

Friends are flowers in the garden of life.

Proverbs

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NEXT MEETING

Monday, 2 February 2026 at 19:30 at The Athenaeum

Members: No entrance fee

Visitors: R40 per person

To start, there will be a short Special General Meeting to approve the increase in the membership fees for 2026.

The Committee's proposal is R280 for single membership and R430 for family membership.

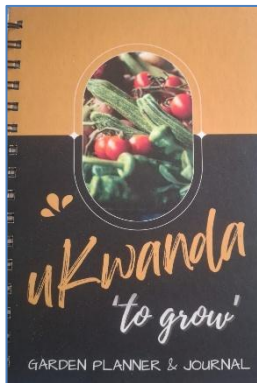
ENCOUNTER. REFLECTION. TRANSFORMATION. THE COURAGE TO GROW

Carmen Viljoen is the founder of uKwandaGro, a South African initiative inspired by the Xhosa word *ukwanda*, meaning *to grow*.

Her journey into therapeutic horticulture was not a conventional one; rather, it emerged organically through lived experience, curiosity, and a deep belief in the healing power of plants.

Carmen has completed formal training in therapeutic horticulture and wellbeing. Through uKwandaGro, her vision is to reconnect people to nature using accessible tools, including a planner and journal, that support gardening as a daily practice for growth, wellbeing, and purpose.

There will be copies of her journal on sale.



OUTINGS

Thurs, 12 Feb at 09:15: Our first outing of the year will be to the garden of Emma Hudson in Constantia. She does flowers for weddings and has a room just for this purpose. Emma is a very creative person and you can see this just by the layout of her garden.

She loves to throw seeds and when I visited, her verge was a riot of colour. At the time we will be visiting, we will be able to see her dahlias. Apart from the dahlias she has a vegetable garden and lots of interesting flower beds. In the back area she is cultivating some fruit trees.

Emma is very generous and will be serving refreshments afterwards. She says she is honoured to be receiving a visit from the CHS members.

Numbers are limited to 20. Please RSVP to Glenda by no later than Monday, 9 February.

Wed, 4 March at 10:00: Another visit to Coniston, Muizenberg, the home of member John Venn. If you have not yet seen the garden, you are in for a treat.

John opens his garden to collect donations (large or small) from visitors towards the restoration of the stream which runs through Muizenberg Park (right), a project which he is leading on behalf of the local community. The City has given him the go ahead to start Phase 3 of the project and he is in the process of trying to raise the necessary funds. Our outing will start with a walk around this park.



John has created different rooms making up the garden which is all on different levels with water running through it from a natural stream. He has a Japanese garden, a desert garden, an orchid section in a conservatory and a natural pool amongst others. The secret to this garden seems to be a wall of trees on the south side which protects the garden from the wind and also water, of which he has plenty.

Alan Dawson, his landscaper has recently won 1st prize in the S.A. Landscaping Institute’s national competition for the Coniston garden.

Please bring a donation which will all go towards Phase 3 of the restoration project. The usual charge for these garden tours is R250 pp but, as a fellow CHS member, he wanted us to see the garden again and would be grateful for donations of any amount (large or small).



Limited to 25 members. Please RSVP to Glenda by 2 March.

If members are not able to fill the spots, visitors may attend at R40 per person.

FROM THE COMMITTEE

Looking forward

- Our annual Plant Sale will take place on Sunday, 3 May 2026. Keep potting up those plants.
- Our very successful seasonal raffles will continue this year. The dates will be announced shortly.

REPORT BACK

End-of-Year Party

Our December meeting was our annual get-together to mingle, have some fun and enjoy good food. 44 members gathered and on arrival were faced with a list of questions which they had to answer. The five with the most correct answers took part in the final quiz. Chris fired a number of questions at them which they answered with alacrity.



Some of the revellers:

Michael (note the appropriate shorts), Linda and Mia ...



... Tina with Tony, the Christmas Clown.



The Quiz Kids above: Anne with Tessa, Sue and Lynne.

Two of the many raffle winners: Isabella (below) and Adrienne



Thanks to those who donated the hampers and raffle prizes. A happy evening was enjoyed by everyone. We all went home to take a break from meetings and outings and are now ready to start again.

AFTER THE FIRE

Here are a few photos taken in December in Silvermine. The flowers were exceptional after the last fire (April 2025) and we saw a number of species that ONLY flower after fire.



Clockwise from left above:
Aristea bakeri, formerly
A. macrocarpa
Watsonia borbonica (pink)
Watsonia tabularis (orange)
Bobartia indica (yellow)
Pseudoselago serrata

And *Watsonias* as far as the eye
 can see. What a beautiful sight.

Isabella Hayden

THE ATHENAEUM – formerly La Rochelle, Newlands – part 2

That Pilgram intended to rebuild the burnt La Rochelle is backed by family information and by a set of surviving plans which he commissioned the architect, Anthony de Witt, to draw for him. These four sheets 'The Proposed Villa Residence at Newlands for Bernhard Pilgram Esq.' are dated 1889 and are typical De Witt in style. (Fig. 2). The outward appearance of the dwelling is very similar to the Loopuyt house in Milner Road Rondebosch, which is another example of the work of this architect.

The Pilgram plans show a basement and a house of two storeys comprising twenty rooms, four of which were for the staff; also two bathrooms, two separate W.C.'s, kitchen, wine cellar, grocery store, vegetable store, dairy and scullery. The living rooms included a ball or billiard room, huge day nursery and a servants hall. This grandiose conception was never put into operation for before Pilgram could do so fate decreed otherwise. In 1890 the Union Bank, which had been established at the Cape for over forty years, failed. Pilgrani had just been appointed to its board of directors but had not as yet attended a meeting. Possibly he might have

escaped involvement but he made no attempt to avoid the responsibilities he felt he owed to the shareholders and he assigned his estate. La Rochelle was put up for sale by the trustees and purchased by Frederick Chapman Gibson and registered in his name by Transfer 1550/22.4.1891.

As has already been mentioned there is no official diagram showing the form of the original La Rochelle but two contemporary maps do give some idea of the house. The first is an undated map of unknown origin assigned to between 1873 and 1879 and this shows La Rochelle with Pilgram's name added, as an oblong dwelling with two entrances to the grounds, one from what was Station Road, Newlands and the other from Camp Ground Road. The second map of military origin (as is the first) and dated 1885 (Map. 1/1855, Cape Archives) shows what appears to be a slightly smaller La Rochelle in relation to the grounds but, as in the case of the earlier map the house is sited very close to Camp Ground Road. The driveway in the earlier map seems to suggest that the house faced Table Mountain. Unfortunately neither of these maps is suitable for reproduction.

One thing is certain about Pilgram's La Rochelle: it was a double-storey house. Two photographs taken shortly after the fire and in the possession of the family demonstrate this quite clearly and these pictures have played their part in solving a minor mystery concerning the house

Preserved with the De Witt plans is a set of four diagrams most professionally drawn by Pilgram himself showing a more modest dwelling of two floors and ten living rooms. The family has always believed that these were prepared for the rebuilding of the burnt house and this contention is strengthened by the fact that 'existing walls and floors' are shown and that an attic-type double-storey was also indicated as existing and was obviously to be incorporated in the new building.

This belief has now been proved to be incorrect. The architectural expertise of Mr John Rennie who is ever ready to help when appealed to, has shown that the two photographs could not relate to the attic type double-storey appearing on Pilgram's plans but to a house of conventional double-storey height and with a completely different roof structure from what would have been possible in an attic. If further evidence were needed to discount the family belief that the plans were for La Rochelle Mr Rennie also discovered that the paper used by Pilgram bears the watermark 1895, by which date Pilgram's successor had already replaced the burnt house. Pilgram was rehabilitated in 1895 and was busy establishing himself on the property that later became the Salesian School in Lansdowne Road, Claremont and the strong possibility exists that the plans were drawn to renovate and rebuild on this site.

The question of the rebuilding of La Rochelle must now be considered. All Pilgram's papers and ledgers were lost in the fire but he made an attempt to reconstruct these and they are in the hands of his family who have, most generously, made them available for this study. There is no amount entered for the rebuilding and indeed there would hardly have been time for this. De Witt's professional fees were paid in 1890 and amounted to £ 116.1.6. and a further item in the same year is:

'cost of new foundations (Linder's) . . .
£150.15.0.

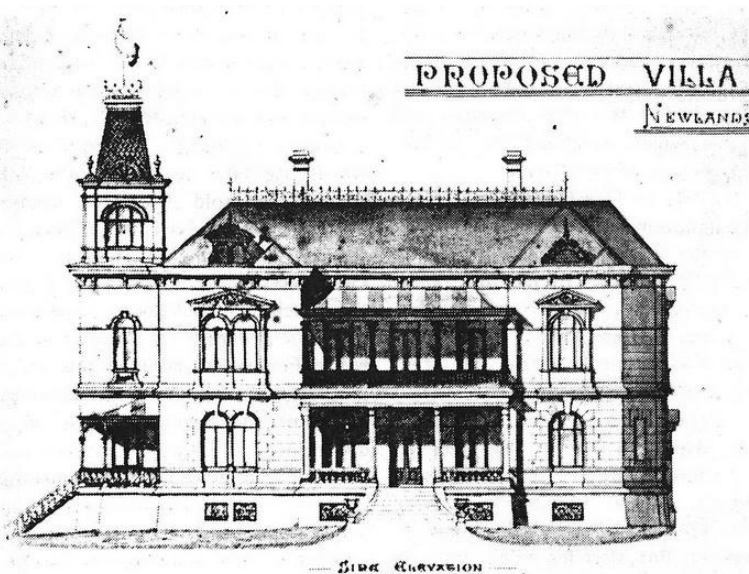


Fig.2

One example of the residence proposed at Newlands for Mr Bernhard Pilgram to replace the house burnt down in 1889. The architect was Anthony de Witt.

This makes it more than likely that these had been laid before the bank disaster put an end to the completion of the dwelling. Whether these foundations followed De Witt's or an alternative plan will never be known and the few records of the Liesbeek/Claremont Municipality throw no light on how the next owner, Gibson, dealt with the situation for no papers relative to building matters have been preserved. A mere two years of valuation rolls for 1896 and 1897 are all that is available as source material.

The roll for 1896 reveals that the property in Camp Ground Road, Newlands was owned and occupied by Gibson and was valued at £4000. In the same roll Ohlsson's Montebello was valued at £4250, Stellenburg at £4000, with Kelvin Grove at £6000. This last is followed by (£ 5000), so possibly the amount was considered too high.

The directories reveal that by 1893 La Rochelle was known as Lockerbie House which name it bore only during the Gibson period of ownership 1891-1903. That La Rochelle and Lockerbie House were one and the same property is clearly shown from the papers of Gibson's deceased estate (MOOC 13/1/ 997 etc.) namely that he owned no other property in Camp Ground Road and that Mrs Gibson remained in the house for two years after his death.

When all the available information is considered it seems evident that Gibson was responsible for the building of the house, possibly about 1893 when the new name appears for the first time and that what he built is the present Athenaeum, alterations and additions excepted. The architectural style is consistent with that of the last ten years of the nineteenth century and this is borne out by the existence of several very similar dwellings in the Cape Peninsula which are known to have been built about that date. Unfortunately the identity of the architect has not been established.

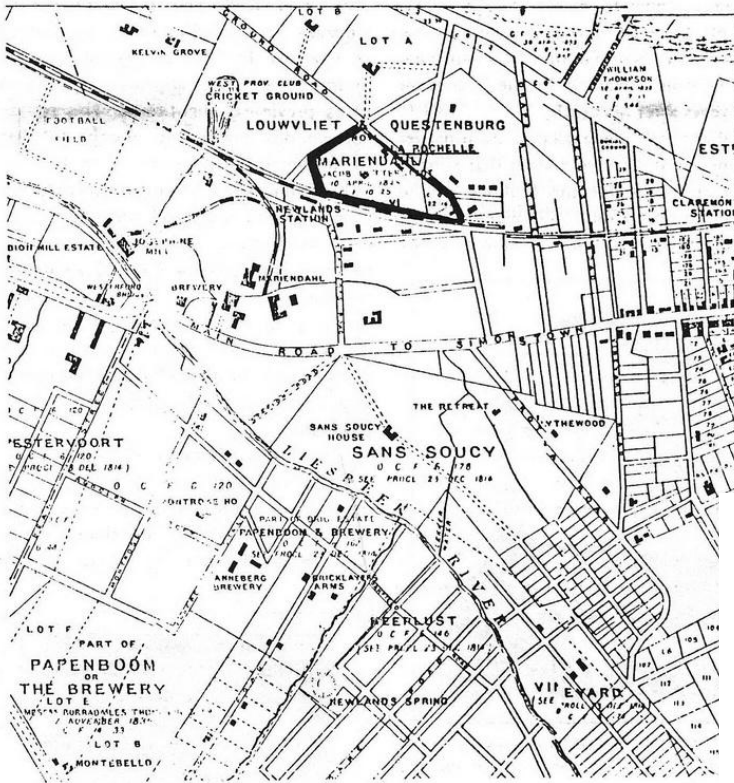


Fig.3
Map 2/49 Cape Archives, showing the position of La Rochelle on the Mariendahl Estate.
By Courtesy Cape Archives

A section (Fig.3) of a map of the Cape Peninsula in the series M.2/49-2/61 in the Cape Archives and dated between 1897 and 1899 shows the second of Gibson's La Rochelle (Lockerbie House) as a square building, as opposed to the more oblong shapes appearing in the two maps previously mentioned. This square corresponds reasonably closely to that of the present Athenaeum which too had outbuildings sited behind it towards Camp Ground Road and which have now been demolished. (Fig.4). The triangular piece of land marked C.Q. 22.16 in the righthand corner of the La Rochelle property in Fig.3. was added in 1886 to Pilgram's 1875 purchase and for this portion both he and Gibson paid quitrent. The remainder

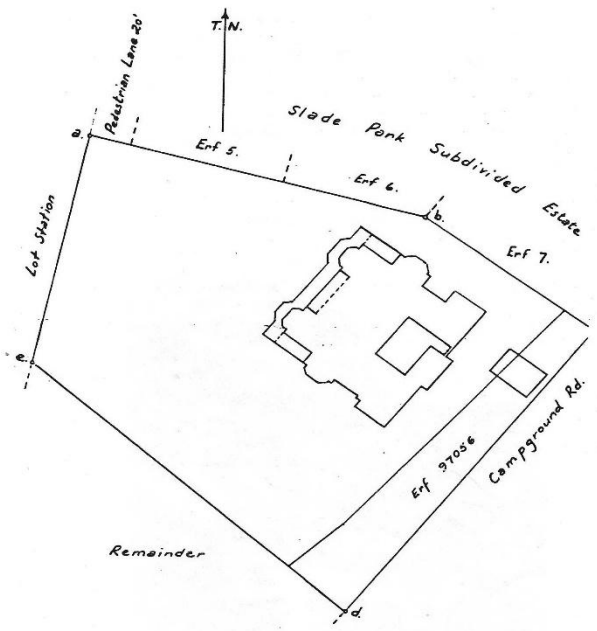


Fig.4
THE ATHENAEUM, 1980

of the property was free-hold land.

Frederick Chapman Gibson (1862 – 1901), who bought La Rochelle in 1891, came from London and married a South African girl, Margaret Wilhelmina Roos, who survived him by nearly thirty years. Their family of nine, which was almost complete when they moved to Newlands, must have filled the house to capacity. Here at his Lockerbie House he died on 18.2.1901 aged forty-nine years and was described as 'retired' (Death Notice 681/01, 117/289, MOOC 6/9/421).

... to be cont.
Source: *The Athenaeum Newlands*
by Margaret Cairns – 1980

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