

Robertson synagogue – two anecdotes

Towards the end of 2006, Bernie Sher (Johannesburg), son-in-law of Eli Sandler from Robertson, went to Robertson while visiting the Cape with his late wife and some friends. He found the Shul and knocked on the door of the house next to it, presumably once the Rabbi's residence. It was opened by an Afrikaans man with a big beard, no shirt, and a beer in his hand. He asked the man where he could find Jewish people, and the man gave him directions to a Jewish home, which turned out to be the home of Leslie and Becky Saacks.

Becky told Bernie that she looked after the cemetery and the Shul, which had been deconsecrated around 1967 but still belonged to the community. She told him that after regular services had ceased, she took off all the little nameplates from behind each of the seats. She brought them out to show Bernie, and he found the nameplate for his late father-in-law's father, Guttel Sandler. He also found the nameplates for Colin Schachat's father and grandfather (Colin was previously the Chazan at Linksfield in Johannesburg, and living in Israel at the time of this story). Colin's father was a first cousin to Eli Sandler.

Becky later opened the Shul for Bernie, which still had the original pews and fittings, and Bernie davened Mincha there.

Some 20 years later, Bernie was contacted by an acquaintance, Candice Miller. She told him that in 2024 she had bought the Shul from the buyer who had bought it from the community in 2009, and that she (not Jewish) had just got married in the Shul.

Content provided and reviewed by Bernie Sher, August 2026

After the Shul was deconsecrated, it fell into disrepair and later went on auction. It was purchased by an Afrikaans businessman around 2009. He spent many years working on it and used it as a weekend getaway home. He subsequently retired to Onrus and rented it out to a local church. Unfortunately they didn't maintain the property and he put it on the market. Candice Miller and Andre Visser purchased it towards the end of 2025 and are in the process of renovating it. They found extensive damage to the wooden floor from a flood, and the previous owners had had to completely replace the floor.

Candice writes:

“There is the most unbelievable energy in the space. It was love at first sight. We are now busy working on the property, establishing a garden, etc. It is really the most beautiful building. The hand work of the ceiling just blows my mind. It is all tongue and groove, and no one works like that anymore. We have already removed the two ladies balconies that were added around the 1950s (I think), and which blocked the light from the windows, so it's more or less back to its original look. We removed an indoor fireplace which we felt messed up the beautiful symmetry of the interior. We have had the Shul rezoned to a residential property, and whilst it was still a church we spontaneously decided to get married in it. We intend living in it one day, but our plan for now is to use it as a base. Once we have finished renovating, we may Airbnb it as well. It is such a special space that we are taking our time with the project.”

Content provided and reviewed by Candice Miller, August 2026



*10 January 2026
Getting married in the Shul
Candice Miller, Sophia Visser (daughter), Andre Visser*



The ceiling I fell in love with



*The tongue and groove hand work
of the ceiling just blows my mind*



Renovations in progress



*The ladies balconies added later
that blocked out all the light*



*The indoor fireplace that messed up
the beautiful symmetry*