

**EXHUMATION OF HUMAN REMAINS ON ERF 23346,
FORMERLY THE CEMETERY OF THE ST STEPHENS
ANGLICAN CHURCH, PAARL**

Prepared for

The Survey Partnership

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1. INTRODUCTION

Erf 23346 is a portion of erf 23347. The two properties were once owned by the Anglican Church. Portions of it were used as a private burial ground (mostly on erf 23347), while in later years a school, a hall and some residential buildings were erected (on erf 23346). The last burials in the cemetery took place c1938 and an application to close the cemetery was granted in June 1973 after the intention to close was advertised in accordance with Provincial Ordinance 19 of 1951¹.

Between 1973 and 1975, exhumation was undertaken at the site, in preparation for sale of the land by the church to the Dept. of Community Development. Both the Paarl municipality and the Anglican Church believed all human remains had been removed during this exercise and their views are reflected in letters to that effect^{2,3}. The municipality also indicated that some form of excavations took place in the graveyard in the 1960's. No further information is however available about this event.

It is not clear why no development of the site took place at that time but extracts from the "lêefis" of the Paarl Municipality on 19 April 1995, seem to indicate that the land was owned by Community Development who had allowed the buildings on the site to fall into a state of disrepair. By 1978 the school had been demolished.

Proposals have recently been put forward to develop the site and the developers were requested to carry out an investigation of the site by the local authority following the discovery of human remains in a services trench on erf 23347. The Archaeology Contracts Office was contacted in this regard and following a site visit, undertook an investigation of a portion of the site (erf 23346). A permit to undertake the investigation of the site was applied for as required by the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999 and the go-ahead to begin was given pending issue of the permit.

The part of the site that was investigated was identified by older members of the St Stephens congregation who visited the site with the current parish priest, Father R. Cox prior to our commencing excavations. We obtained an enlargement of a portion of a 1945 aerial photograph showing the site, as it appeared after the last burials were made⁴. The presence of graves on the portion of land that is now erf 23347 is clearly visible, and an apparently walled portion of land on erf 23346, consistent with what has been pointed out by informers, can be identified although no graves can be observed. Portions of this photograph are reproduced in section 3 of this report. The location of the property is shown on Figure 1.

The initial investigation⁵ showed clearly that a relatively small portion of erf 23346 had been used for burial, and that some rather random attempt had been made to exhume remains. After considering the results of the report, the Anglican church were approached with regards to exhumation. A process of negotiation followed during which various Paarl parishes were consulted. An agreement was eventually reached that required that exhumed human remains would be passed to an undertaker who would

¹ Section 213(2)

² Dept of Community Development – letter from Paarl Municipality ref: G.3/3 , 20 May 1976

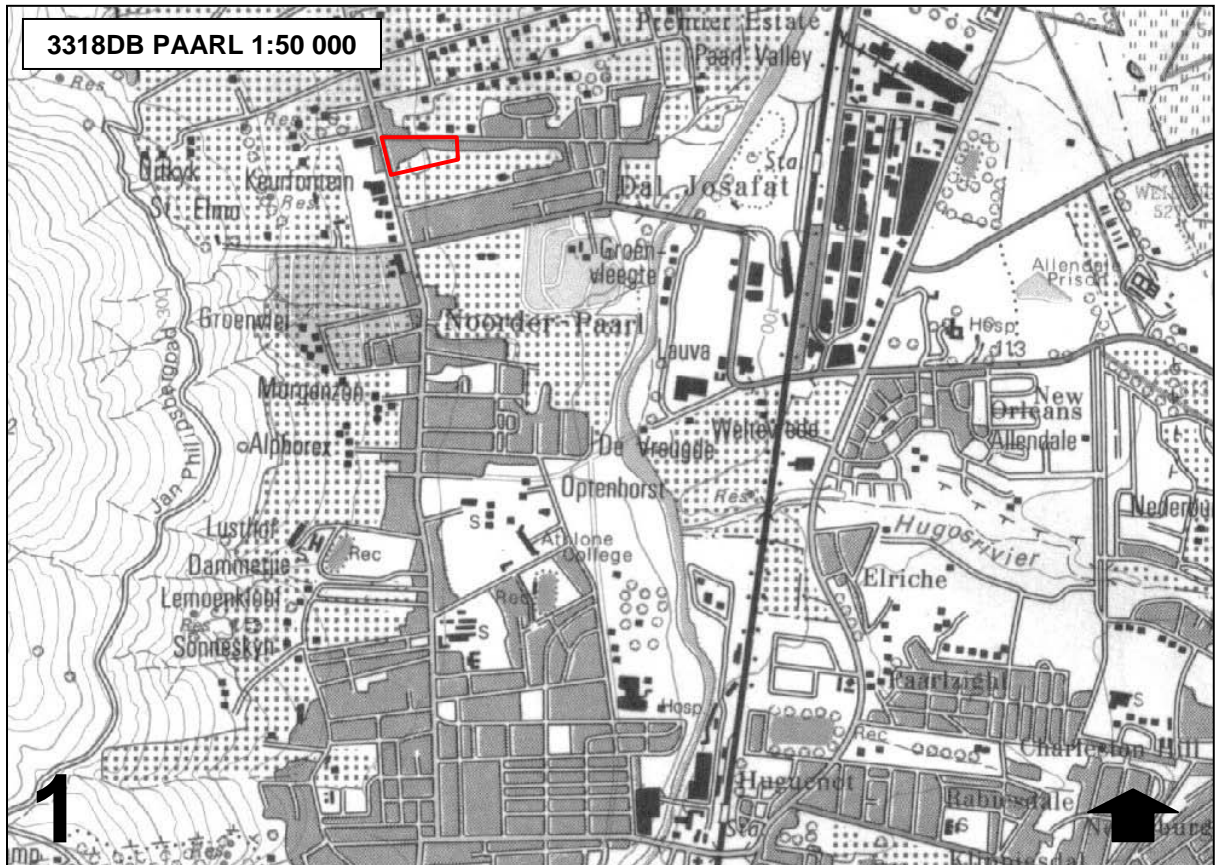
³ Dept of Community Development – letter from St Stephens Church, 29.January 1975

⁴ Chief Directorate of Surveys and Mapping – Job No. 204, Strip 10, Photo No. 533, Date 1945

⁵ An initial investigation of erf 23346, formerly the cemetery of the St Stephens Anglican Church, Paarl. Report prepared for The Survey Partnership, November 2002

arrange cremation. The ashes would be placed in an urn that would reside in the Anglican church in Main Road (recently returned following a land restitution case).

A permit for exhumation (No. 80/03/02/002/51) was issued by SAHRA on the 22nd February 2003 and exhumation commenced on the 25th February.



2. METHOD

Having identified the location of human remains in the initial investigation, a mechanical digger was again deployed to remove topsoil and expose grave shafts at a depth that easily facilitated the removal of human remains, on average between 1 and 1.5 meters (plate 1).

The fact that soil was not being removed from the site meant that the whole graveyard could not be exposed at one time. Instead a series of east-west trenches was excavated in which the graves were exposed, remains removed, graves surveyed and then the trench was refilled and a new one opened in which the process was repeated.

Graves containing human remains were numbered. Remains were removed and placed into temporary



containers. The undertaking firm responsible for removal, visited the site at regular intervals at which time remains were transferred into wooden containers.

A record of observations was kept for each grave which took note of the presence/absence of a coffin, presence/absence of human remains, approximate age, any obvious major pathologies, any grave goods and position thereof (other than coffin fixtures). The observations are summarised in Appendix 1. The position and size of the grave was surveyed by recording a central point at the head and foot ends of the shaft. The observations of pathology were for the most part limited by the generally extremely poor condition of the bone. This will be discussed in more detail in section 3.

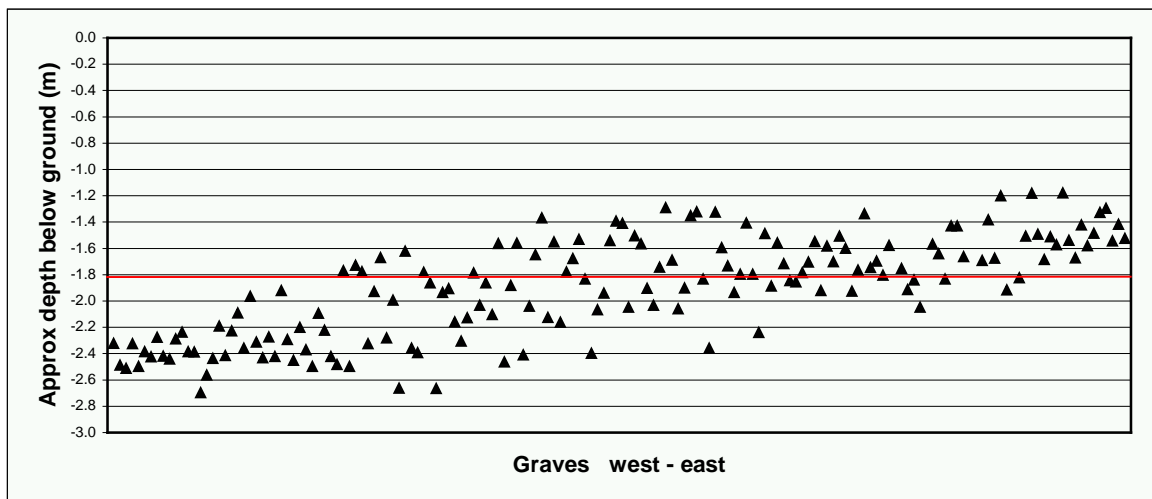
3. OBSERVATIONS

A summary of observations is presented in Appendix 1. The following paragraphs provide additional detail and explanation.

3.1 Stratigraphy

During the excavation of test trenches in the initial investigation it was noticed that no evidence of grave shafts was evident in sections. It was only when close to the lower part of the grave that the outline of the grave became evident. We noticed too that in the areas not used for burials, that the ground was distinctly rich in ferruginous gravel relatively close to the surface. This tended not to be the case where burials were located, where the gravel rich material was only found near the bases of the graves. This suggests that considerable modification of the soil profile occurred after the closure of the graveyard and obscured the traces of the upper shafts and "diluted" the gravel quantities. It is presumed that this occurred when the visible grave monuments were removed and exhumation took place during the 1970's. While the upper deposits were dry and dusty, the lower deposits in proximity of grave bases was often very damp. The conclusion is that during periods of higher water table, the lower parts of the graves would be saturated.

3.2 Burial depth



This graph shows the depths of grave bases below ground (where ground is taken to be the ground below the survey instrument at the western-most part of the excavation).

What this shows is that graves get shallower towards the east, almost certainly the result of a change in the ground level. If we assume that graves were dug traditionally to a depth of six feet (1.83m shown in red) the graph shows that the western-most graves are deeper than expected. This could be the result of an increase in ground level in that area (possibly due to subsequent landscaping).

3.3 Layout of the graves

As we had concluded from the initial excavation, graves were oriented west/east, with heads located to the west. The burial layout is shown on Figure 2. One of the main observations that becomes evident is that the layout in the eastern part of the site was fairly regular and formalized as seen in the neatly positioned graves and the allocation of a wider space (that we believe formed a pathway) between two of the grave rows. The formalisation deteriorates to the west and north, where, although there is still a semblance of rows, the placement of graves is more ad hoc. One possible reason for this is that the eastern part of the site represents the earliest part of the cemetery, and that the less formalized areas are more recent and possibly indicate a shift in attitude to burial.

The positions of exhumed graves are shown in green and blue on Figure 2. Only some of the empty shafts were surveyed (see green on plan) while the positions of other empty graves is interpolated in blue. This was an omission on our part as the initial trenches were refilled prior to our getting the information. It is evident that there was no systematic exhumation conducted on the site although some remains were removed. The empty graves do seem to be in patches and may indicate that pits were dug in odd places to make it appear that something had been done. Our initial observation of the quantity of exhumation was biased due to the poor preservation of the bone in many unexhumed graves. The fact that some of our exploratory trenches intersected parts of the graves (central) where we have now seen preservation was at its worst. This will be discussed further in the following paragraph.

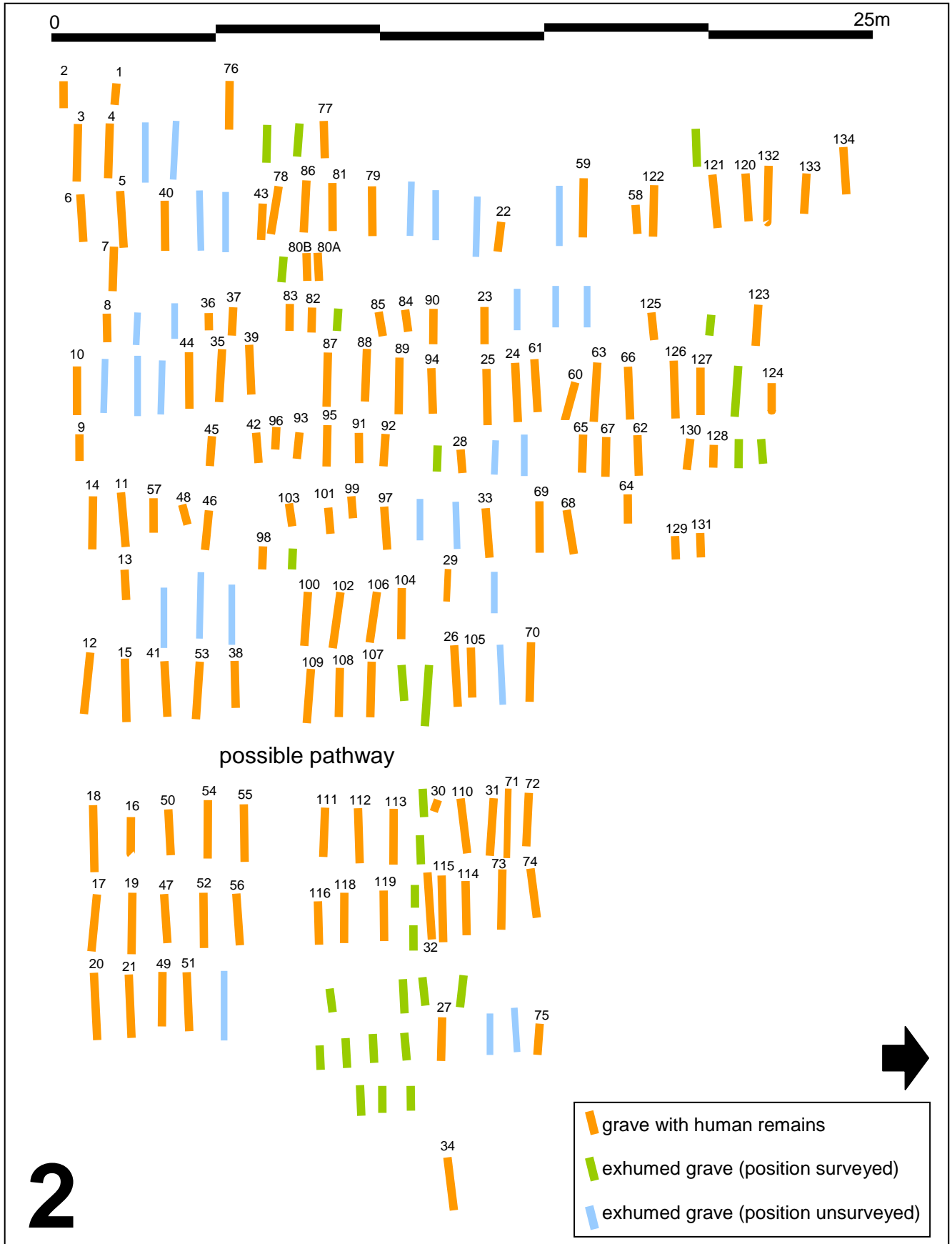
A portion of the 1945 aerial photo is shown in Figure 3. On this can be seen the two erwen that have been discussed in the report. Figure 3A shows a detail of this photograph with the positions of the graves superimposed. These positions are not absolute as a result of factors such as photographic distortion and having to identify fixed points on the photo to which the survey positions can be linked. It is nevertheless believed to be a reasonable fit.

3.4 Condition of the remains

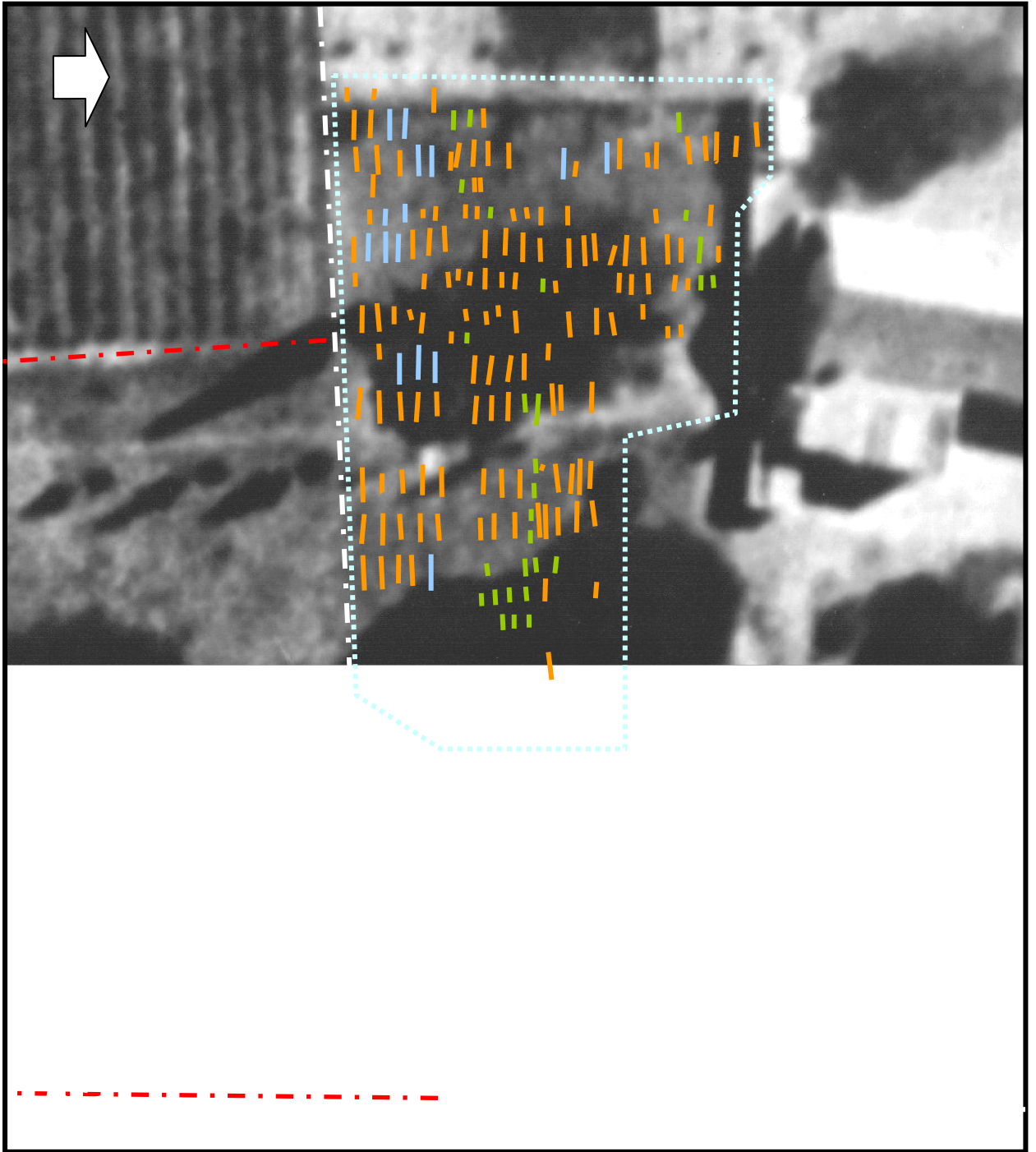
In general, the condition of the bone was extremely poor. We noted that preservation varied from grave to grave and within individual graves, to the extent that in some cases one side of a skeleton was preserved while the other had completely disappeared. The central portions of the bodies, in addition to the extremities were the worst preserved body parts. The poor preservation is almost certainly due to acidic groundwater which also extensively etched the few copper coins that were found in the graves. Some bodies were however relatively well preserved and may indicate more recent burials.

It was often difficult, where few bones remained in the coffin, to decide if this was the result of exhumation or of poor preservation (particularly since some apparently exhumed graves still contained bone fragments). In most cases the coffins had also

disintegrated preventing us from seeing if the lids were in place or not. Not a single coffin was preserved to the extent of retaining form.







3.5 Interment

In all cases where sufficient bone was preserved to make observation possible, individuals were interred on their backs with arms at their sides. Coffins were present in all cases.

3.6 Characteristics of the burials

3.6.1 Pathology

Poor bone preservation prevented us from establishing in many instances if pathologies were identifiable from the bone. A single case of a fused hip joint (grave 126) was noted. This individual would most likely have had to walk with the aid of crutches. The other most common pathology was dental caries. This varied from mild to severe. Not a single instance of dental intervention was observed by way of either fillings or dentures, and is a factor in determining the overall age of the burial ground.

3.6.2 Sex profile

This could not easily be determined from the bones in the time that we were on site.

3.6.3 Age profile

Burials from across the full age spectrum were observed. Age of the individual at death is often reflected in the size of the grave.

3.6.4 Racial profile

This could not easily or precisely be determined from the bones in the time that we were on site. Our gross observations however do indicate that burials are from more than one racial group and probably reflect the makeup of the Anglican parish during the time when this burial ground was in operation.

3.7 Grave goods

A number of graves contained items related to the burial process (e.g. pins, coins etc). Four graves contained coins believed to have been placed over the eyes of the buried individuals. This practice was not uncommon during the 19th century. Only one grave contained two coins (grave 27). These have been identified as "cartwheel" pennies



and although no dates are discernible on these specimens, they were only minted during the reign of George III (1796 -1806). Without exception these copper coins are both worn



and have been severely etched by groundwater. Dates could be discerned on the other three coins namely grave 64 - 1858; grave 86 - 1865; grave 72 - 1876. These coins could



only have been buried before the coins were minted and so we are given a clue to the starting dates for the graveyard. In addition, a number of buttons and clothing hooks were recovered and suggest that at least some bodies were clothed when buried. All of these items are listed in Appendix A. Two graves contained items that presumably had some significance for the persons buried in them. Grave 29 was that of a juvenile and contained a small porcelain doll, and the head of another doll, also made of porcelain and probably at one time attached to a cloth body. Grave 104 was that of an adult and contained a ceramic pipe bowl of English manufacture (stem broken off), and a slate pencil.

3.8 Period of burials

There are various factors which indicate when the burials took place. The evidence from the coins is a good indication of the approximate date of use (given that coins may remain in circulation for some time before being buried). The presence of 2 cartwheel pennies in grave 27 is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, these were only minted for a limited period (1797-1806) and secondly the position of grave 27 is in an area which is relatively isolated from other graves in the eastern part of the site. It seems to confirm our conclusion that the eastern part of the site is older than the western part assuming that the coins were used at the time they were in circulation.

3.9 Gravestones

Three virtually complete gravestones (see photographs below) as well as numerous fragments were found during the exhumation. These had previously been removed and buried in pits containing stone grave surrounds, brick and other rubble.



Plate 2 and 2a show a slate gravestone containing inscriptions on both faces. The older inscription (see above) was partially damaged by the stone having been re-used reads as follows (text in brackets is interpolated: "(Char)les Paton Maxw(ell), Died 6th March 186(6), aged 19

months and 6 days." When this inscription was added, the stone was probably rectangular. It was later fashioned into a cross, the old inscription filled in with cement, and a new inscription was added which reads: "In memory of George Earnest (Wi)lde, Born May 19th 1872, Died July 29th 1872." Both were infants. One can only speculate the reasons for the re-use?



These two marble gravestones belonged to people with strong links to the Anglican church. The stone at left reads: "In Sacred Memory of, Mary Curlewis, (Born Murray), Born 14th June 1831, Died 28th June 1899. Beloved wife of J.F. Curlewis, Rector of the Paarl." The other reads: "In Sacred Memory of, James Frederick Curlewis, Born 30th October 1833, Died 12th August 1901.

Rector of the Paarl who laboured in his Parish for 47 years." Apart from identifying some of those buried at the site, these stones give an indication of the dates of use of the cemetery.

4. CONCLUSIONS

All the aspects of the exhumation when put together indicate that the cemetery was in use from sometime in the mid-19th century until closure in the 1930's. Although it was claimed that exhumation had been undertaken in the past, this was clearly not done in accordance with the legislation of the time. During the test phase, we interpreted the absence of bone in some graves to be due to exhumation, but following the larger removal exercise, we can conclude that empty graves may also be the result of decomposition in highly moist and acidic conditions.

5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL TEAM

Fieldwork

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Report

Appendix 1: SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

date	grave	age	coffin/coffin remains	coffin handles	whole	partial	no bone	grave goods	observations (where possible)
25/02/03	1	baby	x			x		pins	
25/02/03	2	baby	x			x		2x pins	
25/02/03	3	adult	x	x		x			severe caries
25/02/03	4	adult	x	x		x			
25/02/03	5	adult	x				x		
25/02/03	6	adult	x	x		x			
25/02/03	7	?	x						
25/02/03	8	juvenile	x			x			
26/02/03	9	juvenile	x	x		x			
26/02/03	10	?	x			x		button	
26/02/03	11	adult	x	x		x			no teeth, complete resorbtion
26/02/03	12	adult	x	x		x		button	
26/02/03	13	juvenile	x			x			
26/02/03	14	adult	x	x	x				
26/02/03	15	adult	x	x	x				
26/02/03	16	adult	x			x			
26/02/03	17	adult	x	x		x			
26/02/03	18	adult	x	x		x			
26/02/03	19	adult	x	x	x			button, pin	
26/02/03	20	adult	x			x			
26/02/03	21	adult	x	x		x			
26/02/03	22	?	x				x		
26/02/03	23	juvenile	x	x		x		pins	
26/02/03	24	adult	x	x		x			
26/02/03	25	adult	x	x		x			
26/02/03	26	adult	x	x	x			pins	
26/02/03	27	adult	x	x				2x cartwheel penny	cu staining of cranium
26/02/03	28	?	x			x		pins	
26/02/03	29	juvenile	x	x		x		porcelain dolls, pins, buttons	
26/02/03	30	baby	x			x			
26/02/03	31	adult	x	x		x			
26/02/03	32	child	x	x		x			
26/02/03	33	adult	x	x	x				
26/02/03	34	adult	x		x				
27/02/03	35	juvenile	x			x		pins	
27/02/03	36	child	x			x			
27/02/03	37	child	x			x		clothes hook - metal	
27/02/03	38	adult	x		x			1x button - white glass	
27/02/03	39	adult	x	x	x				
27/02/03	40	adult	x	x	x			pins	
27/02/03	41	adult	x	x	x			star-shaped coffin decorations	
27/02/03	42	child	x	x		x			

date	grave	age	coffin/coffin remains	coffin handles	whole	partial	no bone	grave goods	observations (where possible)
27/02/03	43	adult	x			x			
27/02/03	44	adult	x	x	x				
27/02/03	45	child	x			x			
27/02/03	46	child	x		x			pins	
27/02/03	47	adult	x	x	x				
27/02/03	48	baby	x			x			
27/02/03	49	adult	x			x			
27/02/03	50	adult	x			x			
27/02/03	51	adult	x			x			teeth in good condition
27/02/03	52	adult	x	x				pins	teeth worn but good condition
27/02/03	53	adult	x	x	x				teeth worn but good condition
27/02/03	54	adult	x?			x			
27/02/03	55	adult	x	x		x			
27/02/03	56	adult	x	x	x				teeth unworn - good condition
27/02/03	57	adult	x			x			
27/02/03	58	juvenile	x	x		x			
27/02/03	59	adult	x	x				pins	
27/02/03	60	adult	x			x			
27/02/03	61	adult	x		x				grave shaft disturbed
27/02/03	62	?	x			x			grave shaft disturbed
27/02/03	63	adult	x						no teeth in maxilla, complete resorbtion, some resorbtion in mandible
27/02/03	64	juvenile	?				x	penny near head area	
27/02/03	65	baby	x			x			
27/02/03	66	adult	x						
28/02/03	67	juvenile	x			x			front incisors erupting
28/02/03	68	adult	x	x	x			clothes hook and eye - metal	
28/02/03	69	adult	x						
28/02/03	70	adult	x		x			x2 star-shaped handle backing plates	very large individual
28/02/03	71	adult	x					marine shell 1x burnupena in coffin	very large individual
28/02/03	72	adult	x		x			coin in head area, 1x button	teeth worn and with caries
28/02/03	73	adult	x		x				teeth worn and with caries
28/02/03	74	adult	x	x	x				
28/02/03	75	juvenile	x						deep grave
28/02/03	76	adult	x	x					
28/02/03	77	child	x						
28/02/03	78	adult	x	x					
28/02/03	79	adult	x			x			
28/02/03	80a	baby	x	x					80a&b buried next to each other in a common grave - twins?
28/02/03	80b	baby	x	x					

date	grave	age	coffin/coffin remains	coffin handles	whole	partial	no bone	grave goods	observations (where possible)
28/02/03	81	adult	x						deep grave
28/02/03	82	child	x	x		x			
28/02/03	83	child	x	x		x			
28/02/03	84	child	x				x		
28/02/03	85	child	x			x		pins	
28/02/03	86	adult	x	x				penny near head	
28/02/03	87	adult	x					1x button - white glass	elderly person, bone resorbtion in jaw
28/02/03	88	adult	x	x					
28/02/03	89	young adult	x	x	x				
28/02/03	90	juvenile	x	x					
28/02/03	91	child	x						
28/02/03	92	baby	x						
28/02/03	93	child	x			x			
28/02/03	94	adult	x			x			very deep grave
28/02/03	95	juvenile	x			x			
28/02/03	96	baby	x			x		1x pin	
28/02/03	97	adult	x						very deep grave
28/02/03	98	baby	x					pins	
28/02/03	99	baby	x			x			
03/03/03	100	adult	x		x				teeth good condition
03/03/03	101	baby	x			x			very deep grave
03/03/03	102	adult	x	x	x				teeth good condition
03/03/03	103	child	x			x			
03/03/03	104	adult	x	x				pipe bowl, slate pencil?, button - metal	pieces of leather thong in the coffin? 2 cobbles beneath the head and foot region of the coffin presumably to hold it up off the ground
03/03/03	105	adult	x			x			
03/03/03	106	adult	x	x	x			buttons - metal	cu stains on limb bones
03/03/03	107	adult	x	x					teeth worn but good condition
03/03/03	108	adult	x	x	x				
03/03/03	109	adult	x	x	x				
03/03/03	110	adult	x	x					
03/03/03	111	adult	x	x				2x buttons - white glass, pin	
03/03/03	112	adult	x	x	x			metal button	
03/03/03	113	adult	x	x	x			2x buttons - white glass, 2x "flower" coffin decorations	
03/03/03	114	adult	x					2x pins, ribbon?	
03/03/03	115	?			x				
03/03/03	116	adult	x	x	x				severe caries
03/03/03	117	baby	x?			x			
03/03/03	118	adult	x	x	x				severe caries

date	grave	age	coffin/coffin remains	coffin handles	whole	partial	no bone	grave goods	observations (where possible)
03/03/03	119	adult	x		x				large individual, teeth worn but good condition with some resorbtion
03/03/03	120	adult	x	x	x				teeth worn but good condition
03/03/03	121	adult	x					pin	teeth worn and severe caries
03/03/03	122	adult	x						
03/03/03	123	?	?					1x button - white glass	
03/03/03	124	juvenile	x						
03/03/03	125	child	x					1x button - metal	
03/03/03	126	adult	x						hip/femur joint fused
03/03/03	127	adult	x						
03/03/03	128	child	x					pin	
03/03/03	129	baby	x						
03/03/03	130	child	x			x			
03/03/03	131	child	x			x			
03/03/03	132	adult	x		x				
03/03/03	133	adult	x	x					
03/03/03	134	adult	?			x			middle area only