

**REPORT ON THE BURIAL SITE AND ASSOCIATED TERRAIN**

**LILYVALE, BLOEMFONTEIN**

**SUBMITTED BY:**

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## **Introduction**

I was invited by Dr Zoë Henderson of the National Museum Bloemfontein to undertake a survey of a burial site, rubbish dump and the general terrain in the vicinity of these two features, which included a rock wall and other such structures. The exercise was undertaken on 16 September 2002 and conducted on foot.

At the outset, the area and physical evidence surveyed and any history associated with the site was unknown to me and it was the first occasion that I surveyed the terrain. I had no knowledge of any associated site-specific history, and the terrain was viewed without prior information that could have premeditated a conclusion. I was also unaware of any potential implications associated with this site and therefore submit this report as an independent specialist.

My area of expertise is that of a military historian, with particular reference to the Anglo Boer War (1899 – 1902). Of particular focus are the concentration camps and labour camps established by the British military and which incarcerated black civilians between 1900 -1903. Since 1999 I have located and surveyed several such sites in South Africa, formerly unidentified, and have familiarised myself with the historic terrain of some thirty other black concentration camp sites. Concentration Camps that I have located include Dry Harts, Vryburg, Springs, Kimberley, Taaibosch, and Klip River Station. Black labour camps located to date include Brandfort and Witkop.

During the last fifteen years I have surveyed some one hundred and fifty sites pertaining to various historical conflicts in South Africa, primarily sites associated with the Anglo Boer War. These include battlefields, military campsites, concentration camps and associated terrains. I have visited numerous military sites in Western Europe and the Far East and hold an MA degree in Heritage Studies for a research report titled “Reinterpreting Military Landscape. I am currently embarking upon a PHD which examines the incarceration sites for black civilians during the Anglo Boer War. I operate a consultancy which provides specialist services and products to the heritage and tourism sectors on a national basis and was appointed in 2003 by the National Minister of Arts and Culture to the Council of the Nelson Mandela National Museum. I was directly involved in numerous heritage and commemorative interventions, developed by National, Provincial and Local authorities during the centenary commemorations of the conflict during 1999 -2002.

## **Historical Military Overview**

During the Anglo Boer War the protagonists made extensive use of local labour to sustain their fighting formations and operational capacities, supplied mainly by the black population. As the site in question, Lilyvale, is located within the British defensive perimeter thrown up by the British army around Bloemfontein after its occupation of the city on 13 March 1900, this report does not concern itself with the involvement of black civilians serving with the Boer forces.

When the British army launched its offensive operations from Orange River Station on 21 November 1899 records reflect that extensive numbers of black men were employed by the forces in a logistical capacity as transport drivers, grooms, cooks and labourers. This initial force of some 12 000 troops was extensively reinforced to around some 30 000 Imperial combat troops by February 1900 and consequently labour supply would have increased proportionately by the time this force occupied Bloemfontein in March 1900. Bloemfontein remained garrisoned by the British military throughout the duration of the conflict and labour requirements were met by black civilians, either with the forces, or recruited into the forces. Labourers received payment and military rations.

With the onset of the Boer guerrilla war campaign from June 1900 until the cessation of hostilities in 1902, the British forces applied scorched earth tactics to undermine the capacity of the Boer forces to conduct operations. This involved the destruction of civilian homesteads and kraals along with foodstuffs and livestock in the rural areas, while some towns were also destroyed. The rural infrastructure in the former Orange Free State was particularly affected by this counter guerrilla campaign and laid to waste.

Black and Boer civilians were incarcerated into internment centres, which were situated near major towns or military garrisons. These centres became known as concentration camps where high numbers of inmates perished for a number of reasons; cause of death included infectious diseases, malnutrition, inadequate shelter and medical neglect. Estimates vary, but it is likely that at least 50 000 – 60 000 black and white civilians, held captive by British military force, died in the camps.

From the beginning of 1901, when the concentration camp system was being established, no formalised military or civilian management structure existed for black civilians affected by the scorched earth tactics or who had been displaced by combat operations; they were either dropped by the military columns or left to fend for themselves in ‘satellite’ areas, linked to the Boer camps, or they sought shelter on the periphery of established black living areas near the towns and urban centres. In July and August 1901, the Department of Native Refugees was established by the British military and some 66 formalised black concentration camps were established in the former Transvaal, Orange Free State, and Bechuanaland. Camps were also established in Natal, but the extent of these remains unknown. The inmates, mainly women children and

elderly men, were compelled by the military to harvest crops for the army. The proportionate lower numbers of men in the concentration camps was mainly because they were employed by the military forces during this guerrilla phase of the war.

Records reflect that many of the Boer concentration camps set up by British forces retained black labour force to provide labour in the running of these camps and they were incarcerated usually within the defensive cordon around these places. As for the British garrisons, the same would have been true. Living areas for black labourers, accommodated in the labour camps would have been established within the defensive cordon and the men compelled to remain within the cordon, due to martial law and a state of war. Consequently burial areas and discarded ration tins and living areas would be within close proximity to each other, considering that inmates faced the possibility of being shot on sight, if they strayed beyond the defensive cordon for whatever reason.

The black inmates were not supplied with tents or bungalow type accommodation for shelter, as in the Boer camps and erected shelters with whatever materials were available: organic building materials, crates and boxes, clods of soil, tarpaulins, Hessian sacking, corrugated iron etc. Consequently when one views the physical terrain of such places very little remains on the surface to denote a formerly occupied area. Locating such sites can be difficult but other clues exist to denote such places, such as surface scatters of glass shards and military ration tins, upper and lower grinding stones, strapping from crates and impacted ground. Impacted ground can be observed both on the terrain and in aerial photographs and vegetation growth disparities, such as areas of shorter growing grass where shelters were once erected or areas cleared of rocks and stones, are obvious to the naked eye.

Burial sites and rubbish dumps are always found in close proximity to previous locations of concentration or labour camps. Grave ornaments such as cans, bottles, glassware etc have not been observed at any of the sites listed in the introduction. Such ornamentation is observed on graves that postdate the war. At certain black concentration camp sites, such as at Dry Harts, some thirty hand engraved stones bearing the casualty's name and date of death have been located in a burial area containing approximately 2000 – 3000 graves. The Taaibosch black concentration camp burial site, which contains some 640 graves, has only one stone listing the casualty's details. The labour camp at Brandfort has only one stone carrying engraved details from some 67 burials. One therefore finds no established pattern with respect to engraving headstones from the period.

The physical structure of individual graves from the period from various sites all bear the same characteristic, be they British or civilian in origin: individual or mass graves were covered over with a cairn built from local rock, gathered and packed into a mound, usually elliptical in appearance., With respect to British burial practices of their own casualties at the time of the conflict, the soldiers erected headstones of

local rock, engraved with the casualty's details at the head of the grave. British burial sites reflect a sense of demarcated order - graves are located in lanes or rows and the same is true for black casualties that were buried within the control mechanisms of the British authorities.

At black concentration camps such as Dry Harts and Taaibosch the graves are situated within ordered rows and lanes, while at Kimberley they reflect a more haphazard arrangement, due to camp being more remote and removed from the British garrison. At these sites it is observed that the Black civilians erected at least a headstone and in most cases included a footstone or built up the burial mound with gravel and small stones or mounds of sand if large rocks were not locally available. However, it has been observed that sometimes this practice of building cairns did not always occur. At the burial site from the Dry Harts black concentration camp there are areas between recognisable graves that do include individual burial sites but with no surface mound; the casualty was simply buried in a hole and covered over with sand. Some 103 years later environmental activity has resulted in a fairly level surface. At the site in Kimberley it was established that the graves of male casualties were marked with larger and more prominent cairns than that of women or children, possibly due to a cultural practice at the time of denoting status.

A few years after the war a Guild of Loyal Women was formed and raised funds to provide for and erect a standardised iron grave marker above the graves of British troops who died in the conflict. These markers carried the soldier's details, stamped into the marker or on an attached disc. These markers are generally known as Guild Crosses and variances do exist in the design between the various provinces in South Africa. Nevertheless they are similar in that they contain a vertical cross, framed with a circular disc. Cemeteries for the British dead were 'tidied up', formalised with fencing and memorials and denoted with pepper trees, planted to provide shade and to serve as markers on the landscape. Consequently British cemeteries or individual graves situated within municipal burial sites are easily located and the practice seems to have continued until the British army withdrew its garrisons from South Africa with the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Black casualties during the war would appear without exception, to have received no official formalisation such as to markers or stones. Prior to 1994 no effort was made by the authorities to plot and record black burial areas associated with the war resulting in their virtual 'disappearance' from maps and plans, recorded histories and broader knowledge and consciousness.



**British Graves, Phillipolis Cemetery.  
Visible are two differing designs of  
Guild Crosses**



**British grave, Rhenoster River,  
Reflecting the standard Guild Cross**

## **The Dump Site, Lilyvale**

This dump bears all the characteristics of been generated by a British military garrison during the Anglo Boer War and probably for some few years after the conflict. During a visual inspection of the dump the author located a number of artefacts confirming this: ammunition, one half of a brass military belt buckle and some general service buttons, all of which are items that can be found at such dumps sites linked to British garrisons from the period. Which garrison in particular is impossible to determine; Bloemfontein had a number of fortified positions, presumably this dump originates from the garrison or outposts closets to where it is currently situated.

Although unauthorised persons have undertaken excavations it would appear that original sections of the dump remain intact. Consequently the dump presents an opportunity for a targeted excavation that could identify aspects of social and military history from the period, as well as determining its base and thus its first origins. Of particular interest are a few sections of very aged corrugated iron sections lying on the surface of the dump. As it is known that black refugees used this as building material, it is suggested that these be retrieved from the dump for safekeeping by the National Museum.

## **The Living Area, Lilyvale**

Immediately adjacent to the dump a low rise stretches up to a footpath, located adjacent to the formal housing area. This 'rise' constitutes an open section of ground along the slope, and which is linked to a section of stonewalling. This ground has all the characteristics of having once functioned as a living area for persons who received British military rations. A surface scatter of bully beef, Norwegian sardine and milk ration tins, together with glass fragments, strapping from crates and a large rusted lock were observed. These tins date from the Anglo Boer War and are always found at British military linked sites throughout South Africa and constituted the standard military ration. They lie on open ground which in turn bears the characteristics of once having been occupied by a number of people. The area is clear of large boulders, while the surface vegetation growth and general appearance in relation to height, density, and lack of growth in certain places are all suggestive of impact of human settlement. What was not observed during a very extensive surface examination was ammunition, buttons and other artefacts that are almost always found on ground once occupied by British troops. Nor were any stone circles in evidence; which would have demarcated formalised tent lines, an overriding characteristic of a British garrison position.

It asks the question: who was occupying this ground at the time of the Anglo Boer War and why were these persons receiving military rations.

The occupants might have been British troops, camped there temporarily, but then the dump site would not have existed at the time of occupation, given the health hazard posed to soldiers positioned in the vicinity of

what would have been a fly infested site and related disease risk. Military positions from the period were not positioned at such places, more so when one considers the plague of Bloemfontein which struck the British forces during 1900. As for temporary camping grounds by British troops, these were also positioned with health considerations in mind.

Typically at other sites in the country, dumps sites were located towards the outer edge of the defensive perimeter and from all appearances this dumpsite at Lilyvale was started during the British occupation of the area, commencing sometime in 1900. Therefore it is considered unlikely that the living area was occupied by British troops, given the proximity of the dump.

The possibility that the persons living in this area during the war were Boer civilians seems unlikely. If they were Boer refugees they would have been accommodated in the Bloemfontein concentration camp, which is known not to have been located on this site. Again the proximity to the rubbish dump would rule this out as a temporary Boer living area under British military supervision. As for the possibility that this site was once a black concentration camp, this is highly unlikely. There is no evidence of arable ground in the immediate proximity to plant crops, and no extensive burial site has been located in the area, which would have been the case, given the high mortality rates in these camps. Records confirm that the black camp in Bloemfontein suffered losses running into the hundreds.

Records reflect that the scenario was very different when it came to management of black civilians by the British forces; particularly before the establishment of the Department of Native Refugees in August 1901. Black civilians, driven from the rural areas by scorched earth tactics or the fighting forces clustered themselves on the periphery of military garrisons and established settlement areas located around the towns and cities, such as Bloemfontein. Consequently in the case of this particular site it is very possible that black civilians were living here sometime between the middle of 1900 and 1902, given the proximity of a British garrison – a source of employment and rations, the likelihood exists that this ground was once occupied by black civilians employed by the British military. Employment by the military resulted in the receipt of military rations, often a motivating factor in seeking work; hence the surface scatter of ration tins located on the site. Military employees were exposed to the same diseases, such as typhoid fever, which afflicted the British forces, particularly in stationary garrisons such as Bloemfontein. Consequently the inmates of labour camps suffered casualties which were buried in close proximity to their living areas, given the overall defensive cordon and the practice of burying the dead as soon as possible which ruled out transporting corpses to areas far removed from their place of death.

It is also known that black settlement areas that developed during the war often remained at the site of settlement after the conflict and formed the nucleus for later townships which continued developing into the twentieth century. Examples are Brandfort, where former inmates of the labour camp remained behind as



farm labourers on the site after the war. At Taaibosch at least fifteen families remained after the camp was closed in 1903 and occupied the ground until the 1960's when they were moved elsewhere. Graves from the post war period found at Taaibosch are directly adjacent to the burial site from the concentration camp. These post war graves lie in non-regulated rows, all carry decorations and ornaments, similar to those observed at Lilyale burial site, while the concentration camp graves lie in regulated rows without ornaments.



**Taaibosch Black Concentration Camp, Note the regulated rows of graves and their construction  
Located by author, 2003**

It should further be remembered that, like the Taaibosch post war settlement area, many other black townships were destroyed and relocated by the apartheid authorities during the period 1948-1990, so it is highly possible that in certain cases, the Anglo Boer War and post war townships no longer exist where they were once situated. This is probably true for Lilyvale. A 1913 map of the area reflects a 'native location' in the immediate vicinity; one that probably had its roots in the Anglo Boer War but which no longer exists.

Therefore the burial site, located in the immediate vicinity of the living area was for the purposes of this report closely examined for possible characteristics that might reflect a relationship with a black military

settlement that later developed into a permanent township and which was removed by the apartheid government.

## **The Graves, Lilyvale**

The area was heavily overgrown during the survey but it was possible to examine each of the burial cairns and markers and to view the site in its totality. At first glance, the site displays various characteristics that lead one to conclude that it constitutes a post Anglo Boer War burial site of black South Africans. Grave ornaments and decorations can be immediately dated to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as can a number of the engraved headstones.

However it was the unique characteristics of certain grave markers and the cairn types that require further comment, as these indicate a stronger link with the not so recent past than the rest of the burial site. Of particular interest were grave markers that through their manufacture had the appearance of Guild Crosses, although they clearly were not, along with certain sections of the site which appeared to predate some of the more recent graves. Although the entire area appears to have been laid out in a non-regulated manner there is a section of the burial site that reflects conformity and regulation, suggestive of Eurocentric influence during the time of burial.

This section comprises the following graves:

### **Row 1**

Grave 1

### **Row 2**

Graves 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

### **Row 3**

Graves 67, 68, 69, 70, 71

These graves constitute cairns, similar in appearance and packed up with weathered rocks gathered from the vicinity. The cairn on grave 68 includes an unidentified brick type and further research would be necessary to determine if this type was in existence during the war or shortly thereafter. None of the graves had any visible markers such as engraved headstones or other forms of ornamentation that might identify the persons buried there or suggest a date period of the burials.

What they do reflect is a similar type of construction to graves of black civilians from the Anglo Boer War period, found on battlefields, other concentration camps or at the burial sites of labour camps; consequently this possibility cannot be ruled out. The same applies to a few other graves located elsewhere in the burial site, most notably grave 136, which comprises of a stone cairn with a head and footstone. This grave is identical in appearance to graves located at other such sites.



**Taaibosch Burial site:**

**Note the appearance of the cairns, similar to grave 136, Lilyvale**

The conclusion drawn is that this area constitutes the starting date of the burial site, which was regulated by the British authorities; hence the demarcated rows. The persons buried here were employees of the British army who may have succumbed to diseases inflicting static military garrisons and that they resided in the immediate vicinity. Assuming an average of a ten percent fatality rate amongst inmates, which is consistent with other sites then the thirteen graves in the three rows represent a labour camp population of 130. Given the area covered by the surface scatter, this appears plausible with respect to the amount of space that this number of people would have occupied, versus the impacted area that was examined.

Families and descendants of these fatalities who remained in this area after the war continued burying at the site until the township was removed elsewhere and hence the burials stopped in the 1960's. This is supported by the fact that that the engraved headstones from the post war period appear similar in style to other identified headstones from black casualty's from the conflict. Particularly so given that the person buried in grave 26 was 100 years old in 1937 and the person buried in grave 117 was 80 years old in 1948; both these people experienced the war as adults and presumably originated from farms or traditional strongholds in the rural districts.

As indicated certain graves have a similar marker to that of crosses erected by the Guild of Loyal Women throughout South Africa after the war. These markers, made from steel, comprise of a vertical upright cross structure, framed with a circle and are found on graves 36, 94, 158, 173 and 183. Grave marker 183 appears to have been constructed during the more recent timeline of the burial site, as the circular section is constructed from what appears to be the lid of a paint drum. However the remaining markers appear in every way to resemble a Guild Cross and appear to be a lot older than that of grave marker 183.

There could be many explanations for this but a reason could be that of an imbibed cultural practice by persons who witnessed and experienced the war and its aftermath. The post war period saw extensive memorialisation of the graves of combatants but excluded the graves of black men who fought with the British army and could have created a feeling of non-recognition of their services by the authorities amongst black communities. Consequently the families of deceased labourers and black combatants might have on their own initiative copied the marker style chosen by the Guild and replicated this onto the graves of family members who either died during the war or afterwards, as their own expression of recognition of wartime service.

Imbibed cultural practices are not unusual from this period. If one examines the engravings on grave markers of black casualties in other concentration camps, these in certain instances are similar in



**Grave of Sani Dami,  
Dry Harts**  
**Note the similar style of  
engraving to stones at  
Lilyvale**  
Located by author, 2001

appearanc  
e to the  
style of  
headstone

s found on Boer graves from the same period, leading one to a conclusion that farm labourers had adopted certain Eurocentric practices with relation to burials.

This is further likely when one considers that a black community living nearby probably had its origins to the area as a result of a wartime settlement. Consequently persons related by blood or marriage to wartime burials and those who died in the post war period would have been buried by their community, immediately adjacent to the original graves dating from the war. Hence these types of markers together with the other named and dated headstones postdating the war are located beyond the commencement point of the wartime burial site.

## **Recommendations**

It would appear that a relationship exists between the burial site and the Anglo Boer War and that some of the graves originated from a black labour camp, linked to a British garrison positioned in the immediate vicinity. It is also likely that rubbish generated by the labour camp may have formed the nucleus of the nearby rubbish dump and that the original living area for this camp terrain has survived in the area of the ration tin surface scatter. The survivors from this camp in turn formed a nucleus for a post war black settlement in the immediate vicinity, as reflected on the 1913 map. People living in this settlement buried their dead, some of whom were adults in the war, throughout the later course of the twentieth century, ending in the 1960's when the settlement was removed under the apartheid administration. During the course of these post war burials, it is possible that certain cultural practices associated with the war dead were imbibed by this community and practiced after the war.

The site is considered as holding significant value; both with respect to a further understanding of the military and social history and the experience of black communities in the Bloemfontein area, covering the period of the Anglo Boer War, through to the present era. It also holds significance as being associated with a key conflict in South Africa's history, recognised by the Heritage Resources Act, and the various dialogues to be unpacked by the intended developments at the Freedom Park, Pretoria.

Therefore it is recommended that the burial site be preserved, not only from respect for notions of observing memory to the past, but also for the potential value that could be unlocked for future generations. It is strongly recommended that the dumpsite and living area, be surveyed before any further obliteration might occur. It is recommended that the living area be surveyed in its entirety, with each and every ration tin, stone formation, debris and the impacted area being accurately plotted as currently very little, if anything, is presently understood about such sites. Places such as these form intrinsic assets of the National Heritage Estate. Of the 66 black concentration camps known to have existed during the war and this excludes sites dating before the formation of the Department of Native Refugees, only some 7 such sites have been identified and surveying work is still in progress. As for the labour camps, which have generally escaped most historians' attention to date, very little, if anything is understood about their functioning and histories at present.