

The Roads of Bathurst

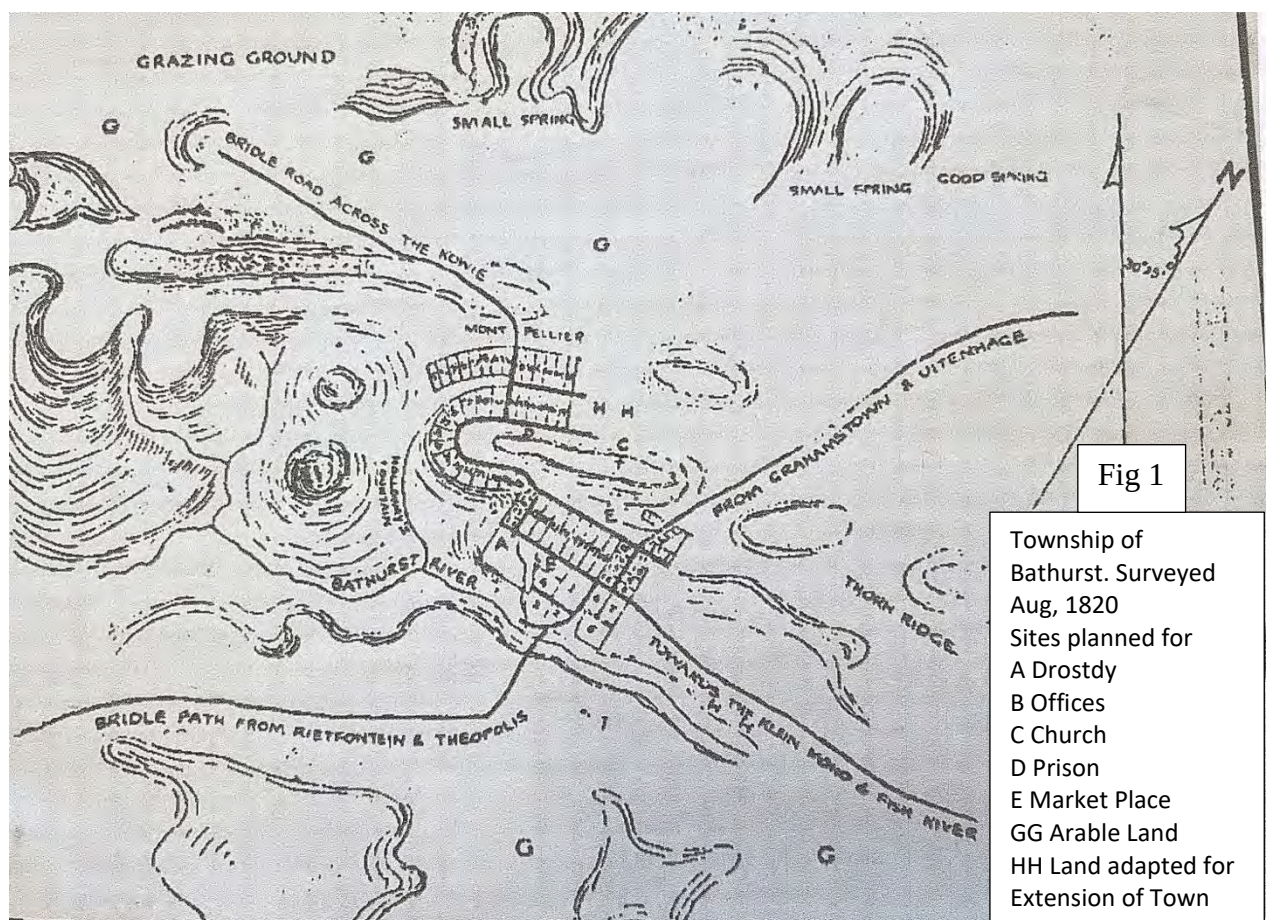
By David Forsdyke

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When Sir Rufane Donkin decided to establish the new town of Bathurst in May 1820, Johannes Knobel, the Government Surveyor, was instructed to create a plan. He must have started with a completely blank canvas, as there was nothing in the area at that time to act as the central focal point for the project, except a possible crossing of two rough tracks. These must have been very basic tracks at that time and it is interesting to see how they have evolved (or not) in the last 200 years.

The oldest known map (Fig. 1) from the Survey of August 1820, shows four roads passing through the proposed village. The “Bridle road across the Kowie” from the north west probably did so via Pennys Hoek. The road from Rietfontein and Theopolis may have crossed the Kowie via Curries Drift which is now in the Waters Meeting reserve. The steep, high and densely forested banks of the Kowie River had always made crossing places hard to find.

The road “to Graham’s Town and Uitenhage” and the road “towards the Klein Mond and Fish river” confirm that the map was drawn up before 1825 when the little settlement at the mouth of the Kowie became Port Frances, and they would have joined the existing main route through Clumber.



A careful study of the original map (Fig. 1) reveals some interesting changes as for example the "Bridle road across the Kowie" runs into **Mill lane** as it is known today but was then **Mansfield Road** possibly after the Earl of Mansfield who was a major sponsor of the Nottingham Party. The path from Theopolis crossed the Bathurst River at a point where it would have joined **George street** and not the lower end of **Trappes Road**. The proposed centre seems to have been the area enclosed by **Somerset** (or Upper) Crescent which would be named Victoria Park in later years. The letters H H on this map indicate land suitable for future housing on the northern side of the ridge. The church was planned to be where the Powder magazine now stands. The roads (or streets) named at this time represent the senior actors in the establishment of the Cape Colony from King **George III** and his brother Frederick¹ (the grand old) Duke of **York**, to the Governor Lord Charles **Somerset** and his deputy Sir Rufane **Donkin**, the resident Colonial Secretary Col. Christopher **Bird** and the provisional magistrate Capt. Charles **Trappes**.

The sudden stoppage of all development in Bathurst when Lord Charles Somerset returned to Cape Town at the end of 1821 and the rather nervous restart in 1825 when he finally did visit the area for the first time, resulted in a completely new outline for the village. Without the core functions of local government Bathurst reverted to being a community centre around the military outpost. The wars and difficult times of the 1830s, '40s and '50s saw very little

¹ After whom Fort Frederick in Port Elizabeth and Fredericksberg. were named. NB: The brother of a British king always assumes the title Duke of York

development in the village and it is possible that there was no growth until Bathurst became an effective Municipality towards the end of the 19th century. The opening of the railway line in 1884 with the station very close to the present Co-op would have boosted all types of commercial activity.

However, Bathurst was at this time still not on the main road from Grahamstown to Port Alfred. (Fig 2 Survey Map 1901) There is a record of correspondence spanning the years 1888 to 1908 between the Municipal Council and lawyers in Grahamstown seeking advice on how to get the road through the town and across the commonage declared a “main road” so that the responsibility for its maintenance could be passed to the Divisional authority. When this actually happened is not known but it was certainly after 1908.

The Settlers’ centenary celebrations in 1920 must have created a great wave of interest in Bathurst. The 1820 Settlers Foundation sponsored the Centenary Hall and the Municipality demarcated 75 new erven which were offered on auction in January 1921. These properties extended the village westward to what became known as Monkey Town. The central road in this area was named **Gillanders** Road apparently for the popular contemporary Vicar of St John’s Church. On the south eastern side of town access was from **Boundary** Road into **Davies, Luke, Hilditch,** and **Peddie** Roads. These were all named after prominent business people and or Mayors of the Municipality.

It is perhaps surprising to note that the only roads in this area named with Settler connections, **Bailie, Chapman** and **Nautilus**, were not recorded on this map and were possibly not created until the 1960s.

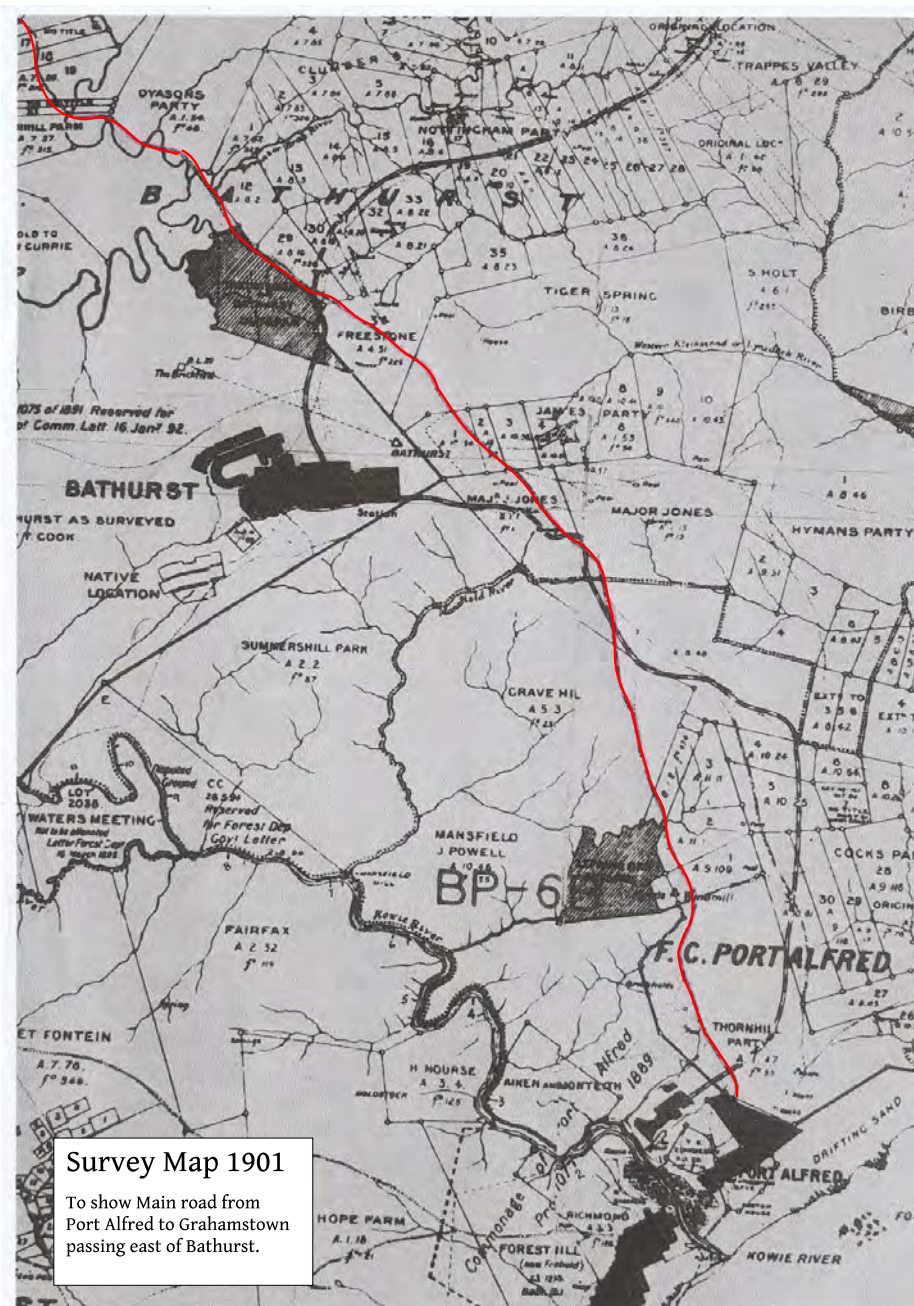
Twenty one years later in 1942 the first aerial photographs of Bathurst were produced by 43 Air School as one of their war time training courses. We can be very grateful to the RAF for this gift in addition to the naming of the Pig and Whistle, as it is often said, “a picture is worth a thousand words”. Changes in details which can be seen in subsequent photographs up to 1990 and in the more recent satellite images add an endlessly fascinating layer to the historical record. It can be clearly seen in the 1942 photograph that Bathurst was a significant citrus

growing area which was marked in the naming of **Orange** and **Lemon** lanes. The Royal visit in 1947 was recorded in **Elizabeth** and **Prince Philip** Roads.

The photo of 1961 shows the main road (R67) under construction with tar for the first time.

Another example is the development of Nico Malan Street from an insignificant lane originally known, for unknown reasons as Winslow Road, to the only tarred municipal road in the town. The reason that it was tarred relates

to the occasion of the official dedication of the Toposcope in September 1968 when the weather was so severe that the Toposcope was inaccessible. The Administrator of the Cape Province, Nico Malan, could not get to Bathurst and the ceremony had to be held in the

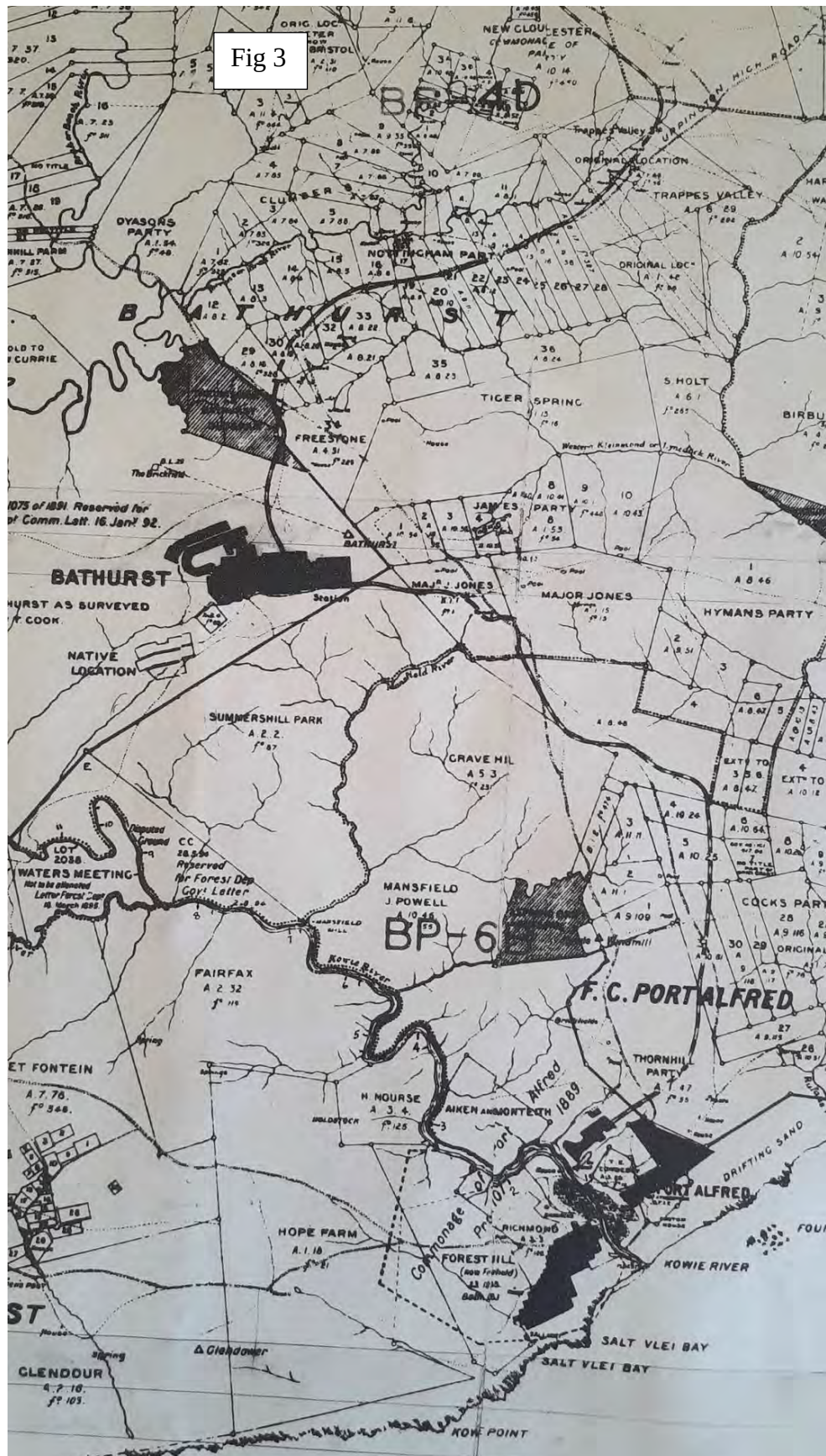


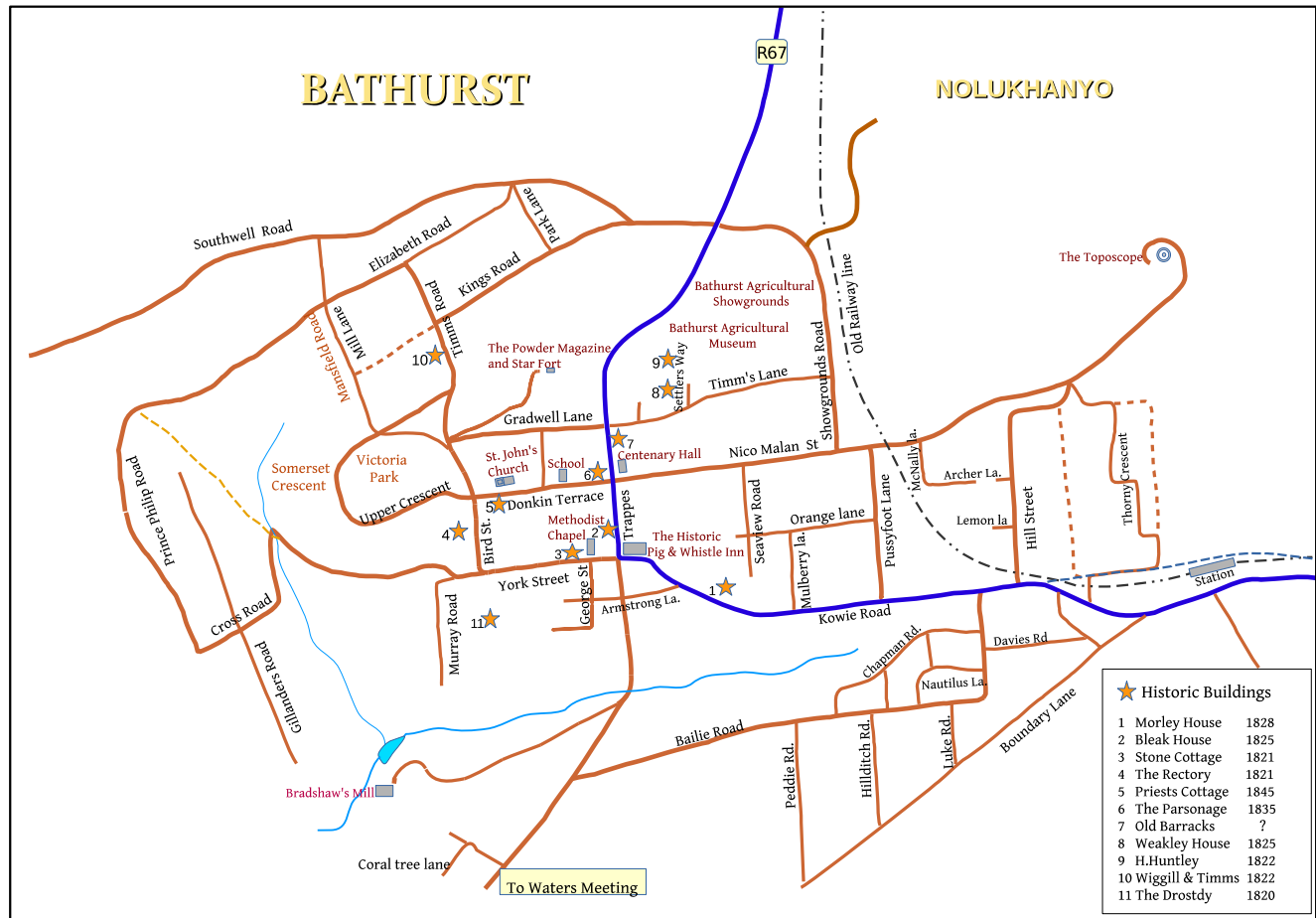
Survey Map 1901

To show Main road from Port Alfred to Grahamstown passing east of Bathurst.

Centenary Hall. The Administrator authorised funding for a tarred road so that such a situation would not happen again. Two hundred years after the first optimistic plan for the new town was created, the road map of Bathurst continues to grow and develop, most noticeably in the adjacent township of Nolutkanyo. One of the strangest road names in the village is Pussyfoot Lane. It is said to originate from the time when both the Rectory and the Parsonage housed

theological initiates and this lane provided a suitable detour around the worldly temptations of the village centre.





Today Pussyfoot Lane and Showgrounds Road carry heavy traffic to and from Ndlukhanyo. Hard and durable surfacing was essential and concrete brick paving has proved to be very successful. It also seems to satisfy those long term residents who have resisted any change to the quaint rural character of Bathurst. Now, almost all the gravel roads have been graded, scraped and eroded down to bedrock or gullies so that the Municipality is in a similar financial bind as it was in the 1880s. Concrete brick paving is the best option for the future and there are hopeful indications that this might happen soon if the funds can be found.

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Note: The terms **street**, **road** and **lane** have been used interchangeably as they are commonly applied. By definition **streets** are major roads, usually in a city with buildings on one or both sides and with lights. There are certainly none in Bathurst!

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Aerial Photographs from Sunshine Coast

Tourism Office in Port Alfred:

David Forsdyke left England in 1971, spent the 1970s in Rhodesia and crossed the Limpopo in 1980. He worked in agriculture (chemical field trials, cattle ranching) and travelled very extensively and intensively in both countries, laying the foundation of his interest in local history. After time in horticulture and the plant nursery industry in Natal, he moved to Grahamstown and Rhodes Botany Dept until retiring to Bathurst in 2013. David believes history becomes more interesting the deeper one penetrates into the details of how, when and why it all happened. Living in the centre of Settler country with so much living history, easy access to excellent museums and projects like Bradshaw's Mill has been hugely satisfying to this amateur historian.