VASSA Journal

In this Issue
A tribute to Dr Hans Fransen – edited by Antonia Malan
The aims of the Society are to
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### Illustrations

The photographs and illustrations are by the authors unless noted otherwise.

### Cover

The design symbolises architecture in a modern African context.

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A tribute to Dr Hans Fransen (1931-2017)

Preface

Antonia Malan

It was with great sadness that the Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa learned of the passing of Dr Hans Fransen, one of its most illustrious members. This VASSA Journal is a personal and general tribute to the influence Fransen had on us as individuals and as architectural historians in South Africa. The contributions were not planned, but were spontaneously volunteered. Their diversity and geographical range, albeit indirectly, pay respect to and acknowledge the wide interests, industriousness and curiosity of the man held in such high regard by many people in many places in our country and elsewhere in the world. Thank you to all who contributed. We also include a short but lyrical piece in which Fransen spoke at a VASSA workshop of his personal feelings about South African vernacular architecture.¹

Appearing in the contributions are several others of that generation of stalwarts - scholars, researchers, activists, writers and recorders of South African cultural history and landscapes - including Dr Mary Cook and Gre van der Waal-Braaksma. In a joint obituary in Die Burger, Marthinus van Baart paid tribute to Fransen and Marie-Lou Roux, an environmental activist of local repute.

Kari Longman, Fransen’s beloved daughter, generously shared personal and poetic memories and images of her father and mother, Hans and Anneen.

Mauritz Naudé is curator of buildings and structures at DITSONG: National Museum of Cultural History, Pretoria. His article about a modest building melds the viewpoint of an artist – Pierneef – with research by museum curators and architectural historians. As Fransen so often did.

André van Graan is a past chair of VASSA and continues to be actively engaged in its activities and products. He manages to summarise an extraordinary lifetime’s output by focusing on Fransen’s unique interpretive skills, only possible because of a rare ability to synthesise deep knowledge of many subjects into a clear exposition of what it means. Fransen’s way with words was extraordinary, both in the written and spoken form, but his use of imagery (including his own photographs and drawings) must also be acknowledged as a crucial contribution to the recording and chronological sequencing of settlements and buildings.

One of VASSA’s most significant research, recording and publication projects is focused on the Karoo and in particular its stone-built corbel-style buildings. Since 2006, pieces of the puzzle are gradually being put in place. In this case, Nigel Amschwand thinks he has found a man who may have brought the knowledge and skills to build them to the region.

Figure 1:
Hans Fransen joins a VASSA outing, with Mike Visser and Antonia Malan.

Figure 2:
Hans Fransen caught on the other side of the camera.
The harmonious vernacular


My original title for this presentation was ‘The symphonic vernacular’. My personal responses to my physical environment - including the built - are akin to fully enveloping musical experiences. But the word ‘symphonic’ is perhaps not entirely appropriate to describe what I experience while enveloped by the Cape thatch-roof vernacular. In a symphony, different elements work together to form an entity that is greater than the sum of its component parts. A German Baroque church, with the sculptural quality of its architecture, its vaulted ceilings full of illusionistic painting, its carved pulpits, the organ playing Bach fugue, aspired to the quality of a symphony - ‘n sameklank - long before Beethoven fully consummated the concept as a musical form. The thatched Cape vernacular can perhaps best be compared with a string quartet, in which the sounds of different instruments all belonging to the same family blend together - or, perhaps even better, with an a-capella choir.

Please forgive me this musical detour. Today I want to take a closer look at a quality of our ‘Cape Dutch’ thatch-roof vernacular with which we are all familiar but that has not yet been adequately assessed or explained. That our vernacular shares a strong quality of consistency, of materials, details and scale, with vernacular building styles in other parts of the world, is to state the obvious. The word ‘vernacular’ seems to suggest this quality almost by definition. If in a given environment this in essence ‘egalitarian’ uniformity is sometimes overlaid with decorative layering indicating a certain individuality or even status, it can do so without upsetting the underlying unity.

Of the Western domestic vernaculars, and of those established in their colonies, there can be few that display quite the same degree of uniformity as that of the Cape of Good Hope. In helping to set up our recent Folk Architecture exhibition at the Irma Stern Museum, where one of my topics was ‘Roots and Parallels’, this struck me once again. Yes, plenty of parallels can be found, of longhouses elsewhere in the world, of wing-type development (though not too many!), of gable enrichments and other decorative overlays. But quite the same configuration of all of these, and quite the same degree of adherence to the basic locally developed type, are hard to find elsewhere - if at all. Even in other former Dutch colonies, of which some developed a vernacular of their own differing considerably from that of the Cape, it is not found to anywhere near the same extent.

To put it very simply, the Cape thatched vernacular is standardised to the extreme. It is a standardisation based on a transverse longhouse that must have served most early free burghers as homestead but also, from the beginning, was used as ‘town house’ in the streets of Cape Town, Stellenbosch and other towns. It is important to note that the Cape colony never had real ‘cities’, with a confined area protected by an enceinte of fortifications, in which space was at a premium and houses were therefore erected end-on on narrow plots. Even Cape Town was not initially intended as a city, but tolerated as a largely agrarian settlement, and long retained its cottage-type houses, long side to the street, much like most later towns in the Cape with their street-hugging houses with unbroken agricultural space behind.

It is when such transverse longhouses, always one room deep, initially seldom more than three such cells in a row, had to be extended, that this unique concept of standardisation became manifest. For it was almost invariably done by extending it lengthwise and/or by way of back wings of uniform dimensions -
the letter-of-the-alphabet or dominoes principle with which all of us here are familiar (Fig. 3).

Figure 3:
The ‘letter of the alphabet’ plan: Suurfontein near Aurora. A ‘pi’-shaped homestead adjoined by a T-shaped outbuilding, all with uniform wing widths and heights (photo Hans Fransen).

Despite that familiarity, a few notes on some of the shapes and their significance might be of interest. Among the first wing extensions towards the back were those recorded on a very accurate plan of the fledgling vlek of the Cape in which an L-plan dominates: a back wing hard-up against the boundary - and not in the centre, where it would have cut up the back yard. Any further extension would then have to be up against the other side and producing a U-shape - the second wing often slightly narrower than the other. This townhouse plan undoubtedly explains the predominance of U-shaped homesteads in the Peninsula.

Elsewhere the T-shape is by far the most numerous, often as intermediate stage towards the celebrated H in which the homestead, here not lined up along roads but in the open landscape, could be given two ‘fronts’, all achieved with the same one-room wide building elements. Outside the Peninsula, interestingly, the only dwellings that were almost always U-shaped were parsonages, presumably because they appeared more sophisticated, ‘finished’ and block-like, without the gaps at the sides of the H or the untidy kitchen backs of the T, and looking as if covered by one full-span roof. Auxiliary structures on the farmyard followed the same principle: stables, jonkershuis, sheds, wagon houses. Always one-room-width configurations.

Why this striking standardisation in dimension? It was not limited, by the way, to dimensions. Details like windows (whether casements or sashes, both based on a fairly uniform glass-pane size) and doors (inside and out), ironware, ceilings, etc. were seldom varied much.

There are suggestions that this strict standardisation took several decades to develop. The 1710 Stade drawings seem to show slightly more individuality among the still very modest dwellings. And we know
that at least for outbuildings, the ‘hall’ type, with three adjoining ‘aisles’ was in use at Meerlust and Vergelegen but possibly elsewhere, too.

Gwen Fagan has suggested that the fairly rapid shift towards standardisation of dimensions around 1700 was prompted by one of the detailed instructions issued to Van der Stel and others by visiting commissioner Van Reede in 1684. He apparently referred inter alia to the length of beams spanning a row of rooms, and the construction of the roof frames of which they formed the basis. I have yet to find these instructions in Boeseken’s records and would like to know exactly where they appear. Such standardisation would indeed have simplified the erection of buildings, although it was certainly not unknown at the Cape and may well already have been the prevailing custom anyway.

So if Van Reede did lay down these instructions, we still cannot be entirely sure how ground-breaking or indeed how binding they were. Whatever the case may have been, this way of building thatch-roof houses was continued for almost two centuries, by builders who had probably never heard of the name Van Reede. If anything it became more general as a century and a half went by, instead of - as one would expect in an increasingly sophisticated community - gradually displaying more freedom in its application.

From the mid-18th century, of course, it lived side by side with the flat-roof vernacular of one or two storeys, where roof-span is no limiting factor and which was less of a fire-hazard in contiguous city tissue. But in the towns and rural areas the unfailing consistency of the single-storey one-room wide thatch-roof wing-type vernacular never ceases to amaze me. Its appearance became so dominating that right throughout the Dutch period it even became obligatory for the few public buildings that were erected, namely the drostdye and churches (Figures 4 to 6).

Figure 4: This panorama of Stellenbosch in about 1880 illustrates better than most early records the uniformity, in an urban setting, of the Cape whitewash-and-thatch-wing style punctuated by its gable edges, as yet largely unaffected by the shallower and gableless corrugated iron roofs (a few are visible in the foreground) (Naudé, Stellenbosch Museum).

That wider roof-spans were entirely possible is seen in the numerous traditional churches where considerations of space dictated wing widths of eight to ten or more metres, with correspondingly higher walls, producing buildings which modestly rose above the surrounding dwellings like mother hen among its chicks. And around 1790 Cloete at Groot Constantia broke the mould for dwellings, when he devised a
two-rooms-deep plan under a wide roof of over twelve metres' span, made possible by raising the 'spine-wall' to the height of the roof ridge. Westfalen (188 Main Street), Paarl of c.1810 is another early example - twelve metres or two rooms deep - one of the first with a narrow entrance passage. But if anything, these few exceptions serve to show the stubbornness of the one-room-wide roofs.

**Figure 5:**
The style became so universal that it was also used in remote early Karoo dorpe like Colesberg, as recorded here by Thomas Baines in 1850, the town presided over by the (gabled!) church (CA M 546).

Double-deep houses started to come into more general use only around the middle of the 19th century, mostly as a town model and linked to the town-founding boom of that time producing towns like Robertson, Montagu and Prince Albert. It may have met the need in towns for a slightly bigger house with more loft space, and leaving a more unbroken space at the back for agricultural cultivation. This model lacks the delicate proportions of the one-room type, slightly top-heavy with the roof and corresponding gable much taller than that of the lateral walls. But visually their texture still fits in well with the older, lower model with which it is often interspersed, its fenestration subtly different with larger panes, the half-width windows absent because of the entrance passage replacing the former full-width voorhuis. The one-room-wide house continued to be used side by side with the double-deep.

In the mission towns, where Governor Caledon had urged the clerics to insist on the use of the colonial rectangular house type instead of the villagers' own more makeshift traditions, this was to remain the prevailing building style until after the 1900s. Wupperthal now presents the best unspoilt environment of 'the harmonious environment' (Figure 7).
Few of our Western Cape towns were masterpieces of the town-planners’ art. They were usually little more than constructs by surveyors using their rulers and set-squares to divide a piece of farm into large wet erven and smaller dry erven. It is the purpose of this brief presentation to illustrate the beauty that the harmonious vernacular of the Cape brought to often unremarkable town layouts. How the long mellow-brown roofs, punctuated by the thin white lines of end-gables and ridges and here and there broken by centre gables, their back wings and wagon-houses forming fascinating configurations with the fronts neatly aligned along the building line. How the quiet rhythm of their white facades, subtly balancing the expanses of thatch above, form pleasing compositions with their boundary walls and the ends of outbuildings. Let me give you an eyeful of what I am trying to describe.

Even in towns that we would hardly describe as ‘Cape Dutch’ today, the thatch-and-wing vernacular was initially much in evidence: Uitenhage before its Georgianisation, Mossel Bay before it became a stone town. Yes, even both Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth started off with long thatch roofs in Dutch style, not to mention, of course, most Voortrekker towns up-country. That this sort of built environment can be highly attractive to many of us, I do not have to say. But did the people inhabiting these perhaps somewhat elementary environments, and the people who built them, experience them as aesthetically pleasing? There is nothing particularly clever or artful about our ‘Cape Dutch’ vernacular, except perhaps some well-executed fanlights or gable scrolls. Nor can I recall any rapturous descriptions of the unspoilt Cape townscape from the pens of the many dozens of travellers of a century and a half, two centuries ago. Where they do describe the beauty of a locality, like that of George, they usually refer to its natural beauty, its trees, gardens or setting.

The potential beauty of a largely standardised urban environment must have been well realised by the ancestors of the Cape settlers in exquisite cities like Amsterdam or Delft. Were our villagers out here aware that their highly standardised small-town vernacular, too, was capable of producing townscape of serenity and harmony? Perhaps the centre-gables that enriched the occasional house in these streets - otherwise models of architectural democracy with their great consistency of scale and details - provide the answer to my question.
One last observation, on the near-complete make-over of our traditional thatch-roof vernacular towards the end of the 19th century. Corrugated iron caused the end of gables and of the purity of wall-to-roof proportions (not everywhere incidentally: it did not touch Montagu and McGregor). But here and there some of the harmony of townscape survived nevertheless (Figures 8 and 9), at least for a decade or two until the advent of different idioms disturbed even that harmony.

**Figure 7:**
In the Cape mission towns, the insistence of the missionaries on rows of near-uniform cottages lent an ‘egalitarian’ (and to us highly attractive) quality of uniformity to its contour streets – a quality of which very little is now left. Two well-known early Vernackers (Sue Henderson and Matthew Marsh) are walking down the main street of Wupperthal during a visit in 1971 (photo Hans Fransen).

**Figure 8:**
Few officially laid-out towns had parts of their grid set aside for their working-class, mostly ‘Coloured’ population. If they could not afford a property in the main grid (which until the time of apartheid was quite possible, if unusual), they either lived in their employers’ back yards or in informal abodes in the veld on the outskirts of the town proper. Worcester and Clanwilliam are among the very few exceptions. The original houses of the Clanwilliam ‘Onderdorp’ behind the gaol/museum, were still intact until not so long ago (photo Hans Fransen).
The Cape ‘English’ vernacular assumed a character of its own during the mid-19th century, with hipped roofs without gables and with lots of chimneys, but it retained its uniformity with its configurations of long thatched roofs. This group, somewhere in Newlands or Claremont, no longer exists (CA E8198).
Speech for my Dad’s Celebration of Life

Kari Longman (15 December 2017)

I knew this day had to come at some point or another, but one is simply never prepared for it. In all honesty I’d quietly been hoping for some time – despite loving him with every bit of who I am that my father would drift away gently one night, taking him away from the anguish and frustration of living a life where the body and mind he’d once been able to embrace and challenge with such fervour – and with which he achieved such remarkable things – was so fundamentally reduced. He lived for 32 months in this state, steadily spiralling downwards, which is really a pretty long time. And now he is finally in that peaceful place. And yet my heart is bereft, I feel a deep and aching sense of loss, and my soul weeps for everything that he was to me and the world. I’m sure many of you feel the same way.

But I’m here primarily to speak about Hans as my father. And in my opinion he did such a fine job of that.

My dad was the one that used to call me his little “Muisie” when I was just five years old (and I’d tell him off, saying I was his “Meisie”, not his “Muisie”), who read The Early Bird (by Richard Scarry) to me on countless occasions so that I nearly knew it off by heart.

He was the one who would sit with me in the car and come up with some ridiculous system for making specific noises whenever we saw a Volksie, a Kombi or a Merc, seeing who could beat the other at saying it first. So we’d constantly be making silly sentences, going “Beep, Beep, Borp, Beep, Murk, Murk, Borp, Borp, Beep”, etc. Such a nonsense game, but what fun it was!

He was the one that would take me to his tennis afternoons at UCT (when it was still on middle campus) or some tennis courts near the station in Kenilworth, and I would wander around the big trees in a happy haze, and then we’d go and get a lovely soft serve ice-cream with Peter du Preez, who was my dad’s favourite tennis partner.

He was the one who built the wonderful white boundary wall (which stands to this day, despite having been built in the early ’70s) and driveway at our Cape Dutch-styled house called Ronde Lodge in Doordrift Road.

He was the one who – when we moved to Pietermaritzburg in April 1980 – I’d say goodnight to downstairs, and then he’d promise to come up the 22 stairs and say a “proper goodnight” to me once I was safely tucked in bed a few minutes later.

My dad was the one that came to all of my concerts over the years and celebrated the fact that he’d produced a daughter with some degree of musical potential, even if I sometimes made mistakes!

He was the one that took my mom and I overseas for two months in 1981, and introduced me not only to a world of wonder and a different beauty steeped in centuries of cultivated and cultural history (especially traipsing through European churches for much of those two months), but also introducing me to my
simply incredible Dutch family, who continue to be immensely special to me. I can also confirm that they are in awe of their cousin who decided to move to Africa, and all that he managed to achieve.

He was the one that rejoiced in the fact that – just as he discovered running – I somehow won my primary school “round the school” race and then encouraged me to take it a bit further. There was a time trial at Alexandra Park called Herman’s Delight and it was a very odd 2.7km long. My dad worked out that if I ran 22 times around our house, it was equal to 2.7km, so it was perfect training!

My dad was undoubtedly the person who introduced me to the concept of the beauty of words and the magic of letter combinations, and who decided that it would be a good idea for us to play Boggle together. We would play for hours on end, and he was completely delighted when I finally beat him! He also wrote a kind of letter code for me (where each letter actually represented another letter), making me untangle the new and mysterious words that I saw into ones that made sense. Word games and logic puzzles continue to give me a great sense of pleasure!

Because my mom was so very particular about eating healthily and my dad (and I) pined for sometimes having “naughty” food, I remember that there was no greater thrill than when my mom would go off to the Hydro for a few days to do a detox, and my dad would go out and buy all the ingredients for the most delicious pasta carbonara, which we’d eat pretty much for the entire time she was away! While she was detoxing, we were toxing ☺.

I have very fond memories of my dad taking me to help him do something simple but useful whenever there was an election happening, either for the PFP, or the DP. I would stuff envelopes or – very dramatically – scratch names off lists when those “who are you going to vote for” calls were made to someone who categorically stated they’d be voting for the Nats.

One of my greatest memories is of walking to the finish grounds of Comrades in 1983 and welcoming my dad home as he finished his first one at the age of 52, after just six months of training. I somehow managed to jump over the barrier and run across the finish line with him, which was actually forbidden! I will never forget that he referred to that moment (and the one the following year) numerous times as having been his greatest accomplishment ever as a human being. I truly was in awe of how my father transformed himself into a deeply committed runner with the most incredible stamina and resilience. When I went and finally ran my first Comrades in 2010, my father was ecstatic. His greatest running wish for me was for me to beat his PB. Unfortunately I never took much notice of what it was exactly, so I happened to miss it by 15 seconds in 2012.

In the years after Pietermaritzburg, when we moved back to Cape Town again, I have numerous memories, only some of which I have the time to reflect on here. One of them is of me “rescuing” a cat from the College of Music which seemed a bit lost (but was probably just out on a stroll). He came to my parents’ house and fought with their cats. So he promptly got moved to the Michaelis Collection and was named Max the Museum Cat and became probably one of the most famous and celebrated cats in Cape Town.

Another fond memory I have is of him going on his long lunch-time bicycle rides in about 1992 and 1994, when I would occasionally work at one of the barrows at the Waterfront. He’d arrive near the end of his ride, park his bike by the stall and then head promptly to Marcel’s to buy English Toffee yoghurt. He’d sit with me chatting about life and savouring his yoghurt, only to go back and get more. I once counted and he’d done this five times, so I asked him why he didn’t just go and buy a 500ml tub instead of five 125ml
ones, and he said “it just doesn’t taste as nice and isn’t nearly as much fun”. I’m sure there are many of you here who would concur with the fact that my father had a wonderful sense of fun and enjoying the moment!

In 1997 Alistair and I were very fortunate to have my dad come over to the UK, as we were ending our trip there, and then us being able to accompany him in a hired car through Holland, Belgium and then finally to our Dutch family’s house in the Dordogne for two weeks. It was in almost all respects heavenly. I’m sure many of you can imagine what it must be like to accompany Hans on a trip through Bruges, for example, where he was an absolute walking encyclopaedia! That trip is etched in our memories in many wonderful ways.

I’m quickly going to digress and tell you a story that Guus and Annemarie Balkema (Guus being the son of AA Balkema) relayed to me.

My brother-in-law, Anne Tjis, accompanied Hans on a road trip in 1965. The trip took them through Mossel Bay, Knysna, inland towards Oudtshoorn. All set on the search for old beautiful homesteads. While driving, Hans inadvertently reverted to an old ingrained habit that he took from Holland. Suddenly he was driving on the wrong side of the road. The RIGHT side!! Looking at Anne Tjis he wryly remarked (we can actually picture Hans saying this): “Zij hebben hier ook al de foute wetten die je NIET moet volgen. Die je aan je laars moet lappen. Maar deze moet je wel volgen.” And he drove over to the left hand side of the road like all good South African citizens, be they liberal or not!

[Translated, this is something like: There are many laws in this country that should be ignored, use them to patch your boots if you like (referring to Apartheid laws). But there is one law which should be obeyed. And he drove over to the left hand side of the road.]

Things I will miss so very much about my wonderful father are, for example, his spontaneity. For so many years he would take a cycle and then just randomly come and ring our bell at 15 Loch Road and pop in for a glass of fruit juice or a mug of Milo. We so appreciated the fact that our continued close relationship
with him – and him with his three grandchildren – was in no small part due to this light-spirited, adventurous and spontaneous spirit.

I will also miss him waiting on the side of the road – either outside 14 Kenmain Gardens as we ran the Peninsula Marathon, or during Two Oceans – to support and encourage us, despite it being at a rather ungodly hour. But my very best running memory of him is of him waiting at 53km during the Two Oceans Ultra on numerous occasions, sometimes with his bike and sometimes not, waiting to cheer us along those last three agonizingly long kilometres. Those are memories to be cherished forever. What I’d give to see his patiently waiting and supportive face at that corner again I cannot begin to describe.

I thank my dad for a multitude of things that he gave me and taught me: my love for music, my dedication to running, my devotion towards spontaneity, my absolute adoration of cats, that it is always advisable to assume best intent in others, a sense of fun and lightness of spirit, an enormous love of cheese, how very important it is to cherish one’s family and to celebrate life in any way one can. He showed us all what it is to fight a cause with fervour and grace, to be brilliant but humble, to be generous and unthreatened by the notion of sharing your knowledge with others, to never take oneself too seriously, and to see all of the arts as the most incredible opportunity to display both human brilliance and humanity. I can quite honestly say that every form of art, including music, ballet, art and architecture could reduce my father to tears of wonderment and joyousness. He was a highly sentimental man and an aesthete to the very end.

I will never forget the second last time we brought my parents home for afternoon tea, about two months ago, and my father sat in a wheelchair because he could hardly walk. When we played some Scarlatti sonatas and some wonderful Bach snippets, my dad just melted at the sound of it. It literally reduced him to tears and was a profoundly poignant occasion to witness. Those tears were a symbol of so many feelings within him at the time.

Despite the fact that he loved sleeping, I’m sure you’ll agree that my dad managed to fill his life with a myriad of wonderful and diverse achievements, a small snippet of which you’ll be able to read in his CV, and many of which have been referred to by Jan, Piet and André. I thought I’d quote from my own post on Facebook on Monday night:

I am in awe of everything you achieved and crammed into your life: one World War, one beautiful wife, one daughter, six Comrades, 45 marathons in six years, two doctorates, 21 Argus Cycle Tours, more kilometres ridden on your bicycle than would take you to the moon and back, a knighthood, more than a dozen books, numerous honorary awards which are actually too many to mention, knowing just about any piece JS Bach ever wrote by heart, eating 2521 Marcel’s frozen yoghurts (this is an estimate) and then for being the most fabulous dad and husband one could ever wish for.

Every day I am and will continue to be grateful for all the things my father taught me, and for his continual fatherly support and love.

Thank you to all of you for being here, and for appreciating my father for all that he did and was, and for the legacy which he created, which will live on forever. I have been brought to tears on so many occasions reading the beautiful tributes that so many of you have written about my father and what he meant to you and the broader community, over so many years, stretching from 1955 all the way through to 2015. I’d love to quote Michael Godby here, who so eloquently penned the following words:
In my experience Hans appeared perennially youthful – seemingly indestructible – an example to us all on how to remain vital as the years went by. More than that, and I believe throughout his life, Hans distinguished himself as a thoroughly good person, generous in contributing to debate and generous in extending support – and always with a twinkle in his eye. Hans was a much loved man.

I end with these parting words from the poem called ‘On the Death of the Beloved’ that Gordon Oliver read to us:

May you continue to inspire us:
To enter each day with a generous heart.
To serve the call of courage and love
Until we see your beautiful face again
In that land where there is no more separation,
Where all tears will be wiped from our mind,
And where we will never lose you again.

Figure 11:
Marthinus van Bart

Two of the most valued senior leaders of noteworthy non-governmental organisations for conservation in South Africa, Dr Hans Fransen of Pinelands (86) and Marie-Lou Roux (87) of Somerset-West, at the end of last year departed from this world after a long struggle of several decades against greedy, insensitive and careless developers, city councils and government officials. Marie-Lou died on 29 September, and Hans just two months later, on 11 December.

**Dr Hans Fransen**

“The death of Dr Hans Fransen is a big loss to South Africa. He was an irreplaceable expert and archivist of the South African architecture, cultural history and the arts”, said Dr Dan Sleigh, historian, writer and close friend of Fransen, when it became known that Hans, world-renown museum archivist, writer, lecturer and one time editorial staff member of a Cape Town newspaper, Die Burger, died on 11 December 2017.

Fransen was born on 14 June 1931 in Amsterdam, Holland, and emigrated to South Africa in 1955. He never returned to the Netherlands, but was a life-long Dutch patriot who never let go of his Dutch nationality, nor of his distinct Dutch pronunciation when fluently speaking English or Afrikaans. He studied architecture in Amsterdam before he came to Pretoria, where he got a position as surveyor with the Department of Water Affairs. In 1968 he obtained a BA degree in History of Art at Unisa, and in 1989 a doctorate in History of Art at the University of Natal. His thesis was: “Styl-tydperke in Kaapse argitektuur en versiering” (“Style periods in Cape architecture and decoration”).

In 1959 he was a press and cultural assistant and translator with the French embassy in Pretoria and Cape Town. At the same time he obtained a three year position as proof-reader and editorial assistant at the daily Afrikaans newspaper Die Burger in Keeromstreet, Cape Town.

Fransen's long career in the South African museum world began in 1962 when he was appointed as temporary curator of the Michaelis Art Collection in the Burger Watch House on Green Market Square in the centre of Cape Town until 1965. Twenty five years later, in 1990, he became full time director of this collection, and retired in 2001. Previously he was consecutively curator of the Stellenbosch Museum (1965-1969), the Groot Constantia Museum (1970-1974), and assistant-director of the SA National Art Gallery in Cape Town (1975-1980). In 1981 he was appointed as senior lecturer in History of Art at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, before he returned, nine years later, in 1990, to Cape Town to continue his career as curator with the Michaelis Art Collection.

After his retirement in 2001 he was advisor as well as activist for the conservation of Cape architecture and the arts. Among other activities, he was involved with the Boerneef Art Collection at Welgemeend in the grounds of Hoërskool Jan van Riebeeck in Gardens, Cape Town, and was involved with the restoration
of the historical Church Street in Tulbagh. He was a lifelong acquaintance of the prominent art auctioneer, Stephan Welz, and regularly advised him on noteworthy works of art at auction.

Fransen’s greatest legacy is unquestionably the monumental treasure of authoritative books on art and architecture from his pen. Most of them are still regarded as standard handbooks on these subjects by academics as well as professionals. The fourteen books, of which many have been revised and supplemented by Fransen through the years, are regarded as Africana.

They are:
- *The Old Houses of the Cape* - researched with Mary Alexander Cook (1965)
- *The Cape Chair* (1971)
- *Groot Constantia* (1972)
- *Ontdek Stellenbosch - compiled with the assistance of photographer Christo Botha* (1979)
- *Old Buildings of the Cape* (1980)
- *A Cape Camera* (1994)
- *Old Towns and Villages of the Cape* (2006)
- *Erik Laubscher - ’n biografie* (2009)
- *Cape Baroque and the Contribution of Anton Anreith* (2015)

*Figure 12:*

Front covers of some of the books authored or co-authored by Hans Fransen.
Fransen was a member of many specialized and professional organisations, such as the Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa, the SA Association of Arts, the Simon van der Stel Foundation, the SA Society of Cultural Historians, the SA Museums Association, and the Dutch cultural association De Orde van den Prince (Cape of Good Hope). Of the many awards he received for the excellence of his contribution to the preservation of arts and culture, are the Simon van der Stel Foundation’s Gold Medal (1984); the Cape Times Centenary Award for Conservation (1993); a knighthood from the Netherlands Order of Orange-Nassau (2001); an Honorary Doctorate from Stellenbosch University (2008), and an honorary medal from the VOC Foundation (2016). At the same occasion, a co-struggler for conservation of the historical architecture of South Africa, Marie-Louise (Marie-Lou) Roux, also received the VOC Foundation’s medal and honorary membership.

Fransen was an able photographer and took most of the photographs published in his books on architecture. He travelled more than 5 000 km on his bicycle to take these pictures. As a fitness fanatic and athlete he took part in 45 marathon events - of which six were the Comrades Marathon. As a keen cyclist, he took part in 21 Cape Argus Cycle Tour events in the Cape Peninsula.

He is survived by his wife of 54 years, Marie Anneen (Van Zyl), and one daughter, Kari Longman.
Marie-Louise (Marie-Lou) Roux

A life-long exceptional educationalist, culture and nature lover, Marie-Lou Roux was in 2014 honoured by the SA Academy of Science and Art with the awarding of its Honorary Medal for her contribution of over 60 years to the furthering of education and culture. In spite of her declining health during the last decade of her life, seriously hampering her mobility, she led the conservation NGOs Captrust and the SA Habitat Council from strength to strength. Right up to her death from heart failure she would regularly work on her lap-top into the early hours of the morning, compiling court papers and legal documents for the several Supreme Court actions in aid of nature conservation and the protection of the country’s architectural heritage.

Marie-Lou was widely known for her active involvement in the never-ending struggle against greedy developers who have no respect for South Africa’s heritage nor for the indigenous natural environment. She also kept an unwaveringly sharp eye on corruption-inclined heritage officials of the National Government, the Western Cape Province, as well as of the City of Cape Town, to prevent them from allowing these ruthless developers to demolish and ruin the architectural and natural heritage belonging to all citizens of South Africa.

The last, highly noteworthy, court case in which Marie-Lou was intensely involved, still pending in the Supreme Court, is an action against the addition of an ultra-modern tower block in the old centre of Cape Town adjacent to the Lutheran Church complex on Strand Street. This proposed overbearing structure of concrete, glass and steel will not only dominate the heritage site, but totally destroy the visual charm of this architectural gem. For her stance and efforts to prevent this ultra-modern edifice from being erected, the VOC Foundation honoured Marie-Lou shortly before her death with honorary membership and its prestigious medal (of sterling silver). In 1988 she received the Cape Times Centenary Award for the conservation of nature and the environment, and the Wild Life and Environmental Society awarded its gold medal for conservation to Marie-Lou.

Marie-Louise Roux was born on 19 July 1931 in Pretoria. She matriculated in 1947 at the Hoërskool Langenhoven in Riversdal. In 1950 she obtained a BA degree in Languages at Stellenbosch University, and in 1951 she obtained a HOD at Rhodes University. In 1975 she obtained a BA (Hons) in English at Stellenbosch University, and in 1979 the BEd degree at the University of Cape Town. In 1994 a MEd (cum laude) was conferred on her by Stellenbosch University.

She taught languages for 28 years at schools in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Zeerust in the Transvaal Bushveld, Riversdal, Stellenbosch, Tygerberg and Cape Town. From 1981 to 1993 she was lecturer in English at the Education Faculty of Stellenbosch University. She also spent much of her spare time on youth education in the Performing Arts, composed the school anthem of the Hoërskool Langenhoven, and organised and trained youth participants for mass folk dancing at the 1981 Republic Festival.

As far back as the 1970s Marie-Lou was involved with the conservation of nature and the protection of historic buildings. She spearheaded the protection of the Western Facade of Church Square in Pretoria against modern development and collected a vast sum of money to pay for legal costs to launch a successful action against the B.J. Vorster government. In the 1980s Marie-Lou again took the lead to update and expand Nature Conservation laws and law enforcement. In the 1980s she took a special interest in the conservation of the unique Strandveld natural environment at Stilbaai, as well as the restoration and protection of the local historic architecture, such as the Jagersbosch homestead, the Palinggat (where for centuries eels bred), two pioneer cottages, a school building and the sea cottage of
the family of the artist Volschenk. In 1992 she became a member of Captrust, and in 1995 the executive official of the SA Habitat Council. She then also became involved with the cultural organisation Stellenbosch Heemkring, the Stellenbosch Music Society, as well as the Botanical Society of SA.

During the last seven years of her life Marie-Lou took the lead in the mass action of conservationists of Cape Town to prevent the ruin of the Martin Melck Granary at Strand Street, dating from the 1700s, by the redevelopment of the heritage site. At the same time she tried (alas, in vain) to prevent the demolition of Highclere at Bloubergstrand, seaside cottage of Sir Langham Dale, last Colonial Superintendent-general of Education.

Marie-Lou was co-writer (with Helene Steyn of Stilbaai) of three authoritative books: Die Volschenks - drie geslagte kunsskilders (a biography of the Volschenk artist family), Stilbaai (a history of the town and its people), as well as My Hofmeyr en De Vos Familie (a biography with Annie Hofmeyr). Marie-Lou even found time to write for, edit and publish countless journals on the fauna and flora of the Strandveld and the Southern Cape. She was a rare individual indeed.

Figure 14:
Marie-Lou Roux. She and Hans Fransen headed a mass protest against the development of the historical VOC Granary adjacent to the Lutheran Church in Strand Street, Cape Town.
Hans Fransen’s contribution to our understanding of the Cape architectural tradition

André van Graan

“If we regret the loss of most of our old architecture, what we regret most is perhaps not so much the loss of the actual buildings, but the passing of a era that produced a modest architecture of such unity, so right and so fitting and without the wilfulness that makes much of the subsequent architecture so bewildering” (H. Fransen, A Cape Camera, 1993, p.14).

Hans Fransen’s contribution to our understanding of the vernacular architecture of the Cape through his writings is of inestimable value. Taking his place in a small group of historians who engaged with the material culture of the Cape and locating its endeavours within the wider cultural milieu of the age, he created a unique perspective on the significance and range of the region’s architecture and cultural artefacts.

In the preface to his last book, Cape Baroque and the Contribution of Anton Anreith (2015), Anton Obholzer remarked that, with few exceptions, most of the authors in the field of Cape architectural history have been ‘outsiders’. He lists Atmore, Baraitser, Cook, De Bosdari, Fairbridge, Fransen, Lewcock, Obholzer, Pearse and Walton. In acknowledging his achievements, Obholzer posed the question: “why [has] most of the work about Cape material culture [has] been initiated by outsiders - of whom Hans Fransen is probably the prime example? In reading his latest book, the answer becomes clear, namely that it requires an outsider’s perspective to see the material ‘in the round’ and also to put it in a global context” (Fransen 2014: viii).

It is perhaps useful to consider Hans Fransen’s contribution in the light of this concept, of him being an ‘outsider’. I would begin by arguing that, with his deep engagement with the local people and his empathetic understanding of their culture, he should rather be looked at as an ‘outsider/insider’, thus reflecting the degree to which he assimilated the local culture and cultural understanding. Social scientists use the terms ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ to describe the potential conflicts and benefits of these two different perspectives. The so-called emic or insider approach focuses on what local people think and value. It considers how they perceive the world, their behavioural norms, to what things they ascribe value, and how they imagine and explain things. The etic approach, by contrast, shifts the focus from local observations, categories, explanations, and interpretations to those of a wider, global context - the view of an outsider. The etic approach realizes that local people are engaged in their cultural practices sub-consciously and have difficulty interpreting their cultures impartially. When using the etic approach,

2 The terms "emic" and "etic" were first coined by the linguistic theoretician Kenneth Pike in 1954 and were subsequently expanded upon in his book Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior (1967). Pike derived the term "etic" from the suffix of the word phonetic which pertains to the study of sounds which are universally used in human language—specifically, the function of sounds within a language regardless of their meanings. Similarly, "emic" stems from the word phonemic which is primarily concerned with the acoustics, external properties, and meanings of words (Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dasen, 1992; Helfrich, 1999; Yin, 2010).
the cultural historian emphasizes what he or she considers important. Although emics and etics are sometimes regarded as inherently in conflict, and one can be preferred to the exclusion of the other, the complementarity of emic and etic approaches to cultural historical research has the potential for uncovering a far richer network of inter-relationships that an examination, for example, of architecture, furniture or indeed any aspect of material culture would have in isolation.

In taking this approach to the study of Cape architecture, Hans Fransen and Barrie Biermann stand out as two architectural historians who attempted to locate the architecture of the Cape in a larger, Dutch cultural milieu, although Biermann was certainly an ‘insider’. Fransen took Biermann to task, however, in the chapter of his aforementioned book on Cape Baroque, where he commented that, “his text is arranged on very general stylistic lines, making liberal use of the terms Baroque, Rococo and Classicism”. He added that, to assume - as Biermann did - “that the Vergelegen affair gave birth to a Cape aristocracy, and the farm itself to a rural Baroque unknown in Europe, are challenging thoughts if perhaps somewhat simplistic”.

Hans Fransen drew on his wide range of experience, both academic and professional in his writings, thus bringing a richly inter-disciplinarity to his publications. His formative studies in architecture in the Netherlands were followed by a master’s degree in Fine Art and culminated in a doctorate at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg wherein he examined the style periods of Cape architecture and decoration. His involvement during his working life with the curation of museum collections widened his knowledge and understanding of South African material culture. This diverse set of informants, coupled with his European background, helped to develop what I believe to be Hans Fransen’s uniquely insightful way of examining material culture.

*Figure 15:*
*Hans Fransen with his cousins in Holland (circa 1936).*
His earliest contribution to an understanding of vernacular architecture was made in the second edition of *Cape Dutch Houses and Farms*, which was edited by C. de Bosdari and published in 1962. Here he looked at the outlying districts. This was written very early on in his engagement with Cape material culture. He had come to Cape Town in 1959, where he worked as a Press and Cultural Affairs Assistant at the French Embassy and also as an Editorial Assistant and proof reader on *Die Burger* newspaper. At that time Piet Cillië was the editor and a staunch supporter of the Nationalist Party. This must have been an extremely difficult period for Hans, who was a strong supporter of the Liberal Party.

*Cape Dutch Houses and Farms* came out just when he took up a post as Acting Curator of the Michaelis Collection. In the chapter on the outlying districts we see the first sign of his extensive travelling to look at vernacular architecture as he commented that, “[w]e are aware that, in spite of extensive travelling through these areas, our notes are far from complete, and in most instances we have not yet been able to find out the history of the places described”. He described, albeit broadly, the ‘Coastal Belt’, the Karoo and Little Karoo, and Graaff-Reinet. He also expressed his concern about preservation, which was to be an ongoing issue for him. He described meeting an owner of a historic house who “remarked that it was a pity that I could not return a few months later, when he would have modernised the house, and he apologized for ‘the state it was in’”. He went on to look at the Northern Districts, where he identified Coenradenberg as “by far the most interesting homestead north of Cape Town”. He also raised a question which he was to reiterate often in his writing: “Here is a farm that should really be proclaimed a National Monument. Is it asking too much: one National Monument in an area of thousands of square miles? For one day there will be a Jasper Smit who may want to build a nice, new farm - and who will stop him?”. He also examined the Mission Villages of Wupperthal, Genadendal, Mamre and Elim. Finally, he looked at the fishing villages of Waenhuiskrans and Hotagterklip. Throughout the chapter the descriptions are brief, but one senses the beginnings of his approach to surveying, to gaining an overall impression and mapping the vernacular heritage. The descriptors are almost cursory, but there are flashes of insight as he highlights a particular building.

The founding of the Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa in 1964 must have struck a chord with Hans and he became a founder member. There are a number of photographs of Hans attending the early outings of the Society, where he was obviously adding to his knowledge of Cape architecture. His position as Acting Curator of the Michaelis collection, with its important collection of Dutch paintings, broadened his interest and understanding of material culture and specifically the art field in South Africa, so that he completed a BA in the History of Art through UNISA in 1968.

However, it was his meeting with Dr Mary Cook that led him into the first iteration of a publication on Cape architecture that remains an essential series of seminal works that mapped the architectural landscape of the Cape, broadening and widening with each new publication. *The Old Houses of the Cape* published in 1965, was “the result of a desire on the part of its authors- the late Dr Mary Cook and the present author - to provide an inventory for the then Western Cape Province. They set out to collect as much material as possible in order to provide any subsequent research with some sort of basis and to serve as a tool for conservation”. In the foreword Dr Anton Rupert boasted that “in the relatively short space of 300 years, South Africa has made two original and significant contributions to world culture - Cape Dutch architecture and the Afrikaans language”. He went on to say that “Cape Dutch architecture has been described as the most beautiful domestic architecture in the world”. He also pointed out that “it is strange that ‘foreigners’ who came to visit or settle in South Africa- people like Cecil Rhodes, Sir Herbert Baker. Alys Fane Trotter, etc. were among the first to realize the beauty and uniqueness of Cape Dutch architecture”, a phrase repeated by Obholzer, quoted earlier. The book set out in its first chapter an introduction to the Cape gable, its origin and development. In the last revision of the book, published
in 2004, Hans Fransen also paid tribute to Mary Cook, “this remarkable medical doctor and parson’s wife from England who made Cape cultural history her own as few others did”.

Figure 16:

Dr Mary Cook (1902-1981), photographed in Swellendam in 1970.

Dr Mary Cook’s fascination with Cape architecture and decorative arts started during family holidays to the Cape, leading her to study the topic and do research in the archives. Becoming known as an authority on the subject, she started campaigning for the preservation of Cape architecture and, from 1947, she wrote regularly on the subject in journals and newspapers. The family then moved to Cape Town, and her husband died in 1957. In 1958 she took up the position of cultural historian at the South African Museum, being put in charge of their cultural history collections. At the time, these were primarily located at Koopmans-de Wet House, Strand Street, Cape Town. In 1965 she was appointed the curator at the Drostdy Museum in Swellendam. She held this position until her retirement in 1974. Dr Cook was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Stellenbosch University in 1971.

The book was revised some fifteen years later as *The Old Buildings of the Cape* (1980). In their preface they commented that there had been “a remarkable upsurge of interest in the historical styles of architecture in South Africa…The essential task of the actual preservation of the dwindling remnants of these styles, however, has always been hampered by the lack of a detailed inventory”.

In the period between the publication of the first edition of *The Old Houses of the Cape* and its revision in 1980, Hans completed his BA in the History of Art and moved on to become first the curator of the
Stellenbosch Museum from 1965-1969 and then of Groot Constantia from 1970-1974. This was followed by a post as Assistant Director at the SA National Gallery from 1975-1980. In that year he moved to Pietermaritzburg, taking up a senior lecturing post in History of Art at the then University of Natal, where he stayed until 1989.

A key publication that came out not long after his move to Pietermaritzburg was *Drie Eeue Kuns in Suid Afrika* in 1981. This was unique in being the first art history book published in Afrikaans. It covered the broad spectrum of cultural historical artefacts and focused on providing study material for Afrikaans-speaking students among others. This was followed by an extended English edition, *Three Centuries of South African Art*, published in 1982. In his preface he pointed out that the book was written because “the general outlines of our cultural history have become blurred by all the detailed studies. Added to this is the fact that our art history, as an extension of our social history, does not possess the type of logical coherence that is, for instance, a characteristic of British art. South African art must be understood in terms of the existence of various settler cultures alongside black African cultural traditions; periods of increased or diminished cultural contact with Europe.” He explained the relatively large section on architecture was due to the fact that “architecture has been, until very recently, the art form in which our country has made its most significant contribution”. His section on architecture is a remarkable synthesis of the history of Cape vernacular architecture, its typologies and its genealogy. Here he made reference to the doctoral thesis of J. van der Meulen, whose attribution of Cape architecture to North German predecessors caused a considerable stir in South Africa. Indignant counter-arguments were raised by Dr Bax, Willem Punt, Dutch historians and Clemens Trefois in Belgium, whose book on the origins of Cape gables was widely published by the Simon van der Stel Foundation. Despite his Dutch background, Hans supported the sound tenets put forward by Van der Meulen.

Yet another remarkable attribute of this publication is the extent of his knowledge and coverage of fine art around the country as well as applied art including furniture, silver and ceramics. And he did not limit the period he covered to a historic past but brought the discussion right up to the present day, manifestly the characteristics of a latter-day ‘Renaissance Man’! He also included indigenous African art and architecture, as well as Hindu temples, in the wide-ranging coverage of the book. In the conclusion to the preface he expressed the “belief that South African art will reach full maturity only when the various cultures coexisting here mutually influence and enrich one another, and our art becomes the fullest expression of all facets of the fascinating country”. In the breadth of his coverage of South African architecture, the various sections, although sometimes brief, are insightful and divorced from either wistful sentimentality or subjective criticism. For example, at a time when Art Deco architecture was highly underrated in South Africa, he described it as “a style with a strongly associative character, It expressed a certain fashionable progressiveness, a joie de vivre and optimism”. Hans’ openness to flux and change is borne out in his comment in the concluding paragraphs on art where he proposed that “we should declare ourselves prepared to experience whatever art the future may produce”.

Hans’ research into Cape architecture involved not only looking at the buildings themselves, but also studying the work of early photographers such as Ravenscroft and Arthur Elliot. His study of the latter’s work resulted in two publications. First he wrote *Architectural Beauty of the Old Cape as seen by Arthur Elliott* which was published in 1969. In the published selection of photographs from the Elliott Collection of the Cape Archives he chose both urban and rural examples most of which had vanished in the intervening years. He mourned the losses not only of the buildings Elliott photographed, but also the loss of character in those that had survived. He returned to the issue raised in *The Houses of the Cape*, saying that “one cannot do anything, as long as buildings are not listed and free advice in the case of restoration is not given”. In the first book, the last section is titled ‘Half a century’s loss’. Here he posed the question:
“What is it that makes this largely utilitarian, run-of-the-mill architecture so attractive to us today?”. This was a question that Fransen attempted to answer in all of his writings on architecture. He always retained a sense of realism in his texts. He commented that it was pointless deploring the losses of the nineteenth century, comparing it to a musicologist bewailing the death of Hayden. He constantly wrote of his concern about the extent of the losses of the twentieth century when there were mechanisms available to offer greater protection to the architectural heritage, despite which great losses continued to be made.

He subsequently revised the book as *A Cape Camera*, a standard reference work, which was published in 1993 in hardcover and in 2000 in softcover. In this edition, he added a section on ‘The Architectural Heritage of the Cape’. There he offered a cogent description of the ‘Cape Dutch’ style. Calling it a true vernacular, he stated rather unequivocally: “The Cape Dutch style was a true folk style in the sense that it was the universal building idiom in use by the Cape settlers of the 18th century. While the 19th century, even in the Western Cape, saw several architectural styles in use simultaneously – Regency, Georgian, the Gothic, Greek and Egyptian Revivals, and indeed late Cape Dutch – the 18th century was Cape Dutch and nothing but Cape Dutch”. One clearly sees his great love for this architecture which he describes as being simple and uniform. He summed it up in his remark that, “as a totality it achieves that unity of scale, proportion and texture which has always been regarded as an artistic ideal”.

**Figure 17:**

100 and 98 Loop Street, Cape Town, much altered but still full of character when photographed by Arthur Elliott circa 1913.
In 2004 he published *A Guide to the Old Buildings of the Cape*. This was a complete revision of the 1980 publication. The survey now covered a much greater field and widened the time frame, so that he examined Victorian and Edwardian buildings as well as the buildings of the Dutch period, which had been the focus of the earlier editions. Here he attempted to rectify errors, improve the coverage, and cover the gains and losses of the preceding years. He also considered that this book came closer to their initial ideal - a true monuments inventory. Now some 5700 buildings were listed, as opposed to 600 in the first edition and 4000 in the second.

But in addition to the book being an inventory, the first chapter was also expanded to cover the typological as well as the stylistic development of the architecture of the Cape. In the conclusion to this section he discussed the vexed issue of restoration. Here he raised the question of a return to a so-called ‘best’ period, but pointed out that this is no longer an acceptable approach to building conservation. He advocated an acceptance of the notion of ‘layering’ and not trying to reinvent speculative lost gables with concomitant loss of patina. However he did laud examples of reconstruction, such as Norman Eaton’s reconstruction of Reinet House in Graaff-Reinet, or Meerlust by Revel Fox, or Church Street in Tulbagh by Gawie Fagan.

*Figure 18:*

Hans Fransen in District Six, recording a world that was lost through demolition in the 1970s.

The publication of *Old Towns and Villages of the Cape* in 2006 marked Fransen’s expanding upon the context of vernacular architecture and the concept of a cultural landscape. He saw this publication as a response to the need to record and examine the “micro-histories of our towns and of the surveyors who laid them out”. He explored the “imprint imposed on the natural landscape by human habitation and cultivation”. In considering the impact of urbanisation and growth on historic towns, he believed that it was vitally important to record the landscape at a point in time, describing its development, as he was concerned that unfettered growth would destroy the character of rural towns and villages. He classified typologies of settlement from cities (Cape Town is the only city in the region) through to hamlets, and the partition of larger settlements into suburbs. In the introductory section he clearly located the development of towns and villages at the Cape to European precedents, noting both similarities and differences. In considering the etymology of towns or villages, he referred back to Dutch precedent and
the various names used in Dutch for different patterns of settlement. One observes again an Outsider/Insider way of examining settlements. He was constantly looking for a perspectival overview of what he was examining, and maintained a distance which is invaluable in reaching a clearer understanding. Once again he returned to a recurrent concern: the issue of conservation. He dealt at some length with urban conservation and his concern that restoration “ironically always involves a degree of further loss of authenticity”. He also related an interest in conservation to a nostalgia for the past, and the impact of the so-called ‘heritage industry’. In the final part of the introduction, he considered what he regarded as sensitive conservation projects and once again addressed the concept of ‘layering’.

In his last book, Cape Baroque and the Contribution of Anton Anreith, published in 2014, Fransen drew together the threads of a lifelong engagement with the architecture and material culture at the Cape in what was clearly a favourite period for him: the 18th century. He attempted to come to an understanding of why there were unique characteristics in Cape architecture, furniture and metalwork as they re-interpreted European stylistic developments. He spoke of the “term ‘Afrikaner’ [which] had been coined to express that feeling of belonging here” and identified this feeling of independence to partly explain how a small, scattered population could produce “the distinctive, vital and coherent style of architecture and decorative arts”. This book is perhaps one of the most in-depth academic studies by Fransen, and rather than being a survey or an inventory, he engaged with concepts such as Gestalt theory when he considered the Cape farm. Here he acknowledged the contributions made by Gwen Fagan in her doctoral study, as well as Barrie Biermann. In the penultimate chapter he again acknowledged the contribution made by a wide range of authors: Alys Fane Trotter, Dorothea Fairbridge, G.E. Pease, James Walton, Barrie Biermann and Mary Cook. As referred to earlier, he recognised that most of the earlier studies had been descriptive-historical in their approach without attempting stylistic analyses.

In all his writing, Hans Fransen combined both archival textual evidence and images, whether based on his own direct observations and measuring up, or historical photographs, particularly those of photographers such as Elliott or Ravenscroft. Much evidence - that is, written texts and cultural artefacts - endures physically and leaves its traces on the material past. It is impossible to talk to and with these materials, but rather they need to be interpreted, for in them are found important meanings about the form of lived cultures, such as at the Cape. Fransen engaged with these in an extraordinarily insightful way to draw out meanings and understanding. His background as a cultural historian was a considerable advantage in this regard. His methods of interpretation of material culture centred on the simultaneous hermeneutical procedures of defining the context, the unpacking of patterned similarities and differences – for example between the Cape and European examples - and the use of relevant social and material culture theory to explain these.

The French theorist Paul Ricoeur argued that history is to be understood as a form of narrative that draws causal connections between events in order to explain them. In his view, to explain why something happened and to explain what happened must coincide. In this regard Fransen excelled. His explanations always followed a clear, rational narrative which lent credence to his hypotheses. Added to this, his Outsider/Insider approach was combined, giving the ‘richest’ view of Cape architecture. Where, on its own, an emic approach would have struggled with applying overarching values to a single cultural manifestation, such as the vernacular architecture of the Cape, the etic approach helped him to see more than one aspect of Cape culture, and to apply observations from other cultures.

Hans Fransen made an extraordinary contribution towards locating and understanding the architecture of the Cape. His writings will remain seminal texts on the extent and scope of the vernacular architecture
of the region. The ‘outsider’ demonstrated a unique way of ‘seeing’ and sharing his love of the material culture of his adopted country.

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Two Views of Culture: Etic & Emic: Lumen cultural anthropology.

https://courses.lumenlearning.com/culturalanthropology/chapter/two-views-of-culture-etic-emic/
Assessing some of J.H. Pierneef’s artworks to reconstruct the history of a vernacular dwelling

Mauritz Naudé

Abstract
The architectural historian has several support sciences to his disposal when interpreting a building. Due to the institutionalised procedures involved in design and approval, sources regarding a formally designed and constructed building are easier to access. The interpretation of the vernacular building is less accessible as the designer, builder and owner was often the same person. Moreover, the vernacular building is often interpreted after the landowner and his relatives have passed away. In a scenario such as this, a multi-disciplinary approach becomes necessary and the architectural historian must rely on the source material, knowledge and methodologies of the art historian, cultural historian, historian and historical archaeologist. In this instance the lino cuts of artist J.H. Pierneef were used as a significant source of information - assuming that these depictions contained some veracity regarding technical and architectural detail.

Introduction
I first met Hans Fransen in 1976 when I was one of a group of art and art history students from the University of Pretoria who visited the Cape. The excursion was organised by Murray Schoonraad, who was a lecturer at the Department of Art History at the University of Pretoria at the time. The tour included a visit to the South African National Gallery in Cape Town (currently part of Iziko Museums South Africa) where Hans served as staff member. He introduced us to the museological approach to artworks, explaining the benefits of and logic behind different storage methods associated with formal preservation. His knowledge of museology and his love for the artworks was evident, although none of the students had any real interest in conservation or museology as a career. The information he shared with us only later became useful to me when I also started working in a museum.

Around 1983 Hans visited me at Botshabelo (a former mission station of the Berlin Mission Society) near Middelburg (Mpumalanga Province) after a Southern African Museums Association (SAMA) conference in Gauteng. I was the curator of the mission station and Ndebele Museum. The Middelburg Town Council bought the mission station and had just commenced with the restoration of the historic buildings of the small village. The restoration project was preceded by the construction of an open-air museum for the South Ndebele people on the same site but some distance away from the original mission settlement. Hans had an interest in South Ndebele mural art. The last chapter of Drie Eeue Kuns in Suid-Afrika (Fransen 1981) reflected on the vernacular mural art of various indigenous black groups. He had been travelling through different regions taking pictures of wall decorations of the dwellings he came across. I was surprised when he fetched stacks of suspension files filled with colour slides from his car and started unpacking these on my dining room table. This resulted in an extensive discussion on the differences between Sotho and South Ndebele wall paintings, motifs and the use of materials. Whether any of the shared information resulted in new publications is unknown, and I lost contact with Hans afterwards.
Hans Fransen and Gre van der Waal-Braaksma

A contemporary of Hans Fransen, also of Dutch ancestry with a similar passion for the cultural history of the local Afrikaans people of South Africa, was Gre van der Waal-Braaksma. Gre and Hans worked separately and had no professional or personal association with each other, except for being of Dutch origin. She died in March 2018 in the Netherlands, but she used to be a staff member of the National Cultural History and Open-Air Museum in Pretoria (currently the DITSONG: National Museum of Cultural History). She contributed to the little book called *Die Noordweste, die stoflike kultuuruitinge van die streek se bewoners* (published by the National Cultural History and Open-Air Museum in 1986). The significance of Gre van der Waal-Braaksma relates to her work in the Northwest (Afrikaans: *die Noordweste*) – a geographic domain in common with the interests of the Vernacular Architectural Society of South Africa (VASSA). Her co-author was O.J.O. Ferreira, the well-known historian who lectured at the Department of Cultural History at the University of Pretoria and worked at the National Cultural History and Open-Air Museum in Pretoria. The book was based on several months of fieldwork in the Northwest region. They were accompanied by Louis Changuion, a colleague at the time who became a lecturer at the Department of History at the University of the North but has also since retired. The book contains chapters on farmyards and farmsteads, outdoor ovens, traditional bread baking, the interiors of the dwellings, and several chapters on leather products still manufactured at that time according to the simple folk methods of the region.

The reason for mentioning the book and the authors is simple: the loss of Hans Fransen and Gre van der Waal-Braaksma leaves a significant void in the recording of South African cultural history. It also concludes a chapter in the recording of the South African cultural landscape. The *Noordweste* publication resulted from field research and recordings covering the region that several contributors to the VASSA Journal have visited and researched. The passion of these two Dutch individuals resulted in the publication and therefore the preservation of valuable data and information regarding different regions in South Africa, and they need to be commemorated and celebrated for these contributions.

Jacob Hendrik Pierneef and the pioneer dwelling (Mundt dwelling)

This tribute to Hans Fransen was provoked by a lino print of the pioneer dwelling in Silverton east of Pretoria made by the well-known South African artist Jacob Hendrik Pierneef. Hans included the image in *Drie Eeuwe Kuns in Suid-Afrika* (Fransen 1981: 107). The print serves as a good point of departure to reflect upon his multidisciplinary approach, combining art, vernacular architecture and museology.

Pierneef made several prints of the pioneer dwelling (Mundt dwelling) of which six have been published (Naudé 2003: 45). They served a valuable purpose during academic reconstructions of what the dwelling looked like prior to the building’s first restoration in the 1960s. Pierneef’s drawings focus on the exterior of this small dwelling, but deeper research and analysis revealed the floor plan and the chronology of changes to the dwelling. It expanded from a simple three room unit to the existing floor plan (2018) that includes a boys’ room (Afrikaans: *ramkamer*) and kitchen. The investigation highlighted significant aspects of the frontier lifestyle and frontier dwellings, including the presence of the *voorkamer*, the *ramkamer* and the attached kitchen (with a specific type of hearth). During a more recent assessment of the structure, Pierneef’s drawings were once again scrutinised in order to debate the presence and positions of doors and windows.

Of special significance in the depictions of the pioneer dwelling is the large hearth, seen from outside. The hearth became an architectural subject of contention when it was compared to those of other early
farm dwellings. The particularly problematic aspect of the hearth was the height of the inside base, as it sits about 80mm from the kitchen floor instead of being elevated to the usual hip height.

Figure 19:
*Lino cut by J H Pierneef of the pioneer dwelling published in Drie Eeue Kuns in Suid-Afrika (Fransen 1981: 107)*
*(Original print: DITSONG: National Museum of Cultural History, Pretoria).*

The personal life of Pierneef is mainly associated with the history of Pretoria: the city’s cultural life, its art scene, its architects and its landscape. He was associated with some of the early artists and architects of the city and surrounding areas, such as Gustav Preller, Coert Steynberg, Gerard Moerdijk and Norman Eaton. Pierneef made numerous drawings and oil paintings of the Pretoria landscape, the town, rural scenes surrounding the town, and farmsteads and farm dwellings that he considered worth recording. The small dwelling of the Mundt family (later known as the pioneer dwelling) was one of his subjects. It is not monumental in size or scale and the only sculptural and perhaps monumental aspect of the little dwelling was its hearth and chimney. The kitchen was not part of the original dwelling, however, but was added to the southern elevation of the original core building. Pierneef also made drawings, water colours and oil paintings of other farm houses, such as the Doors Erasmus dwelling (oil painting) north of the Magaliesberg on the farm Wonderboom, the farmstead on Derdepoort (landscape oil painting) where the N1 national road cuts through the Magaliesberg (from north to south), and the dwelling of the Struben family (Harry and Fred Struben) on the farm The Willows (water colour), east of the Mundt dwelling.

**Pierneef’s interest in the Mundt farmstead**

Pierneef must have visited the Mundt family and known the area where they farmed well, as he later acquired a portion of land nearby. Most of the lino cuts of the small dwelling were made prior to Pierneef moving to his own farm. From 1939, Pierneef lived on the property later known as Hartebeespoort 304. Assisted by the Pretoria architect Norman Eaton, Pierneef created a safe and artistic cluster of huts and rondavels and named it Elangeni (place in the sun). He used the existing circular layout of abandoned stone ruins to guide his new home. His studio was located some 40 metres away from the circular private village or ‘kraal’. Pierneef’s property bordered the farm Hartebeespoort 308, which belonged to Hans Heinrich Mundt. Today, travelling from Elangeni to the Mundt farmstead would take about eight minutes.
The farm is located along the northern slopes of one of the ridges of the Bronberg. The area is drained by the Moreletta Spruit (from south to north) through the Hartebeestpoort. Where the spruit crossed the historic main road between Pretoria and Bronkhorstspruit, Mundt developed irrigated fields and fruit orchards along the eastern and western banks. Although Mundt died in 1922, at that time he was still a formidable person. Pierneef must have visited the Mundt farmstead quite often and most of the prints and drawings date from this period. Mundt’s daughter inherited the farm and the family remained there until the 1960s when they donated the farmstead and some surrounding land to the local authority (municipality) of Silverton, which was later consolidated with the City Council of Pretoria (Kritzinger 1980: 12).

Reflecting on the vernacular

Although the identification of the vernacular product and vernacular building may seem simple, trying to reconstruct the original logic inherent in the structure is not that easy. The interpretation of the building becomes even more complex as the building materials and techniques usually date back to a period when the knowledge of construction used to be considered almost common sense. This knowledge has since been lost or disappeared as the families left the property or those associated with the product (and place), passed away. In this case, the exact date of origin of the building remains uncertain as no exact documentary evidence indicates when the original dwelling was erected and by whom.

According to some sources, the pioneer dwelling was erected by Adolph Botha who bought the farm in 1848 but no evidence indicates that he lived on the farm. He sold it to the Vermeulens in 1853 and the brothers divided the farm into several portions. In 1874 Hans Heinrich Mundt bought the various portions of the farm and consolidated them. This became known as Hartebeestpoort 308, the portion on which Mundt stayed. He appointed two German supervisors and developed the farm into a profitable enterprise. The first families who owned Hartebeestpoort were thus Afrikaans families (Botha and Vermeulen) while the Mundt family of German origin was the owner for more than 80 years. Would it be sufficient to classify the building as ‘Boere’- or Afrikaans-vernacular and leave it at that, or does it represent or even reflect on some characteristics of the Mundt family and their German (or European) origins?

Irrespective of the origin of the dwelling as a type and sample of a typology, the Mundt dwelling reflects a building tradition that was quite common during the period 1850-1880. In all aspects the building can be defined as a sample of a vernacular type. The occurrence of small three or four room cottages was common on the farms and in settlements in the Pretoria region during the period 1860-1910 when
Pretoria was only large enough to be defined as a village or small town. Clay-walled dwellings with thatched roofs used to be the rule of thumb. Within this typology a variety of types existed, including single rondavel hut types, the multiple rondavel, the small three-room cottage and the larger multi-room dwellings with or without kitchens and hearths. One of the prominent differences between the farm dwellings and urban models were roof types. The hipped thatched roof was more common on farms while the parapet side gable dwellings were more common in Pretoria. Historic photographs of Pretoria, taken during the period 1860 to 1900, confirm the common occurrence of parapet side gables.

The pioneer dwelling

The pioneer dwelling is the last (preserved) example of the original 19th century mud-walled farm dwellings typical in the Pretoria region. Although the dwelling contains only five rooms, it developed over a period of 120 years into its current form and layout. The farm, farmstead and dwelling used to be associated with the history of the Mundt family as it was inhabited by them for almost 80 years. The prominence of the Mundts in the region resulted in the dwelling being referred to as the Mundt dwelling. The importance of the Mundt family is also reflected in the names of landscape features surrounding the farm. A nearby ridge is indicated on some maps as Mundts-rif (ridge) and where the main road crossed the Moreletta Spruit it is indicated as Mundts-drift. The name ‘pioneer dwelling’ was given to the site and dwelling by the former National Cultural History and Open-air Museum (currently known as the DITSONG: Pioneer Museum). When the Museum became the curator of the farmstead in 1961, it was proclaimed a National Monument and it is still a Provincial Heritage Site.

The original north-facing dwelling consisted of a small core of three rooms: a living room (Afrikaans: voorkamer) in the centre with a bedroom on each side. This core was constructed with rammed earth walling on top of a stone foundation, which defined only the exterior of the little building. The dividing interior walls were added later and were constructed with sundried bricks. The dwelling had no gables and was covered with a hipped thatched roof. When the original building had to be extended, a single room was added to the western end and a kitchen was added at the back (southern elevation) of the living room. The walls of these extensions were constructed with a combination of clay and stone. The single parapet gable wall of the kitchen, containing and supporting the hearth, was constructed with sundried bricks.

Although the gable wall has never been a seriously contested element of the building, a comparison between Pierneef’s lino cuts indicated that he depicted a more dominant gable than the one found intact when the building was restored in 1986. Pierneef presented the gable as slightly steeper (towards a 45 degree slant), the chimney higher and more prominent, and the stepped aspect of the lower gable ends more prominent. One of the lino cuts is an imagined presentation of the little dwelling, with both hipped ends of the original dwelling being replaced with parapet side gables and the kitchen gable altered to suit the aesthetics of the artist. The kitchen gable was enhanced and decorated with two pilasters at the gable ends, covered with prominent moulding along the rims. To support these formal additions to the gables, the hearth chimney is rendered more rigid and sharp-edged. Whether this proposal was the result of artistic licence or due to a brief given to him by the Mundt family remains unknown.
Figure 21:

Figure 22:
Western (side) elevation of the pioneer dwelling with hearth located at the right defining the southern side of the kitchen (original lino print: DITSONG: National Museum of Cultural History, Pretoria).
Another contentious issue was the location of the back door leading from the kitchen. When the Museum became the curator of the site and building (circa 1961) the kitchen had a door exiting westwards – as indicated in all the depictions by Pierneef. However, archaeological evidence exposed more detail. When the plaster was removed from the exterior in 1986 the remains of another door was exposed along the eastern elevation. The presence of two back doors had to be debated in order to find order and a rationale for this arrangement. In one of the paintings (assumed to be by Pierneef), a single room structure appears
along the eastern side of the kitchen (on the right-hand side of the painting). It had a flat roof, assumed to be of corrugated sheet-iron. It had a single sash window in the centre of the southern elevation and a cylindrical outlet of a coal stove protruding through the wall directly underneath the roof. During a subsequent interview with one of Mundt’s daughters, it became evident that this room was an addition to the original core dwelling and was known as the music room. It contained a large piano and was located in the south-eastern corner where the living room and the kitchen connected. The room had to be linked with the living room and the window of the living room was replaced with a door to allow access between the living room and the music room.

The original back door leading from the kitchen faced eastwards. When the music room was added this door had to be sealed and another back door had to be created, resulting in the back door being relocated to the western elevation of the kitchen. This western back door, depicted in all Pierneef’s drawings and lino cuts, was not the original back door but a second one. After Mundt’s death his children demolished the music room, leaving no record of its removal. They also retained the back door in the western elevation, and the original back door was then altered into a window and the door leading to the living room from the music room was also replaced with a window. This information was not available at the time when the dwelling was restored the first time (period between 1961 and 1964) and it was assumed that the back door in the western elevation was the original door.

Hans Fransen’s work reflects his love and knowledge of the Boland and Cape Dutch architecture. References regarding his opinions or recordings of the vernacular architecture of the trans-Vaal River region are almost non-existent. In Drie Eeuw Kuns in Suid-Afrika, Fransen mentions the T-floor plan of the pioneer dwelling. He uses it in reference to a timeline and developments linking the early Cape and the later floor plans in the interior of South Africa. The existence of this T-floor plan is undeniable, but whether it was the original intention of its owner and formed part of the original vision for the dwelling is questionable.
The kitchen could have been added to either end of the original core structure or could have been erected as a separate detached room, as was the norm for early frontier farm dwellings north of the Vaal River. Adding the kitchen to one end would have introduced structural problems as the dwelling had no side gables and only hipped ends. A vertical gable with a parapet serves as essential support for a hearth and chimney. It is assumed that the addition of the kitchen as a T-tail was the only option, and it was also preferable as it linked directly with the voorkamer (which also serving as dining room). It was a practical solution rather than an original vision. If the building was envisioned as a T-shaped dwelling, the design principle of symmetry would have been adopted, resulting in the leg of the T being located in the middle rather than off-centre, as is the case in this dwelling.

Figure 2:

Pioneer dwelling in Silverton with its 2018 floor plan (drawing: M. Naudé).
The hearth

The hearth forms part of the kitchen addition. It covers almost the entire gable wall of the kitchen and is unique as its lintel is about 1.2 m high from the floor. The height of hearth lintels is usually between 1.8 m to 2 m high. The floor of the hearth is also unusual, as it is not lifted from the kitchen floor to about knee height, as was the case for farm dwellings recorded in the Boland and Graaff-Reinet. These differences created several debates regarding the originality of the hearth and the entire gable wall. It was during these debates that the lino cuts and drawings by Pierneef became useful comparative sources. However, Pierneef's drawings and lino cuts only reflected what the hearth looked like from outside and no evidence of the interior was recorded. The archaeological evidence (fabric and construction method) had to suffice as being the original evidence that remained in situ after all the alterations and restorations.

The debate was extended by an investigation into the occurrence of hearths in the farm dwellings of Namaqualand as reflected in the drawings and paintings of Erich Mayer. The DITSONG: National Museum of Cultural History has a collection of about 88 drawings by Mayer and the depictions containing dwellings were analysed. Numerous images of outdoor kitchens, attached kitchens and hearths served as reference to what hearths looked like during the period 1919 to 1940. Although the region is far removed from the Transvaal, this collection of artworks also contributes to the history of vernacular frontier dwelling traditions. One of the typical elements present in Namaqualand are bake ovens attached to the hearth. In the case of the pioneer dwelling, the hearth had no attached bake oven.

Hearths with low floors were the rule of thumb in Europe and the British Isles in the 19th century and earlier. The floors of these hearths were sometimes merely an extension of the kitchen floor (extending into the chimney cavity) and the height of the lintel could range from 1.2 m to about 2 m. This seems to be a European tradition, where the kitchen also served as a living room, and sometimes also as a bedroom with a bed built into the wall beside the hearth. In this way the heat of the fire in the hearth, and heat radiating from the hearth structure, allowed the room to also serve as a bedroom during the cold winter nights of Europe. One of the arguments for the logic of the Mundt hearth was that the kitchen may have been added when Mundt became the landowner and resident of the dwelling, and that the measurements and character of the hearth was based on his German origins and a European mental template.  

3 Ed.: Early Cape inventories record groot kamers (kitchen-living-bedroom), excavations at Vergelegen indicated open hearths on the floor in the style of the Dutch/German hallehuis, and excavations at Paradise in Newlands
A second argument was based on the drawing of the interior of a kitchen of a Boer dwelling depicted in *De Worstelstrijd der Transvalers* (Frans Lion Cachet, 1882). A large hearth formed part of the gable end of the kitchen. What still needed to be determined was why the lintel was this low and how food was prepared, as the ergonomics did not make sense. When a standing person is preparing food on the fire in the hearth, the lintel is below eye level resulting in the cook not being able to see the food to be prepared. The cook therefore had to kneel or bend extremely low, or had to sit on a special low seat. In figure 30 there are two individuals sitting almost inside the hearth cavity on low seats. The large hearth with a high lintel allowed individuals to sit inside the hearth either to prepare food or just to enjoy the heat of the fire and the heated chimney. In the case of the pioneer dwelling the lintel would have been too low for such enjoyment and it is assumed that the food was prepared by someone sitting on her knees or by using a special type of seat.

A photograph taken by museum staff in 1986 revealed the presence of two particular seats in front of the hearth (the photograph was taken of the interior display and not of the original interior). One was a low exposed hearths built against gable walls but not raised. Dutch interior genre pictures show women sitting on low stools to cook.
seat (about 350 mm high) with an elliptical seat cut and shaped from solid wood with four short legs (Afrikaans: bankie). Normally a seat of this form, size, height and scale would be associated with milking cows, but in this instance it was introduced as a seat used when food is prepared in a hearth with a low lintel. It is heavy and hard to lift, except if it was carried by holding onto one leg, implying that it was only moved forward and backward and not carried around.

A second chair of uncommon size and scale also appears in the photograph. At first its scale suggests that it was made for children to sit on but its use in the pioneer kitchen alongside the heavy stool (as part of the display) is equally appropriate. In this case the chair has all the features and components of a standard folding riempies chair, but the size and scale is completely different. The seat is about 250 mm high and it is clear that the chair was not manufactured for comfort, leisure and casual conversation but for another more utilitarian use.

**Conclusion**

The pioneer dwelling, as the name indicates, is not an example of high style architecture or pedigree architecture but reflects the simple lifestyle and traditions of frontier folk and early settlers – in this case within the region of Pretoria and environs. The building is a true vernacular type. As all the original landowners who may have been able to explain the origins and development of the little dwelling have passed on, it remains the responsibility of the architectural historian to interpret the building, its spatial arrangement of rooms, the building materials and the techniques. Typical of museological observations and vernacular architectural interpretations, the more aspects that are exposed, the deeper the researcher has to delve into other fields of investigation.

Museology has long been an almost ‘covert’ profession, but the benefits of working in a museum have been evident in the work of Fransen and were also demonstrated during this investigation. Museums contain vast catalogues, databases and collections still to be discovered and exploited – also to be exposed and presented to the keen scholar and even armchair historians. Using the lino cuts of Pierneef as sources of information was only one avenue to be pursued. As the DITSONG: National Museum of Cultural History has a vast collection of Pierneef’s works and drawings by Erich Mayer, it was inevitable that related paintings and drawings from the collections would be scrutinised for links and evidence leading to and contextualising the history and the architectural detail of the Mundt dwelling.

Although Pierneef’s depictions of buildings were his interpretations, and architectural historians know that he had the propensity to alter any form into a new composition to suit his sense for balance and symmetry, in instances where the lack of visual evidence exists, the researcher is sometimes confronted...
with the only option left, interpreting works such as lino cuts by someone such as Pierneef. Although the drawings of Pierneef cannot be used for exact reconstructions of historic buildings, in this instance his works hint at aspects and elements of truth and should therefore not be totally ignored.

References


A possible candidate for the introduction of corbelled buildings into South Africa

Nigel Amschwand

There has been much debate on the origin of corbelled buildings in South Africa. Patricia Kramer believes that the commencement of corbelled structures by colonists may have been as early as 1815 but perhaps 1830. Burchell and contemporary travellers in the area make no mention of corbelled buildings but they possibly appear in survey diagrams dating from the third decade of the 19th century.

Researchers have found over 200 structures, the great majority in a rhomboid containing Fraserburg, Williston, Carnarvon and Loxton. There is a scattering of corbelled buildings to the south of this and to the south-west around Sutherland.

What happened between 1815 and 1830? One occurrence was the arrival or the 1820 settlers. The majority of the over 4000 settlers were destined to go the Zuurveld, the area between the Sundays and Great Fish Rivers in the eastern part of the Cape Colony. However, an Irish contingent was sent initially to the Clanwilliam area, previously known as Jan Dissels Vlei. These new arrivals soon realised that this area in the Oliphant’s River valley was unsuitable for agriculture (as was the Zuurveld where they mostly ended up). Some decided to stay in the area, to make a try at either cultivation or as tradesmen. For the complete story read Dickasen (1973) Irish Settlers to the Cape.

In the party of settlers sponsored by John Ingram, which departed from Cork, were three masons: John Coffee, John Hannan and Thomas Quinn. Little has been discovered about the latter two, except that Quinn died in a building accident. We do know that the three left Ingram in May 1821 and, on 22 June the following year, were employed to build a new pound in Clanwilliam. Due to a dispute between the supplier of the stone, S.I. du Toit, and the Landdrost, Walter Synnot, the work was not completed. Coffee returned to Clanwilliam in February 1825 (it is not known where he was in the intervening years) and finished the work.

On 6 January 1828, Coffee married Christina Elizabeth Hoon in the church at Worcester. Christina was the daughter of David Simon Hoon (whose parents were of slave origins) and Maria Roos. Where Hoon resided at this time is uncertain, but most probably it is the farm Gunstfontein, as he had the property surveyed in 1832. There are three Gunstfonteins in the Sutherland area. The Hoon farm (Sutherland Farm 29) is to the north of the town that was established in 1858. According to the Genealogical Society of South Africa, after his marriage in 1828, Coffee lived in the Fraserburg area (Fraserburg was only founded in 1851).

John and Christina had five children:
- David Simon, born 10 September 1828, married his cousin Maria Margaretha Hoon on 11 September 1851.
- Jane, married Andries Cornelis Esterhuizen on 27 August 1855.
- George, born 27 July 1831, married Rachel Johanna Hoon in Fraserburg on 5 February 1853.
- Maria Wilhelmina, born 25 December 1832, married Jan Gerhardus Rupping.
- Christina Elizabeth, born 3 October 1834, married Gert Johannes van Wyk on 12 September 1852.
Sadly, Christina Elizabeth Hoon, John’s wife, died nine days after her third daughter was born (the baby was named after her mother). She died at her father’s farm, Guntfontein.

John Coffee died two years later, aged 38, near Colesburg. His inventory, dated 2 May 1836, stated: “such possessions which belonged to the late John Coffee were found in a knapsack belonging to him”. These consisted of various items of clothing, a prayer book and a number of mason’s tools. Unfortunately, there is nothing in the will of John and Christina Elizabeth giving any hints to their place of abode, only a strange clause stating that they “exclude the Orphan Chamber from interfering”.

How does John Coffee connect with corbelled buildings? The similarity between some corbelled buildings in Ireland and the Cape is notable (Figures 32 and 33), whereas corbelled buildings in other countries, such as France, Spain, Italy and Greece, are markedly different.

Coffee and his children married into colonial Trekboer families and all these families had widespread connections in the corbelled building area. It is very likely that John Coffee constructed corbelled kafhokke in the Fraserburg–Loxton area, and others copied these elsewhere. The corbelled style is ideal for a kafhok, to keep insects and rodents out of the chaff.

There are many ‘possibles’ and ‘probables’ in this story, due to the time that has elapsed and the lack of contemporary records. However, this is a credible explanation for the introduction of corbelled structures to the Cape.

Figure 32:

This building is on the Dingle Peninsula, Kerry, Ireland. The Dingle Peninsula is 120 km from Cork, not an impossible distance for Coffee to have travelled as a mason.

4 [Ed.] Under the ‘Cape Dutch’ inheritance system the Master of the Orphan Chamber (active between c.1680 and 1834) was responsible for administering deceased estates when any of the children were still minors, unless expressly prevented in a will (testament). British laws of inheritance were different, and there was extensive debate about which to follow in the British Cape Colony. After 1834, all deceased estates were administered by the Master of the Supreme Court, though there were also provisions for Widows and Orphans. See http://www.ancestors.co.za/the-history-of-the-orphan-chamber/.
Figure 3:

This building is at Omkeerkolk in the Northern Cape.

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