ROBBEN ISLAND MUSEUM: OLD POWERS STATION

PRELIMENARY REPORT No.4: REINSTATEMENT, RETENTION, REMOVAL, REPLACEMENT AND MODIFICATION OF HISTORIC FABRIC

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

The conversion of the OPS will, arguably, for the first time see major intervention in the historic fabric of any building as yet attempted on Robben Island. Robben Island Museum has a policy that a structure and its fabric must reflect its state as at the takeover by RIM of the Island in 1997. Major deviations from this policy in the conversion of the OPS is important if the structure and parts of its fabric are to be saved. The policy can also not be sustained with regard to the OPS as this would mean that the fabric will be in a permanent state of dereliction. [refer to fig. 39. 1996 Mayibuye photograph] Determination of significance of fabric will, therefore, over ride any policy decision to freeze heritage in space and time.

RIM also uses the Australia ICOMOS [Burra] Charter as a guideline in its conservation principles. Adaptive re-use of heritage is firmly supported.

2. SPECIFIC CONSERVATION POLICY AND PRINCIPLES

With the conversion certain elements will need to be reinstated, certain elements will need to be retained, certain elements will need to be replaced, certain elements will need to be modified while some will be removed completely to accommodate the new use.

Retention, re-introduction, removal, replacement or modification of fabric is a contested area and should not be done by one or two people alone. It will require input from a range of experts and be carefully considered and motivated.

The aim is to achieve a reasonable balance between the needs to conserve with that of adaptive re-use.

Decisions to re-introduce, retain, remove, replace or modify must be justifiable.

The process must be re-iterative. Recommendations in this document may need to change with implementation and construction.

Good methods of interpretation of re-introduction, retention, removal or modification should be implemented.

Records by means of both photographs and documents must be made during construction of the re-introduction, retention, modification or removal of fabric.

Any fabric removed must be either retained to form part of the collection, be reincorporated into another part of the building or be placed in a materials bank for later use by RIM.

The principle of 'do as much as is necessary and as little as possible' must be used as far as possible. In situ materials should be made good and left as is.

The industrial 'feel' or 'sense of place' [genus loci] of the buildings and their environment must be respected and interpreted appropriately

3. REINSTATEMENT OF HISTORIC FABRIC

3.1. ELEMENTS IDENTIFIED

3.1.1. Roof

The design proposal provides for the reinstatement of the roof ventilator shown in the ca 1963 tracing from an earlier architectural drawing. The reintroduction will allow for the ducting of the new air conditioning plant, wiring, pipes and other services required for the storing of artefacts. This will also create and save more space.

The two current roof ventilators are asbestos fibre cement. One is situated on the SE pitch of the roof approximately on grid line 'B', the second is situated on the NW pitch approximately between grid lines 'D' and 'E'. Both will need to be removed and must be taken into the collection.

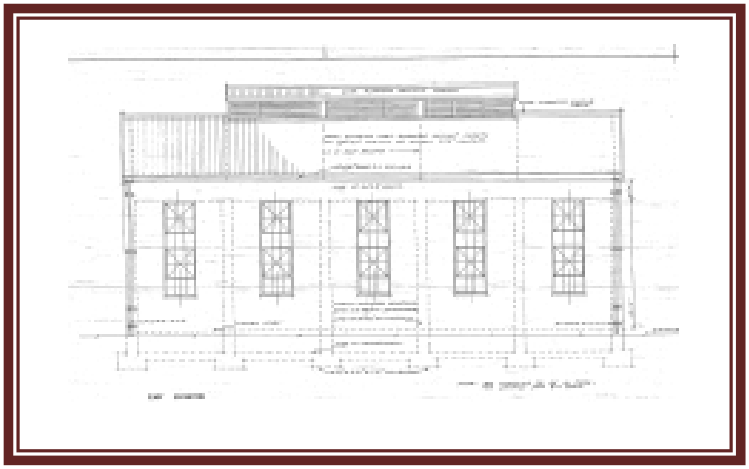
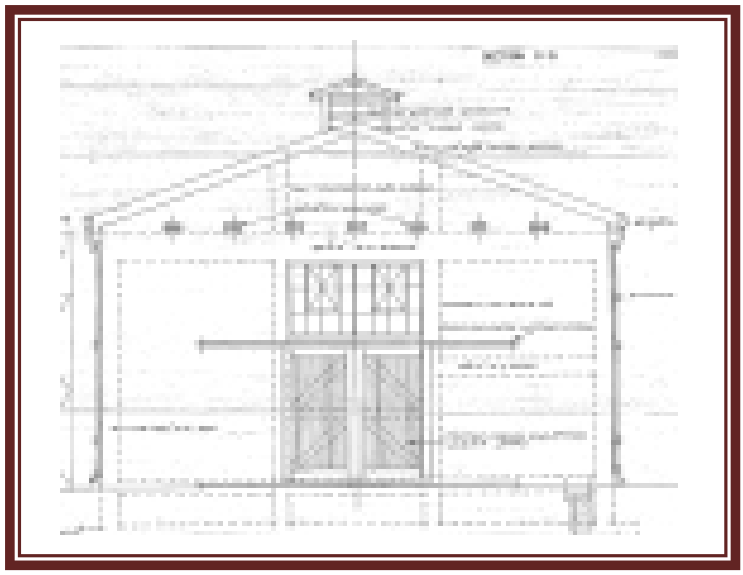


Fig.1. Ca 1963 tracing showing roof ventilator

Fig.2 & 3. Current roof ventilators ca 1970's or 1980's

3.1.2. Doors

The door on the north façade shown in the 1963 architects drawing is to be reopened beneath the central window. This will mean the return of the symmetry of the original design and will allow for better access down a central axis throughout the proposed storage area. The present door ca 1980's would be bricked up. The outline should be retained in the plaster as an interpretation of this part of the history of the place. The door to the ca 1967 to 1970 transformer room will be repaired.



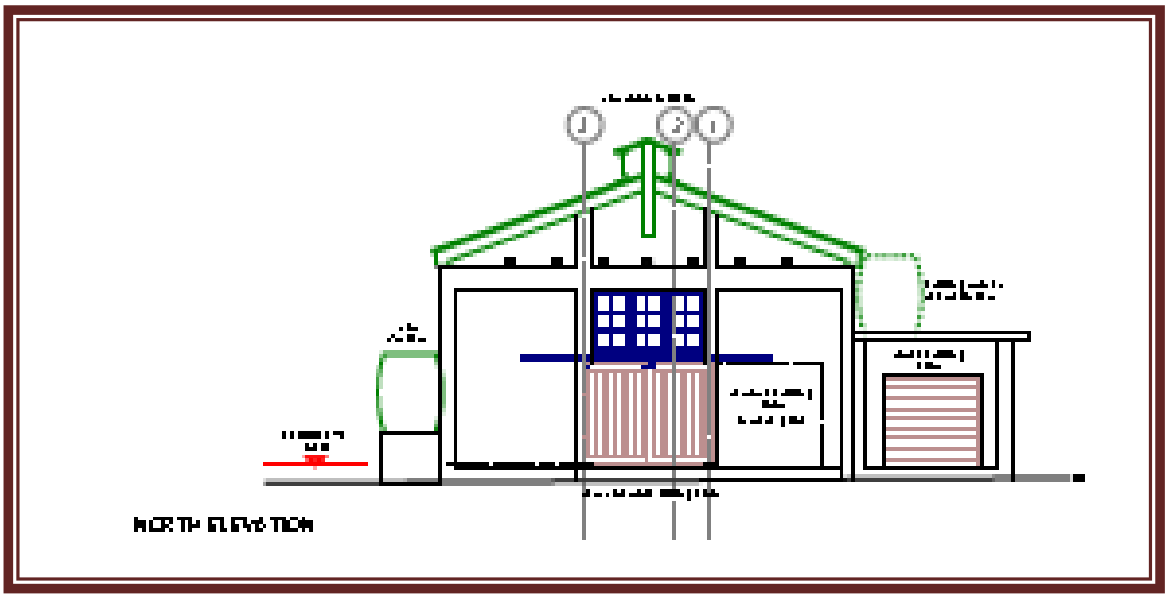


Fig.4 to 6. North elevation

3.1.3. Windows

The design proposal does not call for the re-introduction of any windows from earlier periods.

The window between gridline ‘B’ and ‘C’ on the east façade reflects two historical periods and should be interpreted appropriately to retain the original symmetry and aesthetic of the building.

Fig. 7. Halved window of ca 1970’s conversion in section B-C

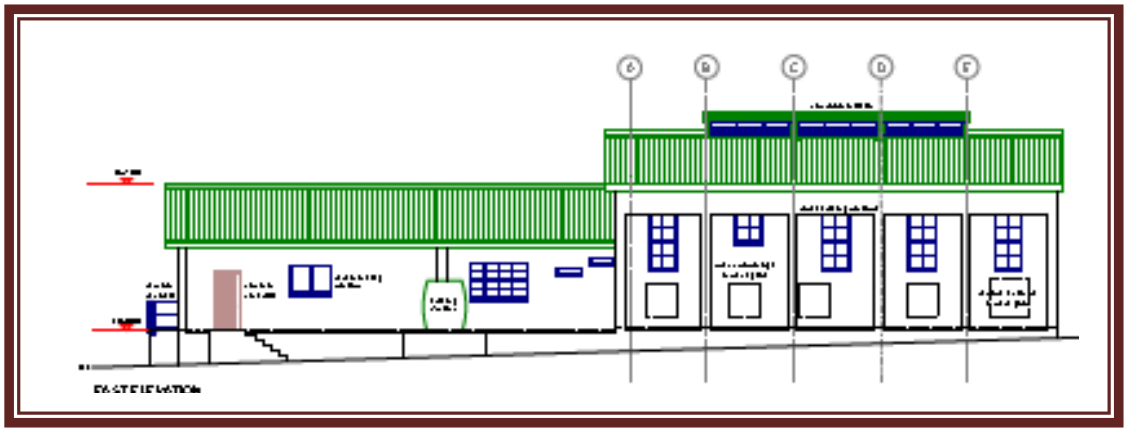


Fig.8. Design proposal East Elevation

3.1.4. Mezzanine level

The number and type of artefacts requires that the available space in the double volume of the main building be optimally utilised. The design proposal provides for the introduction of a mezzanine level. The 1963 tracing clearly indicates a gallery on the western interior of the building. The idea would not be to replicate the gallery but the introduction of a mezzanine would interpret the earlier historical layer, create a new layer and provide the requisite space.

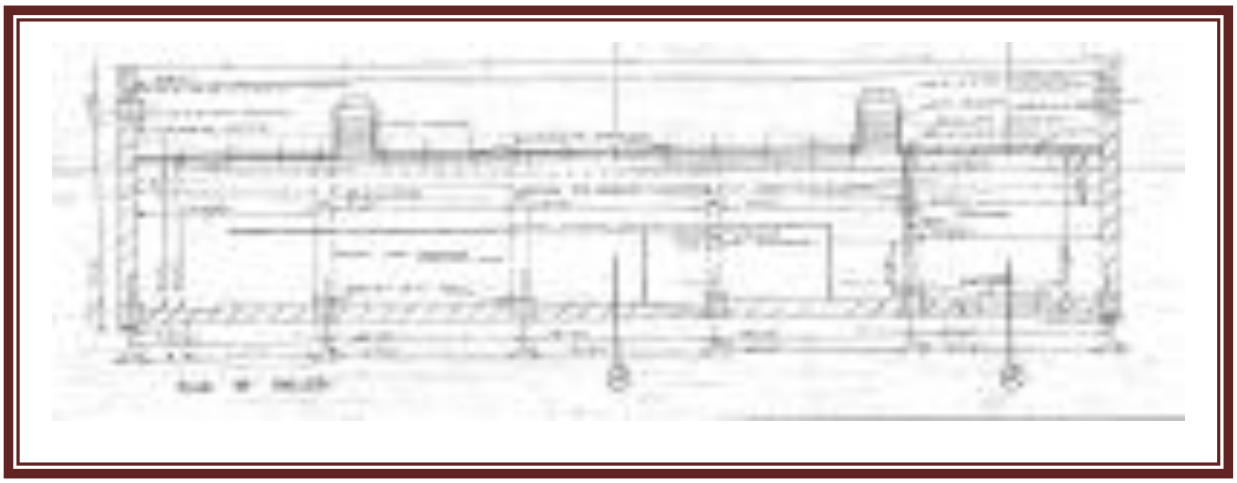
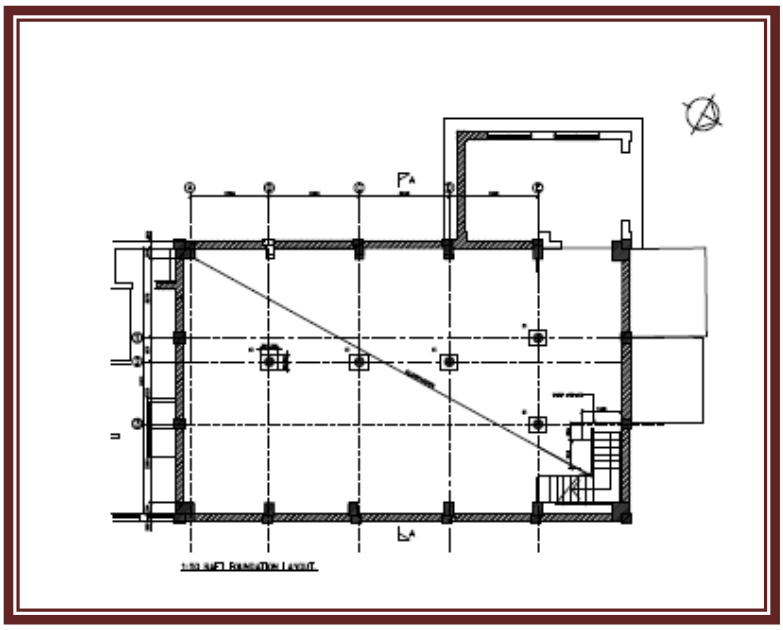


Fig. 9. Plan of gallery from 1963 tracing



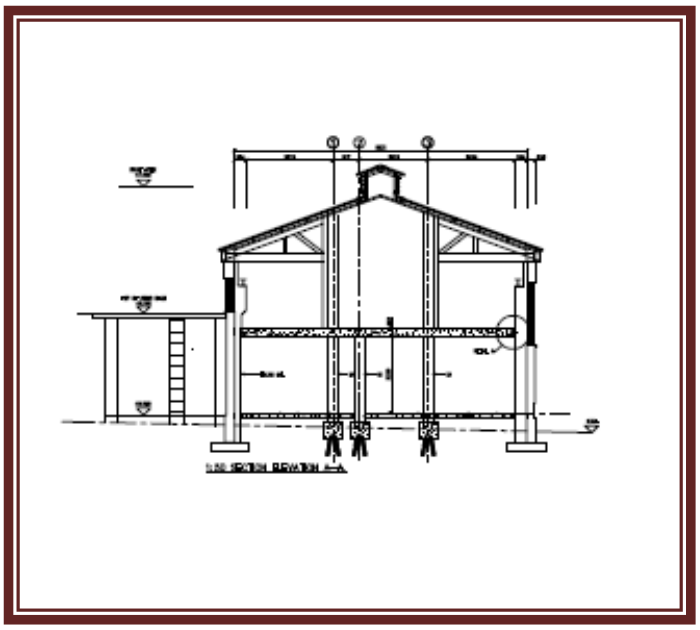


Fig. 10 & 11. Proposed new mezzanine.

3.1.5. Floor

With the ca 1967-1970 refurbishment the pipe channels leading out to the cooling pond were filled in with concrete. Three channels can be seen running west to east to the eastern wall. A third trench runs at right angles into the southern most of the three trenches from north south. The new design proposes the use of the trenches to facilitate humidity and temperature control. The final design is dependent at this stage on the results of the excavation of the cooling pond.

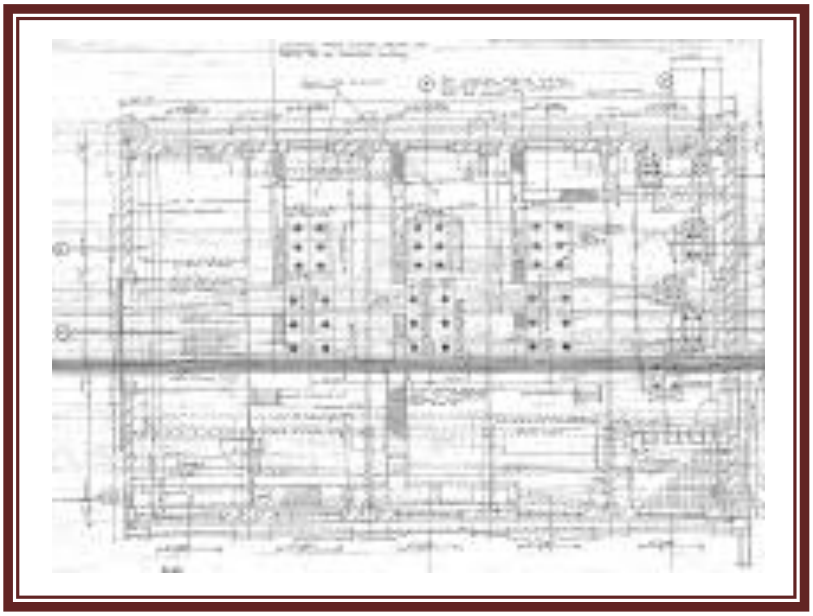


Fig. 12. Showing the 1963 floor plan.

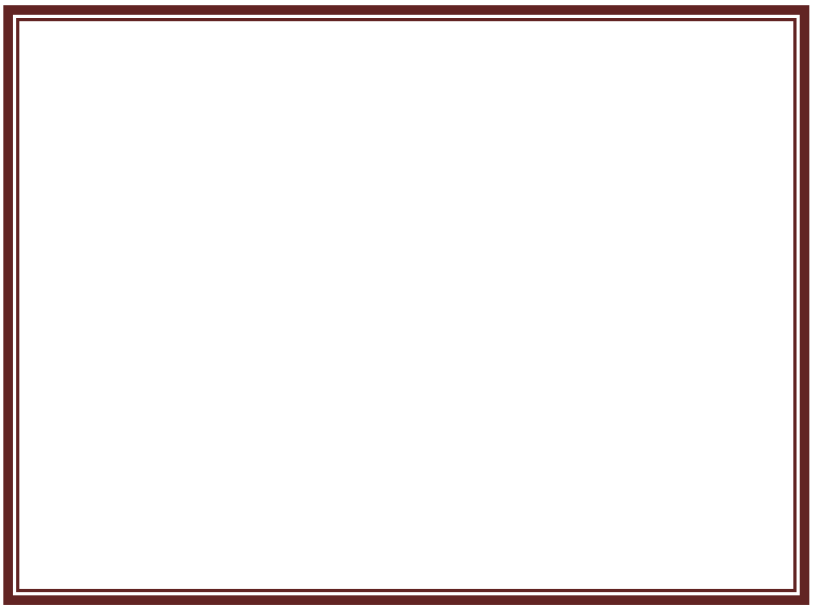


Fig.13. Photo of feint outline of three trenches on floor. [not available at time of writing as floor not cleaned properly.]

3.1.6. Cooling pond and channels

The new design provides for the use of the cooling pond shown on the 1963 tracing and mentioned in archival sources outside the eastern elevation. A proposal for its excavation is pending. The cooling pond will house the new plant for temperature and humidity control.

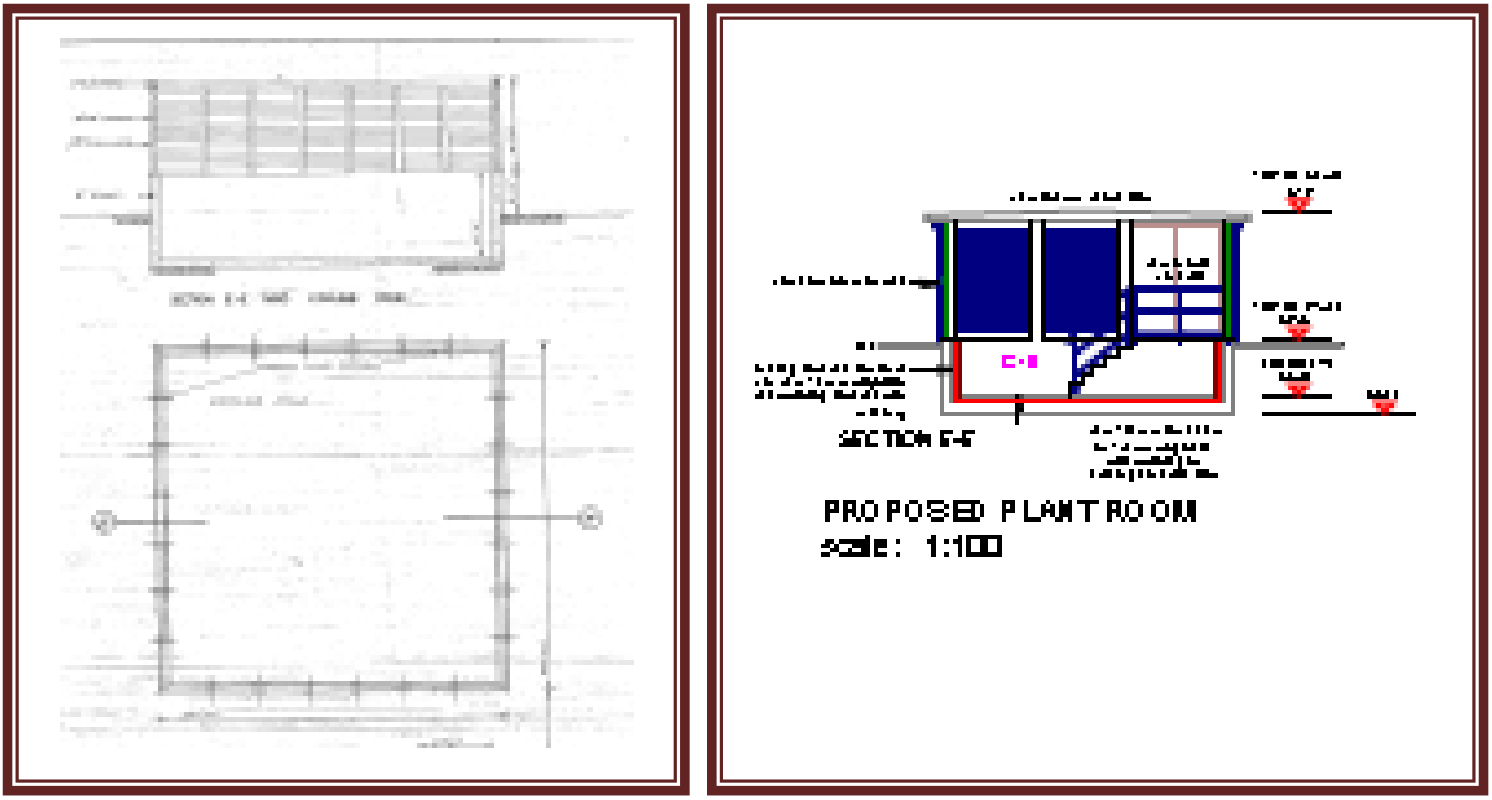


Fig.14. Ca 1963 tracing of cooling pond

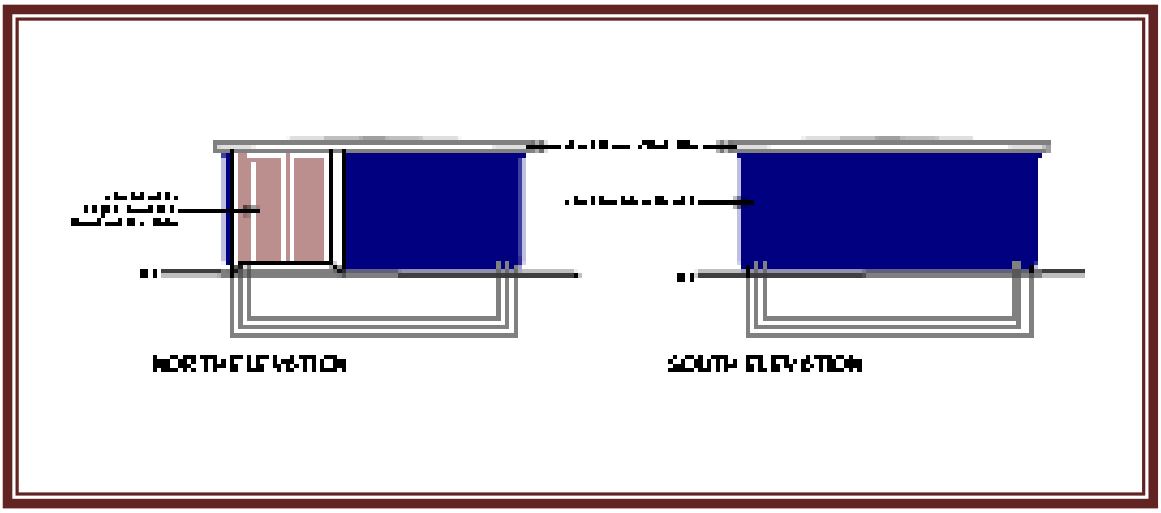


Fig. 15 & 16. Design proposal

4. RETENTION OF HISTORIC FABRIC

The following is recommended to be specifically retained as at the time of writing. Much of the more common elements of the historic fabric will be retained. Other features may come to light with implementation and as work progresses. A mechanism should be created to facilitate decisions to retain or remove during implementation and construction.

4.1. Roof

The corrugated asbestos roof sheeting dates from WWII on the main double volume building and from the ca 1980's on the extension and must be retained as part of the historic fabric.

The siren mounting on the southern gable of the double volume building should be retained.

The function of the wooden mounting on the north gable is not clear but it may be related to the siren mounting on the south gable. Pending further investigation the mounting should be retained.

Retaining both these features must, however, be balanced against the aesthetics of the reintroduction of the roof ventilator as shown in the 1963 tracing.

Fig.17. North gable wooden mounting. South gable siren mounting is discernable.

4.2. Guttering and down pipes

Two types of guttering provide historical layering to the building. The first is the steel guttering of the main building and then the asbestos guttering of the later Extension.

On the main building a section of steel guttering on the east elevation from grid lines ‘C’ to ‘E’ and from grid lines ‘A’ to ‘E’ on the west elevation are still extant.

Also still extant is a short section of the down pipe connected to the steel guttering on the western façade.

Fig.18. East elevation with extant section of steel guttering.

Fig 19 & 20 West Elevation

The steel guttering is representative of the earliest part of the historic fabric and must be retained.

It is recommended that the steel guttering and short section of down pipe is consolidated on either the east or west façade. Enough guttering is available to provide one façade with a representative sample of the earlier fabric.

On the later extension to the main building the remaining sections of guttering and down pipes are made from asbestos fibre cement.

On the western façade of the extension only a very short piece of guttering and down pipe are evident. The unique feature here, however, is that the short down pipe ingresses the building, a steel pipe on the inside of the building provides for the flow of rain water from west to east and then drains into a tank on the east face.

The feature should be retained to interpret the historic fabric but must be made inoperable as it would not be conducive to best conservation practice to allow rain water through the building where artefacts are stored.

Fig. 21. West face

Fig.22. East face showing exit point of western down pipe.

Fig.23. Steel rain water pipe through building.

4.3. Walls

A double row of red clay tiles similar to those on the floor forms a skirting round the interior of the main building. These must be retained and missing tiles be made good from the floor tiles.

Fig.23. Showing skirting outline with missing tiles.

Careful consideration should be given to the retention of the steel ladder on the inside SE wall. It may require some modification so that it does not interfere with the laying of the mezzanine. Another solution may be forthcoming at a later stage.

Fig.24. Steel ladder in SE corner.

4.4. Doors

It is recommended that the wooden door and frame in the SW corner be retained and built into the new position as proposed by the concept design.[refer Fig.24]

4.5. Windows

Window frames should as far as possible be retained and made good. Should it be necessary to replace a frame or part thereof it should be of the same material.

Window frames are made from a wide range of materials. Older wooden elements are either Oregon pine or meranti. Younger elements are SA pine or steel.

4.6. Floor

The existing channels must be retained and used for cabling and other services.

The small square red clay quarry [6" by 6"] tiles are part of the original historic fabric. Careful consideration should be given to their retention. The floor has, however, over time been considerably disturbed. Not enough tiles remain to cover the floor as it would have been. Howard Smith [Architect] suggested that existing tiles should be lifted and the perimeter of the floor be tiled to provide symmetry and compliment the skirting. This is highly recommended.

Fig.25. Floor tiles

Fig.26. Feint outline of trenches

4.7. Hoist and gantry

The hoist and gantry should be retained in situ, de-rusted and made good. The hoist should, however, be moved to either the east or west as its current position in the centre would interfere with the reopening of the central doorway.

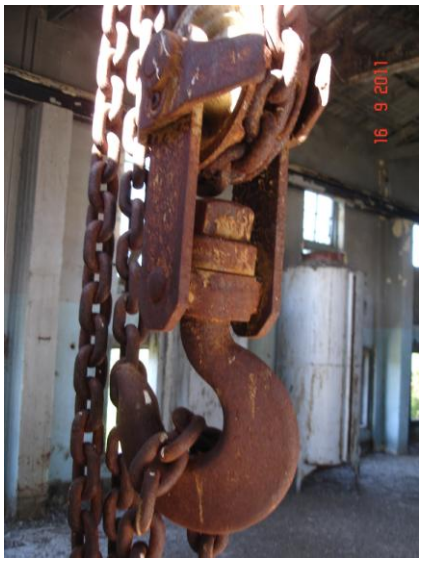


Fig.27 to 29 Hoist and gantry

4.8. Transformer room

The channels should be retained.

The steel ladder on the exterior south wall must be retained. Its condition, however, is so poor that it will have to be replaced.

Fig.30. Steel ladder on South exterior wall

4.9. Water tanks

The design concept proposes the reintroduction of the harvesting of rainwater for use in the garden. Two asbestos fibre cement tanks are still extant. The eastern tank is in reasonable condition, should be retained, cleaned, sealed and used to harvest rain water. The western tank on the roof of the transformer room cannot be salvaged and should be replaced with a tank made from appropriate material or consideration should be given to its removal for aesthetic and safety reasons. New tanks could then be placed at a lower level to harvest rain water.

4.10. Fire bucket stand

A fire bucket stand is still in place on the western side of the building. A fire hose reel stand is still visible on the eastern side. Both should be retained or replaced depending on their state of conservation.

Fig.31. Left, East elevation tank

Fig.32. Right, tank on roof of transformer room

Fig.33. Left fire bucket holder west

Fig.34. Right, fire hose reel

5. REMOVAL

5.1. Exhaust pipe

The stainless steel exhaust pipe still extant on the east elevation forms part of later conversions when generator sets started improving. While its retention would be advisable to allow for the representation of all historical layers this may not be practicable for the adaptive re-use of the building. The pipe should therefore be removed, accessioned and become part of the collection.

5.2. Steel prison door

A steel prison type door was modified with sheet metal to presumable provide a safe store on the interior adjacent to the SW corner of the main building. While its retention is desirable this may not be practicable as the design concept proposes that the small room [G07] become a safe. This would require a better fire resistant safe door. Should the prison door be removed then it must be accessioned and become part of the collection.

Fig.36. Stainless steel exhaust pipe

Fig.37. Modified prison door

5.3. Doors – other

A section of the wooden double door and the door frame on the western façade of the Extension is still in place. The design concept provides for the bricking up of this entrance. The door and frame should be use to make good the door and frame on the Southern face of the Extension. Half of the southern door was salvaged from debris outside and adjacent to the staircase.

Fig.38. Interior of door boarded up

Fig.39. South entrance with wooden door on its side on staircase

5.4. Cage

A diamond mesh and wooden framed cage used to store chain saws and related equipment will be removed. Materials must be salvaged and either accession for the collection or placed in a materials bank for later re-use by Robben Island.[refer fig.38]

5.5. Walls – interior rooms

A number of walls and rooms inside the Extension to the main building will be removed. The walls represent two distinct periods, one more modern ca 1980's and an earlier that may represent the ca 1950's. Where appropriate their outlines should be interpreted on the floor, walls and ceiling. Samples of the bricks must be kept,

accessioned and placed in the collection. Doors and window frames must be placed in a materials bank for later re-use.

5.6. Steel diesel tanks

Two round steel diesel tanks approximately 2,5 metres high and a square steel diesel tank approximately 2 metres high still remain inside the main building. These should be removed, cleaned, accessioned and be included in the collection.

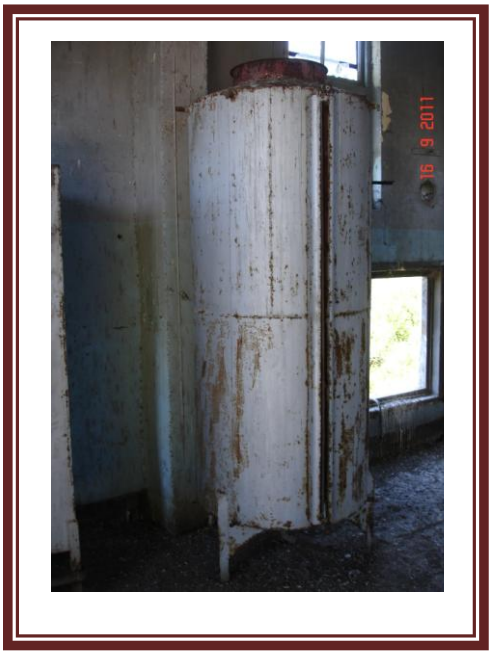
Fig.43. Door to cage

Fig.41. Office

Fig.42. Room

Fig.43. Earlier ca 1950's wall

Fig. 44&45. Diesel tanks



5.7. Toilet

The current toilet would appear to be ca late 1950's or early 1960's. The design concept proposes the installation of a disabled toilet and shower facility. The toilet bowl and cistern are relatively modern. The red painted urinal is moulded plaster on the walls and concrete moulding in the floor. This was later converted to accommodate a hand wash basin, which made the urinal obsolete. A wooden toweling rack is also present.

Careful consideration needs to be given to historic fabric that is often reduced to insignificance and ignored because of its function. A firm recommendation is not made at this stage.

Three options are available at this stage:

1. The retention of the present walls and shape of the toilet if house 49 becomes available. The conversion to a disabled toilet can still be done. Parts of the urinal would remain and be interpreted appropriately. The wooden toweling rack should be retained if possible. The wash basin should be placed in the position over the urinal where its wall mountings can be seen.
2. The partial demolition of the toilet and removal of some of its elements should house 49 not become available to accommodate the disabled toilet and shower facility. This would entail the removal of all walls and building of new walls. The urinal walls on the east and south interior should remain and be interpreted appropriately. The hand wash basin should be placed where the wall mountings can be seen. The wooden hand rail should be retained.
3. The removal of all walls and elements and their replacement with new appropriate fabric. The elements and a sample of the wall will need to be accessioned and placed in the collection. The urinal should be appropriately interpreted.

5.8. Wooden electricity poles

Two wooden [eucalyptus] creosote poles are still extant on the NW corner and in the middle of the South wall of the Extension. Both are not in good condition and will become a hazard to the building of not removed or replaced.

Fig.46. Left, Urinal and wash basin mounting

Fig.47. Right, modern bowl and cistern.

Fig.48. Wooden towel rail

Fig.49. NE wood pole

Fig.50. South wooden pole

5.9. Log book holders

Five log book holders made of galvanized metal plate are attached to the wall of the main building in the SE corner. Two are missing their paintwork, two have their paintwork in reasonable condition and one is deteriorating. It is advisable at this stage to remove, accession and place these in the collection.

5.10. Switch boards and shelf

Switchboards and a small shelf are situated on the south side of the south wall of the toilet. These should be removed, accessioned and placed in the collection.

Fig.51. Log book holders

Fig.52. Switch boards and shelf

6. MODIFICATIONS

6.1. Ventilation openings

The ventilation openings on the eastern side below the windows are modifications made ca 1972 to accommodate the Rolls Royce generator sets. The openings provided for air to flow to the radiators of the diesel motor. These need to be bricked up to provide for a sealed and controlled environment for the storage of artefacts. Bricking should be recessed to allow for appropriate interpretation. Consideration should be given to reinstate the steel mesh grills once extant as well as the louvre shown in a 1996 Mayibuye photo. The louvre has since fallen off and is lying on the ground.

Fig.53. Remaining example of steel mesh grille

Fig.54. Louvre still extant as at 1996.

6.2. Guttering

The guttering on the west face of the Extension to the main building will need to be modified in order for the harvesting of rain water on the west side. The current down pipe runs through the building to the east and will be sealed off, but retained as recommended with the section on retention.[refer to section on retention]. Provision must be made for water run off from west to east around the building.

Fig. 55. Remainder of gutter and downpipe west face Extension.

7. OUTBUILDINGS AND ASSOCIATED LANDSCAPE

7.1. Guard house and facilities

This outbuilding is situated on the SE corner of the Extension and replaced the corrugated tin guard house in the early ca 1980'sw. Roofing, wall, window and door opening elements should be retained as far as possible. No provision appears historically to have been made for guttering but there is evidence of a water run off system on the ground, which should be retained.

Fig. 56 & 57 Guard house and facilities SE

7.2. Store

The store is situated on the NE corner of the site. The design concept proposes that this be turned into the fumigation and isolation unit. The design conmcept requires that the building be sealed to suit its purpose. The historic fabric of the shaped clay brick vents on the north and east facades of the building requires careful consideration as these are irreplaceable. It would be preferable to find a means to retain these and still seal the building. If, however, this is not feasible then the should be sensitively removed and then either accessioned and taken into the collection or taken into the materials bank for later re-use.

Fig.58. Entrance and west face

Fig.59. decorative ventilation interior east wall

7.3. Fence and entrance gate

The current fence and entrance gate dates from ca early 1980s. The gate and fence will be retained, made good and necessary repairs are to be made. Replacement is not advisable.

Careful consideration must be given to opening up a gateway in the fence on the western side to facilitate easy access to house 49 should the use of the house be approved for office space.

7.4. Retaining walls

Retaining walls on a part of the western side, the whole of the north and south create terraces that should be retained.







Fig.60 to 66. Fence, gate , retaining walls