

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF SELECTED BASEMENT ROOMS, MARTIN MELCK HOUSE, STRAND STREET, CAPE TOWN.

Prepared for

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Prepared by

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Alterations to the Lutheran Parsonage at 96 Strand Street, or Martin Melck House as it is more popularly known, required that a limited archaeological investigation be conducted in rooms towards the back of the house. Our brief required that we test the ground prior to the casting of concrete slabs.

## 2. ARCHAEOLOGY

A plan of the house showing the location of the rooms to be investigated is presented in Figure 1. Also shown are the location of test excavations and a section drawing characterising the stratigraphic sequence of the deposits. Room numbers in the detail correspond to the room numbers on the architects working diagram. Subdivision into areas 2A and 2B are for purposes of discussion.

### 2.1 Excavations

Two test holes were excavated, one on each side of the wall that is to be removed. A plaster removal in the west corner shows that the dividing wall is built with brick while the outer SE wall is constructed with stone. The brick wall does not lock with the stone.

Removal of timber floors has revealed varying surfaces. In Room 2A, brick had been laid between the joists probably in an attempt to reduce damp (Plate 1). Floors and brick are probably late Victorian. In Room 2B, the situation is slightly different in that some stone paving has been preserved below timber floors in a small area (see Figure 1 and Plate 2). Other parts had been lowered to provide an aeration cavity. Several fragments of refined earthenware were recovered from the aeration gap and date to the later part of the 18th or early 19th century. These have probably worked their way into the deposit through gaps and cracks in the timber floor. The presence of this material to the exclusion of earlier styles would seem to confirm the date of the addition of timber floors.

Excavations show the deposit in both 2A and 2B to be virtually identical. A description of the various units can be found in Figure 1 on the section drawing. The lime plaster layer marks a transition from 18th to 19th century or at least from the Dutch to British periods. Below the plaster layer, ceramics are exclusively of oriental manufacture whereas only refined earthenwares characteristic of the British period are recovered above. Artefact samples are very small and are in most cases in secondary context.

The matrix below the plaster layer consists of sand and a large amount of shale chunks. The rubble is almost certainly the result of stone dressing during building of the outer walls. The presence of porcelain in this matrix may be due to mixing with surface material from the surrounding area where there is quite likely to have been amounts of this material present at the time of construction given the existence of earlier residential complexes in the area. The reason that there is no admixture of the two ceramic types above the plaster is probably due to the fact that stone floors were present in this locale until wooden floors were introduced later in the 19th century (by the later part of the 19th century oriental porcelains had been replaced by mass produced, relatively cheap earthenwares, for everyday use). Artefactual material does not generally find its way into underlying deposits through stone floors where grouting is present.

The layer rich in shale rubble lies immediately on top of a sterile clay substrate (decomposing Malmesbury shales) marking the approximate original surface at the time of construction in c1782<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Fransen, H. and Cook, M.A. 1980. The old buildings of the Cape. Cape Town: Balkema. p58

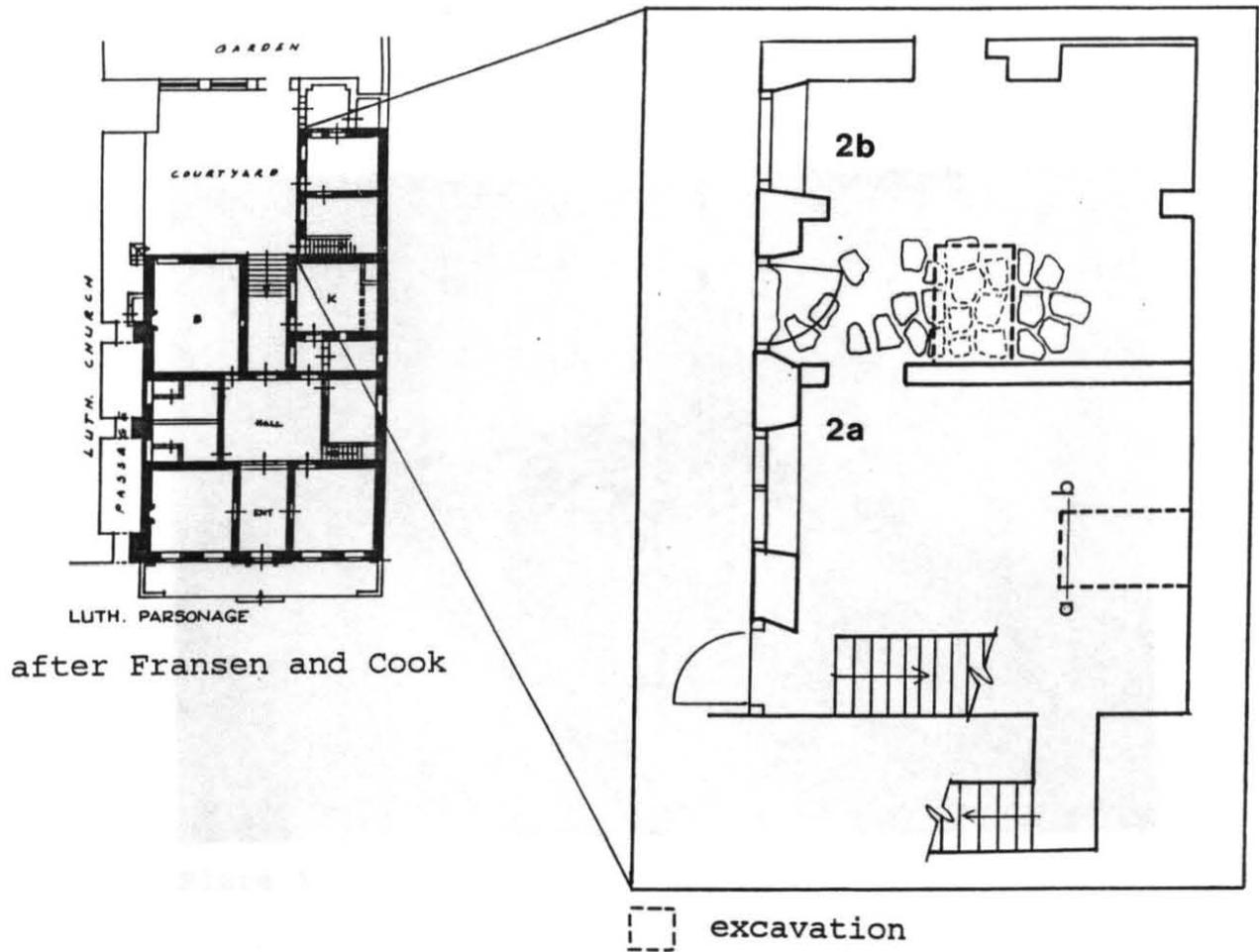
### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In our opinion the deposits which occur below the timber floors are uniform and have been sufficiently documented by this examination. Artefactual material is present in very small quantities and for the most part is in secondary context. As far as we are concerned no further archaeological work is necessary.

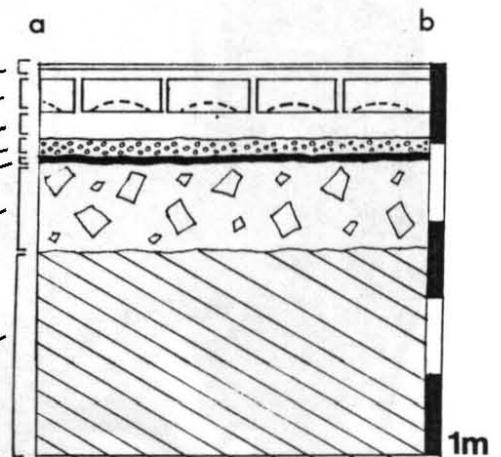
### **4. INVESTIGATION TEAM**

Principal investigator  
Excavations

Dave Halkett  
Dave Halkett  
Mzwondile Sasa  
Mzunzima Mjikelezi



- timber floor
- brick
- light brown/grey soil
- ferruginous gravel
- lime plaster surface
- brown soil with shale rubble
- decomposing Malmsbury shale (sterile)



1





Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3