

witnessed the attack and the defeat of the 'Old Guard', the end of the battle and the end of an era of history. As it is he lies with the men of his regiment in a mass grave on the field of Waterloo.

At home in Dover his family erected a headstone in their local churchyard in the town centre. It stands in the shade of a small tree to the right of the front doors to St. Mary's Church, opposite the 'Eight Bells', where I sat to write this short account.

Also on the stone are other members of this military family, Lt Charles Hart, late of the 5th Royal Veterans, died 1836. Lt Samuel Hart, 9th of Foot, died 1810, and Christianna Hart, died 29th December...? Theirs would be other stories to write.

The next time you pass St. Mary's, give a thought to 23-year-old Lt James Hart and the events he witnessed on that ridge at Waterloo 187 years ago.



James Hart's gravestone.

The story of

Liege Hulett

FOUNDER OF KEARSNEY COLLEGE SOUTH AFRICA

He answered a Dover Mail advert!

Contributed by Mike McFarnell

KEARSNEY COLLEGE was founded up the North Coast in August 1921 by the joint efforts of Sir J. Liege Hulett and the Methodist Church of South Africa. But in examining the birth of Kearsney College one really has to go back over sixty years before that. After all, what was Liege Hulett doing in South Africa? Had he not decided to emigrate from England in 1857 there would be no Kearsney College today and the name Hulett would be unknown in South Africa.

There is nothing in my research to indicate that Liege Hulett had itchy feet. His family was well established in Gillingham, Kent, though he himself was born in Sheffield. His grandfather was a devotee of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church and all the family, including Liege, were God fearing men. In fact Liege preached his first sermon at the age of 18. By 1856 England was suffering from the aftermath of the Crimean War, and there is no doubt that, looking across the world, there were many young men in England at that time who felt that the grass was greener on the other side.

The critical factor appears to have been a small advertisement in the local paper, the Dover Mail, put in by a Mr Burgess who was a Durban chemist and had property in Verulam. He sought an assistant. Had this advertisement appeared in any other paper rather than the Dover Mail, there would be no Kearsney College today. This looks suspiciously like the 'Hand of Fate'. Not only this, but the position appealed to

26 Liege, and he decided to apply. The situation was compounded by the fact that his application was accepted. He had no experience in the work of a chemist, nor in farming, but he took a chance and sailed forth early in February 1857 in the Lady Shelbourne, arriving in Durban some three months later, with the promise of a salary of £30 a year. Durban was, of course, a minor settlement surrounded by bush and wild animals, including lions, with one or two small boarding houses and a large market place.

Suffice it to say that Liege did not stay long with Mr. Burgess. He embarked into farming and the buying and selling of property. He bought land at Mount Moreland and tried a number of crops with no great success. Now a married man, he decided to buy 600 acres inland from Stanger, in the Nonoti area, which he called Kearsney Estates. The name 'Kearsney' was no more than a nostalgic tribute to the ruined Kearsney Manor in Dover, England, where, no doubt as a child he had spent many happy days. He could have given it any other name - possibly Gillingham College! But this choice of name was the third factor which determined the existence of Kearsney College!

Here again he grew crops with no outstanding success until, about the year 1880, when he was over 40 years of age, he decided to try growing tea, and ordered a large number of cases of seed from India. This was an immediate success, and on the vast tea plantations of the Kearsney Estates there was laid the foundation of the Hulett Sugar Empire. The sugar was to come later. With tea there came relative wealth. With his sons, six in number (and he had two daughters) he set about building the stately Kearsney House (later to become Kearsney College). This imposing building had 22 bedrooms, some very large, and an open balcony upstairs where two dozen beds

could be laid for those who preferred to sleep outside. For his lovely grounds he gathered in trees and shrubs from all parts of the world, so that it became a fairyland of beauty. Much of this flora still stands there today. Here Liege settled with his family and directed the operations on his tea estates. Time passed. His family married and had families of their own, and moved away to build their own homes elsewhere.

Liege, who had taken an active part in the politics and administration of the province, including being a Magistrate, Local Preacher, and Speaker of the Natal House of Assembly, was knighted by King Edward VII early in the 1900's when he was 65 years of age and it was at this point that he decided to retire from his active farming and live in Durban, in the magnificent Manor House which he had built for himself on Mentone Road, and which is still fully in use. His eldest son Albert remained in Kearsney House to manage the estates (and was ultimately succeeded by his eldest son Guy, as Chairman of Hulett's). Albert lived in Kearsney House until the latter days of World War I and then decided to build another home for himself further down the coast. Thus Kearsney House became empty, and its lovely grounds neglected.

By this time Sir Liege Hulett was 85 years of age, still showing much of the mental and physical fitness which had characterised all his days. He must have wondered many a time what was to become of the lovely home he had built for himself 40 years earlier. Inspiration, or again the Hand of Fate, gave him the answer. He would offer his home and grounds to the Methodist Church to be used as a boarding school for boys, with the provision that its government and influences should be based upon the Christian ethic of his mother church.

Looking back, it seems rather an extraordinary decision. Kearsney was far away in the wilds, over 50 miles up

the North Coast, with the railhead at Stanger (known as the City of Sinners). The North Coast Road was narrow, winding, corrugated and dusty. Nevertheless Sir Liege made the offer. You can well imagine the discussions that went on in the hierarchy of the Methodist Church as they tried to decide whether they were justified in saddling themselves with the incubus of a school in so unlikely a spot. They no doubt sought Divine Guidance, and got it. They decided to accept. The mind boggles at the expense involved in converting a home into a school, no matter how small, and with no money to call upon except that of the Church and of Sir Liege himself. A proper water supply had to be laid on (and Kearsney was set on the highest point of the Kearsney Estates); a home produced electricity supply installed (often liable to breakdown, to the boys' delight, when they were doing their homework); there were class-room desks and benches; cutlery and crockery and tables, blankets and linen for the dormitories, and the beds to lay them on; books and

stationery for the classrooms; African and Indian staff to cope with the grounds, upkeep of the school and the feeding of the boys; and a nucleus of teachers, plus a housekeeper and a sister. All this had to be attended to, before so much as one boy could be enrolled. I have no doubt that much of the expense was met from the pocket of Sir Liege himself who, in his old age gave his close patronage to the school which was now to be known as Kearsney College.

The activities of the first few years remain rather vague, enshrouded in the memories of the handful of boys who were educated there. Even the school timetable was vague, and it is stated that in the early days the staff used to meet at the end of each lesson and decide what they would teach next! It was very much a family existence. Motor cars were few and far between, and the main contact with Stanger was via an eighteen-inch gauge railway line, installed in 1901 for the transport of tea. Boys returning to school would catch the train from Durban to Stanger, then squash themselves into the tiny



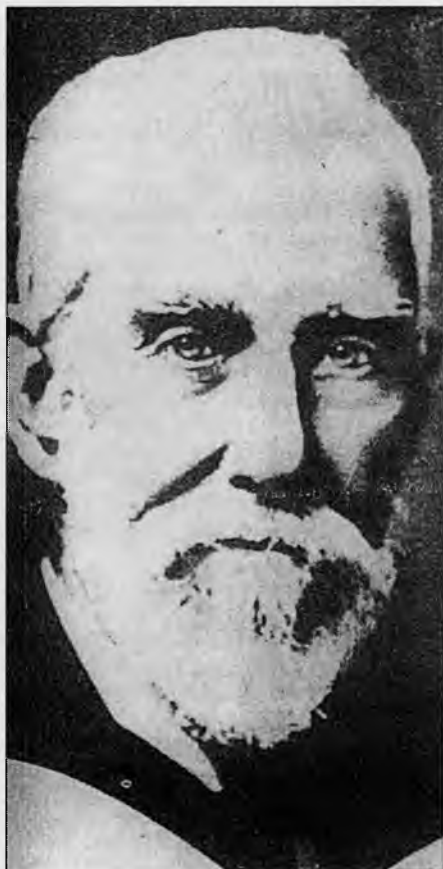
Kearsney House, later Kearsney College. Note the sleeping balcony.

28 carriages of the tea train. Its arrival at the beginning of each term was a 'Great Moment'. It was almost the only physical link with the outside world. There was, however, a telephone line, and in due course a daily newspaper would put in an appearance, but even Robinson Crusoe could hardly have been more isolated. How very fortunate that the spirit of the school and staff was so good and closely knit.

The physical life had to be attended to, and tennis courts were levelled in the immediate proximity of the main building. To level a sports-field, in the pre-bulldozer days, was no mean feat, for the whole terrain sloped steeply from the school's focal point. However, this was accomplished, and, gradually, as the school increased in numbers, sporting contacts were established with local men's clubs and Durban schools.

The purchase of a school bus meant a link with civilisation, and these occasional excursions into the life of Durban were far more exciting occasions than they are today. It took anything up to two hours to reach the city, on the corrugated and dusty North Coast Road, and generally cool drinks and sandwiches awaited the boys at Umhlali, so that the trip took on something of the appearance of a picnic. For the return journey the boys would stock up with pies etc. at whatever Durban tea-room happened to be convenient.

Thus it was that in August 1921, Kearsney College opened with eleven boys, mainly Huletts or sons of local people. Little could Sir Liege have foreseen what an oak tree was to develop from his acorn. His college has 530 pupils today, the largest boys' private school in Natal and the fourth largest in South Africa. It seems that his decision to emigrate to South Africa, to buy property up the coast, to invest in tea, and ultimately to hand his home over as a school, was all ordained by a foreseeing Providence.



Sir Liege Hulett.

Information for this article came from Jack Reece, who went to Kearsney College from England in July 1927 and remained with the school for 40 years. Throughout this period he taught Latin and other subjects when required. In his earlier days he coached cricket. On arrival he was a housemaster. He was choirmaster for ten years, editor of the school magazine for 35 years and he initiated and ran the Kearsney Parliament. After his retirement in 1967 he and his wife continued to live in their house, adjacent to the school.

The life history of Liege Hulett can be found in 'Man of Purpose' by R.E.Osborn