

**A CENTENARY HISTORY OF
BARROW CONSTRUCTION
(PTY) LTD**

Ivor Sander

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“I KNOW A THING OR TWO ABOUT BUILDING”

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Extract from the proceedings before the Board of Conciliation appointed to enquire into a dispute between the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners and the Society of Operative Bricklayers and Messrs Allwright and Pill, November 15, 1916. Mr Allwright cross-examining Mr John Barrow:

Mr Allwright: “You are a businessman?”

Mr Barrow: “Yes.”

Mr Allwright: “And you have been successful?”

Mr Barrow: “Moderately. I do not brag. I know a thing or two about building.”

PRELUDE

The Barrow family who founded Barrow Construction in 1897 and have led its fortunes over the intervening 100 years have left many memorials in brick and mortar to their exceptional expertise in building and construction.

In particular, their acknowledged and fastidious craftsmanship contributed an essential element of the distinctive style of domestic architecture evolved by Sir Herbert Baker whose designs for houses on the rocky ridges of Johannesburg echoed the stark simplicity of the highveld landscape.

The family firm's long and intimate association with others of the most outstanding architects of their times - Frank Fleming, Frank Emley, John Perry, Douglas and Norman Cowin, Gordon Leith, Geoffrey Pearse, Steffen Ahrends and others - has been especially fruitful in producing many buildings of outstanding quality of construction which grace Johannesburg and the domestic architectural heritage of South Africa.

It is noteworthy that when these architects designed houses for their own families, they turned to the Barrows to build them in the assurance that exceptional skills and an unstinting devotion to quality would be applied.

Appreciation from architects of this calibre and from clients (a list of whom reads like a South African social register), repeatedly refers to the commitment of the Barrows to painstaking craftsmanship. Such craftsmanship is of course itself the expression of cherished values, the outcome of deeply held Christian convictions that (as John Barrow put it) the Saviour should be honoured in work and life, convictions that animated the builders of the great mediaeval cathedrals of Europe.

If integrity to the principles of fine craftsmanship was a feature of the Barrow ethos, integrity to the moral principles of business dealing was no less an emphatic part of the family philosophy.

This landmark feature of the Barrow approach to business was reflected in John Barrow's industry nickname, "Honest John", and was often the subject of comment by industry colleagues and clients alike.

Typical is a letter from R W Rusterholz, chairman and managing director of Ingersoll-Rand (South Africa) dated 1928:

"I wish to take the opportunity of expressing our deep appreciation of the beautiful and extremely satisfactory job you have performed in building our house [at 43 Bompas Road, Dunkeld].

"Personally, I have had some experience with building in this and other countries, but I have never been able to experience such real feelings of satisfaction as we now enjoy since we are in our new house.

"I am particularly proud to be able to boast to my friends and others that I never had the scratch of a pen so far as a contract was concerned and that there was always a most cordial good feeling, and that it all resulted in perfect satisfaction.

"We both want to thank Mr Bert Barrow for the immense amount of personal attention and the deep interest he took in building this house. We appreciate more than we can say all the extra trouble you took and we shall never forget it."

Personal attention to detail and close personal involvement in contracts have ever been part of the Barrow way of doing things and a competitive advantage in the marketplace. In the same way, it was widely recognised in the construction industry that the steadfast honest and straight dealing of the Barrows set standards of conduct for the rest of the industry to follow.

Leaders of our great local institutions of the church, schools and universities have recognised and valued the distinctive blend of solid moral integrity allied with integrity to the requirements of quality craftsmanship that have been dominant features of the values of Barrow Construction during its life of 100 years.

For example, so complete was the trust of Jan Hofmeyr, the brilliant young Principal of the early University of the Witwatersrand who later became Deputy Prime Minister to Jan Smuts, that when he and his committee engaged John Barrow to build the Medical School on Hospital Hill they did so on the basis of a “cost plus” contract. It was the first of a number of similar contracts for a large number of buildings at the University.

Hofmeyr wrote to Barrow in 1923 on behalf of the University: “We count ourselves extremely fortunate in having obtained your services for the erection of our buildings.” It would be difficult to find more wholehearted and spontaneous commendation from a client.

Humphrey Raikes, a subsequent Principal of the University, wrote in a letter of condolence recording his “personal feelings of a great loss” on the death of John Barrow that he had made a great place for himself in the community “due to his fearless honesty”.

“The University buildings will be for him an enduring memorial,” the letter continued, “and the stability of their structure typical of the striking nature of his character.”

Other enduring memorials to the integrity and skills of John and Bert Barrow in particular grew from their collaboration with Sir Herbert Baker in the creation of many exceptionally fine buildings. This, indeed, should be regarded as one of the notable and strikingly successful co-operative ventures in South African cultural history.

Perhaps the only comparable example of such a happy interaction between what Baker called the “Mistress Art” of architecture “striving to reach the higher spheres of creative art through the limitations imposed by practical necessities and rigid structural laws and her sisters, sculpture and painting and the crafts allied,” was the collaboration of the architect Louis Michel Thibault with the builder Herman Schutte and the sculptor Anton Anreith at the Cape in the 1780s and 1790s.

The houses on the Johannesburg koppies created by Baker and Barrow, one author describes as “reflecting the vernacular methods and craftsmen’s skills and honesty in the use of materials and construction”. An honesty, it may be noted, which was also the basis of the Barrow approach to life and business.

In a tribute to John Barrow on his 90th birthday, Frank Fleming, the well known and perhaps under-rated architect who effectively ran Baker’s Johannesburg practice for many years, summed up the essence of the man who founded the business of Barrow Construction and set the tone of its corporate culture for all time:

“Something in John Barrow’s life and work was not common to all men,” he said. “The secret was a strict attention to business and the correct attitude towards work and religion.

Mr Barrow has set a pace that is difficult to maintain. To this day he insists on two things - Pay Day and Sunday.”

The company grounded in these values and driven by men with the necessary vision and skills could not but be successful. Barrow Construction has survived the vicissitudes and changes of the often turbulent property and construction market, quietly and steadily extending the scope of its activities without compromising its commitment to quality. Above all, without losing the character of a family company. Advancing relatively unscathed through successive cycles of boom and bust on the stock exchange to achieve increasing prosperity, it has resolutely shunned the temptation of losing its independence by going public.

Again, it is the unpretentious steadiness of purpose, persistence and wise leadership of the Barrow family members which have shaped this exceptionally successful response to the challenges of a testing industry.

CHAPTER 1

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS: JACK AND BERT BARROW, 1895

Johannesburg was a curious mixture of the brash, brawling, sophisticated and primitive when Jack Barrow arrived there in 1895.

The satirical poem “Haus Breitmeyer”, which appeared in the *Rand Magazine* of January 1896, highlights in mock-German some of the features of life in the fast-growing highveld metropolis: the large number of Germans, the many wood and tin shacks, the pervasive nasty smell from inadequate sanitation, high prices, unsealed roads, the dust, the liberal quaffing of beer and unbridled speculation in gold shares.

These observations were echoed in the accounts of many contemporary travellers. One, who in 1895 rode a tiller-steered bicycle from Stellenbosch to Johannesburg with a friend - surely a remarkable feat considering that the road was virtually a wagon track - spoke about “the unbroken line of headgears and smoke stacks and the long line of white minedumps” that signalled their approach to the town.

The diary of another described Market Square, Jeppestown and Commissioner Street with “churches, theatres, cabs, tramways, ladies mounted on splendid horses, luxurious carriages, gentlemen with liveried servants, hospitals, gaols, a race course, organ grinders, public parks, trees more than thirty feet high and a public water supply, all testifying to the enterprise of this wonderful eight-years-old city”.

Lord Bryce, distinguished historian, jurist and statesman, left us with an accurate and vivid description of the town in 1895.

“Johannesburg stands on one of the highest, driest and windiest spots on the southern slopes of the Witwatersrand.

“Although it is rapidly passing from the stage of shanties and corrugated iron into that of handsome streets lined with tall brick houses, it is still rough and irregular, ill paved and ill lighted, with unbuilt spaces scattered about and good houses set down among the hovels.”

Johannesburg was, he said, a busy, eager, restless, pleasure-loving town with a large proportion of educated men. The main drawback was the dust and lack of proper water which made it an unhealthy place with a high incidence of typhoid fever and pneumonia.

Indeed, so severe was the drought of 1895 that water was scarce “even at Quinn’s Tearoom” and sold for the unheard of price of 30d a bucket. The power station in President Street was forced to close down for a time, bringing many industries to a standstill. A “day of humiliation” was proclaimed and Solly Joel supervised the firing of rockets into clouds above the Wanderers Club in a desperate and futile attempt to encourage the rain. This experiment prompted certain worthy burghers of Krugersdorp to petition the Volksraad to prohibit a practice which was “a defiance of God and which would most likely bring down a visitation from the Almighty”.

The 102 000 inhabitants of the town, half of them white, apparently did their best to cope with the dry climate and absence of clean water, for they patronised no fewer than 216 bars and 21 beerhalls. This must have been somewhat offensive to the severely abstemious habits of the Barrow family reared in the strictly temperate traditions of the Baptist church. On more than one occasion, John Barrow spoke publicly about the follies of riotous living.

Not that life was all hardship and hard drinking without social graces. Another distinguished traveller wrote that although the sanitation was unsatisfactory, it was clear that “Johannesburg was not a remote corner, sans civilisation, sans society, sans culture, sans everything that makes life worth living. On the contrary, we

found there a charming circle full of interest and happiness”.

Johannesburg reminded some commentators “more of Birmingham than a new industrial area”, while Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild of the famous banking family thought that the fast growing city was a “cross between Newcastle and Wimbledon”.

Rothschild was particularly impressed with the local racing scene which he saw as “Ascot and Doncaster with one peculiar exception, namely that Mr Abe Bailey’s jockey is a Bushman.”

Other observers commented on Johannesburg as a busy and thriving city, intensely alive, vibrant, humming with industry and active with plans and projects of development and money-getting.

Sir Herbert Baker described the surge of adrenaline induced by the town: “As soon as the train had climbed up the steep Hex River Pass into the exhilarating air of the high plateau the thrill through the blood urged action, not contemplation.

“At Johannesburg human energy, electrified as it were by the rarefied dry air, can be very vital. The climate impelled all to live and work there at full throttle; it called forth the utmost that was in man for whatever purpose, be it high or low; and happily the high purpose for the most part prevailed.”

Common to almost all descriptions of the town at this time were complaints about the “three-inch deep dust” (although it was widely acknowledged that Johannesburg’s dust storms were nothing compared with Kimberley’s), the unpleasant smell and the unceasing roar of the nearby stamp batteries crushing the hard gold-bearing quartzites hauled up from the mines night and day.

Hectic business activity was a striking feature of the Johannesburg lifestyle. “In Johannesburg, shares are a way of life, profits the goal of all men and all things,” declared an editorial in one of the local newspapers, probably with little exaggeration.

The 1895 gold share boom

If the sound of the ceaselessly pounding mills was the characteristic noise of the Witwatersrand gold fields, thoughts of gold and gold shares were certainly uppermost in the minds of most Johannesburgers in 1895.

The two year old boom in gold shares on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange - and, indeed, on many of the bourses throughout the world which had been attracted by the high values of the Witwatersrand gold field, including the stock exchanges in London, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, Vienna, Cairo and Constantinople - was reaching an astonishing climax.

There was frenzied trading on the JSE where the market value of 105 leading quoted gold mining companies rocketed from £25,5 million to £82,5 million in the space of 12 days in July though the boom still had two months to run. The price of the shares in Cecil Rhodes's company Consolidated Gold Fields, for example, which stood at 35s in 1892, rose to 397s 6d at its peak in 1895.

Not that booms in gold shares were anything new in this part of the world. The chairman of the Langlaagte and Robinson gold mining companies once complained that speculation in mining shares was so great that people more or less abandoned mining for the share market. But in its intensity and fervour, the 1895 boom was unprecedented and not to be repeated until the Gold Standard boom of 1933.

Though the boom collapsed without warning towards the end of September on the Jewish Day of Atonement (many thought appropriately) and some shares immediately fell by as much as 50 percent, the spin-off effects of increased wealth, heightened business confidence and a sharp rise in building activity persisted.

Business and employment opportunities in the building trade

Business and employment opportunities increased enormously. “The Witwatersrand gold fields offer a tremendous field for industrious artisans, especially in the current building boom,” South Africa magazine quoted a leading financier as saying.

“New buildings are springing up daily in every quarter, while there is a tremendous influx of people from all parts of the world. Quite recently as many as 100 plans for new buildings were passed in a week.”

A letter to the Pall Mall Gazette, London, at about the same time exhorted “any smart, bold fellow who brings his craft in his hands to COME TO JOHANNESBURG: although a laggard will find nothing to do but drink himself to his coffin, which can be managed pretty quickly on the Rand.”

Jack and Bert Barrow enticed to South Africa

Tidings of the business and employment opportunities in the enticing Eldorado far away on the African veld with its glittering reef of gold must have reached the ears of two of the sons of a Cheltenham carpenter and builder, John Barrow.

John Barrow junior (born in 1873 and called Jack to distinguish him from his father) and Albert (Bert) Barrow, born in 1875, who like their father had both worked in the building trade at Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, were intrigued enough to try their luck.

We know for certain that Jack Barrow arrived in Johannesburg some time before October 1895 and rented a room in the house of a certain W D Mitchell and his wife. A contemporary Directory lists the business of Mitchell & Dunbar, carpenters and builders, carried on from a house on the eastern side of Von Brandis Street between President and Market Streets.

It seems likely that this was the house where Jack found lodgings and it is possible that he also found employment there.

In a letter to his father written at the height of the drought when no rain had fallen for seven months, Jack described the house as having “a front room, kitchen and two bedrooms without any fireplace or stove, brick lined with galvanised iron roof and casting. He commented as an instance of the high cost of living that the Mitchells paid £8 a month rental.

Comfort for Mrs Barrow

The Barrow family archives contain a letter from Mrs Clara Mitchell in Johannesburg to Mrs Caroline Barrow in Cheltenham dated October 13, 1895, in which the writer seeks to allay a distant mother's anxieties about her son's safety in Savage Africa.

The letter gives independent confirmation of the close family affections linking the members of the Barrow family, the principled lives they led and their determination to get ahead.

“I am about to take the liberty of writing to you, really at the request of your son who seems anxious that you are worrying yourself and imagining evils that are, comparatively speaking, unknown,” the letter begins. “He thought it might comfort you to hear from someone who has been some years in South Africa.”

Mrs Mitchell goes on to describe the healthy climate which had given her respite from the threat of Consumption. “Your son is likely to enjoy even better health here than in crowded London where such dreadful epidemics are constantly breaking out. Johannesburg is 6 000 feet above sea level so the air must be beautifully pure.”

She gives a picture of the civilised amenities of young Barrow's new place of residence. “There is a population of 80 000 white people. The great majority are from different parts at home so you can imagine it is almost like some English town. There are a great number of very large shops carried on in exactly the same

way as in London, Manchester, or Birmingham. So you can see it is not the Savage Africa you imagine.

“Now, as to the wickedness, I must admit there are many temptations for young men who are fond of drink and company, although if my Husband ever saw the smallest departure on your son’s part from the straight path he would soon talk to him and show him the danger. But I don’t think there is any need to fear that, for he is in every way a steady goodliving young man anxious to do well and make the most of his opportunities.

“We have a nice Wesleyan church about four minutes’ walk from the house [presumably the President Street east church]. He generally attends with my Husband on Sunday mornings while I stay and look after dinner. Then he usually has a read after dinner, then after Tea we all three go to church.

“You will be pleased to know that you are often in his thoughts and conversation and he seems concerned with thinking how you may be worried over him. He is in hopes of his brother coming shortly, though sorry when he thinks of you having two away to worry about. I have promised that if he comes they should stay here together so it would be somewhat a comfort to know what kind of home he would be coming to.

“Just now there is a really great boom in the building line and carpenters and joiners who are teetotallers like your boys can save very considerably and do well.

“God led your son here where he will see no harm and every interest for his comfort and well-being is studied. I am quite sure he was led here in answer to prayer - perhaps your own prayers.

“PS The same God watches over us all out here as in the homeland.”

It has to be said that Clara Mitchell’s descriptions of the rather tepid sounding “wickedness” tempting young Barrow are far tamer than those of another writer

who described “the public houses and low canteens innumerable, where the vilest and most poisonous liquor is sold, which disfigure the streets and which, with gambling hells etc, contrive to make the place a sink of abomination equal to Chicago”.

The somewhat evasive “etc” in this account and the “company” alluded to by Mrs Mitchell presumably refer to ladies of the night who were very much in evidence in those times. Olive Schreiner, the noted author, wrote that in the half-hour walk from her house on Primrose Hill, Nugget Street, to the stock exchange she passed no fewer than nine houses which were apparently flourishing brothels.



JOHN AND CAROLINE BARROW IN THE LATE 1920s

Encouragement for John and Bert Barrow

A letter from Jack to his father at this time implied rosy prospects for builders in Johannesburg: "Well old chap, I wish you were here. We would start building, make a pile and make the old lady a real lady for the rest of her life.

"What about young Bert? He might write and say whether he intends coming or not. I should have been on the way if I'd been in his place.

"What I should like to do is to remain three or four years, make a little money and go back to dear old England."

Jameson Raid

This letter was written against the background of fierce political tensions that were approaching a climax of intrigue in high quarters, precipitating the Jameson Raid which was in turn to lead inevitably to the outbreak of the South African War four years later.

The political tensions arose essentially from the discontent of the largely foreign Johannesburgers ("Uitlanders", as they were disparagingly called by the burghers of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek) with the government.

Municipal mismanagement and the withholding of the franchise from those who would normally have qualified were doubtless part of the trouble. But the underlying cause was more probably the agitation of many of the leaders of the mining houses who resented paying taxes to what they saw as an inefficient "foreign" government led by an uncouth farmer with no high regard for the "Mother Country".

General Piet Joubert, a veteran of the First Anglo Boer War of 1881, summed up the tensions racking the country in a simple countryman's metaphor.

“There are two riders but only one horse here in the Transvaal,” he said. “The question is, who is going to sit in the front: the Uitlander or the Boer?”

John Hays Hammond, the famous American mining engineer who was sentenced to death for his part in the Jameson Raid, claimed to have answered this remark with a neat retort:

“General, we Uitlanders are paying nine-tenths of the cost of the horse and nine tenths of the upkeep as well. I think we ought to be in the saddle.”

Wherever the truth lay between these opposing views, Johannesburg was certainly seething with barely concealed rebellion, especially among the English-speaking contingent of Uitlanders.

This discontent and incipient rebellion were exploited by many mine owners (particularly Cecil Rhodes and his followers, who wanted a change of government for their own largely imperialist reasons) and fanned by inflammatory public statements.

Lionel Phillips, president of the Transvaal Chamber of Mines, warned the Kruger government in a speech that the leaders of the mining industry “would not be content to remain politically impotent in a country which had become wealthy through their efforts”.

Thus, despite the general accuracy of the observations of a noted British commentator to the effect that the Johannesburgers were in general not a seditious, rebellious quarrelsome set of men but money makers, and that the masses were content with their wages (which were high), the prospect of open rebellion came ever closer.

The newspapers attacked the government with increasing vigour, there were growing rumours of arms secretly imported into the town and approaching military

action. As December drew on, the trains were crammed with women and children leaving Johannesburg and the prices of provisions rocketed.

Soon, those men that did not join the rush to leave town enrolled with various platoons of volunteers springing up. The Australians formed a brigade and the Americans formed the George Washington Corps.

“The Devil’s Own”

Between the fevered excitement of the gold share boom and the simmering political unrest, the atmosphere of Johannesburg in these months must have been exceedingly heady for the newly arrived scion of the Barrow family fresh from the gentle sheep country of the Gloucestershire Cotswolds and his younger brother Bert, who probably arrived in the last month or so of 1895.

Jack showed a healthy scepticism for the jingoism of many fellow-townsmen, as evidenced in a letter to his mother: “We English are a wonderful people in our own estimation and for a self-admiration society, give me a meeting of the Uitlanders in Johannesburg.”

Yet he and Bert were affected by the “war fever” and volunteered for service against the government. Told to report to the Wanderers Club, on the site of the present Park Station, they were enrolled in The Devil’s Own.

A photograph in the Barrow archives shows Jack and Bert Barrow with some friends, all in slouch hats, rifles in hand, lounging like languid buccaneers in the grounds of the Wanderers Club. The hand-written caption describes them as members of “The Devil’s Own”, a suitably romantic description for a group of mettlesome young men bent on high adventure.



***"THE DEVIL'S OWN" – A GATHERING OF VOLUNTEERS FOR THE JAMESON RAID 1895
ALBERT BARROW - X***

In the meantime, the members of the self-styled "Reform Committee" of 64 Uitlander members were in almost constant session, secretly (although sometimes more than a little indiscreetly) plotting their uprising. This was to be co-ordinated with an attack by an invading armed column from Bechuanaland led by Colonel Jameson, the charismatic and popular friend of Cecil Rhodes.

Rifles brought into Johannesburg hidden in oil drums railed from Kimberley by Rhodes's chief engineer Gardner Williams, were concealed in mineshafts. The mines stopped working, the Cornish miners (the "professionals" who were too much involved in their work to be bothered with sedition) left town, and shops

were battened up with wood and corrugated iron sheets.

At this crucial moment, the Volksraad of the Transvaal Republic announced its willingness to make certain concessions to the Uitlander population.

These may have been prompted by a surge of Christmas goodwill although they were more likely the result of shrewd political calculation by Kruger, who cannot have been deaf to the mounting rumours of an approaching uprising. In any event, the concessions removed at one stroke the causes of much of the resentment and discontent. Hurried meetings of the Reform Committee were convened and a resolution taken to request Jameson to call off his invasion.

Too late, impatient of delay, and without obtaining the final approval of his Johannesburg collaborators or his chief backer, Cecil Rhodes, Jameson set off from Pitsani to cross the Transvaal border with his armed column of some 560 men on December 29, 1895.

Attempted support action from Johannesburg sympathisers was unable to assist him much, if at all. A powerful searchlight was set up on the ridge at Auckland Park to guide Jameson, but a sniper's bullet soon ended its usefulness and machine gun posts were positioned on Houghton Ridge to cover the main Pretoria road along which the government forces were expected to gallop.

The Boer leaders mobilised the commandos which, however, did not ride to Johannesburg from Pretoria but intercepted Jameson at Doornkop near Krugersdorp, where he surrendered with his force after a brief skirmish.

The smouldering uprising in Johannesburg died quietly and rapidly without ever taking fire, the members of the Reform Committee were rounded up at their favourite watering holes like the Rand Club and escorted to prison in Pretoria.

At their subsequent trial, the four ringleaders, including Hays Hammond, were sentenced to death (later commuted to fines of £25 000 each) and the others to two years' imprisonment with the option of a fine of £2 000.

What part Jack and Bert Barrow played in all this is not recorded, but it is unlikely that they or their friends of the Devil's Own were able to taste any of the action they evidently craved.

As a result of this episode, however, Bert is said to have acquired a gun, which he kept until it fell out of his bag of tools one-day and he had to get rid of it quickly.

Jack and Bert's first months

Bert Barrow, who had been working in the building trade in London and Birmingham, is said to have answered an advertisement for employment in an English paper, but it is surely not too much to suppose that he was influenced by Jack's accounts of the life and prospects in Johannesburg.

In later life he explained how he was met at Johannesburg station by Jack and Bill Pattison who was later to make a name for himself as a builder in Pretoria and became Bert's lifelong friend.

According to an article in the *South African Builder* published after his death, Bert (who, like Jack and his father, was trained as a carpenter and joiner) set up business with Jack, Pattison and Terry Midgely to work together on "the erection of some of the earliest buildings in Johannesburg".

All, with the exception of Jack, later played a leading part in the affairs of the building industry for half a century or more.

Independent evidence suggests that the Barrow brothers were successful enough within a few months to accumulate sufficient funds to invest in property, for on May 9, 1896, Jack Barrow was registered as the joint owner of Leasehold lots 193 and 194 in the township of Lorentzville Estate situated on Milbourne Road. The purchase of the stands - which were bought at auction from the Australian Trust Company jointly by Jack and one W Webster for £265, with an annual ground

rental payable for the duration of the 60 year lease of £4.10 - was a momentous event as the first investment of the Barrow family in their newly adopted country to which they were to contribute so much.

Among the early residents of Lorentzville was Mr Nathan, manager of Lewis & Marks, perhaps better known as the owner of the first steam-driven motor car in Johannesburg. It may well have been early experience of this vehicle which encouraged Bert Barrow's lifelong interest in motoring and his father's lasting suspicions about these new-fangled contraptions.

Milbourne Road was the first in the general locality to have some rubble steamrolled into a hard surface (a process flattered by the term "macadamising"), possibly because it carried a service of horse-drawn buses.

The year 1896 was significant for another reason. It was the year when the family patriarch, John Barrow senior, joined his sons in Johannesburg to begin a career of remarkable achievement for the family as notable builders and leaders of the industry.

CHAPTER 2

THE PATRIARCH ARRIVES: BIRTH OF A SOUTH AFRICAN BUILDING DYNASTY

When John Barrow arrived in Johannesburg from England in September 1896, he was already more than 55 years old, an age when many men are already looking forward to retirement.

As events turned out, he began working as a carpenter and joiner almost immediately after his arrival, and 35 years later was still making a contribution to the running of the company he founded.

He explained later that he had been induced by his sons' glowing reports to throw up his position where he was earning considerably more than the standard wage, leaving behind in England his wife and the rest of his family.

"I had no money because I had spent the whole of my earnings in educating my children and sending three to the College for Teachers," he said. (His eldest son William became headmaster of the Bezuidenhout Valley School and a daughter, Maria - "Minnie" - taught at the Rosebank Primary School for many years.)

"I came out here with the idea of making a little money and going back, but I liked the country so much that after three years I sent for them to come here.

"My wage as a joiner was £5.10 in one case and £6 (per week) in another, and though I did not work very long, this was enough to keep myself and send rather more money to England than I had previously earned there."

He was able to do this partly because of the fairly Spartan life he (and his sons) seems to have led in those early months and years. Years later he recalled details of his expenses. He shared a small room with one of his sons for which they paid £2.10 a month, and they took their meals together at a boarding house for which they paid 25 shillings a week.

“I was a very careful man and our additional expenses were ‘the bit of furniture’, allowing me to save about £3 a week. I sent home £2.10 a week to support my wife and family.”

Working conditions in the United Kingdom

It is interesting to compare the wages which joiners were earning back in the UK at the time. Bill Pattison recalled later in an interview that in Scotland in 1896, joiners were paid 9d an hour for a 54 hour week, amounting in all to £2 and 6d a week.

In return for these levels of pay, Barrow and men in his trade regularly worked 62 hours a week. “We did a lot of work at country houses and sometimes walked eight miles to work and then worked from six in the morning to six at night, with one and a half hours for lunch. There was very little machinery in those days and we had to plane up even our floorboards and strike our own mouldings.”

At the age of 75 Barrow was able to give sworn evidence that he worked 12 hours a day - his son Bert was often up till 12 at night, he added - and he was impatient with anyone who did not meet his own exacting standards in this respect: “It seems to me preposterous that a man should get tired after eight hours,” he commented.

In the same evidence he narrated how he was “working very hard” by the age of 12, learning the trade with his father and uncle in Cheltenham.

He described how he worked his way up until he was managing his uncle's business by the age of 21, how he stayed with the firm until he was over 30 and how he and his brother then "did some contracts" for a few years.

"I was eventually asked to join the man I drew out the sub-contracts for, and was employed by him for more than 16 years until I came to Johannesburg."

It appears from his statements that John Barrow worked for two employers in the 12 months or so before he started out in business with his sons, who had already made their base at 53 Milbourne Road, as we have seen. This was to remain the Barrow place of business and residence for many years.



JOHN AND CAROLINE BARROW – PROBABLY CHRISTMAS 1911

BACK ROW: FRED WATTS, ALBERT WITH JOHN ALBERT, WILL, CHRISSIE, JO GRIFFIN, BOBBY BURNS, GEORGE

MIDDLE ROW: LIZZIE, EMILY WITH HUGH, CAROLINE BARROW, JOHN BARROW, MINNIE, CARRIE WITH ROBERT, SARAH WITH WILLIAM

FRONT ROW: MARGERY, EDGAR, KATHLEEN, JACK

He described the first months of the family business succinctly: "When we started, I had £10 or £20 I suppose. I do not think the three of us could have mustered £50. Then we put up several small places and from that time we have gone on and gradually increased our business."

Although it appears from this account that they did one or two other small jobs, the first buildings of any note which they put up were the Dutch Reformed Church at Langlaagte - the first of many churches they were to build - and the Dutch Reformed parsonage at Fordsburg.

NGK Church, Paarlshoop, Langlaagte

The Nederduitse Gereformeerde Church at Paarlshoop, Johannesburg, is the denomination's oldest church building in Johannesburg, and was commissioned by the Langlaagte Congregation to replace the corrugated iron structure they used until then.

The Paarl Pretoria Gold Mining & Exploration company having donated the land in 1897, the Rev Kriel engaged architects Flemming & Reynolds to design the church. The design was considered revolutionary by the standards of the times although in keeping with Kriel's own definite ideas about ecclesiastical architecture.

The corner stone was laid on March 28, 1899, giving John Barrow occasion to comment favourably on Kriel: "The Minister would not have any name put on the foundation stone - only an anchor in a wreath with the words in Dutch, 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower' with the date. He told me he wanted the stone to speak and did not believe in putting a big man's name on it. I really think he is a thorough good man - rather a rare thing for a parson."

Enthusiastic members of the congregation supplied the bricks themselves, and the Barrows went to live near the site in the house of "a good Christian Dutchman", as John Barrow described him.

Large enough to accommodate 600 congregants, the building was in a style that was almost completely American, according to an article in *De Kerkbode*, and “sinned against almost every classical beauty of the accepted Gothic church style”.

The exterior finish was in facebrick, which contrasted strikingly with the plastered lintels of the doors and windows and set off the Victorian roof decorations and embellishments. Noteworthy interior finishes were the beautiful wood panelling and the fine wooden pillars decorated with carving.

The space under the galleries inside the church could be partitioned off with folding doors to serve as a Sunday school hall and the floor ramped upwards from the pulpit towards the back.

Work by the Barrows progressed so well that by the outbreak of the Anglo Boer War in October 1899 the building was almost complete. However, construction was suspended for the duration of the war until most of the populace returned to Johannesburg on conclusion of hostilities at the end of May, 1902. The pews ordered from overseas had been stranded on the dockside at Delagoa Bay for three years and there were doubtless further delays, so that the church was only formally inaugurated on December 12, 1902, seven months after peace.

The total cost was £4 300 which must have ensured a handsome profit for the Barrows on their first contract of any real note.

Three months before the inauguration, the Rev Kriel and his congregation had established on the site adjacent to the church an orphanage to house children whose parents had perished in the British concentration camps during the war. Known as the Abraham Krielkinderhuis, this institution which housed 600 children at its peak serves the community to this day.

The church which was altered over the years was restored in 1972 and is considered to be a building of historical importance. It was declared a Historical Monument by the National Monuments Council in 1982.



**DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH, PAARLSHOOP LANGLAAGTE
BUILT IN 1899**

Other building activities

No trace can be found of the Fordsburg parsonage of the Dutch Reformed Church which was apparently built at this time, but John Barrow remarked in a letter to his wife that “we seem to have got the confidence of the Dutch parsons here and they have asked me whether I would like to build another parsonage at a place called Bethal about 80 miles from here.”

Norman House

Barrow tradition has it that John and his two sons made the magnificent carved oak panelling and staircase of Norman House, Doornfonten, built at about this

time for John Dale Lace, the flamboyant mining magnate who later built Northwards in Parktown. Norman House was later bought by the mining magnate Sir George Albu, became the Norman Nursing Home in the course of time and was partially restored in 1978 as Dale Lace House, a home for the aged.

Dale Lace was described as “the most popular man on the Rand” which may well have had something to do with his exceptionally beautiful wife Josie, “Queen of Johannesburg society”, who enjoyed driving a carriage drawn by a team of zebras. It is sad to record that the couple spent an impoverished old age in a humble house in Kenilworth, Johannesburg.

That things were going well for the fledgling Barrow building business is indicated in a letter from Jack to his mother (who had moved from Cheltenham to London with two of her children, George and Eliza) written before the South African War, late in 1898:

“Well, old lady, and so you are got into the big village and in your old age have become a Cockney ... It always seemed folly to be living in Cheltenham with Georgie and Lizzie while the rest were together or nearly so in another place.

“Having made one move it seems if you are destined to make another and this time across the water ... I cannot help thinking it would be best for you to come for a time at least.

“Dad has been here for two years and ought to have made enough money to come home and settle down, which he has not done. But he has, I believe, started a very good business in which, if things go all right, he will be able to earn a good wage without being obliged to do any manual labour, which is a great thing for him”

The growth of the Barrow business about which Jack was so sanguine was, however, to be severely disrupted by what is variously called the South African War, the Second Anglo-Boer War, or - more simply - the Boer War.

South African War

While John Barrow and his sons were engaged in building the Langlaagte church and interacting so harmoniously with the local “Dutch” community, the political clouds which had rumbled with martial thunder virtually since the Jameson Raid grew more and more threatening until they finally burst.

During August 1899, many British and foreign residents, sensing approaching trouble, began to leave for Durban, Cape Town and other coastal towns in the colonies. In most cases they simply locked up their houses, left their furniture and boarded the train.

Such was the rush to leave the Rand as events drew to a head that the trains leaving Johannesburg were packed to capacity. Many comparatively well-to-do refugees had to crowd into open cattle trucks or goods vans for a long and uncomfortable journey to the coast. At that time a train journey from Johannesburg to Cape Town took a week.

Before there was a direct rail connection to Kimberley, trains had to travel through Jeppe to Elandsfontein junction (later called Germiston) before heading for the coast. Children of families sympathetic to the Boers gathered on the bridge over the railway at King George Street to hurl stones down into the furious throngs of fleeing Uitlanders jostling in the open trucks below.

Military government - first by the Boers and then by the British from June 1900 - was so effective that those residents who fled found their houses and belongings intact when they began to return after months of absence. Similarly the shops whose windows were barricaded with sheets of corrugated iron by fleeing merchants were also undamaged for the most part.

Precisely when the Barrows left Johannesburg and whether they were constrained to ride in cattle trucks is not known, but it is presumed that they left with most of the population on about October 18, when Kruger's ultimatum to the British expired.

We do know that Jack and Albert proceeded to Port Elizabeth where they enlisted in the Colonial forces. Albert joined E Company of Prince Alfred's Volunteer Guard on November 6, 1899, and Jack was enrolled in H Squadron of the 2nd Regiment of Brabants Horse.



**ALBERT BARROW (ON RIGHT) AND HIS BROTHER JACK IN UNIFORM OF THE BRITISH ARMY
FOR THE BOER WAR IN 1900**

John Barrow's movements

It appears that John Barrow senior went back to England for some five months, since Jack wrote to him on November 25, 1899, from Port Elizabeth: "I suppose you are safe at home now and no doubt have had a jolly good reception, only I hope they won't make you so comfortable that you will not want to come out again.

"Johnson sent a bill for signature regarding the houses so no doubt he is all right," he added, indicating that business was not far from his mind.

Another letter from Jack at Queenstown dated February 5, 1900, mentioned that he had met in church the previous day the architect Flemming, designer of the Langlaagte church, who had enquired after Barrow senior with the news that he had work for him. "I am not in a position to advise you one way or the other," the letter continued. "If you had work in London it would be best to stay for a time as things must be in a bad state in every town out here - but between Johnson and Flemming you might get something. But you must decide yourself."

John Barrow apparently decided to return to South Africa and took up lodgings at 121 Bree Street, Cape Town, for Jack wrote to him on April 29, 1900: "I am very sorry indeed to think of your being out here alone but things seem so dark I don't know what in the world to advise. Of course, it's no use to say you ought to have remained at home - but now you're out here it would be best for you to endeavour to get work.

"If you cannot do that, don't worry, for between Bert and me we can keep you going although it would be much better if you could just keep jogging on for the time.

"My position is: £12 in the Port Elizabeth bank, Chapman has £4, I have in hand

about £13 and £7.15 to draw tomorrow - but some of this I'll want as I have lost my saddle bags with shirts and socks and must buy in the next town.

"I shall send you all the money I have as soon as I get to a town and also my chocolate."

This was written just after Jack had endured three weeks of acute discomfort and danger in the siege of Wepener, as we shall see later, which gives an indication of his attachment to his father.

It is clear from his letters that Jack fretted constantly about his father's lack of money and was forever urging him to stop worrying, offering to let the old man have his and Bert's pay and encouraging him to persevere.

Bert Barrow and Prince Alfred's Volunteer Guard

Bert Barrow enlisted as a lance-corporal with Prince Alfred's Volunteer Guard soon after it was called out by Governor's Proclamation read out in the Drill Hall, Port Elizabeth, on October 17, 1899, with a total strength at that time of some 320 men.

The regiment, its numbers augmented by recruitment, was encamped at the Port Elizabeth race course and Jack was able to visit him there, as appears from a letter to John Barrow dated November 25, 1899: "Bert seems all right and likes the life. You need not worry about him for I don't believe they will see any fighting. There are too many Regulars in the field now." Although he was proved wrong on the second count, we assume that his assessment of Bert's state of mind was accurate.

Three months later, Bert transferred to one of the two companies of Mounted Infantry which were created from the regiment when it became clear that mounted detachments were essential in a war fought over vast distances. The Official History of the war describes the companies as consisting of "good horsemen and

good shots,” a description which did not necessarily apply to Bert Barrow.

Early in December the companies entrained for Cradock and detachments were spread up the line to Rosmead Junction. After a short while, the Mounted Infantry was split into three companies which were fated to range far and wide over the interior.

The first two companies became involved in the campaign to the north. Bert was in one of them because we know from Jack's letters that he was definitely in Bloemfontein during May.

They left Tweeddale for Naaupoort on February 23, and from there moved to Arundel where they were placed under the command of Major King-King and soon came under enemy fire at Vaalkop. They stormed several hills in the vicinity of Mooifontein, not far from Hanover Road, and on February 27 were involved in the engagement at Taaibosch Koppies.

Prince Alfred's Guard, in assisting the British army to drive the Boers northwards out of the Cape Colony, operated on the right flank of the British forces as far as Norval's Pont and drifts further up the river.

By April 12 Bert and his fellow-officers had arrived at Bloemfontein where they were attached to the 6th Division under General Kelly-Kenny who needed scouts for the advance of the British army on Pretoria. They were then ordered to join General Pole-Carew's 11th Division advancing on Brandfort where, coincidentally, Jack Barrow's regiment, Brabants Horse, was actively engaged for some time although it does not seem that the brothers were aware of their proximity, let alone able to meet.

(The veritable platoons of high-ranking officers in the British army with apparently enough double-barrelled names to make up the cast of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, is remarkable.)

In the ensuing march on Johannesburg which was reached on May 30, 1900, they took part in engagements at Vet River, Sand River and Rooidam and at a parade in Kroonstad General Pole-Carew specially commended the men of the regiment for their excellent work.

After the surrender of Johannesburg, a detachment of 50 men of Prince Alfred's Guard was detailed to guard the grandstands and property of the Johannesburg Turf Club at Turffontein, and it would be nice to think that Bert Barrow was among them. Other detachments were sent to Waterval Onder, Pretoria, Kroonstad, Honingspruit, Fish River, Rosmead, Sherborne and Steynsburg.

Perhaps Bert was able to watch the Transvaal Horse Artillery using Bezuidenhout Valley for gunnery practice as they fired their guns positioned near the present Kitchener Avenue and Cumberland Road at targets in the valley below the Observatory Hill.

When General Pole-Carew eventually left Port Elizabeth on his way home in November 11, 1900, he paid public tribute to the men of Prince Alfred's Guard "for their grit and their efforts which had frequently called forth the admiration of the British Commanders."

Lance corporal Bert Barrow received his discharge papers at Port Elizabeth on December 18, 1900, his character during his year of active service being characterised as "excellent".

Jack Barrow and 2nd Brabants Horse

The two regiments of Brabants Horse were raised at the end of 1899 with an authorised establishment of 600 for each regiment, to serve with the newly created Colonial Division under the command of Brigadier-General Brabant and

took the field in the Queenstown, Dordrecht area.

Jack Barrow wrote a number of letters to his mother and father about his experiences as a trooper in the Boer War which give a fascinating personal perspective and show what life must have been like for thousands of his fellow-volunteers.

At the end of November 1899, he was still stationed at Port Elizabeth where he had presumably enlisted although there was even at that time talk of his regiment being posted to the Orange Free State.

According to the Official History, the task of Brabants Horse was to work on General Gatacre's right flank in the north-eastern Cape, in the first place to occupy Dordrecht and then to move to Jamestown in the hopes that the Boers would fear for their communities and evacuate Stormberg.

Jack's undated letter from Tylden Camp, near Queenstown in the Stormberg mountains, fills in some of the details about the movements of Brabants Horse.

They embarked for East London after a parade through the streets of Port Elizabeth and a farewell civic dinner in the town hall. Arrived at East London, Jack had only an hour or two to recover from intense sea-sickness before entraining for Queenstown and then Tylden Camp, some 30 km beyond. This journey was more comfortable because he was able to share the 1st class compartment of the officer in charge of the troop whom he knew, but there was no food waiting at the camp and the men had nothing to eat for 24 hours. There were also no tents, so that they had to sleep on the bare ground under the stars.

Much of their time was at first taken up with drill. "Us new arrivals have riding exercise in the evening and if you can't stick on your horse, well they make you." He enjoyed the company of his fellow troopers, "a decent lot - farmers and bank clerks from Cradock, and we all get along very well together".

In his next letter, dated January 5, Jack amplified on the need for training: "Life here is pretty exciting at times, especially for me, for as you know I'm no rider or shot and we have a corps of picked riders in the country and at first it was a bit dangerous for me. However, after the last three weeks training I am all right. [A week later he felt confident enough to write that he could "ride with the best of them."] We are sometimes ten hours in the saddle going full gallop and when you are fully armed it makes you keep awake."

"We also go out firing every second day and altogether our time is fully occupied. The captain we have is a very decent fellow but the life is very strict and conducted on military lines." Indeed a certain Major Pollock, a Regular officer, watching the men of Brabants Horse at musketry practice remarked how impressed he was with how quickly they got into fighting trim.

Jack was clearly pleased with life in training camp and proud of his ability to put up with hardships of military life. "We have just come in from a hard gallop started at 5 am and it's now 10 am and we have got chops for breakfast and so we are all in high glee. Life is not all honey but it suits me well and I am right as a fiddle.

"I would like mother to have a look at us now. The water we drink is too dirty for a civilised being to wash in and yet after a long ride we would give anything for a drink of it.

"When a few of us go out on patrol, we often manage to get round by a farmhouse and then we get our water bottles filled with milk and that's a bit of alright I can assure you. Then at night we have a waterproof sheet to go on the floor and two blankets. We are ten in a tent and what with our saddles, bundles and outfit it doesn't leave a good bit of room.

"Our horses are tethered in a long line outside our tents and guards are on every night against attack."

The Colonial Division, including Jack, then moved to General Gatacre's former quarters at Queenstown which he liked better than Tylden, "for at any rate we can

see a church steeple and a few houses.”

Here, the general addressed the troops and took the opportunity of complimenting Brabants Horse as the finest volunteer corps he had seen. In confirmation of this view, several histories of the war tell us that the two regiments of Brabants Horse were widely regarded as among the best of the Irregular corps.

By February 10, 1900, Brabants Horse had moved to Penhoek Camp “right on the roof of the Stormberg”. Jack gave a good word picture of the impressive appearance of the column on the march over this mountainous country: “It is a pretty sight to see us in the line of march. We are in troops of 50 and the march is made up of the advance guard, the main column and the rearguard. This extends over some miles of country with connecting files to the main column. Then the main column is extended in line of 50 about 50 yards between each man and then the rearguard is made up similarly to the advance guard - so you can see we cover a great extent of country, especially in country like this where the mountains are a tremendous height and in some places nearly perpendicular.”

On February 16, says the Official History, Brabants Horse moved towards Dordrecht. They were soon in action at Bird River where the enemy were posted to the north of the main road and at the end of the day’s skirmishing the Boers abandoned their wagons and laager and disappeared during the night.

The 2nd regiment in which Jack Barrow served under the command of Lt-Col HM Grenfell was reported as having done good service in this action and they soon occupied Dordrecht. They came into contact with the Boers again on March 3 at Labuschagne’s Nek between Dordrecht and Jamestown, and “after a long day of desultory fighting carried the part of the position they had assaulted with the result that the Boers retired all along the line. “The colonial troops were much encouraged by this success and rapidly acquired confidence in their officers and themselves”, the Official History continues.

Jack wrote that he “felt fairly knocked out by the excitement but we are winning all

along the line and when things are going well one does not feel it so much.”

“Strange to say, the life suits me well and I weigh more now than when joining. No doubt a fellow has a lot to put up with but taking it altogether it’s a free and easy kind of life.

“Now yesterday, for example, we came on a rebel farm, collared about 1 700 sheep and cattle and some geese, made a fire, plucked the geese, cooked them and had a grand feed of goose and biscuit.”

Brabant seized Jamestown and then marched to Aliwal North where the headquarters of the Colonial Division were established for the time and on March 30 the 2nd Brabants Horse was sent to Wepener in the Brandfort basin of the Orange Free State where the Boers were present in numbers.

At Wepener, the men of 2nd Brabants Horse, including Trooper Jack Barrow of H Squadron, entrenched themselves in a strong position in a series of koppies surrounding an oval-shaped basin between six and seven miles in circumference and commanding the Jammersberg bridge over the Caledon River three miles north west of the town.

Hostilities marking the opening of the siege of Wepener began on April 7 and were to continue until the garrison was relieved by British troops almost three weeks later.

“So heavy and ceaseless was the enemy’s fire that the garrison were kept continuously in their works,” says the Official History. “To add to the discomfiture of the troops, rain fell without intermission for three days and nights, the trenches were flooded, and in some places men in the firing line had to kneel in water a foot deep, while so shot-swept was the ground behind the works that rations could only be brought up and distributed under cover of darkness. The severity of the bombardment varied - sometimes 200 to 300 shells were fired in a few hours and

then there would be a lull for a few days.

“For 16 days the Boer riflemen were constantly in action and at night their snipers harassed the working parties repairing the damage of the previous day or throwing up new traverses to meet the ever-varying direction from which the enemy’s guns played on them.”

This is the sober, objective account of the affair from an historian and one might have expected trooper Jack Barrow’s letters home to have embroidered a little on these hardships. Nothing of the kind.

His letter to his mother dated April 30, four days after the lifting of the siege, summed up the discomfort in a few telling details. “It was rather a warm time and lasted for 20 days and all the food we had was kaffircorn with which we had to make a kind of porridge and cakes. We had no tobacco, very little meat and no bread - however, we smoked tea leaves and managed to keep alive.”

The account given to his father was equally matter-of-fact: “We have been cut off by a large force supposed to be about 8 000 and for 20 days have had to keep them at bay. Its been a rough time and our losses have been heavy, for out of 1 500 of us no fewer than 200 were down.

“The shell and rifle fire was incessant - we got used to it but the worst thing was the food and we had to live on kaffir meal right through.”

A month later he was writing to his mother from Ficksburg, and the strain of being constantly on the move was evidently taking its toll. “We have had it very cold lately and a lot of work on hand. This is Wednesday and since last Saturday I have been almost continually in the saddle. On Saturday, 50 of us started about 4 pm to ride to Clocolan to get the mail and arrived there Sunday mid-day and left for camp the same night. We arrived to find that another patrol had been taken prisoner, some killed and some wounded. We had a few hours sleep and then about 600 of us left to try and locate the enemy. We found them in a range hills

about 22 km from here. Their fire was very hot and we lost several men. I don't know why we retired, but we did and got back last night.

"This is a most exasperating war. You never know where you are. You chase the beggars for miles and then find they have given you the slip and got behind you again."

Despite his comments about the "piteous sights" associated with the farm burning policy, Jack came to believe that confiscation of all the farms, provisions and weapons of the local Boer population was the only way to end the war, of which he was now heartily sick.

Anxious to be with his father in Cape Town, he repeatedly asked for discharge but without success. In any event, he believed, the war was about to end any moment and there was a rumour to the effect that the Home government would repatriate all volunteers to Britain free of charge. The prospect delighted him. "It would be a break to come home at the expense of the government and to stroll down Cheltenham's streets as a SA Volunteer, wouldn't I chuck chest."

The Times History takes up the account of Boer activities in the vicinity of Senekal, whither Jack and his regiment had moved from Ficksburg. "On June 23, when general Clements was going from Senekal to Winburg with a convoy of sick he was attacked half way by General PH Roux and though he succeeded in driving off his assailants, he succeeded in inflicting no serious damage upon them. On his return, therefore, he made an attempt to deal with them. Expecting an attack at the same place on June 26, he ordered Col Grenfell in command of 2nd Brabants Horse to go from Senekal along the Kroonstad road to Leliefontein and fall upon the Boer laager while they were engaged in attacking his convoy on the Winburg-Senekal road further south.

"Grenfell started on the night of the 25th but at dawn next morning, instead of being in a position to attack, was surprised by a force of Boers who unknown to him, had camped three miles south of his bivouac.

“They were in considerable strength, having five guns to Grenfell’s two, and were pressing him hard when he was extricated from his difficult position by the arrival of reinforcements under Brabant from Senekal and the Boers moved off in a north easterly direction.”

Casualties on the British side were ten wounded and three killed. One of the men killed was Trooper Jack Barrow.

The war draws to a close

The anguish of John and Caroline Barrow on learning of their son’s death is evident from their letters. Of course, the situation was made far worse by the fact that they were living apart in different countries, but they both had deep reserves of religious faith to sustain them.

John Barrow was appointed executor of Jack’s estate which consisted of a life assurance policy of £300 and part ownership of various Johannesburg houses. He was also joint heir with his wife, although a few years passed before the estate was wound up and it is not clear that his financial position which had caused his sons such concern was improved in the short term. Bert had always been ready to help with his salary as a trooper in the Mounted Infantry and perhaps he was able to help.

We know for certain from the official landing papers that Mrs Caroline Barrow landed at Cape Town from Southampton on March 15, 1902. Accompanying her were her minor children George, a carpenter, (19), and Maria (“Minnie”). It is possible that her eldest son William, who had trained as a teacher, together with her daughter and namesake, Caroline (23) were also with her, which meant that the whole family was now in South Africa.

Their permanent address on the landing papers was the Barrow postal address in Johannesburg, PO Box 3007. This suggests that they went there soon after disembarking, since civilians were again freely admitted to the city in January, 1902, five months before the signing of the peace treaty on May 31, 1902, two years to the day since Lord Roberts had received the official surrender of Johannesburg. It is important to note that the Barrow Company kept the same Johannesburg box number until 1997.

During the war, life in Johannesburg had, not surprisingly, been in a state of suspension. There were no electric lights, public transport had stopped, the town was under martial law and what remained of the population had to obtain passes for nearly every activity unless they were members of the Rand Rifles Regiment. Because of the need for special passes, a curfew applied and everyone had to be indoors by 10 pm.

We can assume that John and Bert Barrow resumed business as soon as they were able to. During the weeks preceding his death, Jack had been urging his father to make his way to Johannesburg where he would join him after his hoped-for discharge. "Would you please write to Ned Chapman and get him either to bring all the things [presumably tools] with him or arrange with you to collect them from him," he had requested.

A document preserved in the archive dated October 14, 1901, allowing "J Barrow to pass unhindered to his house at 164 'Melbourne' Road, Lorentzville," is evidence for the conclusion that John Barrow must have returned to Johannesburg at about that time.

The months from mid-1900 had been relatively prosperous despite the devastation of the countryside and the destruction of livestock caused by Kitchener's farm-burning policy. This was primarily because of the presence in the Transvaal of up to 200 000 British soldiers and the expenditure of large sums by the Imperial Government after the occupation of Johannesburg and Pretoria in mid-1900.

A young American, Edmund Bright, who came to Johannesburg in 1902 to assess its prospects wrote to his mother that “Johannesburg is just like a thriving American town. Everyone is in a hurry and, if you cannot keep up with the push, you must fall behind. Everyone is out for gold and you can almost smell it in the air.”

A substantial expansion of the gold mining industry which would lead to an even more buoyant economy was foreseen, but it failed to materialise although there was a brief surge in the prices of Witwatersrand gold shares on the London Stock Exchange and a generally short-lived spurt in building activity in almost every town, a reflection of Lord Milner’s reconstruction programme designed to revive the war-ravaged country.

Herbert Baker was looking for contractors to work on Stonehouse as early as March, 1902, and contract plans for other houses followed in quick succession. His contract plans for Inanda House, Forest Road, for W Wybergh, Commissioner of Mines, were completed by March 6 and the plans for Athol House, Pretoria Avenue, shortly afterwards. In August he was writing to Barrow inviting contract tenders for a house near Cook’s Farm - the present Killarney - for W Douglas Pennant (which was to be The Thatched House).

Barrow signed the contract for a Baker house in Bellevue for Lt Col CM O’Brien, President of the Military Tribunal, on November 1, 1902. Other houses built by the Barrows for the Baker partnership in 1902 and 1903 were for Mrs Brehm in Inanda and for a Mrs Gethin.

First and foremost, however, the Langlaagte church which was already close to completion, had still to be finished.

The economy

The unexpectedly sluggish economy was primarily the result of the sudden

departure of the British troops at the end of hostilities leading to a drastic fall in the demand for local produce, aggravated by an acute labour shortage on the gold mines (partially and temporarily resolved by the importation of Chinese labourers in 1904). Many white workers were unemployed and many immigrants returned to their countries of origin.

The Barrows did not return to England and were kept reasonably busy with a succession of contracts as the economy gradually picked up momentum during the first decade of the century. Gold production dropped slightly in 1905 (the year of Lord Milner's return to the United Kingdom, convinced that he had "re-started the Colonies on a higher plane of civilisation than they had ever previously attained") from the previous year but it was still in line with pre-war levels and continued to rise until in 1910 it reached almost £32 million, double what it had been before the war.

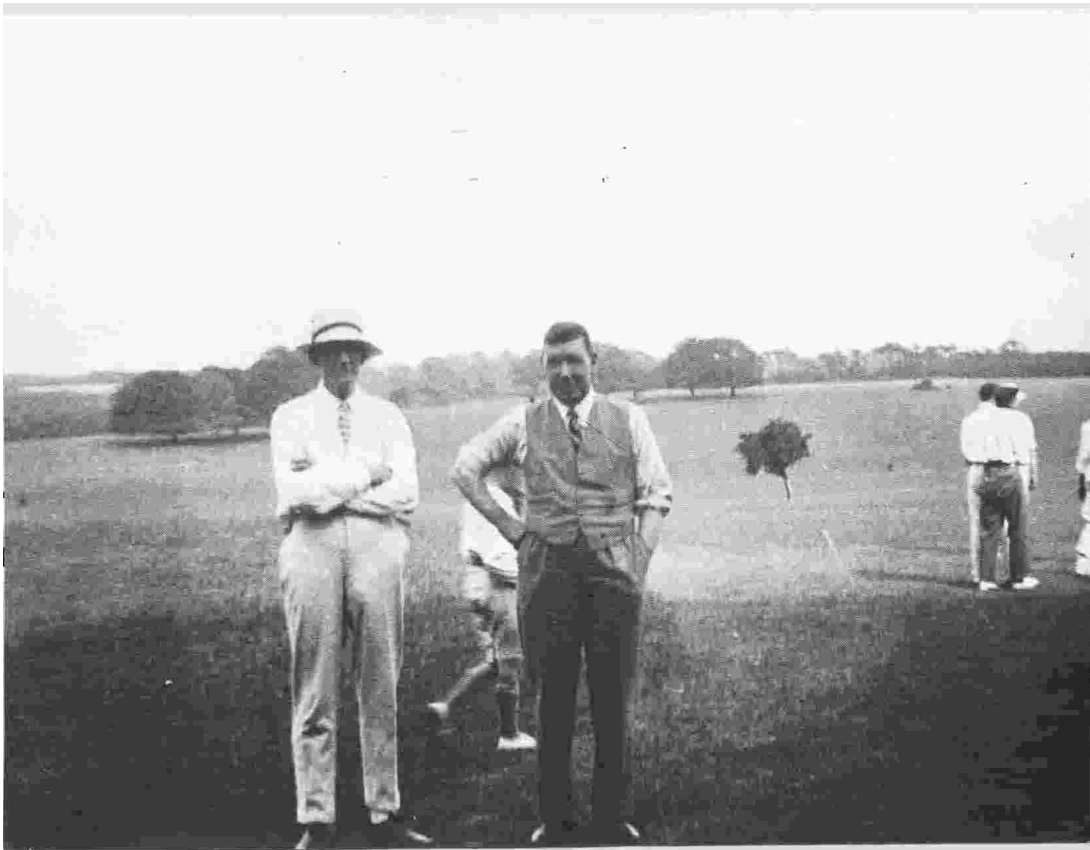
By that time, also, diamond production had rocketed to some £1,5 million from negligible levels at the turn of the century, largely because of the discovery of the Premier Diamond Mine at Cullinan in 1903. Meanwhile, the Central South African Railways - owned jointly by the governments of the Transvaal and Orange River Colonies - yielded large profits each year, aggregating £16 million between 1902 and 1909.

The dominant trend in the stockmarket in these years leading up to Union was quiet, while the gold mining industry was being rationalised financially and technically. Notable among these were the Crown Mines, Witwatersrand Deep, the Nourse Mines, Village Deep and the Simmer & Jack Mines.

Mineowners tackled rising working costs by maximising output through technical innovations such as tube mills and mechanised rockdrills and moving into low-grade areas. Chinese labour helped the mining industry to survive a savage depression which lasted from 1906 to 1908 and the upshot was that output rose at an average of 14,2% a year in the period 1901 to 1912.

CHAPTER 3

SHAPERS OF A HERITAGE: HERBERT BAKER'S DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE AND BARROW CONSTRUCTION



ALBERT BARROW WITH SIR HERBERT BAKER, 1935

It has been authoritatively stated that Sir Herbert Baker's grave, majestic stone houses, built of stone quarried from the koppies and set in gardens designed by himself to enhance their beauty, were the first original contribution to South African architecture since the Cape Dutch Baroque.

It is surely significant, in the light of the central importance of his domestic architecture in the cultural history of this country, that Baker's preferred choice of builders to translate his designs into imposing and austere reality were the Barrows.

Baker is, of course, recognised as one of the great imperial architects who expressed the sweeping grandeur of vision of the British Empire at its zenith in several notable buildings.

He was at the forefront of his profession in Britain and showered with distinctions during his 82 year lifetime: knighted, awarded the Gold Medal for Architecture (1927), honorary doctorates conferred on him by Oxford University and the University of the Witwatersrand, elected to the Royal Academy and his ashes finally buried in Westminster Abbey.

The Union Buildings in Pretoria, the Pretoria Railway Station and the Institute of Medical Research (which many regard as his most beautiful building) are supreme examples of the noble style of his public buildings which left a lasting influence on the character of South African architecture.

Baker's forceful and lasting impact on the domestic architecture of this country was made largely through the design of a number of houses in Johannesburg which had at least two features in common: they were invariably soundly built and possessed a minimum of decoration.

That he was able to make this contribution at all was the result of a summons from Sir Alfred Milner (as he then was) who tackled the task of the reconstruction of the Transvaal after the South African War with vigour.

Lionel Curtis, for one, was impressed with the pace and intensity of the reconstruction programme in Johannesburg.

"I never saw such earnestness to make the best of their crude city," he wrote.

“The cold and dust did not seem to matter very much. The town was full of movement and activity. The wheels of the mining industry were slowly revolving. Everybody was busy cleaning and tidying up and in the off moments getting some kind of communal life going again. Friendships were being renewed everywhere after long severance.

“There was a big measure of goodwill and co-operation, for much racial friction had been dissipated by the war. It was good in that dawn to be alive and young - and to watch a wrecked civilisation being built up from its foundations.”

Milner's grand and comprehensive vision was for the former Republics to be transformed into worthy members of the British Empire. Surveying the task of reconstruction, one of his first thoughts was how to avoid the squalor which buildings of a temporary nature, built in haste, would bring. “He was determined to establish a system of building which would give the Transvaal the gift of permanence.”

The realisation of his aims in this respect was assisted by the influx of influential Englishmen - some 40 000 Uitlanders were reckoned to have flooded into Johannesburg after Peace - and the new-found confidence of the mining magnates which created a demand for houses of a quality not seen before. They wanted imposing mansions to be designed for the ridges of Parktown and Westcliff, commanding wonderful views of the Magaliesberg range to the north, which would express their wealth and status.

Early in 1902, Milner invited Baker to come to Johannesburg with a commission “to introduce a better and more permanent order of architecture”

The talents and taste of Herbert Baker, the right man at the right time, were admirably fitted to satisfy both Milner's imperial dreams and the needs of local society, and in the Barrows he found the right combination of integrity, ability and craftsmanship to complement his own vision perfectly.

Baker and the building industry

Baker, steeped in values of the Arts and Crafts movement, regarded good craftsmanship as lying at the heart of great architecture.

“Beautiful architecture depends more on solid construction and good materials and good workmanship than on multiplication of detail,” he declared - referring, incidentally, to a Barrow-erected building.

From the time of his arrival at the Cape in 1892 where he was appointed by Cecil Rhodes to reconstruct Groote Schuur, Baker had acquired from his patron an added concern for craftsmanship in the building trades.

Rhodes rejected painted deal in favour of teak, for example, and demanded hand-hammered nails. According to Baker, he abhorred the small and mean and any commercial things made with machines rather than the hand and brain. “He liked the big and simple, barbaric if you like.”

Baker duly set about finding and developing craftsmen at the Cape who could satisfy these exacting requirements, thus fostering the development of the local building industry as well as raising general levels of taste.

In the Transvaal, too, Baker “pioneered the organisation of men and materials in order to build with such natural materials as stone, brick, thatch, tiles and timber instead of the characterless, imported, often prefabricated building components which were until then generally used in building houses”. These included cheap timber, stock doors, windows and mouldings and cast iron verandas, all of which could be selected from trade catalogues.

He found at the outset that the few skilled masons in Johannesburg had been accustomed to work only in softer freestone and had no experience in quarrying and building with the hard rough quartzite of the koppies.

“But handymen appeared,” said Baker, and “soon learned to make clean walling

which displayed the varied traits of this refractory by beautiful stone”, effectively instructed in these skills by Baker’s partner, Ernest Wilmott Sloper, who had primary responsibility for supervising contracts.

Baker could well have been referring to the Barrows in these extracts from his autobiography. Their contract to build Stonehouse on a beautiful site in Ridge Road, Parktown, for Baker himself and Lionel Curtis was the Barrows’ first after the war and established their reputation as builders of real note.

The Barrows had grown up and worked in Gloucestershire where they would have been familiar with the substantial buildings which grace the villages and market towns of the Cotswolds, all beautifully built with the fine limestone of the area. With such examples to follow, who could have been better placed than the Barrows to apply tasteful craftsmanship to the building of Stonehouse and other fine houses built in natural mountain stone and timber, usually teak, on the Transvaal highveld?

Indeed there are strong grounds for the argument that the Barrows contributed as much as their illustrious partner in this collaboration of exceptional talents. John A Barrow (Junior), present chairman of Barrow Construction, said in his speech at a ceremony to unveil a bust of Baker at “Northwards”, Parktown, on September 5, 1992: “Baker worked with my grandfather and great-grandfather on so many significant projects that there developed a good-humoured debate between them: ‘Did Baker make Barrow or did Barrow make Baker?’”

Stonehouse

Evidence suggests that the Barrows learnt something from their experience of working with Baker on their Stonehouse contract at the outset of their long association.

In March, 1902, Baker wrote to Lionel Curtis: “This is my first job in Johannesburg and there are naturally so many difficulties that it would be a great comfort to me

to have full confidence in the contractor.”

Baker and Curtis could only move into Stonehouse when it was finally complete on March 16, 1903, after what one biographer describes as “much exasperation with the contractor”. The letter books of Baker & Fleming contain a letter of this date to Barrow which certainly seems to show some impatience, possibly at the Barrow determination to have every detail perfect: “Our patience having become exhausted, we are moving into the house today and must ask you to finish everything immediately.”

If Baker did indeed feel some impatience with the Barrows, it certainly did not dampen his satisfaction with the workmanship displayed in the finished building, considered the first and finest example of the H-shape plan he used so often in his future houses.

Baker described Stonehouse as being “planned round a long-windowed hall with two-storeyed wings of small rooms on either side; and to the north, facing the kopje terrace, the sun and the distant view there is an arched stoep, and forming the entrance to the south a white-columned atrium under and through which steps lead up from the front door in the rock below”.

CR Ashbee, the renowned English architect, designer and writer, wrote of Stonehouse in 1903: “I wipe out of my mind all the foolish preconceptions as the ugliness or vulgarity of upstart Johannesburg, for I have seen today Baker’s buildings: the red sandstone crag sites, the fir and cypress, and the rolling purple hills of the Rand. Baker’s own house, springing like a jewel castle from out of the rock, its arcades and stoeps, its red shingle roof, the open court, the white columns and pergola with the circular garden below ... is one of the most exquisite pieces of architecture I have seen.”



**STONE HOUSE: 5 ROCKRIDGE ROAD, PARKTOWN
BUILT IN 1903 FOR MR HERBERT BAKER**

Fittingly, Stonehouse was the first “Moot House”, the intellectual and social meeting place for Milner’s “Kindergarten”, the group of exceptionally gifted young Oxford men who were to gain great distinction in public life in South Africa and overseas.

During the next 13 years, Barrow built no fewer than 18 houses for Baker’s firm, including such outstanding examples as Pilrig (1 Rockridge Road, Parktown), The Thatched House (North Avenue, Killarney), Inanda House, Timewell (Gordon Hill Road, Parktown), Ednam (49 The Valley Road, Parktown), Glenshiel and Duntreath (Pallinghurst Road, Westcliff) and Stonehaven - lasting testament to the remarkable collaboration between gifted architect and Barrow craftsmanship.

The cumulative result of this effective and highly skilled collaboration, based on shared taste and common concern for quality craftsmanship, was a distinctive and striking domestic architecture which Lutyens, himself one of the pre-eminent Edwardian house designers, envied and admired during his visit to South Africa in 1910.

Indeed, as Dr Doreen Greig, a leading authority on Baker's architecture in South Africa, has said, "Baker's buildings combined to produce an influence so profound on many other architects that it resulted in what is collectively known as the Baker School, of which the most distinguished members were Frank Fleming, JM Solomon and Gordon Leith," all of whom the Barrows also worked for.

"Such architects followed Baker's style by responding to the climate with recessed arcades, peristyle atriums or columned stoeps, creating cool recesses and deep shadows, while preserving balance, symmetry and dignity of plan."

Recognising that his early example had been widely followed, Baker himself observed that, in time, "houses grew harmoniously out of the foundations of the ochreous, lichen-stained rocks of the ridges of Johannesburg".

General features of Baker's style

Dr Doreen Greig says that the mixing of different stylistic ideas is characteristic of Baker's work and that his overall style (like that of many of his English contemporaries) "showed more interest in presenting a picturesque external appearance and in the design of furniture and interiors than in planning."

Inspiration for the sheltered courtyards to provide circulation and windows recessed and shuttered against strong sunlight came from the early Italian palaces of Florence and Rome, while the H-shaped plan he used in many of his houses was based on the mediaeval plan of hall houses in England, such as Penshurst Place.

In particular, "the interiors of all Baker's houses show how he took his ideas impartially from Tudor, Restoration, Mediterranean and Dutch sources with beautiful and satisfying results. They have the best of Cape-Dutch features - beamed ceilings and wall cupboards with gently curved gable tops; square tiles from Holland and Portugal with coloured designs were used for practical and decorative purposes - not only in bathrooms and bedrooms for built-in wash-

stands and for surrounding fireplace openings, but to form skirtings in entrance halls such as in Moot House in Parktown; floors of polished boards and quarry tiles, the latter for hearths and stoeps; shutters, carved fanlights and elegant brass fittings which had their origins in Holland.

“With these elements he combined mediaeval cottage features made popular by the Arts and Crafts Movement - such as inglenooks, complete with high-backed seats and screens.

“He sometimes used walls sheathed with light or dark wood-panelling from Elizabethan and Jacobean England to accent the comfort and importance of certain rooms... and staircases, some with simple carved balustrades and elongated newel posts, as at Glenshiel.

“For his own house and the houses of clients willing to spend money, he used quartzite for foundations and walls, a stone quarried from the koppies on which they stand. Being intractable and difficult to work, it was used only for hammer-dressed work but it was of a durable nature and weathered well.

“He used the quartzite alone or with other materials; rough-cast plaster (as in Timewell), hanging shingles (as on the gables at Dykeneuk, Jeppe) or with weatherboarding on the upper floors of Duntreath, Pilrig and the stables of Glenshiel. (The use of weatherboarding, incidentally, was “a recollection of the timber houses of Kent”.)

“Baker never employed unplastered bricks for the walls of houses - other than for the chimneys of the stone and timber houses - believing that the warmth of red brick was out of place in the bright Transvaal climate. Internal walls were generally plastered or panelled over brickwork.

“The expressive pitched roofs were covered with shingles or tiles manufactured locally at Craighall and Vereeniging where he also promoted the manufacture of klompie bricks which until then had been imported from Holland.

Occasionally he used corrugated iron (Athol House), which he regarded as “not such an evil building material as it seems when used in styles and methods and pitches suited to tiles. If kept flat at its economic and functionary slope with a wide projecting eave giving deep shadow, it has a practical fitness which produces a simple but real beauty of its own.”

Baker's many medium-sized houses were generally H-shaped, with the living rooms on one side and the bedrooms on the other, separated by a central hall, the spaces between the two arms filled with stoeps, loggias, porches, or forecourts. This was the general pattern in many Barrow-built houses, including The Thatched House, Killarney, The Angles (now Stonehaven), the St George's Parsonage, Earnholme, Stonehouse and the charming Blackroof with its well-proportioned dormer windows.

“The larger double-storeyed houses were also frequently built on an H plan but being on grander scales provided opportunities for better articulation. At Timewell, for example, a separate block was added to accommodate the servants and the many pantries, storerooms, kitchens and sculleries required.

An L shaped plan was used at Pilrig and the Gate House and at Glenshiel, the plan was a modified butterfly shape.

“Baker acknowledged the heat of the Transvaal summer with deep, recessed stoeps, sometimes vaulted, sometimes beamed, which act as suntraps during the winter months when the sun is low. He also used columned loggias as an extension to the house, or in carefully planned gardens, over which climbing plants grow.

“The eaves of the houses were wide enough to cast deep, relieving shadows and he provided windows which were not over-large, frequently protected by shutters to keep out the glare of the landscape (which was treeless at the time) and tucked well up into the shadows of the eaves. These lessons he had learned from old buildings in the hot Mediterranean.”

The atrium has sometimes been adjudged as not a success, as at Stonehouse

where it is a beautiful and spacious introduction to the house but provides no shelter from the cold south winds of Johannesburg's winter, though at Inanda House it fulfilled its purpose better as an interior courtyard.

"The vernacular chimneys of Kent and Surrey provide the exteriors of many of Baker's houses with their most distinctive feature, high and bold and made interesting with set-backs, recesses, panels and off-sets. They are usually built of soft red face-brick and provide fitting complements to the stone houses. "Chimneys are an important element of Baker's design - to accentuate symmetry or to achieve balance.

The two attenuated chimneys on the south elevation of The Thatched House are among the most interesting of all, their simple, cottage-like design being in keeping with the Voysey-like character of the house with its long, low elevation and dominating roof.

Some larger Baker/Barrow houses

In addition to Stonehouse, many Baker/Barrow houses remain, objects of admiration, study and praise to this day.

Timewell, Gordon Hill Road, Parktown, occupied by the Belgian Consul-General, was built in 1905 in for Howard Pim, a pioneer accountant (founder of the firm Howard Pim & Hardy, now absorbed into Deloitte & Touche), businessman, politician and philanthropist.

It was constructed of brick "combined with rough cast plaster, with rough quoins of mountain stone quarried on the spot. The roof was of red Craighall tiles, later replaced with slate. It had many typical Baker features, tall brick chimneys, sandstone columns, sash windows and shutters. The entrance was on the south side through a circular porch carried on four Doric columns and with a noteworthy copper-moulded roof. On the ground floor were spacious public rooms and a day nursery leading out on to separate stoeps, the kitchen offices being to the south-

west in a one-storey wing. A roomy staircase and broad corridor on the first floor led to five bedrooms with three more bedrooms in the roof. The woodwork throughout was of stained oregon pine, except in the bedrooms which were finished in white, and the ceilings were white, the halls broken by heavy trussed beams.

“The coach house was later converted into a dwelling house for the Misses Pim. The estimated cost of the house was £4 500 and the coach house £580. The terraced garden and well-grown trees bear testimony to the architect’s plan to harmonise house and garden.”

Blackroof, 40 The Valley Road, was built by the Barrows for another pioneer accountant, HGL Panchaud, whose well-known firm Goldby, Panchaud & Webber which later merged with Pim’s firm to form the largest accountancy practice in the country, has also been absorbed into Deloitte & Touche. “Designed on a basic north-facing H-plan, it was faced externally in stone with a steeply-pitched hipped roof, covered in wood shingles, with dormer windows and symmetrical brick chimneys. It bore a close resemblance to Kleine Schuur and the more rambling St Margaret’s near Stonehouse in Rockridge Road.”

Athol House, built in Pretoria Avenue and Linden Street for W Wybergh, Commissioner of Mines, and since demolished was said to be “Baker’s only house in the Transvaal which was unaffectedly Cape Dutch in conception. The centre gable bore a strong resemblance to the one over the front of Die Oude Pastorie in Paarl. White walls and a corrugated iron roof, through which massive plastered chimneys sprouted, contrasted with the dark-beamed interior ...”

Little remains of the original design of Inanda House, built for a Mr Myberg, because of the many alterations. “It was square-planned, with an internal courtyard and a long stoep across the north side and also white-walled under iron, with tapered plastered chimneys and elongated gables.”

John Barrow described Glenshiel, the house he built for Colonel (later Sir) William

Dalrymple, as the principal Baker house he built in Parktown/Westcliff. This house, which today is the Priory of the Order of St John, was built in 1910. "The plan has splayed the legs of Baker's customary design and formed a butterfly-wing pattern on three corners. Twin Doric Columns support the arcade of the double-height loggia, over which three dormers form an attic (third) storey. The rusticated ground floor is faced in stone, as is the unusual two-storey, projecting entrance which thrusts towards the visitor, barring his way with large forbidding doors in an arched opening. The shingled roof is hipped at every end, with a massive volume, containing the dormers, in the connecting 'body' of the butterfly. The eaves are tilted upwards, shading the plastered walls of the first-floor level."



**GLENSHIEL: PALLINGHURST ROAD, WESTCLIFF
BUILT IN 1910 FOR COL. WD DALRYMPLE**

CHAPTER 4

BARROW-BUILT CHURCHES BY BAKER AND OTHERS

The remarkable collaboration between the Barrows and Baker in domestic architecture was carried further in other buildings, including churches and schools. Baker recalled this important association in a letter to John Barrow in 1925: "I always think with pleasure of the work we did together in stone-built houses and churches during those interesting years after the South African War."

Churches

Baker, who was appointed Diocesan Architect for the Anglican Church, designed many churches in the Transvaal, several of which were built by Barrow. Generally, these were strong, simple buildings of brick and stone with plain and undecorated interiors relieved by beautiful timber roofs derived from those of Kent.

Like the rustic churches of Kent, Baker regarded their simple plans as appropriate for the uncomplicated liturgy which had been transplanted by the Church of England and he saw them as adequate in size, scale and form to meet the needs of the kinds of parishes they served.

The small churches have no aisles and are rectangular with an apsidal chancel usually framed in a wide chancel arch. The simple but interesting timber roofs which enliven the plainness of the design are sometimes used against a dark background of close boarding and sometimes with a background of white boarding or plaster covering the common rafters, which emphasise the beauty of the different shapes of the posts and struts.

Because Baker thought that on bright days, the strong light shining in the eyes of the congregation would distract them from their worship, he built the windows high in the walls - generally twin ogee windows enriched with mullions and slight tracery in dressed stone under a rounded arch.

He felt strongly about the need for an apse, a constant element in his church plans, to “express within the Sanctuary the supreme symbolism of the altar”.

St Peter’s Church, Krugersdorp

According to Michael Keath’s *Herbert Barrow and Idealism, the South African years*, John Barrow began building the Baker designed St Peter’s Anglican Church, Rissik Street, Krugersdorp, in November 1904.

St Peter’s is described as an eclectic design in which early Saxon, Kentish and Italian vernacular elements were used in an unusual mixture of materials with successful results.

“A trio of arches (a link with Kent) leads into a porch with stone, groined vaults under a lean-to roof at the west end. The porch is formed by embracing buttress walls which are a continuation of the upper walls of the nave - an interesting and successful arrangement. The nave consists of five large, high bays and gives access through three round-headed arches to the very narrow aisles on either side. A large chancel frames a splayed apse.

“The external treatment of the walls is the interesting mixture of stone and rough-cast plaster often used by Baker in his domestic work. The stone, a beautiful golden colour, is used for the foundations, the buttresses and the western front. Where windows occur in stone walls, they have freestone surrounds and in the plastered walls they are finished with smooth plaster surrounds.

The west gable wall shows strong projecting purlins under the roof and, at the apex, a small pattern of curved timbers for decoration. The wide-eaved roof is

covered with red Marseilles tiles.

“Internally the church is lined with dark, uninteresting brick which is also used for the splayed window sills. The floors, which were laid in Baker’s time, are of wood blocks in a herring-bone pattern. The simple, round-headed windows of the aisles and the double clerestory ones which light the nave are deep set under brick arches. The latter are divided into neat little white Romanesque columns with plain cushion capitals.

“On the west wall, on the same level, are larger three-light windows. The aisles are flat-boarded but over the nave there are four magnificent king-post timber trusses, their posts supported on heavy tie-beams which, in their turn, are supported at both ends on moulded timber corbels. Like their Kentish prototypes, the king-posts have moulded caps and bases; from the caps spring four braces which disappear into a dark boarded barrel-vaulted ceiling which conceals the other roof timbers. An unexpected moulded wooden cornice is fixed at the top of the brickwork to conceal the ends of the transverse plates on the brick wall - a refinement which Baker found necessary with a barrel-vaulted ceiling.”

Michael Keath draws attention to a feature of the design repeated in several later churches which Baker described as: “The curved buttresses - of which the lower part is pierced so as to form small side aisles giving access to the seats. [They] will add character to the building and by taking the thrust of the roof, prevent the necessity of tie beams and allow the maximum height to be obtained in the interior.”

The experienced craftsmen’s skills of the Barrows are surely to be seen in the striking timberwork, which is so prominent a feature of the design of St Peter’s. Although the Barrows did not take long to complete the contract, the chancel was only built in 1951 and the tower two years later.

St George's Church, Parktown

St George's began as a parish hall designed by Baker, Masey & Sloper and the work was completed by John Barrow at a cost of less than £3 000, the foundation stone having been laid by Lord Milner on September 23, 1904. In 1910, Baker was asked to prepare designs for a chancel and campanile.



**ST GEORGES CHURCH, PARKTOWN
BUILT IN 1904**

The hall, 100 feet long and 30 feet wide, was divided into bays and later a small rounded “western” exedra was added to be used as a temporary sanctuary.

“Externally, the walls were of a fine, hard koppie stone and the roof, with a slight bell cast to the eaves, was covered with flat broseley tiles made at Craighall. Internally, the hall was lined with a remarkably ugly brick of an indeterminate colour and with free stone surrounds to the high, double-light windows with their

deep splayed sills . Not very interesting dark, arch braced king-post trusses with dark boarding behind them rest on high stone corbels to form the roof...

“The choir and sanctuary, with incongruous bright red face-brick arches and concrete plastered vaults were added later.

“The beauty of the church is to be found in the exterior, in the stonework of varying colours, and in the strong unaffected forms - such as that of the exedra and the apse and, particularly in the well-proportioned battered campanile attached to the chancel: all are linked to one another and to the arresting and difficult site.”

Barrow Construction undertook further work for St George's when they built additions to the church and vestry, designed by Fleming & Cooke, in 1967; and an upper floor to the hall and offices in 1986.

The Church of Christ, Pretorius Street, Arcadia, Pretoria

The aisles and nave were built by Barrow to the design of Baker, Masey & Sloper in 1906, other elements being added 20 and more years later.

“The floors are of wood and slate and the walls inside and out are built of a local mountain stone cut into long narrow blocks. The roof is covered with red tiles. The main beauty and interest of the church is to be found in the interior. A high generous nave consisting of five bays is divided from the narrow aisles by wide arches and piers. The aisles are barrel-vaulted in stone and also divided into bays between lower barrel-vaulted arches which are, in length, the width of the nave piers...They act as arched buttresses to help take the weight of the upper part of the nave wall.

“The roof, instead of being the usual arch-braced collar timber roof borrowed from the hall house of Baker's youth which he generally used for his parish churches, is made up of four sets of stout, dark tie-beams supported on the stone walls with

the aid of moulded corbels of an unusual shape, each supporting a plain square king-post. From each post, half-way up, branch four slightly curved struts which, with the top of the post, disappear into a white plaster ceiling which conceals the rest of the roof timbers.”

St Michael’s and All Angels Church, Sunnyside, Pretoria

Barrow built St Michael’s and All Angels in 1908 from stone quarried at Meintjeskop, says Michael Keath. This stone, uneven in texture and variable in colour, contrasts with the smooth-grained red sandstone used in the chancel vault and nave arches.

The original plan was cruciform with a nave of six bays, aisles, transepts, choir and sanctuary but only a portion was built at first, the rest following in subsequent years as funds allowed.

“Internally, the roof is open to the apex and all the timbers are left in view. The nave arcade is regular from west to east up sanctuary arch and is carried out in red Warmbaths sandstone, with plain caps of the same, borne on rectangular pillars of the local stone.

“The arcade is surmounted by a clerestory of simple pointed windows, similar to those of the aisles and transepts. A wide flat arch, nearly semi-circular at the head, separates the nave from the five-sided apsidal sanctuary which is vaulted in the red Warmbaths stone. The same stone is also used for the two cusped sanctuary windows.”

St Martin’s-in-the-Veld, Dunkeld

St Martins-in-the-Veld has always been remarkable for its beauty and its resemblance to an English village church.

The original church with seating for about 50 people and designed by Baker, Masey & Sloper was built in the district of Rosebank by John and Albert Barrow in 1911, the foundation stone being laid by HE Viscountess Gladstone. It was constructed from stone quarried at Hyde Park estate and donated by Sir Llewellyn Andersson (who owned the celebrated house, Dolobran, Parktown, on the north western corner of the intersection of Oxford and Victoria roads).

The little church was aptly named, for it was right out in the veld for some time. In fact, the Rosebank district was a mission district of the parish of St Luke, Orchards, which sent a priest once a month to administer communion and once a month to conduct morning prayers, until 1914 when it was separated from the parish of Orchards and established as a separate Chapelry.



***ST MARTINS-ON-THE-VELD, CRADOCK AVENUE, ROSEBANK
BUILT IN 1911***

The growth of the congregation, which included people from as far afield as Rivonia, necessitated the expansion of the church to seat 150 people, the work again being carried out by the Barrows who completed the additions in 1922. This contract and other extensions to the church occasioned a glowing tribute in the

pages of the *South African Builder* in 1953:

“No report of contracts undertaken by Barrow Construction would be complete without reference to what must be one of its smaller contracts - but none-the-less one of its most beautifully executed - the extensions to St Martins-in-the-Veld. The additions made by the Barrows over the years have been so exactly matched to the original structure that when the newest portion has weathered it will be impossible to tell where the old ends and the new begins. Such work is a joy to those who find pleasure in skilled craftsmanship and dedicated work.”

Other Barrow built churches

The Barrows built St Dunstan's Church, Benoni, for the noted architect Frank Fleming. Fleming who took over the baton from his one-time partner is considered by many as being at least his equal, having created extremely fine buildings such as St John's College, Michaelhouse, St Mary's Cathedral and many others. The foundation stone for this church, situated in the centre of town on Cranbourne Avenue, was laid by Lady Ella Farrar in 1909. The foundation stone and stone work of the east end of the church were moved to new site in Woburn Avenue 31 years later.

The Barrows have also been responsible for constructing the appealing if rather austere Crypt chapel at St John's College in 1916 and the lovely main Chapel in 1925 which they subsequently panelled in Burmese teak in 1930.

The Roman Catholic Cathedral of Christ the King, Doornfontein, Johannesburg

In 1958, Barrow Construction embarked on what was perhaps their finest ecclesiastical creation, the Cathedral of Christ the King, Doornfontein. John Albert Barrow was particularly proud of this magnificent building erected during the early years of his chairmanship of Barrow Construction, and with good reason. Although thoroughly modern in concept and execution, it preserves both the

traditional features of church design without incongruity and the atmosphere of spiritual peace and sanctuary essential to worshippers.

“The design, by architects based in Belfast, Northern Ireland, takes full advantage of South Africa's abundant sunlight and to step from the comparatively shady porch in the west into the nave is to enter a world of ethereal, multi-coloured light streaming through the stained glass windows”, an article in the *SA Builder* said.

The basic design is in the form of the traditional Latin cross, the main architectural feature being the huge concrete portal frames buttressed by side chapels, two of which are on each side of the transepts.



**CATHEDRAL OF CHRIST THE KING, DOORNFONTEIN
BUILT IN 1960**

In plan, the Cathedral is 83m long and 27m wide at the northern end, reducing to

13,5m internally at the southern end and there is seating for 1 500 worshippers. The height from pavement to cross is 40m and the interior can accommodate a normal five storey building in the space between the Italian marble floor and the vaulted roof.

The sanctuary, 14,4m wide and 14,4 deep is raised slightly above floor level and the High Altar can be seen from all parts of the nave, transepts and gallery. The canopy over this altar was said to “illustrate vividly the beauty which can be obtained from the effective use of timber”, and is a combination of edge grained oregon pine with sapele mahogany fascias. It is in the form of a hyperbolic paraboloid supported on laminated sapele mahogany columns which are tapered at each extremity so that the canopy and columns appear to be resting on pin-points.

Directly beneath the crossing, under the marble floor, is a crypt with 18 vaults for the remains of deceased Bishops and directly above the crossing stands the 13,5m flèche which is architecturally and symbolically correct, bearing the orb and cross to indicate the universality of the Church.

The building includes a presbytery containing a luxurious suite for the Archbishop and accommodation for eight priests; a sacristy for storing vestments; ancillary meeting rooms and a utility room.

Reinforced concrete was the basis of construction - normal aggregate for hidden structural use and a special red granite aggregate for exposed surfaces which were subsequently brush-hammered. All finishes were chosen to provide durable surfaces and to eliminate maintenance problems, with the result that plaster and painted surfaces were avoided.

Externally, the concrete structural members were cast with red granite aggregate and sand- and brush-hammered. The window tracery was in reconstructed stone and the infilling of the panels in face brick. The roofing comprises copper sheeting on a felt underlay fixed to battens set in vermiculite concrete screed laid on pre-cast concrete roof slabs.

All furniture and joinery was in sapele, with the ceiling over the side aisles and chapels finished in open-jointed edge-grained oregon pine slats for acoustical purposes.

The large double doors at the south and west entrances with relief figures of the disciples were said to be “triumphs of the architectural metal-workers art”.

CHAPTER 5

BARROW-BUILT INSTITUTIONS BY BAKER AND OTHERS

The Union Observatory

Following a petition from the Johannesburg branch of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science submitted to the government of the Transvaal Colony in 1902, the Transvaal Meteorological Department was instituted on April 1, 1903. This body commissioned Baker's firm to design an Observatory, to be built on the ridge which separates Berea, Yeoville and Bellevue from Bezuidenhout Valley and which had a clear and smokeless atmosphere. Barrow won the tender to construct the Transvaal (later renamed the Union) Observatory which was completed in 1904. In due course a township began to take shape along the special road which had to be made to the Observatory.



**THE OBSERVATORY: OBSERVATORY, JOHANNESBURG
OFFICIAL OPENING ON 17TH JANUARY 1905, BY LORD MILNER**

Roedean School

Roedean School, Parktown, since its foundation in 1903 has educated many women of outstanding calibre in every field of human endeavour. First set up in a house in Jeppestown by Miss Theresa Lawrence and Miss Margaret Earle who had come to the Transvaal from Roedean School, Brighton, with which the local school maintains close contact to this day, the fledgling institution was supported by many prominent members of the mining and business fraternity.

So quickly did it grow that three acres of the present site were acquired in 1904 and Baker's firm commissioned to design the first buildings.

John Barrow was awarded the contract to erect the four classrooms, dormitories, staff quarters, refectory, kitchen and storerooms which were designed on an H plan with a strongly domestic character and incorporating features of English and Dutch architecture.

The materials were simple. Mountain stone was used for the foundations, the brick walls were plastered or limewashed and the roof was corrugated iron. "The entrance elevation is the most graceful," writes Dr Greig, "having two white Doric columns to support the roof over the stoep and a charming small ornamented gable over a well-proportioned 'Venetian' window. There is some good detailing for the cupboards and chimney piece in the staff room and the refectory has some dark timbers which show up to advantage against a white ceiling and also support the floor above. The solid main staircase is particularly well designed, though the exposed bricks in the entrance passage are the same unsightly colour and texture as those used for the inside of St George's church [which the Barrows were building at the same time]".

In 1910, the Barrows built a new wing on the north side consisting of two large rooms, one above the other, to be used as a laboratory and a studio, and near to these an open air gymnasium, costing £1 152 altogether.

Some two years later the Barrows added a wing to the south side and in 1913 the Council Block - consisting of two rooms separated by a movable partition with four staff bedrooms and a bathroom above. In 1921 they converted an existing building into the sanatorium and in 1927 installed the fittings in the laboratory.

The Roedean buildings as they are today have been praised by Bernard Cooke, a respected writer on architectural theory and partner of Lionel Fleming who took over his father's (Frank Fleming's) partnership: "The simple painted brick walls and corrugated iron roof achieve a very pleasant simple quality of fine proportion and detail which is most satisfying in a quiet way. The homely friendliness of these gentle buildings has a gracious charm."

St John's College

St John's College has been described as Frank Fleming's greatest work and is a superb monument to the enduring skills and craftsmanship of the Barrows who have constructed all the buildings of the magnificent complex and many of whom were scholars there.

St John's, which started in 1898 in a private house in Plein Street, was established on the site in Houghton in 1907 when Lady Cullinan laid the foundation stone of a new school building designed by Baker, Masey & Sloper and built by the Barrows.

It is designed round three sides of a quadrangle with the fourth side facing north and is built of whitened brick walls above mountain stone foundations, ground floor and arches. The roof was covered with corrugated iron and the internal finishes were appropriately utilitarian in view of the tight budget. Today it is the main component of the Preparatory School and is the only part of the school designed by Baker.

The Barrows completed a number of separate contracts for the school as it was

built piecemeal over the years. They completed the south and west sides of the main quadrangle in 1912; the laboratories in 1918; Darragh Hall, the kitchen and staff quarters in 1925; the Tower and west side of the quadrangle in 1925/26; the north west wing in 1927; in 1929, the south wing of the David Quad; in 1958, extensions to the Preparatory School; a new quadrangle for the College in 1961; additions to the Preparatory School in 1975; staff quarters and squash courts in 1985, a music block in 1986 and a major new science block in 1994.

The perils of working for an always thrifty and often impoverished church school are illustrated by a note in the 1928 school magazine, *The Johannian*, written by the headmaster, Father Eustace Hill, MC. "The wall was not foreseen as a necessity until a cloudburst showed us how soon the good topsoil could be washed away unless protected by a retaining wall. Barrow has built the wall and we shall pay him fairly soon - quite soon, in fact, if someone gives us the money." The extensive science block, designed by Taljaard & Carter to accommodate nine laboratories, six class rooms and six prep rooms each for the teaching of physics, chemistry and biology, together with a 160 seat central oak-panelled auditorium, a staff room and two computer rooms, involved substantial additions to the school buildings and some alterations to the existing fabric of the building.

The complex was built on a U shaped plan, the rear of the building forming a solid barrier to the south. The arms of the U on the north side embrace the plaza, offering an arcaded cloister towards the breakthrough access arch from the existing buildings. The two wings on the east and west housing classrooms and laboratories are decorated with symmetrical gables and the curved rear wall of the central block consisting of the auditorium presents itself windowless to the busy traffic of St Andrews Road.

A new quadrangle was added to the south side, extending the north-south axis of the school directly through the Pelican Quadrangle and across St David's Road on which a trafficable piazza was established, forming the focus of the new structure.

Stone masonry could not be used throughout because of cost constraints (stone

used in the building was quarried from a continuation of the Houghton Ridge in the distant Krugersdorp district.) Only the east facade which forms the new 'face' to the piazza is entirely of stone. The entire building perimeter has a continuous stone plinth and all piers and corners are also in stone, but portions of the facade of lesser importance are clad in face-brick of similar colour to the stone.

"The construction of a prominent complex in stone presented new challenges to the building team and stone details were carefully prepared due to the unfamiliar nature of the material. Quarry tile stringer courses and lintels were combined with brickwork to add to the rich texture of the building. The fenestration is simple, being a combination of tabiated and arched windows and giving the building a Norman feel which is reinforced by the squat towers to the south and north.

"The roof is softened by a bell cast typical of the Baker style and is punctuated by numerous dormer windows, while the interior passages are finished in face-brick to dado height with a quarry-tile course separating the brickwork from the plaster above. The floors, passages and staircases are in quarry tile bordered with black slate. "



ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, HOUGHTON – BUILT IN 1927
THE NORTH WING SHOWING TERRACES AND THE CHAPEL



*ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, HOUGHTON
BUILDING OF THE CRYPT CHAPEL IN 1916*

Fleming's achievement

Baker, who may have had a hand in sketching out the basic conception of the completed project, was lavish in his praise of what was achieved by Frank Fleming in the years following his brief first involvement: "I am proud of having started the building of St John's College upon its kopje site... Built of the local hard quartzite of its kopje, it is proudly set upon a commanding kopje site with its playgrounds in the green valley below. It has a beautiful chapel and an open-air theatre cut out of the rocks... I enjoyed little beginnings which Fleming has carried to great ends. The architecture of St John's is a tour de force."

Bernard Cooke writes that "The form of the chapel, knit into the hillside and rearing up dramatically from below the crypt to its high eaves is monumental. Basically it follows the English vernacular of the Arts and Crafts Movement but there is a strong Italian flavour. Stylistically it is extremely eclectic. For example, the interior of the chapel is Renaissance, yet the Tower is crowned with Gothic motifs. The interior of the dining hall has the character of the great mediaeval

halls. Generally, the buildings are a blend of many styles varying in time and place which give them a richness of character and atmosphere redolent of the warmth of association and tradition. Yet there is considerable unity in the building group, resulting from the consistent use of the same materials, rough stone walling and pantile roofs, both of which are handled with great sensitivity.

“The great merit of these buildings is their fine proportioning and grouping and massing of forms and shaping of roofs into a splendid and satisfying total composition. The buildings enclose beautiful courtyards, each with a different character. It is the quality of these spaces as one passes from the confined and shadily dark cloisters and passages to the contrasting brilliant light in the courtyards which is so memorable.”

Clive Chipkin, author of an important book on the architecture of Johannesburg, is equally generous in his praise.

“At St John’s College,” he writes,” Baker’s benign, site-bound, hand-shaped building method reached its climax in Johannesburg.

“The school is built in the venerable English collegiate tradition - organised organically around a series of cloisters forming interconnected pedestrian routes (with sculptural accents) unequalled elsewhere in Johannesburg.

“The composite walling is faced with kopje stone quarried from the ridge; load-bearing modulations serve to express the nature of stone as a building material; red baked-clay products can be found in the lintels formed of bedded quarry-tile, on the tile gable-copings and on the red pantile roofing, while those delectable dormer windows provide cellular scale to the monolithic forms of the building. An arcaded loggia supported on pairs of powerful plastered Doric columns, resting on massive slate stylobates, forms the shadowed recess that was the Baker School’s response to hot summer weather.

“Clearly it is time that Frank Fleming’s reputation should be rescued from Baker’s shadow, since his work at St John’s surpasses that of his master.”

Michaelhouse and other schools

In 1925 the Barrows completed one of their rare contracts outside Johannesburg, probably at the behest of Frank Fleming who designed the building and could think of no better craftsmen to complete the project: the erection of an £18 000 Memorial Hall with new class rooms, kitchen and domestic quarters at Michaelhouse, Balgowan, Natal. Celebrated for its beauty like the rest of the school complex, it was built of Pietermaritzburg brick on a plinth of local whinstone and with local hard freestone dressings. It was intended as a memorial to the boys and masters of the school who died in the Great War.

In subsequent years the Barrows have worked on Kingsmead College (1962 and 1986), Waverley Girls' High School (1967 and 1979), St Stithian's Preparatory School (1979), St Stithian's College (1980, 1995 and 1996), Forest Town School (1990) and St Andrew's School, Bedfordview (1984 and 1996).

The Union Buildings

Presumably for reasons of pure nostalgia, a longing for what might have been, the Barrows' original schedule of quantities for Baker's crowning achievement, the Union Buildings, is kept in the company archive.

Family legend has it that the reason their tender was not accepted although it was the lowest, was that John Barrow, then 60, was considered too old and Bert Barrow, then 30, was considered too young.

South African Institute for Medical Research

The SA Institute for Medical Research was set up on 1912 as a joint venture between the government of the Union of South Africa and the gold mining industry in the Transvaal. Its purpose was to carry out research into the prevention and treatment of human diseases. In particular, it was to investigate diseases common among black mineworkers such as pneumonia, silicosis, tuberculosis, bilharzia

and cerebro-spinal meningitis. It was also to take over the functions of the old Transvaal Government Bacteriological Laboratory.

The government donated to the Institute a six-acre site below Kruger's Fort on a plateau which was formerly used as a Boer parade ground, in a commanding position directly overlooking the central area of Johannesburg. Baker was commissioned to draw plans for a complex comprising laboratories, administrative offices, a medical library, pathological museum, large lecture theatre, refrigeration plant, store rooms and a workshop.

The resulting complex, a gleaming white Renaissance building which functions adequately as a structure devoted to scientific research, is often thought of as the most beautiful of all Baker's creations and for many years was a gracious and striking landmark before its loveliness was obscured by taller modern buildings.

Dr Greig describes it as one of Johannesburg's most cherished works of architecture whose enchanting, lyrical quality becomes greater as the passing of time emphasises the contrast between the buildings and their surroundings.

Built in a less demanding material than the stone of the Pretoria Station or the Union Buildings and using simpler basic architectural forms, it has a most pleasing unity. This, combined with Baker's careful use of familiar classic features of undeniable beauty which never seem to lose their hold on the affections of ordinary people, result in a most satisfying expression of the classical idiom of the English Renaissance. Indeed, "its classicism goes much further than that of the Union Buildings even though its use is in no way linked with the physical and spiritual conditions which resulted in the flowering of that style".

Baker planned the main building with a basement, a ground floor and two upper storeys around three courtyards or triangles. The first courtyard, open to the east, is approached through lawns and ornamental trees which soften the glare and give protection from the pervasive red dust which was for years the curse of Johannesburg. The two side wings of the courtyard end with columned porticoes similar to those of the Union Buildings but with square piers at the corners.

“The second courtyard is screened from the first by a colonnade of white coupled Tuscan columns through which one can see ‘the refreshing sight of green turf and orange trees’ and a low fountain. Behind the colonnade, over a central pediment, rises a tall, columned cylindrical tower surmounted by a dome which forms the focus for the whole composition. Rising from the dome is a bronze finial consisting of a skull supporting three intertwined serpents, emblems of Aesculapius, symbolising the efforts of medical research and science to control sickness and death.

“This beckoning tower leads one through courtyards and under the colonnade to gather the entire harmony together in one triumphant chord. It is the dominant element which was missing in the composition of the Union buildings and the Pretoria Station.

“The third courtyard, behind the tower, is enclosed on all sides and Baker’s original design made the northern side one storey to admit sunshine and air. All the laboratories have Wren-like arch-headed windows and a southern aspect to ensure steady light while the offices, library, clinical wards and staff rooms face north.

The roof and floor slabs are of reinforced concrete supported on painted brick walls strong and solid enough to bear their weight with the assistance of reinforced concrete columns at the corners of the slabs. Steel girders were used over particularly wide spans such as that over the lecture theatre. The dome, in which the water tanks are stored, is of reinforced concrete and the quoins at the corners of the buildings are of pre-cast concrete blocks. A corrugated iron roof laid at a low pitch covers the roof slab is hidden by parapets which run round the building, broken with sunk panels and balustrading. Below the parapets runs a wide cornice. Water is discharged into box-gutters.

Internally, the quarry-tile floors and other hard finishes - slate dados and painted plaster-cement on the walls and ceilings of the laboratories and circulation spaces are simple and workmanlike.

Dr Greig summarises the planning as being of a high standard with the different elements clearly articulated. The proportions of the library are good and the boardrooms and Director's offices are fine examples of applied traditions of quality materials and revived craftsmanship: "panelling and fireplaces with enriched but not elaborate surrounds give them the right degree of importance and comfort. Brass finials and the wrought-iron work on the main staircases, the brass escutcheons on the doors, the gracefully curved light brackets in the passages and the rich iron work of the main gates" add to the general effect of discreet elegance.



*THE SA INSTITUTE FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH, HILLBROW
BUILT IN 1913*

Pre-cast concrete blocks

It is worth noting that this was the first time ever that pre-cast concrete blocks were used in a South African building. The Barrows were to put their skills acquired in making pre-cast blocks for the quoins in this project to good use on

numerous subsequent contracts, particularly those for buildings with a broadly classical character. The pre-cast moulds were made on the New Doornfontein site now occupied by the company offices.

In addition to using them on their own buildings, most of the buildings on the campus of the University of the Witwatersrand, for example, the Barrows supplied pre-cast concrete blocks for numerous other buildings. These included Stanley House (Commissioner and Loveday streets), Davidson Mansions (Eloff Street) Beresford House (Main and Simmonds) and Standard Bank of SA (Kruis and President). They provided pre-cast concrete blocks for several of WM Pattison's Pretoria contracts, including the Pretoria Hospital, the Standard Bank of SA and SA Mutual.

To make the blocks, crushed granite (from the Midrand area) was used for the aggregate together with sand and cement. The moulds were lined with crushed granite and then filled with concrete, the surface of the blocks then being brushed hard to reveal the granite. Apart from their craftsmen's skills in making moulds, the Barrows were renowned for never jeopardising quality by skimping on the cement content.

Striking examples of the skills of Barrow craftsmen are the huge concrete elephant ears which can still be seen at the entrance of the imposing premises of Elephant Trading at 107-109 Market Street (built by John Barrow in 1923 and designed by Allen Wilson) and for which they made the moulds. The front of this building, which has a somewhat ornate exterior with giant Ionic orders on a rough-hewn granite podium, is of Paarl granite and cast concrete blocks. The steel windows with special automatically closing shutters were a matter for comment when it was built.

Another good example was the admired putty sculpture at the entrance of the YWCA Town Hostel built in 1917 and referred to later.

Clive Chipkin pays tribute to the Barrow skills with pre-cast concrete in writing about the University buildings: "Pre-cast concrete was used in panels to emulate

dressed ashlar and to form the profiles and enrichment of the classical orders. The plaster casts for the Corinthian capitals were executed by master craftsmen - experts in the classical canon - working in the workshops and yards of the contractor John Barrow in Doornfontein.”

An interesting Barrow contract, for the Associated Scientific & Technical Societies of South Africa in 1962, was the cladding of the exterior of Kelvin House, (named after the distinguished Scottish mathematician and physicist) on the corner of Hollard and Marshall Streets, with concrete blocks to bring the building into line with the classical finishes of the nearby Chamber of Mines and Union Corporation buildings.

Arch at Hartebeespoort Dam

Chipkin comments on what he calls “pre-cast classicism” which was used for the Roman triumphal arch also built by John Barrow in 1923 on the high wall at Hartebeespoort at the very entry point used by Dr Moffat when he passed through on his way to Mzilikazi’s capital in 1824. Designed by Williamson of the firm Emley & Williamson which was responsible for the Wits campus, it is a small-scale replica of the graceful proportions of the Arc de Triomphe.

A press report on the “lovely Parisian arch” commented that Mr John Barrow, the contractor, had put “such skilled work into the arch that it bears no resemblance whatever to concrete, but even on close examination appears to be composed of huge blocks of quarried stone, while the exquisite tints of the dark and light blue mosaic work, harmonising as they do with the blue water of the lake, add an architectural and artistic finish as beautiful as it is unexpected.

”It certainly can be claimed for the arch that it is one of the most beautiful things in South Africa and fitly surmounts one of greatest engineering works in the Union.”



**ALBERT BARROW AT HARTEBEESTPOORT DAM
JOHN BARROW CONSTRUCTION BUILT THE ARCH IN 1923**

A commercial contract: Transvaal Leader House

The Barrows won the contract to build their first business building in 1904. A large building bounded by Harrison, Anderson and Frederick streets, it housed the offices and printing press of the *Transvaal Leader*, a morning newspaper.

The paper did not flourish and in May 1915, it was absorbed by its rival, the *Rand Daily Mail*. The printing press was sold to Die Burger, the Cape based Afrikaans morning daily launched in July, 1915, with Dr DF Malan as its first editor. The building was bought later by Hortors.

It is interesting to note that the next commercial building undertaken by the Barrows was Elephant Trading house, in 1923.

CHAPTER 6

THE FIRST WORLD WAR, 1914 - 1918

The years of the First World War were a huge economic stimulus to the country. Gold output was maintained, agriculture thrived and secondary industries protected by war conditions sprang up to fill the imports vacuum. This progress however was not achieved without some strains on the general economy. Taxes, particularly on gold, and customs duties rose steeply with prices rising commensurately, profiteering was rife, rents were uncontrolled and the cost of living soared.

A parliamentary commission on labour, wages and economic conditions was set up after the miners' strike of 1913 and the widespread strikes which followed in other industries (including the building industry) early in 1914. The commission reported that the cost of living on the Rand was 40% higher than in the United States and 80% higher than anywhere in Europe while wages were 40% higher than the United States and 225% higher than in Europe. It recommended the setting up of an advisory council on native affairs and an industrial commission to administer labour legislation. Minimum wages should not be prescribed and trade unions should be recognised. The budget for 1914 showed a deficit of £15,8 million.

The following year, the income tax threshold was lowered from £1 000 to £300 and the rate was graduated from 1s to 2s a year, the maximum being reached on incomes of £24 000 a year. Though war expenditure was charged entirely to loan, the deficit was £2 million, partially due to the suspension of diamond production as a result of weak market conditions. By 1917, some £23 million had been added to the country's debt on account of war expenditure and in the depression following the cessation of the war, the price of gold fell in tandem with profits and wages.

Legislation necessitated by increased industrialisation resulting from wartime policies of import substitution were a Factory Act and Regulation of Wages Act. It is perhaps worth recalling that a measure giving women the vote was defeated in the lower house.

Barrows' contracts

When the First World War broke out in August 1914, the Barrows were engaged in putting the finishing touches to the SA Institute of Medical Research, while during the war years they completed a much-praised institutional building - the YWCA on Jeppe and Von Brandis streets - a War Memorial on Louis Botha Avenue, Patterson Park, the Crypt Chapel and laboratories at St John's College, three major houses designed either by Fleming or Baker & Fleming, a medium sized house designed by Baker & Fleming and alterations to Richard Feetham's famous Moot House on The Valley road designed by Baker.

Crown Mines and the Kowie

Fleming designed two houses for Ruel Chaffee Warriner which were built by the Barrows in 1916 and 1917: at Crown Mines and at the Kowie near Grahamstown (the only Cape contract which can be traced).

Warriner was another of the brilliant American mining engineers who came to the Witwatersrand gold fields at the end of the 19th century. He was appointed manager of Lionel Phillips' famous Bonanza Mine when he was only 26 years old, it being said of him that "what he lacked in years he made up for by his capacity for hard work and his self-assurance". He rose quickly through the ranks of the Central Mining Rand Mines group, then by far the largest gold mining company in the world, until he was appointed assistant general manager of Rand Mines and shortly afterwards was offered what was regarded as the plum job on the Witwatersrand, the managership of the Crown Mines.

He really made his name in the mining profession, however, with the publication in 1909 of his proposal to amalgamate several mines and integrate their workings to form the enlarged Crown Mines. This was for many years the largest gold mine in the world, producing over 34 million ounces of gold in 40 years and paying some £40 million in dividends to shareholders.

The Barrow-built general manager's residence at Crown Mines was one of the larger and more luxurious houses in Johannesburg, reflecting the exalted status of the head of one of the city's greatest industrial undertakings.

The Barrow business in 1916

We have a picture of how the business of John and Bert Barrow performed during the war years from the evidence given by the former in the 1916 enquiry before the board of conciliation appointed to enquire into the wage dispute between employers and workers in the building industry which has already been referred to.

On the question of the profitability of building in those years he was forthright: "You must admit the builders have been very prosperous of late?" counsel for the workers put to him.

"I do not admit that at all", was Barrow's reply. "Our profits have been cut down. And I will tell you another thing. If I had worked as a journeyman and been in constant employ for the last 20 years I should be as well off as I am today." Profits, he asserted, had declined by 25% since the war started.

Barrow told the enquiry that many of his workers had been with him since he resumed business after the Boer War in 1902 and that about 15 or 16 had been with him for between three and 14 years. Seven were on active service and the remainder, with the assistance of the Barrows, had subscribed about £350 for the

support of the families of those who were at the Front. He described how the men had called a meeting at which they urged the younger among them to enlist, each engaging to set aside a portion of their wages to support their friends.

An average of 30 carpenters and bricklayers worked for him throughout the year, he said. In 1914, when he was still busy on the Institute for Medical Research, he had 42 men on the payroll but the highest numbers working for him had been in 1911 when he “had several jobs at one time” - Col Dalrymple’s house Glenshiel, the Angles, Duntreath, St Margaret’s and the St George’s Parsonage; St Martin’s-in-the-Veld and, at St John’s, the south and west sides of the main quadrangle. “We have had 11 men working in the shop alone, besides the outside ones.”

John Barrow and his employees: setting a pattern

The key to Barrow’s relationship with his employees is also to be found in his evidence before the enquiry: “I think it is better to keep a steady staff of contented men round one.” He believed in paying his employees “a decent wage to be able to keep their families” and he encouraged them to build houses for themselves, providing assistance where necessary, although he expected them to work hard, just as he did himself.

That the men responded with uncommon loyalty and even affection is clear from the length of time they spent with the company and is highlighted by two hand-drawn illuminated addresses presented to him on the occasions of his 84th birthday in 1925 and his diamond wedding anniversary in 1929.

“The undersigned, representing the employees of John Barrow, wish to convey to you their hearty congratulations on this your 84th birthday and sincerely hope you may enjoy good health and many happy returns of this day. They also wish to convey to you their appreciation of your courtesy and fairness at all times and to assure you of the continuance of their loyal support in the future.”

In the second illuminated scroll, his employees said that they “recognised and

valued the great kindness he had always shown” to them.

This approach of genuine concern for employees resulting broadly in close-knit harmonious relationships between managers and workers has been a continuous feature of the Barrow organisation down the years and instances of industrial unrest have been relatively infrequent.

Where there have been strikes in the industry, as in 1947, the Barrow family have been prominent in settlement negotiations.

John Barrow in the community

If John Barrow was held in great affection by his employees, as appears from the tributes at his birthdays and wedding anniversaries, it is clear that he was liked and admired both in the building industry and in the wider society of which he was part.

When his employees were presenting him with a scroll on his 84th birthday, the *SA Builder* carried an editorial in his honour: “John Barrow, whose name is revered both inside and outside the Association and whose business reputation still stands high with all those who come in contact with him, still keeps in active touch with his business.

“We wish him many happy returns and trust that he and his good wife may enjoy many more years of happiness to continue to spread their beneficent influence and fine example to all around them.”

In a 90th birthday tribute, the Stoep Talk column in *The Star* gave a vivid picture of his early lifestyle and how much he was esteemed by his fellow citizens:

“In what we now think of as the long ago, Mr John Barrow was a familiar figure in Johannesburg. When through the streets came an old fashioned barouche driven by an old coloured coachman in bowler hat and long frock coat, the inhabitant jerked his finger over his shoulder to inform the stranger: ‘That’s John Barrow, the builder. Nice man.’ Many happy returns, Mr Barrow.”



***FAMILY GROUPS AT HOME: 53 MILBOURNE ROAD, BERTRAMS
CHRISSIE, JOHN BARROW, CAROLINE BARROW, FRED WATTS, ALBERT, WILL, ? , LIZZIE, CARRIE***

This story refers to Barrow's custom of visiting building sites in his spider drawn by a white horse driven by the liveried coachman. On Fridays, he would pay his workers on site with cash he himself collected from the bank. This custom continued until 1978 when Doug Barrow and a clerk were held up and robbed of the payroll in the New Doornfontein yard. Needless to say, payment on the next payday was by cheque.

One recalls that when he was asked at the 1916 enquiry whether he had bought a motor car he replied, "No, I am scared to drive one."

One may remark that Bert, unlike his father, was a real pioneer motoring enthusiast as was his wife Tiny, and there is a delightful photograph of his children perched on the running board of an open car with a canvas hood.



FAMILY PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN AT BLEAK HOUSE ON THE OCCAION OF JOHN AND CAROLINE BARROW'S DIAMOND WEDDING, 30 MARCH 1929

BACK ROW: HERBERT, DENNIS, JOHN, HUGH, ROBERT

MIDDLE ROW: CHRISSIE, MARGERY, EMILY, BETTY, ALBERT, LIZZIE, BOBBY, CARRIE

FRONT ROW: WILLIAM, JOHN BARROW, MARGERY, CAROLINE MARROW, MINNIE

The building industry and the Barrows

Dan Corlett, in a 90th birthday tribute to John Barrow, called him “the grand old man of the building industry in South Africa who had been largely instrumental in placing the industry on the high place it is in today.” The careers of four generations of his descendants have continued this pattern of most distinguished and valuable service to the industry. Dan Corlett was a life-long friend of the Barrow family and founder of DF Corlett Construction (Pty) Limited, another company that continues as a leader in the industry to this day. Corlett was mayor

of Johannesburg and was made an Honorary Freeman of the city in 1949 in recognition of his exceptional and long services to the community.

The inaugural Master Builders Association (MBA) was set up in 1895 when wages were fixed at 2s 6d an hour for a 48 hour week and lasted until about 1897 before being wound up following a strike for uniform wages. The *SA Builder* wrote in 1932 (the year before John Barrow died) that the strike “was attributable to a very prominent member of the building industry today who was then working in one of the suburbs. While the accepted rate of pay was £5.10 a week, he was receiving £6 and the men struck for an increase of 10 shillings a week in their pay. They were out for a fortnight but went back on their masters’ terms. A week later all wages were raised to £6 a week.”

Barrow, in 1916, gave evidence that he was a foundation member of the MBA and then “went out of it for reasons I don’t care to give.” One wonders whether he was not the tradesman whose higher pay had precipitated the strike and whether he did not resent the MBA’s capitulation to the strikers.

Whatever the case, some time after the MBA was resuscitated in 1904 it seems that he became a member of the executive, starting a tradition for his family whose record of service to the building industry is remarkable and unparalleled in this country.

Bert Barrow was elected president of the Witwatersrand MBA in 1921 and president of the industry’s national representative body, the National Federation of Building Trade Employers in South Africa, in 1931-32.

In these capacities he was acknowledged to have “made a huge contribution in directing the industry to organise itself.” He was also a foundation member of the National Industrial Council for the Building Industry established in 1925 where, colleagues said, “his sane outlook and the high regard in which he was held by both employers and artisans did a great deal to keep relationships in the industry stable.”

Bert's son, John Albert Barrow, was elected vice-president of the National Federation in 1952 and president five years later but it was in 1947 when he was president of the Johannesburg MBA that he showed his mettle as a leader of men and a negotiator of skill and sensitivity.

John Albert Barrow (Senior) and his relations with building industry employees

The 1947 strike by building artisans which lasted for nine weeks was a bitter and hard-fought stoppage for better employment conditions. During the strike and while he was ill in bed, some of Barrow's colleagues on the MBA met the trade union leaders and gave way to their demands. Barrow was most dismayed at this turn of events and, when he recovered, persuaded the unionists to return to the negotiating table where compromise was reached after long discussion. The result was a reduced working week, 1d an hour increase in wages, a guaranteed annual holiday and the establishment of a retirement benefits scheme.

This outcome is manifest evidence, not only of JA Barrow's stubborn determination which again came to the fore ten years later in the attempted take-over of the Federated Insurance group, but of the trust he was able to inspire in others by his straightforward honesty and obvious sense of fair play.

A passage from his President's address at the 1957 congress of the National Federation of Building Trade Employers at Cape Town articulates his concern for human relations which explain to some extent for his own ability to get on well with people. "In this complex industry in which human relations play such an important role, we have come to rely more and more on goodwill and a proper understanding of mutual problems."

Little wonder that when he retired from the Industrial Council for the Building Industry (Transvaal) in 1970 after 21 years of uninterrupted service, he was presented with an illuminated scroll by the employee representatives at a special luncheon given in his honour. It indicates the exceptionally high regard in which he was held.

“We have had our differences,” it read, “but you always maintained a proper dignity and balance of judgement which enabled us to reconcile conflicting points of view in the interests of the building industry as a whole.

“You represented your principals with efficiency, diligence and integrity, sometimes under most trying circumstances. Even where we differed from you, you commanded the respect of all.”

The scroll paid tribute to him for “being instrumental in the establishment of a number of schemes,” viz: Transvaal Holiday Fund (1950), Benefit Fund (1952), Tool Insurance Fund (1959), Transvaal Building Industry Pension Scheme (1962), Building Industry Stabilisation Fund (1967), Labourers’ Holiday Fund, Non-Artisans’ Pension Fund and the Non-Artisans’ Sick Pay Fund.

“We regret that your valuable advice will no longer be available to us but we want you to know that we always cherish fond memories of your wisdom and pleasant personality. We deem ourselves privileged to have had the benefit of your guidance for such a record number of years. We wish you a well-deserved retirement.”

“Respect” is a word which occurred frequently in tributes to JA Barrow from his colleagues in the industry who also commented on his tough sense of purpose, his dry wit and “almost obsessive modesty”.

The Barrows as “peoples’ people”

It is clear that a striking feature of the successive Barrow generations who have led their family construction company, the building industry and the Fedsure group has been their exceptional ability to get on with people of all kinds and at all levels.

Everything written or spoken about them supports the view that they have been not only respected and admired but liked - as decent, upright, amusing and unassuming people imbued with a strong sense of service to the community to which they have given freely of their time and resources.

John Albert Barrow (Junior)

John Albert Barrow (Junior), who qualified as a quantity surveyor at the University of the Witwatersrand after schooling at St John's College and joined Barrow Construction in 1963, was elected to the executive committee of the Witwatersrand MBA in 1967. Two years later he was appointed to the executive committee of the Building Industries Federation of South Africa (BIFSA) and in 1970 he was made an employers' representative on the Industrial Council for the Building Industry (Transvaal). He became president of the Witwatersrand MBA in 1975 (the third Barrow to hold the post since 1921) and in 1980 was elected president of BIFSA.

The executive director of BIFSA commented in his annual report that "traditional forces have decreed that BIFSA should have elected a president in the mould of his own 'family greats' and who in his own right has proved his ability to cope with the numerous challenges presented during a turbulent year of office.

"John Albert Barrow (Jnr) is a man of quiet but resolute disposition who during his year of executive office has positively guided BIFSA with a firm democratic hand." These words express accurately the ability of John (Jnr) to persuade people towards a course of action without undue pressure - an ability that had been shown in ample measure by his father and grandfather before him.

John Barrow had won the respect and recognition of every member of BIFSA, the report went on to say, "and he more than adequately displayed his diplomacy and statesmanship during a year when the implementation of sometimes unpalatable restructuring policies threatened to change sensitive irritation areas into raging fever spots."

Among the far-reaching innovations introduced during John's year of office was the appointment of a full-time Industrial Relations Officer to the staff of BIFSA. Renewed emphasis on the recruitment of apprentices coupled with education and training, reflected in part the people-centred views of the president for the year and his insistence on taking a long-term view.

During John's year of office, a permanent centre was established in Springs for the training at different levels of whites and blacks. It was to train the hundreds of black operatives who were allowed into the industry by the Department of Labour as carpenters, plasterers, bricklayers and painters who had until then acquired their skills for use in projects in the greater Soweto area at the Vocational Training Centre in Dube.

A fifth generation Barrow in the MBA

John Robert Barrow, son of John Albert (Jnr), was elected vice-president of the newly formed Gauteng MBA (an amalgamation of the Johannesburg and Pretoria MBA's) in 1996, and in February 1997, president. He thinks he is the youngest ever to hold the office "by a long way", the next youngest having been his father. "The Association is battling to find people with a financial interest in their own business and its strength has traditionally been in family-run businesses like ours," he explains modestly. In addition, he holds office in BIFSA, serves on the Industrial Council and is a trustee of the Building Industries Pension Fund.

This is a remarkable culmination of the family's unstinting contribution to the building industry over almost the entire period of its formal organisation and it is surely not too much to expect that future generations will follow these distinguished examples.

Not surprisingly, John Robert is responsible for labour affairs in Barrow Construction. "Our labour relations have been very quiet and satisfactory for the past five years since the illegal strike of 1991 and we recently signed a recognition

agreement with the unions,” he comments. “We have a happy workforce - perhaps because the building industry has been battling for the past few years and they’re grateful to have jobs. A lot of politics has gone out of our relationship, which is not adversarial and I personally find our people very pleasant and co-operative.”

That labour relations are smooth and friendly is surely partly due to John Robert’s own open, friendly and humorous disposition, very much in the mould of his forebears who made such a mark in the industry.

The Barrows and the architectural profession

John and Bert Barrow’s exceptionally fruitful business collaboration with Sir Herbert Baker has been amply chronicled. Their personal relationships were also exceptionally cordial. Bert visited Baker at his home, Owlets, in Kent and Baker visited them in Johannesburg on his way to New Delhi, writing a warm letter to John Barrow on at least one occasion.

The Barrows had what was perhaps an even more fruitful and certainly a longer relationship with Frank Fleming who was responsible for so much work at St John’s College and various churches and houses, first as Baker & Fleming, then as Fleming & Cooke. Indeed, they have worked with three generations of the Fleming family – Frank, his son Leonard and his grandson Michael.

They also established a very close working relationship with the architects of the University of the Witwatersrand, Emley & Williamson, whose work has left such a lasting imprint on the face of Johannesburg, as well as with subsequent university architects such as Pearse & Anneck Hahn.

They performed regular work for other outstanding architects, leaders of the profession, at various times: Gordon Leith; Kallenbach Kennedy & Furner; Pearse & Anneck Hahn; Irvine-Smith & Joubert; and Steffen Ahrends.

What reveals more clearly than anything the high regard in which the Barrows are held by the architectural profession, however, is the remarkable number of houses they have built for the architects' personal occupation. The list includes Herbert Baker, Cowin (of Cowin & Powers), Kennedy, Haddon, Gordon Leith, Professor GE Pearse, Henri Joubert, Professor Fassler and Irvine-Smith, Paul Anneck-Hahn and David White.

Professor Pearse wrote to John Albert Barrow after Bert's death in 1953: "I have known your family for so many years that I feel architecture and building in Johannesburg could never exist without them. I had a profound admiration for your grandfather who did so much to help Sir Herbert Baker in his efforts to foster the use of local building materials. Your father, too, was a man whom one was proud to know personally and particularly to have been associated with on so many jobs."

CHAPTER 7

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND AND THE BARROWS

One of the most striking memorials to the skills and craftsmanship of the Barrows is the University of the Witwatersrand for which they built practically all the principal buildings on the East campus. Early photographs show just how impressive this magnificent complex of classical buildings on its commanding site was before being obscured by trees, tall buildings and the clutter of a modern city.

A distinguished principal of the university, Humphrey Raikes, wrote in a foreword to a brochure commemorating the opening of one of the buildings that “the skill of the workmen of John Barrow (Pty) Limited has been the admiration of all concerned since the foundation of the university.”

Formation of the University

Although the first Union Parliament immediately turned its attention to education at school level, very little progress was made in tertiary education in the Transvaal. This was a matter of serious concern to many of Johannesburg's leading citizens, who in 1916 formed the Witwatersrand Committee to raise funds and lobby government to elevate the status of the Transvaal School of Mines to that of a university.

The School of Mines had originally been established at Kimberley in 1896 in association with the South African College, Cape Town. A course of study at the school involved two years of preliminary technical training in the college at Cape Town followed by a year of theoretical and practical instruction at Kimberley and a final year of practical instruction at Johannesburg on a gold mine.

The functions of the school were taken over in 1904 by the newly established Transvaal Technical Institute of Johannesburg which erected temporary buildings on Plein Square next to Park Station.

Classes in law, the arts and pure science were offered in addition to technical subjects and in 1906 the name of the Institute was changed to the Transvaal University College which was housed in a fine building at the north western end of Eloff Street.

The following year, a branch was opened in Pretoria. This branch - which became what is now the University of Pretoria - became independent in 1910 and as the result of political pressure from Smuts and others, itself became the Transvaal University College. Concurrently, the Technical Institute was renamed the South African School of Mines and Technology.

A concerted civic movement led by the mayor of Johannesburg and other interested municipalities raised, by public subscription, a substantial endowment for the purpose of establishing a fully-fledged university. The result was that the institution was reincorporated in 1920 as the University College, Johannesburg, and attained full university status on March 1, 1922, under the name of The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Medical School, Hospital Hill: the first Barrow university contract

In 1919 the Witwatersrand University Committee entered into a cost plus contract with John and Albert Barrow, “trading together in co-partnership as contractors under the style or firm of John Barrow” for the construction of a Medical School on Hospital Hill, adjacent to the Institute for Medical Research and opposite the Johannesburg General Hospital. Four years later they were awarded a contract for additions to the Medical School, in 1966 they undertook various alterations and in 1989 they converted part of the Medical School to a students’ residence.



**THE MEDICAL SCHOOL, HOSPITAL HILL
BUILT IN 1920**

Milner Park campus of the University of the Witwatersrand

Jan Hofmeyr, principal of the new University of the Witwatersrand and previously principal of the SA School of Mines and the University College, Johannesburg, was enthusiastic about the aptness of the siting of the 34 ha of ground at Milner Park which the municipality donated for the university:

“Barely a mile from the town’s centre and easily accessible from every part of it, yet isolated from the noisy bustle of life, looking on the one side over the most beautiful position of Johannesburg away to the dreamy distances of the Magaliesberg, and on the other over the industrial activity to which it owes its being, this University set upon the hill is indeed admirably placed for the linking together of the idealistic and the practical which is not least among its tasks.”

Geoffrey Pearse, who was appointed professor of the new Department of Architecture in 1921, had lived in Ameshoff Street before the South African War and remembered the site as farmland and stone quarry, part of it a rubbish tip. The release of methane gas from this source during piling excavations caused

major problems in building the Central Block.

This, then, was the site chosen for what Clive Chipkin calls the “antiquarian forum Romanum of the University, with its entrance in Jan Smuts Avenue, the old wagon road to Pretoria.”

Campus layout and buildings

Beaux-Arts neo-classicism was thought to be the appropriate style for the massive group of university buildings that were constructed in the 1920s, writes Chipkin, and the plan for the campus was an appropriately rigid symmetrical layout.

“The east-west axis, the main academic street, intersects the south-north axis at the forecourt of the Central Block. Along the main academic street are positioned the academic buildings, including the Central Block, flanked by the Physics block on the east and the Engineering block on the west.

“The giant Tuscan colonnades of the Physics and Engineering blocks play a crucial supportive role to the great axial portico of the Central Block, where the exhilarating scale of the fluted Corinthian orders and the splendid enrichment of the pediment provide the theatrical focus of the entire campus.

“The giant orders of the Engineering block on the west form an open loggia. Here moulded concrete seats supported on neo-classical winged lion pedestals have provided generations of students with seating adjacent to the volutes of the column bases. And behind the loggia an inner cortile with graceful arcaded ambulatory exudes the atmosphere of a place of learning in the classical tradition, renovated in recent times with modern design flair.”

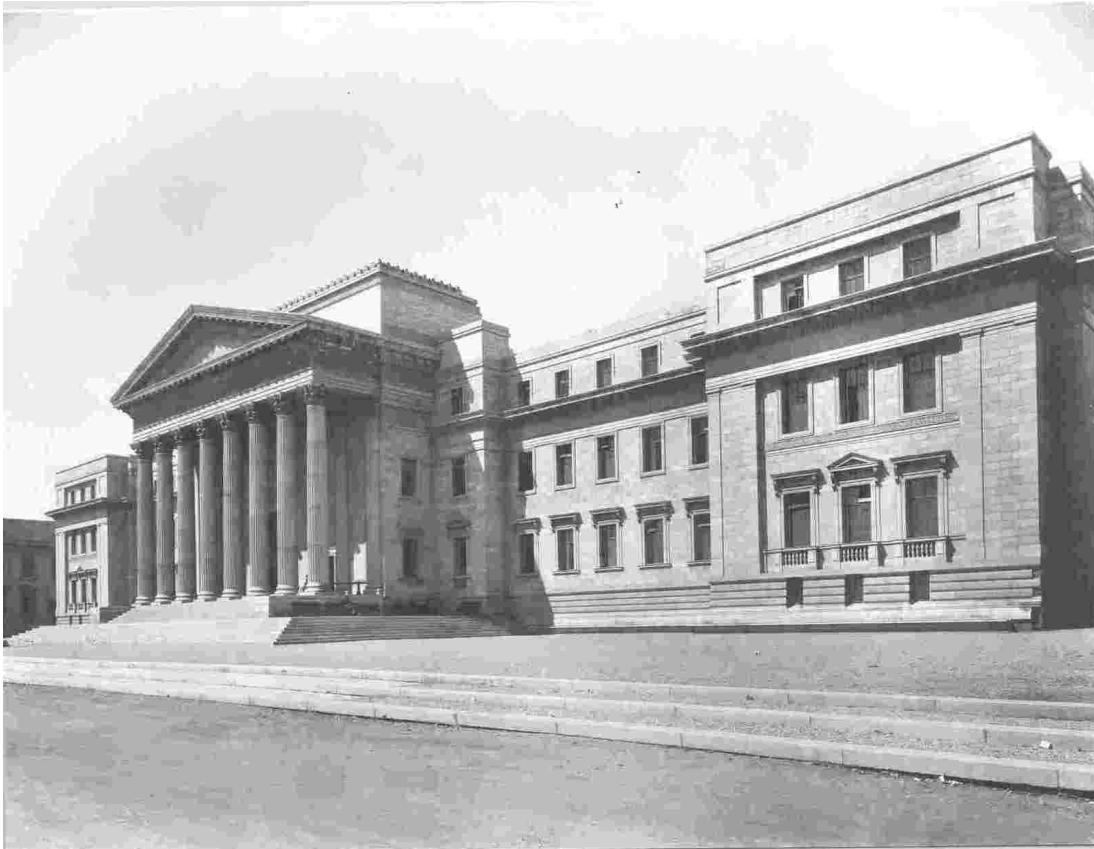
The architects for Wits University in its first, formative, decade were Emley & Williamson. Emley, who won the appointment in a public competition for the design of the main teaching buildings, had been co-designer with Leck in 1903-1904 of such well-known landmarks as Corner House, National Bank and the

Rand Club and was perhaps the leading architect on the Rand.

In 1922 the Barrows built the first building on campus, the Botany and Zoology Block and later that year, in October, the foundation stone of the Central Block (for which they were also awarded the contract) was laid by Prince Arthur of Connaught. In 1923 they built the Physics and Chemistry Block (immediately to the east of the Central Block) and in 1928 the Engineering Block (to the west of the Central Block). These buildings were all constructed from concrete blocks pre-cast by Barrow craftsmen on site, the joinery shop also being moved there.

Frank Tucker was the Barrow general foreman at the university while Charles Fraser who gave each stone a ticket before sending it for placement, worked in the joinery shop below Central Block. Jack King, who was with the firm from its earliest days, was in charge of the pre-cast shop. The stonemason at the university (and at St John's College) was A Reekie, father of Tom, well known director of Rand Mines in later years, and grandfather of Andrew and Duncan Reekie, the latter a current professor of business economics at the university. Ted Clarke was the foreman of the joinery shop at Doornfontein, Dick Pils the carpenter foreman and W Ross the plumber foreman.

The Central Block was officially opened by the Prince of Wales (later Edward VIII) on June 23, 1925. Bert Barrow apparently had a hand in the detailed arrangements for this visit and received a friendly letter of thanks from the university principal, Mr Thompson.



COMPLETED CENTRAL BLOCK

The Barrows built the Isabel Dalrymple Hostel for women in 1929, the William Cullen Library in 1933, the Bernard Price Institute in 1938, the Wolf and Hirsch Hillman Building in 1941; extensions to the women's residence in 1953; alterations to the Medical School in 1966, together with extensions to the Central Block and the Social Sciences and Speech Clinic Building; alterations to North Lodge in 1967, alterations to the Biology Block in 1972; alterations to the HR Raikes Block, Gate House and the TRL Building in 1975; extensions to the squash court complex in 1982; extensions to the Dalrymple House Men's Residence in 1983; the Du Plessis Building in 1985; new squash courts and sports building in 1989; the conversion of the Esselen Street Medical School into a new residence in 1989; extensions to the Commerce department in 1990; and extensions to the John Moffat Building in 1992. In the firm's centenary year, 1997, it is engaged on the conversion of the Sturrock Park complex to become part of the West Campus.

The Social Sciences block may be singled out as a building that did not conform with the neo-classical style found on the rest of the campus. The bold departure by Steffon Ahrens caused a good deal of controversy at the time and was a major contract for the Barrows.

East Campus buildings

The Central Block was partially destroyed at the end of 1931 by a calamitous fire which also consumed some of the renowned Gubbins Collection of Africana books stored there.

This was in the depths of the Great Depression and it was 1936 before the reconstruction of the Central Block could begin, once again by Barrow. The technique used for these neo-classical buildings again incorporated the modern methods for constructing ancient architecture that had been pioneered by John Barrow and used in the earlier buildings - pre-cast concrete blocks.

Barrow submitted two tenders, both of which were the lowest: One of £42 800, using black labour, and one for £45 600 using white labour. The Council accepted the first tender, subject to the condition that "if the Department of Labour should be found willing to pay the extra amount of £2 775, European labour could be substituted for Native labour."

The Department of Labour, eager to combat the widespread white unemployment, duly undertook to meet the difference and Barrow was invited to use white instead of black labour on the project.

When, in September 1936, the university architects submitted plans for the completion of the Central Block at a cost they estimated would be £225 000, Barrow's tender was £160 000, far lower than anyone had imagined.

The Council resolved to ask Barrow to undertake the completion of the whole Central Block scheme at a total cost of £185 000 and to approach Government for an increase in the building grant.

A deputation led by Bert Barrow duly met the Minister of Education - the Barrows' old friend and admirer, JH Hofmeyr - on October 14, 1937, presenting him with building plans for £204 600, including plans for a research laboratory at the newly founded Bernard Price Institute for Geophysical Research. It says much for Bert Barrow's powers of persuasion and the trust he had already established with Hofmeyr that the building grant was increased to £102 300 from £80 000.

The Central Block was completed in May, 1940, although parts of the east and west wings had been occupied during 1939, and Great Hall was officially opened by the governor-general, Sir Patrick Duncan, in June, 1940.

The contract for the Bernard Price Institute had already been given to Barrow and the laboratory was completed in early 1938, to be opened by General Smuts (who also opened the Hillman Building in 1941).

In the meantime, the foundation stone of the William Cullen Library was laid by HE the Governor-General, the Earl of Clarendon, on April 10, 1933 and the completed building, erected by Barrow, was officially opened in March, 1934, by HRH Prince George (afterwards George VI).



UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, MILNER PARK – THE WILLIAM CULLEN LIBRARY

Built at a cost of £55 000, including the shelving of Rhodesian teak and other fittings, the library was “easily the largest in the southern hemisphere” at the time. It was the sixth building to be erected on the campus and was designed by Emley & Williamson, in association with Cowin & Powers, to harmonise with the others. A simple and dignified building, it was clad “with pre-cast concrete blocks made to resemble stone” and consisted of five floors, three of which were underground and which contained lecture and seminar rooms in addition to storage space for books. The walls and floor of the fine entrance hall were covered with Transvaal travertine marble and the extensive main reading room was panelled in Rhodesian teak.

The Wolf and Hirsch Hillman Building housed the hydraulics and structural engineering laboratories on the ground floor, with a workshop, model analysis laboratory and survey instrument store, lecture theatre and drawing hall. The north wing contained the highway engineering and construction materials laboratories and a research laboratory for the chemistry department.

The treatment of the pre-cast concrete facing was kept simple and direct, according to the brochure produced for the opening. “It is of a form and size which is in scale with the building and compatible with its function as a facing material. The colour harmonises with the adjoining building.”

Architecturally, the Hillman Block represents the Modern Movement in its classic stage, according to Chipkin. The building was given its own unique character to reflect the modern age: the centre block raised on cylindrical pilotis to form a colonnade faced in blue mosaic; egg-crate window panels to express the verticality of the stair-well; a Villa Savoye glazed screen, free-standing column and photo-wall panel (not quite a montage) all in the entrance foyer; the thematic red quarry-tile insets to corridor dados, at floor-skirtings and on the exterior elevation as column facings between the large square-division steel windows; fan-shaped lecture theatres and stonework retaining walls (both Corbusier derivatives) adjacent to the lower-level parking.

Chipkin writes that the pre-cast facing and the neat horizontal coping-course are perfectly compatible with the adjacent grey neo-classical buildings, another acknowledgement of the Barrow abilities.



*THE WOLF AND HIRSCH HILLMAN BLOCK
OFFICIALLY OPENED BY GENERAL JC SMUTS ON 18 JUNE 1941*

West Campus

Barrow Construction successfully completed the R2 million conversion of the old Bien Donne Restaurant building, known to generations of visitors to the Rand Show, on the new West Campus in 1985. The premises, originally built for the Empire Exhibition to mark Johannesburg's Golden Jubilee in 1937, were made into a multi-purpose building incorporating a lecture theatre, seminar rooms, offices, shops, a butchery and a bakery.

In 1996, the company began the conversion of Sturrock Park Recreation Club to form part of the adjoining west Campus, continuing its association with this most important institution in Johannesburg and indeed the country, right down to present times.

Other work by Barrow Construction on the West Campus includes the important Moffat Building designed by Hubert Prins, the maintenance department established in an existing building and alterations to the stands around the old main arena of the show grounds.

CHAPTER 8

TOWARDS A MORE COMMERCIAL ORIENTATION - 1919 TO 1939

The first significant event in the years between the two world wars occurred in 1919 when land in New Doornfontein on the corner of 4th and Miller Streets was acquired in John Barrow's name. In succeeding years the plasterers' and joiners' shops moved to this site, where the company remains to this day. Other milestones in the shaping of the company were a formal partnership agreement in 1926 between John and Bert Barrow, although the actual running of the business was - and had been for some time - virtually entirely in the hands of the latter, and the apprenticeship of John Albert Barrow (Senior) as a plasterer in the family business a year later.

John Albert Barrow joins the firm

John Albert and his brother Hugh were at home together during the school holidays in December 1926. Finding that there was not much to keep themselves occupied, they doubtless squabbled and fought in the time-honoured manner of all brothers. In desperation, their father, Albert, packed them off to help in the business and keep them out of trouble. Hugh was sent to the workshop at the university and John Albert to the plasterers' workshop at Doornfontein. There, he worked on making the moulds for the pre-cast blocks used in building the university. Hugh went on to study medicine and became a successful general practitioner.

So congenial did he find the work that he declined to return to school and became a plasterer's apprentice early in 1927, aged just 17. He worked on the buildings for North British Insurance and the MBA and, later, he plastered ceilings at St John's College. When he tired of this, he went into the joiners' shop to sharpen his skills in that area and helped erect the roof and extensions to the firm's Doornfontein premises.

This early experience gave John Albert a wonderful insight into the practical workings of the trades on which were founded the fortunes of the family firm. These years equipped him for a lifetime of inspired leadership of Barrow Construction and other companies as well as selfless service for the building industry and related trades.

Other Barrows in the firm

In 1931, Muriel Surmon, Albert's niece and John Albert's cousin, joined the firm to work in the office. She stayed with the firm for many years apart from a break of eight years after she was married in 1941 to Boyce Eagar who was mayor of Johannesburg in 1966-67. During this period, the New Doornfontein yard was often graced by the gleaming mayoral car TJ1 arriving to collect the Mayoress. She was a stalwart of the company until she retired in 1974. Other members of the family working in the firm at this time were Margery Barrow and Jo Griffin (Maria Barrow's husband).

John Barrow retires

John Barrow formally retired from the business in 1930 aged 90 although Bert had effectively been running its affairs for some years. He died two years later, rich in the affections and regard of his immediate circles and the community at large to which he contributed his skills, wisdom and considerable energies for so long.

John Barrow (Proprietary) Limited

The organisation founded by John Barrow took a more commercial aspect with its registration on October 30, 1934 as a private company, John Barrow (Proprietary) Limited, which purchased the business from Albert for just over £22 212. The shareholders were Bert himself with 1000 shares and his four children - Margery, John Albert, Hugh and Herbert with 250 each. The first directors were Bert (nominated as chairman and life director), Margery and John Albert. The current directors are John, David and Douglas Barrow and the company's only asset is the New Doornfontein property.



***"THE THREE GENERATIONS"
JOHN BARROW WITH ALBERT AND JOHN ALBERT***

Economically, the period was overshadowed by the Great Depression with its attendant human suffering and social upheavals during which the Barrow organisation was fortunate to be almost continuously busy with a succession of large and important contracts. These included contracts for institutions like the

University of the Witwatersrand, St John's College, Roedean School, the MBA, the SA Institute for Medical Research, the Chamber of Mines, the South African Reserve Bank, the Rand Water Board and the Jubilee Memorial Old Age Home at Randjeslaagte.

South Africa began to emerge from the Depression after the abandonment of the gold standard in 1934. As if to confirm the prospect of increasing prosperity, rich values were obtained from boreholes along the West Witwatersrand Line where companies were extensively prospecting for gold, and share prices on the JSE rocketed. In September 1935, the price of West Witwatersrand Mines was 35s. In May 1936 it rose to 168s and then to 203s by June 22, shooting up to 255s on the same day. By February 1937 it had reached 400s.

The price of most of the other gold shares rose in sympathy and the general business mood was highly buoyant. In the United States of America, however, all was not well with the economy and a senator urged in a speech that the USA unilaterally reverse its undertaking to pay a fixed price for gold. On Friday April 9, 1937, to be remembered for long as Black Friday, West Wits dropped to 180s,

Western Reefs dropped 72s to 38s 6d and Anglo American Corporation 94s to 66s.

Strangely, despite this carnage on the JSE the country continued to prosper. Secondary industry manufactured goods worth £173m (£22m more than the previous year), the gold mines produced 338 000 oz more gold and retail sales increased sharply together with revenues from farming and fishing.

Commercial contracts

As something of a departure from the normal pattern of its business thus far, the Barrows won a series of contracts for major commercial buildings in the Johannesburg CBD during these years. These included buildings for Elephant Trading in Market Street (1923), Mackay Brothers in Pritchard Street (1925), North

British Insurance (1926-27), the massive Castle Mansions in Eloff Street, the Rand Provident Building Society, Mackay Mansions on Rissik and Jeppe Streets (1934), Annan House at 86 Commissioner Street (1935-37), Unit Security House on Fox and Sauer Streets (1936) and Linton's Hotel on Loveday and de Villiers Streets (1939). Annan House was built on the site of Green's Building, well known in the 1880s as the terminus for most of the coach lines which linked Johannesburg with Kimberley, Natal and Cape Town.

The four-storey £24 000 Mackay Bros' building in Pritchard Street, designed by Robert Howden, was an extension of, and connected to, the old premises of Messrs Mackay Bros, sellers of musical instruments. The new structure was of reinforced concrete throughout and faced with pre-cast concrete blocks "like those used on the university buildings". The extension contained "piano and gramophone rooms and showrooms with attic storerooms. The floors were supported by 56cm ornamental plastered pillars. A unique feature was the hanging veranda, held by iron tension rods. "

Castle Mansions in Eloff Street was a well-known landmark in early Johannesburg where Lord Milner established his offices (his residence was in Sunnyside, near Roedean) when he was governor of the Transvaal Colony after the South African War. In 1931, in time to shield them from the worst of the building slump during the Depression, the Barrows won a £114 462 contract for the demolition of the old building and the erection of the new "massive ocean-liner of a building with a central attic tower and flagmast which was 55 metres above the pavement." It took 16 months to complete.

"It was described as 'the greatest building in South Africa'," writes Chipkin: "greatest in size (a whole city block in length), greatest in bulk (massive, symmetrical, fortress-like), and greatest in height.' Its pre-eminence on the Johannesburg skyline was based not on the mandatory 10 storey elevation but on the height of its central Art Deco flagmast. It was regarded as the most modern building of the day, noted for its modern plateglass shopfronts with Art Deco brass trim and modernistic illuminated shop signage, the first-floor plateglass showroom windows and the dramatically modern entrance with sans-serif name letters."

The 11 storey Mackay Mansions erected on the corner of Rissik and Jeppe Streets Brothers for the Mackay Investment Trust in 1934 at a cost of £75 000, was designed by Cowin, Powers & Ellis in association with Emley & Williamson

Institutional contracts

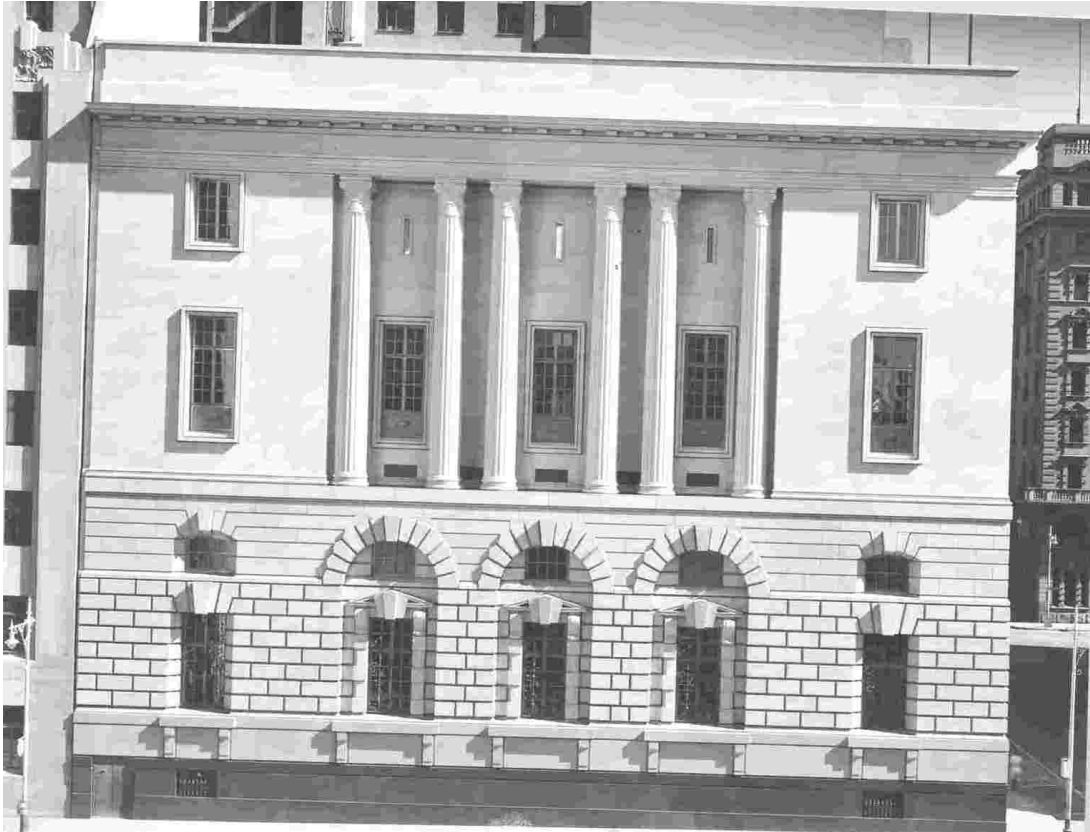
Chipkin writes that the “secular urban style with its marked human scale and dignity” produced four memorable buildings of great distinction in the early 1920s, including the YWCA Town Hostel.

The building was designed by JM Solomon who had worked in Lutyen’s office in 1911 after a previous stint in Baker’s office and whose crowning achievement was the University of Cape Town.

“The YWCA building was small and dignified, a street architecture with an inner cortile, a classical lanterned entrance and elegant street-corner sculpture comprising two putty figures with garlands that lent distinction at the pavement intersection of Jeppe and Von Brandis Streets until their wholesale destruction in the 1970s building boom. This sculptural enrichment was ‘a gift of the street’ only rarely emulated in Johannesburg.”

Noteworthy from our point of view is the fact that the sculpture so much praised by Chipkin was produced by the same Barrow craftsmen who showed their remarkable skills in the buildings we have already discussed and others - Jack King, who was in charge of the pre-cast shop, including site supervision, and Charles Fraser.

The Barrow company had already acquired a reputation for sheer excellence through exceptionally fine buildings such as the YMCA and major buildings such as the Institute for Medical Research, the University of the Witwatersrand, St John’s College and various churches. This reputation was reinforced and even expanded by the work they did on buildings for the South African Reserve Bank in 1934-38 and the Rand Water Board in 1938.



**RESERVE BANK, 79 – 81 FOX STREET, JOHANNESBURG
BUILT IN 1934 - 1938**

Chipkin writes that the Reserve Bank building on the corner of Fox and Simmonds Streets “represents the establishment of a modernised Renaissance palazzo in Johannesburg, providing a building of classical feeling combined with modern services.

“The massive dressed granite rustication of the ground floor has deep recessed joints and enormous voussoir blocks to the entrance arch. This massiveness contrasts with the burnished surface of the polished granite plinth. This is stonework controlled by a master in the San Michele tradition: the skill of John Barrow’s stonemasons was commensurate with the task.

“The light sandstone of the upper levels where we find modernised capitals on the giant orders and simplified classical surrounds is an anti-climax but it reflects, perhaps, the national romanticism which Leith thought appropriate for his monumental work.

“As a counterpoint to the curvature of the massive tunnel-vault entrance arch, the architect Gordon Leith placed a wide-bowl hemispherical urn - a ‘birds’ bath motif it was called - above the massive entrance doors below the arch.”

An article in the *Record* said that “Leith created a monument worthy of, and reflecting for the time to come, the stability and security of the institution it houses,” and Bernard Cooke likened the building with “its austerity and grace” to the work of the Swedish masters like Ivar Tengborn

In the Rand Water Board building at 3 Fraser Street, Chipkin considers that Leith and the Barrows “created a building of overall dignity and human scale which was a major statement of street architecture unsurpassed in the Johannesburg townscape.”

It brought together elements of the Italian Renaissance, modernising classicism, clean Swedish forms and optimism. These were expressed in polished red granite blocks with splay-cut arises and deep joints; arched windows with water-griffin keystones; a black granite plinth with bulging consoles and equally bulging wrought-iron grilles beaten into curvilinear shapes; a beautifully modulated face-brick superstructure with bull-nosed ends to receive the window surrounds

The Chamber of Mines building in Hollard Street was designed by Emley & Williamson and built by the Barrow organisation in 1934 using the pre-cast concrete blocks that had become their special expertise.

To create a living monument to commemorate Johannesburg’s Golden Jubilee in 1937, the Council resolved to establish a scheme which provides “seemly houses for old people of limited means who have served their city well,” and the municipality donated a tract of 16 hectares of grassed and wooded parklands to the south east of the Highlands North shopping area. The Barrows built the Donald Mackay entrance gates, donated by their old friend who was mayor of Johannesburg at the time.

The scheme consisted of six blocks containing 22 flats in all, each with its own living room, bedroom, bathroom and kitchen together with 11 blocks of ten rooms each providing accommodation for single women consisting of a self-contained room with cooking and washing-up facilities, the bathrooms and conveniences being communal. All blocks were north facing single storey buildings under slate with their own gardens and a communal laundry. A Rest House for 30 people was provided for those who could not look after themselves.

At the time of launching the project, the municipality donated £50 000 as the nucleus for a fund-raising campaign to raise the balance of the money needed. Most of the necessary funds were afterwards raised by the Rotary organisation and, since Bert and his son John Albert Snr were Rotarians, there is a strong possibility that they were involved in fund-raising for Randjeslaagte. Certainly, their company was involved in the building of three blocks of single quarters in 1946, alterations to the Rest House in 1953, further additions to the Rest House 1976, the Raleigh Block in 1977/78 and an additional wing in 1977. Fleming House at Randjeslaagte commemorates the close association of Keith Fleming associated with the organisation. Fleming was, of course, a long-standing friend of the Barrows, closely associated with them in the MBA and subsequently Fedsure. He was a mayor of Johannesburg

Another old age home which the Barrows Built was Rosehaven, established by the Rosebank Union Church at Hurlingham Gardens in the 1970s. An article in the Rosehaven newsletter of 1975 reads: "We will always be grateful to our builders John Barrow Construction for a quality building of which we are going to be proud for many years. It is a joy to know that the Barrow family has been associated with the Rosebank Union Church for four generations since the founding of the church." This refers to the fact that John Barrow became a deacon of the Troyeville Baptist Church shortly after his arrival in Johannesburg and the family maintained its connection with the Baptist Church down to present times.

It is a remarkable feature of the Barrow organisation that it has always been ready to assist with philanthropic projects in an unassuming way and that may well be one of the reasons that institutional buildings have been so prominent a feature of

its activities.

Houses

John Barrow (Pty) Limited also built a number of houses in the 1920s and 1930s. These included alterations or additions to three Baker houses: Stonehouse for George Mackenzie; Ednam, 49 The Valley Road for Walter Webber; and St Margaret's. The Huts was a splendid Killarney mansion for Manley Anstey, the department store owner, designed by Gordon Leith very much in the Baker style.

A whole clutch of houses was erected in Dunkeld, which was growing in popularity. They included Mr Vaux's house in Kent Road, Bleak House at 56 Cradock Avenue for Albert himself, one for his brother-in-law Jo Griffin on the corner of Reform Avenue and Oxford Road and one for another brother-in-law, Fred Grunsell at 29 Reform Avenue (the Grunsells later built at 21 Rosebank Road, Dunkeld, where John and Caroline Barrow lived from 1926 and where John Albert (senior) grew up and one for Herbert Barrow at 63 Hume Road. A house was also built for Hugh Barrow at 56 Kent Road. Other Dunkeld houses from these years were 30 Eastwood Avenue for the stock-broking Freemantle family and 23 North Road for Donald Mackay, a close family friend who later became mayor of Johannesburg.



***BLEAK HOUSE, 56 CRADOCK AVENUE, DUNKELD
BUILT IN 1921 FOR ALBERT BARROW***

One of the more interesting houses was the Ideal All-Electric Home built in Linksfield on Sylvia Pass near Links View and Kallenbach Drive, in 1932. "Once in a blue moon an architect and builder get a chance to build an ideal house and to make it as perfect as it ought to be and seldom is," ran an article in *The South African Builder*. "Every so often an electrical firm, with a free hand, has the opportunity to install all the devices which every woman dreams about and hopes to have some day in her ideal home. When the three put their heads together and decide that the blue moon has risen, the result is an Ideal Electrical Home.

"From the first outside view to the last, even the layman is impressed by the fact that this is a well-built house. Rain pipes and guttering, wall corners and door and window tops are cleanly finished. Floors are rubbed to ballroom smoothness and all joints are close fitting and well matched. Nothing here was rushed or scamped and it requires no technical knowledge to appreciate the difference between this and numberless houses where deficiencies become obvious by comparison.

The house was interesting because there were no chimneys of course and because the windows - all steel framed - were much larger than usual for those times ("the lounge is startling because a window occupies the whole of one side - a wide sheet of plate glass flanked by corner windows"). There was an unusually large number of electrical plug points, while the kitchen, "a clean, white, airy room" with parquet flooring excited the most wonder.

"Few women like to wash dishes. Here, an electric washer does it while you wait. The dirty things are placed in rubber-covered baskets into a deep container and warm water is let in. On pressing the switch, water begins to swirl round and cleans them. The water of the first washing is let out and the plates are rinsed with boiling water in the same way and come out dry.

"Other kitchen devices include a 'wife saver', a machine with attachments that mix cakes, beat eggs, peel potatoes, mince meat, sharpen and polish knives and a number of other things.

“In a small room alongside is the laundry with two big sinks and a clothes washing machine in which the soiled linen is placed, washed perfectly without manual attention and whirled dry by centrifugal force.

“Any woman who visits this house will go crazy to own it; and any gardener will long to set about the spacious grounds to which nature has added such charming backgrounds and make of them a setting worthy of a wonderful little house.”



ALBERT BARROW AND HIS FAMILY, c. 1921
ALBERT, ELIZABETH, MARGERY, JOHN ALBERT, HERBERT, EMILY, HUGH

CHAPTER 9

THE FEDERATED INSURANCE GROUP

Fedlife Assurance, the unlisted core earnings business of the Federated Insurance (Fedsure) group earned gross premium income of R4,6 billion for the 1997 financial year, 60 years after it was founded under the leadership of Bert Barrow as a practical service to the building industry. It is a striking fact that members of the Barrow family have been chairman of the Federated for 52 of those years of exceptional growth.

Just as the expertise, fastidious craftsmanship and sheer hard work of the Barrow family are celebrated in several notable buildings, Fedsure is a powerful memorial of their creative business thinking, deeply rooted in the fertile soil of concern for the community in which they live and work, and their leadership.

The Federated was conceived at the 31st Annual Congress of the National Federation of Building Trade Employers of South Africa held at the Pretoria City Hall in October, 1936, when the building industry was enjoying an unprecedented boom which was a welcome relief after the privations of the Great Depression.

In his opening address, the President attributed the boom to the gold price and forecast that the high levels of activity would be maintained for some time, certainly as long as gold maintained its value as the instrument of international exchange.

The City of Johannesburg celebrated its Golden Jubilee in a style which reflected the general prosperity and created a carnival atmosphere which lasted for much of the year. On October 5, 1936, for example, a long procession of colourful floats moved through the central business district which was specially lit and decorated with bunting. The most spectacular of the celebrations, however, was the Empire

Exhibition at the Milner Park showgrounds, which drew 2 000 000 visitors. In a constructive spirit which matched the general euphoria, the Congress approved the new Industrial Conciliation Bill. There were other matters on the agenda, however, which did not meet with general approval - the system by which various regions fixed their own wages and working hours, for instance, was strongly criticised. But the issue which generated unanimous indignation was the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1934.

With the humanitarian aims of the legislation nobody had any quarrel. What the building employers did not like was the functioning of the Act.

Premiums charged by the conventional short term insurance companies (which underwrote workmen's compensation insurance at the time) had rocketed from an average of 15s per £100 of cover to 50s under the new Act. Furthermore, the amounts paid in compensation relative to the premiums paid were minuscule.

Bert Barrow, past president of the Federation, marshalled the evidence skilfully and mobilised a swingeing attack on the way the Act worked in practice. Builders had paid £67 200 in workmen's compensation premiums in the past year, he said, and had received in return the paltry sum of £13 500, or some 20%, in compensation or medical benefits. The building industry was perhaps paying too much while higher risk industries were paying too little, he suggested.

He cited as an example a building contractor on the Reef who had paid £2 800 in premiums against claims of less than £470. No less than 36% of the firms insured had made no claims at all during the year, he said, and 23% of the claims were for amounts less than £10. High medical charges were another cause for concern and one doctor had charged fees of £50 for treating a whitlow.

The solution, Bert Barrow concluded, was for the building industry to set up its own insurance company to underwrite workmen's compensation insurance - a suggestion that had first been debated some years before in the same forum but dropped for lack of support.

This time, Congress enthusiastically supported the proposal and the Federation's executive committee was mandated to take whatever steps were thought necessary after investigating the matter in depth.

Bert Barrow and his band wasted no time before reporting that the only possible effective course of action was for the Federation to sponsor a mutual insurance company to write workmen's compensation. It would be a case of insurance of builders, by builders, for builders.

The legal formalities were completed in short order and the Federated Employers Mutual Assurance Company Limited was incorporated on December 18, 1936. As a mutual company, the company was a "not for profit company" for the benefit of the builder shareholders. There was to be no dividends or capital appreciation for the initial shareholders. It was only later that the builders and MBA were asked to subscribe for shares in the short-term company.



*Seated — W. Knuckey (Vice-President, National Federation); D. F. Corlett, Director;
A. Barrow, Chairman; H. O. Young (President, National Federation) Director;
John J. Kirkness; James Thompson, Director.
Standing — Keith G. Fleming, H. C. Roberts,
Joint Secretaries.*

**THE FEDERATED EMPLOYERS MUTUAL ASSURANCE CO LTD
A MEETING OF THE BOARD ON THURSDAY 22ND APRIL 1937 AT WHICH THE FIRST POLICY WAS PRESENTED TO
J J KIRKNESS OF PRETORIA**

Thus, 40 years after he and his father had set up the family building contracting business, Bert Barrow's insurance company which was to become one of the country's leading financial institutions, was ready to do business on behalf of the country's builders.

Office holders

Albert Barrow was elected first chairman in recognition of his leading role in the company's formation, the generally high regard in which he was held and his general business acumen. He brought to its affairs the integrity, warm humanity and energy which had shaped the values of his own family construction firm and which played a vital part in the subsequent expansion of the Federated within the building industry and, later, beyond it.

"He was the rock on which the Federated was built," it was written of him on his death. "He brought it into existence, his honesty of purpose and his reputation were the main factors in persuading builders throughout the country to support the concern in its vital initial stages and his enthusiasm was a source of inspiration to those privileged to serve in the company."

The inaugural board consisted of other contracting stalwarts, James Thompson and Dan Corlett (both former mayors of Johannesburg) and Henry Young, incoming president of the Federation and managing director of Cape based Arderne Scott, Thesen Timbers. Keith Fleming, one of the Federation's two joint secretaries and a former secretary of the Master Builders and Allied Trades Association, was appointed the first general manager.

Fleming, who later became mayor of Johannesburg, commented in later years that the particular and distinctive approach to the conduct of the Federated's business and the provision of its insurance services to its customers was rooted in the deeply Christian character of the men who founded and ran it. He pointed out that Bert Barrow, his son John, Fleming himself and Norman Levey, who was to make a notable contribution, were all devout Christians and regular churchgoers.

Company structure

It was resolved that the initial capital of £20 000 should consist largely of preference shares entitled to a preference dividend of between 5% and 10%. Because only shareholders could be policyholders, special shares of £1 each with no privileges and no real value would be issued.

Net profits would be distributed to policyholders. This, it was hoped, would result in a substantial reduction in the costs of workmen's compensation insurance to members of the industry. A similar company in England, it was noted, had secured an average rebate of 33% for its members.

A commercial insurance company was to be engaged to administer the country's main centres at a reasonable fee and the only other expenses were expected to be directors' fees and reinsurance premiums.

Promoting the company

The wholehearted support of the building industry would determine the success of the venture, it was recognised at the outset. Winning and maintaining the support of builders was to be the basis of the company's management strategy and its remarkable growth in subsequent years.

Barrow, Young, Fleming and Charlie Roberts (the Federation's other joint secretary) at once set off on a whistle-stop tour of the country to win the support of the various Master Builders Associations which were largely autonomous although affiliated to the Federation. They were not always amenable to persuasion. Some had long-standing relationships with particular insurers which they were unwilling to disturb, while others were frankly sceptical about the prospects of an insurance company run by builders.

Despite these difficulties, Barrow's arguments won many converts and 15 000 shares of £1 each were issued. The largest single subscriber was the Federation itself, which took 500.

Generally, swelling confidence overcame initial misgivings and it was reported that every member of the Pretoria MBA, for example, had bought at least one share.

The small staff of the fledgling company set up shop in the offices of the Federation at 99 Polly Street. "It was", recalls Fleming, "the only building in Johannesburg with a round lift. Probably the last, too."

The spadework had been done and a large number of builders personally canvassed. All that remained was for them to buy policies. It was, therefore, with a good measure of gratification and confidence for the future that the first policy of Federated Employers Mutual Insurance Company was formally handed to John Kirkness OBE of Pretoria on April 22, 1937.

Success

That the confidence was justified was shown by the first year's results. Gross premium income was £54 000 and the profit £7 583. Significantly, the premium rate had dropped 24% to 38s from 54s per £100 and the company had been able to give a rebate of 25,19% to shareholders, thus reducing the cost of workmen's compensation insurance

for the shareholder/builders by a half to 28s per £100 compared with the old cost of 50s.

Soon the Federated was emboldened to reduce its dependence on South British. It began to issue its own policies and handle its own claims, reinsuring the risks through Pearl Assurance.

A truly mutual company

In 1941 the government published a Bill which provided for the centralisation of all insurance through the Workmen's Compensation Commissioner, denying insurance companies access to the business.

Bert Barrow at once took up the cudgels on behalf of the building industry and his lusty infant company. He urged forcefully in the highest quarters that the industry be allowed to retain the exclusive right to underwrite workmen's compensation for its own members.

In this bold proposal he was not altogether successful, but a compromise was reached allowing builders to choose between placing their insurance either with the Federated or the Commissioner. This was in fact a significant victory, for the only other sector to be granted a similar dispensation was the mining industry.

In order to comply with the terms of the legislation, however, it was necessary for the Federated to be transformed into a truly mutual company and preferent shareholders were bought out at 19s in the £, leaving them with shares of a nominal 1s each so that they could qualify as policyholders.

Short-term arm launched

Success in providing services of real value for the industry with which it had built a close familial relationship prompted Bert Barrow and his board to consider new fields of service with prospects of further benefits and useful profits for shareholders.

Short term fire and accident was identified as promising and from the end of the reconstructed company's fourth year was written as a kind of by-product to workmen's compensation. Premiums amounted to £10 800 in the first 12 months.

Federated Employers Fire and General Insurance Company

Profits rose significantly as the result of increasing fire and accident business coupled with realistically conservative underwriting, and Barrow began to press for

a separate company to handle not only fire and accident but also third party cover and motor insurance. Persuasive as ever, he succeeded in having the Federated Employers Fire and General Insurance Company registered in July 1944.

Shares were once again offered to the building industry and Federated Employers Mutual itself took a substantial shareholding which it gradually reduced by offering shares to its policyholders from time to time.

The Federated was now operating in a wide variety of insurance markets, and offices had been established at Pretoria, Port Elizabeth, Pietermaritzburg, East London, Queenstown and Bloemfontein.

Growth during the Second World War was impressive and the short-term business gathered momentum. Premium income grew from some £33 000 in 1939 to £135 000 in 1945 and the staff from nine to thirty four.

Long term assurance and Norman Levey

Strong growth in short term insurance highlighted gaps in the services provided by the group. An urgent requirement was clearly a pension scheme for building artisans, as was made clear in the 1947 builders' strike for better pay and terms of employment.

Bert Barrow, demonstrating his shrewd judgement of character and abilities, called in Norman Levey, a young actuary with Pearl Assurance, the Federated's reinsurers, to help devise a scheme for the Cape Industrial Council which had approached the Federated for assistance.

The outcome was a scheme - the first industrial pension scheme in the country - which provided for a deduction of 1d an hour from the workers' weekly pay-packets and a contribution by the employer of 3d an hour in return for basic life cover and a very small pension. The industrial councils of the other provinces followed the Cape in incorporating the scheme into their respective industrial

agreements, although the Transvaal at first ran its own independent fund.

To accommodate this new field of business, the Federated Employers Fire and General Insurance Company was registered as a composite insurer in 1950 and Norman Levey appointed as general manager. He was to be associated with the Federated for 35 years (albeit with a 14 year gap) as general manager, director, managing director and chairman, during which he greatly influenced the growth and development of the Federated.

The formation of the Fire and General Insurance Company was a significant milestone in the group's history and the beginning of a concerted move beyond the limits of the building industry into other markets. In this wider field, the company quickly established itself as a respected and widely recognised insurer in the full sense. As Barrow reported with justified pride, "the name of the Federated stands very high in the insurance world today and is becoming very well known in all areas."

Indeed, the essential elements of the Federated's remarkable future expansion were in place by the time its dynamic founder and champion, Bert Barrow, died in 1953.

Improving safety in the building industry

Before his death, Barrow had been able to secure notable advances in the safety practices of the building industry. He reported at the end of the 1946/47 year that workmen's compensation premiums were fast approaching the £1 million a year mark but the rising number of claims suggested that the standards of safety on building sites around the country were inadequate.

Research had shown that seven out of every ten of these accidents were preventable and of those seven, five could have been prevented by educating workers in safe habits and practices. "Hidden" losses were four or five times the actual cost of the compensation paid to workers and he urged employers to pay more attention to accident prevention so that the men would respond and the

incidence of accidents drop.

This approach, combining genuine humanitarian concern with sensible business practice, became integral to the Federated's philosophy. Increasing time and expenditure was devoted to safety, and hoardings began to appear at building sites across the country bearing exhortations such as "Care on heights, tidiness on sites". Many companies began to implement serious accident prevention programmes.

The benefits of these programmes down the years have been incalculable and may well have inspired other industries to follow their example.

Towards life assurance

The accumulated resources and experience of the mutual and short-term companies coupled with the extensive relationships built up with policyholders made the move into life assurance feasible.

The first rate book proved to be extremely competitive because it was assumed, naively as it was soon discovered, that business would flow in automatically through established short-term connections. Very soon it became clear that the public did not come forward voluntarily, clamouring to buy policies. The merits of policies and products had to be sold to them, it was realised, and an agency network of brokers was established to deal with this reality.

Gross premiums for life and pension business totalled £7 500 in the first year of operation but, if progress was slow at first, it soon accelerated and by 1962 reached R1m. In 1980, gross premium income from life and pension business exceeded R50m. In 1996 it reached R5,05 billion.

Threatened take-over

The asset base of the group grew in tandem with expanding sales and by 1958

was large enough to draw the attention of the voracious corporate predators which were active even at that stage although they were to be especially prominent in the 1960s and 1970s.

Dan Corlett, a fellow founding director who succeeded Bert Barrow as chairman of the Federated on the latter's death in 1953, was already 82 at the time and retired after four years. His successor was Alfred Norris, who had been a director with Bert Barrow of the Rand Provident Building Society. He was also former managing director of Lennons, a member of the SA Druggists group.

The aptly named Wolf Heller, who was resident director of the British & Overseas Insurance Company and owned extensive holdings in various local companies including Standard Cannery & Packers Limited which was listed on the Johannesburg and London Stock Exchanges, approached the board of the Federated in June 1958. He offered to purchase the short-term company on behalf of the British & Overseas. The terms were to purchase the entire issued share capital of Federated's short-term company, amounting to 100 000 shares, for £3 a share, £200 000 to be paid in cash and the balance in £1 preference shares in Standard Cannery & Packers.

The majority of the Federated board rejected the offer out of hand, the sole dissenting vote being the chairman's, that of Alfred Norris, who argued vociferously in favour of acceptance.

Heller now chose to approach the shareholders directly, upping the offer to £3 cash a share. This was closely followed by a letter from Norris in his capacity as chairman, urging acceptance despite the contrary recommendation of his board.

The opposition now waded in with a letter to shareholders over the signatures of three other directors representing the founder families: John Albert Barrow (Bert's son), "Duna" Mitchell (Corlett's son-in-law) and Mark Thompson (son of James Thompson).

The letter, drafted by John Barrow who was fiercely and stubbornly determined to

fight for the Federated's continued independence, recalled that the Federated had been created by builders for builders precisely because their interests had not been looked after by commercial insurers. The company had grown enormously and to sell at this stage would be to waste the fruits of 22 years' work. The letter added that if shareholders were determined to sell in any case, a far higher price could be negotiated. The closing remark - coming as it did from a man of Barrow's renowned probity and integrity - was a clincher: the single dissenting board member, Norris, was also a director of one or more companies in the Heller organisation.

Yet another letter from Heller asserting his good faith in the matter, availed him nothing and acceptances from shareholders fell far short of the 90 000 votes required to confirm the deal.

As further emphatic rejection of the bid, letters opposing the bid were read from six MBA's countrywide during the proceedings of the 1958 conference of the National Federation in Pretoria.

John Albert Barrow elected chairman

The brief episode occurring when someone other than a Barrow was chairman had been a near-disaster. It had fallen to John Barrow to demonstrate his qualities of leadership, integrity and stubborn determination in saving the Federated and he was unanimously elected chairman to replace Norris. He led the company wisely and shrewdly during the ensuing 25 years of truly remarkable achievement and growth.

These years from the restructure of the group, substantial investments in property, colossal growth in the life pension business and growth in the short-term business as appears fully in the succeeding pages.

Federated Trust

A new company in the Federated family was established in 1960 - the year when South Africans were debating whether or not to bring to an end their country's 50 years of membership of the British Commonwealth - to offer yet another much needed service to the building industry.

Until that time, interest earned from retention moneys on contracts was generally pocketed by clients although it rightfully belonged to the contractors themselves. Federated Trust was set up to hold the retention sums so that contractors could themselves earn the interest. An immediate success, it was paying interest of some R300 000 a year to builders by 1973.

Contractors all risks and property investment

The specific needs of the building industry led to the establishment of yet another new product in 1960, Contractors All Risks Insurance.

About this time, too, the Federated's philosophy in connection with investments underwent a radical change. When the company was founded, institutions invariably invested in fixed interest stocks rather than equities which were considered far too volatile and risky. Similarly, direct investment in fixed property was looked at askance.

During the early 1960s strenuous efforts by newly established merchant banks such as Union Acceptances Limited gradually spread the idea that the share market was a desirable haven for investment funds. The generation of massive funds by assurance companies which were increasingly aggressive in their selling of policies added hugely to this impetus.

Federated was one of the first companies to look seriously at direct investment in fixed property, largely at the urging of board member Hugh Lobban, although in

this as in all its ventures it preferred to follow its marketing precept: “cautious but capable”.

At first continuing to lend funds secured by mortgages over fixed property, it gradually began to take small equity stakes. This incremental process continued until the company acquired its first wholly owned property in 1966 - “Gravenage”, a residential apartment building in Illovo, Johannesburg.

Rapidly growing confidence persuaded the directors of the Federated to invest quite heavily in Retco - a newly established company of which John A Barrow (Senior) was a founder and the first chairman - in which the promoters had exchanged their buildings for shares which they saw would be far more tradable. Unfortunately, after a good start, the venture did not achieve as much success as had been expected. This was largely because the shares were listed only in 1969 when the market crashed after the hectic boom of 1968 and several major property companies such as Glen Anil and Corlett Drive Estates went to the wall. SA Breweries eventually took over the management of Retco after buying a substantial interest in the company.

Company restructure

To safeguard the Federated from further assaults on its independence, a holding company, Federated Employers Insurance was created in 1969. It held 50,1% of the another newly created company, Federated Investments, which in turn held 100% of Federated Insurance, conducting both long and short term insurance as separate operations.

Since the majority of the shares in the holding company were owned by the founder families and the building industry, it was felt that the group was safe from an attack by another “Wolf at the door” as the failed take-over bid was waggishly called.

Enter Finansbank

An investment made by the Federated in 1970 had a marked effect on its future. At the suggestion of Hugh Stocks, a Pretoria builder well known to the members of the board, the company acquired 8% of the shares in Finansbank, a fledgling merchant bank started by Piet Liebenberg and four young Afrikaans merchant bankers.

Norman Levey, who had been general manager of the Federated since 1973 on the retirement of John Everett after 15 years in the post, struck up a close friendship with Liebenberg. The combined talents of the two organisations made for a formidable body of investment expertise; the Federated specialising in the long term and Finansbank in the short term.

Growth for the Federated

The short-term arm of the group weathered torrid market conditions in the 1970s, shaken by successive oil crises, the collapse of the industry tariff agreement and the ensuing rates war.

On the other hand, the life and pensions business grew strongly under the leadership of Levey and his young and extremely able pensions manager, Arnold Basseraie. The main impetus for growth came from industrial and occupational pension schemes, but great strides were made in marketing life policies.

Gross premium income rose fivefold to R50 million from R10 million in the decade and the life fund grew to R300 million in 1980 from R100 million in 1974. Assets, which exceeded R10 million for the first time in 1962, passed the R1 billion mark in 1984.

JA Barrow (Junior) a director

The representation of the building industry and its leading families in particular was strengthened with the appointment of John Albert Barrow (Junior), a grandson of founding chairman Bert Barrow and David Mitchell (son of Duna Mitchell and grandson of DF Corlett), to the Federated Board in 1980. True to family tradition, JA Barrow became chairman on the retirement of Norman Levey in 1986 and has led the group through eventful times to its present pre-eminence.

Another restructure

Short term insurance and life and pensions insurance are totally different businesses demanding different skills and abilities and by 1981 it had become clear that these aspects of Federated's operations could best be conducted by separate companies.

Federated Insurance became Federated Life (Fedlife) and a new subsidiary, Federated General Insurance (Fedgen) was formed to handle the short-term business. The Federated Employers' Investment Company which had hitherto been primarily a holding company, took on responsibility for handling staff matters, accounts, data processing, secretarial administration and investment services for subsidiaries.

At the same time, Finansbank increased its interest in the Federated to 40%, doubling the holding which it had owned since 1978. Arnold Basserabie became managing director of Fedlife and Levey was made managing director of Federated Investments with Johannes Hamman, one of Finansbank's founders, as his deputy.

This organisational rearrangement, accomplished between 1981 and 1983, saw the transformation of the group from one composite company to three separately

managed operating concerns. The benefits were evident almost immediately and profits after tax rose to R3,6m in 1984, an increase of 19,3% over the previous year. It was an auspicious start to the three-year career of John Albert Barrow (Jnr) as deputy chairman.

John Albert Barrow (Snr) resigned as chairman In 1983, to be succeeded by Levey who was in turn succeeded as managing director of Federated Investments by Hamman. In paying a gracious tribute to the retiring chairman, Levey said that he had been a director for 33 years, 25 as chairman. During that time, total assets had grown to R800m from R1,7m.

“But growth in assets only does not do justice to Mr Barrow’s contribution to the Federated,” continued Levey. “In addition there was his steadfast pursuit of the ideals of Federated’s founders, his courage in the face of adversity and opposition, his kindness and integrity. These elements were the basis of a remarkable career.”

Resigning as chairman himself three years later on April 24, 1986, Norman Levey handed over the reins to John Albert Barrow (Jnr). Johannes Hamman was deputy chairman and managing director of the holding company, Basserabie was appointed to all the main boards and Brian Flanagan, a general manager who had been with the group for a number of years, was made a director of Fedlife, Fedgen and Federated Mutual.

Total assets stood at R1,3 billion and there were some 300 institutional shareholders, with Finansbank holding 40 percent. Against general expectations, this large stake proved a threat to the Federated’s independence and once again it fell to a Barrow - John, who was then deputy chairman - to foil a take-over attempt. This time it was couched in the form of a suggested merger.

Another take-over attempt

Ambitious and thrustful, the young Finansbank tigers saw an opportunity to create

a powerful independent financial group by effecting a merger between the Federated and Finansbank. Hamman was close to Levey, almost a protégé, and the suggestion did not fall on stony ground in that quarter although it must have been clear that the Federated would forfeit its independence. The state of affairs closely resembled the situation in 1958 when Norris headed the company and Wolf Heller was circling his prey.

As in that earlier take-over battle, the board by no means unanimously acquiesced in Levey's support for the proposal set out in a detailed submission by Hamman to the Chairman's Committee dated August 15, 1985. John Barrow and Dave Mitchell in particular, representing the interests of the founding shareholders, argued forcefully against surrendering independence.

They suggested that Hamman's proposals be submitted for independent analysis by Ray Wheeler, an established businessman and highly successful entrepreneur who had settled in England. He also happened to be David Mitchell's brother-in-law. His intervention having been sanctioned by the board, he duly arrived in South Africa, spoke to as many people as he could about the proposed deal which he examined meticulously - and submitted a report damning the proposed merger, recommending firmly that the board reject it.

Thus passed another threat to the Federated, foiled by the dedicated opposition of founder family shareholders led by a Barrow. Other trials for the group and its directorate followed in quick succession.

The AA Mutual deal

Hamman's energetic ambition found another immediate focus, this time on Fedgen which he had long wanted to expand into the biggest operator in the local market. Fedgen was doing badly and it seemed sensible to find a strong partner in the short-term industry to form a new organisation with the critical mass to make headway in a difficult and competitive market.

AA Mutual Insurance Association Limited, in which the largest shareholders were the Automobile Association and Natie Kirsh, who was also chairman, seemed a fitting partner. It had been run in fairly autocratic fashion by Warren Plummer for many years, had a good share of the market and was well thought of.

Such was the pressure to consummate the marriage that a deal was signed in February to form the Federated-AA Insurance Company subject to the completion of the due diligence investigation.

John Barrow recalls that during a board meeting held at AA Mutual's building, presided over by Levey for the last time and attended by Kirsh and Paxton from the AA, there was a kind of handing over ceremony which was friendly and convivial.

If the departure of Plummer for England very soon after the deal was signed did not cause uneasiness, however, the figures which began to emerge in the early stages of the due diligence study were most alarming. Far from being a thriving company, it became clear that the books of AA Mutual had been doctored to conceal the fact that it was hopelessly insolvent.

The effect of this news on the Federated board and its new chairman of barely a month can scarcely be imagined. As John Barrow explains, he and Dave Mitchell did not have the experience or detailed knowledge of short term insurance to feel confident about precisely what to do. Fortunately, he says, he could draw on the invaluable experience of fellow-director Naas van Staden, a former Registrar of Financial Institutions who, on his appointment to the board, was invited by the chairman (JA Barrow Senior) to sit immediately on his left, a seat he has continued to occupy to this day.

The advice of van Staden was to cancel the deal, the rest of the board concurred and on May 16, 1986, the plug was officially pulled.

In the words of the chairman's review for the year, "Despite great efforts to save

the company, the AA Mutual was shortly afterwards placed in liquidation and Federated instituted legal proceedings to recover the purchase price from the vendors of the shares of that company. The impact of these steps was not only felt by the Federated Insurance Group but throughout the insurance industry, the general public and even the national economy.”

The Melamet Commission of Inquiry into the collapse of the AA Mutual had important long-term benefits for the stability of the industry which was required to observe far stricter solvency requirements.

The Federated itself suffered financially, incurring substantial legal costs and making substantial provisions against possible non-recovery of the purchase price, whilst a wavering of focus from sound underwriting practice during the entire merger process resulted in an underwriting loss of R19,2m for Fedgen during the year. A capital injection of R30m was needed to bring the solvency margin to something like previous levels of 30% and morale was severely affected throughout the group.

John Barrow recalls that Hamman who, with Piet Liebenberg, had really set the whole deal in motion through Finansbank, the Federated’s merchant bankers, was desperately anxious to make amends. He arranged a meeting of the board with Piet Badenhorst, chairman of UBS, with a view to persuading him to take an interest in Federated to provide the strong financial partner that was needed to build up resources again. UBS declined the opportunity.

Fedgen soldiered on and Ron Carter, a former managing director of Standard General Insurance, took over as managing director of Fedgen on a contract basis and managed to staunch losses largely by dint of severely cutting staff costs and pruning the product range.

Barrow family steps up shareholding

This remarkably eventful year for the group, its fiftieth, culminated in yet another

development affecting its structure. The Nedbank group acquired Finansbank which found it necessary to relinquish its 40% holding in Federated because of a conflict of interests with Nedbank's controlling shareholders, SA Mutual. At the same time, Federated liquidated its reciprocal holding in Finansbank.

In terms of the rights of pre-emption contained in the Federated's Articles of Association, the shares in question were available for purchase by existing shareholders. John Barrow explains that the shares were changing hands at a price of R4 but the auditors valued them at R10 each.

Despite the fact that the group was certainly not at its healthiest and was still emerging from the trauma of the AA Mutual debacle, John Barrow stepped in to show his courage, his sound business judgement and above all his faith in the inherent strength of the institution to which his family had already contributed so much energy and leadership. He acquired half of Finansbank's shareholding, amounting to 20% of the Federated, on behalf of the Barrow family in March 1987. The balance was bought by FFM. John's action in acquiring the shares in fact continued a pattern of action established by his father many years previously, of applying any cash surpluses generated by the building company towards buying more shares in the Federated whenever they were offered for sale.

JSE Listing

The board decided that the time was opportune for a listing of Fedsure Holdings on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. The intention was to raise about R50 million through a private placing to selected clients and business associates, a preferential offer to the company's 60 000 policyholders and other clients, a rights offer to existing shareholders and an offer to the public. Federated Employers Investment Company and FEI Holdings with their 350 or so shareholders were to be consolidated under a scheme of arrangement and would hold about 75% of Fedsure. After the listing, control would rest with a voting pool of major shareholders including the Barrow family, Federated Mutual (15%) and the directors (20%).

At the end of 1987, the group's fiftieth year of existence, total assets reached R1,8 billion with profits after tax of R6,8m and gross premium income from Fedlife of R292,4m. The significant statistic to emerge was that new business had grown at 52% a year compound over the previous five years. New business written in 1987 was twice that of 1986. Management expenses, at 6% of gross income, were the lowest in the industry as was the lapse ratio of 6,6% in the life and pensions business.

Five days after the listing, on October 20, the market collapsed and the price of Federated plummeted. Hamman and the group investment manager decided, entirely off their own bat and without consulting the board, that this was an appropriate time to buy shares on the stock exchange. The R50 million raised in the listing was wiped out. This led to Hamman's resignation and Arnold Basserabie took over as group chief executive in June 1990.

Doug Barrow, a CA (SA) and John's younger brother, joined the board in 1991 at the time group assets first passed the R5 billion mark and the group established a strategic alliance with the Investec group. Fedsure acquired 27% of Investec Holdings and Investec acquired 19% of Fedsure. Bas Kardol and Stephen Koseff, respectively chairman and managing director of Investec, also became directors and Dr Morris Bernstein joined Fedlife as managing director.

Federated was now a multi-faceted financial group with interests in life and short-term insurance, property investments and a building society (Saambou). It was decided to raise another R200 million of new capital to further develop the relationship with Saambou in particular.

Just before the formation of Amalgamated Banks of South Africa (ABSA) in 1990, Louis Shill of Sage approached John Barrow (Junior), representing Federated's substantial investment, and suggested that Federated join ABSA.

Federated declined to follow this route. When ABSA was formed without the Sage group, Shill approached the Federated once again. He was anxious to get together with the Federated and made another suggestion: that the Federated sell

its Allied shares to Sage. Although Barrow never acceded to this request, Shill apparently concluded that a deal had been struck and expressed acute dismay when Federated sold its Allied shares to First National Bank.

“For the Federated, this was the start of a most important strategic relationship,” says Barrow. “I am now on the board of First National in which we have an interest of about 4% and we have a very good rapport with them.”

The growth of the Federated, both organically and by acquisition, continued apace. In 1992, attributable income rose 47% to R42,2 million and group assets to R6,5 billion, a debenture investment was taken in the Eastern Province Building Society, and the shareholding in Saambou was increased from 36% to 41%. A German company, Haftpflichtverband der Deutschen Industrie VAG in the meantime had bought 29,9% of Fedgen (in which John Towsey had succeeded Ron Carter as managing director) as a result of which Claus Bingmeyer came on to the board.

Fedgen was offered another opportunity to tie up with a short-term company when the IGI Insurance Group got into serious financial difficulties in 1993, largely as the result of some seriously flawed investments. Although the press speculated that a take-over by Fedgen was almost a foregone conclusion, the due diligence study conducted jointly with Investec suggested that such a step was inadvisable. It did, however, identify certain worthwhile purchases within the group, and the Federated raised R60 million capital to acquire the credit life and funeral insurance business of Saflife and IGI Life. Fedgen also expanded its client base and distribution channels in areas where it had previously been under-represented when it acquired the life and short term operations of IGI in Namibia.

In the same year one of the Federated's investments in financial services, the Eastern Province Building Society, merged with Fidelity Bank, based in Port Elizabeth, giving the Federated a 30% interest in the R1,8 billion group.

During 1994 when Federated's assets exceeded R10 billion for the first time, the group bought 60% of Reef Medical (renamed Fedhealth), 50% of National

Finance Brokers and 65% of Technical Management Assignments operating in the investment management services market. It also teamed up with black-owned Insika Holdings to form Safrican, 49% owned by the Federated, operating in the funeral insurance business, as a result of which Dr Bethuel Setai and Ms Bongiwe Njobe joined the board.

Also in 1994, Fedsure Asset Management Company (Pty) Limited was set up to manage larger corporate and institutional investment portfolios. The result of this flurry of acquisitions allied with internal growth was that group assets grew 44% to reach R14,7 billion and Attributable earnings grew by 44% to R95,4 million.

That the Fedsure group is today a major and rapidly growing force in the financial services industry, is the result of the soundness of its management over the years (and especially, the driving energies manifest abilities of Arnold Basserabie) under the inspired leadership of three generations of Barrows. There is no doubt that John Barrow and other members of his family will continue to provide their invaluable guidance as the group advances confidently towards new achievements in the future.

CHAPTER 10

THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND POST-WAR GROWTH: 1939-1953

As if to emphasise the divisions in the white population which underlay the appearance of unity given by the Fusion Ministry of Generals Hertzog and Smuts and which soon came to a head in the dissolution of the Ministry over the declaration of the Second World War, many Afrikaans speakers celebrated the centenary of the Great Trek in December 1938 with great symbolic flourish and palpable public fervour.

A small party of ox-drawn wagons driven by men and women in period costume and escorted by suitably bearded horsemen, journeyed from Cape Town to Meintjeskop near Pretoria where the centenary celebrations drew to a climax at the site of the present Voortrekker Monument on December 16, 1938.

Just over six months later, Hitler's troops swept into Poland on September 3, 1939, and Britain and France declared war against Germany. Opinion in South Africa was by no means unanimous, either at grass roots or government level. Smuts, the Deputy Prime Minister, argued vigorously for intervention on the side of freedom against the forces of evil, as he described the conflict. Prime Minister JBM Hertzog and many of his followers on the other hand saw it as a European war, something to be settled by the British, their people's imperialist enemies.

Other, more extreme Afrikaners who were gathered under the banner of Dr DF Malan's Purified National Party were frankly and openly pro-Nazi and later expressed their opposition to the Allied war effort through persistent if relatively minor acts of sabotage carried out by the Ossewabrandwag, "grey shirts", "brown shirts" and other assorted disaffected groups.

When Smuts forced a division in the cabinet and Hertzog was outvoted, South Africa formally declared war against Germany on September 7, 1939 and the Fusion Ministry was dissolved. In Johannesburg there were clashes between angry crowds outside the City Hall and riots near the German Club in Loveday Street where police used batons to break up pro-war demonstrators who threatened to destroy the premises.

Soon, volunteers were flocking to enlist in the armed forces, troops were dispatched “up north” to Abyssinia and the country was placed on a war footing.

Directorate General of War Supplies and the Barrows

A crucial task was to gear up the country’s productive capacity to turn out much-needed munitions and materiel for the British war effort. In this field, both Bert Barrow and his son John played a significant role, as is shown by letters of thanks sent to them at the war’s end in November 1945 by the Smuts-appointed Director General of War Supplies, Dr JH van der Bijl.

“I look back with a feeling of the greatest appreciation to all those who rallied round and assisted me in what proved to be a colossal task.

“As one of my colleagues, without whose help and loyal co-operation the great task we have just completed could never have been accomplished, I would like you to accept my sincere personal thanks.

“I would further like to congratulate you on the manner in which you discharged your duties and on the splendid service which you rendered to South Africa.”

The efforts of the Directorate encompassed all industries. Mine workshops were re-equipped and adapted to produce munitions, other factories produced armoured cars, spares and accessories and facilities were established at ports for the repair of ships torpedoed off the coasts at Durban and Cape Town.

From 1941, it was difficult to obtain all imported goods and shortages were especially marked in piece goods, building materials, vehicles, fertilisers, metals and machinery, wheat, rice and tea. During 1942, imports were even more difficult to procure. This led, first, to a system of priority ratings for imports and, later, to the control of the acquisition and disposal of a fairly wide range of essentials.

In line with these developments, building control was established in July 1941 and building material control in March 1942 with the appointment of a Controller of Building Material. Commodity controls of this kind were at first set up under the Ministry of Commerce and Industries but the need to reconcile and co-ordinate civilian and war demands for the same scarce resources led to a major extension of the powers of the Directorate-General of War Supplies. This resulted in a representative Board of Supply, which correlated the work of the individual commodity controllers who operated with the assistance of panels chosen from within the trades. Thus was created a flexible and informed system of control.

It is highly probable that the Barrows, among the most senior and respected members of the building industry, served on the relevant panel in this scheme of arrangement.

Other measures affecting the building industry during the war years were the Factories, Machinery and Building Works Act of 1941 and the Apprenticeship Act of 1944. The former regulated the control of factories and hours and conditions of work, supervision of the use of machinery, and accident prevention. The latter regulated the training, employment and apprenticeship of minors in designated trades.

General economy

The Minister of Finance, JH Hofmeyr, who was also Deputy Prime Minister, adopted a policy of meeting defence expenditure (the overall cost of which was said to be some £600 million) half from taxation and half from loans.

Allocations from loan funds to war expenses amounted to £272 million, increasing

net public debt by £299 million and external debt was reduced from £101 million to £18 million. Although the process was to some extent kept in check by rent control, price controls and certain wage controls, inflation was inevitable. The retail price index rose from 99,9 in 1939 to 132,2 in 1945 and the wholesale price index from 97,6 to 152,6.

On the positive side, overall, the war resulted in marked industrial development, increased employment (especially of women and blacks) and greater urbanisation.

The lives of ordinary South Africans were not much disrupted, although petrol and tyres were rationed and public transport services ended at 22:00 on weekdays and an hour earlier on Sundays. There was a shortage of mealies, oranges and meat, the country observing one meatless day a week, and white bread was no longer to be found in the shops.

Changes in John Barrow (Pty) Limited

Change was not restricted to the environment in which the firm operated and in 1939 Margery Barrow resigned from the company, gave up her directorship and married Andrew Clark.

Her place as a director was taken by Herbert George Barrow, John's younger brother by three years who went to St John's College before joining Pearl Assurance and then Federated Employers Mutual in 1936 as the first head office inspector. Having married in 1939, he joined the family firm in the accounts department and was appointed a director. He joined the South African Air Force, which posted him to Port Alfred where he returned to live after taking early retirement from Barrow Construction in 1963. His wife Joan, who had been the first head girl of Kingsmead, took an honours degree in economics at Rhodes University and taught economic history there for a year.



FAMILY GATHERING AT BLEAK HOUSE, 1948

*BACK ROW: JOHN ALBERT, ELSIE WITH BRUCE, ANDREW CLARK, MARGERY WITH ANN, BETTY, WILLY EVANS, EUNICE WITH ROBERT, HUGH, JOAN WITH MARGARET
MIDDLE ROW: JOHN ALBERT JNR, DAVID, ROSALIND, ALBERT BARROW WITH HERBERT, RICHARD, ELIZABETH
FRONT ROW: MARY, DOUGLAS, EDWIN, ANDREW JNR (KNEELING), CYNTHIA (SEATED), BRIAN, DIANA, IAN*

Barrow contracts

The Barrows were fortunate to have several substantial institutional and commercial contracts during these years, including the Bureau Wing of the Institute for Medical Research and The Rand Water Board head office at 35 Fraser Road (1939), the Wolf and Hirsch Hillman Block at the University of the Witwatersrand (1941), the Working Girl's Hostel in Saratoga Avenue, Berea, designed by Gordon Leith (1944) and the Associated Engineers Building, Doornfontein.

Linton's Hotel, on the corner of Loveday and De Villiers Streets and designed by Kallenbach, Kennedy & Furner (1939), was one of the rare commercial contracts

of these years. Seven years later the Barrows won the contract to convert the hotel to Duncan House to accommodate the Governor General's War Fund.

Baragwanath, which is today one of the better known hospitals in the world and was handed over in 1947 for use by the black community of the vast Soweto urban complex, was established as a 1 400 bed military hospital at the start of the war, mainly for TB patients. In 1940 the Barrows built several of the wards at the hospital, designed by Gordon Leith.

In making substantial contributions of this sort to the war effort, the company also erected several of the buildings in the military camp at Roberts Heights near Pretoria (Voortrekkerhoogte) in 1941 and a munitions factory at Modderfontein (1943).

Thus the Barrows maintained a reasonably steady stream of work during the difficult years of the war and kept the company poised to take advantage of an upturn in activity when it ended.

The Poliomyelitis Research Foundation

Immediately after the war the company was engaged to erect three blocks of single quarters at Randjeslaagte, as we have seen, and afterwards built the Nurses' Home at Coronation Hospital, to be followed by the Nurses' Home at Northcliff designed by Irvine-Smith & Joubert for the SA Nurses' Trust Fund (1950).

The largest undertaking by the Barrows in the first few years after the war, however, was the complex containing the research laboratories and associated facilities built for the Polio Research Foundation at Rietfontein near the serum laboratories of the SA Institute of Medical Research.

A severe outbreak of poliomyelitis on the Reef in 1948 prompted Mrs Gordon, the wife of the then mayor of Johannesburg, to organise a fund-raising drive to

establish a research institute to investigate the prevention and cure of the disease. Soon the Poliomyelitis Research Foundation was represented by some 390 committees around Southern Africa and by June 1950, when the public appeal was closed, more than £450 000 had been collected. A grant of some 5 ha of land was obtained from the SA Institute for Medical Research and a start could be made on the facility “providing unique facilities according to the latest medical knowledge for the intensive study of Poliomyelitis and other virus diseases.”



**THE POLIOMYELITIS RESEARCH FOUNDATION, RIETFontein, 15TH AUGUST 1950
TURNING OF THE FIRST SOD BY MR HW ANDERSON**

L TO R: MESSRS. MCKHECHNIE, JA BARROW, A BARROW, PROF. PEARSE, G COOK, ST SESSEL, BILL STEVENSON (FOREMAN FOR JOHN BARROW (PTY) LTD), MESDAMES. WILSON-SMITH, GORDON, MESSRS. HAHN, DR GEAR, J NELL

Dr James Gear, who was appointed director of the proposed institute and established its reputation as an important world centre for virus research, contributing to the development of the Salk vaccine which eventually tamed the disease, described the exacting specifications for the complex. These were presented to the architects, Pearse & Anneck-Hahn in association with WD

Howie, who had worked with the Barrows on other projects.

“In virus research it is essential to have dust-free atmosphere so as to avoid contamination of the virus suspensions and virus cultures. The design must also provide against the possibility of cross-infection and consist of a number of different units, each devoted to a separate aspect under investigation. Special sterile cabinets must be provided where various manipulations and procedures can be carried out without fear of contaminating cultures.”

Other special facilities included incubators for hens' eggs to provide living tissue in the form of chick embryos, serological laboratories with water baths running at constant temperatures to incubate serum virus mixtures, and extensive accommodation for the primates and monkeys - the only animals susceptible to human strains of the polio virus - and other animals. The animal laboratories had to provide sterile operating theatres, sterilisation rooms and laboratories for the study of diseased tissue as well as insectary rooms where insects could be bred and observed in conditions of controlled temperature and humidity.

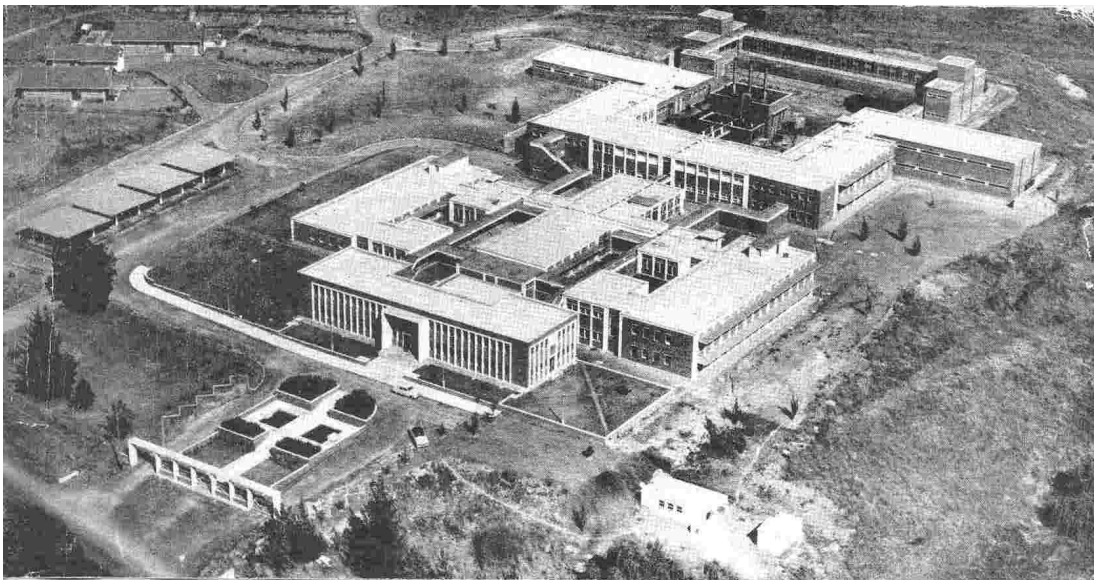
The overall complex consisted of an administration block, including a library, and two separate and distinct virus laboratory blocks, each served by its dedicated experimental animal block from the animal breeding centre, and both served by a centrally placed Services Block containing the main wash-up and sterilises, media preparation laboratories, the bacteriology laboratory and glass stores, egg incubators and storekeeper's office and by a boiler house supplying steam for sterilisation and heating.

The topography of the site allowed the erection of a floor below Virus Unit No 2 to contain the bio-chemical, analytical and electro phoresis laboratories as well as high speed centrifuge rooms and the electron microscope.

This was clearly a major and complicated project, placing severe demands on the expertise and thoroughness of the contractors. There was also pressure to complete the building as quickly as possible, both to provide visible evidence of progress to the public who had contributed so generously and to ensure that the

research could begin at the earliest possible date; polio being known to be a disease which occurred in regular cycles.

In view of this urgency, work on the site had to commence in August 1950, only nine months after the commencement of the drawings and before many of the details had been settled. Other considerations added to the difficulties of the contractor. Costs had to be kept strictly within bounds; the building had to be orientated so that there was no direct sunlight in any laboratory; the complex had to be completely proof against the escape of experimental animals which could be infected; and the escape of air- and waste-borne viruses to the exterior had to be prevented, as did the transmission of virus contamination from one laboratory to another.



**THE POLIOMYELITIS RESEARCH FOUNDATION, RIETFONTEIN
BUILT IN 1953**

The virus units had to be specially air-conditioned, the supplied air being free from bacilli and all extracted air sterilised, while all waste water from the laboratories and animal blocks had to be passed through the sterilisation plant before being disposed of.

Public praise

It was reported in the press after the roof-wetting ceremony for the first part of the institute completed on May 1952, that HW Anderson, chairman of the Poliomyelitis Research Foundation, “congratulated Mr Albert and Mr JA Barrow on their enthusiasm and initiative.” Indeed, Anderson was reported as having described the building as “a monument to the skill and patience of the workers.” This praise was repeated in a private letter of thanks.

Bert Barrow dies

Bert Barrow did not live to see the completion of the Polio Research Institute. He had gone to England in 1953, accompanied by his daughter, Betty Evans, who had looked after him since the death of his wife in 1938, and his son Herbert with his wife, Joan. After a few happy days in London, they went to visit his hometown of Cheltenham where he died peacefully but suddenly aged 78.

One cannot exaggerate the importance of Bert Barrow’s contribution to the fortunes of the company. His hard work, his skills both as a craftsman and leader of men, his sound and shrewd business judgement and - above all, perhaps - his immensely likeable and winning personality, helped to establish and then consolidate the first-rate reputation of the family company from its earliest beginnings. It was largely due to his influence that the Barrow name became synonymous with quality work and personal attention to clients.

He had formally taken over the company 33 years after its formation when he bought the shareholding of his 90 year-old father in 1930 but it is clear that he had in fact been effectively running the firm for many years before that.

He was instrumental in forming John Barrow (PTY) Limited in 1934 with himself, Margery Barrow and John Albert Barrow the first directors and Hugh and Herbert Barrow as additional shareholders. The choice of name for the company despite his own pre-eminence for many years shows his strong sense of family and his

personal modesty.

Bert who, from the time he arrived in Johannesburg in 1895 to join his elder brother Jack, had been known for his skills as a carpenter and joiner, showed an entrepreneurial flair at an early stage. He and Jack speculated in land, buying certain properties in the Bertrams area and building houses on them. Later, in 1907, he and a partner bought 12 claims in a public gold diggings, Vogelstrysfontein and although it is not clear that this was a hugely profitable venture, he was able to present his bride, Emily Surmon, with a wedding ring made with gold from the claims when he married her in 1908 at the Troyeville Baptist Church.

Bert's entrepreneurial energies came to their full flower, however, with the establishment in 1936 under his driving leadership of the Federated Employers' Mutual Insurance Company, forerunner of the mighty Fedsure Group which is today such a vigorous player in the financial services industry and of which he was chairman for its first, formative 27 years.

His business insight and judgement were valued by other outstanding companies in other fields. Having given crucial advice which solved pressing problems for the company, he was for some 30 years a director and vice-chairman of African Products, which is today a highly profitable company in the Tongaat-Hulett stable. He was also a director of the Rand Provident Building Society, which later merged with the Alliance to form the Allied Building Society, for 23 years (chairman for three years) and of Brittan Boustred.

We have already spoken about his leadership in the building industry: his election as president of the Master Builders and Allied Trades Association in 1921 when he was 46 years old, his election as honorary treasurer of the National Federation of Building Trade Employers in 1928 and his election as president of the Federation in 1931, a year of severe financial stringency for the country. He was a member of the first Government Apprenticeship Committee and represented the building industry for many years on the National Industrial Council for the industry "where his sane outlook and the high regard in which he was held both by the

artisans and the employers did a great deal to keep relationships in the industry on an even keel at that time.”

In 1932 he was elected chairman of the board of the *South African Builder* magazine when the Federation took control of the publication, largely at his urging.

It is fitting that busts of Albert Barrow (and his son John Albert Snr) should have been placed in the Fedsure building which also contains the Albert Barrow Conference Hall built in 1968 to commemorate his services.

His character

Bert Barrow was brought up in the traditions of the Baptist Church of which he remained a devout adherent throughout his life, and his religious values were reflected both in his warm, affectionate family life and in the unswerving rectitude of his business dealings. Above, all his personal warmth and unassuming friendliness inspired the devotion and respect of all in the building industry and beyond.

After his death a correspondent (A Stark) in the Cape wrote a letter to the editor of the *SA Builder*: “I always remember the merry and delightful twinkle in Mr Barrow’s eyes and, like many others, I came to know him as a man whose judgement was unerring and whose name stood on the highest plane in the building industry and business circles generally in South Africa. I have been specially asked by all connected with the industry here to record their deepest regret at the passing of Mr Barrow.”

Revealing of the affection he inspired, even in casual observers, is a report in a Port Elizabeth newspaper about his evidence as an expert witness in a civil trial heard there in the Supreme Court, *Lennon Limited v The United Building Society and RG McLelland* in 1932. The plaintiff complained that he had suffered damages when his shop collapsed because of the negligent demolition of certain

adjoining properties by the defendants. In a subsequent criminal case, McLelland was charged with negligence and the following poem appeared, accompanied by a caricature of Bert, hands in pockets and pipe between his teeth.

“What a wonderful thing that old buttress has been
When through the eyes of the Crown it is seen!
How really rotten it was to the core
Is the submission by which the defence sets store.
The experts differ, as they always do,
The many condemn the support of a few.
The assessors really don’t care very much
Being naturally swayed by the views of the Judge.
The public, not knowing quite what to believe,
Are prepared to agree that looks may deceive!
The whole darned thing is so very obscure
That nobody really can be all that sure
Whether attorneys, counsel, judge or assessors,
Builders, experts, or “legalised guessers”!
Was it perchance a “Barrow”, or cairn, or of rubble a pile,
With face of babe and disarming a smile?
I give up the problem, concluding the rhyme
Still puzzled, but feel it’s a blinking shame.

- NB: BARROW 1. A proper name attached to a very worthy and well-known Master Builder and Contractor with the face of a babe and a smile without guile.
2. A grave-mound (many to be seen in various parts of England)

Having started off his married life with his beloved wife Emily at 80 Derby Road, Judith’s Paarl, in 1920 Bert bought a large block of land in Dunkeld, which was then barren veld, on the corner of Cradock Avenue and Kent Road and at the top

of a slight hill with views of Johannesburg to the south.

A friend wrote that the enquiry as to why the residence, which the family occupied in 1921, was called "Bleak House" always "brought a twinkle to Mr Barrow's eyes. He explained that on the family's first night in the house there were no lights, the wind howled outside and to cap all a celluloid candle holder in the bathroom caught alight, filling the house with smoke and the younger members of the family with alarm. Next morning, Mr Barrow, who was a great admirer of Dickens, humorously suggested Bleak House as a name."

Of course, Bert Barrow being an admirer of Dickens would have known that the name of the house in the novel was entirely ironic and that the atmosphere of Bleak House in the story is anything but bleak. On the contrary, as the home of the modest, kind and affable John Jarndyce, benefactor and true philanthropist, it radiates hospitality and benevolence.

Although Bert Barrow was probably far too modest to acknowledge it, the name he chose for his house reflected exactly the character of Dickens' creation, for he and his beloved wife - who created a lovely garden out of the barren three acres of highveld - made their house a warm and vibrant family home

The same friend, Keith Fleming, who was for many years joint secretary of the National Federation and secretary of Fedsure, described Bert and Emily's Bleak House as "the very antithesis of bleakness, a home where every homely quality was present and which was filled with the laughter of children."

The selflessness and family loyalty that lie at the heart of the ethos of this home are well expressed by the fact that the two foundation stones Bert caused to be laid on either side of the entrance in February 1921 were laid by his father and his wife. It seems entirely appropriate, therefore, that this family home should afterwards have been occupied, first, by Bert's son John Albert Senior and then by his grandson, John Albert Junior.

Keith Fleming perhaps caught the essence of Bert Barrow's character when he

wrote in the *SA Builder*: "Mr Barrow was a home-loving man who loved his own armchair, his pipe, his newspaper or book, his family round him. Here we saw him relaxed, he who was so successful in business, so wise in financial matters and yet so humble in himself and so natural that the children loved him and were always happy in his company."

In a letter of condolence to John, Fleming wrote: "I know of no man, living or dead, who has meant so much to the building industry as your father. I know what he meant to the industry in forthrightness, integrity and ability - how his views were respected and appreciated not only by his colleagues but also by the architects, the quantity surveyors and the artisans themselves. The present position of the Federation owes more than most people realise to him for he was leader of a small group of men who held it together on more than one occasion when it threatened to disintegrate."

In similar vein, Norman Levey wrote that he "had come to appreciate more than I can say your father's fundamental integrity which, I am sure, was at the root of all he achieved and from which sprang so many of his sterling qualities. Although his career was such a successful one in so many directions, the characteristic which implanted itself most deeply in my mind was his honesty of approach to every matter, no matter how small it might have been."

CHAPTER 11

THE THIRD GENERATION: JOHN ALBERT BARROW (SENIOR), AND THE BUILDING BOOM OF THE 1960s

John Barrow soon showed the fallacy of the old shibboleth “shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in three generations.”

He was well equipped by experience to take on the task of leading the family firm into the challenges of a new era of accelerated growth in the economy that came to full flower in the building boom of the 1960s and 1970s with its enormous flow of work.

Apprenticed as a plasterer when barely 17, he had quickly acquired experience in the allied trades. As early as 1933 when Bert and his wife went overseas on a protracted holiday, during which they were guests at the opening of the Baker-designed South Africa House and at Baker’s own home in Kent, John was “minding the shop.” Responsible for preparing tenders and supervising contracts, the quiet low-key friendliness of his somewhat retiring disposition ensured that his relations with clients, fellow-builders and members of allied professions were cordial.

Importantly, he developed particularly close relationships with many of the more important architects in Johannesburg such as Charles Irvine-Smith of Kennedy, Furner, Irvine-Smith and Joubert, Paul Hahn of Pearce, Anneck-Hahn & Bristol, Steffen Ahrends, Dan Robinson, Bill White and Alan Meadley.

Assisted in due course by his sons John, David, Douglas and Bruce, with their diverse abilities and training, he brought John Barrow Construction (Pty) Limited which he formed in 1969, to the forefront of independent construction companies.



***"THE MEN AT THE TOP " - JOHN ALBERT BARROW SENIOR AND SONS
L TO R: BRUCE, JOHN ALBERT JUNIOR, DAVID, JOHN ALBERT SENIOR, DOUGLAS***

To give an idea of the growth achieved under John Barrow's stewardship and that of his son and namesake John Albert (Junior), Douglas points out that when he joined the company in the mid-1960s there were three group companies. In 1997 there were between 60 and 70.

John Albert Senior's most urgent task after the death of his father was the completion of the Polio Research Institute, which was soon accomplished. There were many other contracts which were successfully completed, although it was his winning of the contract to build the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Christ the King in

1958 which he believed set the seal on his early performance and enabled him to win his spurs.

Other institutional contracts in 1953 were additions to the YWCA in Wellington Road, Parktown, to the Rest House at Randjeslaagte and to the Women's Residence at Wits University. In 1955 there were additions to Red Cross House in de Villiers Street, extensions to the church of St Martins-in-the-Veld just down the road from Bleak House, substantial extensions to St John's Preparatory School where Barrow had erected the first buildings 51 years previously and the erection of the Portland Cement Institute in Richmond.

Barrow also completed various major commercial contracts in the 1950s, notably Lawson's Building, designed by Nurcombe & Summerley and consisting of a garage and offices situated next to Wits University who ultimately acquired it for teaching and administration purposes. Gloucester House on the corner of Rissik and Jeppe Streets was built in 1955, as was Luton House in Owl Street, Auckland Park, designed by Irvine-Smith & Joubert and Polliak's factory in Malvern (1956).

During this period, Barrow continued to build quality houses, designed by Irvine-Smith & Joubert and Steffen Ahrends. It was particularly appropriate that they should have worked for the latter who is considered by many to have assumed the mantle of Herbert Baker in the arts and crafts tradition of architectural design.

Ahrends, born in Berlin 1907 where he trained before going on to the Bauhochschule, Weimar, came to South Africa in 1936. Chipkin writes that trainees in his office acquired a thorough grounding in the honest use of natural materials and achieving human scale in buildings. He is said to have been responsible for designing some 450 houses between 1945 and 1948 "using a vocabulary of thatched roofs on gum poles or Brosely roof-tiles on rafters, bagged walls, timber-strip flooring and quarry-tile hard surfaces where needed.

"Reacting positively to chronic post-war shortages of building materials and building controls on house size, he used easily obtainable local products and built steep-and hollow-roofed houses with dormer windows so that roof space could

later be easily converted into loft-room accommodation.”

Houses on which Barrow worked for Ahrends between 1955 and 1961 were by no means limited in size. On the contrary, they included some of the more substantial residences in Johannesburg, such as Colin Anderson’s in Harrow Road, Sandhurst, Gordon Richdale’s Cloud End at Morningside and Charles Engelhard’s The Court House at Hurlingham. The firm returned to its roots, so to speak, when it completed alterations to a Baker masterpiece, Gate House, The Valley Road, for Peter Anderson in 1959.

The busy 1960s

Work in the 1960s included alterations and additions for some of the firm’s oldest institutional clients: a major contract for a new quadrangle at St John’s College; the north and west blocks at the SA Institute of Medical Research; the cancer research block at the Polio Research Institute; for the University of the Witwatersrand, extensions to the Central Block offices, the Social Science & Speech Clinic Building, North Lodge and alterations to Medical School; alterations to the hall and vestry at St George’s church; alterations to Kelvin House and alterations to Waverley Girls’ High School.

The nature of many of these contracts, involving the use of materials and techniques with which the firm had made its name, and the fact that many were repeats for clients confirms that its reputation for quality work combined with all-round client service had lost none of its lustre.

As mentioned earlier, the Kelvin House contract for the Associated Scientific and Technical Societies of South Africa involved cladding the exterior with pre-cast concrete blocks made in the Doornfontein yard. This was the last occasion that the blocks, which had contributed so much to the Barrow reputation in earlier years, were used by the firm.

Other contracts were clear evidence that Barrow Construction performed equally well with modern materials in modern buildings. In a new departure, factories were built for George Kent in Industria and Kearthland Packaging in Denver, while alterations were completed for General Tyre at Newtown, the Newtown Hotel and the Portland Cement Institute, Richmond.

The firm tried its hand at a recreation complex, the Tenpin bowling Alley at Vereeniging which may well have panted the way to a development in the Barrow operations which offered interesting commercial prospects in the light of changing lifestyles.

Squash Promotions (Pty) Limited

There were several changes in the Barrow firm, some of them far-reaching, during the 1950s and 1960s. Often the leader in the industry in terms of labour relations, possibly because it was a family company with a long-serving and devoted staff, John Barrow (Pty) Limited was one of the first to set up a pension fund for its artisans in and other staff in 1958. Two years later it established a pension scheme and life assurance scheme for senior executives.

Four of the chairman's sons came into the firm in these years as we have already seen: John Albert Barrow (Jnr) and his younger brothers David (1965, Bruce (1968) and Douglas (1969). Bruce started as an apprentice, and was foreman on several jobs such as the Flora Centre and Simba Quix factory.

John Barrow Construction (Pty) Limited was formed in September 1969, John Barrow (Pty) Limited remaining as the property holding company. Bruce and Douglas were appointed directors in 1973, David having been appointed to the board in 1965, two years after his older brother.

David William Barrow was born in Bleak House in 1940 and educated at St John's College, where he was a school prefect and captain of the squash and rugby teams. At the University of Cape Town where he obtained a BA degree in 1962,

he won full blues for rugby and squash and was elected UCT Sportsman of the Year. After completing a Secondary Teachers Diploma he taught at Western Province Preparatory School for three years before joining the family firm in 1965.

He obtained Western Province colours for squash in 1959 and represented South Africa against England in 1962, 1965 and 1970 and against Australia in 1963, 1964 and 1967. He captained the Springboks in 1967 in the 1st World Championships and in 1968 against Scotland while in 1969 he won the South African Championship after reaching the finals on four previous occasions. David served on the executive committee of the Squash Racquets Association of South Africa for nearly 20 years, including a term as vice-chairman.

Douglas George Barrow, born in 1943 and educated at St John's College, obtained B Comm CA (SA) qualifications at Rhodes University. An accomplished sportsman, he played squash for Eastern Province in 1961 and for Transvaal in 1966. Described as "a precise stroke player with some extremely tight shots", he won Springbok colours in 1967 when he played in the world championships at Sydney, Australia. He afterwards represented South Africa against Scotland (1968), England (1969) and Great Britain (1970), captaining the national side in the last two tournaments. While at Rhodes, he played scrum half for the university first rugby team and in 1963 played for Central Universities against the touring Australian Wallaby side.

An epic battle between David and Doug Barrow in the finals of the 1971 National Squash Championships at the Wits Squash Centre and watched by a capacity crowd was widely and appreciatively reported in the press. "It will be some time before anyone repeats Doug's remarkable performance in the South African Championships", one publication reported. "The results speak for themselves. He never dropped a game nor lost more than 10 points in a match and only 42 in six outings – a most impressive way to win a first South African title".



DAVID WILLIAM BARROW AND DOUGLAS GEORGE BARROW IN 1968

A newspaper report commented on the match that “the years were obviously beginning to tell on the 31 year old Dave who has played in six finals and won once, in 1969. He showed touches of class but his reactions are not as quick as they used to be and he was nowhere near as fit as Doug who is 27”.

Doug captained South Africa in the 1973 World Championships in South Africa and had the distinction of going through the team event unbeaten. He also served on the executive committee of the Squash Racquets Association of South Africa, serving as chairman from 1979 to 1988. He then headed up the Squash

Development Council, which facilitated the unification of the different squash associations.

Like his elder brothers, Bruce – born 1948 – went to St John's College. After a year at the University of Cape Town studying for a B Sc Building degree, he joined John Barrow (Pty) Limited in 1968 as an apprentice in bricklaying, carpentry and joinery. After completing the Construction Supervisors course at the Technical College he was foreman on several contracts, including Stairways, Glendower Heights, Flora Centre and Simba Quix. He was appointed a director of the firm in 1973, moved to the management side of the company in 1975 and two years later went to the US for year to join Sellon Construction where he gained experience in management and site work.

He left the company and the building industry in 1981 to begin farming.



JOHN ALBERT AND ELSIE BARROW FAMILY PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN IN 1963
STANDING: BRUCE, JOHN ALBERT JNR, MARY, DOUGLAS, DAVID
SEATED: JOHN ALBERT AND ELSIE BARROW

CHAPTER 12

THE BUILDING BOOM OF THE 1970s

Barrow Construction was in the thick of the building boom of the 1970's, keeping its hand in with institutional contracts yet moving increasingly into commercial and industrial undertakings. A new departure was a venture, which sought to exploit changing modern lifestyles in relation to sport, particularly and not surprisingly, squash.

Squash Promotions (Pty) Limited

The formation of Squash Promotions sprang directly from the astonishing squash-playing talents of David and Doug Barrow. They were both South African Champions and both toured England and Australia with the Springbok Squash teams. They were greatly impressed with the growth in the popularity of the game in these countries and realised that similar growth could be achieved in South Africa, given the right conditions.

What was needed, they saw, was for the ordinary young man to be able to walk off the street and play without having to undergo the considerable expense of joining a sports or social club. The solution was to build public squash court centres which had proved immensely popular in Australia from as far back as 1960 although they were a totally new concept in South Africa.

The first complex was build by the new Barrow subsidiary (with Simon Malone as a co-shareholder) in 1973 at Blairgowrie Park, Randburg, adjacent to the municipal recreation hall and swimming pool. In addition to six courts initially, two being added in 1976 when its popularity had been proved, it consisted of change rooms, a sauna bath, a small shop, a small lounge and a light refreshment kiosk. It was a success and encouraged the Group to continue the development of Public Squash Centres.

A second centre of eight courts was built in Discovery Ext 6, Roodepoort, on the corner of Celeste Crescent and Winifred Streets, in 1976. The following year the firm handled all the finishes for the 16 court Hillbrow Centre, also becoming tenants for the centre, which set new standards of comfort. For eight years the complex was the main squash tournament venue in South Africa, holding all major team events as well as the South African Amateur and South African Open Tournaments. An eight court centre with an innovative design and layout was opened in Kempton Park in 1978. The Group also teamed up with local shareholders in the Cape to build squash centres at Goodwood and Greenpoint. A further complex was also built in the fast developing area of Vanderbijl Park, on land leased from the municipality.

Expertise gained in the construction of these public centres, particularly in respect of the special plastering of the walls and the laying of the floors was applied to good effect in contracts for other squash courts for clubs, municipalities and private individuals. Sometimes the company invested in squash centres which it had not built itself, as in the two complexes in the Durban area, one in the CBD and the other at La Lucia.

Within a period of eight years, Squash Promotions was operating more than 100 public squash courts countrywide. The expansion was driven by substantial growth in squash as a leisure activity.

Doug Barrow explains that public enthusiasm for the game declined over the years, against his expectations, and the group subsequently sold its interests in all squash centres, the last being disposed of in the early 1990s.

However, with the development of Public Squash Courts, valuable experience was gained which pointed the way to the more substantial commercial developments in future years.

David Barrow recalls that the firm worked on a lot of small contracts, maintenance and the like, during the 1960s and 1970s - a pattern that was abandoned in the 1980s. For example, the firm fielded a plumbing maintenance service, which was

closed when it moved away from the smaller jobs and increasingly used sub-contractors.

Institutional contracts involved a return to old sites for long-standing clients such as the Institute of Medical Research (the R270 000 Media Block, 1970), Randjeslaagte (Fleming House, 1972, R62 000 additions to the Rest House, 1976, additional wing, 1977, and Raleigh Block, 1978), and Wits University (alterations to the Biology Block, 1972, and alterations to the Humphrey Raikes Block, Gate House, Telecommunications Research Laboratory Building and Biology Block, 1975). Other institutional contracts were for a new lounge at Rotary Park, the Rosehaven Retirement Village at Hurlingham, the hospital and offices for the Mines Benefit Society at the old Joubert Park Nursing Home, alterations to the Old Edwardian Club, alterations to the Chamber of Mines Sports Club, Richmond, and a new classroom block for St Stithians Preparatory School, Randburg, in 1979.



MINES BENEFIT HOSPITAL AND HEAD OFFICE, JOUBERT PARK

Rosehaven Retirement Home, a R572 400 development for the Rosebank Union Church, consisted of ten double and ten single flats, staff accommodation for the matron and two other flats, a frail home for the aged, a servants' block, laundry, chapel, carports and garages. The design was by Irvine-Smith Joubert & Lennard in association with Rodney Lloyd.

Major office building contracts were Maybaker Building (de Korte Street, Braamfontein), alterations to Northern House (Rissik and Fox Streets), the Southern Life Building in the Johannesburg CBD, the fine and high-quality head-office building for Blue Circle in Keyes Avenue, Rosebank, alterations to Pearl Assurance House (Commissioner Street), and buildings for the United Building Society in Boksburg and Alberton.

The Southern Life Building on half a city block bounded by Main, Harrison and Marshall Streets, consisted of shops on the ground floor with arcade and centre court, parking on the first floor and ten floors of offices of 1 180 square metres each. Barrow Construction submitted the lowest tender for the building, designed by Stauch Vorster & Partners. It was fully air-conditioned and sprinkled throughout, while other features were solar heating water systems, electronic security systems, closed circuit television, smoke detection and voice evacuation. It was a major development, says John Barrow, for which a new foreman - Tom Mulheron - was engaged and another - Philip Kneppers - detailed to assist him later during the course of the job.

The structure was of re-enforced concrete, the facades of the tower block and parking level being formed of pre-cast concrete panels with exposed terrazzo aggregate. All exposed concrete columns and beams had an off-shutter finish. The facades of the tower block were waterproof between concrete structures and windows and the pre-cast panels were supported by concrete haunches at slab levels. Otherwise, the panels were free of the concrete structure and open-jointed. All windows were double-glazed with internally built-in venetian blinds. A feature of the shopfronts, both externally and internally, was the virtual elimination of vertical aluminium members by the use of 10 mm butt-jointed float-glass.

The project architect wrote to John Barrow thanking him for “the patient and careful way he had dealt with the many difficulties that arose and in particular with the remedial work which has gone so easily and enabled us to complete the formal management of the contract and its completion at such an early stage.”

Flora Centre, a major shopping centre and office complex at Florida designed by Harold le Roith was built in 1972 and a shopping centre at Wendywood in 1973, while factories were built or altered for Kent Industries (Industria), Vivian Saunders, Simba Quix (Isando) and Allen West (Selby).



FLORA CENTRE, ROODEPOORT

Flora Centre, on Ontdekkers Road, Florida North, was another large project for Fedsure, which necessitated further investment in plant including a new crane supplied by GKN Mills. The centre comprised 50 speciality shops on two levels around a central piazza interconnected by escalators and stairs, a Pick n' Pay, a Dion Discount Centre and cinemas. Substantial renovations and additions were undertaken in 1986 and 1988. Lillicrap Wassenaar were the engineers and Johnny Walters the foreman, assisted by Bruce Barrow.

One night the crane broke loose from its mooring in a high wind, trundled down the track and toppled over onto the building. It was the end of the crane which was cut up for scrap, while the building was also damaged.

The Joubert Park Nursing Home for the Mines Benefit Society was one of the Barrows' larger contracts and kept the firm busy from about 1972 to 1975. Moross was the architect, David Rawlinson handling the project for them. Lillicrap Wassenaar the engineers and Oliver Gibson the main foreman. "It was a tricky, complicated building, as only hospitals can be," recalls John Barrow, "and required a lot of special finishes and services."

A major step forward was the contract negotiated with Fedsure for a large block of flats called Glendower Heights at Marais Street, Bedfordview, near the Glendower Golf Course. This development comprised a tower block of 176 flats of varying sizes in five acres of landscaped garden with swimming pool and tennis court, common laundrettes and underground parking. To handle the contract, in which Charlie Windsor was the foreman, the company invested in substantial new plant and equipment: a Liebherr 35C tower crane and new support work including economy frames and 4ft decking plates.

Barrow Construction negotiated another contract with Fedsure for a second and virtually identical tower block on the same site. For the first time the company worked with the architect Hymie Moross and John Barrow looks back on it as a very successful contract. Construction was simple and fast by the standards of those days, especially because the building was largely a repeat of the one just completed. "It went very well," John Comments.

Charlie Windsor was again the foreman for Majestic Mansions, Parktown, overlooking the former Clarendon Circle intersection. Chummie Graaff was the architect and Graaff Ehrlich the engineers. "It was a more complicated block of flats", says John Barrow, "and the off-shutter concrete on the ground floor which was quite a feature, was tricky. It was, however, a very successful contract ideally suited to our new crane and the expertise we had acquired at Glendower Heights."



MAJESTIC MANSIONS

Charlie Windsor began to suffer from severe pains in the chest during the contract and was given extended leave. On his return, he moved on to the Joubert Park Nursing Home site but his health deteriorated and he was advised that major heart surgery would be necessary. This did not square with his Christian beliefs and he refused treatment. The result was that he died a few months later after retiring to the Natal South Coast.

John recalls that the pattern established in the company in those years was to be engaged in perhaps five or six small jobs, in parallel with quite a large jobbing section and one really major job. "We found that the jobbing work would pay the overheads, the small jobs made good profits and the large job, which we looked on as a sort of prestige project, sometimes did very well and sometimes not so well."

Industry slow-down

The central message of John Barrow (junior's) statement as outgoing president of the Witwatersrand Master Builders Association in February 1976 was that all

sectors of the industry appeared to be facing a shortage of work for the first time in 20 years. The value of building plans passed on the Witwatersrand during 1975 increased by less than three percent (against a national drop of R100m), he said, while the total labour force in the region had fallen by some 5 000. There were virtually no flats being built, he said, home builders had continued to operate on a much reduced scale, shops and offices were in over-supply, the amount of work put out by the public authorities had been considerably reduced and generally there had been much less work available in the industry.

“For the first time in 20 years”, he said, “all sections of our association appear to be facing a period during which there is likely to be a serious shortage of work.”

This position was to be greatly aggravated by the social, economic and political turmoil occasioned by the Soweto riots which flared up after June 16 in protest against the government injunction that teaching had to be through the medium of the Afrikaans language.

It was fortunate for Barrow Construction that in 1977 and 1978 they had no fewer than 11 substantial contracts on their books as mentioned above: Pearl Assurance, Freight Services, Chamber of Mines Sports Club, Randjeslaagte (two), Allen West, United Building Society, Southern Life, Blue Circle, University of the Witwatersrand, St Stithians Preparatory School.

John Barrow recalls that when there was a shortage of work at this time, Barrow Construction successfully tendered for buildings for the UBS in both Alberton and Boksburg. It was the first time the firm had worked with the architect Bruce MacDonald of Rinaldi MacDonald and both contracts were completed very successfully. Oliver Gibson was the foreman at Boksburg and Philip Kneppers at Alberton.

Gibson was also foreman for the Blue Circle headquarters building in Rosebank, a strikingly handsome building with classical finishes designed by Dan Robinson. It was, however, a particularly difficult site. Despite the presence of a strong underground stream, the owners did not wish to pile, with the result that the bases

had to be cast in undesirably wet conditions. "It never seemed the right solution to me," comments John Barrow, "and the building has had a lot of cracking ever since. Still, it's an extremely attractive building with a magnificent elliptical staircase."



FAMILY GATHERING AT BLEAK HOUSE, OCTOBER 1978

BACK ROW: DOUGLAS, JOHN MILNE, MARGARET, BRUCE, JOHN ROBERT, JOHN ALBERT JNR, DAVID

MIDDLE ROW: WENDY, MARY, JOHN ALBERT BARROW, ELSIE BARROW, JEAN, ANNE

FRONT ROW: PAUL, JENNIFER, SANDRA, MARK, DONALD, COLIN, JANET, GILLIAN, ROGER, NEIL

CHAPTER 13

WIDENING PERSPECTIVES: BARROW CONSTRUCTION IN THE 1980s

In 1977 Barrow Construction had acquired two stands in Amalgam with a combined area of 3 831 square metres for R118 000. No tenant could be found for either of the stands although one was used for the storage of builders' plant, and six years later it was decided to develop the stands on spec by building a flexible factory/ warehouse structure with about 2 800 square metres of lettable space at a cost of some R970 000. Feasibility studies indicated a promising rate of return and it was decided to proceed.

The Amalgam development was an indication of Barrow Construction's readiness to strike out in new directions while continuing its usual quota of large institutional and commercial contracts.

Barrow Dewar and Associates

Barrow Construction and John Dewar, a property finance consultant, formed Barrow Dewar Associates specifically to ensure that the Barrow organisation was able to exploit the enormous opportunities offered by the rapidly developing move away from the CBDs of Johannesburg and satellite cities to decentralised locations. Another aim was to smooth the troughs in the highly cyclical building industry and Douglas Barrow, for one, considers that property development has been responsible for creating much of the growth of the Barrow organisation.

Douglas comments that his father was not in favour of the company's going into property development. In his view it was an area in which you could make substantial profits, but in which you could also make substantial losses. He was

not enthusiastic about the squash court venture and was suspicious of the idea of building “on spec” which was against his business philosophy.

“Our property development has stood us in very good stead, and at this moment accounts for a little over 50% of our work. In the bad times for the industry 10 or so years ago, Barrow Dewar ensured a regular, consistent flow of work.

“We have remained inherently conservative in our property development and have been able to ride our occasional losses through and we have not borrowed heavily although we have had to gear up from time to time.

“Above all, we’ve been flexible. We have been happy to develop and build for owner-occupiers or to put up buildings for ourselves to let to tenants, and we now have quite a substantial portfolio of properties - Bedfordview Office Park, Thornhill Office Park in Midrand and the Chiselhurst Office Park, for example. Clearly, the office park concept has worked well for us. The Riviera Office Park in Killarney with three blocks of offices and two blocks of apartments took some time to be let but has now been turned into a successful development.

Property development

Having tested the waters at Amalgam, Barrow Construction continued its development initiatives with two office blocks in Wierda Valley in 1988, whither it returned with a further five office blocks in 1992. Also in 1988, the company began the celebrated three year Woodmead Office Park development comprising a total of 24 buildings. The success of this development led to the completion of office blocks in Rudd Road, Illovo, (1990), Bompas Road, Dunkeld, (1990), Oxford Road (1990) and the Rosebank Office Park in Jan Smuts Avenue (1993). The Bedfordview Office Park was started in 1993, as were the office buildings in Empire Road, Parktown. The Riviera Office Park was started in 1994 and work on Thornhill Office Park, Midrand, began in 1996.

Woodmead Office Park, near the Woodmead base of the Johannesburg Country Club, was the first project of the new company Barrow Dewar Associates, The

R44m project, funded by the Allied Bank and Building Society, was built on the 8,4 hectare site of the Blue Hills Riding School close to the busy Buccleuch interchange on the main Johannesburg-Pretoria freeway. It has been described as the epitome of all that is best in the drive for a unique business environment - "testimony to what can be achieved by builders who care more about pleasing office folk and less about the assembly of high property bulk for the profit motive." Conceived in response to a growing market demand for owner-occupied developments in a prestigious environment, it consisted of 34 landscaped freehold stands of 1 300 - 2 300 square metres providing a total of 16 000 square metres of office accommodation. This represented 25 percent coverage and consisted of single storey face-brick buildings for about 800 people. The low bulk factor allowed some 5,84 hectares to be landscaped.

A stated objective of Barrow Dewar was to prove that it was possible to incorporate conservation and ecological principles into a commercial development, and the landscape framework - designed by Gina Perkins of EDP and laid out by Landscape Enterprises (Pty) Limited - was completed before marketing the stands. The wisdom of this approach was shown when the sites overlooking the streams and lakes were snapped up first although they commanded a premium of 20 percent above the price of stands on the periphery.

Woodmead Park was said to be "a true example of a multi-tenanted office park where the landscape elements, rather than the buildings have been the primary determinant of its character and have been used to structure the development of the site. The public park within the centre is a major feature of this concept.

"This does not mean that to say that the buildings are not significant, as each building and site has been developed to create an individual identity and landscape within the overall framework. Architectural unity has been achieved by a consistent building vocabulary using a common palette of building materials."

The benefits of each site were maximised by saving trees and reducing the impact of car parking with all road surfaces bricked and edged with mountable kerbs. More than 1 550 trees and 61 800 shrubs (90 percent of them indigenous species)

were planted. Two major water areas were designed with a series of smaller pools and rapids, which meandered through the site to create a constantly changing water scene. Altogether there was 1 100 square metres of water surface, with the water flowing a distance of some 170 metres and falling 15 metres over the length.

The development was awarded the Gold Award of Excellence and the floating trophy for the best landscaping project by the South African Landscaper's Institute in 1991.

Woodmead Office Park was based on the premise that many small businessmen wanted to be owner-occupiers of their premises and that most office buildings were either owned by institutions or were too large and expensive to buy. The development filled this gap and the original selling price of R1 500 a square metre of bulk area was soon increased to R1 800 in a reasonably strong market which saw some 40 percent of the development sold in little over a year.

One of the first companies to move in was Gypsum Industries, which took a 1 500 square metre building on three stands totalling 4 7545 square metres. The Cape Dutch style building under slate, designed by Moross and Partners, was built by Barrow Construction using internal walling and finishes made of gypsum products, including Rhino Drywall, Rhino ceilings, fibrous mouldings and Rhinolite plaster and joining compounds.

Barrow Dewar Associates' other project, backed by Standard Merchant Bank, was at Wierda Valley off Katherine Avenue, Sandton, where two office blocks with a total of 2 500 square metres were developed at a cost of R5 million.

Another office park, in Rudd Road, Illovo, overlooking the Wanderers golf course was completed in June 1991. The R11,3 million project consisted of 3 000 square metres of office space over three storeys with 103 basement parking bays.

Office blocks have been built for other investors or developers in Rivonia, Woodmead, Wierda Valley and Randburg, while a R45 million office park was

erected in Riley Road, Bedfordview, in 1993. Again, water features and extensive gardens were laid out and the offices were double storey, facebrick buildings under tile.

Barrow Construction's move into property development substantially changed the balance sheet of the Company. Where it formerly had no borrowings and no investments in property, today it has large property investments.

Institutional contracts

In the institutional category, numerous large contracts for the University of the Witwatersrand were completed in the 1980s: College House, Sunnyside and Dalrymple House residences (1982), the squash court complex (1984), the du Plessis Multi-Purpose Building (1985), the Sports Centre (1988), and new Hillbrow Residence (1989). For St Andrews School, Bedfordview, classrooms and laboratories (1984), staff quarters and squash courts at St John's College (1985) and a science block at Kingsmead College (1986). Churches were built for the Anglican Church in Hillbrow (1984), Weslea (1985), Edenglen (the Church on the Rock, 1990), and a chapel at Randjeslaagte.

Major head office buildings were erected for Deloitte, Haskins and Sells (now Deloitte & Touche) in Fredman Drive, Sandton (1983), Pearse & Anneck-Hahn, Parktown (1984), Kenyon House, Sandton (1986) and Standard Bank in Randburg. Large commercial contracts included buildings for the NBS in Roodepoort (1983), and the UBS in Blackheath, (1988).

Factory and office buildings were erected for Wyeth Laboratories (1981), Keens Electrical, Springfield (1981), Safcor, Isando (1982), Cummins Diesel, Kelvin (1982), Kimcon, Strijdom Park (1984), Federated Park in Midrand (1986, 1990), General Electric, Kramerville (1989), and QD Properties, Kramerville (1990).

Barrow Construction won a R1,9m tender for the Natal Building Society building on Church Square, Roodepoort, designed by Stucke Harrison FH Moerdyk &

Partners in October 1981, a mere month after starting the R160 000 contract for additions to Fleming House at Randjeslaagte and less than a month after the final account of the R2,5m contract for the new women's hostel block for the Witwatersrand Technikon at Doornfontein was settled. A building for Squibb laboratories was completed and handed over in 1982 and in July 1984, the firm won the R356 800 contract for National Cancer Association House, Bedfordview.



WITWATERSRAND TECHNIKON RESIDENCE IN DOORNFONTEIN

Another technical contract was for R545 600 extensions to the mineral dressing laboratory of the De Beers Industrial Diamond Division (1986), while the company won the R741 000 tender for the Forest Town School for cerebral palsied children in September, 1986. At the same time, the company was engaged on the R2m contract for extensions to Woodside Sanctuary for mentally handicapped children at Cottesloe, near Auckland Park, which was described in a press report as “one of Johannesburg’s most ambitious social projects”. The complex was designed by Stucke Harrison & Partners.

Two years later, in March 1988, Barrow Construction started work on the contract for general upgrading of the Alexandra Health Centre and University Clinic and a

new maternity wing. An article in *Building* wrote that the “centre, highly respected for the primary health care it makes available to hundreds of people each day, is well known in the Transvaal. It has limited financial resources and built space is at a premium, yet a dedicated staff responds to a wide range of community health needs. One would not expect it to be a well-planned and physically attractive environment as well and for many years it did not qualify for these descriptions.

“By the end of 1990 this had changed. It is uplifting to see a transformation achieved by careful attention to client emphasis, focus on functionality and a joyous use of colour. The well-worn building fabric has been given new life and the new image ‘infects’ those who use the spaces.”

The clinic had been established in 1929 when the American Board Mission sent a qualified sister to start a mother and child clinic at Alexandra which had been proclaimed a “native township” in 1912. During the 1940s private benefactors funded the purchase of land for some of the existing buildings which were constructed and occupied by 1943.

During the years before the upgrading the buildings deteriorated and posed managerial and organisational difficulties because they did not relate to each other well. The outpatient department had to be upgraded and a new 24 hour casualty unit linked to it. The board of management sought a people-focused, low technology and inexpensive response from the architect and contractor. The successful result is encapsulated in the remarks published in *Building*.

History came full circle when the company won the contract for turning the old Medical School at Hospital Hill - originally built by John and Bert Barrow in 1920. This non-racial residence had room for 355 men and women students with several common recreation areas and self-catering facilities.

Standard Bank’s R12 million building at the south-west of Randburg’s CBD erected from 1988 to 1990, was said by architect Graham Leigh of the firm Taljaard Carter to combine ultra-modern banking facilities and office space in a rustic environment with an almost residential feel. The building contained 6 024

square metres of lettable space and “combined a friendly, warm atmosphere with a functional and efficient image.” Designed on a “Z” shaped plan, which enclosed the casual parking in a motor court for security and visual appeal, it was finished in rough, light-coloured facebrick offset by smooth bands of dark pink brick and deeply recessed windows with dark grey, partially reflective glass. Window frames and vertical air conditioning louvres were in the Standard Bank corporate blue, with certain facade elements coloured white for further contrast to the brickwork. Landscaping and planting played an important role in screening the motor court to the north and providing a foreground to the bank.

Colin Barrow, John’s middle son born in 1966, has some wry recollections about this contract, which illustrate the hazards that contractors are sometimes prey to. He remembers being taken by his father to the site one Sunday to see a bulldozer which had fallen into the basement excavation. When they went to the site the following Sunday it was to see that the bulldozer had been successfully removed: but that a crane was now at the bottom of the pit.

Barrow Construction undertook another institutional contract when it built 43 dwelling units, garages and carports in Witkoppen for St Christopher’s Association for R5,2 million in 1992 and in 1995 completed the construction of Museum Africa in the old market complex, Newtown.

CHAPTER 14

PASSING THE BATON: THE FIFTH GENERATION OF THE BARROW FAMILY AND THE FUTURE

In the ninetieth decade of its life, Barrow Construction has been enlivened and rejuvenated by the arrival of a fifth generation of the Barrow family, the three sons of John (Junior). All qualified in disciplines connected with the construction industry, they are all deeply loyal to the values of the family company, committed to maintaining its prosperity and growth, yet willing to embark on new ventures which seem promising.

John Robert, Colin and Donald Barrow emphasise that they were never pressured by their parents to go into the business, although it was always clear to them that there would be an opening if they wished to. Yet the business and its operations were part of their upbringing. Like their father and his brothers before them, they recount how Sunday visits to building sites were an accepted and perhaps much enjoyed feature of family routine from an early age.

Saturday mornings were usually spent at the Doornfontein yard, clambering around the plant, playing on the trucks or earthmoving machinery and so forth. In this way, the building industry and its tools were so woven into the fabric of their lives, that they became part of their imaginative and leisure activities. The boys often spent their school holidays working in the business, not only because that was a useful source of additional pocket money but also because they enjoyed the physical and mental challenges.

These early experiences gave them all a feeling for the industry and its realities, a sympathy for the workmen in their tough and demanding calling. They helped shape the attitudes of these scions of the family, just as they had their father and

grandfather before them, placing them in a first-rate position to take a lead in industry labour relations.

John Albert (Junior) says that his father always emphasised the importance of site experience, of knowing exactly what occurred on site. In his view, the better the contractor, the more he would know about site work and the more he could identify with his labourers.

John (Junior) found his own youthful site experience invaluable and even when he was at university would be listened to with respect by the lecturers when he spoke about his own first hand observations.

Colin Barrow recalls working during the holidays on a project at St Stithians, where he was at school, and his chief amusement was to count the number of bricks he could load into the wheelbarrow before trundling it across the site. He subsequently worked as a labourer at Fedlife Park, worked part-time as the quantity surveyor on a contract in Auckland Park while at university and, later acted as foreman in the QD Fire contract.

“I enjoyed the feel of the building trade”

The first school working holiday of Donald Barrow, the youngest of John Junior's sons, was spent as a bricklayer on the Alexandra Hostel's contract. He worked at least once a year throughout his school career, he says, and increased the range of his experience by working in the various trades. “I got to like the feel of the building trade,” he says. “I enjoyed it.”

It is clear that these three younger scions of the Barrow family have each found their particular niche in the family company and that they all find their work satisfying, if demanding, in what they all say is a tough industry.

They are all conscious of the Barrow heritage and core value of unrelenting focus on quality. Donald Barrow recalls with wry amusement a recent telephone call

from the architect Dan Robinson who was supervising some minor maintenance and repair work at the University of the Witwatersrand. Would the Barrows be prepared to make good some earlier poor workmanship on the building, he asked, and repair damage caused by water seeping through one or two joints in walls built 76 years ago?

Donald also recalls with evident pleasure, the insight he gained into the demands of earlier building techniques such as leadworking and stone dressing when he was assistant foreman in the firm's contract for the restoration of Northwards on the Parktown Ridge. The experience was all the more piquant for him because he was well aware of his great, great, grandfather's illustrious collaboration with Herbert Baker on some of his greatest houses.

Perhaps it is precisely the consciousness of the exacting heritage of quality workmanship which makes these young men aware of the difficulties of maintaining standards in an environment where the skills of the workforce have deteriorated at the same time as clients' and architects' demands for ever greater speed have intensified. "It is difficult to keep the tradition going and to do things as well as we have in the past," comments Colin, for example.

The fifth generation is comfortable with the severely practical, rather austere business style of their family company. They share the view that on-site training at an early age is invaluable preparation for a career in contracting ("You can't learn contracting in books," Donald emphasises, "and if I apply 10 % of what I learned in four years of studying building management at university, it would be a lot"); and that there is no need for lavish offices or a move to the lists of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. The corridors of power in Barrow Construction do not ring with the cries of ambitious youth jostling for position. All readily accept the ethic that in Barrow Construction the members of the family are equal and everyone trusts the readiness of the others to give of their best.

The strong practical bent is exemplified by Colin who runs the joinery shop in addition to performing the duties of company buyer, quantity surveyor and cost-controller in all tenders. Modest about his own skills, which he hones by

occasionally making furniture for his house, he is proud of the levels of workmanship of long-standing Barrow craftsmen. These include Donald Wiggill and Fred Rehbock who have been there for 10-15 years as well as Simon Tshabalala who is now making rapid progress on the machines after many years as a manual labourer.

New initiatives

All this is not to suggest that the younger generation is shackled to a noble though conservative past. Far from it. Although they have sometimes trodden in the footsteps of their forebears when their individual talents and interest dictated - as in John Robert's involvement with the Master Builders and Allied Trades Association - they have also shown a readiness to take risks and take new initiatives.

So, for example, Colin Barrow and his Swedish-born wife Gunilla were instrumental in setting up Barrow Flooring to market and install laminated flooring manufactured in Sweden. "It is low-maintenance, durable and easy to lay and I am confident that the company will be successful."

John Robert Barrow has been responsible for setting up two successful operations - Barrow Piling and Barrow Projects, both of which he considers offer exciting opportunities. The former grew out of Gauteng Piling, which is run by Nico Maas, a colleague and Vice-President on the MBA. John (Senior), Douglas Barrow, John Robert and Nico Maas are on the board of the company which operates independently with the support and backing of Barrow Construction. The latter was established with friend and colleague Tony Bowen.

The future

Nobody who has worked in the industry has any illusions about its difficulties. "It's a hard industry where you're always battling with people, often incompetent

people,” says David. Yet, as Douglas points out, it’s been a prosperous industry for the Barrow organisation because everyone has given his best shot. It also continues to give satisfaction to participants: John Robert Barrow comments that contracting is a hard but satisfying life in which you help and employ people and in which you have a visible and substantial end product.

Especially evident in the youngest generation is a strong sense of firm yet cautious optimism grounded in determination and courage, qualities which have ensured the quiet expansion and growing prosperity of the company through the peaks and valleys of the building industry in the past.

“The company has grown by our involvement in the past,” says David Barrow, “and the future will depend on the individual contributions of our capable young people. If you do things properly you will prosper.”

“We must have been doing something right for 100 years,” comments Colin. “We should continue to do what we do best and avoid the temptation of diversifying or growing too quickly.”

It is fitting that Donald Barrow, the youngest in Barrow Construction, should summarise what may be taken as the collective vision for the future. “We will probably keep on doing what we have been doing and certainly try to keep the same quality standards in the face of all the trends in the building industry. It’s an uphill battle to produce anything near what we produced 100 years ago. But we will keep on trying.”

Paul Barrow, born in 1970 and Douglas Barrow’s eldest son joined the Company in its Centenary Year. He had been to school at St John’s College, graduated from Rhodes University with a B Comm degree, and Oxford University.

He gained valuable experience while working for Standard Bank Properties before joining the Company. He works closely with John Dewar and Olaf Holtung on the property letting and selling side of the Company.

CHAPTER 15

CENTENARY YEAR

To celebrate its Centenary, Barrow Construction held several functions during the year involving staff, professionals, sub contractors, clients, family and friends.

The main function was a glittering cocktail party held in October 1997 at the Sandton Sun, to which approximately 400 guests were invited. A video presentation had been put together by Clive Parnell showing both old and contemporary buildings constructed by Barrow Construction, as well as interviews with different people who had been involved with the family and the Company over the years. Local entertainers Hal Orlandi and Gordon Mulholland also entertained the guests with a short act on the building industry.

John A Barrow ably welcomed the guests and spoke about past highlights and future hopes of the Company.

David Mitchell, of DF Corlett, praised the Company's part in the growth of Johannesburg whilst proposing the toast to the Company.

A photographic historical record of 16 pages was produced by Graphicor showing "One Hundred Years of Building Excellence". This was intended to be used as a handout for prospective clients, including developers, architects or quantity surveyors who had previously not come into contact with Barrow Construction.

At a final luncheon party held at the Johannesburg Country Club, a number of people who had been closely connected to the growth of Barrow Construction at different stages of its history were presented with mantelpiece clocks. These included Muriel Eagar, Bill Steveman, Ginger Sim (Barrow Construction), Norman de Wet, Norman Levey (Federated Insurance), Charles Irvine-Smith, Paul

Anneck-Hahn, Bill Carter, Hymi Moross and Ivan Schlapobersky (Architects), Simon Malone (Squash Promotions), Steve Jaspar, John Dewar, Ian Douglas and Richard Codron (Property Development).

Fedsure honoured the Directors of Barrow Construction by hosting a luncheon at Fedsure house for the Directors of both companies. David Mitchell, on behalf of Fedsure, presented the Company with an inscribed seascape painting, and the Barrow Directors with mantelpiece clocks, whilst recording the very close association that had always existed between the companies.



THE FAMILY GROUP AT THE CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

STANDING: CHARLES, SANDRA, MARGARET, JANET, BRUCE, JENNY, HEATHER, GUNILLA, JOHN, TANJA, MARY, JOHN ALBERT JNR, WENDY, DOUGLAS, JENNIFER, ANNE, DAVID
FRONT: JOHN ROBERT, DONALD, COLIN, ELSIE BARROW, JEAN, RODGER, NEIL, PAUL

During the year T-shirts with the inscription "Barrow Construction 1897-1997" were presented to all staff members. A share participation scheme initiated by the Johnic Company for non-white persons only was taken up by the Company and given as a centenary present to senior non-white workers.

Several articles recording the Company's milestones were printed in various newspapers and publications highlighting the fact that the Barrow fifth generation were now actively involved and, that the Company had survived and prospered for 100 years through all the good and bad times and contributed greatly to the Construction Industry in Johannesburg.