



A.P.J. VAN RENSBURG (opsteller). *Excelsior 1910-1985: 'n gedenkalbum*. Bloemfontein, 1985. 116 pp. Geïll. Prys onvermeld.

Om 'n dorpsgeskiedenis saam te stel, is nooit maklik nie. As dit boonop beteken dat 75 jaar se gebeure binne slegs drie maande nagevors en geboekstaaf moet word, lyk dit na 'n haas onbegonne taak. Terselfdertyd werp dit 'n refleksie op die beplanning van die opdraggever wat kennelik nie met die aard en omvang van historiese arbeid rekening gehou het nie. Nietemin verdien die skrywer en ander belanghebendes 'n pluimpie omdat die projek wel aan-gepak en deurgevoer is.

Dat die keuse geval het op die bekende geskiedskrywer prof. Arrie van Rensburg om hierdie gedenkalbum op te stel, is nie toevallig nie. Hy het hom tevore al aan die skryf van plaaslike geskiedenis gewaag; daarby behoeft sy vermoë om indringend te vors, logies te formuleer en vloeiend te vertel geen betoog nie. Deur 'n "dwarssnit in die lotgeval" van die mense van Excelsior en omgewing het die outeur die wel en wee van hierdie gemeenskap raak uitgebeeld.

Jare van storm en drang is die tema van die inleidingshoofstuk, 'n stukkie pioniersgeskiedenis wat die agtergrond — tot omstreeks 1870 — verskaf vir die uiteindelijke vestiging van blankes in dié plattelandse kontrei. Die sprong in tyd tussen hierdie en die volgende hoofstuk oor dorpsstigting in 1910 is egter hinderlik groot en kan verwarring by die leser skep. Ander sake wat in afsonderlike hoofstukke aan die orde kom, is die ontstaan en groei van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde gemeente (met 'n kort gedeelte oor die Metodiste Kerk — maar geen verwysing na sendingaktiwiteite nie!), onderwys, plaaslike bestuur en algemene dorpsontwikkeling, landbou en boerderybedrywighede, kultuurbedrywighede en sport. In 'n reeks bylaes aan die einde word naamlyste en dienstermyne van onder meer burgemeesters, leraars, skoolhoofde, landdroste en geneeshere verstrekk.

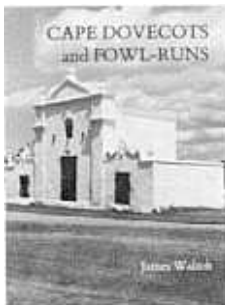
Ofskoon die skrywer duidelik onder groot druk moes werk en hy sy pennevrug as "niks meer as 'n inleiding" tot 'n volledige geskiedenis van Excelsior bestempel nie, moet sy werk steeds as dié van 'n professionele historikus beoordeel word. 'n Ernstige beswaar is dan dat inligting uit sommige bronne ruimskoots gebruik word sonder om sodanige bronne in die literatuurlys op te neem. Verder skenk die outeur kwalik aandag aan ander bevolkings-groepe behalwe die blankes. Benewens die plek wat aan swartes toegeken word uit hoofde van hul konfrontasie met die blanke baanbrekers, figuur hierdie mense byna nooit in die Excelsiorgeskiedenis nie. 'n Lastigheid is ook die aanduiding van historiese geldwaardes (ponde, sjelings en pennies) in moderne R-waardes — iets wat veral by die jonger garde tot foutiewe vertolkings of skewe voorstellings aanleiding kan gee.

'n Pluspunt is die keurige, lekker-op-die-tong-styl waarin die verhaal geklee word. Ongelukkig maak die samesteller hom soms skuldig aan 'n soort doelbewuste "mooskrywery" en uitsprake wat aan die melodramatiese en selfs heldewerering grens (byvoorbeeld pp. 34-35, 38, 43-44, 49 en 89). Dit weerspieël 'n mate van subjektiwiteit en is werklik onnodig. Die boek is netjies uitgegee en goed versorg ondanks heelwat set-, spel- en taalfoute. Dit doen egter nie afbreuk aan die algemene gunstige indruk wat die ryklik en toepaslik geïllustreerde publikasie maak nie. 'n Liggingkaart van die dorp en omstreke sou nogtans die waarde van hierdie gedenkalbum verhoog.

Die negatiewe opmerkings ten spyte, kan prof. Van Rensburg se studie tog gereken word as van die verdienstelikste pogings om 'n gemeenskap se voorgeslagte vir hul bydrae te huldig en tegelyk 'n ryke verled vir die nageslag te bewaar.

C.C. ELOFF

Raad vir Geesteswetenskaplike Navorsing



J. WALTON. *Cape dovescots and fowl-runs*. Stellenbosch Museum: Stellenbosch, 1985. 120 pp. Illus. No price. ISBN 0 620 08816 8.

There are not many scholarly writers on architecture in South Africa and perhaps none that can match James Walton's record of writing consistently over such a long period. Thirty three years after the pioneering *Homesteads and villages of South Africa* (1952) there is another original contribution: *Cape dovescots and fowl-runs*. In between there have been several books and a long list of articles. Walton is also well-known for his leadership in the

movement to preserve and to promote interest in this country's vernacular architecture.

This book again testifies to Walton's deep knowledge of lesser-known structures in the countryside. While architectural historians in general traditionally direct their attention to major structures and the best works in the oeuvre of architects, Walton is continually interested in "architecture without architects", the environmental structures which form the bulk of small settlements. In this aspect he even differs from writers who concentrate, like he does, on the period preceding the Victorian era, when there were few architects in any case. Whereas the large Cape Dutch houses feature in most books on the topic, Walton prefers to write on items such as water mills, windmills and horse-mills and this time on dovescots and fowl-runs. In fact in this book he also looks at fowl houses and "vethokkies" (a little room for fattening fowls before killing them for the table).

Often the demolition of our architectural heritage results from the changes in use of buildings and structures. Ways of living and economies are replaced by new ones through the years and other types of spaces for the accommodation of activities are needed. The human environment witnesses a continuous process of building, demolition and rebuilding, or at least alteration and addition.

It is fortunate for the topic on which Walton has written this time, that poultry remains a requirement for most households on the platteland. But there should be other than pragmatic reasons as well to retain the structures scholars like Walton have identified in this field. There are academic and educational reasons for instance. These "humble" artefacts could prove, precisely through their lack of pretentiousness, to be of the utmost value as documents reflecting the ideals, ways of living and aesthetic perception of the time in which they were built. This is the kind of material open air museums are made up of. They are valued for their directness. In terms of a conservation strategy great care should be given not to exclude such apparently lesser important items.

It is interesting that poultry rearing commenced two or three years after Jan van Riebeeck started the refreshment station at the Cape of Good Hope. Initially experiments with an assortment of livestock were undertaken to ascertain their suitability for the Cape climate and conditions. By 1658 fowls, ducks and geese were well established but the evidence points out that dovescots and fowl-runs were only built from the first quarter of the eighteenth century. It was especially during the period of prosperity of the last decades of the eighteenth and the first of the nineteenth centuries that large farmhouses were built. Dovescots and fowl-runs as well as other outbuildings shared in the affluence. Compared to the other farm buildings and structures, the farmer lavished the greatest embellishments on the former.

The book is presented in five sections: a concise historical background, dovescots, fowl houses, fowlruns and "vethokkies". The four main sections consist of a series of entries on different farms. Each entry reviews the historical evidence and provides a description of the structure. Walton acknowledges the relationship between the structure, its use and the people for which it was built. In this way he provides some interesting material on the histories of the families living on the farms. As usual Walton is meticulous in tracing the historical changes of a structure and although he admits not having done any excavations to trace demolished structures, several remarks concerning structural changes are provided. In this respect the illustrations are extremely valuable.

Each entry is well-illustrated in black and white and often supplemented by line-drawings and sometimes an odd map. Walton's command over the existing literature is evident from the inclusion of graphical depictions in books of the eighteenth century which contribute to the understanding of the original relationship between the architecture of the main house and outbuildings. For this book Walton has also done, in his typical way, some site plans and details. It is a pity, however, that not all the entries have site plans. These would have supported the description in a significant way, especially with regard to distances and orientation.

The lack of a list of sources is met by references at the bottom of each entry. But it is difficult to find one's way in the book. There is no index and the entries are not in an alphabetical or any other order. The reader has to refer to the list of contents where he has to check the complete list.

Cape dovescots and fowl-runs is well-presented and an excellent contribution to the stock of books on vernacular architecture in South Africa.

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