

Architectural Contribution of the De Villiers Family

Many fine Cape Dutch homesteads were built by members of the De Villiers family, most notably Abraham de Villiers, Jean (Jan) De Villiers , Pierre De Villiers and their descendants. Babylonstoren, Bien Donne, Boschendal, Good Hope, Landskroon, Vredenburg, Bellingham, Nectar and Diamant can be attributed to them. They were also involved with the commissioning of the Paarl Parsonage, in the capacity of deacon roles at the church. (De Bosdari 1953:17)

A similar tree motive can be found on the gables of Diamant and Bien Donne. Considering the family ties between the owners, it is probable that the same person did the decorative plasterwork on both homesteads. The work is generally attributed to skilled Malay craftsmen, most often slaves, but in some cases also freed-slaves. The historian, De Bosdari, wrote that plasterwork in particular was a Malay skill, done by slaves at the Cape, and that some of the details of the work are often “*un-European*” such as the palm tree (De Bosdari 1953:15; 83-84). They represent a heritage brought over from the East and made regional in the Cape through traditional use.

By 1850, the De Villiers family owned most of the Agter-Paarl farms. Pierre de Villiers owned Landskroon and De Leeuwenjagt. His cousin, Izak De Villiers owned Ruigtevallei. Pieter De Villiers later owned Landskroon, leaving it to his son, Jan Gabriël de Villiers, while his son-in-law, Jan Stephanus de Villiers, bought Diamant.