

## HANS FRANSEN 1931-2017

I would like to pay tribute to the incredible contribution that Hans made to our understanding of Cape architecture. Through the iterations of the extraordinary survey that he, initially with Dr. Mary Cook, made of Cape architecture, he created an awareness and understanding of the range and nuances of our architectural heritage. Beginning with *the Old Houses of the Cape* in 1965, its revision in 1980 as *The Old Buildings of the Cape* and its final revision in 2004, he mapped the old buildings of our region with meticulous care, travelling by car or by bicycle. To quote from the Vernac website: “The fieldwork for one book alone which covers over 5 000 buildings and includes 700 photographs, required travelling 25 000 km by car and 5 000 km by bicycle. Good thing that he’s a veteran of six Comrades Marathons and twenty-one Argus Cycle Tours!”

What was so significant about his work in this field was the overview that it provided, giving much greater insight into the development of Cape architecture and the way regional variants developed. Hans’ ability to synthesize by looking at the bigger picture led to a greater understanding of the development, for example, of the letter of the alphabet plan form of the farmhouses and how this varied from region to region; his classification of Cape gables and their regional variations; the changes in detailing, as influences on the architecture changed from the Dutch period to the English. He also looked at the relationship between Cape architecture and its European antecedents, tracing roots and influences.

Hans’ studying of Cape architecture involved not only looking at the buildings, but also measuring out the layout of the werfs and then also relating these to each other. He studied the work of early photographers such as Ravenscroft and Arthur Elliot, with his study of the latter’s work resulting in the publication, *A Cape Camera*, a standard reference work for us all.

His understanding of not only architecture but also fine art and applied art, manifested in publications such as *Three centuries of South African Art*, his writings on Cape furniture (*The Cape Chair- Die Kaapse Stoel*), all of which contributed towards a truly holistic contextual understanding of our cultural heritage here at the Cape. This breadth of knowledge also extended to an interest

and exploration of the development of towns in the Cape, culminating in the publication of *Old Towns and Villages of the Cape* as well a study of Stellenbosch.

I came to know Hans through the Vernacular Architecture Society of which he served as Chairman in 1971. Hans was involved with the Society from its inception and so contributed to the study and understanding of Cape vernacular architecture. Hans was generous with his knowledge and insight and shared this with everyone. He was always approachable on any issue or concern about our architecture and, when I was Chairman of the Society, he was always willing to give a talk on a broad range of topics related to vernacular architecture. He loved to discuss aspects of Cape architecture, whether it was the work of Thibault or Anreith or anonymous designers and builders. He was, however, reluctant to adopt modern technology, relying instead on his trusty collection of slides and my ancient slide projector- with me always warning him that when the bulb went in the projector that would be the end of it since I could no longer get replacement bulbs! But it never came to that.

His final work on *Cape Baroque and the contribution of Anton Anreith*, was published in 2014. Telling of his generosity of spirit was the indebtedness that he acknowledged of people such as Dr. Mary Cook. What Hans said of her I would like to quote, but rewrite, as I believe it sums up for me the person that Hans was. He described Mary Cook as having great knowledge of our cultural history which she was always willing to share.

So misquoting Hans: *Of all the scholars with whom I have been fortunate enough to share my interests, this cultural historian from the Netherlands had the most intimate knowledge and understanding of the cultural history of his adopted country. Insights which he never hesitated to share with others.*

Hans is irreplaceable and we will sorely miss him.