

# SETTING

## Site

### CONTEXT:

*To understand history is essential for the formation of architecture.*

*- Ernesto Rodgers on Context*

*(FORTY, 2000:220).*

Context was introduced as part of the architectural vocabulary as a critique on the first generation of Modernist architects. Ernesto Rodgers criticized the way Modernist schemes applied abstract concepts on the grounds of them being indifferent to locality. The critique argued that architecture should relate to its surrounds, connecting with the historic continuum and with its immediate environment. Termed '*le preesistenze ambientali*' or '*ambiente*' the English word '*context*' argues for a responsiveness of architecture to location and history (FORTY, 2000:132). Context enables architecture to investigate and react to the archeological compositions in the setting of a place. The understanding of a place can connect architecture, on an emotional and social level, with history.

### ELANDSPOORT357-JR:

The theoretical investigation and framework directed the need for a site that would allow me to convey my own conclusion regarding the relationship between form and programme. Ingrained with the idea of preserving and linking open space in the focus area of Pretoria, the Union Buildings were selected as site. The site is located on Meintjeskop hill, the old eastern boundary Elandspoortrand. Established in 1855, Elandspoortrand was one of two farmlands that became Pretoria (RENCKEN 1989:1). Orientated around its natural landscape and layered with interventions representative of different relationships between form and programme, the site presents a paramount opportunity to explore my premise.

### METHODOLOGY:

The context and historic background to my site is discussed in three parts:

- Part 1: Historical narrative of events that took place on the terrain.
- Part 2: Heritage assessment and site specific analysis.
- Part 3: Form analysis of interventions on site.

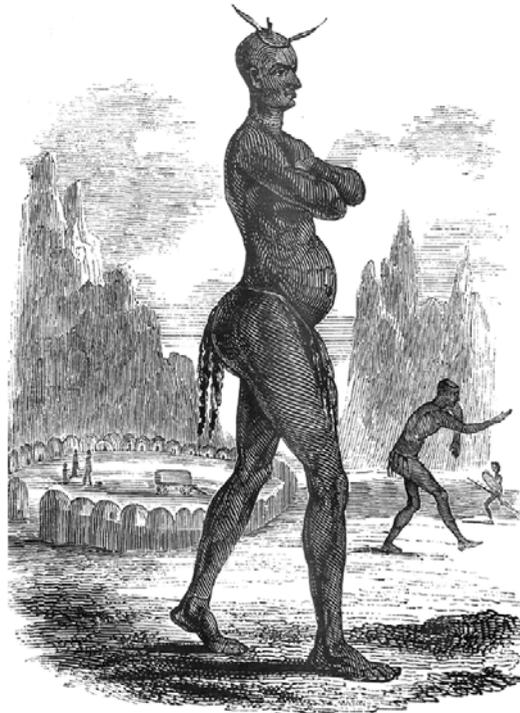


*Fig\_48 : Allegorical scene: the muse Clio and time chained. Cover Illustration of Clio - the muse of history, from Samuel von Pufendorf's 'Introduction to modern history, and general policy of the Universe', 1753.*

## Part 1

### PRE-COLONIAL OCCUPATION:

Two thousand million years ago volcanic eruptions created the Pretoria group rocks, Meintjeskop is located on one of the ridges created by faulting and up-tilting of sedimentary rocks (VERWEY & SONDERLING 1995). From 1600 AD, late Iron Age communities settled in the Pretoria area. In 1825-1832 the Matabele kingdom based in Pretoria. Their king, Mzilikazi governed the area from his royal village, located to the North of Meintjeskop. (ANDREWS 1989:16).



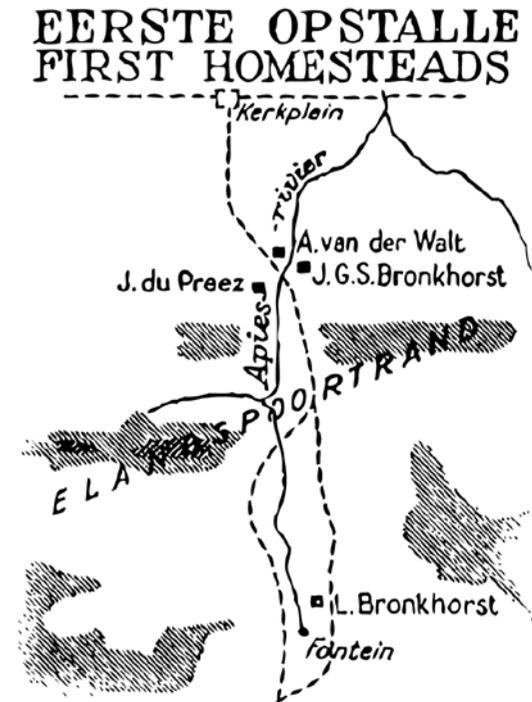
Fig\_49 : 1825 - Chief Mzilikazi: According to legend Mzilikazi, chief of the Matabele kingdom, resided his royal village North of Meintjeskop.

2000 BC-1829 AD

1829 AD - 1858 AD

### BOER SETTLEMENT:

In 1829 the first white travellers, McLuckie and Schoon visited Pretoria. 1836 - 1842 Voortrekker groups arrive, the brothers Gerhardus and Lucas Bronkhorst established the farm Elandspoot in 1842. Thirteen years later the town of Pretoria was established on 16 November 1855. In 1858 Andries du Toit (the first magistrate), bought the eastern part of Elandspoot (including Meintjeskop) and named it Arcadia (ANDREWS 1989:27)



Fig\_50 : 1858 - First Homesteads. A map of the first homestead in Pretoria.



PRE-WAR DEVELOPMENT:

On 7 April 1865 Andries du Toit sold the farm Arcadia. Stephanus Jacobus Meintjes (after whom Meintjeskop is named) acquires the hill on Arcadia (PRETORIANA 1962:39/40). In 1887 Eddie Meintjes inherited Arcadia from his father (ANDREWS 1989:11). Three years later in , 1890 Eddie Meintjes builds a house for his wife (Vredehuis) on the south-western slope of Meintjeskop. (ANDREWS 1999:13).



Fig\_51 : 1889 – Pretoria from Meintjeskop, early 20th Century

1865 AC-1890 AD

1890 AC-1910 AD

ANGLO-BOER WAR:

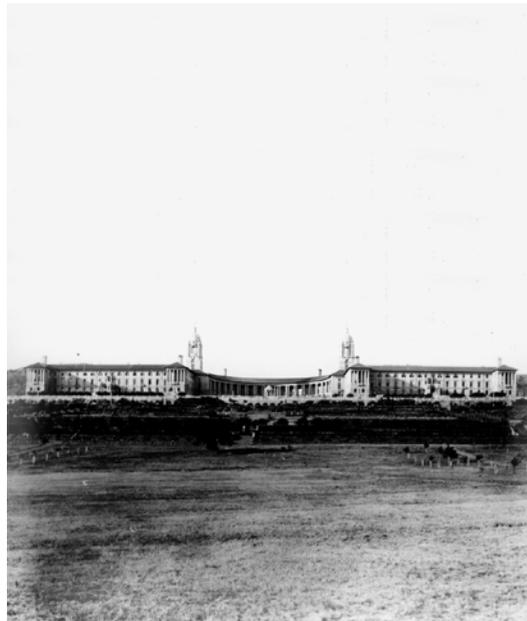
Arcadia was sold to Carel Ziervogel, who registers the site under the name Ziervogel Estate (ANDREWS 1999:81). During the Anglo-Boer War Ziervogel estate was used as a British army hospital. In 1901 a British blockhouse was erected on the western tip of Meintjeskop (VERWEY & SONDERLING 1995). In 1902 Eddie Meintjes bought back the Vredehuis portion of Ziervogel Estate (ANDREWS 1999:64).



Fig\_52 : 1902 – Lisdogan Park Hospital, established on the southern slopes of Meintjeskop.

SOUTH AFRICAN ACROPOLIS:

After the war the Natal Colony, Durban Colony, Transvaal Republic and Free State Republic united as one Union. It was decided to build the administrative capital for the new Union of South Africa in Pretoria. Sir Herbert Baker was appointed as architect, and chose Meintjeskop as the site for the new Union Building. The design was significantly influenced by the slope of Meintjeskop. Since its completion in 1914, the building has undergone many political changes, but remains the seat of the South African government (RENCKEN 1989:1).



Fig\_53 : 1920 – Union Buildings after construction, seen from Church Street.

1910 AC-2010 AD

Part 2

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

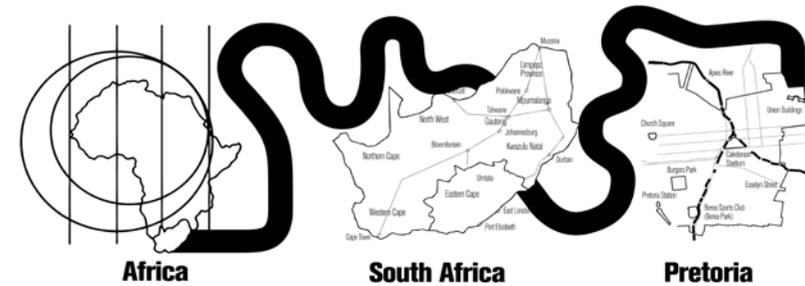


Figure 54: Coordinates: 25°44'25.68"S 28°12'43.28"E 25.7404667°S 28.2120222°E, the location of the Union Buildings Estate.

The site is on Meintjeskop hill, the old east boundary of Elandspoortrand (established in 1855) one of the first farms in the Pretoria area (RENCKEN 1989:1). The Union Buildings estate is located in the Eastern Boarder of the capital core of Tshwane. The layout is dominated by the 1910 Baker scheme, but remnants dating back to the 1850's form part of the property.

The estate has undergone various maintenance programmes i.e. the 1983 conservation programme by Roelf Botha Landscape Architects and was proclaimed as National Monument in 1994. Under the National Monuments Act a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the estate ground was conducted (MULLER & YOUNG 2005:2).

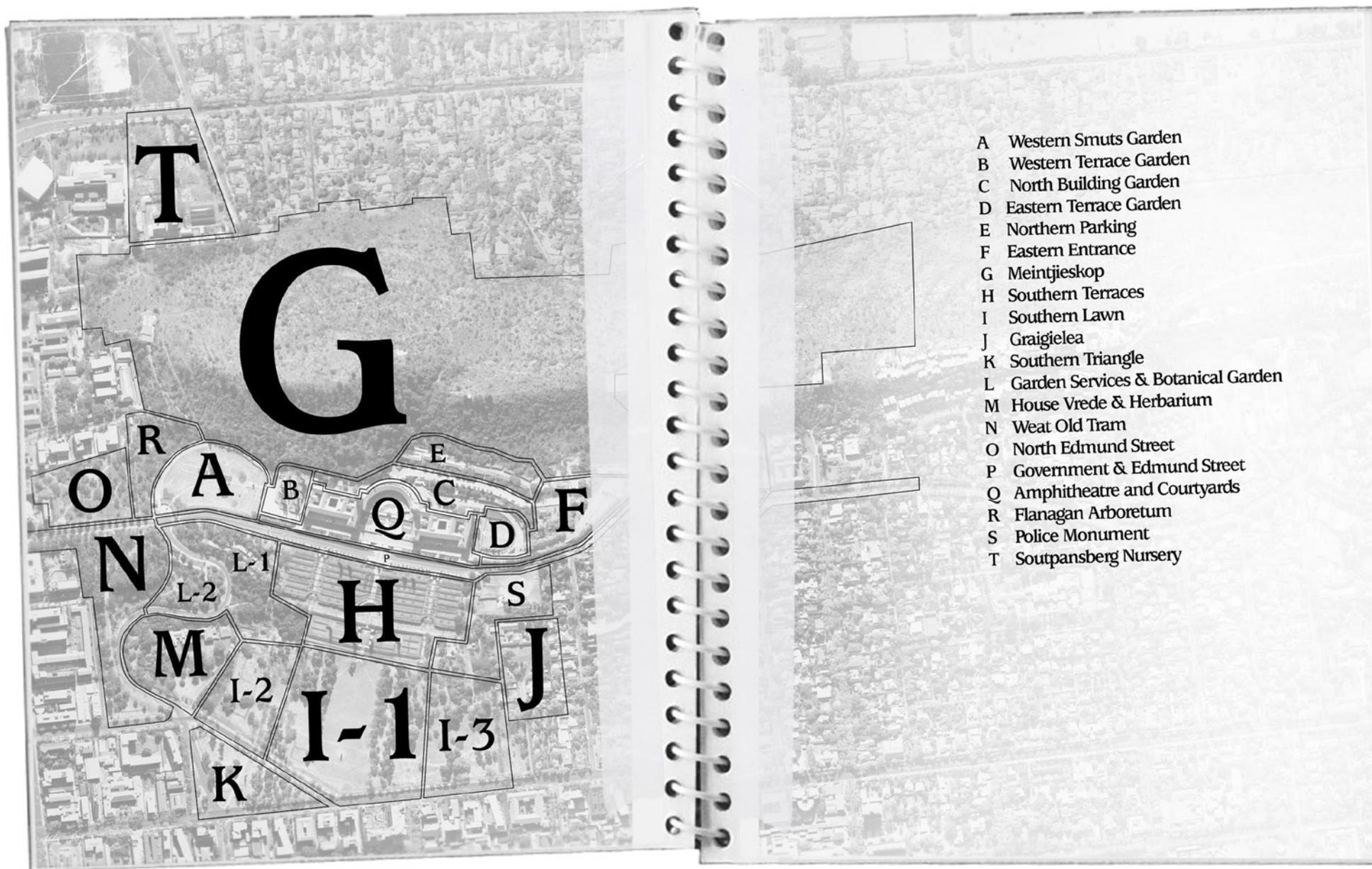
The CMP was initiated by Cultimatrix and Newtown Landscape Architects. In 2004 their approach divided the estate into separate areas, each with is of a distinct character. The CPM focuses on the setting (landscape form and character), the current state and the site history (MULLER & YOUNG 2005:2).

Figure 55: (Opposite Page) The CPM of the Union Buildings estate. The estate is divided in twenty parts (letters A to T) each with a specific character and form.



# CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

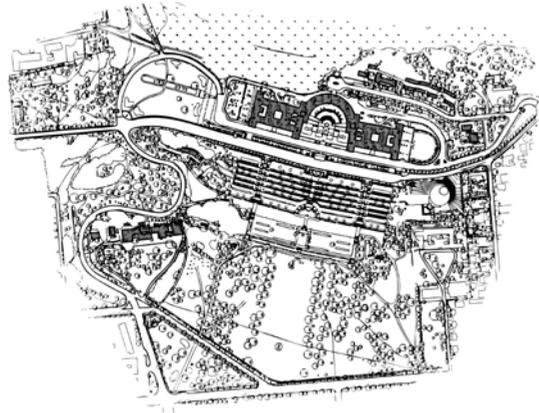
## AREA DESCRIPTION



- A Western Smuts Garden
- B Western Terrace Garden
- C North Building Garden
- D Eastern Terrace Garden
- E Northern Parking
- F Eastern Entrance
- G Meintjieskop
- H Southern Terraces
- I Southern Lawn
- J Graigielea
- K Southern Triangle
- L Garden Services & Botanical Garden
- M House Vrede & Herbarium
- N Weat Old Tram
- O North Edmund Street
- P Government & Edmund Street
- Q Amphitheatre and Courtyards
- R Flanagan Arboretum
- S Police Monument
- T Soutpansberg Nursery

### Part 3

#### FORM ANALYSIS:



Fig\_56: Union Buildings Estate, Diagramme of Elandspoort357-JR

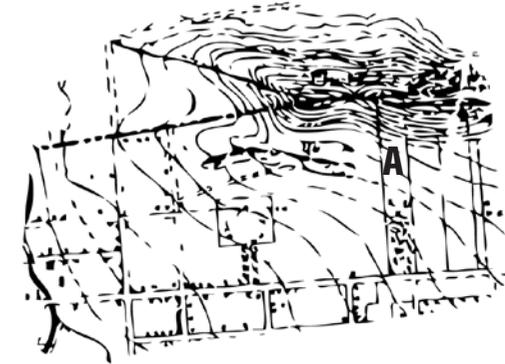
The assessment of buildings on the estate have been evaluated according to area definitions. The estate is layered with memories of events. These include historic boundaries of farms transversing Meintjeskop, three estate buildings on the premises (House Vrede, Engelenburg House and Craigielea), a historic tramline, war memorials and historic pathways (MULLER & YOUNG 2005:2). Although there are many relationships of form on the estate, a graphic illustration will focus on landscape interventions on the site. Not all the area definitions are discussed.

#### PRE-BAKER:

##### A - 1888 AD

*Use:* Used as a farmhouse the estate is in the middle of a rectilinear plot stretching from the top of Meintjeskop to Church street.

*Form:* The original house was square and of plastered brick on a stone plinth. Following the typology of farmhouse, a verandah was added in front. The house had a passage that running the length of the house (CULTMATRIX & UBA 2005:149).



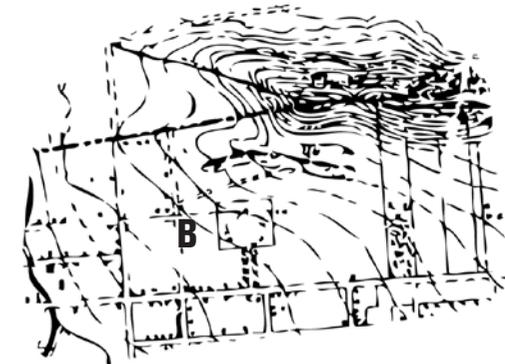
Fig\_58: 1888 - Craigielea (area J on the CPM).

A: In 1888 Hugh Crawford established his home at Craigielea on the eastern slope of Meintjeskop (VERWEY & SONDERLING 1995:185).

##### B - 1890 AD

*Use:* Built on a slope the lavish residence took up a considerable area to host six horse stables, a cowshed, coachhouse, tennis court, croquet lawns, orchards and a large flower garden (CULTMATRIX & UBA 2005:158).

*Form:* The main entrance is shaped in a half circular driveway as access to the site services i.e tennis court and the orchard (CULTMATRIX & UBA 2005:158).

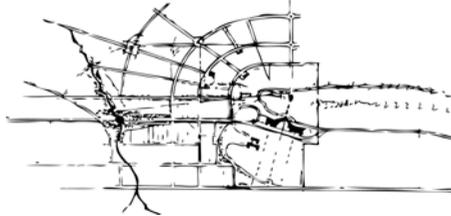


Fig\_57: 1890 - Vredehuis (area M on the CPM)

B: 1890 Eddie Meintjes build a house for his wife (Vredehuis) on the south-western slope of Meintjeskop. (ANDREWS 1999:13).

#### Site -2010 AD

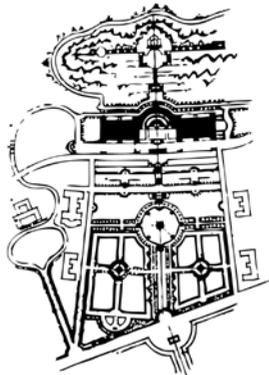
## SIR HERBERT BAKER:



Fig\_59: 1909- H. Baker's vision of the town planning scheme.

## 1. BAKER'S VISION:

In 1909 Baker designed the building for the newly united government. The building is designed to be a symbol of pride and unity. The Meintjeskop site was selected specifically by Baker. He aimed to create an Acropolis on the hill that would connect to the city with and the distant hills of the Highveld (MULLER, L. & YOUNG, G. 2005).



Fig\_60: Sketch plan designs for the Union Building.

## 2. BAKER PROPOSAL:

Baker refined the design and it was approved by the Cabinet on 24 September 1909 ( MULLER, L. & YOUNG, G. 2005).



## H Baker - 1909 AD

*Use: The master plan of the site was intended to host the new seat of government, including the parliament and some municipal buildings.*

*Form: Inspired by the classical Greek acropolis the relationship between building and city is designed in a neo-classical style using radiating axis to connect with the city.*

## H Baker - 1909 AD

*Use: For national ceremonial use by the government, public recreation.*

*Form: The building is designed in a neo-classicist Italian Renaissance style. The semi-circular Open Court is symmetrically flanked by a colonnade. The building is designed round a central axis, radiating into the garden. A temple of peace terminates the axis on top of the hill (RENCKEN 1989:33).*

## H Baker 1913 AD

*Use: Seat of Government*

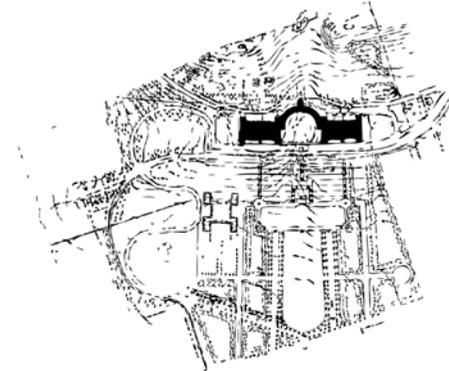
*Form: The Neoclassical Italian Renaissance layout of the garden is part of the building. The site is organized by a central axis stretching the length of Meintjeskop.*

## 1910 AD - 1920 AD

*Use: Government residence for ministers and guests of the newly formed Union.*

*Form: The L-shaped farmhouse building was converted to serve the new government. The entrance and site services were maintained (CULTMATRIX & UBA 2005:158).*

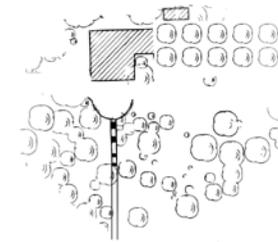
## BAKERS DESIGN:



Fig\_61: H Baker's terrain plan after construction finished in November 1913.

The Union Building was built between 1910 and 1913. The 1910 scheme linking the site with the city has since lapsed. The temple of peace (never built) and original garden design has been disregarded (RENCKEN 1989:9).

## HOUSE VREDE:



Fig\_62: 1910 -1920 Vredehuis used as government residence (area M on the CPM).

After the government bought the land from Eddie Meintjes in 1910, Vredehuis was converted to a luxury 10 room estate. Used by General JBM Hertzog from 1910-1912 during his reign as Minister of Justice for the new Union Cabinet (ANDREWS 1999:81).



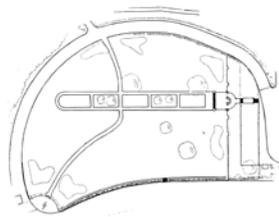
POLE EVENS AT VREDEHUIS:



Fig\_63: House Vrede - adapted through time

In 1912 IB Pole Evans (Chief of Entomology and plant Pathology) requested some land at the Union Buildings to be at the disposal of the Chief of Plant Pathology and Mycology. House Vrede (adjacent to the gardens nursery) was selected as site (MULLER, L. & YOUNG, G. 2005).

MONUMENTS:

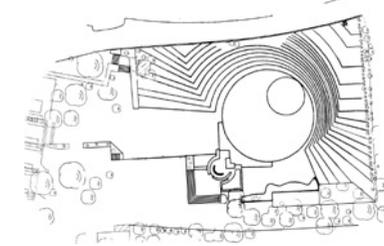


Fig\_64: Jan Smuts Memorial (area A on the CPM)

1. JAN SMUTS MEMORIAL:

Commissioned by the Jan Smuts Memorial Committee, the monument was made by sculptor Danie de Jager in 1975 (MULLER, L. & YOUNG, G. 2005).

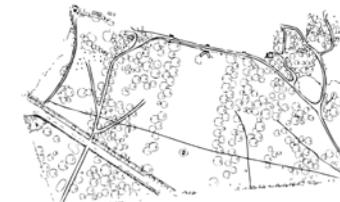
2. POLICE MEMORIAL:



Fig\_65: Police Memorial (area S on the CPM).

Built on the old tennis court of the Craigielea estate it commemorates policemen who died on duty. The monument was designed by Maree and Els Architects in 1983 (SA BUILDER. 1982)

PAVED BEACH AND WALKWAYS:



Fig\_66: 1910 -1920 Vredehuis used as government residence (area I-1 on the CPM).

Site management initiated in 2001 started to rebuild roads and walkways as part of the site renovation. Overseen by WR Partnership Engineers, the renovation is poorly executed without regard to the original garden design (MULLER, L. & YOUNG, G. 2005). Located on the bottom lawn of the site the renovation aims to recreate the old footpaths and road networks.

1912 AD - 2010 AD

*Use: Research facility, herbarium and botanical gardens. The property has been occupied from 1913 by various institutions (State Vet, Plant Pathology and Mycology, National Herbarium and Biosystematics department) (RONG & BAXTER 2006:3).*

*Form: Too small to occupy the plant collections, the farmhouse was adapted for this use (RONG & BAXTER 2006:3). Two major additions were made in a neoclassical Georgian style, a single storey building adjacent to House Vrede in 1913, and a second story addition with an additional Plant Pathology building in 1933 (ANDREWS 1999).*

1975 AD

*Use: Memorial*

*Form: Post-Modern abstract style with a classical influence in the column arcade.*

1983 AD

*Use: Amphitheatre and a monument to honour the South African Police force.*

*Form: The circular design is symbolically charged, relating to the idea of growth. A visual connection in the central wall provides glimpses of the Voortrekker Monument. Several columns are joined together to represent different levels of service in the SAPS (SA BUILDER. 1982).*

2001 AD - 2003 AD

*Use: Recreation and public functions.*

*Form: Curved pathways follow the old footpaths and roads networks of the Renaissance garden.*