

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

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

**Contents**

1. INTRODUCTION.....	2
2. SITE PLAN .....	3
3. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LANDSCAPE ASSOCIATED WITH HOUSE 49 AND THE OLD POWER STATION.....	4

## 1. INTRODUCTION.

1.1. This report is supplemental to the motivation provided on 23 October 2011 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.

1.2. 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.

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

1.4. House number 49, designated as T73 by the military before the takeover by prisons was the office of the Garrison Engineer and his staff from ca. 1943.

1.5. The Union Defence Force [UDF] Garrison Engineer, and later the DPW Resident Engineer, was responsible for, inter alia, the management of the power station and the electrical supply on the Island.

1.6. 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.

1.7. 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.

1.8. 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 back ground and recommendation for the use of House 49 in support of the proposal.

1.9. 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.

1.10. RIM agreed to the use of House 49 as office space for the staff of the Collections Unit on 2012-03-22. Additional space in the OPS is now available for activities related to the storage of artefacts.

## 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, Garrison Engineers Office [House 49/ T73] and John Craig Hall were all built in this year. [Laver; 1982: Architectural drawing ] 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 first PWD Resident 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 until the late 1960's when the Department of Correctional services took over from PWD. House 49 presumably remained the Office of the Chief Engineer and his staff. 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.

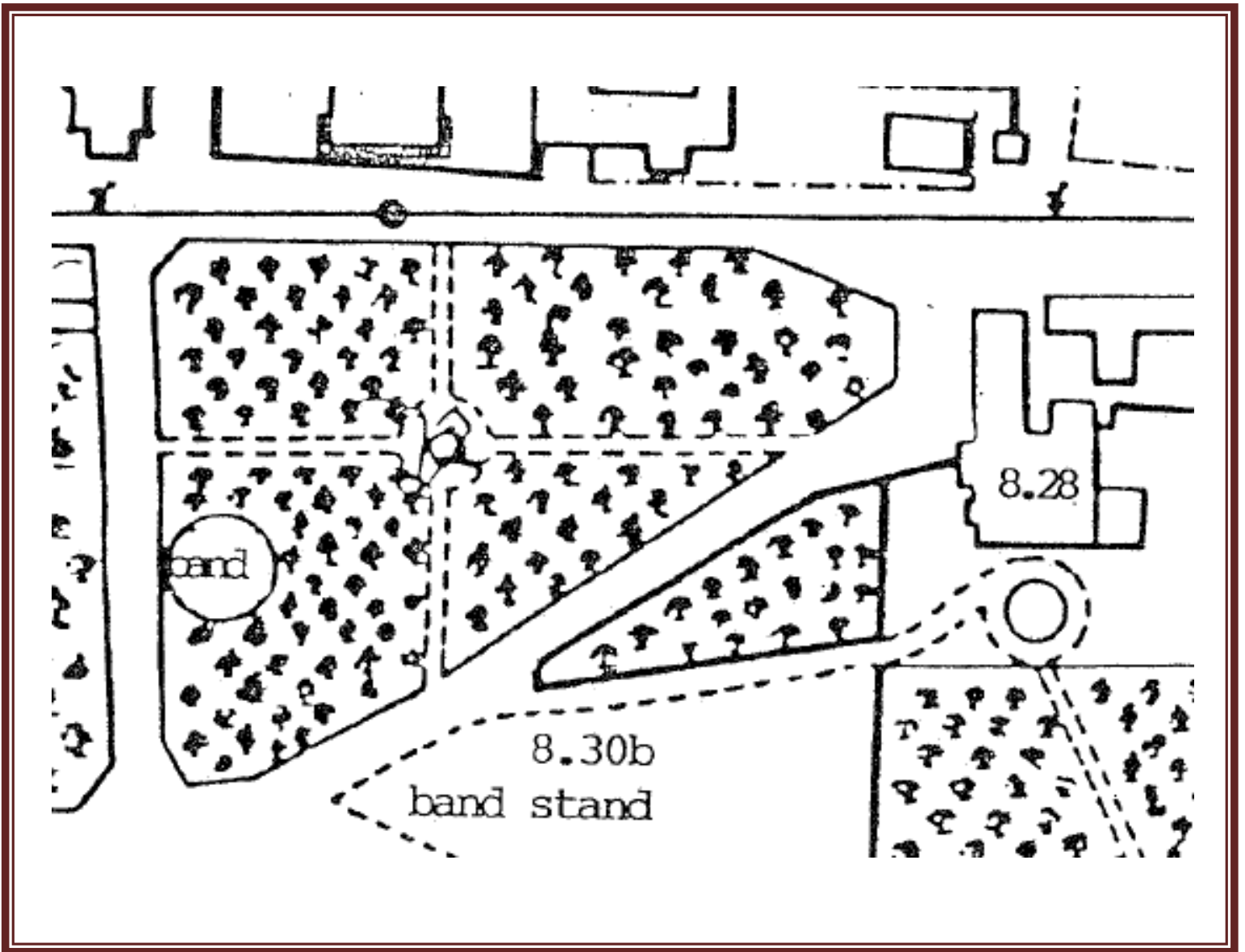


Fig.2. Extract from 1905 map as per Reilly Report, 1993.

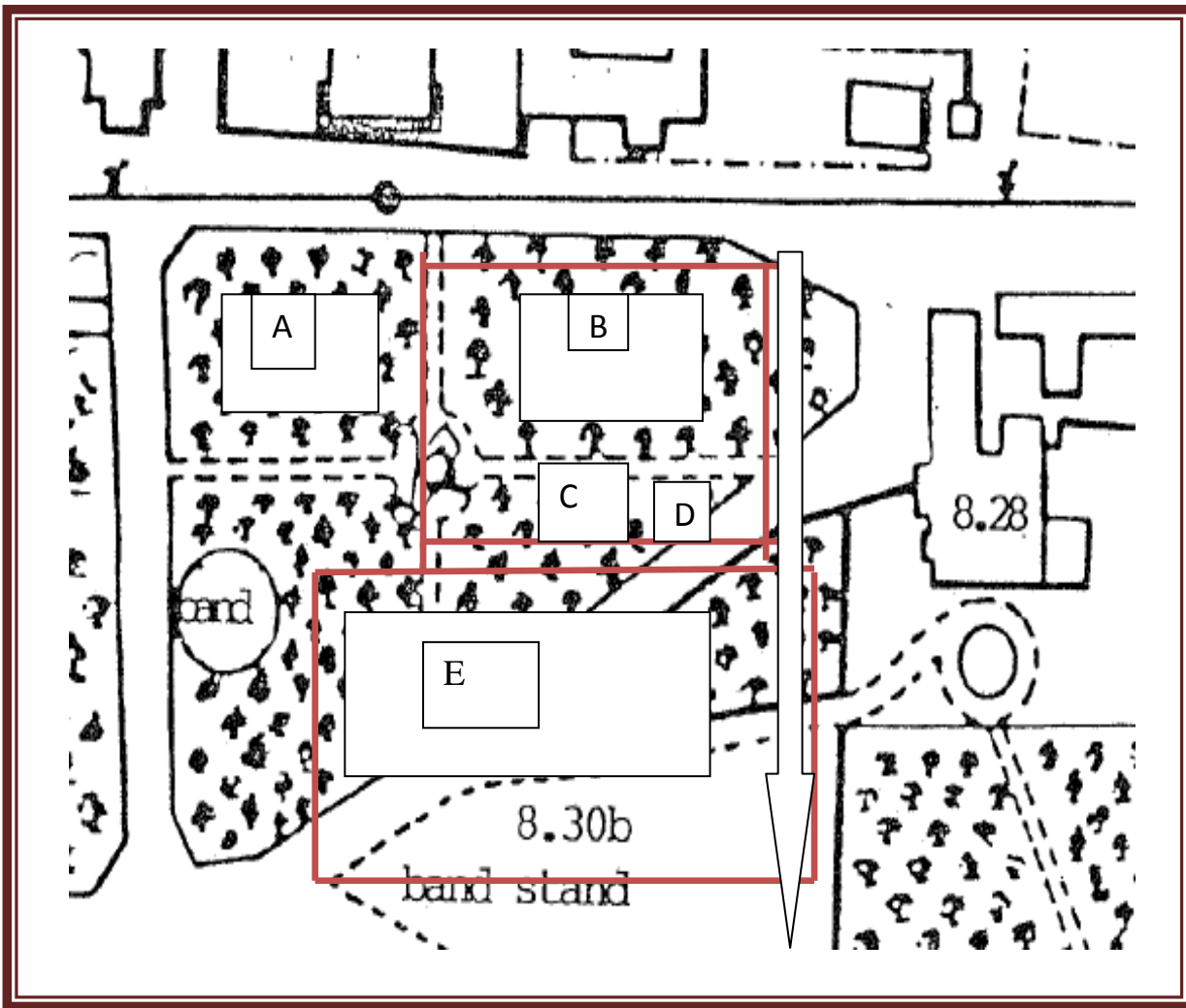


Fig.3. Retief Park, ca. 1905 with WWII and current overlay. Not to scale.

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.





Fig. 4. SW elevation



Fig. 5. NW elevation

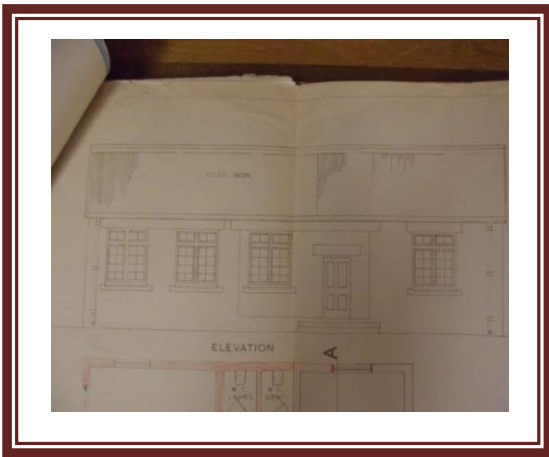


Fig.6. N elevation ca 1949

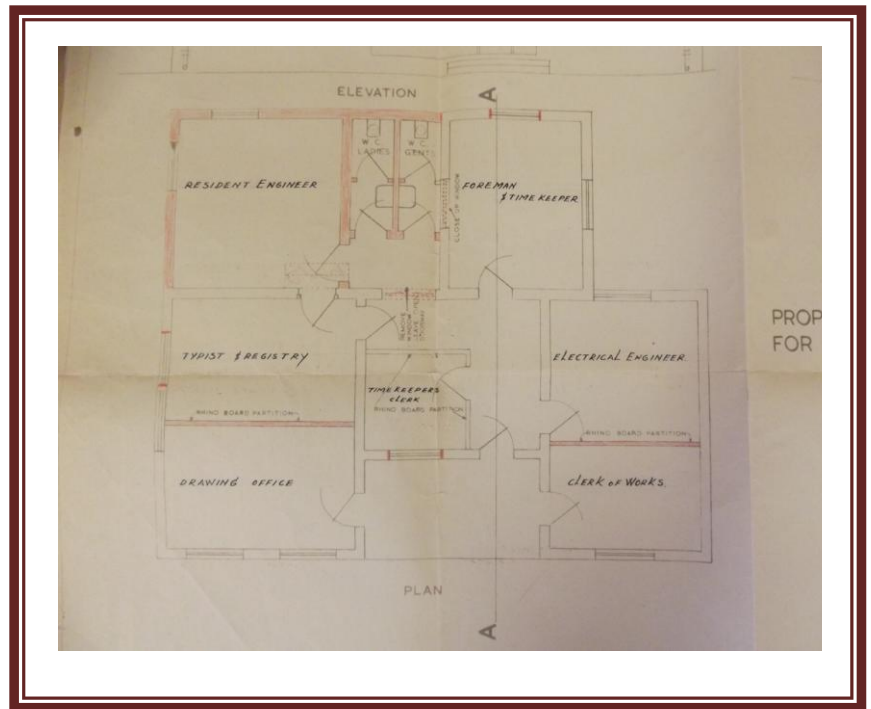


Fig. 7. Floor plan ca 1949

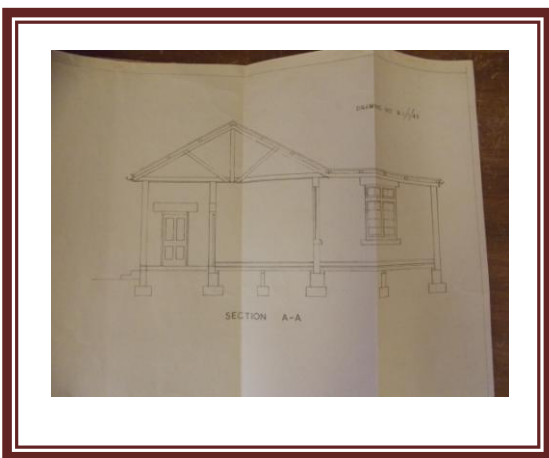


Fig.8 S elevation ca 1949