

PROJECT “RESTORATION GENADENDAL, SOUTH AFRICA”

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Introduction

On 20 July 2001 the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands approved the project proposal *Restoration of Genadendal in South Africa*, set up jointly by Delft University of Technology (DUT) and its South African counterpart, the Western Cape Cultural Commission (WCCC). A subsidy of just over • 1 million was granted to restore the historic buildings and landscape of Genadendal, a nineteenth century Moravian mission station in the Western Cape Province.

As can be shown in my contribution on behalf of Delft University of Technology, this project can be considered as an interesting example in scope of the subject of the symposium about “Strategies for the world’s cultural heritage – preservation in a globalized world: principles, practices, perspectives”. The *Public Awareness* theme fits best with this project. For instance, the intense collaboration between countries, the way the project is set up and the fact that the project of restoration is put in a wider perspective of development of the place, instead of being treated as an isolated object.

The following text will give you a basic background about the project (state of the art July 2002) and the spearheads of my contribution.

Project Restoration Genadendal

Project Description

The project to restore the mission settlement of Genadendal is originally a South African initiative. There exists a long history of involvement in Genadendal and the settlement has been subject to case studies at the University of Cape Town, amongst others, for more than twenty years. Initially supported by the Dutch Department for Conservation in Zeist (The Netherlands), plans for Dutch technical assistance and co-funding for restoration activities were further developed at Delft University of Technology (DUT).

Since the latter half of the 1990’s, DUT and the Western Cape Cultural Commission (WCCC) have been working together with a view to upgrading and rehabilitating the historic core of Genadendal in the Overberg. Representatives of the Genadendal community were consulted in the process. The mission station is considered to be *common cultural heritage* between the Netherlands and South Africa, since the headquarters of the Moravian Church in Zeist (The Netherlands) is closely linked to the historic Moravian mission stations of the Western Cape and especially with

Genadendal. Because of the positive work performed by the Moravian Church with slaves in the service of the Dutch West India Company (WIC) in the West Indies, the Church was allowed to send missionaries to the Cape, which was at the time under the rule of the Dutch East India Company (VOC).

Genadendal, the oldest Moravian mission settlement in sub-Saharan Africa, encompasses a rich religious history dating back to 1738. George Schmidt, a Moravian missionary of German descent, came to serve the impoverished and dispersed Khoi people who were on the brink of complete extinction at that time. Apart from being the oldest and culturally most significant mission station in South Africa, a number of other reasons justify the choice to commence at Genadendal for the implementation of a long-term integrated conservation plan. Summed up in the final report of the Mission Settlements Research Project executed by the University of Cape Town are the following six considerations.¹

Genadendal has many of the development problems that have been identified as typical of mission settlements, such as high unemployment (forcing the economically active to seek work elsewhere and leaving behind the very young and aged people) and neglected local agricultural practises;

- 1) The settlement knows a long history of diverse interventions, often executed in an un-coordinated and ad hoc fashion, among which were ongoing initiatives to improve infrastructure and develop new areas that could be integrated in an overall planning scheme;
- 2) Greater Genadendal is faced with more general problems related to its natural and culturally modified landscapes, including under-utilisation and low productivity of agricultural land, invasion of alien plant species and deterioration of the historic irrigation system in the valley;
- 3) The long history of conservation efforts mentioned earlier, that included the establishment of the Moravian Mission Trust Fund and subsequent conservation projects on the mission *werf* since 1986 with the restoration of numerous buildings, the founding of the Mission Museum and the establishment of a nursery;
- 4) Genadendal has the advantage of already being legally constituted as a quasi-municipal area, meaning that there are various channels to accessing resources that made a multi-resource brokering approach feasible to fund an integrated conservation and development plan;

- 5) Last but certainly not least, the Genadendal area has the potential for sustainable and integrated development, because it is conveniently located near major transport routes within the Western Cape region, thus easily accessible to regional markets and tourists. The marketing of the cultural-historical resources of the settlement, the maintenance and sensitive development of recreational resources and ecotourism, the development of small-scale agriculture and perhaps even commercial farming could all be exploited.

In resume, the necessary commitment, infrastructure and opportunities for a complex, long-term rehabilitation programme all existed in Genadendal, which made it eligible for a subsidy from the Dutch Government.

Identification of Property

“By the end of the 18th century the Khoi in the Overberg region were increasingly threatened by colonial settlement and legislation, which gradually dispossessed them of their ancestral land. Settling on a mission station like Genadendal became a viable alternative to being absorbed into the colonial labour process. Records show that by 1798 about 800 Khoi had settled at Genadendal, occupying some 200 wattle and daub dwellings, each in its own garden. Rapid growth continued well into the nineteenth century. The population increased threefold between 1806 and 1855, as legislation like the 1809 ‘Hottentot Laws’ and the later freeing of the slaves brought more people to the mission”.²

The inventory of Fransen and Cook provides a clear description of Genadendal, including two ground plans: one of the complete settlement in the landscape and one of the core, being the church *werf*. Text and ground plans are reproduced here.³

Genadendal, originally Baviaanskloof, is the oldest mission station in the Cape. In 1737 Georg Schmidt, a Moravian missionary from Germany, arrived at the Cape to try to convert the Hottentots to Christianity. He settled in a kloof at the foot of the Sonderend Mountains, the present Genadendal. Schmidt, however, was not an ordained minister, and later fell out with the DRC [Dutch Reformed Church, RvO] because he baptised converts, which the Church maintained he was not authorized to do. Eventually, early in 1744, he returned to Europe.

In 1791 the Moravian Society was again given permission to send missionaries to the Cape, and in 1792 three men arrived – Marsveld, Schwinn and Kühnel. They settled at Baviaanskloof and took up Schmidt's work again, of which, after half a century, they still found traces. A village soon grew up at the upper end of the narrow kloof, with a church, a school, a mill and a small factory for making simple sheath knives, now called Herrnhütter knives.

In 1803 the Commissioner-General J.A. de Mist made a tour of the Cape and among other places also visited Baviaanskloof, finding over a thousand people settled there – only eleven years after its foundation. In 1806 General

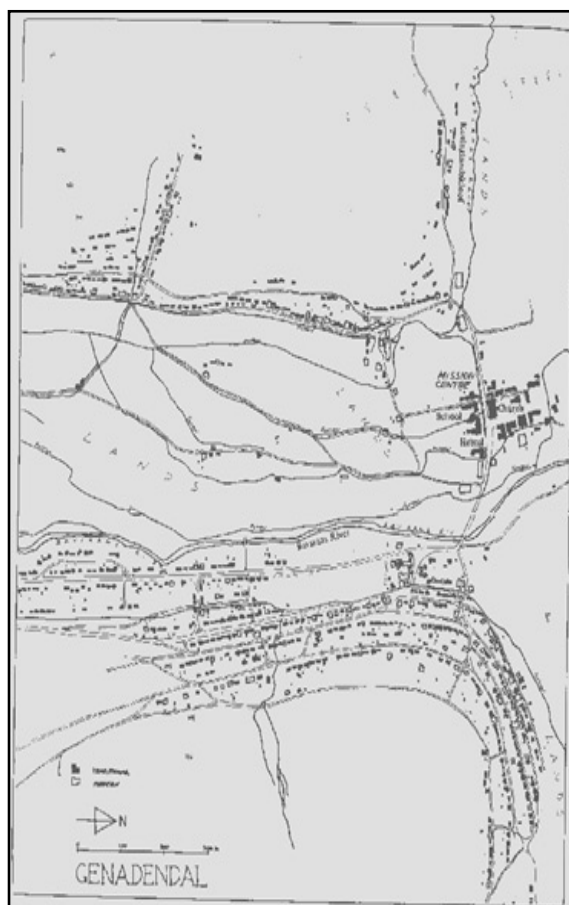
Janssens confirmed the new name given to it by the missionaries, viz Genadendal.

Today about [five, ⁴ instead of three, as in 1980, RvO] thousand people live in the valley, [part] of them in thatched, two- or three-roomed cottages which, by and large, date from the first half-century of the settlement's existence, while later ones continued to be built in much the same style until quite recently. They are placed along a level contour on either side of the valley, so that the two halves of the village form a narrow horseshoe and, where they meet and cross the stream, at the head of the village is the actual mission centre. This comprises one of the most important concentrations of 19th century architecture at the Cape. Shaded by giant oak trees, the nucleus mapped by Melvill in 1816 stands virtually intact. [...] The numbers between brackets refer to the accompanying plan. [p. 339]

Because of the isolated position of Genadendal at the foot of the mountain range, the character of the secluded place has been well preserved. The ground plan of the settlement, referred to as a narrow horseshoe by Fransen and Cook, is both simple and refined. The actual mission station, the *werf* with the church and most important buildings, is situated in a prominent position in the centre, like a country house on its estate. The residential buildings of the village are developed along two parallel entrance roads; from a spatial viewpoint they form an introduction to the actual centre. The area between the two parts of the village is situated slightly lower, in a valley where the Baviaans River is running, which provides for good vistas between the different parts. The valley is subdivided into private gardens used to cultivate crops and vegetables. This system of *overtuinen* –small private garden plots on the other side of the road opposite the houses– resembles that of villages in the north of Holland.⁵ However, this system is barely in function anymore and the landscape has deteriorated considerably.

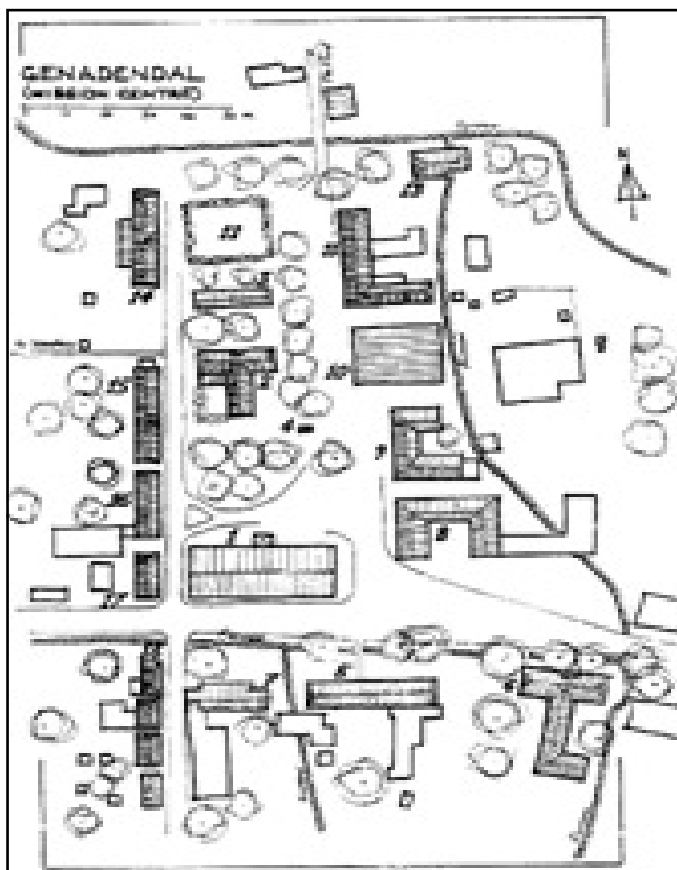
The western entrance road, the Bergstraat, is less built-up than the eastern road, the Volkstraat. From a social viewpoint the Volkstraat is more uptown than the Bergstraat. However, this is not evident from the architectural composition: the buildings along-side and behind the Bergstraat are reasonably well maintained, albeit that the houses are too small and impractical. Also the public space in the western part looks more cared for than in the eastern part. The cultural-historic significance of the buildings is evident, as they represent residential dwellings built at the start of the 19th century with extremely vulnerable materials: mud walls and roofs of reed or straw.

The buildings in the actual centre, the church *werf*, are structured much along the same scheme as the settlement at large—a narrow horseshoe—, only on a smaller scale. The church *werf* comprises the church, the surrounding public space with clock tower, the village museum (2 buildings), a collection of historic buildings associated with the church, including their gardens, the mill, nursery and graveyard. To the west of the



Ground plan of the village developed along two parallel entrance roads; from a spatial viewpoint both 'wings' form an introduction to the actual centre. (Source: Fransen & Cook)

Ground plan of the church werf. (Source: Fransen & Cook)



centre lies the graveyard in the open landscape; to the other side in the northeasterly direction lies a school compound.

The restoration and rehabilitation of Genadendal gains extra significance considering the fact that architectural monuments from the colonial period in the Western Cape Province have always been adequately protected and well preserved. The mission station consists of vulnerable residential houses in a faraway corner of the urban region and is a prime example of an early, still functioning multi-cultural community. With regard to restoration, as Van Voorden put it in 1996, the challenge is to not only restore the most important monuments (read: the *werf*), but to maintain and enhance the specific socio-functional, spatial and environmental qualities of the complete settlement. This requires exceptional efforts, both institutional and professional. The danger exists that the seemingly insignificant houses in the two parts of the settlement will be demolished and replaced by new apartments and holiday homes. Such a process would irreversibly damage this rare cultural heritage.⁶ Conservation guidelines will need to be drafted in order to preserve the character of the historic houses in the village and to prevent existing houses from being unsympathetically renovated. Already such renewal is currently taking place and with it the original, poorer inhabitants are replaced by a new middle class and inhabitants or visitors from outside. This process of gentrification has already taken place in nearby Greyton and can serve as a warning.

Project Set-up

In May 2001 a business plan was submitted to the Dutch Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Education, Culture and Science for consideration for a subsidy under the so-called HGIS-C fund (*Homogene Groep voor Internationale Samenwerking – Cultuur*). The proposal included the following areas to be addressed:

- Socio-cultural and economic functions of Genadendal will be developed through the upgrading and restoration of historic buildings on the historic church *werf* and residential dwellings in the village;
- The cultural-historic landscape will be upgraded;
- Local traditional labour will be utilised in the restoration process, thereby providing for practical skills and much-needed employment in the community;
- Training programmes dealing with the integration of mutual heritage between South Africa and the Netherlands will be developed and presented. These will include workshops, master classes and symposia involving South African tertiary institutions (UCT in particular) and Dutch institutions (DUT);
- Crafters in the historical crafts, e.g. making Herrnhütter knives, will be trained and mentored;

- Skills training in entrepreneurship and business will be undertaken;
- Small-scale businesses and tourism will be stimulated in the process (guest houses together with other tourist attractions will be planned);
- Cultural tourism will be actively marketed to attract tourists to Genadendal.

Given the close relationship between the three elements of the historic settlement and their state of conservation, it was agreed by the Project Management Team that first an overall and integrated approach towards the rehabilitation of the complete settlement –meaning the church *werf*, residential village (buildings and streetscape) and the cultural landscape together– needs to be developed before a Master Plan for Genadendal (including conservation, restoration, maintenance and management activities) will be designed. As part of the procedure to select a restoration architect for the Genadendal Project, such a vision for an integrated approach was requested from the competing architects. On the basis of such a vision, presented to the Project Management Team in April 2002, Architect Lucien le Grange was assigned to execute the project. Meetings with Lucien le Grange to discuss project set-up and execution in detail are scheduled for July 2002.

Notes

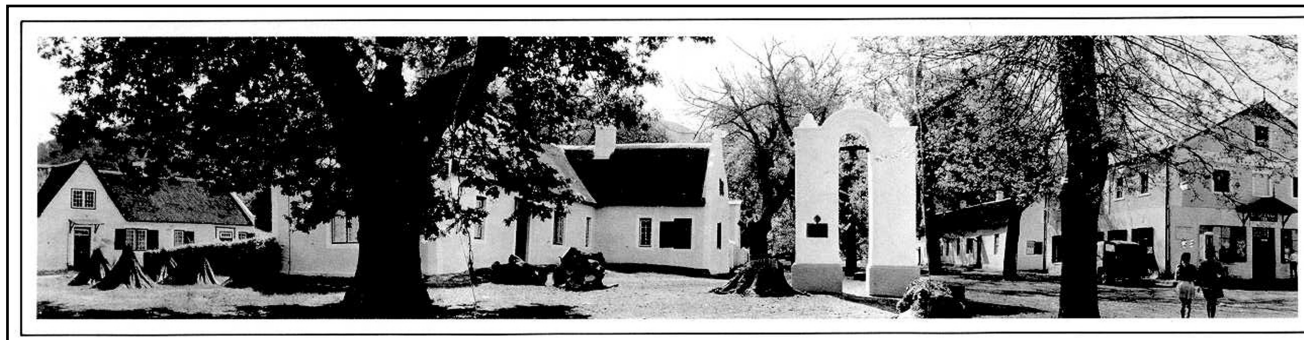
- 1 *Mission Settlements in South Africa – Final Report, Volume 3: Genadendal*, by D. and V. Japha, L. Le Grange and F. Todeschini, University of Cape Town, May 1995, pp.2-3.
- 2 *Mission Settlements in South Africa* (1995) p. 26.
- 3 Fransen, H. and M.A. Cook, *The Old Buildings of the Cape*, Cape Town 1980, pp. 339-340.
- 4 *Mission Settlements in South Africa* (1995) p.1.
- 5 Van Voorden, F.W., *Report of the visit to Genadendal on 21 July 1996*, Delft University of Technology, 9 September 1996, pp. 3 & 7.
- 5 Van Voorden (1996) p.1.

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Education: Atheneum (1966 – 1972), Diplom; TU Delft Architecture (1972 – 1979), Diplom; specialization Restoration / Achitecture

Work Experience - Self-employed architect (1981 - present) Braaksma & Roos Architects in the Hague

Relevant Projects - Many divers restoration plans throughout all Holland among recently: Restoration of The Haags Gemeentemuseum in The Hague (original design H.P. Berlage 1935) commissioned by the rural district of The Hague /district of Art and Culture, (1992 – 1998); Shell Headquarters Netherlands, redevelopment of the site; commissioned by Shell Int. The Hague (2001 - present); Restoration of the Historical Medieval Cellars in the medieval town structure of Arnhem; Restoration and redevelopment of 19th century industrial area near Amsterdam, (2000 – present); Supervisor of the restoration process of classified monument and redevelopment of some existing buildings and additional study for a new entrance pavilion around the gasholder, Westergasfabriek in (Amsterdam 2001 - present). Associate professor TU Delft (2002 - present)



Old house in Bergstreet