

ROBBEN ISLAND MUSEUM OLD POWER STATION

PRELIMINARY REPORT No. 1: ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND STATE OF CONSERVATION.

Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
GENERAL STATE OF CONSERVATION	2
EAST ELEVATION.....	3
NORTH ELEVATION	9
WEST ELEVATION	12
SOUTH ELEVATION	17
INTERIOR.....	20
OUTBUILDINGS.....	25
GUARD HOUSE, STORE AND TOILET	25
STORE.....	26

INTRODUCTION

General description

The general feel of and interpretation of the east elevation is congruent with that of the floor plans and architectural drawings from 1963, 1967 and 1987. The Main building appears to date from WWII. The first section of the Extension appears to have been constructed before that of the second section but after that of the Main building.

There is some doubt, however, at this stage about the provenance of the structure as a whole. Interviews and the unpublished memoirs of Captain George Anderson, who designed the power generation on the Island, seem to suggest that he originally disguised it in 1941 to resemble a tin shack. The Main building is more reflective of the building styles later in the war such as the John Craig Hall.

Common sense would also mitigate against the main building being made to look like a humble tin shack.

More research is, however, required to investigate the apparent inconsistencies in the available evidence and whether the pillars, foundations and plinth of the Extension to the Main building were built first and then covered with corrugated iron sheeting to house the power plant from ca 1941 to 1943/1944. The walls may then be later in fills after the Main Building was constructed.

GENERAL STATE OF CONSERVATION

Conservation of the building is poor. Alien vegetation has been allowed to proliferate over the past 4 or 5 years both around the perimeter and next to the walls on the east elevation.

Over the past 3 years a Seagull rookery has gradually encroached on the OPS from the adjacent sports fields. Observations made in October 2010 showed that the gulls had started nesting, along with a number of pigeons, inside the building. By November of 2011 the guano inside the building ranged in thickness from two to ten centimeters. Bird carcasses and nesting material were also evident. The original pipe and cable trenches had completely filled up. The depth of guano and nesting material around the outside of the building is not known but will be substantial.

Glass panes, doors and other features still extant in 1996 had disappeared completely by November 2011. Attempts were made to board up with corrugated sheeting a number of windows and door openings. This should have followed to a logical conclusion to board up the whole structure.

Little or no maintenance appears to have been done prior to and immediately after the moth balling of the OPS. Some of the deterioration was already evident by 1996. There does not appear to have been any attempt from 1996 to 2011 to stabilize the fabric to prevent further deterioration and invasion by animals and vegetation.

EAST ELEVATION

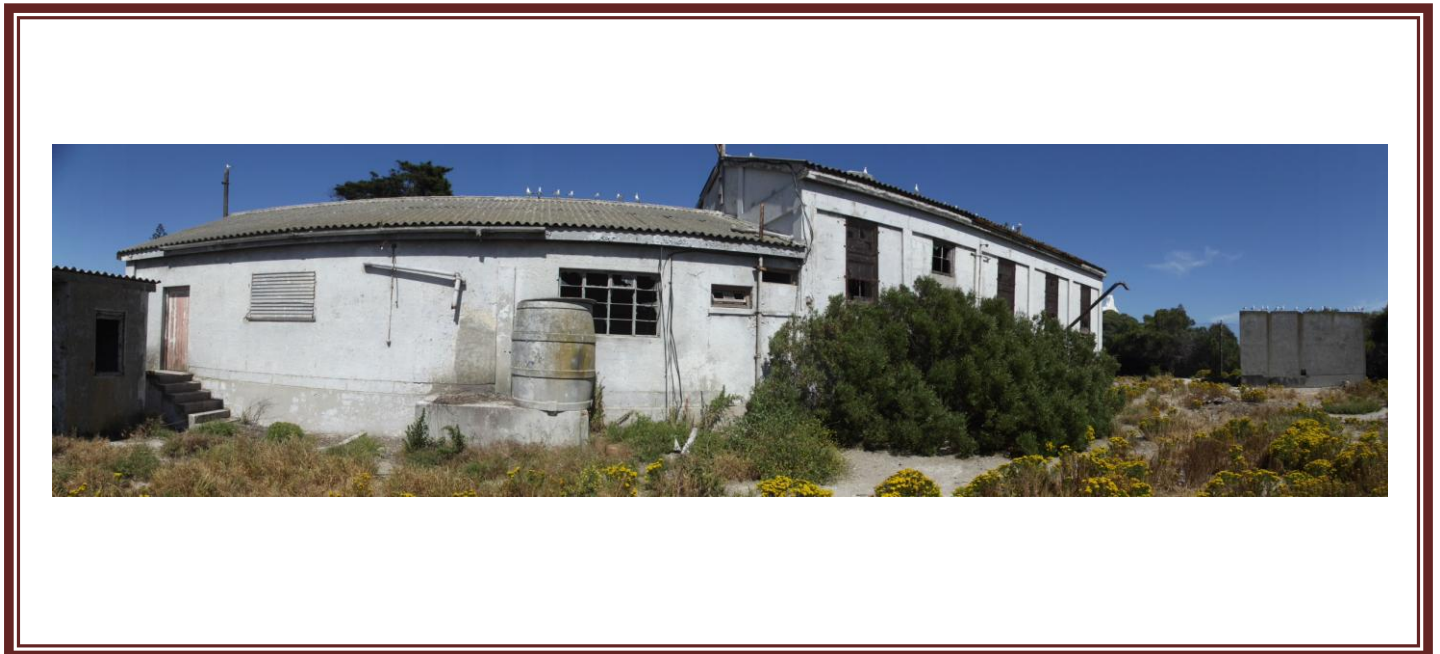
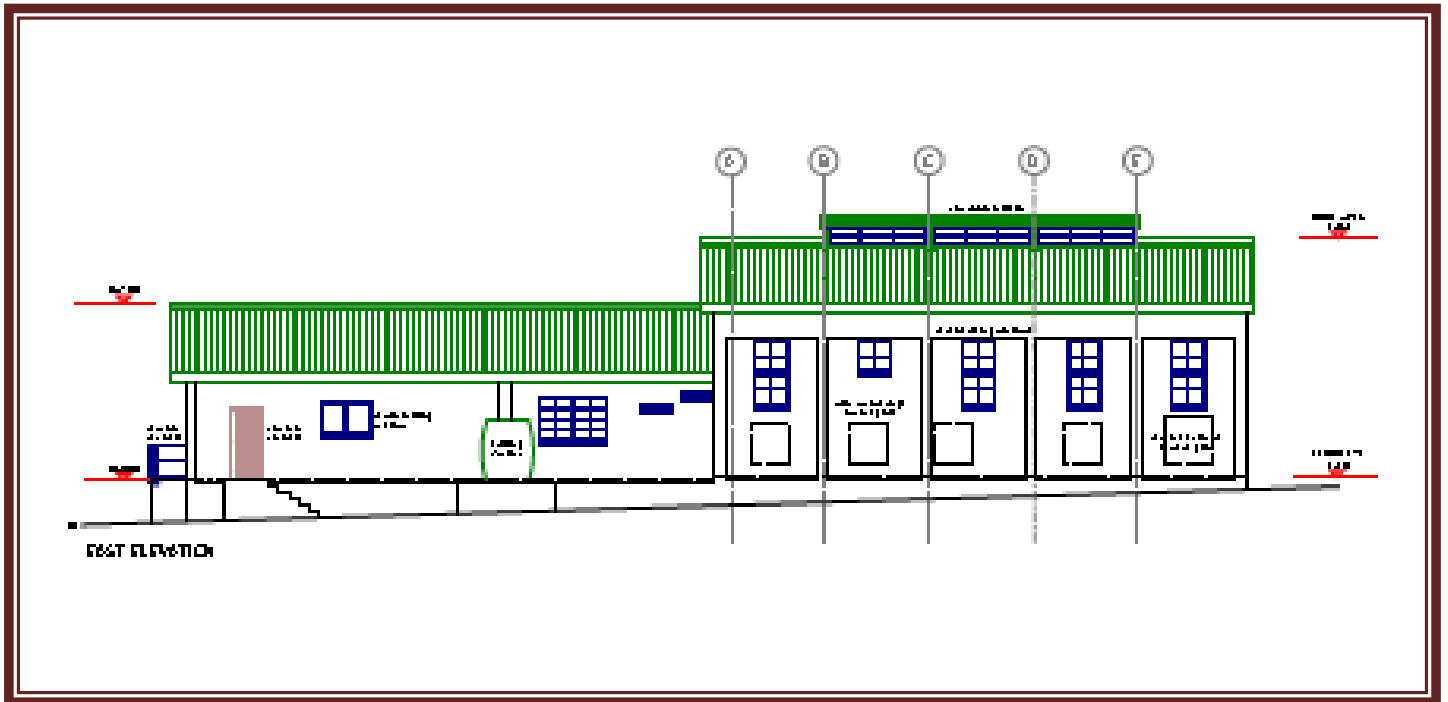




Fig. 3.
Main
building

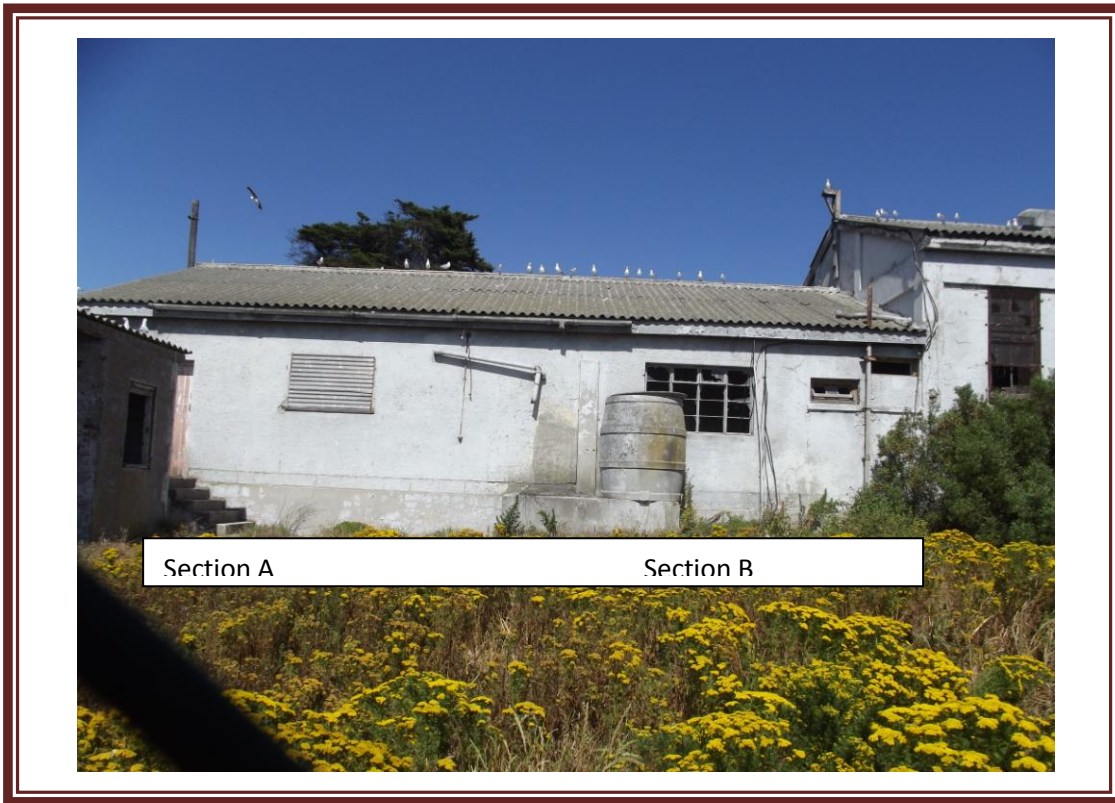


Fig.4.
Extension
to south of
main
building



East elevation
main building ca
1996. Note fire
bucket stand and
grill opening in
section E

EXTERIOR

Roof

No visible holes in corrugated asbestos sheeting on both main building and extension. Asbestos airflow to south of main building in good condition. A mounting for a siren erected in ca 1967 is situated on the gable end of the southern wall of the main building.

Gutters and down pipes

Some original cast iron guttering remains on the main building over sections B to D. No down pipes on main building. Extension has asbestos guttering mostly over section B but no down pipes.

An interesting asbestos pipe exits at approximately the first third of section A of the extension. This relates to the gutters and down pipes of the West Elevation, which run through the interior to catch rainwater in the tank on the eastern side.

A very rusted outside light fitting and conduit is still visible and not worth saving as is.

Decoration

Oregon pine wood fascia on main building in poor condition. Extension has asbestos fascia in reasonable condition.

Asbestos water tank on brick built plastered base.

Walls

Main building

Six cast concrete pillars, one on the NE corner, one on the SE corner and 4 more between each corner support a concrete beam. Appears to have yellowish soft clay brick infill between pillars. Splatter plaster is peeling in some places, mostly where later alterations were made. Two holes approximately 25 centimetres in diameter can be seen in sections C and D. These are later alterations to allow for similar stainless steel exhaust pipes as can be seen coming out of window in section B.

Extension to main building

Two cast concrete pillars, one on SE corner and one approximately two thirds of the way from corner to SE corner of main building. SE corner spalling badly. Section A appears to be an earlier extension to the main building than section B and consists of Robben Island type Breeze blocks between the pillars. These blocks are made from sand, seashells with some Portland cement added. Splatter plaster in relatively good condition apart from the edges with the pillars and the plinth where a definite crack separates the infill from the pillars.

Windows

Main building

Originally had 4 rectangular windows withbetween each pillar centrally placed. Frames made of wood [meranti] and appear to be in a salvagable condition. One was cut in half with later alterations and the half was bricked up. One was altered to allow a stainless steel exhaust pipe [approximate diameter 25 centimetres] to the outside for machinery that was installed later. What appears to be original steel mesh covers 3 of the windows. These have shielded the frames and some of the glass panes to some extent. Lower openings cut into original walls below windows to allow for cooling ducts for Rolls Royce twinset generators in ca 1972. Grills originally over these openings are no longer extant.

Extension to main building

Two small windows made from wood [meranti] in section 1 are for the toilet and men's urinal. They are salvageable. Their style appears to be that of the ca 1950's but more evidence is needed. They are an anomaly to the larger steel window frame. A large standard steel frame window is adjacent to the two wooden windows and may be a later addition to section 1. No glass panes have survived. A smaller window from SA Pine in the second section has been boarded up by corrugated iron sheeting.

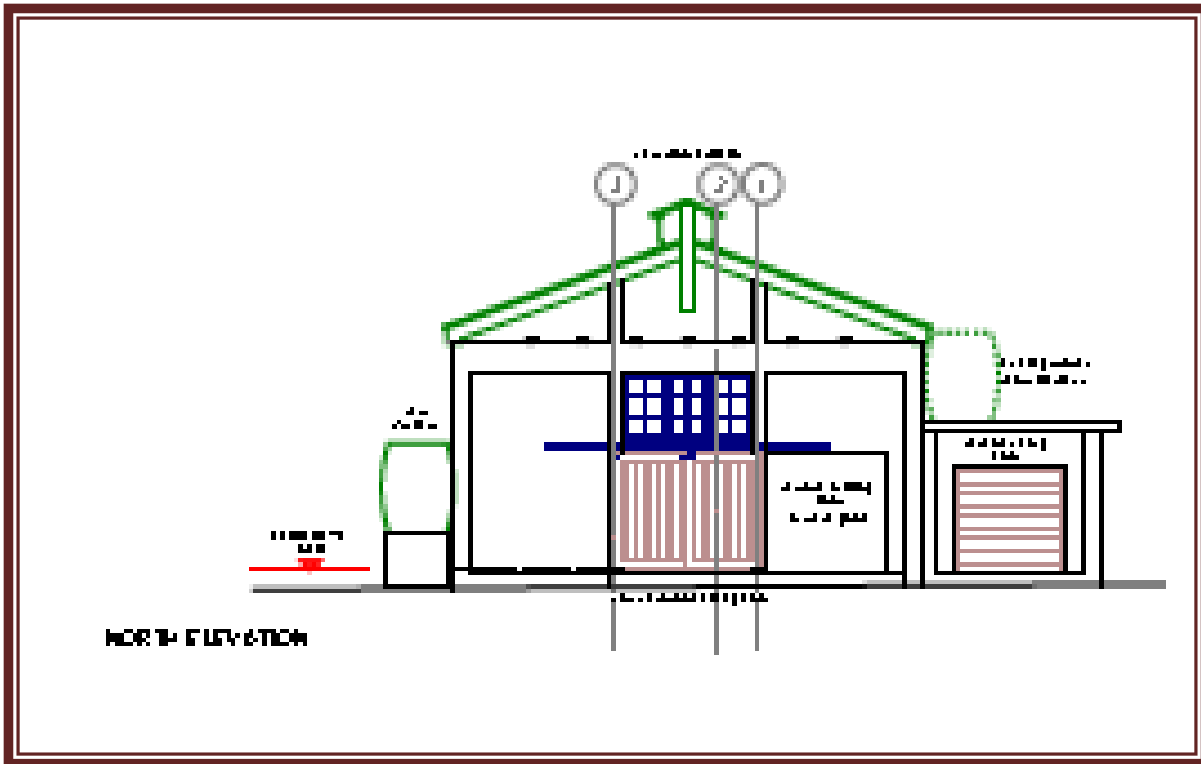
Doors

Single SA pine door and frame on SE corner with stairs leading up to. Small stoep. Built from plastered red clay fired brick as far as can be ascertained. Door and frame are salvagable.

Foundation and plinth

Built from Robben Island breeze blocks. Splatter plaster. Peeling in various places, especially where plinth meets walls

NORTH ELEVATION





The north elevation was the original entrance to the main building. The door was placed centrally below the window. The current door opening on the NW corner was made in the 1970's. The smaller extension and door opening on the NW corner was also erected in the 1970's to house the new transformer when the Rolls Royce generator sets replaced older machinery.

Roof

The fascia on the eastern half is no longer extant. The fascia on the western half is in poor condition and may need to be replaced. The transformer room has a cast concrete roof in reasonable condition on the north elevation. A wooden upright completes the gable. The upright may have been the original start to the overhead power line system. This appears to be in good condition.

Walls

Plaster is in reasonable condition. Cast concrete pillars of the main building are in a reasonable condition. The pillars of the transformer room are spalling badly on the NW corner. The air bricks are evenly spaced and in good condition.

Doors

The roller shutter door of the main building is still extant but not working.

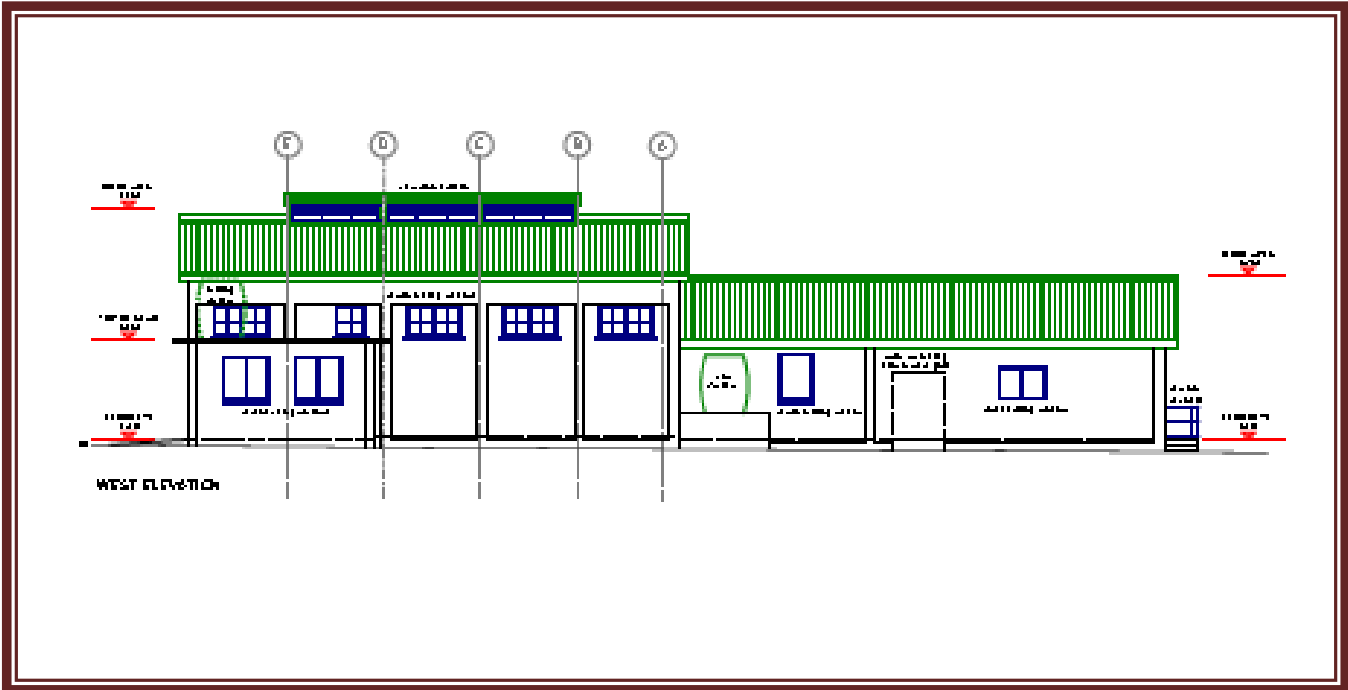
Windows

Window frames are Meranti. The wood on the exterior is in a very poor condition and the whole frame may need to be replaced. No glass panes extant.

Other

The old main door ramp is still visible. A ramp is also at the later door of the main building and the entrance to the transformer room. A very rusted exterior light fitting is still visible. An asbestos water tank is on top of the transformer room roof and in poor condition.

WEST ELEVATION







Transformer room

Roof

Cast concrete roof and plinth in good condition.

Walls

Plaster and cast concrete pillars in reasonable condition. SW corner pillar starting to show cracking. Iron ladder to roof rusted and in very poor condition.

Windows

Boarded up but no glass panes. Wood combination meranti on window sill and Oregon pine in frames. Some slats of panes missing.

Main building

Roof

Consists of corrugated asbestos sheeting in reasonable condition. SW corner sheet broken. Asbestos roof vents appear to be in reasonable condition.

Guttering

A section of the original cast iron guttering rusted but still extant from sections A to D. No or very small pieces of downpipes visible.

Walls

Splatter plaster appears to be in good condition. Paint work in poor condition .

Windows

The original position planned for the row of windows was on the lower level below the gallery floor level. This appears to have been changed to above the gallery floor level in the tracing of 1963. Window frames meranti appear to be in good condition. SW corner [section A] window frame lower strut missing. Two or three glass panes extant.

Other

Steel pipe fire bucket holder situated outside at section A on SW corner rusted and deteriorated beyond salvage.

Plinth and foundation not visible.

Extension to main building

Roof

Corrugated asbestos sheeting appears to be in reasonable condition.

Guttering

A length of approximately 2 metres of the asbestos guttering still attached to the pipe running through the building to the eastern side that connected to an asbestos rain water tank.

Walls

Plaster part splatter part smooth in reasonable condition although there is some cracking. Paint in poor condition. Cast concrete column separating section A and B appears to be in good condition

Windows

Window in section B is boarded up with corrugated iron sheeting and is made of Oregon pine. Window in section A boarded up with corrugated iron sheeting and consists of SA Pine.

Doors

Opening in section B bricked up and plastered. Door opening in section A boarded up with corrugated iron sheeting and SA pine frame.

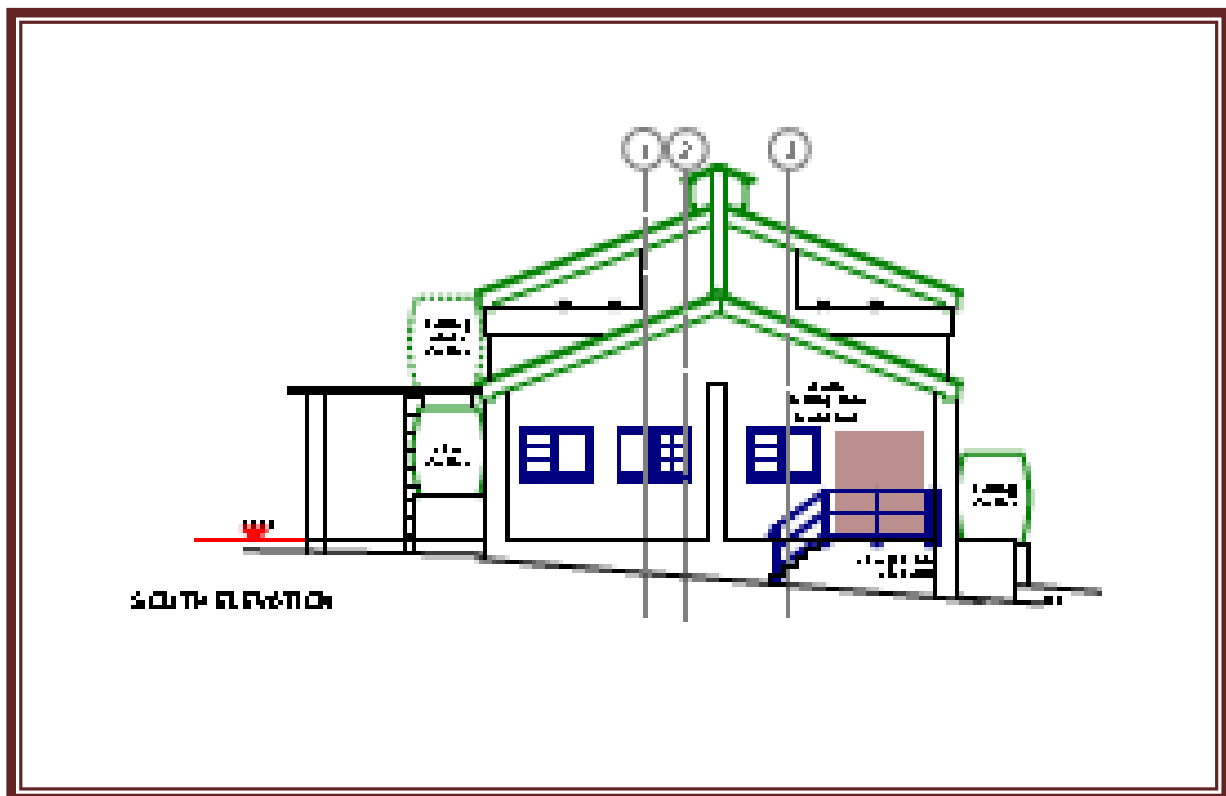
Other

Plinth and foundations only partially visible on SW corner appear to be in reasonable condition.

SOUTH ELEVATION

General description

Cast concrete columns on SE and SW corners as well as in centre. Cement 'breeze block' in fill. Plinth of cast concrete. Three window openings, door opening and concrete and brick staircase. Parts of the main building and the 1970's transformer room are also visible. The transformer room requires no further description at this point.





SW corner



SE corner

Roof and gables

Fascia and siren mounting from ca 1981 on main building appear to be in good condition and made from wood. Siren no longer extant. Fascia on extension of asbestos fibre cement and in reasonable condition.

Walls

Splatter plaster mostly in good condition. Built from Breeze blocks from local materials [Robben Island brick] Both cast concrete corner columns cracking and spalling badly. Central cast concrete column cracked.

Windows

One window boarded up with corrugated iron sheeting. Two windows from SA pine not boarded up and deteriorated.

Doors

Double wooden door no longer in position. One half of door salvaged and placed inside building.

Plinth and stairs

Stairs built from red clay brick and plastered. Some brickwork exposed. Plinth appears in reasonable condition and is plastered. Plaster is cracked and paint layer deteriorated to plaster in most places.

Other

Wooden [eucalyptus] electricity pole in poor condition as original creosote layer has deteriorated.

INTERIOR

Roof

Roof trusses in main building and extension in good condition and mostly Oregon pine. One or two trusses in extension appear to have been repaired by splinting.

Walls

Main building plaster appears to be in reasonable condition. Paint peeling in places. Cast concrete pillars appear in reasonable condition.

Skirting of small square clay tiles. Some are missing.

Interior walls and partition walls in good condition. Some partition walls from later [ca 1980's] Robben Island brick and plastered. Painted with white PVA.

Floor

Original square floor tiles still extant in large areas of main building. A number are loose. Condition not known as a layer of dirt and oil covers most.

Guano and dirt on floor of Extension to main building. Condition and materials not known.

Windows

Window frames on interior in better condition than outside.

Doors

Doors on Southern façade of main building, double Oregon pine and in reasonable condition. Door and frame from section B of Extension from Oregon. Doorframe near toilets also Oregon and in good condition. But door is newer hard board and SA pine and in poor condition.

Other

Three steel diesel fuel tanks in reasonable condition although some rust evident.

Steel hoist and gantry rusted but can be salvaged.

Wire mesh and wood cage used as store for chain saws in reasonable condition.









OUTBUILDINGS

GUARD HOUSE, STORE AND TOILET

Situated on SE corner.

Corrugated asbestos fibre cement in reasonable condition. No gutters or down pipes.

Steel window frames with no glass in guard house in reasonable condition. Wooden SA pine frames with no glass in store and toilet in poor condition.

Walls constructed from red clay brick and plastered. Cracks in plaster and walls. Paint deteriorated.

No doorframe in guard house. Doorframes in store and toilet from SA pine and in poor condition.



STORE

Situated on NE corner.

Has no roof and no floor. Rabbit activity in soil of floor. Stairs covered with soil and guano. Walls and plaster in reasonable condition. No windows but has fired clay ventilation bricks on N and E face.

