

**A REPORT ON MONITORING OF EARTHWORKS
IN SECTIONS OF PARLIAMENT AND CASTLE STREETS,
CENTRAL CAPE TOWN, ORIGINALLY THE SITE OF
WAGENAER'S DAM**

Prepared for
Stocks and Stocks
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1. INTRODUCTION

Extensive modifications of the old General Post Office to facilitate the development of the Trafalgar Place shopping complex development, required extensive earthworks to be undertaken in adjacent sections of Castle and Parliament Streets (Figure 1).

During the late 1970's, development of the Golden Acre building had revealed fairly substantial intact structural remains of the front portion of Wagenaer's Dam. Extrapolation of the layout of the dam onto modern plans suggested that sections of the rear of the structure would be found to the south west of the Golden Acre in the area currently being developed.

In 1995¹ an initial series of archaeological test holes was excavated in the basement of the old GPO building prior to demolition and earthworks. It was determined during that investigation that the basement had been excavated into bedrock and that any structural remains of the dam on that portion of the site would have been destroyed in the process. Adjacent street levels were however at a much higher elevation and it was believed that some portions of the dam may have been preserved beneath them.

2. METHOD

Over the years numerous services have been installed along both Parliament and Castle streets. These services included telephone and electricity cables, water and gas mains, and sewerage and storm water pipes. As a result of these services it was impossible for us to dig any trial excavations to determine if any portions of the dam remained. It was decided during a series of meetings with the developer and the National Monuments Council that if any traces of the dam were found during earthmoving that they would be recorded in detail and sections relocated if necessary. Our task was therefore to monitor activities of mechanical excavators to ensure that if sections of the dam were found, that they would be preserved until recorded and/or removed.

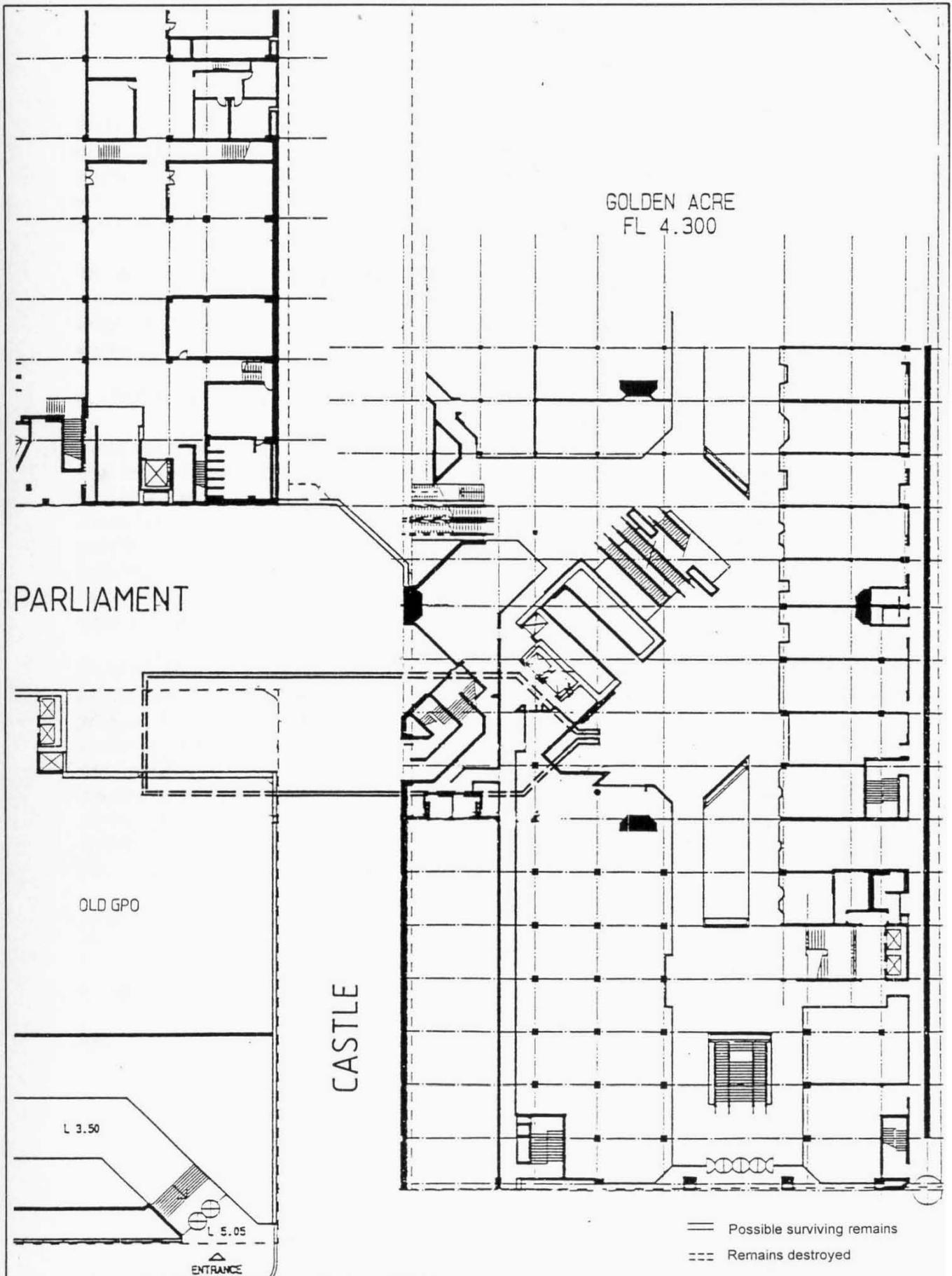
3. RESULTS

Excavation took place in two phases. The first phase was the excavation of Castle Street and the second phase, being the excavation of Parliament street, took place some time later. The initial phase of excavation was intensively monitored while the second phase was monitored intermittently (as by this time it seemed highly unlikely that anything would be found). The position of sections of the dam on modern plans is shown in Figure 1.

While some brick inspection pits were founded on bedrock, most services did not lie this deep. Depth of services was at approximately 1.5 meters below road level while a large sewer in Parliament street had its base at approximately 2.5 meters below road level.

Thus, in Castle street there seemed to be no reason why some remains should not have been found. In reality however, a few chunks of lime plaster and the odd fragment of yellow *klompje* brick are the only traces of a structure that was observed. In addition, virtually no

¹ Hart, T. and Halkett, D. 1995. Phase one archaeological assessment of the General Post Office, Cape Town. Unpublished report prepared for Stocks and Stocks Properties. Archaeology Contracts Office, UCT.



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Approximate location of Wagenaer's Dam

Plan: JVA Architects

1:500



artefactual material of the relevant time period was observed, which contrasts markedly with the volume of material that was found on the Golden Acre site.

The situation in Parliament street was similar, except in this case, the line of the north west wall of Wagenaer's Dam would have been between the wall of the GPO and the large sewer and the proximity of these features probably explains why there are no surviving structural remains here.

4. CONCLUSIONS

From the preserved remains of the dam in the basement of the Golden Acre we see that the walls were built on the bedrock. We assume that the dam itself was probably built in a stream channel which had probably scoured a channel to bedrock or at least close to that level. This being the case it seems almost inconceivable that not a single portion of intact walling survived below Castle street. The virtual absence of either building rubble or artefactual material suggests that at some point in the past, some radical earthworks had taken place on the site. We cannot say if this happened at the time of building of the Golden Acre or of the GPO itself.

If we conclude that the building materials were recycled, then the question must be asked why the section below the Golden Acre was preserved. It seems to suggest that whatever happened that destroyed the Parliament and Castle street remains, took place between the time that the old railway station was built (and protected the Golden Acre remains) and the building of roads and installation of services. From the trial holes inside the GPO away from the deep basement, we were able to detect an original land surface somewhat lower than the recent road level. This may mean that structural remains were much closer to the surface than we would presume and may mean that they were very vulnerable to destruction in earlier years.

In any event, there is nothing of any significance requiring conservation on this part of the site.

5. PROFESSIONAL TEAM

Monitoring of earthworks

Dave Halkett

Tim Hart

Report

Dave Halkett