

THE HISTORY OF DOVETON ROAD, PARKTOWN

Doveton House (21 Doveton Road) shares the rich history of a city founded on gold some 130 years ago. It tells the story of its early pioneers and how the events of the 20th century shaped the world around them, leaving its mark on the public and private lives of the brave individuals who sought their fortune on the gold fields of the Witwatersrand. Today, Johannesburg is one of the most vibrant on the African continent.

Gold was discovered in Johannesburg in 1886. The mining town moved from tent town to wood and iron shacks and then bricks and mortar within a decade or two. The great gold rush rapidly led to the establishment of large mining houses with wealthy shareholders. The founders of these mining companies soon required accommodation befitting their newfound fortunes and to house their white-collar office workers away from the rough and ready mining conditions in what was effectively a dustbowl.

Parktown was the first suburb north of the inner city to be proclaimed in the 1890s and was laid out in 1893 by the Braamfontein Estate Company. It fell beyond the existing city limits and was considered to be out, "in the country" and therefore desirable as a place to live for Johannesburg's new mining magnates, the Randlords. It was administered as a private estate until 1904 and had to provide its own amenities, such as its own cow pasture called "The Oval" in the centre of the suburb, where the Wits Business School stands today. It soon became an elite suburb of the Randlords of the Witwatersrand and to this day, Doveton Road is considered one of the most fashionable roads in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. At the time only architect-designed homes were given building permission, and it was not until 1918 that the first Parktown homes designed by those other than a qualified architect were approved.

From its earliest days the elegant Doveton House has been home to many a prominent Johannesburg family and its distinguished residents include a Colonel, a stockbroker, a lawyer, medical doctors and specialists.

The Architect

Harry Clayton is believed to be the most likely architect of Doveton House, but sadly the original plans for the home have not been found. Clayton and the architect Herbert Baker, who was to become internationally renowned and knighted for his very distinctive early twentieth century architecture, most notably in South Africa and India, were each commissioned by the Braamfontein Co. They designed and built six grand houses to attract wealthy homeowners to the new suburb, that was then open veldt.

All these speculative homes were double-storeyed and an early photograph circa 1903 shows Doveton House standing in splendid near-isolation in the sparse Highveld landscape, with only a speckling of dwellings scattered across the wide panorama. Later photographs show a group of additional single storeyed homes, to become known as the

Eckstein compound, built for the office workers of the mines along the nearby Loch Avenue.

It would seem that all of the Baker designed homes survive to this day, but there are only two homes still standing, thought to have been designed by Clayton. These are the gracious Doveton House (built by a Mr Collison) in the in the first years of the 20th Century; and the other Clayton home built in 1895, located closer to the city of Johannesburg. It is thought that Clayton may well have designed sections of the stately Country Club Johannesburg, nearby in Napier Road, Auckland Park; as well as other non-residential buildings designed by him which can be found in Kwa Zulu Natal and Johannesburg. However, records of Clayton remain scant.

It is not known whether all of Clayton's six commissioned speculation homes were in fact built or whether over the years they fell prey to a rapidly expanding city that demolished old homes to make way for newer, more fashionable and possibly more extravagant homes.

Clayton's sketches of early Johannesburg are now better known than his buildings, some of which can be seen in the book published to commemorate Johannesburg's first 90 years. The publication showing early Johannesburg architecture, entitled *Sketches: published for the Africana Museum on the occasion of Johannesburg's ninetieth birthday (1976)* makes use of Clayton's drawings and texts written by his wife, Ida Mae Stone (whom he married in 1890).

Like so many of the early settlers seeking their fortune in the gold fields, Clayton was born in England. He trained in Nottingham in the office of the architect W Keating, where he was first a pupil and then an assistant, with his period in the office totalling six years. In 1885 he arrived in South Africa and seems to have gone first to Natal where he worked on drawings for the new Legislative Council buildings in Pietermaritzburg. In 1886 he joined the Barberton gold rush and by 1889 was in Johannesburg, where, amongst the pioneer architects of Johannesburg, he advertised his services as architect and surveyor.

Sometime between 1887 and 1889 Clayton won first premium in the competition for the Presbyterian Church, Bree Street, his first major work in Johannesburg. Around 1892, Clayton entered into partnership with A Williams but the partnership ended in November 1894. Few buildings from this partnership are currently identified.

During the Anglo-Boer War (1899 – 1902) Clayton left Johannesburg for Durban but returned to Johannesburg after the war. In 1904 he travelled to England. From 1902 he practised as an architect on the Rand and for most of his remaining career, with a ten-year break overseas (from around 1910 until he returned in 1920), time partly spent in France on active service during the First World War. He recommenced practice after the war and continued to draw and to paint, exhibiting regularly, including a one-man exhibition at the Herbert Evans Gallery in Johannesburg in 1929. After the death of his wife in 1932, he returned to England where he lived at The Warren, Market Deeping, Lincolnshire. He died in the British Hospital, Paris, after a holiday in Italy and is buried at Market Deeping.

Major David Edwin Doveton

Doveton Road is named after Major David Edwin Doveton, manager of the renowned Village Main Reef Gold Mine. Doveton was an early arrival on the Witwatersrand gold fields, having travelled from the UK in 1889. He lived in Plein Street, Johannesburg. In 1894 he had become the manager of the New Rietfontien Estate Gold Mining Company Limited to the north-east of Johannesburg. From this mining house, he was promoted to the management of Village Main Reef, one of the best-known and most profitable concerns of the Rand Mines Group. During his association with Rand Mines' Corner House he was honoured by having Doveton Road, Parktown, named after him.

Doveton was a popular personality and a prominent sportsman. On the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, he was a member of the executive committee responsible for the street procession and other displays in Johannesburg and along the Reef. He was married twice, first to Emily Anne Dixon and later to Ella Helen Kay, with whom he had six children.

At the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War and the closing down of operations on the New Rietfontien mine, Doveton left the gold fields and went to the Cape, where he joined the newly formed Imperial Light Horse. Obtaining a commission, he achieved rapid promotion to the rank of Major and was greatly respected both by his fellow officers and by his regiment. During the Boer War, he served with the Imperial Light Horse Regiment. On 14 February 1900, Doveton died of wounds received at Wagon Hill during the Siege of Ladysmith.