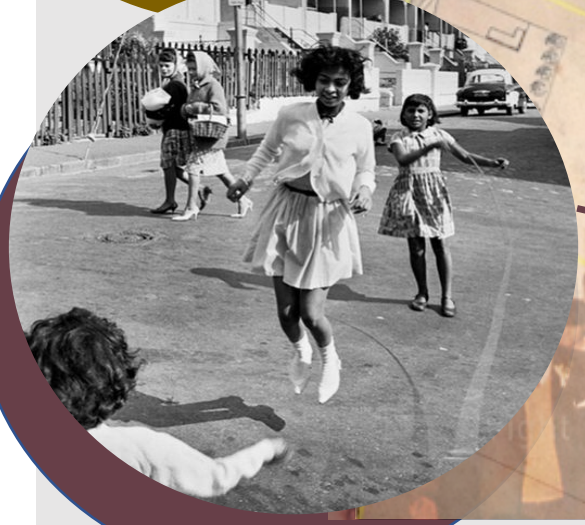


# SOCIO-HISTORICAL STUDY

## PARCEL P / STAGE 4 District Six



PREPARED BY  
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## Property description and historical delineation

Erf 177646 (formerly known as Parcel P and now Stage 4) lies between the newly renamed Hanover Street and Constitution Street, in a central and socially significant area of what was, historically, District Six. The piece of land was historically bounded by Blythe and Horstley Streets to the west, Eckard Street to the north and Plymouth Road to the south, with the eastern extent intersecting St. Leger Street and Dover Street. Upper Ashley Street Preparatory School, currently operating as Y2K College, lies over Constitution Street to the south.

## Social history focus

This site has a built history reaching back to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as evidenced by the Snow survey of 1860 showing a few structures situated on the land parcel along Old Hanover Street. Before then the area was colonial farmland, and most likely pre-colonial grazing ground. It was in the twentieth century that social character of this portion of land became more intensely developed to mixed businesses and residential terraced houses as evidenced by the time of the Thom plan of 1895. It was specifically between circa 1920s to 1970s that the parcel acquired its characterisation that continues to live on in the minds and memories of people forcibly removed from the area and their children.

Stage 4 presents an important historical zone in the social history of District Six, which by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century contained an iconic nexus of urban residential housing, mixed use buildings, and the thriving economic and

social space of Old Hanover Street. Today the site contains sections of where Old Hanover Street lay, as well as New Hanover Street: roads crucially important to the past/present interface of the entire site. It also contains a section that is connected to Horstley Street. The street that is currently called Horstley was historically Blythe. Due to the importance of the nature of Horstley street, its brief history has been included in this report. The historical remnants and social associations of Hanover and Horstley streets in particular require that any urban development responds to their character, especially through memorialisation across the site and activation of public space.

Aside from a few remnants, the entire built form of this parcel was demolished – only the position of Old Hanover Street and Horstley remain. The social history of this parcel is one that is tied to the memories inside homes but also connected to the social life that took place in and around public buildings and streets.

Development on Erf 177646 in the Cape Town Municipal Survey of 1957 (RSA, 2022). Katie Smuts



## Destroyed in built form, but remaining in memory

The City of Cape Town's Cultural Heritage Strategy (Attwell et al 2018) argues that it is important to acknowledge the achievements of individuals and groups during the City's history and seeks to recognise and protect places, narratives and traditions associated with such people and events. While much of the built form of Stage 4 may have been destroyed, the narratives and associations of District Six have crucially remained through the memories of ex-residents.

## Shaping urban design and planning through memory

Preserving and integrating the remnants of built form and memory within future planning and design is crucial to the acknowledgement of the sense of loss, destruction and devastation for the people of District Six who were forcibly removed. Planning and design should continue to incorporate the 'sense of place' that has been informed by these intangible memories and continued cultural practices on the site. Some of the main components for the 'sense of place' of Stage 4 are outlined in overview in this report. How a site is 'remembered' or 'memorialised' needs to be community led, involving ongoing engagement through the design process.

As outlined in the 2003 Heritage Impact Assessment of District Six by Lucien Le Grange, the employment and translation of memory is key to urban design development. It requires the:

- Conserving and celebrating previous and remaining institutions i.e. even if buildings have been destroyed their memory needs to be conserved and celebrated

- Incorporating memory in street/place names
- Identifying and celebrating public places.(Pg. 6)



Former residents of District Six embarked on a walk of remembrance on 11 February 2020 on the streets where they once lived before the apartheid regime forcibly removed them to areas on the Cape Flats. This marked 54 years since the start of forced removals in District Six, Cape Town. Photo: Suné Payne. The street names and memories of streets remain an important part of how District Six continues to be remembered and honoured. Note the inclusion of Hanover, Ashley and Eckard Streets, all of which were situated within Stage 4.

**This report comprises a high level over-view of the social history of places and associations in Stage 4 that shaped the 'sense of place' for the site.**

# Brief Historical Timeline

**1840s** in the post emancipation period the area that would later become known as District Six on the farmstead Zonnebloem saw building and settlement begin. A diverse community of freed slaves, merchants, artisans, labourers and immigrants began to settle on this area closely connected to edge of the port town.

**1867** the area acquired its familiar name of District Six when a new municipal act divided Cape Town into six districts. Before that it was officially called District Twelve or more colloquially as **Kanaladorp**, derived either from the many canals found in the area or the Malay word kanala, meaning 'to help one another'.

**1890s** in a period of population growth and commercial expansion, 3000 people would make their homes in this area as Cape Town's housing spilled out over the boundary canals and the city's colonial grid layout. The affordable rents and close proximity to places of work in the city and at the docks made District Six a convenient and attractive place to live for its varied population. New immigrants from Europe and West Indies swelled the ranks of the cosmopolitan population of former slaves, working class people, traders, shopkeepers and landlords.

**1901** The first forced removals in the area of 'African people': they were removed to the first location established in Cape Town at Uitvlugt farm (later called Ndabeni).

**1940s** plans were formed by the Cape Town municipality to demolish houses under slum clearance.

**1966** the declaration of District Six as a white area under the Group Areas Act when extensive demolition began which was met with intense resistance by the residents.

**mid 1970s** The last residents of District Six were forced to leave

**By the early 1980s** 60 000 people had been removed from the city's core to its distant periphery.

**1984** the destruction of District Six was complete. Aside from a few buildings the landscape was stripped and cleared.

**1994** after the first democratic elections claims for restitution were made by families, which had been forced out of District Six. Under the Restitution of Land Rights Act, those who experienced forced removals after 1913 were entitled to claim for land and/or compensation from the state. In the case of District Six, a claim was put forward whereby the community would return wholesale, instead of through individual claim.

**2004** the first 24 families moved into their new homes in District Six.



## Horstley Street: Diverse social history and removals

Horstley Street consisted of approximately 100 single-storied terrace houses which ran down the steep mountain slope, first settled in the early 1860s (Malan & Van Heyningen 2001).

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were concentrations of Xhosa speakers in Horstley Street (McCormick 1990: 89-90). Initially, many of the properties owned by white landowners who used them as rental properties. By the 1940s/50s this had given way to

ownership of homes and business properties by “black District Six residents”. It would be these people who would be dispossessed by apartheid legislation (Malan & Van Heyningen 2001).

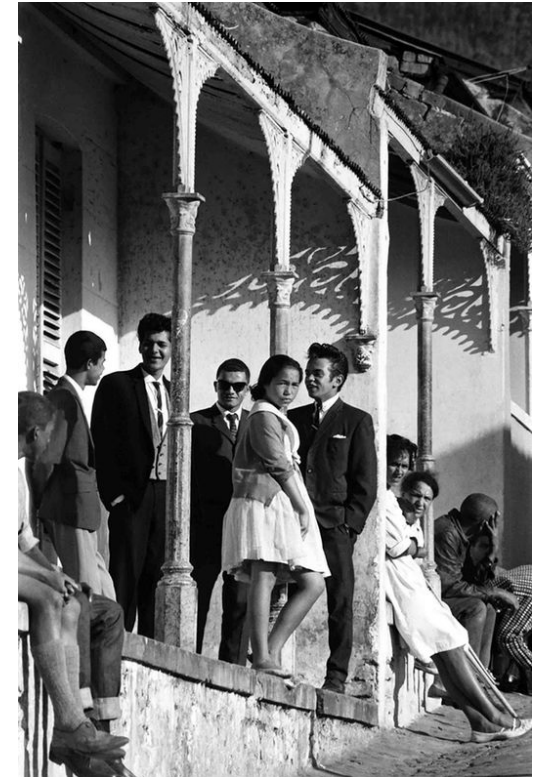
Before the 1960s/70s forced removals Horstley street was a site of the very first forced removals from the City bowl to Uitvlugt forest station (later renamed Ndabeni).

Already by 1900 District Six was overcrowded with refugees from the Transvaal goldfields, British immigrants, and African dock workers from the Transkei.

Plague cases that broke out in 1901 in the upper section of Horstley Street was an excuse to “sanitise” District Six through forced removals of African residents of the district (Malan and Van Heyningen 2001). The back parts of the homes were areas of movement: informal visits, cooking, workshops for additional income streams, ablutions, unregulated building alterations – moments where despite-built environment limitation of structure with no stoep frontage, the residents could subvert control and impose individuality. For instance, when there was a police raid the items from shebeens were put into the sewers of the street (a few of these drains are still there in Horstley street upper sections) (UCT Archaeology Dept. Papers Malan 2000).

**Social gathering outside terraced houses in Horstley Street on a Sunday.**  
Photograph by Cloete Breytenbach.

Many of the houses in Horstley street did not have stoeps so the streets were really an extension of interior life. People could walk to work down



these streets which was a very close distance to many of the workplaces in the area and city. Houses with stoeps provided moments for social engagement between home and street.

In the 1970s and 80s Horstley street would be one of the last streets in the area to be forcibly removed under apartheid. Horstley street becomes then a site of the first and last forced removals from the area.



Further down Horstley street, houses with no street frontages, running down towards Hanover. ©Rob Elliott 1972-SW36 restored by Rudolf Ryser



Remnants of the cobbled Horstley street.

## COBBLED STREETS:

Horstley street was noted to have a cobble stone surface. In a workshop held in 2000, ex-residents of Horstley Street remembered the cobbled street being their playground (UCT Archaeology Dept. Papers Malan 2000). They explained the road was cobbled because it was so steep. As a surface treatment it also provided a sonic space: the noises of people walking and iron wheels on cobbled streets remained in people’s memories. Both Springfield and Dover Street in Stage 4 were similarly cobbled, as was the neighbouring road, Lavender Hill.

## Streets and open fields: spaces of interconnection

Streets were connected to each other through plots of open fields, used for taking shortcuts, and especially by children as spaces of play. Streets were interconnected in view, proximity of built form but also by social connections that spatialised familial and business relationships between one street and another in a social web that shaped the use of landscape, public space and built form.



Horstley street District Six the field on the left connected Horstley with Blythe and Springfield Street where the AME church was situated ©rob elliott restored by Rudolf Ryser 1972

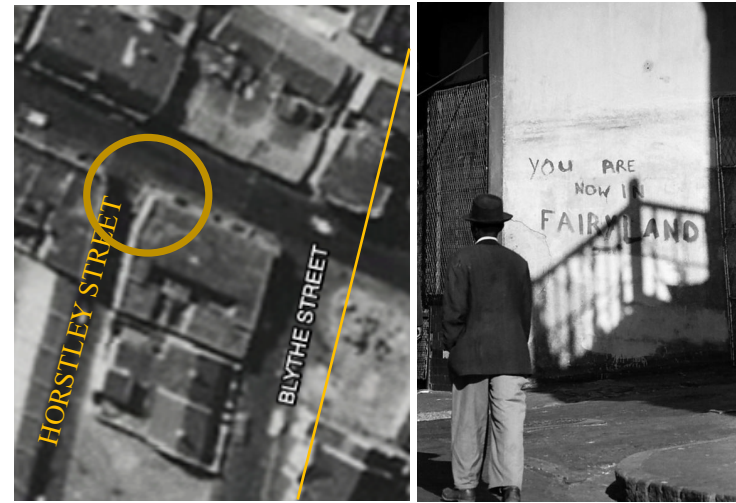
## Old Hanover Street: Bustling business

Situated along Old Hanover Street in Stage 4 are some of the most iconic institutions in the memory of District Six before demolition. With built form as physical anchor, social life took place in and around these buildings and in the surrounding streets. Public spaces of this urban residential environment was key to the characterisation of the District as it is now remembered.



Situated along the Old Hanover street section running from Horstley, passed Blythe and up to Eckard Street were the following businesses, social centres and places of memory:

### 'You are now in Fairyland'



This iconic graffiti in an image shot by Cloete Breytenbach, was situated just outside of Stage 4: entering the bottom of Horsley street and along Old Hanover street. It was painted on the side wall of Ismail's butcher shop. Opposite was believed to be Osman's Grocery store. Jethro argues this graffiti embodied crossing a threshold into a sensory overload of multi layered urban architecture and cultures: "animated by an ethereal "rhythm" that was "living" (Jethro 2009: 27 and 84). It would come to represent the 'Kanaladorp mythology for the area and the golden heydays of the 1950s and 60s despite issues of poverty and gangsterism.

## The Avalon Cinema

63 Russell Street  
Built 1940s

The Avalon Cinema was built during World War II. “It offered plush and more comfortable seating while ushers checked tickets, assisted with seating, and prevented cinema-goers from entering the Avalon with food” (District Six Museum St. Marks Mapping Project).



View of the Avalon District Six Museum



Hanover St corner Russell St Avalon Bioscope D6 1977 Photo ©[Rudolf Ryser](#)

The cinema connected District Six to the world and the music, clothing and actors. Much of *Tweede Nuwe Jaar* was influenced by cinema going, especially American icons, films and gangsterism (Maingard 2017). There was a hierarchy to cinema going: The Avalon and National Cinemas were remembered as being ‘posh’, the ‘Star’ being for poorer people, although even hierarchies of wealth existed within an individual cinema seating – cinema going relates to status and displays of wealth/class.

Cinemas within District Six provided a form of place making and orientation, they were sites of multi-purpose use for leisure, cultural and political activities, having a relationship with the streets that surround them. The Avalon was known to be a site of anti-apartheid rallies and meetings.

Cinema going was an intensely social spectacle that was experienced through all the senses: “Dank, dark and smoky, the cinema aroused clear and persistent memories of leisure, sociality, laughter as well as fear and anxiety”. (Jethro 2019: 91). Even golden memories include references to fighting and drunkenness occurring within these “safe” cinema spaces.



## OTHER BUSINESSES AND STORES:



**Above:** Hanover St corner Philips St District Six 1977 ©Rudolf Ryser showing a **surgey** next to a shop and potentially residential premises above.

**Middle:** **Avalon Record Store** - Hanover St- District 6 – '72 © District 6 Museum

**Right:** Old Hanover Street cnr Lavender Hill **Walmer Bottle Store** on left, Avalon further back at the right. Photo ©Rudolf Ryser

**Bottom:** **Cape Meat Supply** – Hanover St - Early 70's © District 6 Museum

Businesses noted to be situated along this Old Hanover street section were sites of intense social interaction in the 1930s-70s period:

- **Jan Jira:** ex-residents shared how samoosa's were sold and it was a site to buy food after going out dancing.
- Opposite the Avalon was noted to be a **barber shop**
- **Dout's Café** situated on the corner of Blythe and Old Hanover Streets where people often got a take away curry on Friday nights
- **Spice shops and tailors** where District Six families would do their shopping together over the weekend.



- **Adam's Butchery**
- **Pillay's shop**
- **The medical premises of Dr. Safeda**
- **Walmer Bottle Store**
- **Avalon Trading & record store** many

people shopped there on a Saturday and remember buying their first record there

- **Fruit and veg store of Magadien**
- **Lipman's chemist**
- **Crescent Restaurant** A place where people of different races could meet and eat together during Apartheid. Nelson Mandela met and ate here.
- **Cape Meat Supply** owned by Boeta Agmat his wife Auntie Gay (Gayah)



## Old Hanover Street: a space of informal trading, entrepreneurship, and personal economic growth:



Image of street trader with cart. CoCT digital collection

Many people who later got stalls on the grand parade started out as hawkers with a hand cart selling wares. As they did well they progressed to a horse and cart and finally a bakkie (Fortune 1996: 38-39). District Six was a space that enabled personal economic growth and opportunities.

## Residential space- along Old Hanover Street

What ultimately defined District Six was that it was a residential space in the heart of the Cape Town urban environment. Access to work in the city centre in easy walking distance, without requiring transportation was one of the key advantages of living in the area. With corner shops and many businesses situated close to residences, daily shopping for small items was a

common occurrence. Residences also doubled up as home businesses with dressmaking especially being notable in the area.



Old Hanover Street Avalon Trading & record store at right, barber and fruit and veg store of Magadien at left, Springfield street in the background D6 1977 Photo ©Rudolf Ryser

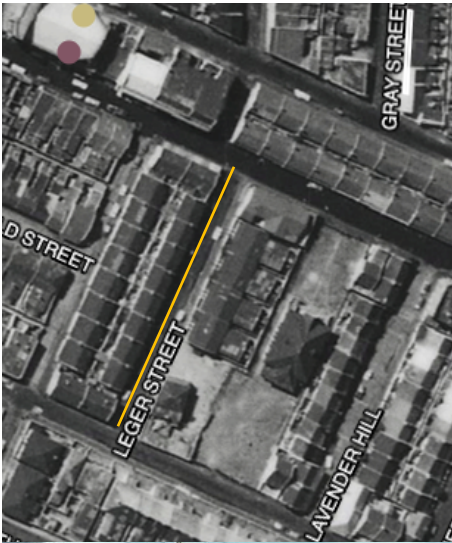
## Residences connected to the urban city and work/jobs:



Back of Upper Ashley St District Six 1977©Rudolf Ryser (48)

The photo shows the close proximity of houses in Upper Ashley street to the buildings situated in the City centre.

## MOUNTAIN AND SEA ACCESS



St Leger Street, in the back Upper Ashley Nr. 56 and 58 D6 1977 Photo ©Rudolf Ryser

**The sea was always accessible at Woodstock Beach straight down from Eckard Street (Nasson 1980).**



Corner of Blythe & Plymouth Streets © District 6 Museum. The entrance to 'Sunny Boy Shebeen' was believed to be on Blythe Street.

For many ex-residents District Six allowed them easy access to natural resources: the mountain and the sea. The historical photos of St. leger and Blythe show how close both sea and mountain were to this area in proximity and vista. Both were public spaces used for recreation, foraging food and social meeting. Residents of these streets had both the freedom and rights to movement to these natural public spaces.

## PLACES OF GATHERING: MUSIC, RITUALS & THE EVERYDAY



**Top:** Minstrels in Old Hanover Street parading passed the Avalon Record Store and Lipman's Chemist. Photo Alex Lawrence. **Middle:** A wedding party in Arundle Street. District Six Museum. **Bottom left:** Blythe Street by Jan Greshoff. **Bottom Right:** Girls playing in the street along Upper Ashley Street ©Cloete Breytenbach.

Most public play spaces for children were on open spaces of land and on the streets. There were almost no dedicated public spaces for children to play. Cricket and soccer played in the street (Jeppie and Soudien 1990: 19). Since houses also tended to be limited in space, festivities of high days and heydays spilled out onto the street. The annual New Year's Klospe Carnival paraded down Old Hanover Street as did the nagtroepe at Christmas and similarly wedding and funeral processions walked through the streets of the District.

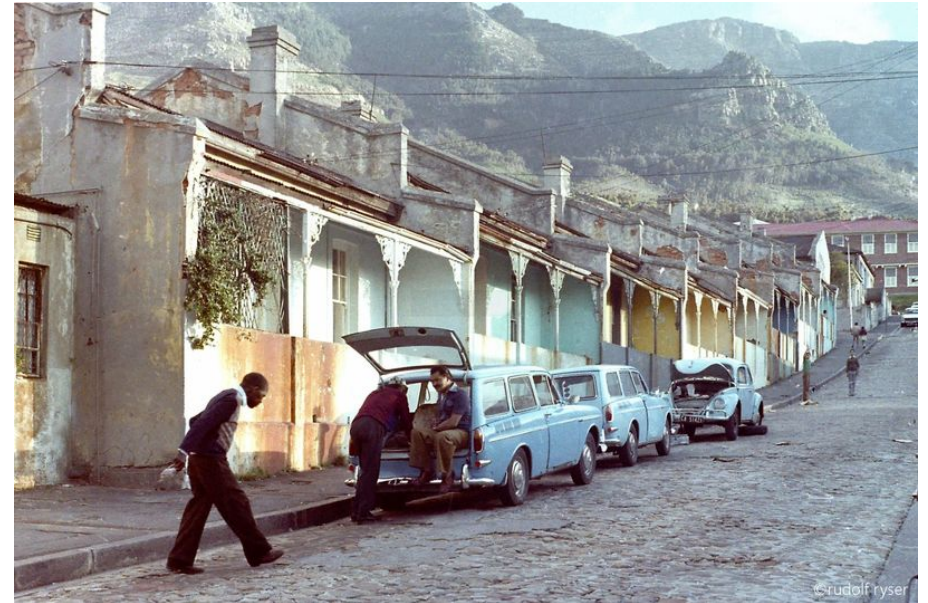
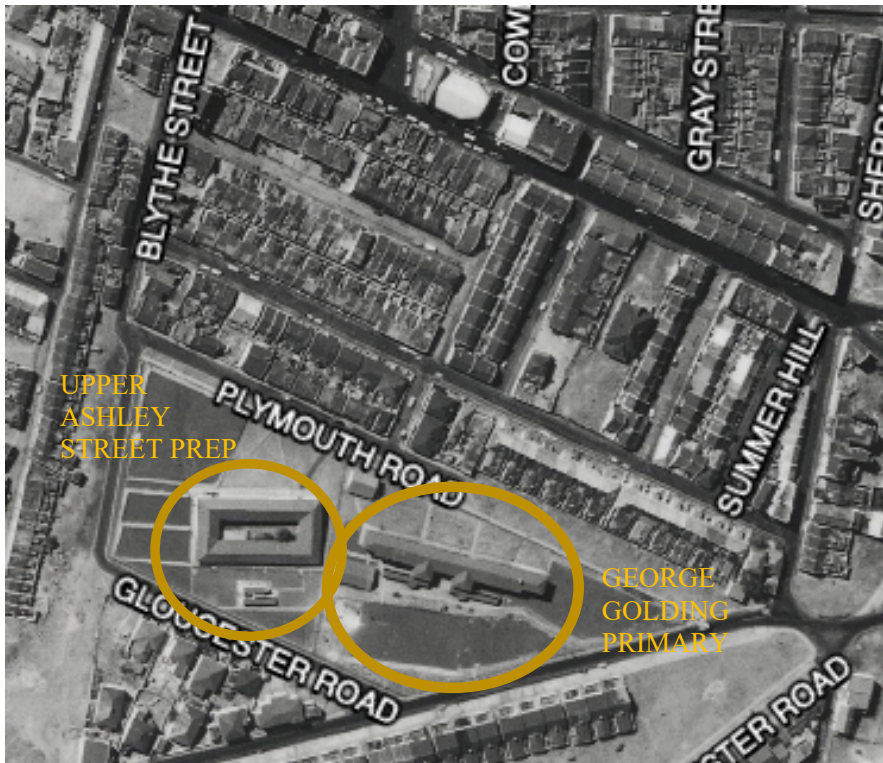


## SCHOOLS: centres of learning and community

Schools were integrated into many aspects of social, cultural, and political life for residents. Many school halls doubled up as the community centres for the surrounding area. The children who lived within Stage 4 would have most likely attended the schools near them.

Stage 4 was situated next to two non-denominational schools that were closed/demolished in the 1980s (many of these started in the 1930s):

**Upper Ashley Street Preparatory (Seven Steps Academy)** and **George Goulding Primary School (now Rahminyeh Primary School)**



Dover Street with George Goulding "Goalie" school at the Plymouth Road in the background District Six 1977. Photo ©Rudolf Ryser

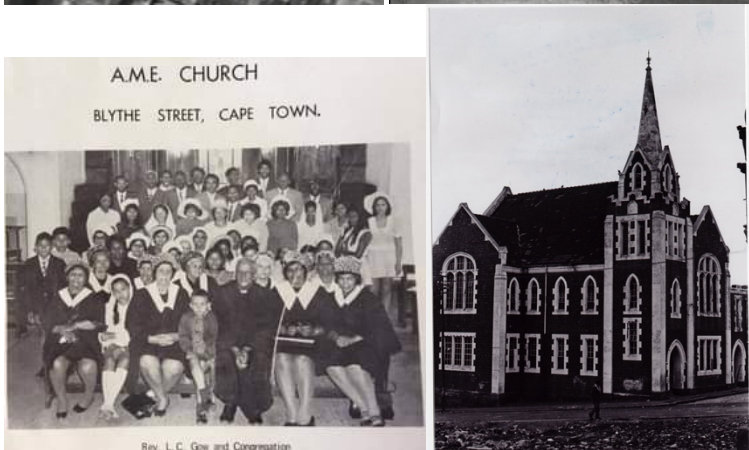
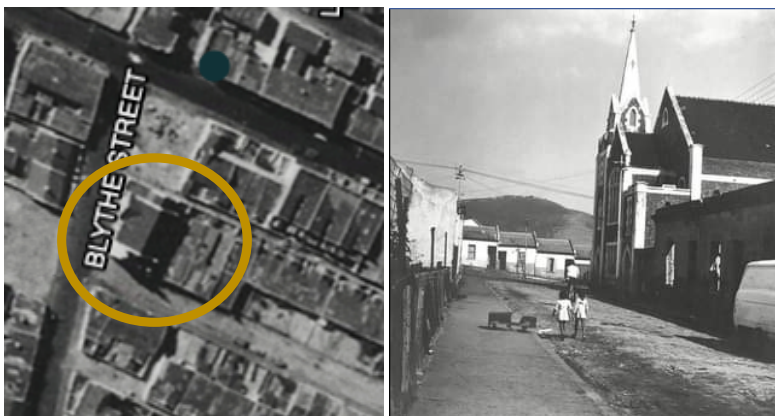
The 1940s and 50s saw intense cultural and intellectual activity within the schools of District Six through inter-school co-operation and extra-curricular education (Lewis 1990: 188-191).

Community centres associated with schools (such as St. Mark's Preparatory School) hosted church socials, acting classes, concerts, the drama society and its performances, sewing classes, dance classes, table tennis, and badminton (District Six Museum St. Mark's Mapping Project).

## RELIGIOUS CENTRES

Schools and churches were tied together: originating in the mission school system when State schooling was denied to all those not classified as “white”. In Stage 4 there was similarly a mission church that was tied to a school.

**THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH (AME)** was situated on the corner of Blythe and Springfield streets at 9 Blythe Street.



The Methodist denomination was the earliest Christian group to hold services in the area that became District Six: forming a congregation as early as 1837 (after the ending of slavery) and later built a chapel in Sydney Street. It was an integrated congregation: By 1854 150 coloured and 200 white people were on its roll with a Sunday school running. Later a second church was erected in Chapel street.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church was established near the upper part of **Old Hanover Street** “on 25 May 1898 by Francis Gow, the church was built with funds donated by AME congregations in the United States. The Church ran the Bethel Institute, which provided primary school education in District Six. Feeling the impact of the Group Areas Act, the church relocated to Athlone in 1975” (District Six Museum St. Mark’s Mapping Project). The building was demolished. Associated with the Church was Bethel school which was believed to be burnt down.

Politics and the church were interconnected within District Six from very early on: Rev Gow of the AME was also for instance made head of the African Political Organisation in 1902 (later becoming the African People’s Organisation in 1920). As Patric Tariq Mellet notes, the AME Church was a vehicle for black empowerment within Cape Town.

**Top right** by Jan Greshoff.

**Bottom left:** Louen Kleinsmidt

**Bottom Right:** AME Church District Six Museum

## CULTURAL CENTRES:

### ISAAC OCHBERG HALL

302 Hanover Street

Established 1933



**Left:** The only known photograph of the **Isaac Ochberg Hall** in **Old Hanover Street, District Six** (Africa Media Online) **Right** Eoan group practice, most likely inside Isaac Ochberg Hall, Cloete Breytenbach.

Situated just outside the far-right extent of Stage 4, Isaac Ochberg Hall was the physical home to the famous Eoan Group: “The Eoan Group was founded by Helen Southern-Holt in 1933 as a culture and welfare organisation for the coloured community of District Six, Cape Town.<sup>5</sup> During the 1950s, under the tutelage of Joseph Manca, the group’s small choir grew into an amateur opera company, which produced some of the first full-scale Italian opera performances in South Africa [Many of its performers went on to perform at the New York Met].

Despite the apartheid government’s increasingly debilitating legislation, such as the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953 and the Group Areas Act of 1955, the Eoan Opera Group produced eleven annual opera seasons, two arts festivals and tours throughout

South Africa and the United Kingdom between 1956 and 1975” (Van der Waal and Lambrechts 2018: 364 – 365).

“The strain of Apartheid took its toll on the group, and support gradually diminished. They relocated to a new theatre space in Athlone in 1969” (District Six Museum St. Mark’s Mapping project). The building was demolished.



## Spaces of poverty, dilapidation, and destruction



**Above:** Crumbling facades along Horstley Street, District Six Museum

**Middle:** District Six buildings before destruction. District Six Museum

**Right:** The 'Mongrels Gang, 1960' who were known to have the territory further down Old Hanover Street, just passed the Avalon. Photo: Derek Williams.

**Bottom:** Destruction of the Avalon by bulldozers, Alex Lawrence photography.

For many residents forced to leave, this was not just a site of golden memories of their childhood and youth, it was also tempered with poverty from low working wages, the dilapidation of buildings and streets due to lack of upkeep by the municipality and the proliferation of gangsterism without police support in the area. Added to this was the devastating loss of their homes and public spaces as they were forcibly removed from the area, split apart from neighbours and families and the physical built form was destroyed. From the first forced removals of African workers in Horstley Street in 1901 to the last removals in the late 1970s, this is a site of ongoing percussive dispossession that was compounded by the far flung settlement of the community across the Cape flats.



© Alex Lawrence Photography



## DEVELOPMENT & MEMORIALISATION

This is a site of grand apartheid but also of resistance by the community throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century from the early development of Coloured politics associated with the AME Church, to gatherings held within cinemas such as the Avalon. With the establishment of 'Hands Off District Six' protest and various civic associations, the fact that the land has remained empty to development is due to this very resistance as well as the return of the land itself to ex-residents.

"The first demolitions began in 1968, only buildings left standing were a few places of worship. In 1970 District six was renamed Zonnebloem. In 1979 the Cape Technikon, a White technical university, was constructed, and that same year a group of people consisting of religious groups and community figures established a community group calling themselves the 'Friends of District Six'. The dominant view of Zonnebloem as 'tainted' land ensured the failure of the Cape Town Municipality to re-develop a large part of the land. In 1987 the 'Hands off District Six (HODS)' alliance was established, aimed at preventing the redevelopment of District Six. In a historic 1988 HODS conference held at Zonnebloem College, a call was made for the establishment of a memory project or museum to honour the memory of District Six. This call was realised in 1989 through the creation of the District Six Museum Foundation" (African History Online).

Ex-residents return to the former streets with family members to re-walk and re-member the places they lived, reinscribing the memories into the streets even though now gone. Stage 4 represents an area that has been part of the memorialisation of District Six by former residents, with some of

the most iconic public spaces, buildings, business, social and religious centres found in this parcel.



**Above:** Close up of the floor map on the interior of the District Six Museum

**Below:** The District Six land claims court case between the D6WC and the South African Government, at the Western High Court on 26 November 2018. Twitter.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. The old street grid and street names of Stage 4 to be retained as far as possible

This is already indicated within the development proposal of Stage 4.

## 2. Including cobbled street textures

Using cobbles as a moment to bring in the former textures of streetscapes within District Six could be done within sections of paving along Old Hanover Street or within landscape design for public space and play areas within the development.

## 3. Old Hanover Street: Historical local activity spine

Previously the heart of public life in District Six, Old Hanover Street can be developed as a commemorative route that provides a smaller scale streetscape than New Hanover Street. This street is recommended to be a pedestrian-dominated space which can serve to tell the story of District Six and the life that played out before it's traumatic demolition.

Narratives of the past should be embedded within this public space using innovative use of pavements, signage, memory markers, public art interventions and landscaping that is community led. With a significant section of Old Hanover Street included within Stage 4, it is essential that the development responds to the memorialisation of the street.

## 4. New Hanover Street: vibrant local business spine

New Hanover Street is seen as the future local business spine of District Six. In keeping with its historical associations there should be retail and mixed-use opportunities on street level, providing opportunities for social life and active edges facing onto the street.

## 5. The memories of places that were destroyed to be re-integrated into development plans

The names, architectural and social histories of

- religious institutions (AME Church)
- schools (AME Bethel Institute and association to Ashley Street School and George Golding Primary)
- and places of cultural significance (i.e., The Avalon Cinema, the Avalon Record Store, and other businesses and memories of streets such as Isaac Ochberg Hall and the Eoan Group, the entrance to 'Fairy Land'...etc)

within Stage 4 to be memorialised through signage boards, street paving, tree dedication/storytelling in line with community engagement.

## 6. Enhance connections and memories to the mountain, sea and city

Stage 4 as a section of District Six had a clear connection to Table Mountain, the sea and business district of the city. This was central to its identity as an urban neighbourhood. Both the natural and the built environment shaped its character and lines of connection to the places it surrounded. District Six was always part of a wider Cape Town City.

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