



Figure 1 (opposite). Detail of map featured in Figure 6 on page 459. This shows the railway line and branches in Natal as they were in 1903. The main stops visited by the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1905 have been highlighted

(overlay) Spine of the bound folio *British Association Visit to South Africa, 1905, Volume 4*, containing correspondence assembled by the Royal Observatory, Cape of Good Hope with Natal et al. relating to the Association's visit to South Africa, in 1905. Collection of Cambridge University Library, File no. RGO 15/192. Photograph: Nessa Leibhammer

## Ethnologised Pasts and Their Archival Futures: Construing the Archive of Southern KwaZulu-Natal Pertinent to the Period Before 1910

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This essay makes two methodological interventions designed to explore modes of engaging with inherited colonial collections of material pertinent to southern KwaZulu-Natal's late independent and early colonial past.<sup>1</sup> We focus primarily on collections of objects (and photographs that feature such objects and other items of material culture) often categorised as ethnographic, historically denied archival status and more recently habituated as 'art'. The first move draws this material into the ambit of archive. Our move differs from what art historians and archaeologists do when they engage with these kinds of materials in their analyses. Where they use objects as historical evidence, we take a different tack by investing in the research necessary to frame collected material culture as archival. We then take the further step of reconstructing the *archival histories* of these materials. The two interventions offer us a position of engagement with the available archive that holds in view its making and remaking over time, with what we hope are productive possibilities for redressing some of the yawning gaps in our knowledge of the remote past. In pushing beyond critique of colonial and apartheid practices affecting understandings of pre-industrial times, and attempting to offer something new, our aim in this essay is not to write a history for the region and period with which we are concerned. It is to provide a carefully researched and historicised account of the preservation of material remains pertinent to the region and period with which we are concerned. This includes their entanglement in colonial collecting practices, in dominant and local knowledge practices, then and subsequently, and the establishing of a sense of their archival potential.<sup>2</sup>

1 This essay is part of a long-term research project of the Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative, 'Ethnologised Pasts and their Archival Futures' (see <http://www.apcuct.ac.za>). The project draws attention to the archival capacities and challenges of ethnographic material. It does this in order to enable ongoing engagement with pasts that were denied or given shape in various ways under colonialism and apartheid. Parts of the argument that appear in this essay were tested out in publication at an early stage of the research, namely, C. Hamilton and N. Leibhammer, 'Salutes, Labels and Other Archival Artefacts' in *Uncertain Curature: In and out of the Archive*, edited by C. Hamilton and P. Skotnes, Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2014, pp. 155–88.

2 Certain objects readily lend themselves to the kind of treatment we undertake in this essay. Others appear to be more decisively marooned without the necessary clues about their histories. It is an implication of our argument that this condition can be mitigated where they can be linked to related materials in other settings.