

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/003/0063
	Site Name	Old Gaol, High Street, Grahamstown
	Date	
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-33.312417, 26.522938

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SiteAutoID: 70

Site Category: Building

SiteComments:

Archive Import History: Like most of the cities and towns of South Africa, Grahamstown grew from modest beginnings. A simple, elongated building in High Street, not far from the Drostdy gateway was one of the first buildings to arise in the town, if indeed it was not the first. It was originally a gaol. In 1812 Major G. S. Fraser, deputy Magistrate of Uitenhage, was sent to Grahamstown to establish a sub drostdy or magistracy there. Jacob Cuyler, the Magistrate of Uitenhage, instructed Fraser to select a suitable site for a house and gaol, and to submit plans and estimates for the building to him. Fraser chose this site because it was close to the area he had in mind for the drostdy. In January, 1813, the plans for a house for the Magistrate, a house for the Messenger of the Court and a gaol were submitted to Colonel Cuyler and approved by him. On 16th April, 1813, contracts were entered into with Lt. W. L. von Buchenroder for erecting these buildings, but the work progressed so slowly on account of the lack of trained workers that by June, 1814, the Messenger of the Court's house and the gaol had only reached the height of the roof. Baron Knobel, the government land-surveyor who laid out the town in that month, took the northern wall of the gaol as the line of High Street which thus served as the basis for the layout of the whole town. In June, 1817, Von Buchenröder had still not yet finished the building. The government paid him for what he had completed and cancelled the contract. The date of the completion of the building is not known, but in January, 1822, the Magistrate of Albany, H. Rivers, reported that the gaol, to which a pound had meanwhile been added, was not only too small, but that its situation in the middle of the town was most offensive to the inhabitants. He recommended that it be sold and the proceeds be used for a new gaol. Consequently a new gaol was completed in 1824 and shortly after this the little gaol building became the Grahamstown Public School until about 1842. It then became the first public library of Grahamstown and served that purpose until 1863. After 1863 the building was used for various purposes until 1930 when the government transferred it to the City Council for preservation as an historical monument on condition that it may not be disposed of without the consent of the government. By 1948 it was so dilapidated that the City Council was about to request permission to demolish it. At this stage the historical importance of the building was brought to the notice of the Historical Monuments Commission, at whose instigation, supported by the Eastern Province Branch of the South African National Society, it was restored by the City Council and preserved for posterity. Visual Description: Single storey - single pile plan. Corrugated iron roof. Rough plaster to walls. Sash windows with raised margins. Thick walls to back and side. Colours: Site Features: Condition: Average Construction Date: 1813-1818 Materials: Catalogue: Radford 1989 (a), No: A.11, Significance Category:

Damage Types: