

Johannesburg Heritage Newsletter No 27 - September 2020

Greetings to all our members. We wish you a happy Heritage Day on 24th September. It is a day JHF is planning a virtual tour to launch a number of blue plaques. We hope you will join us on line. A year ago, none of us had given a thought to social distancing, elbow nudges, lock downs or masks now it is the new normal.

Heritage Day. A public holiday to celebrate a shared South African heritage, also to remind ourselves of the patchwork quilt of origins of our many people. Our 11 official languages are a clue to our cultural diversity. It's a day to feast of traditional foods, beer, boerewors and braai, proudly wear a gorgeous traditional outfit and discover heritage architecture. Heritage is about discovering your "roots" and celebrating new "shoots". Have a wonderful day.

Annual cycle of JHF key meetings. During July and August JHF held its essential cycle of annual meetings. The AGM was held on 8th August and key Board of Management and Trustees meetings were held in July. All these meetings were in zoom format but these meetings are critical for planning, setting budgets and setting out sound strategy.

The JHF Northwards Office. We closed the Northwards Office when strict lockdown was imposed and **Eira Bond** our administrator worked from home for several months. Eira returns to the Northwards office from mid-September, but visiting the office is by appointment, phone Eira on 082 834 3377

Research of Johannesburg's Heritage gets a big boost At the Annual General Meeting of the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation which was held recently on Zoom the chairperson, Kathy **Munro** had great pleasure in announcing sponsorship of half a million Rand for the Research Centre from **Nicky and Strilli Oppenheimer** through the BRO Trust which is dedicated to promoting conservation.

"Such support for the work we are doing from the Oppenheimers is hugely encouraging for the JHF when facing hard times. With lockdown restrictions and observing all the Covid 19 regulations the JHF has not been able to offer walking or bus tours the major source of revenue so this sponsorship is most welcome enabling us to continue the digitization of our ever-increasing data base".

JHF prides itself on its Johannesburg focused library, maps and archive as well as the records we have built up of thousands of Johannesburg heritage properties. We have an expertise in heritage grading and conservation. We research our tours and our blue plaques so that they are solidly grounded in history. Once the pandemic is over, we shall again be open to students, history and genealogical researchers. This grant is an enabler and supports the many dimensions of our conservation work. We value the partnership with BRO trust and this gift underlines our shared vision".

The Research Centre. In September the Research Centre, led by *Diana Steele*, returned to on site functionality but restricted access to the public. We set a working timetable to enable a mix of working from home and presence in the Research Centre. We have concentrated on offering some genealogical research, digitizing work and the provision of systematic information about houses for the Parkview heritage survey. It is always exciting when we receive gifts of old Johannesburg material – a recent gift has been some early Germiston plans. Post cards, old books, cuttings, early records, old photographs are all treasures.

Virtual tours JHF responded to the reality of a suspension in our tour programme at the end of our first quarter with a rapid switch to virtual on-line tours Organized by *Flo Bird* and her sons *Stephen and William Bird*, the virtual tour programme has brought the JHF into the homes of our members with tours and talks on diverse subjects with enthusiastic and knowledgeable speakers. It's a regular Saturday afternoon date with members and friends joining us, not only in Johannesburg but also in Cape Town and Durban. We have stretched ourselves beyond Johannesburg. We have had guests in Edinburgh, Israel and Canada. Our Art Deco tours of Johannesburg (with *Brian McKechnie*), Durban (with *Donald Davies*) and Cape Town (*Andre Van Graan*) have been superb. *William Martinson* has delivered two great tours of Robben Island and the bridges on the River Kei. Congratulations to Flo for leading the way with spirit and innovation. *S J De Klerk* our B of M member, gave a gripping talk on the Jameson Raid Debacle, its origins, its tragic unfolding and its consequences. *Yasmin Mayat and Brendan Hart* took us on a virtual tour of Springs Art deco architecture sharing the drawings and work of their students who learn about heritage by documenting buildings. *Kathy Munro* dipped into the history of Barney Barnato and Barnato Park. We have tour Johannesburg cemeteries with *Flo Bird, Clare van Zwieten and Sarah Welham*

The Making of the Constitutional Court with former Constitutional Court **Justice, Albie Sachs** on Saturday 19th September. This was an inspiring and rare moment of sharing and reflection in film, music and conversation about the making of the constitutional court on Constitution Hill and the many layers of meaning in its art and architecture. It was a poignant afternoon as Albie Sachs recalled the visit of the life and visit of US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg who passed away on 19th September- RIP. An heroic figure and a great feminist, Judge Ginsberg visited South Africa and was inspired by our constitutional court and told the Egyptians in search of new legal models to look to South Africa's constitution and its court. Albie shared his vision and the early dreams of a new South Africa after 1994. It is great news that the Constitutional Hill Trust are launching a virtual exhibition combined with some films via their website.

Albie gave us permission to give our members the link to see this moving and enlightening film <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSH7ToW1NsM&t=844s>

Kensington news. Here is an opportunity to explore Johannesburg's oldest eastern suburbs. *Isabella Pingle* will be organizing a **Johannesburg Then and Now bicycle ride and walking tour** on 24th September through Troyeville, Bezuidenhout Valley and Kensington. Venue departure, Victoria Yardscorner Victoria and Viljoen Streets, Lorentzville) at 8 am. for the walking tour and 9 am for the cycling tour. Covid Restrictions apply. Isabelle is our Kensington Residents Association representative on our Trustees committee and a campaigner for Kensington Heritage for many years.

FNB Heritage Day Virtual Run. For those of you who are runners and out there. There will be a virtual run under the umbrella of the FNB Heritage Day event. The JHF is a nominated charity for this event and we hope it will be well supported in the cause of heritage. Well known FNB Run Your City Series (RYCS) commentators, **Altus Schreuder**, **Sipho Mona**, **Sean Falconer** and **Thabo Molefe** will get to taste the action first-hand when they take on the **FNB RYCS Heritage Day Virtual Run** on Thursday 24 September 2020 in what has affectionately been dubbed the “Battle of the Commentators Challenge”.

Herewith a link to the News Article on the FNB RYCS website: <https://runyourcityseries.com/latest-news/commentators-ready-to-battle-at-fnb-run-your-city-series-heritage-day-virtual-run/>

Residents Associations now joining the JHF. We are delighted that we now have ten Residents associations as members and backers of the JHF. They are Parktown, Westcliff, Forest Town, NORA (Norwood, Orchards, the Gardens), Parkview, Melrose, Upper Houghton, Lower Houghton, Kensington, and Observatory Estate. We welcome our Residents Associations and anticipate mutual benefits as we research, advise, grade, award blue plaques and campaign for heritage.

Skydeck over the M 1. We are delighted to share the news that developers have notified stakeholders that they have abandoned plans for the construction of a Skydeck with service facilities over the M1 in Birdhaven. We were strongly opposed to such a development with implications for heritage cityscapes and diminution of the wetlands, plus unpleasant densities and all the negatives for the nearby suburbs.

The SDF (Strategic Development Framework) is being revised as required every 5 years and the meeting which the COJ is organizing to meet a requirement for public participation includes one on 1st October dedicated to Heritage and the Environment. Flo, Kathy and other JHF representatives will attend this session, but there are other important sessions. Please RSVP by clicking on this link and filling in the form: <http://bit.ly/sdfsessions2020-> or google the SDF review. Do join if you are free.

The Hillson Bridge Project, (Orchards, the Gardens Norwood area). This is part of Johannesburg with an interesting history. **Brett McDougall** is to be congratulated and commended for his ongoing work to research the history and restore the Hilson Bridge. The project has been funded through the Walmart conservation award given to Brett. It has been a six-year effort on Brett’s part to restore the bridge and recover the Orange Grove stream and Waterfall. Brett has commissioned story boards to tell the history of the Portuguese Market Gardens, Hilson Bridge and the Orange Grove Stream.

The Wilds. We regard the Wilds as a special heritage are developing a partnership project with Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo (JCPZ). The Wilds reopened on 1st September. It’s a great place to feed the soul and lift your spirit. We are currently working on a new MOU with City Parks and with James Delaney. Our Wilds Project is led by Andre **Marais** of the Upper Houghton R A and, Trustee of JHF. We want to enable and support Job citizens volunteering in the Wilds on projects endorsed by JPCZ. Visit to view the two lovely mosaic water drinking fountains, recently installed. **Flo Bird** has been working on a special project to restore the Greenhouses with the support of JHF donors.

Heritage buildings with a new life and meaning. Heritage buildings need love and a future to live on. The Constitutional Court with its hundred-year history of early prison, fort, and the horror of its history as the place of incarceration in an unjust system, is a wonderful example of a decaying but important place of Johannesburg history brought back to a new purpose and a meaningful future as Justice Sachs reminded us. To live again, heritage buildings demand restoration, love and careful conservation. It has

to be preservation with a purpose. We have too many examples of heritage buildings under threat because the owner, whether government or a private individual, has neither the vision nor funds capital to sustain an old building; we deplore the state of the Transnet owned architectural gem, the Rotunda its copper roof stripped and stolen.

An especially welcome example of **adaptive re-use** is the **Contemporary Art Gallery in Forest Town** which has changed an industrial municipal tram and electrical substation into a stunning art gallery with exciting volumes of space and made certain the fine brickwork of the original building is not overshadowed by the artworks.



Joburg Heritage Virtual Tours and Talks Presents

“Celebrating our new Blue Plaques on Heritage Day“

Thursday 24th September 2020 at 2.00PM for 2.15 pm

Heroes, Landmarks and Houghton houses. Lockdown gave us time to research and work on new plaques which we are launching in one fell swoop. Ranging all over Joburg and covering musical genius, struggle heroes, laughter and striking architecture it is a potpourri of the City’s people and places of which we are intensely proud.....

These Tours are Open To All – Please Note Space may be Limited.

There is a Nominal Fee of R40.00 for fully paid up members of the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation, Forest Town, Houghton, Norwood, Oaklands, Parktown, Parkview and Westcliff Associations who pay only R40.00. You need to register with Eira on: mail@joburgheritage.co.za

Non-Members to Pay R80.00 by EFT into The Johannesburg Heritage Foundation Account:

If you have registered and paid you will receive the link on Wednesday, the 23rd of September:

Banking Details: NEDBANK

Account Number: 1944023011

Please use your Surname and “VTHD” as the Reference

If you want to join, and still need to pay your Membership Fee, please e-mail Eira on:

mail@joburgheritage.co.za

(Note: Tours begin Promptly at 14H15, so please sign in at least 5 minutes before the tour Starts)

Blue plaques. Our JHF Blue plaque committee, with *Colin Wasserfall* our chair, has been hard at work and in heritage month, several blue plaques are going up. We are happy to report that 13 blue plaques have been manufactured and will be installed in the next couple of weeks. In

Riviera: Hugh Masekela; **Dube Soweto:** PQ Vundla ; **Riverlea:** Chris van Wyk

Noordgesig: Vesta Smith

Lower Houghton: Heritage homes: Foxwood; House Suzman; Noordhoek; Normandie; House Laing

Further afield -**Yeoville** Water Tower (Highlands Ridge); House Bleloch, (off Louis Both Avenue); Sacred Heart College (Observatory); the first Nando's (Rosettenville); Moses Tladi (Parktown)

Replacement: Munro Drive sadly lost to vandalism will be replaced.

Flo Bird is arranging a special virtual tour of our recent blue plaques on Heritage Day, 24th September – see the flyer above. We have a number of other blue plaques in the pipeline in other suburbs. Blue plaque development work involves, research, finance, negotiation, text development and ultimately manufacture and erection.

Parkview Grading Project. Parkview is an historical suburb dating back to 1907 and its development by the Transvaal Land and Exploration Company (the property company of the Corner House Mining group); led by architect *Lenska Tweedy* and a team of local enthusiasts working with JHF and drawing on JHF digitized records provided by *Diana Steele* have been systematically photographing and grading houses in Parkview. The objective is to build a comprehensive record of the heritage value and status of the homes of the suburb. There are a few heritage gems, but many homes have been altered and there have been some demolitions and replacement. We are keen to record early plans, and records and photographs of this suburb and here is an excellent model of collaboration of the local residents and JHF resources.

The Work of the Joint Plans Committees. The three joint plans committees of the JHF exist to oversee new developments across much of Johannesburg where there are heritage implications. The three committees led by *William Gaul* (Central), *Wynand Dreyer* (West) and *Kathy Munro* (East) have switched their meetings to zoom format and the work continues industriously though we have faced closed offices at both city and provincial level.

Friends of the Cemeteries group is led by *Sarah Welham*. With the easing of the lockdown Sarah has organized a few weekend working parties in the Braamfontein and Brixton cemeteries. It's an opportunity to get out into the open, make new friends who are keen on tombstone restoration and gardening. The team has done some incredible work with lifting tombstones, restoring the lettering and researching genealogy. If this turns you on - you are a taphophile and will connect with others sharing your passion. Names on headstones point to some really interesting Johannesburg history.

Books for JHF fund raising. Pandemic permitting, we are planning a fund-raising book sale in December. We are always on the lookout for book donations. A book sale is an opportunity to both thin your bookshelves and also to replenish with new titles at a fraction of the price of new books. Please remember JHF if you wish to give away books. In addition, we are able to offer JHF members a selection of new heritage related books. The *Farmhouses of Old Natal* by Jackie Kalley has been enthusiastically received by members; we ordered more and should you want a copy please contact Eira.

New Ideas and New directions for JHF. *David Fleminger* who joined the Board of management this year has been active in developing new heritage hikes and also developing a video on JHF. David is an ideas and communications man and writes travel books. Welcome David and we look forward to your ideas. *S J de Klerk* our tour programme planner is at work on new tours for the new year. Watch this space!

Heritage Month Networking. We regret that we cannot hold a Heritage weekend this year but we have been active with networking, radio interviews, links with architects' bodies such as the Gauteng Institute of Architects. Our objective is to raise awareness about heritage, inform, educate and celebrate the many dimensions of heritage.

The Passing of Marian Laserson. *Marian Laserson* was a member of the JHF, Joint Plans Committee East. Marian was lost to Covid in July. Much missed she was a knowledgeable community activist in the north-east of Johannesburg, and particularly Orange Grove. She was a town planner, a Rotarian and a fighter for heritage preservation and sensible planning. She will be remembered with a plaque at the new Paterson Park Recreation Centre as she was heavily involved in this project. Marian made a great contribution to the saving of Huddle Park as a golf course and recreation area with her insistence that the wetlands were special.

The Herbert Prins Memorial Prize Fund. During the last few months, a project was launched to fund a prize in heritage in honour of the late *Herbert Prins*, the doyen of heritage. Many people who were friends and colleagues of Herbert have donated generously and an annual prize has been established for a student in heritage studies at Wits. The fund has now been given to Wits Foundation to administer in support of a prize in the Wits School of Architecture and Planning.

JHF connects nationally. JHF has been promoting and establishing its links with other heritage bodies in South Africa such as the Durban Art Deco Society and the Heritage Association of South Africa. The publication of our tours and events on the Heritage Portal brings us wide exposure. Our website, Instagram and our Facebook pages are popular. *Kathy Munro* recently supported Durban colleagues in their efforts to oppose the demolition of House Biermann, a unique architect's home on the Berea – an article appeared on the Heritage Portal. This month we have been on a few radio programmes.

Yeoville Water Tower Prints. The installation of a Blue Plaque commemorating the erection of the 1913 Water Tower and its history, is the culmination of a project that started in 2017. There are a few last facsimile prints of the original blueprint available. There was a limited edition run of 100. We have 10 remaining. These are selling at R450 a print. Order yours from Eira before it is too late.

Yours in support and celebration of Johannesburg Heritage

Kathy Munro, Chairperson, September 2020.