

THE KNYSNA MARKET HALL, AN EARLY KNYSNA CONSPIRACY?



INTRODUCTION

1849 The Village of Newhaven

The village of Newhaven was surveyed in 1849 by William Hopley on the instructions of John Sutherland, son of Colonel Sutherland, who had bought the Melkhoutkraal Farm in 1844, out of the estate of George Rex, and the mostly residential erven were then offered for sale.

1858 The Magisterial District of Knysna

Knysna was established as a separate Magisterial District (Division) in 1858 when Sutherland's village of Newhaven was combined with the 1825 Naval village of Melville. This magisterial district stretched from the Swart River, at Sedgefield, to the boundary of the Humansdorp Magisterial District.

The consequence of this was that Knysna now had to have a Resident Magistrate & Civil Commissioner, assisted by a Policeman, a Court of Law, (and of course, a good solid gaol), a District Surgeon, a Mayor and a Town Committee. But there was no building to accommodate Town Committee meetings.

Early town committee meetings were held in George Brent Steytler's legal office in Main Street. By 1881, Town meetings were being held in the Good Templars Hall, Unity Street. [\[1\]](#)

1882 The Municipality of Knysna

The Knysna Municipality was proclaimed in 1882, and was referred to as "The Knysna". First meeting of elected Municipal "Commissioners" was held in 1883. Knysna's population at this time barely exceeded 1000.

1900 Market Square early 1900

When the village of Newhaven had been laid out in 1849, two *squares* were included in the design of the township, viz. an Auction Square and a Market Square, both along Queen Street. The primary purpose of this market square was to provide a location for the sale of farmer's produce, but it was also used initially as camping grounds for farmers from remote farms attending the quarterly Nagmaal. Later, local farmers started asking for a covered market facility.

1889 – 1902 The South African War (1899-1902)

The depression during the war years, lack of funds and little confidence in the future resulted in little building activity in Knysna. But after the South African War confidence in the future of Knysna was restored.

THE MARKET HOUSE

A decision by the Municipal Council to proceed with the building of a *Market House* was taken in October 1906. At this time £425 was available from the sale of commonage land to the Cape Colonial Government.[\[2\]](#)

The Mayor during the period 1906 to 1908 was William Patrick Cuthbert and the Councillors included Charles W Thesen, Thomas Horn and Henry J Templeman. The Town Clerk was George W Brent Steytler.

First call for tenders

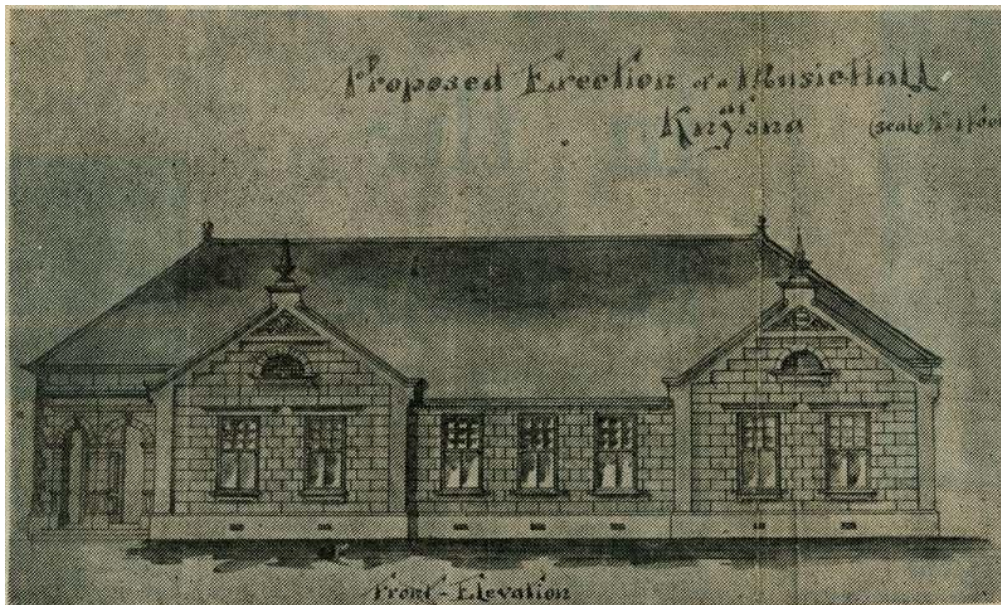
Certain drawings were prepared and in July 1907 tenders were called for, closing date 13 August 1907.[\[3\]](#)



But somewhere along the path the purpose of this new building lost direction.

ARCHITECT PAULUS HOFMAN MAKES A PROPOSAL

A certain local architect, Paulus Hofman, had heard about the 1907 tender enquiry and approached the Council with a 'revised' proposal. He had earlier prepared drawings for a Music Hall [4], but could not raise the funds needed to build this hall from private subscription (estimated at a cost of £1135) [5], but thought that the design would essentially meet the needs of Knysna. His final design included a large hall (65ftx28ft) including a stage (15ftx28ft) (25%), rooms for offices, refreshment room, and toilets.



Hofman the architect

So who was Paulus Johannes Cornelius Hofman? Hofman was an immigrant Dutch architect, who was appointed in January 1897 as Supervisor in the Department of Public Works, based in Pretoria, under Sytze Wierda. Sytze Wierda was appointed by President Paul Kruger in 1887 as Government Engineer and Architect of the Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek (Transvaal Republic).

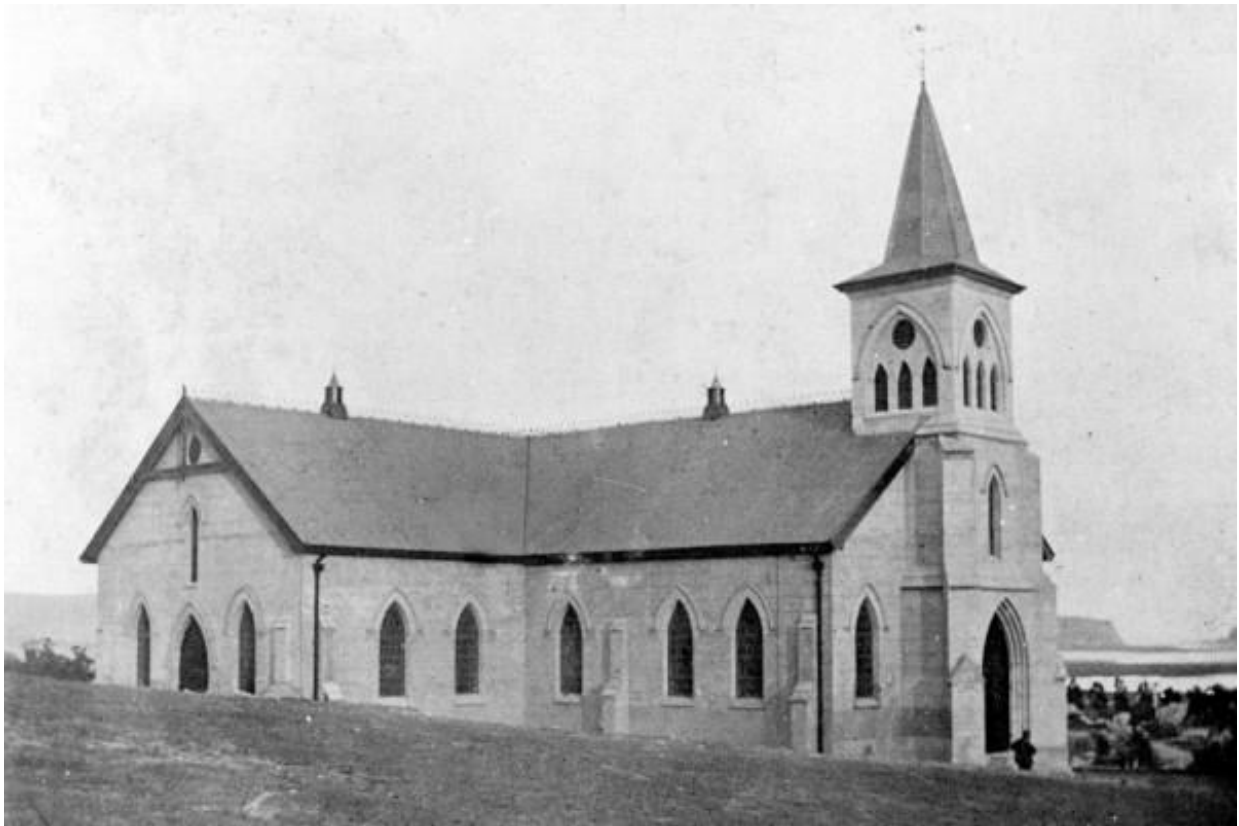
So could we say that Paul Kruger had an indirect hand in the design of this building?

Hofman came down to the Southern Cape sometime during the Anglo Boer War. He advertised himself as an Architect and Builder in the Southern Cape press as *late of the "PWD, Oudtshoorn"* with offices in Oudtshoorn and Knysna) [6].

Being an ex-ZAR man he may have selected the wording of his advert carefully. Stating *Late of the PWD., Oudtshoorn* might have been a deliberate attempt to conceal his work in the Transvaal Republic, under Paul Kruger's tenure.

P HOFMAN,
Architect &
Contractor
(Late of P.W.D., Oudtshoorn),
Undertakes any class of
BUILDING WORK, DRAWING
CUT OF PLANS, SPECIFIC-
TIONS AND ESTIMATES, etc.
AT VERY CONVENIENT PRICES.
OFFICE'S :
Oudtshoorn & Knysna.

He was, however, very successful in Knysna as he designed and built the new Dutch Reformed Church in Knysna, in 1904, as well as local heritage homes Solvang and Grendon, in 1905, before tendering for the Market Hall in 1907.



The new Dutch Reformed Church in Knysna

Incidentally, Hofman does not appear to have obtained any commissions, at all, in Oudtshoorn!

But he was a progressive architect, and promoted the use of concrete bricks instead of the local baked bricks, which were apparently weak.[\[7\]](#)

Unfortunately, he got into financial difficulties in February, 1907, and offered all of his furniture in his house in Queen Street for sale, but it would appear that he bounced back quickly.[\[8\]](#)

Tender's re-issued

In October 1907 tenders were called for again, closing 10 December 1907. This tender enquiry was re-advertised in the George & Knysna Herald in November 1907. Finally, the tender submitted by builder George Tweedy was accepted.

The Town Council issued a statement dated 30 October 1907 saying they had applied to Administrator of the Cape for funds (£700) for the proposed Market Hall on a 25-year loan). [\[9\]](#) Why did they apply in October for £700? Was this because £425 plus £700 approximated Hofman's estimate of £1135?

They also concealed the fact that the building would resemble a Music Hall? Clearly the Administrator of the Cape did not know what was planned to be built with the funds.

The Builder

George Ernest Tweedy lived near the old Knysna Hotel (site of today's Log Inn). He was originally a carpenter, and was married in St Georges Church in 1906 to Cornelia Jolliffe. As with builders then and now, when the economy took a downturn, builders got into financial trouble. A notice of sale of furniture out of his Insolvent estate was published in December 1913. [\[10\]](#)

Laying of Foundation Stone 12 January 1909. [\[11\]](#)

The local dignitaries – Mayor James Henry (Harry) Templeman, Town Councillors, and Town Clerk - left in a formal procession from the Masonic Lodge in Unity Street, led by William P Cuthbert on horseback carrying the seals of office.

Once assembled the choir sang, led by Postmaster Dudley.

After an opening address by Mayor Templeman, the Masonic proceedings took place. The District Grand Officer, Dr. Haw, led the proceedings. Coins and topical documents were placed where the stone was to be set, mortar applied and the stone lowered down while the choir sang a hymn.

The Freemasons then checked to see if the stone was *true* and then the choir sang the Gloria.

The opening of the Market Hall 25 May 1909 [\[12\]](#)

Mayor HJ Templeman presided over the ceremony, and the “Mayoress” his step daughter Daisy Brown, as Harriet, his wife, had died in 1900.

Sadly, Town Clerk George W Brent Steytler was not present as he died shortly after the laying of the foundation stone, at the age of 51, in February 1909.



The opening ceremony

Three celebratory parties were held: A party attended on mayoral invitation only, a party for the youth, and a party for the “working class”.

The South Western Railway laid on transport for partygoers through to *Deep Walls* in the Knysna forest, for invitees to the mayoral party only. [\[13\]](#)

HOFMAN AFTER THE MARKET HALL

Architect Hofman was apparently involved in the design of the new church spire of the DR *Moederkerk* in George after the first church spire collapsed in 1905, but we have no real evidence of this. (The main Architect was Hesse, builders Moor & Tedbury)

He returned to Pretoria after 1909 and was elected a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1912. He came 16th in the Benoni Town Hall competition in 1918 and was a member of the Pretoria Practice Committee from 1919 to 1920. He entered into a partnership with Jan Arie Hofman (no family connection) around 1928, the partnership lasting until the death of Paulus Hofman in 1932. (Hofman & Hofman)[\[14\]](#)

SUBSEQUENT USE OF THE MARKET HALL

The Knysna public questioned if the hall would really be suitable for the farmers' needs![\[16\]](#) Where would the oxen and the ox-wagons with farmer's produce be accommodated? There were also later complaints that it was not suitable as a Market Hall, as it was too remote? [\[17\]](#)

The hall was, however, very suitable for:

Dances (e.g. when there were visits by Royal Navy Ships, New Year's Eve dance, Publicity Association functions..... It was soon to be referred as the Knysna Town Hall suitable for:

Concerts,

Film shows,

Horticultural shows,

Market produce competitions,

Temperance meetings (such as the Good Templar's),

There was even a proposal in the press for roller skating! [\[15\]](#)

The quote the KHS heritage plaque:

The hall was used for dances, the annual horticultural show, concerts, choral performances, ballet classes and also served as the electoral voting station.

Everything but for the holding a farmer's market! Did the farmers benefit? Definitely not!

To add insult to injury, even the Mayor, the Councillors and staff, who were using the offices and the meeting room, were seriously inconvenienced whenever there was a social function! [\[18\]](#)



A typical dance evening

The photograph on the right shows one of the slatted folding stinkwood chairs were made by Donald Sass and Mr Munro for 4 shillings each, for use in the Market Hall.



Extensions in 1911

A south extension, funded by the proceeds of functions such as dances etc was built in 1911, with two dressing rooms either end. [\[19\]](#)

The “afdak” to the south

It is uncertain when this unattractive afdak was added.

Extensions in 1933

In 1933 the committee room to the west of the hall was added.

Extensions in 1963 [\[20\]](#)

Major Extensions were built in 1963 to create a more suitable environment for the Municipal Council, including the Mayor’s office, Council Chambers, and the Mayor’s parlour.

At the same time the old Market Hall building, now called the *Town Hall*, was renovated.

The new extensions were designed by Jack Simpson of Simpson & Bridgman of Oudtshoorn and built by Russell Stuart at a cost of approximately R32,000. The foundation stone was laid in 1963 by the Mayor, John Roos-Bolton.

This new building also housed the historic stinkwood Divisional Council table and chairs made from stinkwood baulks discovered in 1946 and recovered from the George Rex slipway (built in 1831) upriver near the Knysna River drift. This furniture is still in use in the Knysna Municipality Committee Room, today.

© Revision C dated May 2020

Philip Caveney
Knysna Historical Society

References:

- [1] Margaret Parkes - Vanishing Knysna, Views of the Past, 2007
- [2] George & Knysna Herald 17 October 1906
- [3] George & Knysna Herald 21 August 1907
- [4] The Oudtshoorn Courant and Het Suid Western, 12 November 1982
- [5] George & Knysna Herald 6 November 1905
- [6] Oudtshoorn Courant & Het Suid Western 6 February 1905
- [7] George & Knysna Herald 4 April 1903
- [8] George & Knysna Herald 27 February 1907
- [9] George & Knysna Herald 4 December 1909
- [10] George & Knysna Herald 10 December 1913
- [11] Margaret Parkes - Vanishing Knysna, Views of the Past, 2007
- [12] *ibid.*
- [13] George & Knysna Herald 26 May 1909
- [14] www.Artefacts.co.za website
- [15] George & Knysna Herald 7 April 1909
- [16] *ibid.*
- [17] George & Knysna Herald 22 June 1932
- [18] *ibid.*
- [19] George & Knysna Herald 16 August 1911
- [20] Margaret Parkes & Vicky Williams "Wandering through historical Knysna"

Acknowledgements to the Millwood House Museum for use of the photographs