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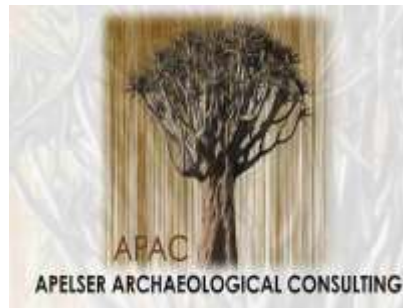
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**APAC021/55**

**2021-06-27**

To: Me. Daisy Kotsedi  
**KMFE Environmental**

**RE: SHORT REPORT ON THE TEST EXCAVATIONS TO LOCATE POSSIBLE UNKNOWN BURIAL PITS ASSOCIATED WITH RECENTLY ACCIDENTALLY DISCOVERED HUMAN REMAINS AT 97 URANIUM ROAD, VULCANIA EXTENSION 2, BRAKPAN, GAUTENG**

APelser Archaeological Consulting cc (APAC cc) was initially appointed by KMFE Environmental, on behalf of Ezee Tile Adhesives, to undertake a site visit and assessment of accidentally discovered human remains found at the location (Erven 178 & 179, Vulcania Extension 2) of the new Ezee Tile Adhesive Facility. After the initial assessment, the Burial Grounds & Graves Unit (BGG Unit) of the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) was approached on the way forward. They then recommended that test excavations be conducted to try and determine if there could be previously unknown and unmarked burials still located in the area. A permit for this was to be applied for from the BGG Unit, and once issued physical test excavations could be conducted. APAC cc was then requested to apply for the said permit and to undertake the investigations.

### ***Background to the Project***

KMFE Environmental was contracted to apply for an Environmental Authorisation from the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) for the construction of an Ezee Tile Adhesives Facility in Vulcania (Brakpan). The physical address is 97 and 98 Uranium Road. The site is zoned as industrial and the previous land use of this site was manufacturing of precast concrete units.

An Environmental Authorisation for the Eeze Tile Adhesives Facility was issued GDARD on the 13th of April 2021. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2021, during site preparation, the Contractor discovered what appeared to be human remains on the site. The Contractor was then informed to cease all construction activities until SAHRA had been informed of this discovery. The Contractor also took the liberty to inform the South African Police Service and a case (Case Number 121/06/2021) was also opened. The found remains (a tibia and femur) were taken by the Brakpan SAP for analysis and safekeeping.

After SAHRA was contacted by KMFE Environmental, they informed the client to appoint an archaeologist to assess the bones and provide recommendations on the way forward. Anton Pelser of APAC cc was then contracted to undertake this assessment, with a site visit conducted on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2021 (**See Report APAC021/50**)

**AJ Pelser BA (UNISA), BA (Hons) (Archaeology) [WITS], MA (Archaeology) [WITS]**

It was clear that the area and development site had been completely impacted and disturbed by past industrial and recent activities related to the approved new development. Over and above the remains discovered on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2021 by the on-site Contractor, more scattered human remains were found during the site assessment conducted on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June.

It was also clear from the initial site assessment that the human remains found here probably originated from a previously unknown and unmarked grave and burial pit. The recent activities associated with the approved Ezee Tile Adhesives Facility development on the property accidentally uncovered the remains, and as a result the grave was no longer intact and the remains had been scattered across the area. It was found to be very likely that the remains were fairly localised between their origin (the soil cutting/trench around 120m to the south-west) and the spoil heaps where the 1st remains were identified on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June and the new remains were identified on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June.

Older aerial images (Google Earth) of the study and development area clearly showed that the site was extensively used for industrial purposes and that the location of the human remains were covered by various structures until fairly recently. It was therefore likely that these structures already covered the historical grave and that there was no way that it would have been visible or marked before the newly proposed development actions commenced. From the human remains itself, as well as the possible coffin wood fragments, it was concluded that these remains had a historical origin and that it could have been associated with historical farming in the area (pre-industrial and the extensive urban expansion in the Brakpan area). A mining origin was also possible but could not be determined at the time.

On the basis of the site assessment and discoveries made the following recommendations were made:

1. that an urgent rescue permit be applied for from SAHRA's Burial Grounds and Graves Unit (SAHRA BGG Unit) for the recovery of all possible remaining human remains at the site. Once the permit is issued this work can be concluded
2. that the area of possible origin of the human remains (the soil cut/trench) and loose soil where newly found remains were identified be cordoned off and no development activities be conducted here until the archaeological investigation has been concluded
3. that the area where the first discovered remains were identified (the soil spoil heaps) on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2021 be similarly cordoned off until further investigations. More human remains were identified here on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June
4. that the SAP Brakpan be contacted in order to get access to the remains they have removed from site in order to re-unit these with all the other human remains associated with the newly discovered and future recovered remains
5. as it was believed that these remains had a historical origin it was also recommended that the remains be removed from site and be either curated in a recognized institution such as a Museum, or that they be reburied at a location close to their origin. SAHRA's BGG Unit was requested to advise on this aspect

It was finally recommended that the Contractor be allowed to continue with their development activities on the site – excluding the cordoned off search areas – but that care should be taken if any other remains or archaeological and/or historical material are uncovered that these should be demarcated and left in situ. The subterranean nature of these resources (including low stone-packed or unmarked graves) should always be taken into consideration. Should any previously unknown or invisible sites, features or material be uncovered during any development actions then an expert should be contacted to investigate and provide recommendations on the way forward.

After SAHRA had reviewed the initial Assessment report they provided the following recommendations:

1. SAPS Forensic must retain the remains until Consultation as per the NHRA regulations is concluded.
2. A Test excavation permit application must be lodged to test suspicious areas to confirm/ rule-out the existence of graves. The exhumation and relocation of the exposed human remains and any other grave identified through this test permit will be authorized upon conclusion of the regulated 60 days consultation. Once the regulated 60 days consultation has been concluded, a grave exhumation and relocation application may be lodged for the grave in question and any other graves confirmed by the Test excavation.

APAC cc was therefore advised to lodge a Test excavation application as a matter of urgency as all development activities may only resume after the Test excavation report had been submitted to SAHRA. A permit application was then lodged and issued on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2021 (**Case ID#16663 & Permit ID#3277**). The physical Test Excavation work was undertaken on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2021 and this report discusses the results of this and provides recommendations on the way forward.

### ***Relevant Legislation***

Aspects concerning the conservation of cultural resources are dealt with mainly in two acts. These are the National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999) and the National Environmental Management Act (Act 107 of 1998).

### **The National Heritage Resources Act**

According to the above-mentioned act the following is protected as cultural heritage resources:

- a. Archaeological artefacts, structures and sites older than 100 years;
- b. Ethnographic art objects (e.g. prehistoric rock art) and ethnography;
- c. Objects of decorative and visual arts;
- d. Military objects, structures and sites older than 75 years;
- e. Historical objects, structures and sites older than 60 years;
- f. Proclaimed heritage sites;
- g. **Grave yards and graves older than 60 years;**
- h. Meteorites and fossils; and
- i. Objects, structures and sites of scientific or technological value.

### **The National Estate includes the following:**

- a. Places, buildings, structures and equipment of cultural significance;
- b. Places to which oral traditions are attached or which are associated with living heritage;
- c. Historical settlements and townscapes;
- d. Landscapes and features of cultural significance;
- e. Geological sites of scientific or cultural importance;
- f. Sites of Archaeological and palaeontological importance;
- g. **Graves and burial grounds;**
- h. Sites of significance relating to the history of slavery; and
- i. Movable objects (e.g. archaeological, palaeontological, meteorites, geological specimens, military, ethnographic, books etc.).

### ***Results of the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2021 Test Excavations***

The area and site where the remains were discovered has been extensively disturbed by current and ongoing ground clearance and compacting related to the approved Ezee Tile Adhesive Facility development. Prior to that the area and site was used for industrial purposes (most recently the site was used for the manufacturing of precast concrete units). As a result of these recent historical developments and industrial activities the original natural and historical landscape was completely altered and disturbed, and if any cultural heritage (archaeological and/or historical) sites, features or material would have existed

here it would have been destroyed or completely disturbed. This would include unknown and unmarked graves and burials.

The human remains discovered by the Contractor were located on spoil heaps taken from another section of the development site, used for leveling and compacting the area where the new Facility will be constructed. It is clear from this that the human remains found were not in an in situ position but that it had originated from another location. This location would most likely be from the area where soil material was removed for use to another point on the site. It was this area that was assessed to see if possible in situ graves or burial pits could be identified.



**Figure 1: Spoil heaps where the human remains were initially identified by the Contractor.**



**Figure 2: The area where the soil was taken from is visible around the tree line.**



**Figure 3: A closer view of the area where the material was removed from.**





**Figure 4: Another view of the cut from where the soil was taken and dumped at the location where the human remains were 1<sup>st</sup> discovered. No evidence of any in situ graves or burial pits was visible during the initial site assessment.**

The 1<sup>st</sup> aim of the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2021 investigation was to recover any scattered and loose human remains across the site, disturbed as a result of earlier work when soil was removed from the cutting for use as levelling and compaction material on other sections of the development site. This included the skeletal remains reported on in the APAC021/50 report and left on site. The spoil heaps where these remains were flagged was sorted through and carefully levelled and all human remains recovered, bagged and boxed for safekeeping on site until formal exhumation and relocation work can be undertaken. The remains kept by the Brakpan SAP will then also be sourced as part of this recovery exercise. Although the SAP was requested to be on site during the 25<sup>th</sup> of June work, they could not be reached and did not respond to any requests to contact the Contractor. Other scattered remains not previously seen was also recovered from the cutting/trenching area and placed in bags.



**Figure 5: The area where the soil heaps were located where scattered human remains were found was carefully scrutinised for the presence of further remains and the soil heaps levelled for the recovery. A few skeletal parts were found and removed from the area.**

The area around the cutting/trench was then investigated in detail for the presence of possible previously unknown and in situ graves or burial pits. This was done by cleaning/brushing the edges of the trench/cutting on both sides (northern & southern profiles), as well as scrutinising the middle portion where top soil has already been removed for other evidence of skeletal material and grave goods.

It became evident quickly that there were a number of in situ and previously unknown graves and burial pits present here, with some obviously disturbed by the recent trenching. It needs to be noted here again that there is no surface evidence for the presence of graves here. Earlier aerial images (Google Earth) show that the area where these burials are located was until recently situated underneath various structures and features associated with earlier industrial activities. It was when these were demolished and removed for the newly approved development and when trenching commenced that these burial pits were exposed.

Once the visible in situ burial pits were identified by brushing the profiles of the trench, the on-site Contractor was requested to assist with an earthmoving machine to carefully make a smaller cutting in the area not yet exposed to see if more intact burials could be seen so that the approximate extent of the burial site could be determined. This exercise resulted in the discovery of a number of more pits, while the approximate extent of the site could be demarcated. This area has now been cordoned off and no further work will take place here until the formal archaeological investigation, exhumation and relocation work has been concluded. For this a formal permit will be applied for from SAHRA once the regulated 60 day Public Participation Process has been concluded. A registered undertaker with experience in this kind of work will also be contracted to be part of this process.

Determining the exact number of in situ and remaining burials on the site is difficult, but at least 30 pits could be located in the southern profile of the pit and with similar pits found in the northern profile there



could possibly be 30 rows of around 3 graves per row in the area covered by the site. This could indicate in excess of 90 graves and possibly more, but with some already disturbed by the trenching in the central part of the site.

In terms of the origin and age of these burials there are some evidence that have come forward from both the on-site finds, as well as documentary and archival searches. Based on the coffin wood fragments, clothing and blanket pieces, coffin nails and other evidence these burials have a relatively recent historical origin. These coffins were not machine made or mass-produced but more likely hand-made. Furthermore, a few coins found close to one burial pit has dates of 1952 and 1954 on them. It is assumed at this stage that the burial site dates to between the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and is therefore older than 60 years of age at least.

The origin of the burial site is a bit more difficult at this stage to determine. The area of Vulcania (in this part of Brakpan) has been used for industrial activities since the 1930's and prior to that the larger area saw extensive mining (coal and gold) activities. It is therefore possible that the individuals buried here used to work on the mines and in the various related industries and that this cemetery was established for people who used to work on and lived in the various villages and locations established here. Searches in the National Archives Database show that the farm Schapenrust or Vulcania was being purchased for industrial sites between 1935 and 1943 (**TAB: MBP Volume 2/2/539 Reference 9/3/1 Part 1**). Of further interest are documents from the Archives regarding the proposed removal of a so-called "Native Cemetery at the Salies/Witpoort Native Hospital, dating to between 1959 & 1971 (**TAB: MBP Volume 2/2/210 Reference 3/219 Part 1**). Both Sallies Village and the current Witpoort Care Centre is not far south from the site. A plastic hospital-type arm bracelet found with one of the burials seems to point in the direction of this origin for the burials. It is also not inconceivable that there was a process to exhume and relocate burials from this site from the late 1950's onwards for the establishment of the previous factories and industrial sites here, but that not all the graves were successfully removed. The fact that various buildings were clearly covering the still- intact burial pits now uncovered after their recent removal and trenching in the area could be further evidence for this.



**Figure 6: One of the in situ burial pits.**





**Figure 7: The edge of another burial pit.**



**Figure 8: Another pit that has been slightly cut by the trenching on the site.**





**Figure 9: A burial pit in the southern profile of the trench. The intact burial pits are located approximately 0.60m below the present surface level.**



**Figure 10: Coins with the dates 1952 and 1954 found close to one burial pit.**



**Figure 11: The start of another intact burial pit in the northern profile of the trench.**





**Figure 12: A view of the area showing the approximate extent of the burial site remaining here. This area has now been formally cordoned off.**



Figure 13: An arm bone with a plastic hospital-type bracelet attached.



Figure 14: Aerial image showing the location of the burial site in relation to Sallies Village & the Witpoort Care Centre (Google Earth 2021).





**Figure 15: Aerial view showing the approximate extent of the burial site, as well as marked intact burial pits (blue dots) and some further disturbed remains (red dots). Google Earth 2021.**

### **Conclusions & Recommendations**

It can be concluded that the Test Excavations (under the permit issued by the BGG Unit of SAHRA) at the Erven 178 & 179 (97 Uranium Road) Vulcania Extension 2 development site in Brakpan, Gauteng, was concluded successfully. Human remains recently discovered at the approved Ezee Tile Adhesive Facility on the property by the Contractor prompted an earlier assessment as requested by SAHRA, as well as this Test Excavation work.

The work conducted on the 25th of June 2021 was able to find a number of intact and partially disturbed burials in the area where soil has been removed for use on other parts of the site for levelling and compaction associated with the approved development work. Although the exact number of burials located here cannot be determined without a doubt, there could be at least 90 or more located on the site. The age of the burials seems to be between the early 19<sup>th</sup> and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and the site might be related to an earlier cemetery associated with the Sallies Village/Witpoort “Native” Hospital in the area. If this is in fact correct then there is a possibility that there were earlier efforts to exhume and relocate graves from this site as part of the establishment of industrial sites and structures on the property. It is therefore also possible that those burials still in situ here are evidence that not all the graves that used to present were successfully moved in the past. This aspect will have to be investigated in more detail as part of the Public Participation process required now before the formal exhumation and relocation work can be concluded.

The following is recommended in terms of the way forward:

1. 60 days Public Participation process as required by SAHRA in order to try and locate any possible descendants of the deceased persons buried here in order to get consent for the exhumation and relocation work to be concluded
2. the appointment of an Archaeologist to undertake the exhumation and relocation work as the grave site and burials are older than 60 years of age



3. the appointment of a registered undertaker to assist with the exhumation and relocation work
4. once the PP process has been completed then the application for and obtaining of a Formal Permit from SAHRA's BBG Unit, as well as the various permits required for by the appointed Undertaker in order to successfully complete the exhumation and relocation work
5. the remains under custody of the Brakpan SAP should be returned as part of the burial remains recovered from the site already, and needs to be reburied with the remains from the in situ burials that will be exhumed and relocated from the Burial Site.

Once the exhumation and relocation work has been concluded development work on this part of site can be completed. In order to assist with efforts to curb undue delays and standing time on the site, some of the above processes can happen concurrently so that when the required permits have been obtained work can commence and be concluded timeously.

It is finally recommended that the Contractor be allowed to continue with their development activities on other parts of the development site that has already been completely levelled and compacted. If any material were to be still located here it would be protected in situ and would not be disturbed any further. No work is allowed in the area cordoned off and where the in situ burials and grave site has been located.

Should there be any questions or comments on the contents of this document please contact the author as soon as possible.

Kind regards



Anton Pelser