

A lack of water, but an excess of brandy!

Years ago, between 1944 and 1968 the usual tranquility at Stanford was disturbed by a fight over water. The water from the Oog (the Eye) supplied one and a half thousand gallons of water per day but only a small percentage reached the village in a four inch (10 cm) pipe. The rest of the water flowed into the sea. For 24 years nothing was done to improve the situation, while the village population grew steadily and some residents liked to plant vegetables. Suddenly water restrictions were introduced, but no one took any notice of them. As far as they were concerned, Stanford had plenty of water. Residents often opened empty taps in the home while gardens were irrigated. The municipality was inundated with complaints. A water-bailiff, (Sas Hoender) was appointed and he received R2 for each summons. In the following two months Sas summoned eight people. Among them Nellie de Villiers (83) and Bettie Swart (81). Residents were greatly indignant. It was the largest court case in Stanford's early history. Long before the case started the court room was so packed with people that many stood outside. Defending advocate Olivier and the public prosecutor agreed to try a test case. Tant Nellie was chosen. Wearing a long green apron and her green Voortrekker kappie, she smiled and indicated that she was ready. The first witness was town clerk Willie du Toit who described the water history of Stanford, giving reasons for the water restrictions. Magistrate Gildenhuis enquired whether the water needs of the village had been investigated, and Du Toit replied they it was assumed the town had sufficient water. The water bailiff was the last witness. He told the court that he caught Tant Nellie with a hose pipe in front of her house but did not notice what she was watering. Adv Olivier: "She could have washed her feet"; Sas Hoender: "No, she was watering things growing there."; Adv Olivier maintained that the municipality was responsible for the lack of village water. He requested the release of his clients. In his sentence Magistrate Gildenhuis referred to a regulation he regarded with contempt and unwillingly passed a sentence of not guilty. The other seven accused were released. The tension relaxed. People smiled – some started clapping. The court constable called for order. Hands were shaken for victory.