

HERITAGE STATEMENT: "GYM"

INTRODUCTION.

The document is supplementary to the application for a permit made by Robben Island Museum and 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.

DESCRIPTION.

Situated to NW of residency next to school. Square building with 5 large wooden barn/ garage doors. Four of which have been blocked up from the inside, steep pitched asbestos roof. Cast iron guttering and downpipes still evident. Remains of newel posts on concrete ramp on northern side opposite each door approximately one meter from building.

NOMENCLATURE.

Known as the Gym. This is the 'old gym', although it was only in use as such after 1990. Before that it was a store and its original function was more than likely as a garage for ambulance and fire trucks during WWII.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE.

Ambulance and fire station during WWII and used as a store during the prison period.

EXPANDED STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW.

ARCHITECTURAL

The cast iron guttering and down pipes are very significant. No other such feature is known of on the island at present. The northern face guttering and NW down pipe are in good condition. The name of the manufacturer is cast into the down pipes and is most visible on the NW side. The guttering is late Victorian in style and was cast by the Carron Company in Falkirk, Scotland. The company started casting iron in 1760 and was well known for its cast iron balustrades and baths towards the end of the 1800's. During WWII the company manufactured arms and ammunition. The exigencies of war saw iron and steel used for munitions and it is very unlikely that the gutters and downpipes were cast during WWII. Some earlier Victorian structures, notably a billiards and recreation building, existed on the site in 1894. The gutters and pipes may have been salvaged by the Union Defence Force when these structures were demolished during the war.

A siren perched on the Western side is also significant as it indicates the wartime use of the structure.

HISTORICAL

The area in 1894 housed 3 other buildings apart from the school. A library and billiard room, the works department recreation room and workers cottages are shown on a map of the period. The same buildings are seen on maps of 1905, 1920's and 1939. External latrines are shown in 1920 and the remains of these are still visible. By 1942 the area had become the parade ground with no structures visible and by 1948 the present structure starts appearing. By all accounts the structure housed the ambulance and fire station during the war after 1942 and the siren was used to alert the crews. Its use during the 1960's is not well understood but by the 1970's it had become a store with a store yard to the back of the building. It was still used as a store room with a fenced in store yard from the building to the south and western sides in 1989 with the siren still evident. Its use as a gym started sometime in the 1990's. It appears to be a store room once again.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

A number of archaeological features form part of the associated landscape and need further research. Of particular note are what appears to be the remains of a tram track next to the bus stop. The remains of the wooden posts of the fence to the store yard are still visible. The remains of a 1920's pit latrine are still visible.

ASSOCIATED LANDSCAPE

A bus stop dating from the prison era with a fire hydrant. A number of houses built during WWII. Trees, notably a large spread out ficus, hiding and providing shade for some of the WWII houses. Trees providing shade and wind shelter for the 'Gym' building.

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 structure to varying degrees.

Plants and animals.

Plants do not pose a major threat to the structure. A large tree is situated on the north eastern corner of the structure and another on the south western corner and pose no immediate threat. Birds may fly into windows that are transparent. Pigeons nest inside the structure. Rodents are a problem for insulation and electrical wiring.

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.

Vandalism and theft.

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. The cast iron guttering and downpipes on the northern side [front façade] of the structure are significant and must be retained. Appropriate conservation measures need to be taken.
3. 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 a holistic management plan.
4. An alternate use strategy must be provided.



Detailing on cast iron down pipe: "CARRON COMPANY, SCOTLAND, MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN"



Siren



Remains of verandah posts on the ramp front facade.