

A Dream That Came True

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BEFORE the advent of Warriors Gate, the Shrine of the Order, in 1936, Moth General Headquarters was housed in what was known as the "CHATEAU-DE-WHATHO", an old barn in Albany Grove, Durban. The ancient building had served its purpose for many years.

The idea for the "GATE" was born at Durban Country Club during a farewell dinner given for Admiral Evans, who was also a Moth. I was privileged to be there and sat between Colonel Molyneux and Senator Clarkson. Charles Evenden (Moth 'O') was sitting next to and chatting with an ex-gunner friend of his.

Colonel Molyneux turned to me. "Claude," he asked, "what is Charles up to now?"

We were soon to know.

Moth 'O's friend had asked him if there was anything very special he wanted to do for the Order. His answer was that we needed badly a General Headquarters of our own. Visiting Moths from near and far had been disappointed when they saw our dilapidated "Chateau-de-Whatho" and he had long yearned for a new building that would do justice to the Moth name.

His ex-gunner friend, who was also an influential business man, asked if he

had any ideas as to the form of building required. "Yes," said Moth 'O', he had in his possession a photograph of a genuine old Norman Gatehouse, which stood in Surrey, England. Into this type of building could be fitted a long boardroom over the archway, and other offices and a custodian's cottage on the ground floor. He had visualised the archway serving as another entrance to the beautiful Old Fort grounds. But all this had been only a dream.

"Well," said his friend, "perhaps if you show me a plan of the proposed scheme, I will give you the money to build it."

It seemed too good to be true.

"I'm not joking," laughed the ex-gunner, "come and have a chat about it in the morning."

Moth 'O', armed with his plan of the proposed building, and accompanied by Guy Dunning, Colonel Molyneux, Bert Constable and myself, visited the donor's house and discussed the scheme with him, after which he turned to Moth 'O' and said: "It's all right, you can get on with the job, but on one condition, that my name is not divulged during my lifetime."

Moth 'O', Guy, the Colonel, Bert and myself kept the secret to ourselves until our friend had passed on, many years later.

Shortly after that meeting, Colonel Molyneux, who was O.C. Old Fort Grounds for the Municipality, took Moth 'O' with him to pick a suitable site for the building. Through the help of 'Moly' Durban Corporation donated a part of the historical Old Fort Ground, in perpetuity, on which would stand the "Gate".

They then went to let Moth Cecil Cowley, our legal advisor know what they had done. There were no legal difficulties likely to be encountered and they could go ahead with the scheme.

On reporting progress at Moth G.H.Q., Moth 'O' was told that it was his baby and to get on with the job.

He would have sole charge of the building and its development. He accepted the role on behalf of the Moth Organisation, and with thanks to the generous donor, building operations commenced.

He decided to name the new headquarters "Warriors Gate", because it could speak for all sections of the forces and all Moths would be shareholders.

One person who had to put up with a lot was Moth 'O's devoted and patient wife, Rene Evenden. She took him by car every day to the field of operations, where she spent many hours waiting for him and watching the "Gate" grow, whiling away part of the time knitting in the waiting car. She saw Warriors Gate built from start to finish.

And so the dream came true.

The recommendation by Moth 'O' that Guy Dunning, Claude Page and John Gourlay be the Trustees was agreed to by G.H.Q. Moth 'O' mentioned that there must be no interference whatsoever with the existing Warriors Gate. Any new extensions must not encroach on the original shrine, which, it was hoped, would remain an historic building and museum for all time.

However, after completion of the "Gate", which had cost £1 700, it was found to be too small, and our generous donor footed the bill again for necessary extensions, which amounted to £4 000, making the total cost £5 700.

The official opening, in 1937, was performed by the Minister of Defence.

To celebrate the opening, the invitations sent out included all the Order, in all provinces, and other celebrities. The floor of the D.L.I. Drillhall was crammed with beds occupied by visiting Moths.

One of the replies to invitations to sit on the rostrum, was from Moth Charlie James, of Randles Bros. & Hudson. It was he who had donated the money to build the "Gate" and extensions. He did not wish to sit with the celebrities. Instead he marched with his own Shellhole, "Twinkle".

The host of Shellholes formed up on Cartwright's Flats, for the march to Warriors Gate. I was appointed O.C. of the parade. The column was to march past Warriors Gate, then wheel round and face the "Gate". Unfortunately, I gave the order "Right turn" instead of "Left turn". Some wag from near the back, realising my mistake, called out "Make up your bloody mind!"

This brought much laughter from all present, and Moth 'O' turned to me and said: "Well, you asked for it."

With the Royal Family (H.M. King George VI, Queen Elizabeth, Princess Elizabeth and Margaret) visit to Durban in 1947, no one in the city knew that it had been invited to take a look at Warriors Gate and what it contained, not even the Custodian, Moth Howe (often jokingly referred to as our Crimean veteran) who claimed that he was entitled to know what was going on at his sanctum.

Moth Douglas Mitchell, M.P. (an old friend who had served in the same regiment as myself in East Africa in 1916) was in charge of the Royal Tour arrangements, and had invited the Royal Family to see the Shrine of the M.O.T.H. before attending a function at nearby Kingsmead Sportsfield.

The custodian was given instructions that the "Gate" had to be locked on that day, and not opened until a certain party arrived. It was the biggest thrill ever for 'Old Boy' Howe when he saw the Royal Family turn up.

The present custodian of the "Gate" is our old friend Jimmy Mitchell. When he was first appointed he knew nothing about Mothdom or what his job would entail, but has turned out to be one of our best custodians.

All business appertaining to the order is dealt with at the monthly G.H.Q. meetings at Warriors Gate. All Provincial Command Old Bills are supposed to be members of G.H.Q., but owing to the vast distances some had to travel to attend the monthly meetings, proxies, chosen from local G.H.Q. staff, represent each province.

Housed in the historic museum are war souvenirs dating back to the 11th Century, A.D. Included are Norman weapons of armour, Crusader side-arms, relics from South African wars and many hundreds of regimental badges and decorations.

There are hats from famous wartime leaders, the first one obtained being that of Admiral Evans. Others include those of H.R.H. The Duke of Kent, Field Marshal Smuts, Admiral Lord Jellicoe, Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, Sir Ian Hamilton, General Evered Poole, and Sir Duncan McKenzie.

At Warriors Gate can be seen the Rolls of Honour of two world wars. There are plaques on which are recorded the names of the foundation members of G.H.Q., and those who have been "Old Bill of the Order". Besides Shellhole nominal rolls, there is a leather bound "Sound Memory" album of numerous Moth Memorial buildings - a record that is steadily growing.

The stones fixed in the exterior walls are from farspread battlefronts. On exhibition inside the building are two stones picked up at the battlefield at Hastings, 1066.

The two light field guns at the "Gate" were captured in South West Africa and presented to General Botha. They stood on his farm for many years and were then given to us by Moth Botha, the General's son.

Among the most valuable souvenirs at Warriors Gate are those from the Tower of London - the armour of two Pikemen, a horseman's armour, pikes, halberds, swords of Yeomen - all "scrounged" by Moth 'O' while on a visit to England.

When asked how he managed to obtain these relics, Moth 'O' grinned and said: "I merely asked for them."

Approximately four hundred Shellhole plaques adorn the walls at the "Gate", "Jambo Sana" Shellhole plaque being the first one to be placed on view. These plaques, a few of which are from Shellholes in England, are intended to be links between Shellholes and Warriors Gate. Although some Shellholes are now defunct, the link is still there. Unfortunately, there are a

few Shellholes without plaques and we have nothing to show visual remembrance of them. Disappointment is shown by visiting Moths when they find their own Shellhole is not represented.

Thousands of visitors from all parts of the world and our own country are enthralled by what they see at the "Gate". In addition, teachers from schools (both Whites and Coloureds) bring their pupils along to see the wonderful historic collection here. In their case the only stipulation is that scholars must not handle any of the exhibits.

Many years ago, when the then Prime Minister visited Warriors Gate, I was present with other members of G.H.Q. After seeing the valuable souvenirs, he remarked: "You have much priceless stuff here. Anyone could get in and help himself. Why don't you have the place made burglarproof? Better do it quickly."

He was assured that this had already been done.

In 1976, owing to lack of space at the "Gate", further extensions became necessary. These were an exhibition hall of 484 square metres and a toilet block, the Custodian's old cottage being converted into an entrance foyer and ante-room for the new hall. Alternative accommodation was found for the Custodian in a nearby Durban Light Infantry cottage.

I have been a member of Moth Headquarters since its inception, and during my long and proud association with the M.O.T.H., served for sixteen years as vice-chairman to Moth 'O' at Warriors Gate Shrine. When he retired, Moth Jimmy Scott was elected to the chair, and handled the task efficiently for a number of years before he passed away.

The present worthy chairman is our good comrade Moth Alf Gooden.

Engraved on the chairman's big wooden mallet are the names of those who held the chair at Moth Conventions.

Moth Charles
de Klerk

