forms of military service on 21 February 1920<sup>13</sup>.

Sgt. George Moore died of cancer six months later later<sup>14</sup> on 20 August 1920 in Wynberg Military Hospital (aka. No.1 General Hospital), leaving an estate of £302/12/-. At the time of his death, Moore was living at "The Anchorage", 15-17 Forest Road, Rondebosch. This distinctively designed block of flats still exists.

He was buried in the Wynberg Municipal Cemetery and later disinterred and buried at Plumstead Cemetery. His headstone is to be found in the military allotment of that cemetery (illustration 3)<sup>15</sup>.

Judging from the nature of his possessions, he was financially rehabilitated and living comfortably. There was a property bought on 26 April 1904 from Kommetje Estates through the South African National Trust and Assurance Company for £21. It was transferred into his wife's name in November 1921 and sold to Elizabeth Billingham (née Tilley) in January 1946 for £130.

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<sup>10</sup> See Sir John Gilbert Kotzé (aka. Johannes Gysbert Kotzé) in Composite Kotzé Family Tree. [www.pelteret.co.za/genealogy](http://www.pelteret.co.za/genealogy)

<sup>11</sup> Military Archives Depot, Pretoria: First World War [http://www.sun.ac.za/mil/mil\\_history/military\\_archives\\_wwl.htm](http://www.sun.ac.za/mil/mil_history/military_archives_wwl.htm)

<sup>12</sup> The South African Service Corps developed during the 1914-1918 War, its motto "*Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense*" ("Evil be to him who evil thinks", incidentally the motto of the Order of the Garter created by Edward III, probably on 23 April 1348) and consisted of Active Citizen Force personnel supported by Permanent Force officers and men. In November, 1939 it was amalgamated with Q Service Corps. The Armed Forces of South Africa 1659 - 1954. Tylden, G, Major. City of Johannesburg Africana Museum Frank Connock Publication No.2. Facsimile 1982

<sup>13</sup> Personal Communication: Command & Management Information Systems Formation, South African National Defence Force

<sup>14</sup> Death Certificate: HAWC 1/3/9/6/22 [H] Reg. No. 85

<sup>15</sup> Graves Commission, Cape Town Unicity



3. Memorial Stone Plumstead Cemetery

His death notice <sup>16</sup> of 1920 put Moore's occupation as being a storekeeper; the death notice of his wife refers to him as being a soldier. As we have seen, in truth, he was both.

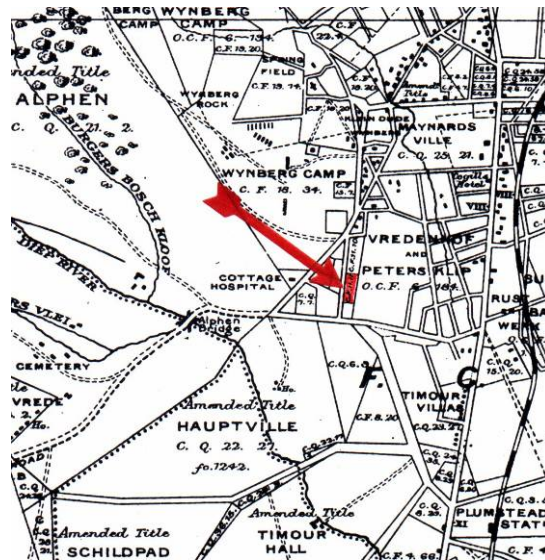
Mrs. George Moore - Hendrika Susanna Maria Cornelia van Schalkwyk - was born in Cape Town circa March 1866 and died in her daughter Harriet's home at 2 Davenport Road, Tamboorskloof on 7 October 1944 <sup>17</sup>. Her estate totalled £26/15/-.

The couple had 5 children: Bernard Walter, Winifred ("Winnie") Ethel (married first to and later divorced from Walter Coutts, later to Hanssen), Oswald Augustine (married to Maud Josephine Hare), Lawrence Thomas (a minor when his father died; living in Hillbrow, Johannesburg and married to Audrey Margaret Wall née Baker when his mother died); and Hendrika ("Harriet") Josephine (a minor when her father died; and later married to JU Brunold).

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<sup>16</sup> MOOC listing 6/9/1798.2879, but in reality MOOC 6/9/851.277; and MOOC 13/1/4282.182 South African Archives Repository, Roeland St., Cape Town

<sup>17</sup> MOOC 6/9/11309.95288 South African Archives Repository, Roeland St., Cape Town



4. Silverlea estate 1902 <sup>18</sup>

"Silverlea Estate" (illustration 4) was situated on Mountain View Road, Wynberg, and in close proximity to both his later residential address and his eventual place of employ, Wynberg Military Camp. In 1900, the estate appears to have been constituted of a house of substance, "Silverlea House", and several small cottages. Whether Moore and his family lived in one of the cottages one can only speculate. I have found no reference to Moore owning property in the vicinity of "Silverlea". However, the 1901 Juta's Cape Town Directory<sup>19</sup>, records Moore, a storekeeper, as being resident in Broad Street, Wynberg. "Silverlea Estate" was bought from Edmund and Charlotte Thomas on 8 July 1902 and broken up by a consortium of investors headed up by Edward Ridge Syfret ("E.R. Syfret & Co"). In what appears to have been a somewhat controversial deal, in 1951 "Silverlea House" was replaced by a block of flats built by Councillor Mrs. M A Hopkins.

Who was it then that wrote to Mrs. George A Moore from Orange River Station in 1900? I have no idea. The handwriting on the envelope clearly was not that of George Moore for there are good examples of his educated hand dating from that time in the Cape Archives Repository.

I have often been surprised at the lack of curiosity shown by many collectors in the provenance of the possessions they so cherish. The existence of this smidgen of postal stationery marks the passage of an ordinary working man and his family whose life surely would otherwise have been lost to history. Researching it has been a most satisfying experience.

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Sunday, 19 November 2006

<sup>18</sup> Courtesy of the Office of the Surveyor-General, Mowbray, Cape

<sup>19</sup> Juta's Cape Town Dictionary 1901