

# The War history of Roodewal

## 1899 - 1902 British Remount Camp during the Anglo Boer War



Roodewal served as a British 'Remount Camp' during the Anglo-Boer War.

During this period Roodewal was requisitioned by the British Forces for the use of a remount camp where sick and injured horses of the British forces that fought in the Orange Free State and Transvaal were brought to Roodewal to recover.

New horses imported from overseas and locally purchased animals were also trained here after which they were sent to the North by train.

The Camp was guarded by members of West Yorkshire and Gloucestershire regiments.

Still to this day, the remains of horse skeletons buried here are being unearthed.

The British forces imported more than 400 000 horses and mules from various parts of the world. Many of the animals were offloaded in Table Bay and dispatched along the railway line passing through Worcester and the Karoo.

The Republican Forces (burghers on commando) made use of their everyday horses, born and bred in South Africa. While the British considered these horses too small and unsuitable for British cavalry and artillery, their exceptional performance in the field, compared to the imported animals, surprised everybody.

As the guerrilla phase of the war progressed, more and more responsible British officers came to appreciate and indeed covet Boer and Basuto ponies as they were derogatorily called.

Major A.H Lane in his book 'Horses For War' said: "This was a fatal mistake we made in South Africa in 1899. Thousands of hardy little horses could have been produced. But these were allowed to be taken by the enemy, and we imported a comparatively useless animal at about double the cost. Had the War Office listened to advice, our forces during the first part of the war could have been well mounted on local horses. But the enemy got these and we tried to get near them with men mounted on soft, unseasoned animals."



## 1941 - 1946

### Italian Prisoner - of - War Camp



Some Italian soldiers captured by the Allies, including South African forces, in Abyssinia (today's Ethiopia) in East Africa and after the fall of Tobruk in Libya, North Africa, were held captive at Kleinplasia.

The prisoners assisted with the construction of the Du Toitskloof pass in 1942. The prisoners were also used as labourers on many farms in the Breede River Valley.

In the 1980's the Italian government sponsored the erection of an obelisk in the garden in front of the main house in memory of the Italian prisoners who were kept captive on Kleinplasia.



**Artist Jean Welz stayed at Roodewal.** From 1949 to 1951 the owner of Roodewal, Jacques Malan, let the old slave house as a studio to Jean Welz who later became a prominent South African painter.

**Bulldozers were ready:** Around the 1960's to the 1970's Roodewal belonged to a French company, **Hex River Textile Mills (HexTex)**. The head of this consortium lived in Kleinplasia for a long time. When HexTex was liquidated, the intention was to demolish the homestead and outbuildings and divide the farm into industrial plots. But thanks to an intervention initiated by Mr Hans Rabie, then member of the Provincial Council, the plans were thwarted by an order of the Prime Minister, Mr John Vorster. The bulldozers at that stage were already on the grounds.

The **Worcester Agricultural Association** then became involved and started using Kleinplasia as showgrounds for their annual agricultural show.

Since January 2015 Kleinplasia is being managed by the **Breede Valley Municipality**.



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## Roodewal 1746 Heritage Route

"... in the original great rift valley of Africa" - Jan Smuts

## Worcester 1820

Du Toit  
Rysseel, Flanders  
1688



## The history of Roodewal - Kleinplasia

Original name in Dutch: 'De-Roodewal-gelegen-over-de-Breede-Rivier-en-aan-de-zijde-van-de-Hexes-Rivier'

British Military Horse Centre

1899 - 1902



1943 Italian POW



THE historic sites of Kleinplasia starts with it being called Roodewal when the Du Toit family came to live on this quitrent farm during the Dutch Period. Today it forms part of the heart of Worcester.

In 1818 during the British Period, the farms Roodewal and Langerug were bought by the Government of the Cape Colony. This was during the time of important legal and political changes at the Cape.

Wars of the 20th century are also echoed in the use made of Roodewal when it served as a Remount Camp during the Anglo-Boer War.

Four decades later, during the Second World War, many Italian POW's were housed at Roodewal. They were later placed as labourers on farms in the Breede River Valley and some of the men married local girls and so started a small Italian Roman Catholic community.

## 1652 DUTCH PERIOD . . . A Hunter's Paradise

IN the early days of the Cape's history the main road went through the great mountain barrier which stretches northwards to the Groot Winterhoek mountains, the mountains were crossed through by means of the Roodezand Pass. It led the into the valley of Tulbagh. From there the road headed south-east into "the original great rift valley of Africa" as famous SA statesman, Jan Smuts, once described the Breede River Valley.

Worcester district is as old as hunting grounds and cattle runs go in the Cape, but new as a settled area. Before 1700, Breede River Valley was a hunter's paradise, teeming with game and wild birds. The main source of income, especially the sale of elephant tusks, came from hunting licenses issued by the Dutch East India Company. By 1709 European farmers were given grazing rights in the area "over de Breede Rivier."

In 1714 the first quitrent farms were allocated.

Settlement in most cases was not on a permanent basis and "hartebeeshuisies" (small, basic homes) were erected.

One of the earliest settlers was Francois du Toit from Rysseel in Flanders, is the French speaking ancestor of the Du Toit clan in the Cape.

In 1731 his grandson Pieter du Toit d'Oude obtained grazing rights on the farm 'Brandwacht' and lived there for 15 years. In 1746 he received grazing rights on Roodewal and decided to relocate there. He was married to Elizabeth Rossouw and they had four children.

In 1754 after their father's death the rights were transferred to his two sons, Francois du Toit and Willem du Toit.

When Francois died in 1793 the grazing rights went to his three sons, Pieter du Toit, Christoffel Stefanus du Toit and Jacobus Francois du Toit.

It is presumed that it was during this time that the homestead of Roodewal was built by Pieter du Toit.



THE Hex River used to be the border between the magisterial districts of Tulbagh and Swellendam, as well as the halfway mark on the Old Cape Wagon route between Tulbagh and Swellendam. Roodewal was an important stopover on the route towards the East Coast and the last stop on the Tulbagh side of the Hex River. The next stop was at Oudewagensdrift.

**1 - 3 Description of the Roodewal homestead:**

The front had a beautiful eastern view of the Old Cape Wagon route between Tulbagh and Swellendam.

Originally the homestead was built in the 'I' form with gables at both ends, which gives it the unusual appearance. Enlargements changed it into the present 'H' shape.

The walls of the homestead are 66 cm thick and the original carpentry consisted of yellowwood and stinkwood, mostly integrated. The front door and some of the doors on the inside are still the original.

The old indigenous trees, as well as foreign trees, confirm the centuries old age of the homestead.

**5 The old Jonkmanhuis** that was built at a later stage has a lower roof than the main farmhouse. It also has a typical Dutch gable with straight classic lines.



The Roodewal slave bell used to signal the dawn and start of the working day.



The original wine cellar is still intact.



**8 Old Slave Quarters:** About 36 meters from the main house is the old slave quarters, one of a few buildings of this kind still existing in the Breede Valley. It is also presumed that the Slave Quarters was used as the jail for prisoners waiting for a hearing at the magistrate court. The doors and windows are still barricaded with thick bars and large old nails can be found in the wooden beams.



At the door of the Slave Quarters an old mill stone is still embedded as a stepping stone.



The slave house still has a very old thatched roof with reeds from the original reed bush.



The reed bush is the original, imported from the far east. The reeds were used to build the thatched roofs of the farm dwellings.

**BRITISH PERIOD**

THE increasing number of European settlers living across the northern mountains in the Cape interior necessitated another drostdy (magistrate court) in addition to the one in Tulbagh to the west and one in Swellendam, in the east. In 1817 Lord Charles Somerset, then British governor of the Cape Colony, ordered Johannes Henricus Fischer, magistrate of Tulbagh, to find a suitable place for a new drostdy. In November of that year Fischer visited the Du Toit brothers of Roodewal and Gerrit Cloete of De Lange Rug and found the farms fertile

and with ample water. He suggested that these farms be bought for the founding the drostdy. The Roodewal transaction was settled for 80,000 gulden. On 9 January 1819 the colonial surveyors, Tulleken and Hertzog, cartographed the two farms and on 4 November the first official advertisement for the sale of plots was issued.

On 25 and 29 February 1820, the first plots of Worcester were auctioned off from the front stoep of Roodewal, with the average price about £20 per plot. 89 Plots were sold.

From 1820 till 1829, Roodewal was used as the first drostdy and post office in Worcester. The first magistrate, **Captain Charles Trappes**, lived there.



**4** It was during this time when the District Clerk of Worcester, **JC Winterbach**, scratched out his name with a diamond ring on one of the panes of a window next to the front door. It can still be seen today.

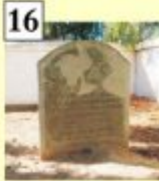
**When Trappes moved to the drostdy in 1829, the following people consecutively resided in Roodewal:**

**1829** - Roodewal was Worcester's first rectory. **Rev Henry Sutherland** was the first Minister of the Dutch Reformed Church. He moved into Roodewal, where he lived until 1841 when the parsonage of the NG Moederkerk was completed in Church Street.

**1841** - **Mr Truter**, son of the civil commissioner PJ Truter.

**1851** - **Dr E A Philcox**, first medical practitioner of Worcester, who renamed it "The Retreat".

**25 Year old Maria Johanna de Wet, born Van der Merwe (1836 - 1861) died of measles at Roodewal. Her grave can be found in the small cemetery at the Worcester Museum.**



**1862** - **Hendrik Francois van der Merwe**, who reinstated the original name, Roodewal.

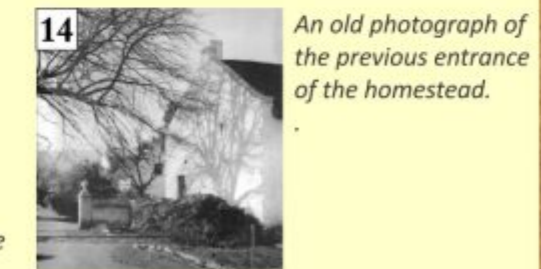
**1862 - 1872** - **Willem Johannes Jooste**.

**1872** - **Pieter Jacobus du Toit**.

**1945 - 1960** - **Jacques Malan**, the renowned journalist, renamed Roodewal to Merindol, in France, where the Malan clan originally came from.



One of Roodewal's old labourer cottages.



An old photograph of the previous entrance of the homestead.



**Henry Lichtenstein visited Roodewal.**

THE famous German physician, explorer and botanist, **Henry Lichtenstein**, visited Roodewal in 1803. He stayed overnight at Roodewal and the following day he enjoyed a meal prepared in the kitchen for him. The luncheon was mentioned in his book, 'Travels in South Africa', as follows:

"At Pieter Roodewal we were entertained at a dinner in a more than usually hospitable manner – we were entertained so profusely, that it almost appeared as if our host was desirous of making us amends at a single meal for all the privations to which we had been subjected in our journey through the Karoo. During the meal, a number of slaves are eagerly busy in washing, while others

stand about here and there behind the guests with bunches of ostrich feathers in the hands, which they wave to and fro to keep the flies off. Before and after the meal, water is set before the guests to wash their hands and face."



A double lane of beautiful old trees leads a path to the entrance of the homestead and Jonkmanshuis.

