

# INITIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE SOMERSET HOSPITAL PRECINCT, GREEN POINT, CAPE TOWN

Prepared for

**The Baumann and Winter Heritage Assessors**

June 2003



Prepared by

Tim Hart

**Archaeology Contracts Office**

Department of Archaeology

University of Cape Town

Private Bag

Rondebosch

7701

Phone (021) 650 2357

Fax (021) 650 2352

Email [TJG@age.uct.ac.za](mailto:TJG@age.uct.ac.za)

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Archaeology Contracts Office (ACO) of the University of Cape Town was appointed by Baumann and Winter Heritage Impact Assessors to undertake an initial Archaeological assessment of the Somerset Hospital Precinct in Green Point, Cape Town.

### **Findings:**

- Somerset Hospital Precinct is a historically significant area containing two National Monuments, several protected buildings and the site of a South African War POW camp.
- The area may contain pre-colonial buried shell middens.
- The area may contain historical middens relating to *Kyk in Die Pot* battery, the military camp set up on the common during the South African war.
- Green Point contains unmarked burial grounds relating to the small pox epidemics of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is possible that human remains will be unearthed in the study area during the course of excavation work and building of services.

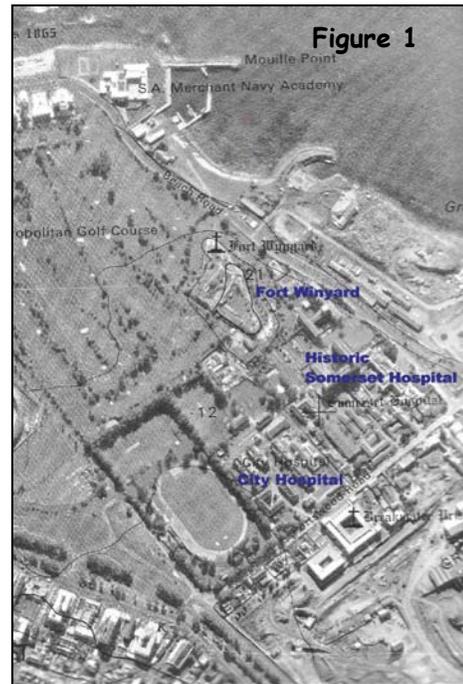
### **Recommendations:**

An archaeologist should be appointed to the project during the development phase to monitor bulk excavation work, trenches for services. He/she will need to sample and rescue any finds made during the construction phase.

1	INTRODUCTION .....	4
1.1	SCOPE OF WORK .....	4
1.2	METHOD .....	4
2	HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.....	5
2.1	THE 17 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY .....	5
2.2	THE 18 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY .....	5
2.3	THE 19 <sup>TH</sup> -20 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES .....	6
3	CURRENT STATUS OF HERITAGE SITES.....	8
3.1	NEW SOMERSET HOSPITAL (ERF 1559) .....	8
3.2	CITY HOSPITAL (ERF 1955) .....	9
4	SIGNIFICANT SITES BORDERING THE STUDY AREA .....	9
4.1	GREEN POINT TRACK (ERF 1056).....	9
4.2	FORT WYNYARD AND LABORATORY (ERVEN 1252, 1536, 1253) .....	9
5	BURIED ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES.....	10
5.1	GRAVES.....	10
5.2	HISTORIC MIDDENS AND OTHER BURIED MATERIAL.....	10
5.3	PRE-COLONIAL MATERIAL .....	11
6	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION.....	11
7	APPENDIX A .....	12

## 1 Introduction

The Archaeology Contracts Office of the University of Cape Town was commissioned by Baumann and Winter Heritage Assessors to prepare an initial archaeological assessment of the Somerset Hospital precinct in Greenpoint. This study is being undertaken as a specialist element of a broader study designed to assess the development potential of the study area which includes the historic Somerset Hospital buildings, City Hospital (old fever hospital) and Medical Museum, nurses home and a host of more modern structures (see Figure 1). The state wishes to develop the area and is seeking appropriate design informants born out of the assessment of risks and opportunities. The following pages contain a review of the known history of the area, describes the known heritage sites and comments of the impacts of the envisaged development on any archaeological material. Appendix A contains a collection of historic maps from which observations contained in this report have been derived.



### 1.1 Scope of work

According to the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999 development activities that exceed stipulated parameters require a heritage impact assessment. These studies, which normally proceed in phases, examine the impact of development activities on heritage. Broadly defined, the term “heritage” includes everything from geology, palaeontology and archaeology to built environment, landscapes and traditions. This particular study limits itself to archaeology – that is the remains of human activity that is more than 100 years old. Other heritage components are discussed in the broader heritage assessment of which this forms a part.

### 1.2 Method

The primary method has been examination of historic maps, texts and secondary sources of information. The area has been subject to a site visit however thick grass cover has limited the ground surface visibility making it difficult to locate any historic or prehistoric middens. Furthermore, much of the area in question has been disturbed by surface preparation for gardens, roads and sporting facilities. The fact that the site is currently heavily used precludes large scale archaeological testing.

## 2 Historical Background

### 2.1 The 17<sup>th</sup> century

Green Point consisted of a flat coastal plain in front of Signal Hill, punctuated by some prominent dunes. A large *vlei* existed close to the present site of Green Point Stadium, while seasonal swamps characterized much of the Common. The granite and Malmsbury shale geological substrates of the area would have provided trace elements necessary for the raising of domestic animals. Early maps describe Green Point as being the location of a “hottentot village” on the outskirts of Cape Town.<sup>1</sup> These people were probably the remnants of indigenous groups who would have grazed their herds on the Common but had become displaced by European settlement. In 1997 the remains of 4 human individuals displaying Khoi Khoi characteristics were found buried in traditional style (with pot and broken grindstones) under 19<sup>th</sup> century houses in Cobern Street, Greenpoint.<sup>2</sup> Dated to about 1000 years before present, these archaeological finds testify to a long history of use of the area.

According to Picard, Green Point Common was the grazing area of the Dutch East India Company cattle herds.<sup>3</sup> The Dutch referred to the area as the Waterplaats or Waterfront – the true coast of the Atlantic Ocean. By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century there appears to have been no permanent structures or settlement in the area.

### 2.2 The 18<sup>th</sup> century

During the early 18<sup>th</sup> century Green Point was undeveloped, the closest permanent structures being the Chavonnes Battery (built in 1715) and the execution ground (Gallows Hill) situated behind where the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront is today. In 1743, the Dutch attempted to build a mole (hence the name Mouille point) out into Table Bay to protect the anchorage. Funding was supplied through extra tax levies and labour provided by convicts, slaves and Dutch East India Company employees. The mole was not a success and quickly destroyed by the Atlantic storms.<sup>4</sup>

A part Green Point, just west of the city and close to where Somerset Road is today was a bleak area characterized by the graveyards of the Dutch Reformed Church and the informal graveyards of slaves, paupers, criminals and smallpox victims. The gallows and place of torture (situated on a prominent sand dune) was an ever-present reminder of the brutal justice system of the time.<sup>5</sup> It was not until 1795 that further development of the area took place. When the British fleet landed

---

<sup>1</sup> The journal of Robert Jacob Gordon, 1777 - 1786, Cape Travels.

<sup>2</sup> Cox, G. 1999. Cobern Street burial ground: investigating the identity and life histories of the underclass of 18th century Cape Town. Unpublished MA dissertation, Dept Archaeology, University of Cape Town.

<sup>3</sup> Picard, H.J. 1969. Gentlemen's Walk. Cape Town: Struik.

<sup>4</sup> Malan, A, 1993. Historical Assessment of Granger Bay and Mouille Point. University of Cape Town: ACO.

<sup>5</sup> Hart, T.J.G. 2001. A Conservation Plan for the Chavonnes Battery. University of Cape Town: ACO.

in Simonstown heralding the commencement of hostilities, the Dutch hastily built a small Gun Battery on a prominent hill on Green Point Common. Named *Kyk in die Pot* Battery, this small irregular redoubt was armed with 4, 24 pounder brass cannons.<sup>6</sup> After the British took over the Cape, the Battery was abandoned for almost 60 years.

### 2.3 The 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

The British occupation of the Cape in 1806 saw expansion of the city towards Green Point as result of the development of the harbour, increased commerce and population. It is this period that has left the greatest range of heritage sites that could be impacted by development activities.

*Burial grounds:* The precedent set by the Dutch East India Company for using the west side of the city as a burial area was continued. This initially took the form of expansion of a mass of multi-denominational burial grounds, which were later closed, or exhumed and moved to Maitland shortly after 1900.<sup>7</sup>

*Defences:* In 1812-13 a laboratory (ordnance magazine) was built on the flats to the south west of the *Kyk in die Pot* Battery. In 1862 *Kyk in die Pot* Battery was upgraded using convict labour from the nearby Breakwater Prison and armed with 68 pounder muzzle loaders and renamed Fort Wynyard. It was remodeled and re-armed in 1889, re-armed again in 1900 and achieved its present configuration by the end of the First World War. For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it served as the Examination Battery for ships entering Table Bay. It fell out of active service in 1958 with the closure of the coastal artillery batteries.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 2** 6 Inch breech loading cannon at Fort Wynyard circa 1936 (SA Navy Museum)

*New Somerset Hospital:* Sir George Gray laid down the foundation stones of the New Somerset Hospital in 1859. Designed to accommodate 100 patients it was completed by 1862. This hospital replaced the notorious “old” Somerset Hospital (South Africa’s first civil hospital) built further to the South East near Prestwich street in 1818 and introduced modern changes in medical care and sanitation brought about by Florence Nightingale’s ideas.<sup>9</sup> The hospital was surrounded by a

---

<sup>6</sup> De Vries, G and Hall, J. The muzzle loading cannon of South Africa. Privately published by Durr Cannon Research.

<sup>7</sup> Halkett, D.J. 1995. Phase 1 archaeological assessment of Victoria Junction, Green Point. University of Cape Town: ACO.

<sup>8</sup> Bisset, W.M. Undated. A short History of *Kyk in die Pot* Battery and Fort Wynyard. *In Fort Wynyard Museum of Coastal and Anti-Aircraft Artillery*. SA Navy Museum.

<sup>9</sup> Laidler, P.W. and Gelfand, M. 1971. South Africa: its medical history 1652-1898. Cape Town: Struik.

formal garden. Maps of the area do not indicate the presence of any burial grounds associated with the hospital.

*Fever Hospital:* Built in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, buildings of the old fever hospital have survived in the City Hospital complex.

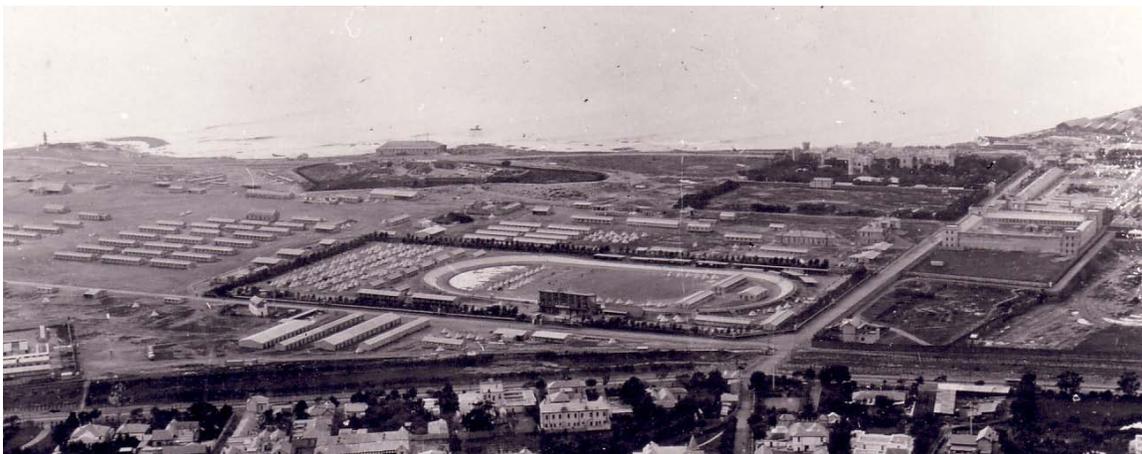
*Alfred Basin:* The completion of the construction of the Alfred Basin and Breakwater in 1860 -1870 brought about accelerated development of the western side of Cape Town and the Green Point area.

*Green Point Track:* The track built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was designed for cycling and running (three laps = 1 mile), and a cricket pitch on the west side. It was equipped with an elaborate Victorian stand. The track remains in use to this day having played an important role in providing a sporting facility for communities who were eventually displaced from District Six by apartheid.<sup>10</sup>

South African War Military Camp and POW camp: During the South African War Green Point common, due to its proximity to the Victoria and Alfred Basins, was used as a vast military transit camp (see Figures 3 & 4) for British and Colonial troops who were housed



**Figure 4**  
Black  
POW's held  
at the  
Green Point  
camp (War  
Museum of  
the Boer  
Republics)



**Figure 3** Green Point during the South African War. Note bungalows used by troops (behind hospital and on common) and tents of POW's erected on Green Point Track

in temporary bungalows.<sup>11</sup> Of particular interest is that the Green Point Track was used as a Prisoner of War Camp for Boer captives who were housed in tents.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Winter, S. Pers. comm.

<sup>11</sup> Cape Archives, J3431

<sup>12</sup> Virtual Museum of the South African War

Photographer, Arthur Eliot earliest images include several taken at the Green Point Camp.<sup>13</sup>

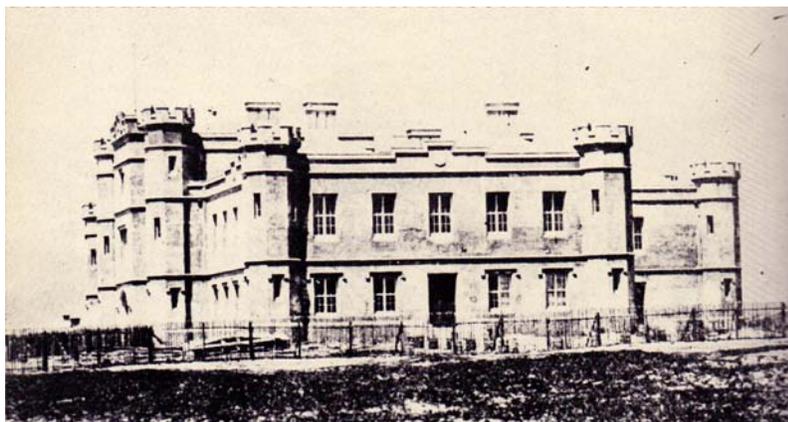
*Cape Town – Seapoint railway line:* A direct result of the transfer of technology that came about with the construction of the harbour was the development of the suburban rail system run by small railway companies established between 1860 and 1870. The Seapoint line ran along the inland side of Green Point Common.<sup>14</sup> Close to where Green Point Traffic Circle is today was a station and level crossing called *Hospital Crossing* (see Appendix A).

*Green Point Common:* For many years this area was used as grazing lands for cattle, a place of leisure where the citizens of Cape Town came for picnics, walks and to enjoy the *Waterfront*. The Common has a long history of recreational pastime – sporting events and horse racing (Metropolitan Race Course) was established early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup>

### 3 Current status of heritage sites

#### 3.1 *New Somerset Hospital (erf 1559)*

This turreted Victorian building is intact and continues to function as part of the Somerset Hospital complex. Additional buildings have been added over the years; with the result that what was once the formal garden has now been occupied by more recent structures (the nurses residence, emergency section and crèche). The main hospital building is an



**Figure 5** The New Somerset Hospital shortly after its completion (after Laidler and Gelfand 1971)

outstanding structure of its type while the site represents a landmark in South African Medical History. The site is a declared National Monument (in terms of the old National Monument Act) and protected as a grade 2 provincial site by the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999 (NHRA).

<sup>13</sup> Cape Archives, Elliot collection.

<sup>14</sup> See relevant maps, esp. J3431.

<sup>15</sup> Todeshini, F. and Japha, D. 1988. Green Point and Sea Point Conservation Study. Report for Town Planning Branch of the City Planners Department of the Cape Town City Council.

### **3.2 City Hospital (erf 1955)**

Original structures of the old Fever Hospital have survived, albeit enclosed by a plethora of 20<sup>th</sup> century structures that make up the City Hospital. The older structures are protected by the NHRA act of 1999 and are considered to be of exceptional importance by the provincial office of SAHRA (South African Heritage Resources Agency).<sup>16</sup>

## **4 Significant sites bordering the study area**

### **4.1 Green Point Track (erf 1056)**

The track lies on land that is currently owned by the City of Cape Town and is therefore historically part of Green Point Common. Its layout has changed very little since the turn of the century, albeit some of the Victorian structures no longer exist. Green Point Track is possibly one of the oldest formal sports grounds in the country having been in use for over 100 years. Its significance as a “heritage place” is further enhanced by the fact that it was the POW camp section of the larger military camp at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The cricket pitch to the west of the track was where the tent camp for POW’s was erected. While it is not expected that any artifacts of the South African War will have survived *in situ*, the *place*, which has changed very little since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, is of historic importance. The track, by virtue of its age, is protected by the NHRA act of 1999.

There is little doubt that the Camp had a waste dumping area, which could contain significant archaeological material. Such dumps could be located anywhere within the development area. Location of graves of soldiers and prisoners of war who died at the military camp area are unknown.

### **4.2 Fort Wynyard and Laboratory (erven 1252, 1536, 1253)**

Fort Wynyard (also incorporating the 1813 laboratory) has remained the property of the South African National Defence Force. The South African Navy converted the facility into a museum<sup>17</sup> in the early 1980’s however; its maintenance has been severely neglected in recent years.<sup>18</sup> There are currently new private initiatives in place to redevelop the fort. While Fort Wynyard is not technically part of the study area, it remains a significant heritage site that could be both directly and indirectly impacted by development activities. The Fort had its origin in a prominent dune or small dune sea that that provided a raised area where a gun emplacement could be built. In the ensuing years the dune sands were shifted around to create earth walls, gun emplacements bunkers and a courtyard. While the sandy mound that makes up Fort Wynyard is of natural origin, its current form is mostly man made and qualifies as a protected structure – a point to be bourn in mind when planning development activities close by.

---

<sup>16</sup> Hart, D, Pers comm. (SAHRA regional manager).

<sup>17</sup> Bisset, W.M. Fort Wynyard Museum of Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery. SA Navy.

<sup>18</sup> Bisset, W.M. Pers Comm.

## **5 Buried Archaeological Sites**

### **5.1 Graves**

Lost and unmarked graves dating to both the colonial and pre-colonial period have come to light in the Green Point area on several occasions. We believe that there is a very real possibility that graves will be found in the affected area. Archaeological work has revealed that the vast majority of working class Capetonians, slaves and non-members of the Dutch Reformed Church did not have access to proper burials grounds were buried in massive unregulated and informal graveyards on the outskirts of Cape Town, and particularly Green Point. Most of these are now covered with buildings – the humble graves being lost to popular memory by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. While formal regulated cemeteries were mapped on council plans and most exhumed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is the informal graves that are impacted on fairly frequently during the course of development activities. Graves and human skeletal material are specifically protected by the NAHRA act.

War graves and graves of victims of conflict are protected by their own set of regulations.

#### **5.1.1 Mitigation in the event of a find**

Any human remains found during construction activity must be left as undisturbed as possible and reported immediately to SAHRA and the South African Police Services. If the Grave is more than 60 years old, an emergency exhumation permit will have to be obtained from SAHRA and the remains disinterred by an archaeologist. Arrangements may also have to be made for reburial.

Any human remains in a known burial ground that need to be exhumed for development purposes, must involve a public participation process to solicit opinions of next of kin and other interested and affected parties 60 days prior to commencement of exhumation.

### **5.2 *Historic middens and other buried material***

The study area is likely to contain 19<sup>th</sup> century dumps relating to the military facilities, hospital and the Green Point Camp. Such dumps will probably take on the form of pits in which garbage was disposed of, which were subsequently filled in and covered over. Any material found in or on the ground, which is over 100 years old, is considered to be archaeological and therefore protected by the SAHRA act).

### **5.2.1 Mitigation in the event of a find**

The project archaeologist will need to be consulted and enough time afforded to him/her to sample the find to the satisfaction of the state (SAHRA) or provincial heritage body (Heritage Western Cape) under a permit issues to that purpose.

### **5.3 Pre-colonial material**

It is also possible that Stone Age shell middens dating to the mid-late Holocene exist, as the area was ideally suited to settlement in pre-colonial times (all archaeological material over 100 years of age is protected by the SAHRA act). The discovery of *in-situ* pre-colonial archaeological material would be considered to be a significant regional find.

#### **5.3.1 Mitigation in the event of a find**

The project archaeologist will need to be consulted and enough time afforded to him/her to sample the find to the satisfaction of the state (SAHRA) or provincial heritage body (Heritage Western Cape) under a permit issues to that purpose.

## **6 Conclusion and recommendation**

While indications to date are that there is unlikely to be any archaeological material of profound enough importance in the development area to warrant exclusion of any particular part of it from development activities, there is a possibility that material of regional or local importance may be discovered during laying of services and any bulk excavation work. Unfortunately the developed nature of the site has precluded the identification of any such material through site inspection, so it is difficult to pinpoint anywhere within the study area that is particularly sensitive at this time.

We recommend that an archaeologist be appointed to future development projects at the start of construction work.

- He/she will need to monitor bulk excavation work or laying of services
- Be contactable in the event of a find on site
- Be afforded time and budget to exhume or sample material as required
- Furthermore, consideration should be given in the event of significant material being found, to its inclusion within the development (displays or site exhibits) to add value and a sense of history to the place.

An archaeologist should be present during:

- All earthmoving activities
- Cut and fill operations
- Trenching for services

## 7 APPENDIX A

### SEQUENCE OF HISTORIC MAPS SHOWING THE DEVELOPMENT OF GREEN POINT

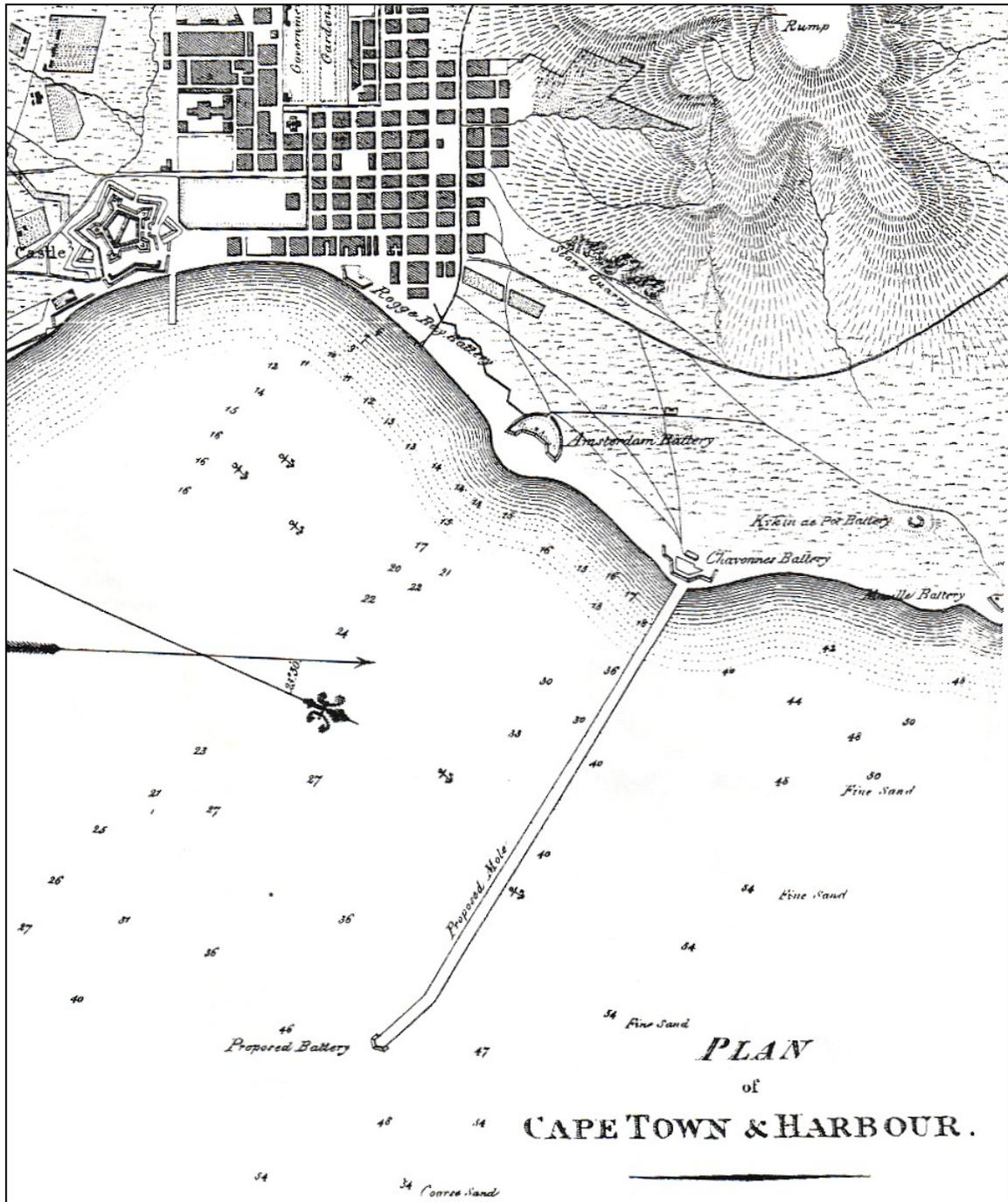


Figure 6 Table Bay in 1823. Note *Kyk in die Pot* Battery situated where Fort Winyard is Today. The proposed mole was never built. (after Wilberforce Bird, W. 1923. The state of the Cape of Good Hope in 1822. London: John Murray)



**Figure 7** An 1836 plan of Green Point showing the hill and *Kyk in die Pot* Battery (Cape Archives M1/571 1836)



**Figure 8** Plan by John Coode (1859) showing the then proposed Alfred Basin, the hill on which the batteries were situated and the laboratory. The Somerset Hospital was not yet built. The position of the Chavonnes Battery is also indicated (South African Library KH C CT Coode 1859)

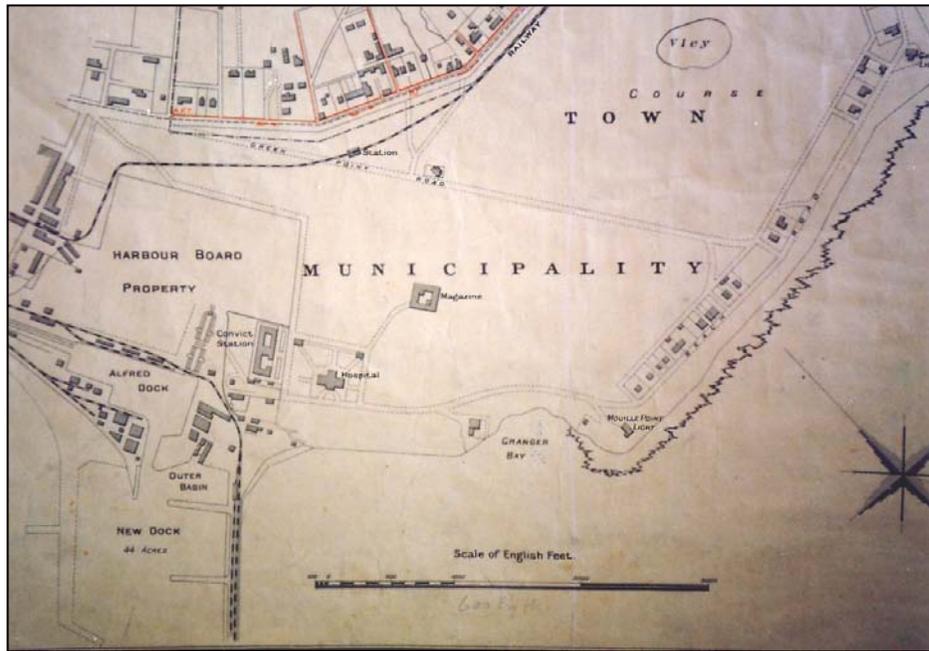


Figure 9 Green Point Circa 1891 (Cape Archives M1/235 1891)

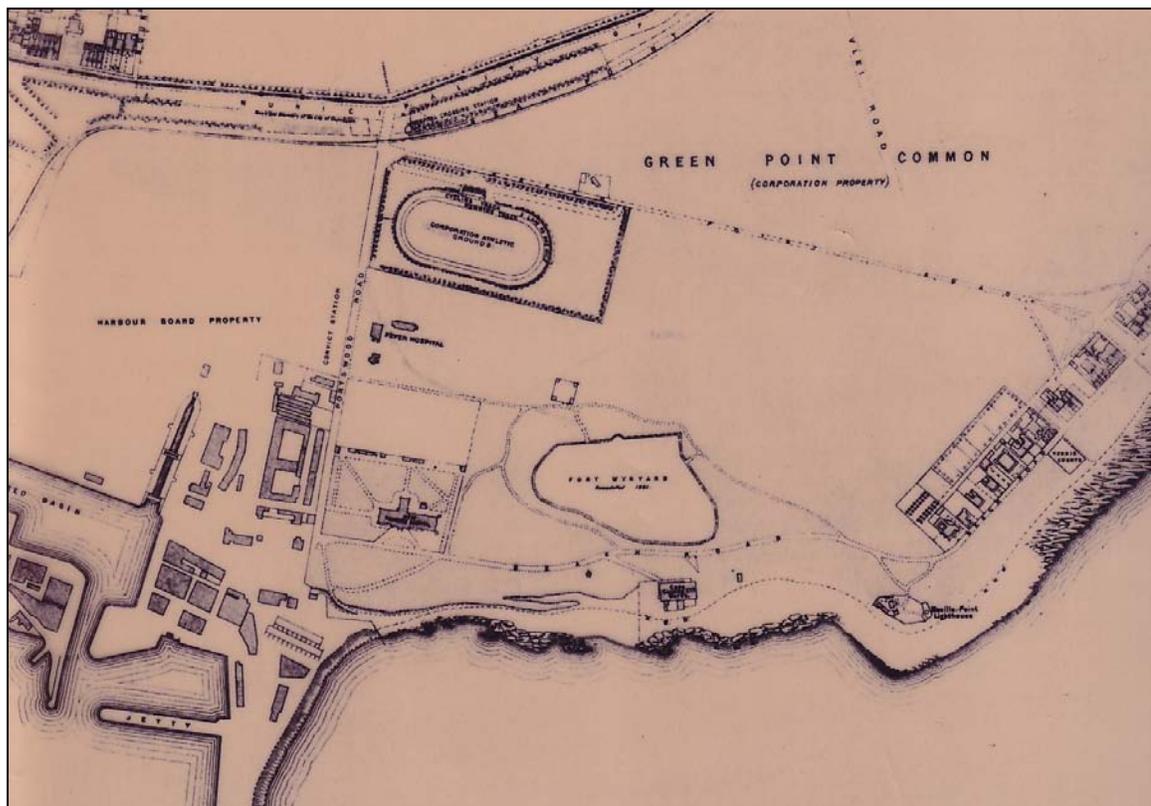


Figure 10 Green Point circa 1900 (UCT Archaeology historic maps collection)

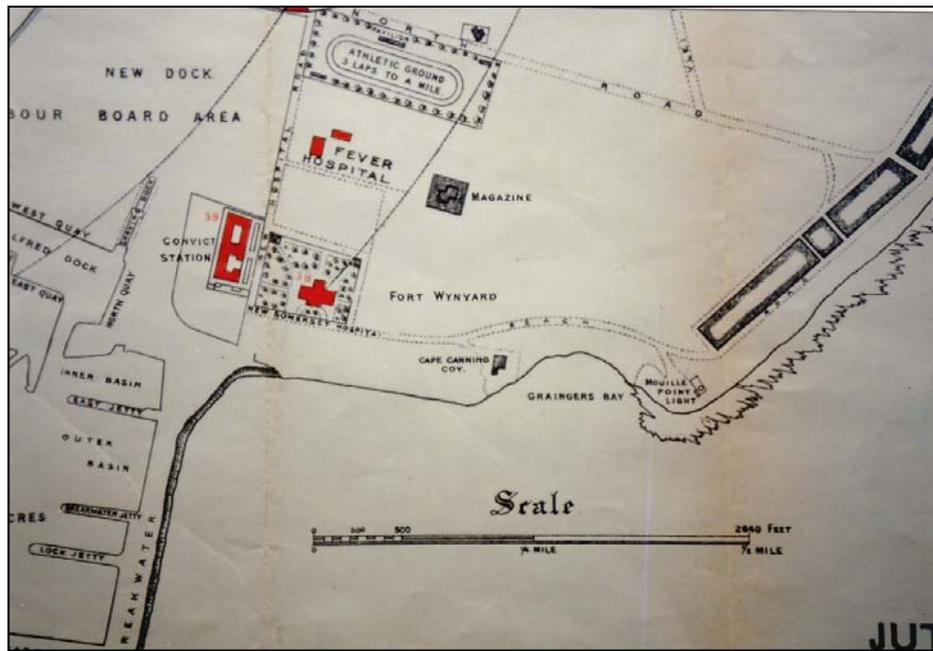


Figure 11 Green Point in 1909 (South African Library Juta's Directory)