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## **VASSA NEWSLETTER**

**MAY 2025**

### **APRIL EVENTS**

The April **Talk** was something completely different and attracted an enthusiastic audience. Dr Siddique Motala, academic lead of Global Digital Heritage Africa based at UCT, gave an enthralling talk on his project of mapping and researching **District Six**. It left the audience both enlightened and saddened at the same time. Siddique's time progression in aerial photographs of the demise of District 6 was most interesting, as was his ability to point out where a number of important buildings in the District Six Community had once been situated - most of those he mentioned were within the CPUT campus. So unexpected. Finally, he placed a number of former residents on the sites where they had lived previously. A lively discussion followed with a number of members of the audience suggesting sources of more photographs of District Six for Siddique to investigate.

As a special additional treat, Helen Binckes provided drinks and eats to mark and celebrate the centenary of the birth of **Graham Binckes** – as reported in the April newsletter – who led VASSA for several years during the 1970s and 80s. His legacy as a heritage conservationist lives on in heritage bodies and publications, and in the photographic collection donated to the Cape Archives. This is being scanned and will soon be available to researchers.

The April **Outing** (on 3 May) was to **Kommetjie** and led by Anton Roux. Our first stop was **Imhoff's Gift**, granted in 1743 to the widow Christina Rousseau (nee Diemer). The isolated location was strategically chosen to produce livestock and grain to supply the Company's winter harbour in Simon's Town (she also supplied ships from her farm Zwaansweide, now Constantia Uitsig). In 1912 the farm was bought by Johannes Gerhardus Pieter van der Horst. A pair of salvaged wooden ship's figureheads set between the pillars of the front stoep were a unique feature. The old homestead burned down completely in 1958 but was rebuilt as a replica largely based on Elliott's photographs. It is now a bustling venue with shops, restaurants, craft works, and numerous activities.

Our next stop was **St Joseph's Chapel** and **St Norbert's Church** on the outskirts of Kommetjie. For most of us it was a complete surprise. The place is set high up against a rocky slope, the favourite spot of Joseph Rubbi an Italian émigré and master builder. The terraced setting overlooks an olive grove with a view of distant sea and mountains and is entirely Italianate and very charming. The small and simple chapel was built after the death of Rubbi in 1946 using imported marble, and to mark his grave. The larger stone church was constructed by Norbertine Fathers for their priory and completed in 1991.

Another famous local character and close friend of Rubbi, was the architect **Ernst Seeliger**. He designed, and Rubbi built, four holiday houses on the sea front at Kommetjie, the village laid out on part of Imhoff's Gift estate in 1902. They are still intact and clearly visible from the beach road; characterised by stone walls, wrap-around verandas with woodwork, and steep roofs.



Stoep at Imhoff's Gift with figureheads, Arthur Elliott (WCARS).



Trevor Thorold and André van Graan trying to figure out the façade of Imhoff's Gift behind a forest of umbrellas (JK).



St Joseph's Chapel (left) and St Norbert's Church (right), where Joseph Rubbi is entombed.  
(<https://catholicchurchkommetjie.wordpress.com/st-josephs-parish-in-kommetjie/>)



Left: St Joseph's Chapel interior with marble finishes and fittings (JK).

Right: The outlook from St Norbert's Church (<https://theearthbeneathmyfeet.wordpress.com/2013/05/07/st-norberts-priory/>).



Ernst Seeliger / Joseph Rubbi houses in Kommetjie (below JK).

## DISTRICT SIX - an interview with an old resident

As the VASSA talk this month was by Dr Siddique Motala on the topic of District Six, this article which appeared in the *Southern Suburbs Tatler* is most apt. The documentary can be viewed on the District Six Museum's You Tube channel.

# Doccie tells story of returning D6 woman

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"This is part of my legacy, and I want to encourage the youth to always remember where they come from," says Soraya Martheze who is the subject of a short documentary about her experience of the District Six forced removals.

The 59th anniversary of the start of the forced removals was commemorated earlier this month.

Ms Martheze, 67, says the 15-minute documentary, *31 Chatham Street with Soraya Martheze*, is about the Dry Docks area of District Six, where she and her family lived in Chatham Street.

The documentary came about after the District Six Museum's oral history programme team approached Ms Martheze to tell her story. A member of the team, Ayanda Mpono, interviews her in the film.

Ms Martheze says her son, Azeez, encouraged her to tell her story.

"I never thought that sharing this story would be so emotional," she says.

She describes how she became overwhelmed with emotion when she returned to District Six in 2022, settling in Cross Street, as part of the restitution process.

Ms Martheze lived in District

Six until she was 11. "It was a community that was rich and vibrant, and everybody knew each other," she says.

After her parents divorced, she lived with her mother, Salegga Cassiem, in Bo-Kaap, but she continued to visit her father, Abobaker Cassiem, who stayed on in District Six until he was forcefully evicted in the 1970s.

As an adult, Ms Martheze moved to Mitchell's Plain, then Stellenbosch and Goodwood until her return to District Six in 2022 as a resident of the Hanover Street complex, which was part of the third-phase restitution process for returning claimants – Ms Martheze's late father in this case.

While she complains about snags in the new complex, she says those who have returned are starting to rebuild a sense of community and "growing to know each other better".

The museum's oral history programme project manager, Matthew Nissen, adds: "As the oral history team, we are trying to build a canon of knowledge that fills in the gaps about what life was like in Cape Town before the forced removals because there is so much nuance that can only be revealed through oral history."

Mr Nissen says the team spent a lot of time conceptualising the documentary with Ms Martheze critiquing the drafts, reviewing



■ Soraya Martheze holding up the name of the street where she once lived during the 59th commemoration of the District Six forced removals.

the final draft and getting her input as to the direction of the film.

*31 Chatham Street with Soraya Martheze* will be part of the District Six Museum archives. The

documentary can be found on the District Six Museum's YouTube channel.

## ARTIFICERS' SQUARE IN GRAHAMSTOWN (MAKHANA) IN 2025

In 2014 the following article was published on the Heritage Portal site and a recent visit to Grahamstown (Makhana) by Pat Kramer allowed her to photograph some of the buildings as they are in 2025. Artificers' Square was restored in the 1960s by Historic Grahamstown.

Over the last few months we have noticed a number of historic properties located on Artificers' Square in Grahamstown come on the market. This piqued our interest in the history of the area which led us to this short description compiled by Désirée Picton-Seymour in her epic 1989 book *Historical Buildings in South Africa*. Enjoy...

"With the arrival of the 1820 Settlers there was a boom in building, and skilled artisans and craftsmen were at a premium; even Trekkers such as Pieter Retief and Arnolduz Bernadus Dietz went into the profitable building trade. Many of these artisans built their modest homes in and around what is known today as Artificers' Square. A number of the Settler houses have been restored under the auspices of Historic Grahamstown (Pty) Ltd, forming an interesting and unique architectural group.

In order to accommodate the artisans, who because of their skills, were allowed to leave their settlement and come to young and fast-growing Grahamstown, a complete block of the grid plan of the town was cut up into 32 small erven, and allotted to these artisan settlers. The houses they built were simple and faced directly onto the streets. Building methods were primitive, yet the style was basically Georgian, remembered from the country of their origin.

They were either single- or double-storeyed with pitched roofs (originally of thatch) and gable ends with chimneys often abutting one another. The facades consisted of a central front door with windows to the right and left, corresponding with the simple plan of central passageway with front rooms on either side. The kitchen quarters were under a lean-to roof at the back, leading onto a small yard. Typical dwellings, now restored, are Jeffries Cottage and Chapel House, the latter built in 1823 for the Baptist minister William Miller and used as a chapel for some 20 years, until a more suitable building was erected in Bathurst Street.

At the intersection of Bartholomew and Cross Streets, the corners were cut across, thus forming a square. A plan of Grahamstown dated 1824, and now in the Albany Museum, shows this section of the town on Settlers Hill centred around Artificers' Square. Among the most interesting examples of Settler architecture, these small scaled-down buildings have all the grace of proportioning and vernacular appeal of their larger counterparts in the town."



Houses on Artificers' Square (PK 2025).

## **BIG CHANGES AT CAPE TOWN LANDMARK**

### **Cape Town Club, formerly the City & Civil Service Club, Queen Victoria Street, Cape Town**

Désirée Picton-Seymour writing in *Historical Buildings in South Africa* described the building as follows:

“Queen Victoria used to vet every member as they turned the corner of the grand staircase and came face-to-face with her marble likeness. Modelled on a London city men’s club, this famous establishment was opened in 1878 with Sir John Molteno as president. It was not until Cecil Rhodes was elected a member in 1890 that monies were made available for a new building.

As Rhodes’ protégé, Herbert Baker was asked to organize an open competition for designs for a club building, the prize being £100. In the event, Baker won the competition! The result is a stunning building, simple and elegant and an interesting example of this renowned architect's early work carried out by his firm. Costing in the region of £22 000 to build, every detail was of the best in both material and workmanship; Rhodes exhorted Baker to design meticulously with perfection in mind - even tasting the sand for salt to ensure that it was river and not sea sand.

At the zenith of the British Empire many famous people visited the club and were signed on in the Visitors Book; in another book members recorded their complaints. Reluctantly, in 1898, the club installed a telephone at a cost of £10.

Life has changed since Victorian times and a reflection on this change is that in 1977 the City Club amalgamated with the Civil Service Club, which had premises in Church Square designed by John Parker.”

Change is in the air again. Now called The Cape Town Club, the front room of the building has been turned into the Gallery Restaurant open to non-members. So now you can roam in off the street and enjoy a coffee with Queen Victoria’s bust looking over your shoulder.



Left: The City Club shortly after it opened in 1898. Right: The Cape Town Club in April 2025 (J. Kramer).

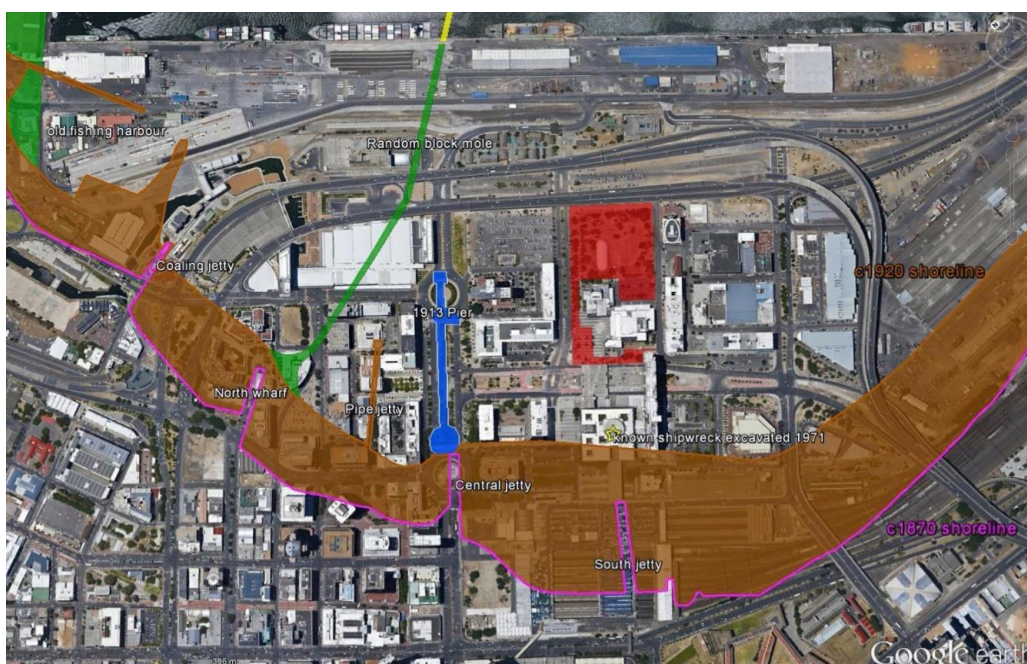
### **How has this come about?**

For a number of years the building was owned by a Russian investor who rented it out as a film set. Then it was bought by property developer Riaan Roos, founder and CEO of MSP Group of Companies. Roos has now obtained permission to build an eighteen-storey luxury apartment block on the car park behind the building and has signed a 10 years lease with Phil Thurston and Steve Wardlaw who plan to run the “new” Cape Town Club as a social and networking hub.

The Cape Town City Improvement District explains the transformation in their newspaper, *City Views*: This time, though, it won't be open only to gentlemen, or even only men. “Diversity is at the heart of what we want the club to be”, says executive director Phil Thurston, who's spent the last five years overseeing the revival of the Rand Club in central Johannesburg. “We don't care where you come from, how old you are, what level of education you have, what colour and sex you are, or anything else. This was my approach at the Rand Club, and it really worked. We think there's a need in Cape Town for a private members club with the same ethos.”

But even if you're not a member, you can now enter the hallowed halls and admire the architecture before turning left into the public restaurant.

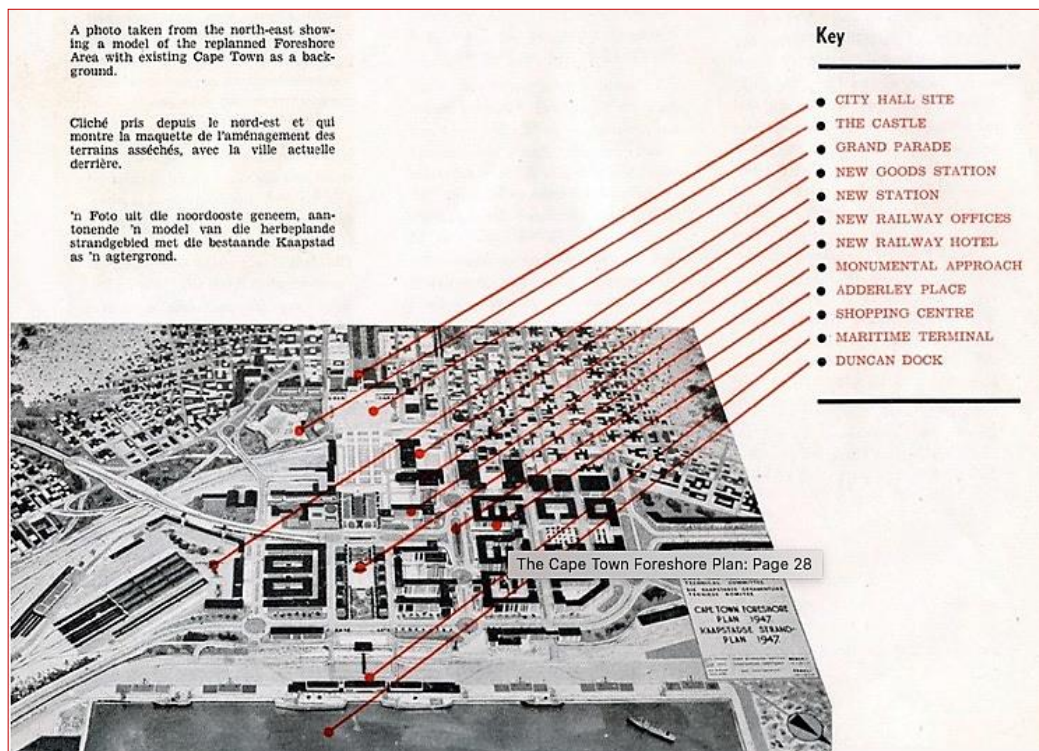
### **A GARDEN HIDDEN IN THE CITY**



This diagram (from ‘A Visual Impact Study of Founders’ Garden, Roggebaai, Cape Town’ by André Pentz, 2014) illustrates the original sea shore in Cape Town (pink) and then the gradual infilling of the bay up to the 1920s (brown). The block marked in red is the “Founders’ Garden” which is next to the Artscape and which few people know about or remember. Today as you pass on the Nelson Mandela Highway, incidentally designated a Scenic Drive, you might notice a garden on the left with the white Zipzap circus tent. This is the **Founders’ Garden**. The garden is a leftover from the original ‘Gateway to Africa’ plan, devised for the newly reclaimed Foreshore in the 1940s. According to this plan, passengers would disembark from the ship and be stunned by the view of Table Mountain that lay before them with an avenue leading up to the City. But, over the years air travel overtook sea travel

and the idea of large cruise ships docking and disembarking passengers in this area faded away. The elevated highway was the final nail in the coffin of this dream. As blocks of offices filled the Foreshore over time, the Founders' Garden remained as a leftover of the original plan. Now, it is sadly a bit neglected with a few straggly trees, most of which are not indigenous.

In 2014 a Visual Impact Survey was carried out as part of a Heritage Assessment - both appeared to have had no objections to development, except that, being a "Scenic Drive", views of the mountain should still be visible. Nothing happened for 11 years. However, in 2024 the site was earmarked for high density mixed use, mixed market social housing. Let's see how they eventually deal with the "Scenic Drive" problem.



Above: The view from the elevated highway today. Below: The Cape Town Foreshore Plan, 1947.



## GOOD HOPE CENTRE - ONCE A CONTROVERSIAL STRUCTURE, NOW A TREASURE



The Good Hope Centre.

Capetonians had until 21 April to give their comments and recommendations on the future of the Good Hope Centre, described as having “high architectural, historical and social significance”. The proposed redevelopment “seeks to maximise the site’s potential through its sale or transfer for further development ensuring lasting benefits for Cape Town’s economy, heritage and community”. Sandra van der Merwe, co-chair of the Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement (Docomomo SA), said the centre is an iconic landmark feature of the Mother City. The building was designed by the studio of Italian modernist architect and engineer, Pier Luigi Nervi, and is a technical and architectural achievement of global relevance. It was built in 1976 and at the time of construction the main hall was the largest concrete cross-vault in the world.

*(People’s Post, Tuesday 1 April 2025)*

## WILLISTON MUSEUM - a country museum, and what can be learned from a visit

Photographs of interior © John Kramer.



The exterior of the museum ([karoohoogland.gov.za](http://karoohoogland.gov.za)).

Over the years every country town had a museum of which the town was justifiably proud. Residents and farmers were proud to donate items to the museum. The depopulation of the rural areas and the

fact that the few younger people who remain do not really relate to this old-fashioned stuff anymore, has meant that most of these museums are closed and a visitor now has to phone the curator (usually honorary) to ask them to open up.

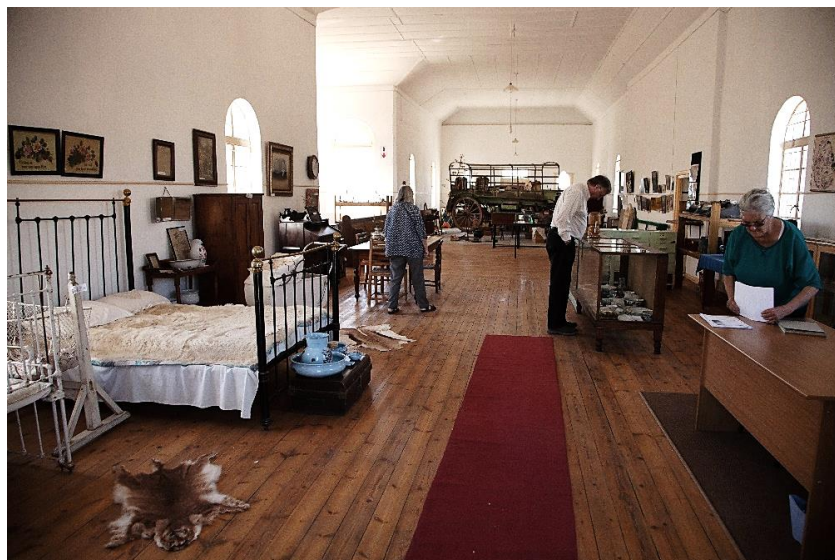
For those of us interested in the old trekboer and early farming way of life, these museums are a treasure trove of information. For example, the source of a piece of metal found on an *ashoop* can be identified on a part of farm machinery in the museum, and crockery exhibits can help to identify shards from the *ashoop*.



Left: In the middle of nowhere, a Boer had to 'make a plan' if the meat fork broke. Right: We have seen pegs like this pushed into the walls of corbelled buildings. Now we finally know what they are called (*kapstokke*) and what they were used for.

The Williston Museum is one such museum. The building itself has a significant history. The land where this building is situated, was bought in 1879 from Mr P. Jacobs for the amount of twenty-five pounds sterling. During a meeting on 12 April 1880 chaired by Missionary P. Sterrenberg, it was decided to consider the erection of a church building to serve the so-called Coloured community. A committee was formed to raise the necessary funds, building materials and sheep. It was also decided that the church should be fifty feet long, seventeen feet wide and ten feet high inside.

The mission church was dedicated on 29 March 1884. The Minister S.H. Kühn opened the doors officially after which Missionary P. Sterrenberg delivered the dedication sermon. The two wings were added in 1942. In 1975 a new Mission church was built in the neighbourhood at Amandelboom, and the old mission building was used as a school. Presently this old Mission building serves as a Museum with the theme "Our Mission Inheritance".



The interior of the museum showing the proportions of the original mission church.



Trekboer wagon - note the jackets made from skins of local animals. Bits of wagon are found on many farms and a close look at an example like this will help to identify the part.



Left: The arrival of a stove like this would revolutionise kitchen activities. Examples are found lying in the veld - probably signalling the arrival of the AGA style stove. Right: Sheepskin covered brass bed. Holy scripts above the bed - now often found in junk shops. The pram is a much later addition.



Left: A photo of Hester du Prees (sic) born Theron in 1857, died 1939 at the age of 82 years. Oom Klaas Mostert se Ouma; Linda Nieuwoudt se groot oma. The tough lives of these early farmers is etched on her face. Right: A family wedding. We do not know the family name, but the farm is Koega and the house which saw such a grand celebration is now a ruin.



Left: Nigel Amschwand searching the written records for clues. Right: Abraham Clarence donated soap made by his mother along with a wonderful description of how she moved around from place to place, only later acquiring a farm called Helpmekaar between Brandvlei and Vanwyksvlei.

### **WYNNE QUAIL, SCULPTOR AND PAINTER**

On the outing to view Art Deco buildings in Cape Town, led by André van Graan, André mentioned that the artist responsible for the reliefs on the Sanlam/Santam building on the corner of Wale and Burg streets was unknown, whereupon Anton Roux said that he thought they were done by Barrie Gasson's mother. You will remember Barrie who gave us such an interesting talk on the Cape Town Pier last November. Barrie and Anton then forwarded this information to us. Wynne Quail was an accomplished artist, but is now almost forgotten.

The following text is extracted and adapted from an article by Barrie Gasson ('Painters and sculptors of Kalk Bay (1): the inspirations and work of Wynne Quail', *Kalk Bay Historical Association Bulletin* no.8, March 2004: 161-127), with thanks to Barrie for permission to reproduce the images.

Ethelwynne May Quail was born in 1903, the only child of John and Adelaide Quail who arrived in South Africa from England in 1902. Her father was a young architect and quantity-surveyor who came to join Herbert Baker's new practice in Johannesburg. He developed his own flourishing business, working throughout southern Africa. Ada started her own practice in the field of ophthalmology, improving eyesight through natural means.

The family embraced the philosophy of Theosophy, which presents a set of truths that underlie all religions. Wynne grew up in a home in which all of these activities and influences were unfolding, and in a town scarcely 20 years old. Their house was on the edge of the open veld but she could hear the muffled throb of the mines. It was a nurturing environment and fed her natural curiosity about what lay behind the visible material world.

In 1918 John joined Babbs & Labdon Quantity Surveyors in Cape Town and the family moved to St James, staying at the Seahurst Hotel before moving into a house at the end of Mentone Road. Then occurred the great tragedy of her life when she and two other children were stricken with a mysterious illness that left one dead, one crippled and Wynne with a permanent weakened heart. Having to keep in quiet conditions led to her developing a prodigious artistic talent. She was removed from Rustenburg School and a special studio was built at their house, Wynholme, which also had panoramic views over False Bay.



Fig. 4.1: The Quay family, c. 1908.



Fig. 4.2: The house Wynholme, St. James, c. 1926.

Thus she had time, peace of mind, a fully equipped studio and a natural gift for art. Theosophists would say that her inherent talent was the product of experiences accumulated during her past lives, and she had inspiration that drew from the forms of visible Nature, the inner life-forces of invisible Nature expressed in spiritual form as angels, fairies, elves, goblins, sylphs and many others, and the beauty and perfection of the human body at rest and in motion. In many of her works she found all three elements of her inspiration with remarkable results. There followed roughly two decades of creative outburst.



A selection of Wynne's paintings (Wikipedia).

Wynne's forte was sculpture and there was always a piece underway in plaster or stone or cement. At the same time she was drawing, sketching, painting, and writing poetry and fantasies. Everything she did was done for the sheer enjoyment of it, but many items were produced to be sold, while others were the result of commissions – a source of income.



Fig. 3.10: The Crest of the Wave, 1933.



Fig. 4.19: Wynne in her studio, c. 1933.

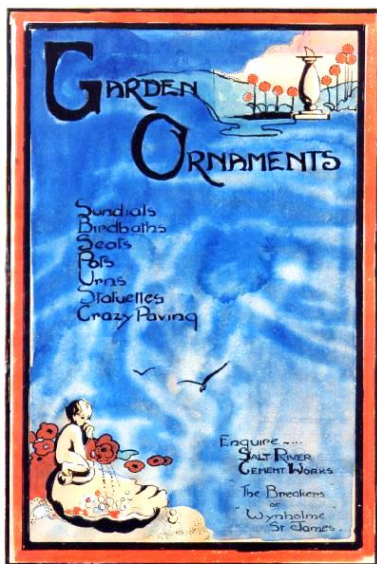


Fig. 4.32: Advertising sheet for garden ornaments.



Fig. 4.52: Wynne at Salt River Cement Works with the sculpture to adorn the pediment of the Women's Wing.

### **Outdoor and architectural work**

During the 1930s Wynne produced a variety of sculptures in cement for the home and garden, such as animal figures, mainly birds and elephants, and bird-baths. Most of the larger works were produced on the premises of the Salt River Cement Works owned by Lewis Sagorski. In 1930 she won the competition for the design of a Garden of Remembrance at George in the southern Cape. Unfortunately, its position at the junction of the town's main streets condemned it to eventual obliteration through road widening and traffic circulation measures.

Commissioned sculptures included a decorative panel for the Drill Hall in Cape Town. It was a battlefield scene with a tank and field gun, and is quite uncharacteristic of her realm of interest. But it may have flowed from the George war memorial work. The nymph ballroom at Kelvin Grove had two sculptures over the entrance, but they have since been removed or hidden. However, her really

big commissions were for artwork on two new buildings rising in Cape Town, the Sanlam Building (corner Burg and Wale streets) and Groote Schuur Hospital.

The **Santam / Sanlam** building was designed by Louw & Louw and built by Joseph Rubbi ca.1932. The brief was to reflect confidence in South Africa's financial future following the Great Depression. It was therefore designed in the Art Deco style also being used for skyscrapers in New York. Wynne's 57 panels were placed at intervals between the spandrels and contained elements of a young and vigorous country by depicting aspects of South African life – commerce, industry, agriculture, sport and nature. Each panel was the product of a strenuous process carried out at the Salt River Cement Works. In 1990 the building was refurbished under Munnik, Visser, Black & Fish and is today one of Cape Town's most important Art Deco examples.

**Groote Schuur** Hospital was planned in 1916 but only got underway in 1926 when a site was found on UCT property (Rhodes Estate) and a 99-year lease was agreed for £1. The building as designed by the PWD architect J.S. Clelland with the assistance of Colonel Mackintosh of the Western Infirmary in Glasgow, an expert in hospital construction. Clelland was apparently inspired by the Union Buildings in Pretoria and the nearby UCT campus. It was set in a formal garden that looked out directly at the mountains. Its façade and roofline are decorated with a variety of sculptures by Ernest Quilter and Wynne Quail.

Wynne's contributions were the sculptures in the pediments at the ends of the projecting main wings, the men's and women's wings, mouldings at various places on the façade, and two 3ft high keystones carrying cherubs depicting youth and vitality in the window arches of the children's wards. As with the Santam Building, the artwork here is so far above the ground that its details are difficult to appreciate. Later additions to the hospital in the 1960s and 1980s have severely disfigured the building's symmetrical plan, as well as its appearance and presence in its fine setting, and also completely obscured the north pediment.



Fig. 4.47: The Santam / Sanlam Building, enr. Burg and Wale streets, 1932.



Fig. 4.43: 'Industry'.



Fig. 4.44: 'Agriculture'.

The Santam / Sanlam building with panels showing Industry and Agriculture.



Figs. 4.35 & 4.36: Kelvin Grove Ballroom and Nymphs, 1934.



Figs. 4.55 & 4.56: Keystones for the Boys' and Girls' wards, respectively.

Left: Nymph Ballroom at Kelvin Grove. Right: Keystones for Groote Schuur Hospital children's wards.

The 1940s were a different type of creative time, that of childbirth and brief motherhood. But by 1946 Wynne was seriously ill as a result of the weakness imprinted into her heart by the rheumatic fever of her teens. She was treated with penicillin, the new wonder drug, but it was not available in sufficient quantities to be effective. She died peacefully in 1947 and her ashes were scattered in the Holy Trinity churchyard, Kalk Bay. She was survived by her husband, Cecil Gasson, whom she had met in 1930 and married in 1935, and by her two infant children.

## MUIZENBERG BEACH HUTS POP UP IN YET ANOTHER GUISE



Gavin Thomson with one of his artworks.

Some months ago, you may remember that we featured sculptures made from the wood obtained from the old Muizenberg beach huts. This is from the *People's Post* of 11 February 2025:

Combining creative expression and the vital cause of preserving Muizenberg's iconic beach huts, art lovers and heritage enthusiasts will have the opportunity to purchase art pieces framed in the original wood of the iconic huts.

The reclaimed wood is the last of its kind, as the newly rebuilt beach huts have been refurbished using sustainable and long-lasting Nutec material, while the unique frames are designed by local framer and artist Adrian van Staden from Cape Art and Frame.

For more information email: [info@beachhut.studio](mailto:info@beachhut.studio) or 0217882829.





Muizenberg beach boxes circa 1900 (WCARS).



Image (circa 1940?) from an exhibition: Memories of Muizenberg 1900-1965.

(<https://www.thesouthafrican.com/lifestyle/move-to/south-africans-abroad/exhibition-memories-of-muizenberg-1900-1965/>)

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