



South African National Society

History – Culture – Conservation
PBO No 930011633



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Van Riebeeck Society becomes Historical Publications Southern Africa

The Society took the decision to support a kindred body the Van Riebeeck Society, with a donation of R2000 towards its plans to publish a series of works on prominent South Africans who have contributed to change over the past century. Cape Town based member, Jayne Moir was roped in to attend the launch of the now renamed organisation and participate in celebrating the 100th anniversary on 29th August, 2018.

The evening started with the opening of a centenary exhibition at the National Library of South Africa. This exhibition highlighted what the Society had achieved over the past 100 years, and what it is planning for the second 100 years.

The next part of the evening took place at the Centre for the Book a few hundred metres further up from the Library in Queen Victoria Street, where the 5:30pm function was being held.

What a magnificent building! An absolutely enormous circular area inside where participants were welcomed with name stickers. From there one could sit at one of the many tables which were decorated with flowers. Being new to Cape Town, I sat myself down and took in this amazing building!

We were seated on the ground floor area around which glass-fronted bookcases housed all the historic book collections – everything solid teak and oak! There was an elevated platform for the various speakers, behind which was a huge screen continuously showing a video of all the van Riebeeck publications over the years. As one looked up towards the huge ceiling one could see the stockrooms, laboratories and workshops. One helped oneself to a copious volume of snacks and refreshments whilst enjoying the lovely background music provided by a string quartet.

There followed various speeches, some encouraging more to become members of the Society – now to be re-named **Historical Publications Southern Africa**. Every half hour two questions were posed to the audience – prizes being bottles of wine. (I just missed out towards the end - it was the quotation of Breaker Morant on the gallows, and I was pipped at the post!!).

After the speeches, everyone moved to an area where a lovely buffet supper was laid out for everyone to help themselves. When I returned to the main hall I discovered a large flip chart where messages could be written to the Society and took the opportunity to write a congratulatory message to their Society from our SA National Society in Durban. The gathering broke up at about 8:30pm.

Additional Information about the Building:

The building is a National Monument and was designed by British Architects, * W Hawke & *W N McKinley who won a competition for the design and moved to South Africa to oversee its construction. It was built in two stages between 1906 and 1913 to serve as the Senate House & Admin Offices of the University of the Cape of Good Hope – housed the archives, and is one of the finest Edwardian buildings in Cape Town. First meeting of the Van Riebeeck Society took place in 1918. The building went on to become the State Mortuary. The Hansie Cronje Trial took place here! (How daunting must that have been!!)

“The Centre for the Book” – the present name for the building - is part of the National Library of South Africa’s outreach programme to promote the culture of reading, writing and publishing in local languages.

** Architects were also responsible for the Supreme Court further down Queen Street, as well as the Johannesburg City Hall.

Jayne Moir
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