

First Report on human remains disturbed at Diamond Park, Greenpoint, Kimberley

Dr David Morris
McGregor Museum
Kimberley
20 March 2014

Introduction

This is a first report on graves accidentally disturbed during provision of Civil Services for 892 Erven in Diamond Park, Geen Point, Kimberley. There is no prior Heritage Impact Assessment for the development. A trench for laying sewerage pipes at the south-east side of the currently informal settlement intersects and substantially displaces some seven or more graves. Skeletal material has been found in the dumps alongside the trench. The graves appear all to have been extremely shallow (about half a metre), with no evidence as yet for coffins or grave goods. It is conceivable (but as yet very far from certain) that this find represents the “missing” Bultfontein Cemetery (known to exist 1898-1906). The report outlines a modus operandi to salvage and investigate the damaged/displaced graves; as well as to establish the extent of the burial ground/cemetery relative to the proposed civil services roll-out.

Discovery 12 March 2014

The author (at De Aar at the time) was notified on 12 March 2014 that human remains had been accidentally disturbed at a development site at Diamond Park, Greenpoint, Kimberley, where sewerage pipes were being laid in excavated trenches.

The site was visited by McGregor Museum director Colin Fortune who advised that work cease at that section of the trench.

The author visited the site on 13 March when bones retrieved from the trench were found in two piles at the following localities alongside the trench:

Locality	Description	Action and Date
-28,77201, 24.78011 (not tagged)	Position where bones from one grave were deposited (but apparently more than one individual – two skulls having been stolen overnight)	Found 12 Mar 2014 Removed to McGregor Museum on 13 Mar 2014
-28.77196, 24.78026 (483)	Position where bones from one grave were deposited	Found 12 Mar 2014 Removed to McGregor Museum on 13 Mar 2014
-28.77187, 24.78076 (484)	Limb bones pointed out by community member	13 Mar 2014 Removed to McGregor Museum on 13 Mar 2014
-28.77181, 24.78052 (485)	Limb bones pointed out by community member	13 Mar 2014 Removed to McGregor Museum on 13 Mar 2014

Two skulls that were at -28,77201, 24.78011 and referred to in verbal reports were found to have been stolen overnight.

A remarkable feature is that all the remains appear to have come from extremely shallow graves, not more than 0.5 m depth. Grave shafts through a superficial soil unit appear not to have been dug to any appreciable depth (if any) into the underlying shale sediment.



Trench at the point where at least two skeletons were found. Work was ceased at this point.



Skeletal parts disturbed from the trench (13 March). Two skulls had been stolen from here overnight.

Meeting with consultant, contractor and municipal officials 17 March 2014

Relevant staff were not available to meet before 17 March. On that date, Dr Morris met inter alia with Mr Prodigy Phepheng (MVD Kalahari Consulting Civil and Structural Engineers, 082 748 8009), Mr Willie Swiegers (Sol Plaatje Local Municipality, 0844437709), Mr Jaco Huisamen (Henra Consulting, 0796927317).

The meeting, at which the process to be followed was explained, included a site visit during which further observations were made.

Locality	Description	Action and Date
-28.77167, 24.78089 (487)	Grave identified in trench section with bones exposed. No indication of a coffin. No grave goods visible.	17 Mar 2014 Loose bone in trench removed to McGregor Museum on 17 Mar 2014
-28.77160, 24.78089 (488)	Bones found below section	17 Mar 2014 Loose bone in trench removed to McGregor Museum on 17 Mar 2014
-28.77162, 24.78087 (489)	Grave identified in trench section	17 Mar 2014 Photographed
Various adjacent to -28.77196, 24.78026 (483)	Fragments of bone	17 Mar 2014 Loose bone in trench removed to McGregor Museum on 17 Mar 2014



Grave at -28.77167, 24.78089 (487), orientated east-west and resting on the surface of the shale (see detail in following image).



The dumps alongside the trench would contain many fragments of bone.

In total it is estimated that between about seven and ten graves/skeletons are represented by the observations made thus far. Given the east-west orientation of the graves relative to the broad trench running north-east to south-west, it is possible that many more skeletons may ultimately have been disturbed.



At GPS points 490 and 491 it was ascertained in open trenches that definitely no graves occur there (dolerite and shale reach the surface at 491 and shale is close to the surface at several other points along the trench, which is indicated by the blue line).

Is this Bultfontein Cemetery?

The initial thought on 12 March was that the burials represented perhaps two or three isolated graves. This view began to be discounted on 13 March with the finding of further bone fragments over a larger area. That this was an east-west aligned burial ground or cemetery was becoming more obvious on 17 March.

Coincidentally, independent historical enquiries in January-February 2014 had located references to a “Bultfontein Cemetery” (Garth Benneyworth pers.comm.), but no indication existed on any known map as to where this cemetery was situated. A further visit to the Africana Library was made on 17 March: none of the relevant maps shows any burial ground in the area now designated Diamond Park. De Beers Archives was also consulted, similarly drawing a blank.

There is a distinct possibility that the Diamond Park graves, not far from the Bultfontein Mine, indeed represent the Bultfontein Cemetery. For now this remains pure speculation. One would wonder whether, at that period, shallow graves such as those found here would have been permitted in a relatively formal cemetery (implied by the extant register). It is possible that the graves belong to an earlier phase (as noted at the Kimberley North African burial ground), predating the more formal controls apparently implemented from the 1880s.

Discussion with SAHRA

During discussion with the Burial Grounds and Graves Unit of SAHRA in Pretoria (Ms Itumeleng Masiteng) and the SAHRA Archaeological Unit in Cape Town (Dr Mariagrazia Galimberti) it was agreed that:

1. It seems likely that the graves are more than 100 years old (as they appear to be, and would be if this is the "missing" Bultfontein Cemetery or an earlier burial ground), and hence would be the concern of the Cape Town (Archaeology) office rather than of the Pretoria (BGG) office. However, both offices would be kept in the picture.

2. During discussion with Dr Galimberti it was agreed that:

a) Two operations are needed: i) to salvage and investigate the graves and bones disturbed/displaced in the existing trench; ii) to carry out controlled exploration along the intended further trench lines within the settlement to determine if/how far the burials/cemetery extend.

b) For the above two operations, two permits would be required.

c) A preliminary report (this document) would be submitted to SAHRA to be discussed on Monday morning (24 March).

In the interim, in discussion with Mr Willie Swiegers of Sol Plaatje Local Municipality, it was agreed that Mr Sello Matsie (PRO, SPLM) would arrange a public participation meeting.

Recommended modus operandi

1. Public participation meeting to be held in Greenpoint in the week commencing 24 March 2014.

2. Submission of application for two permits as indicated above. Once permits have been issued, two concurrent efforts would be directed at:

3. Salvage and investigation of damaged graves and displaced skeletal parts in and alongside the trench.

4. Controlled exploration by way of careful mechanical trenching under supervision of the archaeologist along the intended further trench lines within the settlement to determine if/how far the burials/cemetery extend.

5. Advise the developer as soon as possible how the findings might affect the proposed provision of Civil Services for 892 Erven in Diamond Park.

Dr David Morris
Kimberley 20 March 2014