

Church Square, the Old Synagogue and the Old Government Printing Works

Three historic places for testing strategic intervention

Nicholas Clarke and Adrian de Villiers

Three historically significant sites in the centre of Pretoria were chosen as educational experiments in research-by-design, to test opportunities and risks in adapting them to new needs. These sites can be seen as mutual South African–Dutch heritage due to their historic origin. The Re-centring Tshwane Laboratory, conducted through the Shared Heritage Programme between South Africa and The Netherlands, investigated their potential to contribute to the future of the inner city by means of adaptive reuse. This chapter introduces briefly the historical context of and recent change factors for the three sites that are currently in need of intervention: Church Square, the Old Synagogue and the Old Government Printing Works.

Introduction

Pretoria, presently the administrative capital of South Africa, is a relatively young city in comparison to many of its global counterparts. At 160 years of age, it belongs to those younger capitals created through political processes to serve as seats of government to fledgling nations. When in 1860 the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* (ZAR) declared Pretoria its capital, the core of the today's city of Tshwane, it was located on politically neutral ground, central to the surrounding territories. Yet, the site had by then already a long pre-history of human occupation. The valley between the Schurveberg and Magaliesberg, through which the Apies River meanders from its source at the Fountains at Elandspoort, has been inhabited from the earliest days of man's existence.¹ Wonderboom, on the southern slopes of the Magaliesberg, is proven to contain the largest single accumulation of stone tools found anywhere on earth. From

two million years ago onwards the valley was constantly occupied, right through the subsequent Stone Ages and into the Iron Ages up until today.²

Early histories record that the so-called Transvaal Ndebele settled here between 1600 and 1700 AD, but also that various other Sotho and Tswana speaking peoples occupied the valley and surrounds.³ In ca. 1827 the peaceful valley was disrupted by Mzilikazi and his *impi* (warriors). After a relatively short sojourn in the area, Mzilikazi was attacked by the Zulu king Dingaan's *impi*, which led him to flee westwards, leaving an occupational vacuum. Small groups of Sotho started trickling back into the area,⁴ but they were quickly eclipsed by white settlers (later to be called Boers) travelling northwards, away from British domination in the Cape. These *Voortrekkers* settled

Left: Pretoria, 1898, showing the historic city centre. (Jeppe's Map of the Transvaal or SA Republic and Surrounding territories, originally published by Edward Stanford, London, 1898)

¹ All these names are of recent historic origin.

² Mason, 1957: 36.

³ Van Vollenhoven, 2008: 17.

⁴ Van Vollenhoven, 2008: 17.



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The covered walkway of the Cafe Riche building, one of the few places on the Square which allows for public committal functions. (Jean-Paul Corten)

in the temporarily uninhabited valley, which became part of the new independent *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek*. In 1860 the government chose to turn the modest rural village into its capital. The layout was based on a simple grid pattern of orthogonal streets, with an open space and church at its centre. This historical origin can still be found in the name and size of Church Square. It is often said that the large space needed by ox wagons to turn corners defined the width of the originally unpaved streets.

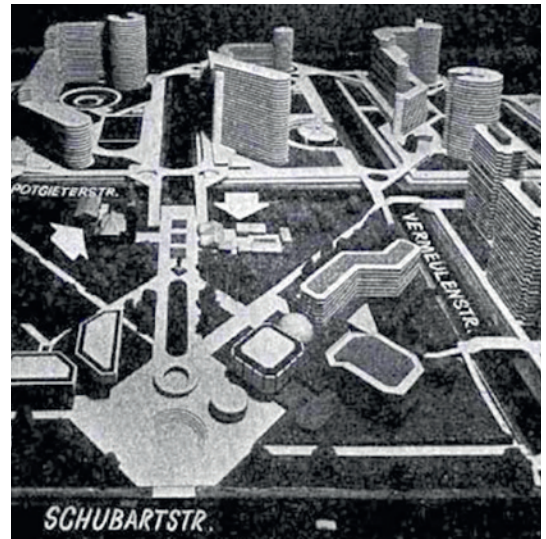
The two main axes that cross at this central square, today known as Paul Kruger Street and Church Street, effectively divide the town into four quadrants. It was under the rule of Paul Kruger that the first urban transformation as a capital city took shape by means of conspicuous government buildings in an appealing architectural language, which can be called 'Eclectic ZA Wilhelmiens'.⁵ Soon, however, the independence of the ZAR came to an end and in 1910 Pretoria was made the administrative capital of the Union of South Africa under British rule. While the already existing government buildings around Church Square remained in use, an impressive new ensemble to the design of Herbert Baker was erected, perched high on the slopes of Meintjieskop. The Union Buildings complex was meant to house the entire public service of the Union and caused a lasting shift in 20th century urban development in the heart of the capital. From the nineteen-sixties onwards, Apartheid and its planning policies of segregation also greatly impacted on the fabric of the city.

Meanwhile, the city has substantially grown and expanded outwards, with the wealthy slowly migrating east- and southwards. All four quadrants started their lives as residential, multi-use areas, but each part has developed its own character over time, reflecting also the impact of successive regimes on the townscape. After the declaration of the Group Areas Act of 1966, large swaths of the north-western quadrant were demolished to make way for the Goedehoop urban

redevelopment project: a large-scale high-density 'whites only' utopian housing vision. The project was never fully realised, leaving a large part of the city fallow.⁶

These long neglected areas now offer great opportunity for redevelopment. Some historical features remain, and their redevelopment could make a substantial contribution to reversing the fortunes of these historically disregarded areas. Two such historic landmarks, the Old Government Printing Works and the Old Synagogue, are of high significance and were chosen as sites for investigation in the *Re-centring Tshwane Laboratory*. Like all things relating to Pretoria's historic core, these opportunities are closely tied to the source of the city, Church Square.

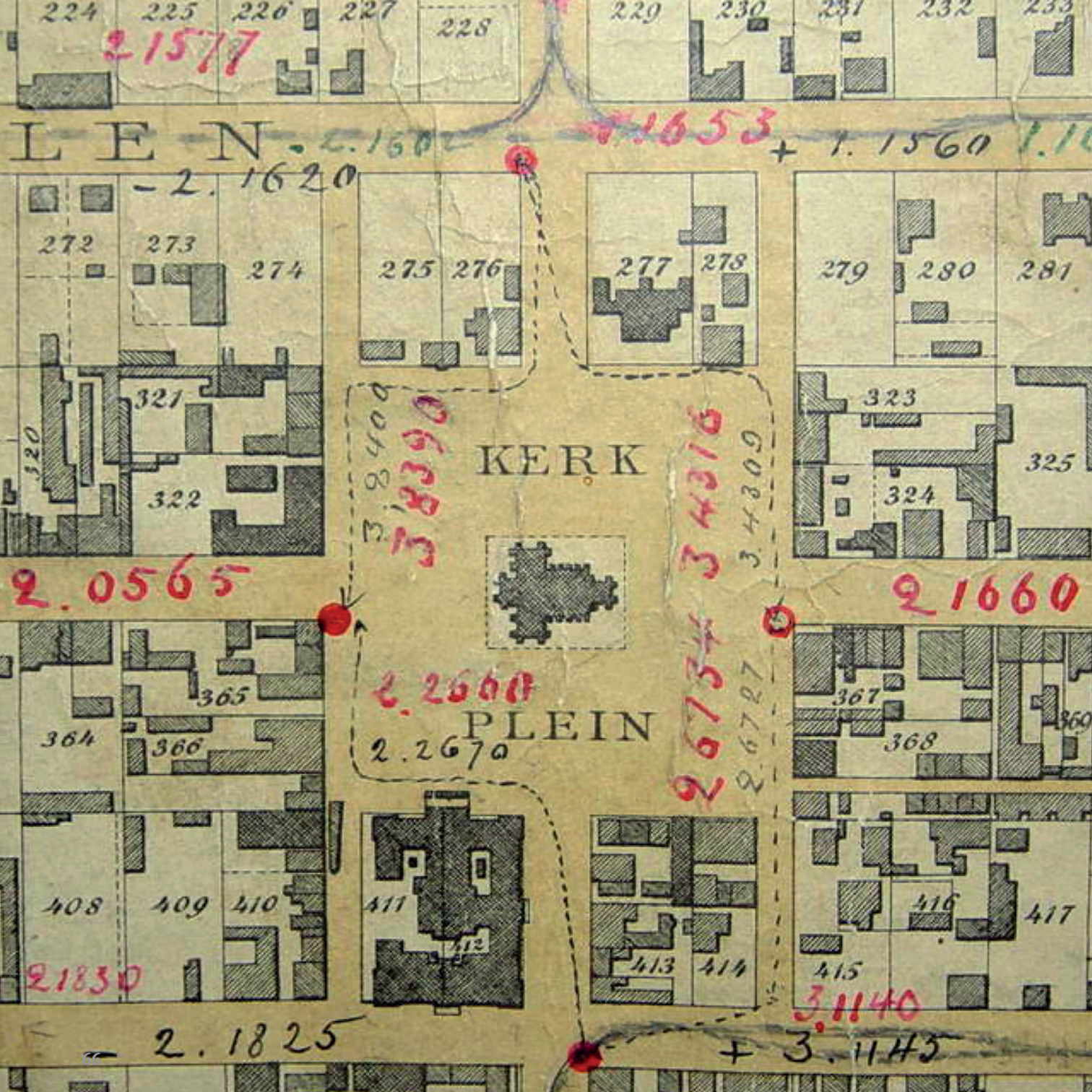
This chapter will explore briefly the origins and histories of the three sites, catalogue the change factors affecting them today, and present opportunities thought to lie in their redevelopment.



Photograph of the presentation model for the Goedehoop housing project of the 1970s for the north-western quadrant of the city. (Swart, 2011: 65)

⁵ See Bakker, Clarke & Fisher, 2014.

⁶ Swart, 2011: 64-65.



224 225 226 227 228 229 230 231 232 233

2.1577

2.1653 + 1.1560 + 1.16

LEN - 2.1602

- 2.1620

272 273 274 275 276 277 278 279 280 281

320

321 322 323 324 325

KERK



2.0565

3.8400
3.8390

2.6734
3.4316

3.4309

2.1660

2.2600

PLEIN

2.2670

364 365 366 367 368 369

408 409 410 411 412 413 414 415 416 417

2.1830

3.1140

2.1825

+ 3.1145

■ Church Square

Date of origin: 1854
Coordinates: 25.746465°S; 28.188074°E
Designer 1910 layout: Vivian Rees-Poole
Uses: Public open space and transport infrastructure
Alterations: 1913: Tram station and public toilets; 1954: placement of the Paul Kruger statue; 2014-2015: introduction of TRT bus system and repaving and landscaping.
Legal heritage status: Article 34 of the National Heritage Resources Act (structures older than 60 years), and the Church Square Act (53 of 1972), amended 1988 and recommended for repeal in 2011 by the South African Law Reform Commission (current status unclear), are applicable.

At the heart of Pretoria lies Church Square, arguably one of the most important of the City of Tshwane's civic spaces. It is a place with many historical and social connotations; it is from here that the city sprung, and it could be the source of the regeneration of the inner city of Pretoria. Change is in the air, yet neither what that change will bring, nor what opportunities lie within the city fabric, have as yet been investigated in depth. And while Church Square might lie at the geographic centre of the inner city, it lies, in socio-economic terms, on the very edge.

Due to the historic forced removals undertaken under Apartheid planning policies, the north-western quadrant of the city centre has become a place of desolation. It requires urgent intervention, but at the same time presents a multitude of possibilities. The City of Tshwane is aware of this potential and, on 14 August 2014, launched the West Capital Project, a R6-billion investment project to redevelop this fragmented urban precinct.⁷

Church Square is the portal to this world. During a 2009 Heritage Field Academy, conducted by the Department of Architecture at the University of Pretoria in collaboration with ArchiAfrika and the Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency, the historic city centre of Tshwane was investigated and an 'Opportunities and Threats' map compiled. Church Square was identified as a place with opportunity for change, but change that needs to be managed to ensure the continuation and ongoing public enjoyment of the heritage values and character-giving elements it contains.⁸



Opportunities and threats map for the city centre, compiled in 2009. (Corten & Van Dun, 2010: 22)

Left: Map of Church Square showing the position of the second church, c.1889. The Raadzaal, the biggest building in the city at the time, had just been completed. This map by J. van Voordern and J.H. Oerder for the ZAR Department of Mines. (University of Pretoria UPSpace Repository, Rosa Swanepoel Collection. No. 5.0.2. <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/45511>.)

⁷ City of Tshwane, 2013.

⁸ Corten & Van Dun, 2010: 23.

The same study identified the whole north-western quadrant of the historic core of Pretoria as being under threat but holding tremendous opportunity. This quadrant needs to be reconnected to the city centre, both physically and socio-economically.⁹ This will help in re-centring Church Square at the heart of the city.

Church Square, enclosed by mostly service or government buildings, will need to become more public, its edges adapted, the use of large parts of it for car parking reconsidered, and a new layer of value added to the existing to reflect current needs. Before such interventions are planned, the capacity for change and resilience of the place need to be understood.



Market day on Church Square, c. 1898. (University of Pretoria Department of Architecture Repository, Old Pretoria Collection. No. P16a)

⁹ Corten & Van Dun, 2010: 23.

Brief History

In the various founding histories of Pretoria, the core of the larger Tshwane metropolis and the origin and evolution of Church Square are well documented. Only the briefest history is to be given here. The area of what is today the square, was the first public open space of the city, and took the form of a *kerkplaats* (literally 'church place') where people came for communion (*nachtmaal*) from distant districts, and market journeymen camped out on the first informal sports fields of the fledgling city. For the first 50 years the square had a church located at its centre. The first, constructed in 1856, burnt down; its successor was demolished in 1904, meaning that the square has been without a church for a longer period than it ever had one! It developed to become a centre of government, commerce, the judiciary and the main ceremonial space of early Pretoria.

As centre of the early town and located at the crossing of two main axes, it also became the transport hub. This aspect has been the most decisive influencing factor in steering the formalisation of the square. A 1910 competition for the redesign

of the then still gently sloping site, won by Vivian Rees-Poole, separated traffic and pedestrian and created the current layout, generated by the ideal inclines for trams at the time.¹⁰ This created the terraced layout the square still has, with traffic circling a rather formal lawned central park. This layout also created opportunity to locate a monument at the very centre of the city, a position first occupied by an ornamental fountain, later to be taken by the statue of Paul Kruger in 1954. (It is worth noting that, while this statue was originally intended for the square, the proposed geographic location was further to the west, with the entry to the church still located at the centre of the square.) This statue has had two previous locations in the city, while the square played host to other 'guests' that graced its heart. When after the Second Anglo Boer War (also known as the South African War, 1899–1902) the idea of erecting a statue to Paul Kruger on the square was abandoned and the church had been demolished, industrialist Sammy Marks donated a large cast-iron fountain to the city. This has since been relocated to the National Zoological Gardens.¹¹



Panoramic watercolour view of the design proposal by Rees-Poole for Church Square, c.1910. (University of the Witwatersrand WIReD Space. <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/10969>)

¹⁰ Allen, 1971: 37.

¹¹ Allen, 1971: 37.



A 1879 watercolour by A.A. Anderson showing King Sekhukhune being transported to prison by British troops. The first Church constructed on the Square is visible in the right-centre. (University of Pretoria UPspace Repository, Rosa Swanepoel Collection. No. 5.1.03. <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/45512>)

The square has played a significant role in the social history of the city and the country, from its early days as general purpose open space, which included serving as auction venue and sports fields, to Apartheid era national festivals and the swearing in of heads of state. It later played host to anti-Apartheid demonstrations and served as backdrop to the Rivonia Trial. An early historical image of Church Square, dating back to 1874, shows King Sekhukhune of the baPadi Marota being escorted across the square to the Pretoria Prison, after being defeated by British and Swazi forces.¹² More recently the square hosted the live screening of Nelson Mandela's memorial service.

Transport infrastructure still dominates the evolution of the square. In the 1970s proposals were made to locate a large underground bus depot under the square (but these were not implemented). Today, the Tshwane Rapid Transit System (TRT) is changing the character of not only the square but also the north-south arterial, Paul Kruger Street, where a TRT station has been placed in the middle of the road on the edge of this monumental space, between the Old Raadsaal and the Standard Bank Building and obscuring the vista up Paul Kruger Street to the Pretoria station.

¹² The area of the ZAR was then under British Colonial rule. King Sekhukhune was released by the ZAR Boers when they won their independence in 1881.

Change factors

Changed demographics

After the scrapping of the Group Areas Act in 1991, the city centre saw a fast change in demographics. The square has, by all measures, become a more vibrantly used public space than it was before. Yet the public infrastructure, including basic seating and leisure areas, needs to be addressed; thus far, no adaptations have been made for informal street vendors and tourism activities.

Economic investment in the area

An increase in spending power among users of the square has started to manifest in the streets leading to the square, as well as through the restoration of the few commercial buildings that face onto it. This trend is expected to increase after the completion of the TRT.

The Tshwane Rapid Transit System (TRT)

The introduction of the TRT system will not only bring more people to the square, but may have a great spatial impact through the frequency of busses circling the square, potentially severing its green heart from the city around it. This new 'barrier' will need to be addressed, while also keeping an attentive eye on the public green and needs of pedestrians.

Challenges

The most important challenge the square poses is the merging of historical identity with a function that reflects current and future social needs. The square is still associated with the ZAR of its origins, enforced by the monumental buildings around it and the associations with the Kruger statue. A more inclusive interpretation for the square needs to be sought, without ignoring its history and its importance for various communities. With the TRT almost complete, Church Square bears the stamp of a traffic engineering design solution imposed upon a precinct where pedestrian and public life in a green public open space should be the focus. In the early stages of the project little thought was given to the hierarchy of pedestrian, motorcar and bus, and how each could be sensitively integrated. Possibilities for the mitigation of the negative impacts of this intervention now need to be investigated.



The Statue of Paul Kruger, wrapped in tin-foil during the 2014 Cool Capital Biennale. (Johan Swart)



The Old Synagogue, shortly after completion. C.1900. (University of Pretoria Department of Architecture Repository, Old Pretoria Collection. No. F013B)

■ The Old Synagogue

Date of origin: 1897–98
Coordinates: 25.742593°S; 28.187953°E
Designer: Beardwood and Ibler Architects
Alterations: c.1957
Uses: 1898-1952: Synagogue; 1956-1977: Special Annex Supreme Court; 1977-c.1994: Storage space; currently vacant.
Legal heritage status: Article 34 of the National Heritage Resources Act (structures older than 60 years) is applicable.

The Old Synagogue has a tumultuous history and today it is certainly one of the most important Struggle Sites in the city centre. Despite its dilapidated state, the site holds tremendous potential for adaptive reuse. At the same time it is a very sensitive place, due to its sacred origin and (inter)national historical significance. Any transformation therefore requires an extremely well-considered approach. The site is of such importance that its reuse needs to be in service of various aspects of commemoration, accessible to all South Africans.

Brief History

The 'Old' Synagogue, the first permanent synagogue at Pretoria, originally had a strikingly polychromatic façade in an oriental style. The first stone was laid in 1897, and the building was consecrated on 20 August 1898. It was constructed to an eclectic design by the firm Beardwood and Ibler Architects. This short-lived practice was based in Johannesburg, and dissolved soon after the completion of this work, when the Anglo-Boer war broke out.

The construction of the synagogue was plagued by a lack of financial resources. In 1906, the prominent businessman Sammy Marks, belonging to the Jewish community, came to the rescue of the complex by settling its mortgage. When donating it back to the congregation, he imposed the following three conditions on the transfer of title:

- that the property was not to be sold, ceded or assigned to anyone, but was to be used exclusively for synagogue purposes in perpetuity;
- that no mortgages, charges or other encumbrances be put on, applied to or laid upon the property under any circumstances; and
- that the house on the property be used solely as the residence of the Minister of the Congregation, or alternatively by some official of the synagogue.

The old building soon proved to be too small and from 1922 onwards, plans for the congregation's relocation to a new synagogue were being prepared. It was only in 1952 that the ever growing congregation moved to a new synagogue in Pretorius Street, taking the candelabra, the cornerstone and the stained glass window of the main façade to the new structure.¹³ After the move in 1952, the old site was expropriated and transferred to the State, which intended to redevelop the whole city block as the new Supreme Court.¹⁴ When plans for a new complex took too long to finalise, the building underwent remodelling in 1958 for reuse as a special 'annex' of the Supreme Court for security-related cases, while the main function was still being operated from the Palace of Justice on Church Square.¹⁵ The striking façade was neutralised by the painting of the whole in a cream colour. Utility buildings were added at the northern and southern sides. These housed police accommodation, holding cells and witness waiting rooms, in which racial segregation was reflected by the levels of finishes and slightly different sizes.

13 Le Roux & Botes, 1991: 33.

14 Le Roux & Botes, 1991: 33; Nigel Vos and Associates, 1995: 6.

15 Nigel Vos and Associates, 1995: 10.



Outbuildings added to the Synagogue when it was transformed to serve as courthouse. These are of outmost importance to the significance of the site. (NJ Clarke)



The interior was reconfigured to accommodate a law court setting, e.g. by altering the former altar into judicial benches, applying acoustic boards, removing the stained glass, and bricking up the windows. In retrospect, the most important of the Struggle Movement trials of the Apartheid era took place on this disrespectfully adapted site.¹⁶ The first, the so-called Treason Trials, were transferred to the Old Synagogue on 1 August 1958 and lasted until 29 March 1961. Those tried in this process included, among many, Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela, who were all acquitted. However, Mandela was soon to return for a second trial (State vs. Mandela), which started on 5 August 1962, and through which he was sentenced to five years in prison with hard labour.¹⁷ While in custody, Mandela, along with Walter Sisulu, Denis Goldberg, Govan Mbeki, Elias Motsoaleng and Andrew Mlangeni, returned to the Old Synagogue for the hearings of the Rivonia Trial. They were sentenced to life in prison on Robben Island. The sentence was, however, passed from the Palace of Justice and not the Synagogue. The last legal proceedings that took place in the building (14 November to 2 December 1977) were the inquest into the death of Steve Biko. Afterwards, the building was put to use as a storage facility for the National Cultural History Museum, before being mothballed.¹⁸

¹⁶ Allan, 1971: 151.

¹⁷ Mandela, 1994: 303 & 313.

¹⁸ Le Roux & Botes, 1991: 33.

Change factors

End-of-use cycle

The synagogue had already reached the end of its original purpose when it was remodelled as temporary court of law. This changed the potential future of the building, due to its acquired significance which mandates its retention and social civic use.

Dynamics in appreciation of its historic significance

The Old Synagogue is now recognized for the important role it played in the history of South Africa and the Struggle against Apartheid, a significance that still requires a physical manifestation through use or memorialisation and in support of the role of the city as Capital of the Republic. Nevertheless, the historical origin as a synagogue, recognizable from the oriental stylistic features, is also a feature to appreciate and, possibly, to incorporate in the overall interpretation of the site.

The Tshwane Rapid Transit System (TRT)

A TRT station has been located in the direct vicinity of the Old Synagogue, changing not only the commercial possibilities of the site and its surrounds but also the physical reality of its urban position. Accessibility to the synagogue has potentially been improved by this addition, which could influence the feasibility of a future public use for the building.



The interior of the Synagogue during its use as courthouse. (Museum Africa) and today (2014). (Cornell Tukiri)



Nelson Mandela with Moses Kotane (right) leaving the Old Synagogue on 13 October 1958 after the government had withdrawn the indictment against them. (Jurgen Schadeberg, with permission)

www.jurgenschadeberg.com

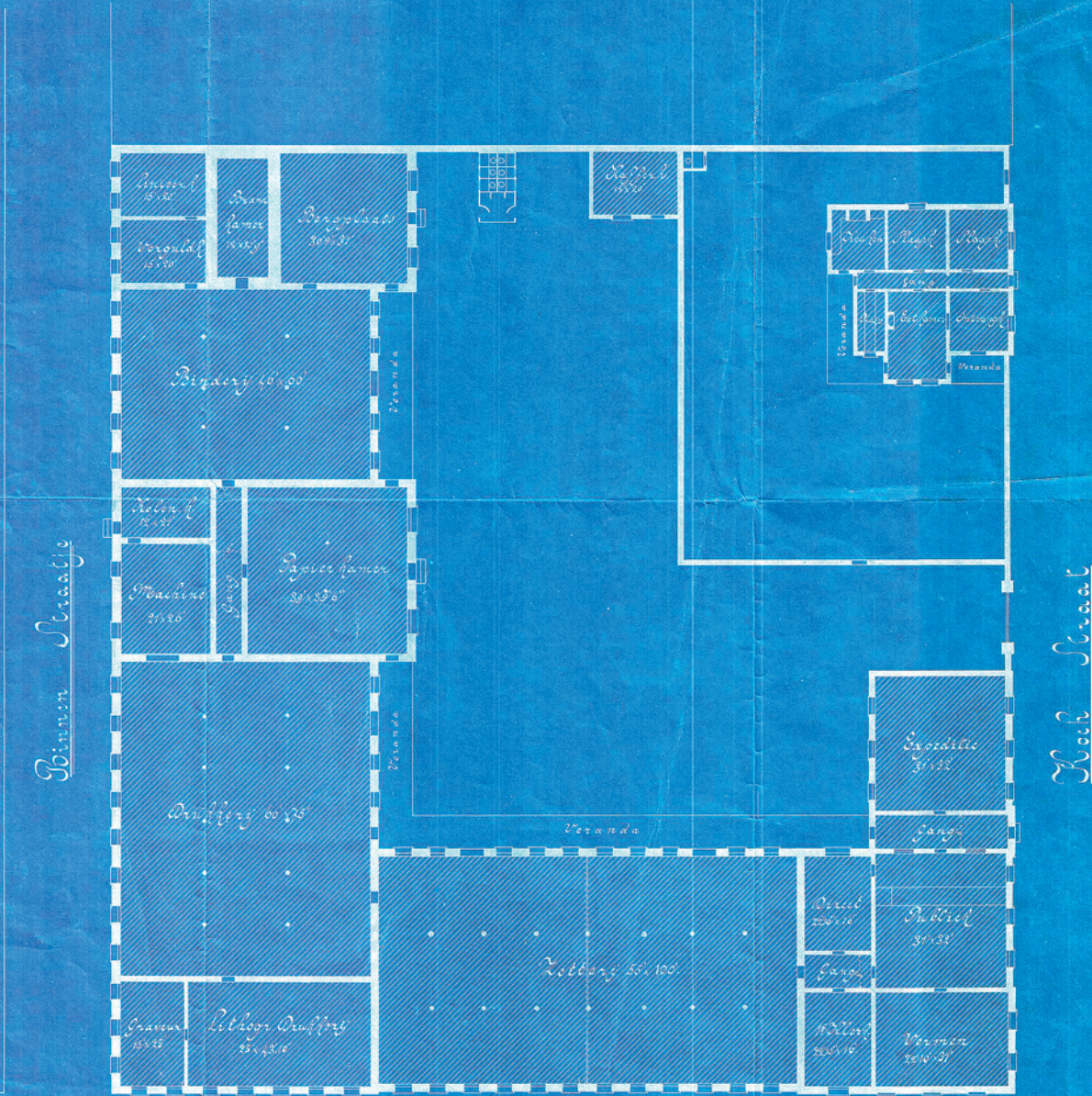
Challenges

- The National Department of Public Works, in which the synagogue is vested, is mandated to provide accommodation to national government departments. The private sector too, has oftentimes expressed interest in renting the property for various uses; however, the mechanisms by which such public/private arrangements could be put in place need to be critically investigated. Many of the Department's historic buildings, positioned in key locations in the city, face similar dilemmas in having reached their end-of-use cycle, and creative measures in thinking beyond red-tape government procedures need to be employed in securing significant heritage buildings for modern functions. The Department of Arts and Culture should be a key advisor in determining appropriate uses for the Old Synagogue. Bringing together the various role players through existing bureaucratic mechanisms remains the key challenge to unlocking the potential of this site.
- Finding an appropriate dignified civic use for the structure, the buildings surrounding it, and the vacant sites located on either side remains the greatest challenge for this building. Insensitive development, due to the opportunities presented by the TRT station, is a major threat.
- Material preservation of the synagogue presents certain challenges. The restoration of especially the original face brick façade will require careful specialist input, should the decision be made to do so: a decision to be carefully considered. It will restore the building to its former architectural glory, but mar the appearance it had at the time of the Treason and Rivonia Trials.



The Old Synagogue, 2014 with the new TRT station under construction in front of it. (Pieter Mathews)

Situatie van een nieuwe Staats Drukkerij
Pretoria



Schaal 1/6" = 1'

Vermeylen Straat

Pretoria 10 December 1894

H. J. van der Merwe
Hoofd van Publ. Werken

■ The Old Government Printing Works

Date of origin: 1895–96
Coordinates: 25.745063°S; 28.185371°E
Additions: 1932
Designers: Departement Publieke Werken, ZAR (Chief Architect: S.W. Wierda). Additions: Union of South Africa Public Works Department (Chief Architect: J.S. Cleland).
Uses: Printing works, now vacant.
Legal heritage status: Article 34 of the National Heritage Resources Act (structures older than 60 years) is applicable.

At the edge of the Church Square precinct lies the Government Printing Works (GPW), the oldest part of which was constructed to the design of the predominantly Dutch-manned ZAR Department of Public Works under its head, Sytze Wierda. The whole, a complex of historical value that is soon to be vacated, is characterised by this redbrick building located hard on the corner of two main arterials in the city centre. Its robust loose-fit planning, large interior spaces and iconic architectural language make this a building with high reuse potential. The Old Government Printing Works is ideally situated to be the first in a series of interventions to bridge the gap between Church Square and the north-western quadrant, a stepping-stone to cross the physical, social and economic divides.

In order to address the future of this site, the opportunities and constraints inherent in the site need to be understood. These investigations should not only be carried out in terms of its architecture, but also in relation to its place in society, time and the city. This can help in making the most of this asset, not just for its custodian, the Department of Public Works, but for the inhabitants of the city. Due to the proximity of the old Government Printing Works to Church Square, a public-spirited reuse might help to create a vibrant, equitable and resilient future for the inner city and the larger Tshwane metropolis.

Left: Original (1894) blueprint site plan of the Old Government Printing Works, (National Archives of South Africa File No. S.2/20. University of Pretoria UPSpace Repository, ZAR DPW (1887-1900) Drawing Collection, <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/41750>)

Brief History

The first phase of the Old Government Printing Works dates to 1895–96, when it was constructed to the design of the *Departement Publieke Werken* to serve as *Nieuwe Staatsdrukkerij* (New Government Printers). The original compound consisted of administration offices, printing works, a steam-powered electrical generator facility,¹⁹ and accommodation for a superintendent. It had a rather short life in service of the ZAR. Even before Pretoria fell to the invading British forces in June 1900, printing activities had ceased here and were being carried out in service of the ZAR Government from a train on the Pretoria–Lourenço Marques (Maputo) line.

The Printing Works were designed in a variant of the Dutch Renaissance Revival style very much *en vogue* for industrial buildings in the Netherlands at the time. This is typified by face-brick facades, with stepped gables articulated with Neo-Classical styling, and sandstone decorations in the form of streaky-bacon coursing, key-stones, quoining and pediment finials in the form of bollards or pinnacles/obelisks. In South Africa, local conditions mandated the use of corrugated iron for roofing, allowing for the use of roof ventilators, which became part of a regionalist aesthetic. A variant of this mainstream 19th century revival style was widely used for tram sheds, breweries and gas works in the Netherlands at the time.²⁰

¹⁹ This electrical generator facility with iron smokestack was locally procured from the engineering firm Thos. Begbie and Co. (Pty) Ltd, established in Johannesburg in 1887.

²⁰ Reference can be made to many Dutch examples, including the now famous *Westergasfabriek* (1883) in Amsterdam and the Amsterdam City Tram Sheds, De Hallen (1901), both of which have been transformed into creative urban-renewal projects.

The interior of the production area of the GPW presents a carefully designed utilitarian structure with expansive well-lit and buoyancy-driven naturally ventilated spaces. The exposed structural system visible in the interior is a beautiful amalgam of cast-iron columns and brackets supporting a timber roof structure, all kept in equilibrium by steel tie-rods with adjustable turnbuckles. This ingenious system—most probably

an imported patent system—allows for large open-plan adaptable spaces that are not dependent on perimeter walls for their structural integrity. The whole was designed to be an ultra-modern, well-lit and dust-free printing works. Wierda, immodestly, thought it to be the largest and best in Africa and certainly of a higher standard than the printing works of many a European State.²¹



Street view looking up Bosman Street showing the Old Printing Works and the Grootekerk / Melodi Ya Tshwane Church, a unique Eclectic Wilhelmiens ensemble. (Nicholas Clarke)

21 Rex, 1974: 416.

Printing work continued after the British conquest of the city, and small changes and additions were effected throughout to improve the efficiency of the complex. The administration wing (corner of Bosman and Madiba—previously Vermeulen—Streets) served as police post for a while, after the whole complex was expanded in 1932 to a design of the Union

of South Africa Public Works Department under Chief Architect John Cleland.²² The complex continued to serve as government printing facility for over 100 years and is now being decommissioned. The historic first phase, focus of the Laboratory, has already been mothballed for some time.



Interior of the main hall of the Old Printing Works. (Marieke Kuipers)



Column capital detail: Precast industrial elements give a special character to the Old Government Printing Works building complex. (Nicholas Clarke)

²² <http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/bldgframes.php?bldgid=3407&archid=378>

Change factors

End-of-use cycle

The building has reached the end of its use cycle and a new function is required to ensure its longevity. This can be done as a stand-alone project (as was done in the Laboratory) or as part of the adaptive reuse of the larger complex.

Changing position in the city

The recently launched West Capital project will be linked to Church Square and will give the Printing Works new life. This development has the potential to shift the focus of energy in the core of the city, effectively repositioning the Printing Works—which now lies at the edge of the inner-city—to a more central location.



Uninformed restoration leading to accelerated decay. The parapets and gables of the Old Government Printing Works were replaced with a harder brick than the original, leading to further damage. The original face brick gable requires specialist-lead restoration. (Nicholas Clarke)

Challenges

- Under the mandate of the National Department of Public Works, the possibilities of providing a government function within the Printing Works that still allows an interactive public interface remains a challenge. Finding a function that, externally and internally, stimulates the best possible enjoyment of the printer's heritage and cultural significance is key to the proper reuse and conservation of the original 1896 complex. In its favour are the large high-volume industrial spaces that lend themselves to easy adaptability for reuse, and its healthy mix of potential outside-inside spaces surrounding a secure and imposing courtyard.
- For reuse to be successful, re-appraisal of the building and the potential social role of its meaning is necessary.
- Material restoration is a challenge: the original soft brick façade is miraculously still in place, with minor detrimental repairs having been undertaken to parapets and gables. The repair and continued maintenance of this fragile façade will require specialist input, which might not be available locally.
- The façade of the building forms a barrier to the street, lining a sidewalk, and is hard, un-urbane and unfriendly. Ways in which the façade could be opened up will be critical to the successful integration of the structure with the urban fabric of the capital.

Conclusion

Despite its relatively young age, the City of Tshwane contains a rich built heritage. This heritage has in turn seen a dramatic history, which has imbued the city with a valuable intangible history. It is not always a comfortable history to confront, but has the virtue of having potential for very positive redirection. These qualities are overt (for instance the valued aesthetics of some places such as the Old Government Printing Works), but often also veiled (the Old Synagogue is an exceptional example of such a site). Even places as well-known and well-used as Church Square can benefit from a reappraisal.

All three of the sites presented have stood the test of time, often because, for a long time, no-one paid any heed to them. They have proven their robustness in the face of neglect. The opposite might also prove to be true. They are fragile places that require very careful investigation and interrogation before any intervention can be made—lest much that is valuable be lost. They can serve to house temporary or acupuncture projects, instigating urban renewal. Together they can, if utilised in an appropriate manner, make a substantial contribution to the ‘re-centring’ of the capital.

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