

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/018/0177
	Site Name	Old Slave Lodge, Adderley Street, Cape Town
	Date	
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-33.925154, 18.420427

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Site Category: Building

SiteComments:

Archive Import History: The Old Supreme Court at the top of the former Heerengracht (now Adderley Street) and adjoining Church Square is a remarkable building. Its history, its architectural merits and its symbolic significance make it unique in South Africa. The proper housing of slaves in Cape Town presented a problem right from the beginning when the first slaves arrived on 28th March, 1658. At first they were housed inside van Riebeeck's fort ; later a house called Corenhoop was built for them just outside the fort and in the sixties they were moved to a slave lodge nearer to their work, just below the Company's garden, where the Old Supreme Court now stands. Soon, however, this lodge also became too small and in any case had fallen into such a state of disrepair that it was decided to build a large new lodge next to it in the form of a single-storeyed rectangle round an open court "on the land recently cut off from the said garden." It was to house some 500 to 600 slaves and was intended at the same time to supplement the defences of the Castle. Work on this lodge was started in February 1679 but during that year, and before it could be completed, the old slave lodge was completely destroyed by fire. The new lodge was praised by Commissioner van Rhee de as a strong, solid building; even today the Old Supreme Court stands partly on its original foundations. As might be expected, this lodge which is nearly as old as the Castle, has undergone important structural and functional changes during almost three centuries of existence. Although it was frequently allowed to fall into disrepair and was often threatened with demolition, it survived these vicissitudes and emerged from each crisis with the increased dignity that comes only with age. The building housed the Company's slaves for nearly 131 years. By 1716 it had again grown too small for the large number of slaves that had to be accommodated. After much delay, it was at last restored and enlarged in 1732, and the possibility of adding a second storey was investigated. In 1752 it was once again renovated and enlarged. The northern wall (Bureau Street) was shifted up to the boundary wall of the churchyard, while the western wall was moved up to the moat of the Company's hospital in the Heerengracht. At this time a second storey was added and the building was given a fiat, plastered roof. By these alterations the building acquired its present approximate form, but other changes were to follow. First, the front facing the Heerengracht, of which the present façade is an exact replica, was designed by the famous architect L. M. Thibault and carried out by the well-known builder H. Schutte. This gave the building, which by now had assumed a prominent position in the main street, an imposing and dignified aspect. From the beginning of the 19th Century the old building was used for a totally different purpose. On the recommendation of the Earl of Caledon most of the slaves housed in the lodge were sold in 1807, when it was decided to convert the building into government offices. This naturally gave rise to important structural alterations which were carried out in 1810. Firstly, the eastern side facing Parliament Street was changed. Once again the structure as well as its decorations were designed by Thibault and carried out by Schutte, while the elevation with the lion, shield and motto is the work of the well-known sculptor Anton Anreith. The second important change was the erection of a building behind this eastern façade and rooms, in which the Legislative Assembly was to hold its sessions at a later time. This, too, is ascribed to Thibault. Thirdly, Schutte altered the northern or Bureau Street side of the building by giving it an entrance and large windows, and changing the slave quarters into offices, some of which later served as the post office. Finally, a number of rooms were arranged for the use of judges. On completion of the building, various public services were transferred to it in succession: the Supreme Court, the Master's Office, the Receiver of Revenue, the Attorney-General, the Post Office, the Government Secretary, the Fiscal, the Bank, the Public Library and

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others. The bringing together of so many services necessitated still more additions and on 31st January, 1811, Thibault was instructed to design a courtroom in the middle of the building, but it was not ready for use until 19th January, 1815, when Sir John Truter "dedicated it to Justice". For a century it was to serve as a courtroom, and it was this that led to the whole building becoming known as the Old Supreme Court. Not only did the building become the seat of justice; it was also the cradle of the South African parliamentary system. The Council Chamber or "Record Room" on the upper floor of the Schutte building in the eastern part of the courtyard was the meeting-place of the Advisory Council from 1827 to 1834, of the Nominated Council from 1834 to 1854 and of the Representative Legislative Council from 1854 to 1884. In addition to certain interior alterations, the building was to suffer two further mutilations after 1884. The lower wall of the southern façade opposite Parliament House was built in 1670 ; the upper wall dated to 1773. It remained unaltered until 1885, when an attempt was made to adapt it to the style of Parliament House by giving it Victorian balustrades and fenestration totally in conflict with the character of the Old Supreme Court. Worse still, the Adderley Street façade was set back 13,4 m in 1926. Although it was done most meticulously and it is claimed that the present façade is not only identical with, but just as good as Thibault's work, irreparable damage was done. Thibault's beautiful vestibule and a number of rooms, including the library of the old Legislative Council, disappeared and these changes necessitated a number of alterations to the Supreme Court chamber. Although the Old Supreme Court survived various threats during the two and a half centuries of its existence, it was never in greater danger of demolition than during the 1950's. The requirements of motor traffic in modern Cape Town demanded that Bureau Street be widened. Almost callously, with cold deliberation, it was now suggested that part of the Old Supreme Court should be demolished to relieve the traffic bottle- neck. The Historical Monuments Commission, which had previously pleaded for the preservation of the building, now insisted that it be retained in its entirety and suggested that Bureau Street be widened by demolishing the consistory building on the opposite side. Never had the Commission had a worthier cause and it enjoyed the enthusiastic support of interested bodies, art societies and public opinion. Today the building stands there with its beautifully balanced proportions ; refined, simple and dignified, a monument to the ability and skill of the famous trio: Thibault the architect, Anreith the sculptor and Schutte the builder. More than this, it symbolises the evolution of South Africa from a small Dutch settlement to a modern state and epitomises the development of an autonomous judicial and parliamentary system. Proclaimed 1967" Visual Description: Colours: Site Features: Condition: Construction Date: 1680 Materials: Catalogue: Rennie, Vol 2, No: 065.27, Significance Category:

AdminComments:

Bibliography archive: f & c, 01.003, p 40

Damage Types: