

THEN & NOW The Libertas mansion in Stellenbosch, 246 years later



AT LIBERTY. The date on the gable of the Libertas mansion – 1771 – shows that the front of the house was rebuilt almost half a century after Adam Tas lived there. Much of the old farmhouse is still original, however. The walls are more than half a metre thick!

Adam Tas was born in Amsterdam in 1668. At the age of 29 he moved to the Cape as a Free Burgher and became a secretary on his uncle Henning Hüsing's farm Meerlust, near Stellenbosch. At the time, there were about 100 small farms in the district. One of those was Libertas – 44 morgen in size (37 hectares) at the base of Papegaaiberg. The original owner of the farm was a certain **Jan Cornelisz (also known as Jan Bombam)**, who sold it to Hans Jurgen Grimpe in 1692. When Grimpe passed away, Adam Tas married Grimpe's widow Elisabeth and became the new owner of the farm. A few years previously, Willem Adriaan van der Stel had taken over as governor from his father Simon. Like other senior officials, the young Van der Stel also owned a farm (his was Vergelegen) and he and his ilk soon began a corrupt trading monopoly with the VOC that seriously hampered the Free Burghers' ability to make a living. By 1705, a third of all the farms in the new colony belonged to just 20 officials. The final straw was when Van der Stel took contracts for wine and meat away from the Free Burghers and awarded them to his friends. Adam Tas drew up a petition, had it signed by 62 fellow Free Burghers, and submitted it to the Lords Seventeen in Amsterdam. Van der Stel was livid and brought the 63 men to trial. Four were deported to the Netherlands, including Tas's uncle Henning Hüsing. Another dissident, Jacobus van der Heijden, was locked up in the Donker Gat for nearly a month – a windowless dungeon at the Castle of Good Hope. Adam Tas spent even longer in the hole – 13 months and 17 days – before the Lords Seventeen recalled Van der Stel and his associates back to the Netherlands. After his release, Tas returned home to his farm. The existing name – Libertas – now

held extra significance. Tas's wife Elisabeth passed away in 1714. Three years later he married another woman, Johanna Koeval. Tas himself passed away only five years later and ownership of the farm was transferred to a certain Wouter de Vos and later to the Roux family, who farmed there for seven generations. The Blake family bought the farm in 1934. Christo Blake currently farms the land and his mother Yvonne has lived in the house since 1956. Sources: Stellenbosch Three Centuries (Stellenbosch Town Council, 1979); Colonial Houses of South Africa (Graham Viney); Stellenbosch (Alice Mertens, 1966)