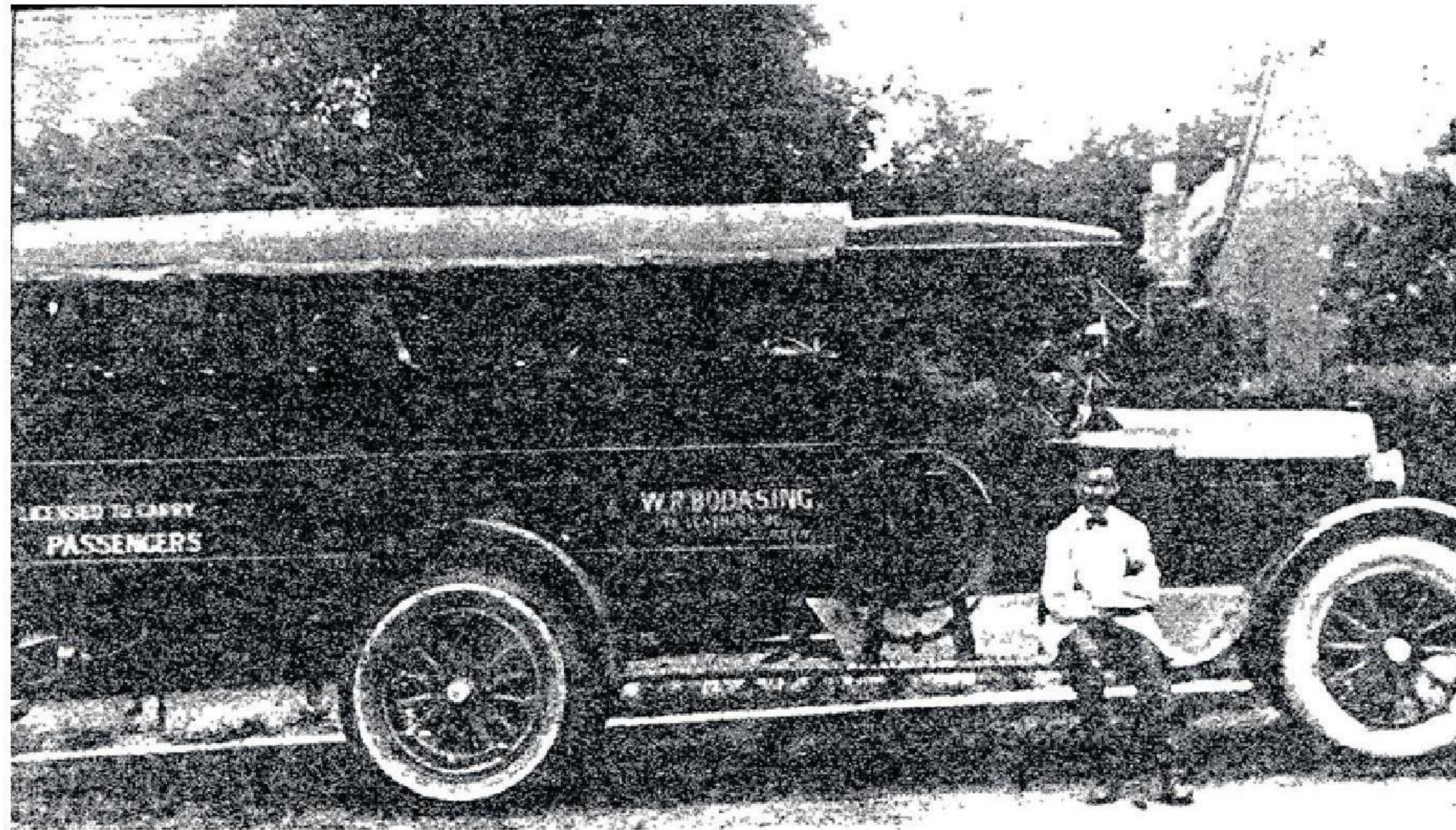


■ BURNED

Historic monuments going up in flames

The destruction of heritage buildings or public assets has become a troubling trend in recent times. Two days ago, the historic L Bodasing Primary School in Stanger was torched in an alleged act of arson



THE Bodasing family's pioneering legacy saw them owning the first bus for black people in Stanger, now known as KwaDukuza. On the right is the L Bodasing Primary school, below some of the pupils who attended the school in the early days. On the right are the burnt-out remains of a classroom which was set alight two days ago.



SELVAN NAIDOO

THE forging of a collective post democratic unity, some 25 years after 1994, remains our biggest challenge as South Africans.

Social media commentary provides truthful insight into how a divisive rhetoric is fuelling anti-constitutional agendas. In part, much of this ignorance points to an urgent need in the memorialisation of a people's history, to foster unity and collective pride.

Today, much of this history from our fractured past goes without commemoration or even documentation.

The hostels that lie in perilous ruin at the historic Adams College, that schooled Pixely ka Seme, John Dube, Anton Lembede, Chief Albert Luthuli, and other leaders, reveals how much work there remains in preserving and memorialising sites of historical conscience.

Other sites of conscience like Red Square, in Monty Naicker Street, in the CBD; Resistance Park, in Umbilo; the Early Morning Market, in Warwick Junction; and others, are likely to be lost forever should preservation orders not be municipally sanctioned soon.

Equally, the wanton destruction of the city's heritage buildings or public assets has become a troubling trend in recent times.

The burning of the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (UKZN) Law library in 2016, and the torching of schools, like Mvuzo High School in Pietermaritzburg and the Bathembu High School in northern KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), earlier this year, further burdens our taxpayers' in a repressive economy.



Adding to the list of heritage casualties, two days ago, the historic L Bodasing Primary School, in the KwaDukuza Municipality (Stanger), was torched, in an alleged act of arson. This public primary school, located in the rural Fawsley Park suburb, KwaDukuza is classified as a no fee institution, that serves children from impoverished backgrounds. In 2016, the school had 90 learners served by 5 teachers, with a student teacher ratio of 18:1. Presently this school is in serious danger of being closed down by the Department of Education, as the present learner numbers do not make for good fiscal discipline. Given the turnaround strategies by the Public Works Department, centred on wasteful expenditure, the closing down of such schools makes financial sense.

In the case of the L Bodasing Primary School, however, heritage value must precede financial prudence.

The school, much like community driven schools of indentured ancestry, is steeped in history. When the

burning of the school was reported on Facebook, one reader's comments provided valuable insight into how community constructs of a colonial legacy could be eventually lost to history. He wrote: "Our suggestions of fundraising (after the arson) are an excellent idea, however, for a number of years now, this school has been faced with far more serious challenges, the main threat being facing closure. Back in the days, my parents and grandparents – together with the communities of Dendethu, Fawsley Park and Lot 16 – were responsible for the upkeep of the school, as it was state-aided.

"The sugarcane farmers played a very big role. Just like all other state-aided schools, our forebears donated land, raised funds and brought such institutions into being that have stood the test of time. Sadly, today, the community that once existed is no more. Many of whom have since passed on. Many who have ceased farming since land claims destroyed aspirations. The few of us farming here do what little



we can. However, the parents of those attending the school today have done nothing. The school faces break-ins weekly. It is suspected that some of learners, together with older counterparts, were playing on the grounds when someone set fire to the grass or the cellar. Now look who's going to suffer.

"Sadly there is no community like yesteryear to help. At least the few farmers today rallied together and summoned the local SAPS and fire department. Not a single parent or scholar came to help, yet a football match continued on the ground (while the school burned). Now let the department decide."

This community driven school and the town's early development was due, in large part, to the philanthropy of the Bodasing family. Babu Bodasing, who arrived from India, in 1874, completed his indentured contract as a sugarcane labourer in the New Guelderland district, on the Natal North Coast.

After serving out his second period

of indenture, Babu chose to remain in South Africa and was given a six-acre plot in lieu of his work. His phenomenal farming acumen led him to acquire more land to expand his vast fortunes. Bodasing's generosity saw him building schools and religious buildings for the hard-working farming community that now services the broader South African community.

After Babu Bodasing's death in 1919, his five sons continued his pioneering legacy to see them owning the first operated bus for black people, venturing into cinema, owning entertainment houses like the Goodwill Lounge and vast properties. At present, the Bodasing lineage sits as a board member and shareholder of the scenic Prince's Grant Golf and property Estate in KwaDukuza (Stanger).

The L Bodasing Primary School's origins are forever embedded in the DNA of indentured ancestry, in forging a better life for future generations. The school was built for the purpose of servicing the schooling needs of the hard-working community of sugarcane farming families.

The school, for many a generation, became a beacon of hope in breaking the poverty cycle and became a proud symbol of community pride to beat colonial and apartheid oppression in finding a better life. In this instance, the school's value deserves heritage status for commemorative purposes to ensure it is preserved. Its exemption from arson or wanton state asset destruction can gain fruition if our "Thuma Mina" campaigners prioritise this criminal reduction, before we lose more historical sites.

Selvan Naidoo is the curator of the 1860 Heritage Centre