

# REPORT ON A STUDY OF A BUILDING, CNR OF HOUT AND BUITENGRACHT STREETS, CAPE TOWN

Prepared for

**Cape Town Heritage Trust**

December 1997



Prepared by

**Archaeology Contracts Office**  
Department of Archaeology  
University of Cape Town  
Private Bag Rondebosch  
7700

Phone 650 2357  
Fax 650 2352  
Email [djh@Beattie.uct.ac.za](mailto:djh@Beattie.uct.ac.za)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Archaeology Contracts Office of the University of Cape Town was commissioned at short notice to investigate and record fabric exposed during building activities in buildings on the corner of Hout and Buitengracht Streets, Cape Town (Plate 1). The building in question was originally thought to have been constructed in 1902 on the site of a demolished 18th century town house. Removal of plaster has revealed that 18th century fabric still exists in the structure leading to the conclusion that the original structure was not demolished but extensively renovated and a third story added. As extensive renovation of the building is to take place shortly, it was necessary to make a photographic record (video and still photography) of the exposed features before they are impacted. Figures 1, 2 and 3 show locations of photographs (Plates 2-9) presented in this report. Figure 4-6 are annotated diagrams showing locations of previous openings and original fabric.

## 2. ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Hall (1989) reports that the property was granted in 1771 to C. Persoon. The next transfer that took place in 1776 makes mention that there was a house on the property. The first modification of the premises is known to have taken place by 1878 (one half was used by a Mason and the other half was vacant). Furthermore, the municipal survey of 1862 shows that the house was divided into two erven at this time. The property was sold to Joseph Cosay in 1901 who divided it into three separate erven. Cosay who was a speculative builder also owned 99 Hout Street at about the same time.

The balance of evidence available indicates that the original 18th century building had undergone extensive changes by the mid-19th century and was further divided and extensively modified in 1901-2. It is quite probable that the standard vernacular town house layout had already been interrupted by 1862 with the construction of an almost central dividing wall.

## 3. PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The most confusing aspect of the study has been the fact that there has been extensive rebuilding compounded with the fact that the latest phase of renovations was done as economically as possible by Cosay who made use of recycled 18th century bricks bonded with a cement based mortar. It is quite probable that he was responsible for gutting no 99 Hout Street and re-used the fabric in rebuilding 61 and 63 Buitengracht Street. A difficulty encountered in understanding the building sequence is that no.63 which was part of the original property is under separate ownership and not accessible.

### 3.1 No. 61 - ground floor

Plaster has not been stripped on this side but enough fabric is visible to determine that much of the left-hand room is 18th century (Plate 2). The rear wall shows evidence of a kitchen fire or hearth, furthermore the room is stepped down (with the fall of the land) and the resulting saving in head space used to create an *opkamer* above the kitchen. Beam slots are visible. The right hand room (left wall rear) shows evidence of 3 openings (Plate 3) with relieving arches - probably one of the original walls of the *gaandery*. In general the central core of the house has been demolished (pre 1862) to create two properties. The right hand wall of the right hand room is not original but nevertheless mid-19th century. Openings in this wall are

rudimentary with no use of relieving arches. Cosay who was evidently a jerry builder recycled a number of 18th century beams which are visible in the left hand room (Plate 4).

### **3.2 No. 61 - first floor**

One of the major alterations Cosay undertook was raising the floor level of the first floor by 920 mm. This is evident by beam slots (bricked up) on the ground floor walls. There are also openings with lintels that extend across both levels which are evidence of previous floor arrangements (Plate 5). The right hand room shows clear evidence of a scar marking the position of the original internal dividing wall (Plate 6). This however, extends to only half the height of the first floor showing that the second floor has also been raised by at least 1000mm with recycled bricks. Several bricked up beam slots are also evident.

The rear portion of both rooms has been rebuilt with recycled materials, as has the facade.

### **3.3 No. 61 - second floor**

The second floors in both rooms have been added with non-standard bricks (recycled) but with cement based mortar (Plate 7). Some 18th century beams have been recycled to support parts of the roof as well as lifting hitches. The most interesting aspect of the second floor is the hand-operated 19th century lift. This is a unique artefact worthy of conservation (Plates 8 and 9).

### **3.4 Facade**

The facade of the structure has been rebuilt (Victorian) as has most of the rear apart from the ground floor. The proportions of the original house are still evident apart from the additional floor.

### **3.5 Foundations**

Visible foundations are of Malmesbury shale. The rear wall of the courtyard is also stone as is the Hout Street ground floor wall of the building.

### **3.6 Below surface**

There is a very strong possibility that below surface excavations will reveal the footprint of the original structure - dividing wall, the remains of the *voorkamer*, *gaandery* and possibly the hearth.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

No. 61 contains multiple layers of modification, the first of which involved division of the town house into two properties before 1862. The second major revision took place when the builder, Cosay (1902) demolished much of no 99, then changed the internal proportions of no 61 and 63 by dividing it into 3 erven and adding a further story using recycled materials (possibly from no. 99). He raised the height of the interior rooms by raising the floors and rebuilt parts of the rear as well as the facade. The left hand side of the structure contains the bulk of original fabric. The right side of 61 is bounded by the pre 1862 dividing wall.

No. 99 has been rebuilt on 18th century foundations and stone walls by Cosay at the turn of the century. The brickwork also consists of a curious mixture of standard frog bricks and non-standard 19th century material bonded with a cement based mortar. As with no. 61, the footprint of the original structure is probably preserved under the existing cement floors.

## **5. REFERENCES**

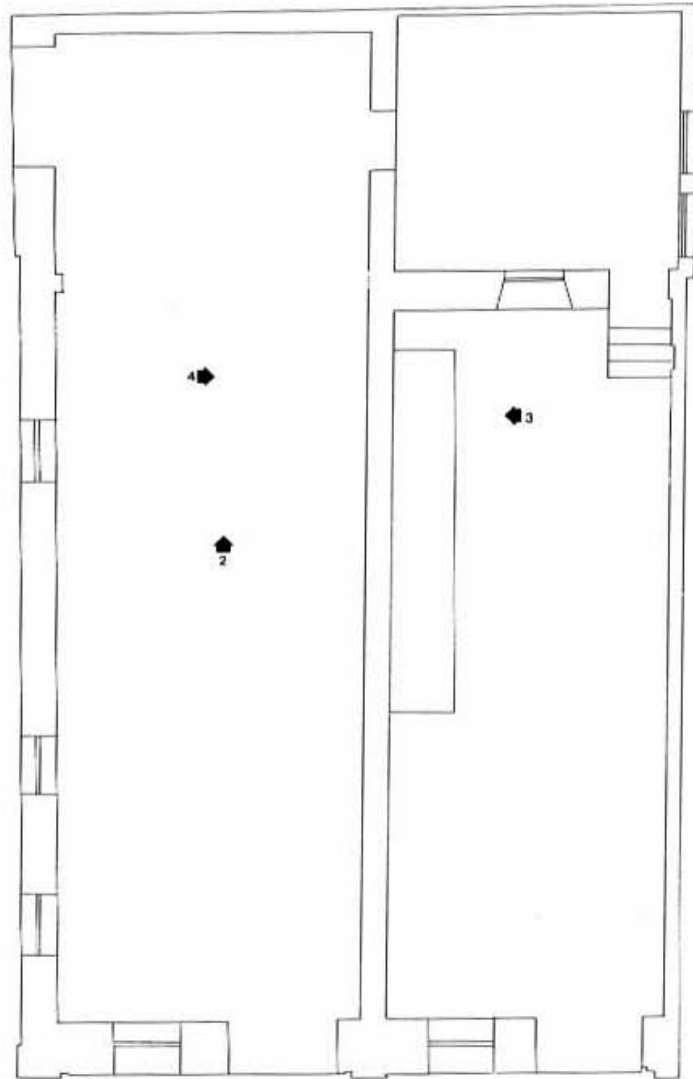
Hall, M.J. 1989. Block 11 Cape Town. An archaeological assessment. University of Cape Town: Archaeology Contracts Office.

Malan, A. 1996-97 Unpublished research material.

All diagram's after site plans, Gapp Architects.

## **6. PROFESSIONAL TEAM**

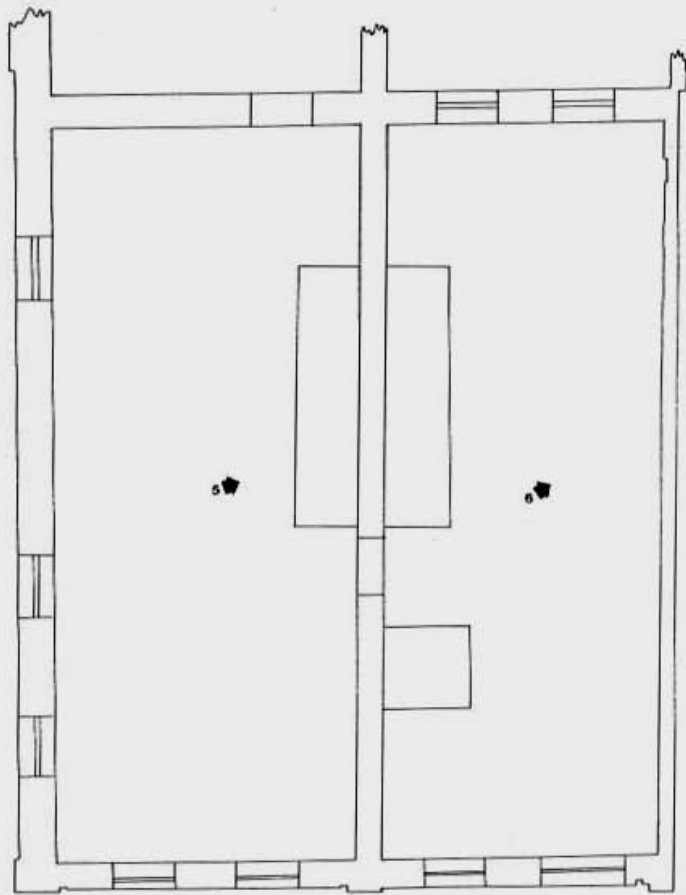
Tim Hart  
Harriet Clift  
Antonia Malan  
Belinda Mütti



**1**

Corner of Hout and Buitengracht Streets - ground floor. Location and orientation of plates are indicated by arrows.

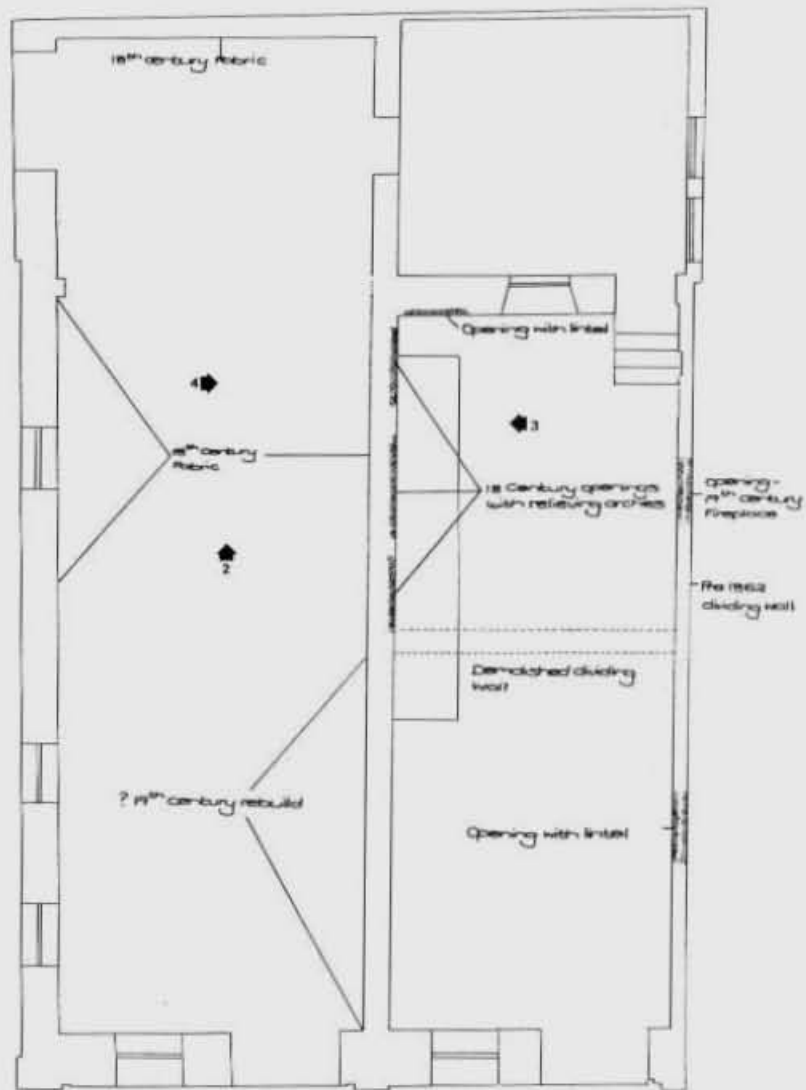




**2**

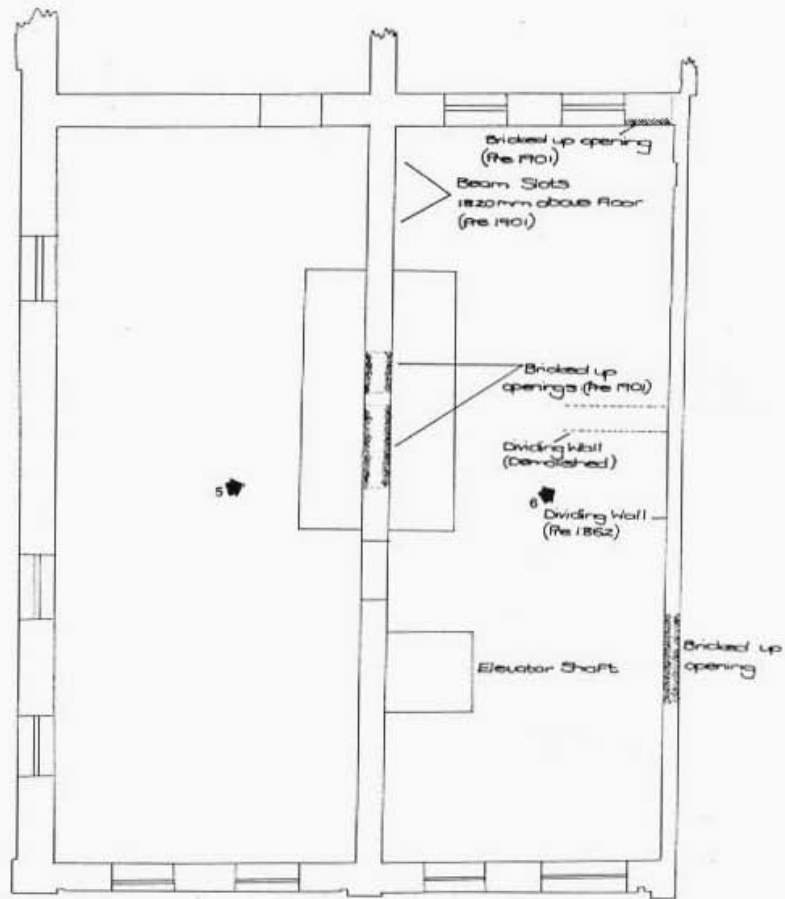
Corner of Hout and Buitengracht Streets - first floor. Location and orientation of plates are indicated by arrows.





**4** Ground floor

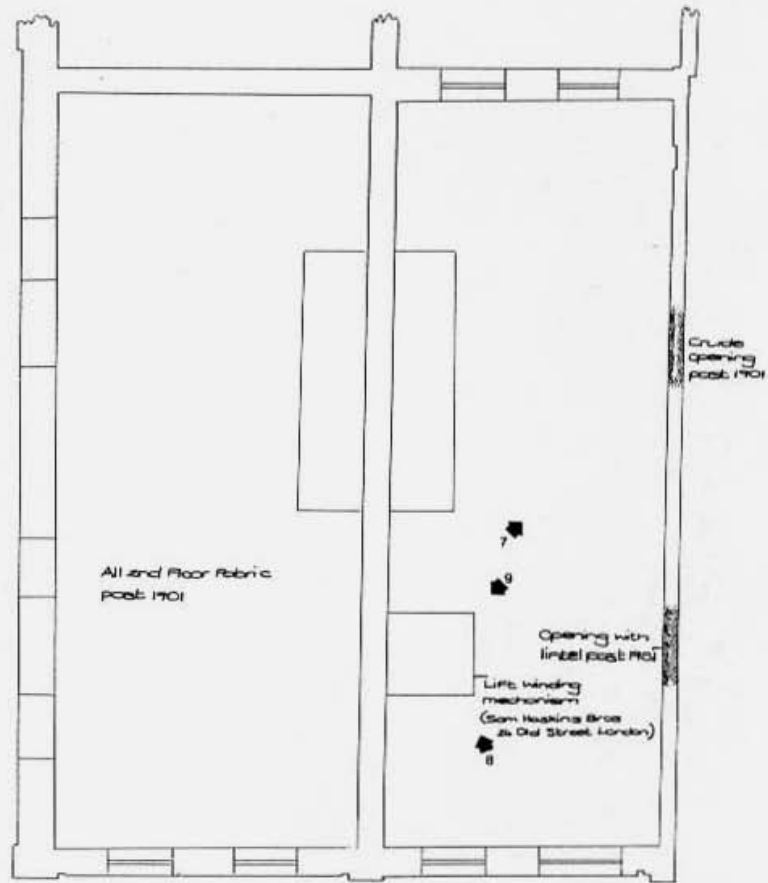




**5** First floor







**6**

Second floor





**PLATE 1:** Exterior view of building, corner of Hout and Buitentengracht Streets



**PLATE 2:** Interior view (Hout Street side) showing soot blackened 18th century fabric, and beam slots (possible *opkamer* above).



**PLATE 3:** One of three bricked up 18th century openings with relieving arches.



**PLATE 4:** 18th Century beams (Hout Street side) reused along with 19th-early 20th century pine.



**PLATE 5:** Interior view, (Hout Street side) first floor showing early openings projecting through present (1902) floor levels.



**PLATE 6:** First floor: the remains of the internal dividing wall is visible as a scar (right), while the change in brick work texture indicating a height raising event (1902) is indicated by an arrow.



**PLATE 7:** All of the brickwork on the second floor post-dates the turn of the century although extensive use has been made of recycled 18th and 19th century fabric.



**PLATE 8:** View of the simple rope operated lift.



**PLATE 9:** Winding mechanism of the rope operated lift which is still in working order.