

JOHANNESBURG



HERITAGE FOUNDATION

JHF NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2022

This newsletter is overdue but members should be pleased because the first draft was full of heritage disasters. So, this time, I have decided to begin with some heritage pleasures.

Volunteering

Most of us live too long - well past retirement date. Instead of frittering away those years of leisure we need to look on this as a time for a second career – time we can give to worthy causes and spend enjoying the things we like to do. If, like Sarah Welham, your taste runs to pottering round cemeteries and studying death certificates, lots of people will be grateful for your efforts, and you will even find like-minded souls who enjoy scrubbing graves and lifting gravestone.

As such, JHF is benefitting hugely from our new volunteers. Welcome to **Louise Marx**. She is fascinated by our files on Sandton and is helping to get them onto our data base. **Jannie Ferreira**, who was an archivist at Rand Water, is working his way through our rather muddled boxes on mining, conservation, open spaces, etc. **Ann Fitchett** has just joined us to work on the old building plans and early architects of Johannesburg. Two much younger volunteers are also helping to set us on the hi-tech path of Quicket online bookings and Social media. They are the efficient **Tracy Clayton** and our wonderful Tour organiser, **Michele Vrdoljak**.

We said goodbye rather sadly to **Alan Chinery** who has moved to the UK following the death of his wife, Rose, who had championed Heritage for years on the Rosebank Killarney Gazette. Before leaving, Alan handed over loads of stationery. Over the past few years, he has created a huge number of entries for our files, working systematically through some early suburbs, assigning stands and street addresses along with the Valuation Roll information and Google street views for some of the suburbs from Abbotsford to Greenside plus Parkhurst, Parkwood and Saxonwold. He was way ahead of other researchers who have only just finished work on Melville.

This dramatic increase in person power is having an impact on **Diana Steele** who carries the burden of updating our data base. During Covid, Diana ate, drank and slept JHF data. She has managed to balance her life a little better, but it remains dominated by the constant increase in information the volunteers keep producing – most joyously!

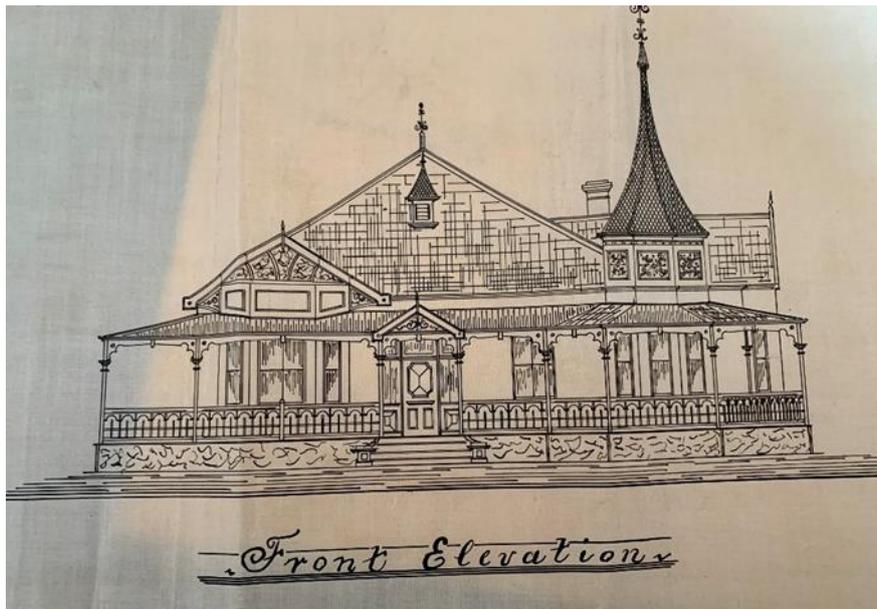
Old Building Plans + Maps

William Gaul, Brian McKechnie and I find great pleasure in going through old building plans in the rather chaotic surroundings of Building Survey in the Metro Centre. Parktown is our current obsession (all those houses demolished for the hospital, the College of Education, Pieter Roos Park, Boundary Road offices, Empire Road institutions and the Parktown office park). The buildings have long since gone, but we have found some beautiful drawings – John Moffat's Park Lane Mansions perhaps our finest find so far - but also some enchanting smaller ones: coach houses, a cart shed and loos. We were also puzzled by a drawing labelled *South African School of Mines* in Parktown. It refers to the women's residence at Sunnyside Park – built in 1912, ten years before Wits University opened. When the new hall of residence for women was built at Milner Park, the name was transferred. So, it remains *Sunnyside*, named after its predecessor.

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We note interesting details from the drawings for the JHF data base and send the really beautiful ones to Museum Africa. In 1902 many of the houses were using sanitary pails. Only the big houses seem to have had French drains – we have some nice details of those – and water was being supplied by Parktown Water Supply, which means the water from the little park in Napier Road was pumped up to two High Level water towers in Ridge Road.



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HASA Conference

As chairman of the Heritage Association of South Africa, Kathy Munro led the proceedings at the recent HASA Symposium in Hartebeespoort Dam. Hosted by the Magaliesberg Association for Culture and Heritage, a number of very interesting tours and functions were arranged and at the Gala Dinner **Vincent Carruthers and Franco Frescura** were honoured with a Gold Medal for their great contribution to Heritage.

Restoration Work

The restoration of the stonework on Stewart Drive has been completed thanks to Richard Holden who took charge and supervised this on behalf of the JHF. For a number of years, Richard has been cleaning and keeping watch over this, the longest pass in Johannesburg. Built in 1933, it was named, at the request of 57 local residents, after James Stewart – a local benefactor. Rather nice that the City Council of the time agreed that he be given this honour proposed by the community.

We are very proud to have undertaken the task of restoring the stonework. We have asked City Power to restore the street lights as, at night, the pass is only used by the very brave. They have agreed to work on the top four poles and if these survive undamaged, they might consider doing a few more. The problems facing City power are vandalism and theft. We are hoping that the local community will keep a keen eye out for anyone damaging the new playground equipment and the streetlights during the day and wouldn't it be great if the JMPD were to patrol Stewart Drive at night with a little help from SAPS?

Heritage Weekend

We had a very enjoyable and successful Heritage Weekend, largely thanks to **Robson Savage** who sponsored the luxury buses and, of course, our tour guides who spent many hours researching the tours and practicing the routes. The Book Sale was also successful thanks to Kathy and Sarah and their team of helpers. I am not forgetting the Davids Gurney and Forrest who managed the buses, David Fleminger, Michele and Tracey who organised and publicised the tours. Special thanks to Laurice Taitz of Johannesburg in your Pocket who promoted all the tours, even though we approached her at the last minute. Many members were happy to say hello to Eira and meet Barbara, who were selling tickets.

It was a special thrill that the scaffolding came down and Holy Family College was revealed in all its beauty - delicate white cast-iron tracery against the warm red brick with its newly restored roof and chimneys. The Corrugated iron roof is the original 1905 sheeting. The observant among you will have noticed that the new sheeting is one long uninterrupted sheet – much thinner in fact than the old material.

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So now to the bad moments which blighted Heritage Month

First, the City of Johannesburg removed security from the Rissik Street Post Office. Having spent millions restoring it after the fire which broke out the last time they removed security, once again the building has been invaded.

The very fine old Central Johannesburg Fire station has also been abandoned and invaded. This again is due to the worst council department in the Metro – the Johannesburg Property Company. It had been converted into delightful flats and a recreation centre. However, these were no longer occupied by firemen as labour legislation made it impossible for firemen to be required to be on call 24 hours a day. BUT there is a great need for accommodation and there are many excellent property developers in the city centre who convert old office blocks into apartments. They could have adjusted the building, no doubt increasing the number of units and making use of the recreational facilities and the large open courtyard. Instead, the building is probably being destroyed by recycling all taps, electrical wiring and burning the flooring. The brass firemen's pole which enabled them to reach the fire engines at high speed will also have been recycled. And what about the statues of the firemen which were placed very high above the main entrance?

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Even the stone kiosk in Rhodes Park was destroyed. Residents complained in vain. Buildings in our parks are all at risk. The oldest house in Johannesburg, the Bezuidenhout Farmhouse in Bezuidenhout Park was broken into and all the cables were cut. The small house alongside for the young men is also in bad shape. The house in Joubert Park, cottage Ornè, is in dreadful shape. We have letters written by the first Park keeper who lived there in the 1890's. It survived the Anglo Boer War intact but it will be amazing if it survives the City's total lack of maintenance.

Which is the worst landlord of heritage buildings? Gauteng Province or the City of Johannesburg?

Gauteng Province is responsible for the appalling state of what was the **Dan Pienaar Memorial Home** in Park Lane – the oldest house in Parktown. It is also responsible for the old **Nurses Home** above the Children's Memorial hospital in Joubert Street. Take a look at the old **Queen Victoria Maternity Hospital**, which was changed into flats and then abandoned. The **Hospital Superintendent's House** on Smit Street is close to ruins even though we had a sponsor who wanted to restore it. The offer was refused by the Gauteng Department of Health, which claimed it would be restoring it as part of the redevelopment of that entire site. That plan would have included restoring the Gordon Leith designed **Ronald Mackenzie Central block**, the chapel and a whole lot of wards which still stand empty and vandalised.

And what of **PRASA**? Another appalling owner of heritage property.

In fact, the only good news from the Johannesburg Railways Station is that TRANSNET intends returning to the very fine old building at 96 Rissik Street, corner de Villiers, overlooking the park. They propose demolishing the awful additions in the courtyard, restoring the facades and much of the interior, while updating the offices for modern technology.

In strong contrast to the villains in government we cite the **University of the Witwatersrand** which takes great pride in its heritage buildings. Over Heritage Weekend, the architect Heather Dodd led one of our groups around two of the lovely Parktown Houses, North Lodge and Beaulieu, on the Wits Business School campus – the restoration of which had been her responsibility.

Additionally, the exemplary restoration of the Façade of the Central Block (now **Robert Sobukwe Building**) is a huge achievement as it followed the incredible detail of many classical elements, cast once again in concrete and coloured to match the sections which have aged. Those who had seen the Virtual Tour presented by William Martinson will remember the extremely complex friezes originally made by Barrows.

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Friends of Johannesburg Cemeteries

Friends of the Johannesburg Cemeteries have been hampered by the rain but at least the flowers planted for the Commemoration of the 1922 Strike are flourishing. A project conceived at that function has led to the reinstatement of two graves of soldiers from the Transvaal Horse Artillery in Brixton Cemetery. Each organisation paid for one and now there only remain three more to complete our work on the 1922 Strike - the graves of Trooper Douglas McGregor Dodd of the Rand Light Infantry and Ah Tong (both in Brixton) and Maria Magdalena Truter in Rynsoord Cemetery, Benoni.

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Conclusion

That concludes this newsletter. Now it is time to wish everyone a wonderful holiday season and we'll see you all again in the new year. As a final treat – here's a photo of some of the beautiful white jacarandas along Herbert Baker Avenue in Pretoria/Tshwane. Enjoy!

Yours sincerely – Flo Bird, JHF Chairperson



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