

REPORT ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING OF INSTALATION OF HIGH VOLTAGE CABLES, CHIAPINNI STREET, GREEN POINT, CAPE TOWN

Assessment conducted in terms of
Permits issued under section 36 of the National Heritage Resources Act

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ACO Associates cc
Archaeology and Heritage Specialists

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Report by

ACO Associates CC
Unit D17
Prime Park
Mocke Road
Diep River

Phone (021)

Email Tim.Hart@aco-associates.com

www.aco-associates.com

Summary

ACO Associates was appointed by AL&A Projects Managers on behalf of the City of Cape Town to monitor the excavations of trenches for the renewal of electrical infrastructure in Chiapinni Street, Green Point, Cape Town. The project area lies with the heart of the Green Point human burial area which was previously the cities cemetery zone with both formal and informal cemeteries.

The project has been necessitated by the Electrical Department of the City of Cape Town needing to replace aging and potentially dangerous high voltage cables by routing new cables into the western city area via the Foreshore and Green Point area. Chiapinni Street was selected as part of the route with the new cables to be installed under the eastern pavement. Chiapinni Street lies between what were once two of Cape Town earliest cemeteries, namely The Dutch Reformed Cemetery (now occupied by the Pavement Testing Laboratory) and the Military and Catholic cemeteries (now occupied by the Salesian Institute). Previous work has revealed that numerous burials of persons thought to be paupers took place throughout much of the lower Green Point area.

During the excavation of the trenches numerous fragments of disarticulated human (and animal) bone was found and retrieved representing the remains of up to 8 people. A single articulated skeleton situated within a visible grave shaft was identified just under the kerb stones of Chiapinni Street. This was not removed but carefully shored up and back filled in situ.

All the Chiapini Street human remains lie outside the officially proclaimed burial grounds and may be part of the Prestwich Street informal burial ground. It is of interest to note that the presence of an east-west wall foundation (significance unclear) seemed to mark a boundary to the burial area as indicated by changes in the quality of the soil and the much greater frequency of human bone to the north of this alignment. This suggests that there was some form of boundary to this burial ground that is not reflected on any historic maps to date. Also relevant to note is that burials did not extend further south than the Prestwich Street crossing. These may have been disturbed by the excavations for the Provincial Government Building basement which is adjacent to the Chiapinni Street pavement.

The opportunity to examine conditions under Somerset Road has also revealed that stone and brick vault structures that were part of the old DRC burial ground still exist under the Somerset Road crossing point. This was predicted as Somerset road passes over the known historic boundary of the old DRC site.

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1 Introduction

ACO Associates was appointed by AL&A Projects Managers on behalf of the City of Cape Town to monitor the excavations of trenches for the renewal of electrical infrastructure in Chiapinni Street, Green Point, Cape Town. The project area lies with the heart of the Green Point human burial area which was previously the city's cemetery zone with both formal and informal cemeteries.

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The project was effectively a watching brief; however in places the full ACO team was required to relocate what were fairly substantial amounts of disturbed human bone. The following pages are an account of the work.

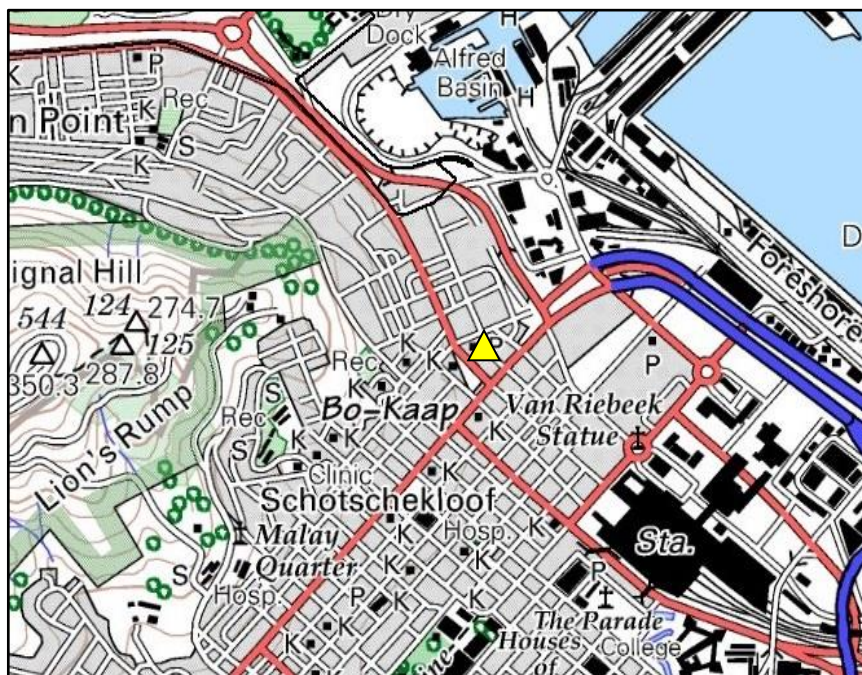


Figure 1 Location of Chiapinni Street in Green Point, Cape Town.

1.1 Background

The Somerset Road area in Green Point has been characterised, over the years, by discoveries of human remains during construction work and in almost every service trench. This has given rise to a host of myths and legends. For some people the area is known as

“the city of the dead” (Cape Slavery Heritage 2008). Issues around human remains are a critical heritage matter in this part of Cape Town.

Green Point was the 18th and 19th century “Maitland” or cemetery area of the city. The process started during the earliest years of the City’s existence. Council of Policy records indicate that by 1725 the area was already used by slaves for the informal burial of the dead. Formal cemeteries followed – namely the Military Cemetery (Salesian Institute), the Dutch Reformed Church burial ground (Pavement Testing Laboratory), followed on in the 19th century by the Lutheran Cemetery (now the site of the Prestwich School). Further down Somerset Road other cemeteries were established – notably the big Anglican Cemetery (Victoria Junction Hotel). In the vacant land around these cemeteries and in the dunes down towards the beach, the poor buried their dead wherever they could find a space and the soil was soft enough to dig a grave. Hence almost every street north of Somerset Road has human remains underneath. By 1860 development pressure and public distaste resulted in most of the cemeteries being closed, and new ground being made available at Maitland. The vaults lay in a disused state for nearly 50 years until the Government finally passed legislation in 1906 allowing for the land to be exhumed and the bodies removed to Maitland. The resulting land gains were to be used for “solemn and serious” activities – religious, humane or educational purposes.

In 1994, a portion of an 18th century burial ground was accidentally discovered during the construction phase of the redevelopment of a property in Cobern Street. The exhumation was executed under the National Monuments Act of 1969 and these remains formed the subject of much academic research, including anatomical studies. In 2003, human remains were discovered accidentally in the block adjacent to the Cobern Street property (referred to as Prestwich Place and presently “The Rockwell”). An emergency exhumation under the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999 (NHRA) was instigated. The NHRA makes provision for public consultation, which sparked a heated public participation and legal battle once it became apparent that some of the people buried there were slaves: men, women and children who were victims of a number of small pox epidemics that plagued the Cape. Paupers and people who died at the Cape who were not employed by the VOC would also have been buried in this unmarked burial ground.

The process and topic provoked worldwide interest and comment. Two books have the excavations at Prestwich Place as a back-drop: M. Nicol, *Payback* (Umuzi, Roggebaai, 2008) and B. Rostron, *Black Petals* (Jacana Media, Auckland Park, 2009). A third book, *Gallows Hill* by Margie Orford (Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg and Cape Town, 2011), is more intimately entwined with the excavations. The conflict generated by the public participation process included varying views on what should happen to the site, whether scientific analysis of the remains should take place, and the final resting place of the remains themselves. The National Department of Arts and Culture mediated the process and a fairly uncomfortable common ground was reached. The Prestwich Memorial was completed in 2008. It houses the remains of about 3000 people and a moratorium was placed on all scientific research of the remains. The mausoleum (The Prestwich Memorial) has been consecrated and has become a significant heritage landmark providing the physical anchor for a number of celebrations, amongst which is Emancipation Day. The ministerial recommendation required that any human remains found in the Green Point area should be reinterred at the Prestwich Memorial, which is a consecrated burial ground for this purpose.

1.2 Method

The work was carried out under a formal permit applied for and obtained from the South African Heritage Authority Burials Unit based in Pretoria (permit ID no 2092). The permit issued under the National Heritage Resources Act allowed for the monitoring of works and the relocation of any human remains found in the project area to the Prestwich Memorial near St Andrews Church. The laying of the cables and trenching was carried out by an electrical contractor. Before work commenced a meeting was held with the contractor (represented by My Thys van Eerden) to agree on the way forward. Within the project area work started with a series of trial excavations to assess positions of existing services and implications thereof. This proved to be useful as the ACO was able to get a sense of sub-surface conditions and the quality, quantity and provenance of human bone. There after monitoring took place on a shift basis being shared between Ms Natalie Kendrick, Ms Liesbet Schietecatte, Ms Gail Euston-Brown and Mr Tim Hart of ACO. Where there was a chance that finds were in-situ these were formally excavated and major finds marked on a plan of the site. Human remains found have been temporarily stored at ACO Associates premises where they were packed into standard museum-type burial boxes and the finds given a preliminary assessment. Arrangements have been made with the City of Cape Town to receive the finds into the Prestwich Memorial. Further analysis will be performed by Ms Natalie Kendrick as part of her MSC dissertation (Dpt of Anatomy and Cell Biology), University of Cape Town.



Figure 2 The first trial excavation on Chiapinni Street adjacent to the basement of the Pavement Testing Laboratory (old DRC cemetery).

2 Findings

Work commenced on site on 15 September 2015, a day of heavy rain to inspect the first occurrences of bone that were exposed in a trial excavations conducted by the contractor to locate cables that were to be renewed. Locations of finds are indicated on Figure 7.

Location 1. On 16 September, trial excavations at location 1 were continued by the ACO team who exposed human bone that was evidently disturbed (Figure 3). The laying of cables and services under the pavement in previous years had done quite a lot of damage as had the basement excavation on the immediately neighbouring property known as the pavement testing laboratory. The presence of orange plastic barrier tape in the excavation alerted us to the presence of an underlying high voltage cable which provided conclusive proof that the entire area under the pavement had been subject to prior disturbance. Up till to that point the team had been exposing the bone carefully, and took plenty

of photographs to show how it was present. These will be retained for record purposes. The trial excavation was terminated at 1200 mm depth which was the envisaged depth for the cable replacement.

On 30 September, after the trial excavation period was over ACO were notified that excavations for the trenches were to get underway in earnest and that our services were required. The project manager, Mr Thys Van Eerden guided us through the methodology. Work commenced at the northern end of Chiapini Street progressing towards Somerset Road. The bulk of excavation was done by hand and a mechanical excavator was used to load the fill into a truck for disposal. A number of fragments of human post cranial bone were recovered as well as a considerable quantity of bones of domestic animals. At location 2 archaeologist Liesbet Schietecatte identified a human cranium wedged under the curb line between the road and pavement.



Figure 3 Human remains were encountered in a trial excavation at location 1. Seen here are fragmented parts of a long bone and a lower mandible.



Figure 4 At the entrance to the pavement testing laboratory the foundations of a stone wall that ran across Chiapinni Street were encountered.

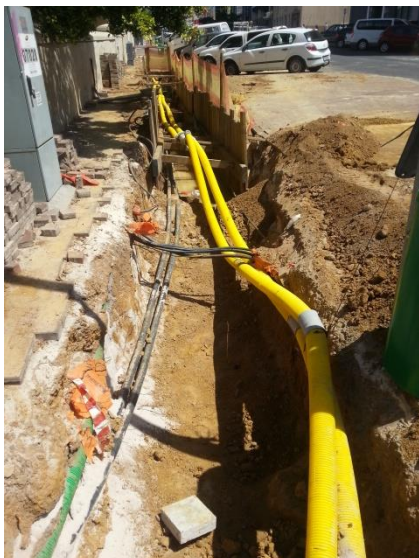


Figure 5 New cables being laid.



Figure 6 A human sacrum (part of an almost complete burial) was left in-situ under the edge of the pavement at location 2. Just below the 20 cm scale the edge of the grave shaft is visible as a soil stain.

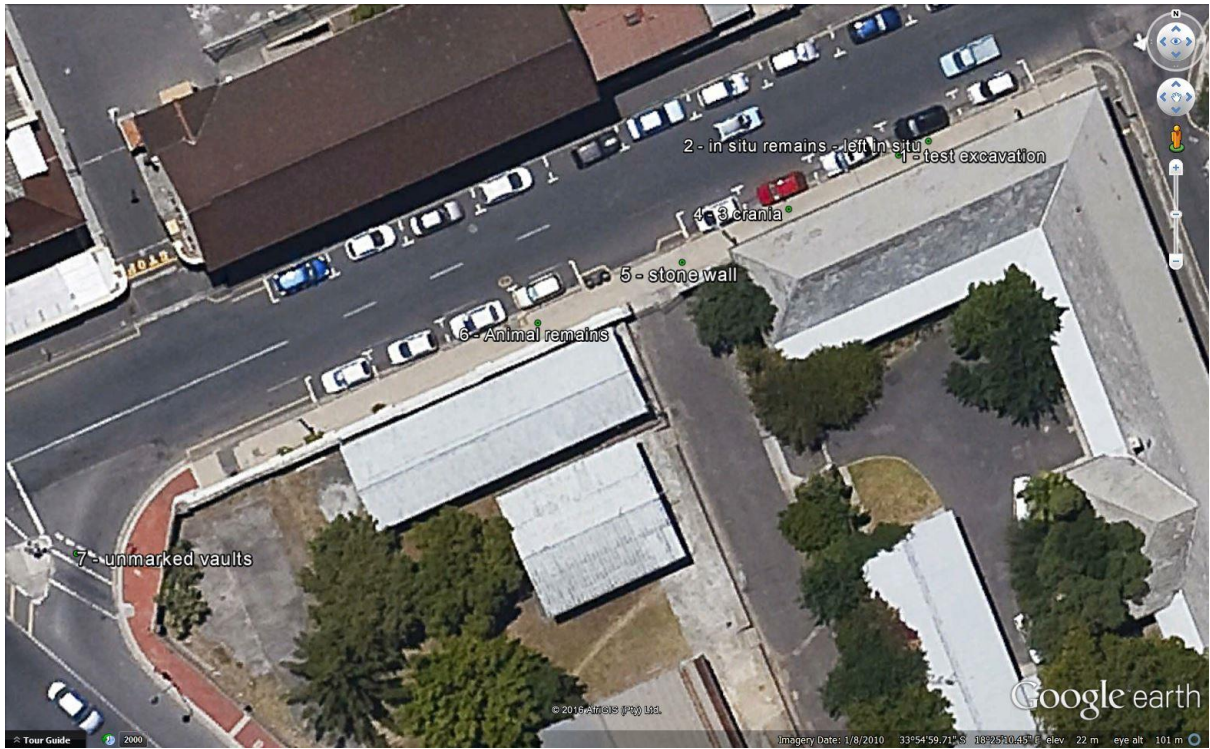


Figure 7 Location of finds of human remains, Chiapinni Street, Cape Town.

The burial was carefully exposed and found to be intact from cranium to pelvis (Figure 6). After consulting with Mr Van Eerden it was decided that the burial could stay *in situ* as it was feasible to place the new electrical cables around it without disturbing it further. The remains were covered with geo-textile, lightly backfilled and the shoring was placed in front. The presence of this burial caused some anxiety among the labour force on site, some of whom were reluctant for religious purposes to remain with the project. ACO organised a short tour of the Prestwich Memorial for interested workers to reveal the process of re-interment for them. It were thereafter agreed that a member of the ACO would be present at all times to collect and receive any human remains. From this point onwards a good working relationship was achieved and worked proceeded smoothly.

The soil was very disturbed and loose so shoring had to be placed quickly after excavation as the sides of the trench were in danger of collapsing. In the upper levels loose bone was encountered, all of it previously disturbed. The disturbed soils consisted of brown grey sand with inclusions of brick rubble indicating a consistent pattern of disturbance. The clay (decomposing bedrock) and ferricrete layer of the B-horizon sat at about 110 cm below the pavement level but this varied along the course of the trench.

At Location 3, a patch of dense and decomposed brick was encountered. The brick was broken up and compacted as if a structure was broken down. In between the brick sat a lot of fragmented bone, but also some ceramics, clay pipe fragments and a few corroded iron nails. This could indicate a burial vault which was demolished (possibly associated with the boundary of the immediately adjacent DRC burial ground) and bits of bone from the exhumations got trapped in between the broken brick.

Next to this brick patch, in the direction of Somerset road a large animal (horse) was found. At location 4, three human crania were exposed. Liesbet Schietecatte exposed them further with brush and trowel to try and determine if there were still associated post-cranial bones. From the position of the crania and the lack of surrounding bone (even lower mandible was absent), it was quickly established that none of the three adult human crania were still *in situ* and dis-associated from their bodies. They were positioned in a patch of grey sand 'sandwiched' in between brown sand above and below. The archaeologists had a sense that they were deliberately placed there, possibly when they were encountered during previous services excavations.

Location 5 (Stone wall)

On 2 October, work continued in front of the pedestrian access to the Pavement Testing Lab (PTL). On the side of the cable trench along the PTL wall, some dressed stone came out of the excavation. At first it was unclear where it came from but it soon became apparent that it was sitting along the side of the trench and got scraped by the mechanical excavator. A storm water drain pipe was encountered and below that sat a clear stone wall foundation which was connected to the one along the side of the trench. Because of the storm water pipe, excavation was halted and Liesbet Schietecatte had a moment to clean up the stone wall and take pictures. The wall seemed to consist of 2 'layers' of stone (height of approx. 50 - 60 cm), dry packed together, not plastered or cemented. The stones were laid on ferruginous brown sands.

Location 6

The excavation on the other side of the storm water pipe was postponed till Monday 5 October as there was not enough time left to finish in front of the PTL car gate before the working day ended. Instead a trench was commenced just beyond the gate in the direction of Somerset Road. There (Location 6, next to the fire hydrant) a partial skeleton of a large

animal (horse? Related to the skull we found earlier) was found in situ in a patch of light grey/white sand on top of the brown sand.

It is of interest to note that location 5 (stone wall) marked a change in the colour and texture of the soil - a grey sand seemingly undisturbed for the best part. The decomposing clay is still present at about 110-120 cm depth (but this varies within the trench). It was of interest to note that very little human bone was encountered in this stretched of the excavation between location 5 and the Somerset Road pavement. The stone wall was clearly some sort of historical boundary marker that demarked an earlier place of burial, however scrutiny of ACO's collection of historical maps did not reveal any formal boundaries at this point as did scrutiny of survey diagrams of the affected erven.

On 6 October Liesbet Schietecatte returned to site to follow the rest of the excavation just off Somerset Road, but was informed that that section would not be excavated and work would move to the other side of Somerset Road alongside the St Andrews Church precinct. During the site visit on 15 September, ACO inspected the test excavations here and the decomposed bedrock/clay was present very close to the surface thus leaving insufficient depth for burials. Therefore no bone was expected and the excavations were not monitored.

On 13 October, ACO was called to site and were directed to two human crania lying half on top of a sack right next to where the stone cross wall had been under the PTL storm water pipe. These crania had been cleaned off and very clearly not in situ any more. They were lying in the area which was excavated on 5 October a week before, above the level to which excavations took place previously. More bones were present under the sack. We asked the labourers where these remains came from and they pointed to the entrance of the PTL and said 'under the bridge'. This entrance to the PTL was excavated and refilled on 5 October in our presence. The provenance of the two crania that appeared in the trench over-night are a mystery and remain a concern subject to further forensic assessment. It would appear that someone was trying to dispose of human remains that they had in their possession, possibly a local property owner as human remains are common in this area.

Somerset Road crossing

The cable trench crossed Somerset road but veered slightly eastwards crossing a portion of land that formed part of the Dutch Reformed Church Burial ground that was closed in the mid-late 19th century. As was expected a number of empty brick and stone burial vaults (location 7) had to be broken through, however considering the shallow depth of the cable trench – that is 1200 mm human remains (if they exist here) lie mostly at twice that depth. No in situ material was found. Remnants of the DRC burial vaults were entirely expected.

Summary of finds

Human

- Three almost complete skulls (one in fragments), two human crania from un verified context,
- Many cranium fragments and lower mandibles
- No diagnostic pelvis segments
- Long bones and post cranial bones highly fragmented.
- No complete skeletons, one left in situ.

Animal

- Bovine and equid remains
- Sheep (*Ovis aries/Ovis capra*)
- Chicken (*Gallus domesticus*)
- Cat (*Felis sp*)

3 Conclusion

Human remains have been found in Chiapinni Street before so it is no surprise that more were encountered. Indications are that those that lay below the pavement had suffered from considerable disturbance by previous trenching for services. The location of an articulated skeleton under the pavement edge indicates that some complete burials still lie under the road surface. All the Chiapini Street burials lie outside the officially proclaimed burial grounds and may be part of the Prestwich Street informal burial ground. It is of interest to note that the presence of an east-west wall foundation (significance unclear) seemed to mark a boundary to the burial area as indicated by changes in the quality of the soil and the much greater frequency of human bone to the north of this alignment. This suggests that there was some form of boundary to this burial ground that is not reflected on any historic maps to date. It is of interest to note that almost every available space in the lower Green Point area adjacent to Prestwich Street appears to have been utilised, even the small gap between the Military and DR Cemeteries that is represented by Chiapinni Street. Also relevant to note is that burials did not extend further south than the Prestwich Street crossing. These may have been disturbed by the excavations for the Provincial Government Building basement which adjacent to the Chiapinni Street pavement.

The opportunity to examine conditions under Somerset Road has also revealed that stone and brick vault structures that were part of the old DRC burial ground are extensive and largely exhumed although the likelihood is that some human remains missed in the exhumation process are likely to be present.

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