

The South African College and the Emergence of History as a University Discipline in South Africa

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The fact that the two oldest independent university chairs of history in South Africa (and indeed in sub-Saharan Africa), at the University of Cape Town and the University of Stellenbosch, are respectively 101 and 100 years old this year (2004), is a clear indication of how recently (relatively speaking) history emerged as a distinct university subject in this country. In comparison, other disciplines in the humanities like the classics, languages, literature and philosophy all enjoyed such a status in South Africa a generation earlier, from the inauguration of higher education in the sub-continent in 1873, when the region's first university, the University of the Cape of Good Hope (UCGH), was founded in Cape Town.

To explain this time-lag, this article will examine the process whereby history eventually gained full university status in South Africa, culminating in the establishment of these two chairs and the UCGH's acceptance of this subject as an autonomous discipline in 1906. In doing so, it is necessary to bear in mind that what constitutes an accepted academic discipline at a university is not (and never has been) an immutable given, fixed in stone, but is subject to change, depending on the intellectual, cultural and socio-political environment of the day. For instance, rhetoric, once a pillar of the curriculum in medieval European universities, had all but vanished as a university subject by the eighteenth century, while few of the chairs of philology, which proliferated in the nineteenth century, survived more than a century.¹ In more recent times, the fate of *Rassenkunde* and Marxism-Leninism as academic disciplines makes the same social constructionist point. As the educationalist, Ivor Goodson, has recognized, far from being timeless statements of intrinsically worthwhile content, subjects and disciplines are in constant flux. Hence, the study of knowledge should move beyond the a-historical process of philosophical analysis, towards a detailed historical investigation of the motives and actions behind the presentation and promotion of subjects and disciplines.²

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1 H Pedersen (translated by J W Spargo), *The Discovery of Language - Linguistic Science in the 19th Century* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1962), pp 12-13; P Bizzell and B Herzberg (eds), *The Rhetorical Tradition - Readings from Classical Times and the Present* (St Martin's Press, Boston, 1990), pp 373-77, 637-68. That in the late twentieth century rhetoric re-emerged as a university subject in the form of discourse analysis illustrates the point made above about the ebb and flow of disciplines over time, well.

2 I F Goodson, *The Making of Curriculum: Collected Essays* (Falmer Press, London and New York, 1988), p 165.

To do this with regard to the introduction of history into the South African university curriculum as an independent subject, requires first an examination of this subject's place in the academic and intellectual landscape of the Cape's nineteenth century colonial metropole and exemplar, Great Britain, before turning to the situation in South Africa itself.

At Oxford and Cambridge, before the 1870s, history was a humble adjunct to language and literature, primarily Greek and Latin. It either provided a source of literary texts (e.g. the writings of Thucydides, Caesar, Livy and Tacitus) or, under the label "ancient history", was taught so as to furnish the background necessary to appreciate literature fully, a role well illustrated by the title of a seventeenth century history of the Roman occupation of Britain by the Oxford classical scholar, Sir Henry Savile – *A View of Certain Military Matters, for the better understanding of Ancient Roman Stories*. In the words of a modern classicist, ancient history of this ilk was

... not History in any serious sense, but a sort of general knowledge about the Ancient World, useful to the reading of, for example, Shakespeare's Roman plays, or for picking up references in art or literature in the same way that an acquaintance with the Greek myths is helpful³

To him this made it no more than "a half-subject which made few intellectual demands" on those whose primary focus was language and literature.⁴

As for studying modern history (understood as history since the fall of Rome) at university, little academic merit or justification could be perceived. As late as 1849, Edward Freeman, a later Regius professor of modern history at Oxford, wrote that "any attempt to introduce the almost infinite field of modern history as a subject of ordinary study and examination on the same level as Grecian and Roman history must be utterly fruitless",⁵ while one of his predecessors in the chair thought it "a subject comparatively so light and unacademical".⁶ With a similar assumption about modern history's lack of rigour, an Oxford don asked critically:

Is the study of Modern History as good an exercise of the mind, with a view to the cultivation and improvement of its powers, as the existing and usual studies of this place? ... Where is the standard author, like Thucydides, Xenophon, Herodotus or Livy? And if there be none, and the Examiner and Candidate have studied different Historians, as well they may, the acquirements of the Candidates can be most praiseworthy and yet be wholly inappreciable by the Examiner⁷

The only appreciable value modern history might have was, as in the case of ancient history, as a handmaiden to law or literature, the contexts of which it could illuminate. Indeed, to many of the generation of Macaulay and Carlyle, history was itself a branch of literature, "with strong similarities to drama".⁸ Only by recognizing this can one understand the appointment of the historical novelist, Charles Kingsley, in 1860 to the Regius chair of modern history at Cambridge.

3 J E Sharwood Smith, *On teaching classics* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1977), p 67

4 Sharwood Smith, *On teaching classics*, p 68

5 Cited in J Kenyon, *The History Men: The Historical Profession in England since the Renaissance* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1983), p 156

6 Cited in P Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986), p 153

7 Cited in Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional*, p 137

8 Cited in A Kearney, "English versus History: The Battle for Identity and Status 1850-1920", *History of Education Society Bulletin*, 48, Autumn 1991, p 22

Nor were such dismissive opinions of modern history as academically reputable in its own right confined to England's older, tradition-bound universities. At the newly-created nineteenth century institutions, University College London, King's College and Owens College in Manchester, modern history was "of even less consequence"⁹ than at Oxford or Cambridge, being lumped with either English literature or ancient history, a subordination taken over in Britain's colonies of settlement too.

At the University of Melbourne (established in 1854) modern history formed part of a composite chair of modern history and literature, and political economy¹⁰; at Sydney in 1857 it was subsumed under ancient history¹¹; and at McGill University in Montreal it shared a joint lectureship with English.¹²

In like vein, the new, examining-only UCGH in the Cape Colony coupled history to languages and literature when it devised its curriculum for the first time in 1873, though even this attracted the criticism from one quarter that modern history was too sectarian a subject to be examinable in an even-handed way.¹³ Initially, ancient history and English constitutional history were prescribed as the fields of study in history for the BA in "Languages, Literature & History", but in 1884 the history component was removed as a majoring subject and downgraded to first-year level only, where courses would be "of a fairly wide and general range"¹⁴, recalling J.R. Green's contemporary impression that in England history was still "looked on as no special or definite study, but as part of that general mass of things, which every gentleman should know".¹⁵ On top of this devaluation, the UCGH explicitly laid down that, even in this limited, first-year only form, history had to be taught in the established manner of ancient history – the detailed study of a single text¹⁶ – to ensure sufficient academic rigour. Clearly, hovering reservations about modern history's academic respectability had come to the fore and all but carried the day.

As a result, history's only presence in the UCGH's final BA curriculum henceforth was in the shape of the ancient history component of the newly-emerged discipline labelled 'classics'¹⁷ or as an auxiliary to the study of languages, for instance as a paper on the history of Holland in the syllabus of the Department of Dutch. From 1898 even the nominal reference to history in the MA curriculum in Modern Languages and History was removed.¹⁸ The argument made to the UCGH's Council

9 Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional*, p 144

10 G Blainey, *A Centenary History of the University of Melbourne* (Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1957), p 10

11 *University of Sydney Calendar*, 1857, preface

12 S B Frost, *McGill University. For the Advancement of Learning II* (McGill-Queen's University Press, Kingston and Montreal, 1984), p 30

13 M Boucher, "The University of the Cape of Good Hope and the University of South Africa, 1873-1946", *Archives Year Book for South African History*, 35, 1 (Government Printer, Pretoria, 1974), p 45

14 Cape of Good Hope, *Report of the Council of the University of the Cape of Good Hope for 1881*, G 40-82, p 7

15 Cited in Kenyon, *The History Men*, p 165

16 *University of the Cape of Good Hope Calendar*, 1884, p 74 For instance, in 1884 W H Prescott's *History of the Reign of Philip II, King of Spain* was prescribed, in 1885 Henry Hallam's *The View of the State of Europe during the Middle Ages* and in 1886 S R Gardiner's *Thirty Years' War, The Puritan Revolution and The First Two Stuarts*

17 *University of the Cape of Good Hope Calendar*, 1883, p 103

18 *University of the Cape of Good Hope Calendar*, 1896-1897, p xcii Nor did the downgrading of history stop at the tertiary level In the same year it was also changed from a compulsory to

at this time by the liberal Cape politician, John X. Merriman, that a knowledge of modern history was essential for a better understanding between Boer and Briton, as “race prejudice is largely the offspring of ... deplorable lack of knowledge”, carried little weight in the face of the disdain of the UCGH’s traditionalists for the subject, and he was, in his words, “overborne by the paedagogic crowd and got nothing but a headache”.¹⁹

How hidebound the “paedagogic crowd” was in its outlook becomes apparent when developments in the last quarter of the nineteenth century are noted. At both Oxford and Cambridge in the 1870s, modern history gained autonomy as an examination subject in its own right, on the back of new intellectual, political and professional currents in Britain and a growing admiration there for the achievements of German historiography. In the 1880s this rising status was enhanced by the introduction of more rigorous examinations tied to original sources, the designation of modern history as one of the three divisions of Oxford’s Arts Faculty and the foundation of Britain’s first professional historical journal, the *English Historical Review*, in 1886. Taken together, concludes a modern historian, these “declared that history has finally won academic respect as an autonomous area of study.”²⁰

In keeping with this trend, modern history took off as an independent subject in other universities in England and Scotland at this time too, and even in Britain’s colonies of settlement. Thus, the University of Sydney appointed its first professor of history in 1891, Toronto in 1892 and McGill in 1895. Alongside these innovations, the UCGH’s conservatism with regard to history as a university subject stands out sharply. Indeed, this seems to have been yet another manifestation of its general conservatism in matters curricular. As late as 1907, the Superintendent-General of Education in the Cape was lamenting that the UCGH “should [have] become so conservative.” It had, he said, been “originally founded on the model of the University of London, and it has stuck to the curriculum of the London University, after the London University had itself gone ahead.”²¹ Not surprisingly, therefore, it was not from within this institution that an initiative to alter the position of history in the curriculum came, but from the Cape’s leading university college, the South African College (SAC), and, even then, not without encountering considerable opposition there first.

Founded in 1829 as a boys’ secondary school, the SAC was by the 1880s setting its sights on attaining a higher status for itself. Already in 1873, it had initiated post-matriculation classes for the handful of its students who wanted to take the new UCGH’s degree examinations, and to this end, in 1883 it designated one of its two classics professors, C.E. Lewis, as professor of classics and history too,²² so that it could offer instruction in whatever history the UCGH prescribed in its curriculum.

There is no evidence that this *status quo*, with its subordinate and restricted status for modern history, would have changed soon, had it not been for the combination of two factors, a push to do so from a quarter at the SAC not tied to the traditional view of history, and this at a time of acute political crisis in South Africa, accompanied by the

an additional optional subject for the UCGH’s matriculation examination (*University of the Cape of Good Hope Calendar*, 1897-1898, pp lxiii-lxiv)

19 Cited in Boucher, “The University of the Cape of Good Hope and the University of South Africa ...”, p 79

20 Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional*, p 164

21 Cape of Good Hope, *Minutes of Evidence of Select Committee on Education*, A 9-1907, p 98

22 W Ritchie, *The History of the South African College 1829-1918 I* (Maskew Miller, Cape Town, 1918), p 284; *South African College Magazine*, 2, 1, January 1902, p 4

onset and course of the South African War of 1899-1902. Such an environment was more receptive to proposals for innovations, especially if they claimed to address the current crisis. The source of the push to change the status of history in these fraught conditions, was the SAC's new professor of English and philosophy, Henry Fremantle.

Within weeks of his arrival at the SAC in July 1899, Fremantle, a 25-year old Oxford classics graduate with "a vigorous mind and boundless energy"²³ which "enabled him to apply himself with eagerness to any subject or cause which enlisted his interest",²⁴ began to urge the SAC to create a separate chair of history. Convinced, as a Victorian liberal, that mutual ignorance lay at the root of the Boer-British enmity then reaching boiling-point in South Africa, he believed that an impartial knowledge of each other's recent history was the best antidote to this. To him, "the teaching of history alone can shake the confidence in narrow and untrue theories which is so powerful for evil in this country."²⁵ With this argument he was able to persuade the SAC Senate to add a chair of history to its wish-list submitted to the College Council in both 1899 and 1900,²⁶ but nothing concrete came from this inclusion.

By 1901, therefore, Fremantle's fertile mind was searching for other channels along which to push his project ahead, as he felt it was increasingly urgent to find a foundation on which a post-war South Africa could be built, free of the Boer-British animosity which had produced three years of devastation in the region. "Whether we are Republicans or not", he wrote,

We can hardly fail to realize that a popular Republicanism founded on ignorance both of South Africa and of general history is likely to be a rickety and ruinous structure which no nation can inhabit with security²⁷

Accordingly, ever up and doing, Fremantle secured the backing of eight prominent Cape politicians and educationalists outside of the SAC in August 1901 for "my professorship scheme."²⁸ That he was able to do this so easily is testimony to how widely his ideas were shared by the local Anglophile elite. The *Cape Argus*, for instance, hoped that a better knowledge of history would induce among the two races in South Africa a

... better appreciation of each other's good qualities, and a tolerance which would go far towards attaining a more complete fusion of idea and interests,²⁹

while the *Cape Times* spoke for many jingoes when it insisted that the creation of a chair of history was essential for "combating the turgid nonsense" of pro-Boer publicists. It went on to state that the time had arrived

... when it behoves the Government to ensure that the history of South Africa taught in college and school shall be free from political and racial bias; that it shall represent in their true light the events of the past one hundred years, and that it shall not seek nor

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- 23 W J de Kock (ed), *Dictionary of South African Biography I* (National Council for Social Research, Pretoria, 1968), p 303
24 Cape Archives Repository, Cape Town [hereafter CA]: Inventory 5/1/5 (H E S Fremantle Papers), p 1
25 "Study of History in South Africa", *South Africa*, 53, 11, January 1902, p 94
26 University of Cape Town Administration Archives [hereafter UCTAA]: South African College Senate Minute Book, 20 December 1899, pp 54-55 and 27 November 1900, p 78
27 H E S Fremantle, "The Prince of Wales Professorship of History at the South African College", *Asiatic Quarterly Review*, 13, 26, April 1902, p 10
28 CA: A 608, Fremantle Papers, volume 2 (Diary 1895-1902), entry for 23 August 1901
29 *Cape Argus*, 12 February 1902

seem to implant into the mind of the rising generation the conviction that British rule has been fraught with nothing but injustice and oppression of the Dutch population from the days of the British occupation and conquest down to the closing years of the century³⁰

Indeed, the planners of new school syllabi for post-war South Africa argued that the “political attitude of the next generation will be determined by the history teaching”.³¹

Fremantle built imaginatively on this local support by seeking patronage for the scheme from the heir to the British throne (soon to be crowned Prince of Wales), who was then visiting Cape Town to be installed as Chancellor of the UCGH. Fremantle discussed his proposal with one of the Prince’s aides who gave “us his august blessing, & I agreed to put a formal scheme before him”, as an optimistic Fremantle recorded in his diary.³²

However, such unilateral initiatives more than ruffled the feathers of several SAC professors, not least those of Lewis, half of whose joint classics and history chair it threatened to remove. Only deft academic footwork by Fremantle – as a result of which Lewis’ chair was redesignated a chair of Greek only - was able to appease the old professor and also to allay the concerns of others who feared that trying to raise funds locally for a chair of history “would be detrimental to the chances of other professorships which were more immediately necessary.”³³ To many of Fremantle’s fellow-professors, modern history clearly still seemed suspect, an upstart subject lacking in academic respectability or desirability. “[C]ertainly I have one or two prize geese among my colleagues”, he confided to his diary in exasperation. “[W]hat a time they can keep up their cackling.”³⁴

However, these vested interests and the doubts about history’s validity eventually yielded to Fremantle’s combination of fluency, zeal and strategic *nous* and, once he had promised not to campaign within South Africa for funds to endow a chair of history, the SAC endorsed his enterprise.³⁵ With a significance for the discipline of history in South Africa amounting to a watershed which hindsight permits us to recognize, a delighted Fremantle congratulated himself on 26 November 1901:

Up to College for a Senate meeting, the chief incident of which was concerned with the History chair. At last the thing went right, though, ... I believe only because of my ... getting the arrangements fixed up.³⁶

True to his get-up-and-go style, he sailed for England the very next day to seek funds for the chair there.

Even before he left, however, he had begun to use his family and academic connections in England to set up a high-profile launch of his appeal for funds. At a well-publicized meeting in London in January 1902, he exploited to the full the Prince of Wales’ willingness to have his name attached to the intended chair, the support of numerous leading politicians and academics, as well as the extreme topicality of South Africa, in order to call upon those with major financial interests in the sub-continent to contribute towards a fund to endow a chair of history at the SAC.

30 *Cape Times*, 27 January 1902

31 Cited in R B Mulholland, “The Evolution of History Teaching in South Africa” MEd thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1981, p 127

32 CA: A 608, Fremantle Papers, volume 2 (Diary 1895-1902), entry for 23 August 1901

33 UCTAA: South African College Minute Book, 3 September 1901, p 94

34 CA: A 608, Fremantle Papers, volume 2 (Diary 1895-1902), entry for 12 November 1901

35 UCTAA, South African College Minute Book, 26 November 1901, p 107; South African College Council Minute Book, 15 November 1901, pp 245-6

36 CA: A 608, Fremantle Papers, volume 2 (Diary 1895-1902), entry for 26 November 1901

Referring to the still-raging War there, he told his audience that, “The subject [history] had been neglected with fatal results, and it was an Imperial necessity that this neglect should be corrected.” The absence of accurate and unbiased historical knowledge, he averred, had allowed political myths to flourish among all the inhabitants of South Africa, and these had to be removed if a new country was to be built on a sound basis. Its bureaucrats too would need such knowledge, while a ‘scientific’ study of the past would be vital for any serious study of ‘native questions’ which he described as “a work of incomparable importance” for the future. In short, he concluded with a flourish, “the matter had an Imperial importance. South Africa must be won over. It could only be won over by influencing its opinion.”³⁷

Though this stirring and appropriately-tailored appeal elicited spontaneous cheers from the audience and was warmly endorsed in speeches by the Cape’s new Agent-General in Britain, T.E. Fuller, and the Regius professor of modern history at Oxford, Frederick York Powell, and though Fremantle made very sure that the proceedings received extensive coverage in the news, editorial and letter columns of the British press,³⁸ by the time that he returned to the Cape in March 1902, only £1 920 had been donated to the fund, i.e. over £8 000 short of the target figure of £10 000.³⁹ He admitted that his seven weeks of in-person canvassing of ‘my millionaires’⁴⁰ in England after the London launch of his appeal had left him

... disappointed to find how many men ... fail to follow the course of events in Africa and, even if they do not altogether overlook the obligation of assisting the country from which their fortunes are drawn, neglect the duty of ascertaining in what channels it will be most beneficial to direct their liberality⁴¹

This academic entrepreneur however did not remain confounded for long. Back in Cape Town, he tried to make up the shortfall by arranging a public meeting in support of the chair, but found the SAC Senate unwilling to lift its prohibition on local fundraising, lest this – and more of his scathing public comments about non-donors, some of whom he had named in the press⁴² – negatively affected its own efforts to collect funds. With irritation he noted, “There are a good many bees in some of my colleagues’ bonnets, & they are inclined to want nothing done here until, e.g., the chair of Engineering is started.”⁴³

However, the shrewd association of the name of the Prince of Wales with the chair – Fremantle referred discreetly to the “great moral and material assistance given by his Royal Highness”⁴⁴ – and the eminence of several of those who had made donations already, meant that Fremantle’s eye-catching initiative could not be shelved in a colony where loyalty to the British Royal House was at a peak – and his colleagues knew this. None other than Professor Lewis suggested a compromise – that Fremantle suspend his fundraising *pro tem* and that a chair of history be added to the short list of

37 *The Times*, 21 January 1902

38 These were collected for Fremantle by a press-clipping agency and were pasted into a scrapbook now in the Manuscripts and Archives Division of UCT Library - BC 753, Fremantle Papers, Scrapbook, pp 3-23

39 “The South African Chair of History”, *South Africa*, 53, 22 March 1902, p 704. By the time he reached Cape Town, additional contributions had pushed the fund to about £2 000 (UCTAA: SAC Senate Minute Book, 8 April 1902, p 115)

40 CA: A 608, Fremantle Papers, volume 2 (Diary 1895-1902), entry for 27 February 1902

41 *Cape Times*, 16 April 1902

42 *Cape Times*, 16 April 1902

43 CA: A 608, Fremantle Papers, volume 3 (Diary 1902-7), entry for 22 April 1902

44 *The Times*, 17 January 1903

urgent needs the SAC was itself drawing up for a major fundraising drive to be mounted once the War had ended. Recognizing that this strategy would allow new sources to be tapped under the aegis of the SAC as a whole, Fremantle agreed, but added the rider that if there was no progress by the end of the year, “he should be free to advocate the claims of the History scheme.”⁴⁵

Even so, Fremantle busied himself by exploring other ways to supplement the money already in the fund while he waited for the SAC to move ahead with its scheme,⁴⁶ but in the end these proved unnecessary, as in October 1902 a chair of history was included under “Some Pressing Needs” when the SAC’s Development Scheme Appeal was launched. Solemnly, in words suspiciously reminiscent of Fremantle’s own rhetoric, the accompanying pamphlet declared: “[I]t is important in the interests, not only of the College, but of the Colony, and indeed South Africa generally, that this chair should be established as early as possible.”⁴⁷ With such an appeal now coming formally from the SAC, he must have felt that his inventive game plan had been entirely vindicated.

Fortunately for the cause of history as a discipline in South Africa, the response to the SAC’s Development Scheme Appeal was resounding and the shortfall in the Prince of Wales Professorship of History Fund was quickly more than made good, largely thanks to a munificent donation of £10 000 by the mining magnate and SAC old boy, Frederick Philipson-Stow.⁴⁸ This “really means that we have got what we want for the history chair”, rejoiced Fremantle.⁴⁹ His tactic of targeting overseas magnates with South African connections had indeed paid off! This success allowed the SAC Council to set in motion the procedures to fill the chair as early as December 1902. A long-time supporter of Fremantle’s scheme congratulated him warmly: “In matters of this kind there always is ‘a man’ who energises the whole machine – & you are that man; and most heartily do I congratulate you in your success.”⁵⁰

Candidates were called for who would be able to lecture both on the topics in the UCGH’s limited history curriculum and on subjects of general historical interest to the public and who would also “make a special study of the history of South Africa”,⁵¹ a job-description in keeping with the priorities which Fremantle had long espoused. An all-British selection committee was appointed, two of whose members had been present when Fremantle had launched his appeal in London,⁵² and in

45 UCTAA: SAC Senate Minute Book, 13 May 1902, p 119

46 His brightest idea was to have the SAC’s professor of history appointed as a part-time assistant to the Keeper of the Archives in Cape Town – see CA, CAD 1, document 115, Noel Janisch – Rev H C V Leibrandt, 9 October 1902. Another suggestion – by the Superintendent-General of Education, Thomas Muir – that history be coupled to philosophy and a joint chair in these be offered to Fremantle, Fremantle declined “much, I think to everybody’s relief except Muir’s” (CA: A 608, Fremantle Papers, volume 3, entry for 27 October 1902)

47 *South African College Development Scheme, 1902* (South African College, Cape Town, 1902), p 19

48 *The Times*, 17 January 1903

49 CA: A 608, Fremantle Papers, volume 2, entry for 31 October 1902

50 CA: A 608, Fremantle Papers, volume 12, B C Frere – H Fremantle, 25 January 1903

51 *Cape Times*, 10 January 1903

52 The members of the selection committee were the distinguished scholar-politician James Bryce, the President of the Royal Historical Society, George Prothero, and the Regius professor of modern history at Oxford, Frederick York Powell (UCTAA: SAC Council Minute Book, 20 December 1902, p 329). Characteristically, by then Fremantle had already asked the Warden of All Souls’ College in Oxford to help find a suitable candidate (UCTAA: SAC Senate Minute Book, 8 April 1902, p 115)

February 1903 it chose the 27-year old John Edgar, a Glasgow and Oxford graduate, as the new Prince of Wales professor of history at the SAC, which made him sub-Saharan Africa's first university professor of history as such. Edgar was "[n]ot quite what I had hoped for", Fremantle admitted to Merriman, betraying his own intellectual prejudices. "Scotch Balliol men are sometimes too Scotch; I hoped for a man civilized by classics and philosophy. Still, he may well be first rate."⁵³

Two months later Edgar was at the SAC, almost at once fulfilling one of the job's requirements by launching a series of public lectures on "Modern European History, with special reference to the eighteenth century", a subject far removed from the very traditional fare hitherto taught by Lewis under the rubric of history.

Edgar remained at the SAC until 1911, when he resigned to go into journalism. His successor, Eric Walker, became the first King George V professor of history at the SAC in 1913, when the chair was renamed to come into line with the Prince of Wales' elevation to the British throne three years earlier.

The break with history's subordinate status at the tertiary level, which the creation of this chair signalled, made it easier for Victoria College in Stellenbosch to follow suit soon afterwards, though, in this, the wish to set up a counterweight to the Anglophile SAC's Prince of Wales chair was probably not absent as one motive. Moves in this direction began as early as November 1902 in the Victoria College Senate and came to fruition in February 1904 when a recent Leiden graduate, Everhardus Godee-Molsbergen, took up the new Krige chair of history at Victoria College, named in honour of the Krige family of Stellenbosch, which had made a donation of a thousand pounds towards the establishment of the chair.⁵⁴

The very different trajectories by which South Africa's first two independent chairs of history had been created – the one the product of a recently-arrived Englishman's solo initiative, backed by Anglophile colonists and imperial and mining interest, the other entirely thanks to local Afrikaners, and both wholly excluding black South Africans – are quite telling of the ethnic and political divisions surrounding history in this country then, and ever since. As Eric Walker once observed ruefully, "history is ... red hot here".⁵⁵

With these two bastions of history as an independent university discipline in place by 1904, it became easier in the new South Africa then being constructed to persuade the UCGH to amend its conservative line on modern history as a university subject in its own right. Though Fremantle left the SAC in 1903 to go into politics, he did remain on the Council of the UCGH until 1917, and from this strategic position he pushed with characteristic zeal for a new academic dispensation which accorded history autonomy. Now with two influential collaborators in the two full professors of history, Edgar and Godee-Molsbergen, by 1906 he had had history re-instated as an independent major for the BA (Literature) and MA degrees, accepted as a full subject for the new Honours BA degree and made an alternative to Greek as a compulsory

53 National Library of South Africa, Cape Town [hereafter NLSA], MSC 15 (Merriman Collection), letter 31, H Fremantle – J X Merriman, 8 February 1903

54 D J van Zyl, "Geschiedenis op Naskoolse Vlak op Stellenbosch, 1874-1918", *Die Unie*, November 1976, pp 201-2

55 Cited in H Phillips, *The University of Cape Town 1918-1948: The Formative Years* (UCT & UCT Press, Cape Town, 1993), p 33

subject for the matriculation examination.⁵⁶ “Every one ought to know some history”, he argued.

... I would ... treat the knowledge of history as Plato treated the knowledge of geometry: “let no man leave without a knowledge of geometry” Without are dogs and sorcerers ... I would ... do all in my powers to make the History School as thorough and as attractive as possible, & to deck the avenues leading to it with flowers and seasonable fruits ...⁵⁷

The syllabuses devised for the new UCGH history degrees were also road-breaking, marking a clear departure from all of its previous senior history courses. Thus, instead of the history of Greece and Rome, and English constitutional history, subjects as novel as colonization, ‘recent’ European history from 1756 to 1815, and South African history to 1873 appeared in the syllabus.⁵⁸ Particularly welcoming the latter course, one examiner expressed his satisfaction that no longer would it be the custom “to regard South African history – or ‘Cape history’ as it was usually called – as a junior subject, suitable only to children in the lower forms or standards.”⁵⁹

In thus finally accepting history as a full and reputable university discipline in its own right, the UCGH henceforth made it a standard part of its curriculum. And since it remained the sub-continent’s sole university until 1918, determining what was taught at every university college in the sub-continent, this made history part of the other institutions’ standard curriculum too. History departments therefore proliferated in the next decade – at the Transvaal University College in Pretoria in 1909, at Rhodes University College in 1911, at Natal University College in 1916, at the South African School of Mines and Technology in Johannesburg in 1917 and at Grey University College in Bloemfontein in 1917. This role as a spur to the creation of history departments did not cease either when the UCGH was transformed into UNISA in 1918. As such, it continued to prescribe the curriculum for the country’s university colleges, so prompting the creation of further chairs of history at Potchefstroom University College in 1921, at Huguenot University College in Wellington in 1922 and at Fort Hare in 1936.

In creating, in effect, the matrix within which the South African university curriculum was developed and in eventually inserting history into this, the UCGH played a crucial role in the emergence of history as a fully-fledged university discipline in the sub-continent. In forcing the UCGH to do so, albeit by an indirect route which began, not without resistance, at the SAC, Fremantle, with his maverick approach, played a decisive role in this process. His belief that the foundation of a chair of history at the SAC “would ... create a powerful and permanent stimulus to the study of history throughout South Africa”⁶⁰ was indeed fulfilled.

56 Cape of Good Hope, *Report of the Council of the University of the Cape of Good Hope for 1905*, G 28-1906, p 14; *University of the Cape of Good Hope Calendar*, 1909, pp 87-8

57 NLSA, Cape Town, MSC 15 (Merriman Collection), letter 21, H Fremantle – J X Merriman, 23 January 1903

58 *University of the Cape of Good Hope Calendar*, 1905-1906, p 123

59 C D Hope, *Our Place in History: A Comparative History of South Africa In Relation to Other Countries* (Juta, Cape Town, 1909), p vii

60 “Study of History in South Africa”, *South Africa*, 53, 11 January 1902, p 94

Abstract

To understand how history came to be accepted as a full university discipline in its own right in South Africa in 1906, this article locates this process in the realm of the intellectual and academic politics of the nineteenth century, first those of the Cape's colonial metropole, Great Britain, and then those of the Cape Colony itself. Only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century did history gain official recognition as an independent university discipline in Britain, as well as in its colonies of settlement. At the Cape, however, this acceptance was delayed by the conservatism of the Colony's sole university, the University of the Cape of Good Hope, and it was only when the leading local university college, the South African College, took the initiative and established a chair of history in 1903 (a step emulated by Victoria College, Stellenbosch, a year later), that it yielded and accorded history the status of an autonomous, fully-fledged discipline. This article analyses who and what lay behind the South African College's by-no-means unanimous innovation and, in so doing, reveals the decisive role played by Henry Fremantle, a professor of English and philosophy, and by the favourable post-war environment of constructing a new South Africa.

Opsomming

Die South African College en die Totstandkoming van Geskiedenis as 'n Universiteitsdissipline in Suid-Afrika

Ten einde te verstaan hoe geskiedenis in 1906 as 'n volwaardige universiteitsdissipline in Suid-Afrika aanvaar is, plaas hierdie artikel die proses in die konteks van die intellektuele en akademiese politiek van die negentiende eeu, eerstens dié van die Kaap se koloniale metropool, Groot Brittanje, en dan dié van die Kaapkolonie self. Dit was eers in die laaste kwart van die negentiende eeu dat geskiedenis amptelike erkenning as universiteitsdissipline in Brittanje en haar setlaarskolonies verwerf het. Aan die Kaap is die aanvaarding daarvan egter vertraag deur die konserwatisme van die kolonie se enigste universiteit, die *University of the Cape of Good Hope*. Dit was slegs toe die leidende plaaslike universiteitskollege, die *South African College*, die inisiatief geneem het en in 1903 'n leerstoel in geskiedenis ingestel het ('n stap wat 'n jaar later deur *Victoria College*, Stellenbosch, nagevolg is), dat die Universiteit toegegee het en aan geskiedenis die status van 'n outonome, volwaardige dissipline toegeken het. Hierdie artikel analiseer wie en wat agter die *South African College* se weliswaar nie-eenparige innovasie, gestaan het en onthul daarmee die deurslaggewende rol van Henry Fremantle, 'n professor in Engels en filosofie, sowel as van die gunstige na-oorlogse atmosfeer waarin 'n nuwe Suid-Afrika gebou is.

Key Words

South African College, University of the Cape of Good Hope, university, history, curriculum, H.E.S. Fremantle