

THE ALFRED LORD MILNER SOUTH AFRICAN ADDRESSES



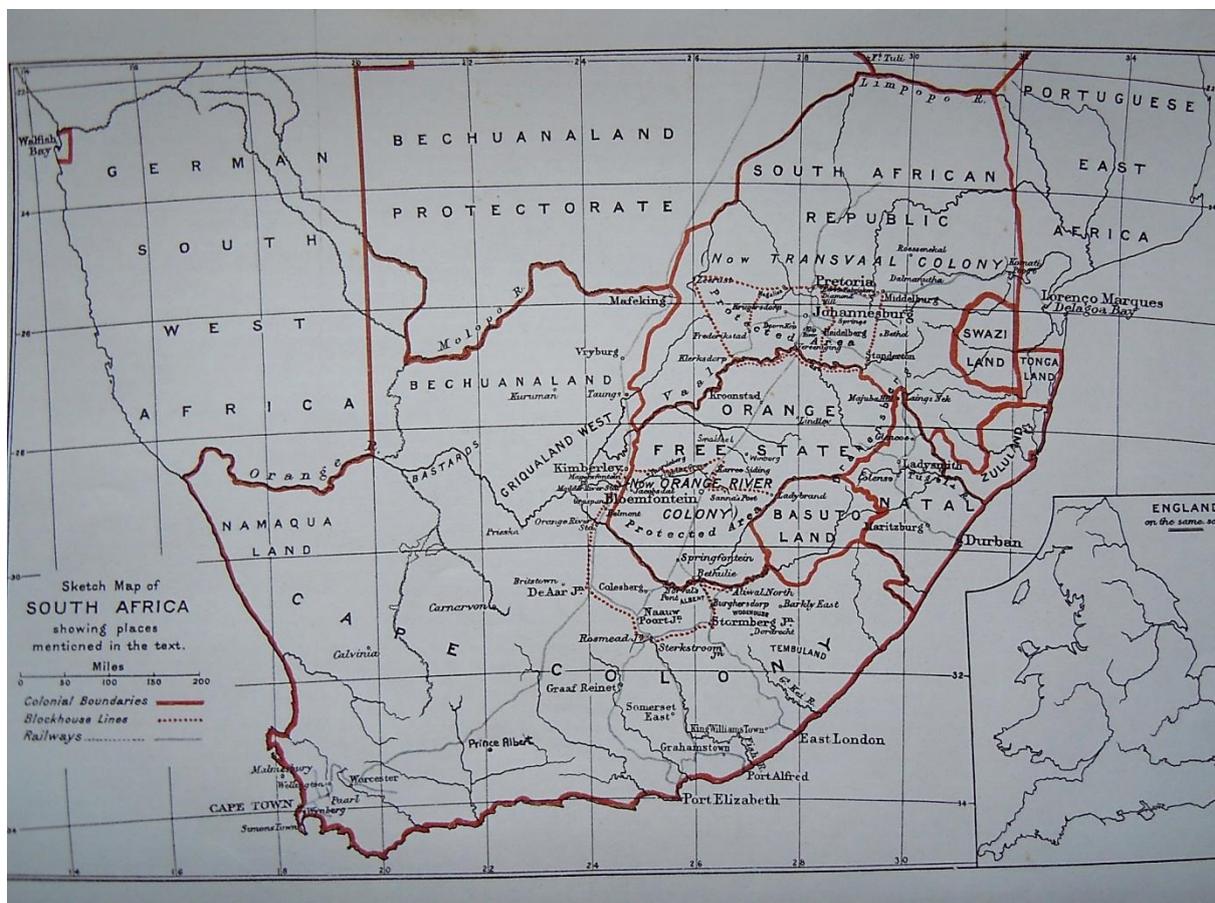
Among the Alfred Milner papers in the archives of New College is a collection of handwritten or printed addresses (or copies of addresses) presented to Lord Milner from the peoples and towns of British South Africa while he was there in the capacities of High Commissioner and Governor of the Cape Colony (and in the wake of the Second Boer War, as Governor of the Transvaal and Orange River Colonies) between 1897 and 1905.

Sir Alfred Milner was appointed to the first two of these positions by Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies, in February 1897 on the resignation of Lord Rosmead. The appointment was supported by many, including former Liberal Prime Minister Lord Rosebery who wrote that "he [Milner] has the union of intellect with fascination that makes men mount high" and Leader of the Opposition (and former Chancellor) Sir William Harcourt who described him as "a man deserving of all praise and all affection". Having previously served for four years as under-secretary of finance in Egypt and then later as chairman of the Board of the Inland Revenue, Milner was seen as a statesman with the ability to assess the situation and circumstances in South Africa and, while acting in the interests of the British Empire, to be able to deal justly with the independent governments of the South African Republic and Orange Free State.

The situation it was hoped Milner would address and help alleviate had been left particularly delicate and difficult after the Jameson Raid of 1895-1896. This had been an attempt, planned in part by Cecil Rhodes, Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, to incite an uprising in Johannesburg and the South African Republic by having an armed force under the leadership of Leander Starr Jameson cross the border and march towards the township with

the ultimate aim of wresting control of both it and the gold fields from the Transvaal government. Forewarned, the Boers arrested the group and its leaders. In total contrast to its aims the Raid only succeeded in unifying the Boers behind President Paul Kruger and eventually resulted, in 1897, in a military pact between the Transvaal and the Orange Free State – the first moves towards the Second Boer War of 1899-1902.

Milner left England on 17 April 1897 and arrived in South Africa in May. In a letter to Joseph Chamberlain in July he outlined his plans to visit towns and districts and so acquaint himself with the land and people, declaring that “there is nothing which could add so much to my efficiency as to have seen the country”; he certainly did not intend to be “tied to an office chair in Cape Town”. He travelled through the Cape Colony in August and September 1897, through the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Rhodesia in November and December 1897, and through Basutoland in April 1898. A large proportion of the addresses in this collection were presented by towns and people he visited and met in this initial period.



The first handful of addresses, principally from Cape Town itself, date from within the first two months of Milner’s arrival and are clearly in the form of a welcome. However, once he started touring the Cape Colony in August 1897, it is possible to roughly (and on many occasions quite accurately) trace his footsteps. He appears to have left Cape Town at the end of August, travelling east and started the tour in earnest at East London on 1 September. He moved north-west to King Williams Town and Fort Beaufort, Bedford and Somerset before heading south to Albany and Bathurst, then west to Port Elizabeth. From here he continued west along the southern edge of the Cape Colony, ending up at Prince Albert on the gold fields on around 23 September.

His tour of Bechuanaland and Rhodesia seems to have started towards the end of October at Kimberley in the district of Griqualand West. The addresses often afford a glimpse into many corners of society in the regions Milner visited, with as many groups as possible clearly keen to express their support for him and their (at least, expressed) devotion to Queen Victoria and the Empire. From Kimberley and Griqualand West, for instance, there are examples from the Divisional Council, the Mayor and Councillors of the Borough, the Indian Political Association (on behalf of the Indian Community), the Branch of the Africander Bond and Farmers' Association with the Dutch community of the Diamond Fields, the branches of the South African League and, in an indication of the social divisions that were to remain, a separate one from the "coloured residents".

Milner's journey north on this tour took him along the border between British Bechuanaland and the South African Republic, taking in Vryburg, Mafeking, Palapye and on into Rhodesia with visits to Bulawayo and Victoria, arriving at Salisbury, the northernmost point, in November 1897.



What is not clear in any way is precisely how Milner and his, presumably, quite large retinue travelled. Railway lines are clearly marked on the maps showing how they connect principal towns and cities such as Cape Town and Kimberley. However, the maps also serve to show that there were many areas that Milner visited that were inaccessible in this way, leaving roads and maybe waterways as the only alternatives.

After opening the Graaff-Reinet to Middelburg railway line on 3-5 March 1898 (an address in the collection from Graaff-Reinet dated 3 March is specifically in celebration of

this event) Milner visited Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State in early April, moving on to Basutoland and the Herschel district and ending at Aliwal North at the end of the month.

The addresses themselves vary greatly in appearance and quality. Some are merely written on lined paper, perhaps presented as a booklet, with signatures of those representing the named bodies or groups, with minimal (if any) decoration. Others are altogether more elaborate, displaying thought and pride, with decorative borders, fanciful lettering, sometimes beautiful illustrations and vignettes and attractive use of colour and patterns. A popular colour in many is pink – perhaps emphasising the perceived pride of being a part of the British Empire?



After the initial round of touring his new territories, Milner presumably returned to Cape Town. The Second Boer War started in October 1899. In early March 1901 Milner took up residence in Johannesburg, assuming responsibility for the administration of the two Boer states, the South African Republic and the Orange Free State which, despite the war continuing, were both annexed to the British Empire. Milner resigned his role of governor of the Cape Colony but continued as High Commissioner. There are in the collection three addresses from Johannesburg from 1901, one of which is dated in March (with the others quite probably from the same point in time), presumably welcoming him as the new administrator of the region.

Milner returned to England for a holiday in May 1901. On arrival in London he had an audience with King Edward VII and was made Baron Milner. At a lunch in his honour he addressed critics who believed that the current war could have been avoided with more time and patience (“a little more of all those gentle virtues of which I know I am so conspicuously devoid”) by maintaining that his administration had been facing “panoplied hatred, insensate ambitions, invincible ignorance”.

He returned to South Africa in August and the collection includes further addresses from Pietermaritzburg and Ladysmith, both in Natal, dating from October.

The Boer War ended on 31 May 1902 with the Treaty of Vereeniging confirming British sovereignty over the Orange River Colony (formerly the Orange Free State) and the Transvaal Colony (formerly the South African Republic), finally ending their independent status. Addresses in the collection from Kroonstad and Ladybrand in the former and from Standerton in the latter from November and December 1902 indicate Milner visited the areas in the months following the settlement, having been formally sworn in as Governor in June and having been made, on 1 July, Viscount Milner of Saint James in the County of London and of Cape Town in the Cape Colony. In September 1903, on Joseph Chamberlain's resignation, Milner declined the offer from Prime Minister Arthur Balfour of the post of Secretary of State for the Colonies, preferring to continue his work in South Africa. Further addresses dating from 1904 and 1905 indicate he made visits to areas such as the Transvaal and Swaziland.

Milner continued in South Africa until 1905. Feeling the strain from his work he resigned and returned to England on 2 April. In a speech in Johannesburg on the eve of his departure, he declared "I engaged in the struggle [to keep South Africa as part of the British Empire] with all my might, because I was from head to foot one mass of glowing conviction of the rightness of our cause ... I should prefer to be remembered for the tremendous effort, wise or unwise in various particulars, made after the war, not only to repair its ravages, but also to restart the new colonies on a far higher plane of civilization than they have ever previously attained". The then Secretary of State for the Colonies, Alfred Lyttelton, believed that Milner's administration had laid the foundations for a united South Africa to build upon to become one of the Empire's greatest states.



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NCA11679-11682

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Map references

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