

<b>Archaeological Site Report</b>	<b>SiteNo</b>	9/2/407/0028
	<b>Site Name</b>	128 Old Fort and Cemetery, Old Fort Road, Durban
	<b>Date</b>	07/09/2014 - 07:02
	<b>Project</b>	
	<b>CaseNID</b>	
	<b>Coords</b>	-29.851122, 31.026142
Page No: 1	<b>SiteAutoID:</b> 26331	

Site Category: Structures, Burial Grounds & Graves

**Directions:**

Locality & Environs: The property is located to the north of the Durban Central Business District with a total of two road frontages namely Masabala Yengwa Avenue and Archie Gumede Place, within the block completed by Old Ford Road (KE Masinga Road) and Old Fort Place. The sites are located alongside what is known as Warriors Gate and is in direct line of sight of Kingsmead Cricket Ground, the ICC, KwaMuhle Museum, City Engineers Department and the City Police.

**SiteComments:**

Archive Import History: This interesting fort and cemetery are situated in Umgeni Road in the heart of Durban, just behind the Post Office. In the beginning of 1837 the Voortrekkers crossed the Drakensberg mountains and entered Natal. The governor of the Cape, Sir George Napier, regarded this as an encroachment on Bantu territory and he feared that the Boers would oppress the Zulus. Besides this, he was loath to see the fine harbour of Port Natal in foreign and hostile hands. The protection of the Bantu and control of the harbour made the annexation of Natal imperative. The British Minister for the Colonies refused to consent to this, so Napier, acting on his own authority, sent a military force under command of Major Charters to occupy Port Natal. When the Voortrekkers returned from their victory at Blood River, they learned with great disappointment that the Bay was in the possession of Charters. However, the British government refused to ratify Napier's action and he had to recall Charters. The Voortrekkers now established their Republic of Natalia, but Napier did not give up his wish to gain possession of the territory and the harbour for Britain. Soon events occurred which gave him the opportunity to interfere; a punitive expedition of the Voortrekkers against a small raiding tribe, the Baka; visits of foreign trading ships to Port Natal and rumours of the discovery of coal in Natal. With the concurrence of the British Government he sent Captain Thomas C. Smith with a force of 260 men to re-occupy Port Natal. T. C. Smith, who had previously been sent to Pondo land with a view to such an eventuality, marched along the coast from the Umlazi River and reached Port Natal on 4th May, 1842. He pitched camp on the site now occupied by the Old Fort. His force consisted of two detachments of the 27th (Inniskillings) Regiment, units of the Royal Artillery with a howitzer and two field pieces, sappers, engineers and a few Cape Mounted Riflemen. A Boer commando under command of Gen. A. W. J. Pretorius soon appeared at Port Natal and pitched camp at Congella. Pretorius demanded that Smith should withdraw his troops over the border. When Smith refused to do this, Pretorius on 22nd May ordered the seizure and removal of the cattle that Smith had brought with him to feed his men. During the night of 23rd May, Smith attacked the Boer camp but he was repulsed with the loss of 17 killed, 31 wounded and three missing, and he also lost two guns. Pretorius then occupied the Point and surrounded the British camp. The British force was soon reduced to a pitiable condition. The Boers kept up a continuous fire on the camp with the captured guns and it also appeared that their longer rifles had a greater range than the British muskets, with the result that they could keep the British under continuous fire while they themselves kept out of range. The British ran short of food and were eventually reduced to eating horsemeat. The Boers were not accustomed to fighting against well-armed and entrenched Europeans. Their investment of the British fort was so poor that Dick King with his servant Ndongeni escaped and carried out his famous ride to Grahamstown to obtain help for Smith, covering the 960 km in ten days. The British authorities at the Cape immediately sent reinforcements, and on 24th June H.M.S. Southampton and the schooner Conch brought Col. Josias Cloete and the 25th Regiment to Durban. Although

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the Boer commando had increased to 600 men, Pretorius was obliged to raise the siege. It was only when the siege ended that the hardships and wretched conditions the defenders had endured became apparent. The wagons and tents were shot full of holes, the wounded had to lie in cross trenches, the fighting men had to stay in a trench behind the wagons and the impossibility of removing refuse and garbage resulted in an intolerable stench. After the annexation of Natal by England the 45th Regiment was stationed in Durban. It took occupation of the Old Fort and built barracks, a powder magazine and other military buildings. In 1858 these structures were demolished and replaced by the present buildings. In 1859 the 85th Regiment relieved the 45th for a short time, but by 1863 the 45th were back in the Fort which remained the headquarters of these troops until the recall of the Imperial troops in 1885, when the Colony of Natal took it over. In 1897 it was eventually evacuated. Finally the Old Fort was handed over to the Royal Durban Light Infantry. The magazine was converted into a chapel and the inner courtyard was made into a garden. The relics include historical colours and memorial plaques in honour of Capt. Allen F. Gardiner and Capt. T. C. Smith. The military cemetery in which those who lost their lives during the siege of 1842 are buried, forms a part of this monument. Proclaimed 1936" Visual Description: Colours: Site Features: Condition: Good Construction Date: Materials: Catalogue: , No: , Significance Category:

**AdminComments:**

The scene of the historic siege by the Boers of British troops who formed an expeditionary force with the purpose of annexing Natal. It was during this siege that Dick King made his historic ride to Grahamstown in order to get assistance. Bibliography archive:

Damage Types: