

Rocklands Farm

Simon's Town



The Story of
ROCKLANDS FARM
Simon's Town, South Africa
1815—2010



JUDY ROWE
2010



ROCKLANDS FARM rests on a plateau at the foot of the Swartkop mountains, just 3 kms south of Simon's Town. Although it has been occupied for nearly 200 years, surprisingly few people are aware of its existence as the farm is hidden, visible only from the sea and to the few who have walked the upper mountain path. Visitors who traverse the bumpy farm track leading up from Rocklands Road are unprepared for its sudden beauty – a white house set against the mountain, the calm fields sloping down to the coast and the unimpeded view across False Bay to the Hottentot Holland Mountains.

It is likely that Rocklands Farm will eventually be developed so perhaps now is a good time to collect its stories together. Fortunately Margaret Lasbrey, the previous owner, had what appears to be a complete list of owners of the farm since it was proclaimed in 1815.

Some are familiar Simon's Town personalities and have been easy to trace but several names disappeared without leaving any discernable mark on history. Others proudly left detailed proclamations of their production of fodder and grapes from the farm.



Rocklands was one of half a dozen farms in the area, such as Froggy and Oatlands Farms, which victualled ships in the expanding new harbour. Rocklands is the only farm which has remained substantially untouched and in fact had a healthy herd of Jersey cows until Doris Lasbrey's death in 1974.

The first official mention of Rocklands in the Cape Archives dates from 1808 and related to an attempted land grab. A man named Frans Daniel Rossouw wrote a Memorial or memorandum to the Governor in which he

"humbly sheweth that at the Place called de Bakoven at the other side of Simon's Town between the Bay called de Smitswinkel and the Company's Garden in the District of Cape Town, there layeth waste ground of more or less sixteen morgen¹ in extent which your Memorialist is very desirous of employing for grazing his cattle and to sow Grains on such part as he might be able to cultivate. Your Memorialist therefore prays Your Excellency to favour him with the grant of the aforesaid Sixteen Morgen of Land more or less on quit rent.."

This request was referred on 27 April 1808² by the Burgher Senate, to Mr Buissime, Deputy Fiscal, and to Mr Thibault, Sworn Surveyor. On the same day, Mr C Bird, Acting Colonial Secretary replied saying that *"His Excellency desires that you may proceed with one Member of Burgher Senate and Mr Thibault to examine and report on"*³. Mr Rossouw's request was unsuccessful. On 6 May 1808 only a few days after the request, Mr Thibault reported back that he had measured the grounds applied for by Messrs Auret and Francois Daniel Roussouw. Such rapid response from a Rezoning Department is impressive. However, Simon's Town residents objected since this piece of ground *"was the only pasturage and the dam the only water for draught oxen which on some occasions had to be unteamed in Simon's Town and likewise the only pasture ground for cows which the inhabitants of Simon's Town are in the habit to keep for the accommodation of strangers"*.⁴ Hence, they argued, it could not become the property of a single person without considerable prejudice to the public and the inhabitants of Simon's Town. The response included a description of the land as being a *"very narrow spot of ground across*

1. Morgen was a Dutch measure of land equal to a little more than 2 acres. A rood also mentioned here was a lesser amount of 272.25 sq feet.

which goes a road towards a dam which appears to have been made to collect some water coming from the mountain". We knew nothing of this dam wall until the 2002 fire which stripped the farm of most of its trees and shrubs. We found a dam wall constructed from stones and earth. Although the dam is silted up and overgrown with bamboo, the wall stands bridging the deep gully. It formed part of the old road connecting Rocklands to Miller's Point. The only road at the time to Cape Point passed from Simonstown over Redhill.



The request to acquire Rocklands as private farm land persisted and on the 8 November 1813 all concerns for local needs and visiting thirsty beasts were completely disregarded. The Colonial Secretary, Mr Alexander,

suddenly instructed J H Brand, the new Deputy Fiscal, that Bakoven Valley be granted to the clergyman at Simon's Town and that it should be enclosed.⁵ Then followed a flurry of correspondence between the various land authorities and the newly appointed clergyman, Revd George Hough.⁶ Consequently, Rocklands Farm of 26 morgen 537 square roods⁷ was first transferred as glebe land to the Reverend George Hough on 1 February 1815 for a perpetual quit rent⁸ of 78 Rix Dollars (approximately £20). The Title Deed sets the condition that the road should remain open for public use. (See Land Surveyor's drawing of farm, annexed)

8. **Quit rent** is a form of levy or land tax imposed on freehold or leased land by a higher landowning authority, usually government or its assigns. The quit rent system was used frequently by colonial governments in the British empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some governments have now abolished the quit rent system and relieved those with a nominal quit rent obligation from the requirement to pay it, replacing quit rents with a uniform system of land tax.

This action was not uncontested; others had had their sights set on owning the land. The grant was challenged by an incensed William Austen who insisted that he had made a similar application for this land in August 1813 and that the Landdrost had been directed to inspect it on his account and furthermore his application had been fully approved.⁹ Nonetheless, providence or maybe the old boy network favoured Revd Hough, as the Landdrost of the Cape District was informed in no uncertain terms that the *"Back Oven Valley had been granted to the clergyman at Simon's Town and that therefore no attention is to be paid to such applications as he may have on his hands for the land in question"*. Mr Brand was directed to go ahead with the grant and enclose the land¹⁰ It appears William Austen must have continued bewailing

5. CO 53/11 and CO 4835/76

6. ST 10/12, CO 4837/78

7. SMT 10/12

9. CO 58/1

10. CO Daybook 5783: 15/12/1813

his fate as on 24 February 1815 the Colonial Secretary, perhaps in an effort to keep William Austen quiet, directed Reverend Hough to pay Mr Austen for the inspection of the piece of land.¹¹ It is not recorded how much this involved.

On 30 November 1814 Mr J H Brand reported that he had valued the piece of land applied for by the Revd Mr Hough at 3 rix dollars per morgen and observed that "*the breadth of the road must be 100 feet as mentioned to Mr Thibault when it was measured and the same as on the land granted to Messrs Sinclair and Murdoch*".¹² 100 feet sounds incredibly wide for a little used road, in fact wider than the current Cape Point main road, but this was necessary to permit ox wagons to turn around.

Peter Philip's book "British Residents at the Cape 1795/1819" makes reference to Revd George Hough. His name, according to Lady Herschel, is pronounced "Huff". He was born 1787 in Gloucester and came to South Africa in 1813 when appointed as Colonial Chaplain, Simon's Town and Minister to the English Church in Simon's Town at a stipend of £300 per annum. Evidently he was a well-connected man and was reputed to be a friend of Admiral Nelson which may explain his success in having Rocklands enclosed against the wishes of Simon's Town residents. He was subsequently appointed Colonial Chaplain in 1817 and moved to Cape Town. There he thrived, as according to Lady Herschel, "*he had a large congregation and was an excellent person*".¹³ When he left Simon's Town George Hough sold the farm on 17 June 1817 to his brother-in-law, Thomas Gardner, who had married his sister, Mary Hough.

11. CO 4837/259

12. SMT 11/4 (143)

13. Lady Herschel

"Letters from the Cape 1834—1838"
page 28

Thomas Gardner successfully applied for another parcel of land of 19 morgen, 262 square roods adjoining the original. This was transferred on 15 May 1818¹⁴ at a perpetual quit rent of 30 Rix Dollars. The new section was described as being north adjoining his own land, south to the waste Government ground, west to the steep face of the mountains and east to the sea. The latter direction has echoes today as Rocklands is one of the few properties on False Bay having ownership rights to the highwater mark.

On each occasion the records have the phrase that the "*land be brought into such a state of cultivation as it is capable of within three years*". This was evidently to ensure these newly granted lands were put to good use.

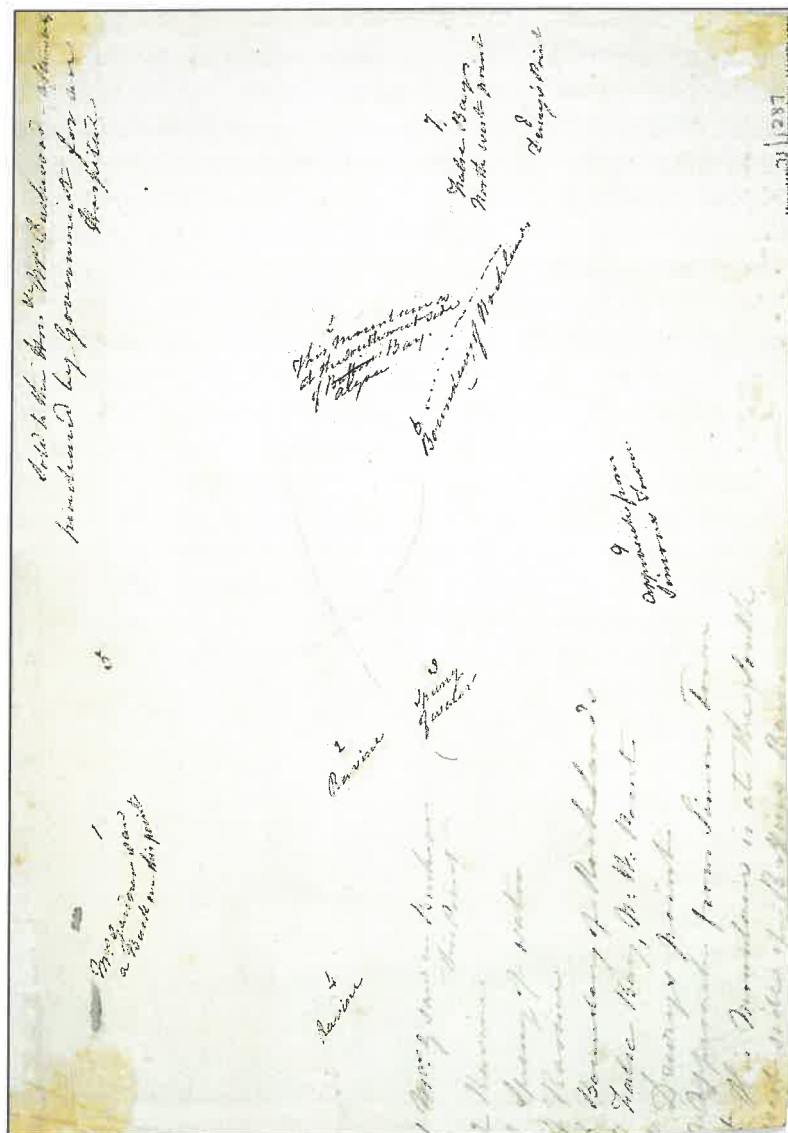
There are no official records of any buildings having existed during the Hough period although he may have had some small dwelling. However, we believe that Lieut Thomas Gardner, who was the Naval Harbour Master from 1814 to 1820, built Rocklands House. We only know from a painting that the house was in a recognizable form and was well established by 1821. In the 1970s a small unsigned watercolour was found in England in a Dorset village pub. This painting shows a rectangular white building with a stoep and cellars nestling against mountains and overlooking the sea. Someone who was familiar with the Cape was smart enough to recognize the rather fantasized scenery and the painting was eventually identified as depicting Rocklands Farm. The work is attributed to Mary Brenton who lived in Simon's Town with her brother, Sir Jahleel Brenton, and his family during his term of office as Royal Naval Commissioner

from 1815 to 1821. Lady Brenton, Jahleel's American wife, died during their stay here and is buried in the Old Burying Ground. Both Mary and Jahleel were talented artists and sketched and painted extensively during their time here. Their paintings are the best we have of early Simon's Town.

The water painting was offered to Margaret Lasbrey when she was the farm owner. She was not a buyer and it regrettably ended up in the Afrikaner Museum in Johannesburg, there to linger in a file, unhung and unappreciated in spite of our requests to send it to a more appropriate home either at Rocklands or at the Simon's Town Museum. We saw the painting for the first time in the 1980s.



The painting dates the original sections of the farmhouse between 1815 and 1821, the duration of Mary Brenton's stay in the Cape. It was built at the base of the mountain



The reverse of Mary Brenton's watercolour of Rocklands

at the confluence of two perennial streams, largely protected from the gusts of the south-easter in summer and from the gales of the north-west winter storms. The façade of the house has changed very little over the years. It has remained a simple single storey home with two large sash windows on each side of the front door. A flight of steep stone steps leads to a broad stoep which gives entry to the light and airy Cape Georgian entrance. This original part of the house is constructed of rocks and mud with walls nearly one metre thick.

Evidently by 1821 Rocklands House was established and inhabited. The painting also connects us to Mary Brenton through her handwritten remarks on the back of her work. She marked with a cross the point "*where Mrs Gardner saw a buck*" obviously a moment of note and similar to the feelings I have nearly 200 years later on the occasions I have seen little buck running across the farm. There are accurate geographical directions and she has identified the approach road from Simon's Town, the two springs, the ravines and Miller's Point (then called Denny's Point).

Mary Brenton took some artistic license with the position of the house, foreshortening the fields. The building however accords with the descriptions of the farm in contemporaneous advertisements so we are reasonably confident of its architectural accuracy. No other buildings, apart from the outhouse, are shown.

There are several significant differences from today's house. In 1977 soon after buying the farm, we asked two young architects Vivian and Derreck Jaffe to supervise

some renovations. The leaking roof needed to be tackled first. Vivian's response was that the long sloping ceiling beams evident in the sitting and dining areas pointed to a flat roof which would have been in keeping with the late Cape Georgian style. She suggested the existing pitched roof was a later modification and that we should revert to a flat roof. There appeared to be no reason to question this reasoning, but we hadn't then seen Mary Brenton's painting of the house with its pitched roof. We now suspect that the long ceiling beams were installed after 1834.

During my research I found a newspaper report describing how Rocklands House had caught fire and burned in February 1834. It is unlikely the stone walls fell but it is probable the roof fell in and those long beams and flat roof were incorporated when it was rebuilt. We don't know exactly when this happened, but note that the farm was sold for a low figure in 1834. Sometime after 1840 corrugated iron became available in this country and maybe this new material was used in the roof's reconstruction.

Mary Brenton's painting clearly shows cellars with entrances beneath the stoep on either side of the steps. An advertisement from 1831 refers to "*two fine cellars*". We could find no trace of them, in spite of taking to the stoep with a pick-axe. How Alec would have loved a real wine cellar! We suspect that the stoep was supported by wooden beams which collapsed in fire and that the cellars were subsequently filled in.

A lugubrious builder with whom we discussed the

possibility of excavating the cellars, suggested that there was probably a water problem. The house is built at the confluence of the two streams, the southern stream runs underground and probably periodically flooded the cellars.

The house in the painting is shown as oblong, not the current U-shape, with two chimneys on the north side and one on the south side. In 1831 Rocklands House was described as "*having two good front rooms with fireplaces, 2 bedrooms, a pantry, kitchen, laundry and 2 servants' rooms and lofts*".

The original shape of the house probably followed the existing thick rock and mud walls around the two front rooms, then extended on the north side to the kitchen, encompassing the cooking area served by a chimney, and on the southern side to a second bedroom. The U-shape developed as extensions were added as two wings, on the north side to a scullery built on to the kitchen and on the south side to extra bedrooms.

Returning to the story of Thomas Gardner, he didn't live long to enjoy his new home as he came to a sad and sudden end. On 10 February 1821 an artilleryman, coming from the Blockhouse in the early hours of the morning, found him face down on the road with his horse and dog close by. It seems he had enjoyed a good party and paid the price of drinking and driving. Thomas Gardner's grave is in the Old Burying Ground, Seaforth, Row 19 No 5. He was aged 42 and he is buried with his 10 week old baby daughter, Mary.

Thomas Gardner's widow inherited his farm and the land

for which he had applied on 17 December 1819¹⁵ and which she received on the 15 October 1821 measuring 16 morgen, 135 square roods. This new piece extended from land measured from Mr Drury (Miller's Point) to the south of her existing land, east to the sea (continuing the rights to the highwater mark), and west to the mountains. Mr Drury subsequently sold two parcels of his land to the Miller family in 1828 and 1840. There was a condition attached to Mrs Gardner's new allotment – that free passage/door-drift for cattle be allowed. The rental was 2 Rix Dollars. This third portion of land is marked on the Land Surveyor's drawing of the farm. It finally turned the little farm into an estate of reasonable size.

Within a few weeks of widowhood Mrs Gardner made plans to visit England. On the 17th March 1821 an advertisement describing the house was placed.¹⁶

*"To be let for the term of one year, from 1st April next, The Estate called Rocklands, near Simon's Town, either in one or two Parts as may be most agreeable to the Parties
Lot No 1, The dwelling House with the Gardens and vineyards*

Lot No 2, Comprising the Arable and Pasture Ground with a small cottage.

Tenders for the hire of either of the above Lots or both together, will be received by the Undersigned until the above Day.

John Osmond

Evidently no one was interested as on 20 October 1821 in the same paper another notice appeared: *"Upon very desirable terms, the Proprietor being about to embark for England. The House, called Rocklands in the*

15. CO 10/1/204

16. CT Gazette & African Advertiser Vol XVI, No 792

neighbourhood of Simon's Town, about a mile beyond the Commandant's Residence. The House is new, and suited to the accommodation of a Gentleman's Family; commands a fine view of False Bay; and, from the salubrity of the air, is worthy of the attention of persons in ill health. There is an excellent garden and small vineyard attached, and is well supplied with water. For particulars, apply to the Rev. G. Hough Cape Town, or J Osmond Simon's Town (CT Gaz 20.10.821)

Nothing further is heard of Widow Gardner and suddenly the Hon. Francis Dashwood became the owner, at a cost of Cape Guiders 30 000. The Lasbrey records show the date as 12 December 1824. This appears to be an error as it is the same date as the transfer of the farm to Revd Sturt, the subsequent owner. Archive records are incomplete and I can only presume the transfer date to Mr Dashwood was December 1821. This assumption derives from an entry in Colonial Office records of 19 January 1822 when the then Resident, H Somerset, sent to C Bird, a list of the places under the two Field Cornetices of the Residency of Simons Town, which includes "*A Place on the road from Simon's Town and further on. Field Cornet Charles de Stadler. Place Rocklands Owner Francis Dashwood*".¹⁷

Another Colonial Office report on 14 April 1824 states that in a "*Return of the Extent of Land cultivated, F Dashwood on his place Rocklands had 3 morgen in 1814 to 5 morgen in 1824*".¹⁸

17. CO 17/4/1

18. (SMT 11/10/121 Enclosure CO8447/42



Lady Herschel. From a miniature by Alfred Chalon. 1829

Mr Dashwood was a man of some stature, married to Lady Ann Dashwood, daughter of the 7th Earl of Lauderdale. He held several prestigious positions, amongst them Receiver of Revenue for Cape Town. In April 1808 he was appointed to a Committee enquiring into clandestine importation of slaves

and later that year, became President of Lombard Bank. He bought a house in Simon's Town in the Mount Pleasant area when he was appointed Collector of Customs (1819-20) so he may not have lived in Rocklands House or perhaps used it for weekends. Lady Herschel wrote that she wasn't impressed by Mr Dashwood although she liked Lady Dashwood "*a sweet, good girl*" but wrote of her husband that his "*dreadful countenance bears awful testimony to a vitiated mind and person*"!

Mary Brenton recorded on the back of her painting that Mr Dashwood bought the farm. She also says that "*afterwards it was purchased by the Government for an hospital.*" I have been unable to confirm this. Several buildings in Simon's Town were used as hospitals and quarantine wards over the years, but nowhere is there any reference to Rocklands being used in this manner.

In March 1824 Rocklands was up for sale again –

"To be sold by private contract. A most desirable marine villa, near Simon's Town, called Rocklands, fit for the immediate reception of the most respectable family. The House is most substantially built, Lands covered with Wood, and having an abundant supply of water throughout the year; an excellent kitchen garden, and the land in cultivation highly productive, having produced near 14000cwt of hay, from the labour of two men only with spades.

*Apply to John Osmond If not sold by the 4th April, it will on that day be exposed to public sale, together with all the furniture etc."*¹⁹

The farm was transferred on 12 December 1824 to another clergyman, Revd George William Sturt Jnr, who had arrived in the Cape in 1796 and in September 1819 was appointed Colonial Chaplain to Simon's Town and the Naval Hospital. The farm was sold for Cape Guilders 24000 (or £600) – less than the price paid by Mr Dashwood in spite of the cultivated land having been increased during his custody. Nonetheless, Rocklands was evidently an active farm as this inventory was detailed in the Opgaaf Rolle No 29 in 1824 : *"5 male, 1 female prize negroes, 6 horses, 9 breeding cattle, 2 pigs, 4 muids barley, 2 muids oats sown. Area 61 morgen. Situation Rocklands, 3 miles FC Simon's Town. For what agricultural purposes adapted – Green forage."*²⁰

On 23 December 1828 James Holman wrote in his book ²¹ that he accompanied Mr Sinclair, surgeon of the "Sparrowhawk", to dine with Revd Sturt. James Holman described Revd Sturt in 1828 as *"a most polished and*

19. The Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser

20. Cape Archives INV 1/5.j.1521

21. "A Voyage round the World" Vol 2, page 101

agreeable person, well acquainted with the highest circles of English society, having served several years in the Army before he took orders." Evidently he was indeed well connected as he was one of the Chaplains to HRH the Duke of Clarence.²²

James Holman also records that Revd Sturt, presumably in his rollicking army days, was said to have taken a considerable wager that he would woo and wed a young lady of great beauty in the small space of a fortnight! He won the lady and the wager, says James Holman, "*his wife being amiable, accomplished and domestic as well as beautiful.*" As James was blind, this piece of information must have been conveyed by Mr Sinclair.

Polished and well-connected Revd Sturt may have been, but it seems not all his workers were impressed. During the annual visit of the Residency of Simon's Town on 18 Jan 1826 it was reported that one of Sturt's slaves wasn't happy, "*Male and female Prize Negroes and one female slave stated that they were well treated with the exception of the prize negro, Philip, who complained that his master was often angry with him and threatened to have him flogged.*"²³

It seems unlikely that there were ever many slaves living at Rocklands although there must have been considerable labour input. There is evidence all over the grounds of stone walls to contain cattle. Erecting these walls was no mean feat. There was a blacksmith's shop, stables and horses and cattle to look after and crops to be grown. Plenty of work would also have been associated with the house. But neither the Simon's Town Slave register nor the more extensive Cape Town registers have any record

22. Theal Vol X11, page 400

23. CO 286/44

of slaves belonging to Rocklands' owners. (Slaves were registered under their owner's name). The only recognizable name is Mrs Sturt who is entered as the owner of a South African housemaid named Hendryn which corroborates the Residency report of one female slave. Hendryn was 29 years 8 months old when she died on 5 November 1832. Such a short life, one wonders why.

The slave trade had been abolished in England in 1807. Although there was no opprobrium attached to owning slaves - only trading was illegal - and consequently slave labour was widely used until 1834.

Tim Hart of UCT Archaeology Department explains that "prize negroes" were not slaves but indentured workers, a labour force which he considers more likely in view of Rocklands' close association with the British Navy. After the abolition of slave trading, one of the main duties of the Royal Navy was to stop and search any ships which might be carrying slaves. They would seize the ships, the slaves were released as "Prize Negroes" and the ships were forfeited as "prize ships". The ship owners however were ruthless and threw slaves overboard before being boarded by the authorities. The watery grave and the empty cargo holds precluded prosecution for the slave traders. At least one well known family in Simon's Town, the Kindo family, is descended from a slave fished from the sea. These prize negroes were usually indentured for 14 years, employed in the Dockyard and taught a trade. Their status was only a notch or two higher than slaves but it was not required to record these prize negroes in the Slave Register as they were not "assets".



It has been suggested by Gerhardus Taljaard, that this building, the so-called slave quarters, may well have been the original shelter erected on Rocklands by Revd Hough

It seems that the agreeable Revd Sturt was living beyond his means. In 1831 Lord Bathurst wrote to Lord Charles Somerset about a debt owed to Messrs Flight and Robson . ²⁴ The farm was sold in a suit between Lombard Bank, the Plaintiffs, and George William Sturt. The sale by the Master of the Supreme Court is recorded in the Gazette December 1830. *"That pleasant and convenient Residence, situate near the Bakoven about 4 miles from Simon's Town, at the entrance of the Bay, called Rocklands, now in the possession of Mr G W Sturt, Inr. together with three pieces of perpetual quit-rent land adjoining measuring the whole 62 morgen and 274 square*

24. Theal, Vol X5, page 261

roods.

The dwelling house is substantially built and contains two good front rooms with fireplaces, two bedrooms, a large closet, pantry, kitchen, laundry, two servants' rooms and lofts.

There is a large stoop in front of the house, with cellars underneath and a yard at the back.

Outbuildings – a small thatch cottage, poultry and pigeon house. Stable and Life, a blacksmith's shop and a small cottage with a flat roof. The outbuildings have been recently erected on a modern plan at a great expense."

Rev'd Sturt died at the age of 53 and is buried in the Old Burying Ground, Grave number OBG29.

Rocklands was then sold on the 25 September 1831 to John Osmond, commonly known in Simon's Town as King John, at the bargain basement price of 3 000 Cape Guilders (£325). He sold it a year later on 9 October 1832 for 18 000 Cape Guilders (£450) to Franciscus Josephus Becker.

John Osmond's name does appear as an owner in the Slave Register. However, he was the local property speculator with a fine home in Simon's Town so it is unlikely he ever lived at Rocklands. He was a colourful, if arrogant, personality. A self-made man, he only associated with people he deemed worthy of his station in spite of the fact that he was of uncertain parentage and when he had arrived in the Cape Colony in 1799 on board HM Ship Lancaster he was described as a mere carpenter. Before long he called himself a Master Shipbuilder and was appointed a builder of a section of the naval establishment in Simon's Town. He and his mother-in-law made a fortune dealing in property and Rocklands

was one instance. He acquired the name "King John" because of the lavish entertainment he frequently gave at his Simon's Town home, which came to be called The Palace. He died in 1847 at this residence.

The new owner, Franciscus Josphe Becker, wasn't very lucky. It was during his ownership that the house caught fire. This cautionary tale appeared in the SA Commercial Advertiser 25 Feb 1834. *"It is reported that the house "Rocklands" near Simon's Bay, belonging to Mr F Becker, was destroyed by fire on Friday last. The flames spread so rapidly that the roof fell in before any of the furniture could be saved. The house was insured in the Alliance Fire Office; but unfortunately for the owner, no part of the furniture was covered against risk. This is an additional proof of the value of Fire Insurance Offices."*

Then followed a series of owners. 6 June 1834 William Farmer purchased Rocklands for Cape Guiders 6000, (£150,) a bargain by anyone's standards . Nothing is known of William Farmer except that during his tenure Lady Herschel visited the farm. In her "Letters from the Cape:, she wrote on 25 November 1835 to her brother Dr D Stewart that they had taken a week's holiday in Simon's Town. They were entertained by the Admiral and by *"your old friend King John, who prepared one day's pleasant excursion for us along the cliffs to Rocklands."* ²⁶ Evidently Lady Herschel's social standing met with John Osmond's approval.

19 July 1839 Maria Josia Catharina Watney bought Rocklands at the even lower price of £125. She was the daughter of John Pigott Watney of Wimbledon and his

26. Lady Herschel "Letters from the Cape"

wife Maria Wilhemina de Waal. She bought several properties in the area during her lifetime, owning Froggy Farm as well as Cradock Valley and Oatlands Farm which she left to her son Joseph John Truemen. Some 50 years later a Pigot-Moodie bought the farm. I've been unable to trace any connection with Maria Josia Catharina Watney nee Pigott, but since Pigott is not a common name, there may well have been some family relationship although the spelling differs slightly

17 February 1843 John Ward bought the farm for £178. There is a John Ward in the Old Burying Ground Grave No 40, born 1819 and died on 26 February 1869. He is buried with Christine Watson, his Scottish wife, and with two baby daughters. If it is the same person, he was described as a Livery Stable Keeper and lived many years in Arsenal Road Simon's Town, but died at his residence in Diep River.

There are no records of events during John Ward's ownership but on 22 December 1847, William Anderson, Auctioneer and Appraiser, (Manager William Runciman) received instructions from John Ward to sell Rocklands by public auction. It was advertised in the Shopkeepers & Tradesmen's Journal on 7 January 1848 as *"That well known Estate "Rocklands" with the buildings thereon (now called The Naval and Military Clubhouse). Being a licensed house and a place of general resort, affording both recreation and refreshment and such a convenient distance from the Town, it offers an opportunity seldom to be met with for profitable investment.*

The terms of payment will be made very favourable to the Purchaser

At the same time will be sold household furniture, some

excellent Milch Cows, Horses, Carts, Harness, and a quantity of Loose Hay, Potatoes etc etc. Sale to commence at 11 oclock am."

It sounds as though Mr Ward turned Rocklands into the local brothel affording lots of recreation and refreshment, only a three miles away from disapproving eyes! I can find no records referring to such a club at the farm. However this may refer to a private club which met originally at the clubhouse next to the existing Shell Garage in Main Street. It was not a financial success. Mr Ward may have tried to resurrect it at Rocklands.

James William Miller, after whom Miller's Point is named, co-owned Rocklands with Carl Watermeyer for 8 years from 1850, bought for £235. Miller is buried in The Old Burying Ground, Simon's Town. He was drowned on 25 June 1865 at the age of 28 and was described as a seaman of the Cutter belonging to McKellen.

On 21 Jan 1858 the property was transferred to Jan Marthinus Hoets, a prominent member of Simon's Town, a man of the sea and closely associated with Miller's Point. He was a licensed pilot, master mariner and member of the Harbour Board. In his later years he was a Marine Surveyor in Table Bay Docks and died as a result of an accident at the docks in 1881. Jan Joets' daughter-in-law was one of the original members of the Simon's Town Historical Society and according to her that, although Jan Hoets did not live at the farm, it was used extensively over holidays and weekends.

On 2 November 1861 the farm was transferred to the Revd Thomas Meredith about whom nothing is known.



George Ryall Budge

On 25 November 1867 George Ryall Budge bought and owned it for 8 years. George Ryall Budge was the first mayor of Simon's Town 1883/84 and took an active part in the Simon's Town affairs until his death in 1902. He is remembered for planting hundreds of trees in the town – at his own expense – and was instrumental in having the town's drainage system improved. He was educated at Simon's Town Government School and was a carpenter early in life but later owned a general grocery and drapery store. He also owned a beautiful home next to Admiralty house so it is not clear if he ever lived at Rocklands on a permanent basis. William Runciman married one of his daughters.

On 25 August 1875 the property was transferred to Alfred Hartley, about whom I can find nothing. It was subsequently sold to William Runciman who is well



William Runciman

known in Simon's Town circles as a businessman and mayor. He imported general merchandise, one of his major imports from England being coal for the Navy. South African coal was just not good enough. Although we've no evidence that Runciman ever lived at Rocklands since he seems to have owned a lot of local property, he owned the farm for 9 years from 1880 to 1889. He may have tried to sell Rocklands during that period as an

advert again appeared in the Cape Times on 5 April 1886.

"Rocklands" Simon's Town. To be let or for sale. This delightful farm, with or without the main dwelling house, and comprising about 125 acres abundance of water all the year. The best dairy farm in the district."

By 22 February 1889, Rocklands moved into modern times and its stories become more prosaic. It was finally permanently occupied as a family home and actively farmed, passing into the hands of a family who tended it for many years when George Pigot Moodie took over from William Runciman. There's a lengthy and florid newspaper report in the Cape Times Weekly edition of 1 October 1890. The City fathers had proposed that a new marine drive could be developed around False Bay to Cape Point as a scenic alternate to the road over Redhill. *"The scenery is so magnificent that it would surpass the now-famed Victoria Road"* referring to the coast road from Seapoint round to Hout Bay. The railway line had been built by this time so that access as far as Simon's Town was easy. Thereafter the coast road to the Point was only open for horse and cart as far as Rocklands, along that 100ft wide track required 80 years previously when the farm was first granted. Then the road dwindled into a bridle path for 6 miles to Cape Point.

In order to assess the feasibility of such a road, a group of 10 local officials were appointed to investigate. Riding around the Peninsula was not lightly undertaken and subsequently warranted a whole page in the newspaper. It is reported that the party started at 6 am from The British Hotel and after breakfast rode along to Rocklands.

They then had to continue carefully on the bridle path, alternatively sandy and very stony, winding up and down the side of the mountains. "*Watchful must be the rider and sure-footed must be the horse, or a stumble would probably lead to both having a roll down the mountainside.*" It took 3½ hours to reach George Smith's cottage at Smitswinkel Bay. Between breakfast and an enormous lunch, it is reported that they made the exciting ride to the lighthouse, marveling all the way at the slabs of granite and myriads of duikers. The journey back was over the mountain and down Redhill. This is described as so dangerously steep that they had to dismount. With some relief the report says that "*the members of the inspecting party having got down the hill without bruises or mishaps as a legacy from the trip.*" The adventure was pronounced a triumph and the proposed marine drive would be a "*great boon to the people of the Peninsula and all lovers of picturesque scenery*". It was of course eventually built, although not until 1914, and is as magnificent as was envisaged in 1890.

It is believed that in 1910 Rocklands was inherited by George's son who revelled in the grand name of George Frederick Arthur Pigot-Moodie.

In 1927, Pigot-Moodie's cousin Herbert Richard Beard bought the farm. Herbert Beard, who married Elizabeth Margaret Bisset, was related to the Arderne family. His father Henry had emigrated from England and married Joanna, one of the Arderne daughters in 1865. When neither of the Arderne sons followed in their father's prosperous timber business, Arderne & Company, other members of the clan, including Henry, took over. In the



1890s it became the turn of the younger generation, including Herbert.

Henry Arderne had established gardens of great note and beauty on his estate in Claremont. It had been his passion, spending many years collecting unusual trees and plants worldwide. Part of these grounds have survived as the now public

Arderne Gardens, boasting an extraordinary collection of magnificent trees, including a Moreton Bay Fig – one of the two largest trees in South Africa. This passion evidently infected Herbert, as with similar enthusiasm, he planted many interesting trees on Rocklands, even though they didn't fare nearly as well as those in wind-protected Claremont. Many of those that did thrive were lost during the devastating fire of 2002. However, there remains an avenue of European oaks leading up to the house – just as there was an oak avenue up to Henry Beard's town house Highwick. Also survived are several large Australian blackwood trees, and there is a rather wind battered syzygium jambos or rose apple from the East Indies shading the right side of the stoep. Finally there were two holly bushes in front of the house – holly bushes which bear red berries – special mention was made of the holly bushes at Arderne gardens and I am sure these were grown from that treasured bush. The pictures show how wooded Rocklands had become by 1950 as a result of Beard's care.



Herbert Beard also had the foresight to buy more land giving him access to the water rights. These two streams run strongly throughout the year, with clear white water. Today, we still use this water, not relying on Municipal supplies at all.



According to Margaret Lasbrey, every summer Herbert and Elizabeth would move to Rocklands from November until March, and keep open house. We've heard many stories from the extended Beard family of happy summers spent on the farm.

Their manager Jacobus Taljaard lived in the cottage fulltime and tended the farm, producing cream, butter, vegetables and honey as well as deciduous fruit from trees and vines which had been transplanted from the Henry Beard's Kenilworth estate "Highwick". According to Jacobus' son, Gerhardus, who was born on the farm, Jacobus achieved all this with the aid of one small, tough farmworker Stoffel Skalwyk. Together the two of them also cut a firebreak around the farm in six weeks. Today it takes a team of 12 longer to do the same.

Alterations made inside the house during Herbert Beard's custodianship were significant. He built the fireplace anew in the sitting room from interesting component parts. Three large granite slabs had acted as stepping stones over the open stream which ran down Buitenkant Street to the Castle moat. When this stream was canalized Herbert dragged these stones over the mountains by ox



Taljaard's Cottage

wagon to use in his new fireplace.

Then during renovations to his Cape Town house, Herbert found some Delft tiles under layers of plaster and brought them to Rocklands for the fireplace surround. They depict the New Testament parables and it is believed that they were originally used to teach the Christian Scriptures to slaves.

It is likely that the imposing Cape Dutch front door also dates from Henry Beard's era - about 1930. The original Georgian doorway would have had two half doors swinging from the uprights and there are marks on the frame showing that this indeed had been the case. The door frame, the window and glass at the top of the door appear to be original.





Little is known about the large beam which supports the roof between the hall and the sitting room. According to Doris Lasbrey it came from a ship which went aground on the West Coast. This certainly looks possible but when it was built into the house and by whom is not known.

Herbert Beard was a man of many parts, apart from being a successful timber merchant and farmer, he was a keen fisherman and photographer. Some of his glass negatives showing scenes of Rocklands nearly ninety years ago have been included in this history. This interest may have stemmed from his



grandfather Richard Beard who in 1840 acquired the English patent of Daguerre's process of photography and had opened the first photographic studio in England.²⁷

In 25 August 1932 a Deed of Grant was given for a further portion of land which brought the total area of the Farm Rocklands to 88 Morgen, 75 square Roods.

When Herbert Beard died in 1960, the farm was left to his three children. One of his children, Doris, was already living there with her husband Ernest Lasbrey. Ernest was rector of St John's Wynberg and Christchurch Kenilworth from 1910 to 1950 and on his retirement in 1950 they had moved to Rocklands. Towards the end of his life Revd Lasbrey was confined to a wheelchair so the left side of stoep was extended beyond the slave seat around the north side of the house for his access. Ernest died in 1963.

The farm had been divided by Herbert between Doris and her two brothers Ronald and Henry. The brothers sold their portions, 1 and 3, to Anglo American Properties. Doris and Ernest kept the central portion (2) with the homestead, cottages and arable land.²⁸ In turn, Doris on her death willed that the central portion be split between her three children, Margaret, Aldyth and Ian.

Doris Lasbrey was a formidable woman, the power behind the Child Life Protection society and active in her husband's church affairs. Then in retirement, she tackled the farm. Margaret, her daughter, told stories of her mother sitting in the courtyard, gun across her knees, taking pot shots at the baboons who dared to steal her fruit and vegetables. She continued to operate the farm

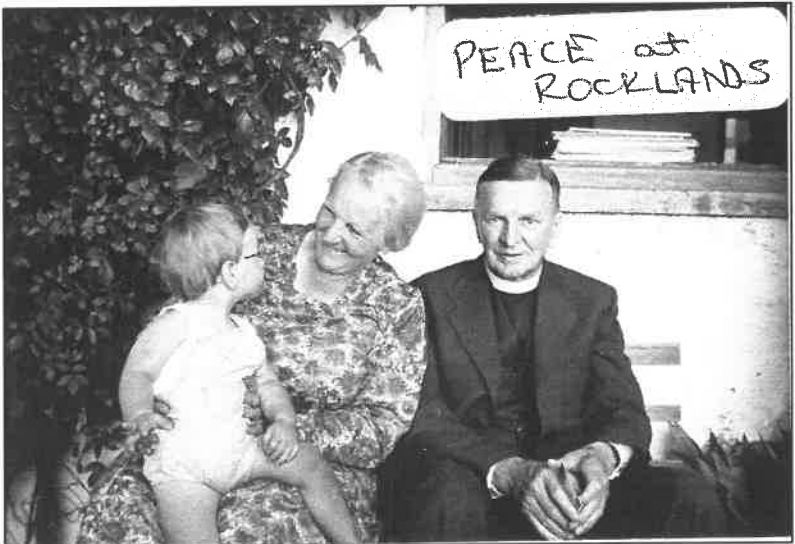
27. Deed of Grant No 85/1932

28. Deeds Office Cape Town, Deed of Transfer, No1 0547/1968

with pigs, cows, poultry, vegetables and a homing pigeon until her death in 1974.

Surprisingly, in spite of its proximity to Simon's Town, electricity was only introduced in 1963 and even then the electric stove was rarely used. If Eskom has its way, it may not be so different in the future!

When we bought the farm in 1976 with it came with the remnants of her dairy herd, three beautiful Jersey cows and a frisky bull, as well as the farmhand, Bible. We couldn't bring ourselves to sell the cows and they continued happily wandering over the paddocks for another 20 years – the oldest and friendliest cows ever seen, wrinkled from age with huge kikuyu fed bodies. I intended calling this history "Cow On My Stoep" as more than once I opened the front door and was met by one of the gentle giants.





The dairy was still operational in 1976 and local residents recall coming to Rocklands for eggs and fresh cream.



This area has now morphed into a pottery where Edu Vaughan Scott creates unique and beautiful ceramic pots, two of which grace the main house.





When we bought Doris Lasbrey's portion of Rocklands, we also bought Portion 1 from Anglo American Properties. On this portion was an attractive little wooden cabin, Pebbles, overlooking the sea about 80 metres from the farm entrance. It was built during World War 2 as a lookout for German submarines and had a large cement slab for a searchlight. As far as is known no U2 subs ever ventured into False Bay and Pebbles was eventually abandoned by the Navy. The little cabin was our holiday home for many years. It was lost in the 2002 fire - the cement slab and chimney are all that remain.



One of the reasons we bought a large piece of ground was that we had always hoped to establish a campsite for children. During negotiations with a Christian organization, their chairman Murray Hofmeyr expressed enthusiasm for our concept and we invited him to

become a co-owner of Rocklands. He also had a personal sentimental attachment to the farm as he had proposed to his wife Stella in the sitting room of Rocklands House.

The Rocklands Campsite Trust was formed and a portion of the land on the northern side of the farm was transferred to this Trust. The result is surely one of the most beautiful campsites in the world – well used and appreciated by many thousands of Cape children throughout the year.



Alec and I moved down to Rocklands in 2005 and set about restoring the old house. Curiously none of the prior owners thought the buildings significant enough to leave any record of alterations, additions or renovations.

We can find no plans of the house in the Municipal Archives prior to 1930, when Herbert Beard registered the farm, and this source makes only passing remarks about the outbuildings. I have gleaned some information from pictures, advertisements, hearsay and passing references in books and newspapers so this history may not be complete nor totally accurate. I have detailed all our alterations as a record for future generations. I hope it is not monotonous.

The house had been neglected for 25 years. The roof leaked, wood had rotted, water supply erratic and electrical supply minimal. Alec's estimate of 6 months to "get it knocked into shape" stretched to two years - a marriage testing job.



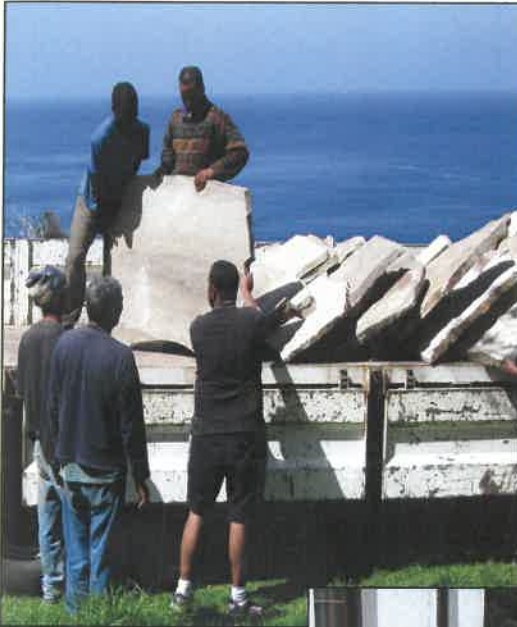
We started outside where the façade had essentially been preserved with its Georgian symmetry and elegance. All the front windows had to be replaced and were lengthened to give a view of the sea from the sitting room. The front door also needed considerable renovation.

The stoep was in a poor state, parts had sunk, cracked and become overgrown. We took all up the variety of flag stones and tiles, which gave us a chance to hunt, again unsuccessfully, for the cellars pictured in Mary Brenton's painting.

On the stoep were a few very old handcut flagstones but not enough to cover the whole area. We also saved and relaid the band of grey slate which runs from the front door to the steps. Apparently this slate originated from Robben Island and was fashionable in homes in the 19th century.



Finding the sandstone hadn't been easy. Anxious to be true to the heritage of the house and not be seduced by cheaper and thinner Indian sandstone, we searched the Cape for South African stone. Most mines have closed but Alec persuaded a mine near Niewoudtville to re-open and supply us.



However, we were aghast when this precious cargo finally arrived. It came in enormous irregular slabs rather than the neatly cut rectangles we had expected. This led to a frantic search for a stone mason able to cut and lay our precious stone.

So Alfred and his two assistants joined us. With years of experience, he calmly surveyed the erratic pile and cut and shaped it into manageable sizes. Dozens of grinding





disks were consumed. His tenure lengthened when we discovered he could also build rock walls. With great pleasure we watched his paving roll out and walls grow, bringing some order around the house.

His beautiful walls hold back the new plantings and a waterfall at the back of the house channels and controls our streams.

Another major addition was the garage and workshop. We replicated the front motif around the modern electric doors in an effort to reconcile the architecture.

Then we cleared and paved the back courtyard, transforming it from a muddy patch into a pleasant and wind protected space. Too attractive it turned out, as



our local residents, the baboons, also found it desirable, both to share the sun and the kitchen with us. We were then forced to cage in the entire backyard. Now we sit in the cage and the baboons watch from outside!

Inside the house, we installed three sash doors opening on to the paved courtyard, from the kitchen, the dining area and the bedroom corridor. These door/windows are replicas of a style known in the Cape circa 1790 to 1820. An example still exists in the Cape Heritage Hotel in Bree Street. We also added internal wooden shutters to all the windows on the outer walls of the house. They are in keeping with Cape Georgian homes although we don't think any originally existed at Rocklands.

The internal doors are probably Victorian and not very attractive. We replaced the ugly selection of frosted glass

with patterned stain glass . The sitting room needed little alteration except for the addition of a large wood burning stove which heats the whole open area during winters.

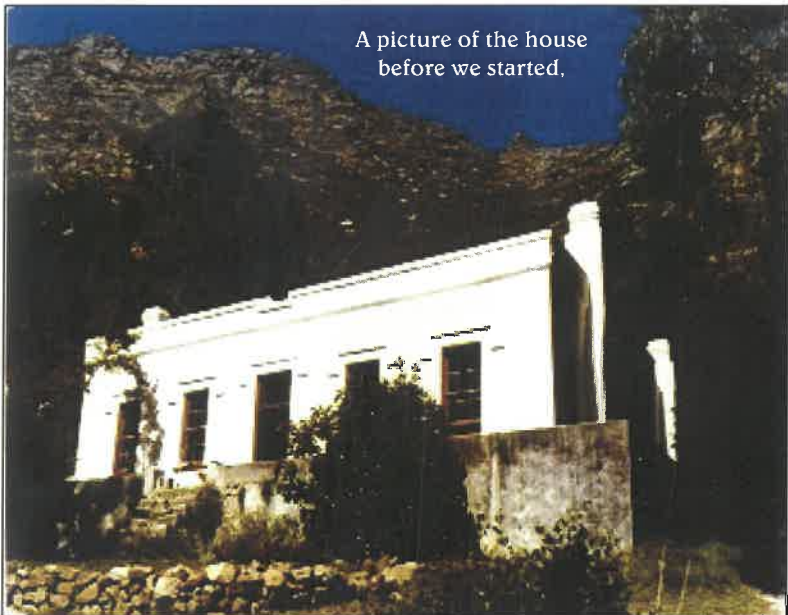
The age and provenance of the wooden floors varies, the older floors being Oregon pine We think the only original wood with its trademark wide planks remains in the main bedroom. The sitting room floor appears to have been partially replaced before our ownership whilst we replaced rotted floorboards in the dining and study areas when we bought the house 30 years ago. The whole area was vastly improved by being sanded and sealed.

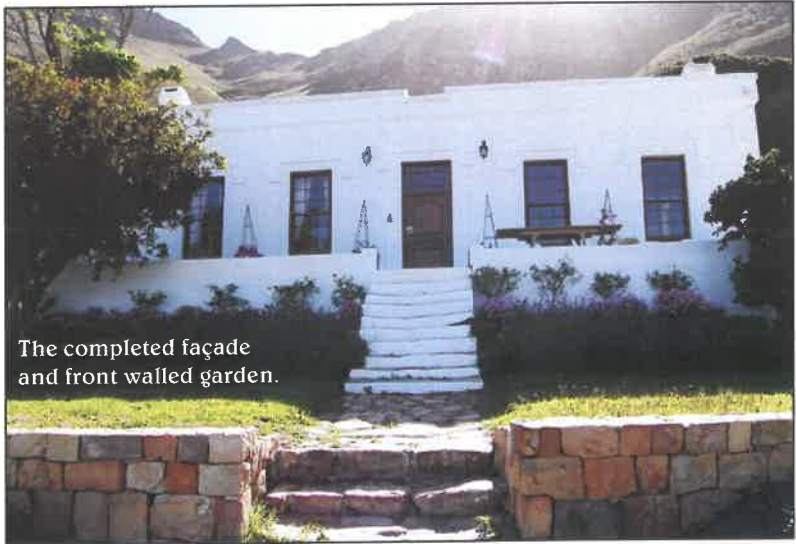


The kitchen has been extensively altered. The addition of the sash door, an additional window together with the removal of an odd inner wall have resulted in a comfortable bright spacious farm kitchen opening directly on to the courtyard. We found a yellow wood

lintel during renovations and this was built into the alcove holding the stoves. We also installed an Esse wood burning stove with a central water heating system. The kitchen floor needed changes and once again we searched for matching handmade terracotta tiles. Finally, we installed cabinets and fittings hand built by a local boat builder.

The bathrooms were a massive task as we had to start from an undefined shape. In the first bathroom we have left part of the old rock walls exposed together with a curiously placed old wooden lintel high in the wall. The floors were replaced with terracotta tiles. A second bathroom was created from an old storeroom adjacent to the fourth bedroom. The bedrooms had little need of alteration except for dealing with rising damp. The southern stream runs underground and during the wet Cape winters soaks the whole area.





And here is a picture of Alec and me happily celebrating our renovated home. The photo shows the newly laid sandstone and part of the grey slate from Robben Island.





Then we turned our attention to the chaotic grounds surrounding the house and a start was made.

Although the mountainside must once have been a fynbos wonderland, years of dairy farming, alien invasive plants, fires and neglect, had left them overgrown with kikuyu and scrub. The farm dam in its grove was the only feature which retained any charm.





The grounds are going to be a work in progress for many years but landscaping has been commenced –



the surrounding walls have been rebuilt, a waterfall constructed, a woodland pathway cleared and fynbos replanted. The kikuyu and periwinkle are reluctantly relinquishing their hold and proteaceae slowly growing. However unlike the fashion of Herbert Beard's time, the unique beauty of the fynbos is now fully appreciated. Too much of the Peninsula has been decimated and species lost, and the emphasis in modern botanical programmes is now almost entirely on planting species endemic to the area.

In spite of the comparatively rich soil and steady supply of water, the task is not so easy. Fynbos is notoriously unpredictable and can be difficult to grow. The relentless summer south-easter howling across the paddocks is enough to intimidate any young plant. Sturdy survivors then have to cope with hungry baboons who regularly hunt for juicy roots and shoots and anything they leave behind, the porcupines finish up! But



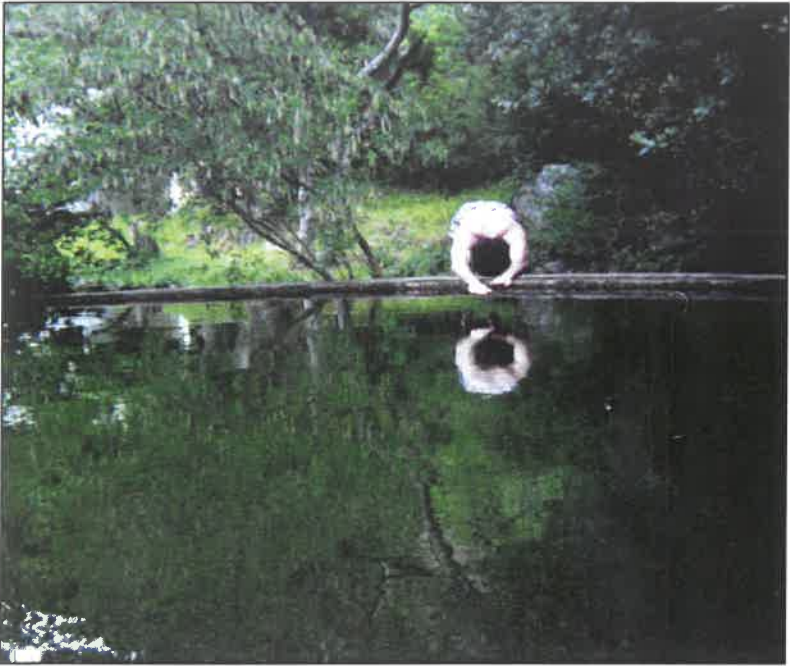
local plants such as the beautiful leucospermum, myriad salvias, tough old agapanthas and restios are gradually gaining a foothold and providing cover for more tender species. The battle will be won!



In the course of all the digging a lot of blue and white porcelain pieces have been unearthed – traces of past elegant living during the last two centuries.



Finally and sadly, there is a grave at Rocklands, behind the house on the hillside under the tall blackwood trees. It is the resting place of our beloved son, Nicholas, killed in the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York. He loved the farm dearly and had spent his last happy Christmas here with us on the farm. We like to think his cheerful spirit pervades the home and its environs.



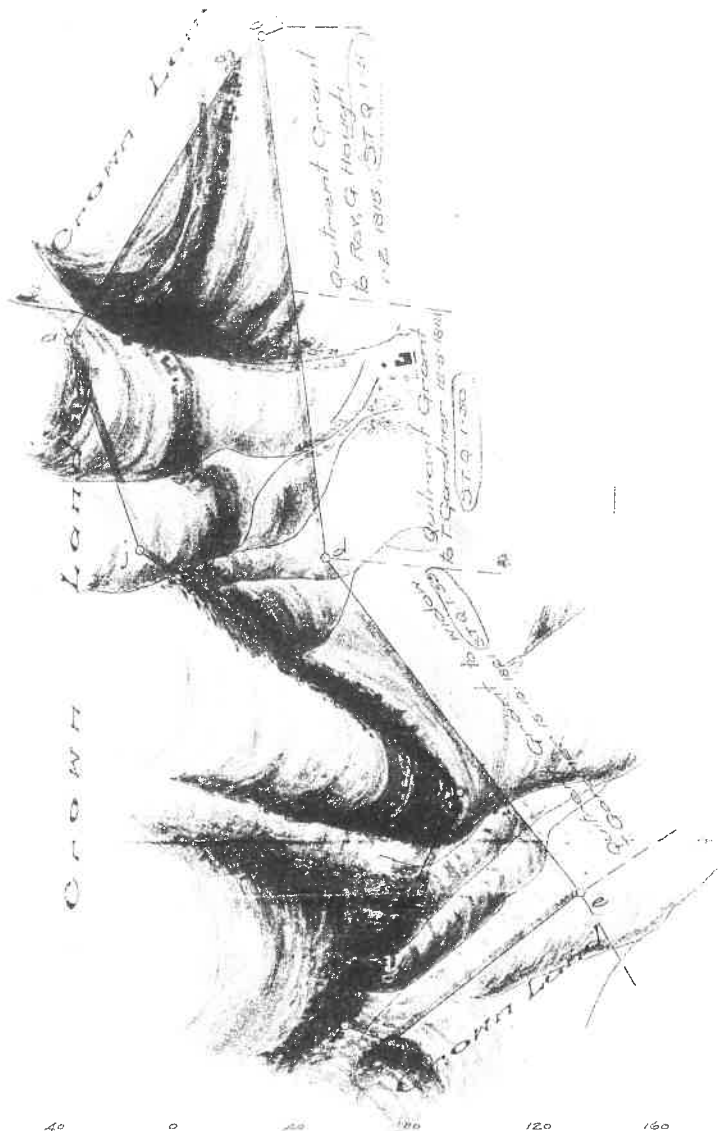
Bibliography:

1. Letters from the Cape 1834/1838 Lady Herschel, Edited by Brian Warner 1991 Friends of the SA Library Cape Town.
2. Reference: Memoirs of the Life and Service of Vice-Admiral Sir Jahleel Brenton (1770-1844) by Henry Raikes (pages 429-629)
3. The Rocklands Visitors' Book, held at Simon's Town Museum. List of owners.
4. The Ardernes & Their Garden, Arderne Tredgold 1990
5. Reference notes from Simon's Town Museum. Handwritten by H C Willis.

OWNERS OF ROCKLANDS

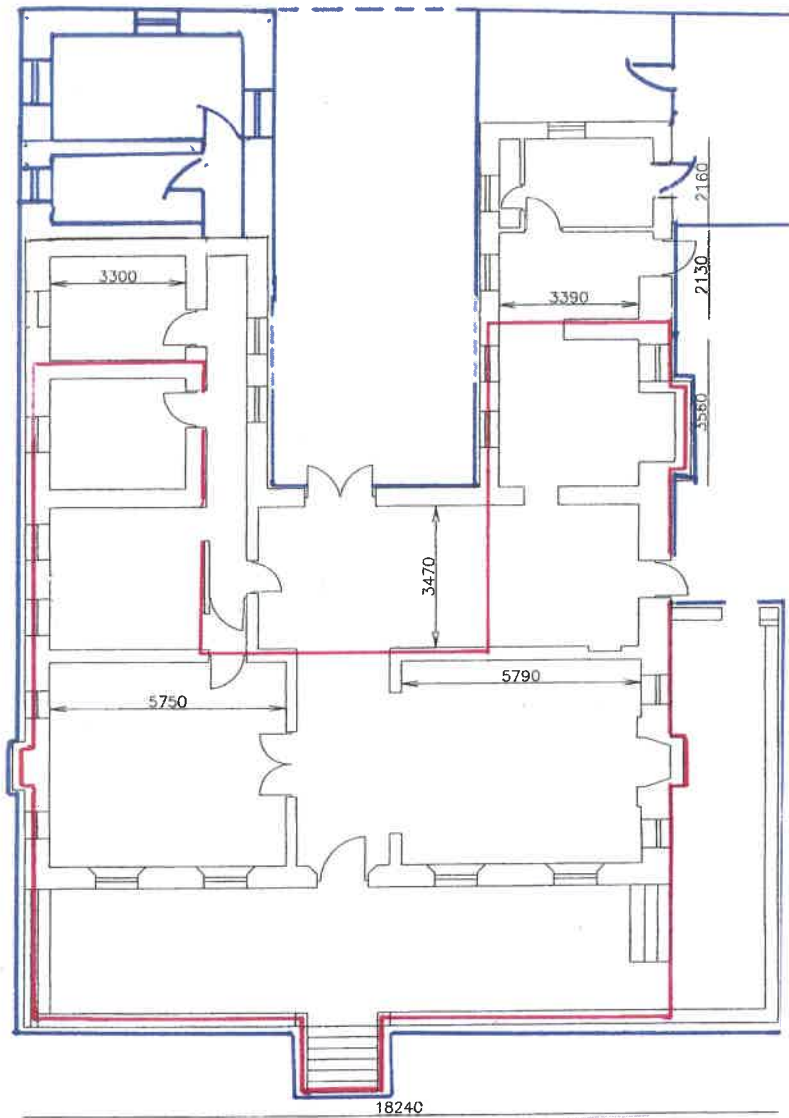
<u>Date</u>	<u>Owner</u>	<u>Size of Farm</u>	<u>Price paid</u>
1815	Reverend George Hough	26 morgen 537 roods	
1817	Lieut Thomas Gardner RN	26 morgen 537 roods	
1818		19 morgen 262 roods	
1821	Widow of Thomas Gardner	Above land plus and additional	
These three portions of land were then joined together and transferred as a whole to:			
1822	Francis Dashwood	Cape Guilders 30 000	
1824	Rev George William Sturt Jnr	Cape Guilders 24 000	£600
1831	John Osmond	Cape Guilders 13 000	£325
1832	Franciscus Iosephus Becker	Cape Guilders 18 000	£450
1834	William Farmer	Cape Guilders 6 000	£150
1839	Josina Catharina Watney (Widow)		£125
1843	Josina Catharina Watney (Widow)		£178
1850	James William Miller & Carl Watermeyer		£235
1858	Jan Marthinus Hoets		
1861	Revd Thomas Meredith		

1867	George Ryall Budge	
1875	Alfred Hartley	
1880	William Runciman	
1889	George Pigot-Moodie	
1910	Frederick Arthur Pigot-Moodie	
1927	Herbert Richard Beard	Bought from his cousins the Pigot-Moodies
1960	Doris Margaret Lasbrey)	The inheritance was split into 3 portions
	Ronald Henry Beard	
	Henry Keenan Beard	
1965	Doris Margaret Lasbrey	Inherited Portion 1020/2
	Beard brothers	Inherited portions 1 and 3.
1974	Margaret Oakley Lasbrey	Inherited Portion 1020/2
	Aldith Hope Lasbrey	Central portion which included the house
	Ian Keenan Lasbrey	
1974	Suncoast Company	Bought Portions 1020/1 and 1020/3 from Beard brothers
1976	Alexander William Rowe	Bought Portions 1020/1 and 2
1980	Murray Hofmeyr	Bought 50% of Portions 1020/1 and 2
	Hofmeyr Family	Inherited on Murray Hofmeyr's death



Land Surveyor's drawing 668/1932
 registered for Herbert Richard Beard
 measuring 24 morgen 209 sq roods.

ROCKLANDS HOUSE GROUND PLAN



Ground plan of house — approximately 1830
 — As recorded in 1976
 — Altered by Alec Rowe 2005