

Local History: A Pot Pourri of Artefacts

Compiled by Heather Howard and Sue Gordon

Albany is an area rich in history. It is therefore not surprising that artefacts representing this history abound. Four local people (Figure 1) with stories to tell brought along some fascinating treasures to share with Lower Albany Historical Society members and visitors at the August 2025 meeting at Settlers Park's Don Powis Hall. The event called Show and Tell was organised by Sue Gordon who hopes to bring more treasures to light during similar presentations in the future.



Figure 1: The Show and Tell cast: Darian Keeton, the late Barry Luckman, Ted Gilfillan and Theo van der Walt, with producer Sue Gordon

Ted Gilfillan

Ted Gilfillan was born in Graaff-Reinet. His career spanned many years as an agronomist, firstly for Tongaat Hulett Sugar, and later as head of a development company supporting subsistence farms in producing sugar cane. He later became General Manager of a joint venture between Tongaat Hulett and the Mozambique Government. After retirement, he and his late wife REM moved to Kenton and then to Settlers Park in 2000. At the Park, Ted served on the Board for four years. Since then, his Settlers Park activities have centred around infrastructure, notably the removal of silt from the Pond, but he is also a woodworker, undertaking repairs to furniture and appliances and donating the proceeds to the Park Trust.

Ted displayed his ancestor's heavy cavalry sword dating from 1796 (Figure 2). It was brought to South Africa by William Gilfillan (born 1796), who came to the Colony first in 1812 with the 60th Rifles.



In 1815 the sword was changed when the point was sharpened but the scabbard was left with the original nubby end and part of the guard was cut off. *"This is not a manoeuvrable sword at all and gained favour more as a bludgeoning weapon"*. Ted told his audience. *"Troops also used the hand guard as a knuckle duster!"* He went on to describe the sword's features in detail, and outlined William's career as a soldier and magistrate. William Gilfillan was later a farmer near Southwell at Gilfillan Park, granted to him for his services in the War of 1835.

Figure 2: Ted Gilfillan with William Gilfillan's sword

Troopers Heavy Cavalry Sword

This trooper's heavy cavalry sword was known as a broad sword and dates from 1796.

Technically the 1796 heavy cavalry sword is a back-sword, defined as a sword with a straight blade with one cutting edge and a spine (the "back") thickened for most of its length to give added strength. This is not a delicately manoeuvrable sword by any stretch of the imagination and gained favour as a bludgeoning weapon; the troops also used the guard as a knuckle duster. The blade is forged with a single broad fuller on each side while the grip is of ribbed leather. The basket guard has ears which are riveted through the tang of the blade to give the hilt and blade a very secure connection. The hilt combines a disc guard pierced with two semicircular and six oval holes, with a single knuckle bow and two slim 2" long langets (projections from the guard, which grip the throat of the scabbard) extending from the front of the guard. The sword arrives sharpened and includes a steel scabbard.

This one was brought to South Africa by William Frederick Anderson Gilfillan who served as an ensign in the 60th rifles and was therefore not listed as an 1820 Settler. He returned to England and came out to South Africa again in 1820 as a military settler on half pay. He persuaded his brother to come with him, but the third brother sailed on and settled initially in New Zealand and afterwards in Australia, and became a successful artist.

William married Anna Margaret Thornhill who came to South Africa as a settler in 1820 on the *Zoroaster*. The story has it that the two brothers courted Anna on board ship. William won her hand and his brother declared that he would marry the first girl he found on shore. He duly married a Miss Marais and as a result that whole side of the family is Afrikaans speaking.

Anna's father, Christopher Thornhill, was the leader of the Thornhill party of Settlers near Port Alfred.

During the war of 1835 William Frederick Anderson Gilfillan commanded a company of levies and after its conclusion he was appointed company commander and resident magistrate of Cradock. He was granted the farm Gilfillan Park near Southwell in recognition of his services. He died in 1855 at the age of 61 and his wife died twenty years later at the age of 71. The first bridge over the Fish River at Cradock was named after him.

Darian Keeton of Hope Farm



Darian Keeton, a commercial beef farmer and the current owner of Hope Farm, is the 5th generation of Keetons who have farmed here. Darian's ancestors, William and Benjamin Keeton, bought the farm, on the coast just outside Port Alfred, in 1879. The farmhouse was built in 1823 by Lt John Hope. William and his wife Millicent had 16 children which is one of the reasons there is no shortage of Keetons to this day! The history of Hope Farm is closely linked to the early development of the Kowie, through Henry Nourse, William Cock and Benjamin Keeton.

Figure 3: Darian Keeton brought family treasures

Darian brought to the meeting the original title deeds, plus the huge family bible, published in 1832, with all 16 of the children's names written in it (Figure 3) He also brought many artefacts uncovered at the farm which made fascinating viewing. They included elephant tusks and molars, strandloper pottery found in middens, a bushman stone with a hole in the centre and a hippo tusk.

Barry Luckman (September 1939- February 2026)

Barry was born in Herne Bay, Kent in 1939 and christened at Canterbury Cathedral. His father, on active service with the RAF, was killed early in WWII and his widow decided to come to South Africa where her brother, also an RAF pilot, was involved in the inception of 43 Air School. Here in Port Alfred she met and married Dr Harold Atherstone. Barry was happily absorbed into the Atherstone family and a brother John and sister Wendy were soon added to the family. Barry attended St George's Prep in Port Elizabeth and thereafter St Andrew's College. In 1962 he married Barbara Richards and they had four sons.

Barry studied agronomy at Cedara College, KZN, and then moved to Alexandria where he lived and worked for 58 years. He tried mixed farming first, then turned to pineapple farming, later diversifying into chicory, becoming one of the leading figures in the South African chicory industry. Barry also pioneered tropical hydroponic farming in the Seychelles, producing fruit, vegetables, herbs, spices and flowers for luxury island resorts. Those he worked with valued his scientific precision and practical, hands-on learned wisdom.

Back in the Eastern Cape, Barry found time for Round Table and enjoyed golf (Captain of the Alexandria Golf Club 1970, and President of the Club in 2015). He was also a keen angler. Barry's "Show and Tell" contribution included the original golf clubs used by Dr Harold Atherstone in Port Alfred in the early 1900s. Harold played a game of golf with the Prince of Wales during his 1925 visit.

Barry is survived by his four sons — James, Craig, Andrew and Adrian – and his brother John Atherstone in Canada.



Barry also brought a portable syringe holder (Figure 4) used by Dr W G Atherstone. Dr W G was a multi-talented figure and gained fame as the first doctor in South Africa to use chloroform in 1849, in Grahamstown. Later he identified the first diamond sent to him in the post from Hopetown in March 1867.

Figure 4: The syringe tin used by Drs. W G Atherstone (1814-1898) and Walther Atherstone

Theo van der Walt



Theo, a former investment banker and now a “relic collector”, brought along the tools of his trade – his metal detector called “Rinkles”, his spade and his hat.

Then, in a wide-ranging display (Figure 5), he laid out some of the large-to-tiny treasures he has found in the Eastern Cape’s thicket and bush, such as musket balls, military buttons and Xhosa bracelets. Unfortunately, he has not found any Settler treasures that were buried in times of danger and never found again. One day perhaps!

Figure 5: A display of Theo van der Walt’s collection

With acknowledgement to Talk of the Town