

# **SECOND REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING OF EARTHMOVING ON PARTS OF THE VICTORIA JUNCTION SITE, SOMERSET ROAD**

Prepared for

**The 406 Fairweather Trust**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Phase 1 study of the original site<sup>1</sup> had established that during the latter half of the 19th century, the area lying between Somerset, Prestwich, Liddle and Ebenezer Roads served as the burial grounds for both the Anglican and Ebenezer churches. The study also found that the site had clearly been subject to a process of exhumation, a fact that was confirmed by the few remaining church records. However, notwithstanding this process, articulated human remains in coffins were still located in certain parts of the site and numerous additional post-cranial human remains were found spread over the site. These had clearly been left behind when remains were exhumed c1921. Burial vaults on the Anglican burial ground that had not been demolished during the earlier exhumation all showed damage to their vaulted roofs. This was certainly a means of gaining access to the remains for easy removal.

As it was likely that additional human remains would be encountered during bulk earthworks, the developers were advised to follow the procedures for exhumations as laid down in the Exhumations Ordinance of 1980 (notwithstanding the earlier exhumation). The intention to excavate on the site was duly advertised in the press with no objections being received. The Archaeology Contracts Office was granted permission by the provincial authorities and City Council to supervise the recovery of any additional human remains which were uncovered at this time.

Remaining burial vaults and other artefacts such as headstones, coffin hardware etc. was subject to the National Monuments Act of 1969 (as amended). As the position and numbers of such vaults could not be predicted, a permit for demolition of such structures was issued in advance on condition that an archaeologist was commissioned to monitor earthmoving and to record any additional structures as they were exposed.

The initial bulk earthworks took place towards the end of 1995 and have been reported on separately<sup>2</sup>. This report deals with the observations made during the final phase of earthworks at the site. A plan of the site showing the location of all the major earthworks is presented in Figure 1.

## 2. METHOD

As with the previous earthmoving, mechanical excavators were monitored during the excavations. As soon as bones or structures were observed the machine was redirected while bones were collected and structures recorded. As the bucket of the excavator holds in the order of a cubic meter of soil, it was inevitable that some bone would escape detection. Short of digging the whole site by hand this was unavoidable. Random trips were made to the soil tip to check that no substantial amounts of bone were escaping detection. The positions of vaults, graves and related finds were recorded on a plan of the site. In the case of whole and partial burials observations were made about the orientation of the body and the presence of grave goods. Individual skeletons were kept separate from the mass of other scattered post-cranial material. The general scatter of loose bone is, we believe, the result of casual exhumation practices in the past.

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<sup>1</sup> Phase one archaeological investigation of the Victoria Junction site, Somerset Road. Report prepared for Newport Property Group, March 1995. UCT, Archaeology Contracts Office.

<sup>2</sup> Report on the archaeological monitoring of earthmoving on parts of the Victoria Junction site, Somerset Road. Report prepared for Newport Property Group, December 1995. UCT, Archaeology Contracts Office.

Observations relating to the presence of articulated skeletal remains made during the initial earthworks caused us to re-evaluate our recommendation (7.4) made in the Phase 1 investigation. This suggested that a portion of the site surrounding a particular articulated burial should be excavated prior to bulk earthworks. We decided that the area that had been proposed for this treatment would simply be dealt with along with the rest of the site.

### **3. RESULTS**

#### **3.1 Graves and Vaults**

As can be seen from Figure 1, earthmoving took place over the area from the new Protea Hotel as far as Liddle Street. As a result of the prevailing ground slope, the base of the excavation was relatively deeper adjacent to Somerset Road (in the order of 3 meters) and bedrock was eventually exposed over most of the site. Without exception, large vaults showed evidence of having been opened by demolition of the roof. Orientation of burials varied from head towards Signal Hill to head toward the Table Bay although in some instances the intervention of mechanical excavators prevented us from seeing the orientation. The location of vaults and graves (that were recognisable as such), as well as the locations of certain artefacts is presented on Figure 2. A summary of the observations relating to recognisable whole or partial burials in both graves and vaults is presented in Appendix 1.

#### **3.2 Artefacts**

Artefactual material is rather scarce on the site for obvious reasons. What has been found is related to burial practice. Numerous pieces of ironwork were recognised and the elaborate shapes were obviously used as railings around graves. Numerous iron coffin handles have been recovered. Only one grave marker was found. This is a fragment of shale with incised lettering. A rubbing of the inscription can be seen in Figure 3. This may have been a plaque attached to a vault rather than a free standing headstone.

Perhaps the most important artefact to have been retrieved is a silver burial plaque of one "W. Wilberforce Bird", a prominent figure in the political and economic life at the Cape shortly after the start of the second British occupation. This plaque was in all likelihood attached to a coffin contained within a vault but since it was found loose in the soil, the precise location of the of internment site cannot be determined. A copy of the plaque is presented in Figure 4. Two biographies of Birds' life are presented in Appendix 2<sup>3</sup> and Appendix 3<sup>4</sup>.

### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

The apparent increase in the number of articulated or partially articulated human remains recovered from this part of the site is dependant on the depth of the earthworks. When the site for the hotel was prepared for example, the base of the excavation was slightly shallower and generally did not intersect intact burials. Deeper excavations for the preparation of foundations which occurred later did however encounter intact burials which were removed. The greater numbers of recognised remains towards Somerset Road is

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<sup>3</sup> Philip, P. 1981. *British residents at the Cape, 1795-1819. Biographical records of 4800 pioneers.* pp28. David Philip, Cape Town.

<sup>4</sup> de Kock, W.J. ed. 1968-1987. *Dictionary of South African biography.* v1: 77-78. Nasionale Boekhandel Bpk, Pretoria. 5v.

probably a factor of the depth of overburden but is also due to the fact that graves and vaults were visible in section at this point.

Quite clearly the exhumation of human remains in this way (by monitoring earthmoving equipment) is unsatisfactory. It is difficult to imagine however that this can be resolved in instances where documentary evidence suggests that exhumation has already occurred. In such an instance it is not easy to justify large scale excavations to find burials that were not exhumed as these occur in a completely random fashion and especially where no accurate records of the exhumation exist.

## 5. PROFESSIONAL TEAM

Monitoring and collection

Dave Halkett  
Tim Hart  
Dennis Neville  
Dino Stynder

Report

Dave Halkett

## Appendix 1

### Observations: Contents of graves and vaults

- (1) Grave containing partially complete upper adult skeleton - ribs, humerus, radius, ulna, scapula, pelvis. Coffin handles x2.
- (2) Grave containing partially complete adult skeleton - femora, tibia, radius, ulna, humerus, ribs, pelvis, vertebrae, skull fragments and complete mandible. Coffin handles x2.
- (3) Grave containing partially complete juvenile skeleton - femora, radius, ulna, pelvis and skull fragments. Coffin handles x2 medium, 1x small. Rusted penknife found against left femur.
- (4) Grave containing partial adult skeleton - femora, tibiae, ribs, pelvis, vertebrae, skull fragments and complete mandible. Coffin handles x1.
- (5) Grave containing partial adult skeleton - femur, vertebrae, skull fragments and complete mandible. Coffin handles x2.
- (6) Small vault containing most of an adult skeleton. This type of vault was only large enough for a single coffin and was almost certainly entirely below ground. One other structure of this type was found during the initial study of the site.
- (7) Grave containing partial juvenile skeleton - pelvis, vertebrae, skull fragments and mandible. Coffin handles x1. Coffin originally lead encased.
- (8) Grave containing lower half of an adult skeleton - femora, tibia, pelvis. Coffin handles x5 (4 of the same style and 1 odd). The rest of the skeleton remains in the unexcavated section.
- (9) Grave containing partial adult skeleton - only skull fragments recovered. The rest of the skeleton remains in the unexcavated section.
- (10) Grave containing partial adult skeleton. Whole grave dug out by mechanical excavator.
- (11) Grave containing 2 partial skeletons buried separately in the same grave. Grave intersected by mechanical excavator.

#### Miscellaneous bone and other finds:

Various bones which were found out of context - probably scattered during the exhumation.

Coffin handles x3 (fancy shapes - cast iron)  
Coffin handle x1 (wound wrought iron?)  
Cowrie shell (large exotic)

## APPENDIX 2

### BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM WILBERFORCE BIRD

**BIRD, William Wilberforce.** **4.1.08** W B, Mrs. B, 8 children, 4 servants, arr. TB in 'Duchess of York' ex Montevideo (98/102). **31.12.08** licence issued to his brig 'Betsey' (late 'Eugenie', a French prize) 90 tons (97). 1809 prize agent (21). **16.4.09** part owner (with Thos, Rowles) of 'Penelope' (late 'Hope', French prize), lost in Table Bay (6). Bought 'Schoongezicht' from E H Ziervoogel (TO 2.6.09), & sold it to J P de Wet (TO 10.3.15)(172). 1809-15 at 'Schoonderzigt'(sic)(22). **3.6.09** licence issued to his ship 'Jenny' (late 'Truth') 340 tons (97). 25.1.10 appointed Controller of Customs vice Raynsford (7/25). 1811-20+ Controller of Customs (21). **6.3.10** licence issued to his ship 'Kitty' (late 'Peggy') ..'84 tons (97). **19.5.10** to let, warehouses in Berg St, lately occupied by W W B (25). **27.5.10** owner of brig 'Harriet' (98). **2.3.11** owner of ship 'Charles' (8). 6.10.11 mar of his daughter Sally (28.3.1793 - 8.6.62) to Capt. Joseph Hare (160). **10.4.13** agent for the captors (25) **29.10.14** reference to W A's loan place at Groene River' (25). **29.6.15** Misses Jane & Harriet Bird, PL in 'Union' for India (88). **2.9.15** Mrs H subscribes to Ales Grant Fund (25), Bought part of Tuin Roode Hek (2 morgen) from Widow Simon van Blerk (TO 21.2.17), & sold it (6 morgen) to Wm. Gribble (TO 5,11.19)(7.72/173). 1817-18 at Gardenhouse Roode Hek (22). **8.11.17** sale by auction of his quitrent place 'Klipheuvel' on Groene River (2,132 morgen)(25); sold to T Heatlie (TO 26.3.19)(173). **15.5.18** & 23.6.19 & Dec. 1819 W B non-resident owner of Klipfontein (3,000 morgen)(122/123/124). 1819-20+ Controller of Customs, Simons Town (as well as of Cape Town (12/21). **23.8.19** death in India of his son, Charles Bird, Collector, Madras (25). 28.10.19 Miss (sic) Penelope R, PL in 'Ganges' for Bengal. **24.9.25** Mrs W R & infant with servants, PL in 'Caesar' for Bengal (88), 8.3.32 will signed by W H of Kenilworth, Warwick, Controller of Customs, Wife Penelope Wheler (MOOC 7/1/135-11). **7.3.37** will signed by Penelope, Widow of W W H, Children: Wm. Wilberforce (Bengal), Jane (inherits 'my cottage at Wynberg') Sally (wife of J Hare, Wynberg), John, George. Mrs B was a daughter of Sir Charles Wheler, Bart, & Dame Lucy Wheler (MOOC 7/1/150-11), **19.4.36** death of WWB at Wynberg, See also DSAB & SESA.

## Appendix 3

### Biography of William Wilberforce Bird

**Bird, William Wilberforce** (\*Coventry, Eng., 2.7.1758 - †Wynberg, Cape, 19.4.1836), merchant, Cape civil servant and author, was the eldest son of John Bird, of Kenilworth, Warwickshire, alderman of the city of London, and his wife, Judith Wilberforce, an aunt of the philanthropist William Wilberforce. The family had long been prominent in the silk manufacturing of Coventry; living in an ancient mansion in Little Park street, they were socially influential. B.'s sister, Hannah, marrying Dr Robert Sumner, archbishop of Canterbury. Their two sons were John Bird Sumner, archbishop of Canterbury, and Charles Richard Sumner, bishop of Winchester.

B. was established by his father in the ribbon trade, being permitted also to trade and possess shipping. In 1790 he was an unsuccessful candidate for the parliamentary representation of Coventry, but was returned on 28.5.1796, with Nathaniel Jefferys, retaining his seat until the general election of 1802.

Soon after the second British occupation he left an assured position in England to emigrate to the Cape Colony in 1807. A possible reason for this step may have been a desire to further the campaign against slavery, and it could have been his cousin, Wilberforce, who secured him the post of prize agent at the Cape, slaves from intercepted slaving ships being delivered to him for suitable apprenticeship for a fixed period, after which they were freed. He was a founder of the Cape Philanthropic society, which ran-

somed slave girls and obtained for them training and employment.

Between 1807 and 1810 he was one of the colony's most active merchants. Having invested considerable capital in the East India trade on coming to the Cape, he pioneered trading ventures to St Helena and Mauritius, soon sharing, with Hamilton Ross\* and the firm of J. B. Edden & Watts, control of such of the colony's foreign trade as was not the monopoly of the English East India Company, and even being permitted occasionally to re-export manufactured goods, the product of India. For the supply of Cape wine to the garrison at Réunion he furnished his own shipping. His trading activities in these years caused him, however, to clash with John Pringle,\* Cape agent of the East India Company, over the company's monopoly of the Eastern trade.

In 1810 he was appointed comptroller of customs, a post he held until his death, though his salary was reduced in September 1834 when the treasury ordered his superannuation. From 1822 he was also an assessor in the court of appeal.

With the advent as governor, in 1814, of Lord Charles Somerset,\* whom he appears to have met socially at race meetings in England, B. began cautiously to play a part in colonial politics, becoming in time a confidant of Somerset's and his valuable henchman when, for example, he implemented the governor's policy regarding the committee for the relief of the Settlers of 1820, and when, with Judge George Kekewich,\* he compiled the game laws for the colony. B. was also closely involved in Somerset's controversies with Sir Rufane Donkin,\* when certain charges were made against B. by those opposed to the governor (cf. B.'s *Cursory remarks on a letter from Sir Rufane Donkin to Earl Bathurst on the government of the Cape of Good Hope under the administration of Lord Charles Somerset*, Cape Town, 1827). Though his sympathies were always with the governor, B. was cautious in his support of Somerset, always remaining behind the scenes. On the dismissal of the secretary to the government, Col. C. C. Bird\* (no relation) in 1824, he became the governor's chief adviser.

Judged by his friends to be a diligent man of talent and superior education, who possessed a cultivated mind, rigid integrity and a thorough knowledge of the law, he was also an excellent orator. Though his talents lay pre-eminently in commerce and finance, his interests were unusually wide, and he was never content to be a figurehead. He was a member of the committee of the S.A.P.L. and a director of the Cape of Good Hope Savings Bank society. Apart from his philanthropic efforts at the Cape, he was

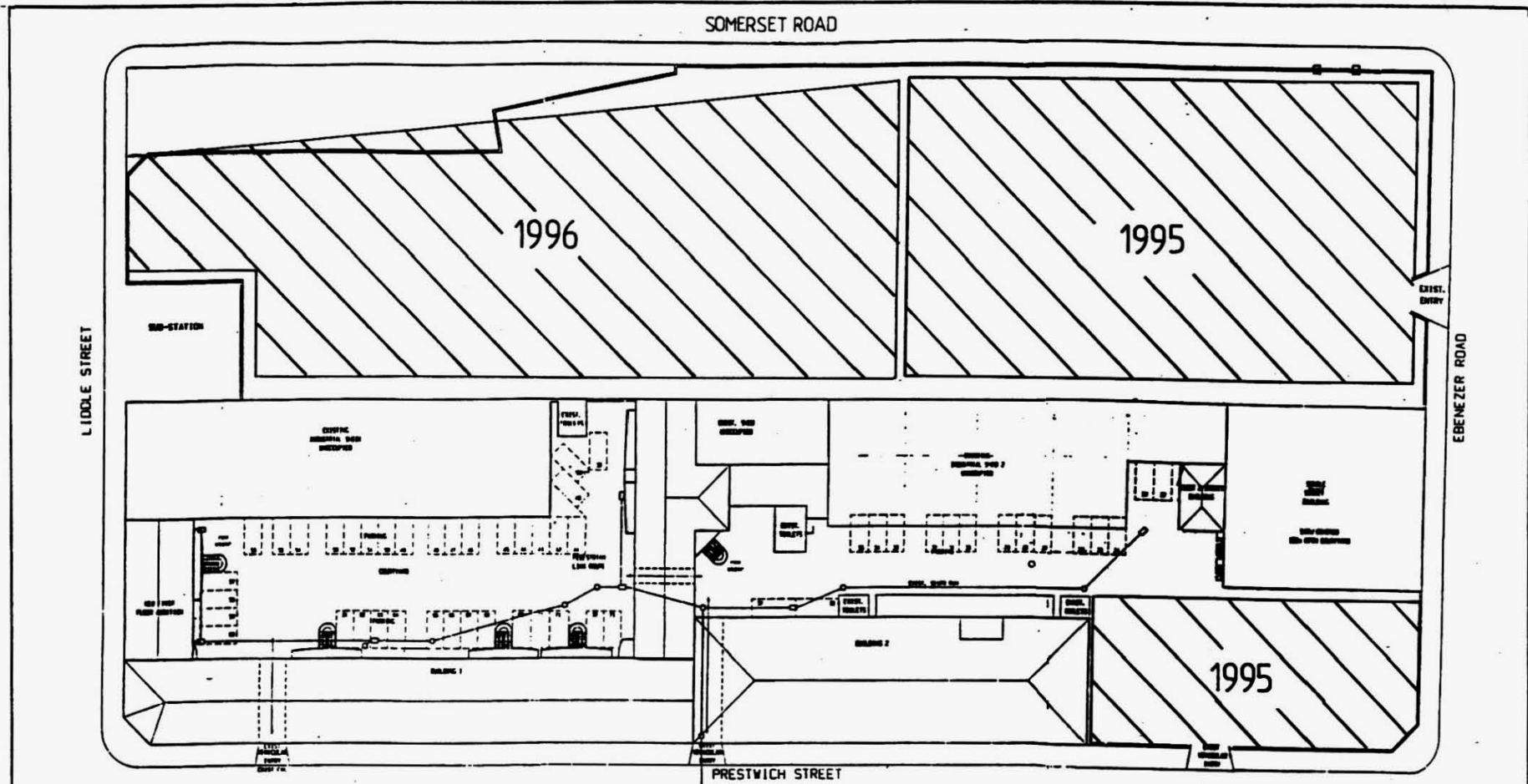
a trustee of Cape Town's first English church and it was he who proposed that it be called St George's; subsequently he became a trustee and chairman of the management committee for the building of St John's church at Wynberg.

He seems to have contributed to W. Bridekirk's\* *South African Chronicle*, but his reputation rests mainly on his major work, *The state of the Cape of Good Hope in 1822*, edited by the orientalist, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, and published anonymously in London in 1823 (although B.'s authorship was well known), a facsimile reprint appearing in Cape Town in 1965. The book provides a comprehensive survey of the Cape scene, being especially detailed on matters of trade, agriculture, currency and commerce, where the author could make use of statistical data drawn from the customs registers; it contains, too, one of the earliest accounts of the Settlers of 1820. The tone throughout is one of constructive criticism, including a strongly worded attack on the remaining privileges of the East India Company.

His first wife, a cousin, Elizabeth Bird, died in 1780. His second wife, Penelope Wheler, died at the Cape in 1839; they had several children. Of their six sons and eight daughters, two daughters married into the Indian civil service, and the eldest son, also William Wilberforce Bird (1784-1857), became deputy governor of Bengal and acted briefly, in 1844, as governor-general of India.

B.'s memorial, erected by his children, can be seen in St George's cathedral, Cape Town. Warwickshire descendants possess a Gainsborough portrait of B.'s second wife, and a portrait of indifferent quality of B. himself. He lived in Cape Town and at The Spring, Kenilworth, and was buried in the Somerset road cemetery, Cape Town, his remains later being moved to Maitland, where the tombstone is still to be seen.

*S.A.C.A.*, 29.4.1836 (obituary); - T. W. WHITLEY, Parliamentary representation of the City of Coventry, Coventry, 1894; - G. M. THEAL (ed.), Records of the Cape Colony, 36 v. C.T., 1897-1905; - M. ARKIN, John Company at the Cape: A history of the agency under Pringle 1794-1815, *A.Y.B.*, 1960 II; - Information by courtesy of house of commons library, Lond.; R. Langham-Carter, C.T., and Prof. A. F. Hattersley, Pmbg.; - Private papers in possession of the family.



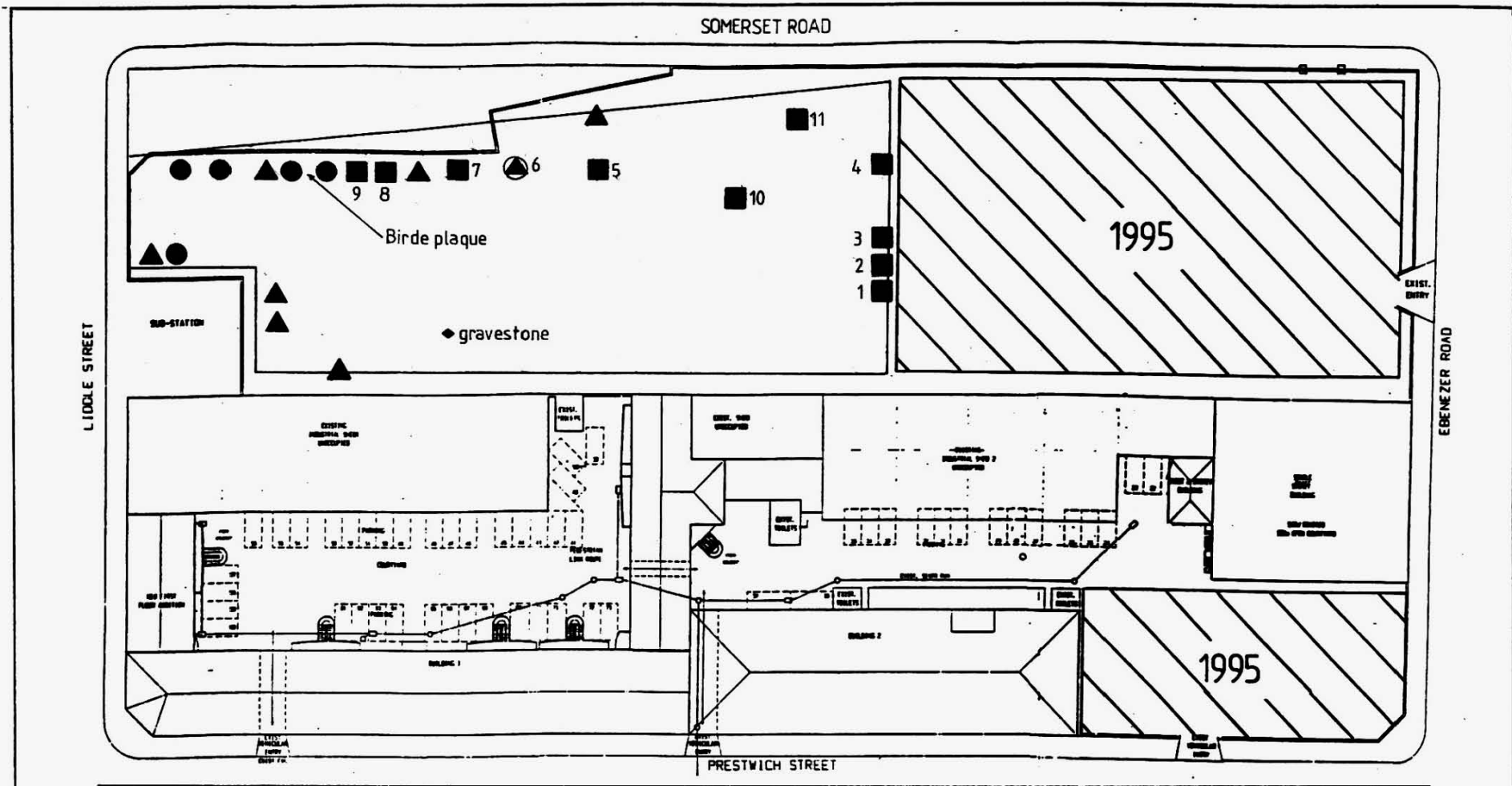
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Location of bulk earthworks







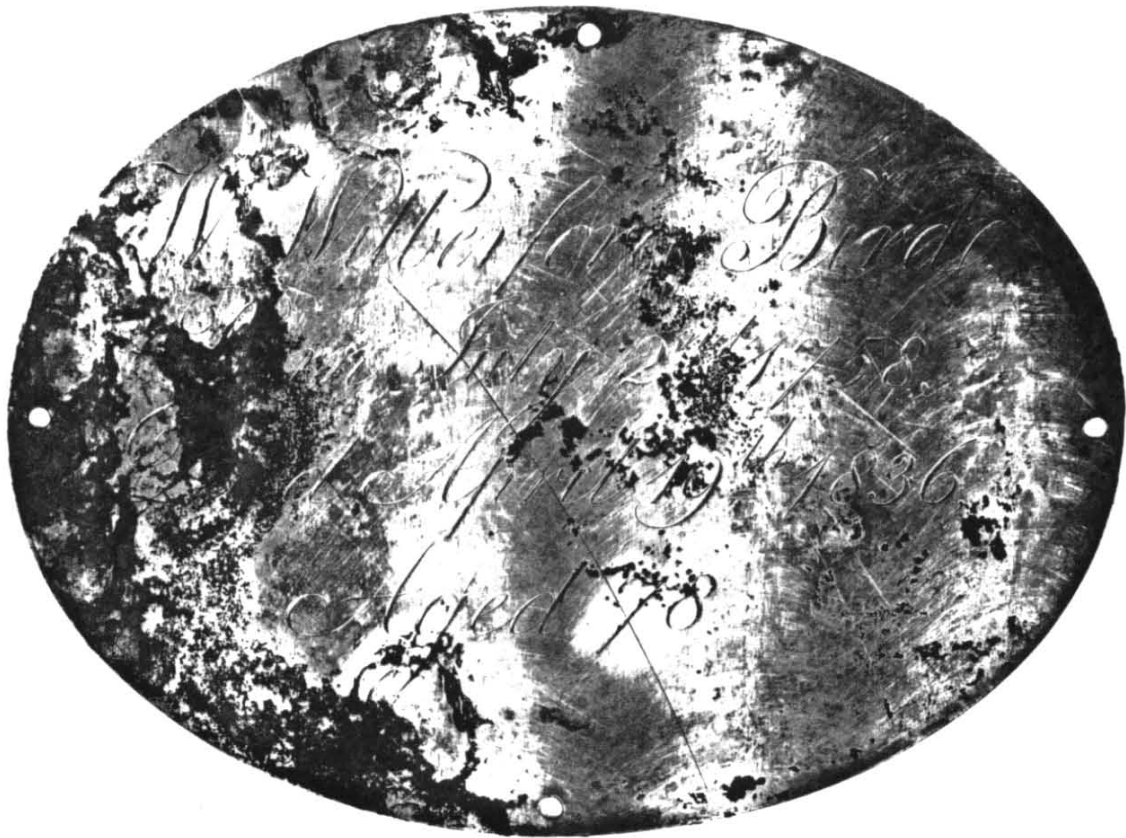
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- grave with human remains
- grave no remains
- ▲ vault no remains
- ⊙ vault with remains





**Figure 3:** Pencil rubbing of the shale burial plaque fragment. The part of the inscription that has survived reads - "in the memory of Alfred Richard Hamilton...died? 21st October 1861".



**Figure 4:** Copy of the silver coffin plaque.  
Reads " W Wilberforce Bird, Born July 2nd 1758, Died April 19th 1836, Aged 78