

# 'Burmeister Covers'

## Part 1: The Mill at Kubusie - The Origins of Burmeister & Co

Steve Hannath

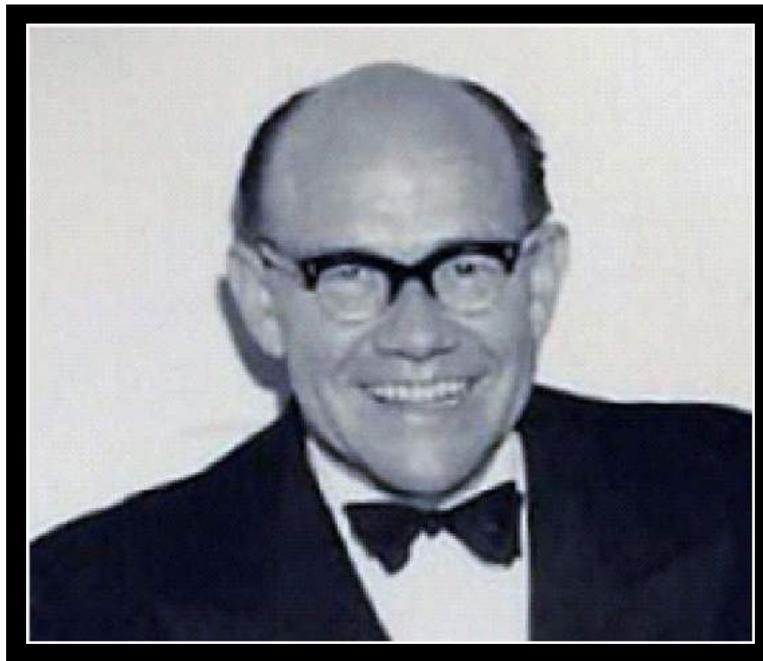


*Circa 1908. The Mill at Kubusie taking water from the stream.*

*The red flag flown above the Burmeister general store indicates loyalty to the Cape Colony and also that the store is open for business. The family home is on the right. The boys are Paul and William Burmeister. This watercolour is thought to have been painted by their tutor, Dr J 'Consty' Constantine.*

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**This three-part article is dedicated to  
Friederich 'Friedie/Freddy\*' Carl Burmeister,  
1902 - 1992.**

**A Great Benefactor of South African Postal History.**

#### **Introduction**

In 1991, Burmeister & Co., a long-established Eastern Cape General Dealer serving the South African farming community, was preparing to move to new purpose-built premises on the outskirts of East London. In clearing the second floor, workmen discovered fifteen tea chests stored under a tarpaulin. When opened, these tea chests were found to contain over 50,000 musty old envelopes addressed to the company.



*1950. Airmail letter EAST LONDON '15 VIII 1950' to Athlone Castle c/o Docks, CAPE TOWN (undated). This cover shows that mail could be delivered to a passenger aboard a ship in CT Docks. (Cover ex Robert Hill, 2020.)  
\* 'Friedie' to family / 'Freddy to friends'*



2014. An unsold fraction of the greater hoard retained by Peter Burmeister.

What the workmen had uncovered was an unsorted accumulation of the company's incoming mail between 1940 - 1972, plus some items of personal correspondence. The image above shows a small part of it in 2014.

This fabulous trove of postal history had been stored for safe-keeping by Friederich 'Friedie' Carl Burmeister, the third and youngest son of the company's German founder, Paul Frenz Diedrich Burmeister. Each tea chest held about two years worth of the company's incoming mail. The hoard was the single biggest discovery of South African commercial mail made during the 20th Century. However, because so much of it was perceived as 'modern', it was not recognised as an important discovery at the time. Now, thirty years after its discovery and 16 years since the bulk of it was sold in 2004 in London, the hoard's significance is more widely appreciated. Today, these so-called 'Burmeister covers' are found wherever South African postal history is sold internationally.

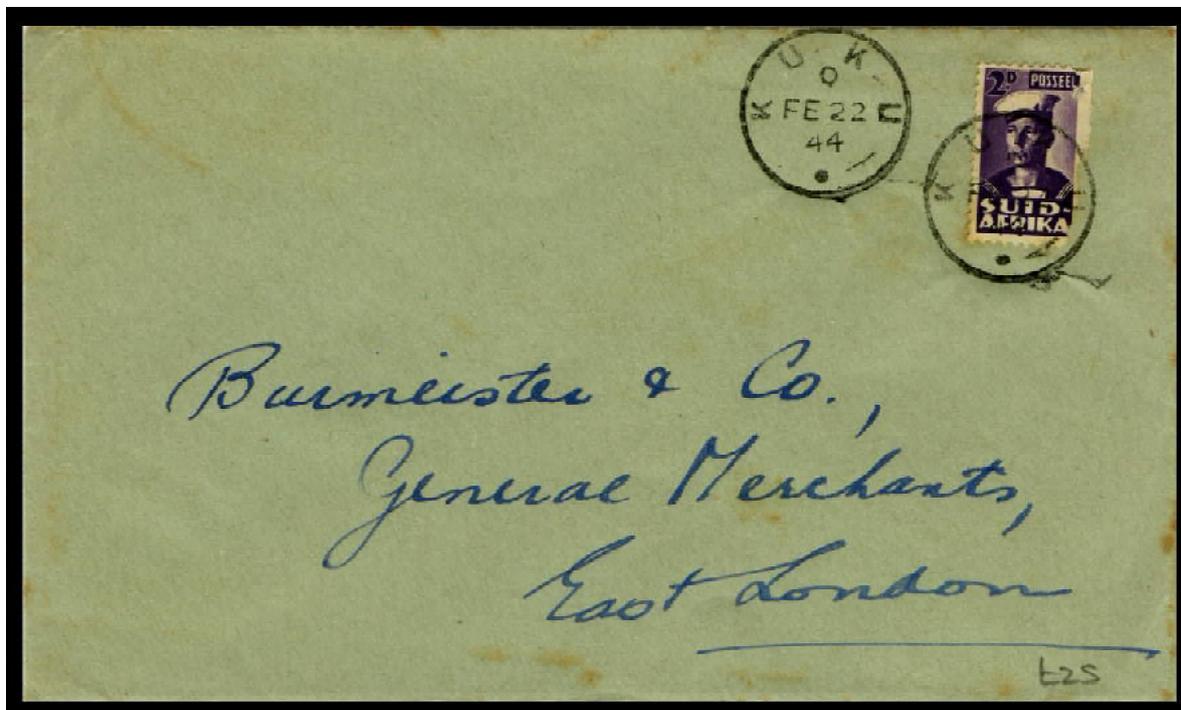
What is surprising about East London's Burmeister hoard is that it contained almost no covers addressed to the company between 1901, the year it was founded in Kubusie, and 1940, roughly the earliest start date of Friedie's accumulation. This suggests that for the first 39 years of its existence Burmeister & Co. placed no value on its opened letters and simply threw them away or at some point they destroyed them. Back then, there was a name for the place where you disposed of mail after you had opened it - it was called "**the letter bin**". It was not just Burmeister & Co. who disposed of their mail in this way but also most South African companies. The letter bin and the fire was the fate of the bulk of early South African mail. However, there were some exceptions.

By a curious coincidence, the only other company providing us with a similarly large trove of postal history is an unrelated near-namesake, the 19th Century Cape Town Jeweller and Optician, 'Burmester & Co.'. The Burmester and Burmeister surname is German in origin, a corruption of 'Burgermeister' ('a master of the citizens' or 'mayor'). The postal history trove emanating from Cape Town's Burmester was smaller but being older and covering the Cape Colony's early stamped mail from the mid-1860s to 1910 is the more valuable.

This article is a tribute to Friedie Burmeister who accumulated his hoard in the belief that one day it would be worth something. While the value of his covers today varies from unsaleable to over-priced, postal historians have found his hoard a wonderful source of postmarks, cachets and labels. Indeed, Burmeister covers have been at the heart of my postal history apprenticeship. In tribute, I have produced this brief history of Burmeister & Co. with special emphasis on its founding (Part 1) and Friedie's obsessive accumulation of company mail, its rediscovery and its sale (Part 2).

## A Little Bit of What the Fuss is About!

In order to appreciate the importance of the Burmeister hoard, below are just two examples which at first glance appear to be ordinary, everyday items of mail but which postal historians rejoice in finding. As can be seen, both covers command a premium.



**1944. Envelope from Kuku, Transkei, 'FE 22 44' to East London.**

The datestamp used to cancel the 1943 SG 100 2d violet 'Bantam' is the COGH Single Circle Datestamp of 1885. This is extremely late usage and exceeds the previous latest recorded date by over 10 years.

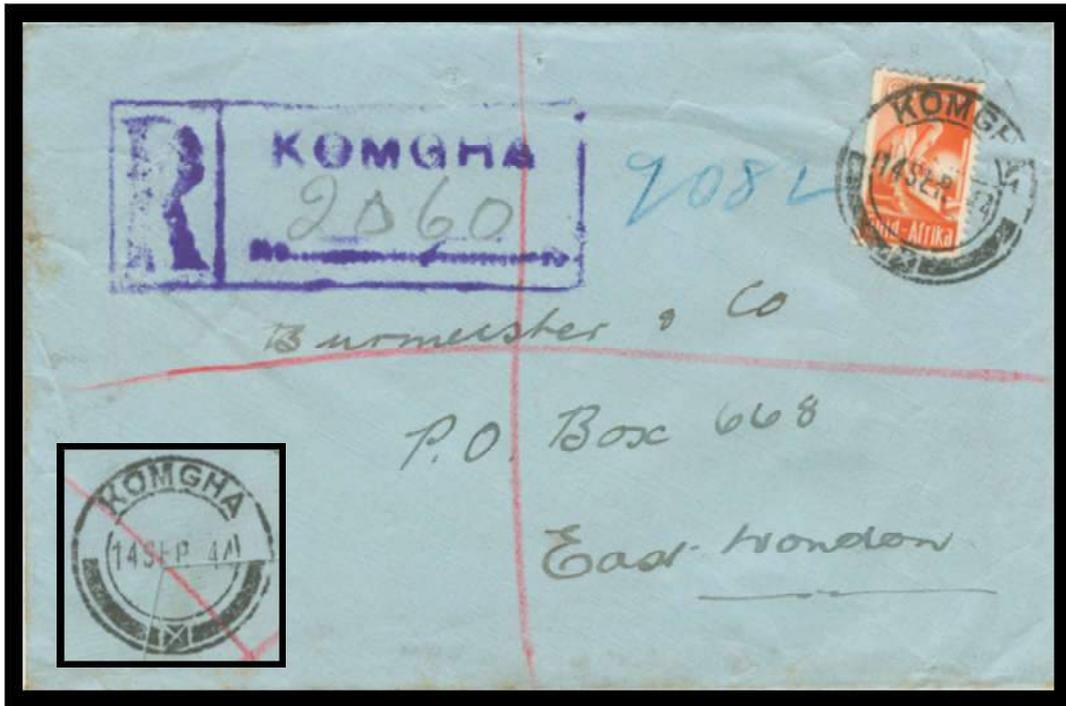
Cover shared with the Club by Robert Hill.



**1953. Envelope from Moshupa, Bechuanaland, '10 VI 53' to East London.**

Moshupa was a Postal Agency, opened 1945, in a very small village, 35 miles south-west of Gaborones. Two 1952 KGVI SG 120 1d scarlet adhesives cancelled with this very scarce datestamp. Seldom seen. £95.

**‘K’ is for Khoi - Place Names Associated with the Khoi**

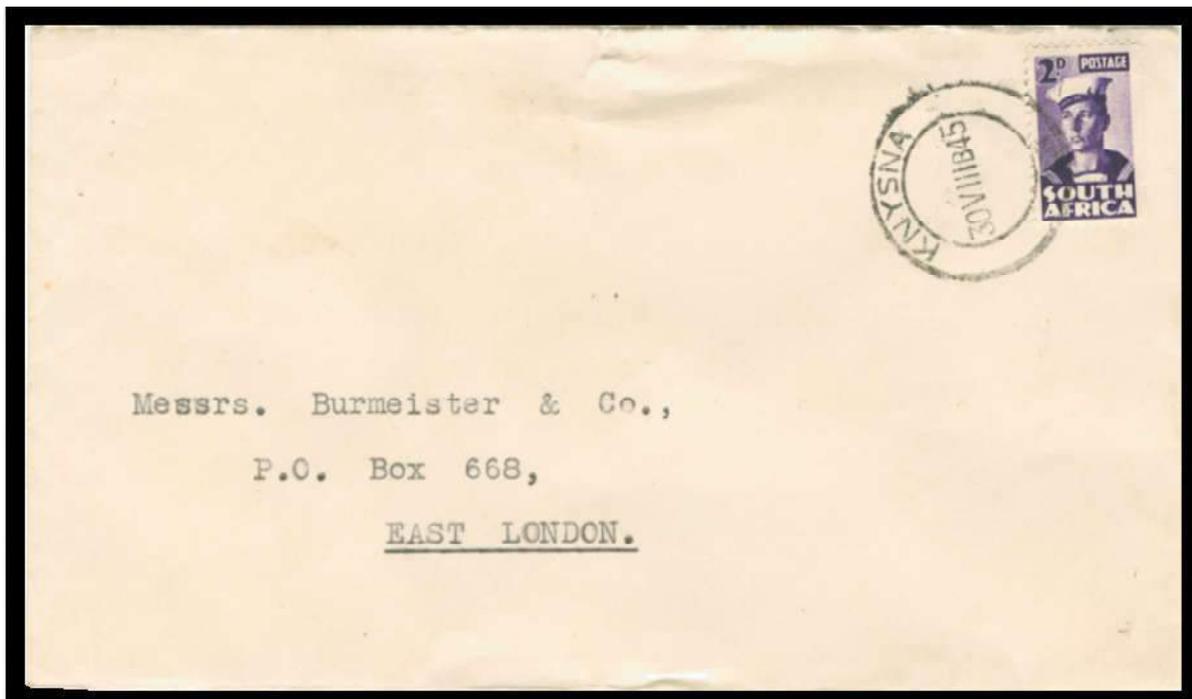


**1945. Registered letter from KOMGHA '14 SEP 44' to EAST LONDON '16 IX 44'.**

Single 1942 SG 102 (SACC 101) 6d red-orange wartime 'Bantam' stamp applied.

The postmark cancelling the stamp is possibly Putzel No. 5 which shows what appear to be thinner bars. The bars in the postmarks (front and reverse of cover) are thicker than Putzel example but all else matches.

Knysna means 'place of much wood' or 'many ferns', Komgha is the place of 'much clay'. These two names are typical of Khoi two syllable words. Others are Hantam, Prieska and Boegoe(berg).



**1945. Cover from KNYSNA '30 VIII 45' to EAST LONDON (undated).**

Single 1942 SG 100 (SACC 98) 2d violet wartime 'Bantam' stamp applied.

The postmark cancelling the stamp is possibly both Putzel No. 14 and 15, without and with cross at base. The above postmark has a very faint rectangular cross at base, like Putzel No. 15, but the name is more like No. 14.

## East London and its Immediate Hinterland

Burmeister & Co. was established in Kubusie outside Stutterhem in 1901 before relocating to East London.



1956. 'Guide to Southern Africa 1956', (Union Castle Mail Steamship Co.).

Copyright. John Bartholomew & Son Ltd., Edinburgh.

Many of the covers shown in this display come from places found on this map, for example Bob Hill's Kuku. Perhaps half of all 'Burmeister covers' come from further afield in southern Africa and are not found on this map.

## The Burmeister Saga Begins in Germany

How 'Burmeister & Co.' came to be synonymous with modern South African postal history is the story of a remarkable family business established by an adventurous and ambitious young man who left his homeland to seek a fortune in southern Africa in the years before, during and after the South African War (1899 - 1902). Just like Ralph Putzel and 'Hasso' Reisener who left their mark on South African postal history through their research and by Emil Burmester who left a large quantity of mail for posterity, (also to a lesser extent Hermann Malcomess), the saga of Burmeister & Co. begins in Germany.

Paul Frenz Diedrich Burmeister was born in 1865, the son of a hotelier, in Heide, Holstein, close to the Danish border, in the immediate aftermath of the Second Schleswig War of 1864 when the German Confederation brutally pushed the Danish frontier back 250 km. (The ZAR / Transvaal collector, dealer and expert, Emil Tamsen, was born in Danish Schleswig-Holstein but became German on its capture). The politics of 19th Century Germany was dominated by unification under the rule of its powerful and repressive Prussian 'Iron Chancellor', Otto von Bismarck. With the German economy in the doldrums and unable to support its people, thousands left the fatherland. German labourers in Britain are remembered for "Jerry-built" houses.



### **1958. First Day Cover from STUTTERHEIM '1 VII 58' to EAST LONDON.**

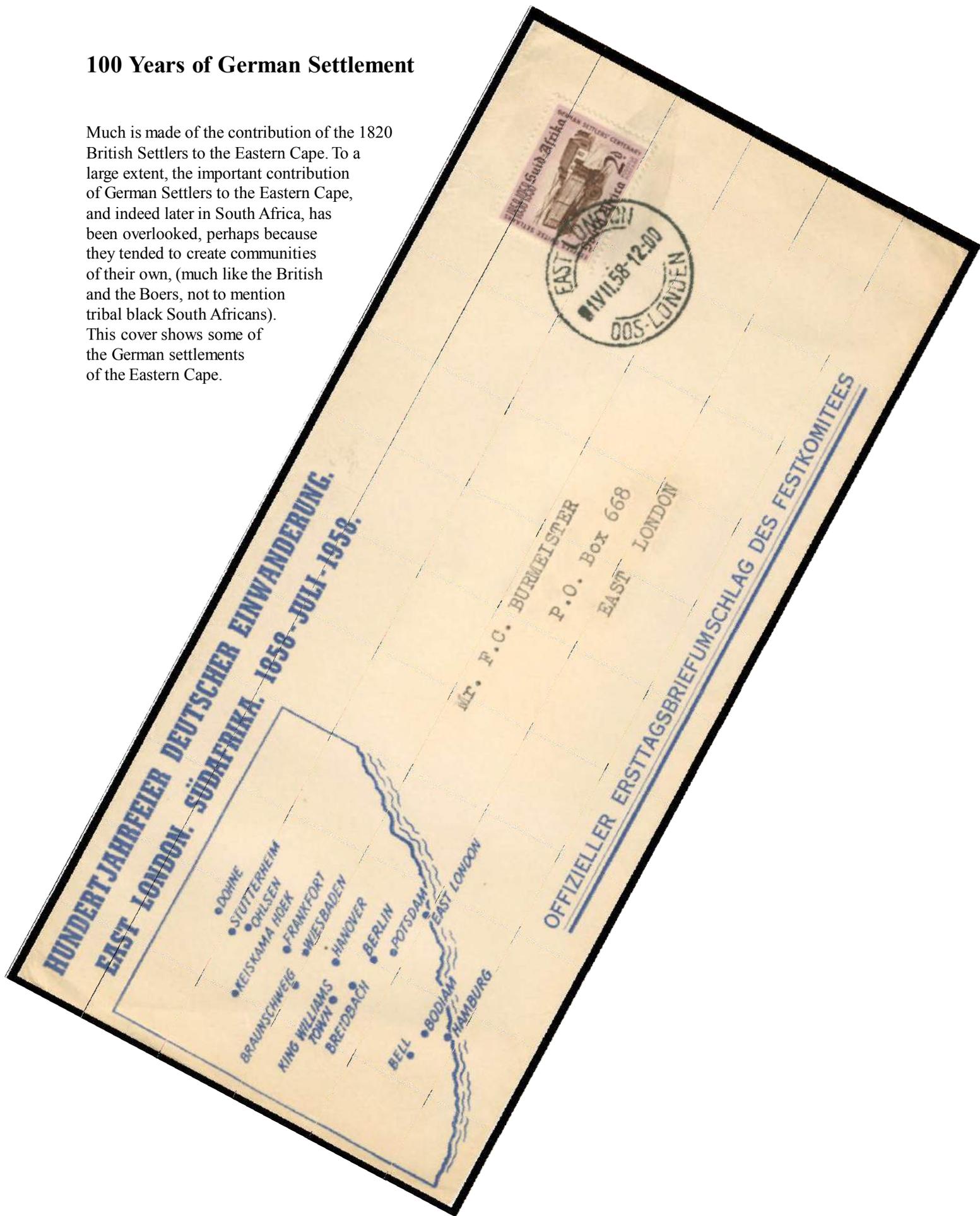
*A single 1958 SG 168 (SACC 167) 2d chocolate & pale purple 'Centenary of Arrival of German Settlers' applied. The postmark is Putzel No. 14, possibly UnID with hyphen before single digit day.*

German missionaries had been active in South Africa for many years before British had settled a force of German mercenaries in the Eastern Cape in 1857. These unemployed ex-soldiers joined a German Legion to fight for the British in the Crimea against Russia but that war ended before they could be deployed. They could not return to Germany because its laws made it was treason to fight for another country. About 2350 legionnaires agreed to be settled in the Eastern Cape. Most of these men were unskilled and not cut out to be farmers or store-keepers. When the going got tough many chose to leave and fight for the British in the Indian Mutiny of 1857. The Eastern Cape German community grew out of the remaining men and two small groups of later arrivals. The towns they built were named after places in the old country.

With no prospect of advancement, Paul's self-motivated brothers decided to emigrate, Carl to San Francisco on the West Coast of the USA and Wilhelm to the Eastern Cape of South Africa. The attraction of the Eastern Cape for Wilhelm was its small German community and the opportunity of employment. When he arrived in East London, the Border region had already seen a century of conflict between the Xhosas, Boers and British. Wilhelm went to work for Malcomess & Co. almost as soon as he arrived in East London. He probably felt that he had done the right thing in leaving Germany in search of work and presumably wrote enthusiastic letters home about his new opportunities.

# 100 Years of German Settlement

Much is made of the contribution of the 1820 British Settlers to the Eastern Cape. To a large extent, the important contribution of German Settlers to the Eastern Cape, and indeed later in South Africa, has been overlooked, perhaps because they tended to create communities of their own, (much like the British and the Boers, not to mention tribal black South Africans). This cover shows some of the German settlements of the Eastern Cape.



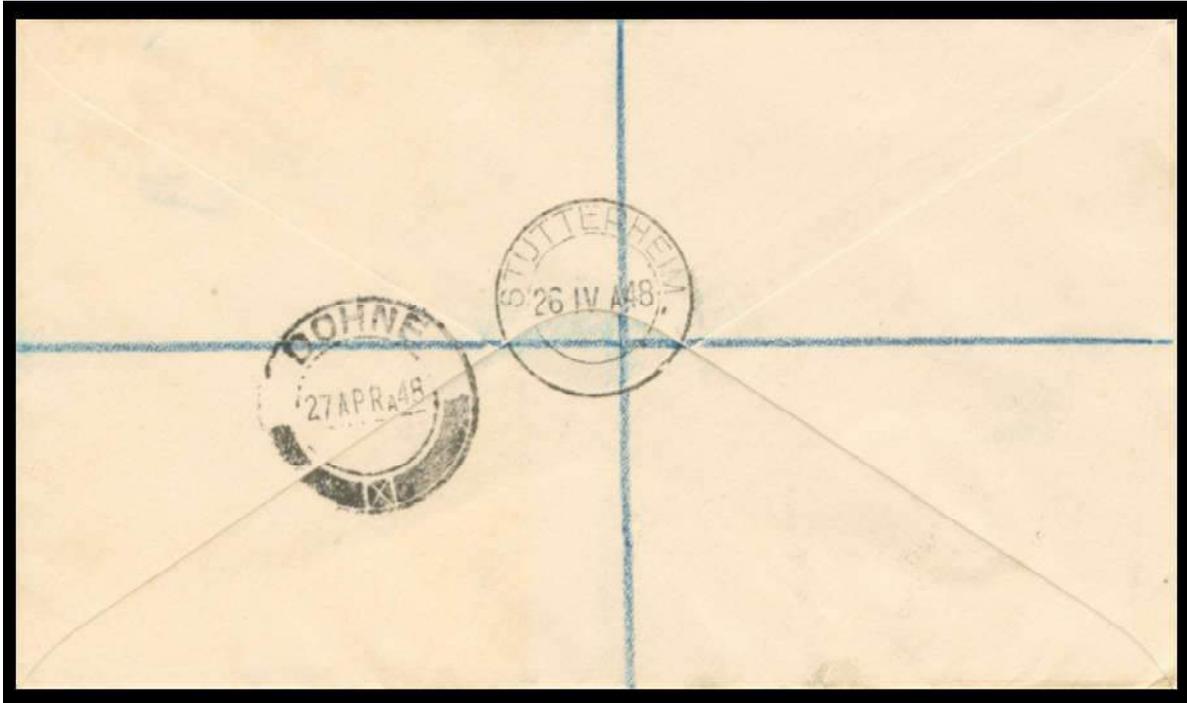
**1958. First Day Cover from EAST LONDON '1 VII 58' to EAST LONDON.**  
A single 1958 SG 168 (SACC 167) 2d chocolate & pale purple 'Centenary of Arrival of German Settlers' affixed.  
The postmark is Putzel No. 46, possibly UnID with block before single digit day.



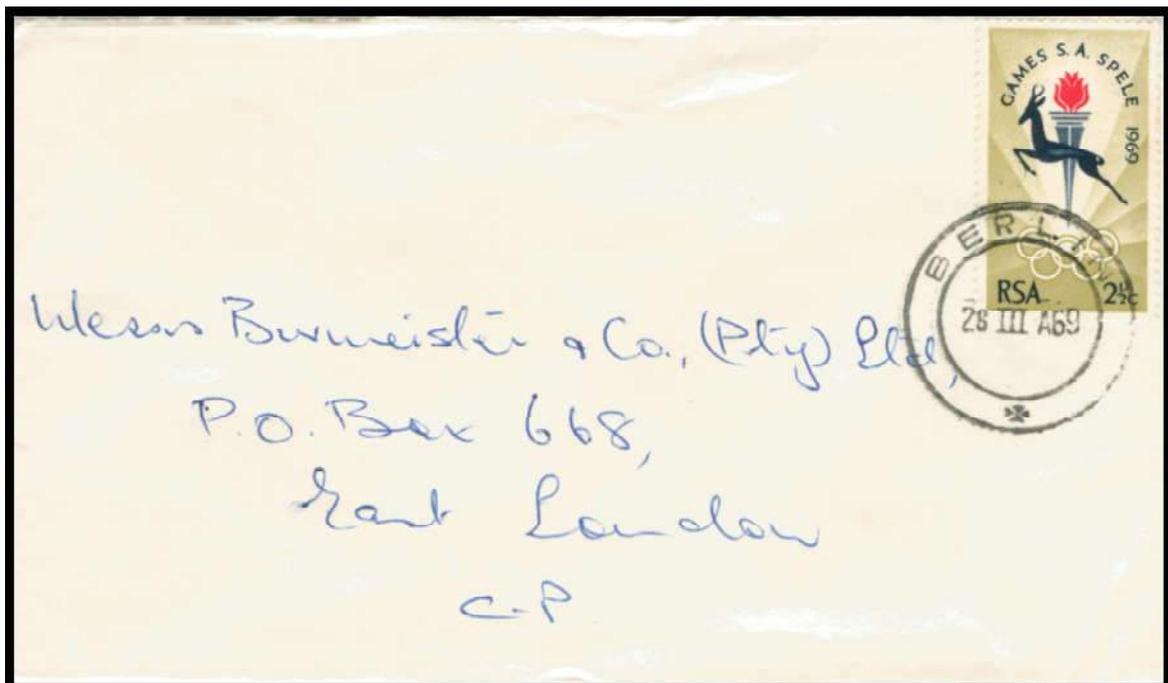
This region was known as 'the Border'. Strung out like a line of strongpoints from East London to Dohne, the 'German' towns show their importance as a barrier intended to hold back and indeed push back the Xhosa tribes's south-westerly migration. East London was largely built to expedite military supplies and reinforcements into the troubled area by sea. Once a mission station in Xhosa territory, King Williams Town became a strategic Border command centre. All these towns are found as postmarks on 'Burmeister' covers. Bell was named in honour of Charles Bell, the Cape Surveyor-General and designer of the iconic Cape Triangles and Rectangular 'Hope' stamps. The Cigarette card shows the cap badge of the Kaffrarian Rifles, an East London-based regiment of Border volunteers. Bell also designed medals and badges.

## The Border's German Community

The German community's main town was Stutterheim, named after the leader of the German Legion in 1857, Major-General Baron Richard von Stutterheim. The Baron made his headquarters at Dohne Post, previously a German mission station, then a British fort, a place the Xhosa called Cumakala. He immediately renamed it Stutterheimstadt. German numbers were bolstered by two small groups who arrived in 1858 and 1877. Most did not stay long. Many of those who did lived around towns named after the places they had come from - Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Hanover and Potsdam. All are found as postmarks on 100s of Burmeister covers.



1948. Registered Cover Reverse from STUTTERHEIM '26 IV 48' to DOHNE '27 APR 48'.  
The postmarks are DOHNE Putzel No. 4 & STUTTERHEIM Putzel No. 13.



1969. Cover from BERLIN '26 III 69' to EAST LONDON (undated).  
A single 1969 SG 237 (SACC 278) 2½c blue-black, red and sage-green 'Springbok & Olympic Torch' applied.  
The postmark is Putzel No. 10.

## Paul's Arrival in South Africa: 1892

Paul expressed to his parents his wish to go to South Africa and join his brother Wilhelm, then working for Malcomess and Co, a successful East London general dealer and produce merchant with branches throughout the Eastern Cape. Paul's parents urged him not to go unless Wilhelm returned to Germany. (Ultimately, Paul would go to South Africa in 1892 and Wilhelm would return to Germany in about 1895.)

Paul's parents compromised and suggested that he go to London which was closer to home. In 1890, Paul was living and working in London, the commercial heart of the British Empire and the world. He trained as a banker and became fluent in English, something that would stand him in good stead in "British South Africa". Wherever and whenever Englishmen met and talked of opportunities and money in London, the conversation invariably turned to the fabulous discoveries of diamonds and gold in southern Africa. Fortunes were being made there, they said. "Just look at Cecil Rhodes and that chancer, Barnato."

The lure of South African opportunities proved irresistible to Paul who determined that he too would find his fortune there. He decided to go to the fabulous 'City of Gold', Johannesburg, by way of his brother Wilhelm in East London who now managed a branch of Malcomess & Co.



**1898. Poor Proving Cover from BUTTERWORTH 'AP 15 98' to EAST LONDON 'AP 16 98'.**

*A single 1897 SG 62 (SACC 57) 2d chocolate-brown adhesive applied.*

*The adhesive has been obliterated with Butterworth's BONC 268 and dispatched with Putzel No. 3.*

Paul arrived in East London, South Africa, in April 1892 and immediately went to see his brother. Seeing Malcomess' import and distribution business first-hand opened Paul's eyes to what was possible. The country was a gold mine of financial opportunities, especially for bi-lingual German-English speakers who could import goods from the world's two greatest manufacturing nations. No-one took advantage of this opportunity quite as vigorously and successfully as Wilhelm's boss, Hermann Malcomess, who was making a fortune selling agricultural equipment and tools to farmers in the region and beyond.



**A pair of 1938 SG 76 (SACC 75) 1/2d blue and green 'Ploughing' Voortrekker Centenary Memorial Fund adhesives.**  
*It was basic farming equipment like ploughs, tools, piping and fencing that farmers so desperately needed.*

## Early Days of the Buffalo Harbour, East London.



*1904. Postcard. 'Buffalo Harbour, East London'. (No details).  
Posted in EAST LONDON 'OC 29 04' to London (undated).*

*The surprising number of sailing vessels suggests the photograph is older than the postmark; probably 1890.*

In all likelihood, this was the scene that greeted Paul on his arrival in East London. The railways had already reached Kimberley by the time these two photographs were taken, probably on the same day in the early 1890s. They show the Buffalo River packed with sailing boats as well as the funnels of some steamships and a tug. In the foreground of the postcard below, one can see the standard South African transport system of the day, an ox-wagon, as well as horses pulling a loaded cart.



*1904. Postcard. Unused. 'Waiting for the Pontoon. Buffalo River, East London'. (No details).*

*This postcard also has no details. It shares the same style and typeface as the topmost PC and is presumably of the same date. Of note are the sailing vessels, the tug (centre left) and the wagons drawn by horses and oxen waiting for the pontoon.*

## Malcomess & Co. and the Growth of the Railways

Hermann Malcomess, the founder of Malcomess & Co. was a German born in Homberg in 1848 and educated at Cassel. He arrived at the Cape in 1867. Diamonds had just been discovered over the 1866 / 1867 New Year period. He travelled to Bloemfontein, the capital of the small Boer Republic of the OFS (Orange Free State), and fought for them during the Basuto War of 1868. Sensing another opportunity, he moved to the Eastern Cape where in 1869 he started a business in King William's Town specialising in supplying the farms of the interior with imported agricultural machinery and implements.

Although he was not actively involved in it, the discovery of diamonds in 1866 / 1867 had a significant impact on his business. Their discovery in the far northern Cape Colony increased annual world diamond production more than tenfold in the 10 years following their discovery. Diamonds became the most important and most profitable industry in South Africa. The newly independent Cape Colony Government saw the future and decided to prioritise support for the diamond mines in distant Kimberley by prioritising the creation of a network of railways running from the ports of Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and East London. East London was well-positioned as it was closest to Kimberley and the OFS than either Cape Town and Port Elizabeth.

In 1870 Malcomess was still based in King William's Town and had begun to open branch offices in the Eastern Cape interior supplied from his warehouses on both banks of the Buffalo River in East London. When Cape Prime Minister John Molteno dug the first spade for both the new East London Harbour and the Cape Eastern Railway in 1873, Malcomess foresaw the changes coming to the means of distribution and relocated his head office to East London in 1875. His wanted to be close to the harbour through which he imported manufactured goods and also the rail head that dispatched them ever deeper into the South African interior.

When Paul visited his brother Wilhelm in 1892, the railway had reached the OFS border and Malcomess & Co. was the Eastern Cape's leading businesses. Success had come by using the new railways to supply the farming community with manufactured implements, machinery, windmills, irrigation pipes, corrugated iron sheeting, fencing, wagons, furniture, timber, cattle dip., etc. While Malcomess & Co. collected and saved some of its incoming correspondence, it did not do so on anything like the scale of the Burmeister and Burmeister accumulations. Malcomess covers nevertheless provide the COGH collector with useful late 19th and early 20th Century material from the Eastern Cape and OFS, a period not covered by Friedie Burmeister's hoard.



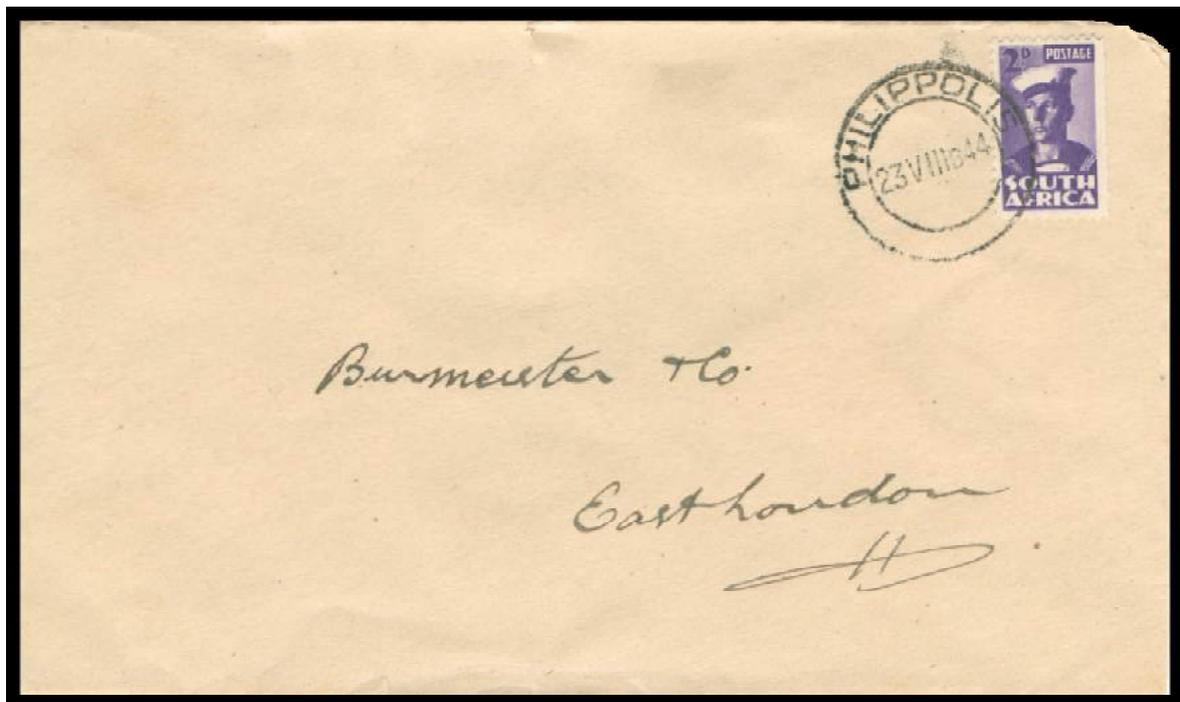
*1898. Postcard 'Post Office & Public Buildings, East London'. (G & H East London. Phototyped in Berlin). The Post Office had rooms in this building. Much of Malcomess's 19th and early 20th C. correspondence passed here. The above PO would be replaced by a new PO in 1927 that would handle almost all of the Burmeister Hoard mail.*



*1945. Cover from MOLTENO '11 XII 45' to EAST LONDON (undated).*

*A single 1945 SG 109 (SACC 108) 2d slate-blue and violet 'Peace' Victory Issue cancelled with Putzel No. 18. While this stamp celebrates Victory in WW2, it also shows SA's farmers' needing ploughs, piping and fencing, etc.*

Molteno is an Eastern town named after the first locally-elected Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, John Molteno, an immigrant born in London into a large Anglo-Italian family. As leader of the Cape, Molteno resisted British imperial expansion in South Africa but by being the driving force behind the development of the railways inadvertently made it more inevitable. When coal was discovered in Molteno it opened the first coal mine in South Africa, much of it going to supply the growing Cape Government Railway system. The cover above is typical of those from an important Burmeister's customer group, rural general dealers.



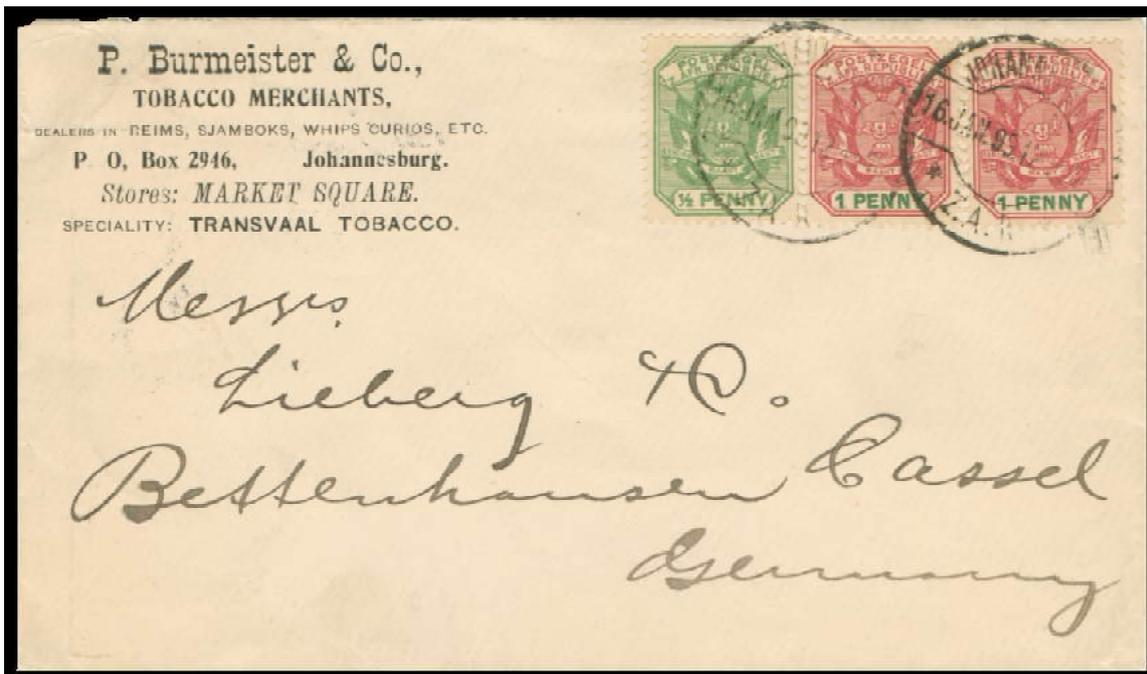
*1944. Cover from PHILIPPOLIS '23 VIII 44' to EAST LONDON (undated).*

*Single 1942 SG 100 (SACC 98) 2d violet wartime 'Bantam' stamp cancelled with Putzel No. 16.*

The railways would allow Burmeister & Co. to reach remote places like Philippolis, the oldest town in the OFS.

## P Burmeister & Co.

While visiting Wilhelm, Paul met and fell in love with Emilie Katherina Grunow, a music teacher who would later become his wife. Her grandparents had arrived as German settlers aboard the "La Rochelle" in 1858. Her father, Julius, was a miller who owned a farm at Kabousie outside Stutterheim that included a large orchard and a water mill. Julius had served as a Field Coronet during the later Frontier Wars. It is not known how long Paul remained there in the area but at some point he made Emilie pregnant and a son, Paul, was born out of wedlock. Paul now desperately needed to support them by making his fortune in Johannesburg, the 'City of Gold' in the Boer's ZAR (Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek). He left Emilie and Paul and joined some 60,000+ 'Uitlanders', (Afr. foreigners) in Johannesburg. By 1895, he was trading as "P. Burmeister & Co., Tobacco Merchants & Commission Agents", in premises on the corner of Market / Sauer Streets, near or opposite where the later Africana Library was situated. His stock-in-trade "Speciality" was "Transvaal Tobacco".



**1899. Cover from JOHANNESBURG '16 JAN 99' to BETTENHAUSEN, CASSEL, GERMANY '6 2 99'.**  
*A pair of 1896 SG 217 (SACC 224) 1d rose & green and single SG 216 (SACC 223) 1/2d green adhesive affixed.  
 The advertisement on the envelope states that he has a store on Market Square.*

In 1896 the Jameson Raid attempted but failed to incite an Uitlander Uprising in Johannesburg over the New Year period. This act of corporate, capitalist and imperialist piracy by the so-called Randlords and the Cape Prime Minister, Cecil Rhodes, with a nod and a wink from the Colonial Office in London, made the Boers ever more mistrustful of the pro-British foreigners in their midst.



Funded by Rhodes, a diamond and gold magnate, the Jameson Raid sowed the seeds of the South African War by making the ZAR see the need to arm itself with modern weapons.

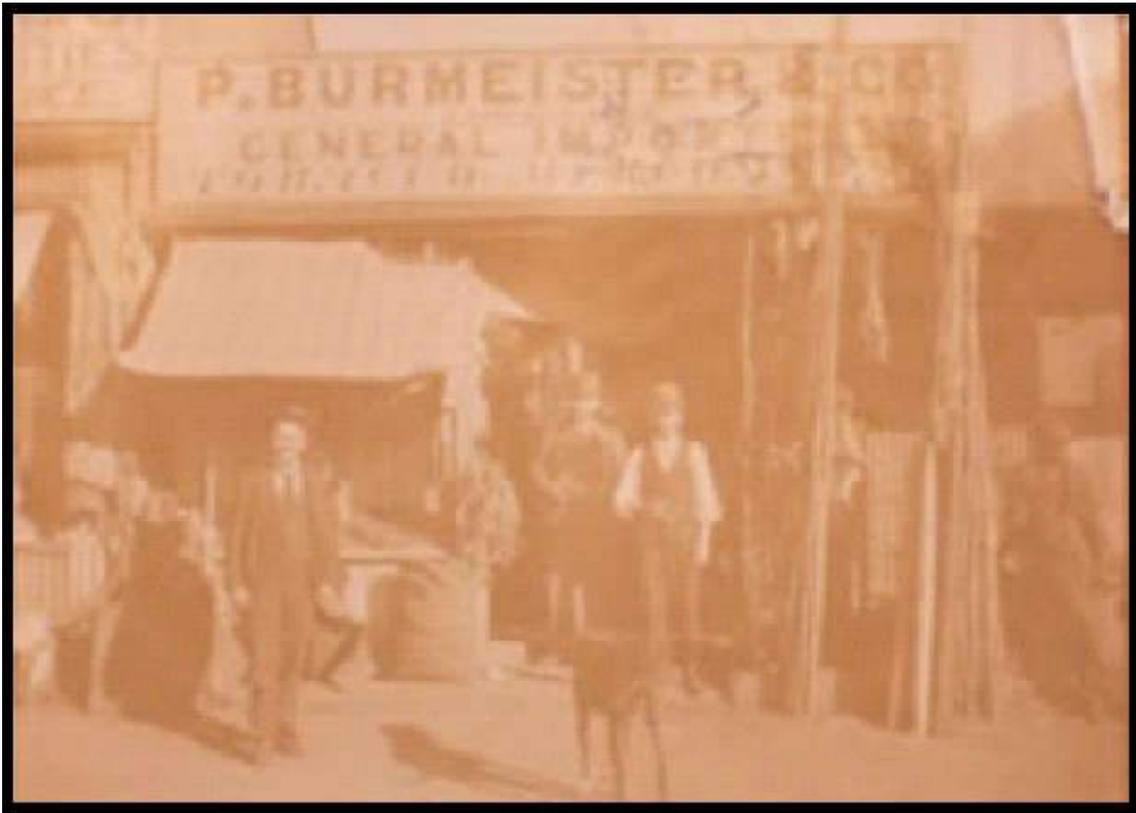
Once armed, the Boers' anti-imperialist republican resolve was strengthened.

Compromise was for the weak. The German Kaiser's telegram of support for the ZAR gave the Boers hope and made the British mistrust Germans everywhere.

In Queen Victoria's London, German businesses were attacked. Those living in the Cape Colony became the mistrusted meat in Britain's imperial sandwich.



*Imperial Enemies: Britain's Queen Empress Victoria (left) and Germany Kaiser Wilhelm, her grandson, right.*



*Circa 1899. Photograph. Paul, left, stands outside 'P. Burmeister & Co., General Dealers'. Between Paul and other two men there is a sack that possibly contains tobacco, his stock-in-trade.*

In November 1896 Paul returned to the Eastern Cape to marry Emilie in Stutterheim. The marriage register gives his address as "Johannesburg S.A.R." (South African Republic) and the occupation of his father-in-law, Ernst Grunow, as "Miller". Emilie returned with Paul to Johannesburg where her aspirational hard-working husband had or would soon buy a property for them to live in and raise a family. They had good reason to believe that their happiness and prosperity in the City of Gold was assured. His store on Market Square was well-located and bustled with pipe-smoking potential customers.



*This is a view of Market Square looking towards the intersection of Market and Sauer Streets. The building on the left is the Johannesburg General Post Office, aka Market Street Post Office.*

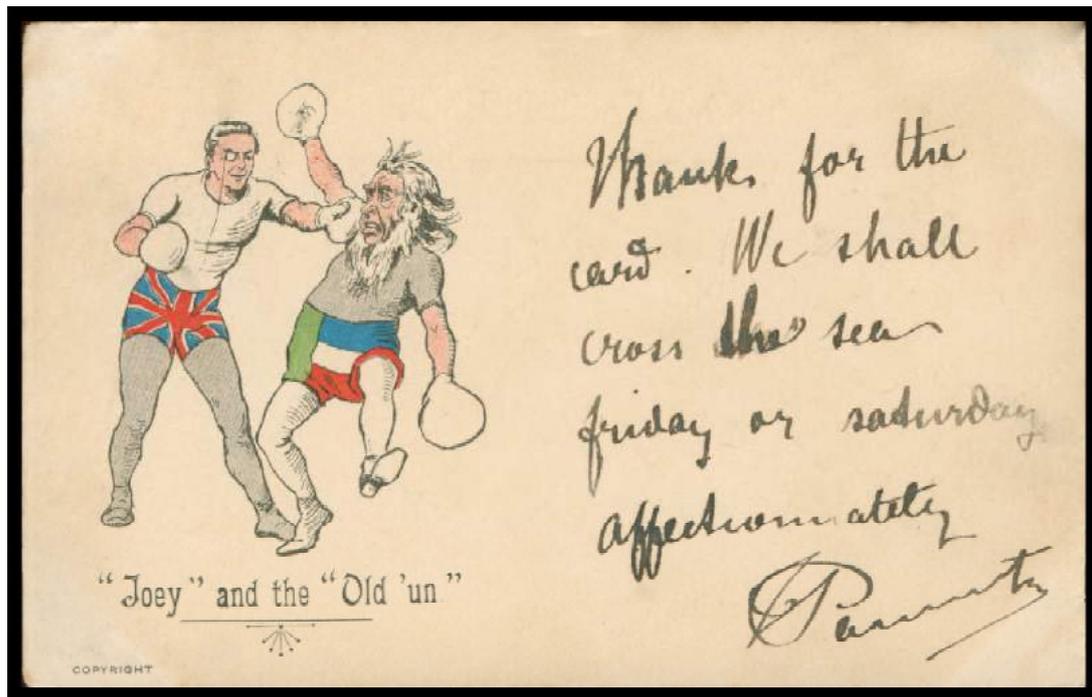
## The South African War: 1899 - 1902

Unfortunately, there were storm clouds on the newlyweds' horizon. British imperialism was unrelenting in its determination to bring the defiant Boers to heel and gain hegemony over southern Africa. In this long game, Lord Alfred Milner, the unscrupulous British High Commissioner for Southern Africa, led the imperialist agitation by manipulating anti-Boer sentiment through front organisations set up among the Johannesburg Uitlanders whom Milner called British "helots" (unfree men) living under a Boer yoke.

In mid-1899 Emilie discovered she was pregnant. Joy turned to despair when it became obvious that war was inevitable with a large British army preparing to sail for South Africa. The Boers had been painted into a corner. The war that Milner wanted was coming. The Boers were left with no options but Ben Viljoen's "God and the Mauser". Paul's choice was equally bleak. Stay and join the German Freikorps of Volunteers and fight for the Boers or flee with Emilie to her family home in Kabousie, outside Stutterheim. Either way, he would lose his Johannesburg home and business. War and the departure of Johannesburg's Uitlander population meant that his business was over. Paul decided to put Emilie and his future family first, even if it meant starting all over again in the rural backwater that was South Africa's Eastern Cape.



1899. COGH ½d stamp cancelled 'KABOUSIE'.

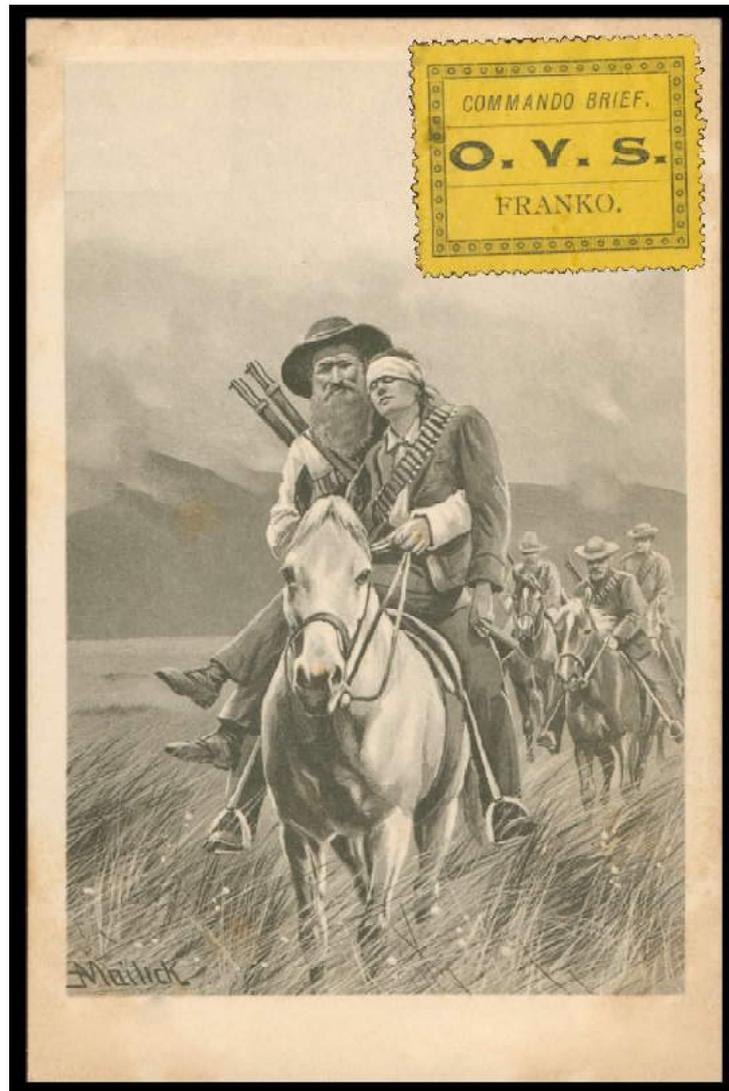


1900. Postcard. "Joey" and the "Old 'un". (No details. Copyright.)

A confident Prime Minister Joseph Chamberlain lands a punch on an unsteady President Paul Kruger of the ZAR. The Boers called up every man and boy they could get. The British drew on the vast manpower resources of their Empire.

Some time before the 11th October 1899, when the ZAR declared war on the British Empire in a desperate attempt to gain an advantage through a pre-emptive attack, Paul abandoned his business and the home which he owned and together with Emilie left Johannesburg on "the very last train" out. This would have placed Emilie in a difficult situation as by that time only open cattle trucks were available. Family legend also has it that all Paul could take with him were eight bags of tobacco. Just how he got them out in an overcrowded train in such chaotic circumstances is hard to imagine unless they were despatched in advance of their departure. Three months after Paul and Emilie arrived in Stutterheim, their second son, Wilhelm Albert, was born on the 22nd January 1900. It was the eve of the Battle of Spioen Kop.

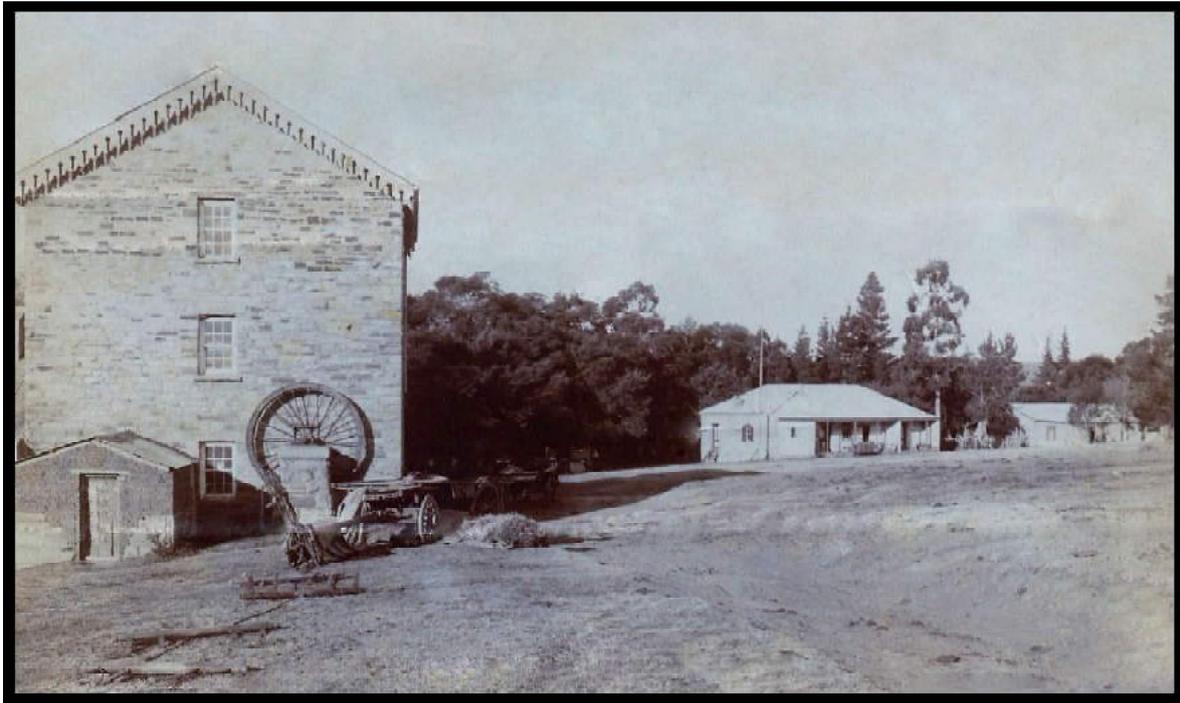
Once in Stutterheim, Paul sold his tobacco and went to work for his father-in-law. The loss of his business and with it his financial independence made this a difficult time for him, the only bright spot being his wife and newborn son. As the fighting turned against the Boers, it swung from conventional to irregular warfare. The eastern Cape with its mix of communities and divided loyalties was not unaffected. Passions were inflamed on all sides, Boer, British and Black. With the Kaiser perceived as pro-Boer, anti-German sentiment resurfaced among a section of the British settlers in the Eastern Cape and further afield.



*1900. Non-philatelic Compilation of European Pro-Boer Propaganda Postcard and Genuine Unused Commando Brief Label issued to OFS forces.*

One big loser was Hermann Malcomess, now the German Consul in East London. He abhorred the bloodshed the war was causing and chose to obey Germany's appeal for neutrality. He refused to join in the Relief of Kimberley festivities on the grounds that much of his trade had been with the Boers of the two republics. After the war entered a guerilla phase, the British and their Empire allies burned and dynamited Boer farms, bayoneted the livestock and marched woman, children and old men off to concentration camps where 25,000 died of neglect. Black South Africans were similarly badly treated by the British who saw them only as a pool of cheap labour. Malcomess' sympathy for the Boers of the conquered republics was severely criticized and there were angry calls for his firm and other German businesses to be boycotted. Perhaps for that reason, Hermann Malcomess retired and his son Carl become Managing Director of the company in 1903.

## The Mill on the Kubusie: 1900



*Circa 1900. Photograph. The Mill on the Kubusie at about the time it was purchased by Paul Burmeister.*

As a newcomer and a German, Paul put his head down and concentrated on family and work. It is not known if he was able to get any money out of the ZAR. However, in 1900 with financial assistance from family members, possibly his brother Wilhelm who was back in Germany, he acquired the larger of two Stutterheim water-mills on the Kubusie River, (more a waterfurrow). He signed milling contracts with local farmers and tanneries, milling the farmer's wheat and maize. He also ran an extensive operation buying stripped wattle bark sourced from areas adjoining the Kologha Forest near Stutterheim which he dried, crushed and sold directly to tanneries around the country, often through untrustworthy middle-men.



*The Ferns above 1st Fall Kologha Forest, Stutterheim*

The Kologha forest is South Africa's second largest indigenous forest, (second only to the Tsitsikamma in Knysna). In 1900, it was seen by most people as an exploitable natural resource.

## Burmeister and Co, Est. Kubusie 1901



Flying the Flag - but which one?

*1908. Watercolour Painting. The Mill on the Kubusie with Flag and Sign on Store Roof.*

Paul realised that the local farmers and suppliers who brought corn, wheat and wattle bark to him to mill were also in the market to buy a wide variety of goods and farm supplies. In 1901, before the end of the increasingly bitter South African War, he opened a General Dealer's Store at the mill which he proudly named 'Burmeister & Co.'. It had taken him two years since the loss of his business and home in Johannesburg to get back to trading as a general dealer. This new venture gave him an added sense of security as it provided an extra source of income should anything go wrong with the mill.

To indicate that the General Store was open for business he would raise a red 'Railway Ensign' flag and fly it for all to see. When he closed at the end of the day he would lower it, presumably without ceremony. The raising of a flag to indicate that a store was open for business was a common South African trading practice. The Eastern Cape town of Flagstaff received its name from the same custom.

Paul now had the opportunity to continue the import business he had started in Johannesburg. He was soon importing manufactured goods from Germany and Britain via East London and having them railed to the conveniently placed siding at Kubusie Station which lay just before Stutterheim on the main line into the interior. Although the South African War was not yet over, the railway would give him quick and efficient access to the far interior of the Cape, the OFS and beyond once the fighting stopped.

Following the Peace of Vereeniging in May 1902 which saw the formal end to the hostilities of the South African War but not the two opposing forces that started it, imperialism and republicanism, the OFS and Transvaal benefitted from reconstruction and his business boomed.

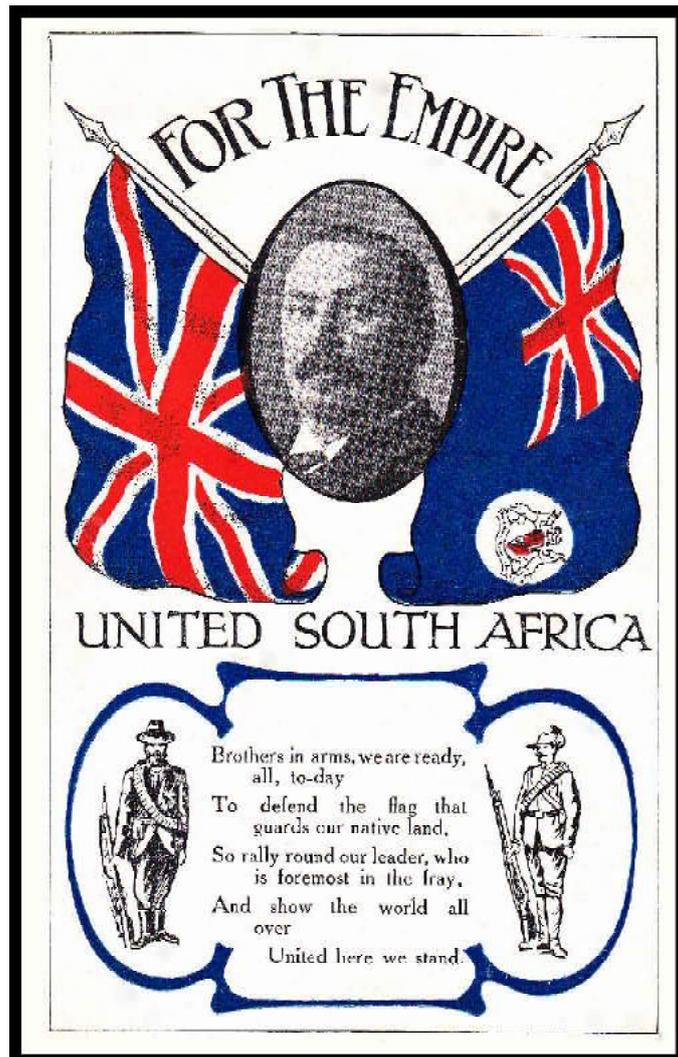
Not only was Paul's business growing but so was his family. On 23rd March 1902, just before the end of the South African War, Emilie gave birth to a third son, Friederich Carl Burmeister. A daughter, Erna Hildegard Ida, followed two years after the peace on 17th June 1904. Very little is mentioned about their first son, Paul. Some of what is written is contradictory. Family records refer to Paul in 1935 as an "*attorney and eldest son*" but no details of his birth are given. The standard history of the family has it that Wilhelm was the first son. It appears that for reasons known only to themselves, the family had decided that they would not marry until Paul, the father, was able to support Emilie and their son. However, as Paul, the eldest son, had been given his father's Christian name, there appears to be no doubt as to who the father was. Wilhelm, the second son, was presumably named after Paul's brother, the uncle who returned to Germany. It is likely that the stigma of Emilie giving birth to Paul out of wedlock remained a sensitive family secret for two generations.

## ‘The Railway Ensign’



1876 - 1910. The Railway Ensign flown above the Burmeister General Store is a version of the Red Ensign.

Up until 1910 the flag of the Cape Colony was a version of the Blue Ensign which included the Colony's Coat of Arms. The red flag flying above the Burmeister General Store at Kubusie is the CGR (Cape Government Railways) flag, aka the "Railway Ensign", which was flown at CGR stations. This is a version of the Red Ensign with the CGR coat of arms. Similar Blue and Red Ensign flags bearing the post-1910 Union of South Africa shield were used as the South African flag between 1910 - 1928. The Red Ensign South African flag was raised in Windhoek on its capture in 1915. Unless it is a red rag, the flag flying in the frontpiece watercolour dated 1908 ie. before Union and before the Red Ensign Union of South Africa flag, must be the "The Railway Ensign". Paul possibly obtained it from the railway siding at Kubusie.



1914. Postcard. 'For the Empire'.

*The South African Flag raised in Windhoek in 1915 was a red version of Blue Ensign (right). (Postcard ex Robert Hill, 2020.).*

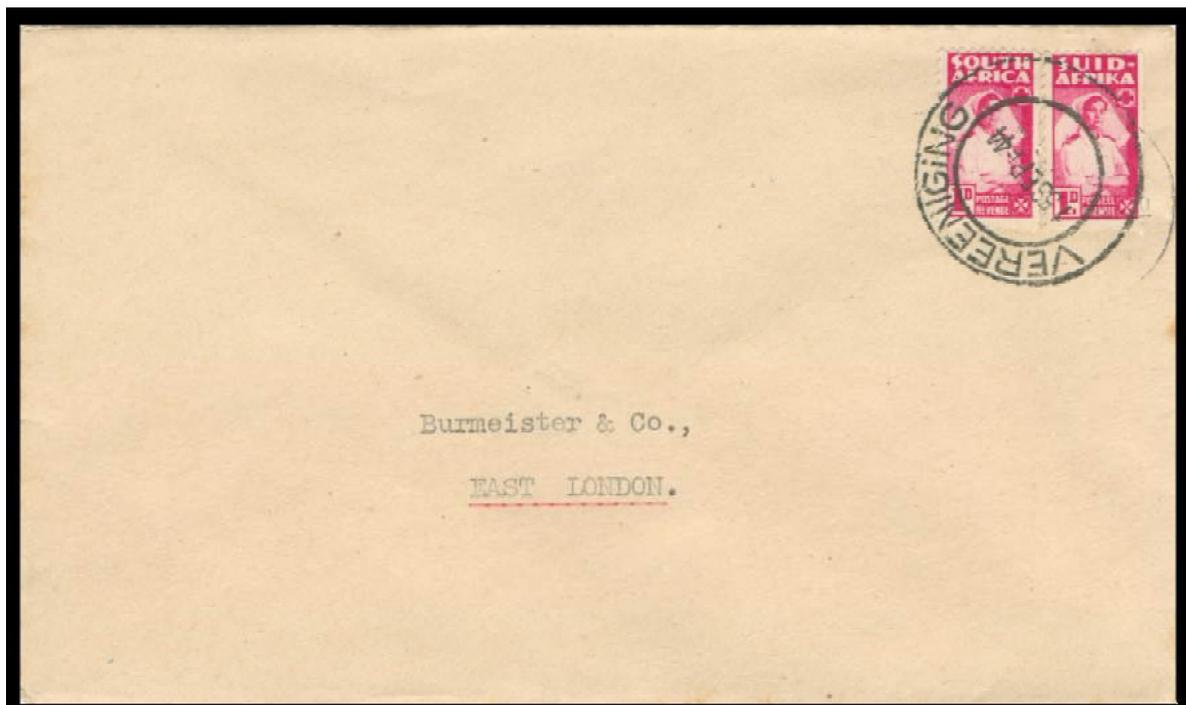
## The Peace Treaty of Vereeniging: 1902

The South African War was the bloodiest, longest and most expensive war Britain fought in the 100 years between 1815 and 1914. To win, it armed a large number of black South Africans and forced many more, into concentration camps it called 'refugee camps', drawing on them as a convenient labour pool for building blockhouses and railway defense lines. The war cost Britain more than 200 million pounds and 22,000 dead. The Boers lost heavily with some 34,000 people killed, the majority being old men, women and children. More than 15,000 black South Africans were killed. The 'Anglo-Boer War' was not a war limited to Anglos and Boers but one which affected all of South Africa's people. The South African War ended in a British victory sealed with the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging on 31st May 1902.



1943. Registered Letter VEREENIGING '3 APR 43' to EAST LONDON '6 APR 43'

Single 1942 SG 102 (SACC 101) 6d red-orange cancelled with Vereeniging's long-serving Putzel No. 4, ('ZAR' removed).



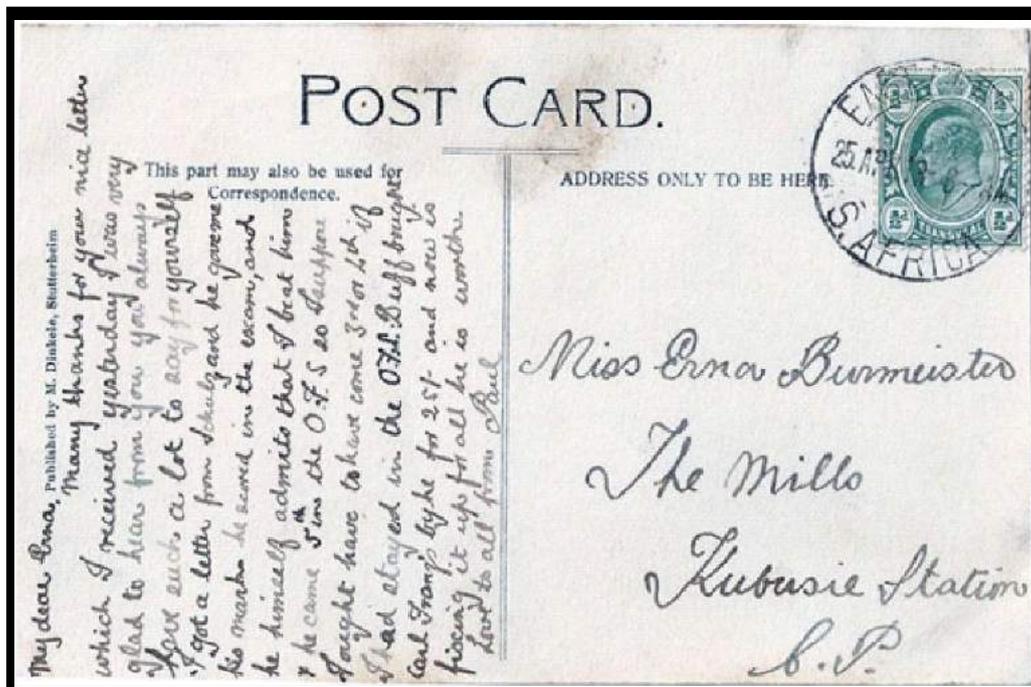
1944. Letter VEREENIGING '15 SEP 44' to EAST LONDON 'undated'

Pair 1944 SG 98a (SACC 96a) 1d bright carmine cancelled with Vereeniging's Putzel No. 12, (wide 'V').

## From “Farm School” to Selborne College

As the children grew up, it became necessary to consider their education. As there were no schools in the area, Paul applied to the Cape Department of Education for permission to start a "farm school". This permission was granted and board and lodging arranged for the potential tutor. It appears that several unsuitable applicants were accepted for the position before their inadequacies become known.

According to Peter Burmeister, “it was only after an advertisement was placed in “The Times” of London that matters were favourably settled. Mr J. Constantine was appointed to the position and through his skills the young family as well as the local railway employees’ children (from the siding at Kubusie) received their primary education. The number of pupils at the school, situated next to the mill, was approximately 42”. Peter remembers the esteem in which “Consty” was held by his Aunt Erna. “The wide range of learning imparted to his pupils was invaluable and the Burmeister children, whose home language was German, learnt their English language from him. Upon his death it was learnt that he was in fact a medical doctor who had decided to leave England due to a personal scandal. It would indeed be very interesting to learn more about this inspirational character about whom nothing else is known”.



1913. Postcard. ‘Kubusie Station, Stutterheim’ EAST LONDON ‘25 APR 13’ to Kubusie Station. Single 1908 SG 273a (SACC 279) ½d deep green cancelled by Putzel No. 15.

My dear Erna,

Many thanks for your nice letter which I received yesterday. I was very glad to hear from you. You always have such a lot to say for yourself. I got a letter from Schulz and he gave me his marks he scored in the exam and he himself admits that I beat him & he came 5th in the OFS so I suppose I might have to have come 3rd or 4th if I had stayed in the OFS. Duff bought Carl Franz's cycle for 25/- and now is fixing it up for all he is worth.

Love to all from Paul.

This postcard tells almost all we know about the education of Paul, the mysterious and gifted first son. It is possible that like Wilhelm and Freddy he matriculated at Selborne College, (founded in 1872 by Pastor Heinrich Muller, a German settler). Paul never joined the family business but as a lawyer he gave legal advice to his father. Wilhelm worked for the Department of Justice in King William's Town where he studied privately to obtain his "Attorneys Law Certificate". At weekends he would ride home to Kubusie on his BSA motorbike with a friend on the luggage carrier. After matriculating, Friedie Burmeister entered the Wool trade to gain work experience before joining the family business in the early to mid-1930s.

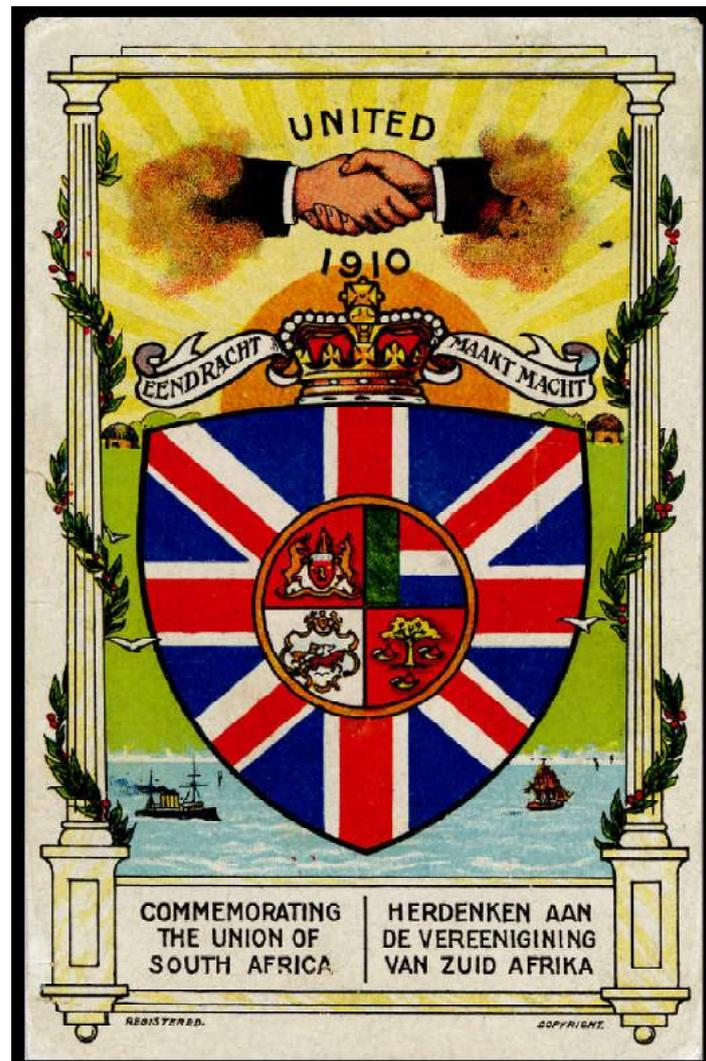
## The Union of South Africa: 1910

As much as some British imperialists had wished to exterminate the Boers, especially those in the military who had run the concentration camps, Britain believed that its best interests would be served by forging an alliance with the Boers. Britain recognised that as a percentage of the total population, black South Africans outnumbered Europeans 4 to 1. For any new country run by white South Africans to have a chance of working in British interests, a compromise political solution with the Boers was the top priority.

On the 31st May 1910, exactly eight years after the Boers had signed the peace Treaty of Vereeniging with the British, the Union of South Africa came into being. The formation of the Union of South Africa was the culmination of British Imperial policy in South Africa. The compromise that Britain made was to deny political rights to the majority Black population. The new leader of South Africa was General Louis Botha, an undefeated Boer General. By handing political power to Boers and Brits only, Britain created a White 'South Africa'. This ensured Botha's unwavering loyalty to the Empire and its interests. This betrayal of the 'Non-European' people formed the bedrock that anchored the politics of injustice that divided South Africa for the next eighty years.



1917. Wills's Cigarettes "Allied Army Leaders" (set of 50 issued in 1917) #14 General Botha (South Africa). Silk printed portrait.



1910. Postcard. 'Commemorating the Union of South Africa'. Bi-lingual Dutch and English Pro-Union Propaganda Postcard. Boer and Brit hands join to shake on Security and Trade behind the protecting Shield of the British Empire and the Royal Navy. Note the distant thatched huts on the horizon with not a Cape-Dutch style gabled farmhouse in sight! (Cover ex Robert Hill, 2020.).

## The Farmer's Weekly: 1911

Paul decided that the route to success for Burmeister & Co. was to target the needs of South Africa's farmers and rural communities. At that time in South Africa there was little or no manufacturing industry. Everything that could not be hand-made locally had to be imported, usually from Britain or Germany. The only significant things that were locally made were the wagons that transported imported goods deep into the interior. However, as railways replaced ox-wagons, customers were made to collect their purchases from the nearest station. As motor cars became more common, cars with large cargo spaces became known as a 'station wagons'.

The way to growth, Paul decided, was to become a South African mail order business similar to those that were successful in the USA, most notably Sears Roebuck. In the USA, Sears Roebuck typically printed hundreds of thousands of catalogues at a cost to the public of 25c each redeemable on orders over \$10. Paul did not want to print thousands of expensive catalogues that needed regular updating, nor hold the thousands of stock items listed by Sears Roebuck. Further, he did not want to start branches the way Malcomess and Co. had done. Knowing what he did not want to do helped but what was the alternative? Part of the problem resolved itself as hundreds of rural general dealers became wholesale customers.

In 1911 an answer presented itself, one which he eagerly embraced when he realised its potential. The solution was 'The Farmer's Weekly' magazine, sometimes called "the South African Farmer's Bible".

Published in Bloemfontein, the new judicial capital of the Union in the heart of the rural OFS, The Farmer's Weekly quickly established itself as a resource for South Africa's farming communities requiring the products of the outside world. Its huge national circulation of readers and subscribers led to it being second only to the Bible as the most influential publication in the development of South Africa. Paul's business was transformed by advertising in The Farmer's Weekly. It helped Burmeister & Co. achieve regional then national recognition as a reliable supplier of feed, seed, fertilizer, fencing and trek gear, etc.

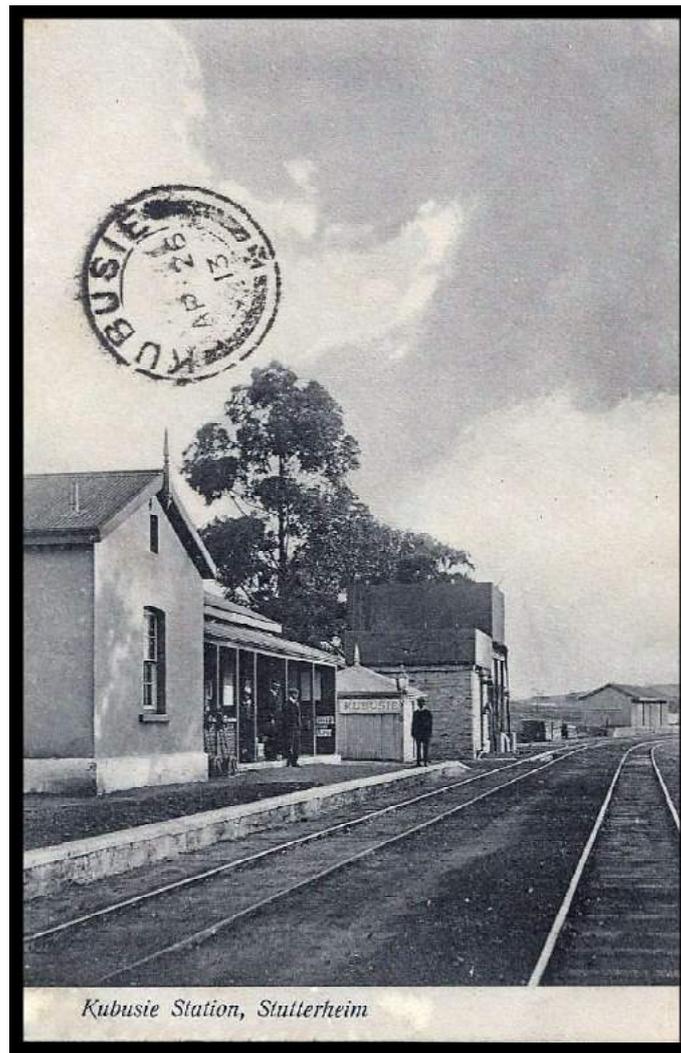
*"The mail order business flourished," said Peter Burmeister, grandson of the founder. "The Farmers' Weekly made Burmeister & Co. a household name among the farming community as far away as South West Africa, the Transvaal, Rhodesia and even further north".*



1943. Reply Paid Letter. PRETORIA 'Official Free Undated' to EAST LONDON received 'APR 5 1943'. Stamped with the purple oval OFFICIAL FREE cachet of the Director-General Supplies, Pretoria.

The Reply Paid Card above from 1943 shows that Burmeister & Co. were 'on the ball'. As early, innovative marketers they used 'the tricks of the trade' to make it easier for customers to buy from them.

## Kubusie Station Siding: 1913



**1913. Postcard. 'Kubusie Station, Stutterheim' EAST LONDON '25 APR 13' to Kubusie Station.**

*Single 1908 SG 273a (SACC 279) ½d deep green cancelled by Putzel No. 15.*

*No flag in sight. It is probably flying over the Burmeister & Co. General Store!*

Kubusie Station was also a railway post office with telegraph facilities. It was vital to the commercial life of Burmeister and Co. whose General Store was situated nearby. Equally, it can be argued that Burmeister and Co. was vital to the life of Kubusie Railway station as a post and telegraph office. After Burmeister and Co. relocated to East London in about 1939, the station and its post and telegraph office closed in 1940.

One must assume that Paul Burmeister enjoyed a good working relationship with the station and its staff. His two businesses probably made him an important, perhaps the most important, local businessman. In addition, his business and his family used the railway station as their local post office. Paul also allowed the children of the railway staff to be educated in the farm school run by the mysterious Dr 'Consty' Constantine. Given his position and generosity, it is conceivable that Paul was either offered or able to ask for and receive a 'Railway Ensign' flag to fly over the General Store when it was open for business.

Had the station and its siding been any further from the Burmeister & Co. General Store, it would have made importing goods from overseas and distributing them around South Africa more difficult and expensive. Typically, all the imported goods coming in from overseas via East London were shipped to Kubusie Station for collection and or delivery to the General Store. Once sold, that which was not able to be transported locally by wagon, was taken back to the siding for forward shipment by rail to customers around South Africa. Kubusie's location was not an issue to begin with but as Burmeister & Co. grew the attraction of being based closer to the harbour and the railhead in East London grew accordingly.

## A World in Flames - The First World War: 1914 - 1919

In 1914, World War One erupted in Europe and the old anti-German imperial antagonisms re-surfaced once more in South Africa. An early painting of the Mill at Kubusie shows the Railway Ensign flying over the General Dealer Store. Some have suggested that this is an ostentatious display of loyalty to King and Country during wartime. It may have been but it is equally likely that, as at Flagstaff and wherever else there was a general dealer a raised flag simply indicates that the store is open for business.



1907. Postal Stationery Card. 'Town House, Cape Town'.  
EAST LONDON 'AU 30 07' to USUMBARA, GEA, via TANGA '23 9 07' and WILHELMSTHAL '24 9 07'.  
1d Postal Stationery Card cancelled with Putzel No. 60.

To jingoistic British imperialists the above 1d Postal Stationery Card was probably a disloyal display of pride in German Imperial achievement. Sent by Paul Kuhne, a General Dealer based in Hanover Street, East London, it shows the German community retaining its language and culture at a time when the Burmeister's still spoke German at home. Many English-speakers viewed them with ongoing mistrust.

Despite his flag-flying show of patriotism, Paul Burmeister's Mill was burned down during WW1.

Arson was the most likely cause. There are different explanations for the attack. One suggests it was simply an anti-German act by local British settlers jealous of Paul's growing prosperity. At that time in the Union of South Africa hundreds of German had been rounded up and interned for the duration of the war in the belief that they represented a security risk. In any event, Paul was not compensated for the loss of the mill by his insurance company who denied liability by claiming "Spontaneous Combustion", an exclusion in the policy. The mill, being inadequately insured, was not rebuilt.

Another explanation for the loss of the mill, one favoured by Paul, is that the mill was burned down by James, a Xhosa employee. Like many other farmers, Paul allowed his employees living on the farm around the mill to own cattle which were allowed to graze alongside his. However, during the drought of 1914- 1916 grazing was badly depleted and Paul found it necessary to hire grazing on another farm. Some of Paul's and James' cattle were sent to graze at this farm but due to their poor condition some died. James demanded compensation as Paul had not asked his permission to send his cattle away to the hired land. James argued that Paul was responsible for their death. Paul refused to pay the large compensation James demanded as he too had lost cattle. It was during this time that the mill was burnt down. A neighbour reported seeing James on a hill overlooking the mill. He was sitting on a white blanket watching it burn.

## The Burmeister Family in Kubusie: circa 1920



### *The Burmeister family at Kubusie in the early 1920s.*

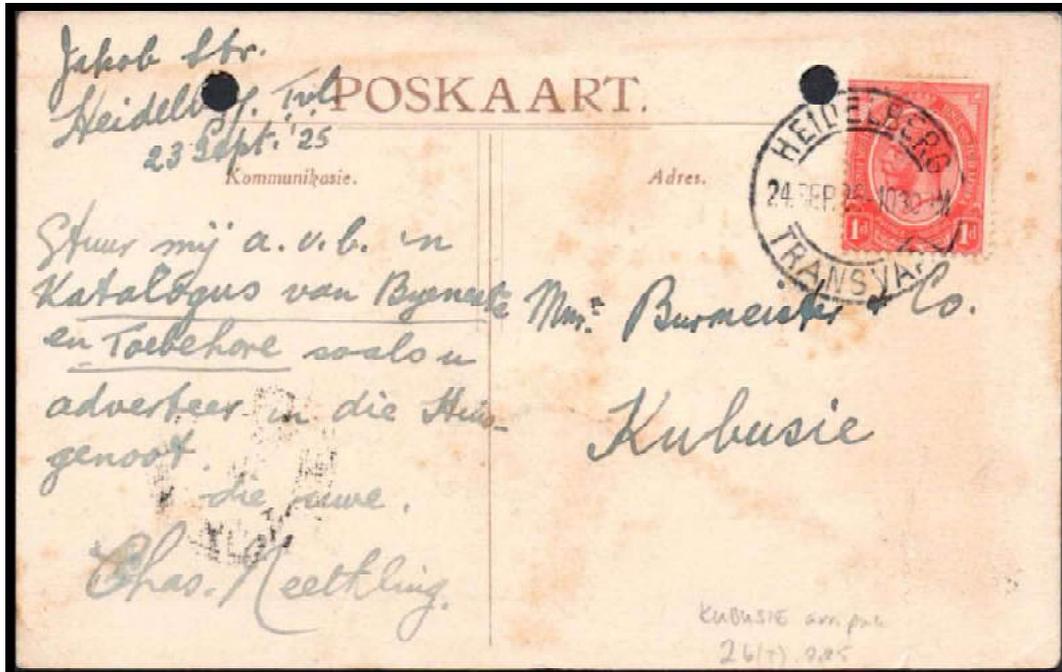
*From Left, Paul, senior; his wife, Emilie, their sons Paul, William and Friedrich and daughter, Erna. The family spoke German at home. The family is standing in age order. Friedie and Erna remained close.*

*Knowing of his interest in stamps Erna would send him letters and first day covers. Many of these covers and some of her letters were included in the 'the Burmeister hoard'.*

Paul now came to the conclusion that being based in Kubusie was not the most efficient and cost-effective way to distribute imported goods. It made more sense to move the business to East London to cut down agent's clearing fees, on transport costs and, like Malcomess, to take advantage railing goods inland from the harbour. The company would move several times in order to find a suitable premises.

## Rare Surviving Commercial Mail to Kubusie: 1925 - 1926

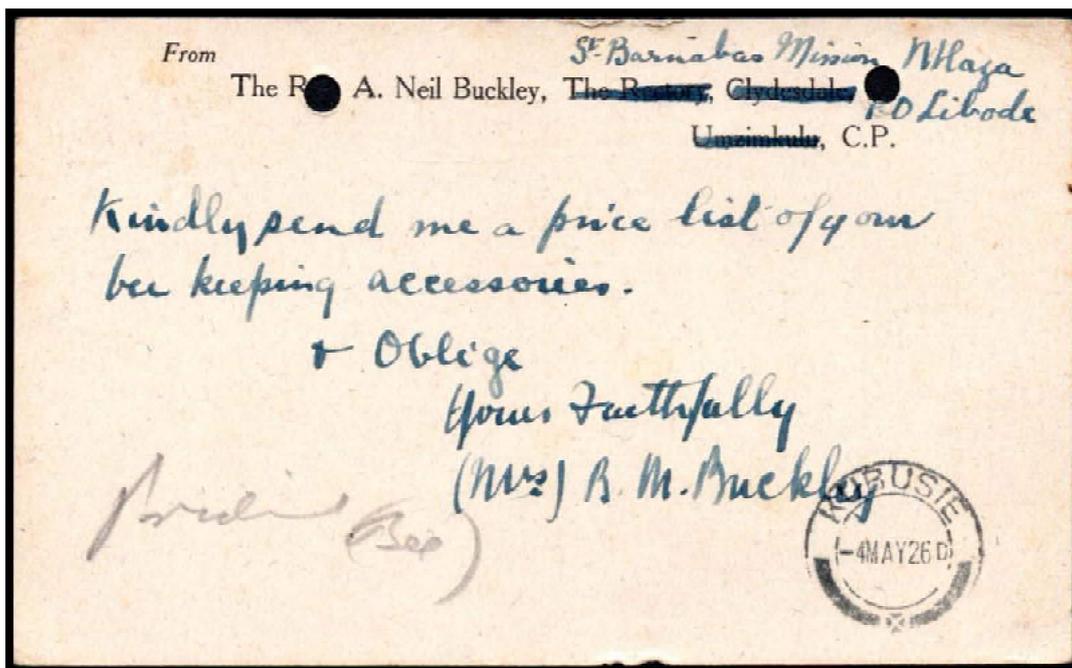
Two remarkable postcards have been contributed to this article by Simon Peetoom, the UK dealer who bought the largest part of the Burmeister hoard at auction. They represent the only known surviving commercial correspondence from Burmeister's Kubusie operation. Both postcards refer to Burmeister's 'Bee-Keeping' accessories, one states "as advertised in the Huisgenoot" magazine.



1925. Postcard. HEIDELBERG, TRANSVAAL '24 SEP 25' to KUBUSIE '26 9 25'

Friedie Burmeister began accumulation in about 1940 and stopped in about 1972. Items of Burmeister commercial correspondence from the period before he came to work for Burmeisters are scarce. These items have had holes punched in them, suggesting that Burmeister employed a punch-card filing system in the mid-1920s. Simon recalls finding "these postcards tucked inside another envelope within the hoard.

This wasn't unusual..... These three were easily the earliest items".



1925. Postcard. PO LIBODE to KUBUSIE '4 MAY 26'

All three of Simon's postmarks have an arrival CDS postmark stamped on the reverse. He wonders if the Kubusie PO staff were instructed to do this so orders arrived with a "received" date on them." Quite possibly! This was a relatively simple thing for the station postmaster' to do as a favour for Paul.

W C Burmeister & Co., Hamburg, Export Agent: 1929



**IMPORT \* WEINBRAND KELLEREI / LIKÖR FABRIK / RUM / ARRAC \* EXPORT**  
 FERNSPRECHER: B. 3 LITZOW 0093      BÖRSENGIANG: VOR PF. 58      BANK: DEUTSCHE BANK-FIL: HAMBURG  
 TELEGR. ADRESSE: SPORNCOGNAC      POSTSCHECKKONTO: HAMBURG 9145

**HAMBURG 91**  
 CANALSTR. 49 / 53

24. November 1929

**Rechnung** für Herrn  
 L. 99

Guido Kaiser,      Lonsa Werke b. Byrenberg  
 Ofenmeister      LAHE.

W. C. B. Nr.	Kg.	Wir sandten Ihnen für Ihre werthe Rechnung und Gefahr zufolge Ihres gefl. Auftrages durch <u>Herrn Albert Kaechub, Trattendorf</u>			
		<u>per Bahn franko an Herrn Albert Kaechub, nach Station Byrenberg (W66):</u>			
96560	2 Flaschen (3/4 Ltr.)	Weinbrand "Ursporn" in Rest	6.50	RM. 13.--	
1	"	"SPORN" Boonkany 45%	6.55	" 6.55	
1	"	"SPORN" Cordial 40%	5.75	" 5.75	
2	"	"SPORN" Jan. Rum-Verschnitt No. 4 50% in Rest	6.--	" 12.--	
1	"	"SPORN" Weinbrand-Verschnitt No. 102	3.30	" 3.30	22%
1	"	Batavia-Arrak-Verschnitt- Marke "ROJH" No. 127	4.25	" 4.25	
				<u>RM. 44.35</u>	

Some time after Paul's arrival in South Africa, his brother Wilhelm resigned at Malcomess & Co. and returned to Germany. His father's death in 1895 might have compelled him to return to look after his mother, as he and Paul had previously discussed. He also had the idea for a business of his own. In 1896, Wilhelm set himself up as an export agent and liquor merchant in Hamburg, a busy German Baltic seaport. Many of the goods that Burmeister & Co. in East London imported, and presumably also his previous employer, Malcomess & Co., were exported to South Africa via the offices of W C Burmeister & Co. The First and Second World Wars put a brake on his services to both companies. This purchase order from 1929 pre-dates the arrival of Freddy at Burmeister & Co.

Bei Zielüberschreitung berechnen wir Verzugszinsen in Höhe der Banksätze z. Zl. **8** % p. a.  
 Beträge, welche bis zum **27.11.29.** nicht eingegangen sind, erlauben wir uns zu entnehmen.

Bedingungen: Zahlbar innerhalb 10 Tagen mit 2% Skonto oder netto in 6 Wochen / Erfüllungsort für Lieferung und Zahlung ist Hamburg  
 Packzusammen werden nur innerhalb 8 Tagen berücksichtigt / Zahlungen sind ausschließlich an uns direkt zu richten / Bei Wechseln auf  
 Bankkreditplätze übernehmen wir keine Garantie für rechtzeitige Prozesse / Fässer und Korbfässer haben unser Eigentum und sind  
 uns sofort nach Entleerung bzw. innerhalb eines Monats in gutem Zustande frachtfrei nach Berlin Hamburg-Hamburg zurückzusenden

**SPORN WEINBRAND \* ERSTKLASSIGER DEUTSCHER WEINBRAND \* PRIMA VERSCHNITTE**

## Relocation to East London: circa 1930

Paul increasingly realised that while Kubusie was necessary for customers who called with grain to be milled, it was a poor location for an expanding General Dealership. He gave consideration to opening a store in Stutterheim but because he often heard it said "that East London had a future" he decided that being closer to the harbour and the railhead was the better long-term option.

Burmeister & Co. was importing practically everything it sold from overseas and in the process incurring large expenses from Landing and Clearing Agents. When Wilhelm decided to return to the family business from the Civil Service, Paul decided to send him to East London to clear goods through Customs. In about 1932, the company purchased a property at the far end of Commercial Road in East London. These gave Wilhelm an office from where he could clear goods through customs as well as a store served with a railway siding at the rear. He was soon joined by his younger brother Friedie. Sadly for postal historians, it appears that it was not until Burmeister & Co. purchased another new building in 1939 that Friedie gained the position that allowed him to begin to accumulate covers.



***Burmeister & Co. "Est. Kubusie 1901"***

*The company occupied several premises in East London during the 1930s.*

*This is likely the one at the far end of Commercial Road, believed to have been occupied by Wilhelm in 1932.*

A photo from the time shows Burmeister & Co. providing 'Produce, Seed, Fertilizers, Fencing Material', also 'Poultry Foods, Bee Hives & Accessories, Dairy & Agricultural Implements, Trek Gear - All Farmers Requisites". At the same time, Burmeister & Co had an office and a smaller store in Caxton Street, East London where the mail order business was run and which also served their local East London clients.

With the company continuing to prosper, Paul retired and Wilhelm, took over assisted by Friedie. Exactly when Friedie joined the company is not known. However, he was certainly active in the business from at least the early 1930s because in 1935, Paul "an attorney and eldest son", drew up a Deed of Partnership between his father, the founder, and his two brothers, Wilhelm and Friedie, who were active in the business. This agreement effectively divided up the assets of the business between the three active partners, as well as determined salaries, profit sharing and interest on loan accounts.

## Burmeister & Co., 11-13 Cambridge Street: 1939

By the late 1930s, Burmeister & Co's continuing growth resulted in a need for more storage and display space. A decision was made to leave Kubusie once and for all, to relocate the general dealership to East London, to sell the Commercial Road property and buy a new larger building in East London with showrooms and an attached railway siding.



*1947. Photo. Burmeisters & Co., 11 - 13 Cambridge Street, East London .*

*This is the building that housed and became synonymous with South African postal history's 'Burmeister hoard'.*

*This old wool warehouse was purchased for £8236 in 1939, just before the start of WW2.*

On 10th July 1939, the company bought the property that would become so well-known to South African postal historians, the old wool warehouse at 11 - 13 Cambridge Street. Burmeister & Co. would occupy this building until 1991. The price paid for the property was GBP £8236.

This purchase price was a lot of money back then but not unreasonable for a commercial building of this size in a town that "had a future". To get the purchase price in perspective, Burmeister & Co. was selling imported corrugated iron sheets, then the staple colonial building material, for 1¼d (one penny, one farthing) per foot on account and 1d for cash. The profit on this was small, perhaps just a farthing. It would be a some long time before the cost of the new building would be recovered from the sale of corrugated iron sheets. Fortunately, the company imported a wide range of farm staples.

Despite profit margins being tight, the Burmeister & Co's future looked rosey. Two trucks were purchased for deliveries to local customers. Gone were the days of donkey cart and ox-wagon deliveries.

## World War 2: 1939 - 1945



**1942. Propaganda Label from EAST LONDON '19 MAR 42'.**  
*"We realise in East London the safe arrival of this letter is due to the British Navy".*

After WW2 erupted, Burmeister & Co. experienced hard times during the war years, (1939 - 1945).

As a supplier of imported goods, Burmeister & Co's prospects looked bleak as imports were severely curtailed, those from Germany ceasing altogether. Petrol was rationed. When the drivers of their two new lorries were called up for military service, the lorries were sold and local deliveries discontinued. For the early war years the shop closed on Wednesday afternoons to allow the female staff to attend lectures given by the Red Cross in first aid, bandaging, etc. East London's garrison was beefed up with two 6" guns for the defence of the port which was actively used by the SA Navy and Royal Navy. The war came closer in October 1942 when the unescorted 'City of Johannesburg' was sunk by U-504 southeast of East London.

At this time, circa 1940 - 1945, Burmeister & Co. used no office equipment except a typewriter and a franking machine. The first machine purchased for office use was a machine for "kicking off" tickets used for the the railing of goods. Joseph, the company messenger, would go to the railway siding behind the shop to deliver these tickets several times a day.



**1943. Cover. JAMESTOWN '2 APR 43' to EAST LONDON '3 APR 43'.**

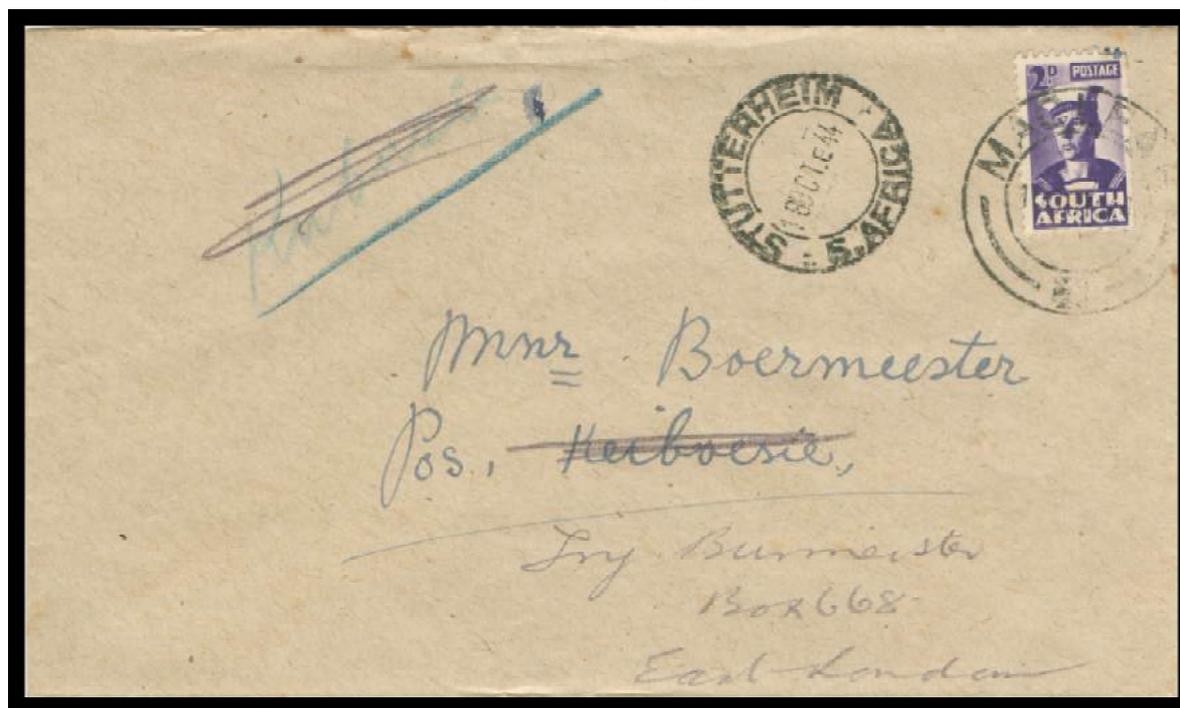
*The large 1942 SG 95 2d violet War Effort is cancelled by an unrecorded datestamp, possibly Putzel No. 6 with block before single digit day. Alex Viser's Addendum has a datestamp, No. 8, that appears to more closely match the above example with round 'O'. However, Alex's Addendum states that the recorded period use for No. 8 is 1944/62.*

The war at sea resulted in a decision not to supply SA with paper as ships were needed for more urgent matters. This caused a paper shortage in SA that resulted in 'Bantam' versions of the large 'War Effort' issue. The violet oval cachet is Burmeister & Co.'s own receiving datestamp.

## Goodbye to Keiboessie: 1940



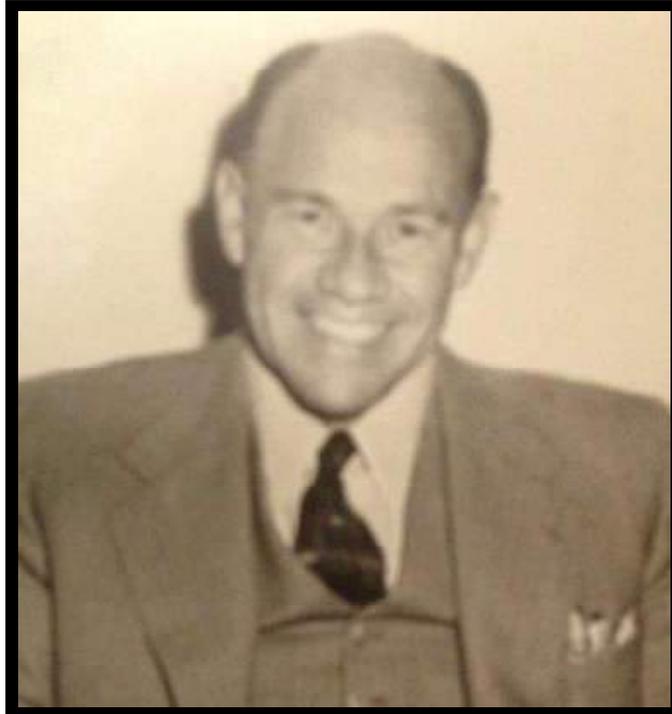
1943. Cover from ZASTRON '4 SEP 43' to KUBUSIE forwarded to EAST LONDON (undated).  
Single 1941 SG 58a 2d (SACC 58a) grey & dull purple cancelled with Putzel No. 11.



1944. Cover from MACLEAR '10 OCT 44' to KEIBOESIE (undated).  
Re-routed via STUTTERHEIM '18 OCT 44' to EAST LONDON (undated).  
Single 1942 SG 100 (SACC 98) 2d violet wartime 'Bantam' stamp cancelled with Putzel No. 5.

After Burmeister and Co. relocated to East London, Kubusie station and its post and telegraph office closed in 1940. Letters from this time addressed to Kubusie can be found forwarded to East London. Kubusie is spelled 'Keiboessie', (Afr. Kei bush). Putzel records 'Kaboessie'. The above addressed to 'Boormeester', (Afr. master of the Boers, is perhaps a tongue-in-cheek reference to perceived high prices). About this time, a farmer wrote asking if Paul was not ashamed that he charged 9d for scissors while the farmer only got a 1d a pound for wool cut with them. Commercial success had made Paul 'master of the Boers'!

**SHOWING SOON ON A SCREEN NEAR YOU....**



**COMING SOON**

**Part 2: How Friedie Burmeister Accumulated  
South Africa's Largest Postal History Hoard.**



# The End

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**Part 1: The Story Behind Friedie Burmeister's  
Accumulation of South Africa's  
Largest Postal History Hoard  
Updated 21/10/2020**

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