

Annexure B

ASSESSEMENT OF THE HERITAGE POTENTIAL OF THE BUILDINGS OF BABERTON TOWN, UMJINDI MUNICIPALITY, MPUMALANGA



Figure 01. The Art Deco cinema house in Baberton is one of the few remaining in South Africa.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SIDNEY MILLER'.

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1. DEFINITION

The broad generic term *Cultural Heritage Resources* refers to any physical and spiritual property associated with past and present human use or occupation of the environment, cultural activities and history. The term includes sites, structures, places, natural features and material of palaeontological, archaeological, historical, aesthetic, scientific, architectural, religious, symbolic or traditional importance to specific individuals or groups, traditional systems of cultural practice, belief or social interaction.

2. PROTECTED SITES IN TERMS OF THE NATIONAL HERITAGE ACT, Act. NO. 25 OF 1999

The following are the most important sites and objects protected by the National Heritage Act:

- a. Structures or parts of structures older than 60 years
- b. Archaeological sites and objects
- c. Palaeontological sites
- d. Meteorites
- e. Ship wrecks
- f. Burial grounds
- g. Graves of victims of conflict
- h. Public monuments and memorials
- i. Structures, places and objects protected through the publication of notices in the Gazette and Provincial Gazette
- j. Any other places or object which are considered to be of interest or of historical or cultural significance
- k. Geological sites of scientific or cultural importance
- l. Sites of significance relating to the history of slavery in South Africa
- m. Objects to which oral traditions are attached
- n. Sites of cultural significance or other value to a community or pattern of South African history

3. METHODOLOGY

Relevant maps and old documents on the town were studied. The town was visited and over a period of two days some of the buildings of the town was photographed and classified.

The main aim of the study was to assess the general cultural heritage status of the town of Baberton, without doing a full scale documentation of all buildings and sites with detail second phase studies of the specifics of the buildings or sites.

For the purpose of this assessment objects such as furniture, etc. was not taken into account. Similarly archaeological sites and natural history sites were not taken into account, as this would have bulked the report beyond its present purpose as to simply appraise Barberton's general heritage status.

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5. BACKGROUND

Baberton is the main town in the Umjinji Municipality in Mpumalanga, South Africa. Its climate is typical of the Low-Veldt, with an average of 750 mm rainfall per year and summer and winter temperatures of 28 and 17 degrees centigrade respectively.¹ Originally the area was nearly uninhabitable in summer months owing to malaria and sleeping sickness. This has been brought under control during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The area is geologically linked to the SWAZI SUPERGROUP that is here divided into the Onverwacht, Figtree, and Moodies igneous rock complex series.² Some of the oldest rock formations in the world is found in the Barberton Highlands, its formation dating to approximately 3,8 billion years ago. In the general area there may be found gold, pyrite, verdite, asbestos, magnesite and talk. Two meteorite impact events of over 3 billion years ago are also unique to this area.³

Botanically Baberton is not specifically unique in Southern Africa, but it is renowned for the Baberton Daisy (*Gerbera jamesonii Bolus ex Hook*) and is also known to house both the tallest and shortest *Aloe* species in Southern Africa.

The general area has also been well populated by Homo Sapiens, from the Stone Age through all periods of the Iron Age, culminating with the settlement of the Swazi Later Iron Age Group. These finally conquered the area late in the eighteenth century after playing musical chairs with other groups such as the Pedi and the Ndebele.

Europeans 'discovered' gold in the region during the 1870's and one Thomas McLachlan is reputed to be the first to report the precious metal. The typical 'gold rush' of the period followed involving several 'characters' of the time such as *French Bob*⁴

This gold discovery has to be seen in context against discoveries elsewhere in Southern Africa. Between the ninth and sixteenth centuries before this discovery, gold was exported from the 'Transvaal' and 'Zimbabwe' regions to the Near East and India by traders from those parts. For some time between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Portuguese also capitalised marginally on the same source, after which time the treasure trove of South Africa remained unlocked. The Z.A.R, the Boer Republic were made aware of the possibilities of the minerals and metals that was laying dormant under the placid plains and rolling hills of the country by one Carl Mauch between the 1860's and the 1870's. Owing to their religion, and their fear that Britain may get involved with the extraction of the wealth in the earth the Boers forced Mauch to keep quiet. First gold was found on limited scale at Eersteling, Magaliesburg, Pilgrimsrest and Selati, and then only at Baberton. But all these finds were nothing compared to what was waiting under the cold High-Veldt of the Witwatersrand. For over 130 years of mining of the precious yellow metal since its discovery, the end is still not in sight.

¹ Bornman 2007, page 4

² Bornman 2007, page 5

³ Bornman 2007, page 6

⁴ B. Chomse

From the above it is therefore clear that the gold mining of Baberton did not have a big influence in the gold mining history of South Africa. The answer is to be found elsewhere.

The founding of Baberton is attributed to a letter dated 21st June 1884 written by Graham Barber to the State Secretary of the Z.A.R. where he reported the discovery of gold officially. On reaction to this, the Gold Commissioner from Lydenburg, David Wilson visited the site on 24th July 1884 and confirmed the discovery. A bottle of Gin was used to christen the reef, and the place was named Baberton, after the brothers bearing that name.

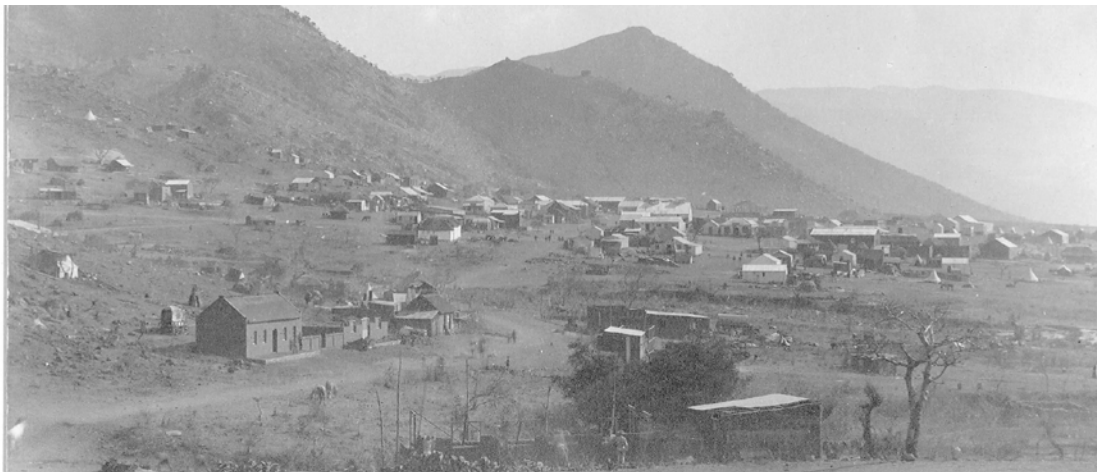


Figure 02. Early Baberton showing a collection of shanties, tents and wagons. The photograph is taken from the east looking along De Villiers Street towards the west. (Baberton museum photo number 06/1579)

In the beginning the ‘Town’ consisted of nothing but tents wagons, but pretty soon grass and reed, as well as corrugated iron structures of all purposes started to spring up serving as shelter and places of entertainment.

In due course Streets and Erven were identified, but as there was no ‘original’ town plan Barberton’s unruly mining community were responsible for the town’s irregular ‘horseshoe’ shape. For some unknown reason the two residential sections to the east and the west of the central business district was named Berea and Belgravia respectively⁵.

As with all boom towns based on gold, most of the prospectors worked hard and also played hard. Very few saved their hard earned gold dust, and most of this money made its way into the providers of liquor, food shelter, clothes, transport and such necessities.

This again were used to build buildings that were both meant to serve the mining community, and within a few years a large number of permanent buildings were erected that was directly associated with the mining processes.

⁵ Bornman 2007, page 32

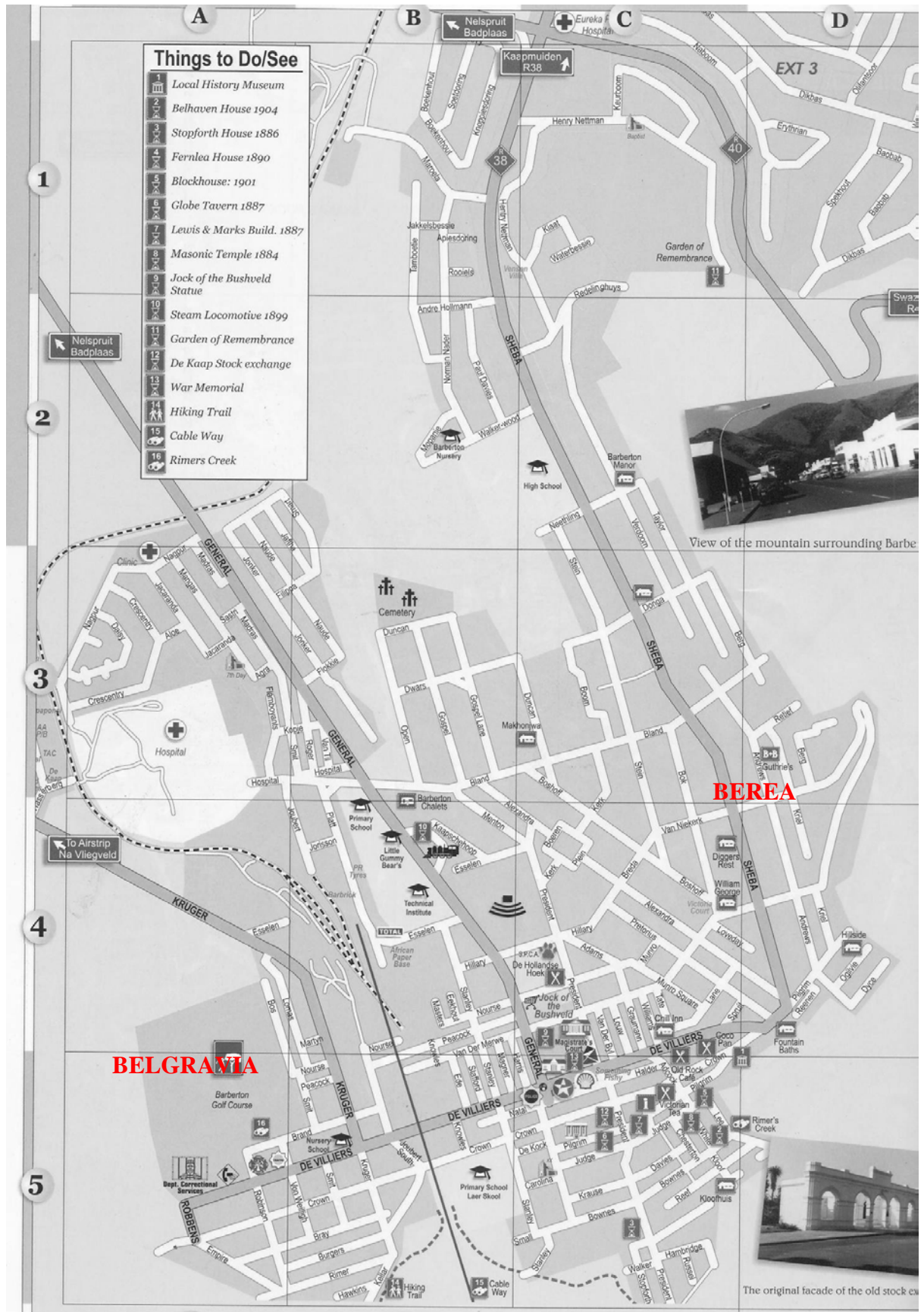


Figure 03. Map taken from the 4th edition of the South Africa Touring Atlas published by Map Graphix.

As with all 'rushes' whether for gold or diamonds it never took long for bigger companies to buy out the individual prospectors and the same happened at Baberton. To this reality the First Stock Exchange in the Transvaal's roofless portico is still reminiscent in Pilgrims Street in Baberton. This again, with the discovery of gold on the Witwaters Rand saw the loss of large numbers of inhabitants of the town.

As can be imagined, transport to and fro from Baberton was a nightmare during the early years. Wagons had to cross mountains and rivers, and the dreaded 'chute' were the headache of many travellers. Fortunately the completion of the Komatipoort Nelspruit railway line in 1892 resulted in Baberton being connected with the rest of South Africa in April 1896⁶. This again resulted in the declaration of the innings of the ox-wagon in the area, again losing large numbers of people frequenting the area from an employment point of view.

The outbreak of the South African War of 1899 to 1902 saw a new role for Baberton, as the British utilised the area where the golf course is situated today as a camp to confine Boer women and children



Figure 4. Baberton with the military and Burgher camps in the background. ((Baberton museum photo number 06/534/3))

After the resuming of normalities of life during the period of Unification the infantile agricultural industry founded by Todd, Caldwell, Exeall, Sinclair and others⁷ of the area grew, from strength to strength and became the new backbone of the Barberton economy. During the initial period of this era few buildings saw the light in the town as wealth from agriculture takes more time to realise in architecture. This growth was

⁶ Bornman 2007, page 59

⁷ Bornman 2007, page 54

partially inhibited with the advent of the first World War between 1919 and 1916, but the large number of Art Deco buildings in the town reflects the wealth created by the agricultural sector between the two world wars.

The growth of Baberton levelled out in the period of the Second World War owing to the obvious maximisation of agricultural income from the region.



Figure 5. Baberton circa 1911 In this photograph many of the buildings surviving today can be identified. (Baberton museum photo number 06/534/3)

The advent of the period dominated by Afrikaner political leadership in 1948 again had an influence in the growth of Baberton, especially in the northern part of the town. This was ascribed to the urbanisation of the people of South Africa, as well as a new period of population growth. Many of these buildings are classics from the 1960's that will all be under the protection of Act 25 of 1999 within the next ten year.

The final expansion of the Baberton town lands over the last two decades is related to business ventures such as malls, motorcar display centres and the housing schemes of the New South African Government that provide accommodation for the poorer section of the population.

6. OLD AND NEW LEGISLATION.

It is important to note the difference between Heritage Legislation from the past and the present, as well as the approach to conservation and preservation.

During the period that was under the legal umbrella of legislation published in 1968 buildings, objects and sites were all collected under the term 'National Monument', and the people responsible for these declarations were also not well defined. This resulted in a monuments list of several thousand and, in a way, many buildings and sites that were in fact not of 'National Importance' were declared, and many other buildings and sites that were not considered 'important' were neglected.

Under the new system all buildings and sites older than sixty years are protected by Act 25 of 1999. Buildings and sites are also individually evaluated if they are in fact either of Local, Provincial or National Importance.

If this is applied to Baberton at present, then one may find it difficult to classify any building or site in the town as of National Importance. Similarly one may only find the old Stock Exchange portico and the remaining blockhouse as of Provincial Importance, with all the other buildings as of local Importance.

What is of special importance in Baberton is the exceptional blend of buildings and sites that have been preserved into the twenty-first century with good examples from all periods preserved and in daily use.

7. COMMENTS AND RESULTS

The town of Baberton in the Umjindi Municipality is one of the towns located in the area previously known as the 'Transvaal'. As the towns of this area have a shared history relating to white farmer colonisation, the formation of the Z.A.R. the wars with the indigenous peoples, the British annexation, Gold, The South African War, Unification, the two World Wars and the Apartheid era, it is then practical to relate the states of preservation of their different heritage estates. A short list of these towns is:

Louis Trichardt	Pietersburg	Middleburg
Potgietersrust	Naboomspruit	Carolina
Nylstroom	Thabazimbi	Ventersdorp
Rustenburg	Lydenburg	Mafekeng
Nelspruit	Ermeloo	Volkswater
Zeerust	Warmbad	Belfast
Ellisras	Brits	Swartruggens

It is then clear that compared to the above list Baberton appears to have been constantly influenced by all aspects of the historical events of the region⁸, and this reflects in all aspects of its architecture.

From the provisional survey it appears that there are possibly more than 50 % of the buildings utilised in Baberton will fall directly under the protection of Act 25 of 1999⁹, while at least another 10 to 15 % will fall in the grey zone of 50 years that will be in contention within the next decade¹⁰.

This is then the essence of the heritage estate of Baberton:- It does not have a small and disseminated collection of buildings and sites of National importance, but rather a large, integrated and bonded, collection of buildings of mainly Local importance. This collection is then also unique in its composition if compared to other similar towns. Because of this unique nature Baberton as a whole can be attributed a higher status on the conservation agenda of South Africa.

It is because of this status then that the overall approach to the conservation of individual buildings and sites in Baberton should be approached with even more care than what legislation requires for individual buildings and sites. What is important is

⁸ Compare comments in W.D.Curror, revised edition 2002

⁹ The 60 year cover protection.

¹⁰ It is now generally agreed that there are grey zones in the Act that allow the extension of its protection to buildings younger than sixty years.

that new development should not negatively impact on the historic setting and ambiance of the town and specific historic sites.

7. LIMITED PHOTO DOCUMENTATION OF BARBERTON BUILDINGS.

7.1 A representative example of the buildings from the period 1890 TO 1910.



Figure 6. Buildings from the period 1890 TO 1910.



Figure 7. Buildings from the period 1890 TO 1910.



Figure 8. Buildings from the period 1890 TO 1910.



Figure 8. Buildings from the period 1890 TO 1910.

7.2 A representative example of the buildings from the period 1910 to 1930.



Figure 10. Buildings from the period 1910 to 1930.



Figure 11. Buildings from the period 1910 to 1930.



Figure 12. Buildings from the period 1910 to 1930.



Figure 13. Buildings from the period 1910 to 1930.

7.3 A representative example of the buildings from the period 1930 to 1950.



Figure 14. Buildings from the period 1930 to 1950.



Figure 15. Buildings from the period 1930 to 1950.



Figure 16. Buildings from the period 1930 to 1950.



Figure 17. Buildings from the period 1930 to 1950.



Figure 18. Buildings from the period 1930 to 1950.

7.4 A representative example of the buildings from the period 1950 to 1960.



Figure 19. Buildings from the period 1950 to 1960.



Figure 20. Buildings from the period 1950 to 1960.



Figure 21. Buildings from the period 1950 to 1960.



Figure 22. Buildings from the period 1950 to 1960.

7.5 A representative example of the buildings from the period post 1960.



Figure 23. Buildings from the period post 1960.



Figure 24. Buildings from the period post 1960.



Figure 25. Buildings from the period post 1960.



Figure 26. Buildings from the period post 1960.

9. REFERENCES

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Act 25 of 1999, The National Heritage Act. Government Gazette 2000