

INTRODUCTION

The homestead is an important building because it retains much original fabric. It is a Cape Dutch homestead with some later features. No significance can be placed on the fact that the homestead has not been proclaimed as a National Monument as it is very conservation worthy. It rates in that category or in the category of buildings that deserve to be placed on the National Register. The plans for the alterations are being submitted to the Plans Committee of the Western Cape Region Office of the National Monuments Council. This is the correct procedure. Adequate motivation and justification needs to be given for the proposed alterations where they will have an impact on original fabric. An initial visit was made on 3 December 1991 at the suggestion of the architect, Ms Caroline Snipelisky. A further visit was made on 10 December when we had discussions on site with Ms Snipelisky and the builder Mr L Raymond. For four days between the two visits and for the next few days Mr A Faul is assisting in supervising plaster removal.

General comments

The date when the building was erected is not fixed although a date between 1820 and 1840 is reasonably certain. It is thus a link between the Bien Donne and Boschendal group of homesteads and those of the 1850's like Watergat. There is a unity to the building that can be seen in the identical mouldings on doors and beams, in the consistent floor levels and in the ceilings. Additions have been made to convert it from a small h to the standard H ground plan by adding a room at the rear on the left. Lean-to's have also been added on the south side in the late 19th century. Internal dividing walls have been added and were part of the Victorian alterations. There is no difficulty in distinguishing the additions. One of the doorways in the wall separating the voorkamer from the gallery has been closed but the position of the opening has been established. The position of the hearth in the kitchen will be established by plaster removal and examination of the floor. Although the investigation of the interior is not completed the main structural details of the building have been established. The exterior of the building has been altered by not only the addition of lean-to's but by raising the front stoep, shifting windows in the front facade, adding verandahs and making various new openings for windows and doors. The thatch roof was replaced by corrugated iron in 1882 with the provision of ventilators increased at a later stage. The end gables on the front were of the holbol-type and those on the back section were hipped. The thatching line is very well preserved on the front end gables. There is no conclusive evidence at this stage for a front or rear gable but plaster removal from the upper sections has yet to be made.

The conservation of the original fabric has been a special concern of our study. The building has several generations of plaster on the walls. Extensive replastering was done as recently as 1969. There is a yellow clay plaster that is found on the later "Victorian" walls and the lean-to's. This has been scored to bond the recent cement plaster. The yellow clay plaster overlies either a lime plaster or a very thin and probably original dark clay plaster. The condition of the plaster both in the interior and the exterior is such that the greater part of the building will have to be replastered. With ingenuity and enterprise it may be possible to keep and restore some areas of original plaster.

There are original doors and windows, not always in the correct positions, that can be used in the restoration. Most of the flooring is modern but there is a section of older pine flooring, in poor condition, in the room on the right in the front. Floor boards will have to be lifted to establish whether the original floors were clay.

The front facade was symmetrical with a single "tall English" window lighting each of the rooms on the right and left of the voorkamer. Two windows flanked the front door.

The general impression gained from examination of the homestead is that it is structurally sound and can be restored sympathetically with relative ease. It is not a Cape Dutch homestead on the grand scale of the earlier part of the last century. As the 19th century progressed prosperity decreased and the Cape Colony was virtually bankrupt by the 1840's. The Keerweder homestead was a product of its times and is the more important for that.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are informal comments and suggestions that may help in making an application to the Plans Committee. The report and the recommendations should not be taken as an assessment that has followed any detailed investigation. We have been pleased to be able to study the building as an example of a Franschhoek homestead but we have no responsibility or involvement in the restoration as such.

1. It is recommended that alteration and restoration be seen as a series of investigative phases. This is to allow plans to be adapted as new information is obtained in the course of the work. The initial phase of plaster removal is in progress and this will provide much of the necessary detail.
2. It is recommended that the front facade be kept symmetrical and no new windows added. If no indication of a front gable is found it is suggested that none be added. The reason is that in reconstruction one does not want to improve on the past but to reflect what existed. Not all Cape Dutch buildings had front gables although this is a general assumption.
3. It is recommended that the front stoep be lowered and restored. Excavation can show original levels.
4. The lean-to at the front is structurally unsound and is a possibility for demolition. Demolition would restore symmetry to the front perspective. A case can be made for restoring the lean-to at the rear. It is convenient to convert this existing structure into a laundry rather than to alter another building for such purposes.
5. It is recommended problems of damp and drainage be solved by drains around the house rather than under floor drains. The reason is that it is assumed clay floors will be found below the floor boards in the house and interior drains will disturb these. The interior floors need investigation.
6. It is recommended that all reasonable efforts be made to preserve original and old fabric in the form of plaster, brickwork and joinery. This is the ethic that would apply in general and in this case would be applicable to earlier as well as later nineteenth century fabric. In any restoration or alteration it is important to keep the imprint of changes that have made to the building at different times.
7. The proposal is to replaster and whitewash the exterior walls. The type of plaster to be used is a technical matter but the plaster mix needs to be suitable for use on the old brickwork. The hard cement plaster used in 1969 was not appropriate. The interior walls will also have to be replastered to a large extent. The proposal is to use PVA on the interior. It is recommended that consideration be given to using the original materials where they would best counteract problems of damp.
8. It is recommended that the kitchen be restored. The original hearth position can be established by excavation if necessary.
9. The proposal is to replace the existing iron roof by a thatch roof. This will mean that the vents will be removed as well as the Regency veranda on the court on the left. It is recommended that these materials be kept on the property for possible re-use where appropriate in restoring other structures.

HJ DEACON and C RADEMEYER

Department of Archaeology
University of Stellenbosch
Stellenbosch 7600

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