

**Architectural Impact Assessment for the buildings on portion
252 on the property Everton 864, eThekweni Metropolitan
Council, Outer West.**



Southern Elevation: Emberton House (Photo: Author: 6 October 2008)

**Prepared for: Afzelia Environmental Consultants
Lower Hilton Quarry Centre
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1. Introduction, Terms of Reference and Methodology

Debbie Whelan of Archaic Consulting was approached by John Richardson of Afzelia Environmental Consultants to prepare a report with respect to the old structures on the above property, with the intention to complement the report carried out by eThembeni Cultural Heritage dated 3 September 2007. From this report, Archaic Consulting was requested to make the appropriate applications to *Amafa aKwaZulu-Natali* with respect to the structures on the site.

Archaic Consulting was advised that the Old Dairy and the building that currently houses the Fitness Centre were intended for full demolition, and that this was to be the focus of the investigation. However, according to the KwaZulu-Natal Heritage Act no 10 of 1997, demolition or alteration of *all* structures which are older than 60 years is subject to approval by Amafa aKwazulu-Natali, and for this reason, other structures on the site were inspected to expedite any further enquiry. A site inspection was carried out by the author on 6 October 2008, and this revealed a number of stone constructed out-buildings, in a variety of states of repair, and also with a variety of uses.

The baseline for establishing a basic date of construction of these buildings is complicated, as vernacular stonework, particularly if much altered, is very difficult to date. The consultation of the 1937 Aerial photographs of the area, (photo number 117B_043_05724) clearly shows structures on the site, including the long barn, the kernel of the building which is now the Fitness Centre, the house, what may be another large house, and the smaller structures on the house property. This situates all of these structures at over 70 years old, which makes them all subject to the Amafa application process. The aim of this report is thus to assess these structures, and provide recommendations for their demolition or preservation.

2. Executive Summary

The general impression of the site Portion 252 of Everton 864 is that it consists of a number of incoherent buildings which have little relationship to each other, although they all formed part of a much larger logical working farm-scape at one time. This farm-scape has long since disappeared, and with it, all context. Not only the Augusta Estate Development in the distance, but also new structures on the farm, add to this lack of context. From the M13 the house, however, has been a prominent landmark for many years, situated as it was intended on the old main wagon road through to Hillcrest. This structure also has architectural value, despite the accretions and alterations over the intervening years.

The buildings investigated were the old dairy, the structure which is now used as the Fitness Centre, and the main house. The brief was to investigate the structures with the intention of demolition of the former two, but the retention of the latter. However, there are a number of other more modest structures on the larger site which, although in a variety of states of repair, form practical functions and fall within the Amafa '60 year' clause. These are also covered in this impact assessment.

Conclusion:

Although the structures on the site have much nostalgia value, most of them have little merit in retention, due to lack of context, incoherence with respect to each other, difficulty in contemporary reinterpretation and inclusion in the intended development. The exception is Emberton House, and with this building, any application for internal or external alteration or addition must be made to the Amafa Built Environment Committee. More importantly, any portions of the Emberton wall which surrounded the original farm are perhaps of greater value, and it is strongly recommended that any sections of these which are known or come to light during construction proceedings should be approached with due caution and Amafa consulted. Demolition for all the other discussed structures on site is an option to be considered.

3. Short history of the site

The Halstead family that currently live on the property are descendents of some of the early beginning of settlement in the Hillcrest area. Russell Halstead's great grandfather was William Gillitt, a transport rider. He was one of the original speculative landowners in the area, purchasing 500 acres of the farm Everton 864, which he re-named 'Emberton'. A main house structure on the site is mentioned in 1882 when the railway was running through. (O'Keefe; 1988: 75)

'Another of the men who involved in wagon transport was William Gillitt, who "as a boy of eleven" had emigrated from England with his parents in 1864, to settle near Pinetown. In 1870 Gillitt bought five hundred acres (200 ha) of the farm Everton and established his own farm, Emberton around which he built stone wall of the kind common in the part of Britain where he was born. This work was done during the slack winter months and took eighteen years to complete. He came to agreement with the Natal Government Railways that its engines could draw water on his farm and in return he and his family were allowed to send down and stop the train if ever they wanted to make a journey. That is why there used to be a halt at Emberton just up the line from Gillitt Station. William Gillitt's grand-daughter Mrs Sheila Halsted, tells many stories about life at Emberton in the old days. The farmhouse, still occupied by the descendants of William Gillitt, can be seen opposite the Winston Park turn-off on the N3 highway.

William Gillitt bought land around Emberton in order to have grazing for his transport oxen. His wagons were then traveling as far away as Kimberly, Barberton and Delagoa Bay (now Maputo). He bought the farms Langefontein, Dovenhouse and Albinia. Gillitt married Elizabeth Field, whose family came from Field's Hill.

His son, Clifton, took over portions of this farm on the death of William Gillitt in 1899. 'At "Emberton," Clifton Gillitt continued to farm concentrating mainly on dairy farming. In 1914 he married a local girl, Jane Harborth, and brought her to "Emberton." Over the years, he was forced to sell parts of his farm, largely "Winston Park", "Clifton Park" and "Chelmsford Park". In 1946 his daughter, Sheila married Tom Halsted, who in that same year took over the running of the farm. Today this couple live in retirement at "Emberton" while their son Russel continues to farm.' (O'Keefe:1988: 78)

4. Assessment of Structures

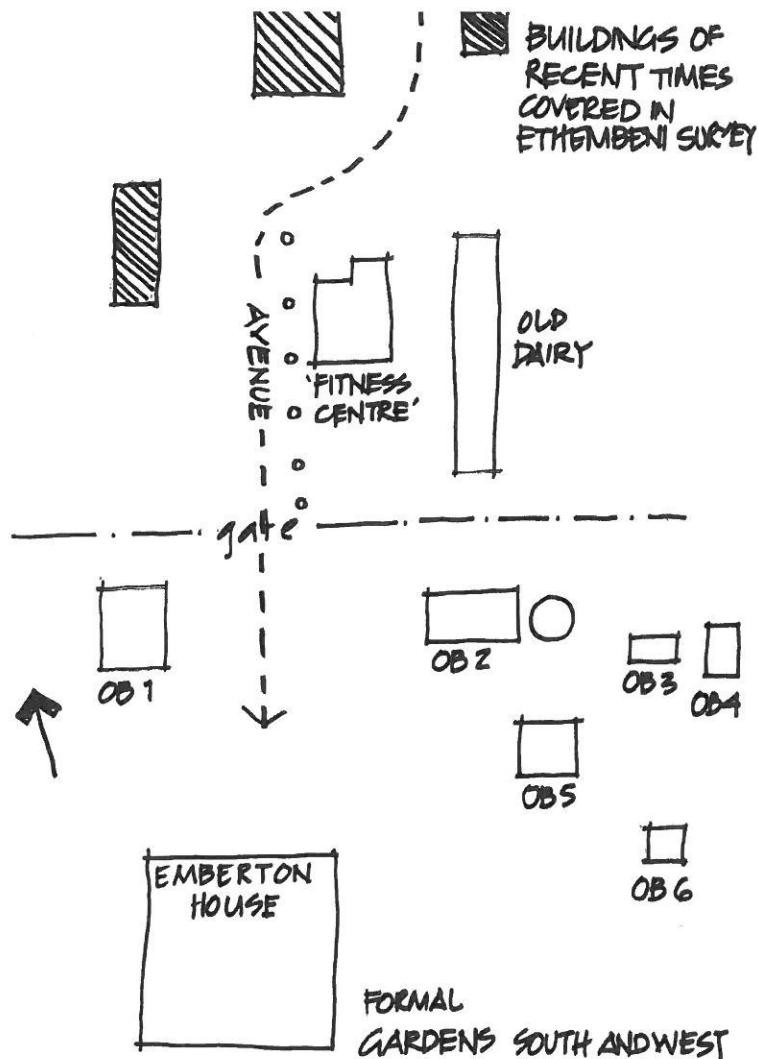


Fig 1: Layout of site with respect to the buildings on it

4.1 Emberton House

The current Emberton House is of mixed construction under Holley-Harveytile. It has been much altered over the years, with the original core being constructed of red face-brick. A strong dado of the same brick runs along much of the base of the structure. It appears that a large part of the 'extensive alteration' is from the closing in of a large veranda which ran around most of the structure. It was constructed in the early 1920's. Windows consist of a mixture of steel, louver and timber. Large sections of the veranda infill have been stucco plastered.

The history of the house on the site goes back to the original settlement of the property by Gillitt. However, this particular version is much later than the 1870 settlement. Bob O'Keefe says: 'After their marriage on April 23rd 1914, having had a week's honeymoon at Umkomaas, Jane and Clifton settled down to their farming activities. For the first 10 years they lived with Clifton's

mother in the original homestead. After her death, in 1924¹, they built a new home on the same spot where the old one had been. All the bricks, concrete etc. needed for the building of the house came by train from Durban as far as Gillitt's Station. From there Clifton fetched them by ox-wagon or trolley drawn by 4 mules. About 148,000 were used – ordinary bricks being brought from Refractories Development Syndicate in Durban for £3.9.0 per 1000 and face bricks came from Pietermaritzburg at £3.10.0 per 1000! Concrete came by the truck load at 6/- per yard – Coarse sand at 2/9 per yard – three wheel-barrows costing 35/- each were employed while nails were £1.20 per case. Forty five casks of cement were used at 16/- per cask.



Fig 2: showing house from south west



Fig 3: showing House from south east



Fig 4: Showing house from North



Fig 5: showing house from north east

Recommendations:

Emberton House	local	regional	national	international
Architectural significance	medium	low	low	low
Historical significance	medium	low	low	low
Technological significance	low	low	low	low
Scientific significance	low	low	low	low
Social significance	low	low	low	low

¹ This information was corroborated by personal communication between Russell Halstead and Len van Schalkwyk of eThembeni Cultural Heritage where their report states on page 8 that this was constructed in 1922.

Emberton House is currently inhabited by the Halstead family and is in good repair. Although it has been much changed, it still has a sense of the original scale and proportions, and elevational siting. The house also had strong connections with the established garden in the past, and it is strongly recommended that this relationship could be revived and enhanced in the development of the site.

Its condition, scale and proportion and its prominent siting, contribute to its forming part of a recently disappeared historic landscape of the area. It is strongly recommended that the house remain, and should any alterations, internal, external be intended, appropriate application be made to Amafa aKwaZulu-Natali in this regard. The fact that the building is much altered does not in any way diminish its value, nor its status as a heritage site.

4.2 The old dairy

This is an extremely long structure which is conspicuous on the 1937 photograph, which dates it to pre-World War II. It is constructed of random stonework with cement mortar, under corrugated sheeting. There is a strong history of dairying on the property. Currently, the major section of it is used as a storeroom, and a portion of it is currently used as an office for a business, as well as a lock up garage.



Fig 6: old dairy from south east

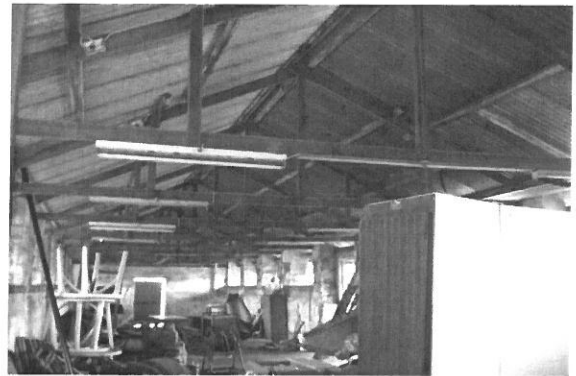


Fig 7: Internal view of old dairy



Fig 8: south end of dairy



Fig 9: dairy from north

Recommendations:

Old Dairy	local	regional	national	international
Architectural significance	low	low	low	low
Historical significance	low	low	low	low
Technological significance	low	low	low	low
Scientific significance	low	low	low	low
Social significance	medium	low	low	low

Records reflect the efficacy of the farm being used for dairying, supplying the Model Dairies in Durban (O'Keefe: 1988:79) It is a building which is more pastorally picturesque invoking nostalgia than one which can practically be reused. The structure is likely to have been constructed out of stone retrieved from the old Emberton Wall. However, despite this, there is not much to recommend it architecturally, technically, historically nor scientifically and demolition, should it be requested, is an option. Since the stone is possibly already recycled, recycling the stone again is an option to be explored.

4.3 The 'Fitness Centre':

The 'Fitness Centre' is plastered and painted conventional construction under corrugated sheeting. It has been much altered, particularly the windows which have assumed a post-modern format, and the 'Modek' sheeting to the gable ends. Russell Halstead asserts that the structural timber in the roof dates back to the original building.

According to the Heritage Impact Assessment report submitted by eThembeni, through conversation through Russell Halstead, the first part of this building was relocated from an staging post situated at Camp Road, Gillitts, during the Anglo-Boer War. This information was reinforced by the following words from O'Keefe, written in the late 1980's: '... These trains stopped at Gillitts Station to take in water. The men were able to disembark for an hour or so. The women and children of Hillcrest, on arrival of a troop train, gathered at Gillitt's Station, having brought with them refreshments for the soldiers. Tea was made in 4 gallon paraffin tins boiled on the platform. Replenished, the soldiers would again board their train, water bottles filled with tea for the long journey ahead. Their journey would begin amid cries and cheers from proud observers....In addition, a camp set up on the outskirts of Hill Crest where soldiers could rest both themselves and their horses. A large shed was erected to house these men, and it is interesting to note that Gillitt's wife subsequently bought the shed. This shed, partly renovated, still stands on this farm today.

Its position on the site is evident on the 1937 aerial photograph, though in a more diminutive form.



Fig 10: internal view of 'Fitness centre'



Fig 11: View-'Fitness Centre' South East

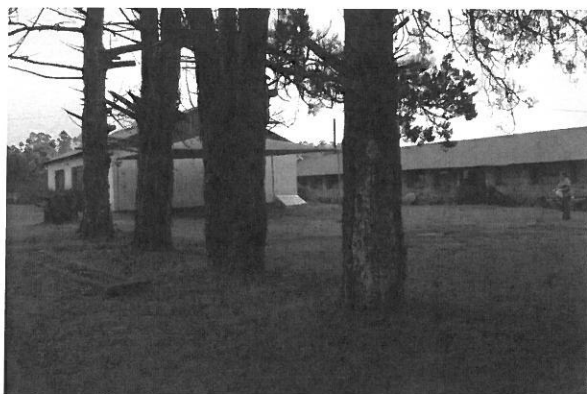


Fig 12: Fitness Centre in foreground, dairy in rear



Fig 13: view from north east



Fig 14: view on approach from north

Recommendations:

'Fitness Centre'	local	regional	national	international
Architectural significance	low	low	low	low
Historical significance	medium	low	low	low
Technological significance	low	low	low	low
Scientific significance	low	low	low	low
Social significance	low	low	low	low

This structure, whilst much altered and reinterpreted, has the 'invisible' core of an historic structure. However, despite this, there is not much to recommend it architecturally, technically, socially nor scientifically and demolition, should it be requested, is an option. Reuse of the structural roof timbers is an option though would be expeditious and a-contextual.

4.4. Other Structures on site:

A series of modest stone constructed structures, all associated with the running of a working farm, are also situated on the greater site.

Outbuilding 1 – Garage: (OB1 in Fig 1)

This is currently used as a garage and store room by Emberton House. It is a neat building of coursed but undressed stonework under a hipped corrugated roof with 'afdaks' to both sides. It has been extended and steel windows inserted. It appears in good condition and a good example of stone vernacular architecture.



Fig 15: Outbuilding 1 from gate

Outbuilding 2- shed (OB2 in Fig 1)

This is a building of very mixed construction, with stone, brick and plaster and painted surfaces under corrugated sheeting, both IBR and corrugated. Some of the brickwork is garden wall bond, indicating pre-World War II construction. There is a large concrete reservoir to the east situated on a random rubble stonework base. These spaces act as sheds and storerooms. There is little merit in this structure apart from possibly being waterproof.



Fig 16: OB 2 through fence from Dairy

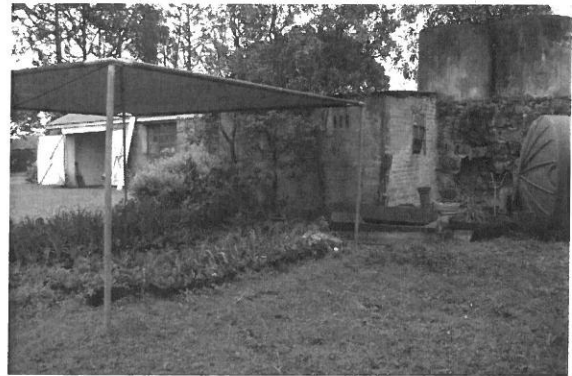


Fig 17: OB 2 from east (downhill)



Fig 18: OB 2 showing water tank/reservoir



Fig 19: OB 2- area adjoining water tank

Outbuilding 3- (OB3 on Fig 1)

Outbuilding 3 is a plastered and painted structure of little merit or significance. Because of indications from materials used, it is doubted whether this structure is 60 years old, but this has been included as it features within a random group of others that are. It is possibly accommodation.



Fig 20: showing house at extreme left, OB 5 to the left, and OB 3 in the front



Fig 21: OB 4 in the foreground, OB 3 in the middle ground and the dairy in the distance

Outbuilding 4 Cottage - (OB 4 on Fig 1)

This is a neat uncoursed stone building, again possibly constructed from portions of the Emberton Wall. It has corrugated sheeting and a dominant chimney. The brickwork to the addition is post War, but the building itself, gauging from the windows is older than 60 years. It appears indistinct on the 1937 aerial photographs.



Fig 22: OB 4 Cottage with OB 3 behind



Fig 23: Cottage showing chimney

Outbuilding 5 (OB 5 on Fig 1)

This is a part stone, part brick part block series of accretions which has little merit on any level apart from shelter. Again, the stone may have originated from the demolition of parts of the old wall, and may have formed the basis of a much earlier structure.



Fig 24: OB 5 from below



Fig 25: OB 5 (left) showing dairy at rear



Fig 26: OB 5 from east

Outbuilding 6- (OB 6 on Fig 1)

Possibly the most meritorious of the outbuildings, this is a simple and neat almost square stone building with a hipped Marseille tile roof. It has been altered on the one façade using large steel windows. It is associated with the new face-brick house as seen in the left of figure 27.



Fig 27: Showing OB 6 from north east



Fig 28: OB 6 from north

Recommendations:

Outbuildings 1-6	local	regional	national	international
Architectural significance	low	low	low	low
Historical significance	low	low	low	low
Technological significance	low	low	low	low
Scientific significance	low	low	low	low
Social significance	low	low	low	low

These buildings are all of basic vernacular construction and used as purely functional structures. The author sees little merit in their retention, except in a contrivedly pastoral landscape, and demolition is thus an option. The author is also of the opinion that the stone came from parts of the old Emberton Wall (see section 5) and suggests that the possibility of similar recycling be considered and even interpreted as such, ensuring a small amount of historical continuity.

5. The Emberton Wall

The author has taken the liberty of quoting Bob O'Keefe on this, as this tells the story of the wall in an eloquent fashion.

'18 MILES OF WALL- Four years after his marriage he (William Gillitt) bought 500 acres of land in the vicinity of Hillcrest calling the farm Emberton, after his birthplace in England. As land was cheap in those days he gradually bought more and more till he owned 4 farms, Langfontein, Dovehouse, Albina and Emberton. The farms embraced the area on which today Gillits and Hillcrest are sited...Fencing material was very scarce so William decided to use dry stone-walls as he had seen used in Bucks. A dry-stone wall is made without the use of any binding medium such as cement. The building of these walls is considered "an art". During the winter months when there were not much agriculture to be done on the farm, the huge stones were quarried from the surrounding hillsides and carried by ox-wagon to the building site as work progressed. (18 miles of wall, 4 feet high and 2-3 feet thick). The wall took him 18 years to build with the help

of his Zulu labourers – imagine a wall from Emberton to Toll-Gate (near the entrance to Durban). These walls were built to enclose the extensive farmlands, and acted as boundary fences and paddocks for the cattle. (Portions of the wall are still to be seen today on subdivisions of various townships in and around Hillcrest and Gillits – Chelmsford Park, Winston Park, Hillcrest Park and Belvedere which were laid out in later years when large tracts of the land were sold)

This historic endeavour is an important part of the social and technical history of this area, and although most of the wall has disappeared over time, it is emphasized that should the developers encounter any fragments of this wall which were hitherto unknown, or should any known parts of the wall which fall into the development be intended for demolition or alteration, that Amafa be contacted and due correspondence regarding its interpretation and the manner of its use be dealt with in a constructive and professional fashion. This wall is an important part of the development of Emberton Farm, and the Emberton Estate is in the most enviable position to be able to defend and reinterpret a part of local history and industrial archaeology.

References

O'Keefe, B (1988) *Pioneers Progress, Early Natal*
Hillcrest, Hilltop Publications

Maps: Government Maps, 1930 Edition
Aerial Photograph: 1937 series 117B_043_05724