



VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA
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VOLKSBOUKUNDIGE VERENIGING VAN SUID-AFRIKA

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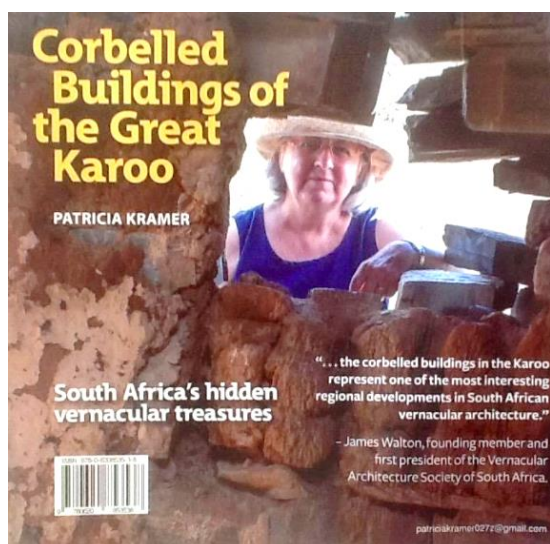
VASSA NEWSLETTER

JULY 2026

EVENTS IN JUNE

Pat Kramer presented a Talk about the Karoo Group's two recent trips to the Karoo in search of corbelled buildings they had not previously seen. The team this time was Pat and John Kramer, Nigel Amschwand (and his Fortuner) and Judy Maguire. In addition to the four more corbelled buildings that can now be added to the register, they revisited the site of Biesiesputs to re-examine the extraordinary water capture construction on the site. As Pat noted, the Karoo always surprises. The informative and entertaining talk included images of odd scenes they encountered along the way. See also *VASSA Newsletter* May 2026.

The Karoo Group has been exploring, recording and cataloguing their findings for about two decades and have become the recognised authorities on the subject. It all started with James Walton: (1960) 'Corbelled Buildings of the Karee Berge' & (1989) 'Notes for the VASSA 25th anniversary excursion to the Karoo'. Research is ongoing as new questions arise and new studies produce books, articles and academic works. Here is a selection.



Kramer, P.A. (2012). The history, form and context of the 19th century corbelled buildings of the Great Karoo. MPhil Diss., UCT.

Kramer, P. A. (2015). 'Corbelled buildings of the Great Karoo: The development of space.' *VASSA Journal*, 31, 1–19.

Kramer, P.A. (2019). *Corbelled buildings of the Great Karoo: South Africa's hidden vernacular treasures*.

Lupuwana, V.T. (2020). Living on the margins: an archaeology of 19th century Karoo rural dwelling. PhD Thesis, UCT.

Maguire, J. (2008). 'Building in stone in the Karoo: possible explanations for the restricted distribution of corbelled houses.' *VASSA Journal*, 19, 15–30.

Smuts, T. N. (2012). An archaeological perspective on the nineteenth century development of land, landscape and sheep farming in the Karoo. MSc. Diss., UCT.



Left: Bonzi. Right: Interior detail of Biesiespoort. Both in the Carnarvon area. (Photos: JK April 2026).



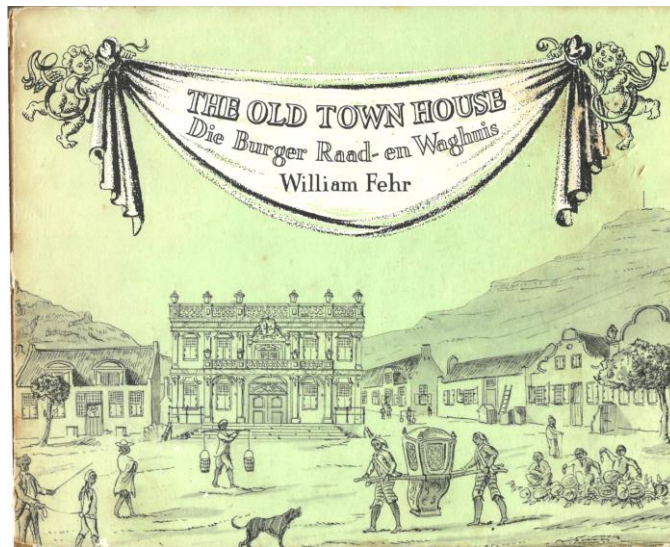
Two *brakdak* houses on the Williston-Sutherland Road. One has lost its roof since last we saw it (JK April 2026).

The Outing was to the **Michaelis Collection at the Old Town House**, organised by Shelley Broad. We were warmly welcomed by two curators, Andrew Lamprecht and Esther Esmiol of Iziko Museums, who gave us a brilliant tour of the exhibitions. It made all the difference to hear the thinking, research, passion, creativity and anecdotes behind such an impressive transformation of the Collection. Many thanks! The Michaelis Collection at the Iziko Old Town House, located on Greenmarket Square, is generally open Monday through Friday from 09h00 to 17h00 and on Saturdays from 08h30 to 16h00.

THE STORY OF THE OLD TOWN HOUSE

Based on *Old Town House also Old Burgher Watch House, Greenmarket Square* by Hans Fransen.

On the site of the present building, a smaller, single-storeyed and thatched building housing the Burgher Watch had been standing since shortly after 1716. It was pulled down and the foundation stone for a new building was laid by Baerendt Artoijs, member of the Council of Justice, in 1755. In 1756 the Burgher Watch and the Burgher Council moved into the building, which was completed in 1761, at a total cost of 33 000 guilders.

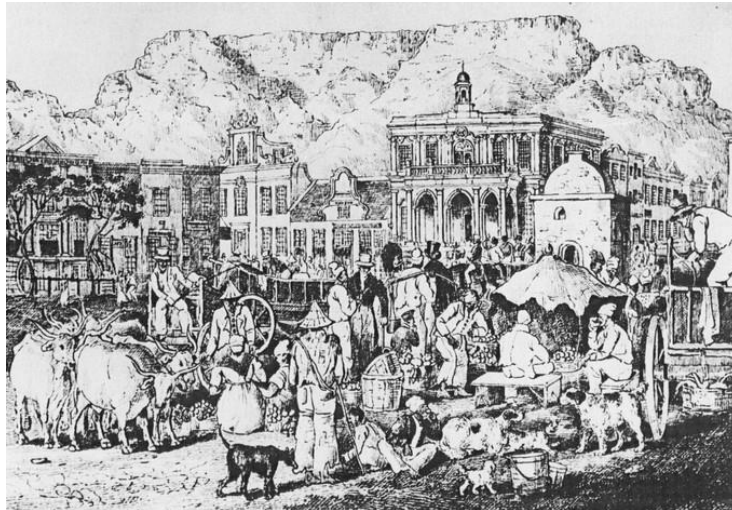


Greenmarket Square (Johannes Rach 1762) on the cover of a book published in 1955.

One year after its completion Johannes Rach, during his short stay at the Cape, made drawings of the newly completed building, which show it very much as it is today: a two-storeyed five-bay building not unlike the ordinary dwellings erected in Cape Town during the following decades. The decorative parapet with its six vases (whether it was pierced, as has been suggested, is not known for certain) was replaced in 1808 by a plain one slightly stepped up towards the centre (a fate that befell most other Rococo parapets), and a small bell-tower was added at the same time, both by Herman Schutte.

The name of the architect of the Burgher Watch House is not known, but the sculptor Johannes Struwig from Groningen made the fine carved fanlights, almost identical, and he may well have been responsible for other decorative features such as the drip moulds over the windows. Apart from the building housing the Von Dessin Library, also sometimes called the Sexton's House, in Adderley Street (now gone), this motif was never repeated, though it is related to the ornamental plasterwork of the Baroque gables, the development of which started about the same time. As probably one of Cape Town's first double-storeyed buildings, and with its early Rococo-style decorations, the Old Town House may well have played a seminal role in the development of Cape architecture over the next half-century.

When a Burgher Senate was created in 1796, it held its meetings in the old Burgher Watch House. In 1804 the Cape Town coat of arms, painted on a wooden board, was affixed above the balcony door where it replaced the figure of Justice (about 1915 it was again replaced by a coat of arms in plaster relief). From 1828 to 1839 the building housed the magistrate's court, and in 1840 when Cape Town became a municipality it became its first Town Hall; it remained so until 1905, when the present City Hall was completed. It was turned into an art gallery (housing the Michaelis Collection of old Dutch and Flemish paintings) in 1917, after adaptation by the architect J.M. Solomon.



Cape Town's civic centre, Greenmarket Square (C. D'Oyly 1832).



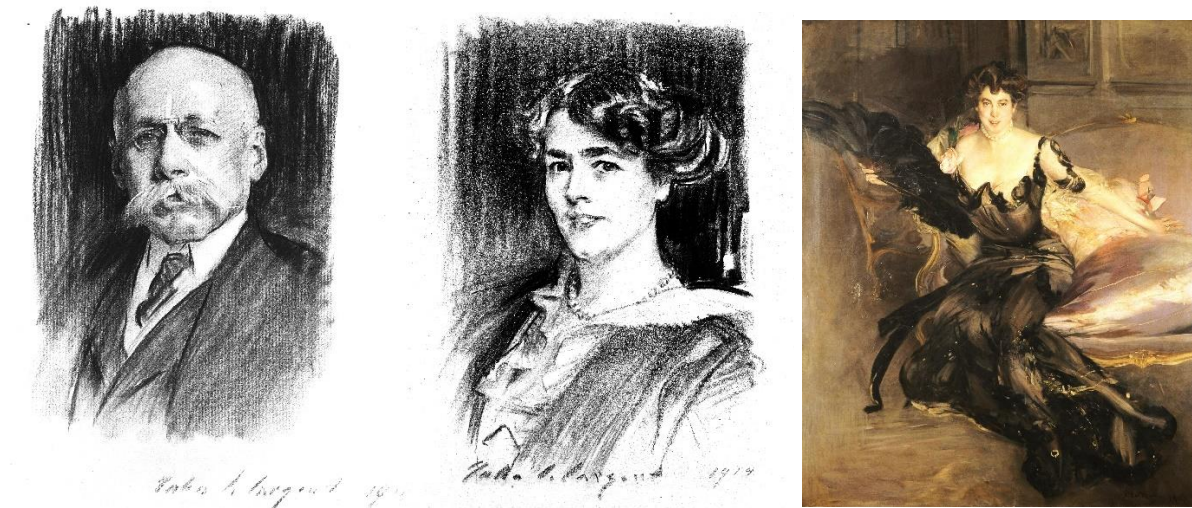
Social interaction in Cape Town's Greenmarket Square, 1860 (*Le Monde Illustré*, April 14, 1860).

Over the years the interior had been altered several times, and almost none of its original features survived. Solomon did not attempt to reconstruct them, but gave the interior the appearance of a 17th-century Dutch guildhall, as an appropriate setting for the pictures. It is a rather eclectic affair, with different styles confused and completely unlike any Cape interior, but in itself it is beautifully detailed and crafted and a fine example of the English Art and Crafts style of the late 19th century. Apart from the balustrades, the Baroque exterior of the building with its superimposed Doric and Ionic orders and tall sashes is almost as it was in 1808. The entrance portico and stoep were removed in 1902 and re-built without the stoep, with the sidewalk running through under its arcade. Solomon reconstructed the stoep and steps, but the central arch was made semi-circular and thus raised and made to cut through the moulding. The attractive house with wavy parapet that had become a fire station and until c1916 adjoined the Burgher Watch House in Burg Street gave way to a small formal garden. The garden façade of the building was altered and given a spurious *dakkamer*.

City Hall becomes art gallery

For a while, the future of this important link with the past was uncertain. But a splendid new use for it was found as a result of the mediation of Lady Florence Phillips, wife of 'Rand baron' Sir Lionel Phillips, to whose initiatives the country owes a number of fine cultural institutions. It was she who

had prompted the British art collector Hugh (later Sir Hugh) Lane to assemble a collection of Netherlandish old master paintings that could one day form the nucleus of an art museum in South Africa. And when a new use was sought for Cape Town's Old Town House, it was she who found her friend Max (later Sir Max) Michaelis prepared to purchase the Lane collection and present it to the South African Nation in 1914. Thus, he could show "his gratitude for the many happy and prosperous years ... spent in this beautiful country".



Portraits of (left) Sir Max Michaelis, (centre) Lady Lilian Michaelis (John Singer Sargent) and (right) Lady Florence Phillips (Giovanni Bondini).

Sir Max Michaelis, whose bronze bust by sculptor Moses Kottler can be seen over the fountain in the courtyard, was a British-born Johannesburg businessman. The Michaelis Collection is not the only institution that benefited from his generosity. His name is also associated with libraries, a hospital and with the Michaelis School of Fine Art.

The City of Cape Town responded to Sir Max's gift by making available the Old Town House and present it to the Union Government. The architect J.M. Solomon was commissioned to restore the building. He adapted its interior to its new function and gave it the appearance of a 17th century Dutch guildhall, though leaving the exterior largely as it was first built. The magnificent stairway and the panelled and beamed Frans Hals Room upstairs – once the home of the City Council – are especially worthy as a setting for the fine collection on its walls. The new art museum – the first in Cape Town – was opened to the public in 1916.

The story of Max Michaelis

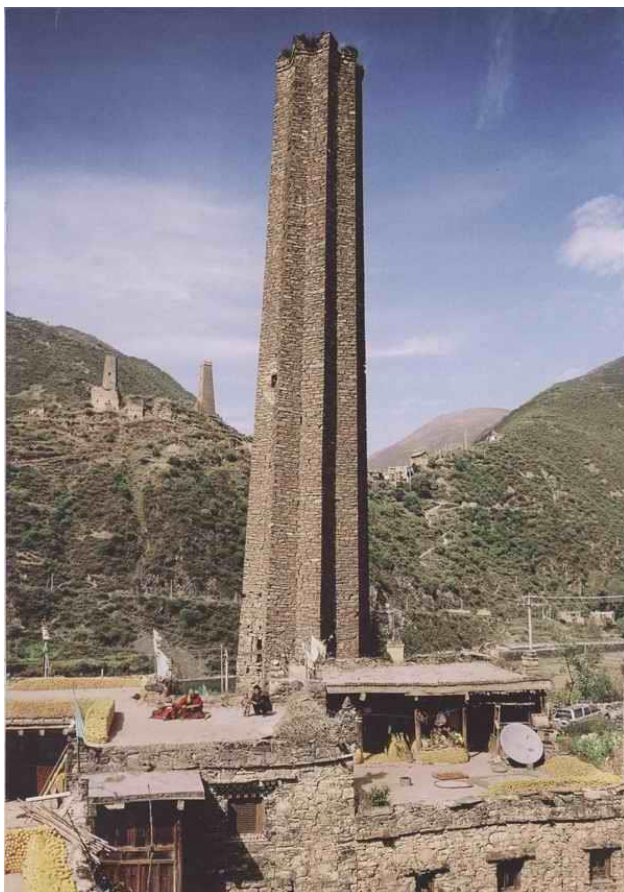
Sir Max Michaelis was born to Jewish parents in 1852 in Eisfeld, Saxe-Meiningen, Germany. He attended the commercial school in Nuremberg and afterwards sailed for South Africa where he arrived in Port Elizabeth in 1876. He then moved to Kimberley in 1878 where he rose to prominence as a diamond dealer, founding the Cape Diamond Mining Company, which was later taken over by De Beers. He later moved to Johannesburg where he became manager of the Central Mining and Investment Corporation, which conducted the business of Wernher, Beit and Co. Michaelis thus became what is termed a 'Randlord', a plutocrat whose incredible wealth was based upon his mining exploits in this country. Between 1896 and 1919 he lived in England, retaining his ties to South Africa and still working for the same firm. He returned to Cape Town in 1919, settling at Montebello in Newlands, which is today an arts centre. He made numerous gifts and benefactions, including gifts to

other art museums, bursaries and the establishment of a Chair of Fine Arts at the University of Cape Town.

Michaelis's gift of the Michaelis Collection of Dutch and Flemish paintings to the Union of South Africa in 1914 was a ploy to obtain a knighthood, unfortunately made on the eve of the First World War. Despite the gift, his German birth precluded him from obtaining it until well after the War's end. He was duly knighted in 1924. He eventually died in Zurich, Switzerland in 1932. It was the most substantial gift of art made by any South African Randlord. It was substantially expanded with further gifts by his wife, Lilian, in 1933. She also made gifts to the South African National Gallery and the Pretoria Art Museum. She later founded the Lady Michaelis Orthopaedic Hospital in Plumstead, Cape Town, which has now closed. The Michaelis legacy and name lives on in many South African institutions.

TALL TOWERS, TRADERS AND RAIDERS

The inspiration for this story was an online talk hosted by the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) at Leiden University in the Netherlands. Frederique Darragon, co-founder of the Unicorn Heritage Institute at Sichuan University, discussed the **star-shaped towers of the Sino-Tibetan Marches** and explained her nearly three-decade mission to protect them and understand their history.



The internal cross-section of earthquake-resistant Himalayan towers reveals interlocking, flexible layers, featuring horizontal wooden ring-beams embedded in masonry, independent vertical timber frames, and loess earth shock absorbers (images: <https://www.iias.asia/events/ancient-star-shaped-towers-himalayas> & www.mdpi.com/journal/sustainability).

In the impossible terrain of the Sino-Tibetan Marches, impressive but little-known star-shaped towers still cling to the steep slopes, in spite of the frequent tremors. The impoverished minority people living at their feet were routinely destroying these amazing earthquake-resistant constructions to reuse their stones. Nobody knew who had built these towers, when, or why. Though generations of indigenous peoples had lived in the shadows of these enigmatic skyscrapers, the towers' origins remained unknown.

In 1998, Darragon started locating, mapping, researching, documenting, and dating the elusive structures. She soon discovered that these towers could be classified in 4 groups roughly corresponding to the territories of ancient out-of-the-way tribes: those of the Qiang, the Gyalrong, the Minyag in today's Sichuan, and the inhabitants of the two small ancient kingdoms of southeast Tibet. The towers' unique construction technique of interlocking pillars with embedded unpegged rods does, in fact, make them earthquake-resistant and is not found anywhere else. It is a testimony to the sophistication of the civilization that built them despite the lack of a local written language. In each region, new traditional houses are built with the same stonework and the same construction technique, suggesting that today's local poor peasants are in fact the descendants of builders of exceptional skills.

By carbon dating fragments of the ancient beams embedded in the masonry, Darragon dated more than 80 towers, demonstrating that the towers still standing were built over a period of about 1500 years, starting around 200 AD. A time when freestanding tall stone towers built by "barbarians" of the Chinese borderlands were first commented on in the ancient Chinese Annals. Although a large part of this region falls within the Tibetan Cultural Sphere, no religious text has ever mentioned these astonishing vernacular monuments.

Some are monumental stone structures reaching up to 60 meters high. For strength, many of the towers use a star pattern of walls as opposed to a strictly rectangular or conical method. They are celebrated for surviving centuries of seismic activity due to an ingenious earthquake-proofing method of interspersing flexible wood beams and planks between the stone walls. The towers are built with alternating layers of cut stone, brick, and timber, with loess packed into the gaps. This allows the structures to absorb, shift, and flex against the violent horizontal forces of earthquakes. Many towers feature star-shaped or polygonal cross-sections with 5 to 13 points, which significantly increases aerodynamic and structural stability, rendering them less susceptible to tremors. The star-shaped designs act, in essence, as clusters of tall pillars woven together, leaning into and buttressing each other against movement. A tapered wall profile lowers the centre of gravity to enhance stability.

Despite their remarkable engineering, these 'Himalayan skyscrapers' have long baffled historians. The local tribes left behind no written records of their construction. While their exact purpose varies by region - functioning variously as watchtowers, defensive posts, trading beacons, or displays of wealth - carbon dating reveals the long-ago builders possessed a masterclass understanding of earthquake resilience.

AN EARLY CONCRETE BRIDGE OVER THE GREAT KEI RIVER

Thanks to William Martinson for alerting us to the story of an early concrete bridge that was constructed at Gaikaford in the Butterworth district in about 1933. It popped up in his talk to the Archaeological Society's Western Cape branch in May 2026. See *Artefacts* for a full description: [Bolo-Kei Road Bridge over the Kei River details](#). Considering that the location was down dirt roads far distant from any industrial centre (about 55 kms from Butterworth), the logistics must have been challenging.



Photograph taken from the wagon road on the east bank looking towards the Bolo Drift / Gaikaford Drift, circa 1910 (posted by Tom Hogg on the 'Border History - in the Eastern Cape' on Facebook).



Oblique view from Transkei side (William Martinson 2021).

The historical context surrounding the construction of the Bolo-Kei Road Bridge in the early 1930s is rooted in global economic hardship (the Great Depression), evolving engineering practices, and colonial-era transport pressures within South Africa. To combat massive unemployment, the South African government launched public works projects that provided critical manual labour jobs for local communities during severe economic distress.

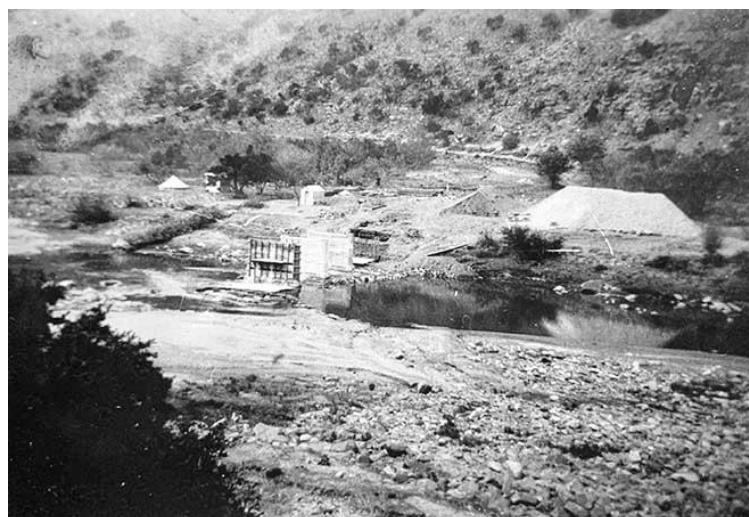
During this era, the Union of South Africa was formalising administrative control over the Transkei territories. Bridges built during this period were intended to solidify colonial administrative routes, improve the mobility of authorities, and ease the policing of the borders between the Cape Province and the Transkei. While the primary transport corridor became the N2, secondary crossings were built to secure alternative agricultural and trading paths. This ensured that inland farming valleys remained accessible even when main highway routes faced disruptions.

The 1930s also marked a major technological shift in South African civil engineering. Prior infrastructure - such as the nearby 1879 Great Kei Road Bridge - relied on imported British cast iron or

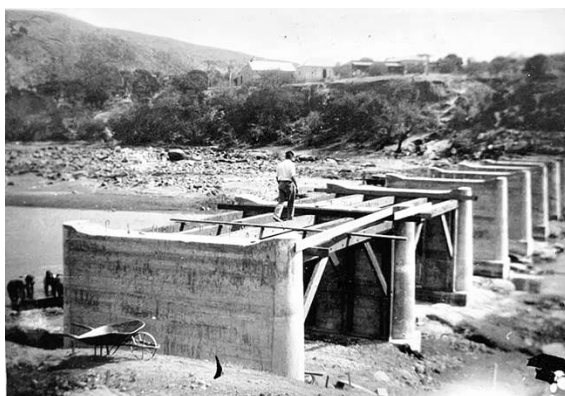
vulnerable timber. South Africa's first true reinforced concrete bridge was the Wagon Bridge over the Kowie River (also known as the Henry Putt Bridge) in Port Alfred, completed in 1907. The early 1930s saw the widespread adoption of reinforced concrete, using local river aggregate to construct durable, flood-resistant structures cheaper than imported materials.

Technically, it is a slab type, reinforced concrete bridge, with 10 free-standing piers and two abutments supporting eleven individual bridge spans. The road deck was cast in four separate panels. The large panels were cast in a series of separate pours and the junction between the separate pours was stepped to form a key on the centre line of the pier below. The junction between the large panels was treated as a normal construction joint. Each reinforced concrete pier was cast on a rectangular concrete footing on the bedrock of the riverbed. Each pier has sloping side faces and a sloping semi-circular profile to the upstream and the downstream faces. The top of each pier had an angled upper surface at each end, which angle matched the tapered edges of the road deck.

Francis Acton (of nearby Stonefell Farm) took photographs of the construction process (now part of the family photograph collection held by Victor Biggs - her son). She used a small box camera and the sequence commences with the site at the Great Kei Drift, records the substantial aggregate stockpile, documents the construction of the piers and the road deck and culminates in the opening ceremony attended by a large crowd.



View from high ground on the Transkei side. Abutment on SA side in progress and two piers complete, circa 1932.
Handwritten date on rear of photograph: 13 Aug.



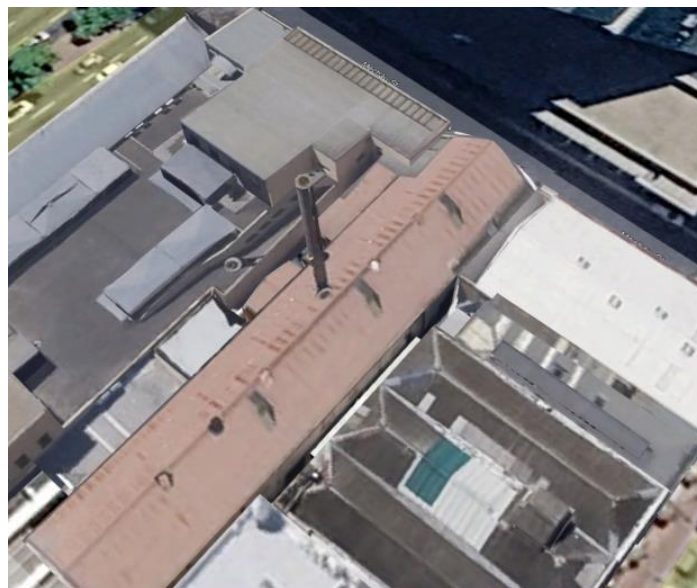
Left: View from SA approach showing detail of substantial temporary timber structure to support decking, prior to casting of first section of concrete road deck. Circa 1933; handwritten date on rear of photograph: 3 Sep.
Right: Oblique view of piers in river bed (William Martinson 2021).



A welcome event in a remote area, the opening ceremony for the new bridge (c. 1933).

CORRECTION! THE MECHAU STREET CHIMNEY IS STILL STANDING!

We are very pleased to report that this chimney is still standing and is being incorporated into new plans (thanks for the correction and image, Katie Smuts). Excellent news. We will let you know more in due course.



Google Earth 3D image of the chimney supplied by Katie Smuts.

VASSA'S ROLE AS A REGISTERED CONSERVATION BODY

Heritage Western Cape (HWC) is the provincial heritage agency that implements the National Heritage Resources Act (no.25 of 1999) in the Western Cape. It receives development and other applications that impact, or may impact, heritage resources. It could be a major project, or an alteration to or demolition of a historic property, or threat to a potentially significant archaeological site. In assessing the heritage-related issues, HWC often calls for detailed impact assessments from architects, planners, archaeologists, landscapers, and others. They also have committees of specialists to assist with

assessment and decision-making. The committee agendas, decisions and minutes of meetings can be found online: <https://www.hwc.org.za/>.

Most importantly, the process of assessment has to include consultation and participation by so-called Interested & Affected Parties (I&APs). Consultants must comply with requirements for public awareness, interaction and response to comments. I&APs can be individuals, but it is more efficient and effective to liaise with local heritage-interest groups. HWC invites them to register as local and regional Conservation Bodies which can provide informed opinion (comments and objections). See <https://www.hwc.org.za/conservation-bodies>. VASSA is registered as such and regularly provides comments on Heritage Impact Assessments (HIAs) related to buildings and landscapes of indigenous styles, constructed from locally available materials, following traditional building practice and patterns, and buildings, roads, or structures which are known to have been constructed during or before 1890 and, where appropriate, at the discretion of the applicant / HWC. VASSA can listen in to the online committee meetings, or register to make presentations.

We encourage our readers to follow the process of applications for approval by HWC. The impact assessment documents that accompany applications often make for fascinating reading. Access to application documents does require some practice and persistence, but the quality of historical, archaeological, architectural and cultural landscape information contained in many HIAs is well worth the effort. These costly and often superbly researched reports seldom get published as most heritage practitioners have to meet tight deadlines and move on to the next job.



There is no central catalogue of cases, however there is a portal on the national SAHRIS site where the assessments can be read or downloaded. To find an existing heritage application or case, navigate to the [SAHRIS Cases Map](#), where you can search by Case ID, filter by magisterial district, or browse the interactive Google Map to locate the property and case ID, and access its associated files.

For a more detailed or text-based search, follow these steps:

- Go directly to the SAHRIS Cases Map or the main SAHRIS Case List.
- Scroll down to use the search filters to restrict your search to the Western Cape province.
- Enter the specific Case ID number, Notice of Intent to Develop (NID) reference, or the property address/farm name into the search field.
- Open the case file and scroll down to the "Status" or "Documents" section to download the submitted HIA report and view HWC's official comments or Record of Decision (ROD).

AMSTERDAM ARCHAEOLOGY



A visit to Dr Ranjith Jayasena at the City of Amsterdam Office for Monuments & Archaeology in May this year.

Antonia Malan was fortunate enough to closely inspect the comparative collection in the archaeology lab. The little bottle, 21.5 cm tall, has a seal saying 'Constantia wine', and was excavated from a late 18th century cess pit in Amsterdam. The ones we find at the Cape are larger but with the same distinctive shape – a squat body and long neck.

Ranjith Jayasena, born in Sri Lanka, studied archaeology at the University of Amsterdam and has been a senior archaeologist at Monuments and Archaeology Bureau of the Municipality of Amsterdam since 2005. His Masters dissertation in 2006 was the historical archaeology of Katuwana, a Dutch East India Company fort in Sri Lanka, and in 2019 he received his doctorate from the University of Amsterdam for the thesis 'Excavation and mud work'. It is an archaeological urban history of Amsterdam and a first synthesis of 65 years of urban archaeology in Amsterdam.



There is a massive, permanent archaeological exhibition at Rokin Metro Station in Amsterdam. It features roughly 10,000 everyday items and artefacts - ranging from medieval coins to modern cellphones - that were unearthed in the river bed. The display spans two massive 12-meter-long glass cases located along the escalators, turning a simple commute into a journey backward through 800 years of the city's history. Ranjith took Antonia there. Next time she will go by herself and travel up and down the escalators as many times as possible.

These links will take you to the stunning North/South Line project: <https://www.amsterdam.nl/kunst-cultuur/monumenten-en-archeologie/archeologie/noord-zuidlijn/>. The website [belowthesurface.amsterdam](https://www.belowthesurface.amsterdam) offers access to over 27,000 photos of 19,000 finds and the complete dataset (135,000 records) of all (700,000) finds from the archaeological project of the North/South Line.

Visitors can conduct their own archaeological research, discover the background details of all finds, locate the 10,000 finds in the display cases at the Rokin, and finally create their own display cases or catalogues of finds.

WATER PIPES BEFORE CAST IRON

A piece of thick, old cast iron pipe lying at the Molteno Reservoir in Oranjezicht brought to mind the question of water pipes before cast iron. Apart from open channels and fountains, wooden water pipes were used to transport water. For thousands of years pipes for carrying water were made from tree trunks hollowed out with an auger.

And, by coincidence, a piece of wooden water pipe is on display at the Cape Town Civic Collection in the City Hall. The label reads: "From about the 18th century. Section of teak water pipe, used to channel mountain water into the reservoirs and canals that fed the city. As indigenous wood tended to be too soft for this purpose, these pipes were made of teak imported from India and Indonesia by the Dutch East India Company. Two metre sections would be joined together using a copper collar at the joins. The last wooden pipes were taken out of use in about 1812 when cast iron became a more common and reliable way to channel water."



Left: Cast iron water pipes near Molteno reservoir. Right: The teak pipe in the City Hall collection.



At the farm Uitkomst in the Bokkeveld district, there was a pile of wooden pipes lying discarded in the barn. They appeared to be made of thin planks formed into a pipe shape and tied with wire. The larger sections of pipe at the rear illustrate this clearly. (Photographs J. Kramer.)

ANOTHER BUILDING IN LIMBO

More than two years after a controversial proposal by the City of Cape Town to demolish two old derelict buildings at New Street Park in Somerset West was fiercely blocked by heritage authorities, the site has degenerated into a severe community-security crisis.

In February 2024 the City's Department of Recreation and Parks attempted to obtain a permit from Heritage Western Cape (HWC) to flatten the structures, which are more than 60 years old, citing escalating maintenance costs and safety risks ("[Proposed demolition plan slammed](#)," *District Mail & Helderberg Gazette*, 14 February 2024). However, following strong pushback from the community and local heritage bodies, who demanded the structures be saved and repurposed, the HWC committee ruled against demolition, ordering the City to seek alternative uses for the local assets. Today those very buildings stand completely abandoned, rapidly deteriorating and stripped of the very security that is meant to protect them.

When *District Mail and Helderberg Gazette* visited and inspected 24 New Street, the property revealed a shocking scene of neglect. An individual openly climbed through a broken window to enter the dilapidated heritage site. For the last two years, members of the Helderberg Renaissance Foundation

who have submitted various suggestions for the future use of the buildings, have heard nothing from the City. Subsequently, on the 8th July the newspaper published news that the municipal Recreation and Parks Department is to implement immediate law enforcement interventions.



Left: 24 New Street in 2009. Right: The same house in 2026.

Despite Heritage Western Cape (HWC) fiercely blocking the City’s initial 2024 permit to demolish the building, the Recreation and Parks Department revealed it has not abandoned its original plans to flatten the existing structures. Instead, the department confirmed that a recent, secondary application to demolish the historic house has been submitted to HWC. While the heritage authority once again refused to support the destruction of the site “at this stage,” municipal officials are currently drafting a reinforced motivation to push the application through.

Any demolition permit application for the site automatically triggers a strict heritage statement requirement, a mandate established by HWC in January 2024 – more than two years ago. To succeed now, the municipality’s application will presumably require a fresh motivation supported by an updated condition report, alongside an explanation regarding their investigations into alternative uses and the cause for the two-year delay in deciding to pursue total demolition. Ultimately, HWC will decide if the demolition permit is justified and should be given the green light.

A heritage professional noted that the case has raised broader, systemic questions regarding “demolition by neglect”. If HWC considers this a clear-cut case of preventable deterioration, the authority will need to indicate how such outcomes can be avoided in the future, and whether corrective action is necessary. This decision carries immense weight as the City and various government public works departments currently own tens of thousands of buildings over 60 years old. Industry observers warn that these public assets must not be permitted to become “problem buildings” – whether by intent, bureaucracy, or a lack of resources – that are ultimately cleared away by bulldozer

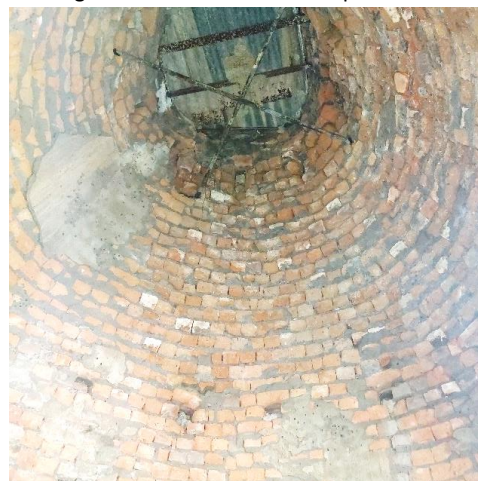
Source: Yaseen Gaffar, *District Mail and Helderberg Gazette* 1 & 8 July 2026.

A SURPRISE IN THE KOO VALLEY

Apparently, this uninhabited ‘corbel’ construction was built for the farmer’s chickens / pigeons / doves. His thinking was that when necessary he could set a fire inside to get rid of all the pests and the building wouldn’t be damaged. This story definitely needs to be fact-checked on our next visit! (Photos AM.)



Left: The setting – all alone in a field. Right: the nesting holes and holes for beam perches.



Left: One of two apertures. Right: The dome was capped with corrugated iron.

TWO VASSA MEMBERS HAVE LEFT US

It is with sadness that we report the peaceful deaths of Steuart (Sam) McLennan and Gwen Fagan. There will be more about them in next month's Newsletter. Meanwhile, our condolences to Lyne and both families.



Nominations for the 2026 HERITAGE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA (HASA) AWARDS

Do you know an individual or organisation that deserves recognition for an outstanding contribution to South Africa's heritage? We invite you to submit a nomination by visiting www.heritagesa.org/awards. Closing Date for Nominations: 31 July 2026.

HASA presents three prestigious awards:

HASA Gold Medal– awarded to an individual for exceptional service to heritage conservation.

HASA Gold Certificate– awarded to an organisation for outstanding contributions to heritage conservation.

HASA National Award of Merit– presented to an individual who has made a significant and worthwhile contribution to heritage conservation in South Africa.



25th Annual Symposium

OF THE HERITAGE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA (HASA)



PRESENTED BY THE **GRAAFF-REINET HERITAGE SOCIETY**

11 - 13 NOVEMBER 2026

3 Days of Karoo Hospitality

DAY ONE

MORNING

- 6 Presentations and a tea break

LIGHT LUNCH

AFTERNOON

- Architecture and Religion Included
- Umasizakhe Township tour Included
- Withand Pairing / A guided tour of the Graaff-Reinet Museum, with food & drinks R200
- The HASA Annual General Meeting

DAY TWO

MORNING

- 6 Presentations and a tea break

LIGHT LUNCH

AFTERNOON

- Traces of the Boer War Included
- Architecture and Art Included

EVENING

- Gala Dinner

DAY THREE

MORNING

- 6 Presentations and a tea break

LIGHT LUNCH

AFTERNOON

- Palaeontology and Geological Echoes, a guided tour of Karoo Origins Palaeontological Museum and a Camdeboo National Park Game Drive and an outdoor talk at the Valley of Desolation. R400

EVENING

- Drinks and snacks will conclude the symposium

IN ADDITION TO THE CONFERENCE

- Engage with locals and heritage practitioners
- A pop-up bookshop will be at the symposium.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

EMAIL: grt.heritage2026@gmail.com

WHATSAPP: 064 619 1200

<https://www.facebook.com/GRTHeritageSymposium>



PHOTO OF THE MONTH

This photo was seen on the *Origins 22 - Genealogy & History* Facebook page. It is titled “Private look out in Ladismith 1900”.



Note the *Boer maak 'n plan* tree branch used to balance the telescope and the rather insecure platform that he is standing on. Two direct hits on the building seem to indicate that danger was close, as do the rifles held at the ready by two of the men sitting below.