

# A COMMENTARY ON THE VERNACULAR BARN SITUATED AT WILDE PAARDE KLOOF (FARM 31) ROBERTSON DISTRICT

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Prepared for

**Mathew Cooke** on behalf of his client, Mrs A. Frater

January 2003

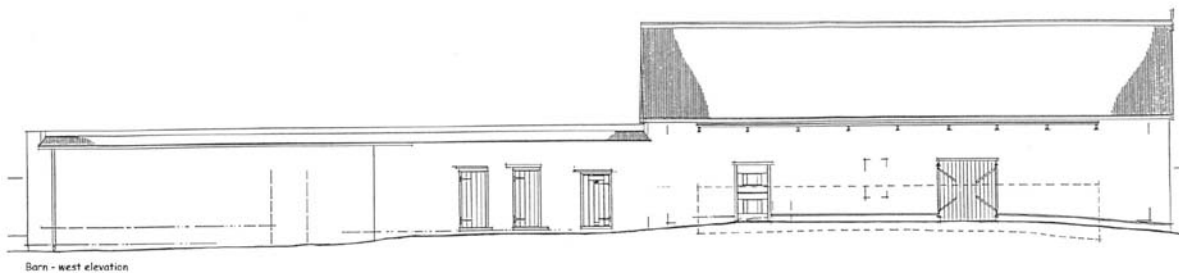


Tim Hart  
Antonia Malan

## **Archaeology Contracts Office**

Department of Archaeology  
University of Cape Town  
Private Bag  
Rondebosch  
7701

Phone (021) 650 2357  
Fax (021) 650 2352  
Email [tjg@age.uct.ac.za](mailto:tjg@age.uct.ac.za)



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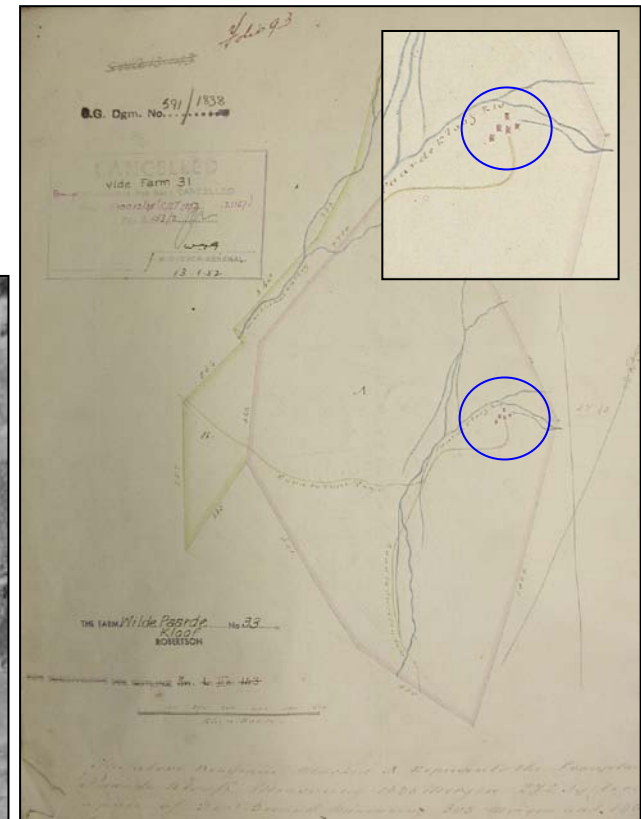
# 1 Introduction

The Archaeology Contracts Office of the University of Cape Town was appointed by Mathew Cook Architects on behalf of his client, Mrs A. Frater, to comment on the age, construction and building sequence of a structure located on the Farm Wilde Paarde Kloof (farm 31 Robertson) located close to Ashton in the Western Cape Province (33°.79031S, 20°.05917E).

There are currently three dwelling houses on the property. One of these, an 18<sup>th</sup> century *langhuis* built in vernacular style has been refurbished by the current owner of the property and is used as a private residence. A Victorian bungalow located close by has also been refurbished and is used as a residence for the farm manager. The third building, a long barn containing several phases of building has not yet been restored. It is the owners desire to readapt the Barn for residential purposes. This study will hopefully contribute to the understanding of the building's history with a view to informing the planned refurbishment of the structure.

The farm has been subject to some previous research and has attracted the attention of architectural historians. Aspects of the interior are depicted in Oberholzer *et al* (1980). In 1990 Helena Scheffler researched the archival and transfer history of the site. Measured drawings of the Barn and Dwelling house were completed by Rennie and Goddard Architects in 1992 while members of the Vernacular Architecture Society have also visited the property on account of its well preserved qualities.

**Figure 1** 1838 diagram showing Wilde Paarde Kloof with detail blow-up and recent aerial photograph. (SG 591-1838 & Photo: Director General Surveys and Mapping)



## 1.1 Historical background

The historical background presented here is largely a synopsis of work done by other researchers. Scheffler (1990) suggests that the land was first farmed in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, however no records have survived. Various early travellers refer to farms in the area that may have been Wilde Paarde Kloof, however the first secure evidence of occupation is a document in the archives that refers to Gideon van Zijl and his wife Maria Elizabeth Bantjies living on the property when their first born son was baptised there in 1795. Two families appear to have been prominent in the ownership of the property, namely the van Zijls and the le Roux's since its early days until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (summary of transfer and archival history is presented in Appendix A). It is not clear when the existing Dwelling House and Barn were built however 5 structures are marked on the diagram of 1838. This means that at least 2 structures that stood on the *werf* have since been demolished. The diagram indicates that the Barn and Dwelling House existed in 1838 as well as a structure in roughly the same position as the farm managers house (which may still incorporate early fabric). There is no surface evidence of the other two structures today as the immediate area is under vine cultivation and garden.

## 1.2 Condition of vernacular buildings

The main dwelling house was recently adapted and refurbished for the owner under the direction of architect Mathew Cooke. This has been pleasingly achieved with minimal intervention in original fabric despite the fact that the structure has now been equipped with modern conveniences such as kitchen and bathroom.

The Barn (which contains at least 3 major building phases) is in need of intervention. Structural problems such as collapsing openings and leaning walls will need remediation in the short term. A portion of the Barn (Phase1) is currently used for storage. The presence of 6 concrete wine tanks, 4 of which are below floor level, are testimony to the use of the Barn as a wine cellar in the mid – 20<sup>th</sup> century. The central portion (Phase2) is largely unused but appears to have functioned recently as a stable. The northern portion (Phase3) currently serves as a garage.

The farm manager's house, a Victorian building, has been refurbished and is currently a private residence for the manager.



### 1.3 Restrictions

No restrictions were encountered. Brickwork and joinery were visible due absence of the plaster in many areas. Roof spaces were accessible. No archaeological excavations were conducted to examine footings.

## 2 The Barn - detailed observations

The Barn, in typical vernacular style, has developed organically over time following the lie of the land and in response to changing use over time. We identified three major construction phases (Phases 1 – 3), however, minor modifications to the structures are numerous. Details of the phases are graphically depicted on the series of annotated illustrations (based on drawings by Rennie and Goddard Architects) included in this report (Appendix B).

### 2.1 Phase 1 (the southern end)

This is the only part of the Barn with a pitched roof, end gables and *solder*. It is currently roofed with corrugated iron although the pitch angle is designed for thatch. Inspection of the *solder* showed that the early joinery (poles, rough-cut beams fixed with wooden dowels) is largely in place and very well preserved. The corrugated iron roof is attached by means of a supporting framework of more recent joinery. The broad ceiling boards are early (late 18<sup>th</sup>- early 19<sup>th</sup> century) and in very good condition. There is an attic door in the end gable. The walls are made of homemade bricks, floors on ground level are concrete, below surface area having been excavated out for installation of 4 underground concrete wine tanks (since flooded with ground water). Windows appear to have been casements but are currently bricked up. Early lintels have survived in two-window openings that are visible. An internal staircase on the south end provided access to the *solder*. Three walls/partitions have been demolished inside the Barn, converting it from a 3 or 4 roomed structure into a single space.

Uses: Phase1 of the Barn clearly started its life as a mixed dwelling and work place and probably remained so into the mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century (internal partitions, Victorian wall paper). The northern portion was partitioned off from early on to accommodate (what was in all likelihood) a Blacksmiths forge. The forge area originally consisted of a space without ceiling that was open to roof height. A large hearth and chimney was built against the north end-gable. Although little of the physical fabric of the forge has survived, wall and beam blackening and the scars where fabric and joinery has been removed are visible and easily interpretable. The forge area had separate access from the interior. We know that at some time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century 6 concrete wine tanks were installed (4 below ground, 2 above ground). This involved demolition of interior partitions to create a single large space used as a wine cellar. Today the above ground tanks are partially demolished while the below surface tanks have been flooded with groundwater.

## 2.2 Phase 2

Phase2 was added onto the northern end gable of Phase1. Its current appearance is more humble than Phase1 having a flat corrugated roof. Its uses have changed over time although it is unclear what these were. Originally this area may have had some form of pitched roof as there is evidence that the end-gable of the forge was crudely punctured to create a walk-through opening. Our interpretation of the changes that took place through time indicates that Phase2 may also have served as a humble dwelling. This is implied by the remains of a *stoep* (stone slabs) on the west side as well as some small barred windows visible from the interior east side. At least one interior wall has been demolished as is indicated by the lie of the plasterwork on the east wall interior. This wall would have created two small rooms, the southern most of which had a separate entrance, two small barred windows and a central *muurkas* (cupboard).

*Uses:* It is difficult to pin an absolute date on the date of construction of Phase2 apart the fact that it is built from homemade materials and in vernacular style (predating advent of standard bricks and other materials). An early 19<sup>th</sup> century date is a possibility. Originally this may have been a servants quarter appended onto phase1, but its most recent use appears to have been a cowshed.

## 2.3 Phase 3

Built as a wagon shed, Phase3 continues to serve as a garage. Beam slots are visible at the top of the un-plastered walls at the east side interior indicating that this building also had a pitched roof and possibly a *solder*. In recent years the tops of the walls, particularly on the west side, have been shaved down to accommodate a gently sloping corrugated iron roof. There are no signs of demolished partitions apart from the fact that the interior wall (separating Phase2) has been recently rebuilt with concrete blocks. There are two bricked up casement windows (each side) with wooden lintels. Beam slots at waist level near the entrance (east wall) indicate that a framework once stood here – possibly some horse operated agricultural device. The west wall is leaning outwards and will need to be buttressed.

*Uses:* Dating of Phase3 is difficult as bricks and materials are vernacular however a 19<sup>th</sup> century date is suggested. Furthermore, there is a possibility that Phase3 was once a separate building which was linked to Phase1 by the insertion of Phase2. The opening, which is wide enough to get a wagon/vehicle through, suggests that this structure was built to accommodate wagons or bring loads of goods in and out.

### **3 Conclusion**

The Barn is a well-preserved vernacular structure that has developed organically over time in response to varying demands and uses. Its development probably occurred over a relatively short period of time between the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries which saw the construction of the three main phases of the building that are evident today. Its significance lies in the fact that it is an excellent example of a building style and philosophy that is typically Cape. Farm outbuildings have been subject to misinformed demolition in the past in favour of more spectacular “Cape Dutch Houses.”

### **4 Recommendations**

- Adaptive reuse of the structure is desirable as fabric and joinery is in need of intervention in the short term. Following the success of the refurbishment of the main dwelling house, we would encourage the same philosophy be applied to the Barn. The application of the principals of the Icomos Burra Charter is certainly appropriate as a guideline to further work. A copy of the guideline is included below.
- The importance of keeping documentary records during the alteration or adaptation of the site is important, as this is the only record that there will ever be of past changes. The importance of retaining photographs, video, notes, plans and sketches for future archival purposes cannot be over-emphasised.
- The building is protected by the National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999, which means that plans need to be approved by SAHRA (South African Heritage Resources Agency) or the provincial heritage authority before work commences. In consideration of the current legal impasse that effects the issuing of permits, it is suggested that agreement in principal be obtained from SAHRA.

### **5 References**

Scheffler, H. Undated. Wilde Paarde Kloof 31, Robertson ‘n geskiedenis van versnippering en konsolidasie. Unpublished report repared for GJ Smit.

Oberholzer, AM; Baraitser, M; & Malherbe, W. 1985. The Cape House and Its Interior. An inquiry into the sources of the Cape Architecture and a survey of built-in early Cape domestic woodwork. Stellenbosch Museum.

SG 591/1838.

## Guiding Principles of the Burra Charter

*The Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance* (the Burra Charter) provides the guiding philosophy for the care of important places. The Burra Charter defines the basic principles and procedures to be observed in the conservation of important places. The principles and procedures can be applied to places including buildings, sites, areas, structures, ruins, archaeological sites and landscapes modified by human activity.

The following principles are in part derived from the Burra Charter (revision November 1999). These principles underpin the guidelines for the assessment of a heritage place. The specific guidelines for the assessment of heritage places provide more solid direction on how to apply the general guiding principles.

**Care for significant fabric** Changes to heritage places should not distort the physical evidence, or other evidence, it provides. Change should not diminish, destroy or conceal significant fabric (the elements, components and physical material that make up the place). Care for significant fabric requires a cautious approach of changing as much as necessary but as little as possible.

**Reversible alterations** If alterations to fabric are permitted they should be reversible. Reversible alterations should be considered temporary and should not prevent future conservation action.

**Distinguishing new from old** Changes to buildings, areas and heritage places that falsify the evidence of their history should be avoided. Buildings and structures should not nostalgically create a false impression or interpretation of age or a style. Decorative detail or additions to heritage places should clearly show that they are new elements to the heritage place. To avoid any confusion, the distinction between old and new fabric should be distinguishable. While being sympathetic and respecting original fabric, the detail of new work should, on close observation or through additional interpretation, be identifiable from the old fabric.

**Sympathetic changes** Generally, new work in a heritage place should be sympathetic to the features of importance in terms of character and context. Matters such as siting, size, height, setback, materials, form, and colours are all important considerations when undertaking new work in heritage places.

**Respecting earlier changes** Changes to a heritage place over time offer evidence of its historical development and may have acquired their own significance. Emphasis should not be placed on one period of a place's development at the expense of others unless that period is much more significant.

**Retaining context** The context or setting of a place is often an important part of its significance. Changes to the visual setting and other relationships of a place should be sympathetic to its character and appearance.

**Compatible uses** A historic place should preferably continue to be used for the purposes for which it was designed or for a use with which it has had a long association. Otherwise a compatible use should be found which requires minimal alteration to the fabric of the place.

**Above all - Understand Significance** An understanding of what is significant about the place, how significant it is, why it is significant and which are the significant components should underpin any conservation or development work. This information should be encapsulated in a Statement of Significance which should exist for most places that are subject to the Heritage Overlay control. Some early listings may not have a detailed or adequate Statement of Significance. Where no analysis of significance has been undertaken, further research may be necessary to establish the importance of the place and to be able to plan any development or works. Major development of places of heritage significance may first benefit from a Conservation Management Plan prepared by a qualified heritage practitioner in accordance with the Guidelines to the Burra Charter.

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## **6 APPENDIX A**

**WILDE PAARDE KLOOF, Farm 31 Robertson**

**A history of deductions and amalgamations**

Helena Scheffler [1990] (Summarised by Antonia Malan)

## Property ownership

- Two farms with same name: nos. 31 and 33. Also confusion between names WP kloof and WP fontijn. WPK associated with ownership of Roode Berg.
- Associated with two family names - le Roux and van Zyl.
- First farming activities on WPK probably in first half of 18<sup>th</sup> century, though no records remain.
- Landbouwer Stephanus Becker, 1 April 1744, lease on “De Wilde paarde fontijn aan de over zijde cvan de Cogmans Cloof” (CA RLR 11/1: 10). But Becker’s land marked on map CA M3/1652, not in this location.
- 14 October 1772, Carl Thunberg visits ‘Clas Vogt’s Rivier’ and mentions owner le Roux (Thunberg 1795: 166). In 1778 William Paterson passed through area (Forbes 1965: 84).
- In 1795 29-year old Gideon van Zijl and his wife Maria Elizabeth Bantjes living at Wilde Paarde Kloof (CA MOOC6/9/86: 5936). Their firstborn, Jacobus Albertus, baptised in September 1795.
- In 1803 Maria Bantjes dies, leaving husband and four children: Jacobus Albertus (8 years), Hendrina Petronella (6), Zacharia Geertruyda (4) and Jan Matthys Christiaan (2).
- Jacobus Albertus van Zyl I marries Frederika Johanna van der Vijver and they produce 11 children: six sons and five daughters (CA MOOC6/9/86: 5936).
- Loan place WPK (farm no.33) granted on 1 November 1838 to Jacobus Albertus van Zijl I and Jacobus Albertus le Roux I (Swel.Q 13 part I: 28); 1 645 mo 272 sr in extent. Further 305 mo 146 sr of state land plus another stuk. Total of 1 950 mo 418 sr. Diagram 591/1838.
- JAvZ’s vennoot JAleR was 8 years younger; le Roux married sister of Johanna vd Vijver- thus they were also brothers-in-law. Le Roux’s mother was Jacoba Alberta van Zyl.
- JA le Roux and Judith Aletta van dre Vijver had 7 children, four daughters and three sons, one of whom was called Jacobus Albertus. JAleR I died on 11 January 1895 aged 91 on Wilde Paarde Kloof at the house of his daughter, Margaretha Cecilia.
- JA le Roux I passed farming responsibilities to son Frederick Johannes (MOOC6/9/336: 117), remaining active in money lending (MOOC13/1/753: 1). His brother JA le Roux II had 4 children, including a son JA III.
- In 1862 two portions were deducted, leaving as remainder the farm WPK no.33.
- 8 September 1882 F.J. le Roux and four others owned the farm, 192 mo 209 sr in extent.
- 1890 (CA) M/31652 Divisional Map of Robertson.
- FJleR dies in 1917 and only then, 14 September 1917, does the land get divided in four: Jacobus Albertus van Zyl le Roux, Frederick Jacobus Johannes le Roux, Martha Elizabeth Minnaar, and Judith Aletta le Roux.
- In 1919 reduced to two owners - each with half - Gabriel Jacobus Minaar and Frederick JJ le Roux.
- 16 April 1930 FJJ’s half passes to Johannes Petrus Cronje van Zyl; 26 August 1931 GJM’s half passes to Johan David Smit (dob 27/9/1888).

- 22 July 1943 JPC's half to Jan Tielman Brits, Hans Jacob Brits & George Frederick Brits.
- Farm no.31 on 22 December 1952 consisted of nos. 3 and 4 marked on plan. 22 December 1952, rem. WPK (no.33), ptn of Roode Berg, and WPK A belonged to JD Smit and the Brits's (Robertson Farm Register Vol.1: 33/1 & 33/2). JD Smit had 321.6347 mo = Gedeelte 1 van WPK A (no.2 on plan). 30 mo deducted to Arnold Millen; 27 April 1953 rest passed to son Gabriel Johannes Smit (Robertson Farm Register Vol.1: 31/1/1).
- The Brits's portion was 438.4407 mo - marked as Restant WPK A (no.1 on plan). 2 November 1966 Jan Tielman Brits gives his portion to Hans Jacob Brits; in 1972 George also hands over his portion to Hans.
- 14 October 1977, at Hans Brits's death, whole farm WPK A bought by Gabriel Johannes Smit.

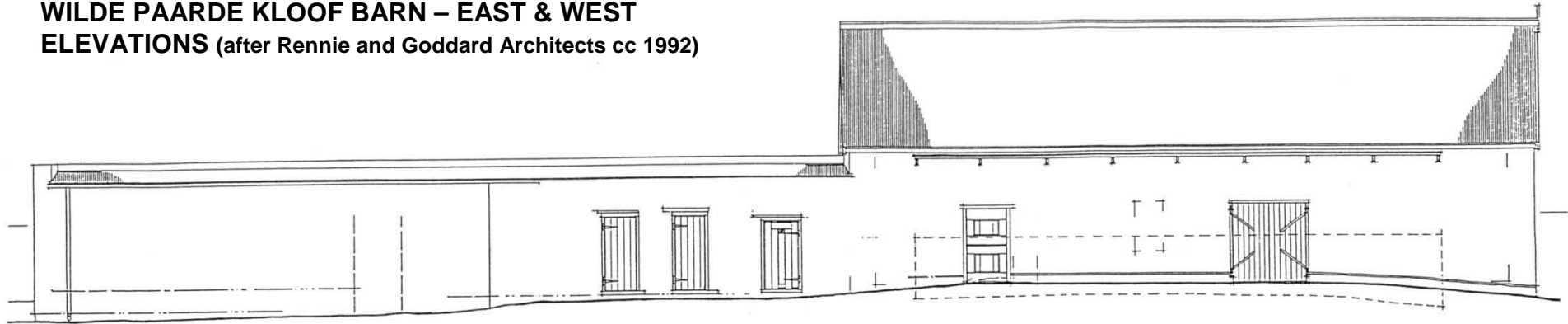
#### The buildings on WPK

- The two old buildings on Dr Smith's farm stand on the original WPK.
- No evidence for when they were built, but on 1838 diagram there are 5 structures marked (Swel.Q 13 part I: 28).
- There are photos of some interior carpentry in Obholster et al (1985 figs. 1400, 1052, 1334 & 1335).

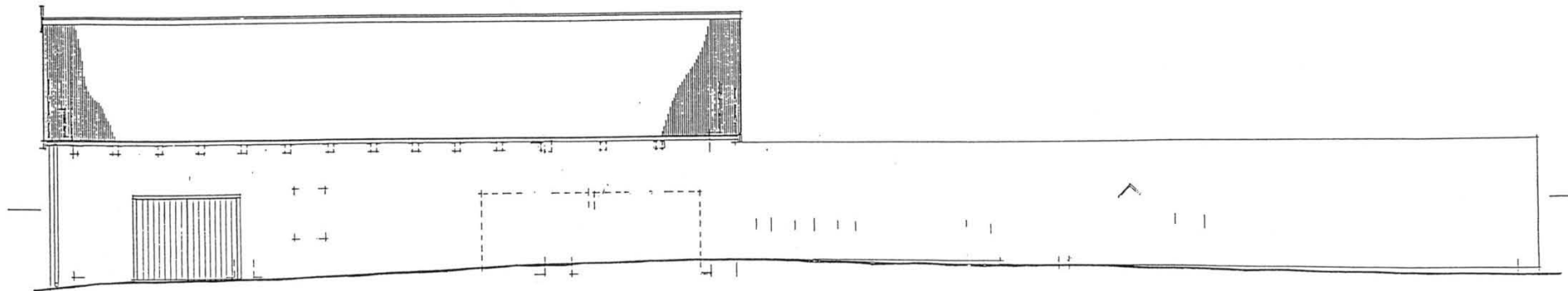
## **7 APPENDIX B**

Annotated diagrams based on measured drawings by Rennie and Goddard Architects cc 1992

**WILDE PAARDE KLOOF BARN – EAST & WEST  
ELEVATIONS** (after Rennie and Goddard Architects cc 1992)

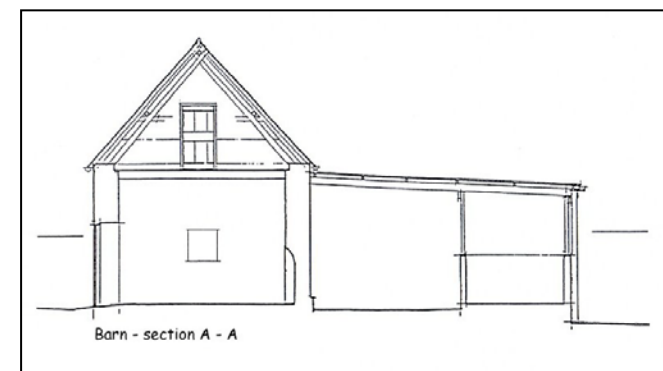
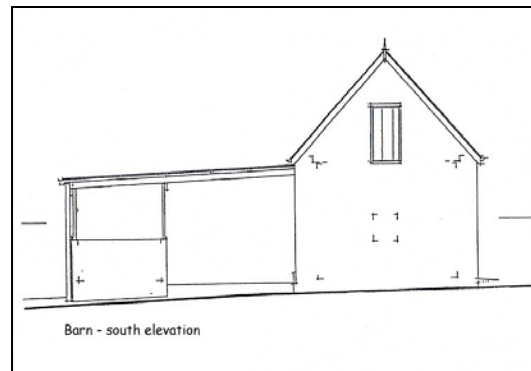
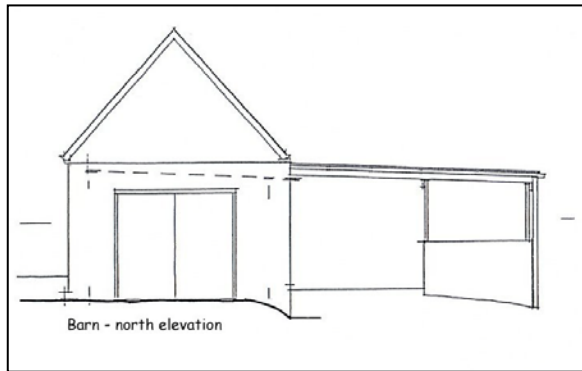


Barn - west elevation



Barn - east elevation

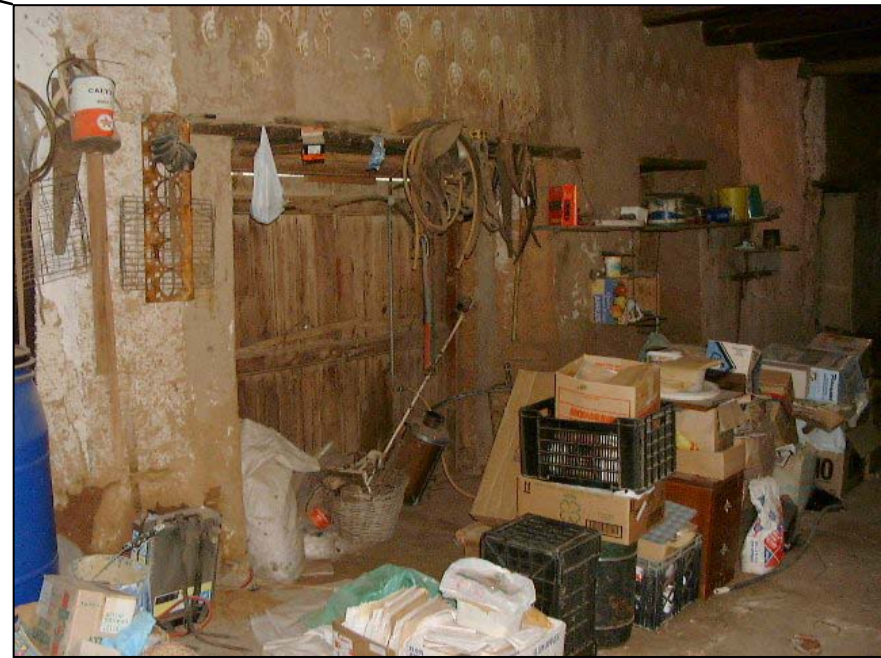
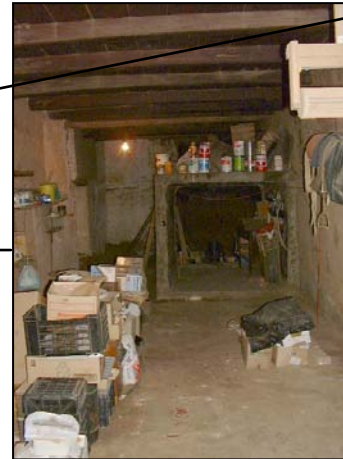
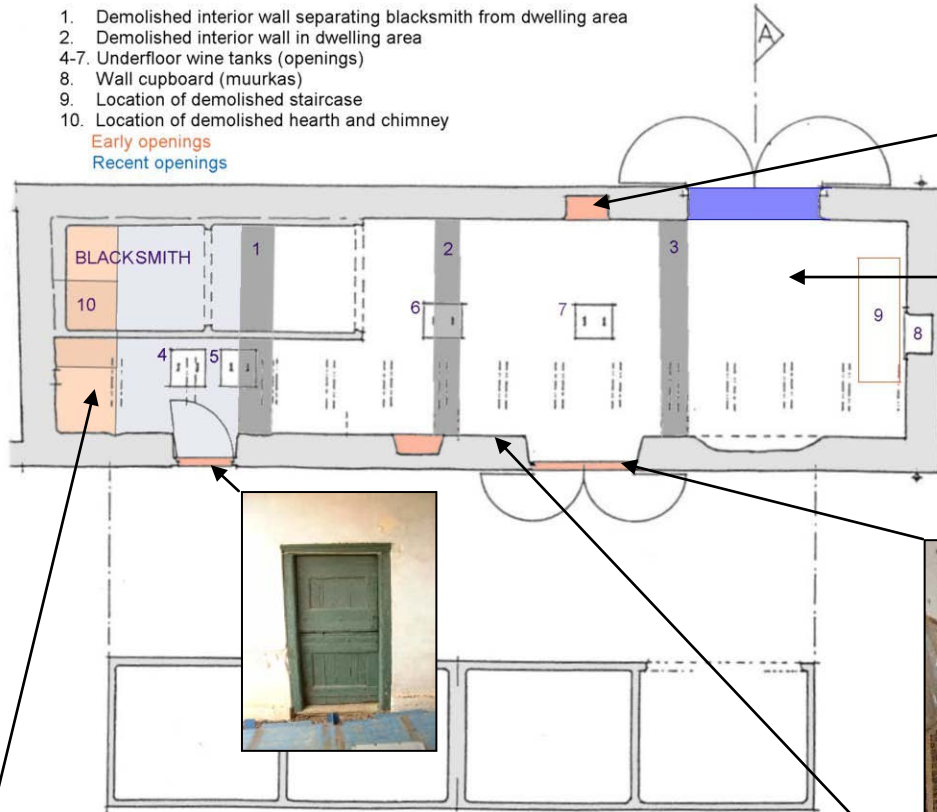






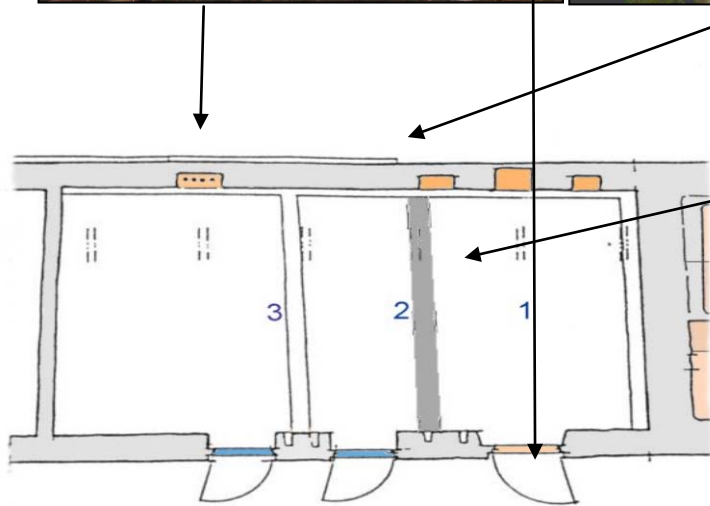
1. Demolished interior wall separating blacksmith from dwelling area
2. Demolished interior wall in dwelling area
- 4-7. Underfloor wine tanks (openings)
8. Wall cupboard (muurkas)
9. Location of demolished staircase
10. Location of demolished hearth and chimney

Early openings  
Recent openings



WILDE PAARDE KLOOF BARN – PHASE 1



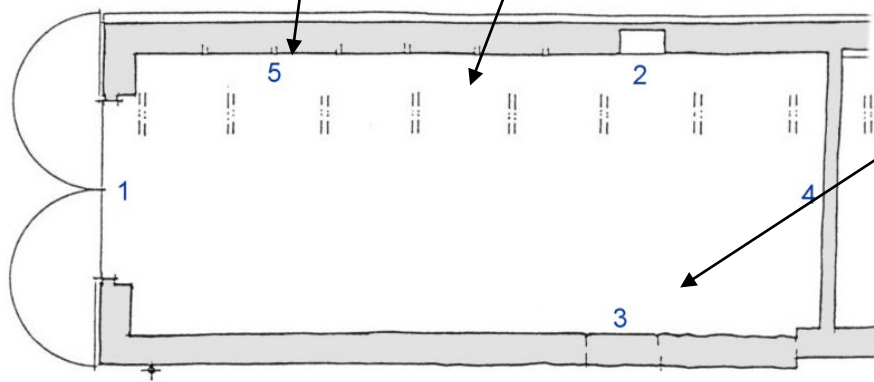


- 1 Originally a room separated by a wall (since demolished)
- 2 Demolished wall replaced by low stone wall and feed trough
- 3 Low stone wall
- Early openings
- Recent openings



**WILDE PAARDE KLOOF BARN – PHASE 2**





- 1 Original opening of wagon shed
- 2 Bricked up opening
- 3 Bricked up opening
- 4 Rear wall rebuilt with modern concrete blocks
- 5 Beam slots at roof level indicate that wall on west side was lowered to accommodate flat corrugated roof
- 5 Beam slots at waist level indicate frame work - possibly storage racks or machinery



**WILDE PAARDE KLOOF – BARN PHASE 3**