LAHS Outing to Alexandria on 16 April 2026

Compiled by Heather Howard

Alexandria Sculpture Garden

In April, at the beginning of their visit to Alexandria, thirty-five LAHS members enjoyed tea in the sculpture garden of Maureen Quin, renowned sculptor who had recently received an Honorary Doctorate from Rhodes University.



Figure 1: Dr Maureen Quin with her life-sized head and shoulder of Nelson Mandela, set eye-leve on a plinth

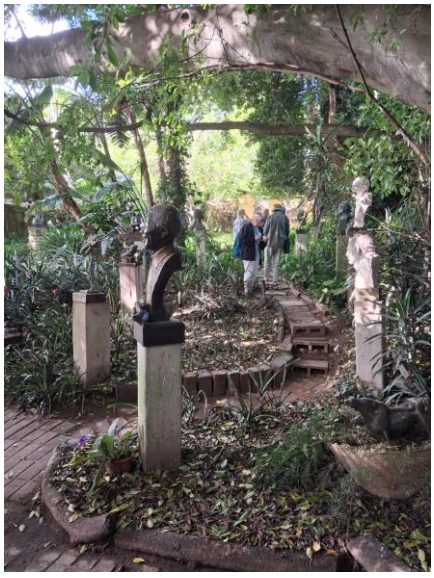


Figure 2: The Quin garden



Figure 3: Inside the gallery

The visitors also had the pleasure of a talk by Maureen herself, in the company of her many and varied sculptures displayed around them. A stroll in the extensive, almost wild, garden revealed Maureen's mostly bronze vision of animals, birds and human figures, large, life-size and miniature, making the walk a voyage of discovery. As Maureen explained, her works are "*not necessarily illustrative, they convey their message to the viewer in a subtler way*", so that some are startling. Visitors could also stroll round her indoor gallery. No-one missed the life-sized head and shoulders of Nelson Mandela, set eye-level on a plinth where its extraordinary likeness and familiar smile could be appreciated.

Alex resident Marie Greyvenstein then joined the party and took everyone on a guided tour of points of interest in the town.

Alexandria Dutch Reformed Church



Built in 1896, the architect was William White-Cooper from Grahamstown. In 1924, construction began on the bell tower, vestry, baptismal room, upper hall, and perimeter wall around the church. The organ and organ pipes were installed during 1926.

Figure 4: Inside the Alexandria Dutch Reformed Church

Reverend Alexander Smith

Reverend Alexander Smith was one of the first Scottish ministers recruited by Dr George Thom to help address the shortage of clergy in South Africa and to support Governor Lord Charles Somerset's anglicization policy. The candidates that Thom recruited from the Presbyterian Church in Scotland were required to first travel to the Netherlands to learn the Dutch language; the training was brief and many struggled with the unfamiliar tongue for the rest of their lives. Rev Smith entered service in 1822 and became the second minister of the Dutch Reformed congregation in Uitenhage. With exemplary dedication and evident blessing, he served this vast region for 40 years, retiring in 1863.

Christ Church, Anglican



It is not certain when the Anglican ministry in Alexandria formally began. The earliest references appear in the written report of Bishop Robert Gray, the first Anglican Bishop of Cape Town. He visited Alexandria in 1850. In 1857, Reverend Philip Walker Copeman received permission to farm on a property just outside Alexandria and to minister to the English congregation from there. He and his wife moved to the farm Lange Hoop/Long Hope, now known as Whitney. From there, Copeman held monthly services in Sidbury and more frequent services in Alexandria. Due to growing demand for a church, the cornerstone of the Anglican Church (Christ Church) was laid in 1860.

Figure 5: The Anglican church in Alexandria, Christ Church

Mariasaal-Maria Hall

The Mariasaal, along with the original outdoor chapel, was reportedly built on Brakfontein, the farm of Evert Frederik Potgieter, in approximately 1830 by Karel Pieter Landman using slave labour. This part of Brakfontein was first known as Kerkplaats (Church Place) and was later renamed Alexandria, after the Reverend Alexander Smith. The Maria Hall was originally constructed as a Nagmaal residence, but it later served as a school building. From 1832 until his departure during the Great Trek in 1836, Reverend Erasmus Smit taught in this small schoolhouse. The hall, with its reed roof, has a fascinating history. During the Xhosa attacks of 1834–1835, the Xhosa forces attacked Kerkplaats, surrounded the old church next to the hall, and set it on fire. All the homes in the district were already ablaze, and women and children sought refuge in the Maria Hall, which was used as a schoolhouse at that time.

As the church roof went up in flames, the people inside the hall were terrified and despondent**.** Among them was a man named Heinrich Schorbeck**,** known locally as Hendrik Skoorbek. He comforted the people and assured them that the schoolhouse roof would not burn because he had ‘blessed’ or ‘spoken protection’ over it. Even though the attackers threw burning branches onto the low reed roof it did not catch fire. Eventually the attackers retreated, and the roof was still intact.

The Old Mill

This mill was built in 1852 by John Francis I Smith. He and his wife, Elizabeth Cannon, fled from the farm Buckne**r** after John’s father, John Baird Smith, was murdered by four vagrant Khoikhoi men. The couple settled in the town, where John, after constructing the mill, also served as the town miller.

The original millstones, later found in the stream below Maria Hall, now stand against the wall of the Maria Hall.

The Three Cottages

Today, known as the **Long House**, the **Top House** and **the Corner House,** during the mid-1800s these cottages were the Police Station, Officers’ Housing and the Butcher’s house/shop.

The Drostdy and the old Jail

The old magistrate’s office and the jail date back to the time when Olifantshoek was still a magisterial district. Although no early construction records have been found, title deeds from 1840 and 1876 confirm the existence of these buildings, meaning that the jail was already in use before 1840, thus making it one of the earliest jails existing in the Eastern districts.

The jail cells were in the basement of the building, with the courtroom directly above. The magistrate and the jail warden lived in rooms above and adjoined the courtroom. Prisoners were held for various crimes, especially the rough timber cutters who felled sneezewood poles in the Alexandria State forest. They were frequently jailed for drunkenness and fighting.

Drew Cottage

Although there is no physical proof, oral tradition indicates that this little house was built around 1795. Originally, the house served as a communion house but was later occupied by people who supplied mineral water sourced from a natural spring nearby. This spring was in the hollow around which the town houses were built, close to where the Maria Hall still stands today.

The cottage was later named Drew Cottage, after its next owner, Dr Aloysius Stanbanks Drew, MD (London). Dr Drew died on 28 May 1894**,** reportedly by suicide, and the bullet hole was still visible in one of the cottage walls until recently.

Oak Cottage

Across from Drew Cottage, beside the stream, stands Oak Cottage, a small building that dates back to around 1840. Over the years, it was used by various church groups as a place of worship. Notably, Bishop Robert Gray, the first Anglican Bishop of Cape Town, held services here during his 1850 tour of the Cape Colony.

In March 1858**,** Captain William Henry Gibbon and his wife Flora Elizabeth Francisca Fogolari arrived in Alexandria and made this cottage their home and it was here that Captain Gibbon established the first small English private school. In front of Oak Cottage stood a row of oak trees, planted sometime around 1850, which gave the building its name. Sadly, these trees were cut down by the municipality in the 1950s as a 'public service'.

Railway Hotel

The exact date of construction for the Railway Hotel is unknown, but it must have been built in about 1880. This hotel once belonged to Thomas Clarke. Today, it serves as offices and apartments.

Heritage Lodge

The Alexandria Hotel, also known as Marshall's Hotel (today Heritage Lodge), was opened in March 1852 by William Cowie. A notice in the *Grahamstown Journal* dated Saturday, 6 March 1852, reads:

> "*Alexandria Hotel. The undersigned begs to inform the public that he has opened a hotel for the accommodation of travelers and hopes by strict attention and moderate charges to merit a share of their patronage. William Cowie. Church Place, Oliphant's Hoek."*

The hotel's covered veranda was once part of the sidewalk, but during main street widening, the front section was demolished and set back. Over the years, the hotel was expanded several times. The current owners, Kathleen Gordon and her husband, have been in Alexandria for forty years.