



# BHA NEWS

## Boksburg Historical Association

*The past is the key to the future*

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### Boksburg 185,000 years ago

Recently, while enjoying the ambience of Chairman Jimmy Mitchell's residence, Carole Doig recalled a talk she had given on Boksburg's Mineral Heritage. Carole had attired herself in the colours of gold – for the vast value of that mineral – and black – signifying coal

Had it not been for the significant presence of gold and coal, Boksburg could have remained an expanse of farmland encompassing the farms of Vogelfontein and Rietfontein. As a result of gold and coal, Boksburg kept pace with a vast developing world. So much so that, 10 years prior to Boksburg's double Jubilee, via the Hubble Telescope, the discovery was made in 1997 of the splendidly beautiful whirlpool galaxy 31 billion light years away

To find out how Boksburg acquired this mineral treasure, the focus must be from futuristic space towards the depths of the Earth in the Realms of Antiquity, for it was 90 years before the founding of Boksburg that the Great Antiquity of the Earth was firmly established

When in 1797, while referring to extinct Fauna and Flora, John Frere could categorically state that these were "Attributable to a very remote period indeed, even beyond that of the present Realm"

The Earth has a radius of 6371 kms

of which the inner core is 3476 kms in diameter. This in turn is surrounded by the Mantle, being 1399 kms thick. This in turn is surrounded by the Mohorovic Discontinuity and underlies the Teutonic plates themselves. Many scientists surmise that the Mohorovic Discontinuity was the original surface of the Earth

The rock strata and density is greater than the plates themselves. This 48km-thick layer and all that is above it, originates from volcanic and meteorite action on an immeasurable scale

It was in April 2005 that a large contingent of B.H.A. members found themselves in the tranquil surrounds of Thabela Thabeng within the Vredefort Dome. Here, spellbound members were enthralled by Johannes van der Merwe, as he skilfully explained how a meteorite had hit the Earth at that point and penetrated 17 kilometres down into the Mohorovic Discontinuity

The Earth's crust was dislodged over a distance of 300 kilometres. Vast amounts of minerals were flung upward and vast amounts of gold became embedded in the quartz nearer the surface. This golden Boksburg treasure would remain inaccessible even despite the efforts of early Boksburg miners – they would have to wait for Messrs. Simmer and Jack's cyanide patent before Boksburg could forsake agriculture and reap the rich rewards of gold

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## Boksburg 185,000 years ago (Continued)

Coal came about from perhaps a similar disaster – maybe 185 000 years ago the area that today extends from Boksburg eastwards, was a jungle paradise with dense forests and deep lagoons through which gigantic prehistoric creatures waded and fed on succulent vegetation. Boksburg, Brakpan, and Springs all have coal deposits; Benoni is the exception as it was perhaps a shallow sandy pond where some Brontosaurus could bathe to keep cool. Some disaster wiped out the prehistoric world and many dead dinosaurs, together with tons of decaying vegetation, slowly sank into the Boksburg lagoons. Subsequently covered and compressed by tons of additional debris, these lagoons fossilised into the coal seams of modern times

As wonderful and magnificent as these creatures were, they would not be able to co-exist with us in modern day Boksburg. How, for instance, would B.H.A. members be able to attend a Saturday morning meeting at Boksburg High if they found upon arrival a couple of 20-metre long, 30 ton leviathans having a quiet morning snooze on the front lawn? Or a Tyrannosaurus that, feeling a little lethargic, didn't feel like walking all the way to Sunward Park to prey on a couple of Duck-billed Trachodon that it knew were in the area; but rather settled himself down on the platform at Boksburg East Station to gobble up luckless commuters alighting from a Metro Rail train? These creatures belong in their own age, and as the Earth bequeathed us with gold, so these creatures and their forests bequeathed us with themselves, the gold and the coal



**VREDEFORT'S ORIGINAL IMPACT SCAR MEASURES 380KM ACROSS AND CONSISTS OF THREE CONCENTRIC CIRCLES OF UPLIFTED ROCK. THEY WERE CREATED FROM THE REBOUND OF ROCK BELOW THE IMPACT SITE WHEN THE ASTEROID HIT. MOST OF THESE STRUCTURES HAVE ERODED AWAY AND ARE NO LONGER CLEARLY VISIBLE**

## African Relics (reciprocal of 330)

In 1958, a Dakota carrying an oil exploration team flew southward over the Libyan Desert, over flying the vast horseshoe-shaped and treacherous Calanshio Sand Sea. They reached the Serir of Calanshio, a vast plateau 160kms long, a desolate furnace, rock strewn and devoid of any form of life. In the middle of the plateau, they saw the plane

As the Dakota circled the area, the skid marks where the aircraft had crash-landed, slewed around, and then finally faced in the opposite direction were plainly evident – the port wing was pointed down and the outer starboard engine was detached from the wing. The Dakota pilot recognised the aircraft as a B24 Liberator. On returning to the Libyan Coastal Strip, the pilot duly reported his sighting to the U.S. Base at Wheelers Field near Tripoli. The U.S. Air Force, however, showed no interest. The complexities of the Cold War made their masters in Washington rather sensitive about American aircraft turning up in unexpected places

Almost a year later, an oil exploration team arrived on the Plateau and drove to the site of the wreck, which had been carefully marked on the charts. Stopping alongside the wreck, they saw a white star still visible on the fuselage, a number 64 painted on the nose, as well as the title of a Gershwin Song, viz. 'The Lady Be Good'

Inside, they entered a veritable hothouse of ghosts – all was in place – equipment and flying jackets neatly hung; drinkable water spouted from urns when taps were turned – even a flask of drinkable coffee. Then, in an equally orderly cockpit, someone spotted the navigator's logbook, which showed that the Liberator had been in this most desolate place on Earth for over 16 years – the date in the logbook being 4<sup>th</sup> April 1943

Slowly, from U.S. Air Force records, what had actually taken place began to emerge, revealing a number of factors which, like a set of collapsing dominoes, would result in the final tragedy

## African Relics (continued)

The 'Lady Be Good' was a new aircraft with an inexperienced crew, captained by William Hatton of New York. Attached to the 376 Bomber Group based at Soluch, 55km south of Benghazi, the 'Lady Be Good' had been part of a raid on Naples Harbour. A sudden sandstorm on take-off had caused some of the aircraft to return to base due to sand ingestion. The 'Lady Be Good', leading the three aircraft of the second wave, arrived in the vicinity of Naples at 17h50. As night had already fallen, the mission was aborted. Italy was on the verge of capitulating to the Allies, and crews had been warned against inflicting unnecessary civilian casualties

Unbeknown to the crew of the 'Lady Be Good', they had picked up a treacherous wind known as 'Ghibli', which had followed the four remaining aircraft of the B Flight. The wind had cunningly turned with them and followed them back to Africa – being, in effect, a tailwind. Navigator Hays had set a course back to Soluch, but the 'Lady Be Good' was travelling faster than the airspeed indicator showed – meaning that the 'Lady Be Good' would make the African Coast far sooner than Hatton and Hays had anticipated. Also, the earlier sandstorms had created a haze which had spilled kilometres out to sea, making the coastline indiscernible – particularly after dark

Hatton now approached his base, assuming that he was still flying over the sea. He didn't notice or believe the compass needles collapsing, which indicated they were over Soluch. The two remaining aircraft landed at 22h45 and 23h10 respectively – the other having diverted to Malta

By this time, the 'Lady Be Good' was heading towards the desert while her crew were still searching for the coastline. Then at 24h12, with fuel now seriously low, Vernon Moore, the radio operator, called the Control Tower at Benghazi:

**'BENINA TOWER FROM SIX FOUR - DO YOU READ - OVER?'**

The Air Traffic Controller replied:

**'FIVE BY FIVE - OVER'**

Moore continued:

**'REQUEST AN INBOUND BEARING - OVER'**

Navigator Hays, being the comedian of the crew, pressed the transmitter button to send a signal. This was picked up by the Radio Direction Station at Benghazi, and a direction bearing was established. However, a single American radio direction station in 1943 was unable to distinguish between a true bear-

ing and its reciprocal. The operator assumed that the 'Lady Be Good' was arriving from the sea, as Moore had requested an 'inbound bearing', and replied:

**'SIX FOUR FROM BENINA TOWER, YOUR BEARING FROM US IS THREE THREE ZERO'**

This placed the 'Lady Be Good' on a direct line between Benghazi and Naples. Moore replied :

**'ROGER, THREE THREE ZERO - OUT'**

But the 'Lady Be Good' was on the reciprocal course from Benghazi into the desert! Shortly after 01h30, the Liberator passed over the Calansio Sand Sea and then over the plateau. Further radio contact couldn't be made as they were now out of range, being more than 480kms south of Benghazi. With the engines now spluttering for fuel, Capt. Hatton instructed his crew to bail out. Setting the controls, Hatton was the last to leave the aircraft

The aircraft was reported missing and after an intensive search over the sea and along the coastline, the crew was presumed dead. When the aircraft was spotted by the Dakota in 1958, oil exploration teams recovered eight bodies, one being Lt. Robert Toner – the co-pilot – who had kept a diary, from which emerged an account of almost unparalleled human courage, tenacity and endurance – almost equalling that of Scott's heroic Antarctic dash 42 years earlier

After a week, the crew were barely alive, having been reduced to mere skeletons – collectively, they had traversed almost 120kms of the desert. This epic journey is worthy of an account of its own – as they, one by one, perished in the flower of their youth under a blazing desert sun. Their remains were interred in their Homeland, leaving the 'Lady Be Good' as an African relic



*Crew of the Lady Be Good*



## Diary of Events

### FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**04 August 2007** - Meet at 9am at **Boksburg High** for the tour to **Nan Hua Buddhist Temple, Balmoral&Diamond Hill**

**Cost** Bring a picnic lunch with you  
- R60 per person

**Please note that we cannot leave cars at St Dominic's any longer due to stepped up security there. We will leave them at Boksburg High instead**

**01 September** - Meeting- to be advised

**06 October** - Tour - to be advised

**03 November** - Meeting- to be advised

**01 December** - Christmas Function

*I am liaising with Charles Leach and Prof Louis Changuion to come and talk to us at one of our meetings, so I may have to juggle with some of the dates, but will keep you all informed*

*I am also watching the press with the idea of us attending one of the good theatrical shows in Johannesburg, probably for the Christmas Function. Please let me have your thoughts on this idea*

### BIRTHDAY WISHES

Our best wishes to all members born in July on the occasion of their birthdays

### GET WELL WISHES

A sincere get-well-soon wish to all members who are feeling below-par. This Winter is producing a greater-than-normal crop of colds & flu, so please look after yourselves

### FEEDBACK FROM OUR LAST MEETING

Our guest speaker at the meeting on the 7th July was the eloquent and witty David Heller, a proud possessor of two PhDs and a renowned antiquarian

He spoke on antiques in general and mentioned that in the USA a collectable is regarded as an antique after 60 years, whereas in Britain (and ex-colonies) the figure is 100 years

He is obsessed with, and an expert on, Cape Silver and its true provenance. His grandfather wrote a book "The History Of Cape Silver" in 1948

He spoke about the faking of antiques and re-

minded us that if a thing is worth anything it is worth faking. Take note that anything made over a 100 years ago, fake or not, is still an antique. It is permissible to restore or repair up to 20% of the volume of a collectable today without damaging its antique status, provided the nature of the item has not been altered

He touched on different categories of collectables and discussed their current market value. Whereas most christening mugs are unsaleable, the first edition of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" is worth \$30,000 at least. Also, boxed toys in mint condition, like the early Dinky & Matchbox toys, are worth a considerable amount of money

Various interesting artifacts were brought to the meeting by members, from a genuine c1835 mahogany chair to porcelain & silver pieces, spectacles and even tin soldiers. All of these were valued there & then, with David showing his skill to a high degree. Some valuations (high or low) came as a complete surprise to the owners!

Many thanks, David, for an excellent, absorbing, informative and humorous presentation

### EDITORIAL

We have received many favourable comments regarding the newsletter. We thank you for your support

Just to shed some light – what members of BHA receive by e-mail, post or hand delivery, comes about via three elements and four people. First comes the spadework in the form of research, and an article is rewritten a couple of times until the final 'polished' version is written out with pen and paper

The document then goes to my secretary Paula who very kindly turns hand-written matter into electronic form using Microsoft Word (and the encouragement of being rewarded with chocolates). The article is then crosschecked with the handwritten original

With any errors having been rectified, the magic of e-mail comes onto the scene. The article is e-mailed to our illustrious Webmaster – Phil Beck – who adapts the length of the articles and adds all the enthralling pictures – many of which were taken with his own camera

With Phil's magic touch (considerably aided by that of our Tour Convenor and Archivist, Pam), the newsletter is then ready for distribution. Lo and behold, the 'scribblings' of the Scribe, with Paula's expertise and Phil & Pam's magic touch, arrive for the perusal of the members and many correspondents in this country and beyond