

COMMENTS ON A DOCUMENT TITLED
"REPORT: BUILDINGS CONSTITUTION HILL"
(MARCH 2002) BY BONNER et al,
THE HISTORY WORKSHOP
UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

INTRODUCTION

It is assumed that readers of this document will also be familiar with the report entitled "Constitution Hill: Western Portion: Towards a Conservation Management Plan for the Western Portion of Constitution Hill Complex, Hospital Hill, Braamfontein, Johannesburg "November 2001" prepared by Prins et al.

In the Bonner document various statements are made particularly in Section 2: Research Process and Section 3: Findings, which are a critical examination of some of the contents of the Prins report and a response is made to these.

Various additional information is also provided in the Bonner document which further clarifies, corrects and enhances the existing Prins description of the development of the Mortuary over time.

Where information has not been referred to in the Bonner document, this will also be noted where considered appropriate.

1. NASA DOCUMENTS: SAB & TAB (Bonner, Page 3)

The claim is made that only the SAB groups of archival documents were inspected, examined or noted in the Prins report. Scrutiny of the unpublished sources listed in the references (Prins, Page 34) together with a knowledge of the source codes of the NASA database, would make it clear that both SAB and TAB documents were consulted.

While not specifically noted by Prins, exactly the same difficulties encountered by Bonner, namely insufficient time, misnumbered boxes and the difficult choice of which NASA documents (of hundreds) to review, in the time available, were also encountered by Prins et al. It was also necessary to summarise the available information into a manageable document.

2. TERMINOLOGY: (Bonner, Page 4).

The claim is made that the terminology used by government officials in the documents that History Workshop examined is different to the terminology adopted in the Prins report.

2.1 *Chief Warder (Prins): Superintendent (Bonner)*

The documentation sourced by Prins et al on the Chief Warder and the references thereto was restricted to the Chief Warder's House. All annotations on available Site Plans (up to 1947), sourced by Prins pertinently refer to this house as the Chief Warder's House.

The copies of the NASA documents relating to the construction of the Chief Warder's House, (attached to Bonner's report), all pertinently refer to the Chief Warder. The superintendent of the Gaol would almost certainly have occupied the Governor's House in the South Eastern corner of the Goal site.

The terminology of Chief Warder used in the Prins report would not seem inappropriate.

2.2 *Assistant Warder (Prins): Assistant Superintendent (Bonner)*

Prins made no reference to the Assistant Warder. This question of terminological difference raised by Bonner seems superfluous.

2.3 *Medical Superintendent (Prins): Resident Medical Officer (Bonner)*

The documentation sourced by Prins et al on the Medical Superintendent and the references thereto was restricted to the Medical Superintendent's House. Annotations on available Site Plans (up to 1947) refer to this house as either the Medical Superintendent's House or the Medical Officer's Residence.

The NASA documents relating to the construction of the Medical Superintendent's Quarters (attached to Bonners report) refer both to the Medical Officer and the Medical Superintendent. It does not seem unreasonable to use Medical Superintendent.

2.4 *Johannesburg Mortuary (Prins): Government Mortuary (Bonner)*

The NASA documentation sourced by Prins et al on the development of the Mortuary refers variously to:

- The Johannesburg Mortuary
 - Mortuary Buildings, Johannesburg
 - Mortuary, Johannesburg
 - Government Mortuary, Johannesburg
 - Government Mortuary
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- Mortuary at Johannesburg
- Mortuary
- Lykenhuisje

Reference was also noted by Prins et al to the General Mortuary, which Bonner has pointed out, actually formed part of the Johannesburg General Hospital.

The NASA documentation relating to the mortuary (attached to Bonner's report) refer variously to:

- The Government Mortuary, Johannesburg
- Police Mortuary
- Johannesburg Mortuary
- Johannesburg Police Mortuary
- Mortuary, Johannesburg

The choice of Government Mortuary as the preferred terminology does however not seem unreasonable in view of the wide range of titles used.

Dr Kemp (who worked for a period of \pm 50 years at the Government Mortuary) has also confirmed that the institution was known as the Government Mortuary during his period of employment.

3. FOOTNOTE 1: LOUIS BOTHA (Bonner, Page 4)

The correction by Bonner relating to Prime Minister Louis Botha is noted.

4. ADDITIONAL MORTUARIES SERVING JOHANNESBURG (Bonner, Page 5)

Bonner makes no mention of the Diepkloof Government Mortuary (behind Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto) which according to Dr Kemp, was opened circa 1980.

5. DUTIES OF GOVERNMENT MORTUARY CURATOR (Bonner Page 6)

Bonner describes a minimal function for the Mortuary Curator. The Chief District Surgeon of Johannesburg, on 20 March 1909, described to the Commissioner of Police in Pretoria, the duties of the Curator, Mr. Pinching and confirmed that Pinching had been employed in the same position for the past 8 years. Mr. Pinching's duties were noted as follows:

- The taking of photos, descriptions, and finger impressions of all unidentified deceased persons.
- The Registration of death of all bodies received into the Mortuary, also the registration of birth of all unknown deceased children found in Johannesburg.
- The Preparation, preserving and mounting of all specimens required at the Courts as exhibits and the making of plaster casts when necessary.
- The Burial of 80 to 90 Native and Coloured (sic) bodies monthly from the Mortuary and Johannesburg Hospital.
- The running and proper care of the refrigerating plant and engine.
- The Official correspondence of the District Surgeons with which is included all correspondence in connection with Medical Boards on Police and others.
- The charge of the Mortuary, for the proper working of which he is directly responsible to the Chief District Surgeon.
- The attendance at Courts for purposes of identification and general evidence.
- The removal of bodies from any part of the District at any hour of the night or day.

6. NUMBER OF BODIES PASSING THROUGH GOVERNMENT MORTUARY (Bonner, Page 6)

Bonner provides figures for four months in 1910 (average of 156 per month) and notes that no other figures or monthly reports were found at the NASA.

In a NASA document located by Prins et al, the Chief District Surgeon of Johannesburg, Dr W M Russell advised the Commissioner of Police in March 1909 of the statistics for the period September 1907 to February 1908; all of which were handled by Curator Pinching.

- Average number of bodies : 121 per month.
- Average number of Post Mortems : 109 per month

Dr Kemp confirms that the number of bodies passing through the mortuary since the 1950's until the present was between 3,500 to 4,000 per year. This fluctuation apparently depended whether the

person in charge of the Mortuary accepted bodies of persons who had died of natural causes.

7. LIST OF MEDICAL OFFICERS ETC. (Bonner Page 8)

Bonner, while acknowledging in a footnote that the list is incomplete, makes no mention of Dr Kemp (retired) who worked at the Government Mortuary for over 50 years. He started as a District Surgeon; was eventually promoted to Chief District Surgeon of Johannesburg then appointed as State Pathologist and eventually promoted to Chief State Pathologist. Dr Kemp can clearly provide the exact dates and details of his employment history.

Bonner makes no mention of Dr Patricia Klepp who has worked at the Government Mortuary as a pathologist for the last 22 years.

8. ROLE OF MORTUARY: POST 1950 (Bonner Page 9)

Bonner notes that "it seems unlikely that the Government Mortuary was utilized in the 1970's and 1980's".

Both Drs Kemp and Klepp confirm that the Government Mortuary was in constant use during this period and certainly would have accommodated bodies arising from the 1976 Soweto riots. Dr Klepp confirmed that all post mortems in the Johannesburg area were done at the Government Mortuary until the opening of the Diepkloof Government Mortuary, in the 1980's.

9. CHIEF WARDER'S HOUSE (Bonner, Page 9)

Prins, in the absence of any documentary evidence suggested that this house, based on the specific architectural details, had been built circa 1900.

Bonner has compiled a very useful summary of the NASA documents (including Sketch Plan Type E – prepared by C Murray: Chief Engineer of the Transvaal PWD) which describe the construction of the house in 1910/11.

10. MEDICAL SUPERINTENDENT'S HOUSE (Bonner Page 12)

Prins, in the absence of any documentary evidence suggested that this house, based on the specific architectural details, dated from a similar period to the Leith Queen Victoria Hospital. (Prins Page 21) and that it formed an integral part of the Hospital site (Prins, Page 22).

Bonner has compiled a very useful summary of the NASA documents confirming that house was in fact constructed for the Resident Medical

Officer / Medical Superintendent of the Johannesburg Gaol and was completed in 1936.

11. ASSISTANT MEDICAL SUPERINTENDENT'S HOUSE (Bonner, Page 13)

Bonner did not locate any archival information for this house. In the Prins document, Annexure 8.2(vi) (Prins, Page 49) evidence is provided that the house was a "New Residence for the Assistant Superintendent of the General Hospital".

12. SHORTCOMINGS (Bonner Page 13)

Bonner suggests that it would have been useful to "have explored material located at the Fort. "Presumably Bonner et al are not familiar with the existing conditions at the Fort which have not been ideal for the retention of any written or documentary records.

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