

HERITAGE STATEMENT CLUB HOUSE

INTRODUCTION

The document is supplementary to the application for a permit by the Department of Public Works to the South African Heritage Resources Agency in terms section 27 of the National Heritage Resources Act, 25 of 1999.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Originally built to house the Medical Officer/ Superintendent, as a residence for officers of the Union Defence Force and later a social club for warders, their families and visitors during the prison period.

EXPANDED STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

ARCHITECTURAL

The original structure was built during the late Georgian [George IV of England] era ca 1843-1846. It consisted of a basic square divided by a central passage with rooms off to the side. The original façade was classically simple Georgian with the moulded parapet still to be seen below the gable erected in 1964. The entrance had an enclosed portico. Two outbuildings and a walled courtyard were also extant. The outbuildings were later extended. The southern façade shows three windows, a door in the wall of the courtyard and a smaller window in an outbuilding. in a painting of 1872 with 4 chimneys. The four chimneys are also seen in a photograph from 1920.

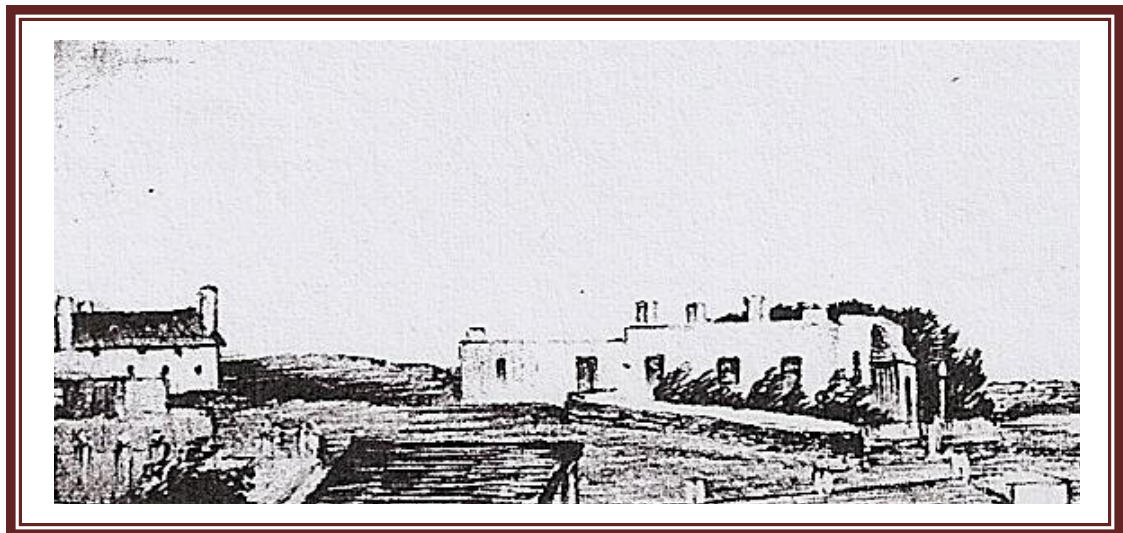


Fig1. Medical Superintendents house ca 1872.

In the late 1880's it was 'Victorianised' with the addition of a verandah with convex corrugated iron and wooden lattice work. The verandah extended around from half of the northern side to the front faced around to the southern façade.



Fig. 2. Photo from 1920 showing the Victorian verandah. The structure next to it is a glass conservatory. A rambling rose hedge can be seen behind the man and child playing croquet.

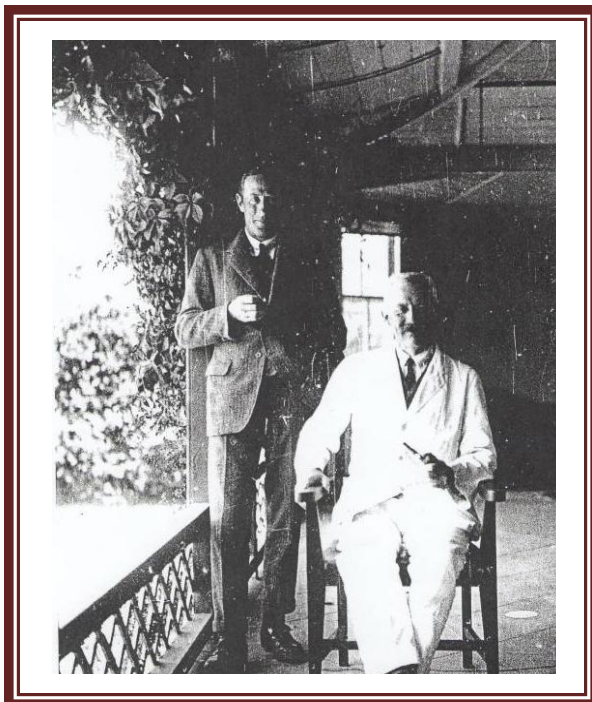


Fig.3. The interior of the verandah. Note the wooden ceiling.

The outbuildings were also extended during the late 1880's and the original courtyard wall became the outer walls of these buildings. The entrance to the courtyard moved to the northern side. The glass conservatory seen in Fig. 2. Appears on drawing from 1905. At the same time the first tennis court appears with its own dedicated structure as well as a croquet field and pavilion. The buildings were unharmed during the demolition of structures related to the leper period in the early 1930's but the separate conservatory has disappeared. It is shown as an addition to the structure from then on until 1962. By 1972 all of the outbuildings have disappeared but the small addition on the northern side remained and may still be part of the present structure.

In 1945 it became the residence of General Moodie, in charge of the army defences. The Senior officer at the time when Moodie arrived said to him:

“You can't move into that place, Moodie, it's haunted ... they used to hang people on those posts that are knocked into the beams ...”

The roof was still, with valleys in it, sloping very slightly to the back. There was also a building to the left northern side] of the house as you face the sea, which was the mess.



Fig. 4. Western Façade, facing Table Bay, of structure at present.

In 1964 the building took on its present form with the neo-Cape Dutch gable showing both 'hol-bol' and 'bol-bol' elements. The gable rests on the original Georgian parapet. The present enclosed verandah is more than likely the older Victorian verandah with the northern part being taken up by the snooker/ pool room. The original staircase balustrade to the western/ original front facade can just be seen below the present ones.

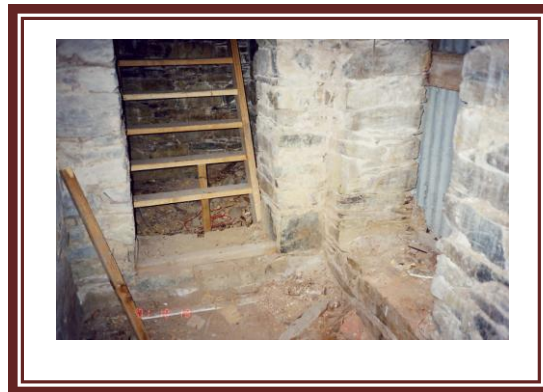


Fig. 5 & 6 Basement walls, ceiling [building floor] entrance and compacted earth floor. Ca 2001.

Features from the Victorian era include two ornate fire places, a corniced ceiling in the passage and the typical ‘cross open bible’ panel doors.

The basement dates from the 1840’s when the structure was built. An overlay with the 1946 plan with that of the recent architectural drawing shows the floor plan of the original dwelling. The basement is built with thick stone walling and forms the foundation for the building.

HISTORICAL

In 1840 plans were put in place to build a residence for the Medical Officers quarters. Convict labour was to be used to build the building from local materials with the Civil Engineers Department providing for finishing off of the building. In 1843 a resident surgeon was appointed to work with the sick. Seriously ill patients were sent to Somerset Hospital. From 1846 to 1895 it was the residence of the Surgeon Superintendent of The General Infirmary with responsibility for the mentally ill and lepers. Dr. Birtwhistle was in charge in the late 1840’s and from eyewitnesses appears to have doled out punishments to the insane that may appear to be harsh and cruel by today’s standards. Placing the insane under the care of the medical profession was a revolution at the time. Prior to this they were locked up and treated as common law criminals in prisons. Use of a black ‘hole’, presumably the basement under the residence, to treat wayward patients was common. The practice of shaving off the hair and blistering the heads of patients was also often referred to.

In the 1880’s Dr Ross occupied the residence. His daughter or wife was buried in front of the residence with a blue tiled grave surround, which was still in existence in 1949 but has now disappeared. In 1893 the Surgeon Superintendent is relieved of administrative duties when the first Commissioner is appointed to the Island. There appears to have been considerable tension between a series of Commissioners and Doctors because of a perceived loss of status by the Chief Medical Superintendent.

In the 1920's Dr Davies was resident and during his time the Asylum and Leper colony slowly became smaller until the last of the lepers left the island in the late 1920's. From the early to late 1930's the residence appears to have been unoccupied. A group of Surveyors from the surveyors office stayed there in May of 1939. This group was largely responsible for the topographic map used during and after the war up until modern aerial photography was used in the late 1980's. According to assistant Surveyor J.P. Fick the building was well kept by the Union Public Works Department.

From 1945 it housed General Moodie who was in charge of defence of the island. During the 1950's the building started to be used for evening entertainment by Island residents. It also appears that Captain Edwards stayed here with his family after the Moodies.

From the 1960's onwards it was the place where warders and their families could socialize. Initially, as was custom, the men's bar did not allow women with a separate ladies bar. Many women still had attitudes in the 1960's about not going into 'such places'. Warrant officers also had their own bar in the south eastern room of the Club. On many occasions a glass of refreshment was enjoyed while watching the rugby, Jukskei or other sports. Darts were also played and later in the late 1980's pool was introduced. In the 1960's the bar was only open for a short time in the evenings and single wardens were not allowed to take their drinks back to their quarters.

From the late 1970's when television was launched for the first time in South Africa a TV was introduced and became a focal point for family gatherings. With the closure of the prison it became the bar for Robben Island staff and residents. Some unsavoury incidents in the early 2000's saw the closure of the bar because it was seen that some could not hold their liquor. Some racial tension was present in the socialization process after 1994.

According to Wayne Bessick the last time the Club House was used was with the short period 2010 soccer world cup. The island residents cleaned up inside, put some flags up and watched the soccer. Since then it has been standing empty.

ASSOCIATED LANDSCAPE

A large precinct containing the tennis club and courts, the Jukskei fields, Rugby club house and fields, athletics track, bowling green, the Club House, the post office, the old power station, a single dwelling next to the post office and a number of WWII dwellings on the eastern edge of the sports fields.



Fig. 7. A large colony of seagulls has taken over the landscape as a breeding site.

PROPOSED CONSERVATION POLICY

Appropriate minimal intervention.

Appropriate and sustainable alternate use strategy. [‘use it or lose it’]

Appropriate, effective, efficient and sustainable maintenance.

Appropriate interpretation and presentation within the associated landscape.

CONSERVATION CHALLENGES

Weather and weathering.

The structure is well inland but subject to the south easterly winds. Rain, sun and temperature differences affect the wood and corrugated iron cladding of the structure to varying degrees.

Plants and animals.

Plants do not pose a major threat to the structure but to the associated sports fields and grounds. Birds may fly into windows that are transparent. Pigeons nest inside the structure. Rabbits are evident further away at the power station but need to be monitored. Penguins are not evident. Rodents are a problem for insulation and electrical wiring.

An urgent threat is the very large colony of seagulls that have invaded the sports fields and terraces over the last three years. Guano builds up into a very hard layer that becomes difficult to remove. It also contains chemicals such as urea and ammonia which corrode building materials.

Fire.

Fire poses a threat from activities within and outside buildings. Very little threat is evident from bush fires.

Appropriate alternative use strategy.

No alternative use strategy has been provided. This poses a major challenge as often structures that are not occupied are left to deteriorate.

Theft and vandalism.

Appropriate action should be taken.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A permit should be issued for the necessary repairs, alterations and maintenance on the structure and its associated components as specified by the project architects. The structure has through neglect over the last decade been allowed to deteriorate to such an extent that urgent work is required to save the historic fabric.
2. That the structure must not be treated in isolation but placed within its associated landscape. This will require a determined effort by Robben Island Museum and Department of Public Works to produce and implement a management plan for the entire sports and recreation precinct.
3. The seagulls need to be removed from the sports fields and terraces as a matter of urgency. The terraces and sports fields must then be cleaned up and maintained.
4. An alternate use strategy must be provided.

5. Plants and weeds must be removed from paving and attention must be given to the outdoor fixed furniture.
6. The contractor appointed to do the work must adhere to sound environmental practice for the disposal of waste and not damage culturally significant vegetation.
7. The entrance to the basement must be reinstated for easy access to inspect the area for damp, cracks or other damage.
8. Interior fixtures and fittings should be left intact and renovated as far as possible.