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## Cover illustrations

Top: Graaff-Reinet; Bottom: Bokkerivier (Hans Fransen).
The Roodezand passes to the Tulbagh valley

Joanna Marx

In August 2009, to mark the fortieth anniversary of the earthquake that destroyed much of Tulbagh and the surrounding country, the Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa arranged an excursion to Tulbagh and environs. Members visited the town and some farms to see how the area had recovered and developed since 1969.

In May 1798 Lady Anne Barnard, the intrepid traveller and diarist, went from the present Worcester area through the ‘Roysand Pass’ to the Berg River valley west of Tulbagh. Before the area was named the ‘Land van Waveren’ it was known as the Roodezand (‘red sand’) valley, a name that still survives. There were no less than three passes from the Berg River valley into the Tulbagh valley, all known at some time as Roodezand (Fig.1). Which was the pass that Lady Anne took?

Part 1 provides extracts from the accounts of early travellers entering or leaving the Tulbagh valley and other descriptions and observations. Part 2 consists of relevant extracts from Lady Anne Barnard’s description of her journey. Both parts are followed by discussion of the clues contained in them. From all this evidence we can deduce which way she went.

PART 1: ROODEZAND KLOOF / OUDE KLOOF / NIEUWE KLOOF / NUWEKLOOF

The Oudekloof was the first pass from the Berg River valley into the Tulbagh valley. It winds over a nek in the Obiqua Mountains about four kilometres north of the present Gouda and Nuwekloof. It has a long western ascent and steep eastern descent.

The Nieuwe Kloof follows the course of the Klein Berg River in a narrow valley through the mountains, and various routes along it have been in use for two and a half centuries.

1658: Pieter Potter
Potter found the Oude Kloof and the Klein Berg River valley (later the Nieuwe Kloof). He was the first European to see the Roodezand valley.

1699-1700: Willem Adriaan van der Stel
Newly arrived Dutch immigrants were settled in the Roodezand valley, named Land van Waveren.

1731: Peter Kolbe (Oudekloof)
“The wagons that pass between this colony [Roodezand] and the Cape … are generally unloaded at the foot of the mountain and taken to pieces and they and their goods carried over in small parcels on the backs of the cattle and the drivers” … “the road across the mountains is very narrow and in many places thick set with trees on both sides.”

1748: First church in Roodezand completed
Figure 1. Three passes to Tulbagh (circled) are marked on today’s maps: Roodezandspas, Oudekloof Farm and Nuwekloofpas (detail from South Western Cape 1: 250 000 First Edition 2000).
1749: Jacobus du Toit
After attempts in 1748 to improve the Oudekloof Du Toit mobilised the farmers and opened a
rather basic route through Tulbagh Kloof, on the eastern side (right bank) of the Klein Berg
River. This route had no steep section like the Oude Kloof, and by the 1760s it had superseded
the original pass. It was called the Nieuwe Roodezand Kloof (Nieuwekloof).

1772: Carl Thunberg (coming from Saldanha)
“The cleft through which we passed from the sandy plain that lies towards the Cape, but
gradually rises until it comes to Roodezand, is one of the chasms left by the long range of
mountains through which it is possible for a wagon to pass, though possibly not entirely without
danger. In some places it was so narrow that two wagons could not pass each other. At such
narrow passes as this it is usual for the drivers to give several terribly loud smacks with their
long whip which are heard at a distance of several miles, so that the wagon which arrives first
may get through unimpeded before another enters it.”

1777: Johannes Schumacher
Drawing of the western end of the Nieuwekloof with the Bushman’s Rock (Fig.2).

1796: Church sold many properties in the village

1798: Lady Anne Barnard
Lady Anne Barnard, Mr Andrew Barnard and Mr Prince had come from the Breede River
valley. On Thursday 24 May they went through the ‘Roysand Kloof’.

1805-6: Tulbagh and the Land van Waveren became official names for Roodezand. Drostdy
established.

1807: Turnpike established at pass to levy tolls
Burchell mentions that, to avoid paying the toll, cattle drovers made use of Oudekloof.

April 1811: William Burchell
 “[A] narrow winding defile of about three miles in length, just enough to allow a passage for the
Little Berg River on each side of which the mountains rise up abrupt and lofty. Their rocky
sides are thickly clothed with bushes and trees from their very summits down to the water,
presenting a beautiful romantic picture adorned with their variety of foliage. Along the steep
and winding sides a road has been cut, which follows the course of the river at a height above it
generally between 50 and 100 feet, in one part rising much higher and in another descending to
the bottom and leading through the river, which at this time was not more than three feet deep,
although often so swollen by the rains as to be for a day or two quite impassable.”

1836: Charles Michell
Addressing a London society, Michell described Tulbagh Kloof as “a natural gap formed by the
passage which the Klein Berg River has made for itself”. ... “This pass, though rugged, offers no
serious obstacle; the ascents and descents are, for this country, scarcely worth noticing.”

1859-60: Thomas Bain, road and railway (in 1873-74)
Having inspected the kloof in 1855 Bain “recommended a route along the left bank. He was
thus able to cut out the two drifts which had occasioned much delay and frustration”. The new
route was built during 1859 and 1860 and “carried all the road traffic through the kloof for over
a hundred years.” (It was widened in 1935.) Later Bain was instructed to build a railway line
through Roodezand Pass, as part of the new line from Cape Town to Johannesburg. It is still
there. By October 1874 he had rejoined the Roads Department.
1927: E.E. Mossop, Old Cape Highways
“[After the 75-mile run from Cape Town to Porterville Road Station …] now Gouda], “a mile beyond the station a large rock covering perhaps half an acre of ground is passed. It has for two centuries been known as the Bushman’s Rock. Flat-topped and crenellated, it stands like some mediaeval castle guarding the entrance to the pass … Soon after the rock is passed, the present road ascends high above the river bed and railroad, and the mountain walls converge as though to crush the three, while down below, crossing and re-crossing the river, is traced the old road which once was the ‘new way for carriages’ ” (Mossop 1927: 56).

1968: Nuwekloof Pass (Provincial Roads Department)
The new route “had to be carried on the east side, back on the right bank. The necessary expertise and equipment were now available to do the rock cuts needed to construct a road whose geometric design … would cater for … larger and faster vehicles …. [and] with reinforced concrete it was also much easier to build the two bridges at river crossings” (Ross 2002: 5).

1990: Jose Burman, In the Footsteps of Lady Anne Barnard
“If you wish to follow Lady Anne over the Oudekloof, however, you will have to drive to a little farm called Oudekloof, situated below the lowest nek in the mountains north of the Nieuwekoof. From here … you will have to walk over that nek”.

“Finding the track is not easy for the route has not been used by wagons for nearly 200 years. Moreover the bush is pretty thick, and obliterates the tracks very well. The best place to find the tracks is in the nek; here you will find the track stretching across the slope, grooved out of the hillside sometimes to the depth of a metre. In several places rocks have been piled up beside the track and in one section there is a built-up area crossing a water-course. If you are eagle-eyed you may even spot the odd wheel-track incised in the rock by the passage of wagons through narrow places. … The track heads down the hillside diagonally to the north and is not easy to follow – but it does return to the level ground on the western side of the Witsenberg” (Burman 1970: 103).

OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS ON THE ROODEZAND PASSES

The Oudekloof, north of Nuwekloof, is approached from the almost level floor of the Tulbagh valley; and winds over a high nek in the Obiqua Mountains in an area where no rock formations are visible from either side. The kloof itself appears to be short; but there is a long descent on the western side of the mountains to the Klein Berg River. At present access to the pass is via the Oudekloof farm (with a gabled house, much altered) on the east side of the mountains, and from La Bonne Esperance farm on the west side. Oudekloof is used as a hiking path. A few pylons or aerials on top of a mountain on the south side of the kloof are a landmark visible from both east and west of the Obiqua Mountains.

Burman’s findings on the Oudekloof are very interesting, but who knows when and by whom the tracks were made. He mentions the Witsenberg, but these peaks are far away on the other (eastern) side of the Tulbagh valley, which was previously known as the Roodezand valley. It is unlikely that Bushman’s Rock can be seen from the summit.

The Slagterspad (‘butchers’ road’) lies between the Oudekloof and the Nuwekloof. It is said that farmers who did not want to pay the toll for their animals used this route. The name appears on current maps. The route is short and passes over a nek close to the southern end of the mountain beside the Klein Berg River. Bushman’s Rock may well be visible from the Slagterspad.
Yet another route through the mountain chain exists, in the far north-western corner of the Tulbagh valley. The **Roodezands Pass** is a narrow corridor between two parcels of the Groot Winterhoek Nature Reserve. The high peak of Roodezandsberg on the eastern edge of the Saronsberg is on its west side, and (the lesser) Platberg is situated to its east, in front of the Solderberg. The long path down continues north-westerly along the Leeuw River valley towards the 24 Rivieren area. The mission village of Saron lies nearby on the western slopes of the massive Saronsberg. It is unlikely that the Bushman’s Rock can be seen from the Roodezands Pass.

The successive **Nuwekloof passes** through the narrow valley of the Klein Berg River are nearer to the watercourse than to the mountain-tops. On both sides the mountains rise steeply from the river and are crowned with rock formations. The distance through this route is about 6 km. The Bushman’s Rock is a notable feature near the western entrance to the pass.

The first Nieuwekloof route was made in about the 1750s and ran mainly along the north-eastern side (right bank) of the Klein Berg River valley, very narrow in places, with two drifts (see Burchell’s description above). Much later, Thomas Bain built his pass (1859-60) which went along the south-western side (left bank), and subsequently he built the railway (1873-74) on the same side. His road was widened in 1935 and can still be seen.

The current Nuwekloof Pass (1968) runs on the north-eastern side (right bank), like the first route through this kloof. Now there are some high rock faces where the road is cut into the mountainside. There is one bridge in the pass and another a short distance to the east, beyond the Toll House.

**PART 2: LADY ANNE BARNARD’S JOURNEY THROUGH THE ROODEZAND KLOOF**

Lady Anne Barnard’s party (Anne Elizabeth, Mr Andrew Barnard, Mr Prince, their guide, and several servants) had travelled from the Cape to the Swellendam district whence they proceeded down the Breede River valley. They travelled in a horse-drawn wagon.

On 22 May they stayed at Brandvlei where they had a horrible night. On 23 May they went as far as Roodewal, the house of Pieter du Toit, where they dined and stayed happily overnight in his well-kept house. The next day they continued along the Breede River valley, dining (midday) at Pieter de Vos’s house, Aan de Breede Rivier (now Olifantsberg).

On Thursday 24 May 1798 Lady Anne Barnard went through the Roodezand Kloof. The party walked over the “Roysand Kloof” behind their wagon and then proceeded to Mr de Waal’s farm De Leeuwenklip (now Saron), which they reached after dark.

The following extracts are from different edited versions of Lady Anne Barnard’s Journals.

**In Lady Anne’s own words (1)** (Robinson 1973: 149-150)

“In the space of 8 or 10 miles, we passed a House of Fushinus [Fouche], another of Conradis, and two others on the banks of the Braide riviere [Breede River] which we had to cross at least three times in the course of this days Journey; hereabouts is a fine cascade after rain but at present it was so dry that I could not draw it with effect. We soon after crossed the Riviere for the 3rd time, and entered upon the Country called Roysand, or red sand … .”

“After travelling about four hours, we crossed a pretty deep tho’ narrow riviere and stopped at a farm house of good size where Mynheer Prince told us we should dine. No invitation on such
occasion is necessary from the Farmers, when a Waggon stops at the door he concludes of course that the passengers want to *scoff* (to eat) and the Horses the same after they have rolled themselves … here we fell in exactly with the dinner hour, 12 o’clock and got to be sure a very greasy one, dressed after the right Dutch fashion.”

“We left the Boors house whose name was de Forset [de Vos] and proceeded on to the Roysand Kloof, a very long and bad pass which we were obliged to walk. … it had much the resemblance of one of the roads thro’ the highlands of Scotland, having the banks on each side of the River which descended rapidly between them pretty well covered with bushes and different sorts of low wood, where there were many fine points I could have drawn but I was not very well.”

“Mr Barnard got a saddle put on one of Anne Elizabeth’s stud and in this manner we proceeded, passing by some very frightful scenes, we then cross’d the River where the appearance of a Fox before us … we ascended Roysand Kloof, the wagon going slowly on before … the Road very bad, but romantic … as we reached the Summit the Sun was beginning to set ….”

“It now began to grow very dark, but Mynheer Prince knew the road and went before us till we descended into the more civilized part of the Country, civil we ought to have esteemed it, for thro’ the gloom we saw it all illuminated (as far as we wished to translate it) with a *feu de joie* [bonfire] for our return, the Slaves who are employed to cut wood generally before the rainy season begins, set fire to different parts of the Mountains at night, the appearance Mr Barnard tells me is exactly that of Mount Vesuvius or any other Volcanic Mountain and looks splendid.”

“In Lady Anne’s own words (2) (Robinson, Lenta & Driver 1994: 394-397)

“We … proceeded to the Roysand Kloof, a very long pass, which we were obliged to walk, the wagon slowly dragging before – the road was very bad, but romantic. As we reached the summit the Sun was beginning to set with a glowing Orange ray to the left, where he was retiring behind the hills, but where he still permitted us light to see, and start at the Image which presented itself – a jet-black Castle, turretted all around, with a strange oddity of a Rock or building at a small distance, on top of which was placed an enormous Urn, which seemed to be the Sarcophagus of some giant who had been Slain by the Prince of the Castle, who of course must have been the King of the Caffres, by its sullen, dark appearance. I was grieved to hear that it had *no History*, but was simply a production of Madam Nature’s in one of her peaks. I drew it, but have done it no justice. ….”

“Nature had even gone so far as to make some windows in this Tower, through which the rays of light darted. I liked it much – it was the finest object I had met with in a Country where objects are thinly scattered, unless we count in the Mountains, which are generally splendid ones. ….”

“It now began to grow very dark, but Mynheer Prince knew the road and went before us until we descended into the more civilized part of the country ….”

“After travelling some miles more, and passing the Lion’s rocks ….”

“After travelling some miles more, and passing the Lions rocks, so called after a fierce one having been killed there about fifty years ago, we reached the House of Mynheer Du Val [de Waal], a wealthy man of rather higher class than the other Boors, and one of the tallest Men I had seen. He and his Wife welcomed us with cordiality … We slept this night in the best furnished and handsomest room ….”
OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS ABOUT LADY ANNE’S ROUTE

Lady Anne’s party walked behind their wagon through the ‘Roysand Kloof’ from east to west at sunset. They had crossed the Klein Berg River, possibly below its confluence with the Boontjies River. She hardly mentions farms or the village in the Tulbagh valley, which had a church and was well populated by that time.

Her descriptions, corroborated by other evidence, indicate that Lady Anne and her party went through the Nuwekloof. They climbed up a long slope from the eastern side on the north-east side (right bank) of the Klein Berg River. She comments that the pass was a long one, and that they walked behind their wagon. The steep sides of the narrow valley and the vegetation match her description. She mentions the summit and describes rock formations on the skyline; the features she describes would indeed be nearby. At the western exit from the kloof are her “turreted castle”, a very large flat rock known as the Bushman’s Rock, and the nearby “oddiy of a rock” with “an urn” on it, just as she described them. Schumacher’s drawing (Fig.2) of the west end of Nuwekloof exactly matches Lady Anne’s description, as does Henry Salt’s (Fig.3), and the current view (Fig.4) as one emerges from the pass.

From there the party proceeded north on the same side of the Klein Berg River, to “the Lion’s Rock”, her name for De Leeuwenklip, a farm which was granted to Cornelis de Waal in 1762. The homestead may date from about 1780 and has a magnificent front gable. The farm was bought in 1846 for the establishment of Saron Rhenish mission, and the homestead (still standing) became the parsonage (Fransen & Cook 1980: 255-256; Fransen 2004: 345-346).

Figure 2. Johannes Schumacher’s painting (1777) of the view looking westwards from the Nuwekloof Pass. He shows the features described by Lady Anne Barnard in 1798: “a jet-black castle, turreted all around, with a strange oddity of a rock or building at a small distance, on top of which was placed an enormous urn ... “. 
Figure 3. Henry Salt also passed through Nuwekloof during his travels between 1802 and 1806 and drew the same scene. This engraved version was published by William Miller in Twenty-four views in St. Helena, the Cape, India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia and Egypt (1809). (Downloaded image © Donald A. Heald, Original Antique Books Prints and Maps.)

Figure 4. Today the railway line cuts between the rock formations (Ralph Malan 2010).
References


1 : 50 000 maps: 3318 BB Porterville; 3319 AA Groot Winterhoek; 3319 AC Tulbagh.
1 : 250 000 map: 3319 Worcester.

Google © 33° 18’ S, 19° 04’ E.
The European origin of Cape vernacular architecture

André van Graan

The whitewashed cottages of the southern Cape fishermen and the *langhuise* of the Cape West Coast are recognisable examples of the simple vernacular architecture of the Cape. The need for basic shelter, the response to climatic conditions and available building materials all play a part in the development of the unique characteristics of these simple habitations. But what were the inherited characteristics that the earliest colonists brought with them from Europe? What traditions of house building were adapted to local conditions at the Cape when the first settlers arrived at the Cape in 1652?

In this examination of the architectural legacy that the early colonists brought with them to the Cape, and for tracing the links between the architecture of the early houses and the architecture of Europe, a debt must be acknowledged to the research of a number of authors. Yvonne Brink in her book *They Came to Stay* (2008), gives a thoroughly grounded and convincing argument for the type of people who formed the early colonists and their social background and she then links this to the buildings that no longer remain but which are described largely in inventories. Her focus on the townhouse and the argument against the commonly held view of the plan of the early townhouse is well presented. This is also related to the writings of James Walton (1989 and 1995), who presented a clear and cogent view of the early architecture of the colony. In addition both C. de Bosdari (1964) and Geoffrey Pearse (make reference to the early colonists’ dwellings. Hugh Floyd’s (1982) examination of the inherited characteristics of Cape vernacular is also particularly relevant with regard to the comparison that he drew between Cape vernacular cottages and those of places such as the Hebrides, Scotland and Brittany.

The focus here is on the evolution of the Cape cottage as a prototypical dwelling unit that was to be extended and elaborated with gables and extended plan forms to become the iconic Cape farmhouse.

We need to begin with a brief examination of the raison d’être for the establishment of a settlement at the Cape in the first place. From the sixteenth century there had been a steady increase in trade links between Europe and the East, particularly India and China as the two major countries of the region. The initial development of a sea route to India and the east by the Portuguese was to be overtaken by the establishment of trading companies by the French, the British and the Dutch. The most significant in the seventeenth century was the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, the Dutch East India Company or the VOC as it is more commonly known. Set up in 1602, it was a private undertaking that was owned by shareholders and controlled by an executive council of seventeen, the Heeren XVII (Figs 1 and 2). This governing body of patrician merchants was based in Amsterdam while their overseas operations were handled from their base in Batavia.

The long sea route had presented many difficulties and in order to address some of these issues the Company decided to set up a refreshment station at the Cape of Good Hope. Thus it was that three small ships of their fleet, the *Drommedaris, Reijger* and the *Goede Hoop* set sail from Texel harbour on the 24th December 1651 under the command of the ship’s surgeon Jan van Riebeeck. They arrived at Table Bay on the 6th and 7th April 1652. They consisted of “about 100 mostly poverty stricken, illiterate and unskilled men (a few with wives and children)” (Brink

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1 Talk presented to the Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa on 18 May 2010.
The first shelter erected by them consisted of a frame of planks covered by canvas. It is interesting to compare this stark reality with the painted image of the civilised colonists interacting with the resident Khoi who resented their intrusion. They are represented as civilised and orderly - a far cry from the reality!

They then set about constructing a Fort on the shore of the Bay. It consisted of an enormously thick protective outer wall constructed of earth sods and planks, with a cluster of buildings constructed of timber with lath infill and a central defensive tower of stone brought down from the mountain, and clay.

This structure was not intended to house all the people, and, there being a distinction between VOC officials and the seamen and soldiers and farmers who formed the rest of the group, they were to set up shelters of their own in close proximity to the fort but more related to the Garden, which was the prime focus of the settlement. Thus we see that the Chief Gardener, Hendrik Boom, occupied a house close to the fort while the rest of the group were located a little further off. The view of the settlement in 1660 shows this arrangement (Fig.3).
The next ‘official’ building was to be the replacement of the Fort with the better-constructed and more durable Castle of Good Hope. But the question that we need to consider at this juncture is: Who were these people who came to the Cape? Too often we find ourselves dealing with a romanticised mythology inhabited by refined Dutch burghers living in elegant gabled houses, but this is far from the reality.

What was the background of the immigrants? We do not have the names of all the earliest colonists, nor do we know what their occupations were prior to immigration. Of the founding immigrants the majority were undoubtedly Dutch, although one needs to remember that the influence of the Hanseatic League, and the lack of unified countries such as were to emerge more strongly towards the end of the sixteenth century in northern Europe, meant that there certainly were people drawn from a wide background in the service of the VOC.

Brink makes a significant plea, though, to consider not the country of origin of the immigrants but their social standing. She quotes Pennington saying: “It is often easier and more relevant to define a man’s social group than to define his nationality”. Undoubtedly most of the 17th century Cape settlers came from the lowest strata of European society. By far the majority of VOC employees were, as Brink points out, “poverty stricken almost penniless peasants” (Fig. 4).

![Figure 4. Peasant dance: Breugel.](image)

According to Brink, C.R. Boxer points out that: “It is undeniable that many unscrupulous individuals enlisted in the service of the VOC ... with the sole object of enriching themselves as quickly as possible, irrespective of the means. Others hoped to live a life of luxury in the East, which they could never afford to do at home. Others enlisted because through no fault of their own, they had no options but to emigrate. Others, such as bankrupts, might hope to recoup their losses and even to repay their creditors. Still others left their country for their country’s good, or simply because their friends and families wanted to be rid of them”. He also quotes Pieter de la Court who complains against the restrictions of the VOC “so that it is no wonder that so few admirable, and that so many ignorant, lazy, prodigal and vicious men sail to the Indies in the service of the companies”.

However, in defence of the early settlers at the Cape, it must be said that:

1. There were the economic migrants - many Germans came for this reason, due to unemployment.
2. There was the expulsion of emigrants from other countries for political and religious reasons:
   a. Germans came and sought refuge in the Netherlands during and after the Thirty Year War (1618-1648);
   b. Jews were fleeing the pogrom in Poland;
   c. French Huguenots fled after the repeal of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.

Brink also makes the point that the social pattern in Europe in the mid 17th century was based on the belief that all people had their place in the social hierarchy and needed to be content with their lot. Status was also closely linked to material culture - the manner in which one dressed or conducted oneself.

The first free burgher settlement at the Cape was established by Van Riebeeck in February 1657, when a group of nine men agreed to try their hand at farming along the Liesbeek, close to the Coorenhoop redoubt that would offer a modicum of protection. There were five Dutchmen, three Germans and a Fleming. They decided to run two farms: five in partnership on the one and four on the other. A German headed the partnership of five on property they named Herman’s colony or the Groeneveld. Their land lay on the far side of the Liesbeek. The partnership of four was near Coorenhoop and they called their property De Hollandsche Tuyn. According to Van Riebeeck’s Journal they built their houses of timber and plaited withies daubed with clay. So here we find the first rural dwellings built at the Cape.

What did these early dwellings look like (Figs 5 to 8)?

![Figure 5. Zorgvliet (Walton 1989).](image1)

![Figure 6. Coetseburg (Walton 1989).](image2)

![Figure 7. Oudekraal Fontein (Walton 1995).](image3)

![Figure 8. Bredasdorp (AvG 2005).](image4)

Some researchers such as Jan van der Meulen (1963), basing his view on his (incorrect) supposition that most of the early settlers were German, looked to the architecture of Germany,
specifically Schleswig-Holstein. Here he compared the local gable architecture to that of the Cape, despite the fact that not only were the majority of the colonists Dutch but they also did not build gabled structures until much later.

Much more to the point would seem to be Hugh Floyd’s examination (1982) of the early Cape cottages. He posed the question: Where does this way of building stem from? He pointed out, to those who consider the architecture to be Dutch, that features such as gables and sliding sash windows did not become prevalent on rural buildings until much later. He drew attention to the similarity between Cape cottages and the cottages built by farmers and fishermen in a number of other Western European countries. In particular the marked similarity that existed between Cape cottages and the cottages of northern France, the Isle of Skye and Scotland - and this similarity can be extended to include the crofts of the Hebrides and Ireland.

Figure 9. Verlorenvlei (Walton 1972). Figure 10. Vermaaklikheid (Walton 1995).

This creation of basic shelter as a response to the most basic of human needs follows similar patterns in a wide range of Northern European countries and is verified in the drawings found on early title deeds in the Cape where buildings are indicated (Figs 5 and 6). Some, but not all, clearly show end entrances that reflect a Dutch town model. As one examines these drawings there seem to be some, albeit limited, similarities with French houses, such as the erection of a cross on the apex that was a particular French tradition.

There is a powerful connection in the simple hipped roof cottages of the Cape with those that are widespread throughout Northern Europe. There is always a local variation in the use of available materials. The common use of thatch for roofing is noticeable. Even in areas of France where this is not the case now, it transpires that clay tiles have replaced earlier thatch. It is recorded that when Julius Caesar went to Gaul he found that the Gauls lived in thatch huts. But what of other connections? The Huguenots do not appear to have brought any architectural heritage with them, but when we see a 17th century farmhouse from Haute Provence it is surprising to find wall cupboards and beamed ceilings such as one finds at the Cape. We can but conjecture as to any possible link.

Floyd makes the point that there were two types of rural buildings in Europe: longhouses and halled houses. He describes longhouses as meaning a single room or row of rooms of constant depth and standard cross section. Although we know that halled buildings were used for some outbuildings at the Cape it is the longhouse that predominated and probably gave rise to the T- and H-shaped houses. These James Walton also describes and links particularly to Danish examples. He also finds similarities in the longhouses with their attached barns and stables (Figs 11 and 12).
But what is interesting is the possibly ancient genealogy of the longhouse. It is a house form not found in Central Europe or in the Eastern regions of France or the Mediterranean where a cellular structure seems to predominate. Given the wide range of locations in northern Europe where longhouses are found it leads to speculation as to their origins. There would appear to me to be strong connections between the longhouse and the buildings of the Vikings. In terms of movement, conquest and settlement it would at least appear plausible as an explanation for the geographical location of the examples shown. Vikings are known to have settled in all of those areas. If this is the case, it would mean that the Cape cottage has a genealogy that goes back to the 7th or 8th century.

If one examines the Viking longhouse, one sees a number of similarities to the Cape longhouse (Figs 13 and 14). Entrances can occur either on the end or on the long side. The organisation of the internal space shows a similar layout. Looking at the form of outbuildings found at the Cape, it would appear that they share a number of common features with Viking structures. In both, the swept eaves over the entrance is apparent, despite difference in materials.

It is particularly in the form and construction of the kapstvl shelters that we find the greatest similarity (Figs 15 and 16). This is known to be a very simple and primitive form of shelter, and when compared to Viking shelters they appear to have much in common. (I must stress that at this stage it is pure conjecture on my part and I have not researched the connection to verify my hypothesis.) It is interesting that there is also a clear Viking precedent for the halled structures that were mentioned by Floyd and that these are also found at the Cape, notably as outbuildings at Vergelegen (where archaeological evidence was found), and at Meerlust and Morgenster.
The early town houses in Cape Town show a much clearer link to Dutch precedent with their end entrances, such as were found in Dutch and Belgian towns. Brink argues persuasively that this inherited form was brought to the Cape and formed one of the prototypes for the early Cape houses. This would appear to be the case in many of the early houses erected in Cape Town, and a similar urban plan form can still be seen in the houses of the Bo-Kaap (Fig 17). But early drawings of dwellings (Fig.3) also show a central entrance on the side, though not always associated with a symmetrical layout, such as later became the norm for Cape farmhouses.

From these simple beginnings grew a tradition of building at the Cape, which adapted these inherited characteristics to changed circumstances in Africa. These include available materials and climatic variations, the need to meet changes in function, and the adaptation of farm complexes to new agricultural requirements. Out of the European vernacular architecture of the early inhabitants grew a new and unique hybrid architecture that was to develop a powerful legacy, extending into the twentieth century and offering clues for sustainable building in the twenty-first century.
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Regional differences in Cape vernacular architecture

Hans Fransen

1. Introduction

As usual, my lecture tonight will be more like a slide show than a proper lecture. As you know, I am an art historian by inclination, and the physical, visual element always stands central in my interest. Unfortunately, old-fashioned colour slides as a photographic medium are becoming ‘vernacular’ nowadays, and mine in particular, most of them half-a-century old now, complete with their mildew – or call it ‘patina’. But as such many of them are mouth-watering reminders of a time that when our farms were still just that and not yet – if at all accessible to the public – smart B&B’s with garish sign-boards and entrance gates, tarred farm roads and spas.

Let me start with similarities, so that later on it will be easier to spot differences. Perhaps the outstanding feature of ‘Cape Dutch’ architecture is its coherence, to the point of standardisation (Fig.1 Bokkerivier). I have discussed and illustrated this fact in this room on more than one occasion. This standardisation can be ascribed to the limited fund of available craftsmanship that is likely to characterise a small settlement such as that at the Cape. It affected plan forms, details such as structural woodwork: ceilings, but also doors and windows, and decoration (mainly gables).

Figure 1. Bokkerivier.

2. Basic features

Standardisation is most in evidence in the almost mandatory use of the ‘letter-of-the-alphabet’ plan with which you are all familiar. It is absolutely unique to the Cape in the way in which it dictated the shape of humble cottages, outbuildings, homesteads and even public buildings alike. It may well have had its origin in 1685 in the instructions left by visiting Commissioner

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2 Talk presented to the Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa on 20 April 2010.
Van Reede tot Drakenstein, whose many aims to improve conditions in the settlement included promoting decent but simple-to-erect housing for the settlers. It is thought that it involved the use of standard-length beams and roofing timbers and resulted in elongated and later wing-type structures of standard width of about twenty feet.

A more immediately recognisable feature of Cape Dutch farmhouses, and at first also town houses, was the use of the centre gable. Though gables are found in their thousands all over Europe, there they are nearly always end-gables, roof terminations. At the Cape, with its transverse type of façade, it was the centre gable that came to be the ‘face’ of the house – something rarely found in the mother countries.

So we have the ‘letter-of-the-alphabet’ and, to a lesser extent, the (centre) gable that are the two outstanding and unique features of our Cape vernacular. And it is those two features on which I want to concentrate regarding ‘regional differences’. Let me say at the outset that we may find little evidence of cleanly demarcated ‘regions’, and some of the variations we find may be partly due to chronological factors.

3. Variations in plan formation

3a. Letter-of-the-alphabet

Let us first look at the occurrence of the letter-of-the-alphabet plan. We know that some early dwellings in fledgling Cape Town itself were longhouses along the street boundary, many of which were given kitchen wings along one boundary producing an L-shape and, when more space was required, another, often narrow back-wing on the other side, producing a letter U. These plans are still visible, fossilised, in many houses subsequently raised to two storeys (Fig.2 ground plan of Koopmans-de Wet Museum). It comes as no surprise, then, that the majority of free-standing homesteads near the City, in the Table and Constantia valleys, too, are U-shaped.

Elsenburg (Fig.3) is not in the Peninsula, but the work of Martin Melck, with his roots in Cape Town. The U-shape is very rare elsewhere. Where it does occur, interestingly, is where it is used for official buildings such as drostdy (Graaff-Reinet, Uitenhage) or parsonages (Tulbagh, Paarl, George), almost certainly because it looks more ‘classical’ and presentable from the sides than an H-shape with its untidy ‘gaps’ at the sides.

Figure 2. Koopman’s-de Wet House. Figure 3. Elsenburg.
It is well known that the preferred plans for homesteads in the Boland are the T-shaped (Fig.4 Uitkyk) and the H-shaped (Fig.5 Welgelegen), the latter often having grown from the former. Not that they are not found further afield (Fig.6 Zonquasdrift). But in more distant regions, different, sometimes haphazard shaped are found, such as uncommonly elongated shapes (Fig.7 Eenzaamheid, Langkloof), irregular T-shapes (Fig.8 Boplaas, Mossel Bay and Fig.9 Keerom, clearly having grown in several ‘instalments’), and irregular H-shapes (Fig.10 Boskloof near Clanwilliam).
And some can be seen as a cross between the T- and U-shapes (Fig.11 Geelbeksvlei near Mossel Bay, and Fig.12 Klaarfontein, the latter clearly grown in stages). Yet others have entirely irregular shapes, yet always conforming to the standard wing width of a little over six metres (Fig.13 Lokenburg).
b. Square, ‘double-deep’ plans
This restricted wing width, introduced well before 1700, and using the various letter-of-the-alphabet shapes, proved perfectly capable of providing fairly spacious accommodation. But eventually it was sometimes abandoned in favour of wider roof spans, though at first as exception and side by side with the other shapes. The first such a ‘double-deep’ house was that ‘nouveau-riche’ showpiece Groot Constantia (Fig.14), where in c.1791 Hendrik Cloete had the front part of his conventional U-shaped house doubled in depth giving it two rows of rooms, with a 'spine wall' (Fig.15) built up to the roof ridge for part of its length to help support the extra roof weight. Possibly Cloete called in the help of architect/engineer Louis-Michel Thibault (who probably also designed the cellar) to perform this important ‘first’. And to fill up the extra space at the top of the gable – like the roof twice the normal height – Thibault in turn had to call in his associate Anton Anreith to provide him with a little niche with sculpture.

Now that this had proved feasible, other such houses were soon to follow after the turn of the century, such as at Old Nectar (Fig.16), where the builder has succeeded much better than Thibault at Constantia in devising a gable that manages to integrate the façade. But in the town of Prince Albert (Fig.17) we see, as at Groot Constantia, how the gable has to be stretched heavenward to reach the required height, standing side by side with houses of normal width and roof height. And at Dennehof (Fig.18), also at Prince Albert, the double-deep, rectangular house has reached its full consummation.
Because the double-deep plan was exclusively a later, 19th-century phenomenon, this caused it to be most frequent in towns established in that period, such as Worcester, Robertson and Prince Albert. So, in effect, it has become not only a period feature but a regional feature as well.

For those of us who have learned to love the perfect proportions of the walls, roofs and gables of the letter-of-the-alphabet house, the double-deep plan is not always the most attractive, the roof dwarfing the walls and the gables having to rise up to meet their tops (Fig.19 Santo, near Ladismith), and Van Reede might have turned in his grave had he lived to see them.

c. The ‘stoepkamer’ house
Perhaps here I should mention another later development: that of stoepkamers. Almost without exception the letter-of-the-alphabet houses grew their wings towards the back. But the front, with its gable, its stoep and steps and its entrance, was always a most important part of the house. No wonder then that, when additions were required, these often took the form of rooms sprouting from either end of the façade, each with a door into it. These could also symbolise
outstretched, welcoming arms. Very occasionally, such as at Matjesfontein near Calvinia (Fig.20), now ruined, these were treated like yet another letter shape, under thatch and of standard width. But usually such stoepkamers took the form of flat-roofed additions (Fig.21 Nooitgedacht, near Graaff-Reinet). These are not too frequent in the Boland.

Figure 20. Matjesfontein, Calvinia.  
Figure 21. Nooitgedacht, Graaff-Reinet.

4. Variations in gable design

So much for variations in the ground-plan of traditional Cape dwellings. Are there discernable regional differences among the centre-gable designs? To start with, if there are, these may be, like the double-deep plan, as much attributable to changing period styles as to regional factors. In areas that were settled at a later date, or took longer to achieve a general prosperity allowing for the erection of grander edifices, gables are more likely to be of the (later) neo-classical group of designs.

Figure 22. Groot Constantia.  
Figure 23. Stellenberg.

4a. ‘Constantia’ gables

Close to Cape Town, early curvilinear, ‘Baroque’ gables were never numerous, although Veldhuysen, Claremont was a fine specimen. But there is a ‘Constantia group’ of gables, of which Groot Constantia (fig.22) is clearly the prototype, breaking abruptly with the curvilinear
type that had been the fashion until then – a statement of the Cloetes’ ‘with-it-ness’ if ever there was. They feature a segmental pediment, hooked scrolls at the base and often a set-forward centre, related to the Amsterdam *halsgevels*. At Stellenberg (Fig.23) the model has been successfully adapted to a normal roof height, and Hoop-op-Constantia (Fig.24) is a slightly simplified version. Inland, there is only Schoongezicht, Stellenbosch (Fig.25), where a grandson of Hendrik Cloete had such a gable erected – the best of the lot, in fact.

**Figure 24. Hoop-op-Constantia.**

**Figure 25. Schoongezicht, Stellenbosch.**

### 4b. Dormers and gable-less homesteads

It stands to reason that, statistically, in outlying districts there is probably a greater occurrence of homesteads without any centre gables (Fig.26 Old Boys’ School, Swellendam), or merely with dormer ‘gables’ (Fig.27 Rectory, Clanwilliam). The latter obviously fulfilled the task of the ‘poor man’s centre gable’, providing a ‘face’ to the house, light to the loft, and a safe exit in case of the thatch catching fire.

**Figure 26. Old Boys’ School.**

**Figure 27. Rectory, Clanwilliam.**

### 4c. Boland gables outside Boland

We may find that, where gables do occur in more remote districts, different hands have been at work, often of somewhat lesser dexterity. This is to be expected for reasons similar to those causing the lesser occurrence of gables there in the first place. But there are exceptions: gables that are fully the equals of the best of Boland gables. That of the mission town of Saron (Fig.28) was since destroyed in the 1969 earthquake. There is also the fine gable of Karnemelksvlei near
Citrusdal (Fig.29) and, further afield, the end gables of the Old Parsonage in Riversdale (Fig.30), pulled down some thirty years ago. Such gables may represent work by reputable plaster craftsmen from Stellenbosch or Paarl, commissioned to work in the more outlying districts.

4d. Regional groups
But let us look at groups of gables that are clearly different from what we could call the 'metropolitan mainstream'. First of all there are some distinct groups that are obviously the work of one particular builder/plasterer. Wouldn’t it be nice if one day we could get to know their names?

Swellendam has its very coherent Kliprivier group (Fig.31), in which the entire gable seems to represent a split pediment – or perhaps rather, the hooked scrolls of metropolitan neo-classical gables have been simplified into straight wings. Another example not far from there, in the town itself, is ‘Rothman House’ (Fig.32).
And the Hex River Valley-Breede River area has a group which I call the ‘square-scroll’ family (if you will allow me to use such a contradiction in terms): Bokkerivier, a perfect homestead if ever there was one (Fig.33), duplicated at Hervat and Waboomsrivier.

**4e. ‘Belated Baroque’**

It is interesting that the holbol, concave-convex shape – which strictly speaking belongs to the pre-1790 Baroque period – proved popular well into the 19th century. It is such an eminently
decorative style, with the outlines curving into, and then again away from the basic triangle. But it often started displaying a lack of skill in setting out those curves. I am including a few examples: Geelbeksrivier (Fig.34), its curves strangely subdued, Mill Street Caledon (Fig.35), Petersburg near Graaff-Reinet (Fig.36), with multiple curves, Boomplaas near Oudtshoorn (Fig.37), a rather jolly effort of 1810, Kombuis (Fig.38), near there, and very remote Elandsvei (Fig.39) up north.

Figure 34. Geelbeksrivier.

Figure 35. Mill Street, Caledon.

Figure 36. Petersburg.

Figure 37. Boomplaas.

Figure 38. Kombuis.

Figure 39. Elandsvei.
4f. Simplified neo-classical
But as I have said, the curvilinear style, though it lingered on for decades, was essentially an 18th-century style, while most regional 19th-century centre gables are in essence neo-classical. A large group is formed by the much-simplified gables found on houses, mostly in towns, dating from the mid-19th century. The town of Worcester is full of them (Fig.40 Beck House), but they are also found in Robertson, Montagu and Prince Albert, where this gable rather comically struggles to reach the top of a double-deep house with its extra-high roof (Fig.41).

Among these late neo-classical gables is also the interesting small group featuring six pilasters (Fig.42 Noree, near McGregor, which is also a splendid example of the stoepkamer house).

Figure 40. Beck House, Worcester.

Figure 41. Prince Albert.

Figure 42. Noree.

4g. Outlying oddities
Throughout the outlying districts gables are found that are hard to classify but are charming in their own right. Here are a few of them. Ongegund, near Malmesbury (Fig.43), is closely related to the conventional neo-classical wing-scroll design, though the scrolls have grown out of proportion. In the town of Malmesbury itself (Fig.44), this gable belongs to the same family, though to mould the scrolls themselves was clearly beyond the plasterer’s skills. Doornrivier, near Worcester (Fig.45), is a beautifully preserved old house, with a slightly awkward gable, but
the equally unusual one at Langkraal, near Mossel Bay (Fig.46), is full of well-executed ornamentation.

Figure 43. Ongegund.  
Figure 44. Malmesbury.  
Figure 45. Doornrivier.  
Figure 46. Langkraal.

4h. Late flowering of the Cape gable
I have always been fascinated by a group of very late gables in and around Montagu, and in the Koo and the Keisie nearby. They are clearly all the work of a man I like to call the ‘Master of Baden’ (Fig.47). They all date from the 1880s, a time when the Cape Dutch style was already running to seed, when the Cape Georgian style had come and gone, a time when High-Victorian was starting to make an appearance and in which corrugated iron was causing the destruction of hundreds of earlier gables. A time also when the Herbert Baker neo-Cape style was not far away. Note the feathered outline, and also the rosette, the latter also found on gables of a different design in the vicinity of Robertson (Fig.48), while the feathers are also found on several double-storeys in the area: Goede Moed in the Keisie (Fig.49). These are clearly the work of one particular plasterer.
4i. **How far did the gable style spread?**

The easternmost surviving ‘Cape’ gable I have come across is that of a house in Uitenhage (Fig.50). I have also found gables in Cradock and Middelburg – all as far as seven hundred kilometres from Cape Town.

Which brings me to the question: were decorative gables ever a feature in the Boer Republics and Natal, and if not, why not? All these areas were settled (by Boere, that is) before the mid-19th century, at a time that the gable style still flourished in the Cape. Even allowing for the ravages of the Boer War, early pictures of Pretoria and Pietermaritzburg, for instance, show townscapes much like the Cape _dorpe_ at the time, with rows of thatched cottages lining the straight streets. But there are little or no signs of centre gables – or of letter-of-the-alphabet shapes, for that matter. Was it a general lower level of prosperity out there, or an absence of skilled builders?
5. Other Cape building forms

We take our leave of our regional varieties of Cape Dutch ground-plans and centre gables. There are of course other architectural building forms we can call traditionally ‘Cape’ and which occur in certain regions more than in others. For the sake of completeness, here are some of them.

5a. The urban flat-roofed style
Originating in the streets of Cape Town from the mid-18th century onward, when thatched roofs were rightly outlawed because of the fire hazard, these were replaced by near-flat roofs and mostly raised to two storeys (Fig.51). Very occasionally the type also occurs outside Cape Town, as in Tulbagh (Fig.52), and as a farmhouse near Stellenbosch (Fig.53 Uitkyk).

Figure 50. Uitenhage.

Figure 51. Strand Street, Cape Town (Jan Brandes 1786).

5b. The rural flat-roofed style
Related to the above is the use of flat roofs in the *platteland*, often in conjunction with the thatch-roof style (Fig.54 McGregor). And at Hoeko (Fig.55), perhaps a conversion of a single-storey dwelling (note the half-windows).

5c. The flat-roofed Karoo style
Well known, thanks also to Gawie Fagan’s splendid photographic essay ‘Brakdak’⁴, there is the Karoo style of flat-roofed houses, still found in great numbers in Graaff-Reinet (Fig.56) and in smaller towns like Hanover (Fig.57). When free-standing, they are often given extra interest by the addition of *stoepkamers* (Fig.58 Prince Albert).

5d. The Karoo corbelled building
Also in the Karoo, scattered over many miles of farming area, the ‘corbelled’ building is found (Fig.59 Goraas), once much more numerous than today.

6. Churches
And churches? There were always many of these in our vast territories, serving the various denominations, including the missions. Churches, too, form part of our vernacular heritage. Much generalised, three main groups can be distinguished, though these are not necessarily regional groups.

Closest to Cape Town, the earliest Dutch Reformed churches were built as yet another form of the letter-of-the-alphabet, namely the thatched and cruciform X-shaped church type known as the pulpit church. The original churches of both Cape Town and of Stellenbosch were built like this, and those of Tulbagh (Fig.60) and Wupperthal (Fig.61) still exist. Sometimes these were fitted with pointed windows to give them an appropriately ‘Gothic’, more church-like look. Very occasionally, funds permitting, a tower could be added, as at the mission of Haarlem in the Langkloof (Fig.62).

Secondly, there is the true Cape version of the Gothic Revival style, in which a skilled architect, Carl-Otto Hager, was the main figure, as at Ladismith (Fig.63) and many dozens more.
And lastly, the churches of ‘the Bishop’s Wife’, Sophy Gray, who introduced, also by the dozen, a version of the English stone village church, always axially planned in Anglican fashion, attractive but hardly ‘Cape’ (Fig. 64 Caledon).

Figure 60. Tulbagh.

Figure 61. Wupperthal.

Figure 62. Haarlem.

Figure 63. Ladismith.

Figure 64. Caledon.
7. Outer woodwork

7a. Windows
To conclude, I briefly want to refer to features relating to outer woodwork, features that at this stage one can also hardly describe as regional but that deserve investigation in greater detail, such as the identity of their makers. We all know, of course, of the two types of 18th century windows, the casement (Fig.65) and the full-blown sliding sash (Fig. 66 Alphen), the latter neatly lined up with an uit-en-tuis door with drop sash.

We should also be familiar with the gradual changes during the English period (Fig.67 Kleine Konstantie, Paarl): the ever-larger pane size, the introduction of the double-sliding sash, the recessed placement in the wall, and the omission of the half-width windows (because the Dutch voorhuis was replaced by an entrance passage providing more privacy but less hospitality). For doors, the vertically divided ‘stable’ door was replaced by the vertically divided door.

Figure 65. Casement. Figure 66. Sliding sash, Alphen.

Figure 67. ‘English’ features, Klein Constantie, Paarl.
7b. Fanlights
Another feature that could one day be studied, as it shows a great deal of originality and craftsmanship, is the fanlight. While the 18th-century fanlight, often lining up with the upper sash of the windows, is usually rectilinear as we saw just now at Alphen (the decorative ‘rococo’ fanlights forming an exception), the Georgian, 19th-century ones often add the decorative touch to the façade centre. At Bloemendal (Fig.68) this is still a true radiating ‘fan’-light. But this soon led to a greater variety of playful shapes (Fig.69 Graaff-Reinet, Fig.70 Valkenburg and Fig.71 another from Graaff-Reinet).

Figure 68. Bloemendal.  
Figure 69. Graaff-Reinet.

Figure 70. Valkenburg.  
Figure 71. The Residency, Graaff-Reinet.

8. Conclusion
It never ceases to amaze me what a variety of forms can be found within the comparative uniformity of the architectural vernacular of a far-flung and never very populous little colony. Enough aspects of it remain to be studied to keep the Vernacular Architecture Society busy for many years to come.