Sir William Hoy

One of the holiday-makers who will never be forgotten is William Hoy. Like many other great South African settlers, Hoy was born in Scotland. At the age of 12 he left school and set off to Edinburgh where he found work as a junior clerk on the North British Railways, earning twelve shillings per week. Hoy, who had a beautiful copperplate handwriting, started learning Pitman’s shorthand and soon was earning extra pocket money teaching shorthand at night school.

In 1890, a recruiting officer of the Cape Government Railways arrived in Edinburgh. Hoy successfully applied and soon after, arrived in Cape Town. After only two years in the country, he became chief clerk to the Traffic Manager in Kroonstad and a year later, when he was 27 he was the Transvaal agent for the Railways. During the Anglo-Boer war, Hoy was in charge of Military Railways, co-ordinating the movement of troops, supplies, horses, etcetera. The Scots claim the three R’s as their decree. Hoy’s were the three D’s: Determination, dedication and domination.

Hoy married Gertrude Price in 1901. They only had one daughter, Maudie. His father-in-law, Sir Thomas Price, General Manager, appointed him as Chief Traffic Manager, a post he had earned by hard work. Another milestone came when he bought the first typewriter in the country and personally typed the first letter which possibly made him the first and only railway manager to have risen from the ranks of shorthand typist!

In 1910 he became the youngest railway General Manager ever and had control of the second largest Government-owned railways in the world. It was during this time that the Hoys wanted to get away from Cape Town and they discovered Hermanus, where he could enjoy his favourite hobby – fishing. He became the most enthusiastic patron of the village and was enchanted by its natural charm.

Local businessmen and residents alike were hopeful that the general manager of the railways would soon help them by building a branch line from Bot River to Hermanus. Their hopes, however, came to nothing, as Hoy wanted Hermanus to remain unspoilt and not run over by masses that could turn up once there was a railway line. When a deputation pressed him for the line to Hermanus, he took them to Sir Lowry’s Pass station on a New Years day and when the train arrived, hundreds of people, laden with picnic baskets, blankets and radios poured from the train, laughing and talking excitedly. “They are off to the beach,” Hoy remarked. “If the train went through to Hermanus no doubt you would have many of them there, too.”

Hoy introduced the first road service of the South African Railways from the railway station at Bot River to Hermanus in 1912. Lorries to carry freight (particularly fish) and a bus to carry passengers were introduced.

William Hoy was knighted in 1916. He died in 1930 at the early age of 62. His fishermen friends carried his coffin up a newly made pathway for the burial on the koppie. From that day on it was named Hoy’s Koppie. Lady Hoy, who died in England, was buried next to him.
Hermanus would never have had a magnetic observatory if there had been railway lines. The scientific contribution to the world is certainly of as great importance as a train-free Hermanus has become for many of its residents.