



# Friends of Smuts House (FoSH)

Dear Friends,

Summer is around the corner and talks will now resume after the devastating passing away of our chairlady Marion.

## 1 A TRIBUTE TO MARION MENGELL (20 October 1941 - 25 July 2023)

Marion was born in England in a rural setting which was possibly why she developed a love of nature. She was a girl guide in her younger days and when she moved to Durban from Zambia in 1967, she became involved in the local girl guide movement. She enjoyed teaching young girls about the environment and led many multiracial guide camps, eventually aspiring to the rank of District Commissioner.

### Smuts House:

Various ex-members of Wessa (world environmental society of South Africa) in conjunction with Penny Grimbeeck (the first curator of Smuts House) got together, including Howard Savage, Cheryl Denning and Marion to form the Friends of Smuts House in 1992.

To raise funds the FoSH started the now well-known supper talks, presenting different facets of the General's life. These lectures or talks replaced the annual fete which was not yielding sufficient income.

In addition, work parties were formed to remove alien vegetation and the creation of the Oubaas Trail which has proved so popular with the public. Marion held the position of chairman of the FoSH for many years and will be sadly missed.

### Nylsvley:

Marion, sitting round the campfire at Nylsvley with a few other likeminded people started the Friends of Nylsvley and has been project-coordinator for the last 30 years.

In addition to educational weekend courses in various nature related subjects, work parties were held, and assistance was given by "Working for water" to remove blue gums and alien vegetation along the Nylriver. A bush bird census has been conducted by Warwick Turboten as the leader and Marion as the organizer of accommodation and meals. Together with the planning of the 18 routes in the different habitats of the reserve. Marion also set in place a facility where FON would finance materials for the repairs necessary for the running of Nylsvley.



## 2 NEW FoSH COMMITTEE

After Marion's funeral the FoSH committee dedicated tasks to individual members to ensure all the tasks Marion took on are addressed. The committee wishes the Friends to continue growing, to receive interesting viewpoints in talks on Smuts and to contribute to natural and cultural heritage preservation on the museum premises.

Committee members are Nigel Coni, Ron Mengell, Elise and Ian McFayden, Christo Rabie, Robert Jacobs and our heritage specialist.

## 3 EVENTS: UPCOMING TALK FOR SEPTEMBER 2023

<b>Date</b>	Thursday 14 September 2023
<b>Time</b>	18h00 for 18h30
<b>Venue</b>	Isie Smuts Tea Garden
<b>Cost</b>	R150 for members (including a light supper) R180 for visitors (including a light supper) Cash bar available or free tea/coffee
<b>Speaker</b>	Graham Duminy
<b>Topic</b>	The women of the Mazeppa

Graham tells the story of the 1842 battle in Port Natal (Durban) between the Boers under Andries Pretorius and the British army under Captain Thomas Charlton Smith.

Captain Smith ended up besieged in what is now known as "The Old Fort" and Dick King was despatched in secret to Grahamstown to raise the alarm and come back with reinforcements to save the day.

What is little known is that the wives of the British soldiers managed to escape from the Bay under heavy fire from the Boers and sail a small schooner up the Mozambique Channel looking for a British warship to come to the rescue of their trapped menfolk. Although it was an epic voyage they were not able to find a warship and sailed back to find that the force from the Cape had arrived and the siege was lifted. Their courage has been forgotten and now Graham will be telling their story!

**Payment:** Friends of Smuts House, Nedbank, Centurion account number 1621173909.  
Kindly mark your deposit with your name and 14<sup>th</sup> September.  
Please then send proof of payment to [friends@smutshouse.co.za](mailto:friends@smutshouse.co.za) / [christorabie9@gmail.com](mailto:christorabie9@gmail.com)

In October advocate Marius Ackerman will discuss the general's career and his duties as lawyer. Details will follow Graham's talk in September.

During November an informal picnic or function will be hosted for a social get-to-know-each-other better. The date and format will be communicated in due time.

Beginning February 2024, a preliminary list of speakers and topics for 2024 will be communicated.

## 4 FoSH PROJECTS

### Restoration of the Cadillac

A suitable restorer has been identified to commence restoration. We want the car in working running order as well to attract weddings to the museum.

The official donation form will be on the website. We encourage members and individuals to contact classic car enthusiasts to donate. Full details of the car are on the form. The car enjoys full status under the American Classic Car Club, only 225 were manufactured and the "suicide doors" (sic!) on both

sides of the car makes it very special. Art Deco features on the body work are understated but undeniably add strong character to this official state vehicle of Smuts.



#### 4.2 Student projects during 2023:

The FoSH donated large amounts of money to purchase hardware or materials, while the students had to contribute 40 hours of community project involvement.

The generous Chamberlain donation which Marion managed to secure for us, was used for wood which served as pillars, finials, viewing cubicle frames, etc.

##### 4.2a Viewing cubicles inside the house

Visitors may now walk inside the kitchen, best room, dark room and Smuts room to have much better visual access to all the details inside these rooms. Thick perspex panels and refined wooden strips enabled the students to complete the project neatly and unobtrusively.



##### 4.2b Milk room and Smuts shower

The milk room interior was renovated this year. The complete floor had to be taken out due to termite damage and replaced with a low beam support. Original floor planks and ceiling planks were re-used and repainted /oiled against termite infestation. Skirtings and Cornish trimmings were added.

The Smuts shower had all later attachments removed. Overhanging branches were removed and the area around the shower has been cleared and cleaned up and is now utilised for restoration storage. An unintrusive small piece of paving has been added in front and most of the structure which has been painted and made more dust proof.



#### 4.2c The courtyard and bronze sculptures

The courtyard had to be paved due to past water issues and the prolonged wet areas on the ground next to the reference library.

The back wall was added after 1961 to enclose the courtyard. A canopy was attached to protect bronze sculptural work from the garden against rain and for security reasons.

#### 4.3d Roof issues

A worker has been paid by The Friends for several weekends to attend supervised maintenance. Blocked gutters and downpipes were cleared, and an additional downpipe was installed behind reception and in the courtyard, where the interior ceiling also was fixed due to full gutters that overflow towards the house structure:



The valley channel above the foyer verandah was replaced due to a gushing water leak:



The kitchen roof was a matter of past attempts and frustrations. Our worker slightly elevated the beams to ensure a better gradient and replaced corroded zink sections. It was a relief that no ceiling leaks were observed a month later during the rainy season.



Our weekend worker also fixed leaks at the chimney of the reading room and the kitchen.

#### 4.2e Parapets and gables

Most of the decorative wooden features on the house have now been renovated and painted with special paint which promises to protect the wood against extreme heat and cold. New finials have been shaped already and still need to be installed.



#### 4.2f Security

The kitchen passage and front verandah door near the tea garden were equipped with security doors to ensure better airflow and 6 windows had burglar proof attached which blends with the house period.

#### 5 Bits and pieces

**Garden tools** The museum has dedicated a garden worker once a week to maintain heritage features based on cultural historical principles. There is a need for garden tools. Friends are encouraged to donate old garden tools / equipment such as a wheel burrow, rake, spade, tree saw (hand / petrol) and smaller sets for work in flower beds.

**Milk room** A display inside will now welcome donations: Separator (in working order?), milk cans, cream cans, butter churners, butter spoons and butter moulds.

Kindly WhatsApp a photograph of garden work or milk room equipment to 072 799 5959 so we can arrange collection or delivery. Old used tools are the best option!

***Notify us if you wish to be removed from this mailing list by replying to this email and we will act accordingly. Also, do not hesitate to spread the word of the talks to interested individuals or friends!***

Christo  
Chairman, Sep. 2023