Napier

Most towns in South Africa developed around a church. Towards the end of 1837 Pieter van der Byl bought the farm Klippedrift for £1,000 from Pieter de Bruyn, with the intention of establishing a town. A group of people in the community, led by Michiel van Breda, were not happy with the location of the proposed town development and bought the nearby farm Langefontein for development, with the result that two churches were built and thus two adjacent towns developed. On 12 April 1838 the first plots were sold at Klippedrift. This was also the first name given to the town. The Governor, Sir George Napier, was approached for permission to name the town after him, and, having obtained permission, the town was officially renamed Napier in 1840. Langefontein, 16 km farther east, was named Bredasdorp in 1838. Heavy competition arose because of the close proximity of the two towns, but both survived.

Napier developed independently from the start. There were two dwellings on the original farm. One was utilised as a church and this building was later enlarged. The present church in the form of a Greek cross with a 365 metre tower, was inaugurated in 1928. Over the years the Napier Dutch Reformed congregation also served neighbouring areas. Stanford formed part of Napier until 1913 and Riviersonderend until 1922. There are some interesting facts concerning the church’s organ, baptismal font, the 59 steps and so on. The festival house next to the church is the town’s oldest building, dating from 1822 when it was utilised as slave quarters and as a wine cellar. Napier boasts the distinction of having held the very first church fête in the country. This was in 1854 when the fine sum of £45 was collected.

Napier is surrounded by an agricultural district populated by wealthy wheat and wool farmers, but the town did not experience the same growth as Bredasdorp. While a town council was elected in 1886, municipal status was only conferred in 1938, with the town’s centenary. Napier is a quiet village, but it does not lack any essential services. The large high school, so the story goes, was supposed to have been allocated to Mossel Bay, but was built in Napier owing to a departmental error.

There is a good road going up to the TV tower, from where a panoramic view may be enjoyed. Napier derives much of its special character from the substantial number of houses that are more than a century old. Outside the town stands the familiar Ox-wagon Monument erected in memory of the Great Trek in 1938. Napier’s home for the elderly, the Klippedrif home, is a beautiful, spacious and sunny place where the elderly live together in a tranquil atmosphere.

Napier was part of the gold rush of the 1870/80s. When gold fever struck the Overberg, Napier made the news too. Relics from this period may be seen on the farm Hansiesrivier.
Danie du Toit, a resident who has been keenly interested in the movement of the sun and the passing of the hours, distinguished himself by building a large, vertical sundial (probably the largest in the country) in front of the municipal offices. There the time can be read accurately to the nearest 30 seconds. (Read about it in the following story.)

By SJ du Toit