

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING OF EARTHWORKS AT THE ARABELLA HOTEL SITE, CAPE TOWN FORESHORE

Prepared for

**Convenco Environmental Management**

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Prepared by

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the Convention and Arabella Hotel sites on the foreshore has necessitated major earthmoving. This is particularly the case at the hotel site where final depth of excavation below surface was in the order of 14-20 meters. The site is positioned on reclaimed ground, that prior to infilling would have been just off of the old city shoreline (see Cox 2000). As a result of the location and the scale and depth of earthworks, the South African Heritage Resources Authority (SAHRA) was concerned that shipwrecks could be uncovered in the process (see Sharfman & Mavradinov 2000 for



assessment of the potential impact). The Archaeology Contracts Office was appointed to monitor the excavations to ensure that if any shipwrecks, or other significant archaeological finds were uncovered, that these could be dealt with in compliance with the South African Heritage Resources Act of 1999. The monitoring began at the beginning of December 2001 and has continued into March 2002. At the time of writing bulk excavations are virtually complete and monitoring has ceased.

## 2. METHOD

Monitoring took place by way of daily visits to site to inspect the nature of the deposits being removed. In addition, staff of the earthmoving contractor, had been briefed about the possibility of finding archaeological material. Contact numbers were supplied where ACO staff could be contacted if important finds were made outside of the daily site visits.

## 3. RESULTS OF THE MONITORING

### 3.1 Stratigraphy

Despite the size of the earthmoving area, the sequence of deposits remained more or less the same across the whole site. Five stratigraphic units were recognised and can be described as follows:

- upper rubble: this is a landfill made up largely of building debris and from the smell in places, also industrial waste;
- dredged sand: landfill consisting of dredged seabed material, white in colour and rich in water rounded marine shell – this is not believed to be the sand brought from near the airport (see Cox 2000 and Sharfman & Mavradinov 2000);
- lower rubble: earlier landfill containing much rocky material and other debris. This appears to have been submerged or waterlogged and had a strong sulfurous aroma;
- old seabed: this was marked by a relatively thin deposit (on average 80cm thick) of black/grey clay also having a strong sulfurous aroma;
- bedrock: Malmsbury shale.

Very small quantities of 19<sup>th</sup> century refined earthenwares were found in both rubble deposits while not a single piece of any 18<sup>th</sup> century material was recognised. Dark green bottle glass was found occasionally in the seabed material but the impression was that these were chance finds from an occasional discard. Lumps of coal were also found in the seabed material.



The lack of any 18<sup>th</sup> century artefacts in the seabed unit and other factors, particularly the absence of an *in situ* marine stratigraphy (we would have expected the white sand to lie on top of the basal seabed clays), suggests that dredging has occurred in the past. This may have occurred during the 19<sup>th</sup> century prior to the establishment of the harbour when ships were still loaded and unloaded via the numerous jetties jutting out into the bay in the vicinity, or may relate to the more recent landfilling event. Whatever the case, the lack of any shipwreck material may be the result of this earlier intervention.

### 3.2 Artefactual material

Based on the stratigraphic observations, it seems unlikely (apart from the odd piece of glass and lumps of coal), that any artefactual material was *in situ*. The relatively small amount of artefactual material observed found its way to site therefore as part of the landfill material.

Two anchors were recovered from the lower rubble fill. The admiralty pattern anchor



shown in Plate 3 is made from wrought iron and has curved arms tipped with flukes. These were used throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This specimen was sent to the Maritime Museum at the waterfront for curation. The anchor in Plate 4 had lost its arms although the mechanism at the top of the shank was well preserved (see plate 5). Neither anchor had a stock (an "L" shaped iron bar that passed through the shank just below the chain ring at



right angles to the arms, that prevented the anchor from lying flat on the seabed causing the arms and flukes to dig in).

As this specimen was found over the festive period it could not immediately be collected by the Maritime Museum. Despite requests to the earthmoving contractor to keep it to one side, it disappeared from site and was presumably dumped along with the fill.

An area within the upper rubble contained a number of late 19<sup>th</sup> century bottles. Other unexpected finds were pages of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century phone book which had been preserved after having been coated with some form of solvent. Some fragments of 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century ceramics contained the logo of the Union Steamship Company. Similar finds were made in the fill surrounding the Chavonnes Battery at the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

Despite the large volume of earth that has been removed from an area that originally lay just off the old shoreline, no *in situ* shipwreck material was observed. The absence of such material is believed to be the result of dredging, either during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century or during preparation for the land reclamation of the 1930's.

#### **5. REFERENCES**

Cox, G. 2000. Cape Town International Convention Center: Archaeological Impact Assessment. Unpublished report prepared for Chand Environmental Management.

Sharfman, J. & Mavrodinov, N. 2000. Cape Town International Convention Center: Assessment of impacts on shipwrecks. Unpublished report prepared for Chand Environmental Management Neptune Research.

#### **6. TEAM**

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