



NEWSLETTER OF THE CAPE TOWN BRANCH OF THE SIMON VAN DER STEL FOUNDATION NO 2 2018

NUWE LEDE/NEW MEMBERS

Ons wil graag die volgende nuwe lede hartlik verwelkom by die Stigting Simon van der Stel:

We wish to welcome the following new members to the Simon van der Stel Foundation:

Ms D Simmonds, Mrs J Doherty, Mr C Keegan, Mr T Stander, Mr & Mrs G Moore

DONASIES/DONATIONS:

Ons bedank graag vir die volgende lewenslede en gewone lede vir donasies ontvang.

We are extremely grateful for the donations received from our life and general members:

Mej C Beyers

OBITUARY

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the unexpected passing on 29 July 2018, of Linda Muir, wife of John Muir.

She will be fondly remembered for assisting John in all his projects. For many years this formidable team organised unforgettable outings for the Simon van der Stel Foundation Cape Town. Their weekend away outings were particularly popular, highly enjoyable and enriching. Her warm personality and dry humour will be sorely missed.

Linda was also the photographer in John's publication *Walking Cape Town*.

Our heartfelt condolences to John, previous Chairman of Cape Town Simon van der Stel Foundation, who still serves on the committee, and his family.

WEEKEND IN MAY 2019 AWAY FROM THE HUSTLE AND BUSTLE OF CITY LIFE.

Break away from city life and join us for a weekend of visiting pristine heritage farms which also includes dining and wining in the valley of Elgin-Grabouw and Bot River.

Our accommodation will be at the historical Houw Hoek Inn. The first day, on our way, we will visit and be lectured at the Eskom Palmiet Visitor Centre and enjoy a cup of tea or coffee. Next on the list we will be looking at vintage brandy kettles at Oude Molen Distillery and pair chocolates and brandy. Drive to Houw Hoek Inn for lunch and booking in for the weekend.



Then off to Elgin Vintners to peruse the 1920 restored house, visit the newly beautifully laid out gardens, savour their wines and listen to the history of the farm. We will cross the Oude Brug and spot the historical cannon on our way to join the N2. Followed by a visit to the new Elgin Rail Road Market (a restored apple warehouse) which will remind you of Willy Wonka's chocolate factory and you can pick and choose from a variety of scrumptious meals and pay for yourself. Leave for the hotel in your own time.

Next morning, after breakfast, we will visit Wildekrans Country House (see left.) to admire the house, garden and artworks and learn even more about our surrounds. Then we will travel to the charming village of Bot River and visit two historically old farms

namely Compagnes Drift where Andy Selfe will show us the working of the Vitruvian mill and after tasting, we can stock up on the famous Beaumont wine for lunch at Goedvertrouw where we will be taken to the house to enjoy a fresh farm food lunch. Then back to the hotel for tea/coffee and scones followed by a walk on the property or a nap. After being re-energised we will head off to Old Mac Daddy for supper in the Barn Restaurant. Sunday we will visit the Goemans and Peter will tell us more about our natural heritage, followed by a visit to Iona for a tour of the restored Herbert Baker house (see right, a highlight of the weekend!) and a history of the farm while tasting their wines. Then you can head back home or pre-book a place for yourself (at own cost) at the Houwhoek Inn for their famous Sunday buffet lunch.



To summarise: you will score 6 accesses to historical farms and or houses, 2 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 1 supper, 3 wine, 2 brandy & 1 bubbly tasting, a couple of lectures, 2 night hotel stay. Please refer to the outings programme for the cost of the weekend.

HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE. Reserve your place as soon as possible as we will probably only be able to accommodate 20 people.
PS We will endeavour to keep to the programme but being so far in advance there may be changes because of things beyond our control.

Nicci Hoal

BLUE PLAQUE SCHOOLS' PROJECT

This programme was started in 2015 as a joint educational venture between the Simon van der Stel Foundation (SvdSF) and the Centre for Conservation Education (Western Cape Education Department – WCED) because it was felt that schools were often neglected as protagonists of heritage. There is a Blue Plaque Sub-Committee that adjudicates the applications made up of myself as the Project Co-ordinator, Ian Pretorius, the Chairman of the SvdSF) and Nicci Hoal and Keith Martin, Committee Members. In short: schools are informed about the Project through a WCED Circular that encourages them to apply in one of 5 categories, with a motivation, for a Blue Heritage Plaque:

1. The age of the school (must be 125 years or more)
2. An architecturally significant building
3. A school's exceptional service to the community
4. A school's survival under difficult circumstances
5. A past learner or educator of the school (must no longer be alive)

Making the schools responsible for their application and motivation allows them to reflect on their heritage and to take responsibility for this themselves. We feel that this is preferable to the perceived gratuitous awarding of a Plaque, which might be seen as 'favouritism' by other schools and be contested! A maximum of 5 Plaques are awarded each year: 1 is given free to a deserving school; a further 4 may be awarded to qualifying schools that can pay for the Plaques themselves.

The project is open to all schools, and it has been rewarding to see that, over the four years that it has been running, applications have been received from schools in all communities, including previously marginalised ones. The awarding of a Blue Plaque brings great joy to the schools that receive them, and is usually celebrated with pride and gratitude. The most memorable unveiling ceremonies that we have attended, and where there



was involvement from the learners and/or community members, have been those held at the Simon's Town School (2015: Age of the School); Good Hope Seminary (2015: Exceptional Service to the Community); St Paul's Primary (2017: Age of the School) and Alexander Sinton High (2017: Survival under Difficult Circumstances). In 2018 Plaques will be awarded to: Bonteheuwel High (Famous Past Pupil: Ashley Kriel); Athlone High (Survival under Difficult Circumstances); Beau Soleil Music Centre, Kenilworth (Architecturally Significant Building) and – through an application and motivation submitted by Dr Dan Sleight – the Centre for Conservation Education (Exceptional Service to the Community). A full list of all the schools that have received Blue Plaques so far is attached. You will see that there are now 19; quite a lot.

The programme is popular with schools because of the heritage status it affords them and because the application process is not onerous. The WCED supports it for the same reason and because it does not have to foot the bill! And the SvdSF gets exposure in communities where it may not be so well known. Everyone is happy. No, not everyone.

Every year the project receives more applications than plaques can be awarded – such is the popularity of the Project. The biggest problem is not so much the numbers, but that so many of the schools have to be passed over because they fall outside the designated geographical area in which the Simon van der Stel Foundation and the Conservator Trust operate. That leaves deserving schools in Stellenbosch, Paarl, Worcester etc that would normally qualify, out in the cold. Year after year we receive applications from schools in these areas, and every year we have to tell them they don't qualify. To show you just how keen the schools are to qualify for a Blue Plaque, Paul Roos Gymnasium has applied no less than 3 times! This type of exclusion is not good for the sustainability of the Project, and so our Sub-Committee is embarking on a new plan for greater inclusivity and co-operation. We will reach out to the Heritage Association of South Africa Western Cape (HASA; which has jurisdiction in some of these areas), historical societies and other local heritage bodies where these exist, to see if we can't all work together. We trust that this will be the new way forward, so watch this space!

PS: Heritage is serious business, but it has its lighter moments. While visiting Wynberg Girls' High School earlier this year, I was shocked to see that their Blue Plaque had been partially and badly painted over with white paint! This Plaque was awarded in 2015 (Age of the School), and was affixed on the front of their Ballet Hall, the oldest building on their premises. I phoned the principal to find out what had happened; she exploded in a mixture of tears and expletives: apparently the Department of Public Works (PWD) was busy restoring the historic Ballet Hall and the contractors it had sent were "completely useless" in her words, peppered with some others that cannot be repeated here. She had already booted them off the campus and warned the PWD that, under no circumstances, was she allowing them back! New contractors were duly appointed, with the principal watching their every move, and I am pleased to report that the Plaque has been cleaned up and once again looks splendid.

Ms Sigi Howes
Head: Centre for Conservation Education
Blue Plaque Schools Project Co-ordinator

BROKKIES GOEIE MUSEUM-NUUS

Dit is verblydend om te hoor dat verskeie museums desondanks moeilike ekonomiese tye met nuwe uitstallings en interpretasies van bestaande uitstallings navore kom.

Die eerste een is Wellington Museum wat ons 'n paar jaar gelede besoek het. Die baie verouderde Egiptiese uitstalling is opgegradeer met nuwe inligting wat op 'n baie meer besoekersvriendelike manier aangebied word. Dit behoort klaar te wees binne die volgende drie maande. Hulle volgende stap is om hul uitsonderlike Afrika-artefakte ook beter uit te stal. Dit is hoofsaaklik aangewin deur sendelinge wat op Wellington opgelei is en veral noord van ons grense sendingwerk gedoen het.

'n Ander museum wat ons vroeër vanjaar besoek het, is tans gesluit en ondergaan 'n algehele vernuwing. Dit is die Hugenote Museum in Franschoek. Nie net is daar volledig navorsing oor die Hugenote se herkoms gedoen nie, maar die verhaal begin al met die Reformasie en hoe dit gelei het tot die verspreiding van die Hugenote nie net na Suid-Afrika nie, maar ook na die res van Europa, die Britse Eilande en die Nuwe Wêreld (Noord-Amerika). Daar gaan baie van moderne tegnologie gebruik gemaak word en alles sal veeltalig wees aangesien feitlik die helfte van hul besoekers van oorsee kom. Die eerste fase sal teen die einde van Oktober klaar wees en hopelik sal die nuwe museum teen die einde van Januarie 2019 ten volle ingerig wees. Die geskiedenis van die plaaslike inwoners sal in die Anneks uitgestal word en die Parfuum Museum bly in die bestaande gebou.

In die Slawelosie van Iziko Museums in die Stad gaan daar ook 'n vernuwing plaasvind in die bestaande Egiptiese kamer. Die inligting sal aangepas word en die delikate uitstallings soos byvoorbeeld die tekstiele word verwyder en met ander artefakte uit die versameling vervang. Die byskrifte word ook oorgedoen en daar sal ook van inter-aktiewe toerusting gebruik gemaak word. Die museum word hier bygestaan deur komitee-lede van die Egiptiese Vereniging van Suid-Afrika. Hierdie uitstalling behoort teen die einde van die jaar klaar te wees.

Anlen Boshoff

VIST TO TWO OF CAPE TOWNS ICONIC GRAND DAMES.

On Spring Day, 1 Sept 2018 we had the privilege to dig deep into the hearts of the two dames, namely the Nellie (Belmond Mount Nelson) and the Taj Hotel. Both hotels are so deeply imbedded in South African history that you can't talk about them without first mentioning their history. We started at the Nellie with scones and tea, while Andrew Jones enlightened us about the history. The ground of the Mount Nelson dates back to 1741 when it was granted to a Dutch Baron, Peter van Oudtshoorn van Rheede. It used to border onto the Company Gardens but is now separated by a road. In 1890 part of the land was bought for the purpose of building a hotel as there were no hotels that lived up to the standard of those in England and the kind that were frequented by the wealthy. Sir Donald Currie, the chairman of the Union Castle Shipping line decided to build a hotel, as elegant as those in England, for his wealthy passengers to stay over in Cape Town.

The hotel opened on 6 March 1899 but at the same time diamonds and gold were discovered in South Africa. It caused tension between the Boer Republics and Britain. The hotel played its part in hosting both parties, Boer and Brit, to find solutions to their differences. When war was inevitable, Lord Kitchener, Buller and Roberts stayed at the Nellie to discuss strategy plans for the war. The young Sir Winston Churchill, a newspaper reporter at the time, also stayed there. During the SA War (1899-1902) the hotel hosted many officers and soldiers involved in the war. Also during the First World War, in 1914, the hotel was used to host the British army officers and soldiers. After the war in 1918 the hotel returned back to its old self and was entertaining and hosting the rich visitors. To rejoice in the end of the war the hotel had a face lift by painting her a joyful pink, known as The Mountain Nelson's Blush. In 1924 a new gateway and a palm-lined drive were established for the visit of the Prince of Wales to Cape Town in 1925. The Second World War again put the hotel under pressure but she survived. From 1945 the shipping lanes were safe and Cape Town became a hub of activity for tourists, forcing the hotel to modernise to keep up with world standards. They were the first to install a heated pool. The hotel was purchased by Orient Express Hotels in 1988 but in 2014 the company was renamed the Belmond Hotel Group.

We also visited the Helmsley which they required in 1996 as well as 3 other historical buildings adjacent to Palm Avenue. The Helmsley was originally the site of the first Jewish service which was held in 1841 from thereafter became the first Hebrew Congregation in South Africa. Taunton House Cottage was originally built as a guest house and Green Park was possibly originally a hostel for nursing staff and Hoff Villa was built as a private home for the hotel manager.

The Mount Nelson's strongest architecture is Cape Georgian and is still furnished in the rich style of woods and rich fabrics. There are also still memorabilia of the Union Castle ships for example the chairs in the dining room and many portraits of the ships. We were taken to see many different venues and exquisite rooms and suites. Some of the venues shown to us were the boardroom and the Sherwood room, with its quaint balcony (rumour will have it that a violinist was serenading a lady from the balcony and got over excited and tumbled down to the floor). We were in awe of the enormous modern ball room that can be screened off into smaller venues. The Simon van der Stel members were so fortunate to see so much of the beautiful Pink Dame that few of the general South African public have and will ever see. Thanks to a very friendly and accommodating staff who spent so much time with us.

Next on the programme was the Taj Hotel on the Corner of Wale Street and St Georges Mall and opposite the Company Gardens. At first there was a hospital on this site but that was demolished in 1786 and for a while it was occupied by houses. Now the granite fortress, previously the Reserve Bank, forms the base of the Taj Hotel. The discovery of gold and diamonds rapidly changed the face of the economy in South Africa. Commercial banks were popping up like mushrooms, resulting in trading in many different currencies. The Treasury started to issue handwritten gold certificates. After the 1919 Gold Conference it was decided that a government institution should be in charge of banknotes and gold conversions and the Reserve Bank was established and opened on 30 June 1921.

The Reserve Bank purchased the plot mentioned above and employed the renowned Cape Town architect, James Morris, who modelled the design of the building on Florence's Palazzo Pitti as a symbol of strength. He also used Paarl granite to symbolise the financial strength and stability of the Reserve Bank. The slightly neurotic Morris made the Astronomer Royal measure the angle of the sun daily for a full year to allow optical illumination of the banking hall. It is also said that he was hopping mad when the marble columns arrived and he declared them incorrect. They were duly sent back to Sweden and 3 new Skyros Portuguese marble columns were ordered and installed. He apparently also screamed at the sculptor, Ivan Mitford Baberton, for omitting the genitals on the sculptured lions which were commissioned for the bank's badge. The construction finished in 1932. In 1968 the building was bought by the Board of Executives (BoE). In 2010 the Taj Hotel Resorts and Palaces bought the two historic buildings, namely the Reserve Bank as well as the Temple Chambers (built in 1890). The name Temple Chambers was named after the Barristers of the Supreme Court, who had offices in the building. In between they erected a glass tower connecting the two buildings. The hotel has managed to beautifully blend the old world charm and the modern luxury and spent huge amounts of money and effort to restore the façade and interior to its original glory.

Today when you enter the lobby (Banking Hall), you can still see the ornate original chandeliers, the 1932 wall clock, which after being polished and repaired is still ticking away, and the heavy grills and doors at the pedestrian entrance onto St Georges Mall still carry the Reserve Bank name and lion heraldry. When you look up you can still see the barrel vaulted sky light supported by the marble columns and the vaults deep in the Reserve Bank are only reserved for the use of the staff, but the vaults in the Temple Chambers now serve as a bar for small parties and events. These vaults used to hold cages for diamonds and gold.

Today the rooms, be it the Classical Heritage rooms on the lower floors (old Reserve Bank), or the more modern glass-fronted Tower rooms, ooze luxury but still with a touch of the old world. The Presidential suite (Tata suite) is the ultimate of opulence and space (194sq m) and a perfect venue location with uninterrupted views of Parliament, Company Gardens, Tuynhuys, Table Mountain etc. The hotel boasts 166 rooms.

We ended the day with a lovely light lunch at one of the hotels restaurants, 'Mint the Local Grill', and once again it was much appreciated that the staff gave up their time to show us around.

Nicci Hoal