

QUEST AFTER CHARLOTTE WHITFIELD

Mr. Frank Newnes, a member of the Historical Society living in Bulawayo, is trying to collect information about Charlotte Whitfield, and any assistance which readers can give him would be much appreciated. Her story, as it has been traced so far, presents certain puzzling features, or, at the least, some confusion.

According to her death notice (**Supreme Court, Cape Town, 204/1597**) she was born in London in February 1790, Whitfield being her maiden name, and she was the mother of these five children:-

Leo Africanus, born near Zwartkops River, 1822,
Mary Margaret, born 1825 (married William Blackbeard),
Charlotte Belinda, born at Bathurst, 1826 (Married Manley),
John, born London, 28 February 1828 (married 1. Jane Cawood 2. Ann Wallis)
William Henry Lancaster, born 16 January 1829 (perhaps at Lancaster, England).

On 9 February 1827, the English schooner Ann sailed from Cape Town, the passengers on board being Capt. & Mrs. Pennyfeather, Mr. J.G. de Villiers and son, Rev. E. Evans, Mr. Brown, Miss Whitfield, and Mr. Peterson and two servants. (**Cape Archives**, Register of Ships' arrivals and departures, in the Colonial Office Archives group).

Permits to leave the colony were granted to Charlotte Whitfield and John Brown on 16 January 1827, he being described as "head of Party", for in 1820 he and John Stubbs had been put in charge of a sub-division of Clarke's party. (**Cape Archives**, Colonial Office 7063. Permits to leave the country 1826/7).

Mr. Newnes has also established that Charlotte Whitfield was married at St. George's Church, Grahamstown, to Henry Turkington, on 25 July 1835. (**Church Register**). Henry Turkington died about 1848. Charlotte was present when, on 15 October 1853, her son John married his first wife, Jane Cawood, at Cuylerville, at the Chapel of St. Mary in the parish of Bathurst. (**Church Register**, and **Lower Albany Chronicle**.)

Charlotte died in June 1875, at Gum Grove Farm, the home of her son, Leo Africanus, on the slopes of Taba Ndoda, between Fort White and Debe Nek, and lies buried in the private cemetery there. Mr. Newnes writes:

"It should be noted that the death notice was made out by her son John some 22 years after her death, the reason for this, I presume, was in respect of a claim for money left in Chancery to Charlotte and her heirs."

This aspect of her story he is still investigating. He mentions also that the death notice of Charlotte's son John states that his father was called John Brown Whitfield; he believes this to be incorrect, and that the name should be John Brown.

So much for genealogy. Evidently Charlotte and John Brown both returned to South Africa. In 1834, when war broke out, the family was living at the Clay Pits in Albany, and they make a tragic, brief, but confused appearance upon the stage of history. This Settler location,

dangerously exposed to attack, was the scene of the brutal murder of Mahoney and his son-in-law, H.W. Henderson (whom we in Port Elizabeth associate primarily with his ownership of property in Cora Terrace).

Mr. Newnes points out discrepancies in two published accounts of the incident. Cory "**The Rise of South Africa**" (vol. III, p. 67), tells the story of the deaths of Mahoney and Henderson, as related to him by an eyewitness, "old Mr. Whitfield", whom he visited at the Fish River mouth in 1900, and who stated that he was leading the oxen in the foremost wagon at the time of the attack, but escaped into the bush, and eventually to Grahamstown, with his younger brother and two sisters, and two Hottentot servants.

Mr. F.C. Metrowich in **Assegai over the Hills** (p. 153) quotes this narrative almost verbatim, but adds that another settler, Mr. Brown, who was also fleeing from the Clay Pits with Mahoney managed to escape with his small son he reached Grahamstown three days later.

It is interesting to observe that Robert Godlonton, on the other hand, in his contemporary **Narrative of the Irruption of the Kaffir Hordes** (p. 26) who was writing about people with whom he was acquainted, does not mention anyone by the name of Whitfield. He tells of the death of Mahoney in the words of "John Brown", the proprietor of a farm adjoining Mahoney's - and who was in his company at the moment he fell. Brown and his son fled into the bush.

Here they dismounted from their horses and turned their horses loose. After several hair-breadth escapes Mr. Brown and his son fell in with the party who went out to recover the bodies of Messrs. Henderson and Mahoney, and were conveyed by them to town.

Now Brown's statement to Godlonton, and Whitfield's longer one to Cory, agree in general outline, except that the former said the party fled in the direction of Kaffir Drift post, this being nearer than Grahamstown, whereas Whitfield 65 years later said that after discussion, Grahamstown was their intended destination.

Brown and his son were on horseback; evidently they escaped without other companions. Cory's informant, Whitfield, a younger child, who was leading a wagon, escaped on foot with the servants and other children. The safety of the three sons and two daughters of Charlotte Whitfield would thus be accounted for. But of their mother there is no mention. Both narratives, it should be noted, imply that only one other family joined those of Mahoney and Henderson in their flight. What Sir George Cory cannot have known, (nor Mr. Metrowich) when Whitfield spoke to him, was that the latter's father was actually named John Brown.

Brown was himself killed by the Kaffirs a few weeks later, having been sent from Grahamstown to the Clay Pits with a Hottentot patrol. Godlonton states (p. 69) "He had been selected for this duty in consequence of his accurate knowledge of the intricate fastness's ... in that direction", and his being "intimately acquainted with the Kaffirs". After taking up a strong position in the "double-storeyed, flat roofed building formerly belonging to the deceased Mahoney" he and his only European companion, Philip Whittaker, allowed themselves to be persuaded to come out to parley. Both were seized, dragged beyond range of the musketry at the house, and "mercilessly butchered".

Whatever may have been Brown's legal status in relation to Charlotte Whitfield, it would seem that he was the father of at least one man later to be known as Whitfield. Possibly other

of her children in later life also took this name, which would actually have been theirs as the off-spring of a single woman. Charlotte's marriage to Turkington within a few months of Brown's death would also have contributed towards the name of Brown being displaced.

I know of only one other reference to Brown and his dependants in a source which is generally accessible. In Hockly's "**List of the Settlers**" (The Story of the British Settlers page 263), it is stated that John Brown was 28 in 1820, that he immigrated with Clark's party in the ship Northampton, and was accompanied by his 25 year old wife Ann, and children Elizabeth and Ann, aged 4 and 2 respectively. With them travelled "Charlotte Brown, 25 (a sister)".

The story of Charlotte Whitfield, as so far reconstructed, remains something of a mystery. Can any reader supply additional information about her ?

M.R.

(Author unknown)