

PHASE 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF NO 43-47 BUITENKANT STREET, CAPE TOWN

Prepared for

Jake De Villiers Architects

On behalf of

Solomon Brothers Property Holdings

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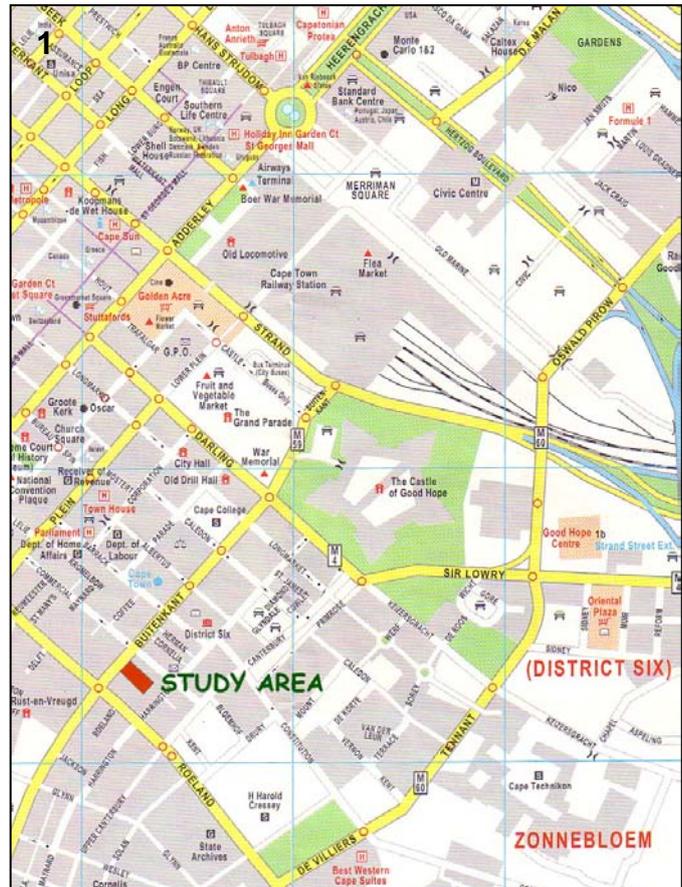
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1 Introduction

The Archaeology Contracts Office (ACO) of the University of Cape Town was appointed by Jake de Villiers Architects to conduct a programme of Phase 1 trial excavations at No's 43 - 47 Buitenkant Street, Cape Town (Figure 1). The erven involved (hereafter referred to as the site) are 5280,5281,5282,5285 located at 33° 55' 33.6"S 18° 25' 20.2"E (Map datum WGS 84).

Archival research has indicated that like many others in the City of Cape Town, the history of the erven extends back into the late 18th century. The owners of the property wish to implement development plans, which will necessitate demolition of existing structures and excavation of footings and basements of new buildings. Any archaeological material protected by the National Heritage Resources Act has the potential to be impacted development activities that involved



any form of bulk excavation. The project described in the following pages was designed to test for any buried archaeological deposits and structural remains so that mitigation procedures could be implemented if anything significant was found.

1.1 Historical background

The archival research pertaining to the site is contained in a separate report by Antonia Malan (2002). For contextual purposes her findings are summarised below. Archival research indicates that during the late 18th century the land that we now refer to as the study area lay on the edge of the fledgling city of Cape Town. Roughly in the vicinity was a "kraal and Pakhuis". Nearby was a stream, which ran down the slopes of Table Mountain and fed the moat of the Castle of The Cape of Good Hope. It is known that the stream ran in a fairly deep donga, which during the 19th century was diverted into a barrel drain. Archaeological excavations at 109 Harrington Street revealed the bank of the old streambed, which at that point ran along the edge of Canterbury Street. This had been used as a rubbish pit by the 19th century inhabitants of Cape Town, and as a result contained a long sequential accumulation of archaeological material (Hart 1990).

The early history of the study area is confused due to missing documentation but indications are the land was first granted in 1793. A diagram of the site dated to 1819 indicates that a watercourse ran roughly through where the centre of the study area is

today. By 1824 there were two buildings on the property. Components of existing structures in the study area are consistent with this date.

1.2 Description of the study area

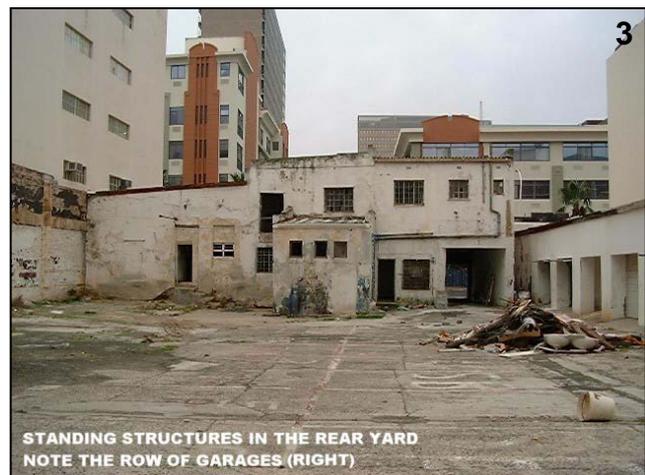


Situated close to the top of Buitenkant Street, the study area takes consists of a large open area behind a pair of shop fronts (no's 43 and 47 Buitenkant Street). The Harrington Street Church lies on a bordering erf.

The shop fronts (Figure 2) incorporate the fabric of early 19th century buildings that have been highly modified to the extent that it is difficult to establish details of the construction sequence. Both Jake de Villiers and Trevor Thorold

have expressed the opinion that the structures have been altered to the extent that their significance is irrevocably compromised, and that demolition should be permitted. The buildings have been abandoned for some years and occupied intermittently by vagrants.

The large yard behind the buildings (Figure 3) used to contain various *ad hoc* structures and extensions to the rear of the standing structures. A row of garages remains along the North West side of the yard. It appears that in recent years standing structures in the yard were demolished to create parking space. Access to this is via an opening through the business front into Buitenkant Street. At time of commencement of the study the yard was covered with a concrete surface of variable thickness and condition.



1.3 Archaeological potential of the site

An initial inspection of the study area revealed the presence of circular feature that could have been a well - these have been encountered on a number of occasions in the back yards of 18th and 19th century buildings. Wells are often repositories of archaeological material that accumulates in a sequential fashion over time. Such material, being waterlogged and in an anaerobic environment is often very well preserved, and therefore of importance.

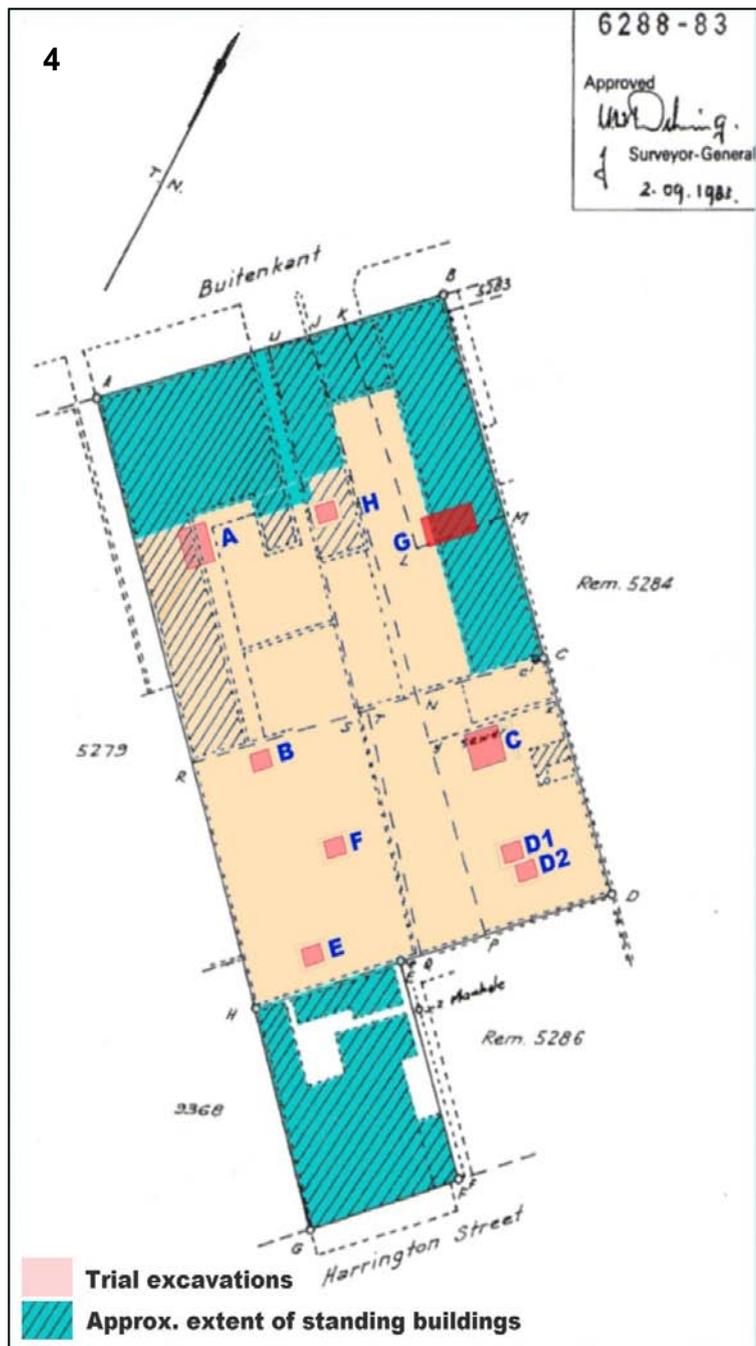
The rear yards of Cape Town buildings have, on a number of occasions, proved to be archaeologically sensitive. These have contained remains of domestic debris discarded

from houses. This archaeological material is not only protected by legislation, but is of scientific importance as it allows for the forensic reconstruction of past lifestyles.

A further concern was the stream channel, which according to archival information ran across the rear of the yard. This nature and extend needed to be explored and recorded before destruction by development activities. Furthermore, it too has the potential to act as an accumulator of sequences of artefactual material.

2 Method

The approach used was to sink a pattern of trial excavations over the property. Some of these were strategically positioned to test specific features such as the backyard areas of buildings, possible wells and footings. Other trial holes were evenly spread across the property to test the depth and quality of subsurface deposits. Excavation was done according to the stratigraphic layering of the various fills; however the sizes of the holes were adjusted in response conditions. Artefactual material was transported to UCT where it was washed and sorted, and presently stored. The locations of the trial holes are indicated on Figure 4.



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2.1 Restrictions

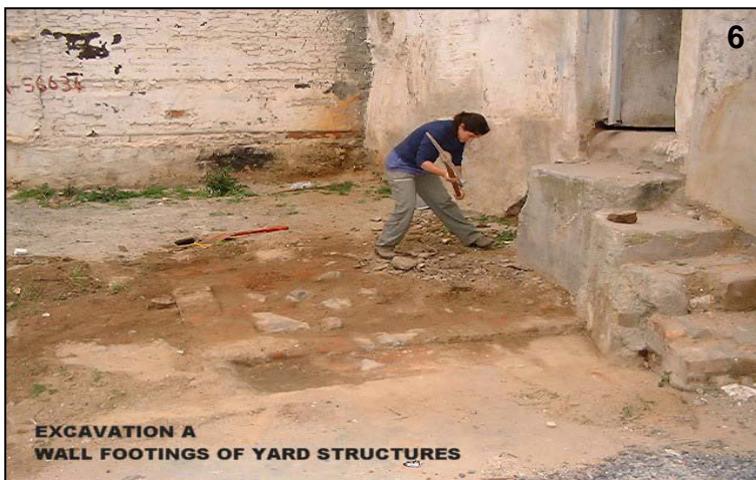
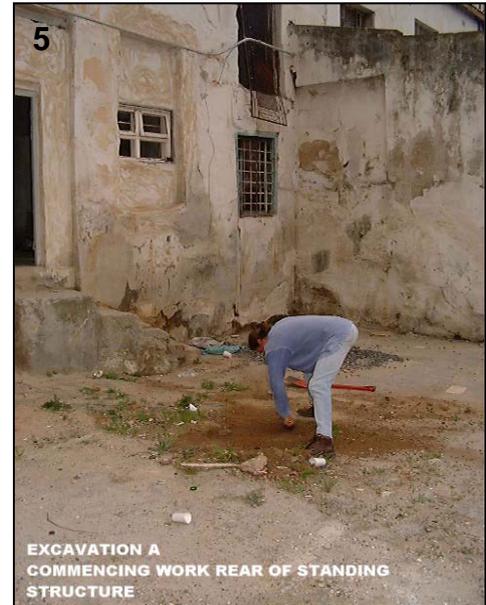
Most of the property was covered with concrete surfacing of variable quality and thickness. This had to be removed with the assistance of an electric breaker. Most excavations in the rear yard of the property reached groundwater at a depth of 1100 – 1200 mm. In all instances this was malodorous and severely polluted with diesel/engine oil and other waste. Excavation could not be continued below water level unless the local water table was lowered which would have involved organising the removal of the polluted water which cannot be disposed of in city drains. This meant that it was virtually impossible to dig any deep soundings to locate the historic water channel, which ran through or close to the affected erven.

3 Findings

3.1 Excavation A

Trial excavations set adjacent to the rear of the house (Figure 5) revealed dense brick rubble packed among old wall footings (19th century frog bricks with stone footings) that once made up part of the rear outbuildings (Figures 6 –7). The presence of chip packets in this rubble attests to a recently laid fill made from demolished older fabric. Underlying this was an older fill containing some 19th century artefactual material. This continued down until natural clays and gravel were encountered at a depth of 1006mm. The water table was encountered at a depth of 800mm.

Some patches of stone cobbble work were found in extensions to the trial excavation on the exterior of the rear outbuildings showing that during the 19th century parts have the rear yard had been paved with cobbles. Two separate layers of cobbles and paving were identified in this area indicating a long use of the backyard of the property. The exterior plaster (shell-lime) is contemporary with or shortly postdates the cobbled surfaces. The cobbles surface slopes steeply towards the east implying that there was once a gutter or drainage channel in the yard. Finds between the cobbles include some fragments of willow pattern refined earthenware indicating that the cobbled surface of the yard was in use during the 19th century. Cobbled surfaces on the site appear to be limited to this area.



3.2 Excavation B

The team had to break open 400 mm of surface concrete (2 surfaces). Underneath this lay 5 layers of fill before grey green clays were reached at a depth of 1540 mm. As with the other excavations on the site, the deposits were polluted with oil.

3.3 Excavation C

This exploratory excavation was positioned to explore what was thought to be a well built from rounded well bricks (Figures 7–8). This was shown to be a 20th century construction built on a concrete slab. We interpret it as being the base of a cistern or tank made from galvanised iron sheets.

The excavation was sunk deeper adjacent to the feature to reveal a dense rubble layer containing English frog bricks and fragments of ceramic sewerage pipe. The rubble contained willow pattern refined English earthenware ceramic, fragments of decomposing iron as well a bottle glass.

Below this lay a compacted rubble containing artefacts of the mid-19th century (ceramics, glass iron). The water table severely polluted by oil and other industrial waste was encountered at a depth of 1200 mm, at which point work had to be terminated (Figure 9).

3.4 Excavation D1

Excavation terminated due to services immediately under concrete surface. Excavation D2 was opened immediately adjacent. Underneath this was a fill containing 19th century artefacts and brick, followed by a smooth brown soil fill that contained 19th century artefacts.

The trial excavation was discontinued at a depth of 1020 mm just before water table depth was reached.

3.5 Excavation E

Trial excavation was continued to a depth of 1050 mm below the concrete surface. Again the excavation was rich in 19th century artefacts, however all of this were contained in fill material, the origin of which cannot be established.



3.6 Excavation F

Excavated to a depth of just over a meter, the deposit consisted of a fill fairly rich in 19th century artefactual material.

3.7 Excavation H

Located immediately behind an existing structure, this trial excavation penetrated the only ashy deposit located on the site, and may be the remains of a disturbed domestic midden. The artefactual contents consisted of refined English earthenware ceramic, fragments of porcelain (oriental) fragments of bone.

3.8 Excavation G



Located in and around the third garage (Figure 11) Harrington Street side) the excavation was positioned to test the fabric of the foundations of these structures (Figure 10). Although the garages appear to be modern, they are positioned along the alignment of buildings indicated on some of the early plans of the site. The excavations revealed the presence of stone

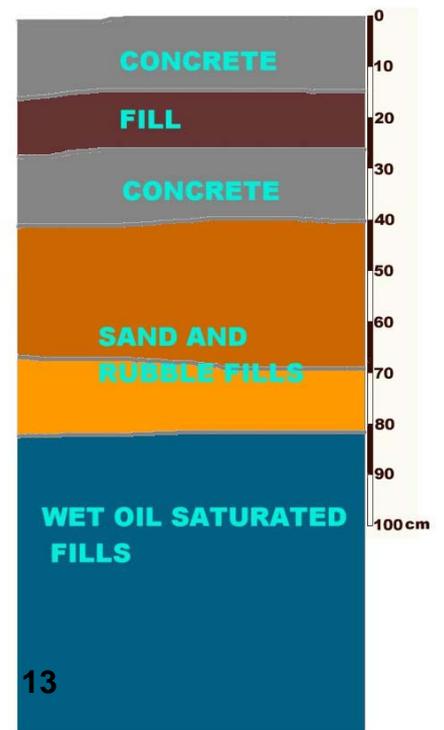


wall-footings the outer one of which roughly followed the alignment of the garages. Built of shale, and being about 650mm in thickness (Figure 12), the foundations penetrate into the soil 530mm. The outer walls of the garages follow the earlier stone footings indicating that there may be places where earlier fabric is included in the existing walls. Artefactual material emanating from the trial excavation was characteristically 19th century.

3.9 Interpreting the evidence

The presence of deep man-made fill deposits (see typical profile Figure 13) that extend below the water table throughout much of the sites is a strong indicator that much of the topography of the site was low lying and uneven. The topography of the street to the south of the block shows a fairly dramatic slope in a south-westerly direction which is likely to be the last visible remnant of the stream gully that flowed through the block. Taking into account the archaeological evidence, the historical information available about the site it remains a strong possibility that there is a deep gully in the backyard of the site that has been reclaimed with fill, the stream diverted into pipes.

In order to make rear yard of the site usable in the 19th century, large quantities of fill soil were brought in successive stages to even off the topography. The original of this material is unknown; however it probably came from an open area close by on the outskirts of the town. The banks of the donga itself may have been subject to a cut and fill operation. The outskirts of the town were used as places for the disposal of domestic waste, which is why the soils that were used to backfill the site contained large amounts of artefacts. *In-situ* archaeological material was found in a limited area at the rear of the existing buildings (excavation H).



4 CONCLUSION

4.1 Significance

Although the site is artefactually rich, most of the material we encountered appears to be in a secondary context, which means that it was transported onto the site from an as yet un- established locality. Contextually compromised archaeological material is not considered to be of high scientific value, which limits the significance of the finds. Similarly, the subsurface built fabric is not particularly informative in that it is too limited and disturbed to contribute meaningfully to the pool of knowledge about the past. Although continuing the work into a second phase of mitigatory excavations will produce a bountiful yield of 19th century artefacts, we remain unconvinced that the difficulty and expense of extracting this material from below the heavily polluted water-table is justifiable in terms of the value of information it will provide.

The archaeology of the site thus far is of low significance; however the site remains interesting and not yet fully explored. The presence of the old stream is suspected but not yet confirmed. Due to the restrictions of the site, this cannot be established until facilities are available for deep excavation and removal of the hazardous water.

4.2 Recommendation

We would recommend that the Provincial Heritage Authority consider the issuing of a permit for the destruction of archaeological material.

We would however, suggest that when bulk excavations commence on site that the client allocate consultancy money for site inspections by an archaeologist to photograph record and collect any material that may be unearthed. Furthermore the archaeologist must use the opportunity to inspect the deeper areas with a view to locating and recording the early stream- bed which may run across the site.

5 References

Hart, T 1990 Excavations at 109 Harrington Street – The Granite Lodge. Unpublished report prepared for the National Monuments Council.

Malan, A 2002 43-47 Buitenkant Street. Archival research prepared for Jake de Villiers Architects.

Map Studio 2001 Cape Town Street Guide: Struik.

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