



SIMON'S TOWN
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BULLETIN



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OUR BULLETIN OF 25 PAGES IS PUBLISHED IN JULY EACH YEAR

SIMONS TOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 14 JUNE 2025 : ROGER BAGSHAW.

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to welcome you all to this our sixty fourth Annual General Meeting.

I would like to summarise the work we have done this year by introducing you to our Committee Members.

Cherry Dilley is our secretary and the glue that's holds our Committee together. Cherry has been involved since the early days of the Historical Society and was curator of the Simons Town Museum from 1993 until 2002. She has a vast knowledge of the STHS and the museum. Cherry is also our membership secretary and chases up fees and collates membership numbers for feedback to the committee and treasurer. She also sits on Stadco.

James Willis is our Vice President and is a long-standing Simons Town stalwart whose family are part of Simons Town History. Think Willis Walk.

Eric Mawhinney is Vice Chairman and a past Chairman who has been active in the Historical Society for many years, Eric is also on the board of the Museum. He has catalogued all our bulletins, put together a Heritage Resource Survey which is encyclopaedic in its format. He also set up the Simons Town Historic Walk on Google and remains a fountain of knowledge. Eric also works on keeping our website updated. Eric also shows a keen interest in keeping our town tidy and in keeping with its heritage be it buildings, signage or pavement clutter.

Roy Burnie is our treasurer but more than that he and Harry Croome keep our historical plaques in good order and supply and fit new ones on a regular basis.

Harry Croome maintains many of the Town's artefacts including the Old Burying Ground in Seaforth the Just Nuisance statue and grave atop Klaver steps.

Harry and Roy have also ventured into clock making, having given the clock above the Stadco office (in Jubilee Square) a new voice and fixing the Dockyard clock which now seems to be keeping good time.

Arné Söderlund is known to many of us and is curator of his own museum (If you have not seen it; it is a must). He is a mine of information on naval heritage matters and the Naval Heritage Trust). Arné was instrumental in getting project Assegai (the Submarine) off the ground and will be giving us an update on the

recent submarine surfacing and opening later this afternoon. Arné is also on the Board of Stadco who by default are the custodians of the Darwin Bust on the Town Pier. This as well as running the Town Square and Tourist Office.

Esther Le Roux is a mine of local knowledge and she along with Eric Mawhinney are to select suitable photographs from the old glass plate negative collection in order to present a lecture within the next few months. We are planning a Coffee Table presentation book based on the old photographs. Esther also looks after our Facebook page and keeps our Traders List up to date. Her most recent endeavour is the preparation of an application to declare the Historic Mile and Simon's Town a UNESCO world Heritage Site. We all know what Simon's Town offers other than Heritage buildings; we have penguins, a harbour, a bay with beaches, boat trips, whales, dolphins, mountains, a submarine, Charles Darwin, Fish and Chips and not to forget, our baboons.

John Newton is arranging the repair and reinstatement of the West Dockyard gate which has been in storage at the Naval Museum for some time.

Diana Reekie is the person responsible for the Wall of Memory plaques on the brick wall between the West Dockyard gate and Wharf Street. A mammoth task, years in the making but a major tourist attraction.

Personally, I sit on the Architectural Advisory Committee, which is chaired by our Councillor, Simon Liell-Cock, and we look at proposals for alterations or new buildings within the Heritage Protection Overlay Zone. There are guidelines for all construction work in the HPOZ which cover the Historic Mile and all the area behind it right up to the Urban Edge. We also comment on any proposed changes to any building over sixty years of age anywhere in Simon's Town.

We were part of the team which was instrumental in the placing of the Darwin Bust on the Town Pier on the 20th April this year. At the unveiling it was suggested by the Deputy Mayor, Eddie Andrews, that the Town Pier could become a Simon's Town Hall of Fame and adding a bust of Mary Kingsley was suggested as a start.

I thank my committee for their hard work and support and you all for listening to me and now hand you over to our Treasurer for his report.

Mary Kingsley, born 1862, died of typhoid fever on 3 June 1900 while nursing Boer prisoners at Simon's Town. At her own request she was buried at sea. Unfortunately, when her coffin was slid over the side of H M Torpedo Boat 29 off Cape Point it floated and had to be recovered and ballasted with an anchor.
- Wikipedia.

OBITUARY : MARGARET CARTRIGHT 1932 – 2024. – CHERRY DILLEY.

“The Cartwright Twins”, Margaret and Janet (Margaret being the elder) were born at No. 32 Glen Road, Glencairn in 1932. The family moved to “Lyndall” at 68 Glen Road, Glencairn in 1937 where they lived for the remainder of their lives.

They both attended Muizenberg High School from 1939 to 1949, and Margaret attended the Cape Technical College in 1950 and from 1951 to 1954 studied for a BA and Higher Diploma in Librarianship at the University of Cape Town.

In 1986 she obtained an M.A. in her field. She worked at the South African Public Library from 1955 (with a short break at the State Library in Pretoria from 1970 – 1971) as a Cartographic Librarian specialising in maps and historic research until retiring in 1991.

She was a founder member of Simon’s Town Historical Society in 1960, serving on the committee until 2018, during which time the Society published a number of her articles in the bi-annual Bulletin. When she retired from the committee Margaret was awarded Honorary Life Membership in appreciation of her contribution to the Society.

She was a volunteer at Simon’s Town Museum from its inception in 1977 working in the Museum Shop and Reception where she enjoyed sharing her knowledge of Simon’s Town’s history with international, national and local visitors. She gladly assisted, whenever requested, with functions and events organised by the Museum and Historical Society.

Both sisters were, for many years, active members of St Francis of Assisi Church, next door to the Museum. Janet was Church Warden and Margaret was ordained as a Lay Minister.

In 2004 “The Twins” were honoured with the Simon’s Town Citizen of the Year award for their contribution to the Town.

Margaret passed away quietly at “Lyndall” in December 2024. As a true “Simonite” she will forever be remembered for her part in preserving the history of Simon’s Town.

The Cartwright Family is well established in South Africa and the Twins were related to the writer Olive Schreiner (1855 – 1920) and Lt. Gen. Dennis Earp (1930 – 2019) who was Chief of the South African Air Force from 1981 to 1988.

THOSE RADAR WOMEN WHO GUARDED THE SHORES: DR BRIAN AUSTIN

A story perhaps not as well-known as it should be is always worth retelling. During the earliest days of WW 2 a remarkable event took place at Wits University when, on 16th December 1939, the first radar “echo” ever seen in South Africa was observed. Those viewing the radar screen were Professor Basil Schonland, Director of the Bernard Price Institute of Geophysical Research, and Mr G R Bozzoli, senior lecturer in Electrical Engineering who was later to become Professor, Dean of the Faculty and finally Vice-Chancellor of Wits during those turbulent political years in the 1970s.

At the behest of the Prime Minister, General Jan Smuts, Schonland had set up a team of engineers and physicists to design and build South Africa’s own radar. This followed the request from the British Government that its Dominions, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa should immediately initiate work in developing their own radars as war was imminent. That technical story has been well told in various places but who became the operators of those radars intended for the protection of South Africa’s very long coastline is, perhaps, rather less well known.

Schonland formed the Special Signals Services (SSS) as a wing of the South African Corps of Signals to undertake this top-secret work but as well as engineers to design and maintain the equipment they also needed competent people to operate it. And soon, the SSS turned to women who, (unsurprisingly, as it soon turned out) had infinitely more patience than their male colleagues when it came to spending many hours watching the fluorescent radar screens for that tell-tale “blip” that indicated a radar target. Word went out to the universities and after being told very little other than that the work they would be doing was “top secret,” volunteers soon presented themselves. Needless to say, all were required to take an oath of secrecy so their excitement mounted. To their friends, who were not party to the great secret despite much questioning, SSS simply meant the “Super Snob Squad.” Their numbers increased steadily so that by 1945 there were more than 500 women serving alongside their 1400 male colleagues, of whom many would find themselves well beyond South Africa’s borders as they tended the radars in East Africa, in the Middle East, in Italy and in West Africa.

The women were trained, throughout the war, in a series of 27 courses held mainly at Wits and UCT. There they were introduced to the finer points of soldiering, including PT! There was often much hilarity particularly when their instructor at Wits, who was the university swimming and gymnastics coach and

a Scotsman to boot, took great in delight in putting them through their paces accompanied by his commands, in broadest Scots, "A...sses to the left! A...sses to the rrright! And, of course, they were also taught all the technicalities they needed to know as radar operators including, strange as it may seem, the Morse code.

Naturally, radar coverage of the coastline was mainly concentrated close to the major ports with Cape Town, and the vitally important naval base at Simon's Town, having a significant number of radar installations close by. In most cases those radars were situated at the highest points in order to give them maximum seaward coverage. That, needless to say, made some of those sites rather challenging to reach whereas those at lower altitude frequently offered delightfully unspoilt and deserted beaches perfect for bathing. But not all the radar girls lived on those many isolated radar stations; others found themselves posted to the Filter Rooms, the centre of operations in the major coastal cities. There they received messages, both by telephone and by radio from the radar stations in their vicinity giving the bearings and ranges of all shipping activity within radar range. Every likely target was indicated with a special marker on a large plotting table laid out in grid-formation with the position of each radar site accurately located. From this the Filter Officer and his senior colleagues would assess the situation by observing the movements of the many markers over time. Regular merchant shipping, following their normal routes, would soon become clear but irregular "tracks" were clearly suspicious and were observed closely. If a follow-up operation was required, the South African Air Force sprang into action.

As well as the many friendly vessels plying the coast there was a constant threat from so-called Merchant Raiders which were ostensibly non-combatant merchant ships but, in essence, they were heavily disguised to hide their formidable armament. Also, there was always the possibility of detecting surfaced U-boats, the fearsome German submarines, that sank dozens of Allied merchant ships all around the South African coastline throughout the war. Just occasionally a false sighting might be reported to "Freddie," as the Filter Room was always known. A surfaced whale and its calf looked for all the world like a submarine and evidently the radar thought so too. It took frustrated SAAF pilots, scrambled to confront the enemy, to confirm the real identity of the target! One very reassuring function that kept those radar operators fully occupied was in monitoring any ships that might be heading for rocks under the dangerous wartime blackout conditions with no lighthouses functioning. Tragedy was averted on more than one occasion by the watchfulness of those SSS radar operators.

The coastal radar stations were often located in places with euphonious names so resonant of South Africa. There was Karbonkelberg and Noordbaaikop, Somersveld, Slangkop and Blaauwberg and all were clustered around Cape Town. Among them too were stations at Baboon Point, Signal Hill, Silversands, Cape Point and Betty's Bay. And no one ever forgot the magnificence of Rooikrans with its precipitous cliffs dropping into the sea below. False Bay with its special naval port of Simon's Town was, therefore, almost ringed by a cluster of radars initially of South African design known, uniquely, as the JB sets in honour of Johannesburg where they originated. As the war progressed more sophisticated radars of British manufacture eventually began to arrive in South Africa and radars such as the COL, the MRU and the exotic sounding NT 277 S appeared with each being distinguished by their very different antennas, from wires supported on wooden frames of the JB's to contraptions that resembled rotating wire mattresses of the COLs and finally to the parabolic dishes now so commonly seen on many buildings and high towers across the country. And the SSS "girls" operated them all.



AN SSS RADAR OPERATOR
WATCHING THE SCREEN.



PLOTTING THE TARGETS IN THE FILTER ROOM.



PASSING-OUT PARADE OF SSS WOMEN.

The SSS, and especially the women who played such a significant part in its operations, are commemorated in a special plaque at Wits where South Africa's own radar story began all of eighty five years ago.



COL RADAR WITH ITS MATTRESS ANTENNA AT CAPE POINT



COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

**LIEUTENANT PAMELA AILEEN HOWELL nee MANNING –
SPECIAL SIGNALS SERVICES : REAR ADMIRAL A. N. HOWELL
SAN (RETD).**

Pamela Manning served in the Special Signal Services at Cape Point and Blouberg and possibly at Yzerfontein during World War II. In 1943 she held the rank of Staff Sergeant and is believed to have been commissioned later.



PAMELA AILEEN MANNING –
SPECIAL SIGNAL SERVICES –
IN 1943.

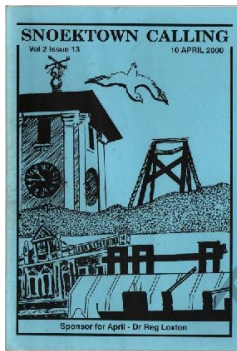
On 15 December 1944 Pamela married Neville Vivian Howell, who was also serving in the SSS, and their son Anthony Neville was born on 18 February 1947.

Both Anthony Howell and his son Neville commanded submarines while serving in the South African Navy.

Neville and Pamela Howell lived in Fish Hoek from 1957 to 2024 when they moved to the farm *Windmeul*, near Paarl, which Anthony purchased after retiring from the South African Navy. Pamela Howell died on 1 July 2005.

Rear Admiral (JG) Neville Howell, the son of Admiral Anthony Howell, and grandson of Pamela and Neville, commanded one of the German-built submarines and is currently (April 2025) serving as Flag Officer Naval Command Natal.

SNOEKTOWN CALLING.



A local magazine published by the Simon's Town Community during the period 1998 to 2003 containing items of local news and articles of interest about the Town. The Society has obtained five volumes (57 Issues) of this publication and has digitised them and added them to our ARCHIVES page on our website simonstown.org.

Simon's Town's nickname "Snoekie" is believed to predate its official name and is linked to the then abundant snoek fish in the area which were a staple catch, particularly during the winter months when the town was used as a Dutch East India Company trading post and naval base,

A VISIT TO THE CAPE ABOARD THE CONFEDERATE CRUISER GEORGIA IN 1863 : REEFER JAMES MORRIS MORTON (1845 – 1928).



We then sailed for the Cape of Good Hope and arrived at Simon's Town to find the ALABAMA had sailed a few hours before.

Some of our lieutenant made up a jolly party and visited the City of Cape Town.

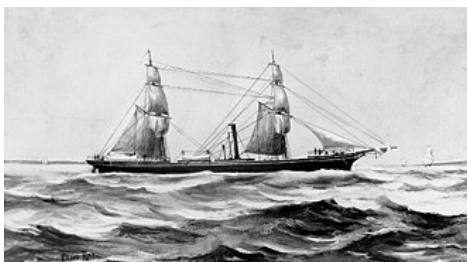
When they returned I was given my liberty for a few days. What to do with it I had not the slightest idea; so I hired a horse and rode across the unknown country between Simon's Town and Cape Town.

At last I arrived at Cape Town hungering for human society. At the hotel, after performing my ablutions, I was shown into the dining room. I thought, on seeing the crowd of people, "Here, at all events, is company who won't object to my rank." I was wrong. There was company, and very interesting company at that,

including Captains of eight or ten ships recently captured by the ALABAMA!

On my entrance several of them rose and flying oaths made the air of the place sultry. I could hear above the din one particular voice swearing that he would

never eat at the same table with a pirate. These words were not accurate, as he had eaten at the same table with me for three weeks while he was a prisoner on the GEORGIA.



THE CONFEDERATE CRUISER GEORGIA

It seemed that the hotel was full of ships captains whose vessels had been destroyed by the Confederate Cruisers. For a moment it looked as though they were going to assault me. I was armed and true to the instincts of my native land,

I got the “drop” on them. The proprietor was horrified. He rushed between us and begged me to accompany him. I complied. He invited me into his private apartments, where I dined with his wife and daughters. Here, at last, was society more congenial than that of the Yankee skippers. Since I have become older, I have often felt grateful to that innkeeper for taking me out of the room in time; for I have been told that a British jury would not have looked upon a man who shot down another with the same favour that I might have expected in my native State.

The next day I returned over the weary road to Simon’s Town and rejoined my ship in high spirits.

While we were caulking decks and taking provisions on board, Her Majesty’s Troopship HIMALAYA entered the harbour. There was a British regiment on board, bound for the East Indies. They took the greatest interest in the “pirate,” and some of the officers invited the little “secesh” midshipman, as they called me, to dine aboard their huge ship.

It was a red letter day for me and I enjoyed my visit immensely, as they made much of me; and when they were leaving port the soldiers cheered our ship. We manned the rigging and returned the compliment with three times three.

We put to sea a few days afterward, and cruised to the South a short distance, where we met the tea fleet coming from the East. By this move we missed running into the United States Ship VANDERBILT, which was hunting for us. When we turned to the North with the fleet, and while going from one vessel to

another enquiring of their nationality, we came under the shadow off Table Mountain late in the afternoon, and saw the VANDERBILT on the horizon, steaming for Table Bay. We did not molest her but satisfied ourselves by making a prize of the merchant ship JOHN WATT. The VANDERBILT was six times as large as the GEORGIA, and carried twelve eleven-inch guns, whereas the GEORGIA only carried five pop-guns, the largest being five inch calibre.

Source : Recollections of a Rebel Reefer – James Morris Morgan – Houghton Mifflin Company (Boston and New York) – 1917.

SAS SIMON VAN DER STEL, FORMERLY HMS WHELP : NAMED AFTER THE FOUNDER OF SIMON'S TOWN :

On 15 August 2025 the World celebrated the eightieth anniversary of V J Day, the day when World War Two ended with the surrender of Japan. The Surrender Document was actually signed aboard the battleship USS MISSOURI in Tokyo Bay on 2 September 1945. One of many warships in Tokyo Bay on that occasion was the British destroyer HMS WHELP. Her first lieutenant who had served in the ship through her construction and sea trials, was HRH Prince Phillip of Greece, later HRH the Duke of Edinburgh.



HMS WHELP AS COMPLETED IN 1944

In November 1947 the ship was sent to Simon's Town together with her sisters H M Ships WAGER, KEMPENFELDT and WESSEX to form the South Atlantic Reserve Fleet, berthed in the Royal Naval Dockyard basin. In 1953 WHELP commissioned as SAS SIMON VAN DER STEL and on 14 July 1954

sailed from Durban for Portsmouth, calling at Walvis Bay, Freetown and Dakar. After a fortnight alongside the battleship HMS VANGUARD in Portsmouth Harbour, SIMON VAN DER STEL sailed for Rotterdam. She then visited Londonderry, in Northern Ireland and then sailed up the River Clyde to Glasgow.



SAS SIMON VAN DER STEL ALONGSIDE HMS VANGUARD AT PORTSMOUTH. – Photo by the late W O “Ginger” Wiltshire by courtesy of the S A Naval Heritage Trust.

On the return voyage to South Africa SIMON VAN DER STEL escorted the newly acquired Seaward Defence Boat GELDERLAND. The two ships departed Portsmouth on Trafalgar Day, 21 October 1954 and called at Brest, Lisbon, Las Palmas, Dakar, Abidjan, Pointe Noire, Walvis Bay, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth before arriving at the S A Naval Base at Salisbury Island, Durban, on 8 December 1954. SIMON VAN DER STEL had covered a distance of 17 200 nautical miles and had been away from her home port for 147 days.

She was decommissioned on 18 February 1957 and joined her sister JAN VAN RIEBEECK in the Reserve Fleet. The South African Navy moved its main base to Simon's Town in April of that year and the two ships became a familiar sight, moored in Simon's Bay.

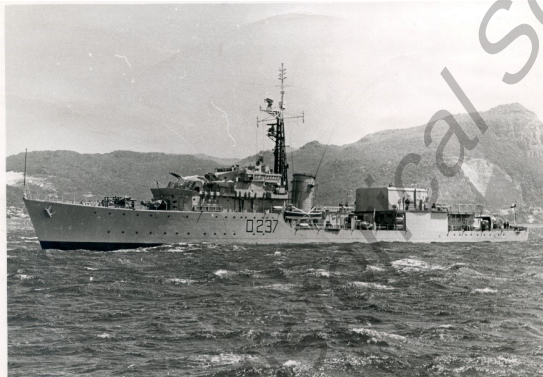
Plans were prepared for the conversion of the two W Class Destroyers to helicopter equipped antisubmarine escorts. Each was to be fitted with a flight deck and two hangars to accommodate Westland Wasp anti-submarine helicopters and updated weapons systems..

SIMON VAN DER STEL was taken in hand at Simon's Town Dockyard in 1962 and recommissioned on 27 February 1964. Due to personnel shortages caused by the acquisition of three new Type 12 Frigates she paid off into the Reserve Fleet in March 1965.

On 17 June 1968 she recommissioned as a unit of the Tenth Frigate Squadron, only to be withdrawn from frontline service to be employed as a training vessel.

In October 1968 she visited Lourenco Marques, now Maputo, together with the Coastal Minesweepers SAS KIMBERLEY and SAS MOSSELBAAI to participate in the opening of a Garden of Remembrance commemorating the Voortrekker leader Louis Trichardt.

In June 1969, supported by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary ENNERDALE she was sent to Gough Island to search for two members of the weather station who were missing. With the aid of the ship's Wasp helicopters the two bodies were located and recovered.



SAS SIMON VAN DER STEL AS A HELICOPTER
CARRYING DESTROYER WITH DOUBLE
HANGAR AND FLIGHT DECK.

By the early 1970s the ship was more than thirty years old and was the last S A Naval vessel in which junior ratings slept in hammocks rather than bunks. Her Officer Commanding, Captain Dickon Silberbauer, described her in a letter to Naval Headquarters as *"fighting to exist rather than existing to fight."*

She was decommissioned at sunset on 12 April 1972. Early in 1975 she was temporarily commissioned for a voyage to Durban, escorted by SAS PRESIDENT KRUGER. It was planned to refit her by contract at Salisbury Island and a team from YAMCO (Yarrow Africa Maritime Consultancy Organisation) was engaged to prepare a refit specification.

The prevailing economic situation forced the SAN to revise its plans and it was decided to dispose of the aged destroyer. A gap in the Navy's shipbuilding programme left the Sandock Austral shipyard without work and the facility was given the task of demolishing her. All that remained of her by 1979 was the double hanger, which had been removed by the shipyard to serve as a spray-painting booth.

Based on information published in South Africa's Fighting Ships Past and Present by Rear Admiral Allan du Toit RAN (Retd).

PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE ROYAL NAVAL DOCKYARDS IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN :

As stated, for security reasons visitors are not allowed to photograph ships, buildings or other facilities in the Royal Naval Dockyards. However, somebody serving aboard the new frigate SAS PRESIDENT KRUGER managed to take this photograph of the destroyer HMS CAVALIER at Portsmouth on 21 May 1964. (Your Hon. Editor found the photo in an album which he purchased in a Simon's Town second hand goods shop some years ago).



HMS CAVALIER had been in reserve at Chatham since May 1963 when it was decided to refit her at H M Dockyard at Gibraltar. On 20 May 1964 she left No 3 Basin at Chatham and was taken in tow by H M Tug REWARD. On 21 May, in mid Channel the Liberian tanker BURGAN snagged the towline and collided with the bow of HMS CAVALIER. REWARD took CAVALIER into Portsmouth where temporary repairs were carried out before the destroyer could continue her journey to Gibraltar via Devonport.

On 16 July 1971 HMS CAVALIER met the Type 15 frigate HMS RAPID (similar to SAS VRYSTAAT) off the Firth of Forth for a 64 nautical mile race to determine which of these World War II veterans was the fastest ship in the fleet. The ships were neck and neck in a thrilling 31 knot tussle when RAPID developed a mechanical problem which allowed CAVALIER to beat her by thirty yards (27,43 metres).



HMS CAVALIER AS SHE IS TODAY IN No 2 DRY DOCK
AT CHATHAM HISTORIC DOCKYARD. – Photo Sheila Rice.

DARWIN BUST UNVEILING CEREMONY ON SIMON'S TOWN JETTY ON SUNDAY, 20TH APRIL 2025. – PROFESSOR MIKE BRUTON.

On a beautiful although windy afternoon in the historic port of Simon's Town, over 170 people gathered on Simon's Town Jetty to unveil the bust of a young Charles Darwin with the historic Dutch tall ship, *Oosterschelde*, flagship of the *Darwin200* project, anchored in the background. The *Darwin200* project partnered the Darwin Bust Fund in the month-long celebrations of Darwin, evolution and the value of science in Cape Town and Simon's Town. *Oosterschelde* is sailing around the world retracing the route of HMS *Beagle* and acting as a host for conservation research projects at each major port of call.

Mike Bruton, leader of the Darwin Bust Fund, opened proceedings by first thanking Piper-Major Andrew Imrie for his inspiring musical performance on the bagpipes that welcomed people to the ceremony as an introduction to our proceedings. Mike then invited the Deputy Mayor of the City of Cape Town, Alderman Eddie Andrews, to address the audience. The Deputy Mayor gave an inspiring speech in which he emphasized the symbolic importance of Darwin's visit to the Cape Colony in June 1836 and suggested that Simon's Town Jetty should become a 'Simon's Town Hall of Fame.'



Oosterschelde AT ANCHOR IN SIMON'S BAY IN APRIL 2025

Mike then introduced the project by saying that, as a student of Zoology at Rhodes University, he had always been fascinated by Darwin but that the origin of this project can be traced to 2009, the bicentenary of Darwin's birth, when he was invited to give an online talk to a group of historians in the USA on the significance of Darwin's visit to the Cape of Good Hope. After giving this talk, he realized that it might be of interest to South Africans as well, so he has given it over 50 times to various audiences. During his research for the talk, he realized two things: Firstly, that Darwin had critically important discussions with Sir John Herschel during his visit to the Cape; secondly, that the importance of Darwin's visit to the Cape in 1836 is not widely recognized, and thirdly, that there is little to commemorate Darwin's historic visit to the Cape.



THE AUDIENCE GATHERED ON SIMON'S TOWN JETTY FOR THE UNVEILING CEREMONY.



DEPUTY MAYOR OF CAPE TOWN,
ALDERMAN EDDIE ANDREWS



PROF. MIKE BRUTON



HIST. SOC. CHAIRMAN
ROGER BAGSHAW

As a result, he included in his talks the need to commemorate Darwin's visit, but this idea gained little traction until he gave the talk to the Simon's Town Historical Society in November 2023. The members of that society were enthusiastic about the idea and, within two weeks, a project had been launched to raise funds for a bronze bust of a young Darwin to be displayed in Simon's Town where *Beagle* had dropped anchor 189 years ago. Roger Bagshaw, chairman of the Simon's Town Historical Society, then spoke about the historic importance of the project and of Simon's Town.



DR JOHN ROGERS (LEFT)
AND
DR TED GROBICKI (RIGHT)

As it costs money to create a bronze bust, Mike had approached the Geological Society of South Africa (GSSA) to make available a ring-fenced bank account into which donations could be deposited and from which payments could be made. The GSSA through its President, Craig Smith, readily agreed. Dr John Rogers, a prominent geologist representing the GSSA, then made the point that Darwin had been a respected geologist and explained the goals of the GSSA's Geoheritage Project which had supported the Darwin Bust Fund.

Mike explained that a fund-raising campaign had been launched and that the first donor was an ex-Rhodes University friend of his, Ted Grobicki, who had flown over from Perth in Australia to attend the unveiling ceremony. Soon thereafter Mike was contacted by Andrew Jones of the Cape Town Heritage Foundation who stated in his speech that their decision to support the project had been a 'no brainer.' Mike emphasized that the CTHF's generous donation of R50 000 had laid the foundation for the fundraising campaign and had made the project possible. He thanked Andrew Jones, Ian Pretorius, Nicci Hoal and Robert Thorp, Trustees of the Conservator Trust, for their generosity.



ANDREW JONES ADDRESSING THE AUDIENCE

Thereafter, with additional generous donations by the *Darwin200* project, Johan Steyn, formula D_, Barbara Hockett, Simon's Town Historical Society, Cape Mining Club, GSSA, Roger Bagshaw, Graham Johnson, Gudrun Schirge, Rowan Mary Mentis and many other generous donors, the target amount of R105 000 was raised. Throughout this campaign another process was played out in the corridors of power – obtaining permission from the City of Cape Town to display the bust in a public place. This process was orchestrated by the Naming Committee of the Cape Town City Council, expertly managed by Mbuthokazi Kubashe and chaired by the Deputy Mayor.

Mike invited Andrew Darwin, the great, great grandson of Charles Darwin, to address the audience and unveil the bust. Andrew expressed his profound gratitude for the honour that had been bestowed on the Darwin family and emphasized the symbolic importance of this historic event. He then unveiled the bust with the help of the sculptor, Johan Steyn. Mike acknowledged the support of the *Darwin200* project that had made it possible for Andrew and his wife, Lucy, to travel to South Africa for this and other Darwin celebratory events.



ANDREW DARWIN GREAT
GRANDSON OF CAHARLES
DARWIN



ANDREW DARWIN AND
JOHAN STEYN UNVEIL
THE BUST

To create a sculpture, you need a sculptor, and Cape Town is most fortunate to have one of South Africa's most gifted sculptors, Johan Steyn, in its midst. In his short presentation Johan gave thanks for the opportunity to create the sculpture and stated that he would leave the bust to speak for itself.



SCULPTOR JOHAN STEYN



THE DARWIN BUST



JOHAN STEYN AND LUCY AND ANDREW DARWIN WITH THE BUST

Mike then stated that, in order to enhance the educational value of the Darwin bust, it had been decided to mount an educational sign adjacent to it. This sign provides additional information on Darwin, *Beagle* and *Oosterschelde*, with further information accessible through a QR code. Amber Borton from Formula D_, who had sponsored the sign, then unveiled the sign with Jim Hallinan, who had produced it.



AMBER BORTON UNVEILING THE EDUCATIONA SIGN WITH JIM HALLINAN AND JOHAN STEYN.

In conclusion, Mike thanked everyone from many walks of life who had contributed to and participated in the Darwin Bust project. Among those whom he had not mentioned he thanked Stewart McPherson of the *Darwin200* project, Cherry Dilley, Secretary, and Eric Mawhinney, Vice-chair of the Simon's Town Historical Society, Denis Lihou of Stadco, Rear-Admiral (Ret.) Arné Söderlund, and Tazneem Wentzel of the Simon's Town Museum.

Mike reminded the audience that the Darwin celebratory events in Cape Town and Simon's Town in April 2025 are a multi-cultural celebration that includes an art exhibition, 'Art of Evolution, Evolution of Art' at the Art@Africa gallery on the Waterfront, a play, 'Darwin. A Curious Mind', written by Sir Alexander McCall Smith and performed by Nicholas and Liz Ellenbogen and Andrew Roux, visits to and excursions aboard the tall ship *Oosterschelde* courtesy of the *Darwin200* project, the 'Darwin Leaders' presentations, and talks at the Two Oceans Aquarium and Cape Town Science Centre. Piper-Major Andrew Imrie then bade farewell to everyone on his bagpipes while the audience mingled with the celebrities and took photographs of themselves with the Darwin bust.



PIPE-MAJOR ANDREW IMRIE



BOYS' TIE ANDREW WILSON DRAPED A SHREWSBURY OLD
AROUND CHARLES DARWIN'S NECK.

*Charles Darwin attended Shrewsbury School as a boarder from 1818 until
1825.*

SIMON'S TOWN'S HISTORIC MILE :

Simon's Town Historical Society is proposing to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation that the main road through the Town, known as the Historic Mile, be declared a UNESCO Heritage Site.



In addition to being the location of many architecturally significant buildings our main street bears the invisible footprints of such historically significant personages as young Horatio Nelson, Charles Darwin, writers Rudyard Kipling, Edgar Wallace, and Joy Packer; Boer fighters and their officers en route to Bermuda, St Helena, Sri Lanka and India; Scientist and Engineer William Froude, who lies buried in the Old Burial Ground at Seaforth; HRH Prince Alfred, son of H M Queen Victoria, after whom the Alfred Basin in Cape Town is named: HRH the Duke of Kent, who was killed in an air crash during World War II.

Two World War II RAF Aces, Group Captain Adolf Gysbert (Sailor) Malan DSO & Bar; DFC & Bar (1910 – 1963) and Acting Squadron Leader John Dering Nettleton VC (1917 – 1943) trod its pavements while attending SATS GENERAL BOTHA at Simon's Town. H M King George VI and his family visited in 1947 and H M Queen Elizabeth II and HRH Prince Phillip in 1995. In recent years a most important visitor was the State President Nelson Mandela, who had a close association with and affection for the South African Navy.

South Africa already has twelve UNESCO Heritage Sites including Robben Island in the Western Cape. It would be great to have another one.

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Articles dealing with matters of historical interest in Simon's Town and the surrounding area will be considered for publication.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES FROM 1st JANUARY 2026

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Additional family members.....	R 10 per person

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