

Obituaries

George Tatham (1929-1986)

George Tatham, Chairman of the Ladysmith Historical Society, died after a three-month illness on Monday, 24 March 1986. On 2 November 1985 one of his greatest ambitions had been fulfilled when the Administrator of Natal, Mr Radclyffe Cadman, opened the new Ladysmith Siege Museum. This museum contains numerous objects collected over many years by George Tatham and his wife Gill.

Born on 9 January 1929, in Bergville, George Tatham was a grandson of a siege veteran, Major George Tatham, of the Natal Carbineers. George Tatham was educated at St Charles College in Pietermaritzburg and at the University of Natal in the city, where he studied accountancy. Whilst he was a student he was a member of the first rugby team.

George Tatham's life was characterised by his compassionate nature. This was manifested in his dedicated community service and by a commitment to the preservation of Natal's history in general and Ladysmith in particular. In public life he was a staunch supporter of the United Party. During the 1974 general election he stood unsuccessfully as the United Party's provincial candidate for the Klip River constituency. He was more successful in local office and served as a Ladysmith town councillor for six years and as deputy mayor of the town. He campaigned against the eviction of Indian traders from the town centre and for improved housing for the underprivileged.

George Tatham's political career was just one way in which he strove to serve the community. He will be remembered more for founding the Ladysmith Historical Society than for his political work. The Ladysmith Historical Society was founded in 1968 and its reputation spread rapidly beyond the confines of Natal. Almost every book on the Anglo-Boer War and the Natal Campaign that has been published over the last twenty years acknowledges its author's debt to George Tatham and the Ladysmith Historical Society. He guided innumerable tours of the battlefields of Northern Natal and his vivid recreation of the grim events of the Anglo-Boer War had a tremendous impact on his listeners.

The Ladysmith Historical Society has published an invaluable series of Siege diaries. George and Gill Tatham were responsible for collecting the documents for publication and for the laborious editorial work involved in publishing them. George Tatham was also anxious to extend the activities of the society beyond the confines of military and settler history. In 1983 the Ladysmith Historical Society published *The Hlubi Chiefdom in Zululand-Natal* by Andrew Manson and John Wright, which marked a small breakthrough in the acceptance of revisionist history by the public.



George Tatham (1929-1986)
The Ladysmith historian and the Siege Town.

(Photograph: *Die Volksblad*)

The Ladysmith Siege Museum is George Tatham's most prominent monument. For years he campaigned for a proper museum in which to exhibit the valuable collection. In 1985 the Natal Provincial Museum Service used the collection laboriously assembled by George and Gill Tatham as the kernel of the Ladysmith Siege Museum.

George Tatham was a founder member of the Natal Provincial Museum Service's Advisory Board and used his valuable experience to assist museums throughout the province. He was deeply concerned about the quality of the local museums as well as of the Provincial Museum Service and played a leading role in having the Hosking Committee of Enquiry into museums appointed by the Administrator in 1985.

The Tatham family has been connected with Ladysmith since 1870 and George and Gill Tatham brought up their four children on their farm *Hydeswood* which contains the site of the Battle of Nicholson's Nek. Not only has the Tatham family been steeped in the history of Ladysmith, but George Tatham's life of service will ensure that the name and works of his family will live in the district for many years to come.

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