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About VASSA

The Vernacular Architecture Society was founded in 1964 as a result of an interest in folk buildings stimulated by a course at the University of Cape Town Summer School led by James Walton. In the same year Bernard Rudofsky put on the exhibition “Architecture without Architects” at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. He was the first to make use of the term vernacular in an architectural context, and brought the concept into the eye of the public and of mainstream architecture.

For want of a generic label we shall call it vernacular, spontaneous, indigenous, rural, as the case may be ...

Before then little was known of the existence and characteristics of such buildings in the Western Cape, and hardly any published information was available. Since then the "Vernacs" have promoted and encouraged the study and recording of local vernacular architecture and its associated material culture, by fostering research, arranging excursions and study tours, organising lectures and publishing original work.

The object of VASSA was to have a society with the object of recording South African vernacular architecture, not just the Cape Dutch – the fantastic stuff – but also the simpler things, to study it and to create real interest in it.

Armed with detailed topo-cadastral maps and padkos, excursions into the Cape hinterland are the highlights of “vernacking”, and the traditional hospitality of farmers and villagers has led to several long-lasting friendships between curious visitors and their hosts.

Monthly talks and local outings are arranged, and at least one annual long weekend excursion to more distant places. These are researched and led by volunteer members and invited experts with relevant knowledge, with the aim of learning how to identify, debate and interpret what we see, and to engage with the property owners and occupants.

Information isn't forced upon our members, but with the services of capable people who see what other people can't, and out of their shared knowledge, we have built a corpus of valuable information.

Walton was a prodigious researcher and publisher, first in Britain and then in southern Africa. The founder members of VASSA include the foremost South African architectural historian, Hans Fransen, whose series of books, Old Buildings of the Cape, record the changes and continuities in the built environment from the 1960s to 2004. The VASSA Journal was founded in 1999 in Walton’s honour and, coinciding with his death, also marked the end of that era. Over the years, special focus recording projects have been undertaken: either commissioned (Walmer Estate, Cape Town), or arising out of a member’s particular interest (Bokkeveld), or as a result of questions raised during an excursion (Karoo corbelled buildings, the Sandveld project).

Extracts and rewritten content from VASSA journal articles, excursion notes, surveys and special publications form the body of this Souvenir. Our thanks to the authors. Many of the original versions can be found on www.vassa.org.za, where readers can also find full citations and bibliographies. We gratefully acknowledge access to images from the Walton and Pretorius Special Collections at the J.S. Gericke Library, University of Stellenbosch. Other images are attributed where known and we regret any omissions.

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Can Vernacular be restored?

**Hans Fransen** is a long-standing member of VASSA. He has been involved in arts, culture and conservation since arriving from Holland in 1955; as curator of the Stellenbosch and Groot Constantia museums, assistant director of the SA National Gallery and until retirement, director of the Michaelis Art collection.

The declared interest of the Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa (VASSA) is the study and documentation of the local form of architecture to which its title alludes. Over the half century of its existence, the Society has built up an impressive body of knowledge and understanding in this field. Even after all that time, precisely what constitutes vernacular architecture is still being debated. Is a homestead like Stellenberg “vernacular”? Or a mansion like Leeuwenhof, a city dwelling like the Koopmans-de Wet House, or a church like the one in Tulbagh? No-one would deny that these buildings relate to the true Cape vernacular of Sonquasdrift or Wupperthal. Yet it is also clear that there are differences. True, it is not essential to come to a final verdict, to draw a watertight dividing line, but it remains an interesting debate. On the whole, we have tended towards the inclusive. We have even drawn topics like Carl Otto Hager, Herbert Baker and even Art Deco into our fields of interest.
Among the first international authors to attempt to categorize “proper” vernacular architecture globally – without actually making much use of the term – was the American writer Bernard Rudofsky. For a photographic exhibition he curated in 1964 – at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, of all places – and the accompanying book, he coined the pithy term "architecture without architects". It carries the perhaps slightly less successful sub-title “non-pedigreed architecture” (one might argue that vernacular building – an often timeless art – has more of a pedigree than designed architecture). And in the cover blurb it is described as "communal architecture – architecture not produced by architects but by the spontaneous and continuous activity of whole groups of people".

Rudofsky's exhibition and book offered a collection of stunning and to us, vernackers, often mouth-watering photographs documenting pit dwellings in the Chinese loess belt, hollowed-out baobab trees in Africa, vast troglodytic cities carved into mountains in Sicily, mountain-hugging terraced dwellings on Greek islands, courtyard dwellings in Marrakash, fortified villages in the Caucasus, enormous waterwheels in Syria, pile dwellings or tree houses in New Guinea, woven houses in Congo. True to his time (discovering the excitement of the "primitive"), Rudofsky did not include any Western European folk building. He could so easily have shown examples of Dutch windmills, of Frisian pyramidal all-under-one-roof farmhouses, of Norwegian stave churches, of half-timbered houses in Flanders or England, of sod-dwellings in Ireland.

I cannot remember whether James Walton, our founding father, was aware of Rudofsky's book. I assume he must have been; the book appeared when VASSA was young. James, I am sure, would have loved it to have included Cape watermills and dovecotes. Or perhaps even a letter-of-the-alphabet homestead.

Let us, once again, try to sum up what, to most of us, characterizes vernacular building. It is the erection of structures by builders, trained in non-technological, time-honoured techniques, with no other brief than to provide the best solution for the intended use under the local circumstances, using only locally found natural materials. It derives its beauty (at least to us, but very probably also to its users) from its fitness-to-purpose quality, never overshooting its target, to the harmonious interaction with its setting, and to its unfailing unity of scale and texture. Our own Cape colonial vernacular fits all those qualities to perfection.

**Restoration**

One of the other topics that often concern our Society and has been addressed in numerous lectures by the many architects and architectural historians in our midst, is that of restoration. Over the years we have seen changing concepts come and go. There was the “earliest stage” school of thought (which could result in almost total demolition), the “best stage” (a highly subjective notion, which could involve the loss of much authentic later material), “layering” (the retention of valuable material from different stages, sometimes resulting in an appearance which never actually existed), or “minimum intervention” (the easy way out of the dilemma).

Something akin to restoration is "re-erection": the dismantling and removal of entire structures to a new site, usually an open-air museum. There are several splendid such museums, of which I have seen Cloppenburg in Germany, Arnhem and De Zaanse Schans in the Netherlands, Bokrijk in Flanders, Den Gamle By and Den Gamle Landsby in Denmark. They are, in every way, proper museums, fenced-in with admission fees, labels, numbers and guide books, which turn these into true "collections", their exhibits arranged in well thought-out arrangements. As such their importance as inspiring educational institutions cannot be over-estimated. But they also share the limitations of museums: they separate the objects from the user and spectator and reduce them to the status of mummies.
"Worcester: Die Boland Opelugplaasmuseum" (Restorica 12, 1982).

Brochure for "Kleinplasie Living Open Air Museum", Worcester.

Training project and restoration of houses at Genadendal (W. Arendse 2004).
There is also an undeniable and inevitable degree of artifice in the re-erection of structures in open-air museums. Very few to-be-moved structures have survived entirely unchanged, and often a considerable amount of informed guesswork is needed in their re-erection. The staff of open-air museums are usually fully qualified to do this and the end result can be entirely credible. But, yes, the structures remain museum artefacts.

What about our own vernacular architecture? Our Sotho decorated hut complexes, our Zulu kraals, our Sandveld werwe? During my own lifetime, I have seen these dwindle, almost to extinction. We don't have any open-air museums in our country. The closest to it in the Cape are perhaps two or three “museum villages”. The one in Swellendam consists of the Drostdy, the gaol and gaoler’s cottage, nearby Mayville (Cape Georgian), and rebuilt Zanddrift (originally from Ashton). The Stellenbosch Village Museum is a cluster of buildings from various periods preserved in situ. The grounds of the Worcester Museum (old Kleinplasie) have been developed with structures forming a traditional Cape farm yard. All are of great interest but, being museums, necessarily contain elements of artifice.

So, can vernacular structures really be restored, in the true sense of the word? And we are not talking about the Boschendals and Koopmans-de Wets, which are products of skilled designers. There have been brave attempts. Mostert’s Mill has been restored to working order without losing its basic vernacular-ness. The Fourie House in Heidelberg, at c.1740 one of the oldest materially unaltered houses in the Cape (VASSA Journal 21, June 2009) was saved from total collapse by Jill Hogan’s “cob” technique, but most of the original Fourie house was built of soft-baked and mud bricks. Similarly, doors were, sometimes very convincingly, “knocked up” from bits of old timber. As I put it in the Journal, all this does help “retain the ‘pioneering’ look” of the old house, but it can hardly be described as a proper restoration. This would simply not have been possible.

Our most substantial complexes of vernacular architecture are, or more correctly were, the older mission villages. Apart from their kerkwerwe – the church, the parsonage, etc. – restoration of even a small section of the villages’ architecture has usually proved to be out of the question (quite apart from it being rather pointless). For the inhabitants, as for us, time has moved on and “vernacular living” belongs to the past. In Mamre, as we saw during our recent excursion, not one single dwelling survives – or survives in a recognizable state – from the hundreds that were there even thirty years ago. And while traces still remain of the once so characteristic “river-ribbon” layout (if we may call this sort of village layout vernacular, too, with long and narrow strips of irrigated land below each of the lowest row of dwellings), these will soon disappear.

That is what makes James Walton’s work so significant. He, too, must have realised that threshing floors, Norse mills, fowl nests and kapstylhuisies will not last forever. But he documented them. And we, following in his footsteps, have been trying to do the same for the ever-dwindling stock of vernacular architecture. A tiny fraction of it might one day be moved or rebuilt in museum villages. At best, some surviving structures could be repaired, by a well-meaning farmer, to survive for another few decades. But vernacular architecture simply cannot be restored or created anew. It would no longer be vernacular. So let us enjoy it while it lasts. As Rudofsky’s book says: “the philosophy and practical knowledge manifest in this communal architecture [is] an untapped source of inspiration for modern industrial man trapped in his chaotic cities”. Even as such, this inspiration will not last forever.
Reading the structure of old Cape buildings

During a presentation made at a VASSA workshop in 1999, “Understanding and recording Cape vernacular architecture”, Dirk Visser spoke to slides on the screen. A tape recording was later transcribed and lightly edited by VASSA members (VASSA Journal 9, 2003). Dirk had an innate understanding or feeling for old Cape buildings which is why his insights on vernacular architecture, expressed here in his own words, are so interesting.

Reading the structure of a building is like reading a book: there's no point in reading if you don't know the language; and you must want it to tell you something. So, if you're dealing with vernacular Cape work, you have to have some knowledge of the way that they built buildings in those days.

Whether the building is made of stone or brick or clay, the wall thickness is equal to that of the length of two bricks plus the plaster. That wall is founded on boulders laid in a trench. The topsoil is removed until you are down to solid earth then you put boulders in. They tend to work like a French drain which to some extent prevents rising damp – but not entirely.

The wall goes up at the thickness of two bricks to [loft] floor height, or first floor height, where the beams are placed spanning from wall to wall, about five and a half metres. From that level up the wall reduces to a brick and a half thick. That walling goes up to where the thatch eaves are. Where the gable projects beyond the roofline the gable wall reduces to one brick thickness at the thatch level. This is a rule that is applied generally, but remember all the rules have exceptions. I know of houses, for instance Tuynhuys in Cape Town, where the walls are two and a half bricks thick down below, a half brick thicker than the normal. Newlands House is three bricks thick. So, the bigger and grander the building the more solidly it’s built.

The walls must have openings, for doors to enter through and for windows to let light and air in. The window openings and the door openings have to be spanned. So the door or window frame is made thick and stout and it carries that half brick width of wall in which it is set – the outer half brick width. The rest of the opening is spanned by a wooden lintel that spans from one reveal to the other. So the wall above the opening is supported partly by the frame and partly by the lintel, the lintel being on the inside. The lintel is flatter than the frame. What happens then is the lintel and the frame only have to support the half-moon of brickwork below the relieving arch. When the opening is very high, for instance a high fanlight, and the head is close to the eaves line or close to the line of the solder (ceiling/loft floor) where it's under the gable, then the relieving arch disappears. This is for the simple reason that the frame and the lintel can quite adequately carry the small amount of wall above them.

"Cape Dutch" and "Georgian" doors and windows (www.bokaap.co.za/architecture-of-bo-kaap).
Ground floors are often made just of earth or of clay. I have a recipe out of a book published in England in the 1830s on how to make clay floors in country houses which I used when we had to point between the cobble stones on the stoep of the Posthuys at Muizenberg. We didn’t want to use cement there and we found that clay was very good, and after a time it got so hard it was like cement. Other ground floors could be timber planks, often placed on earth without any ventilation underneath. The space between the rising walls is filled up to just below floor level – in the Peninsula, often with sea sand full of shell material – and then half logs are laid in that with the cut surface upwards and then the planks are nailed down onto that. Tile floors are laid on clay backing or a lime mortar backing.

I have always assumed that the Cape beam is a certain size, spanning 18 feet [5½ metres]. But when you get a house grander than the normal house – like Elsenburg [which Dirk restored] – the span is one metre greater than the normal house. When we opened up, we found the stubs of the original beams and I had to admit that Martin Melck [the owner and builder] had more knowledge of building than the average vernacular builder. His beams were a centimetre deeper and a centimetre narrower [than the norm], so it was a more effective beam.
First the beams are placed in position on the walls and then the ceiling boards or *spaansriet* (reeds) are placed on that. The boards are nailed down onto the beams. *Spaansriet* is laid down but often not nailed as the nails tend to split the reed, so they are sewn together with twine or with reed. At Graaff-Reinet [where Dirk restored the Drostdy] we found that there was one room which we knew was the kitchen, but there were no ceiling planks. When we looked down, once we removed upper floor strips from the loft floor, we found the tops of the beams had little shadow lines closely spaced running from side to side, but not a single nail or nail hole. I said this was a *spaansriet solder*, so the *spaansriet* was put back again. Then we had to decide what to tie them with, as the builders wouldn’t have brought twine from the Cape all the way to Graaff-Reinet. So we got a *bees* (cow or ox) tail to make *roriem* (thongs), with the hair on, a building method which I have seen in that part of the world.

The *spaansriet* is covered with a clay layer, which can take various forms. It can be unfired clay tiles, laid down, and I’ve seen brick ones and also quite a variety of types. That clay layer is intended to prevent a fire in the thatched roof from getting into the interior of the building, so that at least your goods inside don’t burn.

On top of that the roof structure is erected. The roof trusses, which are the basic support elements, are placed on alternate ceiling/loft beams, or every third beam, depending on how elaborate or stout the building is to be made. The trusses, then, are standing on the loft floor. The trusses carry *kaplatte* (purlins) at the eaves line and at the *hanebalk* (collar beam) position and at the ridge where the truss beams cross. The *kaplatte* anchor the roof: the ends are then built into the gables, which then ties the gables together and ties the whole roof together. The *kaplatte* then carry the *sparre* (uprights) which carry the *latte* (laths) to which the thatch is fixed. *Latte* are usually rounded twigs, (*sparretjies*), or more commonly *spaansriet*. The centres are at 127 mm from the first three spaces down the row, and then 230 mm, and the top three are again 127 mm.

Where the roof structure has disappeared you look at the ceiling beams on which the trusses stand. You will be able to identify where the roof trusses were because the beams will have the strap of an iron anchor showing inside on the one side. In many houses if you look up you will find anchor straps on every alternate beam, then you know that the trusses stand on alternate beams.

In a straight, long building you may have a problem with the stability of the roof. So to brace it you introduce diagonal members in the space between the *kaplatte* and the main truss. They are usually about 45°. Quite often you don’t have to do that because if you have a front gable the valley rafters of that front gable form the diagonal members and they therefore give you the support. Of course, when you elaborate the house to H-plan you have two crosses in the roof, where in each case you get four diagonals to brace your roof. So it’s interesting, like one thing supports another, or:* *een hand was die ander* (one hand washes the other).

People considered mountains dangerous, a wilderness. You turn your back to the mountain. Or face downhill so people come up to your house. It gives you dignity. You may lift the house on a platform to look at a distant view of rolling farmland and cultivation rather than wilderness. At Newlands House, for instance, where the entrance goes down the slope to the house from Newlands Avenue, it is such an undignified approach. The reason is that the house has been turned around, you originally approached from the other side.

While the English started influencing building techniques and styles in the Cape Peninsula [from 1806] with the introduction of the Neo-classical style, beyond the mountains they were still carrying on in the old way. In the 1830s, when the so-called “Old Boys’ School” or Olyvenkrans College House was built at Swellendam, old-fashioned 18th century Dutch sashes were placed into that house. There is nothing English. Beyond the mountains, at Klaasvoogds, Montagu, for
instance, you find that towards the end of the 19th century gabled houses were still being built, but some of those gabled houses had corrugated-iron roofs right from the start – they never had thatch. You can see families of gables in this time – the same group of people, builders or designers, were responsible for the design of those buildings.

Archival records can be incomplete. For instance there is a very fine farmhouse, Windhoek, near Klawer (in a hole in the mountains where the wind comes howling down so it is very aptly named). I asked why there was no record of it. The owner said that it was a loan farm until the 1940s when two brothers inherited the farm and wanted to divide it and so had to have it surveyed and registered. Before that they couldn’t afford to have it surveyed. He said the house was built in 1815. As far as I was concerned, the house was not the original one because the stable next door had original wall paintings, a frieze near the top of the wall. Who puts wall paintings in a stable? So that must have been the original house. You have got to look at all the possible sources.

Every time you deal with an old building you have to start again and make it a whole debate: What is it? What has it become? What does it want to become? To what extent do you restore? An interesting situation was when Stellenbosch Village Museum restored the old police station, Landdrost Bletterman’s house. We knew it had six gables because the studs remained in the loft, but we didn’t know what they were like and had to decide what to put on. I suggested the Wesleyan Parsonage, which stood across the road, could be used as a model, but that was too early for Museum Director Marius le Roux’s wishes. I suggested the gable from Paarl Diamant, because from the inscription one gable was of the same family as the Drostdy gable at Stellenbosch. Marius went to the archives to find out who owned Paarl Diamant at the time that it was built, 1794. Unbelievably, it was owned by Bletterman’s brother!

When the building is simply to be kept as an artefact, representing something of its time, then it’s easy. You restore it as a “museum artefact”. At the Posthuys in Muizenberg the floor – so interesting – was left as excavated by the archaeologist. It became a thing to show.

Those are all general logics which come from a study of the buildings. You must then say to yourself, these are the rules, but of course rules are there to be broken. So when you start studying the building you must look at it in that language, but then if it says something which does not fit your assumption, you must accept what it tells you.

*Drawing of roof elements by David Glennie (VASSA Journal 16, 2006).*

*In the roof space at Wildepaardekloof, near Ashton (J. Kramer 2013).*
Recording on the Northern Frontier: The Bokkeveld

Starting in 2000, the Onder-Bokkeveld Project grew into one of VASSA’s major recording and research activities of the decade (VASSA Journal 28, 2013). The team comprises a multi-disciplinary group of volunteers capable of recovering both the tangible and intangible heritage of the group of remarkable farms in the vicinity of Nieuwoudtville in the Northern Cape. At that time, Nigel Amschwand was already interested in the journals of early travellers in the area and had been following their routes to see what remained, while Tim Maggs was a recently retired archaeologist. Maggs knew Julia Meintjes who, with her husband Willem Strydom, had restored and were living in part of an old farmstead in the Onder-Bokkeveld. During recording trips in the field the team was also joined by a number of local people thanks to the efforts of Julia and Willem. Many lasting friendships have emerged from the project.

This area has been called the Onder-Bokkeveld since the early 18th century and centres on the town of Nieuwoudtville. It is an elevated and relatively well-watered plateau surrounded by much less hospitable landscapes. The Onder-Bokkeveld must always have been recognised as a green island in an arid sea. For the colonial frontiersmen it offered an area suitable for grain cultivation surrounded by areas at best suited only for extensive grazing. Naturally, these all occurred at the best water sources.

While the project did not set out to examine the pre-colonial past of the area we did come across some evidence. Rock paintings and scatters of Cape coastal pottery, with the characteristic lugs associated with Khoikhoi herders of the second millennium, show that the Onder-Bokkeveld had long been a magnet for settlement. We also found some alignments of stone forming rough enclosures which may also have been the work of pre-colonial people.

A typical day’s recording would see two teams led by architects tackling the buildings one by one while the third team surveyed the whole werf. Others would be conducting interviews in the neighbourhood and taking photographs. To quote from our first publication (2001): “The project covers individual buildings, styles, raw materials and how these differ from the vernacular of other areas. We are interested in the composition of the werf and how this fits into the landscape. ... We are also particularly interested in the people of the farms and their lifestyles; not just the owners but also the landless classes of people who made a contribution to farm histories”.

The basic recording work progressed, farm by farm, and the resulting archive now covers most of the older Bokkeveld farmsteads. Architecturally they show a typical, though simple, Cape vernacular with undecorated gables or wolfeus ends to the buildings. There are some langhuis structures, while the more elaborate houses tend to be T- or H-shaped. Locally available restio (Cape reeds) species for thatching are less than ideal and have led to the need for steeper roof pitches on some buildings. We also noted composite layers of thatching on some buildings, where rye straw with the heads still attached formed the under-layer with restio laid on top.

Some buildings were of mud brick but the great majority were of dry stone construction, usually with a clay plaster. Styles of stonework vary greatly and it seems that, while some buildings were probably built by the people on the farm, there were also some specialist masons. It has been possible to stylistically link different buildings on various farms to the same builder and date them. Much of their beautiful stonework still stands today, although in most cases the roofs and plasterwork is long gone. Wooden lintels may have rotted and collapsed but the rarer stone lintels have stood the test of time.
As our research developed we became aware of a complex pattern of land use and land tenure on the Bokkeveld plateau. While these basically fit into the wider Cape context of the 18th and 19th centuries, some farms developed in a unique way. One factor here was the local geology, for it emerged that the most complex farms were established in a roughly north-south line along the boundary between the Cape and the Karoo Supergroups. The quartzitic sandstones of the Cape, forming the western side of the plateau, provide sandy soils, relatively poor in nutrients but appreciated as heiveld (heathland) for grazing livestock. To the east the finer-grained sedimentary formations and dolerite outcrops of the Karoo provide richer soils – the rooigrond – the best arable land. Farms which had both types of soil were evidently able to support larger communities, as shown by their large clusters of buildings, forming small hamlets.

Interviews and archives provided information on the network of landowners and how this progressed through time. Here, as elsewhere in the Cape, with the death of the landowner, the farm was normally divided equally among the heirs. This led to the repeated subdivision of land until, as one farmer acquaintance of ours put it: "the portions became so small that you could only farm tortoises". Faced with this issue, some of the major Bokkeveld farms developed what seems to have been a unique solution. The centre of the farm, where the original opstal (building complex) was situated, continued to be the site of all or most of the new buildings added by the next generation of owners. The terms "common werf" and "vierkant" (rectangle) are still used for this space. Some examples are indeed four-sided, like those on Groenrivier and Willemsrivier, originally called Klipperiver.

Instead of dividing the farmland up into blocks, as was so often the case, some of these common werf farms took to a radial pattern of subdivision resulting in sector-shaped plots radiating outwards from the central werf. Situated on the geological boundary described above, each recipient of these subdivisions required a sector of the heiveld for grazing and a sector of the rooigrond for cultivation.

Despite the shared common werf, individual landowners remained relatively self-sufficient – each aspired to have their own threshing floor, barn and horse mill. The larger farmsteads contain several sets of these structures. The common werf probably also contributed to the tensions characteristic of neighbourhood relations. While ownership of the agricultural plots may be clear, the common werf presents problems. Ownership of individual structures on it is recognised, but the space itself is regarded as a single unit in which people hold shares. After many generations this has led to large numbers of people holding tiny fractions of a share in the werf. While some of the houses are still maintained, many buildings have been abandoned and joint management action is well-nigh impossible.

Members of the Bokkeveld team at Soutpan (J. Kramer 2006).
Matjesfontein

One of the key members of the VASSA Bokkeveld recording group was the late Guido Lugtenburg, a professional architect, and his contributions in this particular case were beautiful drawings and diagrams of the buildings. See Amschwand, Matjesfontein, 2001, for a plan of the werf.

Like so many Cape farms, the general pattern of Matjesfontein, with its werf located at the reliable water source centrally situated in relation to the boundaries, still reflects its origin as a loan farm of the Dutch East India Company period. It developed during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries into a thriving community based on a large werf. Today, the numerous scattered buildings on first sight present a rather confusing picture, more a dispersed hamlet than a typical farm.

Matjesfontein (farm 791) was located on an intermittent stream, which accounts for the fontein and matjes (rushes) that grow in it. It was initially granted as a loan place to Pieter Loubser on 22 November 1742, and changed hands over the years until it was surveyed for Daniel Jacobus Louw senior and granted in 1838. It was later divided into three. One portion came into the hands of the Van Wyk family in 1892. Today the werf still has three different owners, two of whom interacted enthusiastically with VASSA and have restored their buildings to a very high standard.

There are three substantial houses, each with its own complement of outbuildings. The outbuildings mainly reflect the two traditionally important aspects of local farming, livestock and grain, in the form of kraals, sheep dips and threshing floors. Two buildings were evidently southuise used for the preparation and storage of meat products.

The independence of each of the three farm subdivisions is best demonstrated by the fact that each has its own set of grain processing buildings. There are three circular threshing floors, each with a barn. More surprising is the evidence that there were three separate horse mills. This substantial investment to allow independent flour production by each landowner seems to have been the norm for 19th and early 20th century Bokkeveld farms. Roughly walled plots beside the stream were evidently gardens where vegetables and fruit trees were grown.

In its heyday, Matjesfontein supported a substantial community; part of a building even served as a school. Massive labour inputs are still visible, for example in the system of stone-walled fields that extend from the werf far to the west. Apart from the landowners and their families there would have been "white" bywones (artisans, labourers or share-croppers) and numerous "coloured" families as labourers. Labourers’ families lived in the small buildings as well as a relatively late square cottage to the northeast. Three other small square stone ruins may also have served this purpose.

Bokkeveld historical sources tell us that many labourers as well as bywoner families continued to live in round or rectangular pole-and-thatch huts as recently as the 1950s. One cottage, with its buitekombuis (open-air kitchen), postdates the 1951 aerial photo and was built for a son of the family from one of the large dwellings. This simple structure indicates that a surviving strand of the local vernacular tradition persisted as recently as the later 20th century.
Drawings of dwelling houses at Matjesfontein by Guido Lugtenburg (c.2000).
Soutpan

The farm Soutpan lies south of Nieuwoudtville in the Bokkeveld Karoo. In 1850, when a survey was made of the Clanwilliam District, it is shown in the Veldcornetcy of Biedouw. In 2006 the Bokkeveld Research group of the Vernacs gathered for a weekend at this isolated farm in order to record the extraordinary old werf. David Glennie’s comprehensive yet elegant drawings of House A are included here as an example of their work.

No loan farm records have been found to indicate that the farm had been granted during the period of Dutch East India Company administration, but there is evidence that in 1811 Jan Harmse Steenkamp was at Soutpan as his initials (J.H.S.K) are engraved on the rock-face behind the farmstead. In the 1818 census, Steenkamp was listed as occupying Soutpan, Klipfontein and Driefontein. Thomas Petrus Arnoldus Theron was given perpetual quitrent grants for them in 1831. Soutpan remained in Theron hands until it was transferred to Frederick Hendricus Boltman in 1897, a relative by marriage. The farm remains in the Boltman family to this day and their history has been documented in Van Hede tot Boltman Verlede, privately published by Ell-Marie Schutte in Pretoria.

House A

According to Ell-Marie Schutte, Stoffel Briers built this house for Lettie Briers. There is an inscription dated 1899 reading “CJ Briers born 1878” on the rock-face behind the farm buildings. This is almost certainly Christoffel Jacobus Briers who was married to Aletta Boltman. Aletta was Frederick Hendricus Boltman’s daughter. One can assume that the house was built at the time of their marriage, therefore around 1900.

The depth of the house, at about nine metres, indicates a relatively late building but the woodwork looks much older and the ceilings seem to have been reclaimed from elsewhere. It is possible that, as Petrus Jacobus Boltman was a carpenter and builder, the doors and windows were reused from other and older buildings.

Structures outside the werf

Upstream from the werf on the other side of the Soutpans River are extensive stone kraals, and nestled against the cliffs are two small shelters that were probably the dwellings of stock herders. There are also traces of kraals used by earlier inhabitants in the area and rock art of the type thought to be associated with Khoikhoi pastoralists and hunter-gatherers. These comprise finger dot patterns and faded human figures.

Kraal walls and rock art site near the Soutpan werf.
Drawings of Building A at Soutpan by David Glennie (2006).
Lokenburg

André Pretorius undertook extensive research on the history and vernacular buildings on the farm Lokenburg, which is forty kilometres south of Nieuwoudtville in the Onder Bokkeveld (VASSA Journal 4, 2000). The owner’s wife, Elmien Louw, a direct descent of Schalk Willem van der Merwe who bought a portion of the farm in 1835, took a great interest in the farm and had already carried out considerable research of her own over the years.

The earliest known recorded reference to farming in the Lokenburg region dates from 27 November 1744 when Claas Visagie was allowed to graze his livestock there. By the time General de Mist and Henry Lichtenstein visited the farm in 1803, they recorded that: “the owner [Jacobus Adrianus Louw] of Lokenberg is the richest man in the district”. The farm was surveyed in February 1820 but only granted on 20 February 1832, when it was registered in the name of Louw’s son-in-law, Andries Oberholster. The circular loan farm comprised a total of 7971 morgen.

Of the sixteen buildings or traces of buildings, one ruined and three standing buildings on the werf were identified as dwellings. The earliest permanent dwelling on the werf (15) would appear to have been a five roomed structure built of stone, with a voorhuis, three bedrooms in a row (not inter-leading) and a kitchen with indoor hearth and attached outside bakoond.

In 1970 the main house (1) had no fewer than seventeen rooms of which fifteen were inter-leading. There was also a stoepkamer and buite vertrek bathroom making up the 44 metre long façade. It is T-shaped with the ‘tail’ housing the kitchen being double the customary width and beneath one low-pitched roof. A paved stoep once ran the entire length of the main house. The gable at its right end was altered and given a cap in 1975.

The second house on the farm is an F-plan (7 and 8). The original section of this house, the “tail” (8), was probably built by or for Schalk Willem van der Merwe, and was a modest rectangular three-roomed house, with thatched roof and reed ceilings. It partially burned down in about 1873, after which Schalk’s son, Francois, had the double-storey wing added. This became the front façade and changed the configuration of the homestead to its present F-plan. The builder was Koos Boltman, who gave both old and new structures the benefit of a corrugated iron roof. Fransen describes the double storey’s interior as “a gem of Georgian or early Victorian taste”. Re-plastering of the double-storey house in February and March 2000 revealed that the lower storey is built entirely of dressed stone and the upper of red bricks, whereas all the other bricks used on the property are of blouklei.

Lokenburg’s third homestead (14) is a T-plan with Cape Dutch style gable added during “restoration” in 1956. The voorkamer, two bedrooms, dining room and passage all had reed ceilings, which were replaced with new beams and fresh reeds in 1956. The thatch is springbokriet, which is superior to zonkwariet.

Pretorius ends his article by pointing out that: “Time and the elements relentlessly continue to take their toll. Lokenburg has paid the price, with corrugated iron slowly replacing local thatch and old walls collapsing. The ongoing and inevitable repairs are costly and thorough restoration is uneconomical so the character of this historic werf will continue to change.”
Buildings on the werf at Lokenburg (photos A. Pretorius, plan H. Fransen).
Recording at Soutpan: David Glennie (above) and Tim Maggs (right).

Archaeological finds from a Karoo midden (J. Kramer).

Gravestones beside the Sutherland-Williston road, Karoo (J. Kramer 2011).

A wide variety of evidence is gathered during VASSA surveys and expeditions.
Graaff-Reinet: restored and preserved

In August 2004, VASSA members set off for a four day excursion to distant Graaff-Reinet. In the 1780s a Drotdy (magistracy) was strategically established on what was once the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony with its long history of adventurers and rebels, and border wars with the Xhosa, but from the mid-19th century the town thrived as the commercial hub between Port Elizabeth and the mineral riches of the interior.

The better-known and important buildings of Graaff-Reinet underwent some of the earliest and most prestigious restorations in South Africa, such as the Parsonage / Reinet House, the Residency and the Drostdy. This was largely thanks to Anton Rupert, born and raised in the town. With all its historical associations, monuments and restored buildings, Graaff-Reinet is virtually a living museum and it contains more previous national monuments than any other town in South Africa. These include its more modest buildings and streetscapes, which are regarded as highly significant from a vernacular point of view.

In the side streets are many rows of single storey cottages which seem to have been built from 1850 onwards when the town was filled with immigrants from Europe. They represent about 70% of Graaff-Reinet’s older homes. They are typical, symmetrical, squared off, flat-roofed houses of the Karoo, built close to the site boundary and connected by walls to give continuity of style and consistency in scale. Ronald Lewcock referred to them as “climatically adaptable architecture, achieved by the employment of relatively primitive building techniques and crude materials” (Early 19th Century Architecture in South Africa, 1963: 415).

Many were enclosed in Victorian times with an elegantly curved corrugated iron roof supported by iron pillars and broekie lace. The stoeps formed a social function as the residents would sit out in the cool of the evening and interact with neighbours and passers-by.
Little Karoo

*Pat and John Kramer*, together with *Judy Maguire*, have organised several memorable excursions into the Greater Karoo regions.

The Little Karoo is the fertile valley enclosed by the Swartberg, Langeberg and Outeniqua mountains. The area was explored by European settlers from as early as the late 17th century, who encountered KhoiSan people living there. Many Khoikhoi names for the landscape remain as testimony, for example Kango ('Natteberg'), Kanna (Mesembryanthemum), Kansa, Kammanassie (the washing river), Outeniqua (people of the honey bags), Karoo (arid, dry), Hoeko (the Hoe peak), etc.

On the way to Calitzdorp in April 2014, we stopped to see the sad remains of an unusual double-storeyed flat-roofed building which is now beyond repair. It has been photographed and painted by John Kramer many times since the 1970s. This wonderful vernacular building is situated at *Het Kruyspad*, in a key position on the road from Montagu to Barrydale. It stood close to an uitspan and, as usual when travellers had to halt, a small community grew up to provide food, repairs to wagons, shoeing for horses, postal services and other facilities.

The building here was two rooms deep. The front part was a winkel (general store) and butchery, the rear part was a smithy and stabling. The upper storey was divided into four rooms which were reached by an outside staircase at one end of the building, and no doubt provided accommodation for travellers who had to stay overnight.

The windows and doorway had raised architraves; those around the three ground-floor windows were stepped, whereas the others were plain. Although the façade presented seemingly symmetrical features, closer examination indicated that the measurements of the frames vary somewhat and it would appear that these were added without careful planning. It seems quite possible that the frames were added to the existing building. The stepped pediment, bearing the initials JS and the date 1921, was added at the same time.

*The Groenfontein valley, near Calitzdorp, is a favoured local, and lately international, back road route and home to an arts, culture and crafts community. They have invested in restoring, renovating, replacing, rebuilding and adapting many of the old buildings, and making their mark on the landscape.*

The *Kraaldoring* gallery was once a barn, and the house a farm school. With the help of a local builder, who was born in the valley, the new owners have created a retreat from Cape Town that will also serve as a venue for creative workshops and studio space.

*Living Waters* (a portion of the farm Groenfontein) was the original access point to the Wyenek donkey trail to Gamkaskloof, and the many old buildings on the property include a late 19th century manor house (Green Gables) with its several outbuildings, and a fruit store converted into a restaurant.

The Retreat at *Groenfontein* is a grand Victorian-style house, built with wealth from the ostrich boom on the largest farm in the area. It still has its original elaborate cast iron work, fireplace surrounds and ceilings.

The school and house at *Kruisrivier* have been modified and furnished in an eclectic but sympathetic style. It now serves as a gallery for photographs and sculptures.
Het Kruyspad (J. Kramer 2012).

Kraaldoring, Clementina’s gallery (J. Kramer 2014).  
Kruisrivier, Roger Young’s gallery (Calitzdorp.net).

Dwelling house at Living Waters (J. Kramer 2014).
Buffelsdrift Valley

The VASSA annual away-weekend gives members a chance to see vernacular buildings further afield and to meet and discuss local problems of conservation with their owners. On a trip like this, the VASSA group consists of people who are genuinely interested and concerned about vernacular architecture. Among them are historians, architects, archaeologists, engineers, artists, and many other disciplines, all eager to engage with one another and the owners of the buildings. We never criticize and accept that each owner is grappling with his own set of problems involving an old building. The aim is that in the process knowledge is gained on both sides, but most of all we aim to have an enjoyable experience in the company of friends.

The Buffelsdrift Valley lies just outside Ladismith and has long connections with the Van der Vyver family. The first trekboers to gain grazing licenses in the valley in 1749 were Jan la Grange and Louis Fourie. These French Huguenot surnames indicate that they were possibly the sons or grandsons of the original Huguenot settlers. The first Van der Vyver on the scene was Isaac van der Vyver who got the lease in 1768. The actual farm Buffelsdrift was granted in 1839 to three people: Nel, Olivier and Van der Vyver (Isaac's son), and was a typical circular farm. In 1887 it was divided into nine portions.

The valley has suffered economic ups and downs. For many years it was a fertile valley providing for the families who were settled there. However, during the ostrich feather boom in the late 19th and early 20th century, all other farming activities were abandoned in favour of ostriches. Lucerne to feed the ostriches was virtually the only crop grown and the valley was bustling and prosperous, full of people, a school, shops and numerous social activities.

When the ostrich boom collapsed at the beginning of World War I, both as a result of the advent of war and the increasing popularity of the motor car which rendered large ostrich-feather bedecked hats impractical, the economy of the valley collapsed and most people lost everything. However, a few, including the Van der Vyvers, did manage to hang on, only to be devastated by a terrible drought in the 1930s. After this catastrophe, the valley lost most of its population.

Over the years, growth has slowly returned, and apart from a record-breaking flood in 1981, the valley is becoming increasingly productive with newer crops such as olives being introduced. It is also becoming popular with city people seeking a getaway and as a result many of the older buildings are now being renovated to serve as country homes.

On our trip down the Buffelsdrift valley we visited four buildings, each different architecturally, but each deeply embedded in the history of the valley and most had Van der Vyver family connections.

Our first stop was the beautiful flat-roofed house at Vensterkrans, so typical of Ladismith architecture. Next we visited Uitspan, a Victorian house which has been beautifully and sympathetically restored, as has the barn which has been converted to provide accommodation. Next door we visited the virtually unspoiled gabled Buffelsdrift homestead which has a date of 1852 on the gable. There are also two gabled barns on the werf. Further up the valley we arrived at the Winkelplaas homestead which was built in 1835. Unfortunately from the 1970s to the 1990s the house was left to go to ruin and much of the woodwork was stripped out. In 1994 new owners started renovation work, which is still being continued today by the present owners.
Vensterkrans (J.Kramer 2014).

Buffelsdrift (J.Kramer 2014).

Winkelplaas (J. Kramer 2014).
Corbelled buildings of the Great Karoo

The theme of the annual VASSA excursion in 2006 was the corbelled buildings of the Great Karoo. The weekend resulted in the formation of a “Karoo Research Group” of VASSA volunteers, who went on to discover and record well over 100 corbelled buildings, most of them previously unknown, and resulted in a Master’s degree in archaeology for one of the members, Pat Kramer. See also VASSA Journal 17, 2007 and VASSA Journal 20, 2008. Photographs by John Kramer.


The area in which these buildings are located is roughly bounded by the towns of Williston, Carnarvon, Loxton and Fraserburg, with a few outlying buildings around Sutherland. This is an area with no trees, a fact often commented on by early travellers, and a rainfall of less than 200mm a year. But it did have stone of the Karoo Supergroup right on the surface. This stone was laid down under calm water conditions and the result was flat beds of fine-grained stone, in other words, perfect for being worked with crude implements available at the time, such as crowbars and pick axes, and perfect for providing flat slabs of stone for building materials. However the lack of trees to supply wood for supporting beams for pitched or flat roofs meant that the buildings would have to be entirely constructed of stone, from floor to roof.

The buildings were constructed for the use of trekboers. Both European and Baster trekboers arrived in the area from the 1750s, but they led a transhumant life, moving seasonally and living in wagons, tents and matjieshuis (reed mat huts) which they adopted from the Khoikhoi (local herders). Loan farms were applied for and granted, but these were seen as temporary places and the trekboers could move on when the site no longer suited them.

When a permanent building was deemed necessary, a corbelled building was the only option. Some of the trekboers would have had knowledge of the technique of corbelling from the construction of lime kilns and bakoonde (ovens), and some may even have known corbelled buildings in Europe before they came to the Cape. The Bushmen (hunter-gatherers) did not have a stone building tradition. The Khoikhoi built stone kraals for their stock, but lived in matjieshuis. Ironically, it is these very huts which the trekboers adopted with alacrity that probably accustomed them to living in a round, domed structure, after which a corbelled building would not seem strange at all. The other group which might have had some influence were the so-called “mantatees”, a Sotho-speaking people who crossed into the Northern Cape from what is now the Free State to escape the chaos of the Mfecane. They built corbelled buildings, although these were small. It would appear that the corbelled buildings resulted from the pooling of knowledge available in the community at that time and that the design and sophistication improved with experience over time.
Corbelled buildings were constructed to serve several functions on the werf. These are determined from the features of the building. Houses, therefore, have windows, niches and shelves. Kafhokke or chaff stores have none of these features, and their small doors usually face west to make the most of the prevailing wind for threshing. Other buildings were for soap-making with huge soap pots, or for kitchens with hearths and storerooms.

The date of the earlier buildings cannot be pinpointed with absolute accuracy, but incidental evidence tends to point to the 1820s onwards. The Cradock Proclamation in 1813 had altered the land tenure system and under this new land act farms had to be formally surveyed (at the farmer’s expense) and could now be legally sold for their full value or bequeathed to anyone. Anecdotal information puts the date of construction of the later buildings to the 1870s and 1880s. Many of the larger buildings continued to be occupied by farmers into the 1940s and 50s, after which time the wool boom of the 1950s enabled most people to build a new house, or to rebuild their old house substantially.

Much useful information about the social history of this part of the country in the 19th century is being gathered in the course of this project, which continues to this day with the Karoo Research Group making at least two sorties to the area each year.
Corbelled kafhok or chaff store at Witfontein.

Corbelled kitchen at Ou Skietkolk (exterior and interior).

Corbelled soap house at De Put (exterior and interior).
Different approaches

Buildings do not construct themselves, but are conceived, designed and built by the people who intend to occupy or use them. How a vernacular building was planned and constructed was a result of the person’s own experience, influences and environment, rather than book-learning or the intervention of a trained architect. It is this “building competence” of people in the past that we attempt to understand.

Architectural historians in many cases rely on the concept of style, whereas vernacular architecture is all about form. However, we cannot assume that the buildings which have survived into the present simply represent what existed in former years. The form, or material evidence, of older buildings is often buried beneath more recent events, and has become the domain of the archaeologist. Since the 1980s, archaeologists interested in the built environment of the more recent past have systematically incorporated evidence from the written records as well as the remaining or excavated evidence, in particular room-by-room inventories.

If we wish to understand how people “think” their built environment – the structures and the spaces around them – then it is helpful to talk to them, especially old people. For example, ethno-archaeology projects in the Northern Cape from the 1970s were designed to capture the living heritage of indigenous herder descendants, which are assumed to have links to practices in the more distant past. Walton also visited the area in the 1980s. Research teams are still today capturing the memories of families in places like the Bokkeveld, Karoo and Sandveld.

Historical archaeology

Mary Patrick and Harriet Clift excavated the remains of an old building on a farm situated in the Berg River Valley near Franschhoek, which represents a cultural landscape and life style associated with stock farming (VASSA Journal 15, 2006). Although only the foundations of the dwelling were recovered, they were relatively well preserved. It is an example of a longhouse consisting of a wine cellar, dwelling, wagon house and stable. Longhouses are usually associated with an early settlement phase and have generally not been preserved as they were soon replaced by, or incorporated into the “letter-of-the-alphabet” style Cape Dutch houses which have come to be associated with the Boland.

The Driefontein farmhouse was built in the late 18th century. It is a splendid example of a longhouse, and it was entirely worthy of preservation. It is regrettable that it was flooded by a dam in 2007. These hidden valleys, without obvious and classic architectural gems in sight but with archaeological remains still visible, may today prove more interesting and important to explore than their over-developed neighbours.

Ethno-archaeology

Lita Webley’s interest in the indigenous settlement of Namaqualand began in 1981 when she accompanied staff from the University of Stellenbosch to the Leliefontein Communal Reserve. She was amazed to discover that many of the inhabitants (descendants of the Namaqua Khoikhoi) were living in matjies houses, exhibiting a lifestyle which she thought had long disappeared. The research later extended to the Steinkopf and Richtersveld Communal Reserves. Ethno-archaeology is concerned with studying the ethnographic present in order to understand the archaeological past. Her concerns were mainly orientated toward pastoralist settlement studies (mapping distribution of settlements and descriptions of spatial arrangements and features), but she also asked the inhabitants about the use of domestic spaces and recorded information on leatherwork, the slaughter of domestic stock and on hunting (VASSA Journal 21, 2009).
Floor plan of the Driefontein longhouse (M. Patrick & H. Clift 2006).

Piketberg oral history project (2013-14): the team with Dolph & Sanna Faro at Bokloof, Thinus van Zyl at 't Voetpad, Lizzie Smith and her portrait at Keurbos, Amos Lambrechts at Ondersteplaas, and Maureen Archer & Elsa Naudé at Kapteinskloof (K. McCormick).
Archives

While much is known about rural buildings at the Cape, largely because they still stand, less is known about those that were demolished or much altered, and very little at all is known about the original buildings of Cape Town. Only a handful survive, such as in Strand Street, and even these belong to the late 18th century. The evolution of country buildings into U, T and H shapes has been well described by Walton, Fransen and others. By contrast, there is little work that describes and discusses the progress of Cape Town buildings, which responded to a different and more constricted settlement pattern.

What were the precursors and influences that led to the Cape styles in the town and the country? By investigating a wide range of resources, including inventories of deceased estates, it is possible to dig a little deeper into the architecture of a period that has left few physical traces in the form of standing buildings (VASSA Journal 18, 2007).

Inventories are considerably more than lists of possessions. The appraisers described the position and size of the rooms relative to each other as they listed the contents of a house (for instance, in the room to left, back room, room above, great room and little room). The sequence and number of rooms indicate the size and layout of a house. The contents of the rooms are useful for confirming the manner in which individual rooms were furnished and occupied. They suggest their dimensions and function, and often reveal the products of the household and activities of the inhabitants. The type and amount of furniture indicates how big the room must have been, and, if listed, the number of pull-up curtains (ophaal gordijnen) indicates how many windows there were in that room. The evaluation of the estate indicates the wealth of the household and the value of individual items, and the contents of a room indicates the relative status of the household.

The composition and nature of the occupants of a household affects the way a house works spatially. There was the owner's family, but there were also domestic and artisan slaves and an unknown population of servants around. Some heads of families were single men or unmarried women; some families were small and some were widely extended. Many households were also places of manufacture and retail and animal husbandry.

Oral history

Families of those who owned farms and properties, built the houses and worked the land actively maintain their stories and traditions, but the ones who remember first-hand many of the events and knew the people linking the 21st century to the 19th century are now in their 90s. Oral history should be a vital part of vernacking.

The Bokkeveld project included interviews with people associated with the farm Willemsrivier near Nieuwoudtville. Maureen Archer wanted to find out the reasons for the development of the area’s characteristic vierkantplase / kolonieplase with their multiple ownerships, and how the social dynamics worked (or didn’t in many cases). During these conversations, stories about individual buildings, family relationships and farming practices revealed valuable information about how the place grew, developed and changed.

In the southern Sandveld a wide range of people built or occupied a wide variety of places, many of whose descendants still live there and who can shed light on the complex cultural meanings and entangled histories of a vernacular architecture spanning 300 years. An oral history project under the auspices of VASSA and funded by the National Heritage Council, allowed six months of intensive work in the Piketberg, resulting in a collection of digitally recorded and videographed interviews, transcripts and photographic portraits (VASSA Journal 27, 2013).
Cultural landscapes

A cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium. The cultural landscape the result. (Carl Sauer, The Morphology of Landscape, 1925).

Some special places fall into both cultural and natural heritage sites and in 1992 UNESCO decided that places that show the relationship between people and their environment could be defined as "cultural landscapes". A cultural landscape is a geographic area that includes cultural and natural resources associated with an historic event, activity, person, or group of people. Cultural landscapes can range from thousands of acres of rural land to homesteads with small front gardens. They can be man-made expressions of visual and spatial relationships that include grand estates, farmlands, public gardens and parks, college campuses, cemeteries, scenic highways, and industrial sites. Cultural landscapes are works of art, texts and narratives of cultures, and expressions of regional identity. They also exist in relationship to their ecological contexts.

Typologies

North of the Berg River, early Sandveld buildings were simple, practical and modest structures built of local materials – reed, clay or stone – and suited to the region's environment and economy. During the early period these buildings were probably of a fairly temporary nature, initially constructed to house the Khoikhoi and slaves overseeing the herds and the wheat cultivation or the occasional colonist who lived in the area. They would likely have been conceived, constructed and adapted by their inhabitants along similar lines, using locally available materials and building competence rather than attempting to reflect the status or origins of the owners. Unfortunately, there are no securely datable surviving buildings from that period but we know that the matjieshuis tradition continued well into the 20th century along the northern West Coast, and forms were developed to suit their occupants. We can also extrapolate backwards from a later period when a wide variety of sapling and reed structures provided housing and outbuildings for people in the 20th century. Until the 1980s these reed-walled structures were still being built on the West Coast (VASSA Journal 23, 2010).

In an article about the hartbeeshuis / hartbeeshut, Walton (1987) carefully explained and illustrated the distinctions between three types of rectangular houses with reed walls. In summary:

- The kapstylhuis had a paired couple framework which was thatched, and it was, as the name indicates, a roof-like structure such as was used on walled houses (e.g. holiday houses at Puntjie).
- The hartbeeshuis or hartbeeshut was like a bakoond (oven) in shape. It had no direct counterpart in Western Europe (e.g. it did not have a cruck framework), but was more probably a modification of the framework of the circular Khoi mat hut to a rectangular plan.
- The type of dwelling with reed walls was a framed structure with post-and-pan walls largely composed of reeds (e.g. Sandveld, Hopefield, Western Cape coast and Langkloof), and was undoubtedly derived from framed houses introduced into the Cape by settlers. Although their walls were made of reeds similar to those of the hartbeeshuis, they should correctly be called rietmuurhuise.
A cultural landscape with many layers of history: Sandkop, Piketberg (K. McCormick 2013).

Walton’s typology of rectangular houses with reed walls (rietmuurhuise).
Upper Table Valley: transformation from rural to urban landscape

**Dennis Verschoyle**, planner and planning historian, worked for the Town Planning Branch of the Cape Town City Council. After his retirement he produced a detailed research policy statement on the future development of the area now commonly known as the City Bowl. Although his recommendations were never officially adopted, his work on the Upper Table Valley has been used by town planners and urban conservationists over the years. Prior to partial publication by VASSA, his research was only seen by a privileged few (NASSA Journal 3, 2000).

At the time of Jan van Riebeeck’s arrival in 1652 the Table Valley was visited annually by the pastoral Khoikhoi people who sought grazing, wild game, edible plants and water. When the Netherlands East India Company looked for a most suitable location for a provision station on the route to the East, these same resources were important determining factors.

At first it was intended that the Company’s own garden, worked by free labour, should raise fruit and vegetables for victualling the ships but as production did not meet the demand the Company decided in 1657 to import slaves and to grant land to free burghers who would sell their surplus produce to the Company. Some of these burghers were granted garden allotments (tuinland) in Table Valley, from one to eight hectares in extent, and these gradually spread fanwise from the embryo town towards the mountain. Their location was determined by the pockets of rich granite and sandstone soil, the contours of the terrain and the perennial streams from which water could be led for irrigation. After the building of the Castle and a new jetty in 1686, water was led off from the Platteklip Stream to service reservoirs lower down, from which it was distributed to the town, the Castle and the jetty. From this time onward, for close on two centuries, the competition between the growing town and the gardens for the available water runs like a continuous thread through the history of both.

Before the close of the 17th century the line of some of the present streets had already been determined. A wagon road followed the old path from the town to Kloof Nek along the line of Kloof Street, and another known as the Molenweg on the line of modern Mill Street gave access to the Government’s water mill at the top of the Company’s Garden. As new gardens were laid out, reservations were retained between the allotments to allow unimpeded movement on the wagon roads. At the sides of the valley on the lower slopes of Devils Peak and Signal Hill the light Malmesbury soil and the absence of perennial streams deterred the establishment of small gardens. Here the land was used mainly for grazing and dairy farming and was consequently laid out in larger units. These were the farms of Vredehoek, Leeuwenvoet and Tamboerskloof.

The inhabitants of Upper Table Valley were fortunate in living so close to the port and managed to trade directly with the crews of passing ships as well as supplying the townspeople daily with the produce of their gardens. As described by Otto Mentzel who lived at the Cape between 1732 and 1741: “The owners of these gardens dispose of their products by sending their slaves into town with baskets and supplying regular customers or casual buyers.”

From time to time new gardens were laid out but doordrifts or thoroughfares were reserved for the driving of livestock to rough pastures on the mountain slopes. Such were the origins of Buitenkant, Molteno Road and Kloof Nek Road. In addition to these thoroughfares there evolved an irregular secondary system of wagon ways traversing private property and linking the various homesteads. This was the origin of Prince and Hof Streets. So it was that in the centre of the valley there came into being an intricate network of property boundaries, drifts, wagon roads, irrigation furrows and windbreaks, overlaying but combining with the natural landscape to meet the needs of a purely agricultural community.
View of Table Valley, c.1730 (Museum Africa U5).

Market gardens in Table Valley, c.1804 (Iziko Museums Koopmans de Wet House, item 261).


Panorama of Table Valley, as photographed from the slope of Signal Hill in 1884 by W.F.H. Pocock.

"A perfect recreation of the 1884 photo, taken in 2013 by Paul Bruins" (Stuart Buchanan, www.capetown.travel/blog/entry/cape-town-then-and-now).
The problem of water supply continued to plague the settlement and by the mid-century the town’s water supply had not kept pace with its growth. Michiel van Breda of Oranjezicht voluntarily ceded to the Burgher Council the use of a very abundant spring which he had previously opened on his land. This spring became known as Stadsfontein and is now called the Main Spring. [It still produces 2.5 million litres a day and there are plans to divert the water to Green Point Common.] There was also competition for the water from the remaining springs and streams. The garden owners depended on them for irrigation, the Company for the watermills and the town for fire-fighting and flushing its canals. In 1774 and 1787 the Government drew up precise regulations to distribute the available water supply equitably among the various users and adjust the water rights of each garden. They remained in force until the reorganisation of the Town’s water supply in 1811.

The years from 1806 to 1815 were ones of prosperity in the Cape Colony, driven by the expenditure of the garrison and naval establishment during the Napoleonic Wars. Considerable export of wheat and wine had also developed. The agriculturists of Upper Table Valley benefited directly or indirectly from these conditions. By 1820 there were six private watermills operating along the stream from Platteklip to Orange Street. They supplied much of the meal for the bakers of the town and the garrison. The Burgher Senate tidied up the boundaries of the old wagon roads and laid out new streets such as Camp Street and Upper Orange Street, and imposed some sort of order on the discontinuous pattern of straggling gardens. This settlement pattern was adapted to meet changing needs as agriculture gave way to residential development, with subdivision of garden land for urban purposes at the bottom of Hope Street, St. John’s Street and Kloof Street. Some of these resulted in large residential plots with extensive gardens.

The period of prosperity was succeeded by one of political and economic uncertainty at the Cape, largely due to the emancipation of slaves (1838) and increased immigration from Europe. Urban development catering for the less affluent spread into what later became District Six. Some subdivision for residential purposes occurred between Roeland Street and Mill Street, in 1839 the old garden De Hoop was laid out for building lots, and deduction for residential lots continued here and there along Hof Street and Kloof Street.

A new prosperity was then built upon the phenomenal increase in wool production which led to the founding of new towns and the marked growth of the older centres such as Cape Town. A spate of land subdivision for residential development from the 1850s saw parts of the gardens Roodehek, Krynauws Hof, Zorgwyk, Zorgvliet and Weltevreden being broken up and the lots sold by public auction. With the growth of Cape Town its water supply became inadequate and the Municipality began to purchase the water rights of the garden owners and expropriate springs. But the solution of the source problem created a storage problem. The Molteno Reservoir was completed in 1886. This rang the death knell of market gardening. The fine estate of Oranjezicht was crippled by the loss of its springs and high urban rates, though Waterhof, which retained its own water, was fully productive until subdivision at the end of the century.
An unprecedented expansion of housing development took place in 1892 and 1897 with the establishment of new townships on the large Leeuwenhoek and Tamboerskloof estates which had formerly been dairy farms. About the same time further subdivision into building lots and infilling by piecemeal subdivisions took place. Housing development kept pace with subdivision partly due to the sudden influx of Uitlanders from the Transvaal in 1896 and 1897.

The last direct link with the gardens was broken in 1944 when the Welgemeend homestead was sold to the Provincial Administration for school purposes. Upper Table Valley had now become a typical middle class suburb of a city of the industrial age. Yet there are still indirect links with the past, the most enduring of which is the built environment in which the community lives. The two-dimensional framework of wagon roads, watercourses and gardens which had already crystallised by 1820, still forms the basis of the present physical infrastructure of streets, sewers, water reticulation and other channels as well as the adapted spaces for living, cultural and recreational activities. Only in the third dimension of vertical development has there been a marked change in the form of the built environment.

Market garden estates in Table Valley at c.1830, compiled by Denis Verschoyle.
Stormsvlei

James Walton’s plea that the “unique South African settlement” of Stormsvlei should be preserved underscored the opinion of Colin Cochrane, curator of the Drosdy Museum at Swellendam in 1984, who strongly but unsuccessfully recommended that the buildings and property, and also the bridge, be proclaimed national monuments. André Pretorius took up the cudgels and prepared a detailed history and description of the settlement (VASSA Journal 6, 2001).

Stormsvlei hamlet comprises a cluster of buildings on the farm Avontuur, 20 km east of Riviersonderend. It lies just off the N2 highway on a trunk road leading to present day Bonnievale, Montagu and Robertson, and is sited immediately before the bridge over the Riviersonderend. James Thomson acquired the hamlet in 1949 (excluding the modern hotel), together with 49 morgen of land. Through the purchase of the adjoining farm Avontuur in 1968, the property was extended to 250 morgen and was farmed by Morley Thomson and his son Sven. It was the Thomson family’s ambition to keep this unique settlement intact. Its well-preserved structures date from the late 18th into the early 20th century, having been literally frozen in time.

In order to keep the ships of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) supplied with meat, bartering with the indigenous people for livestock was an important and continuous task for those in command at the Castle of Good Hope. To this end exploration and trade expeditions to the hinterland were an ever-increasing activity and after 1665 sorties into the Overberg, the region east of Hottentots Holland Mountains, became more numerous. In time the VOC gradually withdrew from direct trade with the indigenous population and to meet its needs relied increasingly on those free burghers who had become farmers. As a consequence, the beginning of the 1700s saw even more people crossing the formidable Hottentots Holland Mountains to settle on loan farms in the Sonderend Valley, and beyond.

In 1781 Christiaan Andreas Storm was granted a loan place. He departed in 1786, but by that time his name was already associated with the farm on various early maps and we can reasonably conclude that during the half century preceding Storm’s departure a dwelling and outbuildings, however rudimentary, would have been erected. These then would serve as the nucleus of what was to become the hamlet, which, more than two hundred years later, still bears his name.

When the Sonderend River was in spate travellers had to bide their time in their wagons or, in later years, at the old Stormsvlei Inn which overlooked the crossing. Because of its strategic position, where the road to the north and south split from the Kaapse Wagenweg to Swellendam and beyond, the settlement was a hive of activity. A pont (ferry) was put into operation in 1885 and served until about 1910 when the present Van Eeden Bridge was completed. There was a toll-house on either side of the bridge, only one of which remains.

A survey of 1830 confirmed the presence of a dwelling with outbuildings, the location of cultivated lands, the route of the wagon roads to Swellendam and a description of the grazing. In 1841 it was purchased by the Cape Town merchant establishment Twentyman & Co for a substantial amount of money which would seem to indicate that the homestead/inn and outbuildings/stables had been enlarged to cater for an ever-increasing stream of travellers. The Twentyman period of ownership coincided with the settlement’s heyday, lasting until the great depression of the 1930s. The essential inn gradually became a large rambling structure until it was replaced with a modern hotel in 1920. Since Riviersonderend was a “dry” town, the hotel’s liquor off-sales did brisk business. Other facilities in the settlement included a store (which doubled initially as a post office), a bar, butchery, a church building, a school and a police station, stables, a smithy, wagon and furniture maker and a mill. The first sign of what is today characterised as the Victorian Manor House appeared as a T-plan house on the 1820 survey.
diagram. It was “modernised” before 1920 as the dwelling’s Victorian features appear on the Albers frieze painted in the house in 1921.

Key to the settlement’s capitalising on its important position was its ability to handle the horse transport which passed through. Stormsvlei received a major boost in the 1830s when both the Franschhoek and Sir Lowry passes were opened, breaching the formidable Hottentots Holland Mountains. They made the hinterland accessible to the greater speed of horse-drawn vehicles. With the advent of a regular postal service, Twentyman was contracted to provide relay horses, which had to be available at the scheduled time of arrival, and the outspanned team stabled and rested for the return journey. All this coming and going of travellers, traders, trekboere, and the mail coaches called for adequate accommodation not only for the animals but also for their owners, grooms, stable hands and the likes of blacksmiths, wagon makers, millers, bar tenders, and so on. As a result the Stormsvlei halt soon grew to become a self-contained settlement. By 1897 there was stabling for up to fifty horses, besides the stables for the exclusive use of the post coach.

Poor roads took their toll on wagons, carts and carriages, which had to be constantly repaired and the horses shod. The smithy at Stormsvlei was a particularly fine one. The large double-storey building that housed the smithy also accommodated a thriving wagon maker’s business and as many as ten wagons were made per year. They were in great demand and were decorated by special painters from Robertson and Montagu. This facility not only manufactured and repaired means of transport but also turned out stinkwood and yellowwood furniture, even coffins.

Harnesses, saddles and bridles, etc. were an integral part of the equipment for animal-drawn mail coaches, carts and wagons, so a local tannery provided the leather for these, and boots, too. In the building housing the smithy and wagon maker’s business was also a flourmill, which was initially operated by a steam engine. The engine worked both the mill and the other machinery in the complex. It was later replaced by a suction gas engine, and eventually by an engine that ran on crude oil.

Motor transport, which more than anything else heralded the demise of the numerous activities at Stormsvlei, established a permanent presence there in the early 1900s when a garage was opened close to the school. Hubmobiles and Fords were henceforth to become a regular sight on the old wagenweg. So rapid was the acceptance of this new mode of transport that a second garage was soon established. Petrol was received in two-gallon containers, and, after a petrol pump was established, in 44 gallon drums. There is no longer a garage at Stormsvlei, only a solitary petrol pump.
Aerial view of Stormsvlei taken by L.P. du Toit of Bredasdorp, c.1990.

(1) Original Inn, (2) shop and postal agency (handelshuis), (3) butchery, (4) abandoned post office, (5) early schoolmaster’s dwelling, (6) smithy, (7) accommodation units, (8) Dutch Reformed Church hall, (9) school, still in use, (10) first garage, now a creche, (11) Manor House, (12) original stables and shed, (13) modern Hotel, now closed, (14) a homestead, (15) police station, now a homestead, (16) old stables for police horses, (17) second garage, (18) road linking main highway (N2) with Bonnievale, (19) bridge over the Riviersonderend, (20) annexe to the old Inn, (21) site of the abandoned pont.

Morley Thomson and André Pretorius in the shop at Stormsvlei.
Genadendal and its hamlets

In the 18th century many kraals were scattered along the southern flanks of the Riviersonderend Mountains. These were the semi-permanent settlements of Khoikhoi herders, where enough pasture and water was available for people and their livestock to gather in large groups at certain times of year. From the mid-17th century, they served as centres of exchange of goods and animals between colonists and local inhabitants.

Genadendal, and the hamlets of Boesmanskloof, Voorstekraal and Bereaville, evolved out of these much older places. These settlements all follow the same pattern of central mission buildings at the head of the community. Dwellings lined both banks of the river, with a network of irrigation channels and cultivated land in the valley (VASSA Journal 26, 2012).


Plot diagram of Berea, 1901, showing erf allocations and dwellings (Fransen, Old Towns & Villages, 2006: 124).
GAINS AND LOSSES

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. 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 (1977). Hugh Floyd developed standard recording forms and filing systems for students and others to use, evidence of which can be seen in the Verlorenvlei (1980) and Caledon recording projects.

Coenradenburg, an isolated Sandveld farmstead, was recorded and its preservation ensured. This success was tempered by failures. The unique settlement of wattle, daub and reed buildings at Oudekraal Fontein (Hopefield), built and occupied by working class families, was completely demolished in 1979 to make way for sports fields. A VASSA team recorded the houses beforehand and some of the people were interviewed. An emergency recording team visited Kalbaskraal, already half demolished, and several attempts to find a saviour for Klaarefontein at the head of the Verlorenvlei finally ended with its irreversible collapse by 2012. The old farm house of Doornboom, now in the middle of Heidelberg, was once described as vulnerable by André Pretorius, but thanks to the efforts of a team of family descendants, the complex has been renovated and is reused.

VASSA has also been involved in a few selective restoration projects. Josephine Mill, in Rondebosch, was rebuilt in collaboration with its owner, the Historical Society, and much of the work was done by staunch Vernackers. A comprehensive history of the mill, researched by James Walton and Margaret Cairns, was published to raise funds for its preservation in 1978. Walton also continued with his campaign of publishing articles and books about apparently insignificant but crucial vernacular features, such as fowl runs and wolwehokke, culminating in 1998 with Windpumps in South Africa, the year before he died.

Situations of neglect and lack of action, such as occurred with Highclere in Blaauwbergstrand, and Schotschekloof in the Bo-Kaap, can only be prevented if the authorities and members of the public have agreed on the heritage values of a place and know who is responsible for its protection. Suburban sprawl is another threat to vernacular architecture and cultural landscapes, such as the Cape Winelands.

A house at Oudekraal Fontein, Hopefield, demolished in 1979.
Schotschekloof homestead & 81 Dorp Street, Bo-Kaap

Jim Hislop has recorded the differing fates of the buildings on the old Schotschekloof farm in what is now known as the Bo-Kaap, and highlights some of the problems involved in the legislation regarding old buildings which become “problem buildings”.

The origins of Schotschekloof suburb can be traced back to a market garden of the same name, which was situated on the lower slopes of Lion's Head. It was granted to free burgher Andries Thomasz in 1707. An inventory of a subsequent owner, Christina de Bruyn, dated 1722, describes a simple single-storeyed building, consisting of three rooms. Later, a kitchen was added at the back of the house, forming a T-shape (Fransen, Old Buildings, 2004: 55). In about 1723, a freed slave – Robert Schot of Bengal – took ownership of the estate, hence the name Schotschekloof.

The Schotschekloof homestead in its prime c.1828 (Library of Parliament 30733(2)).

Today, although altered, the main house retains its basic 18th century layout and shape, and is easily recognisable as the house in Colonel Gordon's panorama (c.1790). As one of the few remaining market garden homesteads of the Table Valley, and one of only three in the Bo-Kaap (along with Stadzicht and Spolander House), it is worthy of preservation and, ideally, restoration, though fortunately it is currently well maintained, unlike 81 Dorp Street next door.

As early as about 1808 a single-storied outbuilding stood on the site of 81 Dorp Street, which was double-storeyed by c.1828. It was given a Victorian facelift in about 1870. Until very recently, the house was in fairly good condition, but lately has been allowed to become derelict, suffering fire damage (from vagrants) and losing its roof. The windows and doors were bricked up to prevent further access but some of the inner walls started to collapse. It has been declared a “problem building” and the house is at risk of further deterioration unless the owners are forced by the City to renovate the roof and inner walls before the onset of another winter. Since the City does not have the tools under the NHRA to require maintenance of heritage-worthy buildings, the Problem Buildings By-Law has been enacted.
Walmer Estate, Cape Town

In May 1977 The Vernacular Architecture Society was commissioned to undertake a survey of the Walmer Estate by the Department of Community Development. The project was under the control of Graeme Binckes, who also produced the report. Gawie Fagan, Hans Fransen and John Rennie provided advice, while Pieter Brand did the main on-site survey work and Margaret Cairns undertook the Deeds Office research. Together this remarkable little team inspected every building in the Estate and produced a work which described them and noted features worth preserving.

Walmer Estate had originally been much larger, consisting of part of the old estate of Zonnebloem with a very small portion on Kalkbrandery, and the section known as Trafalgar Park falling on the old Military Lines. The Estate had been declared a “Coloured Group Area” in 1975.

For the survey, the entire area was divided into blocks. All buildings were described by block reference number and erf number. In the course of the on-site survey every building in each of the 41 blocks was examined and notes made in terms of the period categories and criteria. Criteria considered by the team included human scale, variety, continuity and character. Listed buildings were photographed individually, together with many examples of townsapes.

The buildings fell into two sections: pre-1920 (the majority of the buildings below Eastern Boulevard) and post-1920 (the upper areas of the upper portion), with a mixture in the area between. Within each of the two period categories (pre- and post-1920) individual buildings were described in terms of:

1. Architectural characteristics evident in the individual buildings that served as examples of a group or section of the Estate.
2. Types of usage:
   a. Single-storey house
   b. Double-storey house
   c. Single-storey semi-detached house or terrace
   d. Double-storey semi-detached house or terrace
   e. Flats
   f. Corner Shop
   g. Commercial building
   h. Religious building
3. Considerations of age or interest.
4. Contribution to the townscape. This included certain “key buildings” or landmarks and also buildings so situated as to close a vista.

The group made a number of recommendations, which, as they pointed out, fell outside their brief. As far as is known, none of their recommendations were formally adopted.

It would appear that Walmer Estate remained static until the Group Areas Act was expunged from law. Today it is a vibrant suburb with mixed wealthy and poor areas, but many of the old families have moved out or been evicted, resulting in the loss of local cultural practices and traditions. No drastic destruction of buildings appears to have taken place although gentrification has resulted in some of the buildings being altered beyond recognition, particularly in the upper section of the Estate. Pat and John Kramer re-photographed some of the buildings in October 2014.
Walmer Estate (www.afribeat.com).


Kalbaskraal, Malmesbury

Kalbaskraal farm lies south of Malmesbury, but today all that marks the site of the opstal are a couple of large blue-gum trees and some old sheds. In 2002 André van Graan and a VASSA team set out to record this historical site before it disappeared completely. An application for a demolition permit was still being considered, but the permit was applied for after demolition had in fact commenced. The focus of this survey was the farmhouse, by that time derelict and roofless.

The land had previously been used as a veepost (cattle post) at least since 1748. The later freehold farm, known as De Calbasse Kraal, was a standard 60 morgen farm and was granted on 1 June 1768 to Hans Hendrik Hattingh. Over the years the farm was enlarged and in 1861 Hendrik Vos subdivided the large farm into three portions. One portion of nearly 8000 morgen remained in the de Kock family's hands until sold in 2002, when both name and structures vanished.

Kalbaskraal appears to have been a late 18th or early 19th century house that was altered in approximately 1840. The first house was probably built before the grant to Floris Smit in 1831, but may well have been upgraded at this time.

The building was T-shaped with a later wing added to the east side of the tail. From the stoep a later, modern door gave access to an entrance passage. There were four rooms on the north front, each with very fine Georgian 24-pane sash windows. A pair of double doors led from the entrance passage into a galdery. This room was obviously the focal living space of the house. A pair of glazed muurkaste flanked the double entrance doors. On the opposite wall, facing the entrance, was a fireplace flanked in turn by a pair of panelled doors. The right-hand door gave access to the kitchen, while the left-hand door, which was added to maintain the symmetry of the room, opened into a shallow cupboard. The kitchen retained its original full width hearth. There was evidence under layers of paint and wallpaper that the walls of the galdery had originally been painted to resemble a dark timber such as mahogany, with trompe l’oeil architraves and skirting. All rooms except for the kitchen and bathrooms had the remains of timber floors on timber grounds laid over the earth floors.

The walls of the house were of opgekleide earth, on a plinth of stonework, with sun-dried bricks used on the upper level and in the construction of the eastern addition. In areas where the plaster had fallen off the walls there was evidence that the house had been altered, using sun-dried bricks. Modern additions (20th century) had been made to the west of the front wing, a veranda had been added and a bathroom afdak was added to the rear of this wing.

Traces of pilasters remained on the façade. Although the roof had been largely removed, there were some remaining timbers of a modern hipped-roof that had a corrugated iron covering. No evidence remained of gable ends and the central gable had been clipped and appeared substantially rebuilt.

The façade of Kalbaskraal in 2002 (A. van Graan).
“Historic Robertson property collapses”

According to a report in the Cape Times (5 September 2014):

“One of the oldest buildings in the town of Robertson collapsed in a heap of bricks and thatch at the weekend. The building, constructed in 1860, a national monument once known as Druid’s Lodge, has been used as the Robertson Museum, with historic furniture, documents and photographs on display. It was restored in 1984 and opened as a museum in 1985. It was undergoing restoration, so all the contents had been removed and stored.

The building is owned by the Robertson municipality, and has been leased for a minimal rent by a board that runs the museum. Board chairman Willem Scott said yesterday he was thankful the contents had been removed. Asked why the building had collapsed, he said: 'We are really not sure. It is just one of those peculiar things. A section of wall had collapsed while they were doing renovation work on the museum last week. We were waiting for a structural report from an engineer on how to stabilise the walls, but before that arrived, it fell in. I think the walls were probably pretty weak from rising damp, but we are not sure of the cause.'

Scott believed it would be possible to rebuild the museum with the original bricks, but this would be expensive and depend on whether the board could find funding. The building had collapsed during the night, so it was deserted.”
Klaarefontein, Verlorenvlei

After 1966, following the death of its last inhabitant Johannes Louw, the roofing and woodwork was gradually removed from the empty and derelict buildings at Klaarefontein. As a precaution the Vernacs measured up the buildings in 1982 while the Simon van der Stel Foundation attempted to raise awareness about the farmstead’s significance. Nothing came of their efforts. It was still restorable in 2003 and freshwater ecologist Bill Harding tried his utmost to garner interest in support for a project to establish an international and interdisciplinary environmental training and research station there, but was unsuccessful. The complex is now a complete ruin.

First granted as a loan place in 1727, Klaarefontein was surveyed by J. Knobel in 1834 and granted to Alida Jacoba Mostert (widow of Andries Carel Alexander Facolyn Gous) in 1839. In March 1882 it was subdivided into four parts but the whole property (14 350 morgen) ended up in the hands of Jacobus Adriaan Visser Louw. Louw then owned all the farms between Redelinghuys, Leipoldtville and Elands Bay, and Klaarfontein remains in the Louw family to this day.

Klaarefontein was strategically situated at the head of the Verlorenvlei, where the busy coastal boating industry exchanged goods with inland farmers: fish was traded for meat, fruit and vegetables. This lasted until the vlei silted up in the 1930s. The farm had a vegetable garden, fruit orchards, vines and even a rice field between the house and the vlei. Fresh water was scarce in this area but the property had two strong springs, Klaarfontein and Hansiesfontein.

The irregularly shaped T-form homestead, its tail separated from the front by a narrow built-in passage, is said to have been built c.1775 by Andries Gous, captain of the Cape Cavalry, who had several other farms in the area. The front was extended c.1800 resulting in the loss of its end gables and subsidence from floods in 1838 may have led to the loss of the front gable. The reduced dormer gable ended up not symmetrically placed as a room was added (with a store below), but the flush casements were left intact. Precisely behind the house and lined up with it was an old outbuilding with another one at right-angles towards the back.

When James Walton measured the building in 1982, he made the following deductions. It was originally a longhouse of the type with a central doorway, flanked by casement windows on each side, and, as the house was built on a steep slope, the front had a high stoep. The central voorkamer was flanked by two bedrooms, each of which had a shuttered window. Behind was a detached second block at right angles to the first, later linked by a passage, which housed the agterkamer and kitchen. Two buitekamers were later built to accommodate two brothers at each end of the front wing, one of which (N-E) was built above a storeroom and the other (S-E) was eventually converted into a kitchen.

Historical archaeologist, Natalie Swanepoel, conducted further and broader research for an Honours thesis at UCT in 1996. She wanted to know why Klaarefontein was altered to become Cape-Dutch in appearance, unlike most of the other farmsteads in the Verlorenvlei area. She placed the site within the context of the physical and social landscape as a whole, not just the layout of the werf, using documents such as land grants and transfers and slave registers. Her conclusion was that this exceptional house “operated as a symbolic artefact in the Verlorenvlei landscape of the 19th century”. To be effective as a symbolic object it had to be visible and impressive enough to make the observer pause. Klaarefontein once fulfilled both these conditions. The elevated position at a strategic point on the road from the coast to the interior and the central gable and symmetrical façade, signalled that the builder, Gous, belonged to a specific socio-economic and political group, the Cape Gentry, and that his home was a specific statement about the power which he held over access to the land and sea.
Klaarefontein: “Taken 1882 when J.A.V. Louw of Klaarfontein bought it from S. du Toit (who bought it from A.S. Gous), but only kept it for one month. On the left is the estate agent with J.A.V. Louw in the middle” (Alida Louw Collection).

1981 (A. Pretorius) 1985 (A. Pretorius)

1992 (N. Amschwand) 2012 (P. Kramer)

The decay of Klaarefontein.
Annotated measured drawing of Saxenburg, Bottelary by Willem Malherbe. The house was demolished c.1945, long before the National Monuments Act of 1969 (Walton, Old Cape Farmsteads, 1985: 101).

The magnificent stable block at Ratelrivier near Bredasdorp was gutted by fire in December 2009 (A. Malan 2005).

Losses can occur due to many causes, such as lack of heritage protection or accidentally from fire.
Coenradenburg, Hopefield

In 1983 VASSA published a booklet titled "Coenradenberg: A survey of an old Cape Farm". It was the culmination of weeks of work by members who were at once surprised at the completeness of this old farm, yet at the same time horrified by the state into which the buildings had been allowed to deteriorate. This keen interest and subsequent visits by the Society encouraged the owner to try to preserve the werf to the best of his ability.

Jasper Smit is the seventh generation of Smits to own Coenradenberg, near Hopefield. The first Smit, Pieter, took over the grazing rights from Christina Diemer in 1749. In 1831 the farm was surveyed and granted as a quitrent grant to Jasper, Pieter's son. Eventually the farm was divided into four portions, with only the Coenradenbeg section remaining in Smit hands.

At the time of the survey, VASSA members were able to interview Oom Jasper Smit who told many family stories and demonstrated the use of now obsolete farm implements. The survey also included a full plan of the werf, research into the history of the farm, comprehensive photographic records and inventories of the contents of all the rooms.

According to Fransen, the homestead falls into the category of Swartland Vernacular. It is a large TT shaped house and bears the date 1804 as well as the initials JS (possibly the father of the grantee) and the letters CRDB, short for the name of the farm. The gable has holbol outlines without any pilasters and is topped with a pediment. The front door is the original one, as are the double casement windows. The original voorkamer was later divided into two small rooms by an entrance passage from the front door. In Fransen's opinion, as an example of an "enclosed werf layout", Coenradenberg is one of the best in the Cape although there is no trace of symmetry and none of the outbuildings have gables. It is notable that the gaps between the buildings have not been closed up with walls.

Over the years, many objects from the house have been given away or simply disappeared. For example, the brass knocker from the front door is now on the kitchen door of the Koopmans-De Wet House in Cape Town.

Vernacs visiting Jasper Smit at Coenradenburg in 2004 (J. Kramer).
Doornboom, Heidelberg

In 2004 Doornboom was bought by a local triumvirate, Henk Rall, Jurie Uys and Jan Geldenhuys, who established a trust to have the building restored, mostly out of their own pockets. Hans Fransen recounted the story in an article in Die Burger, reporting that “die skuinshuisie” on the corner of Fourie and Rall Streets, previously regarded as a kasarm (eyesore) by its neighbours, had become Heidelberg’s chief monument.

The article by the late André Pretorius on the house Doornboom in Heidelberg that appeared in VASSA Journal 12 of December 2004, shortly before his death, was simply one of the most definitive ever published by us. It was also one of the most timeous, for it looked as if the house would not survive another winter. Although another VASSA member, Joanna Marx, then working for SAHRA, had reported on it a few years earlier, and despite the efforts of the then owner, Reverend Willie Fourie, plans for its restoration had come to nothing.

In a neatly laid-out village like Heidelberg (1855), the houses initially all stood lined up along the street boundary, leaving the erven behind uncluttered for maximum cultivation. The Auld House, as it was locally known, stood diagonally on its erf, which could only mean that it pre-dated the foundation of the town itself. The nucleus of the old house must have been the one in which Louis Fourie – son of Huguenot settler Fleury – lived from about 1728 on the farm Doornboom, close to the ford across the Duivenhoks River on the great East wagon road. This makes it one of the oldest surviving dwellings in the entire Cape (the only other serious contenders are the Schreuderhuis and one or two others in Stellenbosch; the Posthuys in Muizenberg is now thought to date from the 1740s).

Its restoration was done in a somewhat unorthodox fashion, without an architect and with the building itself as its own chief evidence. Several modern lean-to’s were removed, and although several walls had collapsed during several severe Cape downpours, no bricks were used to rebuild them, instead Jill Hogan from McGregor was called in to use her own method of cob walling. This helped to retain the “pioneering” look of the old building. Where necessary, old timber was recycled to fashion doors, and the corrugated iron roof was replaced by thatch.

That its roof-ends were given neither straight gables nor half hips but with the thatch slightly projecting, and that the “ears” of the window lintels were left exposed, were details that have been criticised by architectural historians. But no-one can deny that, thanks to the vision of three locals, Doornboom once again lives up fully to its one-time name, the Auld House. Since then the grounds, too, have been cleaned up and a splendid rose garden installed, looking out over the water furrow that still flows across the grounds, with a view towards the Duivenhoks River a few hundred yards further down.

1698 Ensign Isaq(k) Schrijver
1752 Ensign August Friedrich Beutler
1768 Jan Willem Cloppenburg, Secunde (vice-Governor) at the Cape in 1768
1773 Carl Peter Thunberg, the Swedish botanist
1775 Anders Sparrman, a talented and adventurous young Swede
1776 Hendrik Swellengrebel, son of a former Cape Governor
1778 Governor Joachim A. Baron van Plettenberg
1778 Colonel Robert Jacob Gordon, Commander of the VOC garrison at the Cape from 1780 until its capitulation to the British in 1795
1782 François le Vaillant, the youthful French naturalist and traveller

Doornboom was a key stop-over for local and foreign travellers.
Doornboom before, during and after restoration (Martin Smith, Village Life 29, 2008).
Mills

James Walton is particularly well known for his books on mills. He spent five years doing research before writing "Water-mills, Windmills and Horse-mills of South Africa" (1974). South Africa is one of the richest molinological areas in the world, but information was sparse and largely unavailable before the publication of this book. As a fellow molinologist, he shared his love of mills with Joanna Marx, a long-time and active VASSA member. She founded and led Friends of the Mosterts Mill from its inception in 1998 and ensured that the mill's sails carry on turning and the millstones keep on grinding.

Mostert's Mill, Mowbray

Built around 1796 and restored in 1936 and again in 1995, Mostert's Mill is the oldest surviving and only complete windmill in South Africa. It was the first privately owned mill in Cape Town. It is a three-storey tower mill nearly eight metres high, and is constructed of random stone foundations and then with unbaked bricks above. The walls are over a metre thick at ground level. It has a cap of truncated cone shape and is winded by a tailpole. The modern sails follow the Dutch tradition as the originals were lost. Mostert's Mill is situated on the M3 close to the University of Cape Town on the slopes of Devil's Peak where it is a prominent landmark. The Friends of Mostert's Mill operate the mill and it is open to the public on one Saturday a month between 10:00 and 14:30.

Josephine Mill, Newlands

The Josephine Mill is a water-driven mill that ground the grain for the brewery alongside. The original mill was built by J.F. Dreyer in 1818 on a plot that was part of the 17th century grant of Louwvliet, but the enormous cast iron wheel was added in 1840 by Jacob Letterstedt, the brewer. Letterstedt and Anders Ohlsson were pioneers in the establishment of the milling and brewing industries in South Africa. At the mill you can see plans outlining the original watercourses and pipes, and a Cornish steam boiler that was discovered on the banks of the Liesbeeck River. The boiler indicates that Josephine Mill was once a steam mill. There are also etchings and grinding stones for viewing.

Deze Hoek, near Piketberg

Used as a loan place from 1729 and then granted to Cornelis Brink in 1803, who built the house in about 1816, Deze Hoek then passed to the Eksteens in 1864 and is still owned by Johan Eksteen. The main feature on this farm is a complete water-mill with an overshot wheel, in a picturesque thatched and buttressed little building. The woodwork is stinkwood, and the mechanism was adapted to run a wood saw as well as turn the flour mill. It was declared a National Monument in 1981 and is now a Provincial Heritage Site.

Limerick, near Calitzdorp

The original diagram shows that the first name of the property was Lemrick and it was granted to J.H. Zimmerman in 1820. The water-powered mill has an overshot wheel and the workings are in excellent condition and a source of great pride to the current owners, the Potgieters. Like Deze Hoek outside Piketberg, the little building is set into a steep slope, enabling the force of the water fed in from a furrow above to turn the wheel.
Mostert’s Mill, Mowbray (J. Kramer 2010).

Josephine Mill, Newlands (Cape Town Tourism).


Limerick, near Calitzdorp (J. Kramer 2014).
Suburban sprawl

Threats to the Cape Winelands cultural landscape include urbanisation and the expansion of suburban-style housing into farmlands, while some farm owners supplement or replace agricultural production with tourist facilities and subdivisions into what estate agents call “prestigious lifestyle wine farm estates”. Little by little the authentic values are eroded. By identifying and declaring heritage resources at a landscape level, it is possible (and preferable) to protect the whole setting that gives meaning to the history of farms and settlements.

La Cotte, Franschhoek

Since the 1990s the farm La Cotte, on the outskirts of Franschhoek, has been the subject of plans for development. This article was written in response to a proposal in 2003 that the construction of low density upmarket housing, tourist accommodation and a restaurant would be offset by rehabilitation of the historical buildings and farmlands (VASSA Journal 11, 2004).

La Cotte still largely retains the contained historical elements of the 18th and early 19th 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, and the relationship between farm and town. These should be preserved.

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 framing a farm complex that has evolved over a long period of time. The linkages between them 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.

View of La Cotte and its setting (S. Winter).
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, a 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 19th 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.

A major difficulty faced by designing proposals for sustainable redevelopment of Cape rural estates is the contradiction inherent in an assumption that chopping up farmland is acceptable if the historic werf is retained. 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.

Weltevreden, Stellenbosch

When Chris and Paula Peel were introduced to Weltevreden in 1995 as the “last remaining unspoiled homestead” in the area, it was inhabited by a commune of Rastafarians but largely undisturbed by major alterations or previous poor restoration attempts. (VASSA Journal 16, 2006). The Peels had finally found the needy old Cape house they were looking for and they set about restoring the building to its original dignity – a slow, deliberate, endless task. In their case they have done most of the work themselves, with the assistance of local builders and artisans and using traditional tools and materials. All work was carried out under the approval of SAHRA and various specialists were consulted. The well-informed care and minute attention to detail in recreating the Weltevreden homestead and outbuildings, restoring the watercourses and replanting cultivated farmlands in this enchanting valley was exemplary. The venture also spawned successful associated businesses. Chris Peel and Barney Botha became experts in restoring antiques and now produce reproductions of Cape-Dutch furniture and joinery (Cape Heritage Furniture).

One can only imagine the Peels’ horror when the surrounding property was sold for development and urban cluster houses were built right on their doorstep, including on the sky-line along both sides of the property. Though the house has the status of a Provincial Heritage Site, Weltevreden has become engulfed within the rapidly expanding suburbs of Stellenbosch. Poor urban planning and design controls and the resulting visual impacts on the low-lying homestead and narrow cultivated valley seriously affected its integrity and consequently its heritage value. The Peels
battled to gain as wide a buffer-zone of undeveloped land as possible, and planted hundreds of trees in an attempt to screen the developments, but the overall effect of closely packed structures on the high ridges is irreversible.

**The restored homestead at Weltevreden near Stellenbosch (A. Malan 2005).**

**Housing development on sky-line overlooking the werf at Weltevreden (A. Malan 2005).**

**The setting of Rustenburg (www.michaelolivier.co.za).**

**Rustenburg, Schoongezicht & Ida's Valley**

*In 2006 members of the Vernacular Architecture Society were privileged to have the opportunity to visit three beautifully restored and much loved Cape homes on the northern outskirts of Stellenbosch. Each had a different and interesting, tale to tell about the circumstances in which they have survived.*

Peter Barlow, an industrialist, bought Rustenburg in 1940. By this time the homestead and outbuildings required extensive repairs. He also reunited the two properties by purchasing Schoongezicht 1945. The farms had been planted with vines, orchards and vegetable gardens. The Barlow family introduced a prize Jersey dairy business. Peter Barlow’s son Simon and his wife Rozanne have now transformed Schoongezicht into guest accommodation, and a publicly accessible modern winery and beautiful garden environment. Its future appears to be in safe in the family’s hands.
In 1972 Major Philip Erskine and his wife Fiona bought the farm named Ida’s Valley. With their taste and inclination for historical accuracy (and the professional help of Gawie Fagan) and a rich inheritance of British family history, furniture and pictures, they recreated the original homestead as a family home, enhanced their collection of beautiful objects, and restored the garden and surrounding buildings. The maintenance of this extensive complex, essentially run in a 20th-century Cape manor house tradition, must be extremely labour intensive and costly. It was not clear how it can be sustained into the future as a family home. Major Erskine passed away in 2013, but his son continues to care for the place.

The short valley known as Ida’s Valley contains a number of old homesteads of great importance, as well as a natural setting that has few equals in the Cape. In 1976 the whole valley was proclaimed a National Monument, the first time that a large area (1500 hectares) was protected under strict conditions regarding subdivision and structural alterations. Thus, the farmsteads and families of Rustenburg, Schooorgezicht and Ida’s Valley should continue to remain in a setting surrounded by mountain peaks, natural vegetation, large trees and cultivated spaces. The entire valley was intended to become a national heritage resource within the broader Cape Winelands Cultural Landscape, but this proposal dating back to 2005 has not yet been implemented by the South African Heritage Resources Agency.

Durbanville / Tygerberg Hills

Some farmers in the Durbanville / Tygerberg Hills have made plans to protect their properties and the landscape from urban sprawl, mining and quarrying by forming a Conservancy.
Publications

Publication is always a challenge for books perceived to have only academic or esoteric appeal, and finding the resources and time for research and fieldtrips is usually a matter of personal passion for the work. Such an example is Hans Fransen and Mary Cook’s work towards Old Houses of the Cape (1965), which was the first comprehensive inventory of architecturally important buildings illustrated together with reproductions of Arthur Elliot’s early 20th century photographs. Major revisions were conducted and published in 1980 and 2004. A superb collection of photographs of houses and their associated buildings, furnishings and fittings was compiled by A.M. Obholzer, M. Baraitser and W.D. Malherbe and published by the Stellenbosch Museum in 1985 as The Cape House and its Interior. André Pretorius and Gawie Fagan self-published their books on Our Threatened Heritage (1997) and Brakdak Flatroofs in the Karoo (2008), respectively.

In his book, How Buildings Learn (1994), Stewart Brand 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.” He adds: “There is no reason to rely on professionals. This is not astrophysics: everybody is an expert on buildings.”

There is an increasingly exciting potential for collecting and researching old images, such as “then-and-now” projects, with the results being carried on web-based platforms. VASSA is following that trend. A major contribution has been made by VASSA member John Kramer, who has been photographing and re-photographing stores, cafés, garages and back street scenes in South African dorpe for decades.

Professional skills

What Vernackers learn is where to look for clues and then to contribute their various ideas to interpreting them – from their experience as architects, 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.

VASSA is extending its members’ skills in reading the fabric of old buildings and their surroundings to focus on younger people entering the professions of architecture and heritage practice, through partnerships with professional organisations (e.g. SA Council for the Architectural Profession (SACAP) and the Association of Professional Heritage Practitioners (APHP)). By becoming a participating member of the Society architects and planners can gain “continuing professional development” credits. Candidate members of APHP who seek professional accreditation through its mentorship programme are able to gain first-hand experience.

Heritage Surveys

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 National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA no.25 of 1999), with its system of evaluating the broad significance of places and objects worthy of protection. In the Cape, there are three tiers of administration of heritage resources: national (SAHRA), provincial (Heritage Western Cape) and local or municipal (e.g. City of Cape Town). All responsible heritage agencies are supposed to have compiled an inventory of heritage-worthy assets and put protection and management systems in place, but this is a patchy and ongoing process.
Groenfontein, Piketberg (A. Pretorius 1993).


Clanwilliam (H. Floyd 1980).

Idiosyncratic houses: the results of personal decisions within a regional pattern.
The James Walton collection

James Walton, educationist and doyen of vernacular architecture in South Africa, donated most of his research material to the University of Stellenbosch where it was curated in the Document Centre in the J.S. Gericke Library under the direction of Lynne Fourie. The collection is characterised by its variety, such as large maps, manuscripts, drawings, charts, architectural plans, art works and photographs. In addition to the documents, James Walton made a generous financial donation to the library for the completion and preservation of his catalogues.

Walton’s books are now all collectors’ items and much sought after by Africana specialists. All the material used in these books, as well as a huge amount of material not used, is housed in the Walton Collection: Cape Dovecotes and Fowl-runs (1985), Old Cape Farmsteads (1989), Double-storeyed Flat-roofed Buildings of the Rural Cape (1993), Cape Cottages (1995), Water-mills, Windmills and Horse-mills of South Africa (1974), The Josephine Mill and its Owners (1978), and Windpumps in South Africa (1998).

The Josephine Mill belongs to the Cape Town Historical Society, and, together with VASSA members, it was researched, recorded and rebuilt over a period of 13 years and started working again in 1988. For the fund-raising book, The Josephine Mill and its Owners (1978), which covers a time-span of over three hundred years, James Walton and Margaret Cairns gathered a great deal of historical background information. The book provides a detailed description of the mill and the lives of its owners.

He also had an avid interest in African ethnology and two valuable portfolios contain fifty-seven original drawings for the book African Village and Homesteads and Villages of South Africa (1952). Walton was also the author of numerous articles published in various journals and periodicals. For example, for the article “Cape carts”, published in 1990 in Tydskrif vir Volkskunde en Volkstaal, extensive research notes were collected by the author, as well as many photographs and illustrations of various types of carts and wagons. An extensive slide collection depicting African hut types, Bantu settlement patterns and murals, water-mills, Cape carts and wagons, South African sledges, homesteads and villages of South Africa and South African vernacular architecture is also part of the Walton Collection.

The James Walton collection is of exceptional research value and is used by art students and lecturers, architects and town planners, photographers, journalists interested in restoration, members of the public concerned with conservation and those involved in research of vernacular buildings. The work is accessed through the comprehensive James Walton Catalogue which presently comprises two volumes. See also https://digital.lib.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.2/312.

More recently the collections of two members of the Vernacular Society of South Africa have been added to the Document Centre, namely those of André Pretorius and Joanna Marx.
Heritage conservation and management

There are landscapes, sites, artefacts, buildings and structures that are of significance to the people of the Western Cape. Identifying, protecting and conserving these heritage resources will ensure that they are promoted and conserved for generations to come.

Nominations for heritage registration

Members of the public are encouraged to identify and nominate buildings and places for registration as local or provincial heritage sites. A place does not have to be old or impressive to be heritage-worthy, but it must have certain values that make it significant. Nomination is a simple but necessary process of doing enough research to establish and demonstrate why and how it is important to and whom, and submitting a form to Heritage Western Cape (www.westerncape.gov.za/public-entity/heritage-western-cape). For national heritage sites, the approval authority is SAHRA.

Research and report-writing is sometimes a daunting prospect. How to start, where to go? VASSA members Carohn Cornell and Antonia Malan have compiled a guide for beginner researchers. Places at the Cape (2008) demystifies the process through a series of real examples and personal stories, and provides historical context and details of sources and resources in the Cape. Stewart Harris, past VASSA chairman, compiled an annotated bibliography for Architectural history in Cape Town and its hinterland. It was prepared in 2000 and updated in 2005, and so the last decade needs to be added, but it is still a valuable tool for researchers.

Built environment heritage surveys

Under the NHRA, buildings, features and their environs are protected in terms of their age (over 60 years) and their significance (assessed according to formal criteria). There are three tiers of grading, registration and heritage management: national (Grade I) under SAHRA, provincial (Grade II) under e.g. Heritage Western Cape (HWC), and local / municipal (Grade III) under e.g. City of Cape Town. Most Grade IIIIs will remain the responsibility of HWC until local authorities are suitably resourced and deemed competent.

The process of identifying, assessing and grading the built environment depends on having the right sort of information. There are certain requirements and guidelines to conducting and presenting heritage surveys and inventories. Ideally, the grading assessment team should include at least four members with appropriate background knowledge and experience, and proposed gradings (I, II or III) should be tested both with knowledgeable local interested individuals and bodies/communities and with experts who have experience of similar surveys of comparable environments.

Built Environment Heritage Surveys are conducted so as to identify all heritage resources and to quantify and describe their significance in advance of any potential development. This is to ensure that the management of any proposed development is clear, lawful, reasonable and procedurally fair. Any person or organization can conduct a survey, but, ideally and most commonly, it is commissioned by local authorities. Indeed, local authorities are required to conduct these studies in order to compile the inventories of heritage resources within their jurisdiction whenever they draw-up or revise their planning or zoning schemes.

The primary products of a Heritage Survey are an inventory or list of all of the buildings, sites and areas which are recommended to be designated and registered as heritage resources (many inventories list every single property and building in the area surveyed), and a map of the survey area with all of the buildings, sites and areas which are recommended to be designated as heritage resources identified by colour.
Marguerite Lombard discussing renovations at her house on the farm Valencia near Paarl (A. Malan 2005).

Vernacs were spontaneously invited into a wood-and-iron dwelling by a proud householder at Koperfontein near Hopefield (J. Kramer 2014).

The owner of Leyfontein in the Karoo describes his farm and family history (J. Kramer 2006).

Owners and occupants exchange stories and discuss problems with members of VASSA.