

A REPORT ON THE DEMOLITION OF "THE KNOLL" (KNOWN HISTORICALLY AS BOTANY HOUSE), KLOOF ROAD, BANTRY BAY

Prepared for

**Visser and Visser
Consulting Quantity Surveyors**

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Prepared by

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1. INTRODUCTION

The ACO of the University of Cape Town was commissioned by Visser and Visser Consulting Quantity Surveyors to monitor demolition of the house known as the Knoll (historically known as Botany House) situated on Kloof N Road, Bantry Bay. The developers have been granted a demolition permit to remove the structure and sub-divide the property provided that archaeological monitoring was carried out and joinery and roof tiles were surrendered to the care of SAHRA. No archival research was commissioned as part of the study. The report presented below contains a photographic record of aspects of the demolition and attempts to reconstruct the building sequence of the property in terms of the visible evidence obtained while monitoring the demolition. The work was conducted with the co-operation of the developer's consultants and the demolition firm in compliance with conditions set out by SAHRA (South African Heritage Resources Agency).

The property was inspected by T.Hart (ACO) together with the developer's consultants in September 2001. Initial indications were that the building had been subject to a number of changes, which had effectively disguised any original fabric and joinery other than a pair of Georgian windows and architraves, some imported pine flooring. It was evident that a portion of the structure had existed in the mid-19th century, however there was not enough visible evidence to understand the building sequence. Additions to the building included new plaster throughout, reconstruction of gables, replacement of joinery and doors, modern suspended ceilings and fittings. The changes to the building date to the early-mid 20th century. The apparent lack of visible original fabric was partial justification for granting of a demolition permit by SAHRA.



2. HISTORY OF THE SITE

Secondary sources indicate that Botany Bay house had a significant history in terms of its association with FL Liesching M.D. Liesching arrived in the Cape in 1787 as surgeon-major to a German mercenary regiment (Wurtemberg Regiment) in the employ of the Dutch East India Company.¹ He found that medical health in the Cape was in a deplorable state being run by quacks and barbers who had no formal training. Liesching achieved prominence as a doctor serving on health commissions for both the Batavian and British governments. He also opened an apothecary at 60 Loop Street where he sold medicines and herbs to the populace at reasonable prices. Liesching's two sons eventually followed in their father's footsteps achieving eminence in the fields of medicine in the Cape.

Liesching, together with J.J. de Zeigler applied for a grant of land on the road to Camps Bay in 1807. It was here that he established a botanical garden where it is thought that he experimented with cultivation of medicinal herbs with which to supply his shop in Loop Street. Although he resided at several properties he owned in the Cape, Liesching traded from his Botany Bay house under the name of Dr Liesching and Company. In 1840 he leased the property.²

The known historical records indicates that Botany Bay came under ownership circa 1807, however, the detailed history of the house on the property is not clear. It is quite possible that it predates 1807 possibly serving as some sort post holder's house or VOC government structure before it was granted to Liesching.

3. FINDINGS

The demolition process revealed that a great deal of the original building still existed under new plaster and above modern ceilings. Virtually the entire layout of the 19th century core of the house along with three gables existed. The building had been widened in the past and extended westwards during the 20th century with the addition of the dining room, kitchen, store and laundry area. The eastern half of the building (living room and three bedrooms) made up the historic core of the house. This was demonstrated by the construction material (soft non-standard Cape bricks and mud mortar), which contrasted with the 20th century standard bricks used in the western half of the house. Very little original joinery had survived however 18th - 19th century rough-cut beams had survived above the modern hanging ceilings.

3.1 The building sequence

Figures 1 - 8 detail the observations made in terms of measured drawings of the site (provided by the project architect, Mr S. Berman of Berman Bros).

¹ Worden, N. van Heyningen, E. & Bickford-Smith, V. 1998. *The Making of a City*. Cape Town: David Phillip Publishers.

² Laidler, P.W, and Gelfand, M. 1971. *South Africa, Its Medical History*. Cape Town: Struik.

The brickwork in the eastern half of the structure was consistent with that found in 18th - early 19th century buildings in Cape Town indicating that the historic core of the building may date to the 18th century. Indications are that the original structure on the property consisted of a small single or double room dwelling with a simple straight gable at each end, and an attic space (*solder*), which was accessible via an external stair or ladder. In the late 18th or early 19th century the dwelling was extended (possibly when Liesching took over the property) with the addition of a further room to the west. This was attached to the end gable and finished with a third straight gable and attic door. At this point the building took the form of a typical extended vernacular style "*langhuis*" with a pitched thatched roof, 3-4 rooms with a central straight gable and gables at either end.

The next phase of changes to the structure took place sometime in the 19th century. This involved broadening the structure to include a corridor along the side of the southeast bedrooms. All three gables were heightened and broadened in a southerly direction to accommodate the changes in the building's profile, with the result that the attic doors lost their central position, however the plasterwork of the original gables remained visible within the roof space.

The final changes to the building took place in the 1930's with the addition of the dining room, kitchen, store and laundry together with the construction of the 4th gable built in the "Cape Dutch" revivalist style typical of the time. At the same time the three older gables were adjusted to replicate the new end gable.

4. CONCLUSION

The quantity of surviving original fabric within the structure exceeded initial expectations. The structure known as the "Knoll", previously known as Botany Bay house, contained within its core a virtually intact vernacular structure, one of very few which have survived in the Lions Head area. It was certainly worthy of more consideration than we were able to afford it within the scope of this particular project.

5. RECOMMENDATION

While in this instance the developers have fulfilled their obligations, the granting of a demolition permit has resulted in the loss of a significant early building. Ideally, demolition permits should not be issued until the implications of what is being demolished are thoroughly understood. Once demolition is underway, archaeological mitigation work is almost impossible to adequately fulfil due to the incumbent physical and time constraints. The archaeological assessment needs to take place before any final decisions are made with respect to demolitions that may impact early fabric.

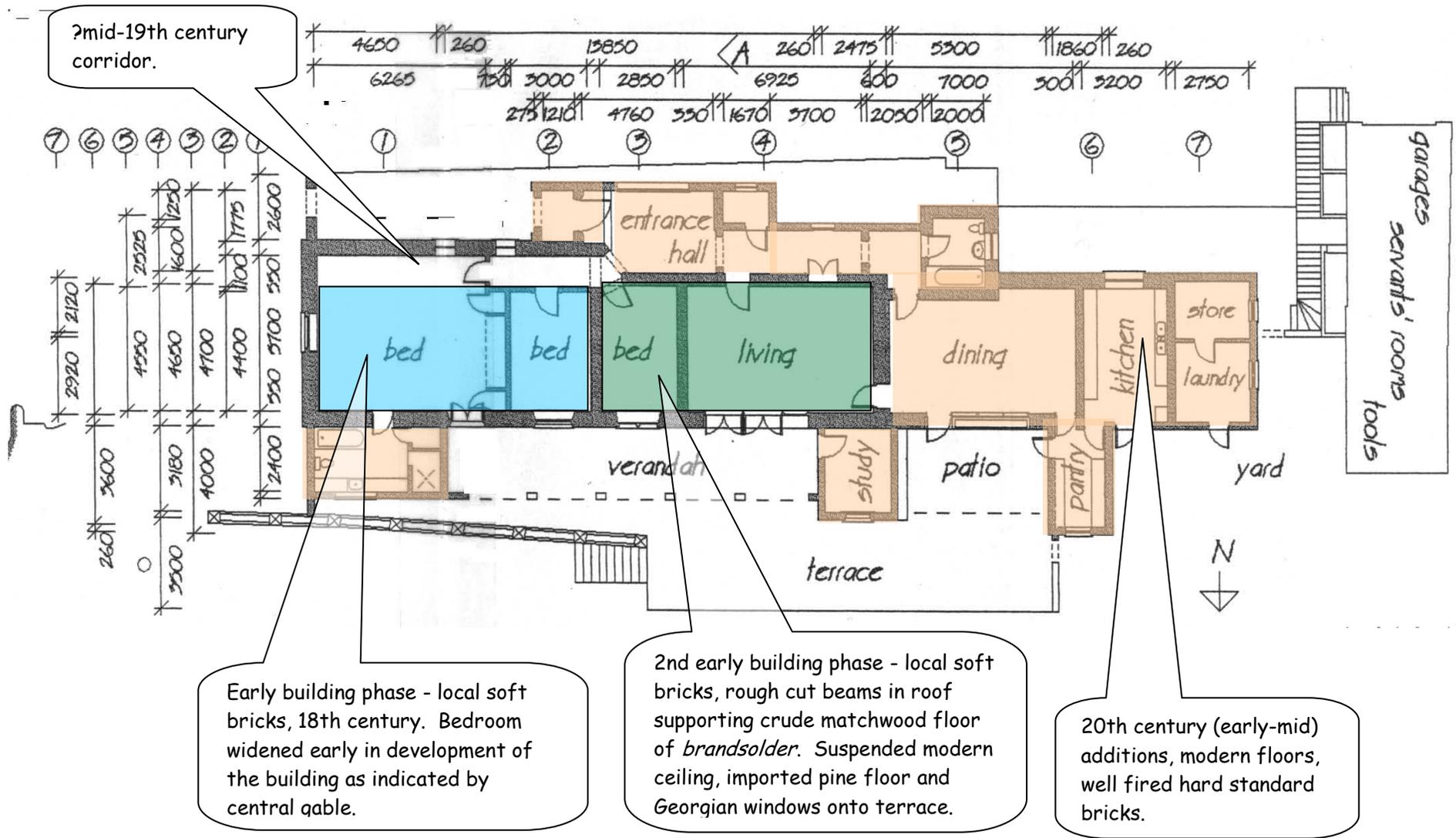


Figure 1 The building sequence



Figure 2 Detail of gable showing three building events that indicate that the original structure took the form of a narrow straight gabled building with an attic space. The western end of the building was subsequently broadened and the gable adjusted in width and height. The final form of the gable dates to the early-mid 20th century.

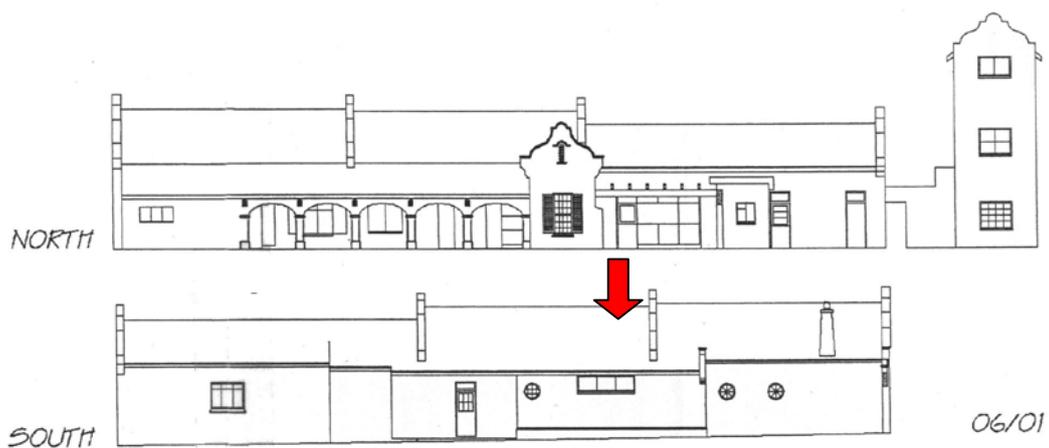




Figure 3 Detail of gable (opposite side) showing three building events that indicate that the original structure took the form of a narrow straight gabled building with an attic space. The western end of the building was subsequently broadened and the gable adjusted in width and height. The final form of the gable dates to the early-mid 20th century.

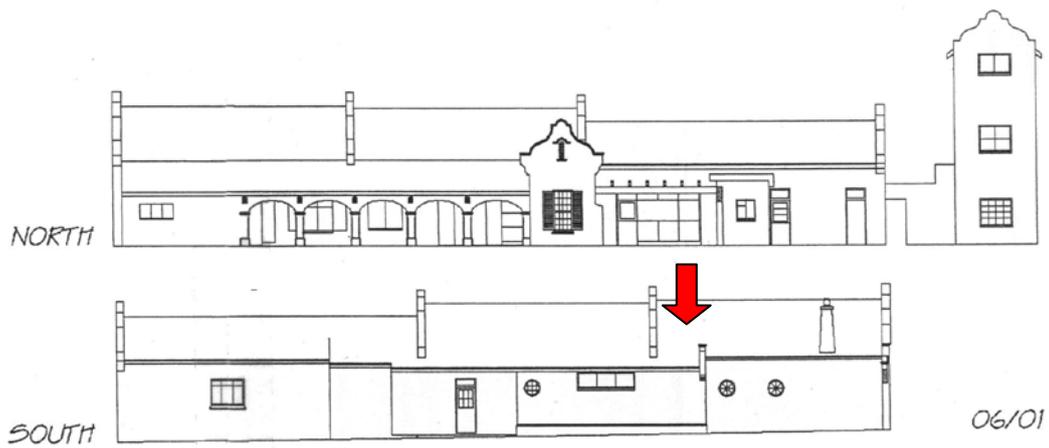




Figure 4 View of gable with attic door from westerly (20th century) end of the structure. Gable demonstrates how it has been asymmetrically modified to accommodate broadening of the structure.

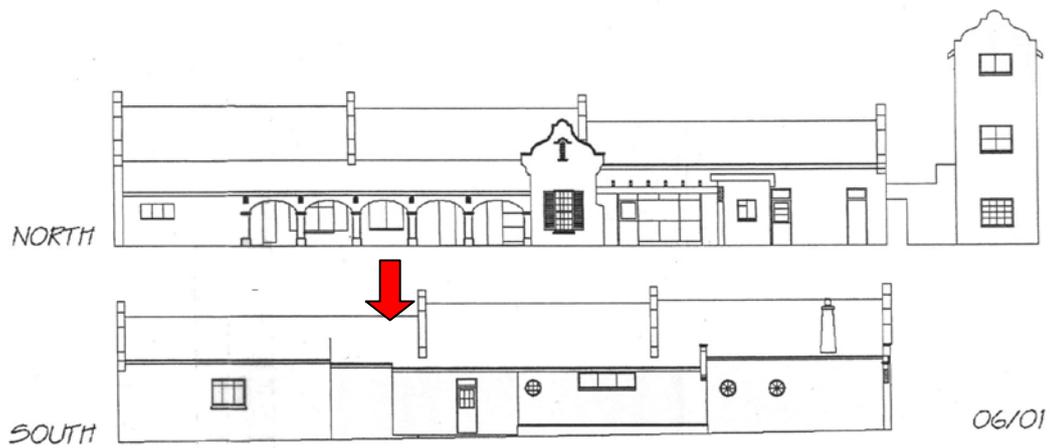




Figure 5 A portion of the Solder floor consisting of matchwood boards affixed to rough-cut beams. A modern ceiling had been hung from the beams obscuring this original early fabric under 20th century additions.

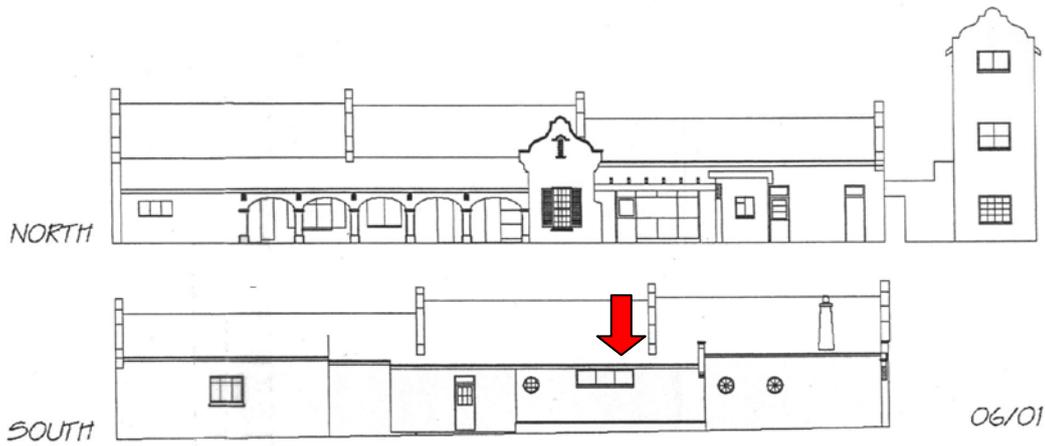




Figure 6 Portion of yellow wood beam among collapsed demolition rubble. Fabric such as this was hidden under 20th century additions.



Figure 7 Length of rough-cut beam in demolition rubble.



Figure 8 Architrave for casement window. Note original wooden lintel and use of soft local bricks.