

# Napier Erfenis/Heritage

JULY 2026  
EDITION 11

## A MESSAGE FROM THE NHCB CHAIRPERSON

It is one of the most beautiful times of the year in the Overberg. The brilliant yellow of the canola fields, the deep blue skies and the vibrant green of the wheat combine to create breathtaking landscapes. Countless photographs have captured this seasonal spectacle over the years, yet each winter brings fresh perspectives and new images.

Speaking of photographs, we are delighted to launch our third annual Heritage Photography Competition.

This year's competition celebrates Napier's rich heritage, with redesigned categories that broaden the scope and encourage creative interpretation. Categories include street scenes, surrounding landscapes, fauna and flora, historical buildings, architectural details and ruins, as well as anything else that reflects Napier's unique heritage.

Whether you use a camera or a cell phone, we invite residents and visitors alike to see Napier through a fresh lens. Capture the landscapes, history, wildlife and small details that together tell the story of our village and its distinctive character.

The competition is open to amateur photographers only, and this year we are pleased to welcome entries from beyond Napier as well. Our judging panel includes professional photographer Juanita Coetzer from Bredasdorp, and Napier's Herman van Bon. We are grateful to the judges for giving their time and expertise to the competition.

Finally, to all the wonderful women in our community, we wish you a very happy Women's Day on 9 August.

Thank you for your continued support of the Napier Heritage and Conservation Body. We look forward to seeing Napier through your lens in this year's competition.

**Marina Richards**



PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE NAPIER  
HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION BODY  
[NAPIERHERITAGECONSERVATIONBODY@GMAIL.COM](mailto:NAPIERHERITAGECONSERVATIONBODY@GMAIL.COM)

## IN THIS ISSUE



**Heritage Feature:** Tom Cole builds Napier a Museum



**Natural History:** Napier's pear trees & Our famous Norfolk Pine



**NHCB Event:** Fire wise workshop take aways



Napier's winter clothing

Pic by Joy Crane.



# HERITAGE FEATURE



## TOM COLE BUILDS NAPIER A MUSEUM



**Another Heritage Hero has come to our attention. As we've said before about our Heritage Heroes, they are people who love to conserve our built and natural environment and quietly get on with the job, no fanfare required.**

This time it's Tom Cole, the man collecting items and compiling Napier's Museum. Don't picture a finished product just yet, though. This is very much a work in progress, with great potential.

There had been talk for a while about creating a museum in Napier. Randall Fuller, who sits on the Napier Heritage & Conservation Body (NHCB) Committee, is involved alongside Tom, and it's been a regular agenda item at NHCB meetings, with Randall reporting back whenever there was news to share.

Recently, a notice popped up in one of the WhatsApp groups from Tom, announcing the opening. That was enough to send our Chairperson Marina Richards and Historian, Ora Laubscher, round to see what had been achieved. Round the back of the Feeshuis, they found Tom hard at work, with only one assistant to help him.

### How did it all start?

Tom hails from Stutterheim, where he was responsible for establishing a museum before he moved to Napier. With that experience behind him, he was keen to get something similar going here.

Out walking one day, he got chatting to Dominee Frikkie, and the idea of a Napier museum came up, along with the question of where it might be housed.

It was Dominee Frikkie who suggested the "barn", a building the Church had been using as a storeroom. It was promising, but it needed serious work. There was no electricity, for a start.



**Tom Cole busy arranging some of the furniture in the new museum**



**The plaque on a swivelling bench from the wreck, Queen of the Thames**



# NAPIER HAS A MUSEUM



The Museum is adjacent to the NG Kerk  
and behind the Feeshuis

The Church gave the go ahead, and a generous R12,000 donation from Cape Agulhas Municipality (CAM) got things moving, and work began.

## How we can help

Tom and Randall have invested a considerable amount of effort in the project and volunteers are welcome to contact Tom to find out how they can help.

The goal is a community museum that tells the story of Napier and its people. Tom is appealing for:

- Exhibits, whether donated permanently or on loan. The museum is happy to draw up a loan agreement for anyone lending items.
- Materials for the building itself, such as paint or a front door.
- Labour, which is always a welcome donation.
- And, naturally, funds of any kind.

As Tom told us, they'd love to be open all the time, but that depends on volunteers. For now, the plan is weekends, with the option to contact an NHCB committee member to arrange access at other times.

The space could also host heritage and museum-related events, talks and meetings.

If you're able to help, please contact Tom Cole on  
083 262 0266 or [tomcole170@gmail.com](mailto:tomcole170@gmail.com)





## THE NHCB VISITS THE MUSEUM



**T**

**Housed in the historic Feeshuis, adjacent to the Dutch Reformed Church, the Napier Museum has come a long way from the storeroom it once was. The list of what's already been done is not short: the building has been electrified, with lights and sockets installed throughout, and the interior has been painted.**

A stubborn leak at the rear has been sealed, and the wall has been replastered. A partition now separates a storeroom at the back, fitted with shelving to keep items neatly packed away. A display unit has been installed against the front wall, and a corner unit hides the distribution board.

Donations so far have included paint and 40 hours of labour for the electrical work..

The Church council has agreed to a lease for an indefinite period, with a 12-month notice clause.

For now, the museum pays no rent, but the understanding is that once it's up and running and generating income, the arrangement will be revisited.

Inside is a genuinely fascinating array of furniture, memorabilia and objects, among them a bench salvaged from the wreck of the Queen of the Thames. The bench swivels so it can be turned depending on which way the boat is leaning.

### NHCB Donations

Marina Richards and Ora Laubscher had a second reason for their visit to the museum.

The NHCB had recently received a collection of books about Napier from a local resident, Jelleke Wierenga, and two scrapbooks from the Napier Craft Club.

Tom welcomed the donations, remarking that they are important records of the history and culture of Napier.



**The NHCB's Marina Richards and Tom Cole with a few of the items donated by the NHCB to the Museum**

### SHARE & INFORM

Contact Tom or Randall if you would like to share historical documents, photos, furniture, art, musical instruments, hand tools and other fascinating objects.



## NAPIER'S LONELY NORFOLK PINE

A

At the back of Napier's municipal offices in Newmark Street stands a tall spindly-looking tree, desperately trying to look both imposing and important. And for a short while in 1972, as a teeny-tiny sapling, it was important. Very important.

*By Ina Georgala*

It was one of four Norfolk pine saplings brought over by Sir Peter Tait, Mayor of Napier, New Zealand, along with his wife Lilian and a painting, as a thank you to Napier, South Africa, for the townspeople's help after the 1931 Hawke's Bay earthquake.

Only one of the four saplings survived. This lonely pine is it.

It's an unusual-looking tree, and that look gives away its origins. Norfolk Pines hail from Norfolk Island, a tiny Australian territory in the South Pacific between Australia and New Zealand.

Despite the name, it's not a true pine at all, but belongs to the ancient *Araucariaceae* family, making it a closer cousin of the monkey-puzzle tree than of any pine.

First documented by the explorer Captain James Cook in 1774, these towering evergreen conifers can reach great heights in their natural, subtropical habitat. Today they're grown as house plants or ornamental trees in warm coastal and Mediterranean climates worldwide, which explains why the Kiwis thought one suitable for Napier, South Africa.

Napier, New Zealand, meanwhile, has its own iconic stand of Norfolk pines along Marine Parade, some of them between 100 and 140 years old. They're a treasured part of that Napier's cultural and settler history, and enjoy full city council protection.

So, shouldn't Napier, South Africa's lonely Norfolk Pine, get the same care and protection?





## OUR NATURAL TREASURES 2



### GOT AN OLD PEAR TREE? NAPIER WANTS TO KNOW

Napier is surrounded by fragments of its rich agricultural past. Nowhere is this more evident than on the old strip erven that line the Klippedrift River, which runs through the town.

*By Ina Georgala*

As spring arrives, old fruit trees blossom in backyards along the river, adding to Napier's charm. This intrigued me. Just how old are these trees, and who planted them? There was no easy answer, so she had to dig a little deeper into the history of pear trees in the Western Cape.

#### The Oldest Pear Tree in South Africa

You may have visited the Company Gardens in Cape Town and seen the oldest cultivated fruit tree in South Africa, the famous Winter Saffron pear tree (*Pyrus communis*).

This Champion Tree is believed to be about 370 years old and to have been planted when Jan van Riebeeck was still governor of a struggling Dutch East India Company outpost. In Afrikaans it is called the saffraanpeer or wintersaffraan.

The species is exceptionally rare today, and its genetic heritage is carefully safeguarded by horticultural specialists, who have taken cuttings and grown cloned descendants through a grafting programme. The mother tree still stands in the Company Gardens, propped up like an exhausted aristocratic beauty behind her palisade fence.

#### Pears in the Overberg

A little closer to Napier is another famous pear tree, and the first official record we have of pear trees in the Overberg. It is the Saffron pear tree, planted in 1738 by Moravian missionary Georg Schmidt at Genadendal, a hundred years before the founding of our village. An offshoot of the original tree can still be found in the Genadendal Museum garden.

#### A Disappearing Heritage

Plants, including fruit and vegetables, are just as vulnerable to extinction as animals. In the 1500s, there were thousands of European pear varieties to choose from.



Since then, many of the old pear varieties, such as the Winter Saffron Pear and Bergamot Pear planted at the Cape, have disappeared from cultivation as newer cultivars became more popular amongst growers.

Today, commercial growers grow only about 50 different pear varieties.

While the Winter Saffron Pear is the historic pioneer and is mainly used for cooking, preserving or pickling, most of us are better acquainted with the classic (and infinitely tastier) plump eating varieties.

These include the Williams' Bon Chrétien (also known as the Bartlett pear if your trees came from the USA, though it is the same variety), Packham's Triumph and Forelle.

## From Kitchen Gardens to Export Crates

By the late 1700s, these pear varieties had spread throughout the Overberg with the early settlers. Pear trees grow relatively easily from cuttings, and settlers often planted them in kitchen gardens so they had access to preserved fruit in the winter months.

Pears became a popular fruit export in the late 1800s, when South Africa's fruit-growing industry took off with the advent of refrigerated shipping. According to science writer and fruit historian Anna Mouton, 629 505 pear trees were recorded in the Western Province by 1927. By 1970, this had grown to 1.8 million pear trees in the Western Province, with Williams' Bon Chrétien still the main cultivar.

Photo evidence from the early 1900s shows that Napier's garden farmers also benefited from the greater availability of fruit trees, with many stands (even yours?) boasting a decent domestic fruit orchard that included peaches, apples, quinces, apricots, lemons and pomegranates.



## Do You Have An Old Pear Tree in Your Garden?

For this article, we're more interested in the messy old pear tree in your back garden.

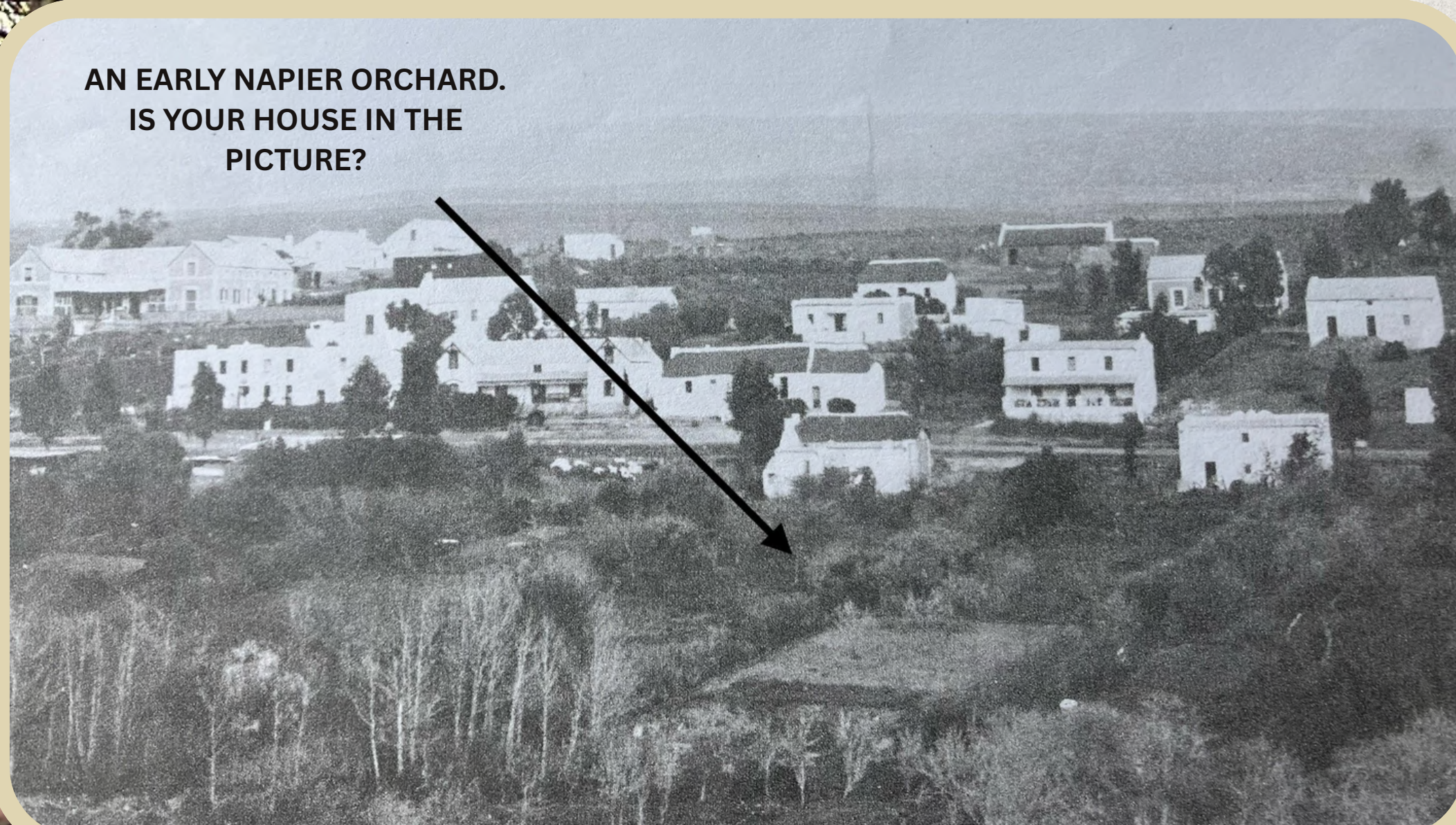
Several organisations, such as the SAPO Trust (South African Plant Improvement Organisation), and Tru-Cape's Henk Griessel and Jeanne Fourie, would be very interested to know whether you have an old or rare pear variety growing on your property.

Whether your pear trees date from the 1800s or the 1970s, you can join a select group of people recording and preserving a piece of our town's cultural and agricultural heritage.

Let us know if you have any old fruit trees, particularly those older than 60 years, in your garden. Email us at [napierheritageconservationbody@gmail.com](mailto:napierheritageconservationbody@gmail.com)



**AN EARLY NAPIER ORCHARD.  
IS YOUR HOUSE IN THE  
PICTURE?**





## OUR NATURAL TREASURES 3



### CONTINUING ON VOLHOU STREET

In our June issue, Marina and Ora took a gander down Volhou Street to see the Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk (VGK). While focusing on the church, they noticed that blue gum (*Eucalyptus*) trees are a prominent feature.

The land in and around Napier belonged to the NG Kerk. In 1937 it was decided that it was becoming too onerous to manage and the land was sold to the Government. It was only in the following year 1938 that Napier became a Municipality.

Land was made available by the Municipality in Volhou street, and the houses were all owner built. Once proud and beautifully kept many of them have fallen into disrepair due to lack of funds.



This property is larger and probably contains two rooms, as there are two windows on either side of the door.



The typical style has a front door and one window and often a “bakoond” at the back for making fires and cooking.

In this property, you can clearly see a gum tree. Louis Smythe told Ora that when these old cottages were built, each house in Volhou Street was given two blue gum saplings to plant.

We can find no reference to substantiate this fact, but it has the ring of truth. The idea was that as the trees grew, they could eventually provide firewood. In addition, the trees absorbed groundwater, serving a dual purpose. Not many remain, but there is this large one at the back of the house.



A range of Eucalypts were introduced nationally in the 1860s by the government as a quick growing timber source to replace the slow-growing indigenous hardwoods that were felled and used for shipbuilding in the Cape. The versatile trees also provided firewood, building material and fuel for the locomotives of the rapidly expanding railway systems. *Eucalyptus saligna* is a prized source of timber for tables, chairs and other timber furniture.

*Eucalypts* are hardwoods and are prized for timber, railroad ties and mine props. The trees also became valuable for the agricultural industry as windbreaks, a critical food source for bees, and for fencing and trusses.

They are fast growing and consume large amount of ground water which means they outcompete indigenous vegetation. Although they are classified as a Category 2 invasive species, some old trees have been designated Champion Trees.



# NCHCB FIRE WISE EVENT REVIEW



## Fires are here to stay. Are you ready for the next one?

We live in a fire-prone environment. Fynbos, renosterveld, and alien vegetation burn. That's not up for debate, and it's exactly why the NCHCB brought together three specialists to learn about living with wildfire in and around Napier.



DR ANDREW TURNER, PIETER ROSSOUW  
AND KIM DA REBEIRA

Dr Andrew Turner, a restoration ecologist at Cape Nature, opened with the ecology: fire belongs in the fynbos system, but he unpacked what's changed, making today's fires more dangerous than those the landscape evolved with.

Pieter Rossouw of the Greater Overberg Fire Protection Association followed with the practical side, mapping which organisations respond to a fire and where residents fit in.

Kim da Rebeira of Enviro Wildlife Services, based right here in Napier, closed the session with hands-on guidance for households.

Two messages stood out for residents: what you can do before a fire reaches your property, and what you can do once one is already burning nearby without getting in the way of the people fighting it.

### Number 1: Protect your home

Homeowners can't simply leave wildfire risk to the fire services. The lessons documented in Vulcan Wildfire Management's *Situational Analysis of the 2017 Knysna Fires* now inform how households across the country are advised to prepare.

Start by assessing your own risk. Are you above alien invasive vegetation on a slope, or tucked into a valley where fire behaves differently? **From there, build a defensible space:**



PIETER ROSSOUW, DR ANDREW TURNER, AND THE NCHCB'S  
MARINA RICHARDS AND LESLEY RICHARDSON

- Clear dry vegetation (fuel) from around the house and nearby areas
- Remove trees next to your house or trim branches overhanging your roof
- Remove dead leaves and vegetation, including from under decks and balconies
- Clear gutters of leaf litter and seal roof gaps, such as chimneys and air vents, that could let embers in
- Store woodpiles and gas bottles well away from the house and any heat source
- Make sure you have water on hand, and if you have thatch, consider sprinklers or drencher systems for your home and outbuildings
- If a fire is already burning in the area, block downpipes and fill gutters with water, move flammable furniture and items away from windows, and keep doors and windows shut. Have an evacuation plan in place before you need it.

## Number 2: How to help without getting in the way

The instinct is to pitch in during a wildfire. The problem is that untrained, unequipped volunteers on a fireline are a danger to themselves and to the crews already there and arriving.

**There are, however, real ways to contribute:**

- Join a volunteer firefighting group. Several operate in the Western Cape under formal fire organisations, offering proper training and protective equipment through a part-time programme. These groups also need people for administration and logistics, not only firefighting.
- When there are calls for donations, remember it's for teams, not individuals. Send sealed bottled water rather than tap water, fresh fruit in bulk, cold drinks, dried fruit, nuts, energy bars, and bread with spreads for making sandwiches.
- Offer to help at refreshment centres, preparing food parcels and sandwiches for crews.
- Support volunteer groups financially. Most receive little to no funding from local authorities and depend on private donations to keep operating.



**There was plenty of opportunity for NHCB members to interact with the speakers in small groups**

Do not speculate on its cause or behaviour on social media or pass on second-hand claims as fact. Do not interfere with firefighters.

Fire spreads faster than people expect, especially uphill, in windy conditions, or through dry, heavy fuel that lets embers "spot" new fires up to 3km ahead of the main front.

Leave reading the fire to the people trained to do it and keep the roads clear for them. Do not be a fire tourist!

---



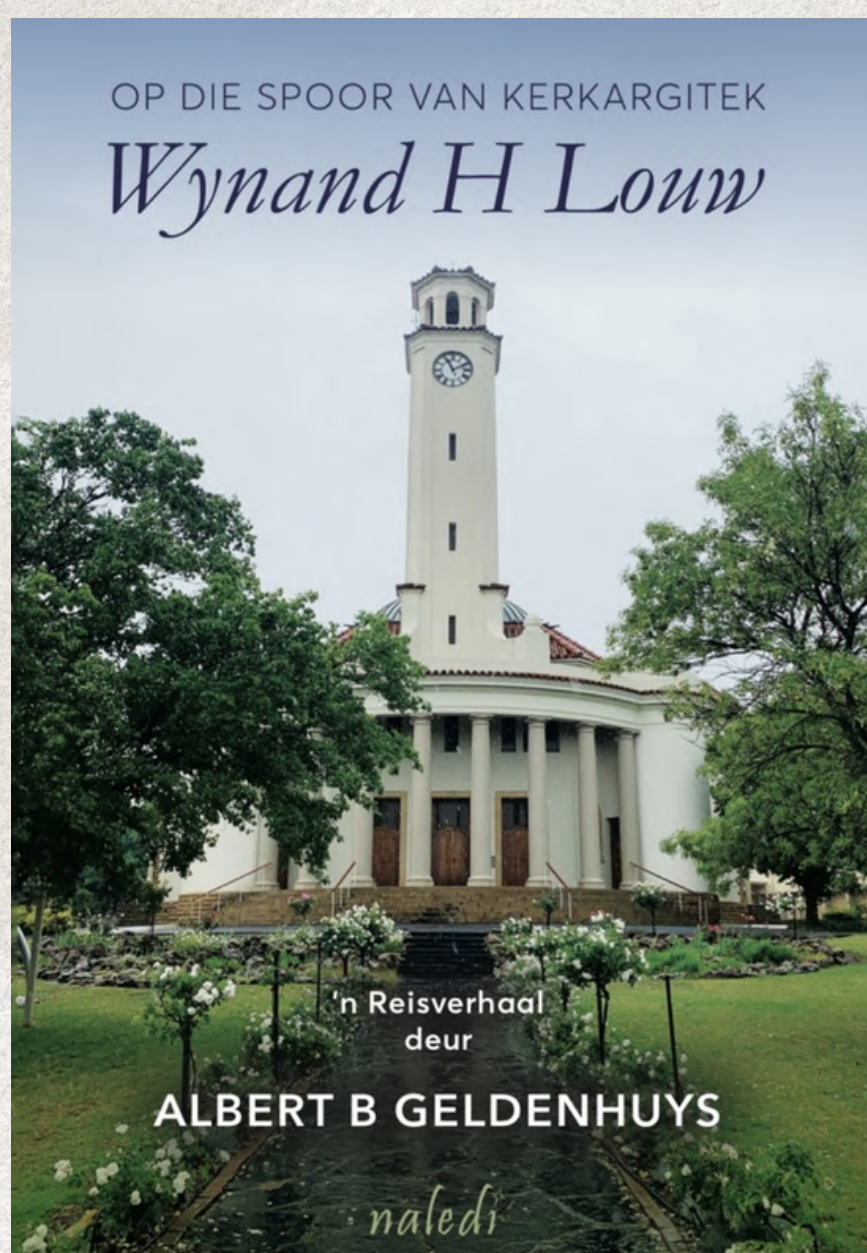
---

## BOEKBEKENDSTELLING

---



---



Albert Geldenhuys, kleinseun van Wynand H Louw, die argitek van Napier se Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, het onlangs sy boek, *Op Die Spoor van Kerkargitek Wynand H Louw* gepubliseer. Die boek vertel die verhaal van die merkwaardige reis wat Albert en sy vrou deur Suid-Afrika onderneem het om die kerke op te spoor wat sy oupa ontwerp het. Daarmee word Wynand H. Louw se argitektoniese nalatenskap en die geskiedenis van hierdie besondere kerkgeboue op 'n unieke wyse vasgelê. Verlede jaar het Albert die hoogtepunte van hierdie reis gedeel tydens 'n boeiende voordrag in die kerk wat deur die NHCB aangebied is.

Prys R439

Kontak: [tertia@naledi.co.za](mailto:tertia@naledi.co.za)

## FOR YOUR DIARY



A reminder to enter our third annual Photographic Competition!

We are looking forward to seeing this year's theme, "Napier through your lens," come to life in five categories. We've already received some wonderful photographs and look forward to seeing them all.

Our esteemed local judges this year are Herman van Bon and Juanita C. There are amazing prizes to be won in each category.



**BE SURE TO ENTER BY 18 SEPTEMBER**  
**PRIZEGIVING ON 25 SEPTEMBER**



**EMAIL US FOR AN ENTRY FORM**  
[NAPIERHERITAGECONSERVATIONBODY@GMAIL.COM](mailto:NAPIERHERITAGECONSERVATIONBODY@GMAIL.COM)

## FOR THE PUZZLERS

In our last issue, we had our bell-inspired Spot the difference. Did you find them all?

1. A top-row medallion icon is missing from the bell
2. The wire/cable draped down the bell face is gone
3. One metal support pillar has disappeared
4. The centre figure's striped shirt has become plain
5. The floral dress on the rightmost figure is now solid colour



Image 1

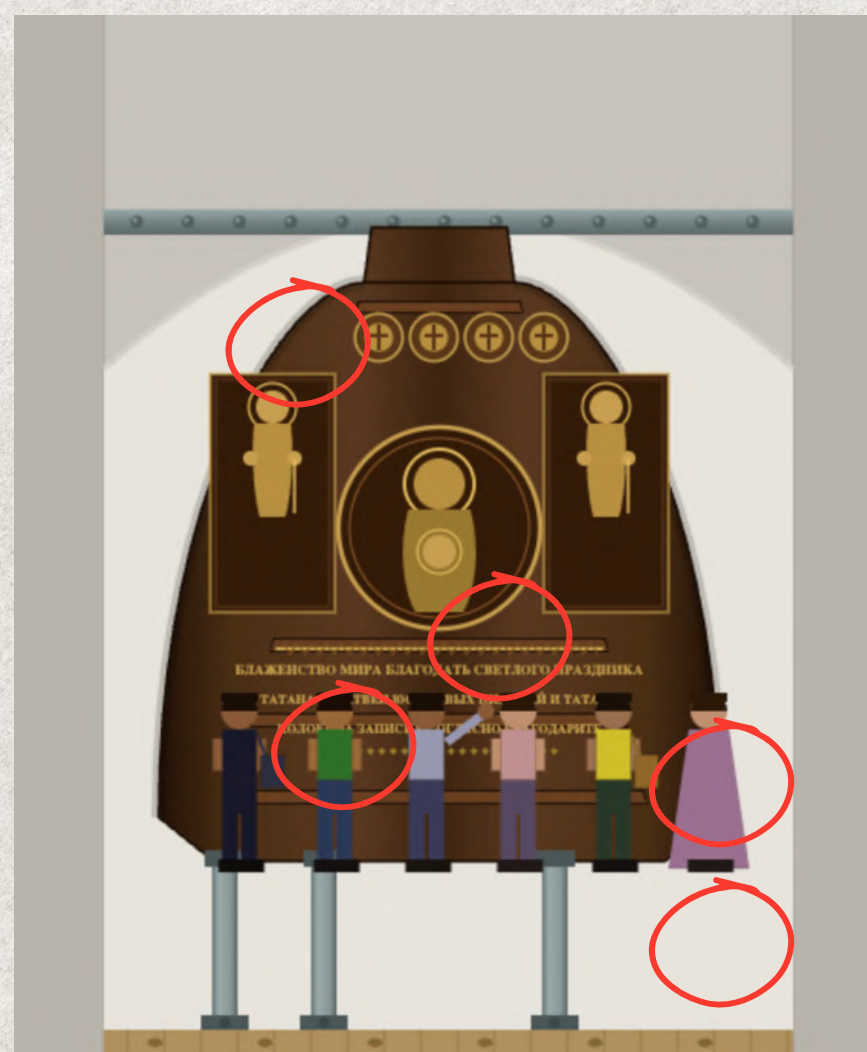


Image 2