



**VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA
UMBUTHO WEZAKHIWO ZEMVELI WASEMZANTSI AFRIKA
VOLKSBOUKUNDIGE VERENIGING VAN SUID-AFRIKA**

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VASSA NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2021

VASSA TALK BY ZOOM LINK: TUESDAY 21 SEPTEMBER at 8pm

VASSA organised a weekend **Workshop in McGregor in June 2019** and we are pleased to announce that the publication of the proceedings is imminent. Elize Mendelsohn and her team will remind us about the event and the issues involved, show images of the place and its characteristics, and discuss the findings of the workshop.



McGregor (Wikipedia).



The publication is dedicated to the memory of Vivienne Japha and Fabio Todeschini, with tributes to that extraordinary team (with Derek) whose influence continues to live in our professional practice.

REPORT-BACK ON AUGUST TALK

August saw our first Zoom lecture which worked very well: 'An Exceptional Heritage: Ceramic Studio tiled art panels in 1930s Post Offices', by William Martinson. Thanks to Avril Paterson for organising not only the Zoom technicalities, but the lecturer as well. Thirty-nine members logged on which was excellent considering the short notice given.

William gave a fascinating talk. He briefly outlined the history of the Olifantsfontein Potteries and then proceeded to show numerous small post offices, some in quite remote areas, all with very distinct Baker-style architectural features and conforming to a certain pattern. These all had wall panels made of ceramic.

For those who did not see the presentation, this web page covers the topic of the tiles:

https://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style_det.php?styleid=785.



The old Muizenberg Post office building (on the left travelling from Cape Town towards Simon's Town opposite the little park just after the main robots) has two splendid examples of these tiled panels. The building was built in 1934 and the two panels are set into the sandstone wall. They are by Isa Cameron and part of the Olifantsfontein ceramic studio's work.

OUTINGS are still postponed as Covid seems to be very active in the Western Cape at this time. Having said that, we appeal to members to pay their annual fee as the Society still has administration costs to cover. The Committee is keeping on top of things via email messages and monthly Zoom meetings.



MEASURING-UP WORKSHOP: 30-31 OCTOBER 2021

Elize Mendelsohn, Avril Paterson and Nigel Amschwand are planning a two-day hands-on workshop for those wishing to learn how to research and measure up an old building. While there may still be restrictions on gatherings, the venues in Durbanville have been selected to be compliant with health regulations for a group of people.

- ▮ CPD points will be awarded.
- ▮ Due to Covid-19 regulations the workshop is restricted to 20 participants.
- ▮ Proof of vaccination will be required.
- ▮ Accommodation is available at the venue should you not wish to travel every day.

In order to complete the planning phase, and fix the cost, we need to know how many people would be interested in such an event. **PLEASE INDICATE YOUR INTENTION TO ATTEND THE WORKSHOP TO nigel.amschwand@hantam.co.za.**



Day One will be held at a venue in Durbanville, with discussions on:

- ▮ Reasons for recording: prior to demolition, conservation, alteration, etc.
- ▮ Cultural landscapes
- ▮ Traditional measuring methods
- ▮ Laser scanning
- ▮ Building structure
- ▮ Photography
- ▮ Archival research
- ▮ Documentation

Day Two is a practical hands-on instruction at a site on a nearby farm.

The cost (to be advised) includes:

- ▮ Refreshments on arrival, mid-morning tea/coffee, simple lunch, mid-afternoon tea/coffee
- ▮ After Day One social – cash bar
- ▮ Day One dinner
- ▮ Copy of the Proceedings, when published

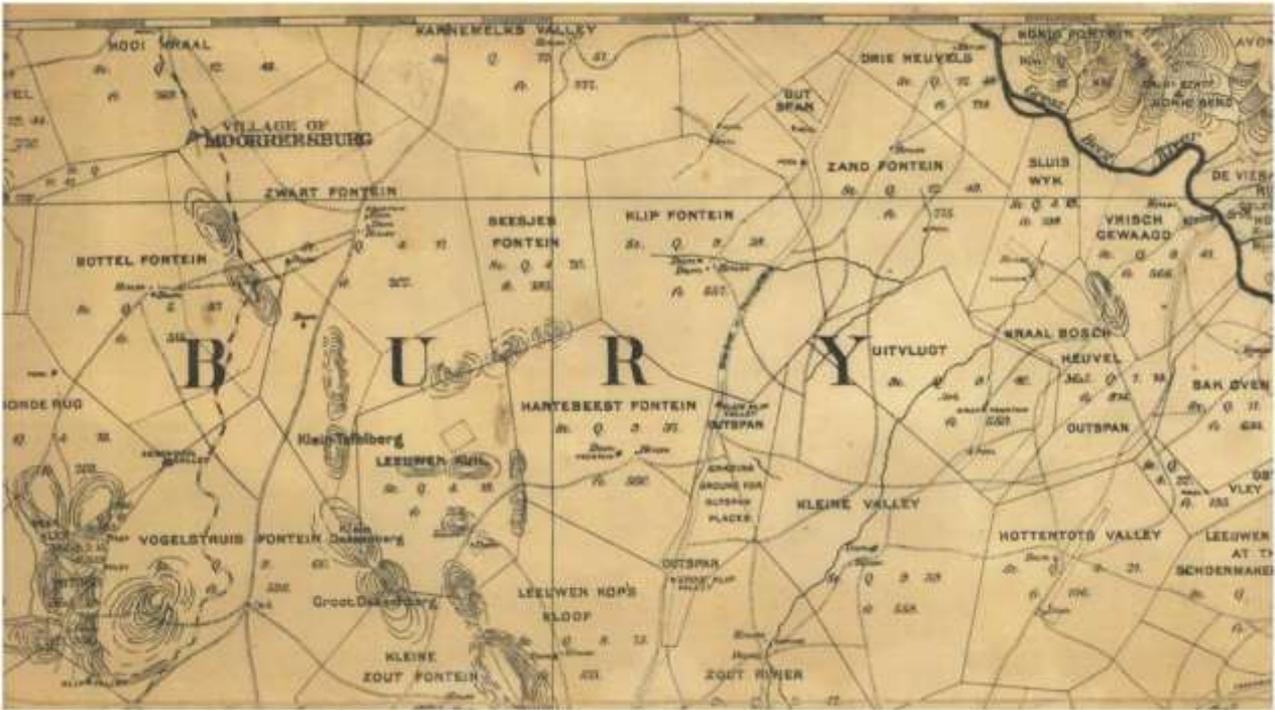
THE (CONTINUING) ADVENTURES OF ALEX DODGE

The second boyhood home of JC Smuts, 1870 - 1950

The birthplace of JC Smuts at Bovenplaats on Ongegund farm outside Riebeek West is well known. But when he was six the close-knit family moved to a farm called Klipfontein outside Mooresberg, where he lived and roamed for another six years until the typhoid death of his older brother forced him into the education this brother had been receiving in Riebeek West.

“Initially Smuts’ father and grandfather farmed together, but in 1876 the family relocated to nearby Klipfontein. Thus, Smuts spent six years of his life on this farm. As the second child, his own son recollected that he was very much of an unspoiled, though not neglected, second fiddle, and was left fairly free to do as he wished. This early life created an indelible love of the veld, farm life and simplicity.”

Klipfontein (Farm 411 Malmesbury) lies off Biesiesvlei Road behind Moorreesberg and to this day feels remote and serene. The T-shaped house is dated 1870 and looks east across the Swartland vista. It has a plain stoep with an elegant curved stone staircase to the loft. The interior has three rooms in front and a kitchen wing behind with a large hearth and chimney. There was a large wall cupboard in the main room and an unusual geometric ceiling design. The front wall curves inwards slightly from bottom to top around the front door and window frames in a graceful way. The lines of the building are simple, sturdy and have barely shifted over time.



The Klipfontein farm boundary is one of the almost circular quitrent grants with the house in the centre. Note also the stock drovers' route passing through the farm between outspans.



Left: Google Maps view of the werf. The T-shaped house (upper right) is marked by dark trees in front. Right: View to the east.



1924 photo, looking east. Little house on left is gone. The house in question is semi centre with dark tree. The entrance road still winds on either side of it as shown.



The present owner bought the farm from a Smuts family member in 2001 and hopes to restore this interesting house.



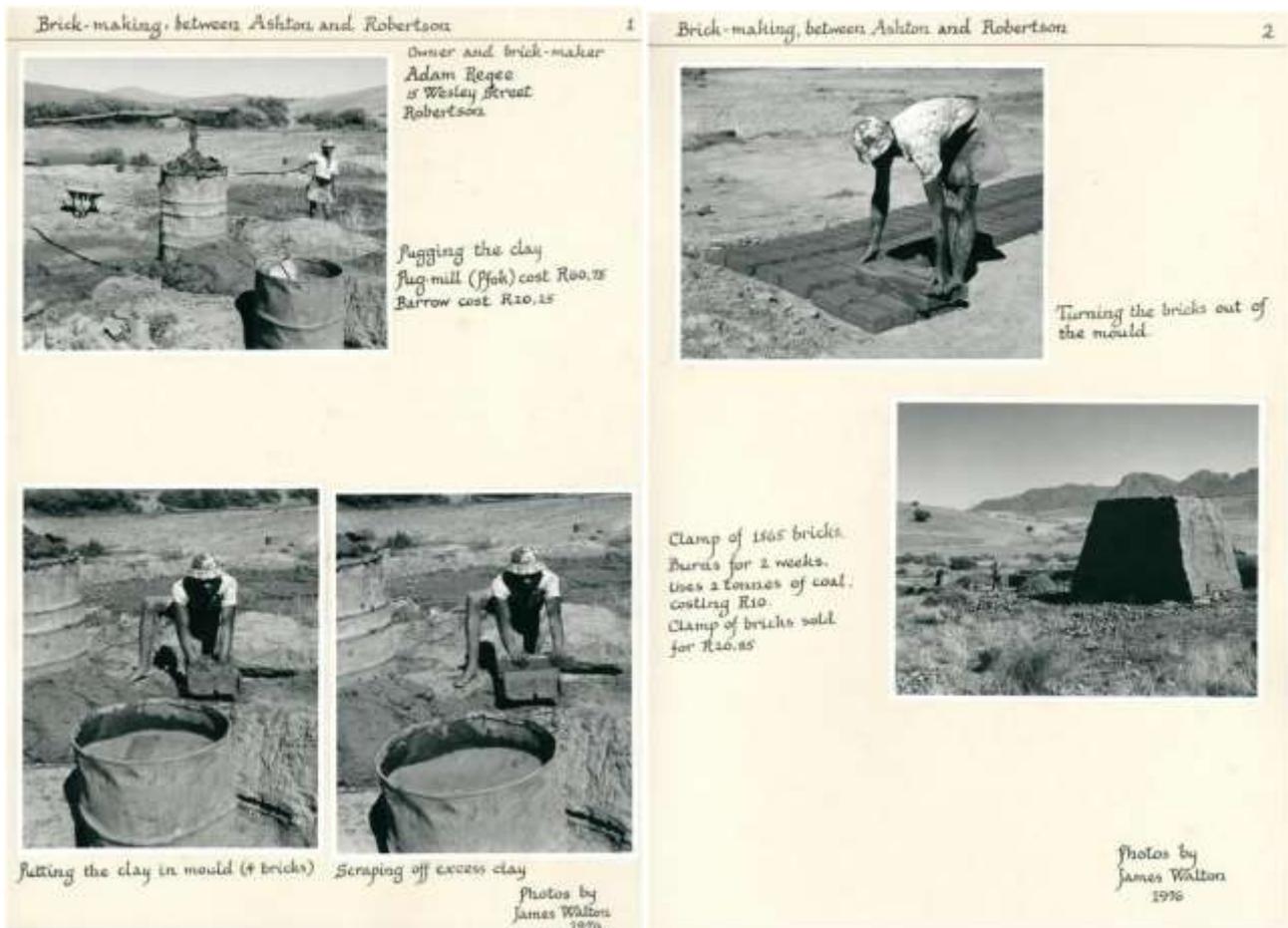
Klipfontein is also noteworthy for its large and ornate Victorian homestead that sits just above the Smuts house, one of three reputedly by the same hand. This house is beautifully kept and lived in by the farm manager who first mentioned the Smuts link to me. I had known nothing of it and was glad of two excellent links for the information:

<http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/jan-christian-smuts-1870-1950>.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_life_of_Jan_Smuts

A note regarding the Ongegund Smuts Museum which has been closed for over a year. Chris Murphy says he has been unable to get access and is concerned there may be a problem. I tried and was told by security it is closed, they don't know why but the glimpse through fencing was of extreme foliage and green moss on shaggy thatch.

VERNACULAR BRICK MAKING



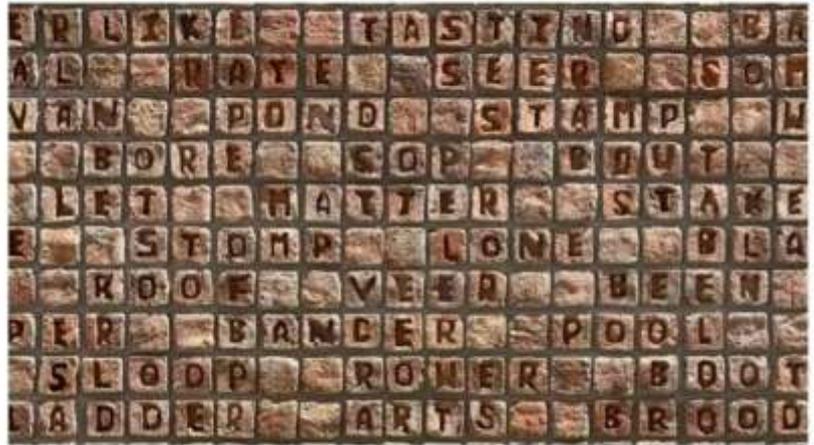
While searching through the James Walton Collection in the Stellenbosch University Library's Special Collections, we found these photographs taken by James Walton between Ashton and Robertson in 1976. The two sheets of photographs, labelled in Walton's beautiful handwriting, show a Mr Adam Regee making mud bricks. At one time, most small towns had a local brick-maker but few still exist today.

A vernacular brick maker who has achieved some measure of fame is Trevor Snyders who works outside Richmond in the Eastern Cape. He makes bricks with letters of the alphabet impressed in the surface - in a font of his own design. Artist Willie Boshoff has used these bricks to create a wall sculpture called *Word Woes*, based on words which are spelt the same in English and Afrikaans but have different meanings.



Trevor Snyders.

Word Woes, Willem Boshoff, 2018



Web pages for more information about Trevor Snyders, *Word Woes* and the Modern Art Project in Richmond:

<http://map-southafrica.org/about/about.pdf>

https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/20200616_mapsa_unesco_.pdf

COORNHOO, MOWBRAY / OBSERVATORY

Tim Hart and David Hart have been searching through historical photographs of Cape Town as part of the City's ongoing heritage survey projects. They were surprised to discover that Coornhoop, in Dixton Road, largely still exists, though you would not realise it from ground level.



This is from a photograph of the area taken in about 1963.



This image is from Google Earth.

“In 1657-8 land in this area was granted to 14 free burghers, who were expected to devote themselves to the planting of wheat for the new settlement. Their defence needs were met by the construction of a small fortification built for their benefit, known as Fort Coornhoop. This was abandoned as early as 1661, and on 2 March 1664 the farm was granted to M. Coninck, who the following year sold it to Thielman Hendricx, who was murdered in 1673. After that the farm changed hands frequently, eventually coming into the possession of Servaas van Breda in 1797. By this stage an H-plan farmhouse as well as a dovecot and adjoining wine cellars had already been built. It was probably under van Breda that several gables were added to the buildings, making the farmhouse one of the finest in the Cape.

The Coornhoop dovecote links two other buildings, originally farm buildings, which were later converted to dwellings in 1965. The front elevation of the dovecote is a unique feature in classical Cape architecture. By the time the property was purchased by the Simon van der Stel Foundation in 1961, only the dovecote was left standing and much of the complex had been demolished.”

<https://www.sahistory.org.za/place/coornhoop-dovecot-dixton-road-mowbray>.

LOEDOLFF HOUSE, MALMESBURY



September 2021: No suitable words ...

CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?

In the June 1977 edition of *Restorica*, journal of the Simon van der Stel Foundation, there is a small piece on the fate of the Mission Church in Long Street, which was at that time dangling on a thread. This is the oldest mission church in the country.

The church had apparently been facing threats for over 50 years by that time, but its future was finally secured when the Cape Administration stepped in to prevent its demolition. At this point it was owned by the owner of the adjacent Metropole Hotel, which intended to incorporate the site into the hotel! The price to buy back the church was a reasonable R310 000, of which the Administration was prepared to take out a loan to the tune of R250 000. The balance had to be found elsewhere.

To raise funds the trustees proposed to sell 500 hand-coloured prints at a cost of R10 plus 10c postage. They must have been successful as the Church was restored by Dirk Visser and still stands today. How many people

still own one of these prints, or remember them? And how many people realise that this heritage building was nearly lost to the city?

According to Wikipedia: “The museum building is architecturally unique as it was South Africa's first building in the form of a basilica with an Apsis. All its windows are small scale replicas of this floor plan. It has the only surviving example of a steeply pitched lime-concrete roof - a form of construction developed at the Cape specifically for flat roofs. Its façade features Corinthian pilasters carrying a moulded Cornice and a Gable with a circular ventilator and four Urns.”



The South African Sendinggestig Museum (also known as the South African Slave Church Museum) was established in 1977 (Wikipedia).

CONSTANTIA HERITAGE AND EDUCATION PROJECT

Hidden Rivers tells the untold story of the people of 'Konstansie'.



“This year we host an exhibition which has been 4 years in the making. We have been documenting, collecting and archiving the stories of the Constantia valley population of colour, who were split apart and dispersed on the Cape Flats by the Group Areas Act and the wildfire of the Apartheid forced removals. This CHEP exhibition is a collaboration with Iziko museums of South Africa, Christ Church Constantia, Centre for Curating the Archive and photographer Kent Andreasen. It opens on 1 September at Groot Constantia for the month of September, before moving on to other parts of Cape Town city.”

Website: <https://constantiaheritage.org.za/>

UPDATE ON MOSTERT'S MILL AND DE MEULE

The buildings at De Meule remain exposed and beyond vulnerable. There is no further news from the Department of Public Works (DPW) or UCT.

Friends of Mostert's Mill are proceeding on the premise offered some time ago that the DPW will be happy with anything happening as long as they don't have to do it. An Emergency Protection permit has been applied for, received from HWC and actioned. A Section 27 application report has been completed and is awaiting DPW signature. All ironmongery and metal work has been collected and is being stored off site after numerous break-ins into the outbuildings on site. Timber is being sourced for the machinery reconstruction which is going apace. Funding raising continues.

Thanks to Trevor Thorold, Mike Scurr and John Wilson-Harris for keeping us informed. The Friends of Mostert's Mill post regular and good updates on <http://www.mostertsmill.co.za/>.

OTHER NEWS

Dr Graham Dominy, a former National Archivist of South Africa, historian and author, writes eloquently, and at length, about his sister-in-law's battle over an illegal structure next to her house in Duke Street, Observatory. Read the story here: <http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/recalcitrant-city-cape-town-permission-procrastination-and-smokescreens>.

The historic Muslim burial ground on Signal Hill, Tana Baru, has been declared a National Heritage Site and plans are afoot, led by the Tana Baru Trust, to turn the burial ground into a place of contemplation. This is a success story as several times over the years a portion of the land was put up for sale - a move subsequently withdrawn.

Finally, a word of apology to Sigi Howes. In her item on the water furrows in Wynberg, the School of Industry and Wynberg Boys' School moved to Aliwal Road in 1845 not in 1945.

This month's photograph from THE GRIBBLE COLLECTION

Courtesy of the Drakenstein Heritage Foundation.

This photograph has appeared in a number of publications, but until we were able to see the actual label on the glass negative the location remained a mystery, apart from the fact that it is obviously somewhere in the Karoo. We now know that this is a farm in the Laingsburg district.

It is interesting for a number of reasons. It is a perfect little flat-roofed Karoo house, with the roof sloping slightly to allow for rain runoff. The kitchen is at the rear with a chimney and a little bakoond attached. The barn, with its open double doors has an upper door for lifting in goods to be stored on a raised platform inside the building. Outside are what looks like bales of wool and there is a cart and wagon parked close by. At the front of the house, women are on the raised stoep watching the men play a game of cricket. A large flock of sheep is gathered nearby, as is a small flock of ostriches. There are at least 13 people in this photograph taken from an overlooking koppie.



*Compiled by Pat Kramer & Antonia Malan - publications@vassa.org.za.
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