

PHASE 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF SELECTED ERVEN, BLOCK A, CAPE TOWN

Prepared for

UCKG Properties Pty Ltd

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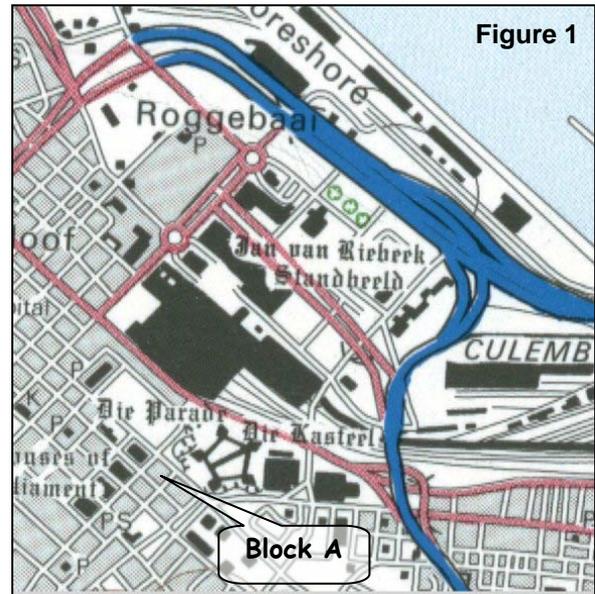
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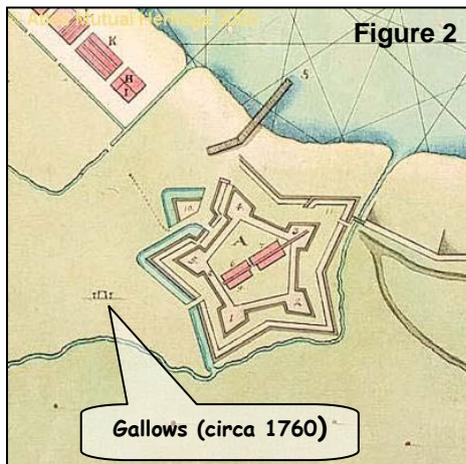
1 INTRODUCTION

The Archaeology Contracts Office of the University of Cape Town was commissioned by C.M Gomez Construction and Williams Associates Architects to conduct archaeological trial excavations at Block A (cnr Waterkant and Darling Streets), Cape Town (Figure 1). The findings of the work form part of a "Stage 1 Heritage Impact Assessment" by Trevor Thorold Architects. Plans are in place to demolish a number of the existing buildings in Block A to make way for the construction of a new cathedral for United Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG).



1.1 Background history

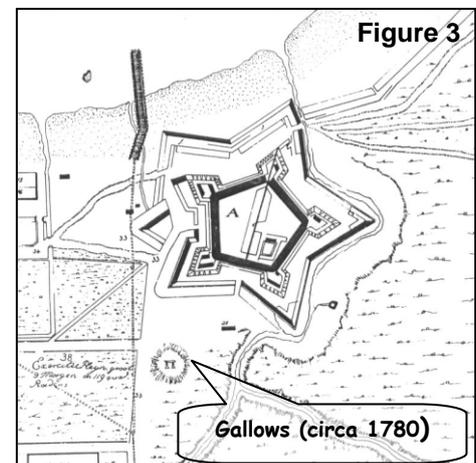
Trevor Thorold Architects have researched the history of Block A in detail, aspects of which are summarised in the following paragraphs.



During the pre-colonial period, the area formed part of the near shore dune system about 200m south of the Table Bay shoreline. A river, which drained down from Devils Peak passed Block A to the east (this was later channelled into the moat of the Castle). According to historical accounts, Table Bay was intensively occupied by Khoe Khoe pastoralists and ancestors of San hunter-gatherers. Most of the archaeological deposits relating to these people have been destroyed by the historical development of Table Valley, however prehistoric burials have been found in Greenpoint (Cox Sealy and Shrire 2001) and a mid-late Holocene archaeological deposit

(about 3000 years old) was found under the granary of the nearby castle of the Cape of Good Hope (Halkett pers comm).

The earliest colonial period structure in the immediate area is the Castle, construction of which commenced in 1666. Block A was part of the open land to the south of the Castle, which according to historic maps appears to contained a large dune on which gallows and pillory were erected (Figures 2 and 3). The area appears to have been used as an execution ground (*Justitie plaats*) for much of the 18th century. Lady Anne Barnard's panorama of 1798 depicts the execution ground as a gallows and pillory erected on a large elevated earth platform surrounded by a retaining wall (Figure 4). Gates and



steps were situated on the corners of the platform and a small structure (thought to be an observation area for officials) on the southwest corner.

By the early 19th century, use of the area as a place of execution appears to have discontinued with the British Administration who moved places of execution away from the city. The 19th century saw the development of District Six (Kanaladorp) and increasing urbanisation of the open land to the east of Buitenkant Street.



Figure 5

The river, which flowed through a deep donga from Devils peak to the Castle moat, was filled in and replaced by a barrel drain. A plan of the Buitenkant Street area thought to have been drawn by Thibault in the early 19th century indicates an intention to fill the donga and divert the river into an underground drain. Ellerman's plan of the area (circa 1818) shows the layout of the Blocks as they are today (Figure 5). By 1860, the river had been diverted into a drain down Canterbury Street. Certainly, by the early 19th century, Block A appears to have been prepared for development purposes with mixed activities ranging from industrial to retail and residential taking place on the site.

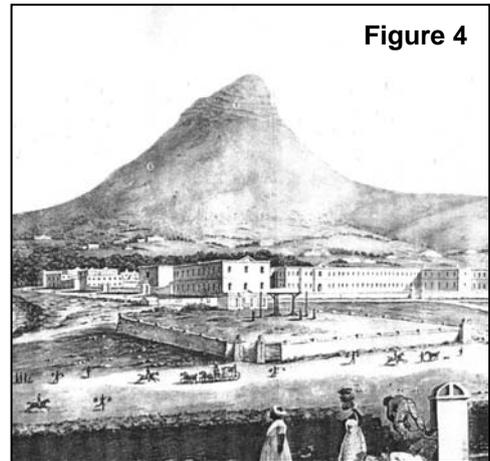


Figure 4

1.2 Status of Block A

At present much of the Block (Figure 6) forms temporary premises for the United Church of the Kingdom of God (erf 4964), which conducts services for its congregation on a daily basis. Buildings on the Buitenkant frontage are leased out on a short-term basis for various retail purposes. Buildings that made up the old Nedbank Building (erven 4967, 4966 and 4965) are un-occupied. Only erf (9453) has a basement with a well. Locations of erven are indicated on Figure 7.



Figure 6

Thorold (per comm.) has identified a pair of intact 19th century warehouses on the corners of Buitenkant and Darling Streets as being conservation worthy. While 19th century fabric and joinery exists in the other buildings on the block, the structures have been subject to a great deal of alteration with the result that they are of limited architectural significance.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL SENSITIVITY

2.1 Human burials

The primary archaeological concern was the possibility that burials and deposits from the Dutch East India Company (DEIC) period emanating from the use of the site as a place of execution may have survived. Recently, some 65 bodies were found on the site of the alternative Gallows Hill execution grounds in Greenpoint, demonstrating that paupers and criminals were buried very close to the to the places of execution (Halkett and Hart 2000). Barnard's panorama shows a possible row of grassy hillocks on the *Justitie plaats*, which may have been graves of executed criminals. Human remains, besides being of high heritage value, are specifically protected by the National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999.

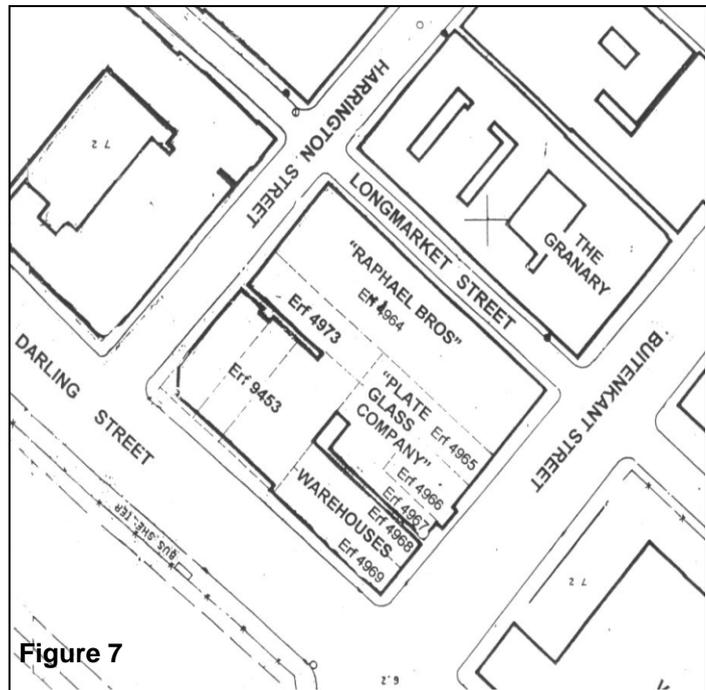


Figure 7

2.2 Structures

Archaeological remains that may be associated with the 19th century structures were a concern. Of particular note are two wells that are indicated as being in the Block. One of these wells has been identified in the basement of erf 9453 while the other is indicated to have existed on erf 4967. Wells have the potential to contain archaeological deposits with good sequential characteristics. Like structures and burials, the law also protects archaeological deposits.

2.3 Other archaeological material

There is possibility that pre-colonial archaeological material may have survived on site in any areas under the buildings with deep undisturbed soils or dune sand. Any such finds would be off high research importance considering the massive loss of pre-colonial archaeological material as a result of development activities in Cape Town.

3 TRIAL EXCAVATIONS

The areas available for trial excavations in December 2001 were restricted to those areas of the block that did not have tenants, or were not in use as an interim church. This meant that we had to focus our activities to erven 4965, 4966, 4967 - the old Nedbank/Plate glass building (Figure 8).

3.1 Erf 4965

Two trial excavations were positioned on this erf to check for buried archaeological deposits. Excavation C (in the long warehouse area) revealed that *in situ* clays lay immediately below the concrete floor. All natural topsoils and deposits had been planed away before construction of the building.

3.2 Erf 4966

Excavation D was positioned in this erf, which originally contained a residential dwelling, built in the early 19th century. Although existing standing walls follow the ground plan of the erf, all of these contain 20th century fabric. The excavation penetrated the concrete floor revealing highly fragmentary remains of what used to be a stone foundation dug into the *in-situ* clays. The feature has been extensively impacted by development activities in the past and is not worthy of conservation.

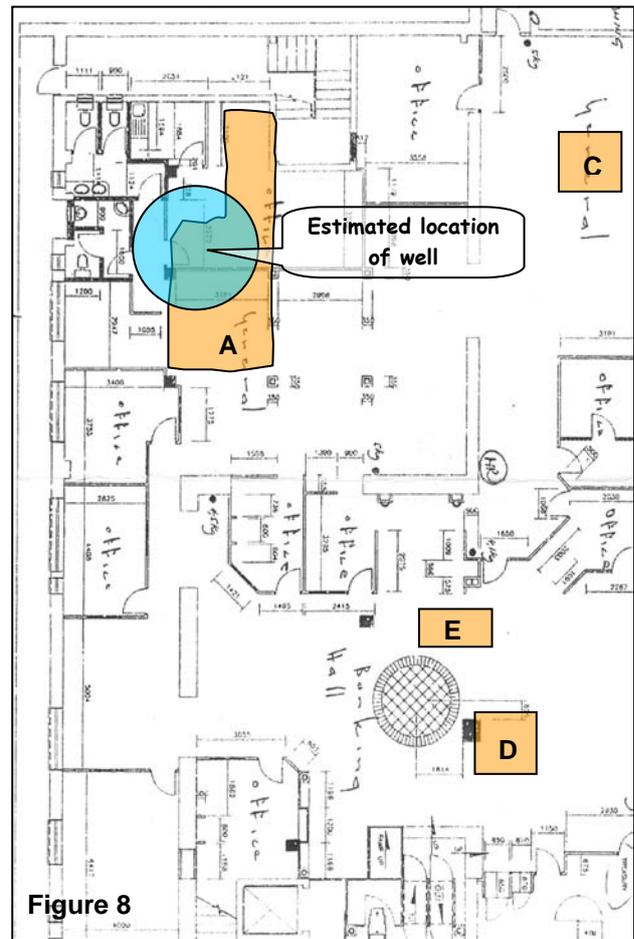


Figure 8

Excavation E was positioned to check the age of foundations of the existing structure on the erf. It was built entirely of 20th century materials indicating that modernisation and rebuilding has been extensive.

3.3 Erf 4967

Early plans of this erf (see Thorold, T. 2001 Buitenkant City Block Heritage impact Assessment) indicated the presence of a well (Figure 8) situated in what used to be part of the rear yard/courtyard. Excavation A was positioned in an attempt to locate this feature. The floor of the building was covered with carpet tiles and 3 layers of concrete (250 mm thick in all). Underneath the floor was a layer of demolished building rubble (19th century). In all, 5 discernable stratigraphic layers were noted, before

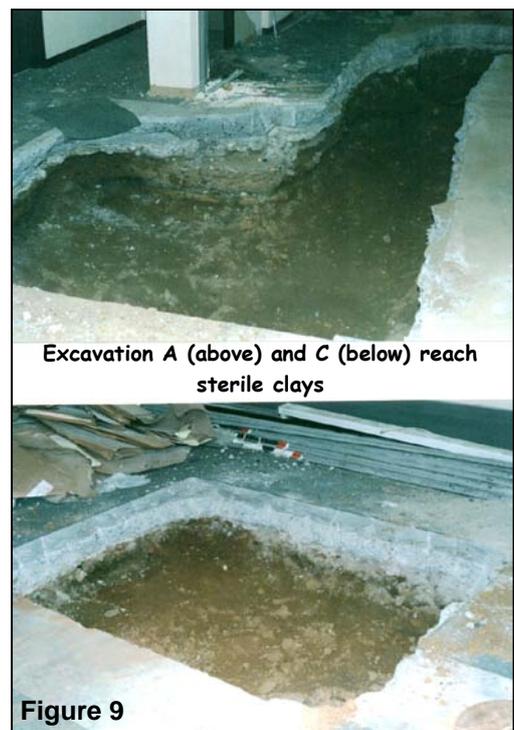


Figure 9

consolidated natural clays were reached at a depth of 900 mm (Figure 9). Layer 5 immediately above the *in situ* clay contained a small amount of fragmented 18th century material (characteristic pipe stems, bone and oriental porcelains).

Since no evidence of any built structures such as a well were found in excavation A, a second trial hole (B) was opened and linked with trial hole A. This also proved unsuccessful in locating the well despite being enlarged to cover the entire reasonable target area where the historic plans indicated that the well existed.

Indications are that there is a possibility that:

- The historic plans are inaccurate with respect to the position of the well.
- The well was indicated on plans but never built.

4 CONCLUSION

The excavations have revealed that ground surface under the existing buildings has been highly modified. In most instances B-horizon shale derived clays were encountered below the concrete floors indicating that any dune sands that may have been on the site originally are no longer in place. We hypothesise that these were used at the turn of the 19th century to fill the Castle Moat and reclaim the Harrington Street donga, which now flows in a barrel drain below street level.

The well, which is indicated on plans to have existed in the warehouse section of the Nedbank building was not discovered despite exhaustive excavations based on overlays of plans of the building. It is quite possible that the feature does exist but was incorrectly plotted on existing diagrams and may yet be found during demolition of the building.

The basement well on the Darling Street side is visible, but at the time of this study the premises were occupied and the basement flooded.

4.1 Recommendations:

- We are confident that substantial amounts of DEIC or prehistoric material do not exist on the site. Monitoring and documentation of the demolition process may reveal any material or features that have been missed. If any finds are made during this process, time will be required to remove or document them. This may result in localised holdups/diversion of activity with respect to the site development process.
- The two wells remain a concern. The basement of erf 9453 needs to be made accessible in the future to allow inspection of the well. The well thought to be in the Nedbank Building may be revealed during demolition and excavation. Should this happen, activities will need to be diverted while it is examined, and if necessary, excavated archaeologically. This may require a week's work.

- Despite the paucity of archaeological remains to date, Block A is an important heritage site as it was here that slaves were brought for torture and execution. Redevelopment of the site creates an opportunity to commemorate the place - possibly in the form of a plaque, storyboard or small memorial.

5 REFERENCES

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