

11 Buitengracht Street

Archaeological Monitoring:
Erf 798 Cape Town



*Prepared for TCI Property Developers
November 2005*

Charles Arthur and Mary Patrick
Cape Archaeological Survey cc
19 Dawlish Road
Plumstead
7800
Cape Town

Tel: (021) 761 4744
Email: maryp@method1.co.za

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1. Summary

Excavations were monitored by Cape Archaeological Survey from the 26th July to 14th September, constituting 28 hours on site monitoring. One disarticulated human femur was recovered. Archaeological remains consisted of two stone foundation walls, a standing wall and a small quantity of ceramics, glass and animal bone artefacts.

2. Introduction

The archaeological monitoring at 11 Buitengracht was commissioned by TCI Property Developers in fulfilment of the Interim Green Point Protocol.¹ In June 2005, Cape Archaeological Survey conducted a desktop study and a series of trial excavations.² Three of the test pits from the trial excavations yielded human remains. Following careful removal and analysis by specialists it was concluded that none of the bones were intentionally deposited on the site. Two of the trial excavations also yielded structural remains and a large amount of 18th and 19th century artefactual material was recovered. The present study followed the recommendations set out in the June report, in which it was advised that an archaeologist should be present to monitor the site clearance.

3. Description of the Study Area

The Study Area, Erf 798, lies on the corner of Buitengracht and Prestwich Streets, and extends on its south-western side to Prestwich Lane. It is located approximately at 33 55' 01. 12205"S, 18 25' 13 43324 'E and falls within the Green Point Conservation Area.

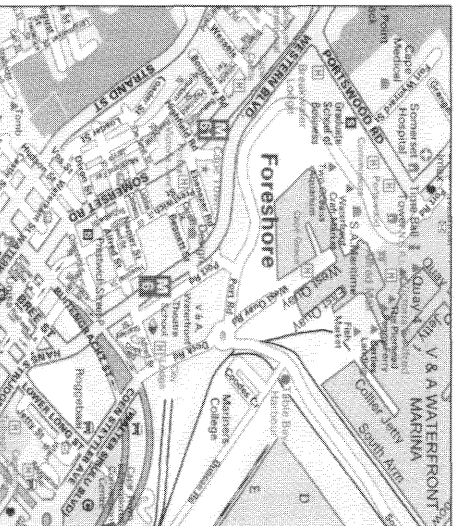


Figure 1. Location of study area.

¹ Bo-Kaap, De Waterkant, Green Point and V&A Waterfront Area in which there is a probability of burials being found. Draft Interim Archaeological Protocol for Developers to follow in the Green Point area until there is a 'Heritage Area' 27 October 2004. South African Heritage Resources Agency.

² Patrick, M. Blackenberg, J and Arthur, C. (2005). 11 Buitengracht Street. Historical Background and Archaeological Trial Excavations at Erf 798 Cape Town. Unpublished report submitted to TCI Property Developers. Cape Archaeological Survey cc. Cape Town.

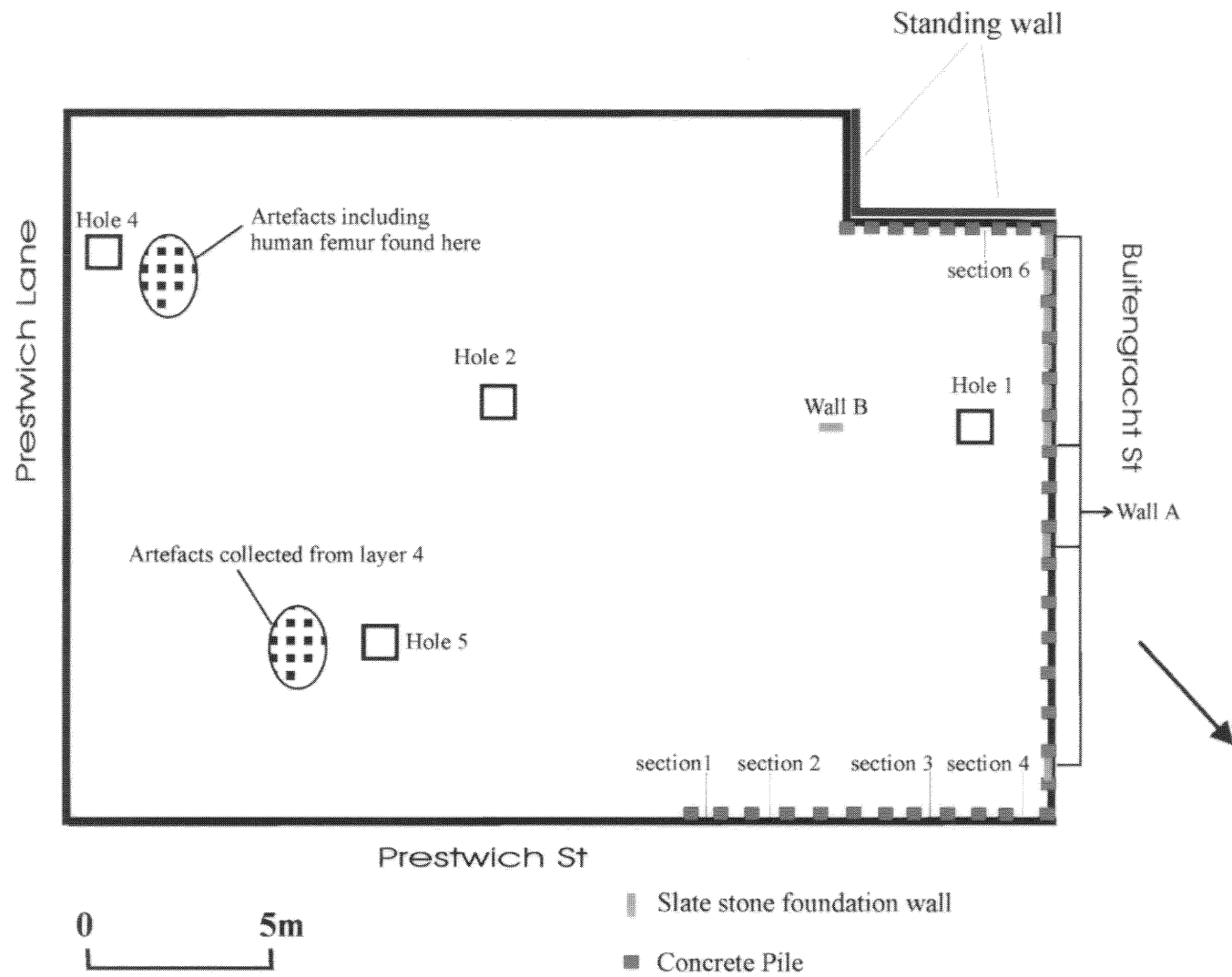


Figure 2. Plan of site, showing the location of: test pits from the June 2005 trial excavations, standing walls, recorded sections and areas of artefact collection.

4. Historical Background³

The construction of Buitengracht canal was commissioned by the Burgher Council in 1771 and the first mention of a road along the Buitengracht was referred to in plans and Title Deeds in 1806.⁴ This was completed some time during the next ten years, as a plan (SG 37/1817) marks Buitengracht Street in 1817. Most canals were covered over in the 1930's but the Buitengracht canal remained open until 1904.⁵

In 1840 the North Wharf at the lower end of Bree Street was opened, followed in 1857 by an act of Parliament authorizing the construction of a breakwater and a new harbour in Table Bay. Rapid residential and commercial development built up between Somerset Road and the dock area, and by 1862 many new streets were declared and several of the Somerset graveyards had been closed.

Reference to the owners of the five portions comprising the study site, and to the descriptions of the property, where given, indicate that this particular area comprised predominantly business premises. In most cases the owners are known to be merchants with extensive properties throughout Cape Town, and in many cases the Title Deeds specify a store and Yard. Indeed by the beginning of the 1900s when the Jutia's Directories became available giving detailed information as to tenants and activities, we learn that for many years from the latter part of the 19th century the address known as 11 Buitengracht was a Skin and Wool Store.

Very soon, however, probably due to its proximity to the docks, the area began to fall into decay and in a recent report by Seemann she concludes that by the 1880s the city blocks under investigation had become a multi-purpose, functional working-class neighbourhood and, despite its large concentration of Muslim communities, it also contained a large concentration of bars, hotels and bottle stores.⁶

5. Methodology

The earth removal was split into 3 phases to allow for the drilling of concrete piles between excavations. The northern section was dug in phase 1, followed by the western section in phase 2 and the southern portion of the site in phase 3. The excavation programme was held up on numerous occasions due to variations in the depth of the bedrock which caused delays in the piling schedule.

The mechanical digger was closely observed by a member of Cape Archaeological Survey until sterile natural deposits were reached. At this point the base of the excavation was closely inspected until it was possible to declare an area free of archaeology. Excavations continued beyond this depth without archaeological supervision.

³ Abridged version of the background history from Patrick et al (2005).

⁴ Plan SG 77 of 1806

⁵ Hyman, W.Picard, H. (1986) The Gentleman's Walk. Struik. Cape Town.

⁶ Seemann, U. (2004) Report on 31 Mechnau Street, Erf 742 Cape Town. Unpublished Report submitted to Bestcape

When it was possible to gain access to the excavated areas, more detailed observations of the depositional sequence could be made. One such opportunity was at the edges of the site; once piling and excavation was complete, a team was brought in to clean down the edges between the piles to provide a straight edge for the reinforcing wire mesh. Between the cleaning and the application of the mesh, it was possible to record the sections. Photographs were made of the sections and 1m sample drawings were done at a scale of 1:20. Numbers were issued to layers, and artefacts that were visible in section were collected. Loose artefacts were also collected from the spoil of the mechanical excavator.

6. Fieldwork Findings

6.1. Human Remains

One human femur was recovered in the loose spoil of the machine close to test pit 4. The area around the bone was stripped with extra care but it was not possible to locate the original position of the bone.

6.2. Depositional sequence

Three of the test pits dug during the June trial excavations, in the central and southern corner of the site, revealed a distinctive artefact rich, thick banded sand layer above the natural clay and bedrock. Human remains were encountered within, on top and underneath these sands in the trial excavations, so it was thought prudent to record this layer where possible. Close attention was also paid to the particular areas of the site where human remains and in-situ walling were recovered during the trial excavations.

Unfortunately much of the stratigraphy had already been disturbed during demolition, especially in the area of test pit 1 and test pit 3. In addition to the disturbance caused by demolition, a large oil sump was situated in the central part of the study area, around which there was a large area of disturbance and an extensive spread of oil pollution.

It was, however, possible to follow the sand layer (Layer 4) in the areas of test pit 4 and 5. Both of which showed a similar concentration of animal bones, including cow foot bones, to that observed during the trial excavation.

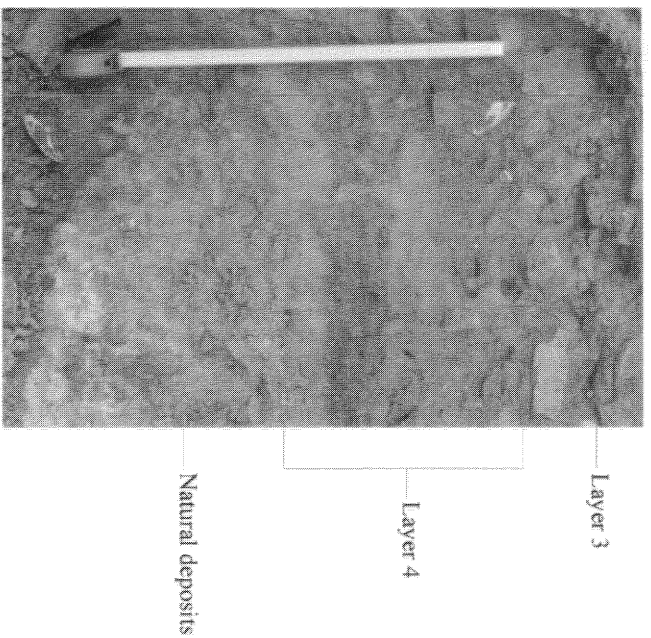


Photo 1 Section 1. Tape extended to 0.50m.

The cleaning of the north-east section revealed that the sands extended across a much wider area than previously thought; and they are now known to stretch from the southern corner to the northern corner of the site.

The 'banded sand,' layer 4, consisted of up to 4 alternate bands or lenses of coarse and fine sand with organic inclusions, frequent bone and 19th century ceramic artefacts. The same layer was observed in all the sections 1-4 shown on figure 2. Overlying layer 4 was a darker brown gravel deposit, layer 3, consisting of angular slate fragments.

The depth of the natural clays under the sand layers dipped sharply from 1.55m below the surface in section 1 to 2.05m in section 3, rising again to the very shallow depth of 1.38m below the surface in section 4 (Section positions are shown on Figure 2). The sequence of sand dumps in this area could possibly represent a purposeful dumping sequence in order to level the area for development.

6.3. Foundation Walls

Between the concrete piles on the north-west section alongside Buitengracht Street, a slate stone foundation wall, Wall A, was visible. It consisted of up to 5 courses of square/rectangular slate blocks, bonded with a modern cement mortar. Figure 2 shows the extent of the wall in the north-east section.

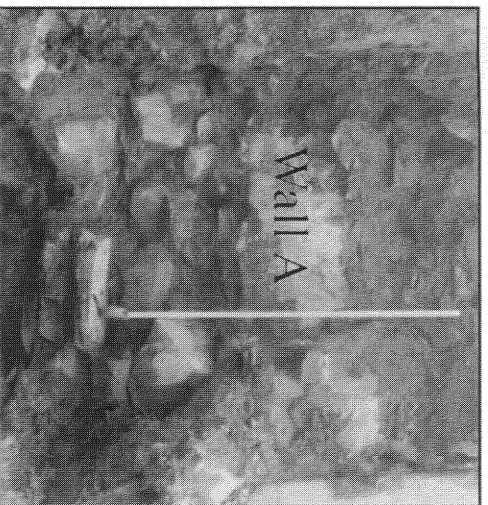


Photo 2-3: Wall A, between two concrete piles, near the northern corner (left), and near the western corner of the site (right). Tape extended to 1m.

A second section of slate stone foundation wall, Wall B, was recorded in the centre of the site in a very unstable section that was truncated by the oil sump. Only a metre length of the wall was visible but it was possible to observe a dry stone technique of construction, in contrast to the modern cement mortar observed in Wall A.

6.4. Standing wall

The in-situ remains of a 19th century brick and stone wall, with 20th century brickwork on top, was uncovered during the demolition of the former showroom in the western corner of the site. The walling consisted of at least three phases of construction (photos 4 and 5). The earliest was a low-temperature fired clay brick and slate stone walling with shell tempered mortar, typical of 19th century construction.

Built directly onto this wall was an early 20th century construction consisting of well-fired brickwork arches. The upper, second floor brickwork consisted of later 20th century brickwork and some re-used older 19th century, under-fired bricks.

6.5. Artefacts

Artefacts were recovered from Sections 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 (figure 1) and from the loose spoil from the excavations. Five sherds of 19th century English refined earthen wares as well as two earthenware sherds were collected. One fragment of glass and one red brick tile fragment were also found. 18th and 19th century porcelain and glass artefacts along with refined earthen ware sherds were collected from the spoil of the digger. The sample of animal bones recovered was too small to allow for meaningful analysis but a cursory inspection revealed they were of a similar nature and type to that recovered during the trial excavations⁷.

⁷ Dewar, G. (2005) Faunal Analysis for 11 Buitengracht Street. Unpublished Report submitted to Cape Archaeological Survey cc. Cape Town.



Photo 4: South east facing section of standing wall



Photo 5: North east facing section of standing wall

7. Discussion

The single human femur recovered during the monitoring programme confirmed the conclusions drawn from the trial excavations; that the human remains found at 11 Buitengracht Street originate from secondary deposition, either from animal burrowing or from 19th century development.⁸ The location of the disturbed remains is likely to be directly associated to the occurrence of the 'banded sand' layers and overlying rubble layers, that extend from the southern to the northern corner of the site. The remains were likely to have been deposited by the deliberate dumping of sand or by the dragging or burrowing of animals.

8. Conclusion

Earth removal at 11 Buitengracht Street was monitored closely enough to conclude that in-situ burials were not present on the site. Standing walls and features were documented where found, and all reasonable attempts were made to evaluate the ongoing archaeological sensitivity of the site. We conclude that no further archaeological intervention is required.

⁸ Patrick, M. Blackenberg, J and Arthur, C. (2005). 11 Buitengracht Street. Historical Background and Archaeological Trial Excavations at Erf 798 Cape Town. Unpublished report submitted to TCI Property Developers. Cape Archaeological Survey cc. Cape Town.