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Giovanni Pietro, model of  
the Cathedral, late 15th century.

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# Sephton Manor — the making of a type

Schalk le Roux and Roger Fisher,  
Pretoria School of Architecture

This essay attempts to determine the significant contributions to the making of a type, that is the fortified frontier farmstead, in the annals of South African architectural history. It is associated with a specific time — the C19-, place — the Eastern Cape — and historical episode — British colonial occupation of and expansion in South Africa. The essay is considered important in that it helps isolate and determine those factors, whether through tradition or by design, which influence the evolution of architectural type. In it an etymological link between “kraal” and “coral tree” is proposed, a conjectural reconstruction of Sephton Manor presented, and the importance of associations with the type after the changing of circumstance of its origins in terms of the emblematic and symbolic qualities is speculated.

Note: Some sources quoted in this article contain a vocabulary which is offensive today, yet we feel, in the interest of the accuracy of the context of the historical episode which we attempt to recreate, that they be left unexpurgated.

## Prolegomenon

In 1995 we commemorate the bi-centenary of the First British Occupation of the Cape. Of the buildings forming part of their legacy, the fortified farmhouses of the Eastern Frontier of the Cape are the most charming because of their origins and the simplicity and directness of response to the local circumstances. These were not, however, forms which evolved locally with the passage of time, but rather inventions dependent on the various means available to the Settlers through their military tradition, the role of the popular press and constructed subsequent to industrialization, the prefabrication of building materials, and their global distribution through trade with the colonies.

## Landscape — tradition and tribulation

The landscape of the Eastern Cape evoked in the British who travelled, or were to settle the region, a sense of familiarity and approval:

*The country through which we travelled, though compleatly [sic] in a state of nature, was beautiful in the extreme, much resembling a nobleman's park in England. The ground was covered by the finest grass, interspersed with single trees and clumps of trees in every direction....*<sup>1</sup>

The “nobleman's park” would, of course, be in the “landskip” style of “Capability” Brown, or his successor, Humphrey Repton, where “nature had leaped the fence and all the world become a garden”

John Ayliff<sup>2</sup> (“Harry Hastings”<sup>3</sup>) writes of his journey into the Albany District in 1820:

*The country being most beautiful to look at, fine grass up to the knees, and round patches of bushes, just like a gentleman's park”.*

Two years later George Thompson<sup>4</sup> notes of the location of the Settler, Mr Thornhill, that

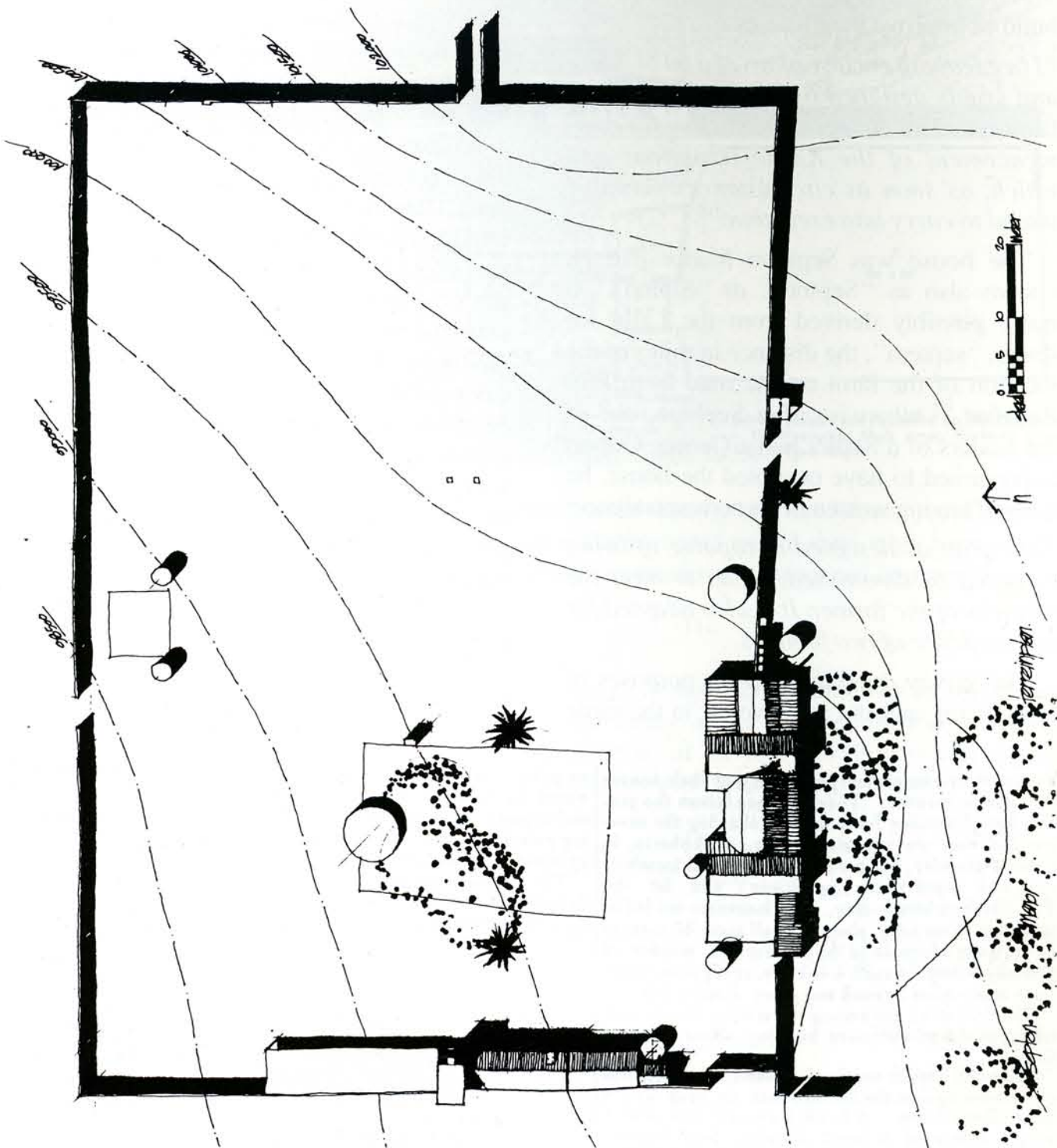


Fig. 1: Site plan after measured drawing, 1986, showing walled kraal, house and outbuildings (P Boshoff, delt).

it “lies in the angle formed by the left bank of the river Kowie with the sea, is one of the most beautiful spots in all Albany, with lawns and copsewoods, laid out by the wanton hand of Nature, that far surpass many a nobleman's park in England.”

Yet this idyll was soon upset by the paradoxical realities of flood and drought.

Philipps<sup>5</sup> was later to complain:

*“We are so dried up that our gardens are perishing ... There surely was never such a dry country known.”*

Zuurveld, as described by Lord Charles Somerset, was a land where a man and his family could be rewarded in “the cultivation of the most fertile soil in the most healthy and temperate climate in the universe, where cold is never so piercing as to congeal water, and where the rays of the sun are never so powerful as to render exposure to them injurious or to impede the usual labours of the field.”<sup>6</sup> He made no mention of the fact that what the government wanted was a human barrier against the Xhosa. The 1820 settlers, some of whom had arrived at Algoa Bay expecting to find apricots growing wild in the thorn bush, soon discovered how brash Somerset's words had been.

The country to the north-east in the Fort Beaufort district was also much harsher than that of Albany:

*“The dreary and desolate country up the Fish River, from Graham's Town to Roode-Wall ... seems indeed to be scarcely susceptible to any improvement. The farms, ‘few and far between’, are mere vee-platzen, or cattle places, without in general the comfort of a garden, or the means of cultivating a single blade of corn.”<sup>7</sup>*

The hardships wrought by Nature on the Settlers was thereafter to be compounded by the unexpected Xhosa invasion of 1835. This was to have repercussions, both on the physical circumstances of the Settlers and, even more far-reaching, on the politics of the region and of the country even today. The immediate response was to recognize a need for securing property through the provision of defensive structures.

## Characteristics of Sephton Manor

In response to an article published in the Graham's Town Journal (to which we shall return), George Gilbert submitted actual proposals for a particular type of fortified homestead whereby frontier farmers could



build or improve their houses.

*"I beg leave to enclose plans of a farm-house and kraals designed by me to be built on a farm near Fort Beaufort, just before the commencement of the Kaffir Irruption; and which, as soon as circumstances permit, I intend to carry into execution."*<sup>8</sup>

The house was Sephton Manor (fig 1), known also as "Septon", or "Sipton",<sup>9</sup> a name possibly derived from the Latin for seven, "septem", the distance in miles of the location of the farm on the road from Fort Beaufort,<sup>10</sup> otherwise after Sephton, one of the leaders of a Settler party. George Gilbert is presumed to have occupied the house, he himself having written in his correspondence:

*"The plan as designed is capable of being extended or diminished, so as to meet the finances of the farmer. It is also adapted for the residence of two families..."*<sup>11</sup>

The survey done in 1850 for purposes of formalizing quitrent is, however, in the name

of William Gilbert, probably a brother. It is possible that more than one family did live there, since a minimum of eight defenders was required to protect the homestead effectively.

To-day the place is in the simple verandahed cottage style of the Victorian era of the latter C19. It has remained uninhabited, although still fully furnished, since the death of the older Mrs Adler, the internal timber shutters of the loopholes making for useful wall cabinets. Mr Morris Adler recalls how his mother stored the objects associated with the celebration of the Passover in the cellar, the previous use of which is unknown.<sup>12</sup> Little by way of the original character as a fortified farmhouse is evident externally since the loopholes of the house itself have been plastered over and a covered verandah added between the bastions, now easily passed off as "stoepkamers".<sup>13</sup> An accretion of rooms have been added to both eastern and western sides thus further camouflaging the once severe lines of the building. Then too the roof,

roofline and gables have all been changed with time.

The area in which the house stands is at the edge of the Karoo, a semi-desert stony and scrub landscape, undulating with bushy riverines, otherwise vast and desolate. In the time neighbours would be separated by vast distances, and the military presence even further away. Yet the now tranquil domesticity in a hostile landscape can readily be contrasted with the description by a contemporary visitor to the Gilbert homestead:

*"Mr Gilbert's house, where we breakfasted, was indeed a curious spectacle. It was more like a fortress than a private dwelling; three acres were enclosed in a strong stone wall; a tower had been built in the middle of the house, armed with three<sup>14</sup> pieces of small cannon, not for ornament, as is sometimes done in England, but for use; stands of arms were in the tower; a wooden barricade before the entrance. It was a melancholy, but yet satisfactory sight: melancholy for the necessity, - satisfactory, for the determined energy which it displayed in him as in several other of our frontier farmers, who are determined, even if their cattle are forced from them, to defend their dwellings."*<sup>15</sup>

It was recorded that:

*"The homestead was one of the most defensible in the district, so seven of us volunteered to remain a few days and protect the property until troops arrived to garrison it as it was a place that should never [have] been abandoned."*<sup>16</sup>

Raiders would be fired upon through the loopholes and raking fire delivered along the walls by means of the towers located at the wall and house. Alexander<sup>17</sup> had recommended a raised pulpit or sentry box in the kraal in the event of the walls being breached. The last line of defence would have been a retreat into the homestead itself, with raking fire offered through the loopholed bastions and covering fire from the tower. It would seem that Sephton Manor survived the war of 1846, The War of the Axe, since only in 1847 was Gilbert forced to abandon Sephton Manor and flee to the nearby Stoneyfields, also a fortified farmhouse in his possession.

Still Sephton Manor must have stood but the Gilberts again forced to flee in 1850, this time to Rietfontein:

*"We proceed on our way to Rietfontein, where we found everything in confusion. Mr Gilbert and his wife had arrived there that evening with but one servant, having left their home Sephton Manor and all it contained to the mercy of the rebels."*<sup>18</sup>

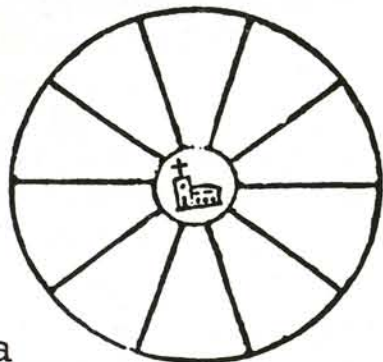
Hermanus, the rebel leader, was joined by the "Kat River Hottentots" in the uprising of the Eighth Frontier War, and were joined by many of the servants of the farmers.

*"The beautiful homestead of Mr Gilbert, might easily have been defended had the servants stayed loyal. As it was, everything which could not be taken away was committed to the flames by the enemy."*<sup>19</sup>

defend their own property by fortifying their houses in a simple manner. They will thus lessen the probability of another Irruption, by showing the savages that they are not slumbering, as hitherto, in fancied security, but are prepared to repel treacherous and unprovoked aggressions; and let the Frontier be where it may, such measures are indispensable to security, since a small party of savages — yet quite adequate to the plunder and murder of a family — may, in such a country, at any time, penetrate many miles beyond any given frontier line.

The following are among the simple, cheap, and ready, modes of defensive building above adverted to:—

After the French acquired Canada, their system of defence against the Indians was an easy and a most effectual one. A fortified church was placed in the centre of a small district, (see diagram subjoined) and from it the farms radiated



When the Indians attacked any part of the location the alarm bell was rung; the settlers immediately repaired to their rallying point—the church; from whence, in a body, they were able to act with effect on the enemy.

For houses already built, (see sketch,) the addition of a porch on the front and back would give a



destructive raking-fire along the principal walls; while the windows of the ground floor in the gables, being blocked up, and one left open above, would enable all parts of the exterior to be defended without exposing the defenders. As houses are now built on the frontier, the inmates are obliged to go outside to fire with any effect, thus exposing themselves to great personal and unnecessary risk.

To secure the roof against the fire-brand is an important point. Thatch ought never to be used on

on posts. In this country cattle grazing in the field would be tolerably secure, if look-out-houses of turf or posts were constructed at different commanding points on a farm, while signals might be made by blowing horns, smoke, &c.

The most economical way for rendering a house defensible is building it on the Spanish plan, that is, of 2 or more stories, (see sketch) the lower are



occupied by horses; access is got to the upper by a wooden stair, which can easily be withdrawn; while a verandah projecting from the first floor gives a vertical fire; thus man and horse are secured under one roof.

In Persia the mills at a distance from the village are each provided with a tower (see sketch) 30 feet high,



(like one of the ancient peel houses on the borders of England and Scotland). Into this the miller and his men retire when the mill is attacked, and from it are able to fire with effect on the assailants. The tower is generally at a little distance in front of the mill.

The plan of the new 'Wellington Barrack' (see sketch) is excellent; for thus every barrack or house



may be made a strong post: between every window is a loop-hole, closed with an inside shutter when not required; a loop holed wall 10 feet high sur-

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Fig. 2: Defensive precedents from around the world published in an article by Alexander in the Grahamstown Journal of 20 August 1835 — a: Central fortified church in Canada, b: fortified porches for existing houses, c: Spanish plan, d: Mill tower, Persia, e: Wellington Barrack.



Merriman,<sup>20</sup> the Christian zealot preacher who did his rounds of the Eastern Frontier on 16 December 1850. He appended his journey as follows:

—This house was sacked and burnt a few days after, not by Kafirs, but by Hotten-

Cory<sup>21</sup> records that when in October of 1851 Colonel Fordyce's 74th Highlanders sacked there (although it is recorded as Gilbert's ruined homestead at Klu-Klu", that the tributary of the Kat on which Sephton Manor lies) they found the farm still a burned ruin. At what time Gilbert re-occupied and restored the dwelling is not certain, although Cory does add in a footnote that: "It is now a military-looking building called Sephton Manor."<sup>23</sup> Cory also mentions that: "This place was enclosed by a high, stone, loop-holed wall and surmounted by a tower."<sup>24</sup>

The question as to whether there was ever a tower attached to the house, as might be deduced from the annotated copy of the Graham's Town Journal, is described by Merriman, and inferred from Cory remains a problem. There still is a tower built into the kraal wall a distance from the house. Is this the original tower to which the various chroniclers refer? It is now only from the measured drawings that one can re-discover the exact initial layout of the house. All the original walls are thicker, some of which might be reconstructed as the base of a tower, although not in the "middle", but to one side of the house. Since they are positioned in line with the surrounding wall, a placement suitable for the tower added to a once annotated copy of the printed illustration (discussed later), the walls could well be the remnant base of such a structure.

Gilbert built Sephton Manor according to the prescripts contained in his letter to the Graham's Town Journal, and so this building can be used to determine the elements which characterize the fortified farmhouse. These are as follows:

- A defensive farmyard wall, loopholed and sometimes with corner bastions or lookout towers
- Lookout towers
- Corner bastions with loopholes attached to the main dwelling
- Loopholed lower-storey walls, shuttered on the inside
- Water well or cistern within the defensive walls

#### Defensive precedents

The building of fortifications and defensive structures are as old as European colonization in South Africa. Only those defences directed against incursion by the native inhabitants will be dealt with here, although there were others, such as the French Lines (known also as the Zonnebloem or Munnik Line, or the *Retrenchment*)<sup>25</sup> to protect the Cape from possible overland attack by the British. Usually the Dutch would have preferred an

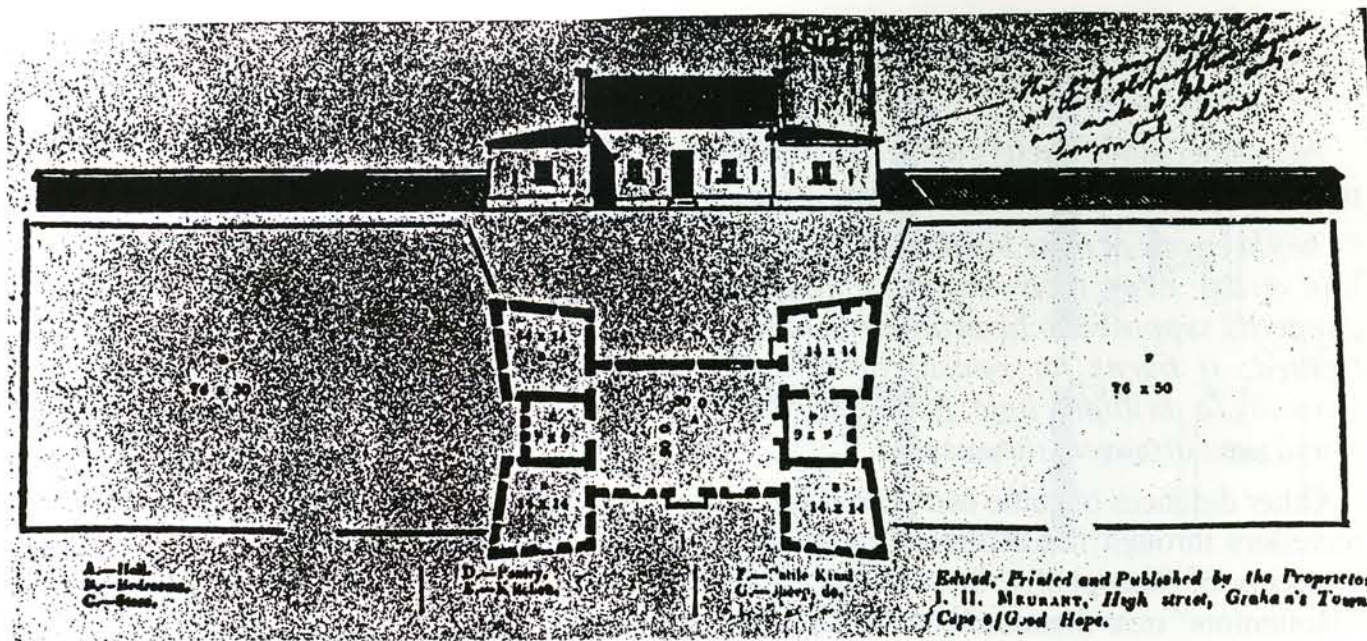


Fig. 3: Copy of Gilbert's drawing in the Grahamstown Journal showing later hand-drawn pencil tower and annotation: "The engraver will take out the slope of this house and make it shew only a horizontal line". It indicates a position for the tower that is borne out by measured drawings and contemporary accounts.

island as a trading post. Initially St Helena was considered but found unsuitable. The first fantastical plan of Commissioner Rijkloff van Goens<sup>26</sup> was that the Cape:

"van't vasteland van Afrika sal konnen afgesneden werden, daarmede wij van alle quellingen soudon bevrijt zijn, die noch daegelijcx subject blijven van de beestachtige inwoonders te vertragen",

an idea never executed, but which has acted as a cultural lobotomy for the collective psyche of the inhabitants of the Peninsula ever since.

The idea of "frontier" rather than "border" with the associated type of sporadic attack by marauding bands or raiding parties determined the nature of the defences. Since the inhabitants were often dependent on their own resources the defences were often of a domestic scale. The first defensive line to the east, erected by van Riebeeck against the Khoi, begun in 1659, was formed from pickets connected in a crescent by planted hedges and erected fences, known as the "*cirskel van den Caapsen omslaght*". Immediately the Liesbeeck Valley became disputed territory and the "*Crommeboom*" was erected, formed from the brushwood, or *creckelbosch*, of the cleared 5km section of forest on the southeastern slopes of Table Mountain. The Liesbeeck itself formed a natural barrier and the remnant portion on the north to the coastline was protected by a palisade fence. It was however Van Riebeeck's intention to replace all this with a planted almond (*Brabejum stellatifolium* l. *proteaceae*) hedge,<sup>27</sup> a task begun in 1660, yet made rapidly redundant by the eastward spread of the Trekboers and by the eighties of the C17 it had become obsolete.<sup>28</sup>

The Trekboers, in settling the hinterland, had adopted their own means of defenses of a domestic scale. Lichtenstein,<sup>29</sup> on his travels in the early C19, observes in the Swartberg:

"two farms, where we first saw a specimen of the precautions which had been taken against the inroads of the Caffres. They con-

sisted in high earth walls, run up all around the house at the distance of five or six feet from it: at the four corners were a sort of towers with port holes for guns, resembling bastions, which gave the whole an appearance of a fortification: the opening opposite the house could be barricaded. Many farmers by this kind of fortification saved their houses. In the way from hence to Algoa bay we found almost all the houses put into a like state of defence."

It is interesting that this observation, quoted by both Kannemeyer<sup>30</sup> and Lewcock,<sup>31</sup> has not led to any further discoveries, either in reports or illustration, or remains of this type of fortified farmhouse, although Lichtenstein does follow his observations with the comment that when the Xhosa:

"did get possession of one of these defended houses, their rage was vented more furiously than upon the free-standing ones."

By the second decade of the C19 the Eastern Frontier stretched as far as the Great Fish River. It had been rumoured that a Portuguese fort had been located at the mouth of the Kowie, and Thompson<sup>32</sup> on his travels tried to locate its ruins. He reports:

"We could perceive no vestiges of the Portuguese fort said to have been erected here in former times. Other travellers, who possessed no means of crossing the river, may possibly have been deceived by some rocks on the left bank, which at a distance certainly have a striking resemblance to the ruins of a fort."

By 1816, three years prior to the 5th Frontier War, pickets had been erected along the Great Fish River northwards from the coast in order to consolidate the defences of the Frontier. The second line of defences were the military posts, farms and river crossings. The securing of kraals was considered of particular importance in the Eastern Frontier:

"Throughout the whole Colony it is highly necessary to secure the herds and flocks at night, in folds and kraals fenced round



generally with a strong hedge of mimosa or other thorny bushes.”<sup>33</sup>

Alexander himself refers to the native techniques of the defences of the kraals:

“They keep one or more bundles of dry mountain grass near their kraals, and when danger is supposed to be near, the bundle is lighted; it burns for considerable time, throwing a brilliant light for many yards round, and discovers the enemy.”<sup>34</sup>

Other defences of cattle had been noted by travellers through the district. Thompson,<sup>35</sup> speaking of Theopholis, the mission to the “Hottentots” near the mouth of the Kasouga, noted:

“This place had been repeatedly attacked ... during the late war, but had been successfully defended by the vigilance and intrepidity of its Hottentot inhabitants; who, for the security of their numerous cattle, (the principal object of Caffer cupidity), had industriously fenced the common kraal of their village with a very strong lofty palisade. The stakes of this fence, consisting chiefly of Caffer boom (*Erythrina caffra*) which grows abundantly struck root, and thrown out flourishing branches, which gave the palisade an uncommon and agreeable effect.”

Campbell<sup>36</sup> notes that at Theopholis, additional to the palisade of coral trees which had each post planted fifty to seventy-five millimeters apart so that fire could be delivered from between them “they have form [sic] a projection from the middle of each side from which they can fire upon such as may advance up to the fortification.”

If we may indulge in the liberty of a botanical and etymological digression, let us consider why the name *Erythrina caffra*? Linnaeus arbitrarily formed *erythrina*, a noun, from the Greek adjective *erythros*, “red”, a bending of his own rules of nomenclature. *Caffra* refers to the fact that the tree is “shrouded in superstition and many Africans will not burn the wood for fear of attracting lightning.”<sup>37</sup> Why the alternative common name “coral tree”? When it is understood that the timber was used by the Khoi to make “kraals”.

“kraal 2. an enclosure for livestock in Southern Africa — [Afrikaans, “enclosure for cattle,” from Portuguese corral, perhaps of Hottentot origin. See also corral]”

“corral 1. an enclosure for confining livestock, against attack during encampment. [Spanish, probably of Hottentot origin. See also kraal.]”<sup>38</sup>

And the etymological link discovered, then the alternative name “coral tree” may well derive from the name used for the tree in the Khoi tongue.<sup>39</sup>

The Settlers then developed their own improvements of the native defences by adding bastions to the kraals.

“This way of building customary here is used because every corner of the kraal can be reached with a gun if they should be raided by Bushmen, and so that wolves and other beasts of prey cannot reach the sheep at night and they are able to protect their animals without endangering their lives.”<sup>40</sup>

After the expulsion of the Xhosa from the Zuurveld, Graham set out with a view to establishing “such a system of defence as

shall prevent a recurrence of the innumerable murders and thefts...” His plan was to set up a network of fortified positions all along the frontier, with constant patrols, and to this end he decided on thirty posts where troops were to be permanently stationed.... deep into the newly-won territory, groups of as few as ten men... were shown a spot in the bare veld and told to construct a fort, either with timber palisades or a breastwork of earth. A typical post was described as a collection of huts “surrounded by a mud wall and a ditch. The wall had loopholes, and small bastions at the angles, sufficient to resist any attack...”<sup>40</sup>

All undergrowth in the vicinity of posts was to be cleared away.<sup>41</sup>

The Xhosa were readily repulsed when attacking properly fortified posts, so that their most successful offensives were not directed against the troops garrisoned there but against the isolated homesteads.<sup>42</sup> The settler farmers were therefore drawn into the defensive system merely by being the target of attack, and hence the requirements of having to fortify the farmsteads. With the outbreak of the hostilities of 1835 the nature of these defences had to be more conventionally military since the indigenous tribes had also acquired firearms, and had used them in their attacks.

Did the experiences of the recent Napoleonic wars, and specifically the provision of defensive structures, assist in meeting the circumstances at the Cape?

#### Military traditions

Captain (later Sir) JE Alexander, the author of the article published in the *Graham's Town Journal*, epitomizes the breadth of experience upon which a professional soldier could draw and on which the injunctions in his article are founded. It is interesting to note that Alexander himself was a Scotsman, of Clackmannanshire,<sup>43</sup> which is some one hundred and fifty kilometers from the English border. The similarities in the history of the two regions, namely the border region of England and Scotland and that of the Eastern Frontier of the Cape had not escaped the notice of Godlonton:<sup>44</sup>

“Numerous frontier forays were continually taking place, very much resembling in character the border maraudings which figure so conspicuously in the annals of Scotland and the north of England.”

And so the aside, “like one of the ancient peel houses on the borders of England and Scotland” in Alexander’s article.<sup>45</sup>

Alexander, on his arrival at the Frontier, was already widely travelled through previous postings, which explains the precedents to which he refers in his article. He had seen active service in the Burman War (1824) — “As in India, hedges of aloes and prickly pears might be introduced here...”, in the Persian army in the war against Russia (1826) — “in Persia the mills at a distance from the village are each provided with a tower ... 30 feet high”, the Russian-Turkish war in the Balkan (1829) — “The Cossack look-out houses on

## ON THE MEANS OF DEFENDING FARM HOUSES

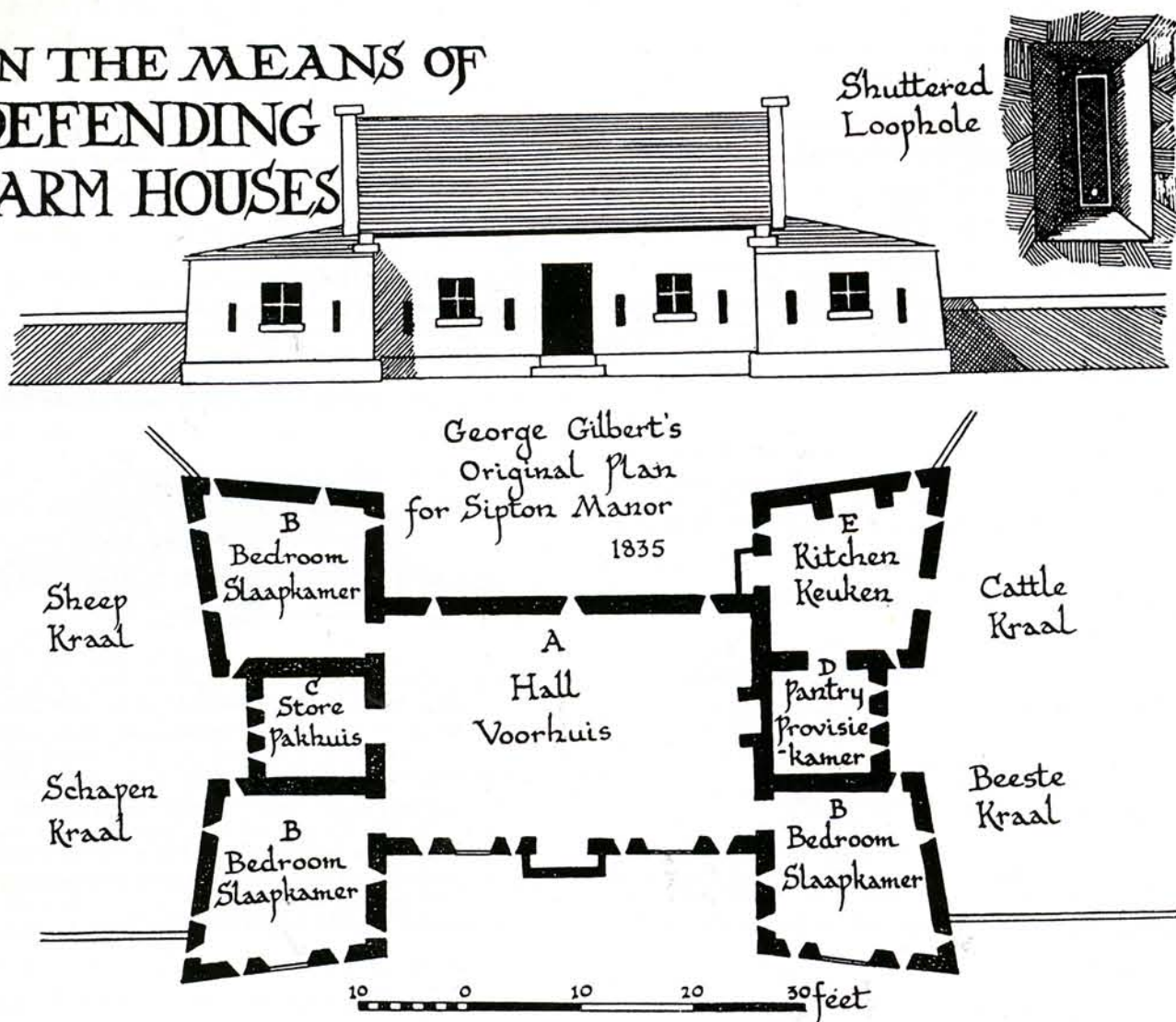


Fig. 4: James Walton's drawing after print in the *Grahamstown Journal*.



the north side of the Caucasus, to observe the approach of an enemy during the day, are merely platforms raised on posts", the Muegelite war in Portugal (1833-4) — "The most economical way of rendering a house defensible is building it on the Spanish plan". He had also visited the Americas and studied the Essequibo — "After the French acquired Canada, their system of defence against the Indians was an easy and most effectual one".<sup>46</sup>

Jooste<sup>47</sup> has touched on the issue of the similarity in construction of defences at the Eastern Cape, particularly the peripheral walls and loopholes. He cites the instruction in the "Aide Memoir of a British Soldier" (not found in his bibliography):

*The interior opening of the loophole can be of the same form in both these conditions [horizontal or vertical], for a man to use his musket conveniently; it should not be less than 2 feet [600mm] wide and 1 foot six inches [450mm] high."*

There is also the "Wellington Barrack" to which Alexander refers which "is excellent; for thus every barrack or house may be made a strong post: between every window is a loop-hole, closed with an inside shutter when not require; a loop holed wall 10 feet high surrounds the yard, with towers at the angles, its line so broken as to give a flanking fire. Firing from a window exposes the person; while loop holes between the windows secure the defenders."

This was obviously of seminal importance for the prototype which Gilbert evolved and we should like to discover more about it.

A study of the military instruction and practice of British forces, both at war and in the Colonies might broaden an understanding of the evolution of fortifications in the Eastern Cape. Was the expertise of the military, or a limited number of skilled builder/architects the reason for a certain uniformity in the defensive designs of the fortified farmsteads?

#### Labourers and mechanics'

Who were the artisans in the Eastern Cape and with which circumstances were they familiar?

Many of the immigrants were selected for their specific skills. The skills of the craftsman were under threat from the rapid industrialization occurring in Britain compounded by the return of troops from the Napoleonic Wars, the same circumstances which had created rising unemployment and thus emigrants seeking opportunities in the colonies.

Moodie, in 1817 had already brought out an immigrant party of "labourers and mechanics":

*who speedily dispersed themselves throughout the Colony; and who, although weakened [sic] by a severe drawback upon the profits of their labour, on account of their passage, ...have, in general, not only cleared that large sum, but for the most part established themselves in comfort; and not a few have acquired property. In various parts*

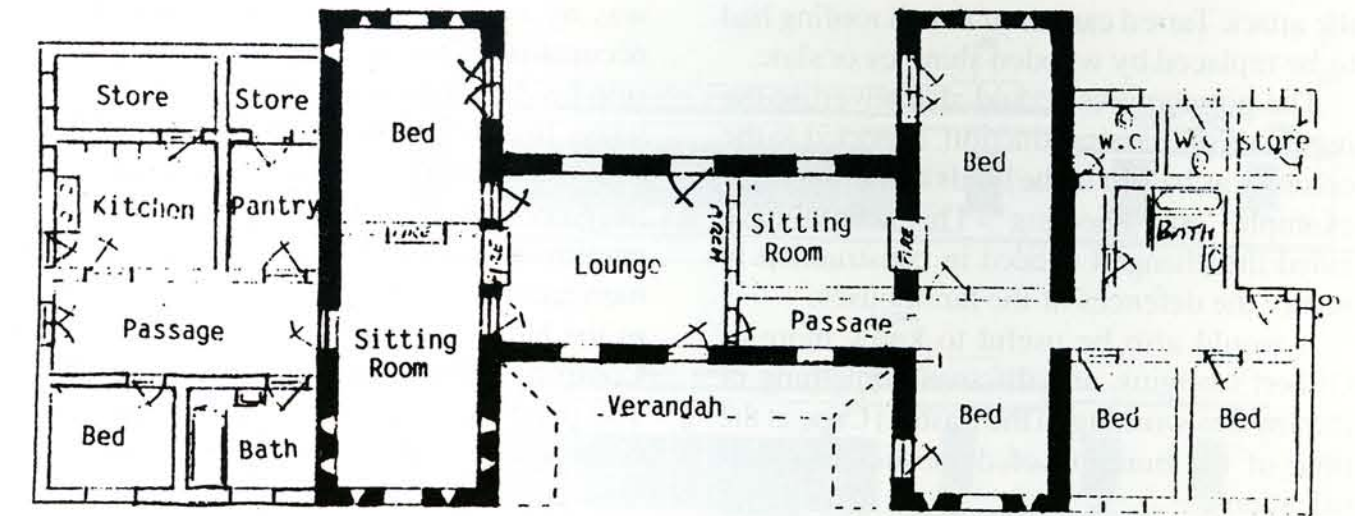


Fig. 5: "Measured" drawing, 1985, from Newsletter of the Fort Beaufort Museum.

*of the Colony, individuals of this party are now to be found, carrying on considerable business as tradesmen, or occupying thriving farms."*<sup>48</sup>

Thompson<sup>49</sup> also addresses the issue of the "lower ranks, consisting of common mechanics and labourers" who had arrived as 1820 Settlers:

*"The great demand for labour, and the high wages given by the Government contractors, and others, who were erecting buildings in Graham's Town, attracted thither great numbers of this class; and all of them who were industrious earned a competent livelihood, and many saved money and built houses for themselves..."*

*[thus] while the majority of the labourers and mechanics had improved their situation, and were receiving high wages, and rising to independence, their former masters were generally involved in difficulties, and rapidly*

*sinking into indigence."*

A ready availability of skilled craftsman and labourers would be a requisite component in building secure fortified homesteads. One must also assume that there would have been literate labour skilled in the reading of plans. Because the plans were printed they could be followed by others wishing to build similar defences. There is much similarity between the examples, even though remote from each other. It is recorded that Gilbert was an architect, perhaps not in the sense it has to-day, but certainly as a builder of merit. The buildings existing prior to the Christmas-day attack by the Xhosa invaders were in the humble yet sturdy idiom of the Georgian vernacular current in England. Besides the dwellings there were the associated utilitarian outbuildings necessary to the farmer. All these had to be upgraded against fire since some four hundred and fifty five farmsteads had been torched in

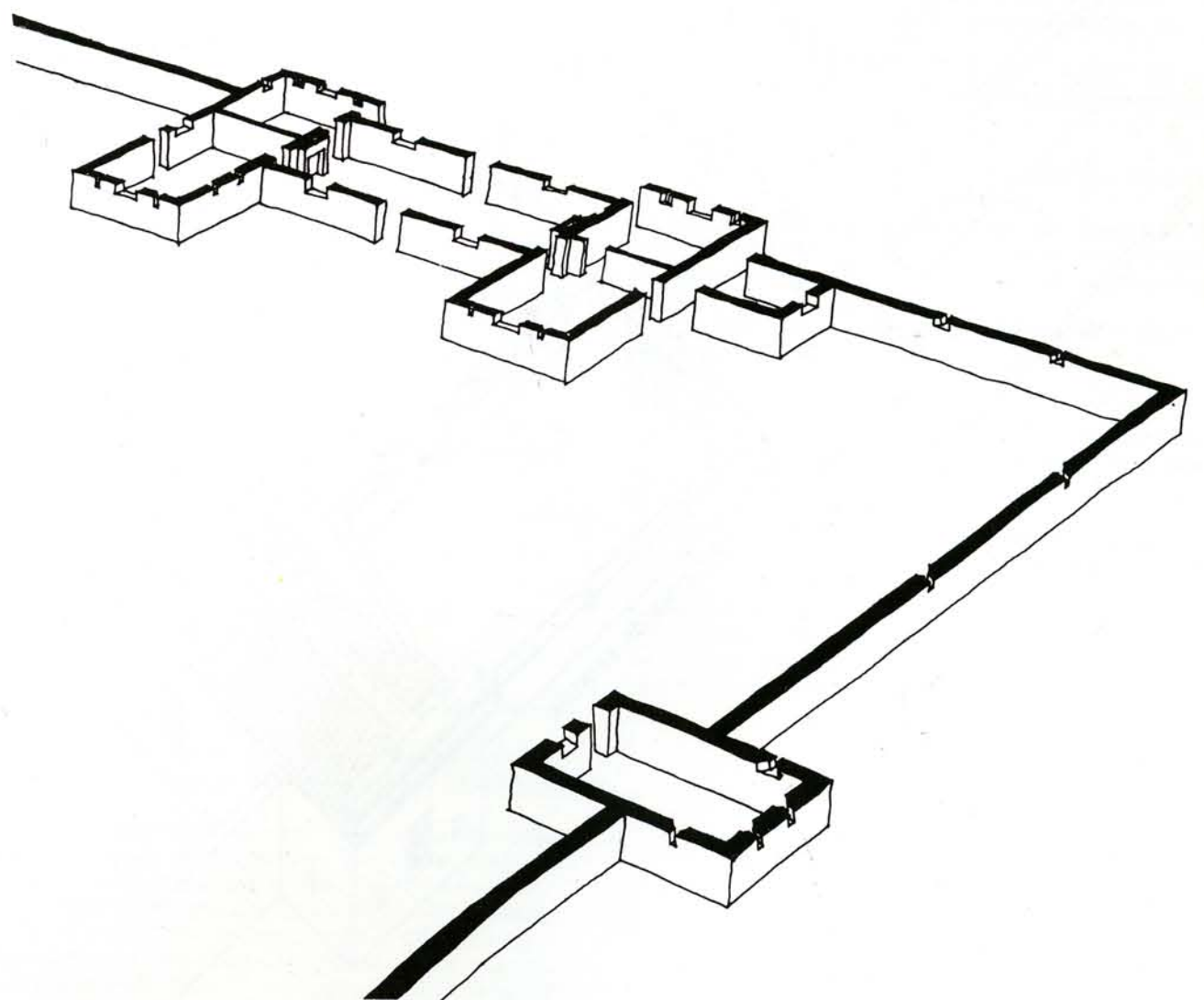


Fig. 6: Reconstruction of Sephton Manor, showing probable position of tower (J Booyesen).



the attack Tarred canvas or thatch roofing had to be replaced by wooden shingles or slate.

The popular press could also advertise the materials of mass-production, exported to the colonies as ballast in the holds of the ships, for example 'zinc sheeting'. This would have aided the changed needed in construction to secure the defences of the farmhouses.

It would also be useful to know more of Gilbert's origins, and discover something of the artisans working in the Eastern Cape at the time of the building of domestic scale fortifications.

The National Monuments Council with the Human Sciences Research Council have created a database of South African architects and builders before 1940. This should become available in electronic form before the end of the year and so enable a collating of data concerning those involved in design and building at the Eastern Frontier of the Cape at the time.

**The archaeology of drawings**

Alexander's article, as supplement to the Graham's Town Journal of 20 August 1835, alerts us to the role of the popular press in disseminating information.

An issue which can be indirectly related to the making available of military information by means of a popular press is that of ownership of such information and right of access to it.

It is interesting to note that this very right

was an issue from the onset of the British occupation. Thibault, who had in his possession his drawings of the defenses of the Cape when the British invaded in September of 1795, refused to relinquish these or swear allegiance to the Crown, himself being in employ as Captain-Engineer to De Meuron's mercenary Swiss Regiment, they in turn being in the hired employ to the Dutch East India Company. He was not alone in his reluctance. The populace of a distant Graaff-Reinet also needed some coaxing through 'the good advice of the traitor Breker who is bailiff there.'<sup>50</sup> Thibault relates how part of the terms of capitulation were the handing over of all plans relative to the Cape:

*"Twelve years of observation and work had enabled me to build up a collection of military plans. General Craig sent Engineer Bridges to ask me whether I could give him the details he needed to send to the English Court.... As the Colony had been occupied for two months by the British and the area was no longer a secret, I thought myself justified in giving him details without compromising either myself or the authorities whom I had recently served."*<sup>51</sup>

The further intrigue of bartering and acquisition of these can be discovered in de Puyfontein.

What interests us is who, in time of turbulence, transition and change is the legitimate owner of such documents, — the

architect as author, the client, or the authority wherein, through succession, the powers of the predecessor resorts? And what if it is suspected that such powers are transitional and in the longer term one might incriminate or prejudice one's situation?

The other question which can be raised and which is integral to the history of British colonization of the Cape and that is the question of the Freedom of the Press. By coincidence another immigrant, also of Swiss-French origins although first through immigration of the family to England, also enters the picture. Louis Meurant<sup>52</sup> established the Graham's Town Journal in 1831, the first newspaper outside of Cape Town in South Africa, after the freedom of the press was announced. He, a 20 year-old, was printer, compositor, proof-reader, reporter, editor and manager until joined by the migrant printer Robert Godlonton, from whom he had purchased the press in Graaff-Reinet, in partnership. Also interesting to note is that Godlonton himself lived in the fortified farmhouse "Hammonds", situated two kilometres south-east of Sephton Manor and 10km outside Fort Beaufort, and was thus Gilbert's immediate neighbour at the time of the outbreak of hostilities in 1835. Meurant acted as Dutch translator to D'Urban at the time of the Sixth Frontier War and it was probably also he who translated Piet Retief's manifesto into flawless English for publication. He was captain in the Grahamstown Volunteers during hostilities at the time and had thus more than passing interest in matters military when Alexander and Gilbert's contribution were published in the Graham's Town Journal.

Sephton Manor has been seminal in providing a legacy of drawings. Historians and commentators have used the illustrations, embellished, altered or illuminated, as this essay demonstrates.

What is interesting of Alexander's article is that it is probably the first published illustrations in South Africa (fig. 2) and of Gilbert's, the first printed architectural illustrations in South Africa (fig. 3). Coincidentally, Meurant's stepfather and posthumous father-in-law (Meurant having married his eldest daughter, Charlotte), Maarten Johannes Smit, was an architect builder in Cape Town. Thus he, as editor of the Graham's Town Journal, would, in all likelihood, have been able to read architectural drawings, and have understood the significance of Gilbert's contribution. It would thus be interesting to know to what extent these illustrations determined the character that the domestic defences were to take, particularly since it was the H-form plan with square bastions which was to become the type, rather, than the embrasured bastions as illustrated by Gilbert. Was this deviation just through lack of practicality or was the contribution by the press in the making of a type insignificant?

What is true is that the illustration of Gilbert has remained tantalizing to the historians researching this period ever since. No sooner

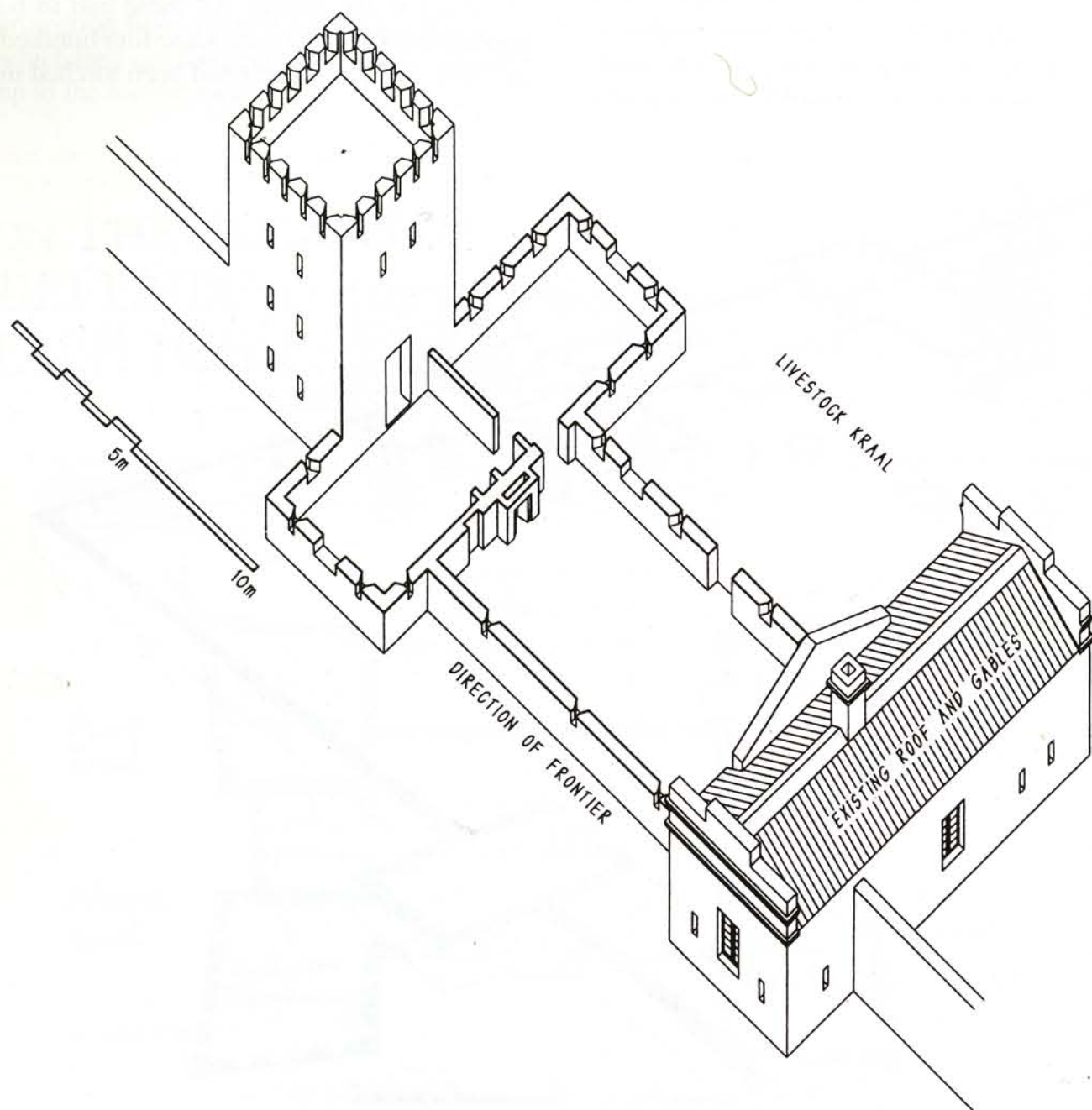


Fig. 7: Computer-generated drawing after measured drawings (P van der Merwe).



SEPTON MANOR — THE MAKING OF A TYPE

as the plan in print than a copy of the Graham's Town Journal was annotated and the tower added in pencil, as noted and illustrated by Lewcock. When attempting to locate this copy, the librarians of the Cory Library, found the pencil addition erased! Hence, the only copy of this, other than the other poorly printed version in Lewcock, is the photograph as part of the manuscript of Lewcock's "Nineteenth Century Architecture", lodged in the archives. And then what of the tower, not illustrated in the original, if the once annotated copy was meant to be a corrected proof? One certainly finds towers as defensive element associated with many of the domestic scale fortifications, although not illustrated by Alexander, mentioned by way of example. Walton used the "original" illustration as part of his "Homesteads and Villages"<sup>53</sup>, yet the drawing is obviously a copy, and not "original" since it lacks the unmistakable qualities of line and shading of his charming drawings (fig 4). Radford draws on the Lewcock resources to pursue his evolution of the "stoepkamer", and uses the illustration to support this view. A drawing from the Fort Beaufort Historical Museum<sup>54</sup> juxtaposes a "measured" drawing with the original by way of comparison (Fig 6). Booyesen<sup>55</sup> has offered (slightly inaccurate) conjectural reconstruction of Sephton Manor (Fig 6), to which we now add a computer generated update (Fig 7), derived from the measured drawings (Figs. 8).

Hence the drawing has also acquired emblematic and iconographic significance beyond the original intention of the author. We could say that the plan has come to symbolize the resolve of those, once foreign, to become rooted in a country under what were originally inauspicious circumstances. ■

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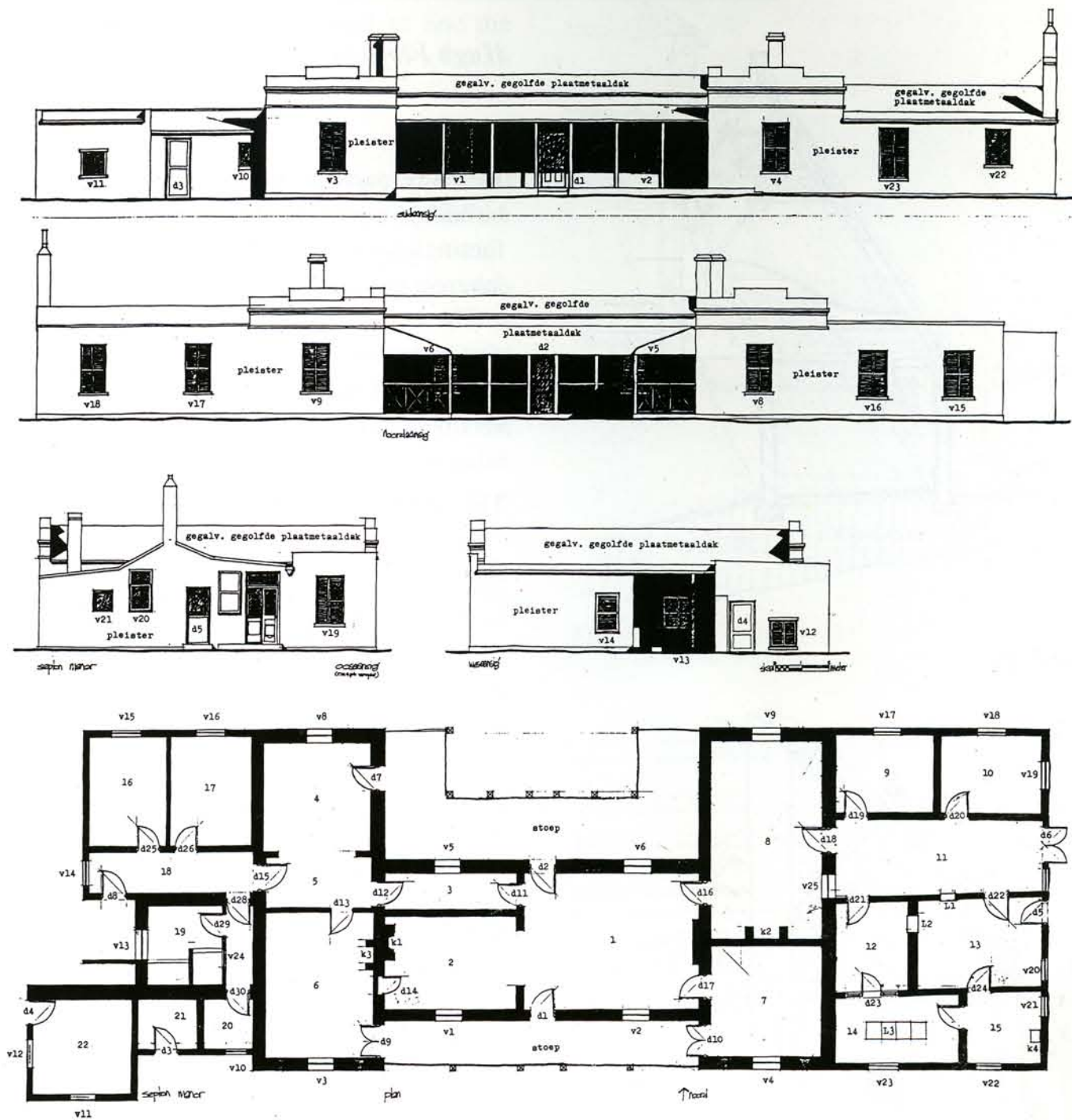


Fig. 8: Sephton Manor after measured drawings by J Booyesen, P Boshoff, J Liebenberg, E Marincowitz, H Potgieter, A Thijssse & P van der Walt, Pretoria School of Architecture, 1986 (D Coetzee, deltd).

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