Contents

Plattekloof: An abandoned pass, an 18th century farm with historic homestead and a painting of a mysterious lady: André Pretorius 2

Reflections on half a century of vernacular architecture studies at the Cape: Antonia Malan 17

La Cotte, Franschhoek: The homestead and its setting: André van Graan & Antonia Malan 30

Cover

Detail from a panorama of Plattekloof at the time of Robert Gordon’s visit in 1777. It could have been drawn by his accompanying ’artist’ Johannes Schumacher. (Prentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam Ref.23865).
Figure 1. The passes between the coastal Overberg and the Little Karoo. Plattekloof is near the Gysmanshoek Pass. (Map from Western Cape Tourism Board 2004)

Figure 2. Topocadastral map showing boundary of Platte Kloof Farm no. 90, Riversdale.
Plattekloof

An abandoned pass, an eighteenth century farm with historic homestead, and a painting of a mysterious lady

*André Pretorius*

**Plattekloof Pass and early travellers**

The Langeberg/Outeniqua mountain range separates the coastal Overberg and South Western districts from the Little Karoo (*Kannaland*). The first wagon track over this formidable natural barrier was pioneered by Ensign Isaac Schriver in 1689 at Attaquaskloof, and based on an old elephant path. It is approximately 6 km west of the later Robinson Pass, which now connects present day Mossel Bay, and Oudtshoorn. To the early hunters, explorers and *trekboere* the only other access to the Little Karoo was through the Cogmans Kloof. A *poort* approached from Ashton giving access to Montagu and the *Kannaland*, which is squeezed between the Langeberg and Swartberg ranges (Fig. 1).

The Khoi1, being nomadic stock farmers, herded their cattle to where the grazing was best. Long before the northeastward migration of pioneer European settlers they had breached the mountain ranges by following the migratory game tracks. One of the earliest written references to Plattekloof only occurs in 1731, at the time that grazing rights to a loan farm which was “*aan de Platte Cloof*” were granted to the Stellenbosch heemraad Theunis Botha. In all probability, a track over the Langeberg north east of present day Heidelberg had already been in use for centuries by the Khoi and San.

By the early eighteenth century the colonial European penetration of the southern coastal region had progressed to the extent that already in 1745 the Cape’s controlling body, the *Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie* (VOC), was obliged to establish a new district with a Drostdy at what was to become known as Swellendam (in 1747). As the only access to the Little Karoo was nearly 100 km away to the east at Attaquaskloof (Mossel Bay), or to the west through the Cogmans Kloof (Montagu), the Plattekloof Pass presented a shortcut to farmers and travellers in the Swellendam / Heidelberg / Riversdale (Overberg) region who wished to visit *Kannaland* / Little Karoo (Fig. 1).

As far as could be determined, the earliest written reference to a journey through the Plattekloof Pass is provided by the Swedish botanist Carl Thunberg (Fig. 3), who negotiated it in 1772. Thunberg provides no details, merely saying that he “crossed the mountains through Platte Kloof”. Early maps show a road that must have been no more than a track over the Langeberge through the Plattekloof. A map drawn by land surveyor Cloete, who accompanied the Swellengrebel expedition of 1776, indicates farmsteads on either side of the road as it enters the “Platte Kloof”. Thereafter it follows the Kanga or Oliphants River and hugs the valley below the formidable Swartberg Mountains all the way to present day Oudtshoorn (Fig. 4). The detailed so-called ‘Van der Graaff map’ (1785-1794), based on one done by de Wet who accompanied Governor van Plettenberg’s expedition of 1778 (Fig. 5), and the map of Friderici and Jones (1789-1790), both show a road traversing the Langeberge via the Plattekloof Pass.

---

1 The terms Khoi (Khoekhoen, Hottentot, herders), San (Bushmen, hunter-gatherers), White (European, Settler), etc. have many variations in historical documents, secondary sources and current publications. Correct usage is still debated and so the author’s wording has been retained.
Figure 3. In 1772 the distinguished Swedish physician and botanist, Carl Thunberg, traversed Plattekloof Pass on returning from his epic journey, which took him as far as the Gamtoos River (Forbes 1986). He was accompanied by the baastuinier Johann Auge, who Governor Ryk Tulbagh had promoted to Superintendent of the Company’s Garden in Cape Town. When old, destitute and nearly blind, Auge was cared for by Swellendam landdros Antonie Faurie on his farm Rotterdam until he died in about 1805.

Figure 4. ‘Caart van een gedeelte der Zuijdelijk oever van Africa’ appertaining to the journal kept during the expedition in 1776 of Hendrik Swellengrebel (son of the former Governor) made by the Government’s Squire, assisted by Surveyor Cloete. ‘Platte Kloof’ pass is negotiated by a road leading to the Little Karoo (Cana Land).
Figure 5. On his expedition of 1778 Governor van Plettenberg’s Secretary, de Wet, drew a map. It was later copied and improved upon on the instruction of Governor van der Graaff, based on closer surveying over the period 1785 to 1794. It is rich in detail. The ‘Platte Kloof’ route to ‘Het Kaana Land’ is clearly shown, as are farmers in the vicinity.
Captain Robert J. Gordon’s sojourn at the Cape lasted from 1777 until his suicide in 1795. He was promoted to Colonel and in 1782 became Commander of the VOC garrison. He was a versatile man and ardent explorer. Within four months of disembarking at the Cape, in October 1777 he undertook the first of many expeditions to the hinterland. Gordon was accompanied by the twenty-two year old Scottish botanist William Paterson and the ‘artist’ Johannes Schumacher. After negotiating the Plattekloof Pass on 28 October, Paterson relates that “...being supplied with a fresh team of oxen the path was found rugged and difficult. After three hours travelling, we gained the summit, where we had an extensive view of the country and the Indian Ocean to the southward and the Kanaland to the north and the North East”. Gordon said: “The way was difficult, with sharp turns and deep ravines”. His map of the journey places a Holtzhausen property at the entrance to the “Platte Cloof” (Fig. 6).

In October 1838 James Backhouse, the Quaker missionary and botanist, set out from the Zuurbraak Mission Settlement near Swellendam for the Berlin Mission at Zoar which is between Ladismith and Calitzdorp. He too journeyed to Kannaland via Plattekloof Pass, which he described as being “very rugged”. Research done by Muller Raedemeyer reveals that over a period of forty-one years, between 1748 and 1789, seventy-nine treks were recorded through the Plattekloof, of which twenty-nine were between 1760 and 1769.
This pass is on the property Hottentots Bosch, now The Oaks (Fig. 2). On-site inspection confirms the ruggedness of the terrain and that the Plattekloof Pass was rudimentary and could never have been much more than a track. Except for a few in-fills, there is little evidence that pick and shovel were used to improve it to any extent (Bell-Cross & Venter nd). It is therefore not surprising that a second, less rigorous, passage over the daunting Langeberge was created close by and almost parallel with the original pass. This alternate crossing came to be known as Gysmanshoek Pass and the ruins of what was in all probability its old tollhouse are still visible. The construction in 1873 of the Tradou Pass to the west, which links Swellendam and Barrydale, and in 1877 of the Garcia Pass to the east between Riversdale and Ladismith, obviated the need to maintain the Guysmanskloof Pass (Fig. 1). Presently it is only used by local farmers when visiting property in the Little Karoo.

**Plattekloof farm and its early owners**

A farm, which in time was to become known as Plattekloof, lies below the like-named pass and is equidistant (about twenty kilometres) from present-day Heidelberg and Riversdale.

On 22 August 1731 the Stellenbosch heemraad Theunis Botha was granted grazing rights in the vicinity of the Plattekloof Pass when he was permitted to “voor den tyd van een geheel jaar zyn vee te mog blyven leggen en weijden aen’t over de duijvenhoeks revier aen’t de platte cloof” (RLR9/2 p.456). Pioneer farmers chose the best watered grazing and staked their claim to large tracts of ground without the service of a surveyor. The extent of the land to which Botha was granted grazing rights is not recorded. In all probability it was a circular tract which covered more or less the same area as when it became a loan place and later a quitrent farm (2622 morgen). It was formally surveyed for the first time in 1823 (Fig. 7). The Duivenhoks River, which has its source in the mountains northeast of the homestead, flows through the property. Lower down it skirts the town of Heidelberg and enters the Indian Ocean at Puntjie - now a private holiday resort famous for its unique kapstyl cottages.

It is interesting to know that the first absentee ‘owner’ of the loan place “aen de Plattekloof”, Theunis Botha, was the eldest son of Frederick Bode/Both/Boot/Botha, who hailed from Gotha in Germany and is considered the stamvader of the South African Bothas. In 1686 Frederick had contracted himself to Jan Cornelisz of Stellenbosch to work for a quarter of the farms proceeds. Botha carried on an immoral liaison with his partner’s wife, Maria Kickers, who had no fewer than six children by him. Plattekloof’s first lessee, Theunis, was the eldest of this illegitimate brood, all of whom, despite being christened Cornelisz, later opted for their biological father’s surname - Botha.

After Theunis Botha’s marriage to Maria M. Snyman in December 1710, the couple apparently settled in the Land van Waveren (Tulbagh). Here, in the same year, he was officially registered as occupying a loan farm under the Witsenberg (RLR1.p.252) which in 1714 is recorded as being the freehold farm Eendracht, later named Waaikraal/sand (Böeseken & Cairns 1989). Like his compatriots, over the years Botha held several loan farms of which Plattekloof, over the Duyvenshoks rivier, was also one in 1731.

Maria Botha was the daughter of Christoffel Snyman, son of the freed slaves Anthonij and Grote Catryn (respectively from Bengal and Palicatte in India), and Marguerite de Savoy. The origin of the Snyman/Senneyman surname remains unresolved. The Bothas became respected members of the Tulbagh community and Theunis, being a public-spirited man, not only served his church well but was also active in the militia. He was first cornet and later ritmeester (‘captain of horse’ or cavalry officer) at a time when raiding parties to recover livestock stolen by the Khoi and San were a prerequisite for survival on the young settlement’s
outlying farms. He was duly elected a heemraad for Stellenbosch, a district that prior to the proclamation of the Swellendam district in 1745 encompassed the entire hinterland.

Figure 7. On 1 September 1823 Governor Lord Charles Henry Somerset granted a circular farm of 2622 morgen on perpetual quitrent to Pieter Lombard Senior, being the loan place “over de Duivenhoks Rivier aan de Platte Kloof”. In all likelihood it is the same ground, “over de duyvenhoeks rivier aan de platte cloof”, to which Theunis Botha obtained grazing rights in 1731 and which passed to his son-in-law J.A. Holtzhausen Senior in 1740. It was farmed in turn by his son J.A. Holtshausen II (Lombard’s father-in-law) until his death in 1790.

Plattekloof farm acquired its second lessee and first permanent resident on 16 March 1740 when the grazing rights passed from Theunis Botha to Johannes or Jan Andries (Johann Andreas) Holtzhausen (RLR10/1 p.191). Holtzhausen had become Botha’s son-in-law in 1734 when he married Maria Elizabeth Botha. Johann, who arrived at the Cape in 1729, was the stamvader of South Africa’s Holtzhausens. Like the Bothas, he too hailed from Germany. His first occupation in the land of his adoption was that of a smith, which was short-lived as in 1732 he became the kneg (farm manager/overseer) of Jan Harmenz Potgieter. By 1734 Johann was a free-burgher and in about 1740 took up residence on the loan place which later became known as Plattekloof. He rose to some eminence in the region, becoming a heemraad and captain in the Swellendam dragoons. In 1763, because of ill health, he asked to be released of his duties. He died in October 1765.
It can be assumed that Johann(es) Holtzhausen’s first home was no more than the traditional rectangular three-roomed pioneer cottage built of sun dried bricks, rubble and clay. Over time it would have evolved to become the “good house” visited by Gordon and Patterson in October 1777 when they were en-route to the Little Karoo via the Plattekloof Pass. At the time Gordon recorded that they “came to the farm of one Holtzhouzen, situated in a deep valley, having to the North the great range over which a difficult wagon-road the ‘Platte Kloof’ goes from here. Here we found a very good house, well furnished and well supplied with everything as well as excellent oranges and lemons. We were most hospitably received by Holtzhouzen”. This reference must have been to the stamvader’s third child (born 1737/8), also named Johannes or Jan Andries. His brothers, Theunis and Johan Philip, born in 1734 and 1736 respectively, had both passed away without issue before their father’s death in 1765.

In March 1756 Johannes II married Francina, daughter of Louis Fourie II and Susanna le Riche of nearby Doornboom (Heidelberg). Like his father, Johannes II was destined to play a prominent role in Swellendam’s, affairs, and also farmed Kaffirkuilsrivier. He served as Swellendam heemraad, was chosen as a member of the body representing the local burgers, the Algemene Representaten, and was also Kommandant of the Dragonders. Johannes is best remembered, however, as being jointly in command of the large expedition (109 Europeans, 300 Hottentots and 47 wagons) that in December 1782 set out for the Pondoland coast (Transkei) hoping to find survivors of the Grosvenor which had gone aground there in August. The party returned without having reached the wreck. Eight years later, in August 1790, Johannes organized and led a second much smaller expedition consisting of only 13 burghers - one being his son Philip Rudolph. They reached the Grosvenor but found no survivors. On the return journey, after falling into an elephant trap in the Transkei and injuring his hand on a sharpened stake, Johannes died of blood poisoning (tetanus) and was buried on the spot.

As the annual rental (recognitie) to the VOC ceased to be paid after 1791 it can be concluded that after a sojourn of half a century and the death of Johannes II in 1790, the Holtzhausen’s ended their stay on Plattekloof farm. Gordon’s detailed map (based on his visit to the region in 1777 and 1778 and finalized in 1790), identifies two farms marked “F Holtzhausen” - one near the kloof and the other to the south on the ‘Crombecksrivier’ near Heidelberg (Fig. 6). Presumably they were then held in the name of Johannes Andries II’s widow, Francina Fourie, and were farmed by one or more of the seven sons born out of their marriage. This map also places the opstal of “Jac Rademeijer”, who was substitute landdros of Swellendam from 1754 to 1760, in the vicinity of the Plattekloof. A fellow researcher is of the opinion that the homestead on present-day Plattekloof farm is in fact that of his Rademeyer forefather, but no evidence to verify this could be found.

The next owner of Plattekloof farm has not yet been confirmed. It presumably passed into the hands of Pieter Lombard, son-in-law of Johannes and Francina Holtzhausen, to whom it was eventually granted in perpetual quitrent in 1823. In 1813, after the second British occupation of 1806, Governor John Cradock decreed that land was henceforth to be allocated only in perpetual quitrent, or in freehold. Loan places such as Plattekloof thus gradually became quitrent properties thereby bestowing undisputed ownership of an officially demarcated farm and requiring the annual payment of rent.

Before a deed of tenure could be issued, however, the loan farm first had to be surveyed. A shortage of surveyors often resulted in delays of many years for this to take place. On 1 September 1823 Lord Charles Somerset, Governor and Commander at the Cape, granted in perpetual quitrent to Pieter Lombard (Senior) 2622 morgen in the district of Swellendam being the loan place "Over de Duivenhok’s Rivier aan de Plattekloof", on condition that an annual rental of 56 rixdollars be paid punctually. This grant is accompanied by surveyor J.H. Voormans’s diagram (173/1823) of what is currently the farm known as Plattekloof No. 90, Riversdale (Fig. 7). One can reasonably assume that Lombard had taken over the property of
his deceased Holsthausen father-in-law long before it was eventually surveyed. Gordon’s map (c 1790) shows that a Daniel Lombard occupied a neighbouring farm.

In choosing and delimiting a loan place the procedure often followed by early farmers was to establish a beacon, usually a spring or source of water, and then from this point to walk, or ride on horseback, for about an hour in different directions. The result, as also in the case of Plattekloof, was a circular farm. The above-mentioned diagram confirms this, which would lead one to conclude that it is the same ground staked out by Theunis Botha in 1731 and farmed by his son-in-law Jan Andries Holtzhausen a few years later. The 1823 diagram further records the numerous cultivated lands, the course of streams, roads and neighbouring farms. Normally, the Surveyor also indicated buildings but regrettably Voormans neglected to show the numerous structures that must have been built by these industrious pioneer owners over many years prior to the formal grant. They do appear, however, on Gordon’s 1778 picture of a farm and werf near the Plattekloof Pass, which he states is that of “Het huijs van Holtshausen” (Fig.8).

Figure 8. This panoramic sketch made during Robert Gordon’s visit to Plattekloof in 1777 could have been done by his accompanying ‘artist’ Johannes Schumacher. The caption above the homestead says Het huijs van Holtshausen. The road to De Platte Klooff continues into the mountains to the left. This important drawing convinces the author that this and the homestead on present-day Plattekloof farm are one and the same. (Prentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam Ref.23865).
An addendum to the grant indicates that P.L. Uys obtained a half-share in the farm in February 1837 (T.96) and that the other half went to J.A. Lombard in June 1838 (T.144). In 1856 Willem Burger acquired the farm from Lombard and J.W. (Basie) Beyers bought it in 1899. The van Wyks - an established local clan - enjoy the distinction of having farmed Plattekloof longer than anybody else - from 1919 to 1982. During their sojourn many of the previous subdivisions of the property were again consolidated.

After first being farmed by the descendants of two *stamvaders* from Germany, Frederick Botha and Johannes Holtzhausen, Plattekloof once again has an owner of German extraction. In 1985 Mrs M.T. Humberg acquired it from Dr J.H. Nell. She resides in Stellenbosch while her farm manager, Deon Gerber, inhabits the old Plattekloof homestead.

**Plattekloof homestead**

Exactly when the historic residence on the property long known as Plattekloof was built is not known. Fortunately we do have it on record by Gordon and Patterson that already during their visit of October 1777 the Holtzhausen home was “a very good house, well furnished and well supplied with everything”. Gordon’s map of the area (Fig. 6) provides us with its location at the Plattekloof Pass, and he has left us with a fine drawing of the “*huis van Holtzhausen*” (Fig. 8) that bears a close resemblance to the present homestead. The tantalizing question is whether the pioneer cottage, which Johannes Andries Holtzhausen Senior must have resided in after taking over the farm’s lease from his father-in-law Botha in 1740, is incorporated in the present T-plan house. Whatever the date of construction, to be able to measure up to Gordon’s flattering description and illustration in 1777/8, it must have been completed well before his visit. This would make it some two hundred and thirty years old and therefore one of the oldest surviving farmsteads in the South Western Cape – a good reason why it should be preserved to join our meagre stock of vernacular monuments.

The house, as it now stands, is a typical T-plan with an exceptionally long façade. The front wing measures approximately 30 metres long by about 5 metres wide (Fig. 9). In recent years a room has been added to the left. The raised front stoep runs for the entire length of the building and is covered by a corrugated iron verandah. This feature also appears at the back of the house where part of the *stoep* under the verandah has been bricked up to accommodate bathrooms and a passage (Fig. 13). As corrugated iron only reached the outlying districts towards the end of the 1800s, the veranda may indicate an effort at modernisation. J.W. (‘Basie’) Beyers is said to have replaced the thatch of the homestead with corrugated iron at the end of the nineteenth century, so the veranda and new roof could well have been simultaneous ‘improvements’ in keeping with the era of Victorianisation (circa 1840-1910).

Some old sash windows with their uneven panes have survived (Fig. 10); so too has the panelled stink-and-yellow-wood front door with its large, but separate fanlight (*bo-lig*). Prominent fluted half-round pilasters flank the front door (Fig. 11). This decorative feature points strongly to the homestead at some time having had the traditional leg-of-mutton style gable which was popular in this region. If the pilasters were not merely decorative, the house could even possibly have had a Cape-style gable, which would have been removed when corrugated iron replaced the thatch. The present diminutive gable directly above the front door once encompassed a window for providing light to the loft. This must surely have been set in a larger gable more in keeping with the proportions of the residence of a leading family.

Although alterations during more than two centuries are inevitable, the house retains much of its charm and character. There are some fine stink- and yellow-wood doors of which two still have their original hand made latches (Fig. 12). The yellow-wood beams and ceiling boards as well as the reed *brandsolder* in the kitchen are still in place, although now boarded over. Unfortunately the large open hearth (*vuurherd*) with its chimney running on the inside of
the back wall has been demolished. According to Kobus van Wyk of Riversdale, who owned Plattekloof for thirty-eight years, it had a massive rough stinkwood beam.

Figure 9. Side and front views of the T-plan homestead with its wide raised stoep and moulded corrugated iron verandah. Note the majestic oak tree in the same position as that shown in Gordon’s sketch.
Figure 10. Many of the panes in the old sash windows are uneven and old. Note the composition of the exposed wall. The building material is basic and comprises stones, clay and rubble, which points to an old pioneer structure.

Figure 11. The front door is flanked by pronounced fluted half-round pilasters. This would strongly suggest that the door to the loft in the present diminutive gable was once a window in a much larger leg-of-mutton gable common to the region.

Figure 12. Hand made latch on yellow-wood door.
Figure 13. Floor plan of Plattekloof homestead (drawn by A. van Graan after sketch by J.F. van Wyk).
Plattekloof’s mysterious lady

Some old houses boast a ghost: Plattekloof’s has its ‘mysterious lady’ (Fig. 14). On virtually the full length of the central panel of one of the old yellow-wood bedroom doors is a painting of a lady, which legend says is Lady Anne Barnard. She was the wife of the Colonial Secretary of the Cape, Andrew Barnard, and accompanied her husband on a journey to the Overberg in May 1798, which also took them to Swellendam and the mouth of the Breede River. Lady Ann’s journal entries of this trip are detailed and, as no mention is made of the Barnards having called on at Plattekloof, it rules her out as the artist’s ‘model’.

Kobus van Wyk relates that his mother, who was born on Plattekloof in 1891, was told that the painting had been done by a ‘tramp’. She also remembers that there was a painting of a sailing boat on the door leading from the voorhuis to the kitchen wing - sadly long since
obliterated. In a letter dated March 1985 the well-known Riversdale (Stilbaai) artist Vera Volschenk inadvertently casts some light on who could have painted the figure on the door. She mentions that Gustav Theodore Meinland von Molendorf - known to all as ‘Johnnie Always’ - travelled the district decorating houses with murals. Other sources confirm this and place his sojourn in the area as circa 1907. Could he have been ‘the tramp’ and responsible for Plattekloof’s mysterious lady?

The costume worn by the lady is in the style of the late 1800s, but the artist could have done the painting from memory of another picture. Be that as it may, Plattekloof’s lady, her age and name, and the identity of the artist who painted her, remain a mystery which will most likely only be solved if the paint can be analysed and dated.

Acknowledgements

Nick Acker, 15 Akasia Road, Proteaville, Durbanville. Owner of The Oaks (Hottentots Bosch), the farm on which the old Plattekloof pass is situated.

Deon Gerber, Farm Manager, Plattekloof Boerdery. Information about the homestead, etc.

Muller Rademeyer, 19 Rhenins Street, Swellendam, 6740. Correspondence relating to his ancestor, Jacques Rademeyer, the Gordon map, painting of the ‘mysterious’ lady, layout of the Plattekloof farm and its homestead, ownership of the farm, etc.

J.F. (Kobus) van Wyk, 25 Warden Street, Riversdale. Long time owner of Plattekloof farm; supplied information about previous owners, the Plattekloof homestead, and diagrams.

Illustrations

_Eighteenth century cartography of the Cape Colony_, 1951, printed in the Netherlands by J.H. du Bussy Limited:

- Caert van een gedeelte der Zuidelijk van Africa, 1776 Swellengrebel expedition;
- Governor van der Graaff map (1785/94) based on Governor van Plettenberg’s expedition of 1778.
- Surveyor Leisten’s map of the South Coast of Africa appertaining to Governor van Plettenberg’s expedition of 1778, ordered in 1785.


National Archives, Cape Town. Photograph Ref. AG 7146. 22. R. Gordon map, Plattekloof, etc.

References

Backhouse, J. nd. ‘A narrative of a visit to the Cape’, _Cape Chronicle_.


Reflections on half a century of vernacular architecture studies at the Cape

Antonia Malan

This talk was presented as a public lecture at Iziko Museums Summer School, Cape Town, in February 2004. It marked the start of the 40th Anniversary Year celebrations of the Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa. Antonia Malan is a past Chairman of the Society (1998-2001).

The Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa (VASSA) is forty years old. It was founded in 1964 with the express purpose to reveal, record and understand the special architecture of South Africa. Forty years later the Society flourishes, but serious threats to our regional heritage remain, and losses of unique settlements and building occur daily. Why? This essay is a reflection on the successes and failures of the Society in fulfilling its purpose, and the broader political, institutional and academic contexts in which these cultural resources were and are perceived and valued.

Fifty years ago, James Walton’s first major book on Southern African *Homesteads and Villages* was published, and De Bosdari’s *Cape Dutch Houses and Farms* also appeared (Walton 1952; De Bosdari 1953). These remain landmark references and mark the start of the ‘half century’ of research in the title. Walton’s name has become synonymous with folk architecture studies. As Barrie Biemann expressed it in a Preface to *Old Cape Farmsteads* in 1989: “At various times before [Walton] settled in South Africa his diverse working environments provided backgrounds which have enabled him to recognize even esoteric technical details and to relate them to a wider cultural context. … In the last decades vernacular architecture has achieved a status not even [he] could have foreseen when he published his first studies on Yorkshire in 1947 … a new discipline has emerged in architectural studies …”.

In this essay I describe the context in which the Vernacular Society of South Africa was founded, and consider Walton, his predecessors, contemporaries and successors, their aims and the fruits of their research. This is not a history of the Vernacs (as they call themselves), nor a historiography of architectural history; neither is it thorough, neutral or objective, and it certainly does not represent the opinions of the Society. It is an attempt to promote the Society’s aims, an opportunity to critically reflect on the Society’s role today, and to consider its future.

What is vernacular architecture?

The simplest definition of vernacular architecture is: “architecture without architects” (Rudofsky 1965). The term has a long history. According to the doyen of British vernacular architecture studies, Brunskill (1981:15), it: “… has been used by architects, historians, archaeologists and critics since as long ago as 1839 to describe the minor buildings of town and countryside. Paul Oliver (2003) says it is: ‘generally defined as ‘the architecture of the people’, … [it] refers to those buildings not designed by architects, but by owners and inhabitants of the houses themselves – sometimes built with the help of family or community members, using locally available materials and in accordance with local regulations …’”. And Brunskill again: “the term … has been adopted to define that sort of building which is deliberately permanent.
rather than temporary, which is traditional rather than academic in its inspiration, which
provides for the simple activities of ordinary people … which is strongly related to place,
especially through the use of local building materials, but which represents design and buildings
with thought and feeling rather than in a base or strictly utilitarian manner.”

**Into what sort of world was VASSA born?**

I start with the early twentieth century because much of the architectural *africana* belong to this
era. These are books we greatly admire, but we seldom consider the context in which they were
written.

Peter Merrington (1998/9) has suggested that: “Perhaps the most abiding architectural
contribution to national identity at the time of Union in 1910 was the rediscovery and
restoration of Cape Dutch homesteads, and their adaptation into a new architectural idiom for
the new state, known as the ‘Cape Dutch Revival’. Based on developments in England in the
1890s that were associated with the Arts & Crafts Movement, the National Trust, the magazine
*Country Life*, and the Queen Anne vernacular revival, the Cape Dutch Revival was at the core of
all loyal-unionist nation-building cultural initiatives of the time.” Merrington explains that:
“These groups … were dedicated to what in retrospect may be termed the ‘inventing of
heritage’ for the Union of South Africa … a means of imagining and propagating a new South
African identity within the international context of the British Empire. … [It was] largely elitist
… manifested in antiquarianism, in aesthetics and mysticism, and in aristocratic gestures which
include, significantly, attitudes to nature, land and landedness. … The homesteads carried a
dual symbolism, of Cape Dutch history and English landed nobility, and this dual symbolism
was promoted for the purpose of reconciliation in the aftermath of the South African War.”

Merrington then adds: “The bitter irony in all this, of course, was the concomitant
stripping of black South Africans of their own patrimony by means of the 1913 Native Land
Act.” Furthermore, numerous ‘Boer’ farmsteads had been destroyed by the British as a result of
their infamous ‘ scorched earth’ strategy during the South African War.

Merrington continues: “In 1905 the South African National Society was founded to
protect historical artefacts. Among them … the derelict Castle and the Old Supreme Court, the
establishment of the National Botanic Gardens at Kirstenbosch, the restoration of Groot
Constantia, and the purchase of the Koopmans-De Wet House in Strand Street. The Secretary
was Herbert Baker’s colleague Francis Masey, who was deeply immersed in a study of old Cape
homesteads, antiques, and domestic interiors. At the same time Dorothea Fairbridge – under the
tutelage of Leibbrandt – was conducting field inspections of old homesteads, accompanied by
the photographer Arthur Elliott, and the artists Weshofen and Goodman. In this she was
following the pioneering work of Alys Fane Trotter. A theme emerged from this intense study,
that is, that the Cape homesteads represented the vernacular essence of establishment, progress,
vision, cultivation: in sum, the will to plant, build and define a nation.”

Between the World Wars there was an influx into South Africa of prefabricated building
materials and ideas about mass production and mass housing. It was the era of modernism, the
Depression years and urbanisation. It was also a time for clearing away the old fabric and
replacing it with progress and industry. In Cape Town the Slums Act of 1934 was reinforced by
new City planning laws in 1940, and many back streets were rid of their early nineteenth
century dwellings and current occupants in favour of factories and flats.

Paradoxically, monuments and memorials to a rural Afrikaner past were the focus of
heritage concern (for instance, 1938 saw the centenary celebrations of the Great Trek) at the
same time that many people were seeking to escape from the shameful poverty and organic
decay of actual rural life. However, Kendall’s restoration of Groot Constantia after a major fire
(1927) and Geoffrey Pearse’s thesis (1933), followed by the publication of his beautiful drawings of late eighteenth century architecture, kept the interest in Cape colonial architecture alive. The links with the previous period were made explicit: Kendall dedicated his book to Sir Herbert Baker (“who laid the foundation of a national architecture in South Africa”), while Pearse added Lady Phillips as well (doyenne of the restoration of Vergelegen).

The post-War years heralded another new beginning, and a reconsideration of what was valuable to a nation and to western democracy. In Britain the Vernacular Architecture Group (VAG) was founded in 1952 by Walton and others, and started building up local and regional pride and responsibility for local culture and vernacular buildings. James Walton, founder member of VAG, produced *Homesteads and Villages* (1952) for South Africans in the same vein. In the Preface he wrote: “This book is the story of the settlement of South Africa … the everyday life of the men and women who struggled against great odds to develop a new country where they could start life afresh”.

But, because Walton recognised the previous emphasis on the anglophile elite and gracious architecture, he redirected people’s attention to the ordinary and unremarkable. He wrote: “The study of folk architecture is new but in recent years it has grown into an important science, for the ordinary homesteads and villages reflect far more than majestic halls, castles and cathedrals the everyday life of the people. [It has] placed the history of the house and village in its true perspective and given it the importance it deserves …”. He acknowledged what had been done for homesteads of the Cape, “but elsewhere in SA the old homes are tumbling into ruin or being modernized beyond recognition without a single record … the fortified farmhouses of the frontier and the ‘hardbieshuis’ of the early stock-farmers are as typical of South African life as the delightful, white-washed, gabled houses of the Cape”. Based in the Free State, his colleagues were archaeologists and historians, such as Obie Oberholster.

A post-war pragmatic approach to architectural conservation was consolidated by a Symposium in 1959 entitled ‘The Preservation and Restoration of Historic Buildings in South Africa’. They termed themselves ‘realists’, and wielded the necessary clout through members such as Anton Rupert, representatives from the Cape Provincial Institute of Architects, local and provincial administrations and the Historic Monuments Commission. They joined forces with architects and planners to tackle the practical problems of identifying and preserving the more important places. Steps were recommended for funding, preparing guidelines to restoration and making an inventory of existing buildings (Immelman & Quinn 1968).

The year 1959 also saw the establishment of the Simon van der Stel Foundation, which brought nation-wide and well-connected influence to bear on architectural conservation. In his autobiography (1995), Justice Marius Diemont recalls: “The Simon van der Stel Foundation … had been launched as a national project by [Dr] Punt … Punt was a good historian, an antiquarian and a lover of antiques, but was fiercely provincial and narrow in his outlook. … [He] believed the Foundation had to buy up old historic buildings and restore them. … The Foundation could work hand in glove with the Monuments Council in educating people to become aware of our old houses and cottages, of our streets and lanes and of squares, churches and mosques.” He added: “Having signed on I found myself chairman of a small but enthusiastic [Cape Town] committee that included Eric Virtue, Mary Cook, Douglas Andrews, Gwen Mills, Ruth Prowse, Louis Hiemstra, Hannes van der Merwe and Col. Ignatius Terblanche. … There was much work to be done. At the beginning of the 20th century there were some 3000 white gabled Dutch homes in the Western Cape; by 1960 the number had dwindled to 465 buildings. … Not every house could be declared a national monument but there were many private dwellings which were worth keeping and treasuring.”

The 1960s in South Africa ushered in the ‘heyday of apartheid’ (Bickford-Smith et al 1999). The decade opened with the Republic of South Africa in 1961 and the restrictive aftermath of
Sharpeville and Langa pass law strikes. It was a period of consolidating tribal identities into ‘bantustans’, and in the Cape it was a time of the racial classification and relocation of individual families and whole communities. It was also a period of economic affluence for many town and city authorities. The atmosphere of ‘purification’ mitigated against valuing the old, organically grown, syncretic buildings and spaces that gave families and communities a deep sense of identity and attachment to a place. Consequently they were often devalued and demolished. It enabled high streets to be modernised in the name of progress, and encouraged the flattening of areas designated as slums. Further, it supported simplistic and uncritical categorisation into ‘good’ or ‘not good’ styles of South African architecture. Examples designated as ‘good’ were restored to their ‘best’ period – often the golden era of the eighteenth century Cape – those that were ‘bad’ were restyled or ignored. Alongside government-approved modernism, the Historic Monuments Commission continued to define South Africa’s heritage mainly in terms of its White, Cape origins. The Cape Dutch Revival thus found continued life in a new context of nation building – not under the rubric of unification this time, but aimed at rooting the cultural identity of the new leaders. In today’s revisionist historian’s terms, Cape Dutch architecture was ‘appropriated as a commodity in the discourse of apartheid’.

Nevertheless, the 60s and 70s produced extensive research into architecture and archives. There was a quest for the European ‘origins’ of Cape vernacular – leading to dramatic arguments led by Jan van der Meulen and Clemens Trefois. These are summarised in Obholzer, Baraïtser & Malherbe’s *The Cape House and its Interior* (1985). The authors of *Cape Town in the Twentieth century* also suggest that: “the greater pace and dehumanising nature of life in the age of social engineering underlay the success of antiquarian histories of [Cape Town] in this period. Older English-speaking whites in particular … enjoyed retreating in their imagination to gentler, slower times full of British achievement. They eagerly consumed the veritable explosion of offerings of writers like Lawrence Green, P.W. Laidler, C. Pama and H.W.J. Picard” (Bickford-Smith et al 1999:194-5).

Meanwhile, architects such as Norman Eaton, Karl Jooste, Carl Germecke, Gawie Fagan and Barrie Biermann, seeking “a regional expression true to the South African ethos, cultural and physical …” developed an architecture … based on the ‘unpretentious structures found on the platteland” (Jooste 2000). This required intimate knowledge and understanding of the original buildings and the craftsmanship of their construction. For instance, Fagan used his small plane from which to photographically survey isolated Karoo vernacular architecture on his way to and from building sites, some interesting-looking examples of which he followed up by car afterwards.

The Simon van der Stel Foundation published numerous articles in their *Bulletin* and then *Restorica*. Activists included Dirk Visser, who as a youngster had helped De Bosdari in his explorations in the 50s. Based on his personal inventory-making, art and architectural historian Hans Fransen contributed chapters to the second edition of De Bosdari’s book in 1964. Gawie Fagan was busy with restoring nationally significant projects such as Government House and the rebuilding of Tulbagh after the 1969 earthquake, supported by extensive archival research by Gwen Fagan. Conservation areas were designated in cities, towns and villages to protect buildings as monuments. Teaching architecture to students during the 60s and 70s were Barrie Biermann (Magda Sauer’s ‘apostle’), Hugh Floyd, Douglas Andrews and others - and they directly or indirectly inspired another generation of respected practitioners and academics – John Rennie, Franco Frescura, Trevor Thorold, David van den Heever, André van Graan, Vivienne and Derek Japha, Stephen and Lesley Townsend, Stewart Harris, Fabio Todeschini, and so on.

Hans Fransen and Mary Cook’s book, *Old Houses of the Cape* (1965), was the first comprehensive inventory of architecturally important buildings. Amazingly, despite the good intentions of the 1959 Symposium, this work was not carried out under the auspices of the ‘authorities’, but by two busy museum employees who were dedicated to their passion for old
buildings. Hans Fransen, who still today epitomises that rare combination of academic and fieldworker, spent all his free time bicycling round the back roads of the villages and countryside of the Cape, observing, photographing, measuring and recording – and comparing what he found with Elliott’s photographs from the early twentieth century. They again pointed out in the Preface to the revised inventory, the *Old Buildings of the Cape*: “regrettably, while great sums are being spent on restoration, both by authorities and private people, … only a few isolated listing project have as yet been undertaken with official backing” (Fransen & Cook 1980). Similarly, a superb collection of photographs of houses and their associated buildings, furnishings and fittings was being compiled by A.M. Obholzer, M. Baraitser and W.D. Malherbe and was published by the Stellenbosch Museum in 1985 as *The Cape House and its Interior*.

All through these years Walton championed broader vernacular architecture studies. In 1952 he had written: “The older styles are fast disappearing. The ornate homesteads of the Western Province are being increasingly treasured and preserved; they are favourite subjects for artists and poets alike. Elsewhere, the houses are failing into ruin without any record. In the foregoing pages I have attempted to remedy this loss and I conclude with the hope that students of South African folk culture and architecture will thereby be urged to make more detailed regional studies of the country’s architectural history. A folk park where surviving early house types can be re-erected and preserved is urgently needed for soon none will remain and the chance will be lost for ever.” (An open air museum of folk buildings was erected at Kleinplasie, Worcester, in 1978.)

When a new edition of *Homesteads & Villages* was printed in 1965, Walton could express satisfaction: “One of the main objects in writing this book was to stimulate interest in South African folk building beyond the boundaries of the Cape. … This has resulted in several new books on the subject – such as Lewcock’s *Early Nineteenth Century Architecture in South Africa* – and the establishment of the … Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa, which will record the folk building and allied cultures.”

‘Vernackers’ and ‘vernacking’

The Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa (VASSA) emerged from a University of Cape Town Summer School course in 1964. Titled ‘Cape Dutch Architecture: an historical and aesthetic assessment of 18th and early 19th century architecture at the Cape’, a series of lectures was delivered by luminaries on history, architectural history and origins of architectural features, such as Cape gables. Two of the speakers stood out in particular, Barrie Bierrmann and James Walton. They were very different sorts of people but they were great initiators and combined their interests in an inspirational way, with the result that a Society was formed by a small group of enthusiasts who took part in the course (Mary Floyd pers.comm.).

VASSA was not intended as a preservation or restoration society. Walton said later (at a function in 1978): “The objective of the Society was to record South African vernacular architecture, not just the Cape Dutch – the fantastic stuff – but also the simple things. The object has been to record vernacular architecture, to study it and to create real interest in it – to have outside people develop a really keen, not just a casual, interest; not to organise just a tea-drinking afternoon, but to really try to learn. … On our excursions we had the services of a number of people like Dirk [Visser] and Gawie [Fagan], who were always there to discuss things. They would see what I and other people didn’t see and out of their knowledge we built up a corpus of valuable information.”

American architectural historian, Stewart Brand (1994), reiterates what ‘Vernackers’ do: “… more than other architectural historians, they focus on how the buildings work. … They excel at ‘reading’ buildings – analyzing the physical evidence of what actually happened in a
building, and when, and why.” He quotes Orlando Ridout: “Traditionally architectural history, because it came from art history, has tended to focus on style. Style is the last thing that I would teach a student about architectural history, because it’s so misleading. … I want to know when it was built, and how it evolved, and what floor plan it had, and how the spaces in that house were used.” Often, the front façade is a self-conscious part of the house, where the owner is trying to make a statement to the world, “so you head for the parts of the house where nobody has tried to dress things up”. Brand emphasises: “The shift from studying what buildings are towards what they do is fundamental.”

What Vernackers learn is how to find the clues, and then contribute their various ideas to interpreting them – from their experience as archaeologists, historians, artists and so on, and out of their memories of previously explored examples. This requires many, many hours in the field and is based on extensive comparative knowledge. Multi-disciplinarity, and the value of different ways of seeing, improves our understanding of vernacular buildings, and teamwork has become an extremely important factor under the new National Heritage Resources Act (no.25 of 1999), with its system of evaluating the broader significance of places and objects worthy of protection. VASSA is extending its members’ skills in reading the fabric of old buildings and their surroundings.

The contribution of VASSA was intended to be modest. It was based on a small group of like-minded people from a wide variety of backgrounds, and the low-key style was deliberate. Walton said in 1978: “This Society has never been very large. It has never grown into a big Society and I think it has always been a friendly Society. It has attracted to itself people who are keen on what they are doing. I don’t think it needs any publicity; it isn’t a Society which needs to be glorified in any way. It needs members who are interested in the subject and will pursue any avenue which will lead to the development of the study of vernacular architecture. We may not have a lot to show but this little Society has done a good deal to help promote all kinds of study by issuing our tour guides and publications.”

VASSA’s early products were modelled on Walton’s ‘Studies in South African Architecture’, a series started in 1961 with a piece on Eensaamheid, Lange Kloof. Walton described the 70-foot long, single row of rooms: “In every respect … a product of local materials and local endeavour: a fine example of vernacular architecture”. In 1999, the year of his death, the VASSA Journal was launched with a tribute to James Walton, and his measured drawing of Eensaamheid was reproduced on the cover. In the years between, the archive of the Vernacks – and the publications of its members – has grown and grown. In particular, the expedition, or ‘recce’, to find suitable places to visit is a fundamental part of the research and recording process.

Hugh Floyd developed standard recording forms and filing systems for students and others to use – evidence of which can be seen in the Verlorenvlei and Caledon recording projects. The District Six Survey of 1976 by Hans Fransen and Gawie Fagan was a desperate but fruitless attempt to motivate for historically significant buildings and precincts to be saved – now only the photographs remain. This project was followed by a commission from the Department of Community Development to survey neighbouring Walmer Estate. Coenradenburg, an isolated Sandveld farmstead, was recorded and its preservation ensured. VASSA also became involved in a few selective restoration projects. The ‘Preserve Arniston Committee’ was established in 1975, to ward off encroachment by a holiday resort and to restore the fishermen’s village with the assistance of the villagers themselves. Josephine Mill, in Rondebosch, was rebuilt in collaboration with its owner, the Historical Society, and much of the labour was done by staunch Vernackers. A comprehensive history of the mill, researched by Walton and Margaret Cairns, was published to raise funds for its preservation (Walton 1978). Walton continued with his campaign of publishing books about apparently insignificant but
crucial vernacular features, culminating in 1998 with *Windpumps in South Africa* - the year before he died.

While Walton was still publishing books on dovecots, water- and horse-mills and pigsties, the founder members of the Society had been joined by others who thoroughly enjoyed the talks and outings to picturesque places but were not always prepared to initiate or engage in fieldwork and research – the function of the Society. There was less interest shown by younger architects and other potential third-generation Vernackers. Various reasons can be considered. Was this because of increased specialisation in academia and practice? Was it because what VASSA did was not perceived as worthwhile, or were its activities incompatible with the pace of modern life? And what deleterious effect does tourism and advertising have on our attitude towards what vernacular architecture really is? Does the purchase of wine estates by businessmen and foreign investors benefit ‘vernacular’ architecture?

Unlike the Vernacular Architecture Group in Britain, whose branches investigate a regional or local indigenous ancestry, vernacular architecture studies in South Africa are carried out from the urban centres and many are still predominantly Cape-colonial-centric. There may also be a lack of conscious distinction between ‘heritage’ and ‘history’. It could be said that heritage is a concept defined by conservationists and politicians (nation-building), and history is the product of research by Vernackers, archaeologists, architectural historians and archivists (local identities). There has been little integration of new theoretical archaeological and historical approaches into architectural history courses – and vice versa - and ‘vernacking’ is not often regarded with particular enthusiasm in schools of architecture. In contrast, though VAG research is still rooted in local and often conservative heritage groups, the fruits of their research have been enthusiastically integrated into more recent theoretical approaches by younger British architectural historians and historical archaeologists. VAG is also fortunate to have access to a large body of transcribed or published local and regional research resources and databases.

Perhaps we should investigate and consider our limited performance in systematically building up publicly accessible resource centres and developing exciting debate in architectural history.

**Defining and interpreting vernacular architecture**

Perhaps there is fruit for debate in the definition of vernacular architecture? Is so-called Cape Dutch architecture ‘polite’ or ‘rude’, high style or vernacular? Nowadays, some people even refuse to use the term Cape Dutch architecture, saying that it may be Cape but it is not Dutch.

On the one hand, vernacular architecture historians in South Africa said that Cape-Dutch is hand-crafted folk building, by white folk, brown folk and black folk – ‘architecture without architects’ - and on the other, architectural historians were saying that Cape-Dutch architecture has ‘respectable’ antecedents and should be valued for its universal formality. For instance, an architect could write in 1953: “The style of Cape Dutch is associated with ‘high’ European culture. We have attempted to describe the uniqueness and essential beauty of the style, to explain the fact that it is classic, traceable indeed to Palladio, founder of the Renaissance movement in architecture, and to emphasize its dependence on proportion and symmetry” (Watson 1953).

It is generally agreed (Hartdegen 1988) that the first professionally trained architect practicing in South Africa was Louis Thibault, in the late eighteenth century. But the question remains: who was it that so competently applied this enlightened architectural knowledge beforehand?

Stewart Brand (1994) points out that the term ‘vernacular’ is borrowed from linguists, who used it to mean ‘the native language of a region’. It means ‘common’ in all three senses of the word.
– widespread, ordinary, and beneath notice. In terms of vernacular architecture, vernacular buildings are seen as the opposite of whatever is ‘academic’, ‘high style’, or ‘polite’. Bernard Rudofsky (1965:1) refers to “unpedigreed architecture … vernacular, anonymous, spontaneous, indigenous, rural, as the case may be”.

The term ‘vernacular’ may be preferred because of negative connotations associated with ‘folk architecture’. By its long association with whiteness, the term ‘Cape Dutch’ became synonymous with the architecture of gentry; ‘vernacular’ became synonymous with rural areas, the people who were marginalised and oppressed (missions, fishing villages, back streets, townships). There is another dimension to the distinction. Amos Rapoport, in his seminal book *House Form and Culture* (1969), wrote that there are formal buildings and vernacular, or informal buildings. Formal buildings are monuments, which are “built to impress either the populace with the power of the patron, or the peer group of designers and connoisseurs with the cleverness of the designer and good taste of the patron”. Informal buildings are products of folk tradition, which is “the direct unselfconscious translation into physical form of a culture, its needs and values, as well as the desires, dreams and passions of a people”. In Brunskill’s words: “… buildings which are traditional in design, though subject to gradual innovation, are built out of materials near to hand, and appear to belong to the district or region in which they are found and no other. They are quite distinct from those buildings whose design is dominated by a concept such as power or mystery, which are designed by professionals according to rules agreed by theorists in academies, and which are built of materials selected the better to match the concepts enshrined rather than simply to take advantage of what might by lying around waiting to be used (Brunskill 1981).”

Barrie Biermann believed Cape Dutch architecture was both. He wrote in the Preface to Walton’s *Farmsteads* of 1989: “It is appropriate that in the well-nigh universal range of his researches, Cape Dutch architecture should have been his main vehicle, since it is the joint product of formal established architectural ‘styles’ and the informal vernacular of anonymous builders”.

Methodological approaches based on ‘style’ and ‘methods of construction’ have come under fire. In 1987 Franco Frescura wrote: “Limitations of approach were exposed in the 1970s by multi-disciplinary studies which rejected environmental pre-determinism and laid emphasis on social and cultural factors.” He quotes Rapoport, who had concluded that: “the decision as to what form the house shall take is made on socio-cultural grounds – way of life, shared group values … – materials and technology were peripheral modifying factors”. … Subsequently, Rapoport (influenced by anthropologists like Levi-Strauss) “explored the use of non-verbal communication in man’s built environment.”

In 1990 Frescura explained that he too “now takes a post-structuralist standpoint”. He interpreted the rural settlement patterns of indigenous southern Africans as ‘texts’ that can be ‘read’ for information and ‘deconstructed’ to reveal gaps and silences. Theoretically inclined archaeologists, Martin Hall (1994) and Yvonne Brink (2001), have expanded our understanding of the distinction between power-filled architecture and the houses of ordinary people by looking at Cape Dutch buildings as the ‘material culture’ of a colonising and slave-owning society – and showing the ‘work’ that architecture did in defining their owners’ status. They view central gabled, thatched, symmetrical façade houses in terms of domination and challenge – both polite in appearance and impressive in function, for example providing visitors with a carefully constructed experience of the relative stature of the owner. They point out some glaring ‘gaps and silences’ in architectural history, some of which inform my own work – the chronology of architecture in the context of changing circumstances and the unrecorded homes of the non-elite and townspeople.

However, we all know of many houses that can be described in ‘typical Cape Dutch’ architectural terms that do not appear to wield much power. Can you interpret a basic T-shaped
house differently in dissimilar socio-economic contexts – can we say that one is polite and one is vernacular? We consider it easy to distinguish between the ‘rude’ vernacular of indigenous, ‘primitive’ builders – based on the circular form – and the ‘polite’ vernacular of colonial, ‘classically inspired’, builders – based on the rectangular form. But both were vernacular and both were used and perceived by the communities in which they were erected through a system of complex symbols and meanings. Can you therefore define a Tswana chief’s homestead as ‘polite’ architecture, even though it is not modelled in terms of the Enlightenment?

There is a long history of discomfort about applying the same approaches to European and African architectural history. Paul Oliver and Marcel Vellinga (2003) suggest that: “With respect to non-western building traditions, associations with the past are combined with the stigma of backwardness and poverty. Vernacular architecture is considered an obstacle on the road to progress.” In southern Africa analysis and interpretation of African vernacular architecture has largely been left to a handful of archaeologists, such as Revil Mason or Tim Maggs, and a few individuals such as Walton, Biermann or Frescura. African archaeology (that of the ‘people without history’) was left out of school history books, and vernacular architecture studies (defined as a folk craft) could be left out of mainstream architecture. The South-western Cape emphasis of VASSA and its precursors, where there was no building tradition of what we perceive as indigenous African buildings, sustained this separation.

Walton’s *Homesteads & Villages* of 1952 was really very revolutionary, synchronising his archaeological and architectural interests and covering most of southern Africa.

**Our vernacular heritage**

A simple definition by Frescura (1987) brings together the commonality of place and meaning for all South Africans: “Vernacular or ‘folk’ architecture … represents a form of housing which, in its time and place, is not only cheap, sound and secure but is generally acknowledged to be a material manifestation of local society and culture.” Oliver and Vellinga (2003) suggest that: “the close relationship between vernacular houses and their builders’ identity is instrumental in the constitution of social, cultural and ethnic unity and pride. In order for fruitful exchange and co-operation to take place, greater acknowledgement and more research and conservation of vernacular traditions is needed. A growing number of scholars of various disciplines is involved in such research, and projects to preserve or revive vernacular skills and building techniques.”

For most ambitious architecture students, understandably, vernacular architecture holds little attraction in comparison with the design imperative leading to prestigious work. However, Frescura, in his article ‘Architecture without architects’ (1969), had been hopeful: “Publications on vernacular architecture by Paul Oliver, René Gardi, Labelle Prussin, Ronald Brunskill and our own James Walton stand as important markers in the study of man and his built culture … Many young architects are turning their skills to resolution of sensitive issues of community design, cultural conservation and environmental control … By entering into loosely organised multi-disciplinary cooperatives with a variety of skills available, they feel better equipped to handle the social issues surrounding architecture which older members of the profession have ignored for too many years … Most importantly they have retained their links with the universities and their published research impacts public perception …. and questions the tenets established by earlier generations of academics … resulting in a more vigorous and critical approach to research, which has followed a strong revisionist line …”.

In the 1980s, regarded by some as the ‘era of environmentalists’, academic architects were particularly concerned to set vernacular architecture into its environmental and cultural context. For instance, in the introduction to *The Landscape and Architecture of Montagu* (1992) Vivienne and Derek Japha wrote: “The range and structure of the essays [have] two
methodological corollaries: first, the buildings must be considered in the context of the broader cultural landscape of which they are a part; second, this cultural landscape must itself be considered in terms of the social, cultural and economic processes which gave rise to it.” However, reading a Professor of Architecture’s preface to Walton’s 1993 book on flat-roofed buildings, makes one wonder how far this thinking was spread in the architectural sector. It was well established among historical archaeologists, but their work was not widely known (Vos 1993).

In an article in 1990, Frescura concurs: “Walton (1956), Denyer (1978) and Frescura (1981) published studies focusing on technologies and forms of dwelling unit but generally failed to emphasise their role in the larger settlement structure. This has enabled others to create ‘ethnic’ stereotypes, reinforcing a western idea of house-form as the primary manifestation of architecture as a cultural activity. However, preoccupation with form is misplaced – an individual dwelling seldom stands alone and there are links between indoor and outdoor spaces. The study of African rural homesteads reveals that settlement patterns are subject to social structure, inheritance hierarchy, burial rituals, religious beliefs and economic practices – not ephemeral and transient values and aesthetics.”

Another problem is that while many people today can understand a Victorian idiom, an archaeologist has to decipher spatial distributions of a Roman villa. Adult Venda can still read spatial significance in old settlements built under different circumstances many generations ago, because they reflect basic social structures that still existed in their lifetimes – but their children cannot.

Oliver and Vellinga (2003) further warn that: “Vernacular cottages and farmhouses are often valued as holiday retreats or second houses, but they are not regarded of relevance to present-day household requirements.” We know that the way ‘Cape vernacular’ is redefined, used and abused by architects and developers today makes nonsense of its significance. There are many real and potential problems with authenticity, for example, uncritical B&B or loft-living conversions. In reality, ‘meaning’ is retained by ambience and suitable use, which is why setting and landscape are recognised as core frameworks in conservation management practice. Contemporary values, passing fashions and uncontrolled gentrification are all threats to vernacular architecture.

We should also recall the political relationship between ‘heritage’ and ‘history’. Peter Merrington cautioned in 1999: “Heritage is a loosely employed concept with distinct metaphorical connotations, primarily legal, secondarily spiritual, and subsequently to do with public ethics, and the cultural property (material, spiritual and moral) of the nation, race, or ethneme. … The concept of ‘heritage’ is currently in use in the ‘New South Africa’ as a controlling motif for the Arts & Culture Ministry. A ‘Heritage Council’ now regulates and funds what was the National Monuments Council, as well as national museums and the cultural needs of particular interest groups. … As a partial synonym for ‘public history’ the idea of ‘heritage’ needs to be understood to entail a legacy of meanings that is not only far from neutral but, in fact, remarkably dated and, by and large, conservative.”

**VASSA’s role**

VASSA needs to be self-conscious of its role and approach in recording the history of vernacular buildings, their settings and their occupants. Paul Oliver (1997) suggests: “There is no single approach to the study of vernacular architecture. As a subject which has yet to be defined as a discipline it both suffers from the lack of coordination of approaches, and benefits by the diversity of perceptions which various research directions bring to it”. Vernackers certainly believe that amateurs are as important in the pursuit of knowledge as professionals, and – best of all - see things differently.
Architects, academics, planners, heritage professionals tend to be seen by property-owners and inhabitants as meddling and officious - especially in poorer, marginalised or rural areas – and as anti-investment by property developers. Having no overt intentions of offering upliftment, betterment, or unsolicited advice, the Vernacks instead are able to concentrate on making the owner/occupier feel proud of what they have, whatever its condition. The deliberate inclusion of local informants into VASSA outings also emphasises the importance of what they can tell their visitors, rather than just the other way round.

Past VASSA Chairman, Graeme Binckes (1999) believes that: “Interpretive functions … evaluation and education, should be integral to the process of conservation. The involvement of local communities, groups and individuals is an important aspect of the conservation of vernacular architecture. … Presentation … would further stimulate public awareness and ‘pride of place’. While vernacular architecture has been treated as a product of the past … vernacular structures are still being erected … [and] in the ‘informal housing’ of many of those attracted to our cities, and there are many cases in which it is regarded as preferable to modern building systems”. Binckes said, however: “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.”

Recording is still largely a private initiative, though conservation is the responsibility of and regulated by heritage resource authorities. The majority of places familiar to VASSA will be the responsibility of Province’s Heritage Western Cape (HWC) and local authorities. The Simon van der Stel Foundation (now operating under various other names) is interested in listing major buildings, so there is ample room for VASSA to continue to focus on ‘reading’ and recording the vernacular fabric, offering their special interest in building technology, the setting and the people who lived there. Towns, villages, farms and missions need revisiting and reinterpreting – and there are many places that have never been recorded or evaluated – while a horrifying number are now reduced to archaeological sites or obliterated completely.

Publication is always a problem for books with only academic or esoteric appeal, as André Pretorius can testify with his self-published Threatened Heritage (1997). Even more amazing than the first two inventories, Hans Fransen has just completed a third revision of Old Buildings of the Cape, and is still using a bicycle in his 70s! Stewart Brand (1994) refers to the prodigious amount of photo documentation of buildings that exists, dating back to the 1860s: “Sequential re-photography of buildings already fills a considerable collection of little-noticed books. But they were created haphazardly as hobbies: the practice could be far more systematic and revealing. … There is no reason to rely on professionals. This is not astrophysics: everybody is an expert on buildings.”

Tour notes and photographs are still being produced throughout the year, and the VASSA Journal was launched in 1999. A team studying the Bokkeveld region is carrying out an ongoing recording project on the border of the Western and Northern Cape. It is in such places that vernacular architecture needs to be identified, recorded, understood, accorded significance, and willingly protected.

To round off our celebratory year, we plan a public exhibition, and a workshop where papers on all aspects of vernacular architecture in South Africa are to be presented, discussed and submitted for publication.
Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Chair and Committee of the Society for suggesting we offer a Talk at the Summer School, and then for entrusting me with researching the content. I have learned a lot, but not yet enough. Sincere thanks to all members of VASSA, whose support make all the work a pleasure.

Bibliography

Rapoport, Amos. 1969. *House Form and Culture*.
La Cotte, Franschhoek
The homestead and its setting

André van Graan & Antonia Malan

This article originated in 1997 when La Cotte was purchased by Robert Maingard and redevelopment of the property and its surroundings was imminent. Since then, a number of different proposals have been made which envisage the ‘restoration’ of the remaining buildings on the werf and subdivision of some of the surrounding farmland for residential development.

According to the Environmental Impact Assessment compiled by Planning Partners in 2003: “consideration is being given to the development of an integrated estate on the farm La Cotte, which includes a low density, upmarket residential component on a portion of the property, tourist accommodation with an associated restaurant in the historic farm buildings, and vineyards with associated agricultural activities on the balance. It is proposed to restore and extend the historic farm buildings to accommodate the tourist complex comprising a guesthouse and restaurant. The development is motivated partly on the basis that this is a viable means by which the farmlands and historical buildings can be rehabilitated.”

One component of this assessment is a heritage report (Baumann & Winter 2003). The authors conclude that: “in the broader townscape context, La Cotte farm is regarded as a highly significant heritage resource. The farmstead is of great heritage significance. Conservation worthy features include the homestead, the longhouse, the wagon house and the mill, which is a Provincial Heritage Site”.

Members of the Vernacular Architecture Society have visited the property many times in the past forty years, and have been supportive of the various conservation initiatives, for example the restoration of the water mill in 1989/90. The Society is currently registered as an ‘interested and affected party’ in the public consultation process for the EIA. In 2003 a team of Vernackers recorded and measured up the main house in detail, and made a basic record of the main outbuildings. These will be more fully published at a later date. In this contribution we refer to past research and the current development proposals to locate La Cotte historically and to identify the particular characteristics that make it unique in today’s Franschhoek.

The location and the setting

La Cotte is on the northeastern side of the town of Franschhoek (Fig. 1). The Chamonix Wine Estate lies to the north, while smallholdings are situated to the east. The southern boundary of the farm abuts the La Cotte (Die Eike) River, beyond which lies urban development that extends along the western property boundary. The site lies at the transition between the town and the farms. Current land use on La Cotte comprises vineyards, olive groves, an historical werf with associated buildings, and vacant agricultural land.

The farms La Cotte and Cabriere, on the Franschhoek River to the south, had a fundamental influence on the form and development of the town of Franschhoek, which was laid out on part of the original freehold land of La Cotte. As the town developed from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the southwestern boundary of the farm was steadily eroded by residential erven Fig. 2). The remains of this cultural landscape today consist of an undeveloped finger of farmland stretching along the La Cotte River. It extends from a cemetery near the main road towards the mountain slopes, and is one of the few remaining areas of arable land at the interface between the village and the foothills of the mountains behind. It acts as an
agricultural boundary between the urban strip, spread as a thick ribbon along the Franschhoek Valley, and the wilder mountain environment. As in Paarl, where the vineyards similarly express the transition from the built-up main road through cultivated land to the mountain, this characteristic feature of Drakenstein settlements is under enormous threat.

Figure 1. Topocadastral map of Franschhoek as it was 18 years ago (1:50 000 3319CC Franschhoek 1987).

Figure 2. View of Franschhoek and La Cotte (arrow) in the late 19th century (?) (Cape Archives R1410).
The 60 morgen property was granted in 1713 to Huguenot Jean Gardiol, who had been living there since 1694. The Gardiols came from Lacoste in France. The deed reads, *seeker stuk bouwland gelegen in de Oliphantshoek genaamt La Kot*. A subdivision (of the 60 morgen plus 24 morgen ‘erfpaggrond’) in 1832 became Die Eike (formerly Oak Lodge). The survey diagram of 1831 (Fig. 3) shows the boundary between the freehold and ‘grazing’ land immediately alongside and to the south of three ‘buildings’. The ‘wine cellar’ was erected on the freehold portion just across this boundary (Fig. 4).

In 1844 La Cotte was split in two, when Portion A (29 mo 436 sr) went to Daniel Hugo and present La Cotte, portion B (30 mo 164 sr), to Jan Gysbert Hugo. The Hugo ‘dynasty’ farmed La Cotte from 1844 to 1997 - 155 years. As with most farm histories in the area, the families who owned them are inextricably tangled by marriage and intermarriage through the centuries. A major connection in this case is between the Hugo’s joint ownership of La Cotte and Cabriere. More detailed historical information can be found in the Appendices below.

The large *werf* is bounded by a very long *ringmuur*. It does not follow cadastral boundaries and there is as yet no firm evidence for its date. The upper length of wall also carries the water furrow that feeds the mill race (Fig. 5). A water mill was first mentioned in the 1782 will of Sara Delpot, widow of Johannes Marais, and again in the 1799 inventory of her son’s estate, Jacobus Pieter Marais. Early twentieth century Elliott photos show a rare example of overshot wheel, compass arm construction and six pairs of spokes. We assume this was the ‘new’ mill mentioned in a notice of sale in 1831, presumably built on the site of the original mill. The mill structure was restored in 1989 on behalf of the Franschhoek Trust by Deon Roux, a master builder whose family owns Die Eike next door. There was also a brandy still recorded in the early documents, but this has not been relocated.

The present homestead is T-shaped with iron roof and clipped gables (Figs 6 and 9). No buildings are drawn in the shape of a T on the survey diagram of 1831, but these sketchy rectangles may have been merely schematic (Fig. 3). The front gable (rebuilt 1969) was dated 1836, and the contemporary façade woodwork includes sash windows and a door with garlanded spoke-fan. Inside, the original *voorhuis* has been reduced to a narrow passage (Fig. 7). Much of the plaster has now been stripped from the façade and interior walls, so that the story of the building and rebuilding can be ‘read’ like a book. There are fascinating traces of construction materials and methods, from *opgekleide mure* to 1970s stonework (Fig. 10).

It seems that an older structure is incorporated in the front rooms of the subsequent T-shaped building. There are traces of simple casement windows (1100 mm high by 1400 mm wide) in the front wall. Deon Roux suggests that the front part burned down very early on and was rebuilt, again with casement windows. However, the reconstruction of a linear building to form the symmetrical façade to a T-shape house (classic Cape vernacular style) was a common trend from about 1740. There is clear evidence of the front wing being raised to a higher floor level, the walls and openings changed, and a central gable being built up from stoep level. This is typical of the modifications necessary to produce a central *voorhuis* and symmetrically flanking rooms. The tail at the back is not placed exactly in the centre, which can also indicate a later addition rather than original construction as a fully fledged T (Fig 9).

Deon Roux offers this interpretation of the exposed wall fabric inside the house. After the T-plan house was developed, the tail was later extended to provide a central *galdery* between the *voorhuis* and the kitchen at the rear. Two doors connected the rooms, flanking a centrally placed *muurkas*. Perhaps this happened at the same time that the gable was rebuilt and inscribed with the date 1836. The gable had pilasters. Surviving woodwork includes doors and a wall-cupboard that were moved from their original positions. Wooden lintels and filled-in
openings indicate where they had once been. The galdery had a double casement to north and south and possibly a door to the south. The kitchen had one single casement in the north wall where two casement windows are now. The kitchen windows may be original windows reused from the front.

There was apparently a fire in 1844, which may explain the new ceiling over the back wing. Unfortunately, this destroyed crucial evidence linking the tail of the T with the front rooms, where the clay brandsolder remains in place. The fire would also have provided the opportunity to further modernise the house with early Victorian elements.

Figure 3. Survey diagram of 1831 attached to subdivision between La Cotte and Die Eike in 1832.

Figure 4. Survey diagram of 1941 showing buildings on the werf at La Cotte.
Figure 5. Site plan of the west portion of La Cotte (drawn by Frank Reitz Architects in 1997).

Figure 6. La Cotte mill, homestead, longhouse (one door just visible) and cellar/barn (Baumann & Winter 2003).
Figure 7. Floor plan of La Cotte homestead (G. Lugtenburg).
Behind the house there is a longhouse-like building with dwelling at one end (Fig. 11). No recent investigations have been carried out beneath the plaster, but Tanya Diemer’s inspection and interview with Mr Hugo in 1993 provide a number of interesting indications as to its relatively old age. The walls are 600-650 mm thick, with the larger portion on the left once functioning as a dwelling (with hearth on the end gable, then another room and a voorhuis with wall cupboards) and the right-hand end as a stable with stinkwood cribs. There are memories that it was also ‘Victorianised’ in the 1840s but no traces of those additions are visible now.

According to Diemer, the ‘wine cellar’ or ‘wagon house’ was probably built in the early nineteenth century (Fig. 12). The red brick and yellow mortar walls have been raised to accommodate a corrugated iron roof, which would only have happened after about 1850. The existing ceiling boards are laid on round gum poles. There are small rooms and sheds attached to the east end and a stone stair leads up into the solder at the other end, above and across the wide entrance. Eighteenth century documents list distilling equipment, which may also have left traces.

The cellar/barn is associated with a low-walled enclosure and kraal (Fig. 8). The enclosed space was being used as a vegetable garden in 1993. There is a depression, originally a pond, alongside the barn. A number of new trees have been planted on the thickly grassed werf and there is no visible trace of its original appearance. In our experience, archaeologically sensitive areas would lie in the area immediately around the homestead (potential locations of household dumps) including the space between the two dwellings and near the pond and water courses. This has particular relevance in light of the proposal to erect a new building close to the existing ones.

Foundations of a smithy and volkshuisie (labourers’ cottage) were in line with the mill, and a pigsty, stock kraal and threshing floor elsewhere on the werf have been demolished (Fig. 8). Rumour has it that a previous owner bought a bulldozer at a local auction and practised his demolition skills on the dilapidated structures. The old pakkamer (packing shed) was near where the modern outbuilding is now.

Mr Hugo also mentioned ploughing over a ruined structure in the field in front of the dwelling house, just outside the ringmuur. Careful inspection of the survey diagrams shows that indeed there was originally a third long building, lying almost at right angles to the present homestead, below and slightly to the west (Fig 8). This last building could well be Mr Hugo’s ruin.

![Figure 8. Left: The three long buildings shown on the 1831 survey diagram of La Cotte. Right: The location of previous buildings as described by Mr Hugo (Diemer 1993).](image)
The \textit{werf} complex is a typical example of the largely self-sufficient extended family farmstead occupied and worked by free-burghers, slaves and servants during the colonial period. It provided for the production and processing of wine (brandy and vinegar), livestock, fruit and grain (including the grinding of flour). These functions can be read in the layout, form and features of the structures on the \textit{werf}. Some still stand, but the minor buildings have been demolished or reduced to their foundations.

Todeschini & Japha (1993) identified all the standing buildings (nos. 97 & 98 - mill, homestead, longhouse and cellar) as “significant historical buildings, possibly of national register status”. Old fabric dating to the early eighteenth century remains incorporated in at least two of these buildings (the main house and longhouse). It is rare in a highly re-developed place like Franschhoek to still find an opportunity to record and preserve intact such evidence for study. The main dwelling house is a textbook example of the story of construction and subsequent alterations and modifications made over three hundred years to a Cape vernacular building in the Drakenstein region.

\textit{Figure 9. Façade (above) and long tail (below) of La Cotte homestead (Baumann & Winter 2003).}
Figure 10. Exposed façade of La Cotte showing opgekleide, mud brick and various fired red brick construction and alterations (N. Amschwand 2003).

Figure 11. Longhouse at La Cotte, from the back (A. Malan 2004).

Figure 12. Cellar/barn at La Cotte (A. Malan 2004).
Analysing La Cotte

Franschhoek is a narrow, linear east-west town with a significant urban-rural interface. This close association between town and farmland is a feature that Franschhoek shares with Paarl. When viewed from the main road, the La Cotte farm forms a strong visual background to the town, particularly as one crosses over the La Cotte stream. From that point the homestead is seen across the cultivated lands with the river in the foreground. Equally significant is the ridgeline behind the farm complex that defines a visual frame to the western view from the town, with the mountains as an impressive backdrop.

The *werf*, the *ringmuur* and the surrounding farmland are important elements in defining a farm complex that has evolved over a long period of time. The linkages between the various built elements and the farming landscape are critical components of a fragile cultural landscape that is a key to understanding the town and its development. It is the particular placing of the farmstead in relationship to the outbuildings and the approach from the town that creates a unique rural composition. The northern ridgeline behind the historic mill is defined by the *ringmuur* and the line of the mill building, it appears, was originally continued with now-vanished outbuildings that formed a *werf* on the northern and western side of the farmhouse. To the southeast of the homestead there were open views across a pond.

The long barn / wine cellar was built on the same axis as the house. *Werf* layouts and their preservation are very important. A *werf* and its buildings was not merely an arbitrary placement of structures, but was carefully designed as a unit to define status and functionality. Too often the farmhouse is retained while the *werf* is demolished or significantly altered to the detriment of the historical context of the homestead as a component of a farm layout. For example, the proposal to build a ‘new’ traditional-style building at right angles to the open splayed arrangement of the outbuildings would completely alter the original *werf* design (along the contour) and obscure the southeast aspect from and towards the house.

The farmstead grew over a period of time and the built fabric reflects clearly the changing fortunes of its owners as it grew from a humble opgekleide longhouse to a T-shaped house that was then further aggrandized with Georgian entrance doors and sash windows. The interior equally reflects these modifications. In its present stripped condition it expresses these changes very clearly, with a legible historic fabric recording a long history from the simple casemented dwelling to nineteenth century ‘grandeur’ and twentieth century alterations and decay.

This raises problems about how to treat the individual buildings and the old thorny issues around renovation, restoration, ‘facadism’, appropriate reuse, and so on. For example, the destruction of the interior of the house, although at present partially demolished, will obliterate both the historical spaces, and the layout of the interior, which showed a clear evolution from three cell house to five cell T-shaped building and then the “Victorianisation” of the house with its narrower entrance hall.

Summary

La Cotte still largely retains the contained historical elements of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century farm with its linkages to the landscape and the town. This makes it highly significant in the area. What is important about La Cotte cannot be reduced to a list of elements, however, for it is the relationship between the built components that make up the farm complex; the relationship of these to the topography of the site; the relationship between farm and town. The physical and visual linkages contextualise the historical and cultural elements and create a matrix of interrelationships critical to the townscape. These should be preserved.

A major difficulty faced by designing proposals for sustainable redevelopment of Cape estates is the contradiction inherent in an assumption that chopping up farmland is acceptable if
the historic werf is retained. Though the development team is aware of this, and is attempting to find a viable and sustainable solution, in the case of La Cotte a restored historic werf layout and new residential subdivisions will ultimately compromise each other. Eventually, an embalmed and functionless werf ends up surrounded by moneyed suburbia, which creeps up towards the mountains. Ironically, the attractiveness of Franschhoek as a rural town is fast becoming lost to the very people who desire to live there, and they pay dearly for the privilege twice over.

Acknowledgements


References


Diemer, T. 1993. The colonial architecture of the Franschhoek Valley. BA (Hons), Department of Archaeology, University of Stellenbosch.


National Archives, Roeland Street, Cape Town


MOOC 7/1/38-28, 1782. Sara Delport, Will.

APPENDICES

Time Line

SQ – Stellenbosch Quitrent; sr – square roods; TD – transfer deed

1694 Jean Gardiol settles on farm. [Diemer writes of a ‘Huguenot hut’ in front of existing dwelling house, the foundations of which were ‘ploughed over’ by Mr Hugo, but then ascribes the construction of this early home to Johannes Marais.]

1713 OSF grant of 60 morgen, named La Kot, to Jean Gardiol.

1731 Hanibal Opits (Opitz) takes ownership. Deed of transfer (TD) lists slaves, livestock and distiller.

1733 Johannes Maree (Marais) takes over the 60 morgen farm.

1750 Fashion for T-shaped Cape vernacular homesteads. [Diemer suggests that two or three outbuildings probably on the property by this time. Longhouse may be oldest building, with dwelling one end (fireplace) and stable at the other (with stinkwood cribs).]

1761 J. Marais dies and his widow Sara Delport inherits.

1779 Mill first mentioned in inventory of third owner, J.P. Marais (NMC file).

1782 Jacobus Pieter Marais, youngest son, becomes registered owner of 60 morgen. TD lists mill and brandy still.

1793 Sara Delport dies. J. Marais and S. Delport both buried on La Motte.

1795 Mill mentioned in last will and testament of Sara Delport, widow Johannes Marais (24/4/1782).

1798 [See Diemer 1973 for sketch based on missing diagram.]

1800 South African government begins to transfer land to private ownership.

1802 J.P. Marais’ widow, Magdalena Johanna le Roux, sells to David Jacobus de Villiers. TD mentions mill and brandy still.

1825 P. du Toit’s ill health and then death results in notice of sale in Government Gazette (4/12/1831) of 24 morgen quitrent land with a new watermill … planted with fruit trees and 40 000 vines … situated ‘onder die Nieuwe Kloof naby die Uitspanplaats’.

1832 P. du Toit’s widow, Anna Margaretha de Villiers, splits farm in two and sells part to Abraham Johannes Pepler & Pieter Abraham Pepler and part to Isaac Malherbe (Oak Lodge, Die Eike). Die Eike is then sold to A.J. Pepler. Mill appears in transfer deed from du Toit family to Peplers. Landmark of chapel built in village.

1833 A.J. & P.A. Pepler granted SQ 264 morgen and 161 square roods contiguous to La Cotte (which includes 23 morgen 175 sr once held on 15 year lease).

1836 Date on gable. [Jan Roux believes there was an earlier gable.]

1839 A.J. Pepler sole registered owner. The dwelling house on Die Eike is built (gable style like La Motte, Wemmershoek).

1844 A.J. Pepler’s widow, Anna Johanna le Roux, splits La Cotte into two and sells to Daniel Hugo (deel A) and his brother Jan Gysbert Hugo takes over remaining 28 morgen 419 sr of La Cotte freehold (deel B) + 254 mo 477 sr quitrent. La Cotte is farmed by Daniel’s son, Abraham Paul Hugo, who is married to his cousin, daughter of Jan Gysbert. Thatch burns and replaced by corrugated iron, gable not replaced, verandah built (Mrs M. Hugo interview). Façade woodwork dates from this time (door and windows) (Fransen & Cook 1980).

1845 Earliest residential erven laid out on La Cotte land, NW of church (see R.F. Aling survey) in an attempt to pay off A.J. Pepler’s ‘embarrassed circumstances’ that accumulated since 1843 (see 1851) – includes portion where cemetery is located.

1848 Die Eike burns.

1851 Three year dispute between Abraham Johannes Pepler (plaintiff) and Jan Gysbert Hugo (defendant) over Pepler’s handling of property transactions (including mortgages on La Cotte), decided in favour of Hugo.

1852 Margaretha Louisa le Roux dies, wife of Daniel Hugo - Abraham Paul Hugo (Daniel’s son) inherits from his mother-in-law / aunt and settles permanently on La Cotte, now 28 mo 25 sr + 253 mo 307 sr, though still also farming La Cabriere.

1853 A.J. Pepler’s widow, Anna Francina Hugo, splits farm in two and sells part to Abraham Johannes Pepler & Pieter Abraham Pepler and part to Isaac Malherbe (Oak Lodge, Die Eike). Die Eike is then sold to A.J. Pepler. Mill appears in transfer deed from du Toit family to Peplers. Landmark of chapel built in village.

1854 A.J. Pepler’s ‘embarrassed circumstances’ that accumulated since 1843 (see 1851) – includes portion where cemetery is located.

1856 Thatch roofs on part of La Cotte annexed to the cellar. ‘Oom Boy’ Hugo obliged to repair buildings and work the farm, and had use of stables, wagon house and contents. Land deducted for plot where Franschhoek Wynkelders is now.

1860 Franschhoek town established on parts of La Cotte and Cabriere. Mill used for last time.

1882 Daniel Hugo dies and is buried on Cabriere.

1903 First municipal census.

1904 Elliott photos of mill.

1905 Pieter Jacobus Olivier (‘Oom Boy’) Hugo gets 24 mo 50 sr + 240 mo 137 sr 108 sf (plus piece of land adjoining ex grant made to J.J. Hauman in 1896). Private deed of sale from his father, who retained rights of occupation of the ‘woonhuis’ and the garden annexed to the cellar. ‘Oom Boy’ Hugo obliged to repair buildings and work the farm, and had use of stables, wagon house and contents. Land deducted for plot where Franschhoek Wynkelders is now.

1905 De Bosdari reports that ‘present T-shaped house is dated 1844, the gables have disappeared’. The old water mill is all that remains from the ‘early days’. De Eike farmhouse has main gable dated 1839, all that remains of building destroyed by fire.

1906 Private ownership of Stellenbosch district mentions La Cotte’s mill.

1916 Last will and testament of Sara Delport, widow Johannes Marais (24/4/1782).

1925 Government Gazette (4/12/1831) of 24 morgen quitrent land with a new watermill … planted with fruit trees and 40 000 vines … situated ‘onder die Nieuwe Kloof naby die Uitspanplaats’.

1933 Colonial Government for railway station (in 2002 water rights still in place for subdivisions and railway property).

1942 Jacobus Petrus ‘Koos la Cotte’ Hugo (son of P.J.O. Hugo and first wife Hendrina Elizabeth Wilhelmina Malherbe) now had 18.4814 mo + 44.5843 mo. His older unmarried brother, Petrus Jacobus Olivier ‘Oom Pierre’ Hugo, farmed a portion of La Cotte he called Waterval.

1950s Die Eike burns.

1956 Thatch roofs on part of La Cotte annexed to the cellar. ‘Oom Boy’ Hugo obliged to repair buildings and work the farm, and had use of stables, wagon house and contents. Land deducted for plot where Franschhoek Wynkelders is now.

1958 De Bosdari reports that ‘present T-shaped house is dated 1844, the gables have disappeared’. The old water mill is all that remains from the ‘early days’. De Eike farmhouse has main gable dated 1839, all that remains of building destroyed by fire.
1969 Earthquake damage. Evidence of fire found in ‘riedtak’ roof of La Cotte. Gable restored on house, corrugated iron roof retained, and straight verandah replaced old one. Longhouse remodelled.


1960s Fransen & Cook found ‘present house T-shaped with a tin roof and all the gables clipped – what was once the front gable is dated 1839 – façade woodwork dates to same period’ – Georgian rather than Victorian. The remains of the mill can be seen.

1984 Historical oak tree blown over. Unlikely story that the acorn was brought from France and planted by Gardiol (because he lived in the Netherlands before sailing to SA). In 1920 acorns from this tree planted at Delville Wood Memorial in France. Also reputed to be a ‘slave tree’, ie there was a metal ring embedded in the trunk.

1987 Petrus Olivier ‘Pieter’ Hugo inherits from his deceased father.

1989/90 Water mill restored (plans by Jordaan, Hartwig & Partners Architects) by Franschhoek Trust and Winery.

1993 Diemer interviews Petrus Olivier Hugo. Graveyard now on urban subdivision.

Publication of ‘Franschhoek: guidelines for conservation and development for the town and for the valley’ (Todeschini & Japha Associated Architects & Planners). See map sheets 6 and 7 for La Cotte, which is listed in ‘significant historical buildings: possible national register status’.

1997 Robert Maingard buys property. Frank Reitz measured drawings. Paint and plaster stripped from main house. Site inspection by Tim Hart & Antonia Malan, UCT.

1999 J. Kaplan’s ‘Archaeological and Historical Study, initial assessment for proposed Franschhoek Golf Estate’ in which he cites Diemer – i.e. no new investigations into historic fabric.

2000 ‘Franschhoek Spatial Development Plan’ (Taylor, van Rensburg & van der Spuy Town & Regional Planners). La Cotte is identified as a special case within wider ‘transitional development area’ because of critical value in preserving natural sight lines and extremely important cultural heritage value as great farm of 18th and 19th century around which Franschhoek grew. Determined that ground should remain agricultural (Franschhoek Trust submission to EIA below) .

2001? Development proposal for a portion of the farm La Cotte, Franschhoek. Guest lodge and restaurant proposed for sustainable reuse of existing buildings, funded by trout fishing cottages to be developed. Van Biljoen & Visser measured drawings.

2002 Scoping study for an EIA of revised proposed subdivision, rezoning and consent use of remainder of erf 548, La Cotte, Franschhoek. Revised concept to link agricultural development with Dieu Donne (also Maingard property), restore historical complex and convert into guesthouse and restaurant, and build 27 residential units behind. Green corridor to be protected, running from town, past werf and up river valley towards mountain.

Franschhoek Trust identifies significant structures within ringmuur and old bywoner’s house at the dam (but skakel houses can be demolished). Maingard commissions archival research by Historical Archaeology Research Group, UCT, through Deon Roux.

2003 Environmental Impact Assessment prepared by Planning Partners, includes Heritage Study and public consultation process.

Registered owners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OSF 2.82 – La Kot</th>
<th>Extent</th>
<th>SQ 10.71 – La Cotte</th>
<th>Extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td></td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.12.1713</td>
<td>Jean Gardiol</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/04/1731</td>
<td>Hanibal Optis</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TD 1997</td>
<td>Johannes Maree</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.10.1733</td>
<td>Sara Delport (widow J. Marais)</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TD 2148</td>
<td>Jacobus Pieter Marais</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/04/1782</td>
<td>David Jacobus de Villiers</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TD 5418</td>
<td>Pieter du Toit</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/3/1808</td>
<td>Anna Margaretha de Villiers (widow P. du Toit)</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/04/1832</td>
<td>Abraham Johannes Pepler &amp; Pieter Abraham Pepler</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/09/1833</td>
<td>Abraham Johannes Pepler and Pieter Abraham Pepler</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/10/1839</td>
<td>28 mo 419 sr</td>
<td>Abraham Johannes Pepler</td>
<td>264 mo 161 sr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/11/1844</td>
<td>Jan Gysbert Hugo (Daniel’s son)</td>
<td>254 mo 477 sr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/12/1852</td>
<td>Abraham Paul Hugo (Daniel’s son)</td>
<td>253 mo 307 sr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Registered owners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OSF 2.82 – La Kot</th>
<th>Extent</th>
<th>SQ 10.71 – La Cotte</th>
<th>Extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td></td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.12.1713</td>
<td>Jean Gardiol</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/04/1731</td>
<td>Hanibal Optis</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TD 1997</td>
<td>Johannes Maree</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.10.1733</td>
<td>Sara Delport (widow J. Marais)</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TD 2148</td>
<td>Jacobus Pieter Marais</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/04/1782</td>
<td>David Jacobus de Villiers</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TD 5418</td>
<td>Pieter du Toit</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/3/1808</td>
<td>Anna Margaretha de Villiers (widow P. du Toit)</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/04/1832</td>
<td>Abraham Johannes Pepler &amp; Pieter Abraham Pepler</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/09/1833</td>
<td>Abraham Johannes Pepler and Pieter Abraham Pepler</td>
<td>60 mo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/10/1839</td>
<td>28 mo 419 sr</td>
<td>Abraham Johannes Pepler</td>
<td>264 mo 161 sr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/11/1844</td>
<td>Jan Gysbert Hugo (Daniel’s son)</td>
<td>254 mo 477 sr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/12/1852</td>
<td>Abraham Paul Hugo (Daniel’s son)</td>
<td>253 mo 307 sr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jean Gardiol (1674-1738)
The Gardiols came from Lacoste in France – Jean was born there on 14 December 1674 and baptised in Merindol in January 1675. He did not have a wife but his sisters married the brothers Jacob and Abraham de Villiers, from La Bri and Champagne respectively. The piece of land called La Kot, situated in Oliphantshoek, was given to Gardiol by Simon van der Stel on 18 October 1694 but the grant was only ratified by M.P. de Chavonnes and registered in 1713. In the 1705 opgaaf he declared 5 horses, 8 cattle, 4 cows, 2 calves, 2 pigs, 100 sheep, 100 vines and 7 leaguers of wine and some grain crops. By 1723 his assets included two slave men, 6 oxen, 8000 vines and 4 leaguers of wine.

Hanibal Opits
The deed of transfer in 1731 from Gardiol to Opits lists: ‘2 mans slaven November van Madagascar en Aron van Bengalen, 70 schapen, 4 ossen, 1 disteel keetel, 9 ledige leggers, 2 trap balijes en eenig huysraad’ valued at 2000 gulden for the land and 1000 gulden for the loose goods. There is no genealogical trace of Opits, and he appears without wife or children in the opgaafrol of 1731, when he declared 5 slave men, 3 horses, 50 cattle, 200 sheep, 8000 vines and 8 leaguers of wine.

Johannes Maree (Marais) (1708-1761) & Sara Delport (de la Porte) (1711-1793)
In 1733 Marais took over ‘1 osse wagen, 9 ledige leggers, 2 pers balijes, bouwgereetschap en eenig huysraad’. In 1752 and again in 1756 he declared a wife, 2 sons and 5 daughters, a slave woman, one slave boy and two slave girls, 10 cattle, 15 000 vines and 10 (18) leaguers of wine. Burgeresse Sara Delport’s will in 1782 bequeaths ‘haar woonplaats La Cotte genaamd … met de daarop staande Molen en Brandewynskeetel’ to her youngest son Jacobus Pieter Marais. Marais and Delport are both buried at La Motte.

Jacobus Pieter Marais (1749-1792) & Magdalena Johanna le Roux (1773-?).
Youngest son of Johannes Marais, married to the daughter of Pieter le Roux of Cabriere. A mill is mentioned in the estate of Marais in 1779. Widow Marais inherited the property at her husband’s death in 1792.

David Jacobs de Villiers (1777-1833) & Aletta Johanna de Villiers (1775-1827)
La Cotte was transferred to De Villiers in 1802 but he sold it to his brother-in-law in 1808 and moved to Helderberg (Moddergat). His wife’s mother was a Hugo.

Pieter du Toit (1774-1830) & Anna Margaretha de Villiers (1776-1834)
First owners to live permanently on the farm. The slave register of 1816, below, lists eight slaves for Pieter du Toit, Jan’s son. In 1825 he had 40 000 vines, 8 leaguers of wine and a half leaguer of brandy. Widow du Toit inherited the property at her husband’s death. A ‘new’ mill is listed in the notice of sale of 1831, along with a permanent water supply, fruit trees and 40 000 vines. It was eventually sold in two portions to Pepler, one of which became Die Eike.

Abraham Johannes Pepler (1810-1842) & Anna Johanna le Roux (1812-7)
The son of Hendrik Lodewicus Pepler of La Motte (Wemmershoek) and married to the daughter of Le Roux of Cabriere. The Peplers were responsible for the gables at La Cotte (1836) and Die Eike (1839). Widow Pepler inherited the property at her husband’s death in 1842. She divided it into two portions, selling lot A to Daniel Hugo and lot B to Jan Gysbert Hugo.

Daniel Hugo (1788-1882) & Margaretha Louise le Roux (1793-1863)
Daniel Hugo was the fifth child of Petrus Hugo. He and his wife had 16 children, of whom Abraham Paul was the eighth. Jan Gysbert Hugo (1783-1868) & Magdalena Retief (1787-1862) Jan Gysbert Hugo was the second child of P.J. Hugo and farmed at Non Pareille, Daljosaphat. His tenth child, Anna Francina, married her cousin, below. In 1845 the surveyor R.F. Aling laid out the first fourteen erven on La Cotte and Cabriere for the town of Franschhoek.

Abraham Paul Hugo (1821-1904) & Anna Francina Hugo (1827-1902)
Abraham and Anna were cousins, children of Jan Gysbert and Daniel, above. In 1904 four morgen of land and water rights were taken by the Colonial Government for building a railway station. Petrus Jacobus Olivier Hugo (1871-1942) & Hendrina Elis. W. Malherbe (1880-1913) & Elizabeth Catharina Wiehahn In 1905 ‘Oom Boy’ bought the farm from his father’s estate. He sold a portion for building the Franschoek Farmers’ Co-operative wine cellar.

Petrus Olivier Hugo (1911-1987) & Margaretha Johanna Lambrechts (1914-1997)
‘Koos la Cotte’ inherited from his father in 1942 but transferred the property the next year to the infant ‘Pieter’ Hugo. His unmarried older brother, ‘Oom Pierre’ (Petrus Jacobus Olivier Hugo, 1907-1947), farmed on a portion of La Cotte he named Waterval.

Petrus Olivier Hugo (1942-) & Wendy Edineen Shaw (1940-)
After selling to Robert Maingard in 1997, Hugo continued farming between Montagu and Barrydale.