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Seyfert, a "vanished" hamlet

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Just to the south of Moltene in the North eastern Cape Province is Seyfert. For many years the name was incorrectly spelt Cyplurgat, apparently the British version. It was a farm which belonged to the Groves long before Moltene was founded in 1874.

Coal was discovered there in the 1850's, later clay deposits of remarkable quality. It was to become the scene of the Great Stormberg Coal Company and the Cyplurgat Coal Company, known as C.C.C. The first person to do some mining there was a trader called George Vice. He established that there were coal deposits over the whole Stormberg region and beyond, so he bought the farms Paardekraal and Ouerwacht, where he was to found the town he called Moltene after the Cape premier, Sir John Moltene.

There were hardly any black people on the Stormberg in the 1850's. Even the Bushmen moved away in the severe winters. As mining operations began, Welsh and Scottish colliers were lured to the scene. They came, and when Moltene was founded it was mainly an English-speaking town, while the district was predominantly Afrikaans.

Such a line of industry began at Seyfert, mining, brickworks, sewerage pipes, ornamental wares and so on, that houses were put up at a quick rate. They were of corrugated iron and timber. A hotel was

erected
also put up, and there was ~~also~~ a main
street.

The bricks were very heavy and larger than
the modern brick, embossed with the letters
C.C.C. Some were ordinary, others glazed.
These bricks were of the best ever made and
were used in the Dutch Reformed Church
built in 1905 and in some houses, such as
the old parsonage which proved very difficult
to demolish.

Mining at Syfegat began in 1864, that
is ten years before Mootens was founded,
within walking distance to the north. The mines
and brickworks were closed in 1924, then
known as the Wallsend and Syfegat Coal
Mines, run by Ten Hind.

There were shops, a school, a post office,
four policemen, railway personnel, a police
station and a township for blacks.
Before the railway reached the mine, wagons
were used to transport coal. On old
snapshots one sees whole convoys of them.

One of the best-known characters
of Syfegat was Alexander Lawrie as
general manager. He built a huge chimney
bearing his initials A.L., and this is
still there and nearly all that is left of
Syfegat. Lawrie also controlled the
brickworks. The manager from 1894-1910
was Joseph Muir.

Another character was G.A. Wilson as
from about 1890, mainly a general dealer.

These men were there during the Anglo-Boer War when a large camp was pitched at the station for the Cape Police and Kaffrarian Rifles, under Major Neyland who worked in conjunction with General W. F. Gatacre, the commander of the British force from East London on the main line up to Sterksburg Junction, and later beyond. There was only one engagement at Syfergat, known rather grandly as the Battle of Loopenberg after the hill behind the station on 2 Jan. 1900, on the summit of which the Boers were observed from Syfergat and guns brought into action. The Boers ~~supper~~ vanished, and people who rushed from ~~the~~ Maltene to see what was happening turned back in disappointment.

As more and more blacks were employed, they were not paid in cash, but given metal discs marked C.C. which could be exchanged for goods in Maltene. This system led to exploitation and was much criticised. Maltene had an amazing number of shops as well as two hotels. There were also some seven mills. Most of the shops are no more, and only one devalued mill is left.

The white miners walked to Maltene to shop and visit the pubs, though these facilities were at Syfergat. Some men walked too much and on walking back lay down to rest. In winter they wake up white with frost.

Dances were held at the Cyphergat Hotel, and there were enough young men to form a strong football team. They even beat Swifts of Grimsby. Tennis was played at the Mains, and there were often new faces as at a spot called The Outspan wagons on their way from the coast to Kilmahony used to halt. At the station trucks were laden with potatoes, wheat, cream and other products

or should
 Could, it here read "where wagons -----"

Tamie Aucamp
 3 slates
 3 pencils

End
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