

**REPORT ON THE PHASE ONE ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
INVESTIGATION OF ASPECTS OF THE SITE KNOWN AS  
*DIE BRON* IN MALMESBURY**

Prepared for  
**Malmesbury Transitional Council**  
March 1995



Prepared by  
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The site of *Die Bron* is an important part of the history of Malmesbury as it was the location of the vegetable gardens of the original *Kerkplaas* established in 1745. This being the case, the National Monuments Council requested that an archaeological investigation be commissioned prior to development to ascertain if any traces of the earlier period were preserved. The location of the site is shown in Figure 1.

The Archaeology Contracts Office was appointed by Louis De Villiers Architecture to undertake the investigation on behalf of the Malmesbury Transitional Council. Aspects of the site which appeared on a plan accompanying the brief included the following:

- i) the hot water spring
- ii) the approximate position of the old spring baths building (demolished) dating to the early 1900's
- iii) the approximate position of the old parsonage (demolished) thought to date to the late 1700's
- iv) existing modern structures such as the swimming bath.

The ACO undertook to establish more precisely the location and nature of the remains of the demolished buildings, and to see if any substantial artefact bearing deposits were present in the area. It was felt that some time in the deeds office may be necessary to establish if any other structures had been present.

## 2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Long before the arrival of the Dutch in the Cape, Khoi-Khoi pastoralists grazed herds of sheep and cattle on large areas of the western Cape. Numerous reports by early explorers and travelers who ventured north of Cape Town attest to this fact. As is the case today, the soils of the *swartland* supported excellent grazing for livestock a fact that was certainly understood by these early inhabitants. It is very likely that there would have been an equally good knowledge of permanent water sources such as the hot water and other springs. This fact seems to be borne out by the finding of a piece of indigenous pottery that was found in one of the test holes on the site.

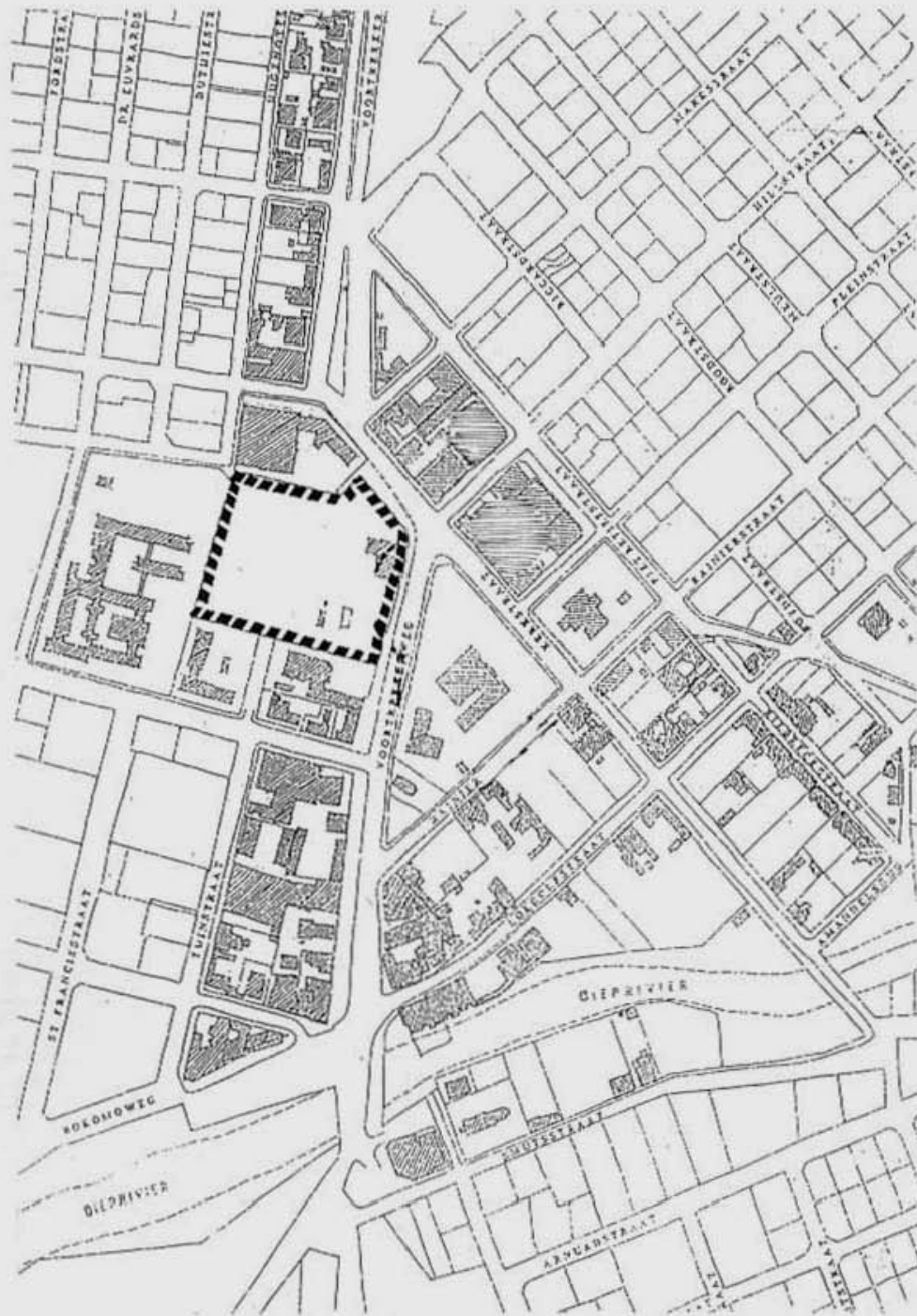
An old surveyors diagram dated 1744 is amongst the earliest documented use of the site by settlers. A copy of this early plan was supplied by the architect<sup>1</sup> and is reproduced in Figure 2. On it one can clearly see the Dutch Reformed church, the *Voorlesers'* house (T-shaped) and garden, the *Pastorie* (U-shaped) and associated gardens. A small insert on the same diagram shows the approximate position of the *Bron* site that has been investigated. The configurations of the proposed roads that appear on this early plan are still preserved to a large extent in the current layout of the town.

The locations of two springs are not easily identifiable on the plan although they are mentioned. A small stream course running from the north would have passed through the area where the spring is now located. Two plans from the deeds office show the site in 1840<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cape Archives M991.

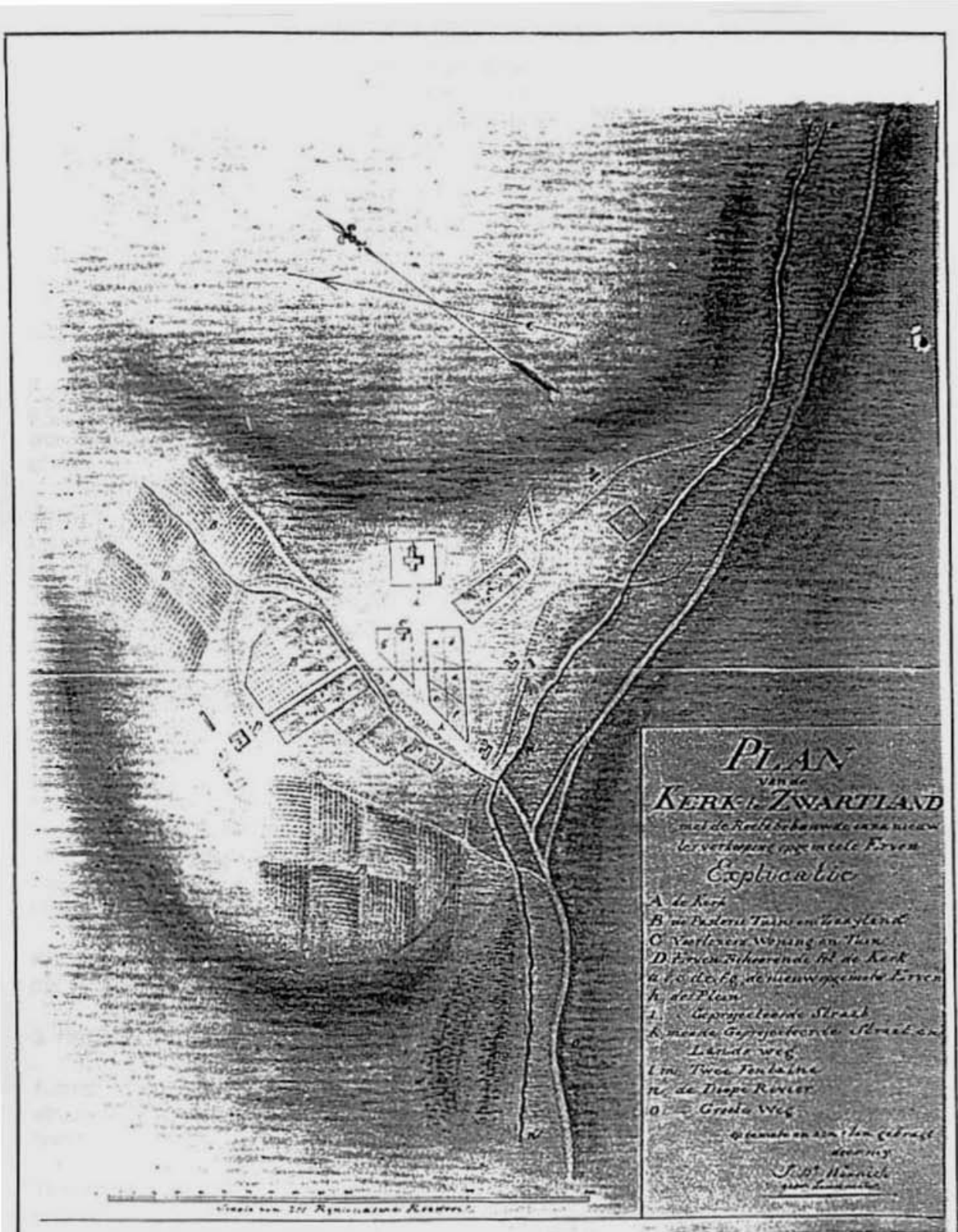
<sup>2</sup> Deeds Office SG 385/1840



1

Site Location





and sometime thereafter (undated plan)<sup>3</sup>. No additional buildings appear on these plans while the U-shaped *Pastorie* is still shown. The hot spring is shown in its present location on both. A later plan dated 1942<sup>4</sup>, shows the addition of both the mineral bath buildings and the building that was thought to be a later *Pastorie* (although we have no direct evidence for this use). This plan is shown in Figure 3. The spring is shown in its present position outside and immediately north of the mineral bath buildings. The land on which the Mineral Baths was situated was granted to the Dutch Reformed Church in 1841. In 1895 the church wardens leased the mineral baths to Garibaldi Toucher for a period of 50 years and the lease included buildings and the mineral spring. It would therefore seem that the bath buildings had been constructed sometime between 1841 and 1895 and may well indicate that the residence also dates to this time and has a Dutch Reformed Church link.

In 1922 the Malmesbury Municipality purchased the lease to the mineral baths from a Mr. Zeff indicating that there had been a change in ownership since 1895. Zeff was allowed continued use for bathing purposes while the council gained full usage of the water for other purposes.

While we were excavating on the site we were approached by Mr. Pieter Swart who resides at Gordon's Court next door to the site who said he knew of someone who had stayed at the demolished house. We have duly followed up on this and have interviewed the occupant, Mrs. Coo Du Plessis. She told us that around 1945, a certain Mr. Wellsford, who had been running a mineral water bath in Paulpietersburg, had acquired the spring property. This was presumably leased from the municipality. In 1946, her husband Dr. Barend Du Plessis, who practiced as a physiotherapist and chiropractor, had rooms at the bathhouse. At about this time the old *Pastorie* became a boardinghouse which she ran. Apparently the water from the spring was not naturally warm enough and had to be heated. She told us that the two palm trees that still survive in the vicinity of the spring were planted during the Anglo-Boer war. The property was later taken over by a Mr. Volschenk. In addition she had in her possession some photographs of both the bathhouse and the boardinghouse as well as a report dated 1948 which includes a chemical analysis of the water in the spring<sup>5</sup> (a copy of this report appears in Appendix 1). The photographs will be discussed in the following section.

Both the bathhouse and the boardinghouse were demolished by the council during the 1960's.

### 3. RESULTS

A number of test holes were excavated to establish if any archaeological deposits or structural remains had been preserved. A plan of the site showing the location of the test holes and the structural remains is presented in Figure 4.

Three test holes (A, B and C) were positioned on the grassy area adjacent to the gravel servitude road that traverses the site. Plate 1 shows test hole A. Sections show that in all the tests the uppermost 300mm was composed of introduced material, such as clay, ash and charcoal and fragmented building rubble. Below this level a loose grey granular soil grading towards a finer brown soil was found. This is *in situ* material and is presumably what was used for cultivation when the church gardens were established.

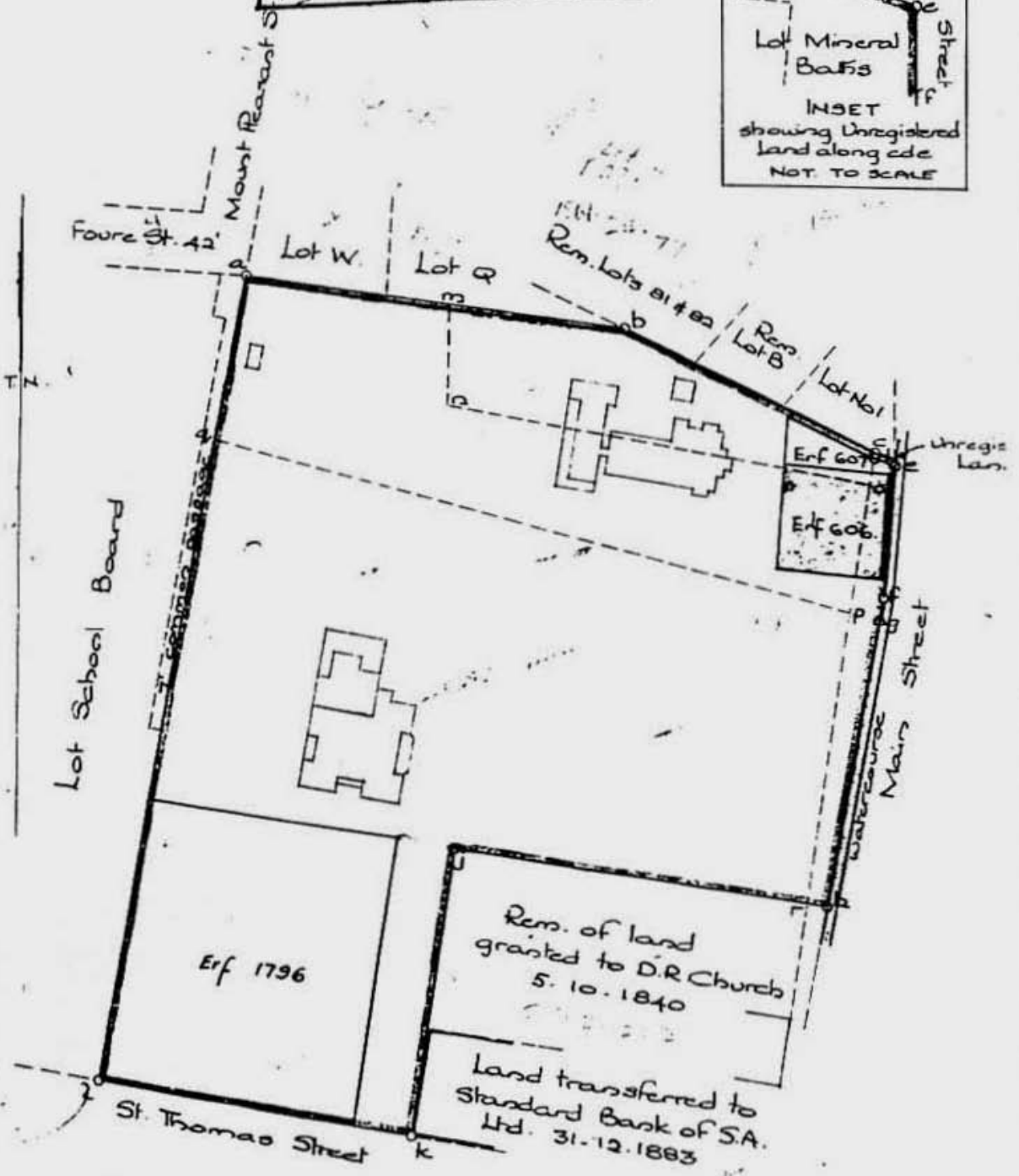
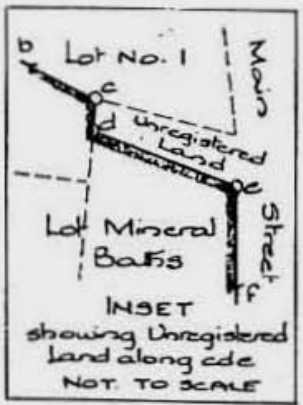
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<sup>3</sup> Deeds Office M2/472

<sup>4</sup> Deeds Office SG 4069/41

<sup>5</sup> Malmesbury Municipality: Statistics of Urban and Rural Areas of Malmesbury. 1948. Compiled by H. Geldenhuys, Town Clerk.

REM  
**CANCELLED**  
 VIDE Erf 4851 (C.T. 33517/80)  
 Eky  
 SURVEYOR GENERAL  
 1978.07.04



**3**

source: Deeds Office SG 4069/41



Some 19th/20th century artefactual material was found in the introduced materials and this includes glass, iron and refined earthenware. In hole A, a sherd of indigenous pottery was found at a depth of 500mm below surface. There was no stratigraphic indication that the sherd was part of a more substantial occupation horizon and while it is not unlikely that the sherd may have originated in the immediate area, previous activities such as ploughing may have introduced material from elsewhere.

Our impression of the uppermost material is that there was an accumulation of various piles of debris which at a later stage, probably after the demolition of the residence, was leveled prior to the planting of grass.

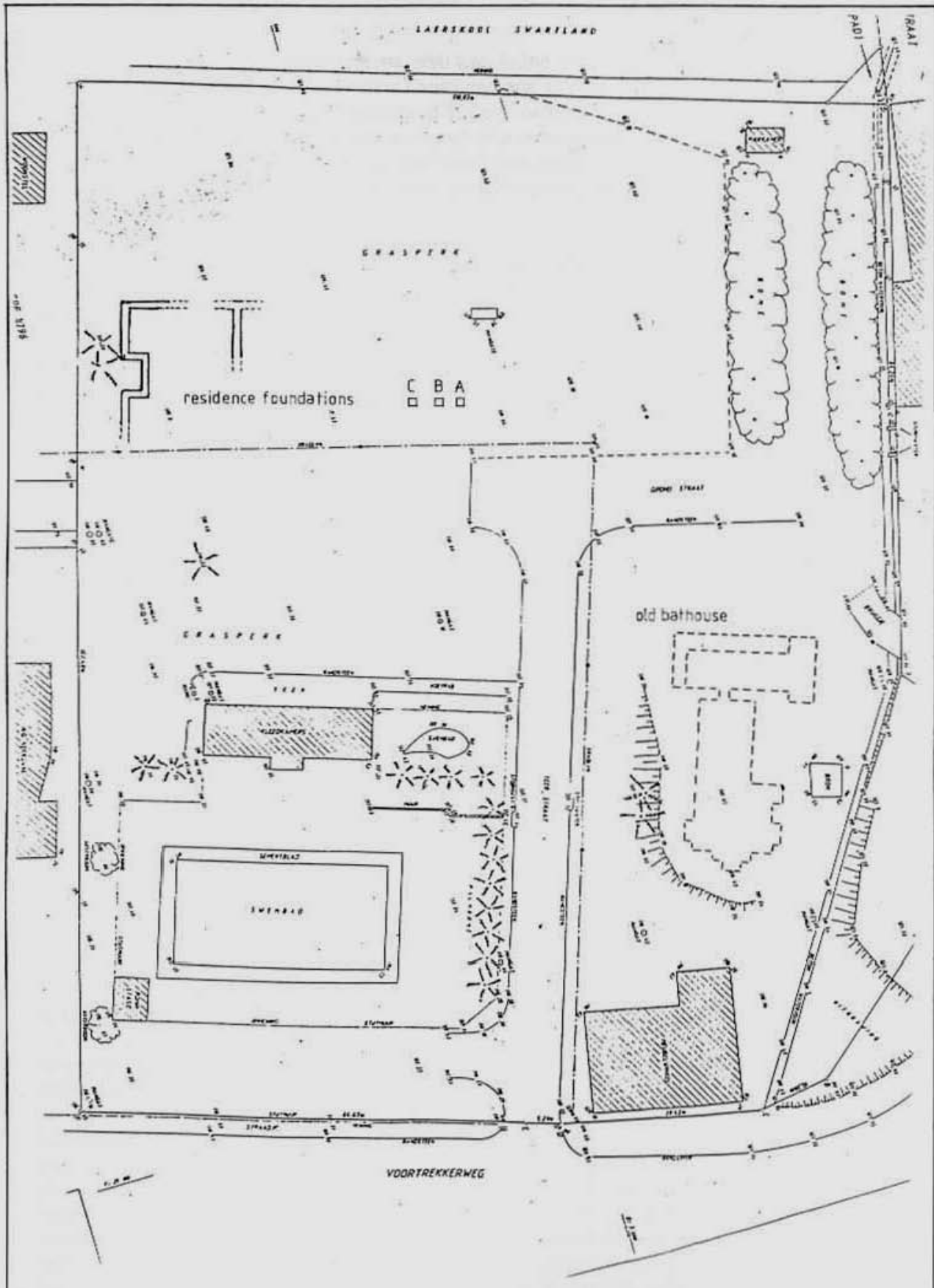
A second line of test holes was located parallel to the fence of Gordon's Court in the vicinity of two palm trees. It was immediately evident that were close to a demolition as the soil contained quantities of building rubble. The remains of a stone foundation were found in one hole. After discussions with the Transitional Council it was agreed that they would make a mechanical excavator and operator available to explore the extent of the foundations. Several trenches were excavated and enough of the foundation was exposed to allow comparison with the building that appeared on the plan of the house from the deeds office. Trenches and foundation can be seen in Plate 2. Various points on the foundation were surveyed to allow accurate plotting. The location of the foundations are shown in Figure 4. Foundations in excess of one meter in width were constructed with slabs of Table Mountain Sandstone and had been dug down into the loose grey substrate. Photographs from various sources showing the residence are shown in Plates 3, 4 and 5.

A single test hole was excavated in the vicinity of the spring to ascertain if anything remained of the old bathhouse. Part of a concrete foundation was exposed and the position surveyed. Informants suggested that the old mineral bath had been demolished along with the rest of the building. Photographs showing the bathhouse are shown in Plates 6, 7 and 8.

An small rectangular building still stands in the north eastern corner of the *Bron* site. On the site plan this is labeled as a store room. Local informants have suggested that this may have functioned as a mortuary in earlier years but we have not been able to confirm this fact. The style of building suggests that it was built towards the end of the last century.

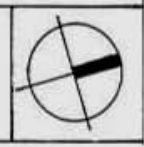
#### **4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The investigation of the *Bron* site has showed that while important to the history of Malmesbury, the very early 18th century buildings i.e. the early *Pastorie* appears to lie within the Swartland Junior School property. The later residence and the bathhouse have both been demolished and while parts of the foundations remain they are not considered to be of such great importance that they warrant preservation. Obviously, should it be decided to reconstruct either or both of the buildings, then the physical remains as well as the documentary evidence could be used as a guide to this process. It would appear that both the bathhouse and the residence lie outside of the area of the proposed shopping center and thus could still be preserved below ground. The store room building is certainly older than 50 years and as such is protected by National Monuments legislation. Our impression is that it is not a remarkable building but some consideration should nevertheless be given to its future. A permit will have to be issued by the National Monuments Council for its demolition.

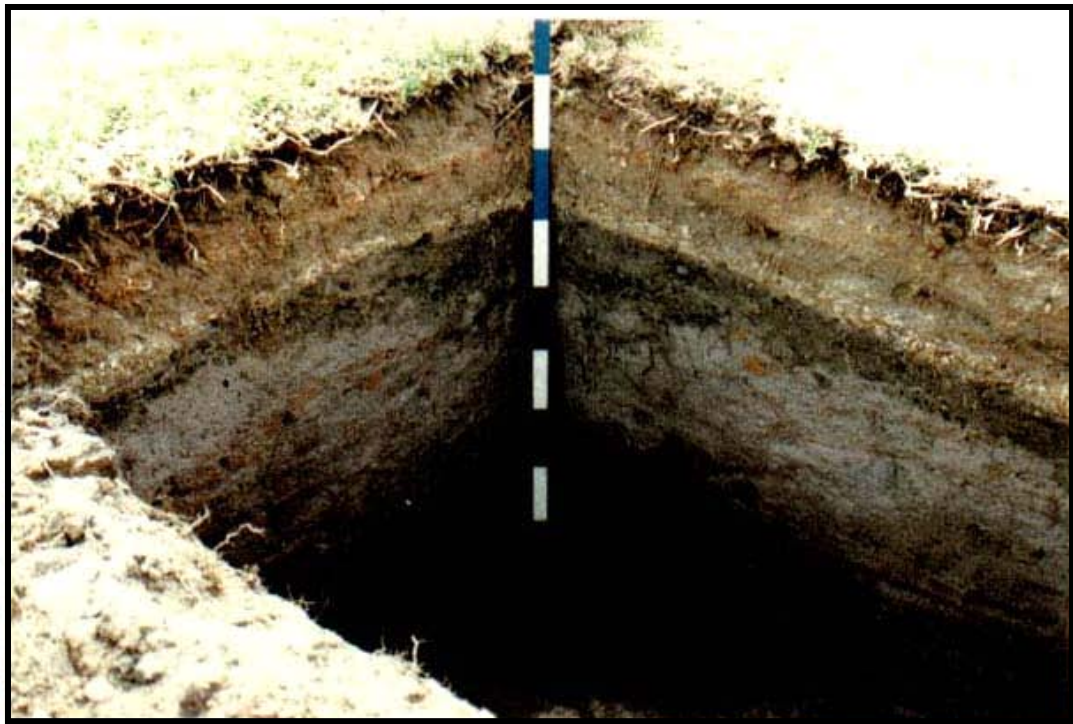


**4**

Site plan







**Plate 1** Test Hole A showing the upper fills and lower grey *in situ* soils.



**Plate 2** The foundation of the residence.



**Plate 3** The Residence on the Bron site (now demolished). Copy of a photograph in the Malmesbury Museum.



**Plate 4** Aerial photograph of part of Malmesbury showing the residence and part of the baths. Copy of a framed print in the Malmesbury Museum.





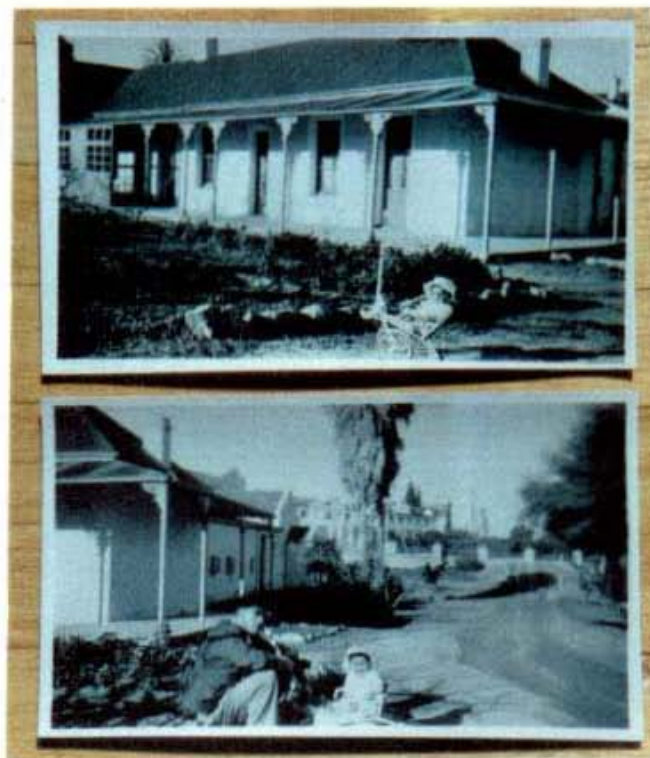
**Plate 5** Aerial photograph of part of Malmesbury showing the residence and part of the baths. Copy of a framed print at the Malmesbury Transitional Council.



**Plate 6** A view of the old boardinghouse and detail of front stoep c1947. Copy of photographs in possession of Mrs Coo Du Plessis.



**Plate 7** The mineral water bathhouse. Copy of a photograph in the Malmesbury Museum.



**Plate 8** Detail of the bathhouse c1947. Copy of a photographs in possession of Mrs Coo Du Plessis.

The sherd of Khoi pottery is an isolated find with no indication from the stratigraphy that there may be more of this material. Under the circumstances we do not recommend that more extensive excavations take place to investigate this occurrence. An inspection of the site during the excavation of foundation trenches should however be arranged to confirm this fact.

## **5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to thank the following people at the Malmesbury Transitional Council for assistance: Mr. Van Rensburg, Mr. Botha, Mr. Du Toit, Mrs. Looock, Mr. Fourie. Mr. Van Der Merwe the previous town engineer pointed out the approximate locations of the demolished buildings. Thanks are also due to Mr. Swart and his wife who organised for us to meet Mrs. Du Plessis. Thanks to Mrs. Du Plessis for speaking to us and allowing us to copy and reproduce her photographs. Thanks to Mrs. Keulder at the Malmesbury Museum who allowed us to view and copy photographs.

## **6. ARCHAEOLOGICAL TEAM**

Excavations

Dave Halkett  
Tim Hart  
Mzunzima Mjikaliso  
Mzwondile Sasa  
Harriet Clift  
Dave Halkett

Archival research  
Report

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Qualities of the Mineral Water Spring**

Extract from a report:

Statistics of Urban and Rural Areas of Malmesbury  
1948

Compiled by  
H. Geldenhuys (Town Clerk)



### MOUNTAINS:

The Paardenberg and Riebeeck Kasteel mountains are in the vicinity and mountaineering clubs are well-provided for in this respect. The height of the mountain range approximately 1,000 feet above sea-level.

### HISTORICAL:

The romance of the establishment of the township of Malmesbury at an altitude of 351 feet, is not the least interesting chapter in the history of the Cape. The whole of the district was named "Het Swarte-Land" or "Groenkloof" by Commander Van Riebeeck shortly after his arrival at the Cape in 1652. In 1745 permission was granted by Hendrik Swellengrebel, "Raad Extra Ordinar. van Neederlands, India, Goeverneur van Kaap de Goede Hoop", to twentyfour persons residing in the vicinity of the present Mineral Baths to establish a Dutch Reformed Church. A farm was acquired from the widow Mrs. Piet van der Westhuizen, for the sum of "Vyf en twintig honderd Kaapse Gulden", which would be equivalent to £175, and the farm "Kersevonteyne" (a certain Van de Poel's cattle-post), situate in the neighbourhood of Paardenberg presented to her.

In 1829 His Excellency the Governor, Sir Lowry Cole, visited the Mineral Springs and changed the name "Het Swartland", and proclaimed it Malmesbury, in honour of his father-in-law, Sir James Harris, first Earl of Malmesbury, England, whose second daughter, Frances, married Sir Lowry Cole on the 15th June 1815.

A Board of Commissioners was formed in 1860, and this gave place to a Municipality constituted under Act 1882 of 1896.

A Railway was opened from Cape Town in 1870, and for a long time Malmesbury was the terminus.

We can offer Historical places of general interest in the vicinity, such as the Dutch Reformed Church built in 1745; Mineral Springs 1660; Birthplace in the district of General J.C. Smuts, Dr. D.F. Malan and several other prominent men.

### OTHER:

We have a Bioscope, a fine public Library built on the old Dutch Style; Botanical Gardens noted for its beauty, roses being probably the finest in the country. Agricultural and similar shows are held annually which are renowned for horses, cattle, sheep, pigs and cereals.

### WIRELESS STATION:

N.B.: The wireless transmission station (Klipheuwel) is within the Malmesbury area, fifteen miles from Malmesbury on the Cape Town Main Road.

### MINERAL BATHS:

Not the least important of the natural endowments of the Swartland are its wonderful Medicinal Springs, delightful fountain of health.

An open Swimming Pond has been erected at a cost of £3,800 with a capacity of 200,000 gallons of sulphurated water and is well patronized in Summer by visitors and the public in general.

### REPORT ON THE ANALYSIS OF WATER COLLECTED FROM THE MALMESBURY THERMAL SULPHUR SPRINGS:

The Town Clerk,  
MALMESBURY.

Dear Sir,

In compliance with your request, I proceeded to Malmesbury on the 8th ultimo and collected in the presence of yourself and other members of your Council several samples of the water during active pumping operations drawing the water from a point 10 feet below the surface and as near as possible directly over the eyes of the Spring.

Certain determinations were made on the spot so as to ascertain the exact quantities of those important constituents which are more easily dissipated or altered in transit of the water to the Laboratory.

The samples collected were analysed, with the following results:-

(1) AS TO ITS SUITABILITY FOR DOMESTIC PURPOSES

	<u>In parts per 100,000</u>	<u>In grains per gallon</u>
Total dissolved solids at 100 °C	120.6	84.42
" " " at 180 °C	118.6	83.02
" " " after ignition	107.2	75.04
Suspended matter.....	Trace	Trace
Organic or volatile matter.....	11.4	7.98
Chlorine.....	56.11	39.28
Ammonia, Free & Saline.....	.030	.021
Ammonia, Albuminoid.....	.002	.0014
Oxygen absorbed in 15 minutes...	.011	.0077
Oxygen absorbed in 4 hours.....	.032	.0224
Dissolved Oxygen taken up in 5 days at 65° Fah.....	.106	.0742
Nitrogen as Nitrates.....	nil	nil
Nitrogen as Nitrates.....	Trace	Trace.

(2) BACTERIOLOGICAL EXAMINATION

The samples were found to be free from any trace of pollution or soakage from the surface, and therefore confirms the chemical analysis above.

(3) MINERAL CONSTITUENTS.

	<u>In parts per 100,000</u>	<u>In grains per gallon</u>
Silica.....	5.6	3.92
Ferric Oxide.....	.11	.077
Alumina.....	.29	.203
Lime.....	7.22	5.05
Magnesia.....	.63	4.41
Potash.....	Trace	Trace
Chlorine.....	56.11	39.28
Sulphuric Oxide.....	4.35	3.045
Carbon Dioxide free.....	.80	.56
Carbon Dioxide combined.....	5.75	4.03
Sulphurated hydrogen.....	.744	.521
Bromine.....	.091	.0637

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(4) THE MINERAL SALTS IN SOLUTION ARE THE FOLLOWING.

	In parts per 100,000	In grains per gallon
Bi-carbonate of Lime.....	10.58	7.41
Sulphate of Lime.....	5.85	4.10
Sulphate of Magnesia.....	1.35	.95
Chloride of Magnesia.....	.43	.30
Bi-Carbonate of Iron.....	.35	.245
Bromide of Sodium.....	.116	.082
Alumina.....	.29	.20
Chloride of Sodium.....	92.05	64.44
Silica.....	5.60	3.92
Sulphate of Potassium.....	Trace	Trace

(5) VOLATILE CONSTITUENTS.

Sulphurated Hydrogen.....	.744	.521
Carbon dioxide free.....	.66	.462

From the above analytical results it will be seen that the water in question which rises to the surface at a temperature of 91° Fah., contain free sulphurated gas in solution which readily disappears on standing through dissipation and oxidation of the sulphur, rendering the water slightly opalescent.

As already stated in a report made by the late Dr.P.D.Hahn professor of chemistry at the S.A. College, Cape Town, the water belongs to the same type of mineral water as the famous waters of Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle) Germany, which is perhaps the most distinguished of Thermal Sulphur Springs.

The strongest of these springs, the Kaiserquelle, contains the following:-

	In parts per 100,000	In grains per gallon
Bi-carbonate of Lime.....	22.7	15.9
Bi-carbonate of Magnesia.....	7.7	5.4
Bi-carbonate of Iron.....	1.3	.91
Bi-carbonate of Sodium.....	91.8	64.3
Sulphate of Sodium.....	15.2	10.64
Sulphide of Sodium.....	1.1	.77
Chloride of Sodium.....	263.9	184.73
Bromide of Sodium.....	trace	trace
Lithium Chloride.....	faint trace	faint trace
Total solids.....	.412.2	288.54

The water has a temperature of 131° Fah.

It will be seen that the quantity of the total solids in solution is considerably higher than in the Malmesbury Spring, yet the sulphuretted hydrogen gas which does exist as combined with sodium renders the water from your Spring as potent as the other medicinally and at the same time has the special advantages in being more easily liberated from the water in the event of the latter being used for ordinary domestic and potable purposes.

(6) MEDICINAL PROPERTIES.

The sulphur spring at Aachen has a special reputation in the treatment of Syphilis. By regular, free mercurial and other treatments coupled with the use of hot sulphur baths absorption favouring

That this is so clearly reflected in the results of the bacteriological examination which proved the water to be of extreme purity.

To sum up briefly, your Council is to congratulate in having acquired this excellent Thermal Sulphur Chloride Spring, and the more so in that it is possible to utilise the said water after subjecting same to a comparatively inexpensive treatment for supplying the householders with an adequate and pure water supply. The water after treatment will cause no intestinal trouble nor corrode any boilers or cooking utensils and may be used for gardening purposes.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed) J. MULLER, B.A.,

Public Consulting Chemist.

Cape Town,  
19th October, 1922.