The aims of the Society are to:
- promote and encourage the study of South African architecture and its cultural context
- organise lectures
- arrange excursions and study-tours
- foster research
- publish original work
- undertake and promote the recording of sites visited
- publish or lodge studies or surveys in a repository for the use of students and other interested persons
- selectively lobby for heritage issues.

Committee to March 2000
Chair             Antonia Malan
Secretary         Celeste Scholtz
Treasurer         Joy Woodward
Membership Secretary Marion Ellis
Portfolios        Kathy Dumbrell, Eloise Hakin, Mathys Hattingh, Jeremy Lawrence, Joanna Marx, Hélène Mendes, Micky Munro, André van Graan

Contact
Voicelink telephone number 088 122 6771

Cover illustration
Eensaamheid, Lange Kloof, 1961. From Studies in South African Vernacular Architecture No.1, a brochure compiled by James Walton for the first VASSA outing: “In every respect Eensaamheid is a product of local materials and local endeavour, a fine example of vernacular architecture.”
Editorial

Following a course at the Summer School of the University of Cape Town in 1964, James Walton and others established the Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa (VASSA). Its main aim was to study local vernacular architecture. At the time little was known of the existence and characteristics of such buildings, and hardly any published information was available.

We are proud to present the first volume of the Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa, a series of occasional publications that are intended to further the Society’s aims, which include a commitment to publish original work.

Dr James Walton’s death on 23 April 1999 marks the end of an era for the Society. It is therefore entirely appropriate to start by honouring the late founder and Life President of VASSA. These essays were first commissioned on the occasion of Walton’s birthday in 1997, at which we floated the idea of a festschrift but then decided to launch the VASSA Journal instead.

During Walton’s active years with the Society, not only did he provide an enduring ethos of discovering and sharing information in the most enjoyable way, but his rich record of publications served as an inspiration for us. Some short informal pieces in this volume, therefore, speak (in English and Afrikaans) with warmth, admiration and respect for James Walton and his late wife, Connie.

Philippina Oberholster and André Pretorius accompanied James Walton on many excursions, acting as translators, researchers and photographers. Mary Floyd and her late husband, Hugh, an architect and teacher of architectural history at the University of Cape Town, were founder members of the Society. Mathys Hattingh is currently the Committee member responsible for co-ordinating the monthly talks and outings for our members. The skills of the distinguished archivist Margaret Caims combined with the meticulous artistry of Walton created publications full of human and architectural interest. Martiens van Bart is Conservation Editor (Architecture) of Die Burger, and Graeme Binckes is experienced in heritage management and is a past Chairman of the Society.

Forthcoming issues will include articles on dwellings, mills, homesteads, outbuildings and institutional structures, whether still standing or under threat or already demolished. We shall learn about the people who designed, built, inhabited and altered these buildings. The contribution of archival and
archaeological research is crucial to our understanding of vernacular architecture.

The Society intends to prepare guides to identification, dating, recording and repair of structures and architectural features. The essay by Graeme Binckes should stimulate discussion on issues of conservation and interpretation and, hopefully, provoke readers to provide their own opinions about VASSA and vernacular architecture.

Lynne Fourie has been responsible for the Walton Collection at the University of Stellenbosch and encourages us to visit and make use of these extensive archives. Contact her at The Document Centre, JS Gericke Library, University of Stellenbosch, Private Bag 5036, Stellenbosch 7599 (telephone (021) 808 4881). James Walton was also founder of the British Vernacular Architecture Group (VAG) in 1952. Some of his books and archives have been donated to VAG and reside in libraries in York.

If you would like to offer written contributions to VASSA Journal, or wish to purchase a copy, please contact the Editors by leaving a message on VASSA Voicemail (telephone 088 122 6771) or send an email message to amalan@beattie.uct.ac.za.

Reminiscences of the early days in the study of South African vernacular architecture

Philippina Oberholster

In 1947 James Walton emigrated from Yorkshire to Mafeteng in Lesotho (then called Basutoland), where he was appointed as education officer in the southern part of the country, which embraced the districts of Mafeteng, Mohale’s Hoek and Quiting. For several years he had been recording the vernacular architecture of northern India, north England and other parts of north-western Europe, so when he arrived in Lesotho he immediately looked for literature in English on the vernacular architecture of South Africa. All he could find were publications such as G.E. Pearse’s Eighteenth Century Architecture in South Africa, which were detailed architectural descriptions of a few grand Cape houses. It seemed to him that European settlers must have lived in such houses only in the Cape, so he arranged a tour of the country starting from Cape Town. He found the kapstyllhuise of Puntjie, the fortified houses of British (1820) settlers in the Eastern Province and the early houses of the trekboere in the Free State. He also found the houses of the Cape Nguni and Natal Nguni. This research culminated in the publication of Homesteads and Villages of South Africa in 1952.

In 1948 I and my husband, Dr J.J. (Obie) Oberholster, arrived in Bloemfontein, where he was later appointed Professor in History at the Free State University (then the University College of the Orange Free State). Obie soon became a member of the National Monuments Council (NMC), the chairman of which at that time was the Hon. Mr Justice H.J. van Zijl. Two other members who served on the Council were Professor van Riet Lowe, an engineer, and the archaeologist Berry Malan.¹

¹ Like the study of vernacular architecture, archaeological research was still pioneer territory. Professor C. (Peter) van Riet Lowe was Director of the South African Archaeological Survey, but although he was a magnificent field archaeologist, teaching himself to read stratigraphy in pits dug for the footings of Free State bridges, he had no formal training. Berry D. Malan, once Van Riet Lowe’s assistant, for a time was the only locally trained professional archaeologist in South Africa. He had been taught by John Goodwin at UCT.
Obie and James Walton soon became friends through their common interests. At that time Bloemfontein was the nearest big town to which the Basutolanders resorted for shopping and for the education of their children. Polly’s Hotel was the main rendezvous for us all. James Walton gave occasional lectures at the university and the friendship between James and Obie grew. In a letter of condolence received after Obie’s death, James wrote: “I remember Obie once in Bloemfontein saying ‘James, we have such a friendly relationship, cannot we do something to bring together all Afrikaans and English speaking peoples in the same way?’”

Berry Malan was responsible for introducing James Walton to the corbelled buildings of the Williston-Carnarvon area of South Africa. The owner of Schuinshoogte, one of the finest in the area, wrote to Malan suggesting that the Council should declare his corbelled dwelling, and possibly others in the area, National Monuments. Malan wrote to James asking him to make a survey of the dwellings on behalf of the NMC. As a result of that and later surveys Walton recorded a large number of corbelled buildings, several of which, including Schuinshoogte, have since been declared National Monuments.

In 1960 Obie and James joined forces to uncover the floor of Dingaan’s big hut at Mgungundlovu. They revealed the umsamo at the back of the hut, where treasures were kept in safety, the holes of nine posts supporting the hut framework, and the crenellated hearth, exactly as portrayed by Captain Allen Gardiner in his Narrative of a Journey to the Zoolu Country, 1836. This excavation was later filled in to protect it from weathering.2

A booklet on Mgungundlovu was compiled by Obie and James and published by the NMC in 1963. When he sent complimentary copies to James, Berry Malan wrote: “I am so glad to have this opportunity of placing on record the Commission’s sincere appreciation of your valuable help, not only in preparing the booklet and drawing the attractive cover design yourself, but for all you have done to assist us in connection with Dingaan’s Kraal and so many other matters”.

While James Walton was still in Maseru (1952-1960) the students of the History Department of the University of the Orange Free State applied to the Government Secretary of Basutoland (Lesotho) for permission to visit Thaba Bosiu (Mountain of the Night). In their letter they asked for police protection. James jokingly asked them for whom they wanted protection – for their girls from the men students? – because at that time Lesotho was quite safe for travellers.

Eventually they came to Lesotho and camped at the foot of Thaba Bosiu. They had a braai to which James was invited. As they were preparing to go to bed, two local Basotho teachers arrived on the scene. They said they were authorised by the Chief to take care of the visitors and that the students must not be surprised if the teachers made occasional visits during the night.

The following morning James and a local Mosotho guide led Obie and his students to the top of Thaba Bosiu to see the graves of the Basutoland Paramount Chiefs and the ruins of Mosheshwe’s homestead. The guide told them that when Lou Wepener was killed during his attack on Thaba Bosiu, his heart and other organs were cut up and shared among the Basotho warriors so that they could acquire the bravery of Wepener.

My father, Dr C.S. Grobbelaar, also knew James well. They first met when they both contributed papers to the Third Pan-African Congress on Prehistory in Livingstone (Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia) in 1955. They both stayed in guest cottages pleasantly situated on the north bank of the Victoria Falls but the proceedings of the Congress were held in Livingstone, some sixteen kilometres away. My father did not have transport so James took him into Livingstone each morning and back to their cottage at the conclusion of each day’s business. Most evenings my father drifted over to the Walton’s cottage, where Connie produced tea on a Primus stove. They were usually joined by Professor Raymond Dart3, the archivist Dr Jeffreyes and other delegates who were staying in similar nearby cottages.

Before emigrating to Lesotho, James’s wife, Constance Eileen (née Armitage), was assistant librarian of the Huddersfield College Library and also bookkeeper-secretary of her father’s textile machinery firm. She studied art at the Huddersfield School of Art and she illustrated some of James’s articles in the Yorkshire Dalesman and the Huddersfield Weekly Examiner.

While in Maseru she did oil paintings of an old Mosotho woman carrying a serothe (winnowing basket) of peaches and showing the various cicatrices received at initiation, and of their house servant, Bahili, wearing a conical straw hat surmounted by a straw figure with an admonishing pointing finger.4 It is the only recorded example of such a hat, which was said to be donned when a chief gave judgement. She also did a painting of

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2 Plans and photographs of the excavated hut floor were given to George Chadwick, the Natal member of the National Monuments Council in Pietermaritzburg.

3 Raymond Dart is famous for his discovery of the skull of a young Australopithecus, the “Taung baby”.

4 These are now in the possession of Roderick Newnham and Jennifer Todd, respectively.
proteas for each of her three children. While in Mafeteng Connie studied under Alfred Krentz, who taught her tone values. She joined the Seven Arts Club on their painting excursions, together with Graham Ivy, Ivor Roberts, Lawrence Hill and others.

After the Waltons moved to Maseru, Connie undertook to establish a Basutoland archive. She visited each district headquarters and climbed into the lofts to collect any documents and letters that had been dumped there. These she put in old cardboard cartons, scrounged from shops. She collected all the books on Basutoland that she could find. Before leaving Lesotho she had the material classified and compiled a catalogue. It was all done without any payment. She was very distressed when she returned to Maseru a few years later only to find that many of the items had been “borrowed” and not returned.

Sadly, Obie was not spared to attend the function at which the gold medal of the National Monuments Council was presented to James Walton in 1981. When the chairman of the Council, the Hon. Mr Justice M.R. de Kock, read the commendatio, my thoughts went back many years to the Free State. I remembered arriving in Bloemfontein in a thunderstorm, all so different for a born-and-bred Bolander. I recalled my very pleasant connections with the Council on which my husband served for so many years. I often accompanied him on his trips and we made many good friends, among them James and Connie Walton and their three daughters Joan, Andrea and Susan. It is a greatly valued friendship.

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Yorkshireman het Suid-Afrikaners geleer hoe om te bewaar

*Martiens van Bart*

James Walton, Vader van die Volksboukundige in Suid-Afrika en Brittanje, is op 24 April 1999 in Kenilworth in sy 87ste jaar oorlede na ‘n besonder produktiewe lewe wat na sy prille skoolseunjare teruggestrek het.

Naas sy tientalle baanbrekersboeke oor die volksboukundige wêreldwyd, het meer as tweeënhonderd manuskripte en artikels oor soortgelyke onderwerpe uit sy pen verskyn - iedereen ’n eerste in sy soort en vanweë hul wetenskaplike inslag van hoogstaande gehalte. Hy het sy versameling persoonlike geskrifte, insluitend sy noukeurige veldaantekeninge in sy netjiese, kalligrafiese handskrif, pen-en-ink-sketse en foto’s wat hy self geneem het, aan die Universiteit van Stellenbosch bemaak, waar dit nou in die J S Gericke Biblioteek georden en beskikbaar is vir navorsers in hierdie vakgebied.

Walton is op 2 November 1911 in Yorkshire, Engeland, gebore en hoewel hy reeds in 1947 na Suidelike Afrika gekom en hier wortel geskiet het, het hy hom steeds as “Yorkshireman” in murg en been beskou. Dit is juist daarom dat sy familielede sy as na Yorkshire teruggeneem het om dit daar uit te strooi.

Sy lewenswandel het hom op ver paaie gebring. Ná sy universiteitsopleiding aan die Universiteit van Leeds en Londen waar hy hom onderskeidelik eers in die natuurwetenskappe (geologie en chemie) en toe in die opvoedkunde bekwaam het, was hy gedurende die Tweede Wêreldoorlog onder meer in Burma en Indië.

Daarna is hy in 1947 in Lesotho aangestel as adjunk-direkteur van onderwys - ’n pos wat hy tot sy afrede in 1960 bekleë het en waarvoor die Order of the British Empire aan hom toegeken is. In plaas van om na Engeland terug te keer, het hy hom in Kaapstad gevestig as besturende direkteur van die uitgewer Longmans South Africa.

Die kultuur van elkeen van die volke waarmee hy in sy lewenswandel aanraking gekom het, het hom in so ’n mate aangegryp dat hy diepstudies na veral hul volksboukuns gemaak het. “Dit is juist in die volksboukuns dat die unieke spore van die voorgeslagte van spesifieke volke gevind word,” het hy by geleentheid aan hierdie journalis gesê.
“Die volksboukuns maak deel uit van die totale lewenssfeer van volke. Die benaming ‘volk’ het in die laaste paar dekades deur die politiek ‘n negatiewe konnotasie gekry. Maar daar is niks verkeerd en die volksboukunde is deel van die omvattende studiereen van volksele. Daarom het ek nie net ‘n belangstelling in die boukuns nie, maar ook in die musiek, dans, kookgewoontes en die talle ander lewenssinge van individuele volke.

“Daar vind ook voortdurend ‘n wisselwerk tussen volke plaas. In die Kaapse volksboukuns, byvoorbeeld, kan die tekens van die Khoi-khoi boukuns, die Kleurling boukuns en die West-Europees boukuns gesien word. Die klein brokkies detail werk saam om ‘n heel nuwe argitektuur te vorm. En volksargitektuur is die boukuns wat voortdurend aangepas en verander word om in die behoeftes van elke besondere volk te voorsien. Dit is ‘n groeiende verskynsel. Daarom gaan dit in die volksboukunde nie bloot om dekriek, stene en brei nie, maar wel om die lewe self.

“Ek is al getipeer as synde ‘n ‘aardse persoon’, maar dit is nie korrek nie. Ek stem het soveel in die boukuns van Europese kastele en herhuisse belang. Wanneer ek ‘n land besoek stel ek ondersoek in na alle kulturele aspekte van daar. Dit is deel van my menswees.

“As jong seun van die plaas Throstle Nest naby Brighouse in Yorkshire was ek ‘n alleenloper. Ek onthou dat ek as sewejarige knaap (ten tyd van die Eerste Wêreldoorlog) op die oorblyfsels van ‘n Middeleeuse smeltery in Bradley Wood, ‘n woud naby my ouerhuis afgekom het. Dit het my so aangegryp dat ek in 1931 my heel eerste artikel juis daaroor geskryf het. Dit is in die vaktydskrif The Naturalist, ‘n maandpublikasie van die Hull Museum, gepubliseer.

“Ek het ook as seun gesien hoe die plaaslike skoenmakers hout in dieselfde woud kom uitsoek het vir die maak van houtsole vir die traditionele Yorkshire klompe (clogs), houtskoene met bostukke van leer. Een van my vroegste boeke was juis oor die houtwerkten die van hierdie skoenmakers. En dan het ek gesien hoe boere in dieselfde woud onwettig hoenderhaangevegte hou (ek het agter die digte bosse geskuil en hul manewales ongesiens beloer). Dié dinge het my aangegryp,” het hy vertel.

Walton was ‘n wêreldkenners op die gebied van die volksboukunde en die meeste van sy talle boeke oor die volksboukuns van Afrika, Europe en die Verre-Ooste was baanbrekerswerk. Geen skrywer het naas hom oor die interessante veld van die volksboukunde verder te prikkel.

“Oor byna tien jaar het Walton voortdurend kommentaar gelever of wenke gegee. Hy was waarskynlik die beste leermeester wat ek nog in die joernalistiese leerkool gehad het. Hy was altyd so opreg, want dit het vir hom oor die volksboukunde verder te prikkel.

“Die Universiteit van Natal het in 1987 ‘n welverdiende ere-doktorsgraad in die argitektuur aan hom toegeken en in 1992 het die Genootskap vir Afrikaanse Volkskunde by die Universiteit van Stellenbosch ‘n erepenning aan hom oorhandig vir sy bydrae tot die uitbouing van die Afrikaanse volksboukunde. Die Stigting Simon van der Stel het hom met ‘n goue medalje vereer vir sy uitnemende bydrae tot die bewaring van Suid-Afrika se volksboukuns, en die Cape Times Eeufeesmedalje vir bewaring is om dieselfde rede aan hom toegeken. Ander toekenings is ‘n meriete-prys van die Cape Tercentenary Foundation, ‘n toekenning van die Institute of South African Architects, en die goue medalje van die Raad vir Nasionale Gedenkwaardighede.

As mede-stigter van die Suid-Afrikaanse Volksboukundige Vereniging was hy lewenslange ere-president.

Sy laaste baanbrekerswerk was ‘n boek oor die windpompe van Suid-Afrika. Die volle oplaag van 500 boeke is in ‘n rekordtyd uitverkoop. Sy "Die volksboukuns maak deel uit van die totale lewenssfeer van volke. Grootse wens, dat die boek in Afrikaans uitgegee moes word omdat dit juist die benaming ‘volk’ het in die laaste paar dekades deur die politiek ‘n die Afrikaanse plattelanders is wat dit die meeste waardeer, is in sy leeftyd nooit vervul nie. Maar daar is niks verkeerd met die begrip nie en die volksboukunde is deel van die omvattende studiereen volkslewe.

Net so merkwaardig as die feit dat Walton sy versameling geskrifte en dies meer aan die Afrikaanse Universiteit van Stellenbosch geskenk het, was sy noue verbintenisse met hierdie Afrikaner joernalis en musiek, dans, kookgewoontes en die talle ander lewensuitinge van individuele volke.

Die klein brokkies detail werk saam om ‘n heel nuwe argitektuur te vorm. En volksargitektuur is die boukuns wat voortdurend aangepas en verander word om in die behoeftes van elke besondere volk te voorsien. Dit is ‘n groeiende verskynsel. Daarom gaan dit in die volksboukunde nie bloot om dekriek, stene en brei nie, maar wel om die lewe self.

Walton en sy vrou, Constance, bewoon. ‘n Vriendskap het dadelik posgevat en Walton het baie moeite gedoen om die jong joernalis se belangstelling in die interessante veld van die volksboukunde verder te prikkel.
Working with James Walton

Margaret Cairns

James Walton was an internationally acknowledged molinological expert and the founder of the study of vernacular architecture in South Africa. Books and published articles running into thousands, each embellished with meticulous drawings of the subject-matter, have come from his pen.

My first encounter with this remarkable man occurred in 1971 when I was engaged in compiling the history of Simonsvlei at Klapmuts. During the course of research the mention of “millstones” and “money owed for the repair of the Drakenstein mill” appeared in documents relating to Matthys Krugel, who owned Simonsvlei between 1707 and 1731.

With no computerisation yet available for archival research the work was time-consuming and, in this instance, fruitless. Recourse to the Franschhoek Museum was equally unproductive. However, it was suggested that contact be made with James Walton, the expert on mills. Enquiries revealed the fame and standing of this man, and as an amateur in this sphere I was unwilling to approach such a person with my enquiry.

Continued and frustrating failure to find any relevant information finally broke down my resolve. A phone call arranged a meeting and at the Walton’s cottage, Le Chalet at Camps Bay, an entirely new field of interest was laid open to me. Several hours later I left, fairly bursting with fresh concepts and more than ever convinced of the erudition and vast knowledge of James and his wife, Connie, who shared all his interests.

But, alas, no information had emerged as to the site of the Drakenstein water mill. However, a wonderful friendship with the Waltons had begun.

James’s book, *Water-mills, Windmills and Horse-mills in South Africa*, was published in 1974 with the problem of the exact whereabouts of the Drakenstein mill still unresolved. By one of those strokes of luck that at times come to researchers, the site suddenly came to light. While studying the deceased estate inventory of Louis Cordier, I discovered that in 1702 the Drakenstein water mill, described as “de ingesetenes haar watermolen” (the water mill of the inhabitants), stood on the slopes of Paarl mountain. With this fact as a starting point the true situation was established through Deeds Registry and archival records. These proved that the elusive mill had operated on the farm Nantes from 1699.
The entire story of the building, running and maintenance of this mill is contained in one complete volume of the records of the Landdrost and Heemraden of Stellenbosch and Drakenstein during the period 1699 to 1806 (Cape Archives: 1/STB 19/166). In his generosity James had this entire volume photographed (not photocopied). Today the copied volume together with the working notes and diagrams are in the care of the Paarl Heemkring. Hopefully, further research into this gem of vernacular architecture, whose basic remains are still visible in Mill Street, Paarl, will be forthcoming.

Working with James included collecting material for the publication of *The Josephine Mill and its Owners – the history of milling and brewing at the Cape*. This proved a most rewarding experience. Countless hours were spent searching for documents, maps and diagrams in order to identify the sites of the early mills. Armed with the resultant information, we undertook excursions on foot to confirm, if possible, the exact positions of the mills. We investigated De Hoop Mill (later Annandale) and Sutherlands Mill, both in the Gardens, Cloete’s Mill and Cloete’s Brewery, Dreyer’s Mill (forerunner of the Josephine Mill) and the early mill on Rouwkoop, all in the Rondebosch/Newlands area. James often recorded our findings with his valuable sketches. Thick bush and the muddy waters of the Liesbeek River were natural hazards of the work.

James’s history of milling in the Josephine Mill book was the first in this field, and his contribution both as to text and illustrations ensured the publication of this venture of the Historical Society of Cape Town. Later he organised work parties of members of the Society to excavate the foundations of the long-lost Dreyer’s Mill of 1818 that lay adjacent to the water wheel of the present Josephine Mill.

Countless others have been enriched by their association with this quite remarkable man, who contributed so extensively to the history of his adopted homeland.

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**A belated friendship**

*André Pretorius*

As I had always been interested in “things old” and being what my brothers termed “snap happy”, my transfer from East London to the Cape in 1967 was a blessing. I fervently started to photograph the “white-walled beauty” of the Western Cape and also collected books on “Cape Dutch” buildings. James Walton was later quick to point out that such terminology was only correct in so far as it denotes a building style which evolved during the rule of the Dutch at the Cape.

My hobby led to acquiring all that James had written on the subject long before our first meeting towards the end of the 1980s. At the time I had just taken early retirement and was helping to edit a book on the Pretorius clan. James was visited to ask permission to use photographs that he had taken in 1952 of, among other houses, the homestead at Lettskraal in the Sundays River Valley, Graaff-Reinet. From 1827 to 1838 this was the dwelling of Commandant-General Andries Pretorius – the Boer leader and their hero of Blood River.

I was overawed by James’s vast knowledge and delighted that he was so willing to share it with a kindred soul. A friendship became established and before long my weekly Sunday evening visits were augmented by one on Wednesday too. The discussions then were wide-ranging and well “lubricated” by a generous supply of J&B. Soon I graduated from merely comparing notes to joining him and his companion of many years, Philippina Oberholster, on trips to the hinterland. Three-score years and ten inevitably make one less steady, so on these sorties James insisted that I take the photographs, with the angle and composition according to his direction. Having my own darkroom was a blessing as enlargements could be made and cropped to enhance what James wanted to highlight.

Philippina, James and I termed ourselves the Three Musketeers, and being the youngest I took the wheel and James navigated. James was meticulous by nature, so with the aid of a detailed topo-cadastral map and notes these excursions were carefully planned well in advance. His planning was focused not only on what we were going to see and photograph but on also where we would lunch and overnight — by insistence, always at his own expense. For a picnic lunch there were kept in the Ford’s boot three
folding chairs and a table, which Philippina generously loaded with padkos and naturally a bottle of wine and J&B too.

Prior to meeting James my own photographic expeditions concentrated on the visually appealing gabled homesteads. Thanks to my new-found mentor I later came to appreciate the warmth and charm of simpler dwellings and to view even the humblest cottage as an important and integral part of our vernacular architectural heritage. How I lament not having earlier met this remarkable Yorkshireman, who when recording dwellings in all their shapes and sizes also included pig-sties, dovecotes, bakoonde, fowl runs and all the other structures which formed the werf. My own vast record of old buildings is consequently sadly incomplete.

Since seeing the book on the Pretorius family safely through the press I kept it in my own photograph albums to draw my attention to dwellings for possible inclusion in my book, Double-storeyed, Flat-roofed Buildings of the Rural Cape (1993).

James appreciated that changes to, and the upgrading of, dwellings, particularly the more humble structures, was a normal evolutionary process and therefore inevitable. In South Africa this process was speeded up after the change in the political dispensation in 1994 which placed at the helm a majority government (ANC), committed to improving among other things the housing standards of the needy. He was therefore anxious to place on record the cottages built by the indigenous population of the Western Cape. This culminated in what was to be his last major contribution to our vernacular architecture literature, Cape Cottages, published in 1995.

The material used in the construction of these modest abodes was truly vernacular, which in layman’s language he defined to me to be “the architecture of people who do not have access to architects, they use their own talents and ingenuity to construct a dwelling from whatever material is readily available”. The very nature of this usually inferior material means that, for example, most of the reed-walled dwellings at Eland’s Bay, Verlorenvlei and Leipoldtville, and the fishermen’s cottages built of timber retrieved from shipwrecks at Buffeljagsbaai (near Gansbaai), are threatened or already lost to posterity.

Fortunately for us, James had already (as far back as the 1960s) built up a sizeable photographic record of the indigenous population’s dwellings, many of which have since been demolished or altered beyond recognition. Being pragmatic he knew that at best only a few representative cottages could be restored for future generations to view and appreciate as examples of their indigenous forbears’ important contribution, however humble, to the New South Africa’s vernacular heritage. He was particularly anxious that this be done at places like the old Witwater mission (Piquetberg) and the green corrugated iron fishermen’s cottages of Paternoster, not to mention the unique wooden structures of Buffeljagsbaai.

James lauded the recycling and/or restoration undertaken at, for instance, Melkhoutfontein (Stillbaai) and Waenhuiskrans (Arniston) as this improved the lifestyle of the inhabitants without sacrificing the uniqueness of their dwellings. He also felt that in implementing man’s natural desire to upgrade one should always strive to retain the “old-world” character of places like Elim, Genadendal, Wupperthal and Zoar. This would make such settlements attractive to passing tourists, and the locals could generate income by, for instance, the sale of homecrafts, dried flowers and local produce.

It came as a surprise when, faced with failing health and advancing years (he was already 85), James one evening asked me if I realised that had it not been for the wind pump (which he said was incorrectly called a wind mill - it mills nothing”) large tracts of South Africa would never have been farmed and that its contribution towards a settled platteland should be placed on record. My immediate response was that he had no first-hand knowledge of these rugged machines; I had worked on a farm and my own recollections were not at all pleasant, for I had had to contend with broken pumping rods, cylinders, etc.

Realising that he had firmly made up his mind, I gave up protesting and for the next few months set about photographing wind pumps while he corresponded with local and American manufacturers for technical information. He wrote numerous articles on the subject for WoonBurger which were enthusiastically promoted by its editor, Martiens van Bart. The response was excellent, which led to material for even more WoonBurger articles and often to follow these up with phone calls to confirm and/or obtain further information on his behalf.

Wind Pumps of South Africa appeared in 1998. Unfortunately no Afrikaans edition simultaneously saw the light. A positive outcome of this book and the interest stimulated by James’s article in WoonBurger was that a Bushmanland community decided to take up his plea to establish South Africa’s first wind pump museum. Its object would be to preserve some of the more interesting examples of this simple machine that for years on end,
and with little upkeep, performs a life-saving task regardless of weather
conditions.

The Fred Turner Wind Pump Museum at Loeriesfontein, which also
houses the book’s manuscript, correspondence and photographs in a special
James Walton section, already has seventeen wind pumps on display. Three
years later it is a living monument to Dr Walton’s foresight and
perseverance.

After what I truly believed to be his last publication and with time fast
running out, I thought it would be prudent to tape his memoirs. After much
protestation he complied but soon his restless mind found yet another
project. During the Second World War he saw service in India and Burma
(1943-44) and true to his nature recorded, sketched and, armed with a
simple box Brownie camera, preserved for posterity the activities of the
depressed classes living at Mhow in central India. Naturally I could not help
with this project so my contribution to Beyond the Pale in Malwa (1998)
was limited to hours in the darkroom attempting to make acceptable prints
from rather “thin” negatives that were over half a century old.

Despite rapidly failing health there was just no end to my restless
mentor. A few months prior to his death he scraped together enough energy
to complete a final booklet that paid homage to the lowly donkey. As with
the wind pump, he felt that the donkey too played a significant role in our
rural development and that acknowledgement thereof was pitifully lacking.
This “dumb animal” was hitched to a cart to provide transport, or to a
plough for tilling a field; it also provided motive power for horse mills,
while a blinkered donkey would follow a monotonous circular course to operate a bakkiespomp providing life-giving water for both man and beast.
He pointed out that even the mining industry drew on the donkey’s
usefulness and that in 1986 the town of Pietersburg acknowledged this by
erecting a statue in its honour with a plaque to state its contribution to the
mining of gold there in the pioneering years 1871-92. James’s admiration
for the seemingly endless tasks that the donkey had stoically performed
since ancient times was not confined to an appreciating narrative. In 1994 he
“adopted” a donkey living in the Jordan Valley in the Middle East, and in
the year before his death he made a generous donation to the Esmerelda
Donkey Fund at Prince Albert. I am pleased that he lived to receive, hot off
the press, some copies of his swan song, A Tribute to the Donkey.

In briefly recounting our friendship and the small ways in which I could
help James in his endeavours to further the cause of conservation through
the written word, it would be amiss if I did not conclude by pointing out that
my own contribution, Our Threatened Heritage (1997), would probably
never have materialised had it not been for his persistent cajoling: “André,
you’re sitting with literally thousands of photographs - when are you going
to write your book?”. I was privileged to have this gifted man as a mentor –
my only regret is that our paths did not cross earlier.
She was small and bright with a warm Yorkshire voice and twinkling eyes. She laughed a lot, she made you welcome with real hospitality and she cooked like a dream. There were many happy meals watched over by her dresser full of blue and white Spode china and pretty blue and white curtains, with good company, good talk, laughter and perfect Yorkshire pudding. Good wine too.

The three Walton girls were grown up when we got to know them in Camps Bay. The eldest, Joan, was born in the early years of Hitler’s war, before James went to India. He was trapped in Burma and took part in the dreadful Burma Walk. Many lonely worrying years in wartime England for Connie and her baby were complicated by polio from which Connie eventually made a good recovery.

My earliest memory of Connie was accompanying the Waltons to Villiersdorp. Dee Kilpin was to show us farmhouses threatened by the proposed Teewaterskloof dam, prior to the Vernacular Architecture Society’s first field trip. How Connie enjoyed and appreciated the Kilpins’ interesting old farm home, the internal door salvaged from some old wrecked ship, the bowls of roses on gleaming wood! In the late afternoon, on our way home, we came upon onions scattered all over the road, spilled from a farm lorry. Connie insisted on retrieving some. “Such a waste. I don’t like to see such waste”.

The visibility was bad in the mist and twilight as we climbed up the pass to Grabouw. James switched on the inside car light to light his cigarette, his foot firmly on the accelerator. There was no comment from Connie. Another time, when my husband, Hugh, was driving up a precipitous wet road in the Cedarberg mountains, she cowered in the back seat with eyes tight shut, stoicism suspended.

The Waltons must have travelled for thousands of miles seeking out and recording vernacular architecture. Some chairs and a large picnic box were packed in the boot of the car. They called upon all sorts of people in remote places, making friends wherever they went: disarming, enthusiastic, unilingual, interested. Connie was an artist, but started compiling the archives in Basutoland in her typically competent way. She put up with the “comet’s tail” (her words) of friends, acquaintances and hangers-on collected by James. She could express her disapproval quite firmly, if necessary, but she was a warm and loyal mother and wife.

The day she died, after a long and dreary illness borne so patiently, she said to me: “I am tired, you know, I have had enough”. Her “enough” was so much in a full and rewarding life. Dear Connie.
Volksboukunde in konteks

Mathys W. Hattingh

Ek het James Walton laat in sy lewe leer ken, maar 'n ontmoeting met hom is iets wat jy nie maklik vergeet nie. Hy kon staaltjies oor plekke en mense onthou wat dertig jaar terug gebeur het en dit vertel asof dit gister was. Wanneer jy met James Walton gesels het kon jy onmiddelik sien waarom hy soveel inligting kon versamel uit 'n meestal Afrikaanse agtergrond. Alhoewel hy nie Afrikaans kon praat nie het sy persoonlikheid en belangstelling boekdele gespreek.

Hy het soveel nagelaat omdat hy al sy navorsing te boek gestel het. James Walton het my geleer dat indien jy iets wil bewaar moet jy mense inlig sodat jy deur kennis mense die mag kan gee om te bewaar. Hy het my geïnspireer om die Volksboukundige Vereniging van Suid-Afrika weer te maak wat dit oorspronklik was, 'n Vereniging wat die navorsing en bewaring van bekende en minder bekende volksboukundige argitektuur nastreef. James Walton het nooit na enige onderwerp buite konteks gekyk nie. Hy het die volksboukundige boustyl nooit verwyder van sy omgewing en menslike invloede nie. Sodoende verseker hy dat die boustyl nie klinies geëvalueer word nie, maar dat die kulturele rykdoom die samestelling van hierdie geboue deurweef.

Sy boeke is ervarings en reise wat jy saam met hom mee maak. Hy bereik 'n groter gehoor met sy manier van vertel. Sy werk is persoonlik en warm, want sy passie vir sy onderwerp spoel oor in sy boeke. Hy het die mense in die huise net so belangrik gevind as die geboue self omdat hierdie geboue deel uitmaak van die bewoners se kultuur. Hy het die menslike manier gehad om hierdie mense te benader en sodoende het hierdie mense hulle deure en harte vir hom oopgemaak.

James Walton het hier aan die punt van Afrika 'n kultuur kom kry wat sy belangstelling so geprickel het dat hy dit bestudeer het en die meeste van sy bevindinge op skrif gestel het. Hier het 'n Yorkshireman ons kom bewus maak van die rykdom wat in ons kultuur sit. Ek vra myself af of ons waarder die hierdie man vir ons gedoen het, want daaglikse lees ons van ou geboue wat bedreig word, wat platgestoot of geplunder word. Ek voel ons moet voortbou op James Walton se nalatenskap aan ons. Ons moet kennis deel en oordra aan elke persoon wat kan help om ons geboue in die Kaapse boustyl te bewaar.

James Walton was nooit bang om sy kennis te deel of sy bevindinge op skrif te sit nie, want elkeen wat hom wou kritiseer of weerspreek, het hy geweet moes ook 'n behoorlike studie van sy onderwerp gemaak het. Dit het beteken dat daar nog 'n gesonde en lewendige belangstelling in die volksboukundige boustyl was.

James Walton was en is 'n baanbreker wanneer dit kom by die volksboukundige argitektuur. Enige persoon wat belang stel in die volksboukundige boustyl sal weet wat hy vir die volksboukunde beteken. Ons het afskeid geneem van hierdie besondere mens, maar hy laat vir ons jare se harde werk na.
The James Walton collection

Lynne Fourie

The Document Centre, or Manuscript Division as it was previously known, was established in 1970 to house the DF Malan and NP van Wyk Louw collections, which had been donated to the University of Stellenbosch. It soon became clear that there was indeed a need for a separate division where valuable original documents could be catalogued and preserved.

In 1984, when the university library moved from the old Carnegie building to the modern underground J.S. Gericke Library, it was decided to plan and equip a Document Centre adjacent to the Africana Room and Rare Books section, collectively known as Special Collections.

More than 300 valuable collections have since been added to the two mentioned above, with a strong emphasis on Afrikaans literature (WEG Louw, DJ Opperman, CJ Langenhoven, Uys Krige, Sheila Cussons and Hennie Aucamp), politics (AC Cilliers, PJ Cillié, PA Weber and, most recently, Japie Basson) and art (Maggie Laubs, Hugo Naudé, TO Honiball and Helmuth von Michaelis).

Most of these collections have strong ties with the Western Cape and with the town and University of Stellenbosch. The idea of preserving the cultural heritage of our own environment has been relatively slow to develop, but has become an important issue among a broad spectrum of people from the region. The late Prof. Frans Smuts, who also donated his extensive collection to us, was a pioneer in this field, and his papers are an invaluable link with those of James Walton, whose collection now forms a cornerstone of the Document Centre.

Variety

From 1991 James Walton, educationist and doyen of vernacular architecture in South Africa, donated most of his collection to the University of Stellenbosch.

The collection is characterised by its variety. Many large maps, manuscripts, drawings, charts, architectural plans, art works and photographs form part of this unique collection of vernacular architecture; it is of great cultural and artistic value, enriching and enhancing the collections of the Document Centre.

James Walton always had an avid interest in African ethnology and collected much information on African shelters and settlement patterns. This field of interest included conical towers in Africa, early Bergdama settlements in South West Africa, the Fokeng settlement of Qeme Mountain, Natal Nguni huts and homesteads, Southern Sotho pottery, granaries and iron furnaces, patterned walling, Bantu saddle-quirns and mullers, a late Stone Age site in the Erongo Mountains, carved wooden doors and door frames, bird figures, African patterned walling, the rock paintings of Basutoland, archaeological research, Bushmen, Northern Rhodesia and Congo contacts, urbanisation in Africa and engraved ostrich egg shells. He had a vast knowledge and interest in African culture, vernacular architecture and various art forms.

Many pamphlets and brochures written by other authors on subjects which interested him were also collected by James Walton, and form a large part of our collection. Newsletters from the International Molinological Society were also collected by him, providing much additional information on mills, an immensely popular topic world wide.

Two valuable portfolios, one containing fifty-seven original drawings for the book *African Village* and the other illustrating *Homesteads and Villages of South Africa*, were also donated by James Walton. The precise and detailed illustrations are kept in specially made boxes to preserve these beautiful artworks.

An extensive slide collection depicting African hut types, Bantu settlement patterns and murals, water-mills, Cape carts and wagons, South African sledges, homesteads and villages of South Africa and South African vernacular architecture is also part of the Walton Collection.

Books

Some classic examples of his works are *Homesteads and Villages of South Africa* (1952); *Cape Dovecots and Fowl-runs* (1985); *Old Cape Farmsteads* (1989); *African Village* (1956); *Early Ghoya Settlement in the Orange Free State* (1965); *Double-storeyed Flat-roofed Buildings of the Rural Cape* (1993); and *Cape Cottages* (1995). They are all collectors’ items and much sought after by Africana specialists.

*Cape Dovecots and Fowl-runs* deals with a previously unrecorded aspect of Cape vernacular architecture. The book contains an extensive collection of photographs and drawings, one hundred and thirty in all.
James Walton himself took most of the photographs for this book. Many extra photographs and illustrations of farms and outbuildings, fowl-runs, nesting places and dovecotes, not used for publication, are also found here.

In the book, *Old Cape Farmsteads*, James Walton traces the origins of Cape rural architecture and its development. He also describes various types of buildings, including long-houses, corbelled buildings, *wolwehokke* and soap houses. The illustrations include historical photographs by Arthur Elliott and reproductions of drawings by Alys Fane Trotter, Johann Christian Friderici, Johannes Mulder and EV van Stade.

Research for the book *Double-storeyed Flat-roofed Buildings of the rural Cape* includes many copies of Deeds of Transfer, as well as plans of buildings. These double-storeyed flat-roofed houses exhibit a wide variety in plan and outward appearance.

*Cape Cottages* is the result of more than forty years of research on Cape vernacular cottages which were inhabited mainly by descendants of mixed settler, slave and Khoi-Khoi origins. The historical background of the Sandveld and Strandveld vernacular architecture is discussed first, then the *matjieshuise*, *hartbeeshuise* and fisherman’s cottages of Namaqualand. Mission stations at Genadendal, Elim, Mamre, Goedverwacht, Witterwater and Wupperthal are looked at in depth. The book ends with a discussion of the vernacular architecture found at Suurbraak, McGregor, Clanwilliam and the Bo-Kaap. An extensive glossary with sketches explaining the different architectural elements of the Cape cottages forms an interesting part of the book.

James Walton is particularly well known for his books on mills. He spent five years doing research before writing *Water-mills, Windmills and Horse-mills of South Africa* (1974). Many mills are recorded, for example Awe’s Mill (King William’s Town), Campbell water-mill (Pilgrim’s Rest), Coedmore (Natal), Izeli (Frankfort), Malmani Oog (Marico), Rheenendal (Swellendam), Stutterheim water-mill and Waterford water-mill, otherwise known as Kubusie of Burmeister’s Mill (Stutterheim). The author collected a large collection of photographs, illustrations, architect’s drawings and newspaper clippings, as well as correspondence. South Africa is one of the richest molinological areas in the world, but information was sparse and largely unavailable before the publication of this book.

*A donkey operating a Findlay bakkiespomp (James Walton).*

*Stuurmansfontein, Carnarvon: “a typical Karoo sheep farmer’s homestead, showing the two early corbelled rooms and later flat-roofed and pitched roof additions” (James Walton 1960).*
For the book, *The Josephine Mill and its Owners* (1978), which covers a time-span of over three hundred years, James Walton gathered a great deal of historical background information. The book provides a detailed description of the mill and the lives of its owners. Jacob Letterstedt and Anders Ohlsson were pioneers in the establishment of the milling and brewing industries in South Africa. This book was published to raise funds for the preservation of the mill as a cultural centre. Background information includes copies of Oscar Hedelius’s letters (1841-1846), notes on the Josephine mill by Cecil Wood, Olof Bergh’s Brewery, Jacob Letterstedt, Gortmolen, Annandale Mill, Rheezicht, Twistniet, Zorgvliet and Platteklip Stream. The correspondence engaged into between James Walton and archivist Margaret Cairns forms a large part of the research of this book. Most of the ninety illustrations are line drawings and half tones, produced specially for the book.

There is once again a growing interest in mills and many newspaper articles have been published promoting this subject. Articles in *Die Burger* written mostly by the journalist, Martiens van Bart, have started an unprecedented interest in windpumps. James Walton’s *Windpumps in South Africa* was published in 1998. This remarkable book is the product of various contributors over the entire country. Readers reacted enthusiastically and James Walton had his hands full in answering all the letters personally. If there are sufficient requests for an Afrikaans translation, consideration will be given by the publishers Human & Rousseau. An important result of this work is the establishment of South Africa’s first windpump museum. It forms part of the Fred Turner Agricultural Museum at Loeriesfontein, which was established by ex-Cabinet Minister Eli Louw and Mrs. Gezina Louw.

**Articles**

James Walton was also the author of many articles published in various journals and periodicals. Some examples of titles of articles include “The Trekker’s wagon fortress” (1949 in *Country Life*); “Wolwehokke” (1975 in *Africana*); “Some early Piquetberg farms” (1982 in *Restorica*); “Klaarefontein, the key to a South African art enigma” (1983 in *Antiques in South Africa*); “South Africa’s ‘Norse’ mills” (1985 in *Restorica*) and “Bantu mural art” (1965 in *SA Panorama*). These articles are all described in the first catalogue. For the article “Cape carts”, published in 1990 in *Tydskrif vir Volkskunde en Volkstaal*, extensive research notes were collected by the author, as well as many photographs and illustrations of various types of carts and wagons. A great deal of information, correspondence and many photographs were also gathered by the author for the article “South African sledges”, which was published in *Tydskrif vir Volkskunde en Volkstaal* in 1991.

The following articles are described in the second catalogue. “Some South African decorative wall-anchors” was published in *Restorica* in 1987. Research notes include English examples of wall-anchors, as well as photographs of local and Swedish wall-anchors. “Hartbeeshuis and hartbeeshut” was published in 1987 in *Tydskrif vir Volkskunde en Volkstaal*. For the article, “Early Cape lime-kilns”, published in *South African Journal for Cultural and Art History* in 1987, James Walton collected extensive background information (notes and newspaper clippings) and correspondence on lime burning and lime-kilns. In 1981 the article, “The SA kapstyhuis and some European counterparts”, was published in *Restorica*. “The ox-wagon: symbol of SA exploration and expansion”, published in *Lantern* in 1976, is of much interest at present with the celebration of the centenary of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1901). Not much background information is available for the articles, “Pieter van Zyl’s farm on the Olifants River” (in *Africana*, 1974) and “Homes of the Trekboers: the vernacular architecture of SA” (in *Lantern*, 1961). “The dagga pipes of Southern Africa” was published in *Researches of the National Museum* in 1953. Much correspondence took place between James Walton and museums during the writing of this article.

From the above titles we get a good idea of the range of the subject matter covered by the author. His knowledge was extensive, as well as intensive, and showed his versatility.

James Walton also wrote articles that were published in the form of pamphlets or brochures. Some of the titles include “Dingane’s Kraal”; “Mgungundlovu”; “Early Cape lime-kilns”; “Historic buildings of Basutoland”; “Old Maseru”; “Villages of the paramount chiefs of Basutoland (I and II)”; “Factors affecting attendance in Basutoland schools” and “Portable corn-mills in South Africa”. The time spent in Basutoland and the position held by James Walton as Deputy Director of Education until 1960 explained his interest in this country. Extensive information, many photographs and illustrations were collected by the author while writing the booklet, “Portable corn-mills in South Africa”.
Research value

James Walton’s collection is of the utmost importance as it comprises the greatest collection of information regarding vernacular architecture, especially that of the Western Cape. There is also a great deal of information to be found regarding African shelters and other dwellings world wide.

Many documents pertaining to the Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa, of which James Walton was a founder and Honorary Life President, form part of the collection. Information covers the many places visited by the group. Other organisations which have a bearing on the conservation or preservation of buildings and which James Walton was involved in, or had an interest in, are the National Monuments Council; Historical Society of Port Elizabeth; Simon’s Town Historical Society; SA Society for Cultural History; and Simon van der Stel Foundation. On many occasions James Walton was honoured for his outstanding work and studies on vernacular architecture. He received the Cape Times Tercentenary Foundation’s Award of Merit, the Institute of South African Architects’ Architects, Critics and Writers Award, the Gold Medal of the NMC, the Gold Medal of the Simon van der Stel Foundation, the Cape Times Centenary Medal and a Gold Medal of the Genootskap vir Afrikaanse Volkskunde (GAV).

The James Walton collection is of invaluable research value and is used by art students and lecturers, architects and town planners, photographers, journalists interested in restoration and members of the public concerned with conservation, as well as students from the Department of Folk Culture. They have found unique and extensive material for their various projects in this collection. Copies of the Walton catalogues have also been requested by universities and other institutions in the Western Cape and Johannesburg.

The Walton collection’s close proximity to the Africana Room offers researchers access to a vast collection of related published material on South African history, culture and nature, as well as maps and pictorial art.

Catalogues

The James Walton catalogue presently comprises two volumes. The material includes manuscripts, information, photographs, slides, illustrations and correspondence pertaining to his many publications. Additional information (donated at a later stage) covering books dealt with in the first catalogue can also be found in the second catalogue. Sufficient additional material (especially on mills) has already been donated to begin a third volume.

In order to compile the catalogues, the manuscripts, research information, illustrations, photographs and so on have to be arranged into meaningful categories. This is usually an exhausting task but it was very simple in the case of the James Walton collection. His work was always well organised, neat and precise. All the information was kept in pamphlet boxes and well marked in his characteristic calligraphic handwriting. This made it much easier to compile the detailed subject and author/title index, which was most important for accessing the collection and facilitating research.

Preservation

James Walton made a generous financial donation to the library for the completion of his catalogues. This donation was used to finance the services of a member of staff, as well as for making specific boxes, all maroon-coloured, in which to store his material. Because this material is unique, larger-than-usual boxes were specially made by the University Bindery. James Walton’s valuable pen sketches, maps and other illustrations are stored flat and are covered either with acid-free polyester or tissue paper, for maximum protection. All items are kept in acid-free boxes and file folders, while neutral board and clear polyester files are used for the preservation of photographs. These materials are imported from England and the USA and comply with the highest standards for preservation, made to specifications provided by the Bodleian Library of Oxford University.

Like the other collections, the Walton papers were comprehensively catalogued to ensure minimal handling of the original material. The Special Collections Section has controlled access, and (limited) photocopying is done by staff members only. The temperature and humidity levels are kept relatively constant. In case of fire the whole area is protected by carbon dioxide instead of water sprinklers. The entrances are fitted with sensors as a means of added security.

Additional collections

During 1997 we were privileged to receive an additional collection of fifteen illustrations. These sketches were previously in the possession of Wits University. They are done in black ink using linear technique and pointillism. Mr Henri Wirth, a professional restorer and acknowledged expert in this field, who has a laboratory in the JS Gericke Library, gave valuable guidance on the correct preservation of the diverse items in the
Walton collection. Mr Wirth worked for months mechanically cleaning the artworks with special rubbing powder in order to remove the stains (caused by dampness and flies). They were then treated with anti-acidic and anti-fungal chemicals, the backs were resealed and small black inner frames were inserted to keep the artworks away from the glass. The original oak frames were also cleaned and restored. This collection is on permanent exhibition in the Document Centre.

Many valuable books (especially concerning windmills, water mills and horse mills) form part of this additional collection. Included are three classics, Rex Wailes’s *The English Windmill*, Jannis Notebaart’s *Windmuhlen* and John Reynolds’s *Windmills and Watermills*. Some books referring specifically to English vernacular architecture were returned to James Walton, who donated them to York University in England.

Throughout the years we at the Document Centre formed a special relationship with James Walton through his friendly letters, his humour, his hospitality, and the inscribed copies given to members of staff. We had a great appreciation not only of his work, but also of him as a person. Having him as a friend truly enriched our lives.

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**The conservation and interpretation of vernacular architecture**

*Graeme Binckes*

This article considers the place of vernacular architecture in the overall architectural heritage and cultural life of South Africa and the consequent need for this component of the heritage to be conserved and interpreted. The views expressed are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect those of others engaged in this field.

It would appear that while the situation is improving, the general public is neither well informed about the architectural heritage of South Africa nor adequately appreciative of its cultural implications. In part this is doubtless due to the perception that it consists largely of buildings influenced by colonialist rather than indigenous cultures, and in part to the inducements of the natural environment, which receives a greater measure of attention in the media and in terms of legislative and financial support.

It may be suggested that vernacular architecture, as a direct expression of human needs in terms of locally available materials and techniques, can provide a means to the more general understanding of the architectural heritage as a whole. To quote Federico Mayor, Director General of UNESCO:

> The extraordinary diversity of vernacular architecture … is a testimony firstly to the diversity of restraints to which man is subjected in different regions, from one side of the planet to the other, and secondly to the ingenuity man has shown over the centuries in adapting his habitat to the conditions imposed by nature …

> This architectural heritage is a rich source of learning for us all. It shows how man has learnt to use the materials available to him, overcoming the obstacles in his path, creating a result that is both functional and beautiful, from minimum resources. It is precious to modern man, and far more relevant than is immediately apparent …

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As a “rich source of learning to us all”, vernacular architecture is indeed relevant to present-day conditions in a number of ways. Thus it can not only provide an insight into the overall architectural heritage of the past, but can also exert an influence on contemporary design and thereby on the architectural heritage of the future (necessarily avoiding a “vernacular style”, which is no more than pastiche). The French architect, Le Corbusier, drew from the vernacular of the Mediterranean region, as in his Ronchamp chapel with its thick, whitewashed walls and small window openings. The influence of the local vernacular in the development of a particular South African architecture is becoming apparent.

Vernacular technology, as for example in the use of *pisé-de-terre*, could contribute to alleviating the present dire shortage of housing. Application of the vernacular “self-build” tradition would result in a reduction in cost and the provision of houses designed to meet the particular needs of occupants, instead of their being presented with standard products which are not readily capable of adaptation. Indeed it is difficult to see the housing problem being solved by a “top-down” rather than a “bottom-up” approach, which would carry the important benefit of personal involvement.

At a further level of relevance, Judge Albie Sachs has drawn attention to: … those whose heritage is that of disinheritance, whose heritage is that of having grown up excluded in the country, whose heritage has been that of dispossession and not possession. A profound, fundamental and complex task faces all of us. How can we all conserve the heritage not only of the possessors, the victors … but also of the dispossessed …? 

While the nature and extent of the “heritage of the dispossessed” have yet to be explored, it is probable that in large part it consists of vernacular structures. The conservation and interpretation of these would render the architectural heritage as a whole more representative of the respective cultures of South Africa. The task referred to by Judge Sachs may therefore be initiated within the field of vernacular architecture.

The process of conservation may be regarded as consisting of three phases: preliminary survey and research, architectural intervention, and final presentation. The view put forward in this article is that interpretive functions, which are defined here as those of evaluation and education, should be integral to this process. Interpretation would thus be seen as the invaluable precursor of intervention, its necessary concomitant, and its logical sequel. This approach is perhaps particularly appropriate in respect of vernacular architecture, the apparent unsophistication of which may lead to its dismissal as of little contemporary relevance.

Initially the evaluative function has to be applied to the identification of individual structures and their significance in relation to the social, cultural, economic and environmental factors that have exerted a formative influence. The preparation of this essential database involves the collation of all evidence available on site and from such documentary and other sources as may exist including verbally transmitted data. In this regard the valuable contribution of archaeological investigations is now coming to be appreciated. In due course, a catalogue of South African vernacular architecture may be compiled and incorporated in the Provincial Heritage Registers now envisaged.

The close interrelationship between the educational and evaluative functions of interpretation is a necessary consideration in implementing interventions. Authenticity is a central concern of architectural conservation and is also of concern if the educational value of the final product is to be ensured. Evidence revealed in the course of carrying out interventions has to be constantly evaluated. Interventions range from simple maintenance and repair to include restoration, reconstruction, replication and translocation. Authenticity is placed increasingly at risk as the extent of intervention increases.

There can be little objection to the reconstruction of an element from its original parts, even with the judicious incorporation of new material, or the replication of a severely damaged or missing component for purposes of record or in order to maintain overall character. However, there are cases where a replica is regarded as the equivalent of the original, an attitude that has led to the demolition of structures that might otherwise have been restored, and their replacement with mere pastiches.

Translocation, as in the several cases where vernacular buildings have been moved to open-air museums, may be an admirable object but should be a policy of last resort. Evidence derived from their original surroundings is lost and that contained in their structure may be destroyed in the process. Authenticity is also at risk when the present is allowed to intrude on the

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past. There may be a temptation to make use of new materials and
techniques (perhaps unavoidable where electrical and plumbing installations
are concerned) and to conform to present-day tastes (varnishing rather
than painting of external hardwood). David Lowenthal mentions that:

In restored Colonial Williamsburg, paints and fabrics brighter
than colonists ever had were justified on the grounds that eighteenth-
century folk would surely have used such colours if they could have
found and afforded them.7

The integration of the educational and evaluative functions of
interpretation with conservation before and during intervention provides the
basis for the presentation of a project to the public. As in the previous
phases of the overall process outlined above, this calls for professional
guidance. A clearly formulated strategy is required, oriented towards those
likely to visit the site in question and involving the provision of as many
such facilities as may be appropriate in order to ensure that they gain by the
experience. These include facilities for the disabled: those who are deaf,
blind or paraplegic.

Particularly in the case of larger projects, it is necessary that aims and
objects are defined and a general theme devised which should be reflected
throughout the project. Reference should be made to the formative
influences noted previously, to the materials and structural methods
employed, and to the nature and extent of interventions carried out. In such
ways an insight may be provided into the inherent attributes of vernacular
architecture. Drawing attention to the collection and evaluation of evidence
in the interests of authenticity will indicate the degree of professionalism
required. It is indeed in this third and final phase of conservation that the
educational function of interpretation serves to bring together the evidence
acquired in the two previous phases and to present it in a form that is easy to
assimilate.

It is desirable to avoid a static, museum-like approach. Rather, the
intention should be to present a “living” entity. Practical demonstrations of
activities associated with the structure in question, domestic crafts and
building construction skills are particularly appropriate. In the related field
of industrial archaeology, principles applicable to structural and mechanical
engineering may be demonstrated. In general, however, attempts at
verisimilitude should be viewed with caution. They are most likely to

7 Professor David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge University Press,
1985, p.329).
The rapid expansion of the tourist industry, both internal and external, could result in our vernacular architecture becoming a notable tourist attraction. In some cases a charge could be made for admission, while in many other cases vernacular buildings have already been converted for use as restaurants, guest houses and “country cottages”. Indeed, there is an opportunity for an entrepreneur to put together a network of country cottages to be leased for holiday purposes and to suggest visits to nearby vernacular buildings and industrial archaeology sites. Industrial structures of the past have their own, often considerable, appeal that is enhanced when machinery is operational and products are available for sale. Besides providing a financial return, these connections would provide for the conservation of buildings that could otherwise be lost. However, the vernacular and industrial heritage should not be sullied by crass commercialism. The essential economic base has to be established without prejudicing the very purposes it is intended to serve.

While vernacular architecture has been treated as a product of the past in this article, vernacular structures are still being erected. In rural settlements, traditional forms of construction have often survived, possibly modified in certain respects. Vernacular architecture is also exemplified in the “informal housing” of many of those attracted to our cities, and there are cases in which it is regarded as preferable to modern building systems. This is a study in itself and representative examples should be conserved as evidence of the present period of our history. Whole areas may come to be seen as an early stage in unplanned but human-oriented urban development.

In conclusion, while is it all very well to suggest certain principles relating to the conservation and interpretation of South Africa’s heritage of vernacular architecture, it is a matter of deep concern that the future of this heritage is by no means assured. This is apparent, inter alia, from André Pretorius’s book, Our Threatened Heritage. There are many cases where the original purpose for which a vernacular building was constructed no longer exists and it falls into disuse and disrepair, leading to collapse. There is a constant risk of damage or destruction by fire. Many structures are of impermanent material and are located on sites threatened with redevelopment or in isolated areas where maintenance, let alone authentic restoration, is a cause for misgiving.

Notwithstanding the efforts of dedicated individuals, inspired above all by the initiative and leadership that James Walton provided, there is a call for a wider public awareness of our vernacular architecture and for facilities for professional and technical training in its conservation and interpretation.

A simple dwelling of saplings held in position by horizontal laths and plastered with clay, Kango Valley, Oudshoorn (André Pretorius 1997).