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## NEWSLETTER OF THE CAPE TOWN BRANCH OF THE SIMON VAN DER STEL FOUNDATION NO 1 2018

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### **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 I Barling, Mrs L Adam, Mrs A Eick, Ms N Zigras, Mr S Olding

### **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:

Mr & Mrs M Hess

### **Dr. HANS FRANSEN**



Sadly long-time member of the Foundation, Hans Fransen passed away on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2017.

Hans was born in Amsterdam in 1931, studied architecture and moved to South Africa in 1955. Hans had many roles during his life, among which he was the Curator of the Stellenbosch Museum and Groot Constantia, Assistant Director of the National Gallery and Director of the Michaelis Collection. He is well-remembered for his books and the work he did in recording the inventory of what became known as Cape Dutch Architecture around the Cape. A great cyclist (13 Argus cycle tours) he was a familiar sight cycling around the country areas and his friendly, courteous, manner gained him entry into many of the homes and buildings that he photographed and recorded.

Hans was awarded the Simon van der Stel Medal of Honour in 1984 and made a Knight of the Order of Orange-Nassau in 2001. Hans leaves his wife, Anneen and daughter Kari.

### **PROFESSOR FABIO TODESCHINI**

Past Director of the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of Cape Town.

It is with sadness that we report that Professor Todeschini passed away suddenly at his home in the Bo-Kaap in middle May. He was a great supporter of the Simon Van der Stel Foundation and we supported each other on conservation issues many times. He was passionate about the conservation of the Cape's Heritage and gave readily of his time to conservation issues working with local groups and organisations, often free of remuneration.

He was recognised internationally for his wide knowledge and experience in Town Planning and was visiting Professor at a number of overseas universities.

Among many projects he led were the proclamation of Ida's Valley in Stellenbosch as a Heritage area. He was actively involved in the proposed World Heritage proposals for the Cape Winelands. He was recognized as the authority of the conservation importance of the Constantia Valley.

In recent years he was prominent for his opposition to a large office block on the periphery of the Bo-Kaap as well as the preservation of the Bo-Kaap area.

He will be missed for his huge contribution to the Heritage of the Cape.

John Muir

## **SIMON VAN DER STEL FACEBOOK PAGE**

We are now on Social Media, this will enable the voice of the Organisation to have a wider reach, and raise greater awareness of the work and potential we can do for our local communities. You will receive and be able to share information with us on all the latest updates on outings, conservation projects, heritage buildings in peril, and more.

Please share the link with friends and family on your Facebook page. Click on the link, then click 'Join', we will then approve you to be an online follower of the group. This will also enable the organisation to increase its membership numbers through increased awareness.

New committee member, Nikki Zigras, has set the page up the address is:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/www.simonvdstel.org/>

## **200 YEARS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN LIBRARY**



The South African Library, until it became part of the National Library, was the oldest library in the country. Its origins date back to 1818 when Lord Charles Somerset, Governor of the Cape Colony, issued a proclamation launching the South African Public Library. Somerset stipulated that a wine tax would be levied "to place the means of knowledge within the reach of the youth of this remote corner of the Globe, and bring within their reach what the most eloquent of ancient writers has considered to be one of the first blessings of life, 'Home Education'."

The Library's first significant acquisition was the collection of Joachim Nicolaus von Dessin, who bequeathed his books to the Dutch Reformed Church in 1761 to serve as the foundation of a public library. In 1820 the board of trustees decided to donate the Dessinian Collection to the new library. Other notable donations followed over the years, among others Sir George Grey who when he left South Africa in 1861 presented the Library with his remarkable personal collection of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts and rare books.

In 1873 the South African Public Library became a legal deposit library for the Cape Colony, and from 1916 it received all printed items published throughout the country. The Library continued as a lending library until 1954, when this function was taken over by the City of Cape Town. From then on it began to develop its unique character as a national reference library devoted to research based on its extensive stock, with a concurrent name change in 1967 to the South African Library.

We will be visiting the National Library Cape Town on the 30<sup>th</sup> August when we will tour their 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary exhibition plus an exhibition of the van Riebeeck Society. See our new programme for details.

## **REVERAND THOMAS FOTHERGILL LIGHTFOOT**

Members may have seen news lately about the restoration of the Lightfoot Memorial in Trafalgar Place, Adderley Street and wondered who was the person who rated such a memorial? Thomas Fothergill Lightfoot was born in the UK in 1831. He was educated at Nottingham High School and at the age of 15 was apprenticed to a printer for whom he wrote articles for the Nottingham Journal, a High Church weekly newspaper. He travelled around the country and covered events such as the funeral of the Duke of Wellington.

He was first introduced to Bishop Gray when he preached in Nottingham in 1853 and was so inspired by the Bishop's rhetoric that he resolved to join the clergy, studying at St Augustine's College Canterbury. It was on his journeys to and from Nottingham to Canterbury, when staying at his uncle's house, that he met his cousin, Anna Ella Fothergill, who became his wife in 1861.



He was ordained as a Deacon on 20<sup>th</sup> Dec 1857 in the Chapel Royal, Whitehall. Fired up by Bishop Gray's oratory on mission work in the colonies Rev Lightfoot moved to Cape Town in 1858 where he was first a curate at St George's Cathedral before being ordained as a priest in 1859 based at St Paul's in Bree Street.

Rev Lightfoot was tasked with the care of the poor in Cape Town and devoted his life to the urban poor. He used a school house, where Parliament now stands, to hold services for the poor and the servants.

The Smallpox epidemic of 1858 gave him a chance to minister to the Malay households and promote the principles of Christianity. Overcrowding meant that there were many families living in one building and so he was known to a wide portion of the Malay community.

In 1859 he started a day school in Buitengracht with about 50 boys and girls, some of whom were Muslim. Several of these converted to Christianity – more girls than boys, either because the boys would be sent on to the madrassah whereas girls stayed on at school, or because the Malay schools were expensive and so only boys were educated there.

Taking his mission to minister to all faiths seriously he learned Dutch and Xhosa and was widely involved in soup kitchens, night shelters, adult education and the Free Dispensary.

He was awarded a gift of 258 UKP in recognition of his work during the 1881 / 2 smallpox epidemic, which gift he gave to the poor. During this time rumours were rife that Muslim people were spreading the disease deliberately and Lightfoot stood up for the Muslims and made sure they got relief as well as whites. Lightfoot was encouraged by the tolerance to Christianity by many of the Muslim faith in these trying times and respected their attitude to spirituality, morality and the openness of Islam to accept former slaves.

He preached to those he called Misbelievers (as with the Muslims who believed in God but with a difference in Theology) and Unbelievers who had no belief in God.

He was ordained Canon 1868 and Archdeacon in 1885. He acted as Vicar General twice when the Bishop was away but refused any further preferment and remained Priest-in-charge at St George's till he died.

He was tall and a fast walker, a regular sight in Cape Town as he went about his business, gaining him the nickname of 'The South Easter' as he bustled busily about. Ironic as it was injuries he sustained by being blown over by the South Easter that led to his death shortly afterwards on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 1904. The memorial stands, to this day, on the spot where he was knocked down by a gust of wind.

It is said that his funeral, two years after that of Rhodes, was an even bigger affair and many of the poor lined the streets while the Muslims stood respectfully at the steps to the church.

Apart from the memorial, in the form of a public fountain, next to the flower sellers, many of whom are descended from his parishioners, a ward at Somerset Hospital was named for him and there is a Plaque at City Hall.

Sadly vandalism and erosion have left the memorial in a very bad state. Thankfully, through the auspices of the Cities Heritage Department and pressure from Cllrs Bryant and Diamond, money has been found to fund the restoration of the memorial. Made of a rare red Veronese marble from Italy it is not possible to source more, however as much of the bottom level of the plinth has already had to be replaced with concrete, it has been decided to use the remainder for repairs to the memorial itself. It is proposed that an innovative way will be found to inform the public of who Rev Lightfoot was, possibly using mosaic as the area is now crowded with traders and a formal interpretive board might not last long. In line with his close association with the Malay community and the neighbouring flower sellers themselves, who claim the fountain as their own, it is proposed that they will be involved in just how the story is told and have their history included. Sadly with our chronic lack of water it will not be possible to re-instate a flow of water to the fountain.

## **FLEURBAIX & LIBERTAS**

Along the banks of the Eerste Rivier south of Stellenbosch run a remarkable collection of farms, Vergenoegd, Meerlust, Welmoed, Spier, Vredenburg, Libertas and Fleurbaix. Blaauklippen and Rust en Vrede. We are being privileged to visit two very fine examples, Libertas and Fleurbaix on the 27<sup>th</sup> October. Restoration architect, Ivan Flint, will take us over Fleurbaix and give us an illustrated presentation of his recent, lavish, renovation of the house. We will then visit the present owner and resident of Libertas, Mrs Blake, who has kindly allowed us to tour her home.

Libertas was granted to Hans Jurgen Grimpe in 1692. Arguably the farms most famous owner, Adam Tas, gained ownership of the farm by marrying the widow Grimpe. Much has been written about Tas naming the farm Libertas after he was freed from prison after being incarcerated for daring to challenge Willem Adriaan van der Stel, but the name had been in use before his release. Still it is a good story and pun. There was a fashion at the time to name farms for an uplifting emotions such as Constantia and La Concorde. The house Tas lived in seems to have been on what is now known as Oude Libertas. After Tas died Wouter de Vos built a T-shaped house on the farm which may be the

present jonkershuis. A later owner, Johan Bernard Hoffman, built an H-shaped house in 1771 to accommodate his wife and 18 children.

This house, the current Libertas, has two gables, that at the back being the finer of the two though somewhat spoilt by the placing of the chimney rising from the fireplace, closed off by wooden doors, at the back of the agterkamer. The walls of the entire voor-en-agterkamer are covered in watercolour-on-stucco murals attributed to Jan Adam Hartman and his son around the 1790s. These are among the finest examples of wall murals in the country and depict Hartman's children in various occupations, representations of virtues, seasons and floral motifs. There are various other buildings in the complex consisting of stables, cellar, fowl run and the older T-shaped homestead of Wouter de Vos.

The Blake family bought the farm in 1934 and Mrs Blake has lived there since 1956.

Fleurbaix was granted in 1695 to Pierre de Febre, a Huguenot surgeon who came from the town of Fleurbaix in Picardie. It is claimed that the house was built in 1768 but the end and front gables were added in 1800 by then owner Paul Roux. Currently an H-shaped house it probably started off as a T-shape. Having been used as offices it has now been restored for use as a private residence.

## **WEST COAST FOSSIL PARK**

The fossil deposits were first unearthed during mining operations to dig phosphate for fertiliser in the Langanbaanweg area of the West Coast in the 1940s. No one knows just how many fossils would have been destroyed during this period but thankfully mining operations came to an end in 1993 when the phosphate fertiliser business became uneconomical.

Now an international team of archaeologists are unearthing what is now one of the richest deposits of fossil remains anywhere in the world. Fossils date back to the terminal Miocene/early Pliocene (circa 5.2 million years ago) and contain fossils of many now extinct species such as short necked giraffes, saber-toothed cats and African bears along with microscopical frogs now long lost to the world.

When the mining operations closed down IZIKO Museums went into a public / private partnership and to establish the park and the centre was officially launched in 1998. At this time Pippa Haarhoff, through her work with IZIKO became involved with the centre and has been the driving force ever since. Originally operating from the old mining offices, the centre now has a brand new centre designed by Noero Architects and funded by one of the largest National Lottery grants ever given.

The building has been designed in consultation with the centre to make sure that no fossils were damaged in the construction. To minimise its impact on the site it is placed low down on a dune and from the carpark



you have to walk down a landscaped valley to enter the building through an opening into a courtyard that gives a panoramic view of the entire site and dig site itself is the focal point. Now there are offices, education facilities, a restaurant, gift shop and the all-important exhibition hall.

The centre has been careful to rehabilitate the landscape to resemble how it looked before the mining commenced and an amphitheatre has been constructed and planted with lush tropical plants from Kwa Zulu Natal which would have grown in the area at the time the fossil deposits were laid down.

Pippa has involved artists in designing the exhibits, explanation boards and dioramas using many different and inventive disciplines. The fossil park is now truly a world class facility and something to be proud of. We are privileged to have a presentation by Mr. Noero and a talk and personal guided tour of the facility by Pippa Haarhoff on the 10<sup>th</sup> November. Well worth the drive!

## **FINANCIAL OVERVIEW**

If any of our members could help, we are appealing for a member to join the committee who can give financial guidance to the Committee. No bookkeeping or clerical work involved and at the most, one early evening meeting a month. Any interested parties can please contact our secretary Pat [pbhebbert@mweb.co.za](mailto:pbhebbert@mweb.co.za)