

**ROBBEN ISLAND MUSEUM OLD POWER STATION ca 1941-1991:**

**PRELIMINARY REPORT no. 2: ASSOCIATED LANDSCAPE;  
REINTEGRATION OF RETIEF PARK WITH WWII STRUCTURES.**

This report is provided to motivate for the use of House 49 and its associated out buildings, Church Street, Robben Island as office and storage space for the staff of the collections unit. This would allow for more space within the proposed conversion of the Old Power Station as a repository for the Robben Island Museum artefacts currently housed in the Maximum Security Prison.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION.

A preliminary investigation in January 2011 provided the historical background to House 49 and the Old Power Station [OPS]. A heritage statement was compiled for House 49 and submitted with the permit application to SAHRA in terms of section 27 of the National Heritage Resources Act, 25 of 1999.

Both buildings along with the Post Office were built during WWII.

House number 49 was the Chief Engineers House from ca. 1943.

The Chief Engineer was responsible for, inter alia, the management of the power supply on the Island.

A first recommendation was made by Ron Viney of Ad Astra Festina for the use of House 49 for office space for the staff on 21 June 2011. The professional opinion was that the OPS would not be able to accommodate the artefacts and sufficient space for 3 staff members.

An onsite meeting with Caroline Wintein and David Hlongwane was held on 7 September 2011. The types and extent of the collection housed in the MSP was viewed. Some scattered artefacts around the island were also inspected. The site visit also looked at alternatives that would assist in housing the collection and provide suitable accommodation for staff. The use of House 49 was discussed as well as its reintegration into the historic fabric of the WWII period.

A project meeting was held on 17 October 2011 and it was decided that Caroline Wintein would provide a proposal for the use of House 49 as office and storage space for RIM management to consider. Ron Viney would provide the historical background and recommendation for the use of House 49 in support of the proposal.

The exterior of House 49 was recently renovated and no conversion will be required to accommodate office space in it.

At present only one room in House 49 is used by RIM security.

## 2. SITE PLAN



### 3. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LANDSCAPE ASSOCIATED WITH HOUSE 49 AND THE OLD POWER STATION

The Post Office, House 49 and the Power Station occupy a large part of what was known as Retief Park. The base of a monument erected in 1870 to a French saint is still extant and made of cement. The Latin inscription: “Strenue et Prospere” can still be made out but is weathering. The urn of this monument had already disappeared by 1986. [Basset & Rudner; 1986] In 1894 the area is shown as an

open space. [Map ca 1894] In 1905 the park is clearly shown with the Monument in the centre and four paths radiating out from there to the four cardinal points. The prisoner band stand is shown approximately where the south face of the Power Station is. [Map ca 1905].

Retief Park remained and was used up to 1927 with the evacuation and removal of the leper colony on the Island. The park then deteriorated until the early parts of the war. [JPF Fick] In mid 1940 a temporary power plant was situated some where in the area of the Park. The first building to be constructed was the Power Plant in ca 1941 in the north east corner of the park. [Anderson; 1996] By 1942 a road named Power Road ran through the north edge of the park between the old Chief Medical Superintendants residence, which is now the Club House. [Map ca. 1942]

By 1943 the war was in full swing and the population of military personnel had increased dramatically. The Post Office, Chief Engineers Residence [House 49] and John Craig Hall were all built in this year. [Laver; 1982] The first Resident Garrison Engineer was Lieutenant De Swardt. [Anderson; 1996] By 1950 the operation of the power plant was handed over to the Union Public Works Department by the Union Defence Force. The Chief Engineer, Basil Earl Gardiner, amongst others motivated for an underwater cable from Blouberg to the island to replace the power plant. The operation of the Power Plant had become uneconomical by this time. [Proceedings of Officers in Council, UDF, 20 November 1950.]

By 1960 the Island had been handed over to prisons. The Power Plant continued to be operated by Public Works. House 49 presumably remained the residence of the Chief Engineer. Power Road disappears in the early 1980's and the fence around the Power Plant is erected. The vibracrete wall is also erected in the 1970's around House 49. With the erection of these two fences the integrity and open space of the old Retief Park was finally severely restricted. The current open space, the monument and sole remaining tree of the park appear to have no context.

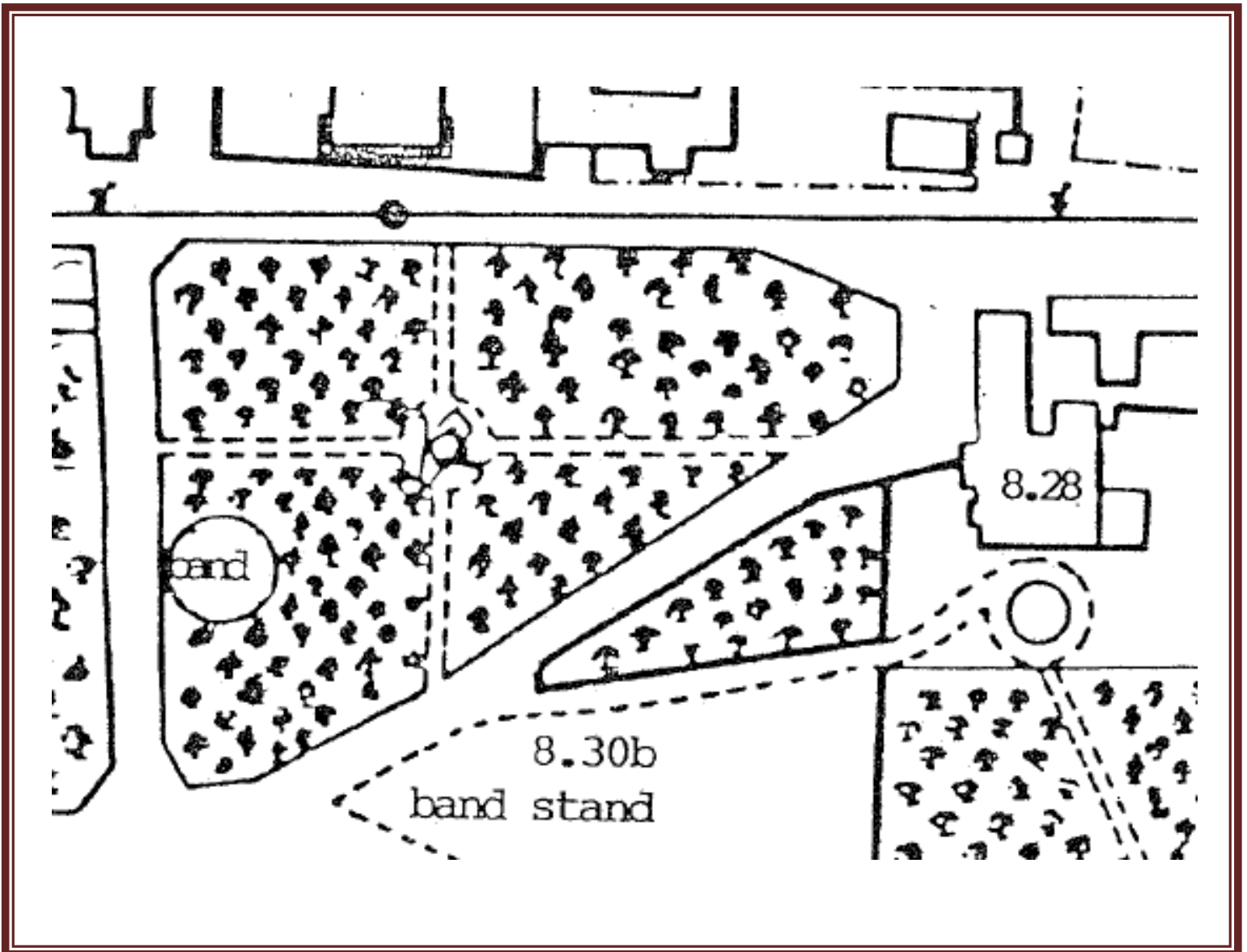


Fig.2. Extract from 1905 map as per Reilly Report, 1993.

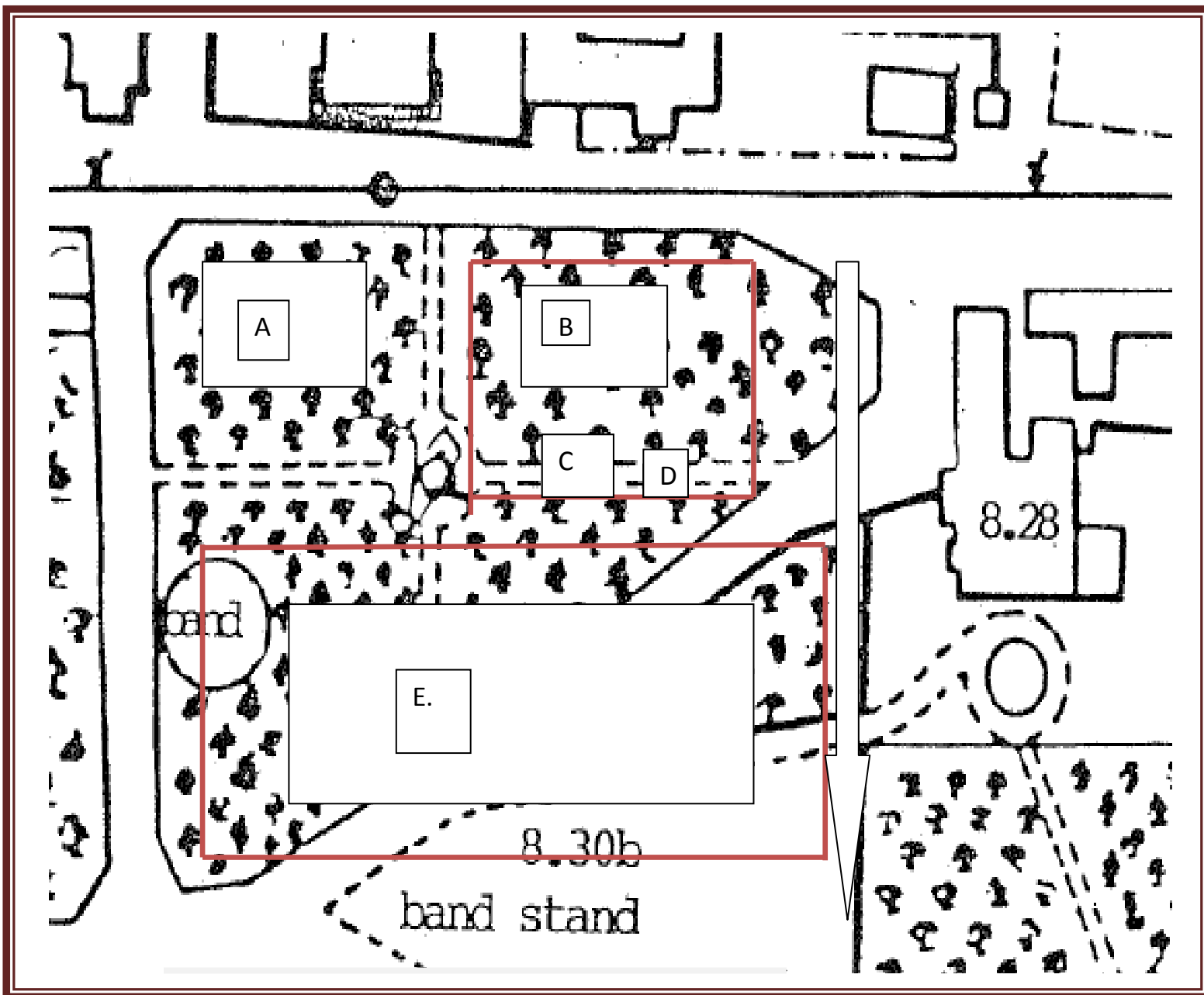


Fig.3. Retief Park, ca. 1905 with WWII and current overlay. Not to scale.

- A. Post office.
- B. House 49.
- C. Servants quarters.
- D. Braai.
- E. Power Plant.

Arrow shows approximate route of now defunct Power Road.

Fences in red.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are consistent with current thinking on the adaptive reuse of historical structures. The National Heritage Resources Act, 25 of 1999, The 1969 ICOMOS [Venice] Charter and its amendments, as well as the Australia ICOMOS [Burra] Charter all provide for adaptive reuse strategies to be implemented within historical contexts.

The aim is not an absolute return to the past but to reintegrate the 19<sup>th</sup> century and WWII landscapes in their current setting. At present the remains of Retief Park, the tree and monument, are very neglected and isolated from their context. The number and size of the artefacts, as well as the requirements for environment control in housing the artefacts, cannot be adequately housed within the Old Power Station. It is therefore recommended that:

1. The base of the monument be used as a landscape feature to reintroduce the four historic pathways.
2. A gateway be incorporated into the current diamond mesh fence around the OPS that would join directly to the historic eastern path of Retief Park.
3. An opening and gate be provided in the vibracrete wall of House 49 to reconnect the historic northern path of Retief Park.
4. House 49 be utilized as staff offices. This will require interior renovation only to complement the already renovated exterior.
5. The servant's quarters at House 49 be used for storage of non hazardous materials used by the collections unit.
6. No recommendation is made for the braai at this time.
7. Landscaping should focus around the formal aspects of the historic Retief Park.
8. Indigenous vegetation should be used for landscaping.

## 5. REFERENCES

### Published material

Laver, M.P.H., et al; Sailor Women, Sea Women. SWANS. The history of the Women's Auxilliary Naval Sevices, 1943-1949. SWANS Hitorical Publishing Fund, 1982.

## **Theses and unpublished manuscripts**

Anderson, Capt George: The Vicissitudes of Life; an Autobiography. Extracts from unpublished manuscript, pp. 130-183, 190-203. Copy with RIM HR Box file 1931-1959.

Base Line Archaeological Assessment Of Robben Island. Archaeology Contracts Office, University of Cape Town, October 1998.

Fick, J.P.F.: Memories of a Stay on Robben Island. SAHRA file ref.: 9/2/018/004.

Le Grange, Lucien: Robben Island: Survey of the Built Environment. 1998.

Le Grange, L, N.Bauman, T Hart: Robben Island Conservation and Use Plan. 2000.

Phase 1 Archaeological Assessment Of Robben Island World Heritage Site. Archaeology Contracts Office, University of Cape Town, 2001.

Reilly, Patricia: Conservation Survey of Robben Island. National Monuments Council. 1993.

Village Conservation and Use Plan; Policy Document. Robben Island Museum Conservation Plan Technical Team, November 2001.

Weideman, Marinda: Robben Island Coastal Defence 1931-1960. M.A. Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1997.

## **Articles**

“Look in after 40 years: The Story of the Artillery Specialists W.A.A.S. 1941-1945” ASWAAS Magazine 1985

## **Interviews**

Informal interview with Ernst Zauchenberger of Nolitha Engineering, 16 September 2011

Informal interview with Grant, EPP Robben Island, 16 September 2011

Informal discussions with Andre vom Hagen, 17 January 2011.

E-mail and informal discussions with Lionel Crook, January, June, August September 2011.

## **Archives**

SAHRA file ref.: 9/2/0018/0004 Robben Island General

SAHRA [NMC] file ref.: 5/k/rob E/1



Union Defence Force file ref.: D.C.[E] 671/2/69 Robben Island General. 1941 to 1959.  
Photocopies deposited at RIM HR courtesy of Capt Chris Dooner, Simons Town Naval base:  
Logistics

Union Defence Force file ref.: D.C.[E] 671/2/507, 23/10/1942 to 27/9/1959. Photocopies  
deposited at RIM HR courtesy of Capt Chris Dooner, Simons Town Naval base: Logistics

### Correspondence

Commissioner of Prisons and Historical Monuments Commission; 20 August 1963, 23  
September 1963, 23 October 1963, 18 January 1964. At SAHRA [HMC] file ref.: 5/k/R-E/1.

### Documents

R. Viney. Heritage Statement House 49, 3 February 2011.

SAHRA correspondence to Robben Island Museum 12 May 2011.

### Maps and drawings

Type [map, arch draw, etc]	Date	Reference	Source	Scale
<b>Archival</b>				
<b>Architectural drawings</b>				
Electr/arch	11/11/1942	Q.F./EM. 21.	RIM HR	1/8 <sup>th</sup> of inch =1'
Kichen& boiler house	24/11/1960	EE27/1503/2	DPW archive Pta [digitized and rescaled to 1:100 metric]	1/8 <sup>th</sup> of an inch =1''
OPS	29/3/1963	R6-G1	DPW archive Pta [digitized and reduced to 1:100]	4'=1''
OPS	26/6/67	8132/E3	DPW archive Pta [digitized]	unknown
OPS	June 1987	2/8132/46	DPW archive Pta [digitized]	1:100, 1:200
Line drawing	26/6/1967	8132/E2	DPW archive Pta [digitized]	unknown
Line drawing	26/6/1967	EE27/1503/1A	DPW archive Pta [digitized]	unknown
Electr engineers	26/6/1967	EE27/1503/1REVL TB	DPW archive Pta [digitized]	unknown
New Power station	Jan 1990	5/8132/4	RIM HR	1:100
<b>Maps</b>				
Line drawing	1905	9/2/018/0004;	SAHRA	Approx 1:4000
Contour	15/10/1942	Drawing no 10	RIM HR centre	1 inch to 200 feet or 1 in 2400 imperial
Contour	14/10/1942		RIM HR centre	unknown

Contour	4/5/1955	D.2078	DPW archive Pta [digitized rescaled to metric]	1:5000 imperial
Contour part site plan	21/9/1961	EE27/1503/1	DPW archive Pta [digitized and rescaled 1:2500 metric]	1"=100'-0"
Contour part site plan	13/12/1961	EE27/1503/1 EAV04	DPW archive Pta [digitized]	unknown
Contour	27/12/1962	Part of drawing 8132/71	SAHRA archive file ref 3/k/robe/1	Unknown
Site plan	6/6/1966	R6-T4	DPW Archive Pta [digitized and rescaled to 1:2500]	1"=200'
	May 1972	D2078/1	DPW archive Pta [digitized]	1:5000 metric
Contour	May 1972	1/8132/2	DPW archive Pta [digitized]	1:5000 metric
	18/5/1972	EE44/2429/15	DPW archive Pta [digitized]	1:5000 metric
	18 May 1972	R6-T6	Dpw archive Pta [digitized]	1:5000 metric
	May 1972	1/8132/2	DPW archive Pta [digitized]	1:5000 metric
	May 1972	1/8132/1 WAJ-01	DPW archive Pta [digitized]	1:5000 metric
	May 1972	1/8132/1 [8132/10 croosed out]	DPW archive Pta [digitized]	1:5000 metric
Contour	Nov 1973	D2078/1	DPW archive Pta [digitized]	1:5000 metric
	18/09/1989	Ref. 5/8132/23B drawing no. C4120/01	RIM HR	1:3000 metric
Part site plan	19/9/1989	EE8440/4-LS	DPW archive Pta [digitized]	1:1000 metric
Contour site plan	Jan 1990	1/8132/24 WBS 4088	DPW archive Pta [digitized]	1:1000 metric
<b>Ortho photo</b>				
Digitised print	1985		Map & survey	1:4692 metric
film	1989	929/4/ 1615	Map & survey	1:10000 metric