

A friend is one who overlooks your broken fence and admires the flowers in your garden.

Anon

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NEXT MEETING

Monday, 1 December 2025 at **18:00** at The Athenaeum

Please note the earlier starting time.



Come and join other members for an evening of fun, fellowship and food.

The cost will be R30 per member.

Tickets for the lucky draw can be bought for R10 each.

Wine and fruit juice will be provided.

All you need to bring is a plate of eats – either savoury or sweet. If serving spoons are needed, please bring them along, marked with your name.

RSVP to Glenda (via the 'info' e-mail address) by Wednesday, 26 November, if you wish to attend.



OUTINGS ...

... are in abeyance until February 2026.

Anne Gleeson has organized all this year's outings for our members, as well as reported back on each of them and is taking a well-deserved break. Anne is sure to arrange another list of exciting visits for the coming year.

WELCOME TO ...

... Michael Grinstead, Jen Rodger, Lize-Marie Bosch and Linda Padfield who have recently joined as members. We hope that their time with the CHS will bring them as much pleasure and knowledge as it does the rest of our members.

FROM THE COMMITTEE

Looking back

When we look back on the year we can see a very large posy of pluses. There was the autumn sale which broke all records and brought in R36000 for our bank balance. It was also an event which showcased our Society positively and was great entertainment to boot.

Meetings have been similarly successful, with a marked upward trajectory in attendance, and we ended the year with a packed hall of 83 people who had come to hear the delightful Leon Kluge talk. It was as if pre-Covid days were back.

Outings continued to be varied and popular. Visits included the Chrysanthemum Show at Pniel, Japhta's Flower Farm and Coniston, which Anne describes as: "a total escape from windy Muizenberg into a Bali paradise with garden rooms including a Japanese garden, a dell area and a secluded eco pool."

The visit by the American Horticultural Society was another highlight, as was October's Garden Day event at Soil for Life.

And we cannot forget the seasonal raffles which were an immediate hit. The three we held brought in a very welcome R5000 and gave us each a chance to get a few plants at a reasonable price – with some unpredictability and fun along the way.

Our Whatsapp group (CHS Members) is full of information, queries and answers, while the other digital platforms are up and running smoothly.

It is pleasing to note that our membership has risen to over 150, and that the digital route is now bringing us more membership enquiries than other routes do.

Then the Athenaeum: we were extremely fortunate to have Nick Starke agree to be our representative on the Athenaeum Board, and the arrival of new managers, Cheryl and Etienne Terblanche, has breathed new life into the old building, with a host of improvements quickly being put into place. We wish them a long and happy stay.

Looking forward

We stride on to our last meeting: the end-of-year party on 1 December at 6pm. Please remember that we start earlier that day to enjoy the evening sun, and could you also please remember to wear your name badge along with your bling – and a plate of eats in hand. Don't forget to let Glenda know if you'll be attending.

The committee is busy finalising details around the Plant Sale which we have decided will be held on **Sunday, 2 May 2026**. Diarise this date and start making space in your nursery/greenhouse for all the plants you will be potting up for the sale.

We are also actively investigating a Garden Tour to a distant town in the Western Cape during September 2026.

Before announcing our 2026 membership fees, we will be looking at how the Society is funded, in order to make it more sustainable. All will be revealed in time ...

Lastly, we wish all CHS members a joyful holiday time, with plenty of family, friends and flowers.

REPORT BACK

November Outing

On 15 November our last outing of the year was a visit to Joan Main's garden in Constantia. Joan loves her garden and has so much enthusiasm for all her plants and animals. Her golden retriever and cat trail her continuously and her tortoise also got involved and was being fed favourites like hibiscus flowers by new member, Michael. Joan has an established and lush English style garden with beds of alstroemeria, salvia, climbing roses, fuchsias, shasta daisies, flax and many more. Her vegetable garden was full of double cerise pink and purple poppies.

Her arbour featuring a climbing rose and star jasmine had blown over on the morning of the outing, a casualty of the wind. We spent time on her veranda among her interesting pot specimens and hoya enjoying a sumptuous tea on our final outing of the year.

Anne Gleeson



Above:
A full and pretty front garden;
Torti, the family tortoise



Centre:
Another bed full of a wide
variety of plants;
Margaret taking a rest on a
beautiful sunny day

Below:
Unusual lavender/pink poppy;
Anne, Fiona and Alison viewing
one of the back garden beds.





Above:
 Lovely specimens of *Orlaya* and *Bougainvillea*
 Centre:
 Enjoying tea, delicious eats and a chat;
 Fiona and Shelley dwarfed by a *Plectranthus* bush
 Below:
 The fallen rose and *Trachelospermum jasminoides*;
 lifted to its former glory onto a new wooden arch.

THE ATHENAEUM – formerly La Rochelle, Newlands

PREFACE

The story of the Athenaeum presented here is an attempt to provide some historical background to a building that has come to play so large a part in the cultural life of Cape Town. What follows could not have been accomplished without the co-operation and assistance so willingly given by Miss Edith Bird and Miss Victoria Pilgram, granddaughter and daughter respectively of Mr Bernhard Pilgram. I am greatly indebted to them for making available family papers and impressions for inclusion.

Mr John Rennie was responsible for solving two major architectural problems and for this he deserves a special word of thanks.

I am also indebted to Mrs Duckham (Desiree Picton-Seymour), Mr Ernest Ford and to Dr A V Hall for their help, and to Mrs M J Vonk, the resident custodian of the Athenaeum whose request to the Historical Society of Cape Town for information on the history of the building initiated this exercise.

MARGARET CAIRNS
Rondebosch, September 1980

Some aspects of its story

THE ATHENAEUM forms part of the estate Louwvliet, granted by Old Cape Freeholds vol. 2 no. 334 on 20.4.1718. The history of this property goes back to 1660 when it was owned by Jan Pieters Louw, the founder of that family in South Africa.

During Louw's lifetime constant clashes with neighbours concerning boundaries had taken place and, after his death, these were intensified to such an extent that the authorities ordered a resurvey to settle the dispute. This re-survey resulted in the above grant to his widow, Beatrix Weyman. The full story of this land between 1660 and 1822, when it came into the hands of Jacob Letterstedt through his marriage to Maria Barendina Dreyer is to be found on pages 31 - 46 of *The Josephine Mill and its Owners* published by the Historical Society of Cape Town.

In 1841 by Transfer 157/24.10.1841 Letterstedt transferred 22 morgen 105 sq. rds. of the Mariendahl Estate, as he had renamed Louwvliet, to his step-son-in-law, Johannes Nicolaas Hamman and it was from this land, which he in turn named Klein Louwvliet, that the Athenaeum derived.

Hamman was married to Martha Maria Magdalena Dreyer, daughter of Mrs Letterstedt by her second of three husbands, Johan Frederick Dreyer (1765-1819) and he made his home on Louwvliet. But after his wife's death in 1852 he appears to have moved elsewhere. To have accommodated the family which comprised issue of the first marriages of both parents, together with their own eight children, all minors when their mother died, would have required a large house but no details of either style or siting, have been discovered.

In 1853 Hamman's Klein Louwvliet was put up for sale and very heavily sub-divided. It is interesting to note that many of the smaller portions were sold to members of the Muslim community as the names Slamodien, Ziediek and Gamaldien suggest.

By 1857 two portions of Hamman's property which had been sold to his wife's brother, Caspar Bekker Dreyer, and to her step-brother, Hendrik Cornelis Dreyer, were united in the hands of the former. Ten years later Caspar went insolvent and by Transfer 191/18.4.1867, 2 morgen 175 sq.rds. 119 sq.ft. of land which was later to become the Athenaeum was sold from his insolvent estate to Jacob Isaac de Villiers. The transfer describes the land as 'now known as La Rochelle' and it is more than likely that De Villiers, whose family had close ties with La Rochelle in their native France had adopted this for the property before it had been registered in his name, hence its insertion in the document.

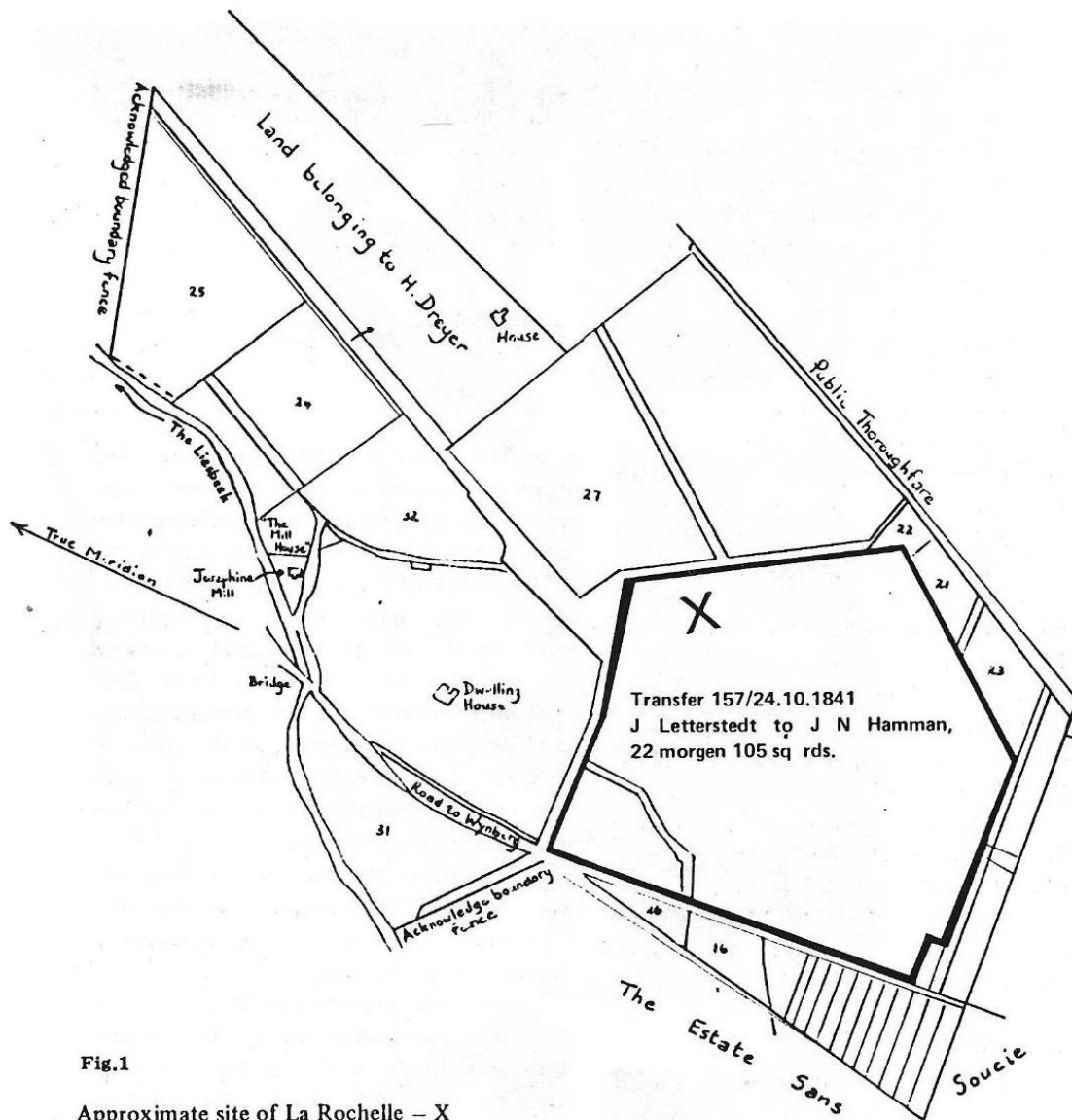


Fig.1
Approximate site of La Rochelle – X

This transfer to De Villiers mentions 'buildings' which are neither described nor shown on a diagram and in fact no building on this estate appears thus until well into the 19th Century when the present Athenaeum already existed. The form and style of its predecessor must therefore remain purely speculative.

De Villiers is something of an enigma; he does not appear anywhere in the almanacs/directories nor is there a death notice to establish when and where he died or details of his family, if any. The transfer deeds mention that his father was 'D A' but this has not been investigated. That he owned La Rochelle for eight years is all that has been revealed and by Transfer 170/8.7.1875 he sold it 'with buildings thereon' to Bernhard Pilgram for £1450. Here at Newlands the Pilgram family of parents and eight daughters lived until 1889 when, on the night of 5 February that year, the house was destroyed by fire. The youngest daughter, Victoria, then aged 16 months, today lives at Somerset West.

Since Pilgram features so largely in the Athenaeum story, some biographical details seem appropriate. These have been supplied by his granddaughter Miss Edith Bird of Somerset West who was also responsible for the loan of

plans and other documentary material. Born on 4.6.1845 at Barmen, Elberfeld, Germany, Pilgram died at Rondebosch aged 98½ years on 15.1.1944. In 1872 he left Germany for England where he married Amy Marian Benison (1851 – 1928), daughter of Major Samuel Benison of the Enniskillen Dragoons and his wife Mary. December 1874 saw the Pilgrams and their first daughter arrive in Cape Town where Bernhard assumed the post of treasurer to the Rhenish Missionary Society with particular reference to their trading stations in the North West Cape. After six years he resigned and opened a store in Okiep but continued to live at Newlands.

BERNHARD PILGRAM
(1845-1944)
*taken at about the date
that he owned La Rochelle
(The Athenaeum).*



Between 1898 and 1905 he and his family were in England where he handled the London office of the Van Ryn Gold Mining Coy. Returning to South Africa, he set up business as a merchant in Cape Town with wide and varied interests. He had been a founder member of the City Club in 1878 and in 1938, aged 93, was the only surviving such member. British naturalisation papers had been issued to him in 1887 and two years later he was appointed a Justice of the Peace for the Wynberg district and in 1889 was Chairman of the Claremont Municipality. He was a member of the South West African Concessions Committee from May to August 1920 and rendered valuable services to that body.

... to be cont.

Source: *The Athenaeum Newlands*
by Margaret Cairns – 1980

HOUSE PLANTS

There are very few people today who have “old-fashioned” indoor plants. I came across this the other day and it reminded me of the days these house plants were quite popular. These are not often seen.

Peperomias

These plants, native to tropical regions (Brazil, Peru, Argentina), were introduced in the second half of the 19th century.

The genus *Peperomia* belongs to the Piperaceae family. Its name means “pepper-like” indicating a certain similarity with the genus, *Piper*.

Morphology: They are evergreen herbaceous plants, with a radical leaf arrangement and a short stem that is barely developed; the alternate fleshy leaves are opposite or verticillate, have an entire margin, cordiform or rounded acuminate, and frequently have interesting variegations. Peculiar and interesting are the clustered inflorescences that look like “mouse tails”, with a white cream colour. The flowers are insignificant as far as decoration is concerned, and the same is true for the fruits that are little berries with thin pericarps.

Cultivation: The decorative value of the leaves, the ease of cultivation in the greenhouse, and their long life in the house make Peperomias much appreciated. The small size and the modest development of the plant suggests cultivation in little pots with a soil mixture of loam, peat or organic matter, and sand. To get good results, it is necessary to provide a shaded location and to avoid excessive watering.

Peperomias can be propagated by seed which should be scattered in pots, in fine, loose soil usually, however, the plants are propagated by cuttings in spring. The little segments of stems with a leaf are placed in sand in a propagation greenhouse or frame; they will need to be constantly shaded and watered.

Species and varieties: Among the most popular peperomias are: *Peperomia obtusifolia*, with green leaves and marginal dark spots; *P marmorata* and *P verschaffeltii*, with green, marbled leaves; *P argyroneura*, with green leaves and silver stripes; *P caperata*, with green and fleshy leaves (left).



It is a mound-forming evergreen perennial growing to 20 cm (8 in) tall and wide, with corrugated heart-shaped leaves, and narrow spikes of white flowers 5–8 cm (2–3 in) long, in summer.

With a minimum temperature requirement of 15 °C (59 °F), *P. caperata* must be grown indoors in most temperate regions.

Glenda Thorpe

Source: House Plants in Colour
Orbis Publishing – 1974

AS A MATTER OF INTEREST ...

- For new members, and for those who have forgotten, here are the links to the CHS social media platforms:
 - CHS Members WA group: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/J6JYlhTtJijAIBdlkCZmBO> (members only)
 - Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/capehorticulturalsociety/>
 - Instagram: @capehortsoc
 - Website: www.capehorticulturalsociety.co.za
- We are affiliated with Mediterranean Gardening International. Information about what they do in their mediterranean climates can be found by clicking on their links on www.mediterraneangardeninginternational.org We also receive newsletters from them during the year, which are very informative.
- A few housekeeping rules for those who haven't been with the CHS for very long:
 - Monthly meetings:

When attending meetings make sure you receive a ticket for the lucky draw. There is no entrance fee but you do need a ticket if you'd like to win the prize of the night. Non-members pay R40 and also receive a ticket.
 - Name badges:

You have been hearing whispers of wearing name badges or fines for not wearing them. The reason for wanting all members to wear one is for everyone to get to know one another and for visitors at meetings to know who they are talking to. Wearing a badge on an outing also helps other members to get to know you. If you do not have a badge and want to order one – either with a pin or a magnet, please let Glenda know, and pay the R100 by cash or EFT. The Committee is giving you until January to place your order.
 - Monthly outings:

You are requested to place your name on a list for all monthly outings. The host(ess) usually limits the numbers depending on the size of their garden. Refreshments are often provided so we need to know numbers. Once the limit is reached other names are put onto a waiting list. If there are cancellations, those on the waiting list get the chance to join the group. If we do not fill all the places, you will be advised should you want to bring a visitor. These family members or friends will be required to pay R40 each.
 - December meeting:

This always takes the form of a year-end get-together for members. RSVPs are also required for the supply of drinks and crockery etc.

Photos: A Gleeson, Google, G Thorpe
Any and all photos taken at CHS events will be used in the newsletter and on social media.