

# A DESKTOP ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF PORTSWOOD RIDGE – SITE B, GREEN POINT, CAPE TOWN

Prepared for

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Report by

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## **Introduction**

ACO Associates cc was requested by Dr Nicolas Bauman to provide a basic assessment of possible heritage and/or archaeological remains present on Portswood Ridge – Site B after this was required by Heritage Western Cape (HWC) upon submission of the Notification of Intent to Develop (NID).

ACO Associates cc has a large body of knowledge on this area as it was also involved in the assessments and excavations at Portswood Ridge – Sites A and C, the excavations at the BP Headquarters, and at a number of other sites in and around the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront.

## **Historical Background**

The Green Point area was on the outskirts of the colonial city of Cape Town which was mostly contained between Buitenkant en Buitengracht streets and the water's edge. For a long time it was the place where only the light house, a powder magazine and grave yards were located. Even though there were several officially demarcated graveyards granted to the different religions, it is well-established and documented that burials took place outside of these (e.g. the burials encountered in Cobern and Prestwich streets, and the numerous contemporary references to burials taking place at *Witsand* behind Gallows Hill, some of which were excavated at the Marina Residential development at the V&A Waterfront).

As the city expanded from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Green Point area steadily filled up with residential (rental) dwellings, warehousing, shops, pubs, the Old Somerset hospital etc.<sup>1</sup> The growth in shipping traffic after the start of British rule at the Cape necessitated substantial investments in harbour and rail infrastructure and facilities. The harbour works commenced halfway the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued for 50 years or more.<sup>2</sup> In order to accomplish this feat of quarrying and construction a large body of workers was required. Initially dockworkers were recruited in the Eastern Cape (former Transkei) and housed in barracks, but as their low cost, availability and dependability was not always guaranteed, a decision was taken to use convict labour. As opposed to free dockworkers who were housed in barracks or rented accommodation, convicts had to be housed in a prison.<sup>3</sup>

In 1860 the Breakwater Convict Station was built to house convicts of indigenous origin. The sprawling nature of it is indicative of an emphasis on the provision of cheap labour rather than control and rehabilitation. A new convict station was built between 1895 and 1901 with a very different approach to punishment in mind: the focus now lay on the need for reform from within through rehabilitation and the teaching of skills. This necessitated high degrees of control to ensure surveillance, very clear in its completely enclosed and 'inwards' layout as opposed to the relative 'openness' of the older Breakwater Convict Station. This difference in approach was applied along the lines of race.<sup>4</sup>

The expansion of the harbour was based on the plans designed by Sir John Coode, a British engineer who visited the Cape in 1876 and 1877. He identified the quarry excavated for material to build the break water as the first place to extend the harbour facilities by flooding it. Subsequently it was believed that that is was more opportune to develop the harbour outside of the existing basins and

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick & Clift, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Malan n.d.

<sup>3</sup> Archaeology Contracts Office, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Archaeology Contracts Office, 2008.

the quarry was eventually used as a 'tank farm' to store fuel in above ground fuel tanks. Some of these fuel tanks were still present in 1992 before any residential developments started.<sup>5</sup>

### **Methodology**

For the purpose of this desktop assessment, previous reports by ACO Associates and by other archaeologists were reviewed, and the ACO map and historical photograph collections were searched.

Below is presented a summary of findings on sites nearby and a visual overview of the land use on the site.

The sites closest to the current area of interest where archaeological investigations have taken place are the BP Headquarters site and the Breakwater Convict Stations. Other sites nearby include the Marina Residential excavations and the work on the Green Point Common. (Figure 1)

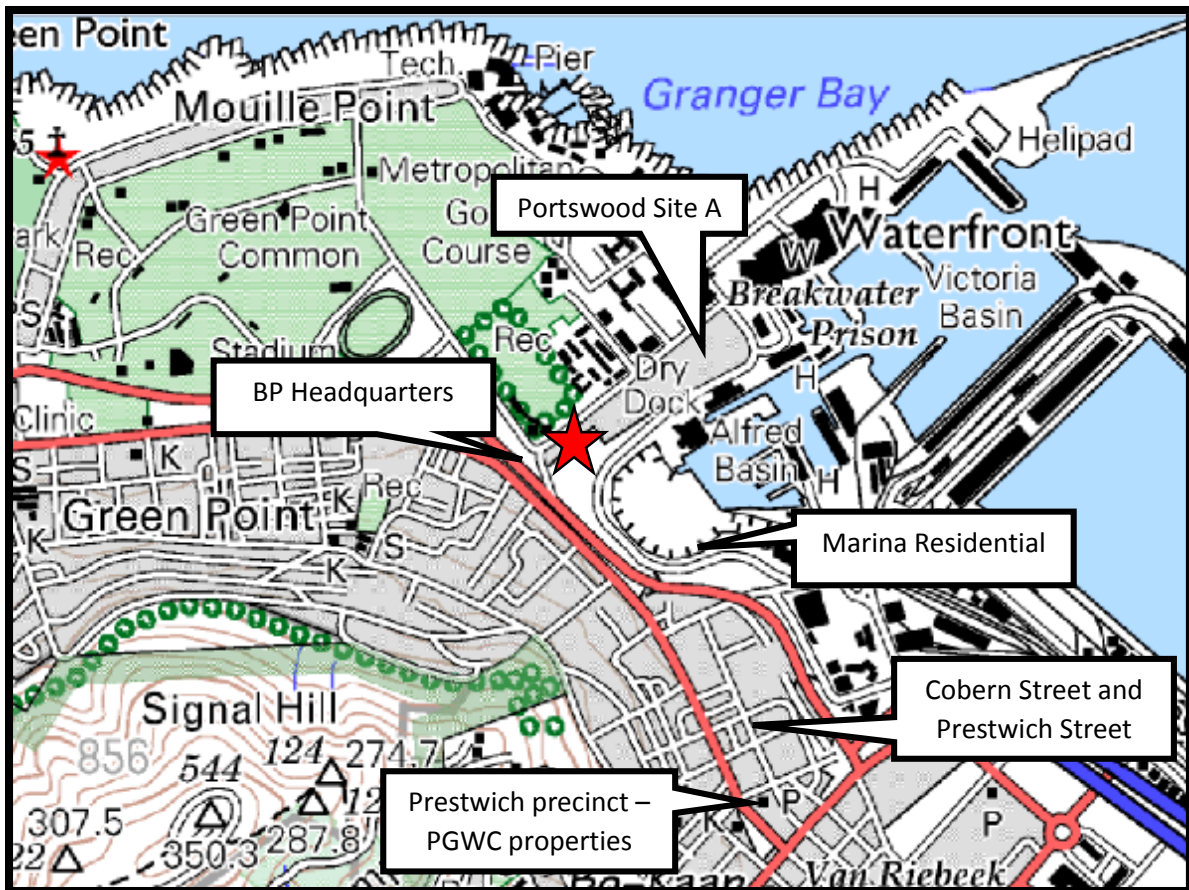


Figure 1: Map of site (red star in the centre) in relation to previous excavations in the area by ACO (Surveyor General, 1/250000, 3318CD)

In 1991, the Archaeology Contracts Office undertook an initial exploration of Portswood Ridge.<sup>6</sup> This was followed in 1992 by excavations and detailed recordings at the Old Breakwater Convict Station.

<sup>5</sup> Halkett, 2003.

It was suggested that the existing historical paving was partly lifted in the past and that the drain/channelling system had been more extensive. Below the tarmac, two distinct layers of soil could be observed, both void of artefactual material. The excavation of the well showed the presence of bedrock (Malmesbury shale) at 5.5 meters below surface level. <sup>7</sup>

In 2003, during the earthmoving works for the new BP headquarters between Dock Road and Portswood Road, a large concentration of bone was discovered. Upon further investigation and excavation, it was established that at some point in time, likely in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a 15-20m long trench was dug to re-inter human bone unearthed at an unknown place probably nearby (*Witsand?*). Bedrock was not reached in this trench, but it was presumed to be close to the bottom of the trench (at just over 1 meter below surface level) as the latter was excavated quite deeply into the *in situ* ferruginous orange clay which overlays the bedrock. A very limited amount of other artefactual material was found with the bone, and was almost all related to the burials.<sup>8</sup>

Further away from the current study area are the excavations at the Marina Residential development which took place in 2000. As another accidental discovery of human bone, this site contained *in situ* remains of people buried in the informal pauper's burial area between Chavonnes Battery and Gallow's Hill. The remains were removed and no bedrock was exposed. <sup>9</sup>

A selection of mapping and photographic material is presented below in chronological order to illustrate the use of the area as it relates to the short historical overview of the harbour area given above.

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<sup>6</sup> Halkett & Hart, 1991.

<sup>7</sup> Halkett & Hart, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Halkett, 2003 and Halkett, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Halkett, 2000.

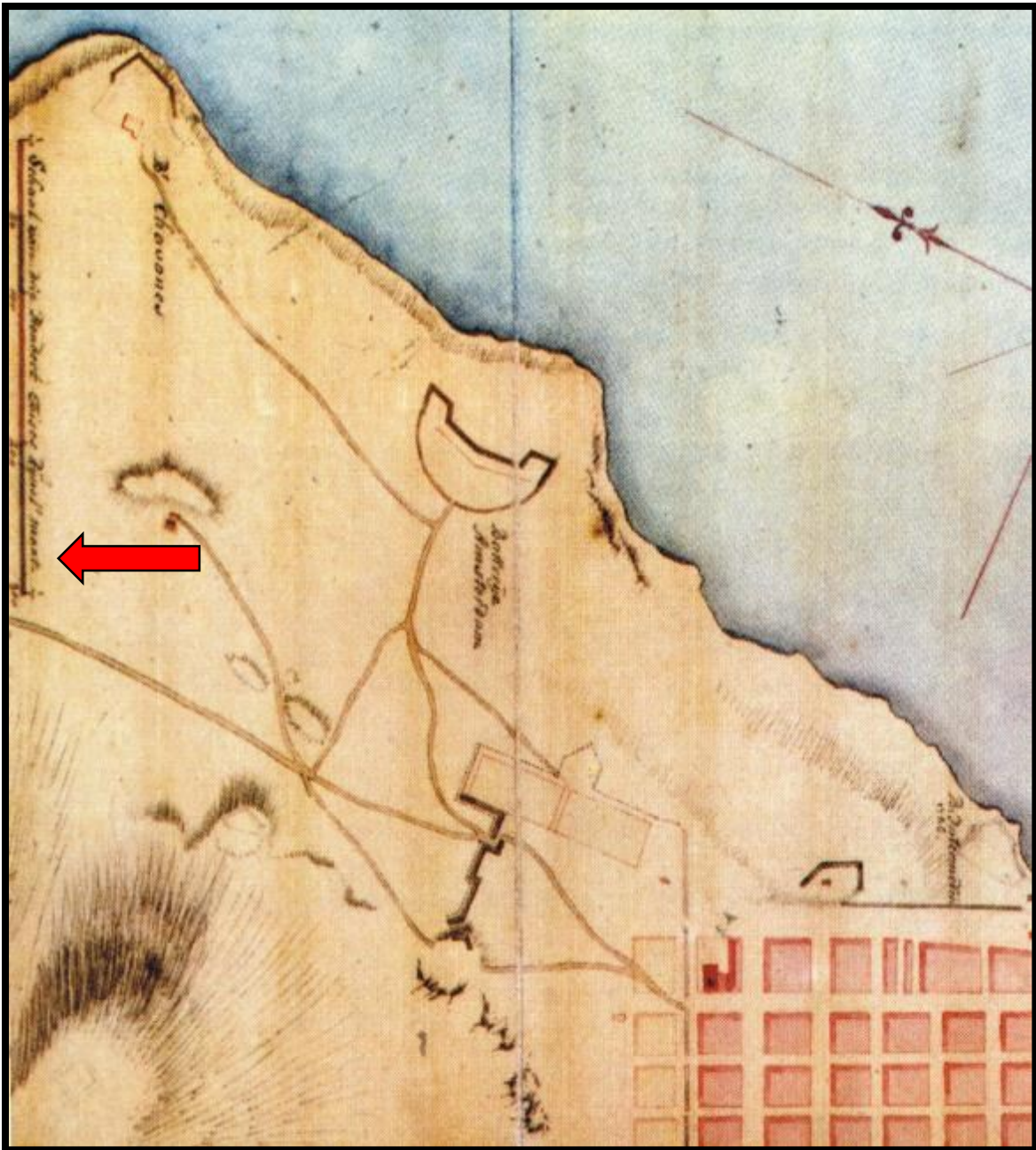


Figure 2: 1786 (Detail of M1-339). The arrow points to the current study area.



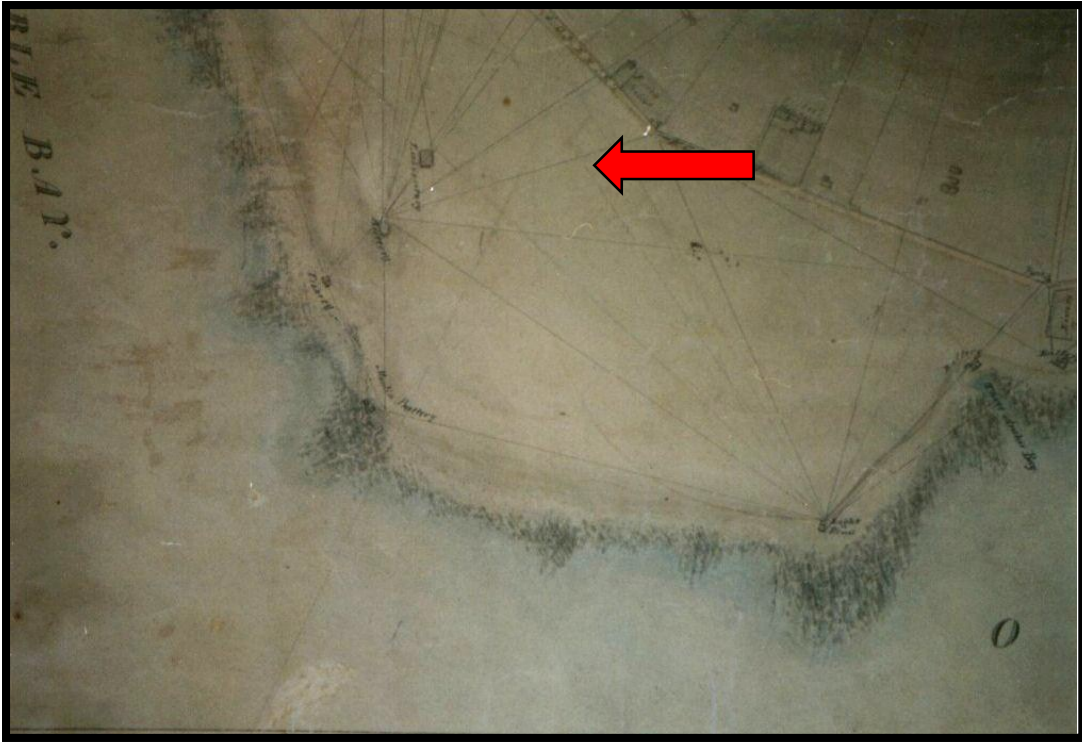


Figure 3: 1836 (Cape Archive M 1/571).

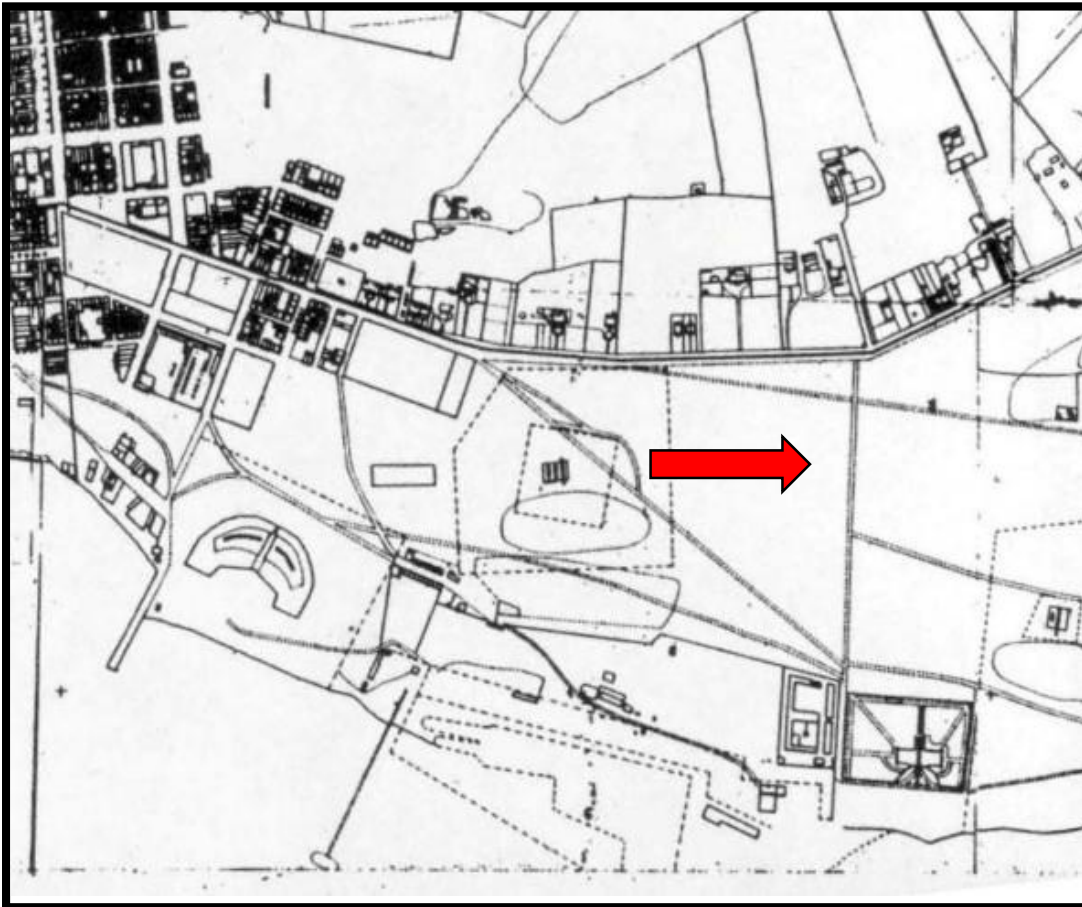


Figure 4: 1862 (detail of Snow map).

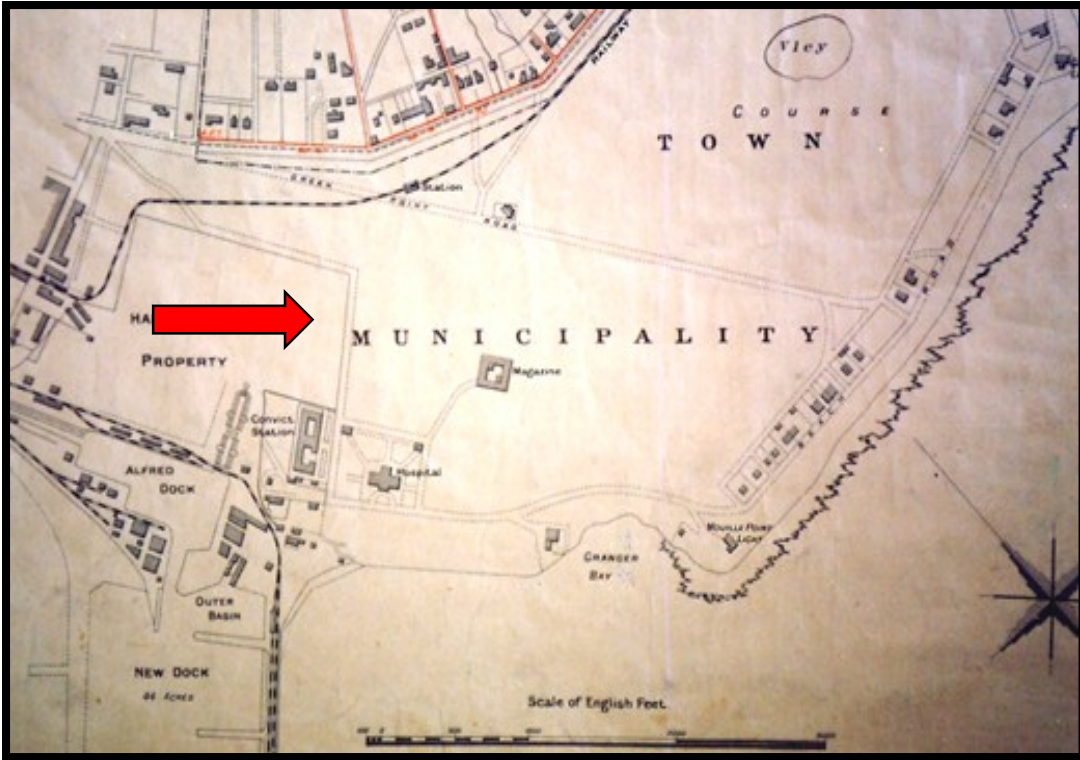


Figure 5: 1891 (M1/235 Cape Archives).

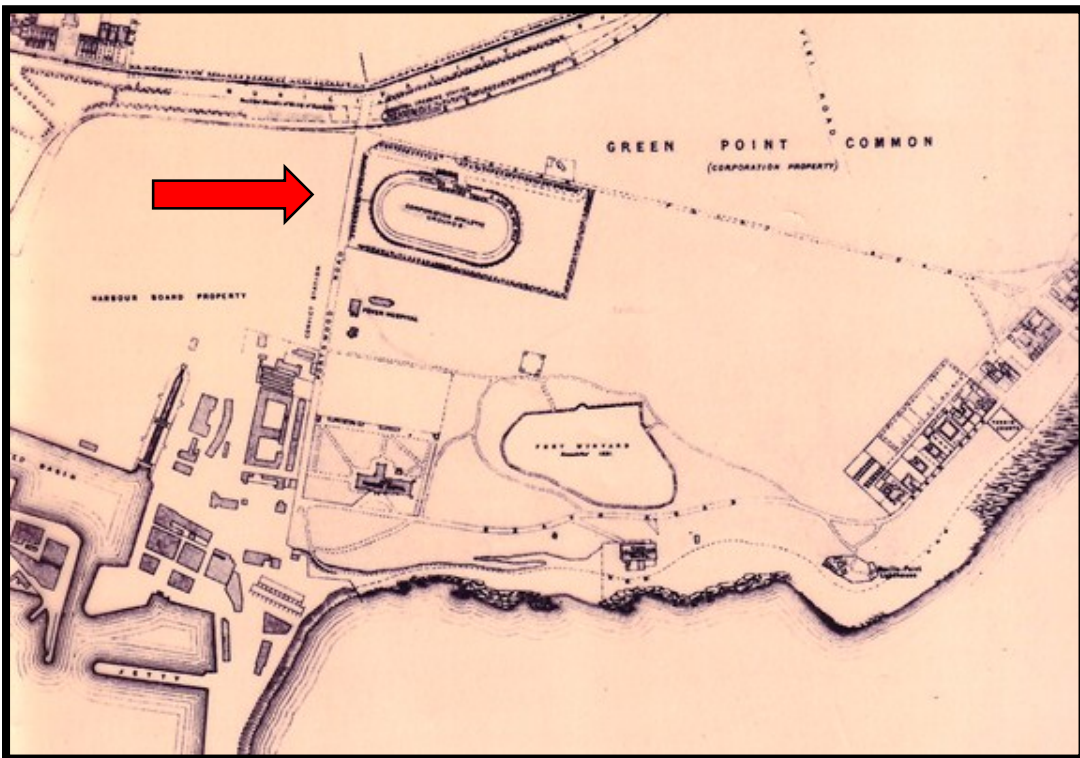


Figure 6: c1900 (UCT Archaeology historic maps collection).



Figure 7: 1899-1902 (Cape Archive E9342).





Figure 8: 1899-1902 (Source unknown).

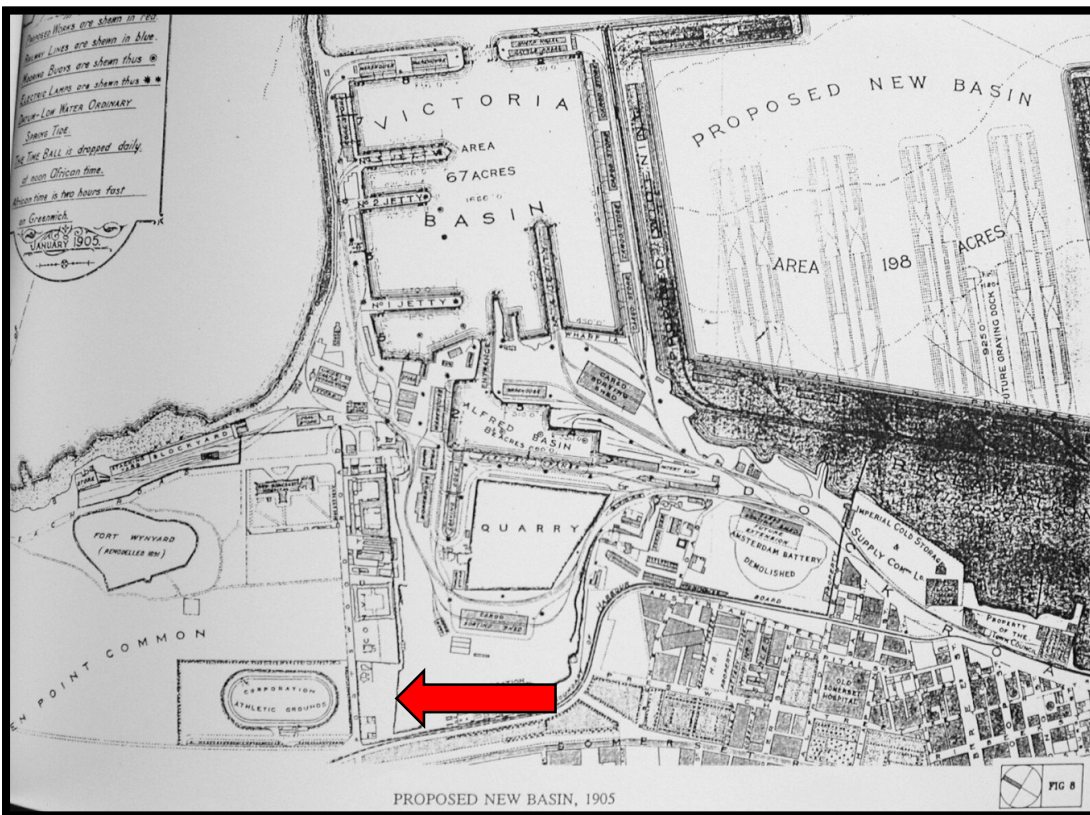


Figure 9: 1905 (Proposed plan for the harbour).



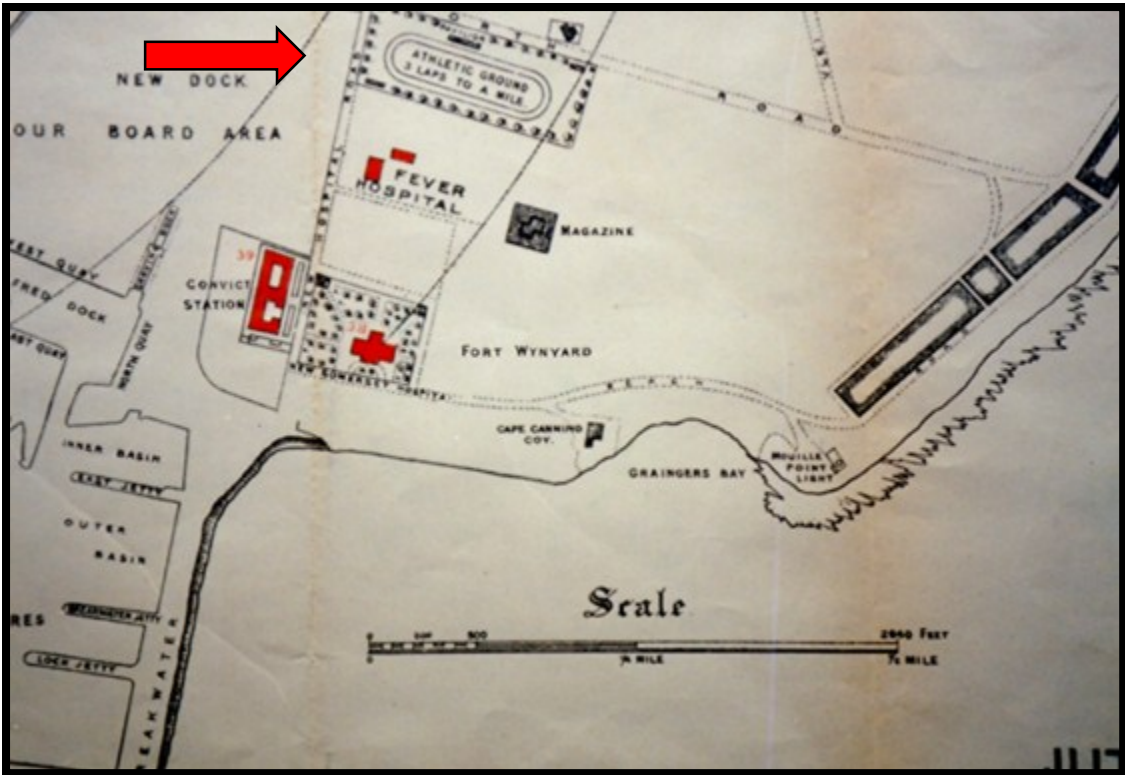


Figure 10: 1909. (South African Library Juta's Directory).

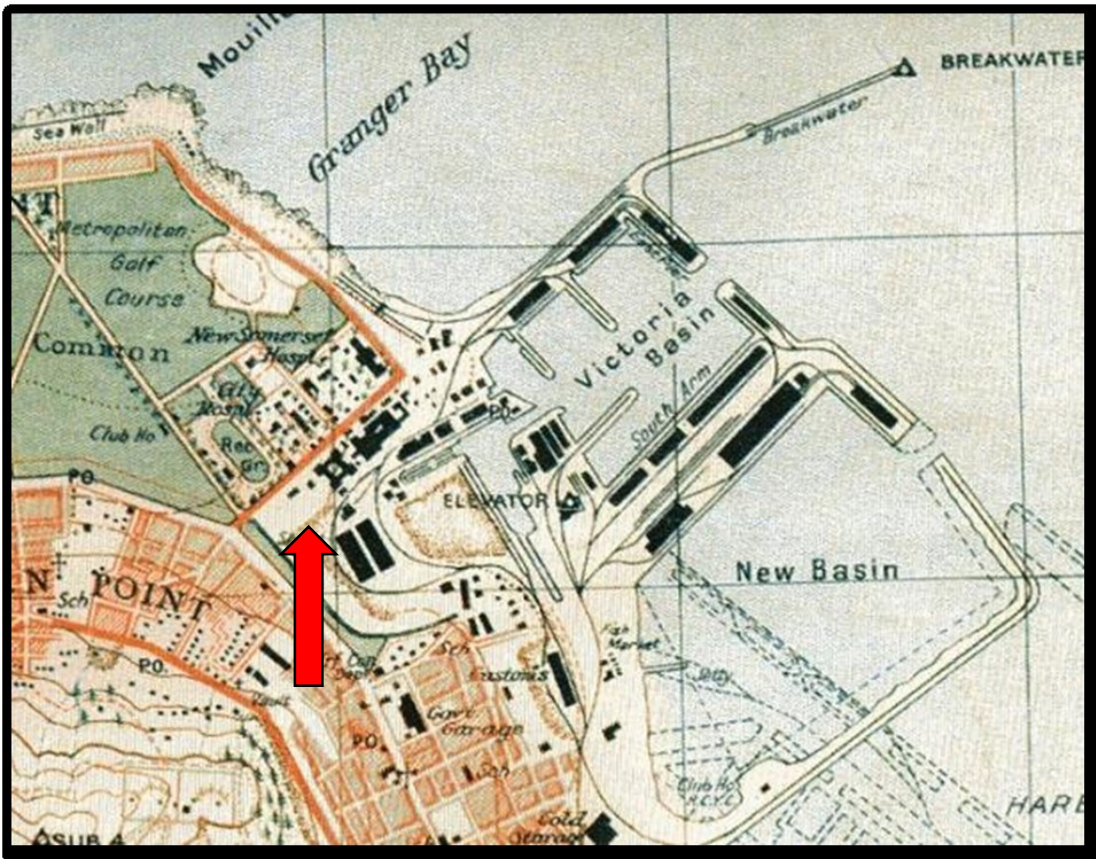


Figure 12: 1934.



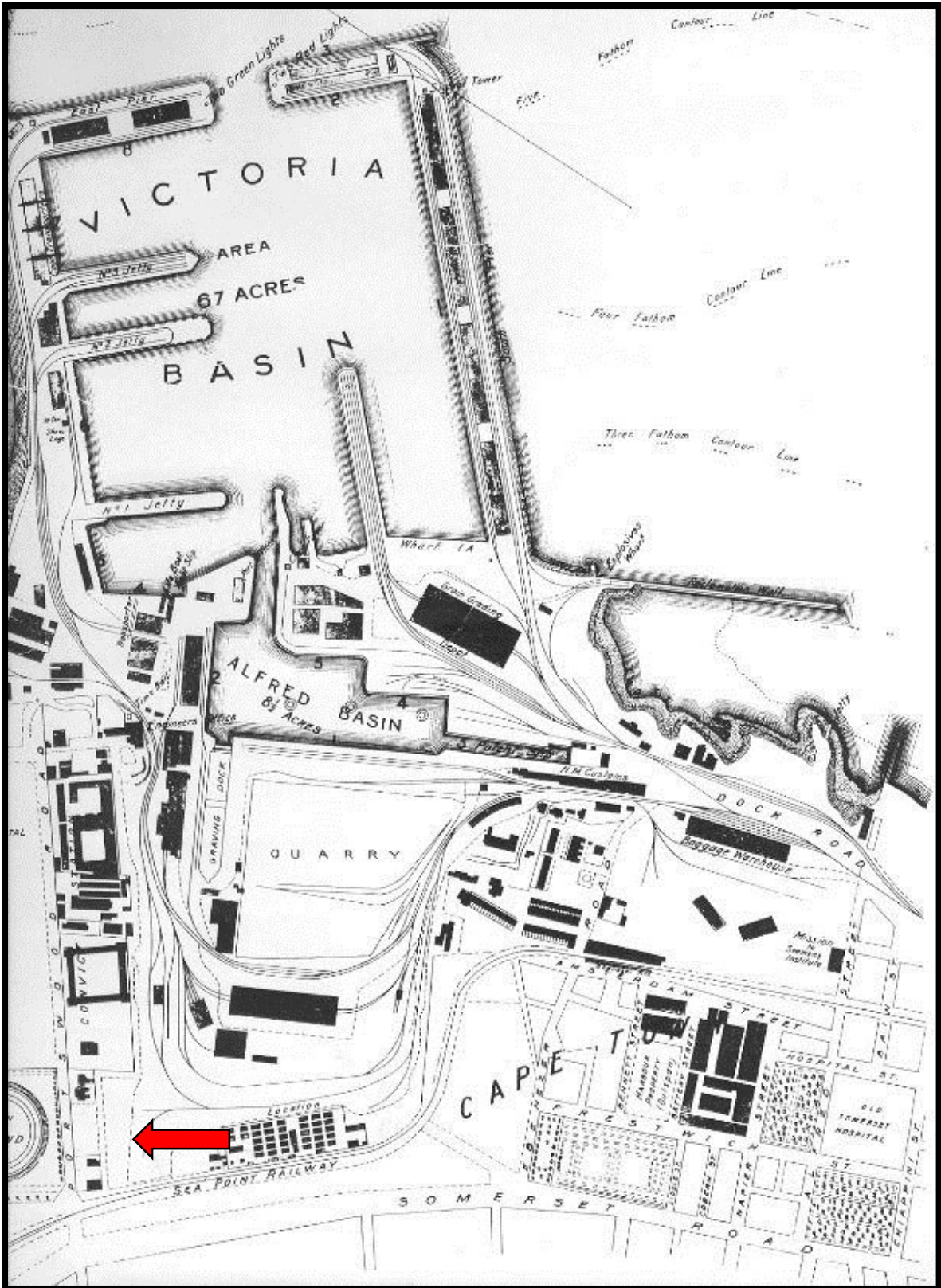


Figure 11: 1911 (Table Bay Harbour Board).

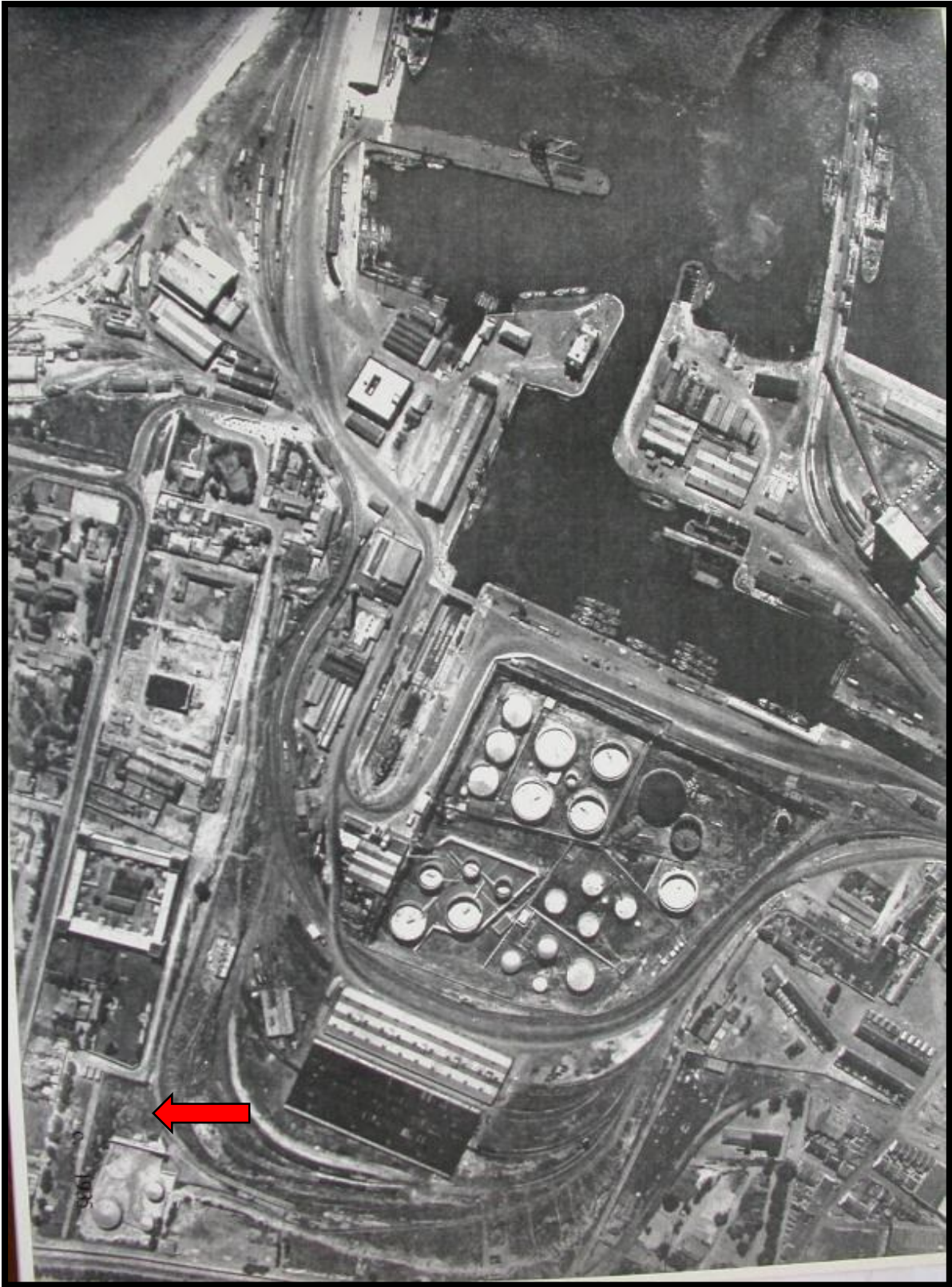


Figure 13: c1935 (Surveyor General aerial photograph).



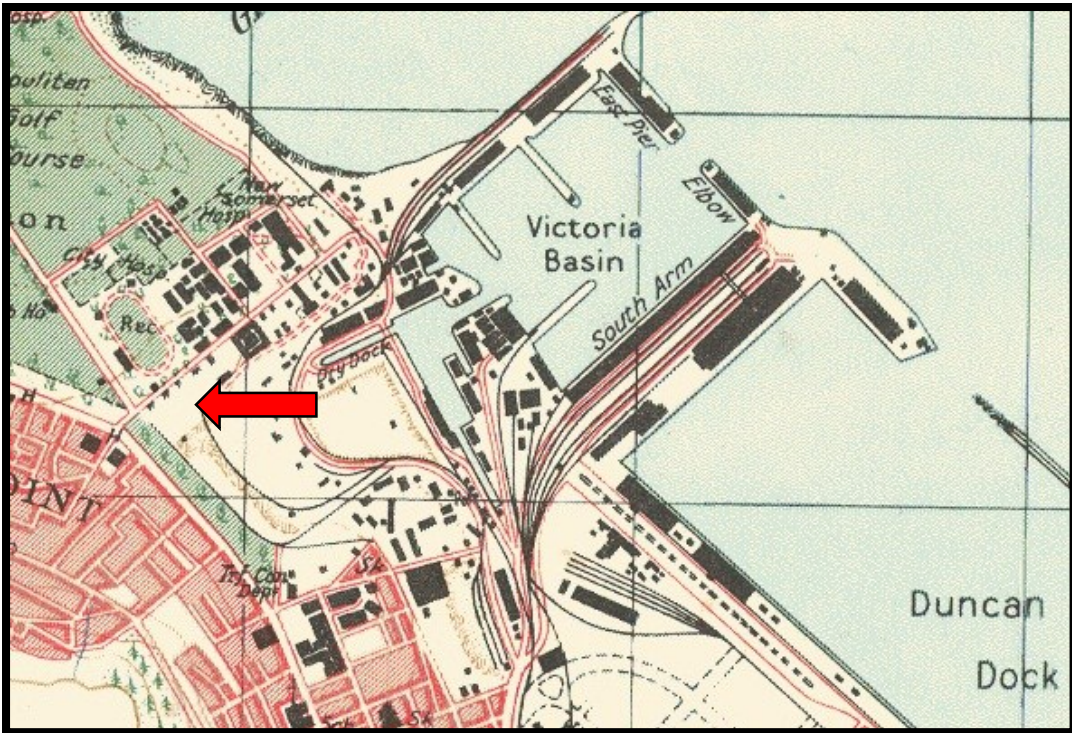


Figure 14: 1963.

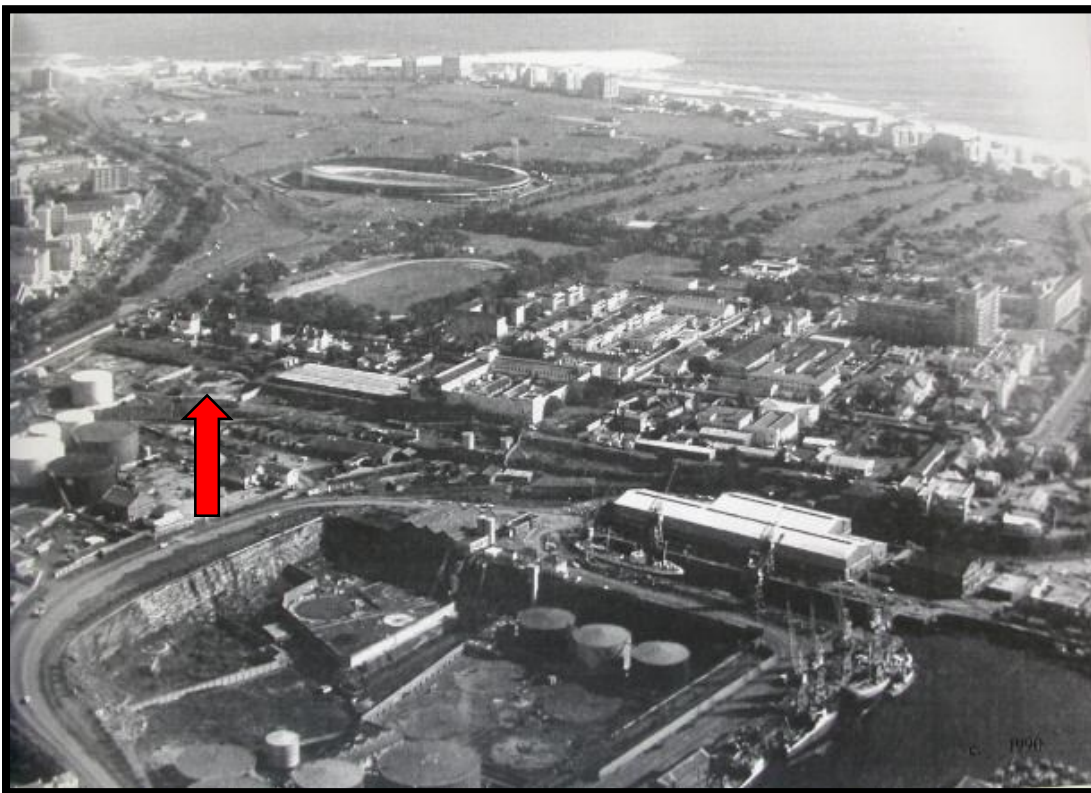


Figure 15: 1990 (Aerial photograph, source unknown).

## **Findings**

The information above shows that, although the harbour development was extensive, the study area remained on the fringes of it. Some buildings were constructed along Portswood Road, but it would seem none were erected on the site of the study area. This however cannot lead one to assume that the ground has not been disturbed. The photographs taken during the Boer war period show earth moving activity. And also the find at the BP site next to the study area shows that the fringes of Harbour Board property were part of the re-working of the soil and subject of general earth moving-activities.

The fact that on two adjacent sites not much artefactual material was found, would lead one to presume that the same would be the case in the study area, but at the same time one must be aware that a repeat of the find of a mass burial of human remains is not impossible, albeit improbable.

Furthermore, the geotechnical report indicates that bedrock lies rather close to the surface: only in borehole 3 was a fill layer observed, in the other two boreholes the weathered shale was present from 50 cm below the current surface.<sup>10</sup>

## **Summary and recommendations**

Portswood Ridge Site B is a piece of land situated in Green Point in the area, in the Dutch colonial period, between Mouille Point and the military graveyard. After the English took over rule of the Cape, Green Point become more populated and built-up. The study area was part of the Harbour Board Properties and as such was excluded from residential and commercial development. Extensive infrastructure works took place from the second half of the 19th century but never seem to have included the study area to a significant extent, which is also confirmed by the geotechnical profiles.

It would be anticipated that very little archaeological material is present in the study area and disturbance of what is present by the earthworks for the proposed development would be of minimal significance. Indications are that bedrock is close to the surface and the site has seen some remodelling for the creation of the parking area. The developer needs to be aware however that unexpected finds of bones could happen.

Recommendation is that no monitoring of earth moving activities is necessary. In the event of an unexpected find, be it bone, structural remains, a substantial amount of artefactual material or anything that seems out of the ordinary, all earthmoving activities need to be stopped immediately, the area cordoned off and Heritage Western Cape notified.

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<sup>10</sup> K&T 2008.

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