

REDISCOVERING WOODSTOCK

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"Woodstock is dying of neglect" wrote C. Pama in 1979.¹ Almost a decade later, this is still the case not only in terms of its generally dilapidated run-down appearance but also of historical research of the area. Historians have tended to overlook this once dynamic centre which underwent rapid change in the late nineteenth century, being second in size to central Cape Town — the focus of most urban history.

Woodstock, originally Papendorp, lies some two kilometres by rail south-east of Cape Town. It stretches from the fringes of the expanding city of Cape Town to the outlying suburbs of Mowbray, Rondebosch and Claremont, and is hemmed in by Table Bay, Devil's Peak and the Salt River. The railway line running through the area provided a valuable service. The nearby beach was an extremely popular bathing resort until the line was extended to Muizenberg in the 1890s.

Today, Woodstock is a bustling, sprawling, ill-defined area stretching above the railway line, lining Albert and Main Roads. It is a mixture of crumbling residences and grimy industry. Warehouses tower over semi-detached dwellings, shop facades and pocket-sized front gardens. More-or-less centrally located, beside a clearing with its characteristic rubble, is a blackened church (the Anglican Church of St Mary the Virgin) complete with belfry and flanked by resistant palms. Over the road is a timber warehouse and on Station Road stands a clothing firm. The trains rattle past. For the passengers, Woodstock is little more than the back of buildings, bright pro-temperance billboards, a patch of grass and windswept melkboom. This is a far cry from Woodstock at the turn of the century.

EARLY HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

Writing about Woodstock in the 1890s, A.F. Keen described it as "a peaceful country village"² with open farmland and mountainside — grapes to be picked on the Van der Byl's farm (Roodebloem); milk, thick with cream, from the herd of Jersey cows; meat and vegetables from the German farmers at the early morning market in Sir Lowry Road.³ This was indeed the "suburb of vineyards and vegetables."⁴ There were also tickey-beers at the Altona Hotel, walks up the mountainside with its few isolated buildings and fynbos, picnics in Woodstock Cave, swimming and joining the Coloured fishermen bringing in their catch at the Woodstock Beach, gas street lamps, and developing industries. Woodstock could boast several churches (with St Mary's famous for its peal of bells), a mayor and municipal council.

This is the Woodstock into which Ernest Rip, a son of Woodstock,⁵ was born in December 1903. Standing at St Mary's where he had served in a lay capacity, Rip recalled the stonemason (on the corner of Albert and Station Roads) whose machines would grind all day. The church had an amicable agreement with him that his machines would cease operations during services. The noise was part of Woodstock life, people lived with it, it ran in their blood.

In those days, there was a well-kept cemetery behind the church. The rectory was surrounded by its gnarled hedge. There was Hickson's sweet factory and Globe Engineering works with its chimney stack. Beside the church, on Albert Road, was a blacksmith and general dealer's store (belonging to Amos Bailey) while opposite was Davidson's Tannery.

Albert Road itself was either dust, or mud in the rainy winters. A telling comment about street conditions at the turn of the century is made in a contemporary local magazine:

At present it is impossible in our walks abroad to trust our feet to look after themselves, and very often difficult in the blinding dust to keep the necessary watch over them, so that those who are not highsteppers are apt to come to grief. But there is now promise of the roads mending their ways, and smooth hard roads and byways is the dream of a yet nearer future.⁶

Cars were also part of that future: traps, spiders and carts were the means of transport in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The mayor of Woodstock noted in 1897: "There is [sic] now two most valuable systems of locomotion through the Town, the Railway and the Electric Tram service which run both to Cape Town and the other suburbs at the extremely short interval of every ten minutes".⁷

The railway line lay behind the tannery and beyond it was the beach where youths would have watermelon feasts, buy lemonade and ginger beer, and go courting. Just down the way from the church, beyond St Mary's School and Chapel, was a fresh water spring (Spring Street) and the famous Treaty House which was rumoured to have been haunted until the Rev. Bergh who lived there, was found making noises in the loft instead of making tea for his guests! A sense of pride and pleasure was richly conveyed by Ernest Rip,⁸ and also shared by others. A one-time counsellor for Woodstock glowingly refers to his abode as "the Cinderella, the sleeping beauty of Cape Town".⁹ It seems that the beauty was far more in the mind than in the eye, but there was undoubtedly something which engendered loyalty and the tendency of inhabitants to look back to "the happy days" with fond memories:

So back to my childhood I reminisce
A beautiful life rich with happiness
How the years have passed with the tick of the clock
But till my life's up
I shall love you 'Woodstock'.¹⁰

¹ C. PAMA, *Wagon road to Wynberg* (Cape Town, 1979), p.19.

² Cape Archives Depot, Cape Town (CA), A 1839 A.F. Keen Collection: Memories — the early history of Woodstock, 1973, p.1.

³ *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁴ L. GREEN, *Growing lovely, growing old* (Cape Town, 1954), p.198.

⁵ University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Archives of the Church of the Province of South Africa (CPSA) AB 1878 E. Rip Collection: Personal album, p.1.

⁶ *Woodstock Parish Magazine*, December 1904 (Opening of a quarry and ropeway at Leliebloem, 5.11.1904).

⁷ CA, Archives of the Municipality of Woodstock (3/WSK) 6: Mayor's minute, 2.8.1897.

⁸ Interview with E. Rip, 14.2.1985.

⁹ *The Argus*, 12.12.1973.

¹⁰ *The Cape Times*, 18.7.1981.



Scenes of Woodstock today (1986).*

Such rosy views are rare earlier on, when Woodstock was known as Papendorp.¹¹ The new name was the result of a local conflict between the patrons of Carey's Woodstock Hotel and Tomblison's New Brighton Hotel. The fishermen, who formed the majority of the inhabitants at the time, frequented the Woodstock Hotel and voted en masse for the name of their public house to become the name of the suburb.¹² In 1875 the Metropolitan of the Anglican Church described Papendorp as "a very dreary suburb of Cape Town along the shore of Table Bay",¹³ and two years later the rector of St Mary's reported: "The moral tone of the village is fearfully low".¹⁴

This characterization was perpetuated by the mayor of Woodstock who in 1897 stated that "Old Papendorp had a very bad character indeed, most of which has been redeemed by Woodstock ... the only fault remaining is that of the wind".¹⁵ Just over ten years later, a magazine article of the time noted: "If you wish to appreciate the dismal and depressing effect of wind sweeping over a galvanised iron town, you must visit Woodstock in a south-east wind". The same observer found little appeal in Woodstock, describing it as "a town of factories, of workmen's houses, of middle-class shops and rival church spires ... [with] ... ugly and irreverent surroundings". He writes of the frequently windswept Albert Road with "its uneven and shabby houses, its dusty little huckster shops and its occasional waste spaces strewn with rubbish"; "the tin-roofed cottages with advertisements painted on their walls"; "the black mass of the gas works".¹⁶

The once rural character of Woodstock, illustrated by references in municipal records to cattle, goats and pigs roaming the streets, was disappearing. There was widespread selling of property in the area, advertised in 1881 as "this rapidly



rising hamlet".¹⁷ The situation in Victorian England was remarkably applicable to Woodstock as it lost its rusticity and became "an incongruous mixture of urbanity and barnyard setting, with town houses interspersed with stables, pigsties and slaughterhouses, and where sheep and cows jostled with horse traffic, and pigs and chickens dwelt in close proximity to human inhabitants".¹⁸ Woodstock was in transition, undergoing a process of development. Both suburbanization and industrialization were stimulated by the construction of a railway line.

POPULATION

Bishop William West Jones, among others, wrote of the population consisting largely of fishermen and other poor folk, many of them Malays, and "nearly all living almost as heathens. There are a few, but very few, of a better class ...".¹⁹ The Malay population was actually relatively small

¹¹ The name was perhaps taken from that of Pieter van Papendorp who obtained a mortgage in 1788 for land lying between the Castle and the Salt River with a cottage that was possibly the Treaty House (formerly Papendorp House, then La Belle Alliance) where the treaty between Britain and Holland was signed on 10 January 1806. See PAMA, *op. cit.*, p.14.

¹² P.W. LAIDLER, *A tavern of the ocean: Cape Town* (Cape Town, 1952), p.198.

¹³ M. WOOD, *A father in God: the episcopate of William West Jones D.D.* (London, 1913), pp.132-133.

¹⁴ *The Net*, 1.8.1877 (Report by Dr Arnold).

¹⁵ CA, 3/WSK 6: Mayor's minute, 2.8.1897.

¹⁶ *The Cape*, 10.1.1908.

¹⁷ *The Argus*, 12.11.1881.

¹⁸ A.S. WOHL, *Endangered lives: public health in Victorian Britain* (London, 1983), p.82.

¹⁹ WOOD, *op. cit.*, pp.132-133.

*All photographs by A. Badham.

but significant enough for provision to be made for St Mary's Malay Mission. There were many immigrants, particularly in the early twentieth century, and in 1904 a quarter of Woodstock's population was British-born. This gave the area an English-speaking, classy image although the population was not affluent.²⁰ Earlier, during the nineteenth century, the population had a larger Dutch-speaking sector²¹ and a Dutch-Reformed Church was built in 1876 to cater for its needs.²² Most of the Coloured population spoke only Dutch and much mention was made in 1888 of the need for an Anglican, Dutch-speaking minister for the people.²³ The population was predominantly White as is noted in the St Mary's Parochial Diary which includes census returns for 1891: "... who would believe our Parish to have more White people than any other of the suburban parishes. Claremont with Newlands beats us by reason of a very large Coloured population".²⁴

TABLE 1

Parish	European/ White	All others	1875 total	1891 total
Woodstock	3 198	1 775	1 211	4 973
Claremont and Newlands	2 416	3 767	4 407	6 183

While the better suburbs of Rondebosch and Claremont had a more evenly balanced White:Non-White ratio, the social and economic distinction between White and Non-White was apparently much less pronounced in Woodstock.²⁵

There appeared to be far greater racial harmony between White and Coloured than between the White and Black population who were singled out for segregation.²⁶ There is a very real danger here of reading ethnic distinctions into the past, thus misrepresenting the situation. Saunders suggests that "at no time in the 19th century were ethnic boundaries as well defined as they are today and between say, the African and 'Coloured' communities there was much passing of individuals". Nevertheless he continues that "at the same time, both Africans and non-Africans saw Africans as having a separate group identity based both on a distinctive history and cultural experience and on physical differences".²⁷ An observation made of the 1830s seems to hold true for Woodstock in the late nineteenth century: although there was a great deal of "racial snobbery", distinctions were primarily based on class rather than colour — there were poor Whites and well-to-do Coloureds, breaking down rigid distinctions.²⁸ Likewise, where people lived was largely decided by what they could afford — a matter of class rather than race although the two were frequently related.²⁹

The Black population, having been set apart, were seen as a problem. A police officer describing the racial situation in the 1880s said that at nights and weekends "marauding bands of Kaffirs, local layabouts and labourers from the docks, carried on almost continual tribal war".³⁰ Another resident recounted that there were a "number of Kafirs in a location on private property; these Kafirs frequently had what are called tribal fights; as a consequence they often ran about the place in a nude state, and we were unable to protect ourselves".³¹

In 1881 there were the so-called Papendorp riots. One "disturbance" is graphically described in *The Cape Times*: a man was chased and beaten by a number of Africans who

fled when a police officer stepped in with a revolver. The Africans retreated to their quarters where the three Papendorp policemen and special constables had to rescue them from the enraged crowd that had gathered.³² Census figures show a relatively small African population, although it is stated that in 1889 Woodstock had the highest proportion of Africans in its population in Greater Cape Town.³³ This may be due to Africans registered as "Mixed or other" or else not enumerated.

More significant than any racial divisions among the residents during this period, was simply the size of the population which became a feature of Woodstock. On his appointment as rector of St Mary's in 1888, the Rev. Young found that the rapidly increasing White population was crowding the Coloured people out of the parish church. To prevent them from being entirely lost to the Church, he initiated the erection of a room in which the Coloureds could meet.³⁴

During the 1890s the population increase was particularly spectacular increasing from 3 204 Whites and 1 770 for other population groups in 1891 to 21 530 and 7 460 respec-

²⁰ R. RIDD, *Position and identity in a divided community: colour and religion in District Six, Walmer Estate, Woodstock area of Cape Town* (Ph.D., University of Oxford, 1981), p.153.

²¹ J.J. MARAIS, *Grepies uit die geskiedenis van Woodstock, Contree 3*, January 1978, p.18.

²² Later a Mission Chapel was built (1898) which the Anglicans hoped would not interfere with their church.

²³ *St Mary's Parochial Diary*, 1888-1891 (Letter dated 1888).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.4.1891.

²⁵ RIDD, *op. cit.*, p.153.

²⁶ Interview with E. Rip, 14.2.1985.

²⁷ C.C. SAUNDERS (ed.), *Studies in the history of Cape Town 2* (Cape Town, 1980), p.17.

²⁸ S. JUDGES, *Poverty, living conditions and social relations — aspects of life in Cape Town in the 1830s* (Cape Town, 1977), see conclusion.

²⁹ V. BICKFORD-SMITH, *The economic and demographic growth of Cape Town, 1880-1910* (UCT, Cape Town, 1985), p.22.

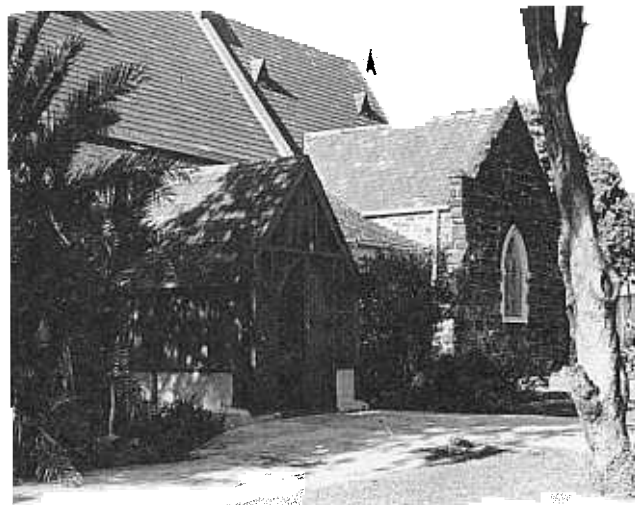
³⁰ PAMA, *op. cit.*, p.18, and A. LOMBAARD, *Woodstock: A history* (Unpublished research essay, UCT, n.d.).

³¹ G.21-1902 CAPE OF GOOD HOPE, *Report of a commission to enquire into and report upon certain matters affecting Cape Peninsula municipalities ... 2* (Cape Town, 1902), p.142.

³² *The Cape Times*, 3.9.1881.

³³ RIDD, *op. cit.*, p.153.

³⁴ *St Mary's Parochial Diary*, 1888-1891.



The Anglican Church of St Mary the Virgin, cor. Albert and Station Roads, Woodstock.

tively for 1904.³⁵ The Peninsula Commission of 1902,³⁶ using census returns, noted the extraordinarily high percentage population increase and density in Woodstock (see table 2). The total percentage increase was larger than that of any of the other suburbs,³⁷ while it was especially large in the European sector³⁸ and unexpectedly high in the Coloured sector.³⁹ The highest population density was also recorded.⁴⁰

Much of this growth can be accounted for by the influx of British people retreating from the scene of operations during the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) to places within the Cape where open land was available for development. In Woodstock terraces of houses went up to accommodate the refugees. They were built rapidly with locally produced bricks and according to a standard pattern: three-roomed with no bathroom or pantry, an outside privy in the narrow backyard and a strip of front garden about two yards across. The facades of houses and shops still bear the tell-tale dates 1901, 1902 and 1903.⁴¹ In a reflection of the times, the streets were named Balfour, Chamberlain, Salisbury, Milner, Selborne, Roberts, Kitchener, Brabant and so forth.⁴²

In 1905, at the first session of the resident magistrate, H.C. Badnall, the comment was made: "Let us hope that the Church will at least not be behind the State in providing for the increased population."⁴³ A later rector's letter observed that a marked feature of the parish was its constant shifting of population — "a perpetual going and coming of the people ...". He concluded: "The net of the Church must ever be cast wide; and, with our large population, it is especially true of Woodstock."⁴⁴

INDUSTRY

Nineteenth century residents originally depended on fishing for their livelihood.⁴⁵ From the 1860s onwards, the railway provided a source of employment, the main works yard being located in nearby Salt River.⁴⁶ A report sent to London in 1871 still noted that Papendorp was "... the refuge of the utterly destitute who eke out their means of livelihood by amassing together shells on the beach to sell to lime-burners ... There is one small tannery here; a few people are engaged in fishing ..."⁴⁷ There was little industry to attract people.

However, towards the end of the century, with the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley and gold on the Witwatersrand, Cape Town received a "rich injection of capital".⁴⁸ It became vitally important as a railway terminus and commercial centre. Such developments could not leave the surrounding areas, like Woodstock, untouched. In the 1890s Woodstock was more of a residential area, popular



Behind the scenes in Woodstock

TABLE 2

European			Coloured			Total		
1891	1902	incr. %	1891	1902	incr. %	1891	1902	incr. %
3 735	18 463	394,32	2 080	6 569	215,81	5 815	25 032*	330,47

* Excluding military =

TABLE 3

Class of industry	1900	1912
Woodwork	3	1
Metals and engineering	4	-
Processing of food, beverages, tobacco	3	8
Books, printing, paper	-	2
Vehicles	-	3
Furniture, bedding, upholstery	1	2
Leather, leatherware	2	3
Total	13	19

with the poorer section of commuters as it was the closest southern suburb to the city.⁴⁹ In spite of this, commercial enterprises such as the renowned confectionery of J.J. Atmore and numerous general dealers' stores were established. A number of inhabitants were artisans involved in tanning, smithing and masonry (see table 3). Early industries were able to establish themselves after the rush of settlers during and after the Anglo-Boer War.⁵⁰ In 1902 there were a number of manufacturing prospects — Kamp's Cold Storage, De Beer's Cold Storage, a large brewery, Saunderson's Saddlery, the possibility of a large soap factory, extensive land bought by the Milling Company for a bakery and employees' accommodation.⁵¹ A study in the 1970s presents an insight into these emerging and expanding industries⁵² (see also table 3).

³⁵ G.6-'92 *Results of a census of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope ...*, 1891 (Cape Town, 1892), pp.32-33; G.19-1905 *Census of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope 1904* (Cape Town, 1905), pp.36-37.

³⁶ The Commission was set up to investigate the adequacy or otherwise of the water supply, drainage, sewerage and lighting systems of various municipalities as well as exploring the possibility of municipal amalgamation. See E.B. VAN HEYNINGEN, 'The "small Greek cities" of the Cape Peninsula', *Contree* 10, July 1981, p.5.

³⁷ Followed by Maitland with 230,56%.

³⁸ Followed by Mowbray with 251,45%.

³⁹ G.21-1902.

⁴⁰ Followed by Cape Town with 12,3 people per acre, and all the other municipalities below six per acre. See G.21-1902.

⁴¹ *The Cape Times*, 1.10.1956.

⁴² Noticably absent are Buller, Gatacre and Methuen who were not considered heroes.

⁴³ *Woodstock Parish Magazine*, January 1905.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, April 1907.

⁴⁵ Wits, CPSA AB1676 Frances Bowers' research material for a projected history of St Mary's Church, Woodstock: Annual report to the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1855.

⁴⁶ RIDD, *op. cit.*, pp.151-152.

⁴⁷ Wits, CPSA AB1676: Annual report to the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1871.

⁴⁸ BICKFORD-SMITH, *op. cit.*, p.6.

⁴⁹ B. PICKARD, *Grand parade: the birth of Greater Cape Town 1850-1913* (Cape Town, 1969), p.153.

⁵⁰ LOMBAARD, *op. cit.*

⁵¹ G.21-1902, p.143.

⁵² J. WHITTINGDALE, *The development and location of industries in Greater Cape Town* (M.A., UCT, 1973), table 43, p.91.

Bickford-Smith correctly observes that these activities can hardly be dramatized by suggesting that “they amount to industrialization”,⁵³ but they did contribute to the increasingly urban character of Woodstock. Because at the beginning of this century Woodstock was no longer the *village* of Papendorp but the *town* of Woodstock.⁵⁴



Civic pride — the town hall and rival church spires — of Woodstock.

MUNICIPAL STATUS

The growth of Papendorp is clearly shown in the advertisements frequently appearing in *The Cape Argus* in the early 1880s. The development was unplanned and the growing community unorganised. A fire occurring in Papendorp in February 1882 prompted the necessity for some organisation in cases of fire, especially since the village was fast growing into a township “... where the residents are being packed together. Papendorp is to have a Municipality none too soon.”⁵⁵

“Villages” such as Mowbray were offering an example in taking the first steps by having their boundaries declared according to the Villages Management Act.⁵⁶ At the time a correspondent to *The Cape Times* suggested that the inhabitants of Papendorp and its vicinity (Altona, New Brighton, Roodebloem) be allowed a chance to register their names as voters having the same privileges as residents of Cape Town.⁵⁷ Papendorp residents were becoming more assertive, partly as a result of the perceived need for “the better protection of the people” following the 1881 disturbances.⁵⁸

A meeting was held in the schoolroom of the English church, St Mary’s, showing the church’s centrality as a meeting place and its concern for parochial matters. A committee was appointed to call a general meeting of inhabitants so as to place the village under the Villages Management Act. A deputation was sent to the prime minister to discuss the Act, the lawlessness of “Kaffirs” and the advisability of having a municipality. Among the delegates were a number of St Mary’s parishioners. A municipality was proposed because it would give them greater power to make the district more efficient, which was a requirement of the large influx of respectable residents.⁵⁹ A series of meetings was held in St Mary’s schoolroom and eventually in February 1882 it was agreed that Woodstock would form a municipality with various regulations such as no firearms, fireworks or other explosives to be discharged within 200 metres of municipal limits and no straw or reed huts to be erected without sanction; provision was also made for a fire brigade.⁶⁰

Implementation was slow. A correspondent called for immediate organization of a local municipal body to remedy the problems arising from rapid development — the lack of any street lighting making movement at night hazardous especially to those residences with difficult approaches, and unprotected wells frequently containing polluted water.⁶¹ By May 1882 the boundaries for the area had been de-

finied.⁶² Polling for commissioners took place in July in an orderly manner with the hours suited to the residents, “the majority being of the working class”.⁶³

Primary concerns were those of disease or health and the dirt and filth that had been accumulating. These appear also to have been the concern of the Church, although the methods of approach tended to differ. The links between the Anglican Church and the municipality were thus established from its inception, and continued despite occasional tensions. The rector attended a municipal meeting,⁶⁴ the mayor and Corporation attended divine services at St Mary’s,⁶⁵ the municipal council gave a hundred tree saplings to help with churchyard improvements,⁶⁶ and the Church congratulated the mayor and council on the passing of the Water Bill.⁶⁷

The need to augment water supplies had led to the cooperation of the municipal areas of Woodstock, Mowbray, Rondebosch, and Claremont. This prepared the way for their unification, along with Sea Point, Maitland and Kalk Bay in 1913 to form the Municipality of Greater Cape Town.⁶⁸

Woodstock had been stubbornly resistant and defensive at the original suggestion of this amalgamation. In his evidence before the 1902 Cape Peninsula Commission the mayor stressed a fact which applied to almost every local authority in that region, e.g. they were not prepared to submerge their individual identities in a common body: “Woodstock is quite content to go on in its own way”, according to the mayor. “It has at present no desire to be joined to any Municipality. We say ‘We have built this house and we do not want any interference with it’.”⁶⁹

CONCLUSION

The Peninsula community of Woodstock always had a strong sense of pride and belonging, but they perhaps also tended to romanticize, glossing over the less attractive concerns such as sanitation and overcrowding, which became central problems for the Woodstock municipality, formed in 1882, as the area became rapidly less rural in character and had to cope with a swelling, shifting population.

People were no longer involved in fishing but in commerce and the railways, while directories show a large resident artisan class. The notions of “respectability” so prevalent at the turn of the century, held sway in the area and were promoted by St Mary’s Anglican Church which was integrally involved in matters affecting the community.

Woodstock indeed has a long and proud tradition, one that still lingers today ...

⁵³ BICKFORD-SMITH, *op. cit.*, p.15.

⁵⁴ G.21-1902, p.143.

⁵⁵ *The Cape Times*, 28.2.1882.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.8.1881.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.8.1881.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.9.1881.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.2.1882.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 21.3.1882.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 3.5.1882.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 12.7.1882. Among those elected were Moore, Behr and Felmote of St Mary’s.

⁶⁴ *St Mary’s Parochial Diary*, 9.9.1889.

⁶⁵ *Cape Church Monthly*, October 1900, and *Woodstock Parish Magazine*, September 1909.

⁶⁶ *Woodstock Parish Magazine*, April 1905.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, October 1907.

⁶⁸ Wynberg was incorporated in 1927.

⁶⁹ G.21-1902, p.235.