

THE UNIVERSITY GRAHAMSTOWN CAMPUS

RHODES owes its unique character among South African universities to a combination of historical, geographical, cultural and architectural factors. Its history is a chronicle of those whose intellect, vision and courage created and sustained a university, often against seemingly insuperable odds. Successive generations of Rhodians, imbued with their independence of thought, have had an influence on southern African and world affairs out of all proportion to their small number.

In the beginning

University education in the Eastern Cape began in the college departments of four schools: St Andrew's, Grahamstown, Gill College, Somerset East, Graaff-Reinet College, and the Grey Institute in Port Elizabeth. By the turn of the century only St Andrew's and Gill still prepared candidates for the degree examinations of the University of the Cape of Good Hope. Limitations in staff, laboratory equipment and libraries made tuition inadequate. It was obvious that only a central university college could provide a satisfactory standard of university education.

Grahamstown, out of the mainstream of commercial and industrial life, seemed an unlikely choice for a university city, but local residents were strongly in favour of the idea. The chief obstacle was lack of funds. The South African War of 1899-1902 almost extinguished the project. In December 1902 Josiah Slater, Member of Parliament for Albany and editor of the Graham's Town Journal, called a meeting to try to rekindle public interest. He succeeded beyond all expectations, but enthusiastic promises of local financial support were not enough. The newly-formed committee applied, unsuccessfully, to the Rhodes Trustees for the financial backing they needed. Selmar Schonland, distinguished botanist and curator of the Albany Museum, then tried a direct approach to one of the Rhodes Trustees, Dr Leander Starr Jameson. Jameson, soon to be elected Member of Parliament for Albany and Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, promised 50 000 pounds without consulting his fellow Trustees. At first they refused to confirm the grant; then, persuaded by Schonland, they made over De Beers Preference Shares to the value of 50 000 pounds to Rhodes University College, founded by Act of Parliament on May 31, 1904.

The early years

The four St Andrew's College professors, Arthur Matthews, George Cory, Stanley Kidd and G F Dingemans, became the founding professors of the Rhodes University College and Matthews' outstanding survey class provided the nucleus of the Rhodes student body. The new university college prepared its students for the examinations of the University of the Cape of Good Hope. At the beginning of 1905, Rhodes moved from cramped quarters at St Andrew's to the Drostdy building, which it bought from the British Government in 1909. During 1905 seven new professors, including Schonland, joined the original four. One of the distinctive features which evolved early in Rhodes's history was the tutorial system, adapted from the Oxbridge model. Students were assigned to staff members who took a personal interest in their work and welfare. As numbers increased, students were assigned to tutors and tutorial groups within academic departments, providing a forum for the lively debate characteristic of a Rhodes education.

Expansion

The foundations of the Rhodes residential system were also laid within the first decade. Steadily growing student numbers put pressure on available accommodation in school hostels and approved boarding houses as well as class and laboratory space in the motley collection of military buildings housing the college. At this point, Baker and Kendall, the firm started by an architect of growing reputation, Herbert Baker, offered their services to the Council to draw plans for a new Rhodes. Their design won the competition held by the Council in 1910. Within five years a new Chemistry-Zoology block and the first residences for men and women, College and Oriel, were built to Baker and Kendall plans. Moves by the South African College in Cape Town and the Victoria College in Stellenbosch to become autonomous universities began as early as 1905. The Rhodes Senate and Council quickly realised that an independent Cape Town University might threaten the still precarious existence of Rhodes. Fears were only allayed when Rhodes became a constituent college of the new University of South Africa in 1918. By 1917 Rhodes's finances had ebbed to the point where staff retrenchment became unavoidable. However, expansion was essential for survival. Increased postwar subsidies, a

government bond on all Rhodes property and further help from the Rhodes Trustees made possible the construction of the first part of the Baker Arts Block and more residences.

Hard times

Sir John Adamson became first Master of Rhodes in 1925. Further loans and another government bond were negotiated and building continued. The first sign of trouble ahead was a sharp drop in enrolment between 1927 and 1929. The full force of the Depression struck Rhodes in 1931 and 1932. Government grants were drastically reduced and De Beers did not declare a dividend in 1932. At the height of the crisis, Cullen Bowles, Professor of Classics, succeeded Adamson as Master. Sudden national economic recovery in 1933 meant restored government subsidies and an end to staff salary cuts. Armed with grants from the government and the Rhodes Trustees, and loans from various municipalities, the Council went ahead with the building of more residences and the completion of the Baker main block and tower. Bowles retired in 1937 after seven stormy years as Master and 26 years at Rhodes. Professor John Smeath Thomas succeeded him. At the end of 1938 the Carnegie Corporation made a Carnegie Library Fellowship available to train the first Rhodes Librarian, F G van der Riet. A substantial grant to buy books for the Rhodes Library followed. Despite the outbreak of war, student numbers continued to rise. The ambitious building programme went on throughout the war and postwar years with funds borrowed from the municipalities of Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth, East London, King William's Town and Cape Town. Rhodians served their country well in both World Wars. Forty-seven lost their lives in World War 1 and 70 died in World War 2.

The day of reckoning

When the future of the University of South Africa came under review in 1947, Rhodes opted to become an independent university. However, 150 000 pounds in free capital was needed for endowment. So, far from funds being available, Rhodes was soon forced to pledge its remaining De Beers Preference Shares to the bank as security against a soaring overdraft. At this crucial point, Dr Thomas Alty succeeded Smeath Thomas as Master of a College owing 561015 pounds. Alty's courageous decision to ride out the storm was soon justified. Just as it seemed Rhodes was finally facing dissolution, the partners in a Grahamstown printing firm, Hugh and

Vincent Grocott, knocked on Dr Alty's door one evening and, almost apologetically, handed him a cheque for a considerable sum of money. Their gift seemed to act as a catalyst.

Birth of a university

The government and the Grahamstown City Council took steps to help extricate Rhodes from its predicament, and a large insurance company lent the college 200 000 pounds on favourable terms. When the Rhodes University Private Bill was passed in April 1949 an appeal for funds was launched. Response from the Rhodes Trustees, the directors of De Beers Consolidated Mines and numerous other public and private organizations and individuals was overwhelming. Soon 100 000 pounds had been subscribed and a further 50 000 pounds promised, with a one for one donation pledged by the government.

Rhodes University was inaugurated on 10 March 1951. Sir Basil Schonland, son of Selmar Schonland, became the first Chancellor of his alma mater, and Alty the first Vice-Chancellor. In terms of the Rhodes University Private Act, the University College of Fort Hare was affiliated to Rhodes University. This mutually beneficial arrangement continued until the government decided to disaffiliate Fort Hare from Rhodes. The Rhodes Senate and Council objected strongly to this, and to the Separate University Education Bill, which they condemned as interference with academic freedom. However, the two bills were passed, and Fort Hare's affiliation to Rhodes came to an end in 1959. Negotiations with the Port Elizabeth City Council culminated in the opening of the short-lived Port Elizabeth Division of Rhodes University in 1961. Rhodes withdrew from Port Elizabeth at the end of 1964 after the government decided to replace the Division with an independent, dual-medium University of Port Elizabeth. The University inaugurated a campus in East London in 1981 with 50 students. The expanding campus moved into its own premises, the former East London Wool Exchange, at the beginning of 1982. By 1997 nearly all of the city block containing the old Wool Exchange had been acquired by the University. By 2001 the campus had expanded to incorporate the former TransNet property across the road.

Continued growth

James Hyslop succeeded Alty in 1963, at a time of rapid expansion which continued throughout the decade. Facilities at Rhodes, Grahamstown were

strained to the limit and when the Community of the Resurrection closed the Grahamstown Training College, the University was provided with a solution to the critical shortage of space. Negotiations began in 1971 to buy the Training College buildings and grounds and a number of adjacent buildings. The Law and Religion and Theology Departments moved into the St Peter's complex in 1975, followed by Education in 1977 and Music and Musicology in 1979. Derek Henderson succeeded Hyslop in October 1975, during the continuing development of the University.

Four St Peter's residences, Canterbury, Winchester, Salisbury and Truro, were in university use by 1979. The beautiful Chapel of St Mary and All the Angels, designed by Kendall, is now the Rhodes University Chapel. It was proclaimed a National Monument in 1980. The former mother house was restored with generous outside assistance and reopened as the Gold Fields Centre for English during its centenary month of July, 1992. New buildings linking the University's main quadrangles and the Library were formally opened in May 1986. They include Geography, which completes the second quadrangle and which, with English, Geology and the existing Library, form a third quadrangle that completes the development of the University's central area. Generous gifts from mining houses enabled the University to complete the Kimberley Hall complex by opening Gold Fields House in 1985 and De Beers House in 1988. A new residence in the Drosty Hall was constructed as a result of a generous donation by Allan Gray Investments, and named Allan Gray House. It was opened to students in 1993. In addition, a new residence, New House, was built in the Jan Smuts Hall complex, and was commissioned in 1994. A further significant expansion to the Grahamstown campus began late in 1997. The Eden Grove complex containing the Registrar's Division, Cory Library and lecture accommodation was commissioned in mid-1999.

During 2000 construction on the Hamilton Building to house the Departments of Computer Science and Information Systems was begun. The building was commissioned in 2001. It is an ultra-modern, high technology facility. A number of new houses and a dining hall were constructed in 2001 and 2002 in the Stanley Kidd complex. The hall was, as a result, separated from Kimberley Hall and now forms the Nelson Mandela Hall of residence.

The acquisition of the Settlers Inn property at the end of 2001 led to the establishment of the Gavin Relly Postgraduate Village which was taken into use at the beginning of 2002.

Student enrolments passed 3000 in 1982, 4000 in 1991 and exceeded 5000 in 2001 in Grahamstown and East London. Dr David Woods, an Old Rhodian and distinguished scientist, succeeded Dr Henderson in May 1996. Despite steady growth, Rhodes is still a small university whose excellence is in part a product of its smallness. About half of the Grahamstown students live in the 43 residences. Classes are still small enough to make individual tuition in tutorial groups feasible. The future of Rhodes lies not in greater numbers, but in increasing academic excellence and building upon almost a century of academic achievement. As part of the national restructuring of the higher education system, in 2002 Cabinet approved the recommendation of the Minister of Education that the East London Campus be incorporated with the University of Fort Hare. The incorporation took place on 1 January 2004. 2004 was Rhodes's Centenary year. The celebrations provided the University with a unique opportunity to reflect on its considerable achievements and their impact on society - in southern Africa and all over the World. A variety of academic and reunion events were staged to mark the occasion. Construction of the state-of-the-art African Media Matrix (AMM) was concluded in 2005. The building houses the Department of Journalism and Media Studies.

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Dr Saleem Badat, formerly Chief Executive Officer of the Council on Higher Education, succeeded Dr Woods as Vice-Chancellor in June 2006. Recent infrastructural additions include a new hall and residences, an Environmental Education building, a magnificent new library building opened by the Minister of Higher Education & Training and a new building for our Education Faculty. Student numbers are increasing, but Rhodes is in no danger of relinquishing its "small university" status. In

2014, approximately 7500 students, including a number of international post-graduates, enrolled at the University. Building of the new Post Graduate Flats started in mid-2014 and it was anticipated that the building would be complete early in 2015.

Also in 2014, Dr Saleem Badat resigned as Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes University to pursue a career with the Mellon Foundation in the USA. Dr Sizwe Mabizela was appointed as Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes University on 1 November 2014.