

# **AN PHASE 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF A PORTION OF ERF 1938, MOUILLE POINT**

Prepared for  
**Cape Technikon**

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1. INTRODUCTION .....	3
2. BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND .....	5
2.1 The Mouille Battery .....	5
2.2 The "Old" Lighthouse 1842 - 1865 .....	6
2.3 The "New" Lighthouse 1865 - 1909 .....	9
3. EXCAVATIONS .....	11
3.1 Test hole 1 .....	12
3.2 Test holes 2 & 7 .....	13
3.3 Test hole 3 .....	16
3.4 Test holes 4 & 8 .....	16
4. CONCLUSIONS .....	17
5. RECOMMENDATIONS .....	17

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Archaeology Contracts Office (ACO) was appointed by Cape Technikon to assess the potential impact on archaeological remains of planned extensions to buildings belonging to the Cape Technikon on Erf 1938 in Mouille Point.

In a report prepared for Equikor in 1993<sup>1</sup>, who at that stage were intending to develop a number of erven at Granger Bay, a number of historical features were identified in the Granger Bay area. Although for the most part, surface evidence of the features has disappeared, the relatively undisturbed sea frontage (at that point in time) meant that there was a good chance that sub-surface evidence of earlier features would be preserved.

For various reasons development proceeded on the area to the east of the Technikon site without any further archaeological assessments having been undertaken. The area in front of the Technikon's Hotel School is thus the last remaining undeveloped portion of Granger Bay where traces of historical features may be preserved.

Earlier this year, the ACO was asked to comment on the proposals to extend the hotel school by Baumann and Winter Heritage Planners. During a site visit, the extent of the proposals was indicated and it was suggested that the ACO re-examine the 1993 report and prepare a short revision of the document identifying features that were present on erf 1938.

A short report was duly prepared and identified features that were believed to be present on the site<sup>2</sup>. The identified features included the Mouille Point Battery (fort) and 2 lighthouses. It was also believed that there was a remote possibility that pre-colonial shell middens could be present. It was suggested that a series of test holes be excavated on the open parts of the site to determine if any traces of historical features could be found that would be impacted by proposed developments. It was suggested that areas identified for development, as well as those to the east of the existing lighthouse be tested by excavation to establish if any archaeological material was still present below surface.

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<sup>1</sup> Halkett, D.J. & Malan, A. 1993. Historical assessment of Granger Bay and Mouille Point. Unpublished report prepared for Equikor Ltd. Archaeology Contracts Office, University of Cape Town.

<sup>2</sup> Halkett, D.J. 2004. An assessment of a portion of land, erf 1938, Granger Bay. Unpublished report prepared for Baumann & Winter, Heritage Planners. Archaeology Contracts Office, University of Cape Town.

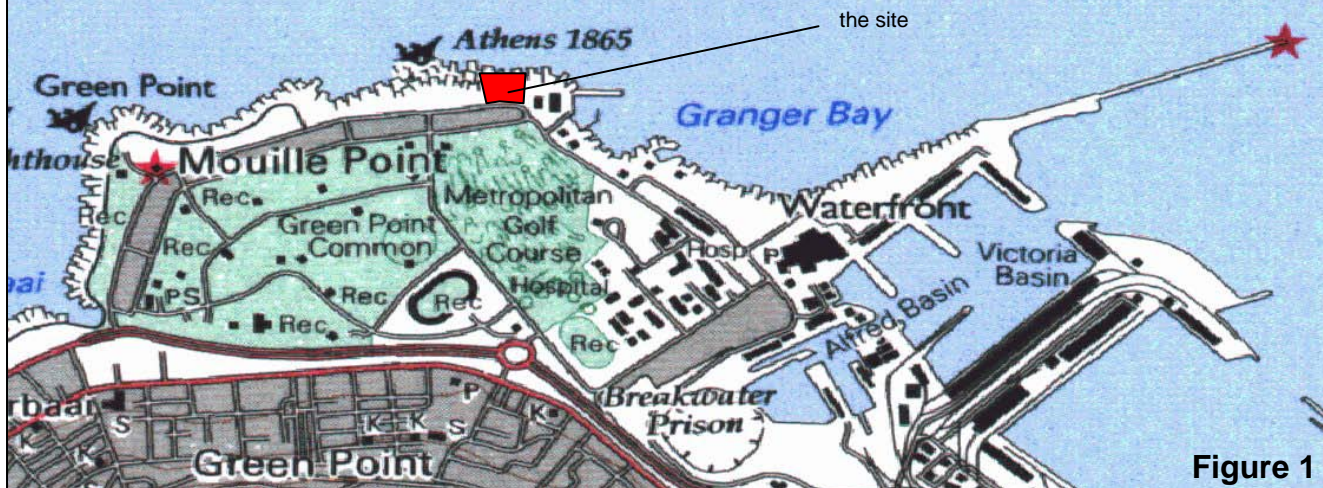
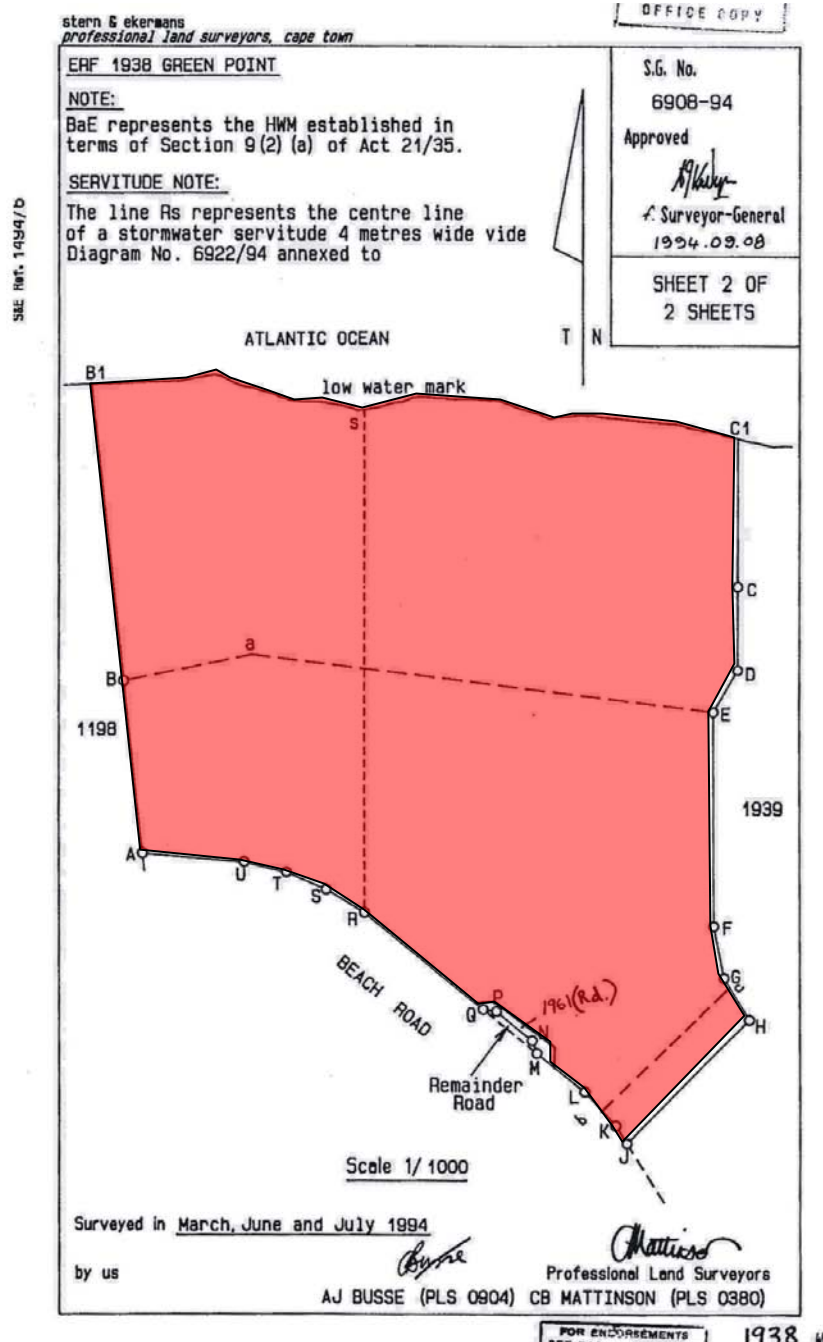


Figure 1



## 2. BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

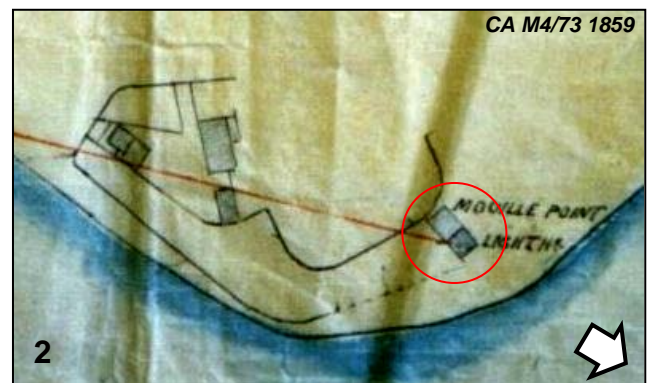
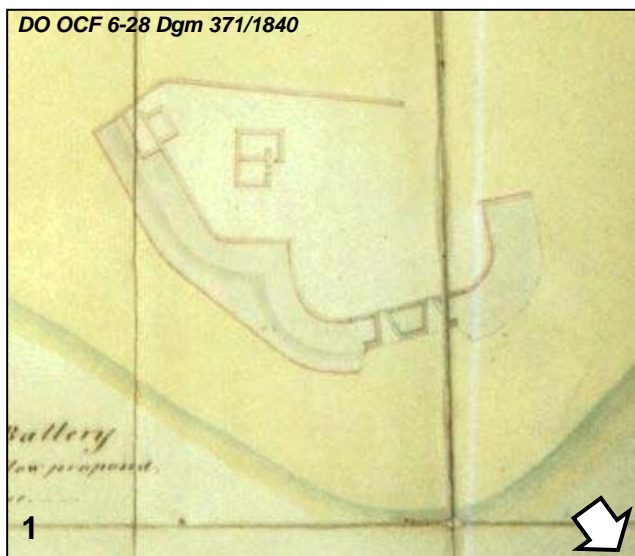
As a more detailed history was prepared in 1993<sup>3</sup>, we concentrate on the identified features that were located on erf 1938. There are 3 main features:

- the Mouille Battery
- the early Mouille Point lighthouse
- the later Mouille Point lighthouse

While the battery and the earlier of the lighthouses show no surface manifestations, the base of the later lighthouse is still present on the site. There seems to be a general misperception in the popular literature that there was only one lighthouse at Mouille Point. Most writers give the building date as 1842 and the decommissioning as 1909 as if there was no break<sup>4</sup>. We now know from the excavations and from studying various plans, that this was not the case, and that there were in fact two separate structures. These will be discussed below.

### 2.1 The Mouille Battery

The construction of a fort at was Granger Bay was first proposed by Commissioner Daniel Nolthenius in 1748<sup>5</sup>. It was however only in 1781, with the arrival of French troops that a battery was finally constructed. The plan shown in Plate 1 dating to 1840 is perhaps the



most detailed. PlanS drawn subsequently (Plates 2, 9, 10) shows the addition of lighthouses and the continued modifications of the fort until it ceased to function.

According to Murray, the name "Mouille Point" is derived from the fact that in 1743, an attempt was made to construct a breakwater (or mole - the old Dutch word for this was 'moeilje') off Granger Bay to provide safer anchorage in Table Bay<sup>6</sup>. This was never completed, but a modification of the Dutch word by the French (Mouille), became the name of the area. A map of 1786 shows the battery equipped with two 36 and five 24 pounder guns.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> see footnote 1

<sup>4</sup> see for example Picard, W.J., 1968. *Gentlemen's Walk*. Cape Town: Struik, pp140.

<sup>5</sup> Burman, J. 1976. *The Bay of Storms*. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, pp65-66.

<sup>6</sup> Murray, M., 1964. *Under Lion's Head*. Cape Town: A.A. Balkema, pp5.

<sup>7</sup> KC.CT (1660-1786) *Geschiedkundige atlas van Nederland*. Marthinus Nijhoff. Map19, pp28. SAL shelf ref 968.702.

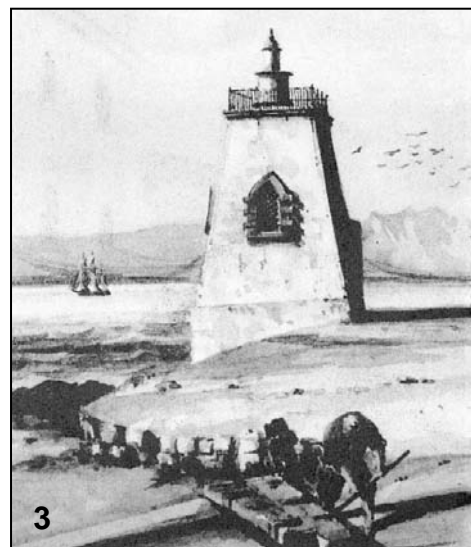
## 2.2 The "Old" Lighthouse 1842 - 1865

The first lighthouse in the area (that continues to be used today) was constructed at Green Point in 1824. Despite the erection of that facility, ships continued to be wrecked at the entrance to Table Bay. The Port Captain, Mr Bance recommended that an additional light be placed at Mouille Point to provide additional guidance to ships. The lighthouse was completed on the 1st July 1842. According to Burman, *"the new structure consisted of a single white light on a pyramidal structure, as against the twin lights of the Green Point lighthouse."*<sup>8</sup> It was built at 33 meters (feet?) above (the high water mark?). The position of the light in 1859 can be seen on Plate 2 (ringed in red).

The shape of the building looking from the west is clearly shown in Plate 3, while another painting, Plate 4, depicts the lighthouse viewed from the east.



A painting depicting the 1857 rescue by Captain Granger of the crew of the ship *Miner*. Reproduced in (Murray 1964, opp page 46). No information on the artist or location of the painting.



A painting of the old lighthouse at Mouille Point by Thomas Bowler. Reproduced in *The Cape Odyssey v4:4*. No information on location of the painting.

Two plans of the lighthouse are attached to a letter from Maclear to the Colonial secretary in 1859<sup>9</sup>. One of the plans (Plate 5), shows the lighthouse as it was at that point, while another (Plate 6) shows "proposed alterations and temporary arrangement" to the lighthouse. This is an indication that the light was still not adequate. Correspondence from 1862, includes a recommendation that the light be made a red one for navigation purposes<sup>10</sup>.

It would appear that the modifications that were planned never took place because we know that a new lighthouse (round) was built close by in 1865, that was indeed a red<sup>11</sup>. It would appear therefore, that instead of modifying the existing structure, that a completely new structure was erected.

<sup>8</sup> see footnote 5

<sup>9</sup> CO 737 Jan-June 1859. Document no. 178, 21 April.

<sup>10</sup> CO 801, 1862

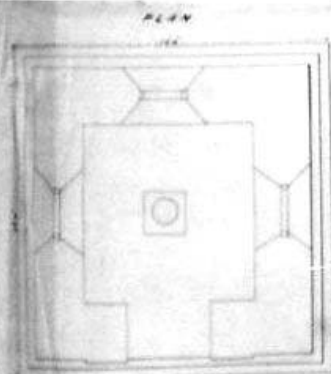
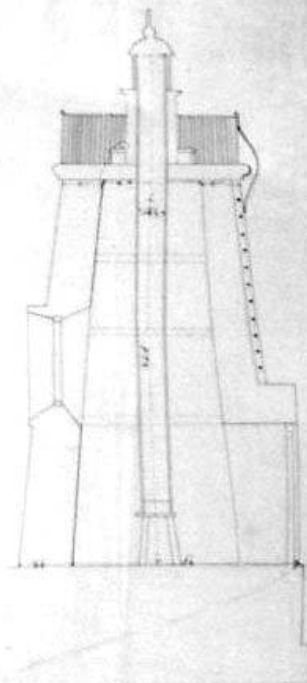
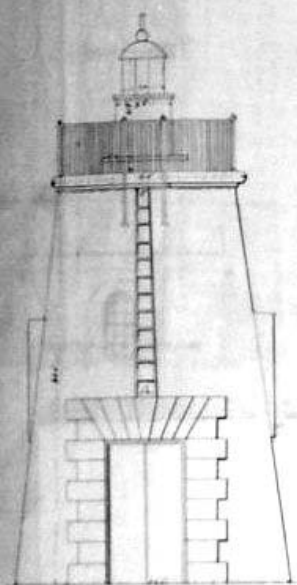
<sup>11</sup> see footnote 12

Nº 1-

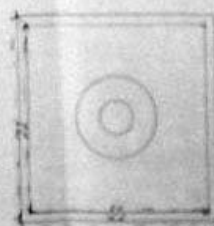
# MOUILLE-POINT LIGHTHOUSE

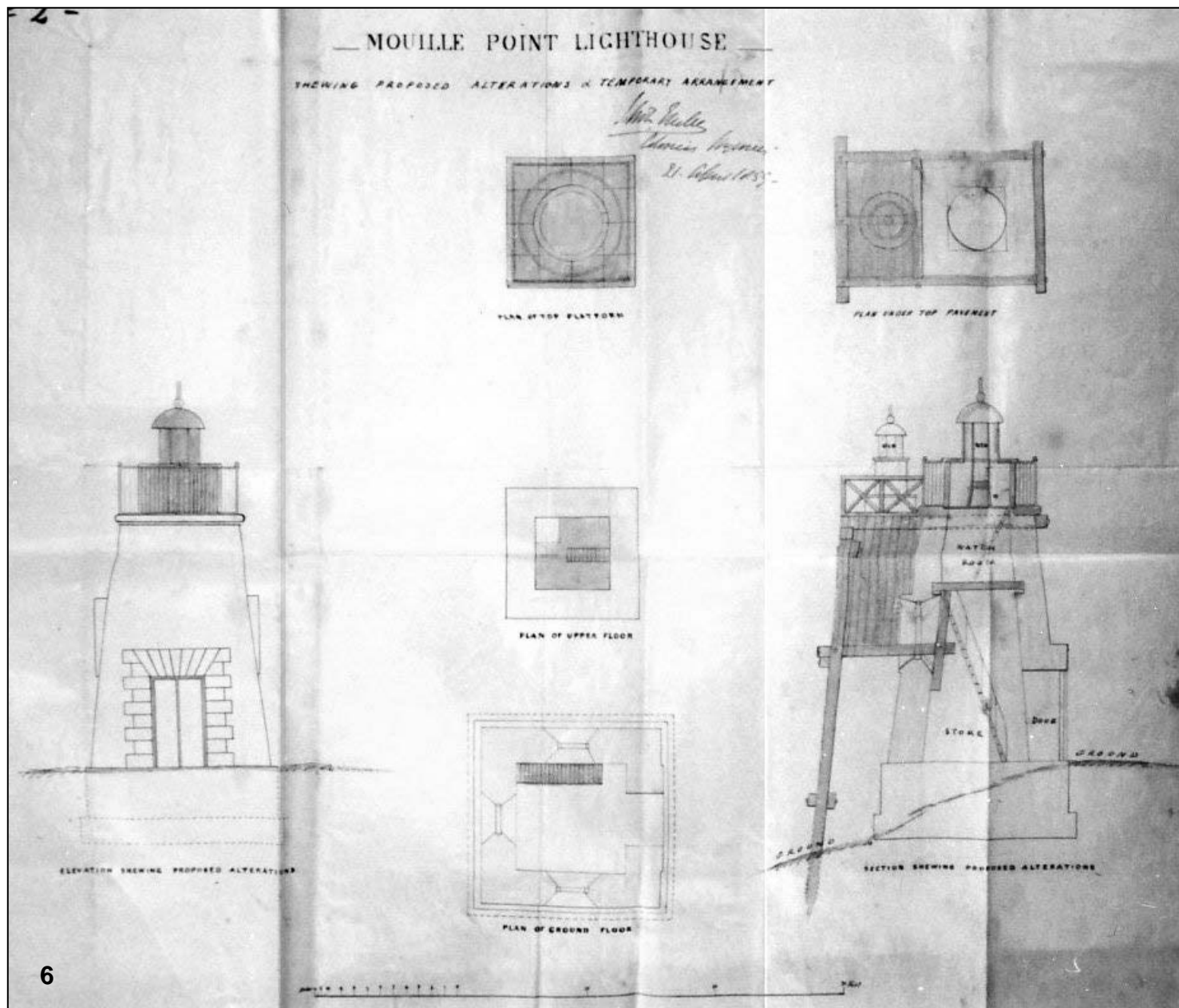
AS - AT - PRESENT

*Wm. Wells*  
*Almon Brown*  
*21 April 1852*



PLAN OF TOP LANDING





## 2.3 The "New" Lighthouse 1865 - 1909



*This light is situated in lat. 33°53'56"S long. 18°24'46"E. The present structure is a round shaft 30 feet high, painted in alternate white and red bands. The light was first exhibited in January 1865. It is 44 feet above high water, and visible (from) about 10 miles. It is a red dioptric fixed light of the fourth order. This lighthouse was constructed at a cost of £800. W. Wright, Keeper."*<sup>12</sup>

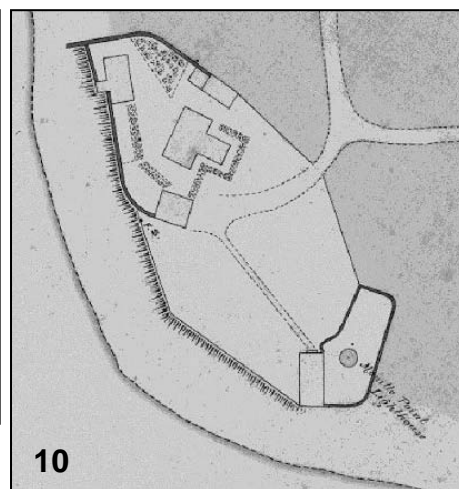
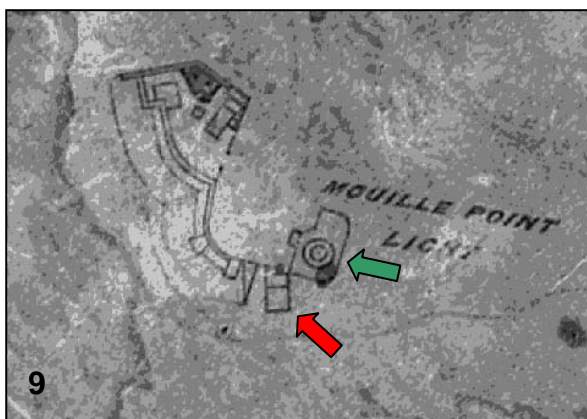
It apparently required 730 gallons of sheep tail oil per annum to



keep the light burning<sup>13</sup>.

A new site was selected for the erection of the new light. The new site was close to the location of the older light and it is possible that some of the stone from the demolished structure, may have been used in the construction of the new.

The new position is shown on excerpts from the Wilson (1878) (Plate 9, green arrow) and the Thom (1900) (Plate 10) surveys of the city<sup>14</sup>. In the



1878 plan, the remains of the Mouille Battery can still clearly be seen, and it would appear that the new light has in fact been placed over one side of the fort. The position of the old light (perhaps the structure was still intact?) is shown immediately to the front (indicated with a red arrow). By 1900, only the eastern part of the battery remains although the platform around the new light probably represents the remains of the western section. The rectangular shape adjacent to the platform is likely to be the site of the old light.

<sup>12</sup> The Argus Annual & South African Gazetteer, 1896

<sup>13</sup> No author, The Cape Odyssey (no.37), Volume 4, Issue 4, 2004. pp2-3,13. Much of the information in the article is from Williams, H. 1992. Southern Lights. Publishing details not given.

<sup>14</sup> Jordan, Elliott. 2003. Digital Atlas of Historic Cape Town. Cape Town: University of Cape Town. CD-ROM.

Despite the erection of this new light, ships continued to be wrecked. The Athens and the Piscataqua were wrecked within months of each other in 1865.

The painting shown in Plate 11 shows the Athens being wrecked with the lighthouse ironically in the foreground<sup>15</sup>.



A painting of the wreck of the Athens in 1865. Reproduced in Durden. No information about artist or location of the painting.

In a report by the Lighthouse Commission of 1890, it was recommended that the lighthouse should be demolished as soon as the new breakwater was completed. The breakwater with its own navigational light was completed in April of 1906, and the Mouille light duly lost its operational status<sup>16</sup>, but was only officially extinguished in 1908<sup>17</sup>.

The light unit was probably removed at that time, but the base and part of the tower survived demolition and can still be seen on the site today (Plates ?- ?).



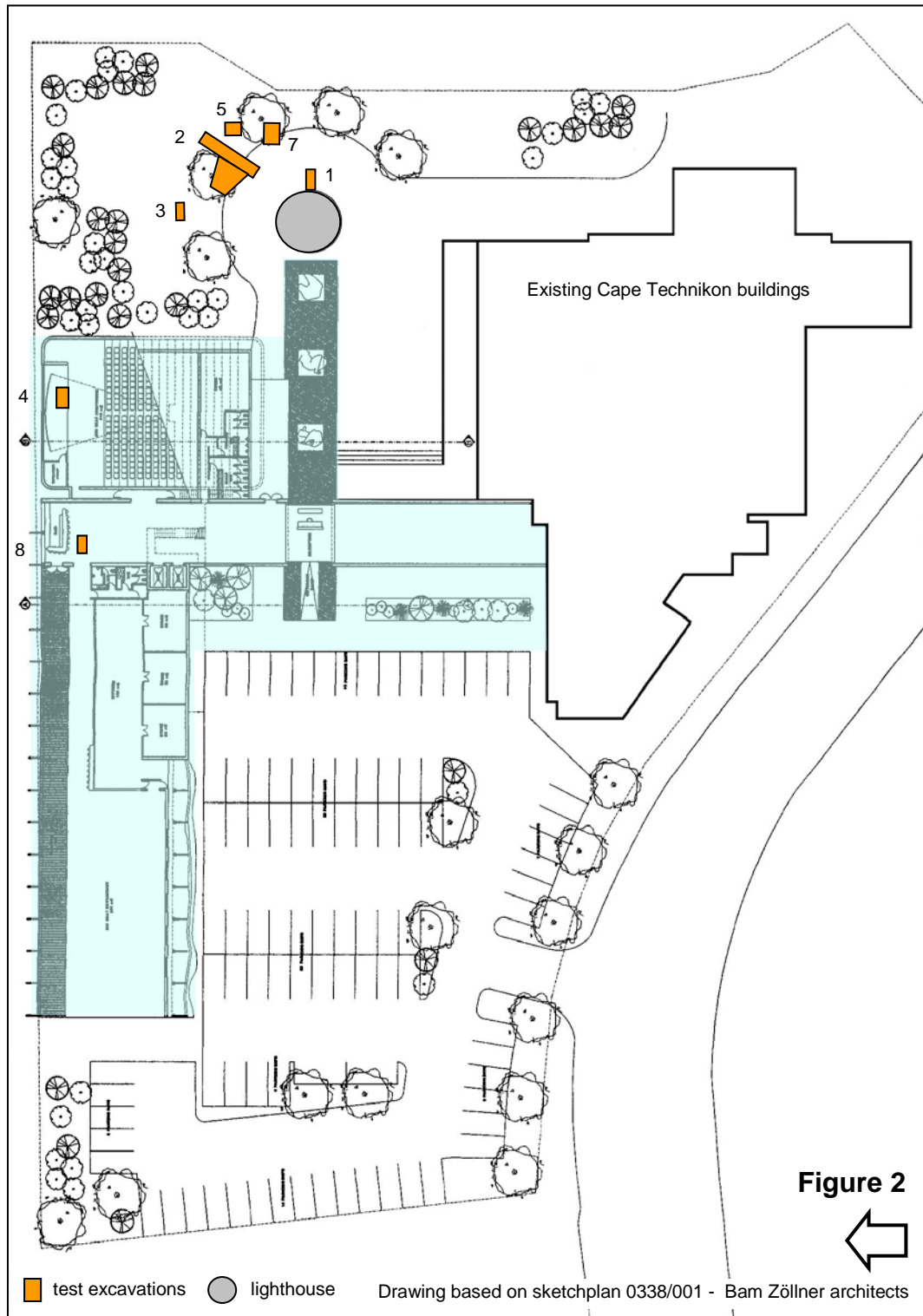
<sup>15</sup> Reproduced in Durden, T.A.S. 1992. An assessment of the maritime archaeological potential of Table Bay:1806-1900. Unpublished BA Hons thesis, Dept of Archaeology, University of Cape Town.

<sup>16</sup> see footnote 8

<sup>17</sup> see footnote 4

### 3. EXCAVATIONS

The objective of the test excavations was to determine where, and if there would be any impact on heritage material from the current development proposal. The site of the old lighthouse, although not directly threatened, was investigated in the event that development is considered here in the future. A sketch plan of the site with the proposed developments highlighted, shows the approximate location of the test excavations. Note: the positions and dimensions of the lighthouse and surrounding brick paving are not accurate.

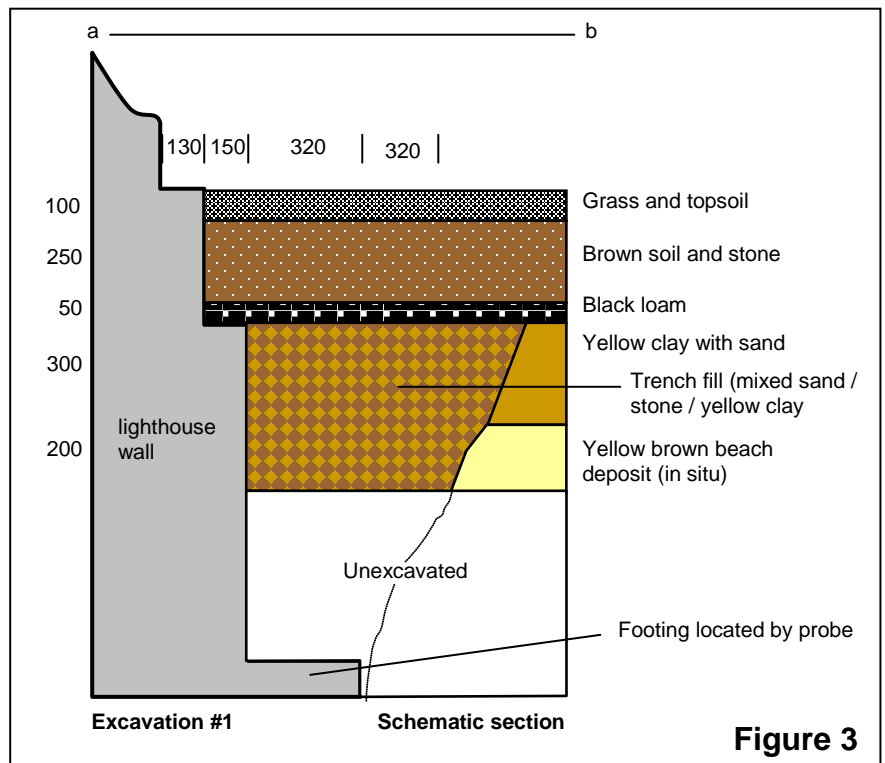


### 3.1 Test hole 1

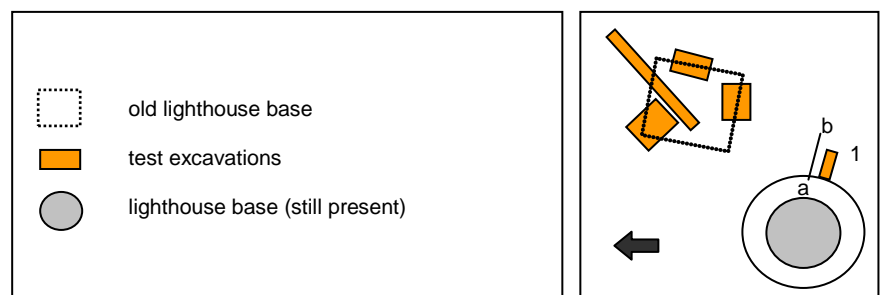
This test excavation was located immediately adjacent to the base of the extant lighthouse. The purpose of the hole was to establish the nature of the substrate on this part of the site. We believed that the presence of the lighthouse, indicated that the ground in this area had not been too heavily disturbed.

We found *in situ* ground at approximately 400mm below present ground surface. There was clear evidence of a foundation trench cutting through these deposits. We use the term *in situ* loosely here as the ground through which the foundation was excavated consisted of a layer of material some 300mm thick relating to human activity (believed to be the construction and use of the fort) that lay immediately above old beach deposit (yellow/brown sand with marine shell). The latter is truly *in situ*.

Indications are that the present surface is approximately 300mm above the historic surface.



**Figure 3**

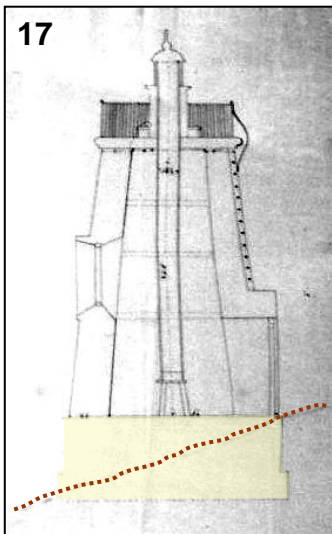


### 3.2 Test holes 2 & 7

Hole 2 was more in the form of a trench which was intended to pick up the presence of any foundations relating to the original lighthouse. The placement was determined by examining archival documents and plans. It was extended to the west to explore structural features.

Almost immediately, large amounts of rubble and lime plaster were encountered, but seemed to lack any structure that could immediately be identified as walls or foundations. After extending the trench toward the sea, the edge of a wall was identified, and from there, we were able to predict where the corners of the structure should be and widened the trench in strategic areas. We were able to determine that we had found the base of the original lighthouse that is described in Section 2.2.

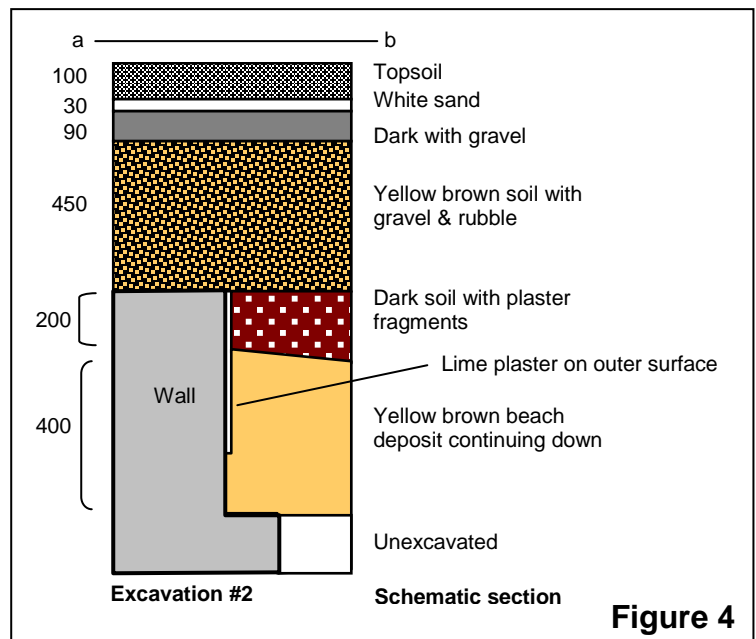
The schematic sections presented in Figures 4 and 5, show the position of the remains in relation to present ground level. Worth noting is the presence of a well preserved layer of lime plaster on the seaward side of the wall above the foundation step. The foundation was dug into beach deposits in exactly the same way as with the later lighthouse.



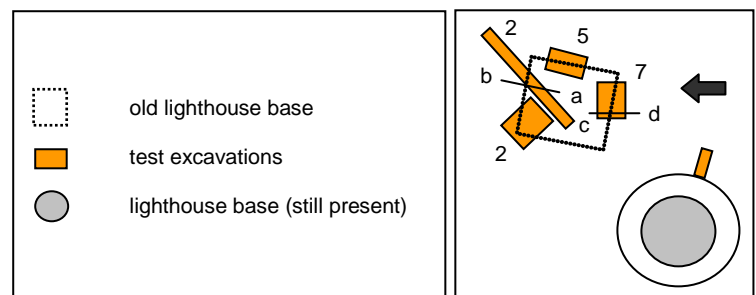
While the inner edge of the wall was not exposed in this hole, we know that by probing around another part of the base exposed

in test hole 7, that foundation steps are present on both sides as indicated in Figure 5.

In fact what has been found in this trench, and in holes 5 and 7, are the portions shown in yellow on the extract of the 1859 plan (see Plate 17). Ground level was marked on the plan and is emphasised



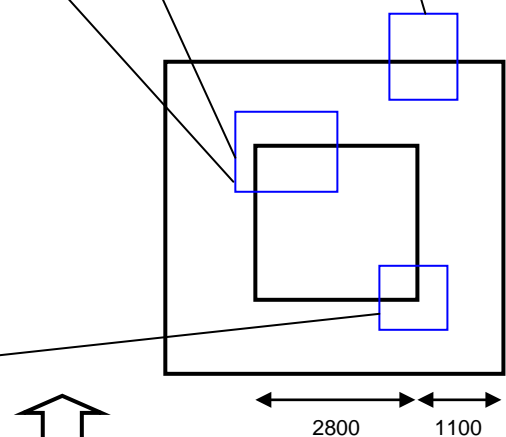
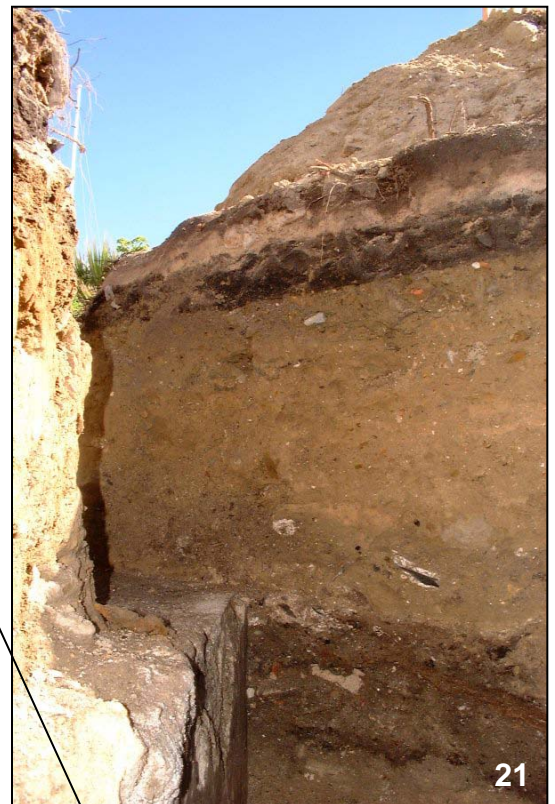
**Figure 4**



**Figure 5**

as a brown dotted line. We believe that the slope represents the edge of the old 3m Holocene raised beach.

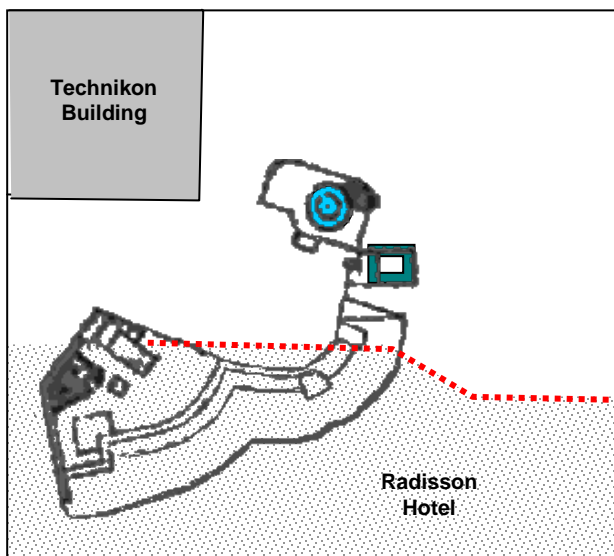
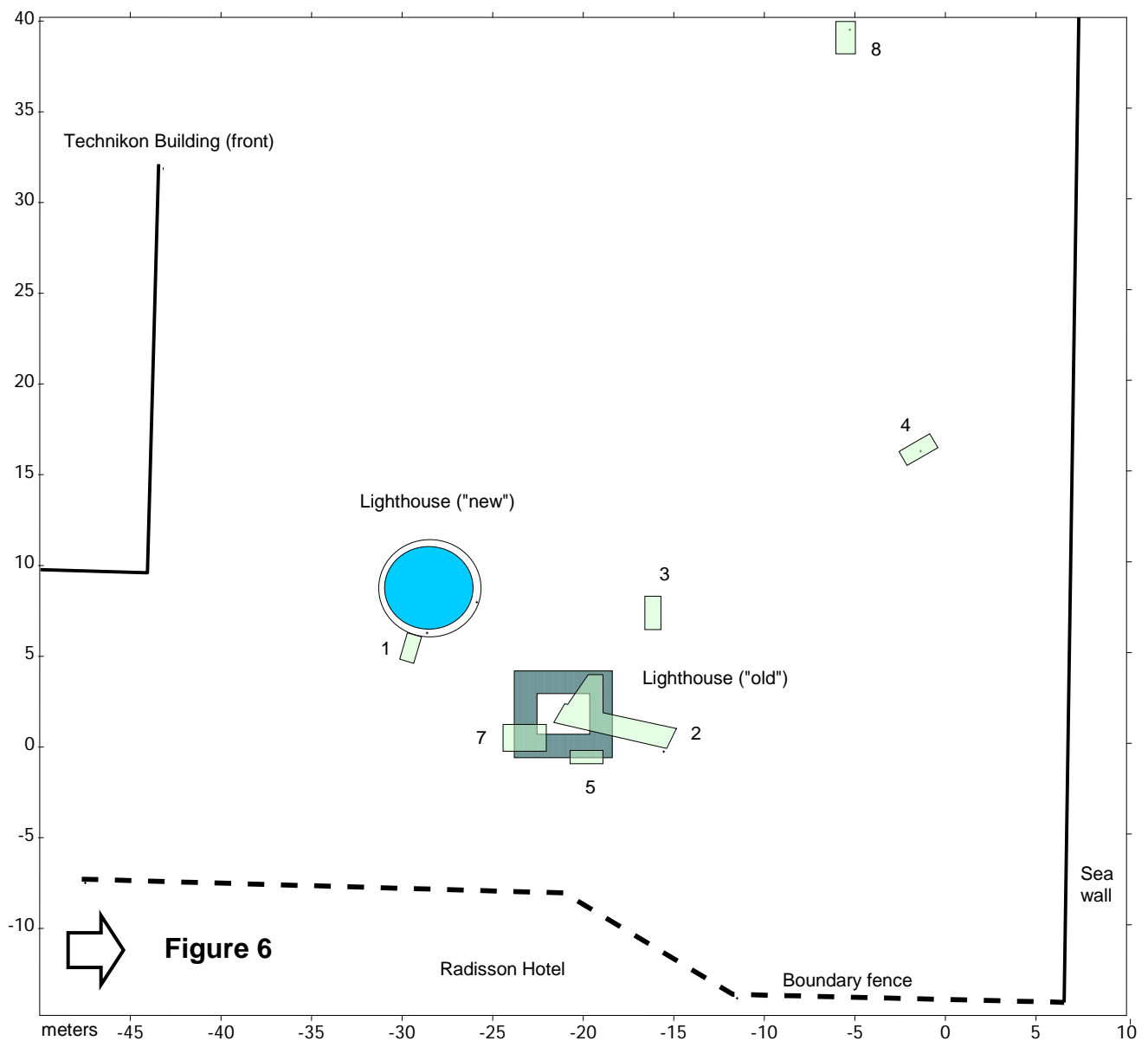
It is important to note that our field observations indicate that the beach level to the north (in this case to the left) of the lighthouse was higher than indicated on the plan, by as much as 400mm.



Schematic depiction of the lighthouse base showing strategic features that were intercepted.

Part of the exterior wall (east side) was exposed in hole 5. The wall alignments in holes 5 and 2 meant that we could estimate the NE corner (outside). By adding the wall width measurements we were able to plot the entire base. An accurate drawing showing the old

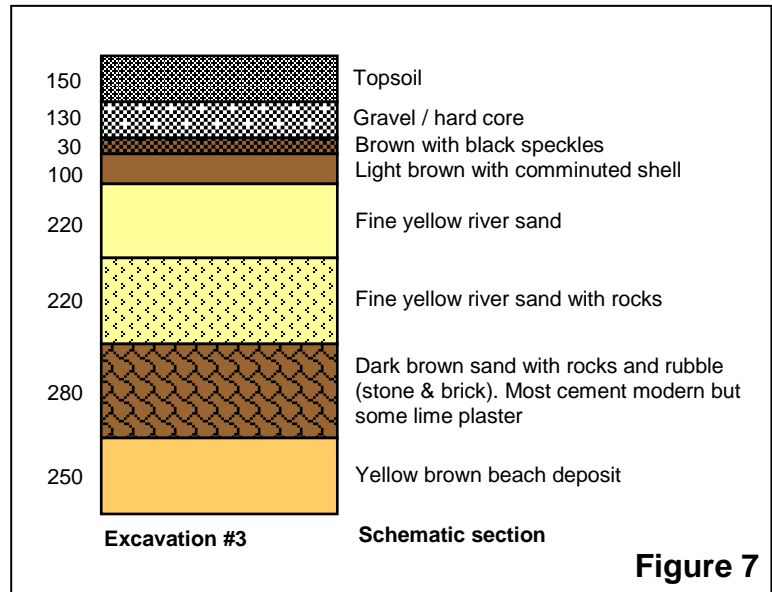
lighthouse in relation to the remains of the more recent one, and the boundary fence and existing sea wall is shown in Figure 6.



The above drawing shows features as surveyed. The smaller drawing at left shows the position of the Mouille Battery in relation to modern features. Although there may be some inconsistencies in the old plan, the fit between the modern surveyed positions of the lighthouses and those on the Wilson survey of 1878 is very good. The dotted red line shows the boundary between the Technikon property and that of the Radisson Hotel. It is clear that most of the fort lay to the west of the boundary and as such has probably been obliterated by the development.

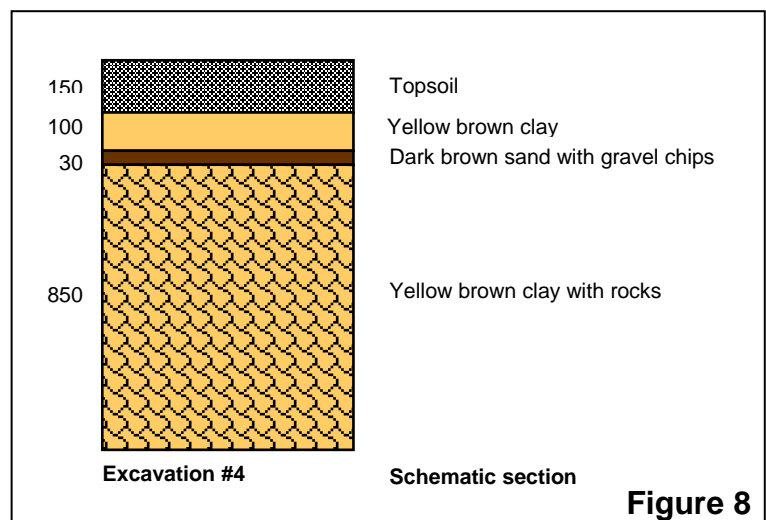
### 3.3 Test hole 3

The location of the hole is shown on Figure 2. No structural remains were encountered in this hole. The profile in Figure 7 indicates several layers of fill lying above the *in situ* beach material.



### 3.4 Test holes 4 & 8

The location of the holes is shown on Figure 2. Being positioned towards the coastline, the holes are in an area that would have been active shoreline during the first half of the 19th century. We encountered no *in situ* deposits or any structural remains and the hole was abandoned. The bulk of the material consists of clay and rubble probably introduced at the end of the 19th century as landfill behind a sea wall. As both of the profiles are very similar, only the one from hole 4 is shown in Figure 8



## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The test holes have demonstrated that the proposed developments at the Technikon site (as they appear on Figure 2) will have no impact on heritage material.

Siting of the restaurant and theatre on the northern edge of the site, is co-incidentally located over the least sensitive part of the site. In the past, this area was active shoreline that was later subject to land filling behind a seawall. Indications are that the present ground level is much higher here than it was in the past due to the land fill.

The existing base of the 1865 lighthouse forms an integral link to the past usage of Mouille Point and as such is a feature that should be conserved and interpreted. The discovery that the base of the earlier lighthouse is still preserved below the ground surface to the north east, provides an opportunity to expand the interpretation. Examples of some of the available archival material appear in this report.

Although some development is proposed in the vicinity of the lighthouses, this seems to consist of surfacing and as such it does not appear to impact the historical features.

In general, no development should be permitted in areas that have been identified as containing sub-surface structural remains relating to the fort and lighthouses.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Some consideration should be given to fully excavating the base of the old lighthouse and interpreting the historic features by way of appropriate signage.