

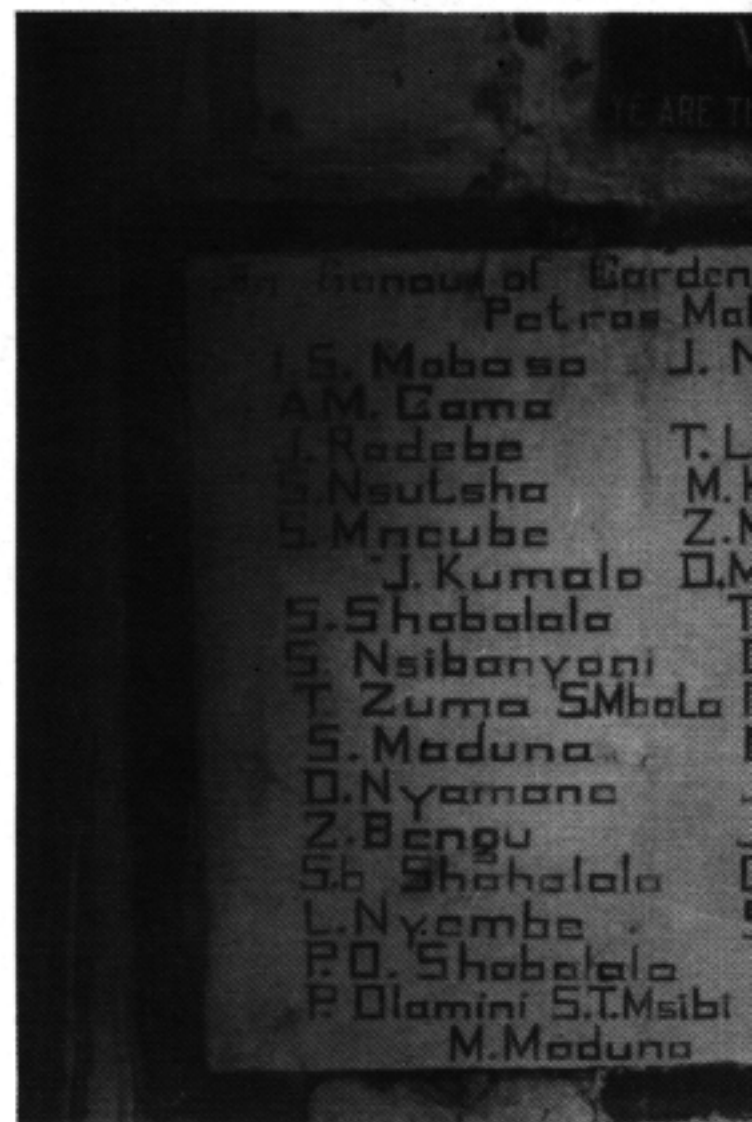
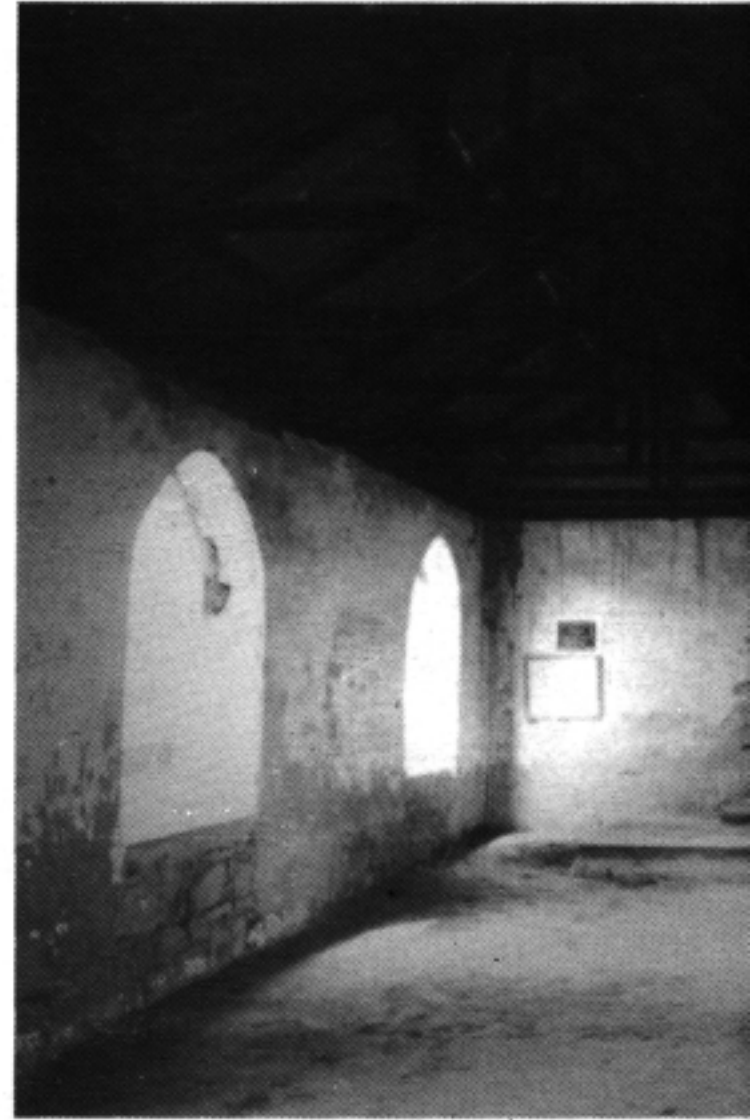
"In our own words"

We won't forget the

ALCOCKSPRUIT is about 30kms from Newcastle and about 10kms from Danhauser. In 1969 most of the community was forcibly removed to Madadeni and Ozisweni. Only two families remained at Alcockspruit in protest against the removal. But they too were forcibly removed in early 1970. Here the Alcockspruit community tell us their story. They tell of the joy of life before their forced removal. They tell of the pain of removal and what they want the government to do now.

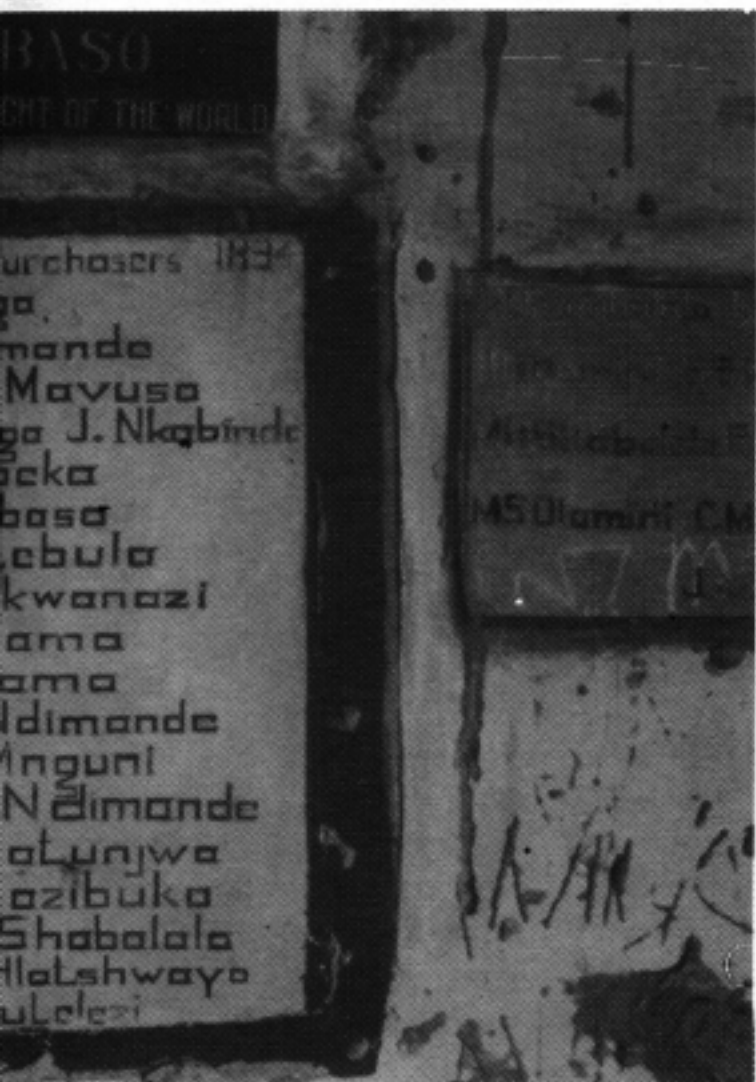
ALCOCKSPRUIT consisted of three farms known as Crane Valley, Gardens and Lochlomond. These three farms were bought by a syndicate of Africans in 1894. The purchasers had title deeds for these farms. The names of these initial purchasers are recorded in the Alcockspruit church, which is still standing at Gardens. After buying the land, the syndicate subdivided the farms into smaller plots for different purposes: residential, agricultural and other. Although the syndicate had overall controlling powers, individuals owned their plots. There was also land known as commonage and which was set aside for common use by the whole community, or for the benefit of the whole community. On the commonage land there were:

- Fenced cattle camps with dipping tanks
- Community halls (one at Crane Valley and one at Gardens School)
- Schools with gardens and sports grounds. The school buildings are still standing and house a farm school that is managed by a farmer who was formerly leasing the farm
- A church (still standing)
- Two cemeteries which were well fenced and are still being used. One of the purchaser's descendants was recently



Top: The church at Alcockspruit, built by the community before their removal.

golden years...



Bottom: The plaque in the old church at Alcockspruit, with the names of the original owners of the land

buried there. There were wells which were dug by the community members and some of these still exist.

All these structures were built by the community members using their own initiative and financial resources, without outside help. The community members themselves dug the stones, cut them into shape to build school classrooms, the church and their dwelling houses. Many of these structures can still be seen standing at Alcockspruit today, although they are in bad shape.

The Alcockspruit community took advantage of the fairly fertile land which they owned. Everyone made productive use of their land. The community kept cattle, goats, sheep and horses which were used for ploughing the fields, as transport and as a source of meat, milk and kraal manure for fertiliser. On their fields the community planted crops like maize, beans, pumpkins, mabele and others. These were mostly for their own consumption, but they sold their surplus to Indian traders and at the maize mill at Danhauser. People were by and large self sufficient, if judged according to those days' standards and levels of needs.

Their children attended school at Gardens

Intermediate School, which the community built. This school had classes up to Std 7 (Form 2). There was a principal's office and a kitchen where pupils got meals. There was also a well-equipped library and a woodwork workshop. Most of these scholars went on to become teachers, nurses and carpenters.

Alcockspruit was a stable community. Diseases, crime and even death were uncommon. People lived to a ripe old age, as can be seen from the graves in the cemetery.

The community youth formed an association called Gardensville Youth Association. This association held concerts and collected money to entertain their elders, especially during Christmas and New Year celebrations.

The removal

In 1968 the community members were told individually that their land would be expropriated. People were given 60 days to submit their title deeds or inform the Minister of Agriculture of the place where these were kept. They were told that they would lose ownership of the land, improvements and rights to minerals belonging to them.

Just before the actual removal of the community, Alcockspruit was flooded by people forced off neighbouring farms. Soon

"In our own words"

"How can we forget how we were made homeless and landless in the country of our birth? The memory lives on! Never can we forget those golden years before our removal. Not until the day we die."

there were more of these people than the landowners. When the actual date for the removal came, these newcomers willingly left for Madadeni township. This gave the impression that the landowners of Alcockspruit had no objection to their removal. The landowners did not want to move, and they remained at Alcockspruit till towards the end of 1969. Two families remained, in protest, till early 1970.

In 1969 most people of Alcockspruit were forcibly removed to Madadeni and Osizweni townships. The manner of their removal was so brutal, ruthless and disruptive, that some pupils missed classes for the whole year.

But a year of schooling was not all that was lost. The most indelible memory and consequence of our forced removal is economic loss that the community suffered. For example, there was no time to move our tools, implements and livestock to the new places. Some simply had to be left behind, to be taken over by strangers as their own. The rest had to be sold to Indian traders at ridiculously low prices. Most cattle were sold for about R7 to R10 and this humiliation broke the spirits of many of the elderly people.

It must be understood that in our community these animals and implements were our main means of survival and a source of

wealth and pride. All these quickly disappeared as we were forcibly uprooted to satisfy the political aims and the greed of the powers that be.

How can we forget how we were made homeless and landless in the country of our birth? The memory lives on! Never can we forget those golden years before our removal. Not until the day we die.

Life in the townships

In Madadeni and Osizweni people were put into four-roomed houses without plastered walls or floors, which shows how brutal and badly planned the whole exercise was. Alternatively, it shows blatant disregard for black people in this country.

The houses were inadequate for our large families, so much so that some of our property could not be accommodated. Many of our family members were forced to go and live in other parts of the country. That is how the community of Alcockspruit was broken up.

In the new township environment many people had to struggle to make a living in ways that were completely strange to them. Fulltime, productive farmers were suddenly made jobless. People were made poor overnight. Many elderly people died of broken spirits and worry, after contracting illnesses such as high blood

pressure, hypertension and sugar diabetes. People could no longer get cheap, nutritious food as they had on their farms at Alcockspruit.

For most of us, life has never been the same again. Township life is so fundamentally different from country life, that even after 20 years we still long to go back to our land. People from different communities were bundled together here. And people are experiencing a variety of problems, such as a very high rate of crime caused by unemployment, as well as a drastic housing shortage for all but the few who could afford high bond rates, as most available land is in the hands of speculators and developers.

What we want

We want to return to our land at Alcockspruit. The only way for the wounds we suffered to be healed is for us to be allowed to return to our land at Alcockspruit, and for our title deeds to be given back to us. We seek the restoration of our land as it was when we were removed and reconstruction of the structures that were built through the sweat and toil of ourselves, our parents and our grandparents. We seek to return to that peaceful, glorious and prosperous life which we once enjoyed at Alcockspruit. We wish to be together with our loved ones who are resting in the

graveyards at Alcockspruit. We are longing to restore the church that our fathers built for us. Our hearts and lives are in bondage in a strange place.

We want the rebuilding of the structures that were destroyed -the whole land must be fenced, our fenced cattle camps must be rebuilt, together with facilities for dipping, the re-establishment of a large garden area for the use of the community, the re-establishment and fencing off of our lands for cultivation, the demarcation of residential plots, construction and establishment of the comprehensive school (including the technical school), the restoration of our church building, and the return of its facilities, the re-establishment of commercial plots, in consultation with the community, the re-establishment of the dairy

We want assistance with the further development of our place, in consultation with and for the benefit of the whole community, including:

- the construction of a dam
- the establishment of co-operative societies
- the building of community offices and a community hall
- provision of water, roads and electricity
- postal service, clinic, etc.

"For most of us, life has never been the same again. Township life is so fundamentally different from country life that even after 20 years we still long to go back to our land."