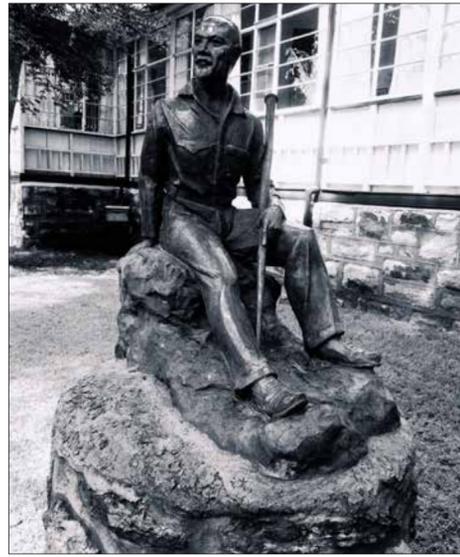




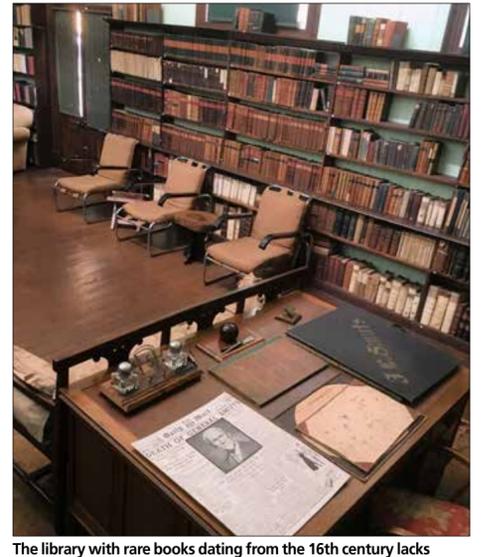
The clapboard bathroom with its original bath – and the telephone so important calls were not missed during ablutions.



The unpretentious veranda or stoep strikingly illustrates Jan Smuts's indifference to luxury and ease of living.



A model of the statue of Jan Smuts by South African sculptor Ivan Mitford-Barberton, depicting him as a hiker resting with his cane.



The library with rare books dating from the 16th century lacks climate control necessary for the preservation of the priceless collection.

# Great leader who loved a holistic life

Smuts's farm Doornkloof stands as monument to his passions

KEVIN RITCHIE

ONCE upon a time it would have been in the middle of the veld. These days it's an oasis in the middle of suburbia – 21 hectares of indigenous grassland, copses and trails.

In the middle, nestled among the trees, is an old corrugated iron structure – a former army officer's mess shipped from India and used by the British army at Middelburg during the Anglo-Boer War.

It's hard to believe this was the home of the man who helped draft not just the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I, but the founding documents almost 30 years later for what we know today as the UN, narrowly missing out on a Nobel Peace prize in the process.

Jan Smuts was a lawyer, a freedom fighter, a philosopher, a botanist, a naturalist, a soldier, a statesman – and twice prime minister of South Africa – facets which are visible at the Big House at Doornkloof, the prefabricated building he bought after the Anglo-Boer War for £300 and then spent another £1 000 re-erecting in 1909, while he helped structure what would become the Union of South Africa.

He would die at Doornkloof – and have his ashes interred atop the kop-

pie that bears his name, followed by his wife Isie – better known as Ouma – four years later. It was the house where they would bring up their very large family and formalise his philosophy known as "holism". And yet, if it wasn't for the incredible study/ library where the original billiards room was or the incongruous telephone in the bathroom, you wouldn't be much the wiser.

Given what Smuts achieved domestically and internationally – his statue stands on London's Trafalgar Square – you'd be forgiven for expecting far more. In this age of social media-induced narcissism and instant celebrity, his fame underpinned by his immense abilities and achievement, even if it is being airbrushed by revisionists, Smuts's well known disdain for materialism is even more starkly refracted here almost 70 years after his death.

Doornkloof was his home, where he could be who he wanted to be. He wasn't shy or embarrassed about it. He entertained the British Royal Family there during their tour in 1947, among other foreign dignitaries and leaders. The fare would always be the same – whatever the family was eating that night.

Today, the farm stands as a monument to Smuts's passion as a botanist. Pictures at the time of Smuts's purchase show open veld, basic



Doornkloof, the Big House, where Jan Smuts (inset) lived and died. The two-time SA prime minister entertained the British Royal Family and other dignitaries in the family home in Irene, Gauteng.

grassland. Today, Doornkloof is a natural horticultural paradise both in the range of plants and trees, as well as the history attached to some of them – like the magnolia seeds given to him by Emily Hobhouse which still flower. There are walks in the veld, testimony to his love of the outdoors. He loved walking so much that a trail going up the

back to the top of Table Mountain is named after him. Cabinet ministers who served him when he was prime minister, would often get their best chance of pitching their concerns to him if they drove out early to the farm and walked with "Oubaas" to his office at the Union Buildings – a mere 25km by road, obviously shorter in days when the area was

just veld, but a coronary inducing hike for those more beloved of blue light brigades and boozy lunches.

The house provides a taste of how it would have been laid out and used during his life, as well as a snapshot of his life in exhibitions laid out in what would have been the children's bedrooms. There's also the Cadillac that was his official car and the gun

upon whose carriage his coffin was drawn during his state funeral.

These days, the farm is host to regular monthly fairs at weekends as well as a rather incongruous caravan park hidden from the main house. It's a battle for the General Smuts Foundation, which is privately funded, to keep his memory and, in particular, this important

legacy alive and maintained.

It's a great pity because Smuts, irrespective of your politics or your time, was an incredible South African and a remarkable human being.

As Alan Paton once noted: "Even the greats thought he was great."

His farm house in Irene provides a very important – and poignant – glimpse into just that.



At the time of Smuts's purchase of the house it shows open veld, grassland. Today, Doornkloof is a natural horticultural paradise both in the range of plants and trees.



Jan Smuts was a lawyer, a freedom fighter, a philosopher, a botanist, a naturalist, a soldier, and a statesman.



A place of reflection where Jan Smuts could retreat from affairs of the state which occupied so much of his life and find peace

INDEPENDENT

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