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‘Township Topiary’: The history of the English-style gardens of Batho, Mangaung (1846–1948)

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ABSTRACT

Du Bruyn, D. 2011. ‘Township Topiary’: The history of the English-style gardens of Batho, Mangaung (1846–1948). Navors. nas. Mus., Bloemfontein 27(3): 37-82. Batho, established in 1918, is Bloemfontein’s oldest existing township. One of Batho’s characteristics is its unusual English-style topiary gardens. Batho came into being when the Union of South Africa was part of the British Empire and anything English was often admired and copied, even by Bloemfontein’s black residents. Topiary involves the clipping and trimming of plants into all kinds of fanciful shapes, and its history dates back to Roman times. This classical garden style made its way to Bloemfontein during the 19th century and then to Batho during the early 20th century. Amongst the key role players in the history of Batho’s topiary gardens are the black labourers who worked in white residents’ gardens and took the topiary fashion to Batho. This happened during the 1920s and 1930s when Batho was being laid out as a ‘model location’. Bloemfontein’s municipality also played an important role in the development of a gardening culture in Batho by encouraging its residents to lay out gardens. During the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s Batho became known for its topiary gardens, many of which have survived to this day. Batho’s topiary, also known as 'township topiary', is varied and may be classified according to different styles. These topiary gardens deserve to be preserved as an important aspect of the cultural heritage of Batho. (English-style garden, topiary, gardening culture, Bloemfontein, Batho, black gardener, township topiary)
INTRODUCTION

Batho,\(^1\) also known as Batho Location,\(^2\) is Mangaung’s\(^3\) oldest existing historically black township.\(^4\) It was founded in 1918 after a decision taken by the municipality of Bloemfontein to demolish the old Waaihoek location. Batho’s residents could build their own houses, provided they were built according to standardised building plans drawn up by the municipality. Built mostly of red clay bricks, these houses displayed a characteristically English cottage style. The fact that these English-style houses were built in a predominantly black area is unusual, but even more unusual is the style of the gardens laid out by the residents. While the architecture was mostly enforced on the residents, they were allowed to lay out gardens according to their own tastes. Completely unexpected are the mostly formal

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\(^1\) Batho is a Sesotho word meaning ‘people’.

\(^2\) In this article the word ‘location’ is used to refer to Batho and other historically black residential areas. During the colonial and apartheid eras the word ‘location’ was commonly used to describe the segregated residential areas allocated to blacks. Some of the elderly Batho residents still refer to Batho as ‘Batho Location’.

\(^3\) The greater-Bloemfontein area (Bloemfontein, Botshabelo and Thaba Nchu) is officially known as Mangaung, which is a Sesotho word meaning ‘place of the cheetah’. Batho forms part of the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality.

\(^4\) In the South African context, the word ‘township’ means a designated living area or suburb for people of African origin. Today Batho is considered a township.
front gardens consisting of trimmed hedges, edges and individual plants clipped according to all kinds of shapes. These so-called topiary gardens, which have become synonymous with Batho’s old-world character, are remnants of Bloemfontein’s early years when anything English was admired and copied, even by Bloemfontein’s black residents.5

The purpose of this article is to investigate the origin, history and significance of Batho’s topiary gardens6 – which may be called ‘township topiary’ – from a cultural-historical perspective. In this article gardens and gardening are considered as expressions of culture. The article focuses on the period 1846-1948, starting with the year Bloemfontein was founded and ending with the year the National Party came to power. The year 1948 is considered a watershed not only in political terms, but also in social and cultural terms, because of apartheid legislation’s far-reaching consequences for blacks.

The following issues are addressed: Why is gardening an expression of culture? What is an English topiary garden and why did this style become popular among Bloemfontein’s gardeners? What role did the black labourer7 play in popularising topiary in Batho? Why and how did a gardening culture develop in Batho? How can a typical topiary garden in Batho be described? And finally, why did Batho’s residents create the topiary gardens? These and other questions will be addressed in order to explain the origin and history of Batho’s topiary gardens.

Today the history of gardening among Mangaung’s black people is mostly an unknown aspect of local black cultural history, but it explains much of Bloemfontein’s and Batho’s socio-cultural milieu between the early 1920s and the late 1940s. Is it mere coincidence that Batho’s gardeners also fancied topiary, or is there more to this phenomenon? To trace the origin of Batho’s unique gardens, they should be placed within the context of not only Batho’s history, but also Bloemfontein’s history. It is necessary to explore not only the history of gardening, and specifically topiary gardening in Bloemfontein, but also to trace the origin of topiary – a key element of English-style gardens for centuries – and how it became popular among Bloemfontein’s, and eventually Batho’s, gardeners.

GARDENING AS AN EXPRESSION OF CULTURE

The practice of planting and maintaining gardens is one of the oldest expressions of culture. Western gardening dates back to Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations (ca. 3000-4000 BC) and represents one of the earliest forms of interaction between humans and plants. Since then, man’s relationship with nature has developed into a system of expression called gardening. Like houses and yards, gardens are essentially material culture, and a study of gardens and garden history falls within the realm of cultural history. The well-known garden archaeologist Kathryn Gleason describes gardens as “the most complex type of ‘artefact’”, because “they are both ‘things’ and environments”.8 In terms of this argument,

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5 Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand (hereafter HP): AD 1765, Yearly report on locations, 1925-1926, p. 2; D. du Bruyn, A green and growing art – the topiary gardens of Batho, Culna, 64, November 2009, p. 5.
6 In this article the focus is on front gardens only.
7 In this article the term ‘black labourer’ also means ‘black gardener’ and vice versa.
gardens may be described as three-dimensional ‘objects’ or ‘artefacts’ which, like houses and yards, also constitute living environments or spaces. Therefore, gardens may be described as outdoor ‘rooms’ that form an extension of the house and yard. Gleason rightfully describes gardens as ‘complex’, because the idea of a garden and how it is perceived and used differs from culture to culture. Some gardens may be purely aesthetic while others, like allotment and workingman’s gardens, are created to serve a specific function. Most gardens are a combination of both aesthetics and functionality.

Gardens are also complex because of what they represent in different societies. Referring to England’s gardens and gardeners, garden historian Nan Fairbrother describes gardens as “expressions of something in ourselves and the society we live in.” Gardens represent not only the owner or creator’s personality, but also his culture and socio-political status. If gardening is essentially about man’s relationship with nature, then this relationship is to a greater or lesser degree influenced by culture and socio-political structures. An upper-class garden may be a symbol of distinction while a working-class garden may be a source of nutrition. The influence of culture and socio-political orders may also be visible in the form of one cultural group taking over garden practices and design elements from another. Such cross-cultural influencing is common in most societies, and the borrowed practices and designs are usually re-interpreted and adapted to suit the needs of the receiving group. From a cultural history perspective gardens are therefore more than just the mere end products of man’s desire to create an attractive environment.

The idea of a garden as a complex environment also relates to the fact that gardens are in most cases environments created during interaction with others. The ‘others’ may be members of either a dominant or a dominated culture. This argument is particularly relevant to the South African context, considering that historically, most South African gardens were created through a process of collaboration between mostly white garden owners and mostly black labourers. As a result, a very unique and dynamic relationship developed between white garden owners as members of a dominant culture and their black labourers as members of a dominated or subjected culture. This argument is also applicable to Batho’s topiary gardens, and therefore Batho’s gardens may be described as expressions of a dominated culture. These gardens were created and maintained by a group of people who were subjected to a socio-political system characterised by racial segregation. Because of the social dynamics involved, Batho’s topiary gardens should be seen as the products of a

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9 The so-called New Cultural History (NCH) movement emphasises the importance of indoor and outdoor spaces and the use thereof in the study of material culture. For more information, see Peter Burke, *What is cultural history?*, pp. 67-70.


12 In this article the terms ‘he/his’ also indicate ‘she/her’. No sexism is implicated by the use of the male forms.

process that was creative and individualistic on the one hand, but on the other hand constrained by socio-political restrictions.\textsuperscript{14}

In order to fully understand Batho’s topiary gardens as an expression of culture, they should be seen not only against a socio-political history background, but also against a garden history background. The art and practice of topiary is an important characteristic of European and specifically English garden history. Due to South Africa’s long colonial history, topiary found its place in South Africa’s and inevitably also Bloemfontein’s garden histories. For the purposes of this article it is necessary to consider the origin and development of this garden practice, and therefore the focus will now shift to a common trend found in all the above-mentioned garden histories, namely a taste for topiary.

**A TASTE FOR TOPIARY**

A very typical and also significant element of the traditional European, and specifically English, garden is the use of clipped hedges, fence-hedges (also known as ‘fedges’), edges (also known as edgings or borders) and shrubs. This practice of pruning and training shrubs and trees into geometric and other forms – commonly known as topiary – dates back to ancient times. According to Pliny the Elder this green art form originated in Roman times (ca. 27 BC-AD 14) when Gaius Matius invented the art of topiary during the reign of Augustus. The craft was named after the *topiarius* (Roman landscape gardener). During the time of the Roman Empire, cypress trees were cut and trained to represent all kinds of images, especially animals. Some Roman texts also mention hedges formed by pruning or clipping. During medieval times the taste for topiary waned, although a practice called *estrade* became fashionable, involving the use of wooden shapes over which plants were trained. Although the forms resembled living topiary, little if any clipping was involved.\textsuperscript{15}

A strong revival of topiary came only one thousand years after the fall of the Roman Empire when Renaissance gardeners rediscovered the art of clipping trees and shrubs. The desire to recreate Roman gardens led to a renewed interest in topiary. While the topiary created by the Romans was of a modest scale, Renaissance gardens became known for their extensive and advanced topiary creations. Topiary was elevated to a more defining role in garden design. The Romans’ edges and hedges were upscaled to larger-than-life blocks, walls and pyramids. The use of topiary became almost architectural in the sense of creating outdoor ‘rooms’. Topiary’s popularity steadily increased and it became a key element of the so-called French grand style. From France the desire for topiary spread across Europe and greatly influenced garden design, most notably in countries such as England, Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium. Although topiary became the hallmark of the grand gardens of continental Europe, ordinary folk created their own versions. It was particularly the English

\textsuperscript{14} Conan, p. 182; Grobbelaar, Dit is..., p. 63.

gardeners who fell under its spell and for many centuries they have kept the practice of topiary alive.16

By the 18th century the appearance of European gardens started to change due to the introduction of trees and shrubs from the New World, especially the north-east of America. The 1700s also saw the advent of the English Landscape Movement, which advocated a more naturalistic or so-called ‘picturesque’ approach to garden design. The traditional forms of hedging and topiary became less fashionable, leading to the destruction of many fine topiary gardens in England. Architectural geometry and particularly topiary were considered excesses of artificiality. Despite this trend, which dominated English garden design for most of the 18th century, topiary never went out of fashion completely. It lived on in the grand gardens of continental Europe and, above all, the cottage gardens of ordinary English folk. The 19th century saw a return to the formality and geometry of the Renaissance and with it a renewed interest in topiary. Garden design became more eclectic in the sense that formal elements, like clipped hedges and topiary, were combined with informal, natural landscaping. This so-called ‘gardenesque’ approach to gardening and garden design, which also became synonymous with the Victorian garden, characterised most of the 19th century.17

The typical 19th century Victorian garden was characterised by strong architectural elements providing the setting and low-clipped hedges providing the frames for seasonal planting. In short: Victorian gardening emphasised the triumph of art over nature. There was a deliberate move away from the naturalistic approach towards a more decorative approach which, according to garden historian Christopher Thacker, led to gardens being “prettified”.18 The aim was to display the individual beauty of trees, shrubs and plants, many of them newly-introduced exotics from the Americas. Increasing numbers of gardeners visited Italy where they were so inspired by the classic Renaissance gardens, and a gradual return to the formal and architectural garden was triggered. Typical elements of such gardens included not only decorative garden ornaments and so-called carpet-bedding, but also the clipping and shaping of trees and shrubs. Topiary was indeed considered an art form and it perfectly fitted the picture of the artistic Victorian garden. Some gardeners took ‘artistic’ to new heights, and topiary gardens described as “almost unbelievable, so varied is the manner of clipping”,19 were not uncommon. The availability of new tools for clipping, as well as a host of garden periodicals, also popularised topiary. Consequently, most Victorian gardens had some form of topiary, whether flowerbeds edged with privet or spruce hedges, or evergreen shrubs trimmed and clipped into some or other shape.20

Towards the 1880s and 1890s the winds of change were blowing in England’s garden design circles. A reaction against Victorian ostentation was expected, and the new Arts and Crafts Movement of William Morris took the lead with a new design aesthetic. The Arts

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18 Thacker, p. 227.
19 Jellicoe, p. 27.
and Crafts ideal propagated a compromise between the formal and the informal schools of thought: a mostly formal architectural framework combined with less formal, almost cottage-style planting. In actual fact, the Arts and Crafts garden represented a revival of the pre-18th century English garden with clipped hedges and traditional English flowers. There was a strong emphasis on simplicity, traditional plants and the idea of the garden as an outdoor ‘room’. An important aspect of the Arts and Crafts garden was the inclusion of clipped hedges, edges and topiary as key elements in the overall design. This new development proved to be the classical and enduring appeal of topiary, but also indicated man’s constant desire to create some or other form of individualistic art. It was also a counter-reaction to the soullessness of the mass production of industrial England and the urge to create something unique and man-made in the form of topiary. The Arts and Crafts Movement had a major influence on garden design in England, and it may even be argued that it influenced all garden design during the early 1900s. It is also widely agreed that the Arts and Crafts Movement laid the foundation for the Edwardian style that influenced garden design for almost half a century.21

The Edwardian style, which is of particular importance for the purposes of this article, came into fashion after Edward VII acceded to the throne of England in 1902. The Edwardian style basically represented the same design principles and aesthetic as those advocated by the Arts and Crafts Movement, but further developed and enhanced them. The Edwardian style is closely associated with the work of garden designer Gertrude Jekyll and her architect partner Sir Edwin Lutyens. Together they perfected the idea of an integrated design for house and garden and created some of England’s most influential gardens of the time. A typical Edwardian garden a la Jekyll/Lutyens consisted of a formal, architectural framework filled with bold but informal plantings of shrubs and perennials. As was the case with the Arts and Crafts gardens, the introduction of clipped hedges, edges and topiary is noteworthy. The difference, however, between the topiary used in the Edwardian garden and the topiary of the Victorian garden is that the former was fashioned after simple shapes like spheres, triangles, squares and rectangles. This new style of topiary was not meant to dominate the garden, but rather to provide definition and structure. The Edwardian-style garden became popular not only in England, but also in England’s colonies. As a colony of the British Empire, South Africa was not spared and, as will be seen in the following section, Bloemfontein’s gardeners were also beguiled by its charm.22

TOPIARY IN BLOEMFONTEIN’S GARDENS

Topiary in Bloemfontein’s 19th century gardens (1846–1899)
Gardening in Bloemfontein dates back to 1846, the year in which the city was founded. In 1846 Charles Frederick Warden, son of the British Resident, Major Henry Douglas Warden, wrote in a letter to his aunt in England: “Bloom Fontein [sic] was rather a pretty place when papa came but now it is becoming quite a village. We have a very fine Garden

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well stocked with fruit trees”. The garden in question was the Residency’s garden and although it must have been Bloemfontein’s largest garden at that time, it was not the only one. In 1851 The Friend of the Sovereignty and Bloem Fontein Gazette published a fairly detailed description of the houses and gardens in George Street. “Next garden Mr. Bain’s property;…Mr. Colley’s garden, plenty of vegetables; next Mr. Crause’s cottage, weeping willows, peach trees &c. &c. Mr. Monach’s good house and store, small neat garden. Glubb’s residence (now Miss Cumming’s school), peach trees and good garden; Mr. Green’s (Assistant Commissary General) neat Bungalow, best vegetable garden in town; Mr. Henry Southey’s house and garden”. Although no sketches of any of those gardens could be located, the descriptions create the impression that Bloemfontein’s early residents created gardens attractive enough to make a good impression. Almost everything needed for gardening was available: ample water provided by the fountain and Bloem Spruit and, according to a visiting Scotsman, “the climate is perfection…the soil is porous and fertile, though light”.

Bloemfontein’s earliest gardeners were mostly English and Scottish immigrants who brought with them a tradition of gardening and horticulture. In those days the gardens consisted mostly of fruit trees, especially peach trees, but roses, dahlias, mignonette and amaranth, to name a few, were also planted. As can be expected, the local garden style was not unlike the reigning garden fashions in England and Scotland. Bloemfontein’s early gardens displayed mostly a formal but simple layout with basic circular, square and rectangular flowerbeds. Some records do mention clipped hedges, which for the purposes of this article are considered a form of topiary. The word ‘topiary’, however, is seldom used to describe clipped plants. The terms ‘ornamental’ and ‘ornamental shrub’ are mostly used and it is not always clear whether topiary is meant. The harsh climate of the region, including droughts, floods, dust and hailstorms, and the fairly primitive living conditions in Bloemfontein at the time, restricted gardening efforts. Therefore topiary, which required sophistication and effort, was not the norm in Bloemfontein’s early gardens. After all, Bloemfontein was still very much a frontier town. To keep out wild animals, residents enclosed their gardens with stone walls of up to eight feet tall. Mostly dependent on the fountain for water for their gardens, most of Bloemfontein’s gardeners lived on erven close to the fountain and Bloem Spruit. These so-called watererwe (water erven), especially those in St George and Douglas Streets, had the most beautiful gardens due to the availability of ample water.

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23 Free State Provincial Archives (hereafter FSPA): A 424, Letter from Charles Frederick Warden to aunt, 25.11.1846, p. 2. See also C. Warden, Reminiscences of the early days of the Orange Free State, p. 4.
24 Currently the site of the Old Presidency in President Brand Street, Bloemfontein. For more information on the garden see S.M. Botes, Die Residensie: Woning van die Britse Resident in Bloemfontein, 1846-1854, Navorsinge van die Nasionale Museum, Bloemfontein, 9(14), November 1993, pp. 461-464.
25 Later to become St George or St George’s Street, as it is still known today.
27 In Afrikaans known as Bloemspruit, Bloemfontein’s English residents also referred to it as Bloem Spruit or Sluit, meaning ‘small stream’.
28 D.S. Salmond, Diary of a trip to South Africa on R.M.S. Tantallon Castle, p. 89.
29 J. Murray (ed.), Young Mrs. Murray goes to Bloemfontein, 1856–1860, pp. 118, 139.
During the second half of the 19th century Bloemfontein not only grew in size, but also became more civilised and sophisticated. This was also reflected in the appearance of the residents’ houses and gardens. Apart from the already mentioned English and Scots, increasing numbers of Dutch immigrants also settled in Bloemfontein. Not only did the Dutch bring with them a range of skills that greatly benefited Bloemfontein, they also became known as keen and expert gardeners. They were particularly fond of planting fruit trees and grapes, which is the main reason why Bloemfontein became widely known for its huge orchards consisting of peach, apricot and plum trees, to name a few. Other trees like bluegum, pepper, willow, syringa and acacia were also planted, and travellers and visitors to Bloemfontein were impressed by the town’s almost forest-like appearance. In addition to their fondness for trees the Dutch also brought with them a formal approach to garden design that was characteristic of the gardens laid out by Jan van Riebeeck and the Dutch who settled in the Cape of Good Hope during the 17th century. Like the gardens of the English, those of Bloemfontein’s Dutch-speaking residents were also characterised by regimented flowerbeds bordered with clipped edges or overlapping bricks.

During the time of President J.H. Brand’s rule, especially after the early 1880s, the Orange Free State Republic became known as a relatively well-governed and prosperous Boer republic. The improved circumstances and living conditions created a feeling of well-being among Bloemfontein’s residents and, as a result, they became increasingly house-proud. Most visitors to Bloemfontein were generally surprised at “the amount of comfort and civilisation” they found in the capital. Larger and more impressive houses were built, and during this time some of Bloemfontein’s most beautiful and well-known gardens were created. One of these gardens was Rose Lodge, the property of Carl Borckenhagen, who was editor of the local newspaper *De Express*. Borckenhagen’s garden in St George Street was a good example of the gardens of upper-middle class Bloemfontein. Of particular interest is the garden’s typical English layout with its round beds edged with red-brick borders, garden paths and metal arches. This garden was particularly lush and it was also known for its roses (Fig. 1). The existence of gardens such as Rose Lodge is an indication that a gardening culture was slowly developing among Bloemfontein’s affluent residents.

31 For more information on the Dutch style of gardening in the Cape of Good Hope during the time of Jan van Riebeeck and the Van der Stels, see D. Fairbridge, *Gardens of South Africa*, pp. 1-10, 40 and H.B. Rycroft (ed.), *Reader’s Digest complete guide to gardening in South Africa*, vol. 1, pp. 10-12.

32 The edges were probably clipped small leaf-privet.


During the late 1880s and early 1890s, Bloemfontein’s gardening culture became increasingly influenced and even dominated by its English residents. Not only was an unmistakably English garden style taking shape, but Bloemfontein’s gardens also became more refined and more detailed and lush. For obvious reasons, the local English gardeners were strongly influenced by the garden styles that were fashionable in England at the time. As was the case with the homes and interior decoration, the Victorian style was still strongly visible in local garden design during the 1890s. Such was the English influence that an overseas visitor to Bloemfontein exclaimed that “this town may be called a South African Oxford”.\(^{36}\) A typical Victorian garden in Bloemfontein was characterised by square, rectangular, circular and other geometrically shaped flowerbeds, patches of lawn, gravel paths, terraces, trellises and a variety of garden ornaments. There are also references to clipped hedges, specifically quince and pomegranate hedges, but privet was also commonly used. Described by early South African gardening manuals as “evergreen beautiful flowering bushes and trees”\(^ {37}\) that are not only “used for hedges”\(^ {38}\) but also make

\(^{36}\) Laird, p. 86.


“lovely shrub[s] for a border”, privet was particularly suitable for all kinds of topiary. Although less detailed and manicured than England’s Victorian gardens, Bloemfontein’s Victorian gardens, specifically the clipped privets, were nonetheless typical of that period. Photographs of Bloemfontein’s gardens dating back to the late 1890s clearly show the influence of the Victorian style, but surprisingly also elements of the simpler Arts and Crafts style that was becoming the new fashion in England. The typical elements of a Victorian garden were still present, but in many cases they were scaled down and adapted to suit local conditions.

The huge difference between the climates of England and Bloemfontein was the main reason for the evolving of what may be called a ‘hybrid’ English garden, i.e. a garden that appeared to be English, but at the same time was adapted to the local climate and lifestyle. Ironically, local conditions forced Bloemfontein’s gardeners to adopt a style of gardening that was more in tune with the simpler Arts and Crafts and Edwardian styles that historically only came later, than the true Victorian style that was in vogue for most of the 19th century. Although many plants and flowers typical of gardens in England at the time were imported and could be obtained from “seedsman”, catalogues and botanic gardens, other plants more suited to the drier and harsher climate of South Africa’s interior were also used. These included pelargoniums, geraniums and also cannas, native to India but well adapted to South Africa’s drier climate. Due to the need for shade during the hot summer months, large trees became a standard feature of local gardens. Photographs of Bloemfontein’s gardens from this period clearly show an abundance of pepper, bluegum, willow, acacia and lilac trees (Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Judge Melius de Villiers’ hybrid garden with clipped hedge, probably cypress, and big trees, corner of President Brand and Charles Streets, Bloemfontein, ca. 1900. (Photograph: National Museum, Bloemfontein)

39 Ibid.
40 FSPA: A 507.9, Memories of K.N. Ramsbottom, part III, p. 5; Schoeman, p. 143; Botes, Die geur..., pp. 15-16; Laird, pp. 85-87.
41 The Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette, 5.6.1894, p. 4.
42 Ibid., 20.7.1894, p. 1.
43 Ibid.
44 Schoeman, pp. 143-144.
Some of the most remarkable Bloemfontein gardens of the late 1800s, also known as the late Republican period, include the huge and by this time well-established garden of Bloemfontein’s “principal gardener”, Gustav Fichardt. The garden of the Fichardt estate, also known as Kaya Lami, is especially noteworthy not only for its size, but also its design. It was a huge park-like garden with large trees, sprawling lawns and flowerbeds. It was also a good example of the hybrid English garden that developed in Bloemfontein at that time. There were the typical Victorian elements like garden paths, arches and rose beds, but the numerous pepper trees and other native plants firmly rooted the garden in its local context (Fig. 3). Kaya Lami, as well as other memorable Bloemfontein gardens of the same period, including Beaufort Lodge, Green Lodge, Fern Lodge, and also the manicured gardens of the Anglican Church’s complex of buildings in St George Street and St Michael’s Home in Markgraaff Street, were an indication that Bloemfontein had become “as civilized as either Cape Town or Port Elizabeth”. Gardening in Bloemfontein increasingly became an expression of the residents’ social status, leading to a desire for the fashionable. ‘Fashionable’ in Bloemfontein meant what was fashionable in England at the time, and this included not only a desire for new and exotic plants, but also a growing taste for the art of topiary.

45 Murray (ed.), p. 75.
46 See FSPA: A 75.2 (Judge Melius de Villiers Collection) for a hand-drawn map of Bloemfontein, dated 1876, that indicates the size of Kaya Lami’s garden.
47 These included the gardens of Bishop’s Lodge, the Cathedral of St Michael and St Andrew, and St Cyprian’s Theological College. For more details on the gardens, see HP: S. Cyprian’s Theological College, Bloemfontein, Quarterly Paper, 40, April 1878, pp. 8-9.
48 For more details on the gardens, see HP: A sketch of life in Basuto Land and at S. Michael’s Home, Quarterly Paper, 43, January 1879, p. 25.
50 K. Schoeman (ed.), The Free State Mission: The work of the Anglican Church in the Orange Free State, 1863-1883, as described by contemporaries, pp. 32-33; Schoeman, Bloemfontein..., pp. 143-144; Anon., S.W. Silver & Co.’s Handbook to South Africa including the Cape Colony, Natal, the Diamond Fields, the Trans-Orange Republics, etc., p. 453.
Topiary in Bloemfontein’s 20th century gardens (1902–1948)

The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) had a profound effect not only on the Free State Republic, but also on Bloemfontein itself. On 13 March 1900, Lord Roberts and his army marched into Bloemfontein to take possession of it. When they entered Bloemfontein Roberts and his troops were surprised not only by the warm reception they got from Bloemfontein’s mostly pro-British residents, but also by the town’s appearance. “Bloemfontein is a pretty little place”\(^{51}\) wrote Captain L. March Phillipps, with “pretty gardens of quiet ease”\(^{52}\). Bloemfontein’s “very picturesque”\(^{53}\) and “nice well-kept”\(^{54}\) gardens made an impression on the invaders, and Filson Young remembers how, when marching into Bloemfontein, the dust rose in clouds and “spread a grey garment over the flowers in the street gardens”.\(^{55}\) The British troops found a town in which they could feel at home and, because of its “many-coloured gardens”,\(^{56}\) Bloemfontein reminded them of home. If Bloemfontein was predominantly English before the War, it became even more so after the War. Bloemfontein became an English capital with its administration and politics mostly dominated by English-speaking people. The town experienced a huge influx of English and Scots and this affected the social lives of Bloemfonteiners in many respects. These immigrants, with their preference for English institutions and culture, also had a major influence on Bloemfontein’s physical appearance.\(^{57}\)

Apart from a preference for English architecture, the English also expressed their preferred tastes in gardening. At the turn of the century the Victorian style was still in vogue in England, yet the simpler aesthetic of the Arts and Crafts movement – the precursor of the Edwardian style – also grew in popularity. England’s Victorian gardens continued to influence Bloemfontein’s gardens for some time after the War, but the overall aesthetic became more restrained compared to what it was before the War. Apart from their stylistic preferences the English also injected the city with a renewed interest in gardening and notably raised the standard of gardening in Bloemfontein. Members of Bloemfontein’s new ruling class took the lead in this, particularly Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams, the new governor of the Orange River Colony.\(^{58}\) Goold-Adams happened to be a “great gardener”\(^{59}\) and thanks to his efforts the garden of Government House\(^{60}\) became a showpiece. The example set by Goold-Adams and others, the availability of new horticultural knowledge and expertise, the introduction of new plants, and also a love for flowers, influenced Bloemfontein’s gardening scene like nothing before. Despite being challenged by “the most awful and frequent dust storms and plagues of flying locusts”,\(^{61}\) the newcomer gardeners embraced their new home and made full use of the huge erven and the opportunity to garden on a larger scale (Fig. 4). Gardeners became more ambitious and by 1906, barely

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\(^{51}\) L. M. Phillipps, With Rimington, p. 92.  
\(^{52}\) Ibid.  
\(^{53}\) Anon., Campaigning in South Africa, 1900-1901, p. 91.  
\(^{54}\) Ibid.  
\(^{55}\) F. Young, Memory harbour: Essays chiefly in description, p. 124.  
\(^{56}\) Ibid., p. 123.  
\(^{58}\) The Orange Free State Republic was renamed the Orange River Colony.  
\(^{59}\) R. Ehrlich, Early days in Bloemfontein, Jewish Affairs, 18(6), June 1963, p. 23.  
\(^{60}\) The Presidency was renamed Government House. For more information on the garden, see E.L. Calverley, A guide to Bloemfontein with a short history and description of the Orange River Colony, p. 54 and BPL: Afric. 920LEVF (Africana Collection), Sophie…, pp. 28, 55.
four years after the end of the War, a visitor to Bloemfontein noted that “one feature of the place is the large gardens”.\textsuperscript{62}

![Part of Dr B.O. Kellner's huge post-Anglo-Boer War garden in Aliwal Street, Bloemfontein, ca. 1904. This garden contains elements of a classic English-style rose garden: a formal layout, garden paths, terracotta edgings around the flowerbeds, and arches. (Photograph: National Museum, Bloemfontein)](image)

Regarding Bloemfontein gardeners’ taste for topiary, it seems that the Anglo-Boer War was a watershed, since it was only after the War that topiary became truly established. There are three main reasons for this: firstly, Bloemfontein’s colonial period (1902-1910) coincided with the Edwardian period which, as already mentioned, commenced in 1902. Subsequently, there was a gradual moving away from the over-detailed and cluttered Victorian style towards the simpler Edwardian style. One characteristic of the Edwardian style was the return of topiary, and this also occurred in Bloemfontein’s gardens. Another reason for the growing popularity of topiary was the increasing availability of garden labour. After the War, jobs were scarce and unemployed black males made themselves available as garden labourers for Bloemfontein’s white gardeners. At the same time the labour-intensive topiary fashion created an increasing demand for black labourers. The constant clipping and trimming of the topiary, especially during the growing season, necessitated full-time garden labour. A third reason for topiary’s popularity was the growing interest in gardening among Bloemfontein’s white residents. The colonial period was characterised by stability, economic progress and, as a result, a growing white middle-class. The new Western Extension (later Westdene) was a middle-class suburb and most of the houses had gardens laid out according to the latest garden styles. Although more modest in size when compared to the huge gardens of the Northern Extension (later Waverley), Westdene’s gardens clearly showed the influence of English tastes: a formal but simple layout with clipped hedges and edges of mostly privet varieties, but also cypress, honeysuckle, plumbago, quince and pomegranate. The garden shown in Fig. 5 is a typical

\textsuperscript{62} R.H. Fuller, \textit{South Africa at home}, p. 190.
Westdene topiary garden with a formal layout, multiple flowerbeds bordered with clipped edges, and mixed planting.63

Apart from the growing number of home gardens, Bloemfontein’s new public parks also displayed examples of topiary in the form of clipped hedges and ‘fedges’. Shortly after the end of the Anglo-Boer War, the City Council established two new public parks and also upgraded the existing one, namely Victoria Park, which was established in 1892. This park became too small and the English residents’ preference for picnics and open-air social gatherings necessitated new public spaces. In 1902 King Edward’s Park, later just King’s Park, was opened in commemoration of the coronation of King Edward VII. In 1907 the Old Veterinary Park on the slopes of Naval Hill was upgraded and renamed Hamilton Park in honour of Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams. This park was known not only for its formal sunken terrace gardens, but also for the many trees planted by Bloemfontein’s citizens. From a design perspective both King’s Park and Hamilton Park are noteworthy because both displayed the influence of the simpler Edwardian style. The basic layout was classic with formal flowerbeds, terraces, steps, ponds, fountains and, most importantly, hedges (Figs 6 & 7). By this time the use of geometrically-clipped hedges, which have become an established practice in private gardens, also made its way to Bloemfontein’s public gardens. In both parks, hedges were effectively used not only to define the outdoor spaces, but also to provide structure. Hamilton Park’s bowling alley, which was developed in 1910, was also graced with hedges.64

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Figure 6: King's Park, Bloemfontein, during the 1930s. Note the formal layout, clipped cypress hedges, and the black gardener in front of the pergola.

(Photograph: National Museum, Bloemfontein)

Figure 7: Hamilton Park, Bloemfontein, with clipped hedge, probably cypress, on the left. The photograph is undated.

(Photograph: Free State Provincial Archives, Bloemfontein)
Although the fantastical shapes typical of European-style topiary were seldom recreated in Bloemfontein, the city’s gardeners used topiary to great effect in their gardens. During the colonial period local topiary evolved into very simple and basic but attractive versions of its European counterparts. Bloemfontein topiary was mostly characterised by low edges around flowerbeds, taller hedges, ‘green walls’ and occasional loose-standing shrubs shaped like spheres and squares or a combination thereof. Fantasy topiary was not the norm in Bloemfontein’s gardens. The taste for topiary prevailed through the 1920s and 1930s and well into the 1940s. During the 1920s and 1930s the fashion for topiary was re-inforced by a number of developments on the South-African gardening scene. New, mostly English gardening and women’s interest magazines – like South African Gardening and Country Life and The South African Lady’s Pictorial and Home Journal – were launched, and gardening articles provided much-needed information on new garden trends and techniques. Numerous articles on topiary were published and gardeners were informed of its aesthetical value for the local garden. The functional use of topiary to divide and define space was also highlighted.65

During the 1920s and 1930s, experienced South African and British gardeners started writing gardening books specifically aimed at the local gardener. These include Dorothea Fairbridge’s Gardens of South Africa (1924), Marion Cran’s The gardens of Good Hope (1926), and R.E. Boddam-Whetham’s A garden in the veld (1933). Ms Boddam-Whetham’s book is particularly noteworthy because her garden, near Westminster in the eastern Free State, was one of few Free State gardens locally and nationally admired. In her ground-breaking book she shared valuable information on gardening in the Free State climate based on her own gardening experience.66 Although all of the above-mentioned authors emphasised the importance of using plants that were appropriate for South Africa’s climate, and advocated the use of indigenous plants and flowers,67 the English influence was still strong. Typical English flowers like violets, delphiniums and hollyhocks, as well as English design elements like topiary, were still in vogue. It must be added, though, that the use of topiary was toned down and more in tune with the new garden style that was slowly evolving: more naturalistic, climate-appropriate, and focused on locally available plants. The enthusiasm for clipped hedges and edges did not wane, however, and most garden writers of that time encouraged the use of “gorgeous hedges”,68 “artistic hedges”69 and “ornamental”70 trees and shrubs. In 1924 garden historian Dorothea Fairbridge described a typical South African garden as “a multitude of little beds, divided from the intermediate gravel paths by Juniper edgings”.71 A combination of both local and English design

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66 R.E. Boddam-Whetham, A garden in the veld, passim.
68 M. Cran, The gardens of Good Hope, p. 245.
71 Fairbridge, p. 43.
elements and plants indicates the evolution of a hybrid English garden in South Africa. Leslie Cox, garden writer for the influential *The South African Lady’s Pictorial and Home Journal*, aptly described this garden style as “a bit of Old England; it is a fragment of Italy, and withal it is Pagan Africa, the Africa of boundless horizons and flaming colours. What a combination!”.

Bloemfontein gardeners’ taste for topiary seems to have reached its apogee in the years between the two world wars. This was in line with garden trends in the rest of South Africa, and the influence of well-known garden estates in setting this trend should not be underestimated. Apart from a number of prized local gardens, like the above-mentioned Kaya Lami, there were also influential gardens elsewhere that served as inspiration for local gardeners. The Union Buildings’ gardens in Pretoria deserve mention, but a particularly noteworthy garden is the Oppenheimer family’s Brenthurst estate in Johannesburg. During the 1920s and 1930s topiary reigned supreme. The garden below Brenthurst’s famous terraces sported an assortment of topiary, mostly cypresses (Fig. 8). Brenthurst’s topiary may well be compared to the topiary found in England’s parks and estates at the time, and many Bloemfontein gardeners must have found inspiration from this rather well publicised garden. Ideas and inspiration from elsewhere therefore found their way into Bloemfontein’s gardens, both private and public. By the late 1920s, Bloemfontein’s public parks had not only become well established, but had also become associated with Bloemfontein as a “garden city” in the making. Apart from the already mentioned King’s Park and Hamilton Park, Bloemfontein’s market square was renamed Hoffman Square and turned into a public garden in 1925. The design and layout of the new garden or “garden square” is particularly noteworthy, because it not only displayed a strictly formal layout with garden paths and regimented flowerbeds, but also sported symmetrical clipped hedges (Fig. 9). The Hoffman Square garden may be described as the epitome of classic garden design in Bloemfontein, and the use of topiary as a feature adds to the importance of this fine example of period landscaping. The use of topiary continued its popularity in Bloemfontein’s gardens into the late 1940s, and remnants of the original hedgework have survived to this day.

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76 O’Connor, p. 12.
Figure 8: Brenthurst’s topiary garden in Federation Road, Johannesburg, ca. 1928. (Photograph: The Brenthurst Library, Johannesburg)

Figure 9: Hoffman Square garden, Bloemfontein, ca. late 1920s. Note the formal layout and clipped cypress hedges. (Photograph: National Museum, Bloemfontein)
Almost simultaneously with topiary’s rising popularity in Bloemfontein, the residents of Batho created their own topiary gardens. These gardens were mostly laid out by the black labourers who worked as gardeners in Bloemfontein’s public and private gardens and who were also responsible for maintaining most of the topiary. For most whites the black gardeners were merely distant figures in the background pushing wheelbarrows and mowing lawns, but they maintained what Angela Read Lloyd describes as a “benign presence” in most South African gardens (Figs 4, 6 & 10). These gardeners were the ones who trimmed the edges and clipped the hedges. Therefore, before Batho’s topiary gardens are discussed, it is necessary to look at the role played by Bloemfontein’s black gardeners.

The role of the black gardener

A key role player in the story of Batho’s topiary gardens is the black male gardener, because the existence of most of Bloemfontein’s topiary gardens depended on his labour. Despite the black gardeners’ importance in Bloemfontein’s garden culture, few sources mention them directly, and if they are mentioned they feature as anonymous figures who formed part of Bloemfontein’s mass black servant force. Like the other black labourers and servants, Bloemfontein’s black gardeners were not considered true citizens of the town, but merely tolerated insofar as they were serving the white population. The general opinion was that Bloemfontein, like the rest of the territory, was the white man’s property. For most of the 19th century and even the early 20th century, white domestic servants were preferred above black servants, because blacks were “not yet trained to European service”. Blacks were mostly used for the hard and dirty labour, including gardening, and for most of Bloemfontein’s history the black gardener was a permanent feature of the labour landscape.

In her memoirs of her childhood years in Bloemfontein, Sophie Leviseur (née Baumann) not only describes her parents’ lush garden, but also mentions that in those days “gardening was easy, [because] every evening after the business was closed Oupa got all the kafir boys who worked in the store to water the garden with buckets”. Photographs of Bloemfontein’s private gardens seldom feature black gardeners, but pictures of public gardens dating from the 1930s and 1940s do show them, mostly as anonymous figures in the background and rarely posing for the camera (Fig. 10).

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79 In this discussion the term ‘black’ also includes other people of colour, e.g. the Griqua, Korana and so-called Bastards who also formed part of Bloemfontein’s labour force.
80 Fuller, p. 191.
82 The terms ‘kafir’ and ‘kaffer’ were used by some whites to describe people of African origin. Today these terms are considered derogatory.
83 BPL: Afric. 920LEV (Africana Collection), Sophie..., p. 62.
Some of Bloemfontein’s well-known early residents, including Sophie Leviseur, Emma Murray – wife of Rev. Andrew Murray – and Mother Emma of St Michael’s Home, did not always refer to these workers only as “black gardeners”, but allowed some to emerge as individuals, mentioning them by name, for example Cupid, Appelkoos, Josiah and Blesbok. Although mostly superficial and distant, there is evidence that a personal relationship existed between some white garden owners and their black gardeners. According to Ms Leviseur, an indication of such a relationship was the use of the word ‘boy’ as an affectionate term for referring to black servants and gardeners. The word ‘boy’ came into use in Bloemfontein during the days of the Orange River Sovereignty (1846-1854), and since then the term was commonly used by whites. Bloemfontein’s black gardeners became known as ‘garden boys’ or simply ‘boys’,84 with Afrikaans-speaking individuals using the derived terms ‘tuinbooi’ or ‘booi’. After the Anglo-Boer War the demand for ‘garden boys’ grew substantially as gardens grew larger and more labour-intensive, partly due to the growing taste for topiary. The need for constant clipping and trimming demanded full-time labourers. During the 1920s and 1930s a significant percentage of the black men living in Bloemfontein’s locations, specifically Waaihoek and Batho, worked as ‘garden boys’ in the white suburbs.85

84 HP: Extracts from later letters (Sister Emma), Quarterly Paper, 28, April 1875, pp. 17-19; Schoeman (ed.), The Free State Mission..., p. 46; The Friend, 29.5.1924, p. 8.
85 BPL: Afric. 968.51LEV (Africana Collection), Talk by..., part II, p. 4 & part IV, p. 12; Afric. 920LEV (Africana Collection), Sophie..., pp. 16-20; Murray (ed.), pp. 21, 75; HP: Extracts from later letters (Sister Emma), Quarterly Paper, 28, April 1875, pp. 17-19; K. Schoeman (ed.), Maude Bidwell: Pen pictures of the past, pp. 21-22.
Since Bloemfontein’s early years, employment opportunities for blacks in general, and black males in particular, were limited to mostly manual labour. Black men depended on the white demand for labour – mostly to perform work that whites were not prepared to do. Referring to this phenomenon, a British visitor remarked that, despite discrimination, blacks “have found useful and respectable niches in the European scheme of things as chefs, waiters, porters, coachmen, gardeners”. Contrary to the case in other British colonies in Africa, South Africa seems to have seen a natural separation between outside labour as work done mostly by black males, and inside labour done mostly by black females. As a result, gardening as an outside activity became almost the sole terrain of black males. Most black males became gardeners since in most cases this was the only job available. At the same time, however, there also seems to have been what Dorothea Fairbridge called an “inherited instinct for gardening” among black males, and she observed that “their hands are far more deft than the fingers of the average white man.”

There also seems to have been a natural interest in gardening among black people, even at a young age. Gardening was one of the subjects taught by the Anglican Church’s St Patrick’s mission school for black children in Waaihoek. In her report of 1923 on the state of education among black pupils at the aforementioned school, one of the teachers, Miss Macy, noted that “their favourite lessons are sewing and gardening.” It may therefore be argued that the combination of a natural feel for gardening and an interest in this activity contributed to the black gardeners’ inherent talent for the art of topiary.

To paint a clearer picture of the black gardeners’ lives, oral interviews were conducted with some of Batho’s residents, mostly the elderly and specifically those living in houses with topiary gardens. During Batho’s early years (1920s) most of Bloemfontein’s whites lived in the suburbs of Waverley, Westdene and Willows, and the gardeners – like other black workers – travelled between the locations and these suburbs on foot. Interviewees remembered the surnames of their parents’ employers who were not exclusively English, but also Afrikaner and Jewish. The interviewees also recalled frequent visits to their parents’ workplaces, vividly describing the houses and gardens in the white suburbs. According to their testimonies, many of the white peoples’ traditions and customs, including the “clipping of a hedge” and the “cutting of evergreen trees”, were copied and adapted by their parents and grandparents. Referring to her white employers, Rachel Thoka, the domestic servant of Bloemfontein’s well-known Krause family, mentions in her life history that “I not only had acquired their language, but had become skilled in all...
their arts of cookery, nursing, husbandry, planting, sowing of seed”. The same cross-cultural influence occurred in gardening. During a visit to a Free State farm garden in the 1920s, British garden writer Marion Cran observed that the black servants, including gardeners, “lead cinema lives among the whites, watching them act, and reading every gesture”. It appears that the black servant class not only maintained the white people’s homes and gardens, but also learned from their employers and were inspired to create, amongst other things, their own small (mostly topiary) gardens at home.

As a result of the unequal master-servant type of relationship that existed between Bloemfontein’s white employers and their black employees, and also due to the prevailing racial superiority on the part of whites, black gardeners had to function in a predominantly oppressive labour environment. According to one black worker, this environment was characterised by “the ill-treatment of native servants” and the “hard hand” of some white employers. Considering that the hard and dirty parts of garden labour were degradingly described by many whites as ‘kafferwerk’, it is difficult to accurately determine the type of relationship that existed between employer and employee in the gardening context. Given the mostly poor relations that existed in Bloemfontein between whites and blacks in general, one may argue that so-called ‘gardening relationships’ were not unaffected by such attitudes. Many interviewees found it challenging to describe their relationship with their former employees, especially in terms of the unequal race relations of the past. Surprisingly, however, many interviewees chose to fondly remember their white supervisors, many of whom happened to be female. The white ‘misses’ or ‘miesies’ was usually the one to whom they reported and also the one who taught them gardening skills. Despite being members of a dominated or subjected culture, black male gardeners managed to survive in that relationship, to the extent that some even ‘benefited’ from it. It may be argued that in some cases the type of relationship that existed between the white ‘misses’ and her black labourer encouraged the transfer of gardening skills, specifically skills related to the art of topiary.

During the period between the two world wars, gardening skills and know-how progressed substantially in South Africa and, inevitably, this knowledge reached Bloemfontein’s white gardeners. The general standard of gardening was raised, accompanied by improved access to running water and a more stable water supply for most of Bloemfontein’s gardens. Added to this was the availability of more sophisticated gardening equipment, most notably

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96 FSPA: A 45.2, Life history of old Rachel Thoka, p. 2.
97 Cran, p. 248.
98 Du Bruyn, p. 6.
99 The Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette, 7.8.1894, p. 2.
100 Ibid.
101 The term ‘kafferwerk’ was mostly used by Afrikaans-speaking whites, but English-speaking whites were not unfamiliar with it, given the fact that the words ‘kaffer’ or ‘kafir’ were commonly used by most whites to describe anything inferior.
102 The fact that the author, who conducted most of the interviews, is a white male should be considered as a variable that may have negatively influenced the objectivity of the interviewees in this regard.
103 The terms ‘misses’ or the Afrikaans version ‘miesies’ were commonly used by black workers to address a female white employer.
104 Van Aswegen, pp. 364, 369, 377; Le Roux, pp. 149, 157-158; The Friend, 4.10.1904, p. 4; Schoeman, Bloemfontein..., pp. 82-83; A.G. Barlow, Almost in confidence, p. 13; Interviews: Mr I. Mphantsonyane, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 12.4.2010; Ms M. Turner, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 17.1.2011.
more efficient clippers or secateurs for the cutting and trimming of trees and shrubs into
topiary, instead of the traditional sheep-shearers commonly used until then. The result of all
of this was not only more knowledgeable white garden owners, but also more skilled black
gardeners. The fact that Ms Boddam-Whetham not only credited the efforts of “Blesbok,
the garden boy”105 in her gardening book, but also included a photograph of him in a typical
gardener’s pose, is an indication that by the 1920s and 1930s a fairly skilled class of black
gardener must have existed not only in Bloemfontein, but also in the Free State at large.
Boddam-Whetham’s mentioning of her black gardener also indicates the type of
relationship that existed between them – something that is noteworthy and, although not
typical, may not have been that unusual for the time.106

Today many gardeners in Batho can trace their own as well as their ancestors’ gardening
skills back to Bloemfontein’s white gardeners. Assessing the type of skills that were
transferred, one needs to distinguish between two categories of interviewees. On the one
hand there are those who worked as gardeners themselves and who learnt gardening skills
directly from white garden owners and, on the other hand, there are those who credit their
fathers and grandfathers, who also worked as gardeners, for their own gardening
knowledge. Two categories of skills were identified, namely general gardening skills and
knowledge, and specific skills related to the art of topiary. As far as general gardening
knowledge is concerned, the knowledge of propagating plants deserves mention. While the
art of propagating plants by means of harvesting and sowing seeds was fairly common
knowledge for most black gardeners, propagating by means of cuttings was less well
known. During the 1920s and 1930s, various articles on plant propagation appeared in local
magazines107 and much of that knowledge was transferred from white gardeners to black
labourers. Consequently, most of Batho’s topiary plants, particularly privets, were
originally obtained from white gardeners as cuttings. Plant species that do not easily grow
from cuttings were obtained from local markets and nurseries. Most interviewees
mentioned Eric Lamb Nursery,108 Bloemfontein’s municipal and railway nurseries, as well
as the fruit-and-vegetable market in Fort Hare Street, Batho, as their plant sources.109

The other category of skills, namely that related to creating topiary, was new to most black
gardeners. As the taste for topiary developed, so did the skills required by this art form.
While the basic techniques were taught by white gardeners, they were further refined and
adapted by the black garden labourers themselves. Gradually Batho’s gardeners became
more creative and recreated not only the basic rectangles, squares and spheres seen in white

105 Boddam-Whetham, p. 15.
106 FSPA: A 507.9 (Part III), Memories…, p. 1; Schoeman, Bloemfontein…, p. 186; Boddam-
Whetham, pp. 15, 199; Anon., Farming for women, The South African Lady’s Pictorial and Home
107 See e.g. Anon., Propagation by cuttings, South African Gardening and Country Life, XV, May
Life, XXV, January 1935, p. 10; Anon., Farming for women, The South African Lady’s Pictorial and
Home Journal, 141(XII), May 1922, pp. 37-38.
108 Eric Lamb Nursery was originally established in 1898 as W. & C. Gowie, also known as Gowie’s,
and in 1947 it became Eric Lamb Seedsmen and Nurserymen. Many Batho gardeners purchased
their plants, mostly privet seedlings sold in wooden trays, from the Eric Lamb Nursery that was
situated at numbers 66-68 Voortrekker Street, Bloemfontein.
109 Interviews: Ms J.M. Bokala, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 14.7.2009; Mr D. Lamb, Bainsvlei,
Bloemfontein, 31.1.2011; Ms E. Lamb, Bainsvlei, Bloemfontein, 31.1.2011; Ms M. Marumo, Batho
resident, Bloemfontein, 9.2.2010; Mr E.G. Madito, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 6.10.2010; Ms M.
Turner, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 17.1.2011.
residents’ gardens (Fig. 11), but also more complex shapes, including combinations of geometric shapes, multiple tiers, as well as other elements like animals and furniture (Figs 12 & 13). As a result Batho developed its own style of topiary and by the 1930s and 1940s, township topiary (Fig. 14) was born. Topiary had become Africanised. Township topiary involved more than just clipping and trimming plants into fanciful shapes – for some gardeners it was also an expression of their individuality, creativity, dreams and desires. For decades their own gardens were among the few areas over which Batho’s gardeners had control, and creating topiary may also be seen as an expression of their desire to control. Today, the end-product of years of clipping and trimming may be described as ‘township topiary’, but the gardeners who were interviewed described it differently. Using the terms of their forbears, interviewees referred to the practice of topiary as “kuta”\(^{110}\) or “lema”.\(^{111}\) The topiary itself was described as “ditlare”,\(^{112}\) “difate”\(^{113}\) or “evergreen trees”\(^{114}\) and the hedges were called “fencing trees”.\(^{115}\) Seldom was a single word used to describe topiary, but rather a combination of words that described the act of clipping. This could be related to the unique nature of Batho’s topiary, because creating it requires a certain level of skill – something that could only have developed over time and which would be impossible to describe aptly using a single word.\(^{116}\)

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\(^{110}\) ‘Kuta’ is a Sesotho word that means ‘to clip’. Interview: Mr A.P. Koitheng, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 12.4.2010.

\(^{111}\) ‘Lema’ is a Sesotho word that means ‘to cultivate’. Interview: Ms J. Modisapudi, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 17.1.2011.

\(^{112}\) ‘Ditlare’ is a Sesotho word that means ‘small trees’ or ‘bushes’. Interview: Ms E. Swanepoel, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 17.1.2011.

\(^{113}\) ‘Difate’ is a Sesotho word that means ‘trees’. Interview: Ms J. None, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 17.1.2011.

\(^{114}\) Interview: Mr H. Lebakeng, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 17.1.2011.

\(^{115}\) Interview: Mr A.P. Koitheng, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 12.4.2010.

\(^{116}\) Interviews: Ms J. Modisapudi, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 17.1.2011; Ms J. None, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 17.1.2011; Ms E. Swanepoel, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 17.1.2011; Ms M. Turner, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 17.1.2011. See also Read Lloyd, pp. 16-19.
Figure 12: Ms M. Marumo clips her two-tiered privet topiary in Mooki Street, Batho, ca. 2010. (Photograph: National Museum, Bloemfontein)

Figure 13: Child in a chair-shaped privet topiary in Phanyane Street, Batho, ca. 2009. (Photograph: National Museum, Bloemfontein)
TOPIARY IN BATHO’S GARDENS (1918–1948)

‘Garden facilities’ for a ‘model location’: Batho’s early topiary gardens

Batho’s topiary gardens should be seen against the backdrop of Batho’s early history – specifically how and why the location came into being – because its founding years were also the time when a gardening culture took root among its residents. It must also be understood that Batho’s history is connected to the history of another location that no longer exists, namely Waaihoek. Waaihoek, for many years Bloemfontein’s main location for blacks, was demolished and replaced by Batho. Today Batho is considered Bloemfontein’s oldest existing historically black township, but others came before it, including Waaihoek. The history of Batho and, in fact, all of Bloemfontein’s locations, should be explained in terms of the aforementioned argument of the white residents, namely that the blacks and other people of colour were not true citizens of the town, but merely servants of the whites. This argument not only determined whites’ attitudes towards blacks, but also underpinned the numerous municipal laws and regulations aimed at regulating blacks and their labour. Since Bloemfontein’s earliest days the black people living in small settlements in the town’s vicinity were kept at a distance. It was only in the early 1860s that their ‘permanence’ was accepted when the then local authority concentrated them in three ethnically-based locations: Kafferfontein for the Fingoes (descendants of Zulus and Xhosas) and Barolong (Tswanas), the so-called Schut Kraal.
Locatie for the Khoi and so-called Bastards, and finally Waaihoek or Waay Hoek, which was situated closest to the town, for the remaining black people.\textsuperscript{117}

During the 1870s Bloemfontein’s black population grew steadily as increasing numbers of blacks came to the town looking for work. In 1872 the Town Council decided to remove the Schut Kraal Locatie and resettled the residents in Waaihoek. The coming of the railway to Bloemfontein in 1890 brought more black job seekers, as did the Anglo-Boer War when thousands of black refugees streamed into the town after the War. Most of these newcomers settled in Waaihoek with the result that by the early 1900s, it had become Bloemfontein’s largest and fastest-growing location. It is this growth and also the side-effects thereof that eventually led to Waaihoek’s demise. By the late 1910s the Town Council had grown increasingly uneasy with Waaihoek and found various reasons to demolish it: overcrowded living conditions, dilapidated and unsafe dwellings, the potential health risk for the white residents (as was experienced during the influenza epidemic of 1918, which hit Waaihoek hardest), and also the Council’s intention to reclaim part of the area for the erection of a new power station. The main reason, however, was the fact that Waaihoek was situated too close to Bloemfontein’s white residential areas which, in those days, were situated fairly close to the centre of town. Waaihoek’s close proximity to the town, and the fact that the boundary between black Waaihoek and white Bloemfontein had become increasingly integrated, became “a constant source of anxiety”\textsuperscript{118} for Bloemfontein’s whites.\textsuperscript{119}

In terms of the segregationist urban planning principles\textsuperscript{120} prescribed by the then Union government it was decided that a new location for blacks and coloureds would be established in an open area east of the Johannesburg-Cape Town railway line. Starting in 1923, the Town Council “moved all the Africans across the railway”,\textsuperscript{121} making this railway line the physical barrier between ‘black’ and ‘white’ Bloemfontein.\textsuperscript{122} Although it was decided that the removal of Waaihoek’s residents would be gradual, the process may also be described as ‘forced’, because no newcomers were allowed to settle in Waaihoek and existing residents were prohibited from making improvements to their homes. The infrastructure was also no longer maintained, with the result that Waaihoek deteriorated. Despite all its shortcomings, however, the Council must be credited for its approach to establishing and developing Batho. Contrary to earlier times the local authority adopted a more sympathetic approach in its handling of the Batho re-settlement project. This is


\textsuperscript{118} HP: AD 1765, Yearly report... 1925-1926, p. 2.


\textsuperscript{121} Barlow, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{122} For Batho’s position in relation to Bloemfontein and the railway line, see FSPA map collection: 2/622; 2/1548; 2/1549; 2/1572. See also D.S. Krige, Afsonderlike ontwikkeling as ruimtelike beplanningstrategie: ’n Toepassing op die Bloemfontein-Botshabelo-Thaba Nchu-streek, D.Phil. thesis, University of the Orange Free State, pp. 154-155, 157, 161.
remarkable considering that Bloemfontein’s Town Council became notorious for its stringent enforcement of segregationist and social control laws. By the early 1920s the Council had softened its approach, due partly to the pragmatic role played by Messrs G.P. Cook and J.R. Cooper, the superintendents of locations. Both were held in high esteem by the Council. Mr Cook – superintendent from 1917 to 1923 – was described as a man who “was able to judge the native mind and their requirements with fidelity”. Mr Cooper, Cook’s successor, was locations superintendent from 1924 to 1945. Hailed as an “able and experienced officer”, Mr Cooper demonstrated his commitment to Batho by living there himself. Cooper deserves special mention because during his time in office he not only spearheaded the creation of a location that was widely admired, but also succeeded in creating a sound relationship between the municipality’s Native Affairs Department and the majority of Batho’s residents.

At the time of Batho’s establishment the idea of creating a so-called ‘model location’ on “the best town-planning lines” influenced the thinking of progressive location superintendents like Cook and Cooper. Since its establishment in 1918, Batho was considered an example of how a location should be laid out and managed, and the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 adopted the principles and practices of the Bloemfontein municipality. Far from being favourable towards urban blacks, this Act was nevertheless ‘positive’ in the sense that, amongst other things, it made provision for eradicating urban slums, created a sound financial administration system for locations, and also encouraged consultative governance in the form of advisory boards. By the time of its passing, some of the key provisions of the Act were already being implemented by the Council, including a Native Advisory Board and the creation of an orderly location based on a leasehold tenure system. These were considered essential requirements for creating a so-called ‘model location’. Batho was also ahead of other locations in the Union in terms of the housing scheme that was implemented. According to the Housing Act of 1920, which was also largely based on Bloemfontein’s practices, the Council implemented a system whereby either the Council built the houses, or residents were allowed to build their own houses with or without the Council’s assistance. Built mostly according to plans drawn up by the Council, small houses were erected in a style resembling the late Victorian architecture that was still fashionable in Bloemfontein during the 1920s. Considering that Bloemfontein was still very much an English city with English-speaking residents dominating the Council, it is not surprising that English tastes influenced the design of Batho’s houses. Most houses were merely smaller versions of the English-style cottages in Westdene: symmetrical or asymmetrical structures with gables, wood-framed windows and doors, bay windows, and boxed ceilings. Attention to such detail was certainly encouraged as part of the ‘model

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123 The Superintendent of Locations was the municipal officer responsible for managing the locations and also served as chairperson of the Native Advisory Board.
124 FSPA: MBL 3/1/19, Mayor’s minute, 1923-1924, p. 5.
125 Ibid., p. 6.
126 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/2, Minutes: Native Affairs Committee, 29.9.1916, p. 1; MBL 1/2/4/1/2, Minutes: Public meeting Waaihoek, 13.2.1918, p. 1; MBL 1/2/4/1/2, City Engineer – Chairman, Native Affairs Committee, 18.3.1918, p. 1; MBL 1/2/4/1/2, Minutes: Native Affairs Committee, 16.6.1919, p. 3; C. le Roux, J.R. Cooper as Township Manager of Mangaung at Bloemfontein 1923-1945, Navorsinge van die Nasionale Museum, Bloemfontein, 26(1), December 2010, pp. 41-42.
127 The Friend, 6.1.1919, p. 4.
128 For more details, see J. Haasbroek, The Native Advisory Board of Bloemfontein, 1913-1923, Navorsinge van die Nasionale Museum, Bloemfontein, 19(4), July 2003, pp. 66-90.
location’ philosophy, but it also indicates that “aesthetic values”\textsuperscript{129} were appreciated on a different level. This new level of appreciation was not restricted to houses, since it also encouraged gardening and specifically the more refined form of topiary gardening (Fig. 15).\textsuperscript{130}

Apart from creating a ‘model location’, the municipality of Bloemfontein also played a key role in beautifying it. Due to the variety of building plans used for Batho’s houses this new location was already displaying a unique character and charm that stood in stark contrast to the regimented appearance of other locations in the Union. Surprisingly, the Council went further than just building ‘model houses’; it also encouraged residents to start their own gardens and, in a limited way, assisted them to do so. First Cook and later Cooper played a crucial role in this new thinking and, as a result, they contributed greatly to the development of a gardening culture in Batho. The first reference in municipal records to ‘garden’ or ‘gardening’ in Batho dates back to the mayor’s annual report for 1919-1920, which mentioned the construction of houses in “garden areas of 50 ft. by 75 ft.”\textsuperscript{131} As a general rule each stand in Batho had to be no smaller than 50 x 75 feet (approximately 16.5 x 25 m) to allow for so-called “gardening facilities”.\textsuperscript{132} This meant that each stand had to be

\textsuperscript{129} FSPA: MBL 3/1/19, Mayor’s minute, 1929-1930, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{131} FSPA: MBL 3/1/19, Mayor’s minute, 1919-1920, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{132} HP: AD 1765, Yearly report on locations, 1925-1926, p. 2.
large enough for not only a decent house, but also for a front garden or so-called ‘gardening facility’. In accordance with the municipality’s long-standing contention that the blacks living in the location were merely tolerated because they were serving the whites with their labour, the Council justified the provision of ‘garden areas’ on those grounds. Therefore, the authorities’ ultimate reasoning behind the ‘garden areas’ concept was “to encourage the settlement here [Batho] of a large Native labour supply of the better-type natives”.

During the mid-1920s gardening became established in Batho, and the role of the newly-appointed superintendent, Cooper, in encouraging this trend is evident. He eloquently expressed his views on the value of gardens and gardening in his reports to the municipality’s Native Affairs Committee. While the municipality emphasised the importance of providing a location that could house a content and able black workforce for white Bloemfontein, Cooper also emphasised the importance of aesthetics. As chairperson of the Native Advisory Board he was in touch with Batho’s residents and their desire to live in an attractive environment. Although many of them were certainly not happy about having to move to Batho, they eventually accepted their new location and the benefits it held. In his report of 1922-1923 the mayor stated that “our natives have a keen civic pride in their location which makes for better, cleaner living”. One way of providing an environment that made for ‘better, cleaner living’ was to encourage residents to garden. In his annual report on the locations for 1925-1926, Cooper made the assurance that “every encouragement is given” and this included, amongst other things, the supply of trees and other plants free of charge. During the 1920s and 1930s thousands of trees, such as eucalyptus, cypress and pepper trees, as well as privets, were planted in Batho. During the 1923-1924 financial year no fewer than 10 000 trees were planted, and in 1937 another 6 000 were added. Many of them eventually perished, however, from lack of water caused by the “absence of facilities”. Woefully inadequate for both domestic and gardening needs, Batho’s water was supplied by communal taps in the streets. By 1948 fewer than 200 communal taps were serving 3 400 households. One of the interviewees, Ms M. Moshashe, remembered that “there was only one communal tap in the street and we had to fetch water with buckets to water the plants”. This lack of easy access to water discouraged some residents from laying out gardens. It was probably in response to this situation that a frustrated Cooper exclaimed: “I wish funds permitted the erection of windmills!”

In order to further stimulate an interest in gardening, and develop gardening skills, the Council started to allocate allotment gardens to residents during the early 1920s. Allotment gardening is another English tradition whereby small areas of public land are rented as vegetable gardens. In 1921 the first 50 allotment gardens were laid out on the fringes of

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134 FSPA: MBL 3/1/19, Mayor’s minute, 1919-1920, p. 8.
135 For more details on this argument, see FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/3, Rough draft of conditions of residence in the locations, s.a., pp. 1-2.
139 Interview: Ms M. Moshashe, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 9.2.2010.
140 FSPA: MBL 3/1/19, Mayor’s minute, 1923-1924, p. 5; MBL 3/1/28, Mayor’s minute, 1937, p. 17; MBL 3/1/40, Mayor’s minute, 1948, p. 19; MBL 1/2/4/1/3, Minutes: Native Affairs Committee, 22.7.1918, p. 2; Cooper, p. 123.
Batho. Not only did this provision contribute to strengthening the emerging gardening culture in Batho, but it also enabled residents to grow produce they could sell on the fresh-produce market that was set up in Batho in 1940. Regarding Batho’s developing gardening culture, mention should also be made of the role played by Batho’s Home Improvement Society. Founded in 1941, the Society was “a willing band of female native workers” who committed themselves to improving the standard of domestic life in Batho and teaching housewives how to achieve that. Domestic life included gardening, specifically vegetable gardening. No mention is made of flower gardening, but important is the fact that this group stimulated an interest in gardening among black women. Historically, almost all black labourers who worked in Bloemfontein’s gardens were men, while most women left gardening to their husbands or sons. This situation was addressed by the Society, and the fact that many of Batho’s topiary gardens are maintained by women may be seen as a legacy of the Society. Further encouragement by the Council came in the form of Batho’s new public parks that served as an example and inspiration for Batho’s gardeners. One such park was Sere Square in the Cape Stands section of Batho. In his annual report of 1927-1928 the mayor mentioned another “much-needed park” that was laid out near Batho’s community hall.

Hedges, edges and spheres: The making of Batho’s topiary gardens

In response to the municipal authorities’ encouragement and assistance, but also as an expression of the pride they took in their new surroundings, Batho’s residents personalised their properties by laying out their own gardens. The residents who erected their own homes were also the keenest to beautify their surroundings. These residents were also the ones who were employed and certain of a steady income, many being full-time gardeners. The Fingoes and Barolong should be mentioned in this regard, with many of Batho’s most avid gardeners belonging to these ethnic groups. As was the case among white residents, a visible class distinction became evident in Batho, with one of the divisive factors being gardening. In the Native Administration Department’s annual report for 1931-1932, Cooper mentioned that “…the laying out of flower and vegetable gardens is an indication of a class distinction as pronounced among the natives as among the Europeans”. Due to the existence of different socio-economic classes in Batho during the period under discussion, the term ‘garden’ should be defined in its broadest sense to also include the most basic notion of a garden. Most of Batho’s topiary gardens, even some of the most basic ones created by the less fortunate, consisted of a front garden and a backyard. The backyard consisted mostly of one or two square or rectangular vegetable patches, a couple of fruit trees, a grapevine, a pit latrine and sometimes a small outside room. The backyard seldom contained any topiary. In rare cases did a clipped fence that served as the boundary between two properties form part of the backyard as well.

142 FSPA: MBL 3/1/32, Mayor’s minute, 1941, p. 20.
143 FSPA: MBL 3/1/19, Mayor’s minute, 1927-1928, p. 9.
145 HP: AD 1765, Annual report: Native Administration Department, 1931-1932, p. 2. See also AD 1765, Report on locations, 1936, p. 3.
The front garden, which may also be described as the flower garden, included some or all of the following elements:

- A clipped fence-hedge (‘fedge’)
- A garden gate, usually metal
- A metal garden arch to support a rambling rose or creeper
- A stone or concrete path, sometimes edged with overlapping red bricks, leading to the veranda and front door
- Flower beds adjacent to the garden path
- Square, rectangular or round flowerbeds
- Fruit trees
- Roses
- Medicinal herbs
- Plants in tins and/or galvanised buckets
- Topiary, clipped in either similar or different shapes and sizes

The general appearance and style of these topiary gardens may be classified as either formal, informal or a combination of both. The formal gardens are usually symmetrical with the garden path in the centre and similar elements on both sides. The informal gardens give the impression of an unplanned garden with plants and garden elements placed randomly. Most of Batho’s topiary gardens represent a combination of both formal and informal styles. These gardens may be compared to a typical cottage garden: informal planting with some structure provided by a hedge and clipped shrubs. Although no photographs of the original gardens could be traced, descriptions of such gardens, and also the remnants of original gardens that may still be seen in Batho today, provide useful clues as to how these gardens must have looked in Batho’s early years.

Batho’s topiary gardens vary not only in terms of their general appearance and style, but also in terms of the style of the topiary. The following five main styles of topiary were identified:

- Hedges and ‘fedges’
- Edges
- Spheres (ball-shapes)
- Combination of hedges and spheres
- Other shapes
**Hedges and ‘fedges’**
This type of topiary garden consists mostly of a clipped hedge, which also serves as a fence-hedge (‘fedge’). It is the most basic type of topiary garden. In some cases the clipped hedge is supported by a metal fence, which usually serves as a framework for the hedge. Most hedges are clipped privet varieties and are approximately 1.5 m high (Fig. 16).

![Figure 16: Clipped privet hedge in Phanyane Street, Batho, ca. 2009. (Photograph: National Museum, Bloemfontein)](image)

**Edges**
Few topiary gardens contain edges. Edges, also known as borders, are usually used to edge or define flowerbeds. In some cases the edges are hedges in the making. Most edges are clipped privet varieties and are between 30 and 60 cm high (Fig. 17).

**Spheres**
Individual topiary plants in the form of spheres are fairly common in most of Batho’s topiary gardens. They are usually loose-standing ball-shaped plants, mostly privet and cypress, planted in rows. The size of the spheres varies from 30 cm up to 1 m in diameter (Fig. 18).
Figure 17: Clipped privet edges in Khumalo Street, Batho, ca. 2011. (Photograph: National Museum, Bloemfontein)

Figure 18: Ball-shaped privet topiary in Moiloa Street, Batho, ca. 2009. (Photograph: National Museum, Bloemfontein)
Combination of hedges and spheres
A combination of hedges and spheres is also found in some of Batho’s topiary gardens. The combination type, also mostly privet and cypress, consists of a square or rectangular bottom part or hedge and a ball-shaped top section. The spheres may be up to 1 m in diameter (Fig. 19).

Other shapes
Some of Batho’s topiary gardens defy classification according to the above-mentioned styles. These topiary gardens are unique in all respects and they vary from multiple tiers to plants clipped to resemble furniture. Over the years some of Batho’s gardeners have included an element of fantasy in their gardens, resulting in creations seldom or never seen in white residents’ gardens. To some extent these fantasy shapes resemble English-style topiary, but they have also become part of Batho’s gardening tradition and represent the uniqueness of township topiary (Fig. 20).

The combination of Batho’s unique topiary gardens, well-built houses and general orderliness not only impressed and inspired locals, but also drew the admiration of outsiders. Batho became the symbol of an ideal location and the proper management thereof. The residents’ own efforts to beautify their location certainly contributed to the positive impression it made on outsiders. Bishop W.J. Carey of the Bloemfontein Diocese of the Anglican Church called Batho “the best location in Africa” and during a visit to Bloemfontein in 1924 Dr C.T. Loram, a member of the Union government’s Native Affairs

Commission, expressed the opinion that “Bloemfontein is known throughout the Union – not because of its wonderful sanitary arrangements, its excellent water supply, or its Women’s Memorial – but it is known throughout the Union as the town that has the best Native location”.\footnote{The Friend, 15.4.1924, p. 5.} Praise for Batho was not limited to white leaders. During his visit to Batho in 1924, prominent black leader Sol Plaatje positively referred to Batho as a model location when compared to other locations in the Union.\footnote{Schoeman, Bloemfontein…, p. 286.}

During the 1930s Bloemfontein established itself as a destination for travellers, and various tourist brochures mentioned Bloemfontein’s new location. Batho must have been fairly attractive to justify mention in literature aimed at a white audience, with one such comment referring to Bloemfontein’s “Native quarter so excellent and exemplary”.\footnote{Dawson, pp. 250-251. For similar comments, see A.W. Wells, South Africa: A planned tour of the country to-day, p. 222; The City of Bloemfontein: Official guide, p. 217; Bloemfontein, Oranje-Vrystaat: Senterstad van Suid-Afrika, pp. 60-62.} Describing Batho as ‘excellent and exemplary’ may have been an overstatement, but much of the praise heaped on it was a direct result of the residents’ gardening efforts. Known for its topiary gardens for more than three decades since its founding, Batho was negatively affected by the socio-political changes brought about by the Second World War (1939-1945) and the apartheid government’s rise to power in 1948. During the War, life for most of Bloemfontein’s blacks became a struggle for survival and, as a result, gardens and gardening became a luxury for most. Economic decline, unemployment, crime and overcrowding took its toll on Batho, and the former ‘model location’ started to deteriorate. While a considerable number of Batho’s residents maintained their gardens and in the...
process kept the topiary tradition alive, the majority of topiary gardens fell victim to neglect. Today, only remnants of those gardens still survive as silent reminders of the once extensive and glorious topiary gardens of the area.\textsuperscript{151}

Finally, it is important to reflect on the possible reasons why Batho’s residents created topiary gardens. When asked about this, interviewees’ responses varied from “others in Batho do it”\textsuperscript{152} and “it looks beautiful and neat”\textsuperscript{153} to “I have a talent for it”.\textsuperscript{154} Other reasons, however, seem to lurk beneath these answers. Apart from the reasons already mentioned, namely the role played by black labourers and the location superintendents, other factors should also be considered. The key question is: What exactly motivated some of Batho’s residents, specifically the gardeners, to accept a purely European cultural practice and make it their own? The first possible reason is that Batho’s residents, as members of a subjected culture, viewed white peoples’ gardens as an example to follow. During a time when white culture, specifically English culture, was seen as a measure of success and achievement, these gardens were something to be imitated and aspired to. The same argument applies to housing and clothing. Another possible reason is that Batho’s residents saw topiary gardens as status symbols in their own community. For many Batho residents, especially those who were assured of a regular income and had managed to achieve a certain standard of living, a garden was indeed considered an indication of a person’s social standing in the community. It is also an accepted fact that where living standards rise above the subsistence level, certain rules – like waste disposal – naturally assert themselves within the community. This argument may, according to landscape designer Joane Pim, also be applied to gardening. As social conditions improved in Batho the “desire to achieve beauty”\textsuperscript{155} and “aesthetic pursuits”\textsuperscript{156} became evident among a certain class of residents and this found expression in gardening.\textsuperscript{157}

A third possible reason why Batho’s residents created the topiary gardens is the fact that topiary was an achievable and accessible way of creating an aesthetically pleasing environment. Topiary has more to do with skill than means, and for the gardeners – especially those working in white residents’ gardens – it was something they could practice with little expense. The plants were obtained mostly by means of cuttings and seeds, and the skills of trimming and clipping were acquired by imitating white gardeners. The final reason deals with the dominant/dominated culture dichotomy. Black gardeners, as members of a dominated culture but also as victims of severe social control mechanisms, including the hated passbook system, did not have much control over their own lives. Creating and maintaining their own gardens at home gave them some form of control. As already mentioned the garden became the only space over which they had personal control, and provided them with an opportunity for creative expression, albeit subjected to strict municipal regulations. This argument also deals with the Batho residents’ sense of cultural identity and it may be reasoned that they derived a sense of identity from developing and

\textsuperscript{152} Interview: Mr E.G. Madito, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 6.10.2010.
\textsuperscript{153} Interview: Ms J. Modisapudi, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 17.1.2011.
\textsuperscript{154} Interview: Mr A.P. Koitheng, Batho resident, Bloemfontein, 12.4.2010.
\textsuperscript{155} J. Pim, \textit{Beauty is necessary: Creation or preservation of the landscape}, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{156} Conan, p. 183.
\textsuperscript{157} S. Astyk, Cottage gardens and swept yards: Recreating a vernacular horticulture, http://scienceblogs.com/casaubonsbook/2010/02/cottage_gardens_and_swept_yard.php, 2.3.2011; Pim, p. 16.
tending their gardens. As Batho’s gardens developed and topiary became more established the practice became entrenched in their cultural identity as something to be considered traditional and not European per se. Another relevant argument is based on sociologist Michel Conan’s hypothesis that dominated groups “tend to stick to traditional gardens”. This is certainly the case in Batho where topiary, which is essentially a traditional style, is still maintained in the same way as Batho’s first gardeners did with their topiary more than 90 years ago.159

CONCLUSION

Batho’s topiary gardens are deeply rooted in gardening history and their origins may be traced through many centuries of European gardening culture. First the Dutch and later the English brought this classic gardening practice to South Africa and it took root in Bloemfontein during the second half of the 19th century. Since Bloemfontein was founded in 1846 it was an English town and the taste for topiary – a typical English gardening practice – was kept alive by its English residents. In Bloemfontein, topiary evolved gradually. During the first half of the 20th century the city’s black garden labourers, who became skilled in the art of topiary, took it to the new Batho location. After Batho’s establishment in 1918 it became known as a ‘model location’ that was widely admired throughout the Union as a prime example of an orderly, well laid-out location. This was partly due to the efforts of Messrs Cook and Cooper, the two location superintendents, who did much to encourage and establish a gardening culture among Batho’s residents. Ultimately, however, Batho’s topiary gardens came into being because of the efforts of the residents themselves, specifically black gardeners.

Inspired by what they saw in their white employers’ gardens, Batho’s gardeners took a European garden practice, adopted it, adapted it, and created a style of topiary that is unique in many ways. Due to this uniqueness, Batho’s topiary may be called ‘township topiary’ – a hybrid of the classic topiary style. Therefore, one may argue that in Batho the practice of topiary became Africanised – borrowed, but also traditional. Over many decades a taste for topiary has become firmly entrenched among Batho’s gardeners, and long after the topiary fashion waned in Bloemfontein’s white suburbs, it continued to be popular in Batho. While most of the topiary gardens in the white suburbs that originally served as the source of inspiration for Batho’s topiary gardens are long gone, many Batho gardens have survived over time. The practice of topiary is deeply rooted in Batho’s gardening culture and today this tradition is still being kept alive by the younger generations who have learnt the art of clipping from their parents and grandparents. Although topiary is not completely unique to Batho and may also be seen in some of South Africa’s older townships, it forms a recognisable aspect of Batho’s cultural landscape. Batho’s topiary gardens have become one of this township’s assets and they should therefore be preserved. These gardens may also become tourist attractions in their own right and may boost future heritage tourism to Bloemfontein’s oldest existing township.

158 Conan, p. 192.
OPSOMMING

Batho, gestig in 1918, is Bloemfontein se oudste bestaande township. Een van Batho se kenmerke is sy ongewone Engelse styl topiarie-tuine. Batho het sy beslag gekry toe die Unie van Suid-Afrika deel van die Britse Ryk was en enigiets wat Engels was dikwels bewonder en na-aap is, selfs deur Bloemfontein se zwarte inwoners. Topiarie (siersnoeikuns) behels die snoei en knip van plante volgens allerlei verbeeldingryke vorms. Die geskiedenis hiervan dateer terug na die Romeinse tyd. Hierdie klassieke tuinstyl het gedurende die 19de eeu in Bloemfontein posgevat en in die vroeë 20ste eeu skiet dit in Batho wortel. Een van die sleutelrolspelers in die geskiedenis van Batho se topiarie-tuine is die swart arbeiders wat in die blanke inwoners se tuine gewerk en die topiarie-mode na Batho geneem het. Dit het gebeur gedurende die 1920’s en 1930’s toe Batho as ’n model lokasie uitgelê is. Bloemfontein se munisipaliteit het ook ’n belangrike rol gespeel in die ontwikkeling van ’n tuinkultuur in Batho deur die inwoners aan te moedig om tuine uit te lé. Gedurende die 1920’s, 1930’s en 1940’s was Batho bekend vir sy topiarie-tuine en vele van hierdie tuine oorleef tot vandag toe. Batho se topiarie, ook genoem ‘township-topiarie’, is wyd geskakeer en kan volgens verskeie style geklassifiseer word. Batho se topiarie-tuine verdien om bewaar te word as ’n belangrike aspek van sy kulturele erfenis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the Director and Council of the National Museum, Bloemfontein, for the opportunity to conduct this study. The reviewers, Prof. Charl le Roux (formerly Department of History, Vista University, Bloemfontein) and Dr Marietjie Oelofse (Department of History, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein), are gratefully acknowledged for their comments and critical reading of the manuscript. I would also like to thank Ms Diana Madden and Mr Alan Garlick of the Brenthurst Library, Johannesburg; Ms Zofia Sulej of the William Cullen Library, Johannesburg; as well as staff of the Free State Provincial Archives, Bloemfontein and Bloemfontein Public Library, for their assistance.

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Koitheng, A.P., Bloemfontein, 12.4.2010.
Lesufi, M.M., Bloemfontein, 10.3.2008.
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VOLUME 25  2009

Part 1:  **Lotz, L.N.** Harvestmen (Arachnida: Opiliones) in southern Africa – an annotated catalogue with notes on distribution ..................................................................................................................... 1

Part 2:  **Kyriacou, K. & Sealy, J.** The archaeological assemblage from the 1958 excavation of Hoffman’s/Robbeberg cave and a comparison with Nelson Bay cave ................................................. 49

Part 3:  **Fitzpatrick, M.J.** A revision of the Afrotropical species of *Setaphis* and the description of a new genus (Arachnida: Araneae: Gnaphosidae) ................................................................. 73

Part 4:  **Haasbroek, H.** Rebelle-ambulanskorps vir die Vrystaat, 1914 ............................................................................................................................. 109

VOLUME 26  2010

Part 1:  **Le Roux, C.** J.R. Cooper as Township Manager of Mangaung at Bloemfontein 1923-1945 ............... 1

Part 2:  **Hugo-Coetzee, E.A.** Two new species of *Austrocarabodes* (Acari: Oribatida: Carabodidae) from South Africa: *A. mahunkai* and *A. lineasetosa* ......................................................................................... 45

Part 3:  **Bates, M.F., Pietersen, D.W. & Measey, G.J.** New amphibiaenian records for the Northern Cape, South Africa ..................................................................................................................... 61