# PHASE ONE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE VICTORIA JUNCTION SITE, SOMERSET ROAD

Prepared for

**Newport Property Group** 

March 1995



Prepared by

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1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. THE BRIEF	3
3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	
4. METHOD	12
5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS	
5.1 Area adjacent to Somerset Road	17
5.1.1 Test Hole 1	17
5.1.2 Test Hole 2	
5.1.3 Test Hole 3	17
5.1.4 Test Hole 4	21
5.1.5 Test Hole 5	
5.1.6 Test Hole 6	21
5.1.7 Test Hole 7	25
5.1.8 Test Hole 9	
5.2 Courtyard, corner Prestwich and Ebenezer roads	25
5.2.1 Test Hole 8	25
6. DISCUSSION	25
7. RECOMMENDATIONS	28
8. PROFESSIONAL TEAM	30

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Archaeology Contracts Office was approached to investigate a planned development site in Somerset Road, Green Point. The site, presently occupied by Telkom on a lease basis will become known as Victoria Junction and is being developed by The Newport Property Group<sup>1</sup>. The location is shown in Figure 1.

Since the site was originally used as a burial ground during the 19th century it has historical significance. Although no visible surface traces of its use as a cemetery remain, the archaeological investigation was commissioned to establish the possibility that human remains were still buried on the site, notwithstanding reports of exhumation during the earlier part of this century. In addition, the possibility existed that funerary structures and/or headstones also remained buried on the site.

As will be seen both human remains and funerary structures have been uncovered and will need to be mitigated in the event of development causing disturbance.

#### 2. THE BRIEF

The intention of the developers is to utilise existing industrial buildings on the site and make available areas which have not been built upon for new development. As the existing buildings have largely destroyed sub-surface deposits, the archaeological investigation focussed on two areas which have largely remained free of permanent buildings, namely the areas at the corner of Ebenezer Road and Prestwich Street, and the area adjacent to Somerset Road, as these may be earmarked for development as part of the project. A preliminary assessment has been made of archival sources to provide some insight into the history of the site.

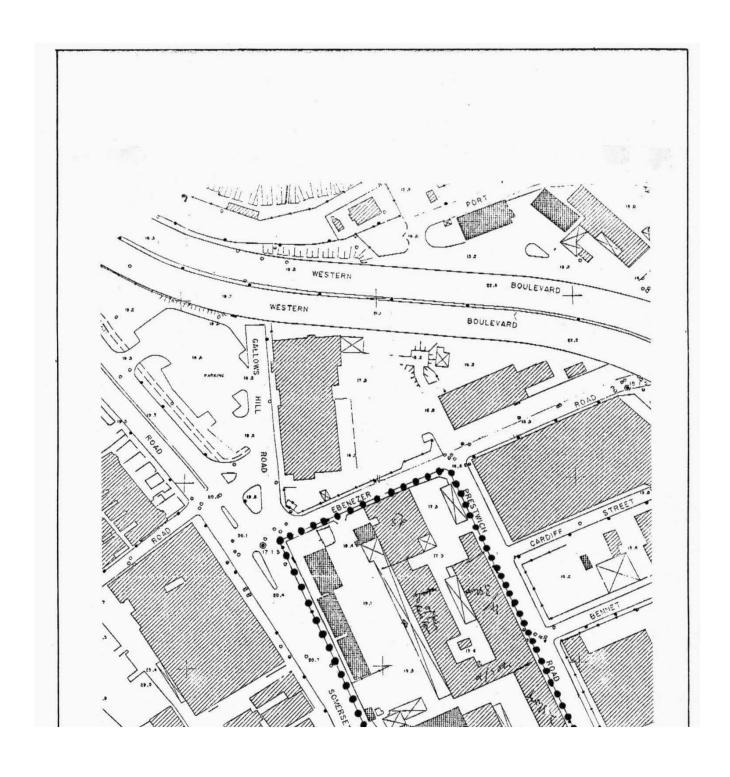
## 3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

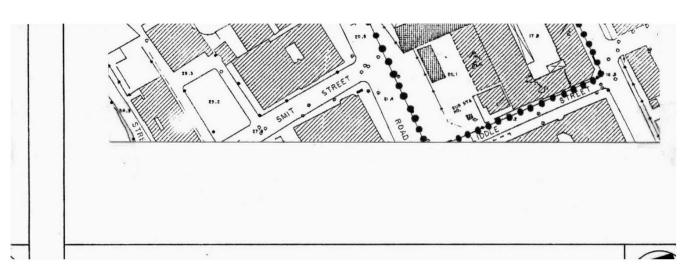
Since the 18th century, the area at the northern edge of the city below what later became known as Somerset Road served as the official burial grounds for a number of religious groups. The area of these burial grounds is today roughly defined by the modern landmarks of Buitengracht Street, Ebenezer Road, Somerset Road and the Amsterdam Battery.

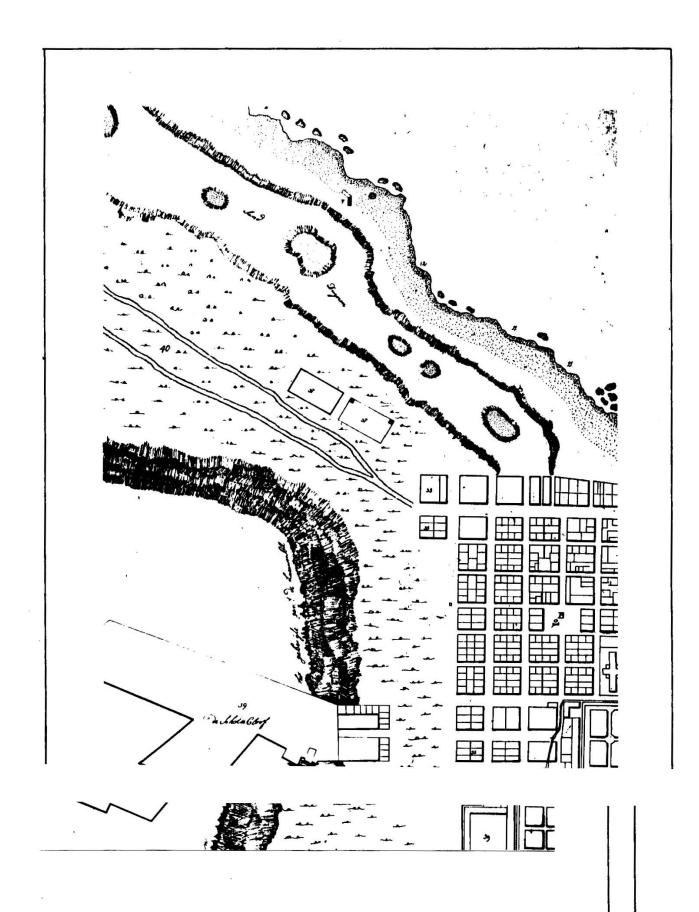
When the authorities had first designated this area for burials they could not have foreseen the growth of the town and its population which occurred through the 18th and 19th centuries. In addition to the normal rate of mortality, the graveyards came under severe pressure during the first half of the 18th century with the outbreak of smallpox. New land had to be allocated to bury the victims of the disease.

The expansion of the burial grounds is perhaps best seen in the changing town plans over a number of years. A selection of excerpts from some of these plans is presented in Figures 2-9. It was only after the turn of the 18th century that religions other than the Dutch Reformed and Lutheran churches were allowed to operate openly at the Cape, following the influences of the British after the occupations.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The project manager is Mr Peter Grobbelaar. 105 Dunkley House, 32 Barnet Street, Gardens, Cape Town, 8001. Ph 457532 Fax 4612320

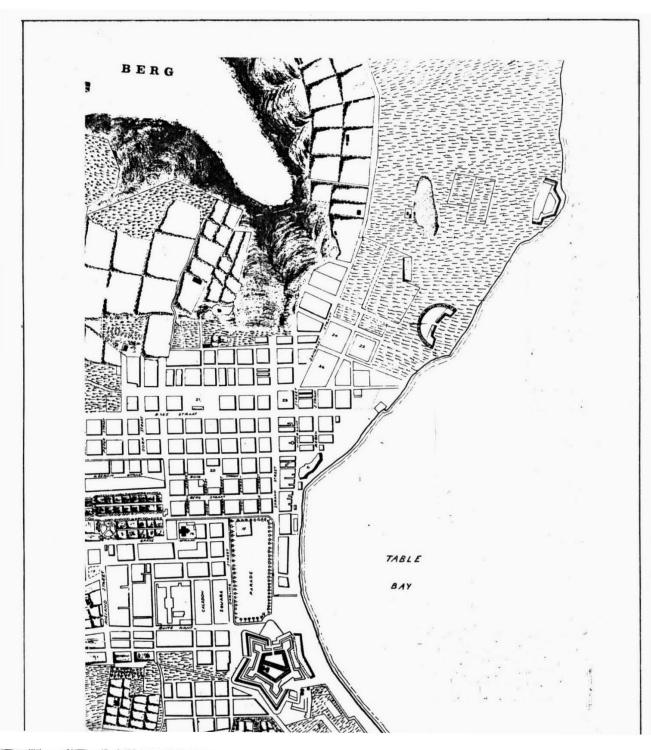


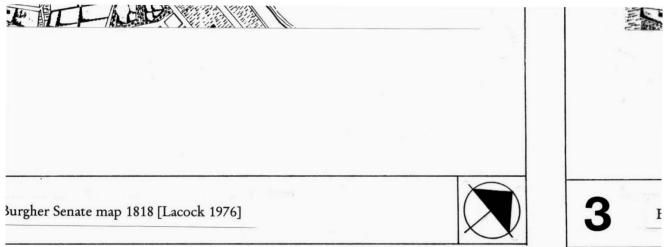


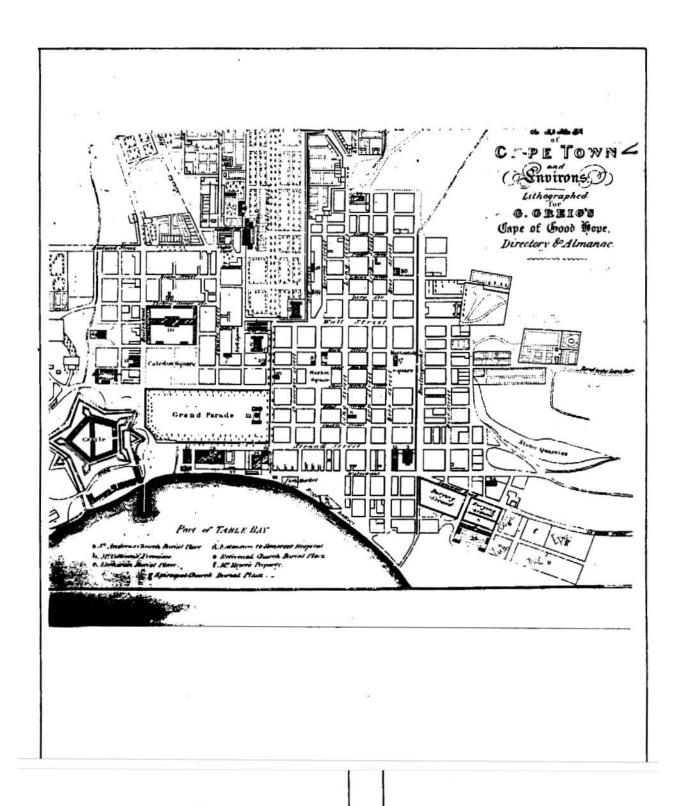


Map of 1767 (CA413/80 HARG 111) [Lacock 1978]



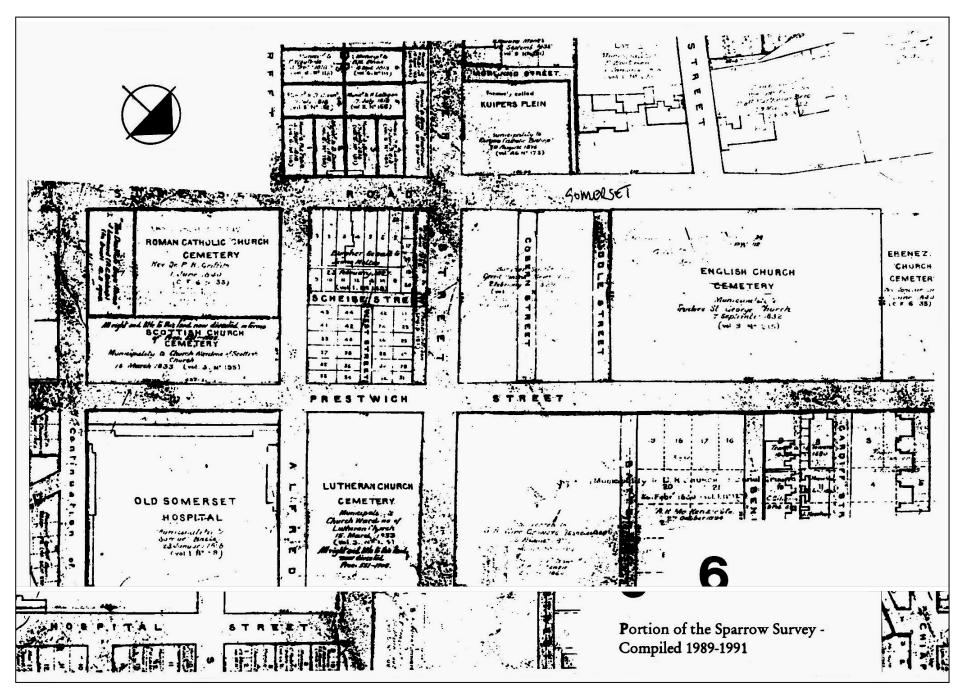


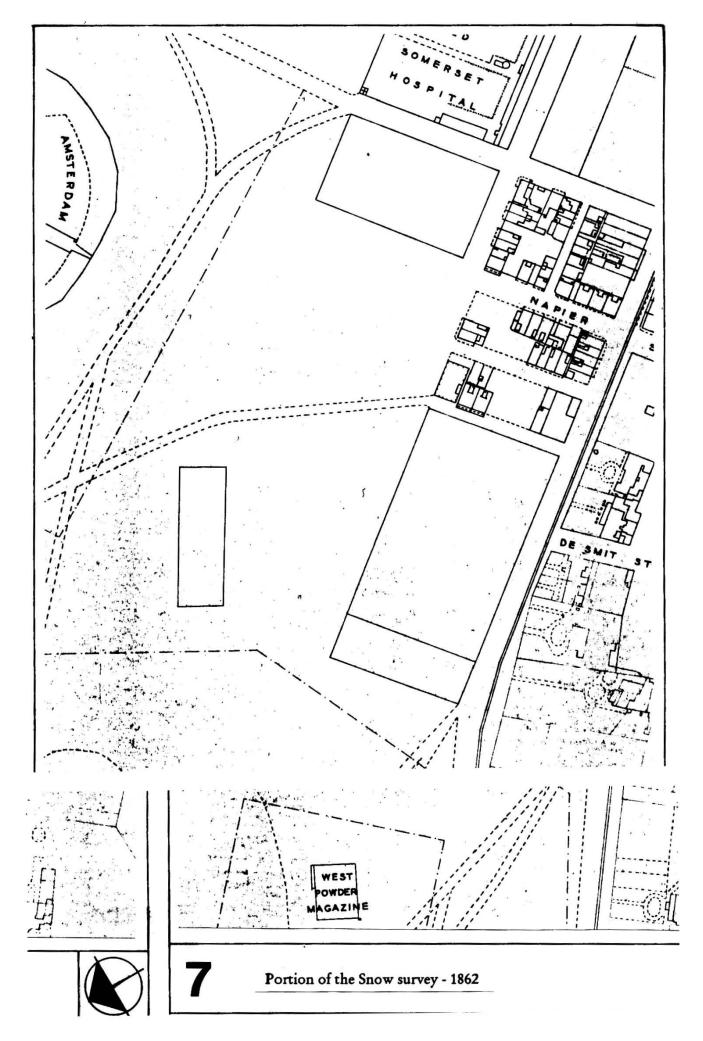


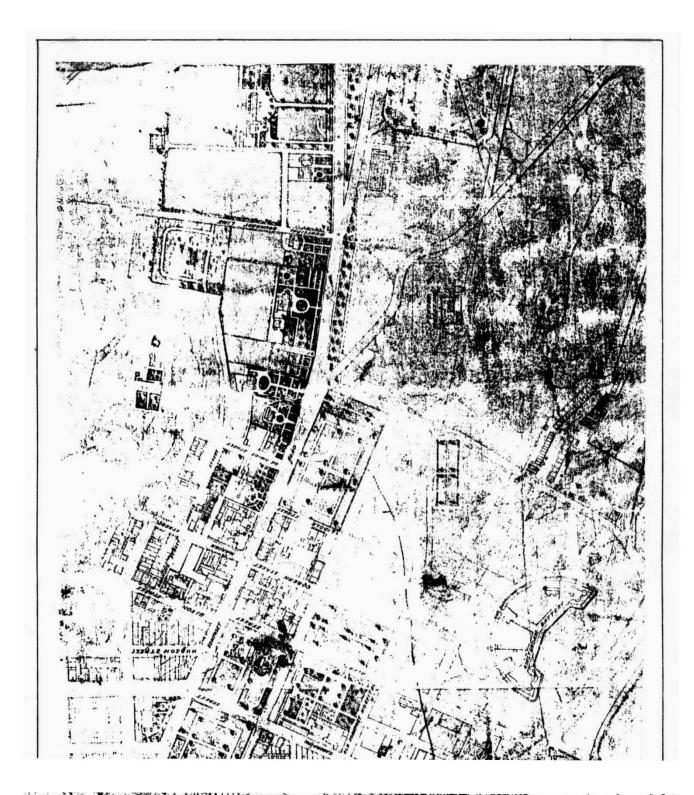


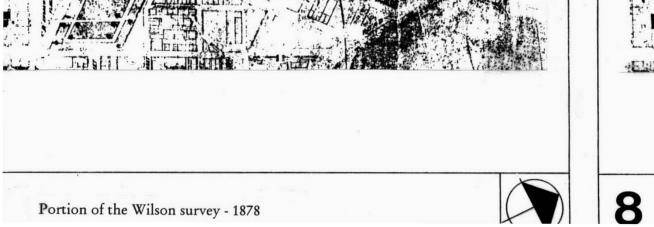


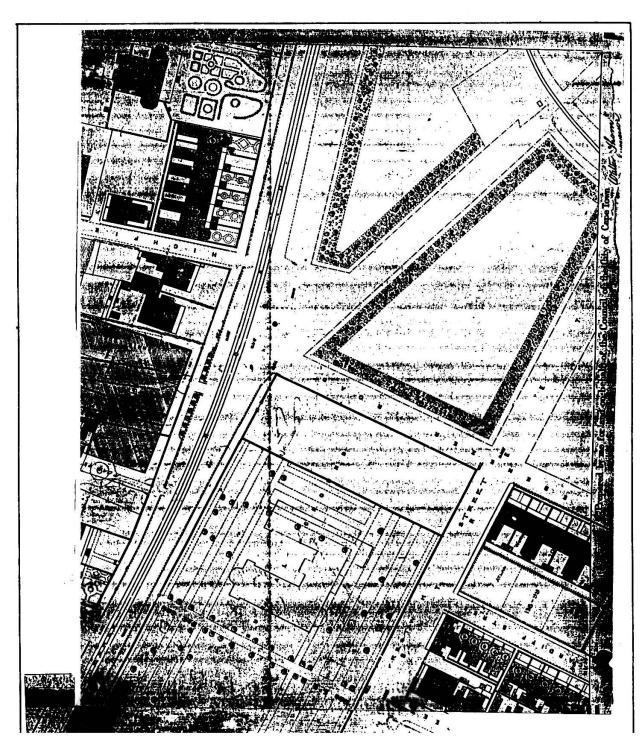
Plan of c1825 (HARG 113)



















It would seem that the English Church cemetery was granted in  $1832^2$  to the trustees of St George's church and a piece of land to the north was granted to the Ebenezer Church in 1840. The two cemeteries were separated by a wall and the entrance to the Ebenezer cemetery was via a gate on Somerset Road. These features can be seen in copies of photographs (plates 1 and 2) taken from Signal Hill in c1880 and c1900 respectively. The gateposts can still be seen. The scale of the panoramas is not sufficient to see much detail of the graves themselves but with selective editing this could be improved. In addition, the Elliot collection contains photographs of some of the more elaborate graves some of which are reproduced in plates 3-7. More detail of the layouts of both the Ebenezer and Anglican burial grounds can be seen on the plans particularly, Figure 8. On both an undated plan and a plan of  $1921^3$  showing the burial plots in the Anglican cemetery, there appears to be a large open area towards the center of the site. This is again seen in the Thom survey in Figure 9. A pencilled notation on the undated plan records this as "free ground - 546 plots".

By the later part of the 19th century the Maitland cemeteries had been established most likely as a result of the authorities realising that the land close to the city was vital for expansion. One by one the Somerset Road cemeteries were closed and the land sold off for development.

The early years of the 20th century saw the removal of headstones and exhumation of remains from the Anglican cemetery which according to a letter of 1912<sup>4</sup> was shared between the diocese of St George's (two thirds) and St John's (one third). A plan of 1921<sup>5</sup> shows headstones and tombs which still remained at this time and which had presumably not been claimed by relatives. Many of the remains and headstones were moved to Woltemade while others were claimed by families and moved to other sites. Although I have been unable to trace the official closing of the cemeteries, the burial registers of the church stop in 1903<sup>6</sup>.

#### 4. METHOD

Test excavations were excavated in several places on a random basis. One constraint was the fact that the open areas are currently used by Telkom for the parking of service vehicles. Test holes therefore had to be placed in such a way as to cause minimal disruption to normal daily operations.

While some variation in the size of test holes occurred, they were generally in the order of 2x1 meters. Excavation depth varied but in all cases ceased only when undisturbed natural substrate was detected. Orientation of the holes was in all case parallel to Somerset road as it was assumed that more potential graves could be intercepted in this way (test holes at right angles to grave shafts). The surface through which we excavated was in all but one case covered by tarmac.

While it was unavoidable to remove disarticulated human bone from the fill of the excavations, other human remains were left in place.

<sup>4</sup> CA A1939 1/6/1

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Although the burial register starts in 1834

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> CA A1939 A1

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> CA A1939 A1

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> CA A1939 1/3/4



Plate 1. CA E1996 Photograph from Signal Hill c1870



Plate 2. CA J6085 Photograph from Signal Hill c1900



Plate 3. CA E3964 Unnamed grave with medallion sculptured by Chantrey



Plate 4. CA E3946 Grave of Lady Sale



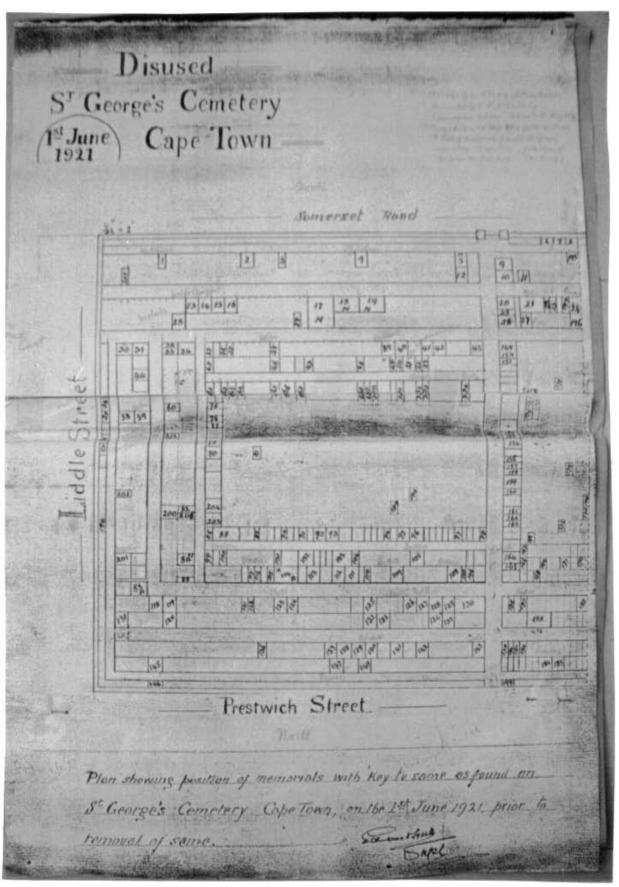
Plate 5. CA E3940 Tomb of Professor Thompson



Plate 6. CA E3947 The Fitzgerald tomb



Plate 7. CA E3954 Grave of Andrew Barnard



## 5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

## 5.1 Area adjacent to Somerset Road

A total of 8 test excavations were located in this area and locations can be seen on Figure 10. Descriptions and general comments of the test holes follow below. The nature of, and a description of the deposits can be seen in the section drawings.

## 5.1.1 Test Hole 1

Section drawing - Figure 11a. The presence of a thick layer of rubble is noted at approximately 700mm below surface. This rubble includes many large shale blocks some obviously dressed. Bricks are also found and include a yellowish type with frog and impressed letters unfortunately illegible (as found in the gateposts of the Ebenezer cemetery) and a thin red type as used in the construction of a vault in hole 9. Many of the bricks and stones have traces of lime plaster adhering to them and have resulted from the demolition of some form of structure, probably vaults.

Undisturbed substrate is encountered at approximately 1400mm below surface. This consists of compacted clay with ferruginous inclusions. Clear outlines of three graves could be identified as cutting into this surface. All deposit above this layer has obviously been disturbed by a process other than normal burial practises. No evidence of burial shafts could be found in section. The depth of the grave bases suggests that original ground surface would have been somewhere in the region of present levels and perhaps slightly higher.

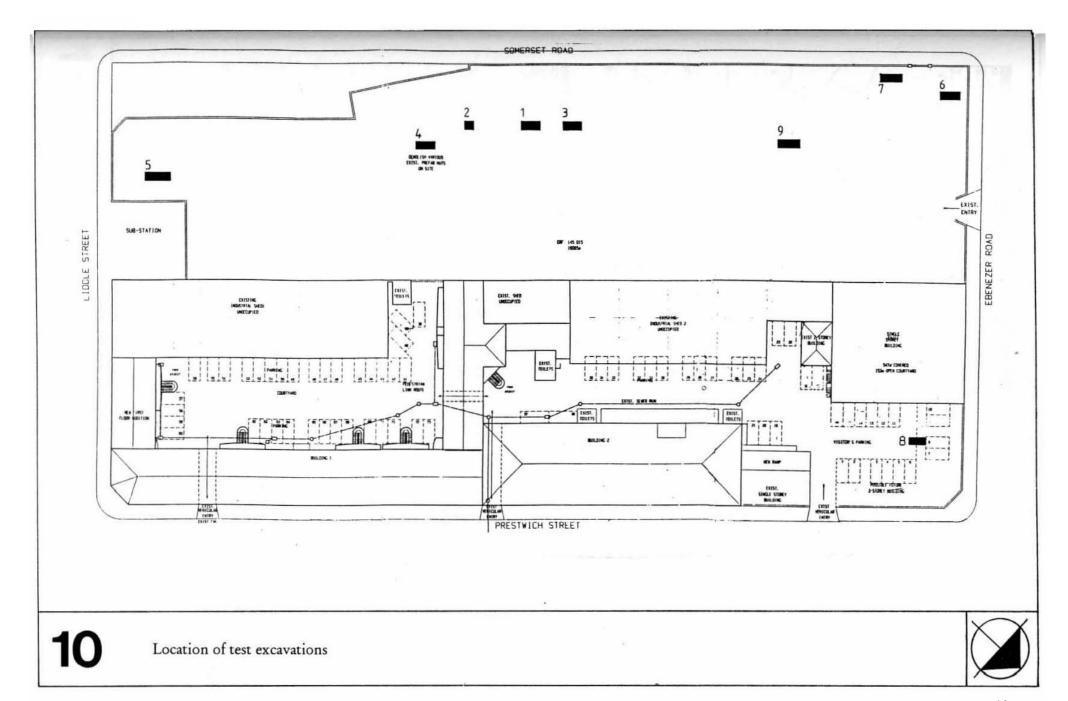
Although three graves were recognised, only one was opened to check for the presence of human remains. The orientation of the test holes meant that only portions of graves were exposed, in this instance the upper part. The remains of a coffin were clearly visible and human remains were present. These were left in place. While this body was intact, portions of another body were found lying above. These remains were disturbed and only portions of a lower leg and foot were preserved. Whereas the lower burial had the head towards Signal Hill the upper appears to have been lying in the opposite direction.

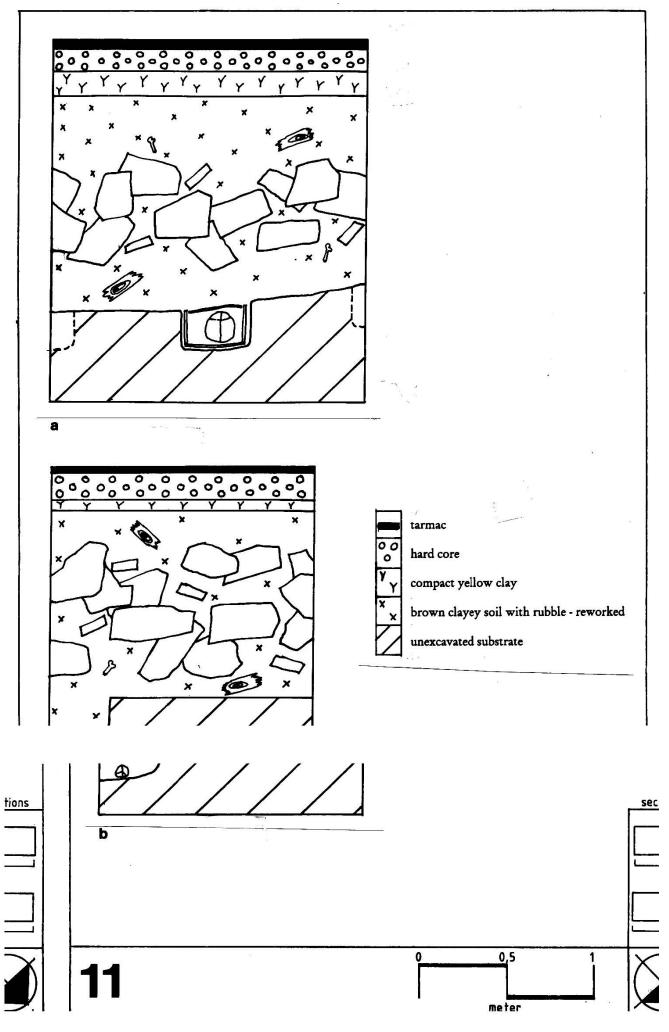
## 5.1.2 Test Hole 2

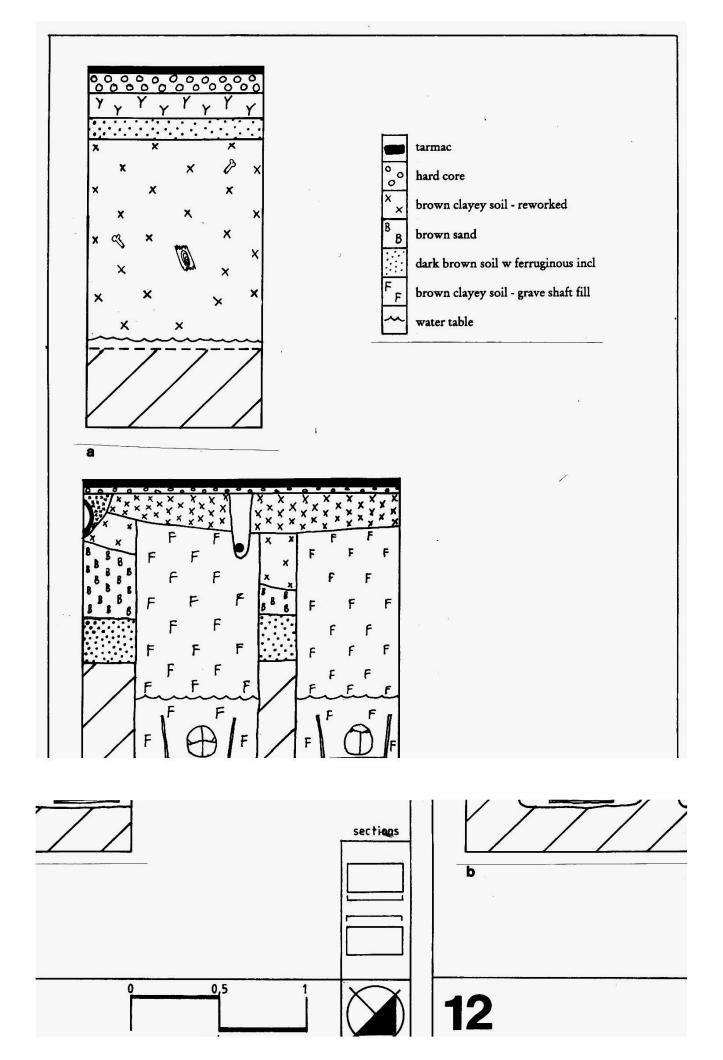
Section drawing - Figure 11b. At approximately 400mm below surface a rubble layer was again encountered. This consists of similar material to that in hole 1. Substrate is encountered at approximately 1300mm and a single grave is recognised cutting into this. Again the impression is of severe disturbance of the upper sequence with only the substrate and a small amount of material above left undisturbed. Again, no grave shafts visible in section. The single grave uncovered has the remains of a child present. Only the lower legs are exposed. The grave appears large for the internment of a child.

## 5.1.3 Test Hole 3

Section drawing - Figure 12a. No rubble was detected in this hole. No substrate was detected and excavation was stopped at a depth of 1710mm as water was encountered. All deposits resembled the upper deposits of holes 1 and 2 and suggested disturbance.







## 5.1.4 Test Hole 4

Section drawing - Figure 12b. This was perhaps the most useful hole in terms of determination of original deposits and original ground level. No rubble was observed and the traces of grave shafts could be clearly discerned in the sections. The traces of three graves could be identified cutting into the substrate at approximately 1300mm below surface. In situ deposits are found close to the surface with reworked fill being found in the grave shafts. The in situ material consists of a layer of light coloured sands overlying a dark brown clayey soil with ferruginous inclusions (the same sequence of deposit has been seen at a burial ground in Cobern Road). The bases of the graves are cut into the hard ferruginous substrate and water is present in the graves though not above. Human remains were detected in one of the graves and not withstanding the water logging are in extremely good state of preservation. Traces of coffin wood are also detected. Burials have been left in place. A photograph (Plate 8) clearly shows the grave shaft and in situ deposit.

## 5.1.5 Test Hole 5

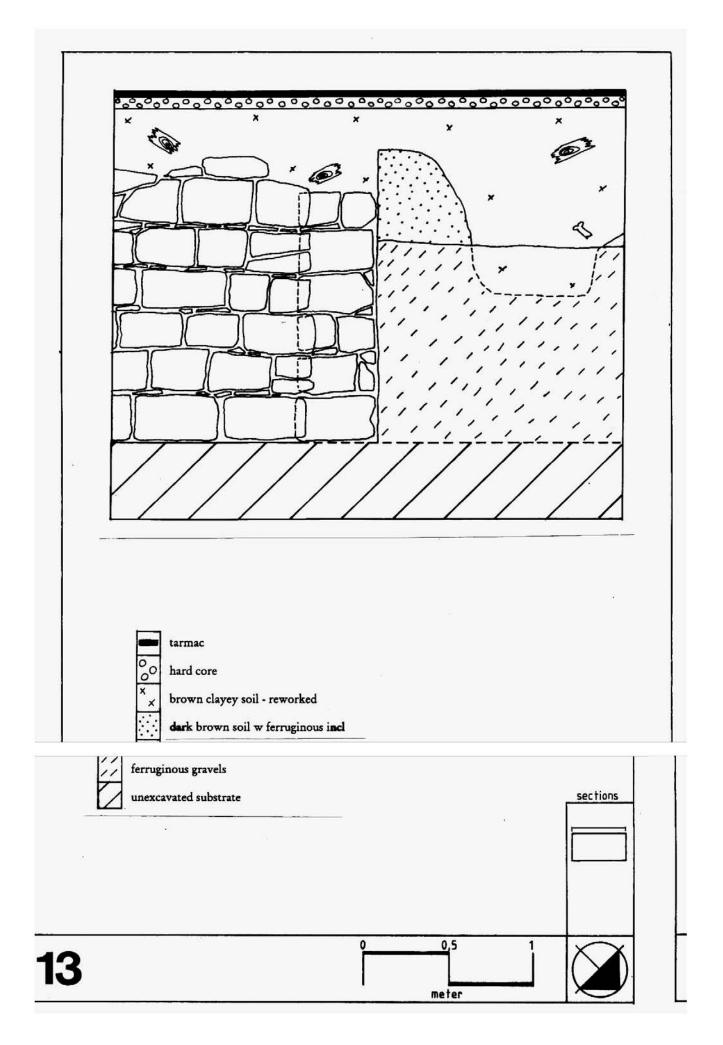
Section drawing - Figure 13. The original hole required extension as a result of finding some intact stone "walling" as well as the base of a grave shaft adjacent to this. The nature of the construction of the walling, having a very neat dressed face to the inside while the rear of the wall is rough, suggests a structure that is built against the sides of a hole. As our observations clearly show some in situ deposits on the west side, it is clear that this structure was at least in part below ground. The conclusion must follow that this is part of a burial vault. Only a part of this structure has been uncovered and further features will undoubtedly be revealed with further excavation. The portions that are visible show that the roof has been broken away. We must assume this to have had a vaulted roof probably constructed of brick. Both dressed stone and two types of yellow brick are found in the fill of what would have been the inside of the vault. Some of the yellow bricks have the letters "BTI" impressed into the frog. Photographs show the west section (Plate 9) and the stone walling (Plate 10).

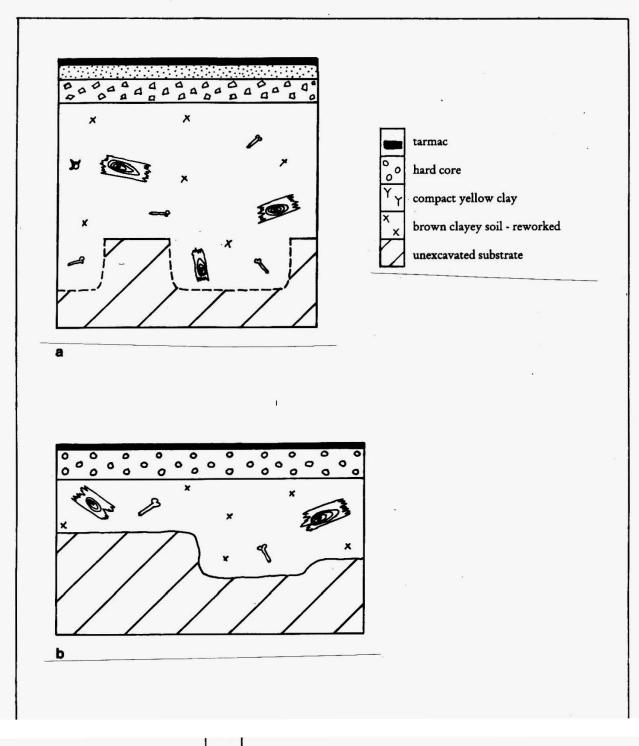
No human remains were found. Fills were found lying on substrate at a depth of some 2000mm below surface. Substrate at this point consists of decomposing Malmsbury Shales with the overlying ferruginous gravels have been removed. These are still found in situ alongside. The stone walls have no foundations but are built directly on the substrate.

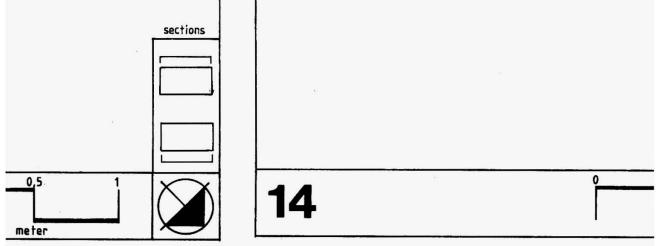
The base of a single grave is found alongside the vault, its base cut into the ferruginous substrate at approximately 1030mm. No human remains are present. The grave base is filled with a mix of soil and red brick suggesting that human remains were removed prior to the fill being introduced (Plate 11).

#### 5.1.6 Test Hole 6

Section drawing - Figure 14a. This hole is situated adjacent to the wall at the Ebenezer Road side of the site. Substrate is found at a relatively shallow 1050mm below surface. The bases of four graves are found cut into the ferruginous substrate. No human remains are found in the graves (Plate 12). Numerous fragments of coffin wood and human bone are however found in the fills above the substrate. Bone consists mainly of bones from feet and hands with occasional vertebral elements, teeth and ribs.













### 5.1.7 Test Hole 7

Section drawing - Figure 14b. Both this hole, #6 and #8 would have been located in the Ebenezer Church cemetery. Substrate is again found at a shallow depth of approximately 700mm below surface. Although not clear, a single grave is present. Edges are not clear and it would appear to have been disturbed. No grave shaft visible in section. Human bone is again found in the upper fills. Bone is of the same type as in #6.

#### 5.1.8 Test Hole 9

Section drawing - Figure 15b. The same stratigraphic sequence that seems to cover most of the site is again present in this hole. The upper fills consisting of brown clayey soil with small inclusions of brick and stone, also contain coffin fragments and human bone. At a depth of approximately 800mm below surface the remains of a vault were exposed. This is different to the one in test hole 5 in the sense that it would have been of more modest size, apparently completely buried and it is constructed with brick (Plate 13). Portions of a vaulted roof can still be seen but has been largely destroyed presumably as a result of exhumation. Traces of a coffin were found at the base of the structure which simply rests on the substrate. No foundations are present. The orientation of the test hole has precluded the entire structure from being exposed.

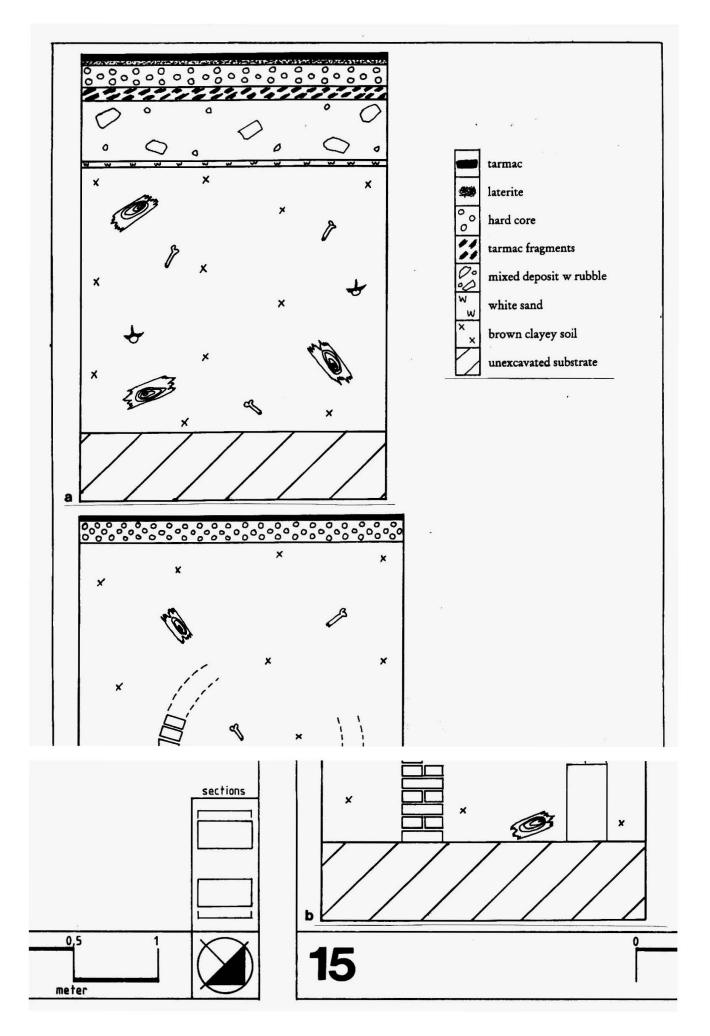
## 5.2 Courtyard, corner Prestwich and Ebenezer roads

#### 5.2.1 Test Hole 8

Section drawing - Figure 15a. This hole lies in what would have been the north-eastern end of the Ebenezer Road cemetery. A substrate of decomposing Malmsbury shale was detected at approximately 2000mm below surface. The absence of any ferruginous matrix above this suggests a degree of disturbance. Numerous bones and coffin fragments are present in the upper fills. There is evidence too that fills from somewhere else on the site have been added to bring levels up in later times. This fill lies above a lens of white sand lying at about 500mm below surface. No grave bases were observed and no shafts are visible in section.

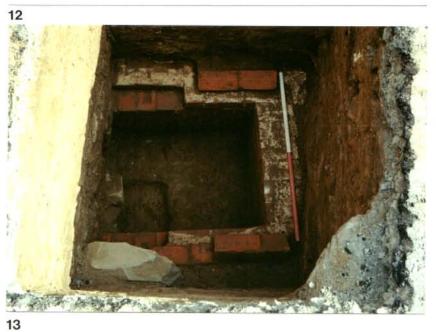
#### 6. DISCUSSION

The investigation has answered some questions and posed a few more in the process. It has become clear that a process of exhumation has taken place on the site and we must assume that this took place in the years between c1900 and c1922 and this seems to be confirmed by the notation on the plan of 1921 (Plate 14). Evidence for the exhumation process is present in a number of forms. Firstly, the nature of the majority of the sub-surface deposits that were sampled are disturbed and few grave shafts can be recognised in sections. Secondly, while human bone is present along with coffin fragments in the disturbed deposits, certain types of bones are absent. Present are feet and hand bones, some rib and vertebrae, and absent are most of the other cranial and post-cranial bones such as the long bones of the legs and arms. Missing too are traces of headstones and the materials often used in the manufacture of monuments such as granite and marble. Photographs of monuments in the cemetery show plenty of the latter materials in evidence. Both vaults that have been exposed have had the roofs broken, presumably to remove the interred bodies.









The disturbance pattern is evident in all but one hole, namely test hole 4. This hole shows grave shafts preserved in section between columns of in situ deposit and articulated human remains are present in at least two graves. Two other holes, namely test hole 1 and 3, also contain articulated human remains. In the cases of these holes however they lay below disturbed deposits containing large amounts of rubble most likely resulting form the demolition of vaults. While upper deposits may be disturbed the bases of graves have been preserved in all the holes. The bases of graves in all cases penetrated the in situ deposits consisting, at that level, of compacted ferruginous gravels.

Telkom workers reported finding skeletons during excavations for the petrol tank in the center of the yard as well as during the digging of drainage and foundation trenches for the wash bay adjacent to the present Ebenezer Road entrance. None of these workers could remember the precise context but I imagine they would not have recognised bones other than skulls and long bones. So the assumption must be made that additional burials exist in other parts of the site.

The presence of human remains can be explained in a number of ways. Firstly, demolition of vaults produced large amounts of rubble which covered these graves. This is unlikely given the fact that no rubble is present over the bodies in hole #4. Secondly, headstones or other grave markers were absent and that exhumation took place only on marked graves. This is the more likely explanation. The absence of grave markers could have been due to the markers having been removed previously or that the graves were simply unmarked (unlikely if buried after 1832). The other possibility is that these graves were unmarked because they pre-date the Anglican cemetery.

Some of the recorded burial plots on the undated plan<sup>7</sup> of the layout of the left half of the cemetery indicate the size of the allotments. In the burial register for the period 1834-18618, a note at the front states that allotments for vaults were 8x10 ft, graves for children 4x2 ft and the graves for adults 3x8 ft9. The walks around the ground and between the vaults is listed as 10 ft. In 1853 the plots were sold for æ3 apiece.

#### 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 The following recommendations apply only to areas which are to be subjected to major sub-surface earthworks.

7.2 A number of issues surrounding the removal of human bone on this site need to be resolved and should be addressed (and may already have been) by the legal experts on behalf of the developers. With regards to the Exhumations Ordinance of 1980<sup>10</sup>, it needs to be established whether an archaeologist may legally remove bodies, and if so then whether the bones may be stored in museum collections for further study. If so what steps need to be followed to secure permission?

<sup>8</sup> CA A1939 1/3/1

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> CA A1939 A1

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Pencilled in next to this is 4x8 ft. The source of this notation is unknown. The excavated graves have an average width of 700mm (2.91ft). <sup>10</sup> A copy is included in Appendix 1.

A number of the following recommendations are dependant on the interpretation of this legislation and assume that given the historic nature of the burial ground an archaeologist may be the best person to perform the exhumation.

- 7.3 While the test holes have suggested some patterning in the remains, it is not possible to predict with certainty where additional structures or articulated burials will be found. The cemetery plans do give additional information but may not be completely accurate. Given that the unearthing of human bone has both legal and moral implications, it would be advisable to have an archaeologist on site for the duration of major earthmoving activities to record structures and to record and remove bones.
- 7.4 The area in the vicinity of where human remains have been found during the initial excavation (in test holes 1, 2 and 4) should be subjected to controlled archaeological excavation in advance of building. There is a suggestion that some of these bodies may have been buried prior to the official declaration of the Anglican cemetery and may contain grave goods (such as found recently with bodies in Cobern Street). An area in the order of 10 x 20 meters may be sufficient to resolve these questions and additional bones could be removed at this time.
- 7.5 The presence of partially intact vaults in test holes means that it is quite likely others will be found. These structures are subject to the provisions of the National Monuments Act of 1969 (as amended). A permit will have to be issued before these can be demolished. Some of these structures should be recorded both photographically and by means of drawings. If an archaeologist is present on site perhaps this permit can be issued in advance? Negotiation with the NMC should take place on this issue.
- 7.6 Notwithstanding the fact that a commercial development would perhaps not wish to emphasise the fact that the ground on which it is built originally served as a burial ground, this portion of the town is of great historical significance. The chosen name of the new development, "Victoria Junction", would seem to emphasise the link between the city and the waterfront. The property developers should consider commissioning a full historical investigation which would examine the site in its historic setting, looking at not only the cemeteries, but also at events before and after this time. Some examples of the wealth of historic material that is available have been presented in this report and more remains to be found. Information derived from such a study could easily be used to stress the historic links between the development site and both the Waterfront and city and could be used in publicity documents. This is not an obligatory process.
- 7.7 The stone wall which partially surrounds the site (on the Ebenezer and Somerset Road sides) is part of the old cemetery wall. The gateposts of the old Ebenezer Church cemetery are still in place although the entrance has been walled up. My discussions with both the National Monuments Council and City Council Urban Conservation Unit indicate that it is not a declared monument, but that it has a high conservation status. The wall has some unsightly additions to it and has been insensitively patched in places. In my opinion I think both of these organisations would be willing to consider the future of the wall in view of the proposed development. Discussions with the relevant bodies should take place.
- 7.8 Given the sensitivity of burial grounds generally, regardless of their current status, a press release should contain information about the steps which have been followed in addressing both the cultural-historical remains and the issue of human remains. A press statement released at the appropriate time could defer negative comments from the public.

## **8. PROFESSIONAL TEAM**

Excavations

Dave Halkett
Mzwondile Sasa
Mzumzima Mjikaliso
Report

Dave Halkett

#### **APPENDIX 1**

## **Exhumations Ordinance, 1980**

Ordinance to prohibit the desecration, destruction and damaging of graves in cemeteries and receptacles containing bodies; to regulate the exhumation, disturbance, removal and re-interment of bodies, and to provide for matters incidental thereto. [Date of promulgation and commencement: 22nd August, 1980.]

[NB. The administration of the whole of this Ordinance has under Proclamation 115 of 1994, published in Government Gazette 15813 of 17 June 1994, been assigned to the Province of We stem Cape with effect from 17 June 1994.]

#### 1. Definitions

In this ordinance, unless inconsistent with the context -

"body" rneans the dead body of a human being and includes -

- (a) the body of a still-born child, and
- (b) any human remains;

"cemetery" means any land, whether public or private, containing one or more graves, and

"grave" includes -

- (a) any place, whether wholly or partly above or below the level of the ground and whether public or private, in which a body is permanently interred intended to be permanently interred, whether in a coffin or other receptacle or not, and
- (b) any monument, tombstone, cross, inscription, rail, fence, chain, erection or other structure of whatsoever nature forming part of or appurtenant to a grave.

#### 2. Desecration of graves

Subject to the provisions of any other law relating to the disposal of bodies, no person shall desecrate, destroy or damage -

- (a) a grave in a cemetery, or
- (b) a coffin, urn or other receptacle in which is contained a body which has not been interred or cause or permit such a grave, coffin, urn or other receptacle to be desecrated, destroyed or damaged.

## 3. Exhumation of bodies

- (1) Subject to the provisions of any other law relating to the disposal of bodies, no person shall exhume, disturb, remove or re-inter any body in a cemetery or in a cemetery or cause or permit any such body to be exhumed, disturbed, removed or re-interred -
  - (a) without the prior written approval of the Administrator, and
  - (b) otherwise than in accordance with such conditions as may be imposed by the Administrator or by any medical practitioner appointed by the Administrator:

provided that the preceding provisions of this subsection shall not apply where any such body is exhumed, disturbed, removed or re-interred in consequence of, in the course of, or for the purposes of the interment of another body by, or on behalf, or with, the permission of the person or body having the control and management of such cemetery.

- (2) Any person desirous of obtaining the written approval contemplated by subsection (1)(a) shall make written application therefore and shall -
  - (a) in such application -
    - (i) state where the body which is to be exhumed, disturbed, removed or re-interred is interred and if and where such body is proposed to be re-interred;
    - (ii) state the reasons for the proposed exhumation, disturbance, removal or re-interment, and
    - iii) specify the methods proposed to be adopted and the precautions proposed to be taken to prevent any danger to health or cause for offence arising, and
  - (b) together with such application -
    - (i) submit a medical certificate as to the date and cause of death or a certified copy of such a certificate;
    - (ii) submit the written approval of -
      - (aa) the municipal or divisional council in whose area of jurisdiction the body concerned is interred and is proposed to be re-interred, and
      - (bb) the cemetery authority or other person in charge of the cemeteries in which the body concerned is interred and is proposed to be re-interred;
    - (iii) submit the written approval of -
      - (aa) the surviving spouse of the deceased person concerned;
      - (bb) if there is no such surviving spouse, an adult child of the deceased person concerned;
      - (cc) if there is no such adult child, a parent of the deceased person concerned;
      - (dd) if there is no such parent, an adult brother or sister of the deceased person concerned, or
      - (ee) if there is no such brother or sister, the nearest available adult relative of the deceased person concerned, and
    - (iv) where the cemetery in which the body concerned is interred or is proposed to be re-interred is owned by or under the control or management of a religious body or is a cemetery in which the controlling body of any particular religious group has a peculiar interest, submit the written approval of such religious body or controlling body.
- (3) Where any medical certificate or written approval contemplated by subsection (2) is not or cannot be obtained or is not granted, the written application contemplated by that subsection shall be accompanied by -
  - (a) full details of the efforts made to obtain such certificate or approval, and
  - (b) full reasons why the inability to obtain such certificate or approval should not preclude the grant of written approval in terms of subsection (1)(a).
- (4) Any written approval in terms of subsection (1)(a) may be granted subject to such conditions as the Administrator may deem necessary or desirable and the Administrator may before any such approval is acted upon -
  - (a) vary any condition so imposed, and
  - (b) impose additional conditions in respect of such approval.

#### (4) Validation

Every permit issued by or an behalf of the Administrator prior to the commencement of this ordinance and

purporting to authorise the exhumation, disturbance, removal or re-interment of a body shall be deemed to have been lawfully issued and any act performed or other thing done in consequence of and in accordance with any such permit shall be deemed to have been lawfully performed or done.

## (5) Offences

Any person who contravenes any provision of section 2 or 3(1) or who fails to comply with any condition contemplated by section 3(1)(b) shall be guilty of an offence and on conviction be liable to a fine not exceeding two hundred rands or imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months or to such imprisonment without the option of a fine or to both such fine and such imprisonment.

## 6. Interpretation of ordinance

The provisions of sections 2 and 3(1) shall be construed as additional to and not in substitution of the provisions of any other rule of law.

#### 7. Short Title

This ordinance shall be called the Exhumations Ordinance, 1980