

BOOK TWO

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THE NEVILL DIARIES

from 1884 until 1898

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C O N T E N T S

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Chapter One

THE YEAR 1884

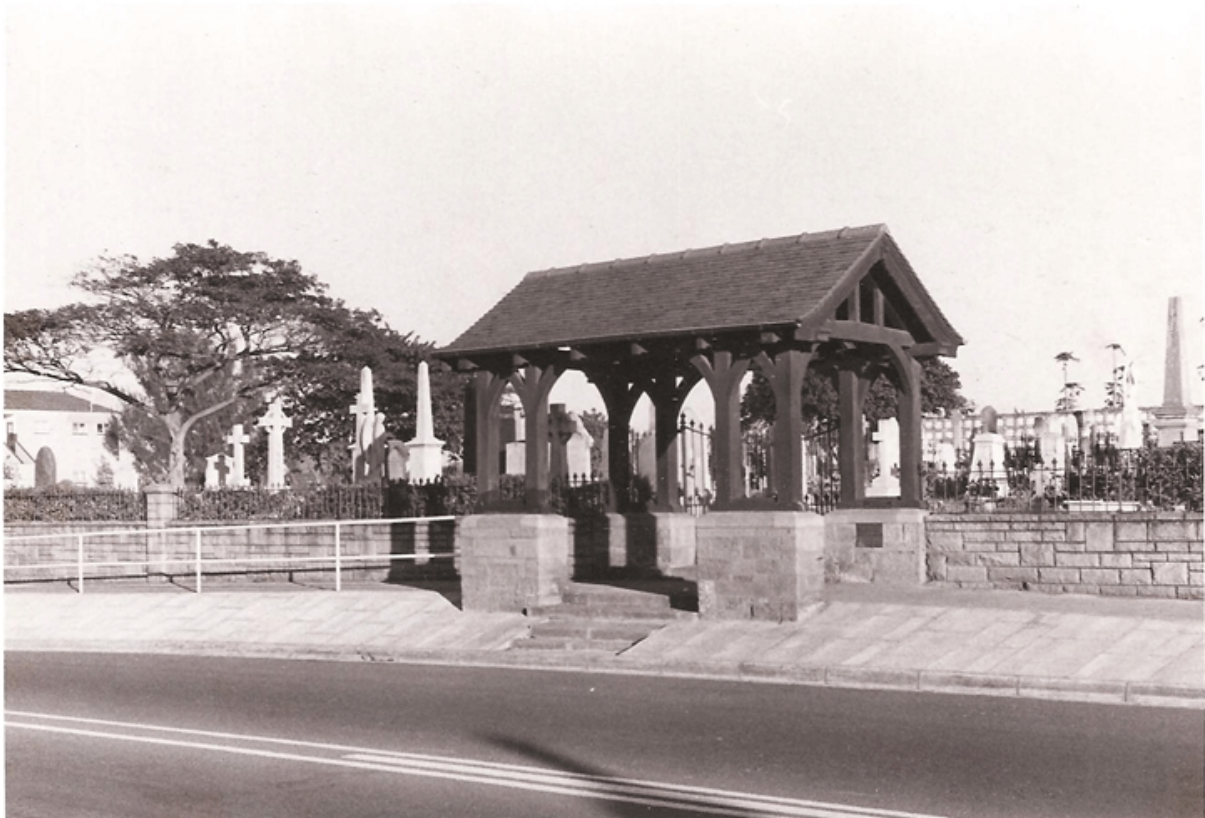
Most fortuitously, the Diaries of Edmund Nevill (Neison) were re-discovered by his daughter, Miss Maud Nevill and were posted to Natal whilst the research was being carried out. They arrived on 5th November 1976 and were placed in the care of the Curator of the Local History Museum, Durban, the late Mrs Daphne Strutt. In due course, it was possible to study these diaries and to extract information which gave a wider picture of the life of Nevill, the affairs of some citizens of Durban in those far off days and also an insight into how people lived and enjoyed themselves.

The diaries contain little of astronomical value not otherwise mentioned, but they do record the private events in Nevill's life. Permission to record extracts from them was given by his then only surviving child and also by the Local History Museum, [It is with gratitude to her and them that this has been carried out.]

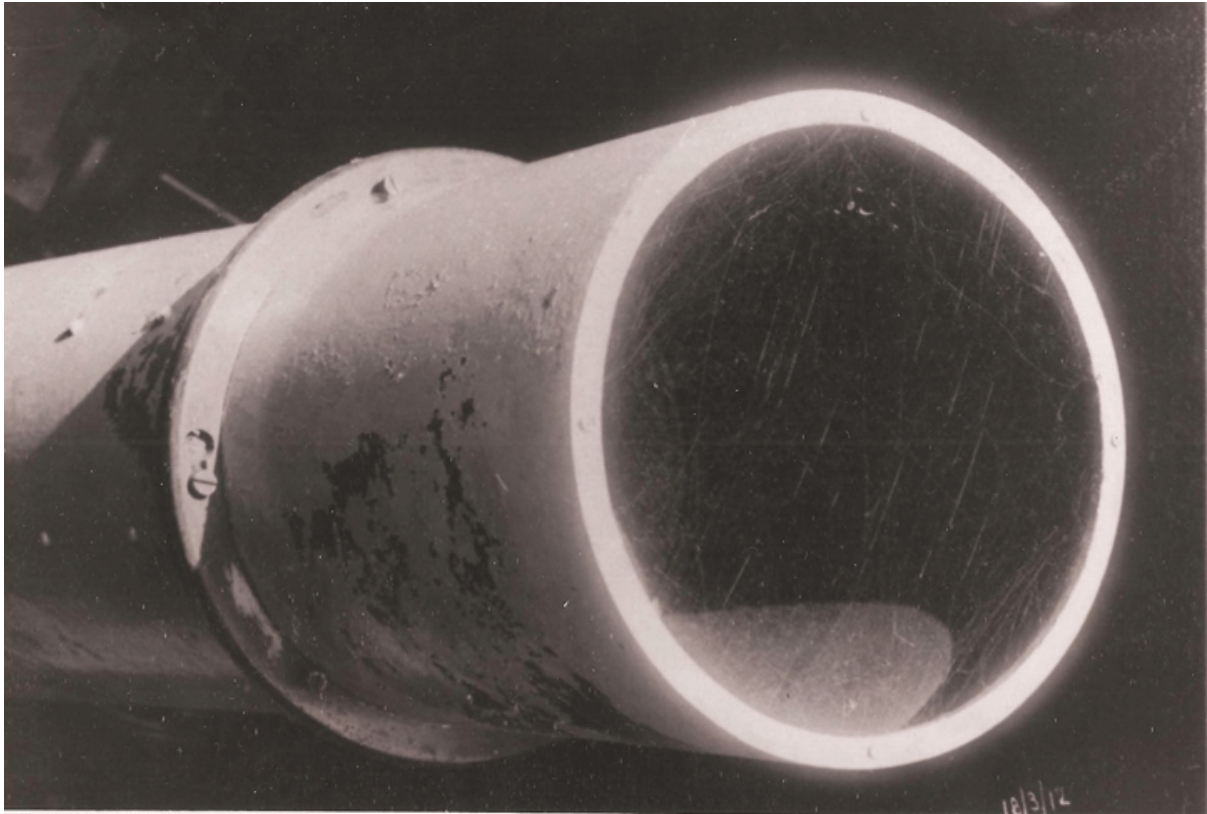
The diaries cover the period from 1884 - thirteen months after his arrival in Durban - until 31st December 1898, with a gap during the year 1889. That year was a highly traumatic one for Nevill and it is probable that he deliberately destroyed the relevant material.

There are many references to the Berea Lawn Tennis Club, as Nevill was a keen tennis player and his future wife Mabel was a champion in her own right. Championship lists are included but they have not been recorded here except where they refer directly to the life of Nevill and his wife. Any member of the present Berea Lawn Tennis Club would be able to learn a lot about the very early days of that Club from these writings, but - a word of warning! In order to do so, a powerful magnifying glass will prove useful as the pages are small and the writing itself is extremely small.

The year 1884 is dealt with in detail but in later times, more sketchily. Virtually all matters shown in parenthesis or in italic typeface are the Author's comments or explanatory notes.



The Lych Gate entrance to St Thomas' Cemetery in Ridge Road, Durban, where the last Professional Astronomer for Natal - Mr A. Hodgson - lies buried. Despite a careful search, no gravestone was found. So ended an era!
Photo: Andrew Gray, 1976.



The objective lens end of the 8-inch Grubb refractor telescope with what appears to be a dew cap extension.

Photo: "Monochrome Picture Company" of Durban, taken on 18 March 1912.

Courtesy: Local History Museum, Durban.

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The Diaries

Tue. 1st Jan. Size 9½ tennis shoes. Went round to Grants in afternoon. Stopped until past eleven. Met Isabel family there.

Wed. 2nd Jan. Went down to exhibition. Judged minerals. Then round to Art exhibition, judged until 4. In evening, dined with Thompson, Letchford, Christie, Stephen, Wilkinson and Lloyd. Played pool. Adjourned to theatre. Rained hard in evening - got wet through.

Thu. 3rd Jan. Again down early to exhibition. Further judging and met Governor. Took his sister Mrs Caldwell round and her two daughters. In afternoon, adjourned to Show to finish judging machinery. In evening went round to Russells. Dull evening. Played charades.

Fri. 4th Jan. Met the Rennies and Mrs Dumas. Pleasant party. Showed them the Observatory. Mrs Rennie nee Miss Blood - Irish family.

Sat. 5th Jan. Saw Acutt and Jenkyn (*Jenkyn was the builder of the Observatory*). Finished judging. Promised to examine quartz for Peel. Played tennis - Saunders, Maritzburg champion.

Sun. 6th Jan. Dull day, no rain. J Grant came round. White ants in Lloyd's roses.

Mon. 7th Jan Official Visitation day. Only Behrens came. Young Grant came back for dinner after tennis.

Tue. 8th Jan. Finished new Catalogue of Stars. Played tennis - Acutt, Grant, Lloyd and self.

Wed. 9th Jan. Went into Durban - saw Sir Charles Mitchell. Met Mrs Acutt, Miss Stainbank present at tennis.

Sat. 12th Jan. Went down into Durban. Judged pictures. Maud Acutt took first prize. Edith Dales second. Row between Bud Acutt and young Grant in which I had to keep the peace.

Sun. 13th Jan. Escombe up at 10 a.m. Tram from Church. Went over Harbour works and Bluff.

Mon. 14th Jan. Analysed ore for Peel. Had to set up extempore furnace. (*This is the first recorded instance of Nevill conducting an assay. Hundreds of further assays were to follow.*)

Thu. 17th Jan. Lloyd's horse went astray and he got wet through looking for it. He went to bed at 10 p.m. Heard of **Thompson and Christie's store being burned down at Duff's Road.** (*Author's emphasis*)

Sat. 19th Jan. J Grant lunched with me. Played tennis and came back - surprised the young Acutts - Maud and Ethel, their two young brothers and MacFarlane. Only Ethel stopped, the others ran away.

Mon 21st Jan. Observed the new Comet and Saturn. (*This was probably Comet **PONS***)

Tue. 22nd Jan. Bad night. Very feverish all day. Time signals failed from some fault of battery.

Thu. 24th Jan. Letchford and a Mr Farthing of Gardner & Co., Victoria Street came round.

Fri. 25th Jan. Went round to Acutts. Found big family gathering. Played charades and music. Rather pleasant evening.

Sat. 26th Jan. Went to tennis meeting. Large attendance. Meeting decided on silver and blue for colours. They voted me into the Chair. Box from Grubb (*Sir Howard*) arrived.

Fri. 1st Feb. Rewired the Transit telescope. Worked at my Memoirs while Lloyd observed. Lloyd and Bud Acutt agreed to go and choose Club colours - light blue and silver.

Mon. 4th Feb. Visitation Day - Escombe and Rutherford came up. Up to Maritzburg by 2.10 train. Arrived there at 8.45 a.m. (*Tuesday 5th.*)

Tue. 5th Feb. Saw De Pass at Club, Colonial Treasurer Col. Mitchell, Auditor and Postmaster. Arranged about Assistant (*Astronomer*) and Computers. Left Maritzburg by 2.50 train and arrived Durban at 8.20 p.m. Straight up to Berea, very tired. Found Grant and Lloyd at Observatory.

Fri. 15th Feb. Saw Errol (?) Acutt who asked me to examine ores. Stainbank came up.

Mon. 18th Feb Jack Brunskill came up. (*Mr Brunskill's son became Chairman of the firm C G Smith & Co., circa 1960s.*)

Sat. 22nd Feb. Received invitation to Berea Amateur Dramatic Society Dance.

Fri. 29th Feb. Mrs Grant amiable today - black and thundery yesterday!

Mon. 3rd Mar. Visitation Day. None turned up. Gill telegraphed for Longitude and Latitude. (*Sir David Gill, Astronomer Royal at the Cape*)

Thu. 6th Mar. L Butcher came round to ask us up to tennis on Saturday

Wed 12th Mar Met the Harveys with the Greenacres at tennis. (*Their retail store was to become Durban's famous "Harvey, Greenacre & Co." in West Street*)

Fri. 14th Mar. Arranged for time signal to Newcastle for Bellott (*Ballott*). Mrs Grant very gracious at tennis. Observed zenith stars.

Fri. 21st Mar. Cold day. Temperature 57°F. (*14°C*) Two and 1/10ths inches rain fallen

Tue. 25th Mar. Ethel Russell's birthday. Sent her a locket. Wires of the telegraph causing some bother.

Fri. 28th Mar. Mabel Grant ill with a cold - unable to come to tennis. (*This is the earliest recorded entry giving Mabel's name.*)

Mon 31st Mar. New tennis courts opened. Young McEwan came round and observed until eleven. Had cocoa and stopped at 1 a.m.

Tue. 1st Apr. Had new chemical apparatus brought up from Durban.

Fri. 4th Apr. Went to concert in evening. Baines from York - fine voice. Mrs Grant, also Miss B Grant (piano and violin), Miss Platt played - slovenly. Miss Keywood indifferently.

Sat. 5th Apr. Gave Miss Maud Acutt a lecture. Russell's had a party.

Thu. 10th Apr. Everyone making fun of Mercury's eclipse error last night.

Fri. 11th Apr. (Good Friday) Found green mamba up a tree. Brought it down and killed it - nearly six feet long.

Wed 16th Apr. Did not play tennis as I had broken my glasses. (*This was to become a frequent mishap!*)

Sat. 19th Apr. Went round to Acutts. Found Ernest Acutt there. Had some music - indifferent. Talked with two girls. Told Ethel she was womanly and mysterious - refined and proud. (*The name of several girls are mentioned in Nevill's diaries, indicating that he was somewhat of a "star" attraction. After all he was a highly eligible bachelor!*).

Thu. 24th Apr. Went to concert at Berea Hall. Crowded. Mrs Atkinson - cold but polished voice. Miss Jessie Whittaker - a nice voice but little expression. Mrs Cocksberth (*?sic.?*) - peculiar voice, highly resonous and spoilt - professional?

Fri. 25th Apr. Lloyd at 6 p.m. round to dance. Committee invited nearly all the ladies of Durban - 140 went to the dance.

Mon 28th Apr Cleaned up instruments. Observed Venus and Beta Orionis. Invited Grants round in evening. Had rather an uproarious gathering 'til after midnight.

Wed 30th Apr Grant came and stayed to lunch. Caught butterflies. Escombe came round with Miss Gillespie.

Thu. 1st May Caught butterflies again. Received invitation with Butcher and Peel to judge art in Pietermaritzburg.

Sat. 3rd May Most people at tournament in Durban. Beat Inniskilling (*Dragoons?*) Grants came round with Capt. Reeves to see the Moon. Stopped 'til after midnight.

Mon. 5th May Everyone talking about "goldfields". Said goodbye to Lloyds - they go to Rondebosch. (*In Cape Town*)

Sat 10th May Put up awning to shelter the verandah (*of the Observatory*)

Tue. 13th May Grant came round and talked all night about gold fever. (*Gold had been discovered in the Transvaal in what became known as the Witwatersrand and the city of Johannesburg had started off as a mining camp.*)

Wed 14th May Tested ore sample for analysis. Red haematite ore

Fri. 16th May Went round to dance in Berea Hall. About 150 present. The Grants were there but only Mabel got many dances.

Mon 19th May Came up to Pietermaritzburg with Capt. Johnstone of 91st. Went to judge at Natal Society. Found Wyndham and Major Granville as co-judges.

Wed 21st May Went to Natal Show to meet the Governor. Went round show with him.

Fri 23rd May In evening, went to theatre (*in Pietermaritzburg*) saw "Old Soldiers" and "A Regular Fix" - the latter very good.

Sat 24th May Saw the Misses Colenso. (*Bishop Colenso's daughters*) One of them stared very hard at me.

Mon 26th May Left (*Pietermaritzburg*) by early train. Came down with Nimmo, Letchford and Miss Player. Talked a lot of nonsense on the way down. Walked up to Observatory.

Thu 29th May Took stroll with Miss Mabel (*Grant*) along Currie Road. Tennis later. Durrell came up, tried to make himself unpleasant but he got the worst of it.

Sun 31st May Grant Senior (*Mr William Grant*) came round. He leaves for Zululand towards the end of next week. Stayed and chattered until past 12 p.m.

Mon 2nd Jun Mrs W Acutt asked us to go in evening to meet Mr Simpson of Port Elizabeth - General Manager of Bank of Africa.

Fri 6th Jun Dance in evening. Officers of *H.M.S. "Boadicea"* there.

Fri 13th Jun Officers of "*Boadicea*" came up and had luncheon.

Wed 18th Jun Row amongst the servants. Had to keep the peace between them.

Fri 27th Jun Had to read the riot act to Natives. Lloyd very vexed. A lot of my glasses broken.

Sat 28th Jun Went round to Grants in evening to amuse them as they were not allowed to go to dance. Played all sorts of nonsense and, I think, amused them very much.

Sun 29th Jun Went down to Escombe. Met Bambridge, M.L.C. for Klip River. (*Member of the Local Council for Ladysmith*)

Wed 9th Jul Got things ready for tea at night. Edith, Blanche, Inez Isabel and full Grant party - thirteen in all. Looked at Moon. Inspected grounds by moonlight, sang songs and had a general rumpus, from 11.30 p.m. until half past one - all in the light of the Moon.

Thu 10th Jul Cold windy day. Heavy squalls with some rain. Did not go anywhere all day. Worked a little, dreamt more

To interrupt this rather touching and human scene for a moment, the foregoing and some of the following extracts give the impression that Edmund Nevill was living a somewhat debauched existence. This social round was by no means a major part of his daily life. Each day, he also gives an account of the state of the weather and also of all astronomical observing that he carried out, together with numerous other tasks which were being thrust upon him.

That he lived an extremely full and active life is obvious. Being a man of "letters" in the scientific world, he was regarded as a kind of celebrity and had every opportunity of mixing with people of station and influence. It was those same people who kept the wheels of the social life turning somewhat quickly for him. It seems as though, in the 19th Century, being an Astronomer and a scientist did not mean that he had to cease being a member of the human race. However, the time would come, and all too quickly, when his popularity waned. His work load and financial needs became far more demanding. This is evident from the text of Book One and we shall see how it affected his diary entries as we progress.

Fri 18th Jul A Mr Branky from Colenso came up to see Observatory. An intelligent Yorkshireman - thinks!

Tue 5th Aug Lloyd still on sick list (*this was to happen frequently*) Made new lightning conductor earth. De Pass and Jack Grant came round. Grants sent us some home- made bread.

Thu 7th Aug Ethel Acutt and Emily Rutherford came round. Could not show them much owing to bright Moon. Fitted up electrical lamps.

Fri 8th Aug Lloyd is god-father to Letchford's girl Alice Muriel, and had to buy a mug.

Mon 11th Aug Barnes lunched with us and talked over water question. (*This referred to the problems with the water supply from Currie's Fountain*) In evening, observed

Barend's Comet.

Fri 29th Aug Went round to Grants to amuse youngsters in evening. Met Mellersh, Member of the Legislative Council. (*For some reason, Mellersh became a bitter opponent of the Observatory and Nevill as the years progressed.*)

Fri 5th Sep B Nerse, Maidie and Maud Grant round in evening. Moonlight but cloudy - had to go out under verandah. General scramble, went round paths by moonlight, saw them home at 12.30.

Wed 17th Sep Beatrice Grant's birthday. Feeling unwell - old complaint again.

Thu 18th Sep Sent a set of beaker glasses to Mabel Grant. In pain all day. (*Dr Gordon called to see to him the following day.*)

Sat 27th Sep Lieut. Moschke, Royal Engineers (a German) called with letter from Gill (*of Cape Town*) He is to explore the Limpopo district.

Mon 29th Sep Went round to tennis. Miss Eastwood extra gracious owing to Mrs Shotters. Miss Gibson extra ill-tempered, Edes extra attentive, Mabel extra cold to me. (*The emphasis was Nevill's. It appears that Edes was married and this may have caused the "attack of the vapours"!*)

Fri 10th Oct Came up from Durban with Robinson who urged the extension of the Meteorological returns.

Mon 13th Oct Went down to theatre. Saw "The Rivals", then on 2 a.m. train to Pietermaritzburg. Travelled as far as Richmond Road with Dr Edie.

Tue 14th Oct Went to Imperial (*Hotel*). Found all heads of Departments away. Saw Auditor and Chadwick later on.

Wed 15th Oct Saw Bainbridge, Bird, met Wyndham. Saw Mrs Wicht - the gay widow.

Fri 17th Oct Amused the ladies by fortune telling - had some good fun. Mrs Munnicks - pride and truth. Mrs Wicht - doubt and sincerity, and generosity.

Sat 18th Oct Still raining. Went over new offices and printing works of the "*Natal Witness*" (*Pietermaritzburg*) with Hillier.

Thu 23rd Oct Saw Beningfield. Met Sutherland, the Surveyor General. Played pool.

Sat 25th Oct Left for Durban on 12.20 train. Arrived 6 p.m.

Sat 8th Nov Robarts up about house. Jenkyns also to see what repairs are required at Observatory.

Mon 10th Nov Lamp in Observatory caught fire. Had to put it out with water.

Mon 17th Nov Bought four Christmas cards for 12/6d. Painted by Miss Chapman.

Thu 20th Nov Had Meteorological House moved to new site. Repairs done to roof and dome of Observatory.

Mon 8th Dec Robarts round, commenced building new wing. Cleared site for Kaffir (sic.) house.

Thu 25th Dec (*Christmas Day*) Played tennis. Dined at Escombes, came back ill, found Lloyd very seedy, gave him some tea.

Fri 26th Dec Packed up for Lloyd. Saw him off on S.S. "***Dunkeld***".

Wed 31st Dec Moved over effects from old house. Saw New Year in at Observatory. Another year (*The "house" referred to was actually part of the Observatory. It was to be some years before a proper house was constructed for Nevill.*)

Fri 2nd Jan (1885) Finally moved over to new part of Observatory

Sat 10th Jan Appointed Jack Grant as new Assistant at Observatory

Fri 16th Jan Got letter from Mater dated 18th

Tue 20th Jan Mabel Grant round to do computing. I sent in my resignation. (*There was no connection between these two comments. In any case, his resignation was turned down.*)

In the "Memoranda" section at the end of the Diary, there appears an entry "Bread and Salt with Blanche Isabel, August 31st 1884". This "Ritual" had a deep significance it seems, and was a serious pact of hospitality between two people. It appears that this was a very old English tradition and is also one which is shared on occasion by some members of the Masonic order.

Nevill also included some personal comments about the various young ladies that he knew such as : "Edith Isabel - sincerity and self-sufficiency, Blanche Isabel - pride and contempt, Ivey - good temper and Vanity, Bella Grant - truth and envy. Mabel Grant - rectitude and generosity, Beatrice Grant - straightforwardness and doubt". There is of course no mention of the reactions of any of these lassies to these comments!

The final entry in this diary of 1884 is in the form of a rhyme which reads :

*There was a young beauty named Mabel
Who sat down to tea on the table.
To Angel "You've blessed it",
She replied "Oh! No! I've messed it,
I wouldn't do such a thing were I able".*

*

Chapter Two

THE YEAR 1885

Having dealt with the first diary somewhat exhaustively, it is noticeable that Nevill's list of friends was quite impressive. It included the whole of the well known Grant family which numbered at least a dozen, the Harry Escombe family, the Churchills, the De Pass family and numerous others, who had a marked influence on the affairs of the Observatory and of course, the development of Durban itself. Hardly a day went by without one, two or more of them calling in to partake of lunch or tea with him.

How he ever managed to get through the work recounted in Book One, is difficult to imagine. He appears to have been "on call" as a judge of Art, his opinions were sought on matters ranging from the Political to the Scientific and he was (at least to start with) a highly respected member of the community as official Government Astronomer.

Paging through the second diary, one of the first things that came to light was that Chard, his assistant was being paid overtime for his work. The rates were two shillings per "long evening" and one shilling and sixpence for a "short evening".

Mabel Grant made an almost daily appearance at the Observatory to carry out her somewhat unofficial duties as an astronomical computer and Nevill's entries refer to her variously as "Miss Mabel", "Mabs" or just plain "MG". His social rounds included playing charades, numerous types of card games and {*horrors of horrors to an Astronomer!*} telling fortunes by cards!

The diary records daily events as follows :

Sun. 25th Jan. Nessa's birthday

Sun. 8th Feb. Went down to Harbour Works and then to Escombe. In afternoon, went for a walk on the Bluff to the beach on the other side. (*Facing the Indian Ocean.*)

Fri. 20th Feb. Visitation Day. Greenacre, Escombe, Rutherford and Behrens down.

Thu. 26th Feb. Received tidal forms from Darwin.

Wed 18th Mar Beatrice Grant's birthday. Presented her with a racquet.

Fri. 20th Mar. Killed large green mamba in tree near Observatory. Over seven feet long. Had nine shots with revolver - in form. Not bad for revolver.

Sat. 11th Apr. Girls all down. Went for walk with Beatrice and Mabel as far as Umgeni Road.

Sun. 10th May Earthquake at Cape Town at 11.41 p.m. Cape Time.

Wed 13th May First day of races. Girls watched first race from roof of Observatory. Lily Chard's birthday, 1868.

Sat. 16th May Went to Pinetown to see Umbilo (*Water*) works. Barnes, Jameson and Edmund there with Innes. Met Sir Baker Russell. Work going well.

Mon. 1st Jun. Played tennis. Lost two bottles of whisky over final three sets which won the match.

Fri. 12th Jun. Telephone wire up.

Thu. 18th Jun Doggett round to harden verandah and finished same.

Wed 15th Jul Worked at and finished Pretoria Ephemeris. Got letter from Lloyd from Ceylon, dated 30th May.

Thu. 16th Jul Mrs Russell asked me if I was engaged to Katie Escombe (!)

Sat. 25th Jul. Mabel Grant off to say goodbye to Rennies who came in S.S. "**Dabulamazi**" in afternoon.

Thu. 30th Jul. Miss Mabel and I had explanations and final separation (!) In evening, Mabel round, very upset.

Wed. 5th Aug. Shut myself up all day. Sandford, in alarm, broke in accompanied by Dr Colenso. Sent Doctor away and had long chat with Sandford. *(It is obvious here that Nevill's "private life" had become somewhat complicated...)*

Sat 15th Aug. J Grant down. Had final word with him about Mabel. She comes down and works *(illegible)* as before, or I have nothing more to do with it. My last word. *(At this stage, matters had become extremely strained between Nevill and the Grant family and many problems had to be sorted out before the wedding bells started to ring. The diary became very much more personal at this point and things came to a head on 9th September :)*

Wed. 9th Sep. Pressed Mabel for final answer, got "NO!". Very reluctantly but she could *(not?)* make up her mind to face poverty with me. This sets me free once more. An eventful day but I, sick at heart.

Sat. 19th Sep. Had long chat with Sandford. William Grant (*Mabel's father*) had been to Escombe - final week in August, and set him against me re- Mabel. I much upset and cannot believe such treachery.....

As can be seen, Nevill's relationship with Mabel Grant was causing much parental tongue-wagging. It also caused rifts between him and persons who, until that time, had been close friends of his. Letters between Nevill and Escombe came and went and replies from the latter were never very helpful. In fact, at one stage, things got so bad that Nevill very nearly took his life because of the apparent duplicity of people around him. How things fared with Mabel can only be guessed as her own thoughts were only vaguely hinted at in the diaries. Whatever she thought, the whole experience was quite traumatic for both of them but it was to be some time before the matter resolved itself. To continue :

Thu. 1st Oct. Worked on reef samples from Trubshaw for analysis.

Sun. 4th Oct. Finished analysis, sent Trubshaw his report. Had romp with Violet (*One of the children that he knew*) Mounted new photographs of the Observatory.

Tue. 6th Oct. Very hot day. Temperature over 100°F. (+38°C) Too hot for girls to work.

Sat. 10th Oct. Fitted new micrometer to Transit Telescope.

Sun. 11th Oct Received invitation to Mayor's banquet.

Thu. 15th Oct Finished Tidal reductions except latest readings. Received letter from Shepstone asking me to give evidence in cement case. Declined. Analysed galina ore for Hope. (*Nevill was eventually subpoenaed to appear in court on the "cement case". His evidence is recorded on pages 46 and 47 of Book One*)

Mon 19th Oct Appeared in Court in re- "Natal Harbour Board v. Brunell". Gave evidence at 4 p.m. Escombe and Gallway there. Wrote to say I was too ill to see His Excellency. (*The Governor of the Colony.*)

Tue. 20th Oct Night of Escombe's reception to say goodbye to the Governor.

Thu. 22nd Oct At six p.m., Sir Henry Bulwer (*The Governor*) came to say goodbye. In evening, played "Snap" with the girls. (*Sir Henry Bulwer actually sailed from Durban on the 23rd October at 1.20 p.m.*)

Wed. 28th Oct Official opening of the new Town Hall. (*This is now the General Post Office*)

Thu. 29th Oct. White ants (*flying ants*) a pest. Girls down to dance at the Town Hall. Jack Grant half mad to think he was not allowed to go because of the expense. Cubbins sent up samples of silver for analysis.

Thu. 12th Nov Went into town. Saw Stranack, Greenacre, Acutt and Vause. Lunched at Club. Went over Town Hall and up the tower. Arranged for Laboratory.

Wed 25th Nov Killed large centipede - nine inches by half an inch (*23cm by 1.5cm*). Killed small snake in hole at 4 p.m. (*The "centipede" was probably what Natalians call a "Shongololo", which is quite harmless but is feared by the Zulus*)

Mon 30th Nov Got telegram re-shower of meteors. Received lump of stone from Natal Government Railways for analysis.

Tue. 1st Dec. Up at Chapman's. Told them origins of Christian names. Talked of folly of old people getting married. Got letter from Escombe asking me to look at samples of sand from the Durban "bar". (*at the harbour entrance*)

Tue. 8th Dec. Point Station Master up to ask me to analyse mineral - suppose cobalt.

Sat. 12th Dec. Down to Point in afternoon, spent time on South breakwater. Observed until midnight. Ship drifting, signals seen at 11.45 p.m.

Wed 16th Dec Drove over with Barnes, Innes and Rutherford and Edmunds to see Umbilo works. Fine dam - work progressing well. Left at 3.20, got back to Durban at 4.40. (*The dam" was of course, the one in Paradise Valley at Pinetown. The 80 minute return journey takes under ten minutes on the new freeway today!*)

Fri. 25th Dec. (Christmas Day) Got cards from Chapmans and Russell. Sent Russells some crackers. Up to Chapmans for dinner - took them some presents. Bud Acutt came in evening. Had games - charades. Played until 2 a.m. Chard girls there - great noise!

Sun. 3rd Jan. (1886) Down to Escombes. Stopped until 7.30. Had talk with Escombe on Harbour Works and with Mrs Escombe on general subjects.

There are no further entries of note in this second diary other than a few comments in the “Memoranda” section. From this, it is learned that : “Sunday trams leave West Street at 2.30 p.m., 3.00 p.m. and 3.30 p.m., and that two leave the Point at 5.10 and 5.30 p.m.” Other items noted were “Mabel (*Grant*) weighs 7 stone 7 lbs., Nellie is 8 stone 4 lbs. And Amy is 8 stone 13 lbs.” The “Closed Season” for shooting birds was from 15th August until 20th April. That for “Buck” was from 30th June until 31st December.

*

Chapter Three

THE YEAR 1886

The third diary opens with quite a gap between January 3rd (above) and the next entry of note :

Fri. 22nd Jan. Very hot morning. Girls down. Romped. Syringed them to cool them. Washed gold in afternoon and analysed. (*Numerous other analyses were requested and conducted during the following days*).

Fri. 12th Feb. Sewed top onto new tennis net and put it up. Finished Annual Report.

Thu. 18th Jan. Fixed up furnace (*for assaying*). Row between Mr and Mrs Chapman. Altered clock pendulum and laid new carpet in Observatory.

Tue. 2nd Feb. Arrived Pietermaritzburg after leaving on midnight train. W Grant going up to Ladysmith.

Sat. 6th Feb. Went to theatre. Saw "The Jacobite" and "Deaf as a Post".

Wed 10th Feb Returned to Durban on early train with Jameson and Edes.

Wed 17th Mar Made arrangements for receiving Governor. Girls helped. In evening he came up with Lady Havelock, the Mayor and Mrs Stranack, also, the Board of Visitors, Cooley and Yardley.

Wed 28th Apr Booked cabin No 5 on S. S. "**Anglia**". Saw Rennie, Acutt & Greenacre.

Sun. 2nd May Observed **Fabrey's Comet**. Wrote up report for "Advertiser" and "Mercury".

Wed 12th May After Grant girls and others came down to say goodbye, sailed ex-Durban in S.S. **Anglia**".

Then follows the expected account of the voyage from Durban to Britain. The vessel arrived at East London the following afternoon at 3 p.m. and sailed one hour later. She reached Algoa Bay (*Port Elizabeth*) at 5 a.m. on Friday 14th May and sailed for Mossel Bay at 2.30 p.m., arriving at 7 a.m. on Saturday 15th where and stayed for only three and a half hours.

The Cape Town visit lasted from 10 a.m. on Sunday 16th until 5 p.m. on Wednesday 19th May, during which time Nevill did the expected thing. He called upon Sir David Gill and Mr Findlay at the Royal Observatory. He also visited numerous other friends and saw the sights of Cape Town.

After a fairly uneventful trip, the ship arrived at Madeira at 5. p.m. on Thursday 3rd June, stayed for 12 hours and then headed for Plymouth where she arrived and stayed for only two hours. Eventually the good ship "*Anglia*" docked at Southampton at 10 p.m. on Monday 7th June - a voyage of about eighteen days which, for the 1880's, was excellent.

Nevill then went to London and made a round of social calls after which, on 18th June, he took the mail train to Holyhead and Dublin and booked at the Shelbourne Hotel. Whilst in Dublin, he visited Mr Howard Grubb, the maker of the Grubb eight inch refracting telescope, and the Observatory Dome for Durban. He ordered some new instruments and then went on a very fast visiting tour, leaving the next day by Irish Mail via Holyhead to London - a journey which took him eleven hours.

The next few weeks were spent in making social and business rounds. Some of the people that he visited were Jack Grant, one of Hepburn family, the senior De Pass's, whose family in Durban were firm friends, and of course the senior Mr Robert Escombe, father of Harry Escombe. Mr Robert Escombe was living in Surbiton, Surrey and Nevill visited him on a number of occasions. He also called on Troughton and Simms (*now known as "Cooke, Troughton and Simms"*) who had manufactured the Transit Telescope.

He did not forget his beloved game of tennis and played once at Wimbledon and many other clubs during his tour. He also mentions a place called "Margaret Street" on a number of occasions but gives no clue as to why, other than the fact that he spent many an evening there. This could have been the home of a very close friend or even a member of the family.

One of his more important tasks while in England was to check the galley proofs of his book "*Astronomy - a simple introduction to a Noble Science*" at the offices of Ward Locke and Company. The addition of drawings, correction of typographical errors and arranging for suitable finances. The book was duly published and at least one copy existed in 1980 in the private collection of Mr G Noel Johnsson of Natal.

Mrs Escombe (Senior) sent Nevill her good wishes for his birthday on 25th August and on 27th August (his actual birthday) he spent the evening with her and her husband. He was then 39 years old.. A round of farewells started a few days later, after he had booked berth No 131 to Cape Town on the S.S. "*Moor*" with the Union Steamship Company. Oddly enough, there was no mention of any visit to members of his family whilst he was in Britain.

Having stocked up with books, ammunition, new tennis racquets and a large supply of tennis balls, he entrained for Southampton and joined his ship which sailed down the Southampton

Water at 1.30 p.m. on Thursday 9th September, calling at Plymouth before heading for the Bay of Biscay and Cape Town.

After a short visit to Madeira on 14th September, the 3 700 ton vessel covered distances of between 300 and 320 nautical miles per day in fairly good weather and arrived in Table Bay at 7.20 a.m. on Thursday 30th September - twenty-one days after leaving Britain.

During the three day stay in Cape Town, Nevill once more visited the Royal Observatory and had long discussions with Sir David Gill, Mr Findlay and this time, Mr Robert Pett - the man who had supervised the construction of the Durban Observatory, passing on the news of various relatives and friends in Britain.

The "*Moor*" left Cape Town harbour at 4 p.m. on Saturday 2nd October, called at all ports up the East coast and anchored outside Durban on Thursday 7th. As the harbour entrance was still not deep enough for a vessel of her draught to enter, Nevill and the other passengers were taken off by basket onto a tug. Nevill finally set foot in Durban at 1.10 p.m. that day and had to pay out 17 shillings and sixpence to clear his belongings through Customs and Excise.

The next few days were hectic - occupied mainly in opening the boxes and packets that he had brought back with him. He made many visits to friends and was visited in turn by many of them, handing out presents, mostly in the form of tennis racquets. Then he had to settle down again as the official Government Astronomer to the Colony of Natal.

His return was immediately noted by the authorities for, within 24 hours of his arrival, he was asked to carry out several ore analyses. These he started as soon as he was able and, within a week, he was back to his old routine. On Sunday 24th October he asked Mr Robarts about an official post as Consulting Chemist to the Borough of Durban. The diary then continues :

Mon 25th Oct. Grant down into town to get teeth seen to. Came up like a bear!

Sat. 30th Oct. Arranged with Bentley, fees to be paid for Assays. One assay : five guineas, each thereafter : three guineas, he to get 20% commission. (*Up to this point, all the assay work had been conducted on a "favour" basis and at last, Nevill had decided to carry out these assignments on a business footing.*)

Sat. 6th Nov. Down to Point to get instrument from Troughton and Simms. (*This was the improved collimator for the Transit telescope.*)

Wed 24th Oct {Part of the Escombe family} left on the S.S. "*African*".

Fri. 10th Dec. Called on R Benningfield, went out into Bay in his yacht "*La Mascotte*".

Fri. 17th Dec. Discussed survey with Stainbank M.L.C., gave Robarts a copy of my book.

Fri. 24th Dec. Up to see Christmas in. Bank played carols. Mrs Russell sent me a card and some mangoes.

Fri. 31st Dec. White ants in Meteorological house. Jack Grant's last day as Assistant.

The "Memoranda" section of this diary is filled with odd notes, one of which lists all the assays that he had conducted during the year, giving the Natal counties and the names of all the persons to whom the samples belonged. He also referred to the date of August 31st 1884 ("*bread and salt with Blanche Isabel*") and noted that his tennis Club fees were one guinea per year. He ended the year once more with a short poem :

The man in the wilderness asked me

How many strawberries grew in the sea

I answered him as I thought good -

As many red herrings as grow in the wood.

*

Chapter Four

THE YEAR 1887

Tue. 4th Jan. Declined Agency with Robarts. Telegram from Bell - can it be true? Will not believe until I hear from them. (*Katie Escombe became engaged.*)

Fri. 7th Jan. Neale round in afternoon - wants me to take him into partnership.

Fri. 14th Jan. Beatrice (*Grant*) came down. Asked me about Miss Escombe's engagement.

Sun. 16th Jan. Into town to Escombe's to tea. Dead silence. They had not had any letter from Madeline. (?)

Thu. 20th Jan. Katie Russell (Senior) died and was buried in afternoon.

Wed. 9th Feb. Went through draft of advertisement on Deed of Poll. (*Until then Nevill had always referred to himself as "Neison" and this was the first indication of his move to revert to his family name.*)

Sat. 26th Feb. Played tennis - Harry Beningfield there. He and Emma engaged. (*Lily Chard became engaged two days later and several others also started to tie the marital knot. Some of these engagements were approved of and others were not - sometimes causing tension between Nevill and Harry Escombe. The latter, because of the "Mabel Grant and Edmund Nevill" episode, was unable to trust Nevill at all.*)

Sun. 1st May To Escombe's. Had tea. Discussed his address to the electorate at Newcastle and other matters.

Sun. 16th May Came up with Escombe by night train to Pietermaritzburg. (*He returned two days later.*)

Mon 13th Jun. Tore up old Arkley letters. (*He burned them the next day. For him to do such a thing was out of keeping with his character. Nevertheless, he spent several days destroying and tearing up old correspondence and ended up with a diary note on 21st June, stating "Destroyed last of mementoes". It was also at this stage that he started seeing quite a lot of young Miss Coral Escombe.*)

Sat. 9th Jul. Stopped with Mrs Escombe and had a long chat. Coral angry with me. Grant there. Waller up - mischief *re*-Grant.

Sat. 16th Jul. Into town. Saw leopard killed by Wood's Kaffirs (*sic.*) at Claremont.

Thu. 21st Jul, Doggett (*a builder*) put up furnace for my assay work.

Wed. 3rd Aug. Girls down except Coral who did not show up until after four. She would not come in to a later gathering and left at 9 o'clock. Coolness between the girls and Coral and I. Eclipse of the Moon.

Fri 5th Aug. Went to violin concert. Katie Escombe distant - Coral would not even look. Danger signals all round. Mrs Escombe asked me to go round to dinner. I did not go.

Sun. 7th Aug. Round to Escombe's. Managed to bring Coral round. Escombe grave and reserved.

Thu 18th Aug. Dull wet day. Sent Mrs Escombe silver smelling salts bottle. Man up about the chimney for the furnace (*the assay ovens*). Got letter from Mrs Escombe.

Sun. 21st Aug. To Escombes. Had chat with Mrs Escombe and youngsters. After tea, Escombe sent for me into study. Discussed everything up until nine. Then saw a good play. Is this a new idea? (*Neither Escombe nor Neville appeared to understand each other's problems, which was a pity.*)

Thu 15th Aug. Lily Chard's wedding.

Wed. 5th Oct. Into town to tennis at Escombes. Coral distant. Had cosy chat with Katie Escombe. Mrs Escombe grave. Took Coral a book "*For her dear sake*". Asked her how much longer - she would not understand. (*That Sunday, Coral was still 'guarded', indicating that things had reached a high pitch of emotion between both of them.*)

Sun. 23rd Oct. At Escombes. Katie very disconsolate. Coral fiery but cordial. Katie provoking. Mr Escombe not quite certain - peculiar afternoon.

Tue. 25th Oct. Received letter offering me post of Official Assayer. (*By this time, Nevill had conducted about 130 analyses and assays!*) Wrote answer. Received letter from Lloyd - old assistant, announcing his engagement to Christine Evans.

Sun. 6th Nov. Saw Coral and Ethel Platt. Both of them uneasy. Katie not at ease. Evidence of quarrel between sisters. High tension between girls. Wedding fixed for April 3rd. (1888)

Sun. 13th Nov. Young Clark at Escombe's. Coral determined to show me how much she likes him and how particularly anxious she was, to go (*illegible*) in the evening. Took her at her desire and left instantly. She did not say goodbye. Escombe more cordial - because he saw?

Fri. 16th Dec. Innes (*Senior*) died. (*He was buried the next day.*)

Sun. 25th Dec. (*Christmas Day*) Coral still uncertain. Wants a second chance? Too late!

Fri. 30th Dec. Had long chat with Ethel about Coral. She told me frankly about her. It is as I expected. I told her that I had guessed so and had acted accordingly.

Sat. 31st Dec. Down to Escombe's to tennis. Coral so-and-so. Not willing to lose and yet not wanting to gain. Told Mrs Escombe of change of name. (*From Neison to Nevill.*)

Apart from a series of names and assay results, there is little to mention at the end of this diary. It had obviously been rather a bad year for Nevill - "*Les affaires du coeur*" had once again taken their toll and the final chapter in this series of events was to be played out during 1888.

At the front of the diary for 1888 we find a limerick which appears to have no bearing whatsoever on any of the personalities mentioned in the diary, but it is once again the product of the ever fertile imagination of the man, Edmund Nevill :

The naughty Sir Malcolm de Mattick

Had a service both hard and erratic

The onlooking crowd

Used to curse him aloud

And call him a - something - fanatic!

*

Chapter Five

THE YEAR 1888

This year follows much the same pattern as 1887. Once again, the Escombe family figures prominently in the affairs of Edmund Nevill. The genealogy of the Escombe family can be summarised as follows :

Mr Harry Escombe was born at Notting Hill, London on 25th July 1838. His wife-to-be, Theresa Susan Taylor was born on 18th August 1847 and they were married in Durban on 21st September 1865. Harry died just before the turn of the century on 27th December 1899 in Durban. Theresa followed him in 1937. There were five children of this marriage, namely Kate Theresa, born in Durban on 14th September 1866, Coral who was also born in Durban, on 5th June 1868, Robert William (*dates unknown*), Ivy, whose date of birth was 20th May (year unknown) and finally Fanny who was born in Durban on Monday 15th February 1875.

Kate Theresa married Mr Sydney Francis Gedge, the only son of Rev W W Gedge of Wells, England, on 19th April 1888 and some years later, after Sydney had probably died, married the Rev. H Towers on a date unknown. Coral married Lt.Col. Henry Richings Bousfield J.P. at 2 p.m. on 22nd April 1890 at St. Cyprian's Church, Durban, where the officiant was his own father, the Rt.Rev. Bishop Bousfield of Pretoria. Fanny Escombe married a Mr C Hall in Durban on Tuesday 21st January 1896. Unfortunately nothing further is known about Robert or Ivy except that the latter remained a spinster. It is thought that young Robert went to the gold fields in the Transvaal and lost his life whilst still quite young.

[References : Nevill diaries and microfilm copies of the "Natal Mercury" in the Don Africana Library, Durban.]

The change of name from "Neison" to "Nevill" caused quite a lot of teasing at the Observatory and elsewhere, but Edmund took this in his stride. What DID get him down was the continual background of inter-family intrigues and squabbles. This caused him deep grief at the end of 1888, so much so that the diary of 1889 no longer exists. It is highly likely that he destroyed it or it may have been destroyed by his wife after they were married in 1894 (refer to page 117) - possibly to bury some family skeletons



Mrs. Theresa Susan Escombe (wife of Harry Escombe). Taken in 1904 upon being presented at Court.

Source: Courtesy of Mrs. J. A. Smith of Natal and copied by the Local History Museum, Durban.



Miss Coral Escombe who married H. E. Bousfield in 1890.
Source: Courtesy of Mrs. J. A. Smith of Natal and copied by the Local
History Museum, Durban.



Miss Kate Theresa Escombe who married S. G. Gedge in 1888. After his death she married The Rev. H Tower in England in about 1898.

Source: Courtesy of Mrs. J. A. Smith of Natal and copied by the Local History Museum, Durban.



Sydney Francis Gedge (son of Rev. Gedge of Wells, England) who married Kate Escombe in 1888 in England.

Source: Courtesy of Mrs. J. A. Smith of Natal and copied by the Local History Museum, Durban.



Lt. Col. Henry Richings Bousfield J P who married Coral Escombe in 1890. Bousfield took over the legal practice of Harry Escombe and the firm became known as "Garlicke and Bousfield"

Source: Courtesy of Mrs. J. A. Smith of Natal and copied by the Local History Museum, Durban.



Miss Fanny Escombe (married J. C. A. Hall) with her first daughter Phyllis.
Photo taken in approximately 1903.

Source: Courtesy of Mrs. J. A. Smith of Natal and copied by the Local
History Museum, Durban.



Miss Ivy Escombe (1871 - 1937) with one of the Escombe's many dogs. She
never married.

Copied from the Escombe family family album and reproduced here with their
kind permission.

Now to the 1888 diary and its contents :

Wed. 11th Jan. Carpenter finished extensions to Observatory verandah. Finished letter to
Escombe *re*-Harbour entrance.

Wed. 25th Jan. Katie (*Escombe*) got her telegram from England - has decided to go. Poor girl. Still, she has herself chosen. I can do no more to help her - she will not help

herself. Mrs Escombe somewhat cold and reserved. Harry very reticent. I do not rescind for I have done what was right for him.

Fri. 27th Jan. Had talk with Mrs Escombe. She will do nothing - wants match to come off. Poor Katie - almost pitiful. Coral very dull and a little angry.

Sun. 29th Jan. Watched (*lunar*) eclipse last night. At Escombes. I am not to be left alone with Katie. Coral so-and-so. Mrs Escombe thoughtful but resolute. Poor Katie.

Sun. 12th Feb. To Escombes. Stainbank there. Coral reserved - kept away from me all day. Did her fernery with Katie. Had some talks with her. She tried to tell me she was happy now and broke down miserably when I told her I could see. Said good-bye for ever. Even poor Kit, she has paid part and now must pay all. So be it - Amen. (*From what was recorded by Nevill, it appears that he was deeply distressed at the possibility of Katie making the dreadful mistake of marrying Sydney Francis Gedge and was trying to make the family see some sense. Researches show that Katie eventually married twice, thus possibly confirming Edmund's fears for the girl. Whether the second marriage was the result of a death or a divorce is unknown.*)

Thu. 16th Feb. The Escombes - Mrs, Katie and Coral – left for England. Bought Ethel Platt new racquet.

Thu 23rd Feb. Got new pen book. Expenditure over five years = £ 4 390. In evening, talked with Grant. Ethel Platt stopped with Grants all evening. They very friendly now.

Mon 27th Feb. Fine morning. Worked at furnace. Put in new webs of Transit telescope. Adjusted wires. In afternoon - ditto. Fitted new carpet. In evening, pondered and smoked.

Wed. 7th Mar. Into town to Escombe's house. Ivy strange and reserved. Ethel Platt also strange and reserved. Went off with Ivy. Ethel Platt is up to something, I guess.

Fri. 9th Mar. Got letter of appointment as Government Chemist.

Tue. 20th Mar. Made new steps. Cleared site for Laboratory. Cement base for new room laid. Harbour Board report arrived.

Wed 21st Mar. Marked out ground plan for new Laboratory. Shot six foot green mamba (*snake*) in tree.

Tue. 27th Mar. Beautiful colour halo around the moon, about 2° radius. Red, Violet, Green, Yellow, Red. Went over observations of zenith stars with Grant.

Fri. 6th Apr. Ethel Platt heard from Coral from Madiera.

Thu 19th Apr. Got news(*of Katie's marriage*). Poor Kitty. (*Immediately following this entry, Nevill changed from writing in minuscule English to a form of script very similar to Arabic. This has totally defied translation and it would appear that entries made in this manner were of a decidedly personal nature.*)

Tue. 1st May Got letter from Mrs Escombe - wrote letter by return - address, 32 Cambridge Terrace, London. Appointment as Official Assayer is gazetted today.

Fri. 4th May Warned Ethel of Coral's engagement. (*This was to H R Bousfield and it seems that many things were taking place in England*)

Mon. 4th Jun. Took Coral's locket to Pardy with miniature photo. (*It was Coral's birthday the next day.*)

Fri. 8th Jun. Governor's Ball. Grants there except for "B". (*Beatrice*)

Sat 16th Jun. Took over new Laboratory from Jenkyn, the builder.

Fri. 22nd Jun. Mrs Escombe and Coral to return from England in *SS "Tartan"*, leaving on June 28th.

Thu. 28th Jun. Escombes left Southampton in *SS "Tartan"*. Mrs de Waal down to Observatory. Carpenter put up shelves. (*Nevill was counting the days until the Escombes returned safely to Durban.*)

Sun. 15th Jul. J Grant did analyses. Into town. Dined at Club. Old Middleton there. To Escombe. Saw Raws leaving. Down to back beach with Escombe, met Shepstone. Had talk with Escombe *re-Zulus*.

Thu. 19th Jul. *SS "Tartan"* reached Cape Town at 5 p.m.

Wed. 25th Jul. Mr Escombe's birthday. Worked on poisoning case. M Grant and J Grant helped. Took all morning and all afternoon - finished at 4 o'clock. Afterwards to tennis. In evening, observed a bit.

Thu. 26th Jul. Escombes landed at 11 a.m. in Durban. Saw Escombe in carriage - Coral would not look at me. Good!

Wed 1st Aug. Had quiet talk with Mrs Escombe *re-Coral*. Ethel Platt anxious to push things - as if this were possible now. Too late!

The relationship between Coral Escombe and Edmund Nevill waxed and waned over the next few months, causing untold hurt on both sides. Coral was frequently thoroughly difficult and Edmund being always the "perfect gentleman" - somewhat naturally as he wrote the diary entries! Whatever took place, Edmund's hopes that the engagement would be broken off were doomed to failure. Coral was only twenty years old and Edmund had reached the age of forty-one years. To some people, this would be of no concern, but to others, the age difference would have aroused of disapproval.

Rather than bore the reader with a detailed account of the changing fortunes of these two intensely human beings, let it just be mentioned that during the last month of 1888, Coral started to flirt with other people in front of Nevill, in particular, one Dr Tabertson who went off to the Transvaal gold fields. This type of behaviour gave Nevill many a sleepless night! Ivy Escombe, who cannot have been much more than a teenager, stirred up a certain amount of animosity whilst poor Mrs Escombe - who remained polite throughout - was entirely bewildered by all these goings-on. Harry Escombe, who had more than enough to contend with in his professional life, continued to distrust Edmund Nevill.

During this somewhat harrowing period, Nevill buried himself in his official work and also in gardening. He also commenced writing a book entitled "*Dione*" - finishing a number of chapters by the end of the year. No doubt this literary effort was triggered off by the traumas of his private life. It is unknown if the book ever saw the light of day as a published item. It might have given further insight into his character.

One or two more poignant entries appear, such as - "*Last year, it was Katie, now Coral*", "*One life has been wrecked, I DARE not risk another*" - referring to his determination not to put a foot wrong, and then on 31st December 1888, after a terrible Christmas Day with fights amongst his African staff at the Observatory, he closed the year with these words :

“Saw last year out. Congratulated Coral and wished her all happiness. She, a little down. Regret she is loyal to her absent (*fiancee*). Ivy a little distraught.

Mrs Escombe very kind, but knows it is too late. So, farewell to the worst year of my life. I have now given up all wealth, rank and love. And God knows if I am punished enough.....”

As has been mentioned, Katie’s marriage obviously did not last very long. Coral’s however, was far more successful, lasting many years. As Mrs Bousfield, she and her husband gave the name Bousfield to the large legal firm of “Garlick and Bousfield” in Durban, from whom some of the foregoing information was obtained.

Also, the 1889 diary apparently no longer exists and, apart from the personal matters which it would have contained, through its loss we are unable to tell anything of Nevill’s astronomical work at the time.

*

Chapter Six

THE YEAR 1890

As can be expected, the whole tone of the 1890 Diary differs somewhat from those of earlier years. Gone are all but passing mentions of the Escombe family and, in their place, we find a return to the original friendship with the Grants. Even this was not to be without problems as something went radically wrong while Nevill was in England - causing him to exclaim that "there appears to be no escaping the power of the curse". More of this will appear in the extracts which follow :

Wed. 1st Jan. Wet morning, dull afternoon, wet evening, Only Grant girls down. They did little work. Watched races. Put up knobs and handles in the Laboratory. At 3 p.m., Mabel Grant down to read instruments. Played some sets - arm very bad. (*He had apparently hurt his arm during the previous year.*) Wrote the report in re-the Time Ball.

Thu. 9th Jan. Jack and Mabel Grant down to put up shelves in the Laboratory. Showed Mabel how to calculate moisture (*relative humidity.*) And sent off year' estimates and Report.

Sat 11th Jan. Showed Alfred James of Cassel's, gold extraction room and over the Observatory. Showed Maidie, Nesser and Maudie some experiments.

Sat 18th Jan. (*After repairs to the unit*), made oxygen to fill gasometer. Told Mabel she might act as Grant's assistant whilst I am away. Fine night. Planned design of new house. (*He checked this and amended it once or twice during the next few months but it was still to be a few years before the house was finally erected.*)

Wed. 29th Jan. Did preparation for report and examined samples of dynamite. Arm bad.

Tue. 30th Jan. Girls down. Gave Di her cheque. Said goodbye to "Duchess" (?) Did Nautical Almanac stars - 91. Had some beer, to bed at 11, ill, worried and upset. When will it all end? Rubbed arm in embrocation.

Wed. 5th Feb. Put Pardy's new spectroscope right. Did crystal analyses. Did assay of gold in afternoon. Wrote up assay book. Promised to Mrs Russel a photo of Sybil. Did assays Nos. 321 to 325.

Tue. 14th Feb. Wrote up report on Charlestown water supply. (*Charlestown is on the border between Northern Natal and the Eastern Transvaal*). J Grant hurt his hand badly with saw.

Wed. 5th Mar. Got letter from Greenacre asking if I would like £3 000. Worked at Airy's Reductions. Saw Livingstone. Saw Collins and Methven.

Thu. 13th Mar. Workmen painted verandah. Apparatus for dynamite arrived. Worked hard at calculation of Ecliptic and inequalities of Latitude. Concert in Wesleyan Chapel.

Mon 17th Mar Mabel upset milk all over herself and had to change frocks. She very upset all evening. Annie Robinson worked for the first time. Mrs Stevens wrote saying that Connie could not do the work. Replied.

Sat 29th Mar. Into town to see about cabin Nos 107/8. Tested field glasses for Pardy. Dined with Birkell and Cox of Dragoons. Observed zenith stars.

Sun. 6th Apr. Went on board *SS "Athenean"*. Arranged things in cabin. Did not leave Durban until 2 p.m. Miss Nicholls is to share cabin with Mrs Randles.

There now follow many details concerning the vessel's voyage to England. On this occasion, Nevill was unwell for most of the way. The weather was not good and the seas rather rough and uncomfortable.

After calling at all the usual coastal ports - during which time he had made friends with Mrs Havelock (*Havelock Mines, Swaziland?*) and Mrs Annie Kilburn (*Kilburn Avenue, Durban?*), the vessel arrived in Cape Town on Monday 14th April at 2 p.m. and he lost no time in visiting the Royal Observatory and talking at length with Dr and Mrs David Gill. Leaving Cape Town at 10 a.m. on Thursday 17th April, the ship headed North for the land of Nevill's birth.

On Tuesday 22nd April, Nevill made an entry in his diary, writing "Coral" with a large ornate cross adjacent. Coral had in fact been married two days earlier.

After calling at Madeira on its way, the ship docked in Southampton on Monday 5th May and he stayed there for the night, leaving for London the following morning. Whilst in London, he used the Rawlins Hotel as his "headquarters".

Nevill immediately embarked upon travelling around London and further afield. On 9th May he attended the Royal Astronomical Society meeting, receiving a warm welcome. He read a paper at that meeting and was entertained to dinner. A few days later, he was introduced at the Society to one Mr Lecky - the author of a superb book called "Lecky's Wrinkles - a Guide to Practical Navigation", which was used extensively by seafarers for many decades well into the present century. He then spent a few days in Bournemouth and moved to Bath for a day, returning to London on 22nd May. On his return to London, a letter from Mrs Escombe was awaiting him. This informed him of Coral's marriage in Durban.

Nevill then visited the elder Escombes in Surbiton, Surrey, where he received a warm welcome. Miss Fanny Escombe also happened to be there on a visit to her grandparents. On Sunday 25th May, there appears what is the only reference to any members of Nevill's family :

"Met Lennie and Carl. She wild. Had tea. Wrote out proofs. Had chat with mater.

Then back to hotel. Wild and unsatisfactory.”

He returned once or twice but the meetings were never very satisfactory. Nevill then went off to Bristol and over the new Clifton suspension bridge, commenting favourable on the “beauty of the hawthorns”. He collected “some curious samples of rock formations”. After numerous games of tennis at Bristol, he returned to London and stayed at the Nelson Hotel.

On 19th June, he went to a meeting of the Chemical Society, which he had founded twenty years previously, but felt right “out of it” and was glad when the meeting was over. A few days later, he was again on the move - this time to Eastbourne, where he became friendly with a lot of children, for whom he bought copious amounts of chocolates and ice cream. This was probably the best thing he could have done, for it encouraged him to relax.

Whilst at Eastbourne, he did a fair amount of letter writing - mainly to the Grants and the Escombes. Once again we find reference to “Sybil” and it is thought that she could have been the daughter of the Russel family in Durban. He was asked to send a picture of the senior Mrs Escombe and her house back to Natal.

Nevill’s next sortie was to tour around the North of England. He visited York where he worked for some days in the Library researching his own ancestry. On 24th July he received a telegram which caused him to “run down to ‘Guise’ at once. Too late. Found all upset. What I all along feared. Only they were so sure. Telegraph to Bel, unfortunately on Saturday after all is done. So my warning came true - so unlike (*illegible*), not me, but mine. So be it. There is no struggling against the curse. Bah!!” Immediately above this entry is another large ornate cross and the word “Sybil”. Immediately below it is a further small entry in hieroglyphics - indicating another extremely private entry in the diary. Putting two and two together, it seems that Sybil had married Guise and had settled in England. Sybil had obviously been very ill and had suddenly taken a turn for the worse which had proved fatal. A photograph of Sybil hung in the Observatory in his room for a number of years afterwards.

Whatever happened in England during Nevill’s stay there, this latest event quite tore his life apart. For a period of over two weeks, the diary entries are completely illegible and what little can be deciphered does not make sense. It appears that he went up to York and made some special arrangements, writing letters to Escombe, Grant and Lloyd about them. What these arrangements were is a mystery. For example, there is an entry on 16th August reading “19/5/1877”, but this date does not have any special significance. By the end of August, things appear to have returned to normal with diary entries of at least eight lines per 20 mm of writing space. Between then and 17th September, Nevill spent watching numerous games of tennis and on the latter date, he booked cabin 178/9 with the Union Steamship Company for his return to Natal.

During his last few days in Britain, Nevill visited Troughton and Simms and ordered some instruments. On 24th September he dined with one "R Nevill" - probably a relation. On 8th October, he went to Surbiton and found Ivy Escombe visiting her grandparents with Katie and Henry Bousfield.

No comment was made about the latter two. He also paid several visits to Strawberry Hill but gave no details. After saying goodbye to numerous friends, he finally embarked on the *SS Mexican* on Friday 17th October and sailed for Durban.

It would appear that his visit to Britain had not been a happy one. What lay behind Nevill's odd excursions here and there, are lost in the mists of time. [Probably as well]

Of the voyage back to Durban there is little to recount. The vessel called at Lisbon and Madeira on the way and after a somewhat cold trip, arrived at Cape Town on Thursday 6th November. Following the usual calls at the coastal ports, she arrived in Durban at 2 p.m. on Thursday 13th November when he was met by Jack Grant. That evening, the whole of the Grant family went round to the Observatory to welcome him home.

Without delay, Nevill plunged back into his work on assays and other chemical matters. On 26th November he mentions having managed to get half of the "Nevillia" - as he called it - down on paper, referring to his researches into his family background.

He then appears to have had another bout of book-writing - this one being entitled "*Maud*" and by the beginning of December he had already reached Chapter sixteen. Although "*Maud*" was never published, a copy of the typewritten text exists in the Local History Museum in Durban.

Then just before the year closed, he hung a photograph of his friend Sybil up in his room, indicating that he had been extremely fond of her.

After spending a rather quiet and pleasant Christmas evening during which he gave Mrs Escombe a locket with a letter, the year closed with him having completed several more chapters of his new book. The diary continues through to January 7th 1891 with little further

to report other than a few fascinating references to his antecedents. The notes contain the following :

An inheritance from the estate of the Guise family amounting to £ 27 000 to one "John Broadley, E N Nevill and Melissa (or Merissa) Nevill". Then further on "Thomas III, son of the 1st Earl of Westmoreland - Nevills of Weardale in 1340 AD" and finally :

"Lady Nevill *nee* Maud Beckett"

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Chapter Seven

THE YEAR 1891

The year opens with the normal entries (with several gaps) and everything appeared to be running smoothly. The first entry of note is dated 3rd February as follows :

Tue. 3rd Feb In afternoon, coal samples came up from Railway Department. Also sample of Dannhauser water. (*Dannhauser is a smallish coal mining town in the Natal Midlands*). Wrote testimony for Miss Chard under date of January 31st. (*Miss Chard left his employment at this time.*)

Mon. 9th Feb. Pulled down old fence. Put down foundations for trellis for the granadilla (*a tropical vine fruit*). Went for wire for the vine.

Sun. 22nd Feb. Worked in Laboratory with Mabel Grant all morning on solutions. Had dinner at Club. Up by 4 p.m. tram. Mabel Grant down to read instruments. Worked at lunar readings. Off to Dr Bartwell's. Not well. (*At this stage, he had conducted no less than 360 assays of all different types*).

Sun. 1st Mar. Dull day. Moved "little house" to new site. (*The "little house" must have been some form of pit latrine.*) MG did instruments. All Grant girls down for evening. Read them parts of "Maud". Saw them back at 10.20 p.m. (*The following day records the fact that the builder Jenkyns had died.*)

Wed. 4th Mar. Made out sketch for Magnetic House. Advanced Tom (*one of his African employees*) £5 to buy cows. MG not bright - toothache.

Sat 14th Mar. Very rainy day. 4½ inches by 9 a.m. (*A total of 8 inches or 204 mm fell in 24 hours!*)

Fri. 20th Mar. Fine day. Carpenter at work. Accepted tender for Magnetic House. Amount is £39.9/-. Grant off into town to see about journey to Port Elizabeth for tennis tournament. (*Mabel and Grant had both been invited to go, but he backed out the very next day - 'too nervous' - and Mabel was most upset at this turn of events as she was at that time, Natal Lady Champion.*)

Tue. 24th Mar. Worked at Lunar reductions. Discovered theft of things. Not a good day. Mabel round to tell me she was going to Port Elizabeth to play. (*She actually left on Thursday 26th March.*)

Fri. 27th Mar. (Good Friday). Up to tennis at 3.45 p.m. Beatrice Grant and young Colam arrived and played singles until dusk. (*The Colam family descendants still lived in Natal in 1980 and are directly descended from Maud Grant.*)

Tue. 31st Mar. Heard Mabel had won championships in Port Elizabeth. Found white ants eating the carpet. (*A later telegram advised that Mabel had won the singles and the doubles. She returned to Durban on 14th April on the "Tyrian" and on her return, that evening, came round to the Observatory to see Nevill and recount her experiences, despite not feeling well.*)

Mon 20th Apr. Magnetic house finished. Chatted to Dr Hill of Currie Line who came up with Andrew. (*Currie?*)

Thu 23rd. Apr. L Butcher's wedding day at Sydenham. Played tennis with W Greenacre and Rennie.

Mon. 4th May Weighed ashes from samples of crushed and powdered coal. The Bishop of Bloemfontein called about determining altitude and sent his aneroid barometer up for adjustments. Grant paid me for cigarettes at eight pence per box.

Fri 22nd May. Mrs Emmanuel Hawe {"Cherie Amie"} called to see Mabel. I sent her away - then long explanation with Mabel Grant. She cares for him (*Hawe Junior*) and would marry him if it were not for this obstacle (?) and his family. I have promised to help if I can. Pretty state of affairs! After tennis, Mabel and Heine (*Hawe*) down. Mabel Grant only too anxious that it can be - and the other poor soul all out in the cold. Good. End of things with a vengeance. Pax Vobiscum. She crying and upset..... (*Yet more upsets! An uneasy peace then followed .*)

Mon 15th Jun. The Escombes and Raws left in *SS "Moore"*. Girls down. Burned sulphur dioxide with Mabel's help. Unsatisfactory results. Sent in Treasury account. (*The mistakes were rectified the following day and he also received the new micrometer for the Transit telescope on the same day.*)

Sun. 21st Jun. Got letter with news of Ivy Dene. (*Another large ornate cross embellishes this entry but no explanation is given.*)

The month of July saw several small matters taking place. There was a major tennis tournament in Pietermaritzburg during which Mabel and Jack Grant took part. Mabel wrote to Nevill from there on several occasions. Nevill complained bitterly to Mr P Cato about the bad condition of the driveway into the Observatory grounds. Coal samples came in thick and fast and had to be analysed as soon as possible. Nevill then tried his hand at cooking, making a successful job of a large ham! He had just about completed the Tidal Reductions for the previous five years and then showed a rather pleasant sense of humour by stating something which must have driven Mabel Grant to distraction. Here it is :

Wed. 22nd Jul. Mabel Grant down to chat. Hindered me all evening in trying to learn (*about*) electricity. Shocking! (*He tested her knowledge the next day and she failed miserably. He was however to pay dearly for his prank, for he fell violently ill immediately afterwards and had to submit to receiving large doses of some vile medicine at her hands!*)

Sun. 22nd Jul. Mabel round to say goodbye. She off to Johannesburg to the Championships. (*She left with Jack Grant at 11 a.m. the next day.*)

By mid-August, Nevill's assays had reached the 406 mark and this,, together with the fact that he was doing chemical analysis No 398, will indicate the amount of work which he had on his hands. He also received a further poisoning case - something which he analysed very reluctantly - and his book "*Maud*" was coming along slowly at the same time. Despite all this, he found time for numerous sets of tennis with other members of the Grant family and also Messrs A Edmund, J Beningfield and others of the "old guard".

Mabel, it is learned, did well in Johannesburg and returned on :

Sat 22nd Aug. Beatrice away to meet Mabel who returned from Johannesburg. Both came round with her prizes. Gave her a short chain and my locket to put on her watch.

Thu 27th Aug. (*Nevill's birthday*) Mabel round with some flowers and a card for my birthday - only token gifts.

Tue. 1st Sep. Put new bar magnets into Magnetic Transit. Observed collimator stars.

Mon 21st Sep. Drafted chemicals report. Girls read "*Maud*". Mabel reduced stars until 10.35 p.m. Saw her home. Stray cat turned up - gave her some milk. She went to sleep on the verandah.

Tue. 6th Oct. Burned my hand badly. Could do nothing. Lay down all afternoon. (*This accident - probably caused by one of the assay furnaces - put him out of action for a whole week.*)

Sun. 18th Oct. Lamp in Observatory caught fire. Put it out.

Wed. 21st Oct. Sir Charles Mitchell up. Lady Lock and others also. Reception at Town Hall.

Sun. 25th Oct. Dined with Mr Justice Lawrence. To Escombes, chat with him about Trades Union. (Sic.)

Fri. 30th Oct. Cases of rain gauges up. Also books. Mabel Grant hurt her finger badly cleaning gun. Did it up for her. Saw her home early.

Thu 19th Nov. Fitted up ice box in old curio box of mine. Looked around and destroyed old letters - 1882 to 1886 which I had forgotten were there. *(How many researchers wish that people would NOT destroy these letters! This particular set could have been most useful)*

Tue. 24th Dec. Saw Mabel round at the Grants. Stopped up to see Christmas in. Ah, me. What a Christmas! A change to the old times - probably my last Christmas..... *(He spent all Christmas day carrying out analyses.)*

Once again, the year closed on a very quiet note with very little happening on either the private or the "official" side. It had been a rather unsatisfactory year for him - there were numerous entries concerning his health, which was decidedly not good. This must have had an effect on his general level of efficiency.

The "Memoranda" section at the end of the diary list a few important dates - most of which have already been referred to. It will also be seen that the visits to the Escombe family had all but ceased and that any such visits that he made were for official purposes. [This again, was a great pity as we would otherwise have been able to learn a great deal more about this extremely important Natal family].

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Chapter Eight

THE YEAR 1892

The year 1892 opened in a manner very similar to 1891 with numerous coal samples arriving for urgent analysis - indicating the rapid growth of coal mining in the northern parts of the Natal Midlands. By mid-January, Nevill had conducted a total of 420 analyses from the day that he had started this work on an official basis. Then, suddenly, there was a series of upsets concerning the Grant family, causing Mabel Grant to arrive at the Observatory either extremely distraught or even in tears. No details are given as to the cause of these upsets but whatever it was, matters soon settled down again after a few days.

By the middle of February, Nevill had carried out a further twenty-five urgent analyses and this had caused Mabel Grant to temporarily act over all his astronomical work. She, it seems, was able to conduct this work without difficulty. The diary continues at this point :

Sun. 14th Feb. Into town - saw Governor. Went over the new tram bridge. Observed. Mabel, Maudie and Fred down. Showed them some stars.

Sat 20th Feb. Col. Dartnell and Captain Nicholls round with quartz samples.

Fri. 11th Mar. Fox (*the carpenter*) brought up new observing ladder and put up vane on anemometer box.

Mon 21st Mar. Dull morning, fine afternoon. Worked at assay No 457a - coal analysis all morning and afternoon. Mabel helped. Then cleaned up Laboratory.

Wed 30th Mar Fitted up new black bulb thermometer. Observed sun. Fox round to fit new electric lamps. New stone put in collimator stand. Fitted up new dark wedge for Magnetic instrument. (*Nevill commented later that the new lights worked well and that he had also wired up the Grubb Equatorial telescope for electricity.*)

Mon 11th Apr. Mabel Grant left for Port Elizabeth in the "**Hawarden Castle**". (A telegram received a few days later advised that she had won the tennis doubles. A further wire on 20th April stated that she had won the Championships. She returned to Durban on 28th April, very pleased with herself. O that evening Nevill observed a comet "with a bright nucleus and a faint tail".)

Wed 18th May Fine cold day. Did plumbago assay No 468. Got quartzite samples. Nicholls up to see me. Talked over scale of fees. MG into town to see Escombe.

Thu. 26th May Coleman up to see me about fault in telegraph system. Discovered fault. (It had been giving trouble for some days.) Put up new battery leads. In afternoon,

finished new apparatus for telegraph. Got new galvanometer from Woodford and Lawson.

Tue. 31st May Saw Baldan (?) and arranged to judge at Art Exhibition. Saw Mabel home - party at their home.

Fri. 3rd Jun. Did Zenith distance stars. Smashed racquet - got very angry because I could not play. MG down - lent her sapphire stud. Met Maudie and Maidie, brought them down to Observatory. Showed them stars and the moon.

Fri. 8th Jul. Played singles against MG : 1 - 6, 6 - 4. She played well, then MG vs. Heine (he was still a favourite!) and at last set, he tossed the game away and she got angry. Dance that night - she went. (The following day, Nevill remarked that he had been working hard at stars and she had returned from the dance very upset.)

Wed. 20th Jul. Lady Mitchell down to see Observatory. Reduced Mars stars. Transplanted roses. Lost Mars in the morning. (Reducing the Mars observations kept him busy for a number of days.)

Sat. 3rd Sep. James Bromwich up to say goodbye - he off to Cambridge with a scholarship. Crushed quartz sample No 475. Did Mars stars up to date.

Wed 12th Oct. Worked at Memoirs in morning. Mabel had lunch with me. Mrs Grant down to ask me to lend her £850 to pay interest on mortgage. Said no and advised her to go to Greenacre and Escombe. She asked me to say nothing about her visit to me (*With apologies to the remaining members of the Grant family*), *this item affected the relationship between Nevill and the Grants at a later stage.*)

Sat. 22nd Sep. Horse fell over the fence. Knocked the place about a bit.

Mon 21st Nov MG rummaging through boxes and albums. Got very upset because I would not let her look through my sketch album and then tore it up because she was angry. Upset all day. (*The reader can imagine the furore that this caused!*)

Tue. 6th Dec. Worked at Memoirs (*Astronomical readings etc.*) Very abnormal barometer fluctuations. Mg's dress came from Liberty's.

Thu. 8th Dec. Received samples Nos 499 and 500 for assaying.

Mon 26th Dec. Gave Mabel gold studs and things. (*Nevill had not seen her on Christmas Day.*)

The year ended more or less as it had started. Virtually every day during the final three months, Nevill had been hard at work updating what he called his "Memoirs". A fair amount of astronomical work had been carried out, but from the tone of his diary entries, he was not satisfied with his achievements during the year.

Again, he was frequently ill and somewhat "down in the dumps" and he could - and often did - look back on happier and more satisfying times. The only entries at the back of the diary are a few names and addresses. Most of these have already been referred to.

Mrs Grant's request for a loan had its repercussions soon after the start of 1893. It appears that she was unable to raise the money elsewhere and this had the inevitable result. A forced sale of the property took place within days. This started a series of events which directly affected the growing close relationship between Nevill and Mabel Grant.

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Chapter Nine

THE YEAR 1893

Fri. 13th Jan. Mabel very upset about the sale of the house in Grant's Grove.

Sat 14th Jan. Occultation of Mars. Had long chat with Mabel about the family wishes. Rental firm stopping. *(The is no date given for the vacating of the Grant house, but it appears that this took place within a week. Mabel moved to a friend's house and lodged there.)*

Sat 4th Feb. Played tennis. MG vs., Cockerell, 1 - 6 ! I will not play for a month after this exhibition! (*Nevill was as good as his word for he did not use his tennis racquet for a full four weeks after that!*)

Thu. 9th Mar. Turned out furniture to kill cockroaches. Met MG in town, had ices. Ordered purchase of £200 - 3½% Natal Stock from London.

Mon 13th Mar Started poisoning case. Bricklayers at work on new cellar.

Thu 23rd Mar. Gave MG her cheques. She off to town to book passage to Port Elizabeth.

Mon 27th Mar MG, Heine, Edmund and Cockerell off to P.E. in “**Grantully {Castle}**”. Maidie and Nessa went over the bar with them. Watched them through telescope. (*A small point here. Durban Harbour was still not open to large vessels. These had to stay outside in the Bay and goods and passengers had to reach the ships by small tugs or boats, hence the phrase “going over the bar” - this being the sand ‘spit’ across the harbour entrance.*)

Wed. 5th Apr. Got telegram to say MG had won doubles and Edmund won championship.

Sat. 8th Apr. Worked at analyses. Read letter from MG to her people. Not over well - rather sick, from poisoning case ? (*Heine and Mabel returned to Durban on 10th April on the S S “Syrian”.*)

Tue 18th Apr. Left Durban by train. MG and I had carriage to self. Lunch at Botha’s Hill. Reached Pietermaritzburg at 3.30 p.m. At Imperial (*Hotel*), met Greenacre, Benington and Colepepper. (*Nevill went to Ladysmith the following day as he had been subpoenaed to appear in court over another case of poisoning.*)

Wed 26th Apr. (*After leaving Ladysmith on 24th., with the case having been cancelled, Nevill returned to Durban with Mabel, picking her up at Pietermaritzburg on the way.*)

Thu. 27th Apr. Moved things into new room. Unpacked collimator from Troughton and Simms. Paid £75 into Bank. MG moved her things to Mrs Green's.

Sun. 7th May Altered pendulum of Sidereal clock.

Thu. 11th May Canvasser up to get me to sign local veto petition. Left pocket book at Dickens and Fisher - got it back.

Thu. 18th May New dentures. MG off to Dog Show. MG and Heine observed - got one star.

Sun. 28th May MG off to Pietermaritzburg to championships.

Wed 31st May Made new lamp. Heard MG had won championships. (*Mabel returned the following day.*)

Mon. 5th Jun. Fine hot day. Did assay No 519.

Tue. 13th Jun. Did assays. Made new door to collimator. MG into town early to see dentist. Fred Grant down to learn to observe. Mabel's face very sore.

Sat. 24th Jun. MG did variation of compass with Ramsay Collins. 500 cigarettes from Zanzibar sent by Collinson.

Fri. 7th Jul. Made some soup. Read magnetic instrument. MG could not play tennis after dance at Town Hall (*the previous evening*). Took off Maud's ring and placed it on another finger.

Wed. 12th Jul. Measured ground for new kitchen and made rough plan.

Fri. 21st Jul. Took draw-tube of telescope to Pardy's for alteration. Got poisoning case from Colonial Veterinary Surgeon.

Tue. 25th Jul. Did poisoning case. Into town with MG, saw Mrs Escombe and Coral - had short talk. *(One of the very few mentions of Coral Bousfield in these pages.)*

Wed 30th Aug Up to tennis - could not play a stroke all day. Sent wedding present off to Heine. *(There is no mention as to whom Heine finally married.)*

Sat. 2nd Sep. Rained very heavy at night. Worked at assay No 532. In afternoon, read in kitchen - very cold. *(The kitchen had been completed for about a fortnight and was the scene of some amazing culinary concoctions.)*

Thu. 14th Sep. Got thermometer from Negretti and Zambra. Roast leg of mutton. Lost temper over cooking - sorry. Up to tennis, had glasses broken by ball. All went wrong. *(According to various notes, Nevill's culinary efforts now included : pancakes, cakes, biscuits and all sorts of other items.)*

Fri. 29th Sep. In morning made a pie. Girls stopped to lunch. Made biscuits afterwards. In evening, MG off to concert - Dragoon band.

Thu. 5th Oct. Paislow and Thompson of "Observer" down. Talked and showed them round until 10 p.m.

Sat. 4th Nov. MG off over the bar to see the *SS "Dunottar {Castle}"*.

Thu 23rd Nov. Greenacre's wedding. *(This must have been one of the Greenacre children but there is no mention of a name.)*

Wed. 6th Dec. MG left for Johannesburg tennis championships.

Thu. 14th Dec. Into town. Saw Pardy about rain gauges etc. Prices 42/- per rain gauge, 25/- per thermometer - all less 5% discount.

Tue. 19th Dec. Heard that MG had won singles and doubles in championships. (*Mabel returned to Durban on Saturday 30th December at 9.00 a.m. whilst Nevill had had a very dull Christmas indeed.*)

Edmund Nevill then also had a very quiet New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. As the new diaries for 1894 had not then arrived from overseas, he continued with the 1893 entries until the middle of February 1894.

The year 1894 was to prove a momentous one in Nevill's life, as shall be seen.

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Chapter Ten

THE YEAR 1894

We now come to the next diary. The year started off pleasantly enough but Nevill's routine was rudely shattered by a series of talks with Mabel Grant about their private relationships. The reader will be spared the details, but suffice to say that Mabel was *still*, after all this time, not certain about her own future. She had left her home and was staying with friends. She was being influenced by them and by her tennis partners. Some had tried to stir up trouble and things came to a rather ugly head during the period from 2nd January until the last entry which was six days later. During those few days, Nevill was actually challenged by Mabel about their future and he asked her to "wait awhile" before giving his final decision. It must be remembered that at that stage, Nevill was forty-six years of age and Mabel was only twenty-four - quite a gap. Furthermore, as mentioned in the relevant period in Book One, Nevill's income was "dicey" to say the least, and his position as Astronomer to the Government of the Colony no longer carried the position of authority that had been the case several years earlier.

When the new diary finally arrived, Nevill made no entries until 28th February. His opening remarks are as follows : "MG went back to her old ways and hopes, and I return to the old position. No!" - thus indicating that there had been further upsets. Thereafter, as the daily entries are filled with extremely personal matters, rather than listing them in chronological order, they are dealt with on a 'narrative' basis.

The capitulation of these two highly individualistic people to the state of Holy Matrimony was over-run with problems. Mabel was still feeling rather fond of another friend of hers - one "W.F." - and was warned on several occasions not to put her faith in a "shadow". This caused several bouts of raised blood pressure and was followed by another of those "definite" breaks which never seemed to last. The two of them went their separate ways on 8th March and a few days later, the Grant family went off in the *SS "Spartan"* for a few weeks' break. Things returned to a kind of limbo at the Observatory and when the family returned to Durban on 7th April, Nevill penned a cryptic note to the effect, "Mabel Engaged!"

This engagement did not last very long as, on her return, Mabel started to vacillate and the engagement was broken off. Finally, on Thursday 26th April 1894, Mabel and Edmund became betrothed and at long, long last, Nevill looked forward to some peace of mind.

This was not to be however as the Grant parents were utterly horrified. They immediately stopped their offspring from going near the Observatory and Mabel herself came into her share of troubles. She desperately tried to patch things up with her family but they were adamant and from that moment onwards, she was treated as an outcast. In defiance, Mabel retaliated on 5th May by openly wearing her engagement ring and this proved to be the final straw. From that moment onwards, the Grant seniors ignored her completely.

In the meantime and during the next few weeks, there was understandably feverish activity in the small range of buildings at the Observatory. Firstly, a new bath arrived on 25th May, carpets were laid down in the new room, cupboards were installed and on 26th May, Nevill signed transfers and sent off Deeds, preparing his Deed of Renunciation for signature. This was signed on Tuesday 29th May and refers to his inheritance which - from what the family informed us - fell away if he became married. This of course, upset Mabel and it took Nevill quite a while to calm her down.



Miss Mabel Grant as a young lady. The picture was probably taken before her marriage to Edmund Nevill.

Courtesy: Local History Museum, Durban.



Mr Edmund Nevill as a young man.
Copied from various archives

When the curtains had been put up and the finishing touches carried out, their home under the shadow of the Grubb 8" telescope and the Transit Room was ready for occupation. Edmund Nevill Nevill and Mabel Grant were at last to be married and the diary entry for the wedding reads :

Monday, 4th June 1894 : Mabel and I married at St. Cyprian's Church. Mrs Escombe, Frank Churchill and Green there. Back to Observatory, work as usual. In afternoon, lay down on tennis court. Tea. Work in evening. M thoroughly happy and contented. M.Nevill now ! And for ever! Curious Very hot, close night but very clear. M supremely content.

The whole of this entry was hand written into a space measuring 50 mm by 23 mm! Rather delightfully, the next item records that "*Mabel has to pinch herself every now and again to be sure she is married. Began milk with Mr Doggett*". What a human touch.....

From that moment onwards, the tone of the diary changes from that of a mature man to that of a small boy who was completely excited. Mrs Escombe paid an early visit to the couple, together with Coral and this caused some slight misgivings, but all was well. In fact, Coral started to visit regularly and was always made very welcome.

Mabel fared quite unsuccessfully with her own family when she tried to rescue some of her personal belongings and her sheet music. These were debarred her and she was terribly and understandably upset about this. She was even refused permission to take her own sewing machine! The upshot of this was that she suggested to Edmund that he resign and they both go to Britain. He entered "*She proposes more than she realises.....*"

A typical daily entry was one on Friday 15th June when he wrote : "*Fine day, worked at fittings. Croydon came to compare his chronometer. Dr Reid called to give me his Report on poisoning case. M went down to gardens to flirt with Mr Wood and to buy ferns. Lay down for sleep. Then worked at electrical fittings. Collinson came to say goodbye. He very down and ill. He leaves next Saturday on the S S "Ifafa". Then Mrs Green came and had tea. Looked at photos. In evening, worked, sent off Report. Wrote to Ballance. Was teased by a pussy cat and told by my wife that I was an horrid atrocity. Couldn't appease her even by sweets. Paid Landsell £52.9.11d.*"

Another sign of a “happy small boy” made its appearance on 22nd June when he wrote “*I feel a want of exercise. Had bath for feet. ‘Toetally’ disabled. Won’t M blow me up when she sees this!*”, and a further one dated Wednesday 27th June when he recorded the following scene - straight from the “Cordon Bleu” section of the household : “*M made a CAKE, such a lovely one but it disagreed with the oven and then formed a strong and unauthorised attachment to the tin, which rendered its parting.*” Further entries of a similar prankish nature appear in the next few pages.

A piano arrived on 10th July and after that, things settled down to what appears to have been an almost idyllic existence for both of them. We now turn to the occasional entries for the rest of the year :

Sat. 18th Aug. Sent some flowers and letter to Mrs Escombe on her birthday.

Wed 29th Aug Mabel not well - it could be as I supposed. (*This hints at the possibility that a “small Nevill” could be on the way.*)

Fri. 14th Sep. Taken ill at 11 a.m. and very bad until after one. M a true wife. Wrote to Hammond about appointment as assistant for three months.

Fri. 28th Sep. Prepared telescope for eclipse observations. Finished Chemist’s Report. Got out some stamps for Frank Churchill. Up early (*next morning*) for the eclipse. Dull & overcast. (*This was somewhat typical of Durban weather!*)

Mon. 1st Oct. Hammond came to work. Showed him round and let Pay (*his Assistant Chemist*) teach him.

Sat. 6th Oct. The storm at 1 p.m. in the afternoon was a true cyclone. Very bad in Dundee and also severe in Johannesburg. Barometer fell 2/10ths inch almost instantaneously and reversed almost as sharply. (*Mabel hated these violent storms and used them as an excuse to almost “squeeze Edmund to death” as he put it!*)

Tue. 15th Nov Went to meet Mabel who came back by 2.47 train from Verulam. (*This is a small town along the North Coast of Natal. Mabel had been visiting friends of theirs, the Isabels, for a rest after finding that her "condition" was not being improved by playing at tennis!*).

Fri. 21st Dec. Booked passage on *SS "Athenean"*. Mabel rejoiced.

Tue. 25th Dec. First Christmas. Very happy, thanks to wife. Up to Russells for the evening.

Mon 31st Dec. Sat up and saw in the New Year. First New Year for wife and I.

The only remaining entries at the back of the diary consist of a full length shopping list of the items which had had to be purchased about the time of their wedding. Unfortunately no prices were recorded. [These would have been interesting as a comparison with current prices.]

So, Mr and Mrs Edmund Nevill ended their first few months of married life together and looked forward to the future with plenty of confidence. Despite the critics - and there were quite a few - this was a marriage which was destined to confound them and it certainly outlasted virtually every one of their original friends.

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Chapter Eleven

THE YEAR 1895

This year's diary commences only on 31st March 1895, the day that the couple arrived by ship at Portsmouth, England. Presumably they had sailed as from Durban as arranged on the "*Athenean*" and this would have been in the second week of February. Because of the gap in the entries from the start of the year, we are denied the story of the voyage from Natal to England.

The vessel tied up at Southampton at 9.p.m. on 31st March and most of the passengers disembarked. The Nevills elected to remain on board until the following morning and then decided to stay in Southampton for the day, booking in at the Radley Hotel for that night. They then went to London on the following day and made the Nelson Hotel their headquarters before going on the expected tour of sightseeing.

Of course, Mabel had never visited Britain before and this was a highly exciting experience for her, even if by then she was in an advanced state of pregnancy. After a few days of visiting places all over London, they headed for the South Coast and arrived at Bournemouth where they tried unsuccessfully to book in at the Imperial Hotel. They then tried the Highcliffe Hotel and spent a night there. After a great deal of haranguing, they finally managed to find accommodation at their first choice, the Imperial. This manoeuvring did not exactly amuse Mabel who by then had become somewhat footsore and weary.

A Dr Gardiner was then engaged to look after Mabel's general condition and a Nurse Kellner was placed on stand-by. On Tuesday 16th April, Nevill moved into a spare room and the nurse took over the night shift. On Monday 22nd April, Mabel had a false alarm and was "mightily upset when her child was not born there and then". This resulted in a Dr Embleton being called in as a Consultant and finally at exactly twelve noon on Wednesday 24th April 1895, little Miss Maud Sybil Helen Nevill was brought into the world at the Hotel.

Edmund was of course, in his seventh heaven and spent the next few days lavishing little gifts on his "clever wifie". He got rid of some excess exuberance by building sand castles and sand boats on the beach. (*This researcher did exactly the same thing when his son was born!*)

When she had settled down a bit, Mabel wrote a pile of letters to the Escombes, the Isabells, the Greens and the Mackenzies in Natal, cheerfully enjoying all the attention that she was getting.

Four days after the birth of his first daughter, having spent a lot of time at his wife's bedside, Edmund Nevill took the train to London where he had a lot of business to attend to. He returned to Bournemouth on Friday 3rd May, gave Mabel a bracelet and helped her out of bed

for the first time. Shortly thereafter, he took her for short walks with a bath chair and “the little one” went along as well. Tiny Maud proved to be “slightly difficult”, being noisy at times and also being slightly naughty - such is the way of parents with their firstborn!

On 20th May, the Doctor called for the last time and the Nevills gave their Nurse notice of their imminent departure from Bournemouth. The following day, the three of them went to Eastbourne. It was not long before Mabel started to tone herself up again. To assist this she started playing some easy games of tennis. She played a championship at Hull in mid-June but lost every game. Unsurprisingly was greatly upset at this.

On 24th June, they left Hull and travelled to Bristol where her tennis form improved immensely. From there, they visited Cardiff via the Severn tunnel and after a short tour of the southern region of Wales, returned to London. On Friday 12th July, Edmund Nevill provisionally booked a cabin aboard the *SS “Moor”* with the Union Steamship Company but it was to be some weeks before they set sail from Southampton.

On Saturday 10th August, whilst they were visiting the City of York, the Dean of York Minster, Dr Percy-Curt, christened baby Maud. The family then made a general tour around the North of England returning once more to London in mid-August, where he purchased tickets for cabins 5 to 8 on the *“Moor”*. The last three weeks in London were spent doing a final round of visits and making last minute purchases. One of these was a diamond star which was destined to be a Christmas present for Mabel.

On Saturday 14th September, the family boarded their ship in Southampton and at 4 p.m. that day, the vessel set sail for South Africa. They took a nurse along with them and one of the diary entries records the following item “*Cabin for Nurse and Babs {Maud} £30.9.0d plus £2.17.9d, totalling £33.6.9d*”. [So at least we know how much the fare cost for one adult and one child from Southampton to Durban in 1895].

The voyage was apparently a pleasant one, only marred by the unfortunate death of the Chief Steward whilst far out at sea. The propeller vibrated a lot and gave them some trouble but eventually on 2nd October the vessel docked in Cape Town harbour. Her departure for coastal ports was delayed by 24 hours owing to high winds which followed them all the way up the coast. Durban was finally reached on 12th October and the Nevills disembarked at 2 p.m. They were met by Hammond and a Mrs Dickson who helped them book in at the Royal Hotel for a few days.

Those essential few days were spent by Nevill in preparing the rooms at the Observatory for their newest and smallest human occupant and by the end of October, the family moved in. Another new room was constructed and all was finished by the end of November.

Now to return to the diaries themselves for the final few entries of note for the year :

Wed. 6th Nov. Lansdell up to do some work. Worked at poisoning case. Worked at Report for Commission of Agriculture. Mr Wilkinson of Ottawa called about an analysis.

Sat. 9th Nov. Edith Isabel came round to lunch. Great swarms of locusts (*on the tennis courts*) from 2 p.m. until 3 p.m.

Fri. 15th Nov. Met Percy Whitehead and went with him to meet Mabel. Round to the Galloways to see the baby. (*Mabel had gone to live out for a few days during the building operations of the additional room.*)

Mon 18th Nov Miss Rich of Tongaat called and had lunch with us. Sent off Reports.

Thu. 21st Nov. Mabel left with Mrs Galloway and came down to Observatory with baby. Bad night with baby.

Tue. 26th Nov. Mabel and Pay (*his Assistant*) observed. (*Mabel was now back to her official "duties" as Assistant Astronomer.*)

Wed. 4th Dec. Sent off Reports on new Government Laboratory.

Mon 16th Dec. Mabel engaged new native girl - Lizzie. (*Lizzy arrived two days later and within hours had run away. She was immediately replaced by one called Katie.*)

Wed 25th Dec. (Christmas Day) Fine hot day. Worked at papers. Up to tennis. Large attendance. Wind spoiled play. Dinner in evening. Gave Mabel her diamond star. Very successful day.

Tue. 31st Dec. News came through - Government Laboratory to be established. Hellett came to see us in afternoon. Tea. Worked late. Saw in New Year - the end of a most eventful year.

*

Chapter Twelve

THE YEAR 1896

This year started off quietly and the first entry in the diary does not appear until a few days after the start. Obviously, the New Year had been celebrated quietly under the large telescope or in some room nearby.

Mon. 6th Jan. Lansdell came to start chronograph room. (*Within five days, the roof was on and the shell of the room was completed within six days. However on measurements taken the room was found to be some 14 inches short - probably a case of "more haste, less speed"?*)

Fri. 17th Jan. Men finished interior of chronograph room.

Sun 19th Jan. Weighed Maud : 21 lbs. 2 ounces nett (!) And 22 lbs. 6 oz. with clothes.

Tue. 21st Jan. Got subpoena from Supreme Court. Mabel off to Fan Escombe's wedding.

Thu. 23rd Jan. Unpacked new chronograph and put it into new case. *(This instrument is a moving tape device, used to make a precise record of the time of an event. It was finally operating on 1st February.)*

Mon. 3rd Feb. Inez Isabel came to stay the night. Up to P.M.B. by 5.15 train.

Thu. 6th Feb. Up early. To Supreme Court. Case broken down on grounds of want of proof of identity. Caught 4.40 p.m. train back. Found tennis courts flooded. Storm put out the lights.

Mon 17th Feb. Worked at Wheatstone Bridge. Mabel out calling with Mrs Rennie.

Fri. 28th Feb. Clouded over in evening. Eclipse of moon. Cloudy. Sent micrometer "A" to Troughton and Simms. *(Once again, Durban's weather had let him down.)*

Sun. 8th Mar. Babs had fall off bed. Frightened Mabel. Too windy to observe.

Mon 16th Mar Weighed Babs. 24 lbs. 4 ounces. Length 30 inches.

Wed 25th Mar Cut down trees and fence in the afternoon. Sent off list of apparatus required for the Government Laboratory. *(He then spent time working on the design for the Laboratory.)*

Fri. 3rd Apr. Sergeant Bousfield came with case for analysis. (*This was Coral's brother-in-law who was destined to become a Colonel.*)

Fri. 24th Apr. Babs. First birthday. Gave her a dolly. Had birthday pudding.

Tue. 19th May Took down and cleaned telescope. Frank Churchill called about Aneroid Barometer which he left. (*The cleaning of the large telescope kept Nevill busy for about a fortnight.*)

Thu. 28th May Bought brass kettle and stand for Ethel Platt's wedding.

Wed. 3rd Jun. Mabel off to see Lily Platt married. Went with Amy Butcher.

From this date onwards until at least August, there was a round of purely routine work, whilst Mabel did a large amount of social visiting. Both she and her daughter Maud had several bouts of illness which caused Nevill some anxiety. At the end of July, Blanche Isabel - of the 1884 diary - re-appeared and made several social visits to the Nevills.

Thu 20th Aug. Cases of apparatus arrived for new Laboratory.

Thu 27th Aug. Fine day. Began assay of quartz with Pay. Mabel off into town. Birthday dinner in evening. Worked.

Tue. 27th Oct. Worked at and finished analysis No 819. Lansdell began new room.

Fri. 20th Nov. Bricklayers began brick walls of Laboratory.

Fri. 25th Dec. (Christmas Day) Dull chilly day. At Observatory all day. Gave Babs and mother their presents. Babs got present from Mrs Escombe.

Tue. 31st Dec. Mr and Mrs Parker of Football Association called to borrow Mabel's book on tennis. Worked until late. Sat up and watched the New Year in. Fine night.

Mon. 11th Jan. (1897) Fine day. Mabel not well. Men at work on Laboratory. Cases of chemicals came. Nine cases and six casks.

So ended the 1896 diary - not an exciting year, but certainly one of slow and steady progress.

*

Chapter Thirteen

THE YEAR 1897

The inside front cover of this particular small volume looks as though it had been mildly, but successfully attacked by young Maud, with several indecipherable scribbles on one of the pages. [Like father, like daughter?]

Fri. 8th Jan. Mabel wrote to Liberty's for new tea gown. Men hard at work on the new Laboratory. Walls now up to three feet high.

Sat. 23rd Jan. Mabel "out" on sofa - moved about a little (*she had been rather ill.*) Mrs Donnelly up for tea. New building walls practically finished.

Mon. 25th Jan. Mabel out for drive with Di Butcher. Miss Edie Isabel to lunch. Men finished off walls.

Wed 17th Feb. Roof of Laboratory raised and repositioned in afternoon. Gave directions to painters. (*Records show that there had been a mistake when the new Laboratory was being constructed. On reading the plans, the builder made the roof too low. After quite an argument with the builder about this, the latter agreed to make the alterations. Mabel had, in the meantime gone off to stay at an Hotel in Nottingham Road {in the Natal Midlands} to recuperate after her recent illness*)

Mon. 1st Mar. Mabel came back in high spirits.

Thu. 4th Mar. Unpacked last ten cases of apparatus. New Laboratory taken over, though painters not finished.

Tue. 9th Mar. Worked at Laboratory. Captain Reeves round to ask me about new building. Told me of Grant.

Fri. 12th Mar. Dr Mackenzie came. Maudie down with chickenpox. Electrician busy with laboratory fittings. Too late to test them. (*He started using the new Laboratory almost immediately and the first case he had to contend with was one of which neither Mabel nor he were happy with - one of poisoning.*)

Fri. 19th Mar. New rack for batteries came. Sent off order to Elliott for new testing apparatus. New switch arrived from Troughton and Simms ex - *SS "Umvoti"*.

Tue. 23rd Mar. Sixteen samples of methylated spirits came up. Papers came with the estimates. Mabel very upset. In evening, worked at Memoirs. (*The matter which caused Mabel's upset was the estimates which, yet once again, did not allow Nevill a*

salary as the Astronomer to the Colony. However, even with this to contend with, they carried on with their astronomical work.)

Sat. 27th Mar. Unpacked acids and last cases of chemicals. Worked in Laboratory. Benches and tables arrived. In evening, wrote letter re - house. *(It will be recalled that when he arrived in December 1882, he had been promised a proper house and had since drawn up the Plans for this. Nevill gave Mabel her "keeper" ring the next day.)*

Tue. 13th Apr. Mr Rose came to see Mars and Jupiter. Beautiful night.

Wed 15th Apr. Worked at Laboratory. M off into town with Babs. Saw McKinley about shelves. Plumber at work. Heard - **NO HOUSE** ! 'M' most upset. Bah !

Sat. 24th Apr. Dull day. Babs birthday. Gave her two dolls and two balls. Had plum pudding. Worked at Laboratory.

Mon 26th Apr. Worked at Laboratory. Water supply finished except for water! Clock stopped. Electric minute sign caught. Could not leave so had to stop *(in clock room)* for night. *(Nevill repaired the clock the next morning and then left for Pietermaritzburg where he booked in at the Plough Hotel.)*

Wed 28th Apr. Up to Estcourt. Up to Post Office and Court. Gave evidence in a poisoning case. Tea with Hellett. *(He returned to Pietermaritzburg by slow train the next day and remarked "nothing to eat except tea and a sandwich". He changed trains and arrived back in Durban in the very early hours of the morning of Friday 30th.)*

Tue. 11th May M off to Victoria County (*Verulam*) to Isabel's wedding. Not back until 8 p.m.

Mon 31st Jun Clock went wrong at tea. Lost seven minutes in two hours. Then went right again. Had to send signals by hand. *(The clock - which gave the whole of Natal its time system - went wrong once or twice during the next few days and Nevill spent hours trying to repair it.)*

Fri. 16th Jul. P.W.D. sent surveyor to survey the ground. Wright, the bricklayer to commence work. (*This had something to do with the waste water system.*)

Sat. 24th Jul. Wood came up for new fume cupboard. Sent signal to Eshowe for Denman.

Wed 11th Aug Doctor came to see Babs. Worked at Laboratory. Blanche Isabel came to spend the day.

Thu 26th Aug. Worked at papers. Finished drains. M out calling with Babs. Doctored the pudding. (!) Worked in evening.

Fri. 27th Aug. Worked at Laboratory. M gave me paper knife for my birthday present. Pudding

turned out well. Babs in raptures over her pudding. (*This was of course, the one that he had "doctored".*)

Tue. 7th Sep. Typewriter came. Lansdell repaired dome of Observatory. In evening observed stars.

Mon 27th Sep. Mabel had a bad ear and sent for Dr Campbell. Worked at Tides and analyses. (*This is the first mention of the well-known Campbell family of Natal.*)

Thu. 14th Oct. Iron filings came. Clock signalling apparatus broke down at eleven. Spring went. Got it right by 3 p.m. Shutters arrived. (*The next few weeks were very ordinary with Mabel taking small Maud for daily visits to numerous friends whilst Nevill got on with the serious work.*)

Wed. 1st Dec. Miss Stein and a dozen girls from the High School came to the Observatory. Coral Bousfield paid a call.

Mon 31st Dec. Bought a new refrigerator and stove. (*Shades of the 20th century!*)

The remainder of the Diary, including Christmas and New Year's days, tailed off into idle notes of no real importance to anyone but the little family. There are a few notes of names and addresses - this time mainly of firms in England.

*

Chapter Fourteen

THE YEAR 1898

The final diary in this small collection shows a definite change in Nevill's personal habits. Here and there, there are numerous gaps of several days between his entries. From his point of view, and obviously from that of his hard working wife Mabel, the most important event of the year was the birth of their first son. Ralph who was born on Tuesday 24th May 1898.

Tue. 12th Jan. Worked at analysis No 1127, spirits.

Mon. 24th Jan. Men laid foundations for new room, in concrete. M off to town, called on Coral Bousfield.

Tue. 1st Feb. Up to tennis court. Next to see Hammond about site for new house. Pay came back from leave but not yet to work. Walls of new room finished.

Wed. 2nd Feb. Off to Duff's Road to see Inez Isabel's wedding.

Tue. 15th Feb. Judge Mason and party up to see stars. Mabel worked two hours in the Observatory.

Thu. 14th Apr. Great Fire at Farr's. (??) Poison case arrived.

Tue. 3rd May Worked at analyses. Wrote Reports. Paid cheques, salaries and boys. Cissie (*a close friend*) out bicycling. (*This was apparently the latest form of easy transport.*)

Wed 18th May In evening, Mabel alarmed and sent for Dr Wells. False alarm.

Tue. 24th May Mabel taken ill in morning. Doctor came. No nurse. Sent up to Mrs Robins for Aya. Came off at 6.30 p.m. - all safely. (*With that somewhat blasé entry, Nevill recorded the arrival of his son Ralph. This took place inside the Observatory buildings and immediately afterwards, Nevill did the "right thing" for those days - he moved out and into his Club to "keep out of the way of the ladies". Ralph tipped the scales at 9 lbs. 2¼ ounces.*)

Wed 15th Jun. Baby Ralph weighed 10 lbs. exactly. Levelling new tennis courts.

Sat. 27th Jun. Tennis at Club. Fair games. Collins and Edmund, Hammond and I. In the evening sent off plan for house. Saw **Comet Boreas** that night. (*Two days later, he moved back into the Observatory and rejoined his now expanded family.*)

Tue. 9th Aug. Made concrete steps. Dressed up to whist party at the Churchills with Mabel.

Thu 11th Aug. Got message asking for analysis inside 12 hours. Impossible !

Mon 15th Aug Into town. Found all upset. Collins ill. In evening, Miss Mackenzie and Mackechnie round with Esther Churchill. Showed them stars and gave them tea.

Fri. 7th Oct. To (*tennis club*) Committee meeting. Resigned to make room for Tates. Miss Champion came to see Observatory. Mr Mason, the new assistant, did the honours. (*Concerning the tennis club, Nevill had been on the Committee almost since he had arrived in Natal in 1882 - a period of sixteen years.*)

Tue. 25th Oct. Up to tennis. Watched them trying to pull down old Chapel.

Sat. 29th Oct. In evening, to theatre to see "School for Scandal". (*Yes! This was in 1898!*)

Wed. 2nd Nov. Jameson took up his duties at the Laboratory as assistant.

Wed 23rd Nov Wrote up report on brewery water. (*He had carried out a milk analysis two days earlier.*) Fastened notice board in ladies' room at Club.

Sat. 26th Nov. Clock wires broken. No signals except by hand. Stopped clock.

Tue. 13th Dec. With M into town to buy present for Babs (*Maud*). Bought big doll. Hammond off to Stanger.

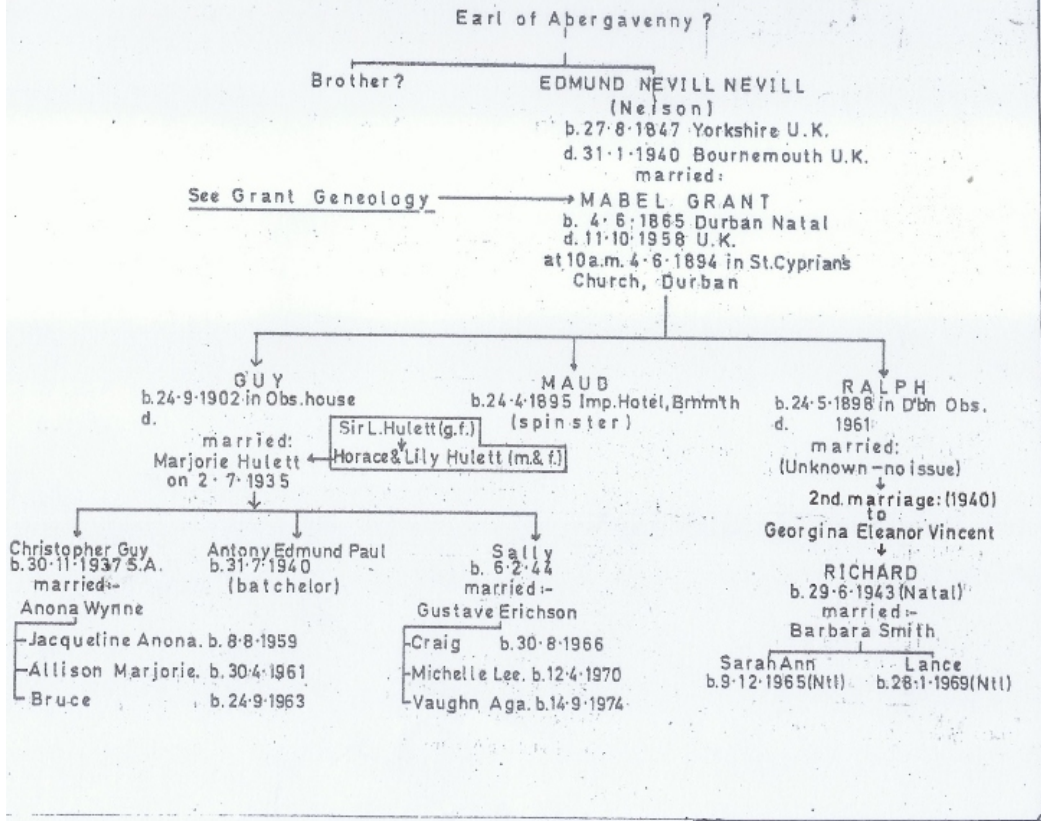
Wed 14th Dec. M and family off to Victoria County to see Isabels. Hammond returned.

The final entry in the diary, and indeed for this whole section of the book is as follows :

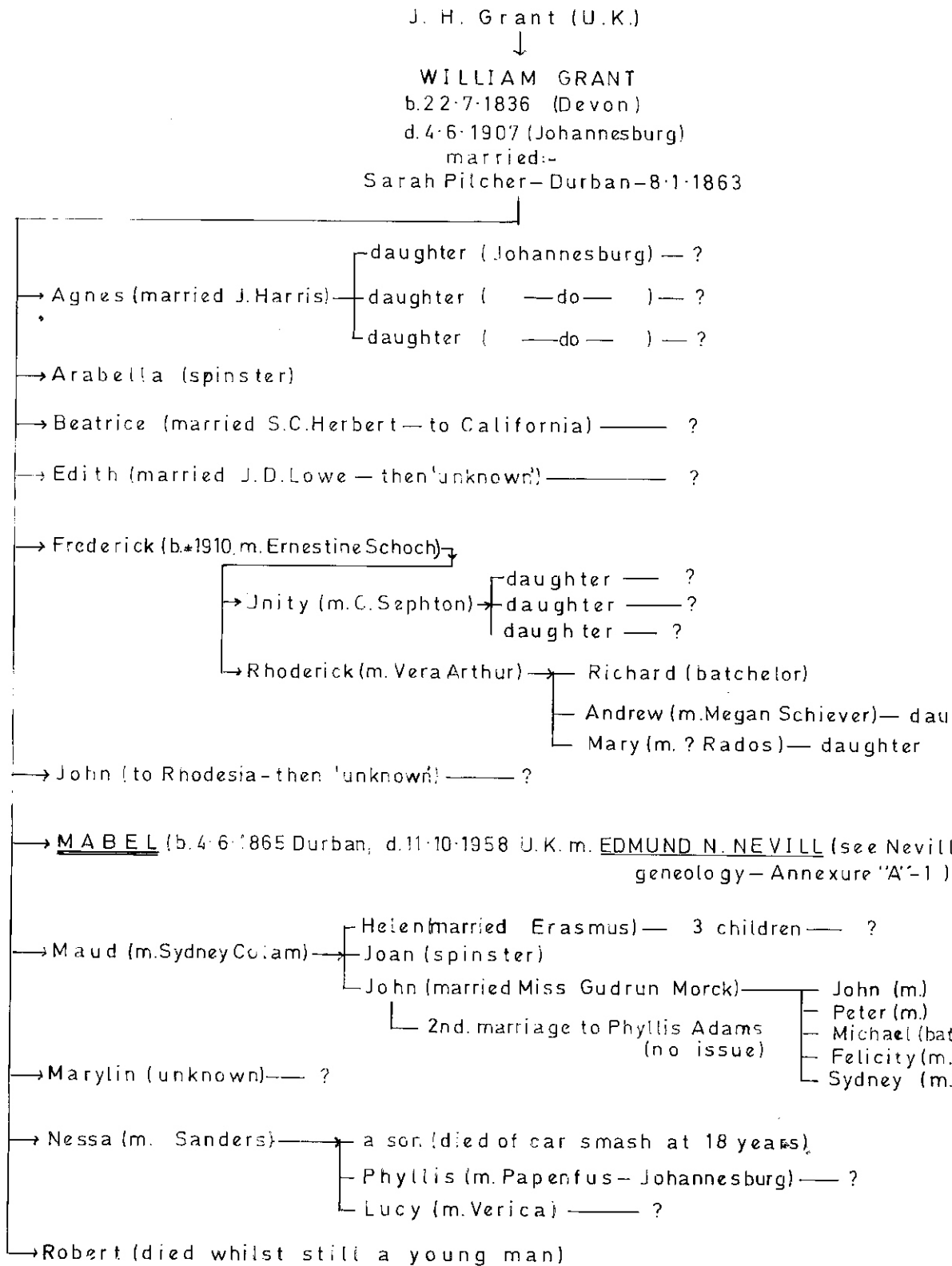
Thu. 15th Dec. Fine hot day. M and Babs off into town to buy Christmas presents. Worked at Laboratory. Up to tennis. Good attendance. Mrs Escombe there. Had some so-so sets. Mr and Mrs Hawkes v. Miss Miller and Miss Hickman. 6 - 5, 6 - 4.

----- o 0 o -----

THE NEVILL GENEALOGY



THE GRANT GENEALOGY



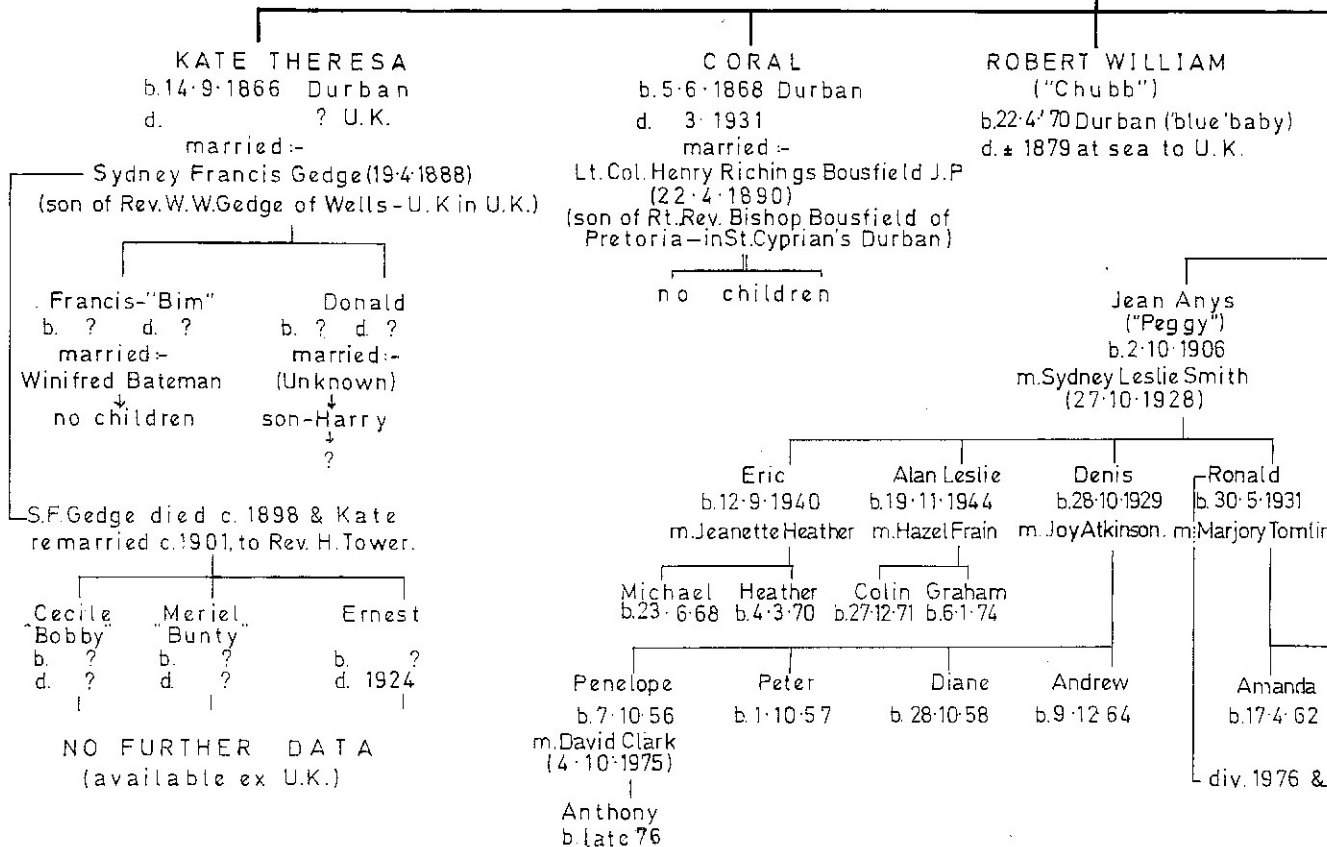
THIS FAMILY TREE IS, REGRETABLELY,
FAR FROM COMPLETE

THE ESCOMBE GEN

THE Rt. Hon. HARRY ESCOMBE

P.C., Q.C., L.L.D., M.L.H.,
 b. 25.7.1838 in Nottinghill, London
 d. 27.12.1899 in Durban (Aged 61)

Married in St. Paul's
 Church Durban on 21st Sept. 1865



Having gone through these small volumes with their incredibly tiny writing, any researcher such as this one, ends up by feeling that he or she has almost become part of a family of this nature. Indeed, one can consider it to have been a privilege to share the joys, the hopes, the sadnesses and the work carried out by this remarkable man, Edmund Nevill Nevill, FRAS, FRCS, FRS.

It is to be hoped that you, dear Reader, also share these sentiments.

Cape Town, Jan 1998.

*

BOOK TWO INDEX

INDEX OF CONTENTS OF BOOK TWO

In creating the Index for the entries from the fourteen Nevill Diaries, the main purpose has been to include the names of most of the personages mentioned therein. Many of these names are of people who influenced affairs in Natal and in Durban. Certain other entries have also been highlighted for obvious reasons. Owing to the tiny writing, some of the spellings may be in error.

(Note by Editor: The page numbers given are remanences of the original typewritten book. By editing the book and transforming it to PDF file the original page numbers fell away. Technology have made the Index redundant. To find any information, just do a search (click on find) of the PDF document. - cdc)

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