

ARCHITECTS WITHOUT ARCHITECTURE – THE ARCHITECT AS ILLUSTRATOR

BY: ROGER C FISHER

WHILE MOST ARCHITECTS are not only catholic in taste, they are also often artistic in temperament and multitalented. Most are schooled in the representation of buildings, a few turn this into high art – the art of the perspectivist. This is almost a lost art in the digital era. Some, however, become illustrators, and as one would expect, those of buildings not to be unusual.

We, for instance, have had our South African shores graced by John Wilford Hilbert Farrow (1878–1952), partner of Cordeaux in one of the pioneer architectural firms in East London, Cordeaux & Farrow. When resident in England, he was in Banister Fletcher's office from 1900 to 1901 where he was responsible for about 30 line drawings in what Gerneke calls 'the architects' Bible', 'illustrating Mr Fletcher's *History of Architecture* (fourth ed., 1901) under Mr Fletcher's supervision'. There was a major revision with the sixth edition in 1921, when much of the text was rewritten by Fletcher's son and heir to the project with his then wife and the very numerous drawings replaced by new ones by George G Woodward and others. More recently, we have had several volumes by the architect Hannes Meiring (1934–2010), where he represents local historical buildings in whimsical style.

Joseph Michael Solomon (1886–1920) was one of the Baker Boys. Baker invited Solomon to join his Johannesburg office in 1910. Here Solomon played a significant role in the decoration of the interior of Villa Arcadia for Sir Lionel Phillips. The meeting with Sir Lionel and Lady Florrie Phillips was to be important to him as it gained him Florrie as patron and advocate, so procuring him many prestigious commissions. The campus for the University of Cape Town was to be his nemesis. The strain of it drove him to suicide by gunshot one morning after breakfast. In the period of his early meeting with the Phillipses, he made a number of portrait sketches

for *The State*, a journal which was an instrument of Milner's 'kindergarden' for the 'closer union' movement and for which a number of architects wrote, mostly connected with and including Baker. Sir Lionel, an advocate of Union, surreptitiously funded its publication. The achievement of Union in 1910 somewhat subverted its *raison d'être* and it fizzled out in 1913. His best-known illustration was the line drawing of the sculpture *Physical Energy* by GF Watts, central to Rhodes Memorial on the flanks of Devil's Peak which graced several of the covers for the journal.



Michael Baker, drawn by J. M. Solomon

Most famous of the local architect-illustrators, and one who has produced some of the most expensive pieces of published Africana, is William Mitcheson Timlin (1892–1943) of the Kimberley practice Greatbatch & Timlin. He had a fine gift for fantasy, rumoured to be enhanced by opiates. The best examples in his architectural oeuvre are the interiors of several atmospheric theatres in the country, the most famous of which was that of the Colosseum Theatre in Johannesburg (demolished in 1985), as well as being associated with the design for the

interior of the Alhambra Theatre in Cape Town. He wrote and published the text in his own hand and illustrated a book in 1923, *The Ship that Sailed to Mars*. The film rights were bought by an unidentified group in America, to be called *Get Off the Earth*, but it was never made. Apart from drawing and painting, Timlin wrote music and worked as an etcher and an illustrator of several more books, including some by Hedley Chilvers and the Afrikaans children's book, *Kalaharie-kaskendes*. At his premature death he was reputed to own the most beautiful toy collection in South Africa. He was also busy with a second book project, *The Building of a Fairy City*, and the originals of these illustrations occasionally come up for auction. His owl logo is unmistakable. A collection of his paintings is held in the William Humphries Collection in Kimberley Art Gallery and is well worth requesting for viewing when passing that way.



An unexpected illustrator is Norman Charles Kingsley Lighton (1904–1981). Lighton is far better known as a painter of birds than as an architect. He was born in Wonderboom near Pretoria. Here he was raised in the Bushveld, surrounded by a menagerie of wild creatures. As a six-year-old, he copied the illustrations of Fitzpatrick's *Jock of the Bushveld*, then as a young man he sketched the exhibited animals in the Transvaal Museum during his lunch breaks. While he was employed in Public Works, first as a draughtsman, then as assistant architect, he was seconded to the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria in April 1936 by the then Minister of Public Works to do the illustrations for Dr Austin Roberts's book *The Birds of South Africa*, first published in 1940. He had previously illustrated CD Priest's *The Birds of Southern Rhodesia*, published in four volumes between 1933 and 1936. Lighton made extensive use of the Finch-Davies originals stored in the Transvaal Museum without any acknowledgment of having done so, although he credited Finch-Davies with having had a profound effect on his work as a draughtsman. During World War Two, Lighton was for a short time a gymnastics instructor at the Medical Corps Training Depot at Zonderwater, before being seconded to the South African Institute for Medical Research at the insistence of Dr J Gear, where 'he made drawings of blood parasites and their hosts for a book on tropical medicine intended for the South African troops serving in East Africa'. He died in Cape Town, aged 77. The Brenthurst Library in Johannesburg holds the collection of his art work. The



latest edition of the *Roberts Bird Guide* has dispensed with all of his illustrations, bar what was once the signature frontispiece of the ostrich family, ground hornbill and bateleur eagles, now placed on the fly page.

Alexander Alan Telford (1911–1976) made a name for himself as a black-

and-white line illustrator. Telford spent all his lunch hours in museums and libraries, carrying a pencil in his pocket to sketch anything of interest that might come his way. In 1956, he illustrated TV Bulpin's *Lost Trails of the Transvaal* and then later also books by Thelma Gutsche, AN Boyce, AR Willcox, PJ Schoeman, DB van Wyk, AP Cartwright, Norman Moorat and lastly (in part) Patricia Storrar's *George Rex: Death of a Legend* (1974). His drawing of Schoonderzicht Farm in Cape Town (after a photograph by Dr Mary Cook and Mary Gunn) is the only surviving picture of this historic building. He was also responsible for the large historical colour drawings, entitled *Scenes from South Africa*, produced by the Shell Company of South Africa as classroom teaching aids. As well as writing and illustrating articles, such as that on the Dromedaris which appeared in *Africana Notes and News* and another on early land transport for the *Standard Encyclopaedia of South Africa*, he published in 1951 *A Visit to the Dromedaris* (sic), his first book,



which was translated into Afrikaans by JLJ van Rensburg in 1969, some sketches of Johannesburg (1969) and *Yesterday's Dress: a History of Costume in South Africa* (1972). His scale models of horse-drawn vehicles were used at the Transport Museum, Johannesburg, and his drawings of old ships and models at the Millwood House Museum, Knysna, the town where he retired to in 1970. He is recorded as a modest, helpful and balanced man with a photographic memory. One of his sayings was, 'One life is not long enough to do all the interesting things I would like to do.'

There seems to be a penchant in the profession for illustrating books for

children. We have already met those of Timlin's. Christiaan Strauss Brink (1920–1992) is recorded as preparing silhouette illustrations for the Afrikaans children's book *My Eie Outjies* by C van Oversteeg (1939). A recent contemporary, Richard (Dick) Maxwell Latimer, in his retirement near East London since 2012, spends most of his time as an artist doing painting, drawings, sculpture and photography. He has also produced a picture-driven children's book, *The Impossible Garden* and previously *The Expedition to the Rainbow's Heart* (1986). His art work is vibrant and kaleidoscopic, with strong geometric structuring, revelling in the depiction of animals juxtaposed with the artefacts of the industrial world (see <http://dicklatimer.com> for examples of his work).

The tradition persists...



REFERENCES

Most information presented here is gleaned from the featured architects' entries on the website artefacts.co.za. The authorship is unrecorded, but Joanna Walker served as chief researcher and is believed to have authored many of the entries. Solomon has an entry in *Dictionary of South African Biography*, Vol. II (HSRC, 1972) and Lighton and Telford both have entries in the *Dictionary of South African Biography*, Vol. V (HSRC, 1987), a rare distinction for architects.

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- 1 Solomon's portrait of Baker in *The State* c. 1909
- 2 Timlin - *The Ship that Sailed to Mars*
- 3 Timlin - *Kalahari-kaskenades* - 'Bird-lime to trap Red-Jackal'
- 4 Lighton's perennial frontispiece for *Robert's Birds Guide*
- 5 Telford's illustration of the *Dromedaris* for the *Standard Encyclopedia of SA*
- 6 *The Expedition to the Rainbow's Heart* (1982) A spread from the children's book Latimer wrote and illustrated