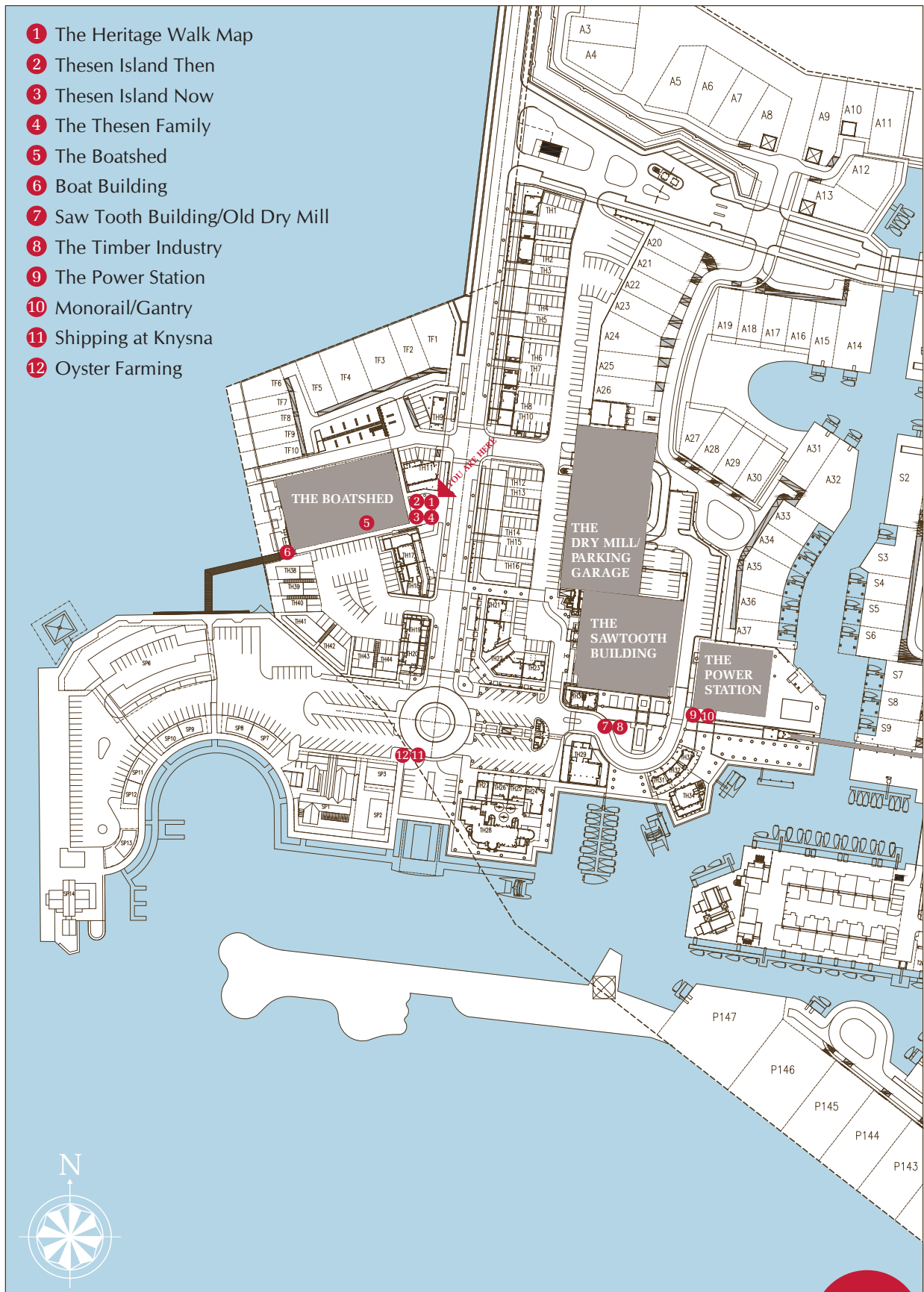


THE HERITAGE WALK

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THESEN ISLAND THEN



1884

At the turn of the 19th century Thesen Island was just a grass-covered sand bar in the lagoon, only accessible at low tide. In 1804 the land was included in the farm Melkhoutkraal granted to George Rex, who grazed his horses and cattle here and collected driftwood to sell. The island later became known as Paarden Eiland.



The Outeniqua at the jetty



The Thesen sawmill in 1947, showing the jetty in the foreground



A staff house on the island

In 1883 a causeway between the island and mainland was constructed to improve access to the wooden jetty, erected the same year as a shipping berth. The causeway was built by convict labour using rubble and stone from the local quarry. Before long, concerns were expressed that the causeway was silting up the lagoon because its small opening was impeding flow, but it was only in 1972 that culverts were installed to improve water circulation.

In 1904 Charles Wilhelm Thesen purchased Paarden Eiland from the Rex estate. The Thesens had maintained a presence on the island since 1883, when their ship the *Ambulant* was the first to load cargo at the new jetty. For five decades the family either operated their own shipping business or acted as agents for other shipping lines. In 1913 the wooden jetty was damaged when another Thesen ship – the *Agnar* – crashed into it, so it was replaced with a concrete wharf, still known today as Thesen's jetty.

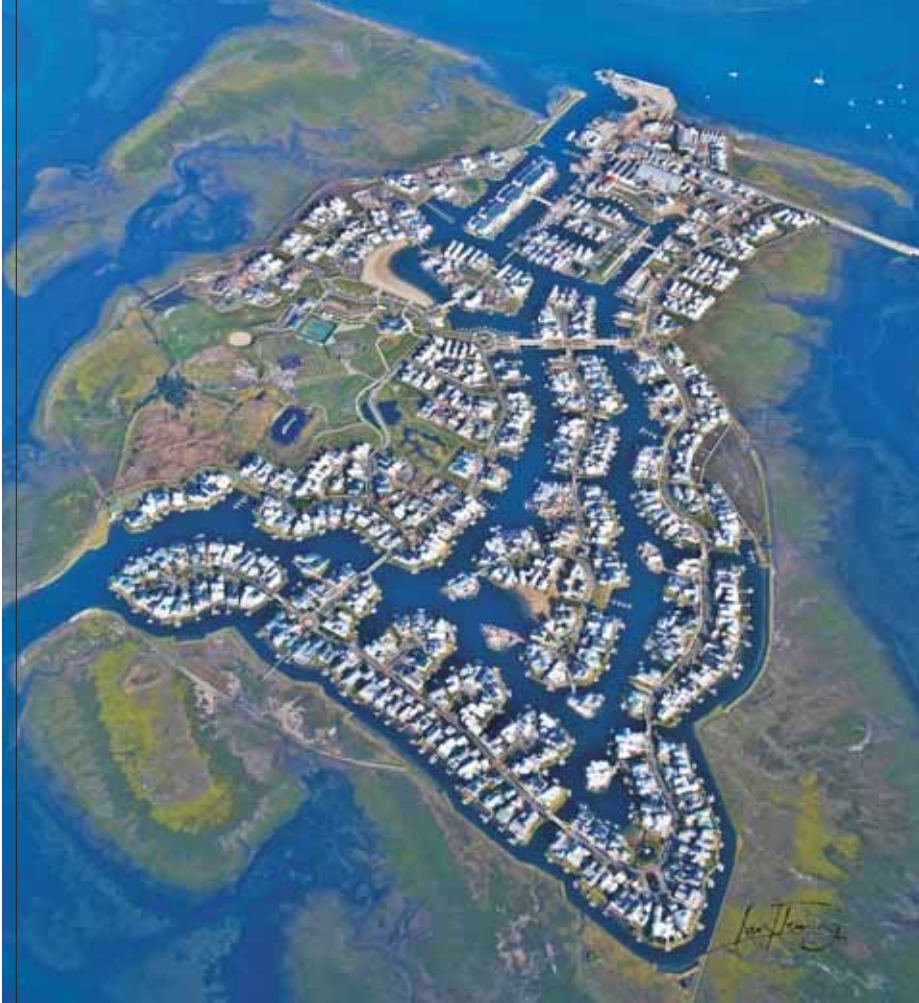
In about 1910 work began on constructing an earth sea wall around the island to prevent flooding during spring tides. Over the next few decades the seawall was extended and strengthened with sandbags, building rubble and timber cladding. Infill was also dumped in parts of the island to raise them above the level of the water table.

Thesen Island, November 1966

In 1924 the Thesens moved their sawmill operation from the forests at Bracken Hill to the island, and began manufacturing a wide variety of wood products. They later started a boatbuilding yard and oyster farm. Since the staff worked in shifts, they and their families lived in houses on the island, while single contract workers - mainly from the Transkei - were accommodated in a compound known as 'Die Kamp', typical of the apartheid-era workers' quarters of the time.



THESEN ISLAND NOW



THE ISLAND'S TRANSFORMATION

In 1974 Thesen Island, together with its sawmill and processing factory, was sold to the Barlow Rand Group, which increasingly focussed on producing plywoods and veneers. Barlows later recognised that the pollution emanating from this industrial activity was incompatible with the island's location in the midst of Knysna and its sensitive lagoon. In 1990 they commissioned property developers and architects, Chris Mulder Associates Inc (CMAI), to investigate appropriate alternatives for Thesen Island.



The building above was the island clinic. Below it its transformation as part of Thesen Harbour Town.



The final design concept was for a waterfront development incorporating residential and commercial components, with historically important buildings retained where practical to create a link with the past. In order to maximise waterfront opportunities, Thesen Island would be carved into 19 individual islands, separated by canals.

Land excavated to create the canals would be used to raise the land from the existing 1.3 m above sea level to the 3 m required for finished floor levels.

In December 1998, approval to proceed with the development was granted by the Western Cape government. The Thesen Island Development

Company (TIDC) purchased the island from Barlows, and set to work on its transformation. The first task was to remove piles of wood waste dumped all over the island, and deal with soil contaminated by dangerous chemicals such as creosote, copper, chrome and arsenic, used in the wood treatment process.

Construction of the canals began in September 2000, the seawall was breached in places and the causeway replaced with a 20 m span bridge to facilitate water flow. By the end of 2005 all the major civil works – undertaken by Arcus Gibb and Power Construction – had been completed. A new chapter in the history of the island had begun.

The Thesen Island Development Company (TIDC) won an award for Best Marina Development - South Africa at the 2007 CNBC International Property Awards.

The TIDC shareholders are Chris Mulder, Graham Power, Raimund Pouliart, Lawrence Miller, Gareth Tanner, Willem Scholtz, Carlos dos Santos, Stefan Bothma and Gerhard Nel.



Above is the old causeway, with the new causeway shown right.

Please supply contemporary pic of causeway

THE THESEN FAMILY

The Thesens were a Norwegian family who settled in Knysna in 1870, and played an integral role in the development of the area's economy.



Thesen family in Stavanger, Norway, April 1869, the year they departed.



A Thesen family picnic



Stan Thesen (centre) in front of machinery used for cutting timber, Thesen Industries



Charles Wilhelm Thesen (1856 - 1940)

Arnt Thesen and his brother Frederik ran a hardware business in the Norwegian port of Stavanger. They later expanded into shipping and fishing, with 10 ships in the fleet. The business was suddenly ruined in 1868 when the collapse of the region's herring fishery caused an economic depression.

Arnt was 52 years old and had a wife and nine children ranging in age from 8 to 22, but decided to emigrate to New Zealand. Frederik was content to stay in Norway, but another brother Mathius, who was a widower in his mid-fifties, agreed to join him with his son Hans.

The family bought one of their boats – a small schooner called the *Albatros* – from their insolvent estate, and equipped it for the long sea journey south. They set sail from Stavanger on 20 July 1869, stopped in Thonberg to pick up a cargo of timber for resale, and then headed for Plymouth in England, where they stocked up on provisions before departing at the end of August for Cape Town. On board were 20 people – 13 of whom were Thesens.

The sea-leg to Cape Town took 78 days, and the family had a well-earned break before continuing on their voyage just over a week later. But the *Albatros* was damaged during a storm off Cape Agulhas, and they were forced to return to Table Bay for repairs. While in port they were offered a charter to take provisions to Knysna. Arnt and his family stayed behind while

Mathius and Hans sailed the *Albatros* to Knysna, arriving a few days before Christmas 1869.

They were so impressed by what they saw that after a few more trips back and forth the family decided to abandon their New Zealand plans and settle in Knysna instead. On 6 April 1870 the *Albatros* sailed through the Heads into the lagoon, with the entire family on board.

The brothers opened a shop in Knysna and continued transporting cargo along the coast on the *Albatros*. After five months, Mathius and Hans moved to Plettenberg Bay to start a new business, and Mathius later began farming at Wittedrift.

Arnt died in 1875 and Mathius ten years later, but their descendants expanded the family shipping business and also played a leading role in developing other industries in Knysna, including forestry, wood-processing, boat-building and oyster-farming.

From here, walk towards the Boatshed, where you will find the next panel adjacent to the main entrance.

THE BOATSHED

The boatshed dates back to the early 1940s, when it was built to manufacture military boats for World War II. The boats were constructed on wooden cradles and then launched down the slipway at the far end of the building into the lagoon. A fire in 1966 destroyed the original boatshed, but it was quickly rebuilt. In later years the building was used as a plywood store, and has now been converted into a shopping mall and boutique hotel as part of the island's redevelopment.



A boat under construction in the Boatshed.



The Boatshed prior to the construction of the jetty.



Fairmile 853 on trails, 1943



The loading jetty



A boat inauguration with the Boatshed in the background.



The Boatshed today



BOAT BUILDING



Launching M.L. Fairmile 4002, 1944



SA Navy launch built by Thesen Industries being tested in lagoon



Fishing trawler Curlew built by Thesen Industries

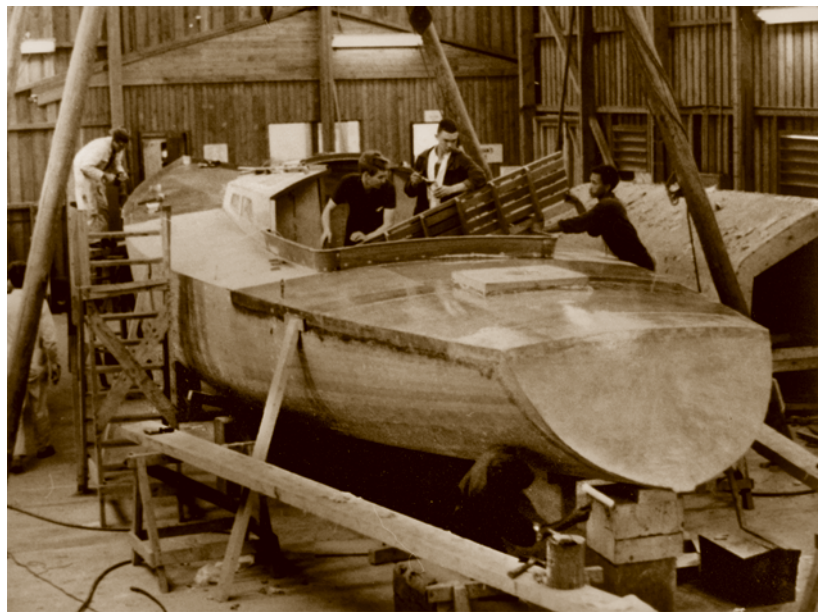
The Thesens had made a few small craft over the years since their arrival in Knysna, but the boat-building business really took off during World War II.

In 1942, after the fall of Tobruk, General Jan Smuts issued a call for extra recruits to the military, so the Thesens closed the furniture-making section of their factory to allow staff to sign up for active service. Just before the staff were due to leave, the Admiralty approached the firm with a request that the wood-crafting skills of these potential recruits be put to good use by building boats for the war effort instead. Ultimately, some 640 wooden vessels of various kinds were made by the Thesens' boat-building yard during WWII.

The most noteworthy were the 112 ft Fairmile patrol boats, or 'submarine chasers', made entirely of wood. The first Fairmile was launched from the boatshed - which had been hurriedly constructed around the keel - on 18 June 1943. Before long these vessels were being built two at a time in the boatshed, while lifeboats and smaller craft were made in the furniture factory.

After World War II, the Thesens' boat-building operation was scaled back, but still produced many pleasure craft and fishing vessels. The largest of these were the 60-80 ft purse-seiners used on the West Coast for pilchard and anchovy fishing.

The Thesens' name first became widely known in South Africa when the family ran a shipping business, which continued trading as the Thesen's Steamship Company Ltd after it was sold in 1921. Then the Thesens focused on their sawmilling operation, and opened a wood-processing factory that soon became famous for producing wagon parts and fine furniture. Later, these areas of expertise were combined, and the Thesens' name became synonymous with master boat-building.



The Voortrekker under construction in the Boatshed, at the jetty and at Simonstown.

More prestigious was the building of the 49 ft yacht Voortrekker, designed by Ricus van der Stadt. Skipper Bruce Dalling was second across the finish line in the 1968 single-handed transatlantic race, but won on handicap.

She was then acquired by the SA Navy and made world headlines once again in 1983 when Bertie Reed sailed her to victory in the inaugural BOC Challenge, a single-handed race around the world.

Shortly after Dalling's success, the Thesens decided to celebrate the 1970 centenary of the family's arrival in Knysna by building and entering their own yacht in the first Cape to Rio Race, due to take place early the following year. The 42 ft Albatross II was launched in Knysna on 14 November 1970 before a crowd of 1500 people, including 60 members of the Thesen family. The yacht won the race, prompting a huge open-air party at the Thesens' boatyard.

Thesen and Co. was sold to Barlows on 1 Jan 1974, but a year later the former MD, Stan Thesen, leased the boat-building yard and renamed it SB Thesen Marine. In March 1977 the boatyard was leased to Ian Rennie and was renamed Knysna Boatyard.

Albatross 11???



SAW TOOTH BUILDING



This was one of the first industrial buildings on Thesen Island, and was initially used for hardwood saw-milling. During the 1970s it was converted into a plywood plant, and the northern half of the building was demolished. The southern half remained in use until the island's redevelopment, when the building was refurbished for its current use. The original brick and steel shell and yellowwood trusses have been retained, as well as the sawtooth roof after which the building is named.



THE DRY MILL

The Dry Mill was once a vital component of the Thesen Island sawmilling operation. It consisted of three enormous steel-framed sheds, used for storing timber and plywood boards once they had been dried in the kilns. During the island's redevelopment, the three sheds were transformed into six three-storey apartment blocks. Today their latticed columns create unique features within the luxury apartments, while the outer roof trusses provide the roof supports for the two buildings. The exposed middle section of the roof trusses forms an attractive trellis archway linking the buildings.

The Dry Mill apartment complex won an award for Best Redevelopment Project-South Africa at the 2007 CNBC International Property Awards in London.



THE TIMBER INDUSTRY

Thesen Island was once a hive of industrial activity, at the heart of which was a sawmill established by the Thesen family. Soon after their arrival in Knysna in 1870, the Thesens began transporting and selling timber products through their shipping service and trading store. In 1880 the family became co-owners of Knysna's first steam sawmill, built in the centre of town five years before. By the time the Steam Saw Mill Company Ltd was liquidated in 1888, the Thesens had bought a tract of indigenous forest and built a sawmill at Bracken Hill, some distance inland.



The sleeper factory owned by the Thesens

In 1924 the sawmill was relocated to Thesen Island, which Charles W Thesen had purchased in 1904. Sawmilling was initially concentrated on producing wood for wagon-building and furniture-making from the indigenous hardwoods – particularly ironwood and stinkwood – as well as millions of yellowwood railway sleepers.

During World War II – when the disruption of normal shipping activities caused a severe shortage of imported timber products – the focus countrywide switched to softwoods from pine and eucalypt (gum) plantations. The Thesens began establishing their own plantations, and the sawmill became an important supplier of transmission poles, construction timber and fencing.

In 1974 the Thesen family sold the company to the Barlow Rand Group, and the sawmill was increasingly used for the production of plywood and veneer products from pines and eucalypts. However, pollution arising from this industrial activity meant that the sawmill's presence in the midst of Knysna and its sensitive lagoon was not sustainable.

The sawmill therefore ceased operation on 29 June 2001, paving the way for the island's transformation into a residential and commercial development.

The sleeper factory owned by the Thesens



The three colour photographs illustrate the scale of the timber industry on the island. Please supply appropriate captions, eg the photo bottom right shows the production of plywood.



Knysna forest woodcutters at work



THE FOREST TRAIN

In 1904 the Thesens secured the support of their competition in the timber industry to build a railway through the Knysna forest to the jetty on the island. Together they formed the South Western Railway Company Ltd, and raised the required £50 000, one-third of which was a government subsidy.

It took nearly three years to complete the railway, so it only began operating in May 1907. The locomotives were fitted with spark arrestors over the funnels to prevent forest fires, and because they brought to mind a coffee percolator, the train soon became known as the 'Coffee Pot'.

The train ran three times per week, taking four hours each way to do the 35 km between Knysna and the forest terminus at Deep Walls (now called Diepwal). Along the way it stopped at Bracken Hill station near the Thesen's sawmill, Parkes Station servicing the Parkes' sawmill near Veldtmanpad, and Templeman Station at Deep Walls, where a large clearing served as a collection depot for logs hauled from the forest.

Apart from carrying passengers, mail and other supplies, the train brought up to 70 tons of logs and finished timber from the forest and sawmills back to Knysna, and then across the causeway to the jetty for loading on to ships. The service was never profitable, and after the main railway line from Cape Town to George was extended to Knysna in 1927, fewer ships called at Knysna. Later, road transport competed with the railway service – being faster and cheaper – so a decision was taken to liquidate the South Western Railway Company. The train ceased operating in April 1949, and the railway line was dismantled and sold.



THE POWER STATION

The old power station once served a vital role as a regional electricity hub. Wood-waste burned in its boilers provided steam pressure to power five turbines that generated electricity for Thesen Island, as well Knysna and Plettenberg Bay. At one stage it was able to meet the towns' entire demand, but by the 1970s it was supplemented by the Knysna Municipality's own facilities. When the sawmill ceased operation in June 2001, the electricity-generating capacity served only as an emergency power supply for Thesen Island, but the steam pressure was still being used for wood treatment and plywood-manufacturing.



MONORAIL/GANTRY

The old sawmill factory on Thesen Island made use of overhead gantry cranes to transport heavy logs and planks, and these have been adapted for re-use as part of the island's transformation.



The pedestrian bridge between the residential and commercial areas is suspended from the monorail gantry, which once transported stacked planks to the kilns, where the wood was dried before being moved to the dry mill for storage. A second gantry was used as the framework for a row of townhouses, known as the Gantry Houses.



SHIPPING AT KNYSNA

Thesen Island was once home to a sawmill and other industries established by the Thesen family, beginning in the 1920s. But even before then the Thesen name was well known, thanks to the family's shipping interests.

The Thesen shipping business began with the Albatros – the 17 ton schooner that brought the family to South Africa in 1869. She was used to transport cargo and passengers up and down the coast until March 1874, when she was wrecked on a reef near Cape Agulhas. The passengers and crew took to the lifeboats and landed on Dyer Island, where they met some fishermen who helped them reach the mainland three days later.



The *Albatros*, the schooner that brought the Thesen family to Knysna in 1869

The 191 ton brig *Ambulant* replaced the *Albatros*, and was used to carry wagonwood and railway sleepers, as well as passengers, between the coastal ports. In 1883 she was the first vessel to load cargo from the new government jetty that later became known as Thesen's Jetty. The following year she was sold, because the operation was no longer viable after the Union and Castle Lines initiated a regular shipping service along the South African coast. The Thesens then acted as shipping agents for the Castle Line steamships and independent sailing ships visiting Knysna.

After the Union and Castle Lines halted the Knysna run following the decline of the Millwood goldfields, the Thesens purchased the *Agnar* – a 427 ton steamship – from their home town of Stavanger in Norway. She was put into service towards the end of 1895, carrying cargo as well as passengers. She was dubbed the 'Knysna Mail Packet', although local schoolchildren called her the 'Agony' as she ferried them away to boarding school. In 1901 she was sent back to Norway for a refit, returning in January 1902. In the interim, her services were taken over by the *Ingerid*.

The *Ingerid* was a 706 ton steamship that was purchased in London, and arrived in Knysna in January 1901. Both the *Ingerid* and the *Agnar* were used as transport ships during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), and also chartered by the German government in South West Africa during the Herero War (1904-1907) to take supplies to troops in Swakopmund. The *Ingerid* remained on the West Coast, transporting guano for the South African government and carrying troops to German South West Africa in World War I, before being sold with the rest of the fleet.

In 1903 the *Clara* was the third ship to join the Thesen's fleet, but as a charter for the first 12 years. She was a 139 ton converted sand barge used to carry railway sleepers and wagonwood from a sawmill above the Storms River mouth – then an official port with its own Customs Officer. The opening of the Humansdorp-Avontuur railway line made the *Clara*'s services redundant, so she was sold to the Thesens in 1915. The following year, Storms River mouth was deproclaimed as a port.



SS Ingerid



Agnar



Clara

Normal shipping traffic around the South African coast was disrupted by World War I (1914-1918), but there was still a need to transport passengers, cargo and military supplies. The Thesens therefore expanded their fleet and formed the Thesen's Steamship Company Ltd in 1916. The new acquisitions were:

The 600 ton steamship *Karatara* was purchased by the Thesens in 1913, and used on the West Coast for a while. She was also dispatched on a dangerous mission to fetch a cargo of elephant seal oil from Kerguelen Island in the 'roaring forties', since she had been purpose-built for the sealing trade. In 1921 the *Karatara* caught fire off Camps Bay, and was damaged beyond repair.

Karatara, below and the *Sherard Osborne*, below right



The 1019 ton steamship *Outeniqua* was specially built for the Thesens in Norway as the flagship of the fleet, and arrived in mid 1915. She was deployed on the West Coast during the war years, but later used more widely. She could accommodate 50 passengers.

The 216 ton steamship *Nautilus* was bought at the end of 1917, but wrecked two years later while being chartered by a diamond-dredging company.

After World War I, ships that had been involved in the war effort resumed their normal services. The increased competition, together with rapid road and rail development, prompted the sale of the four remaining ships in the Thesen's fleet – the *Agnar*, *Ingerid*, *Clara* and *Outeniqua*. On 30 June 1921 they became the property of the Liverpool-based Houston Line, but continued to sail under the name of the Thesen's Steamship Company Ltd.

The Houston Line also purchased other ships for the fleet, including the *Zambezia*, *Pemba*, *Otavi*, *Pondo* and *Lars Riisdahl* – all of which visited Knysna. In 1936 the Houston Line sold the Thesen's Steamship Company Ltd to the Mitchell Cotts Group, which ultimately became part of Unicorn Shipping Lines.

Lars Riisdahl



The *Outeniqua*, above and the *Zambezia*, below



OYSTER-FARMING

Knysna is the historical home of oyster-farming in South Africa, and Thesen Island has played an integral role in the industry from the outset.

Oysters have always been part of the area's seafood offerings, as the indigenous oyster *Striostrea margaritacea* occurs on the south coast's rocky shores. In the 1920s Knysna had its own Oyster Club, where sizable quantities of oysters and champagne were no doubt consumed during merry social gatherings. In those days oysters were either self-harvested or purchased from 'oyster pickers' and seafood merchants.



Interest in cultivating oysters began in 1946, when Harry Thesen – grandson of Thesen and Company founder Arnt Thesen, who had arrived in Knysna aboard the Albatros in 1870 – met Harold Bright, a retired British wine merchant. Mr Bright had seen oyster farms overseas, and recognised Knysna Lagoon's potential for such an operation. Mr Thesen had carried out some initial experiments by placing corrugated roof tiles in the lagoon to encourage settlement of the indigenous oyster.

In 1948 Harry Thesen sent his 23-year-old son Hjalmar overseas to tour European oyster farms with Mr Bright. In Holland they met Willem van Dort, a Dutch oyster farmer, who was persuaded to move to Knysna. Mr van Dort arrived in October 1948, and began conducting oyster cultivation experiments.

In the meantime, Harry Thesen had been paving the way for a formal oyster-farming operation in Knysna Lagoon. In August 1949 the Knysna Oyster Company was registered, with Thesen and Company and the Fisheries Development Corporation (Viskor) as shareholders, and Mr van Dort as manager.

Mr van Dort continued experimenting with the indigenous oyster and also imported European species such as *Ostrea edulis* and *Crassostrea angulata*. He had little success, however, and returned to Holland in the early 1960s.

At about that time Viskor appointed a marine biologist, Andre Genade, who set up a laboratory next to the company's premises on Thesen Island to conduct research on oyster aquaculture. He worked closely with Jack Etherington, manager of the Knysna Oyster Company from 1965 until his retirement in 1992. They initially tried to breed the indigenous oyster in the lab for rearing in the lagoon, but later switched to the faster-growing Pacific oyster *Crassostrea gigas*. In 1977 it was decided to import Pacific oyster spat rather than persevering with the breeding efforts, the results of which were erratic.

In 1980 Thesen and Co sold their shares in the company, but after Viskor was phased out in 1986, Hjalmar Thesen formed a closed corporation with three others. The company has changed ownership a number of times since then.

Various systems of 'growing out' the oysters have been tried over the years, but the intertidal bag-and-rack method proved most successful. The oysters need to be exposed for part of each day to prevent infestation by worms, but submerged long enough to filter-feed and avoid overheating. These days the oysters spend much of their life in Port Elizabeth's Algoa Bay, where faster growth can be achieved with lower mortality rates.



The Knysna Oyster Festival – held during the July school holidays – was initially called the Knysna Winter Festival when it was inaugurated in 1983.

Later, sponsorship by the Knysna Oyster Company prompted the change to a name reflecting Knysna's unique flavour.