

Initial Assessment Report and Motivation for Exploratory Permit, Erf 4995, corner of Waterfall and Palace Hill Roads, Simonstown

Report prepared to accompany HWC permit application

Prepared for

Regent Blue Sayers' Lane (Pty) Ltd

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Details of the Heritage Practitioner

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1 Introduction

In early June 2018 ACO Associates cc was approached by consultants for a proposed development on Erf 4995, located at the corner of Waterfall and Palace Hill Roads in Simonstown, after fragmentary human remains were discovered by the building contractor excavating foundation trenches for a proposed new building on the site (Figure 1 and Plate 1).

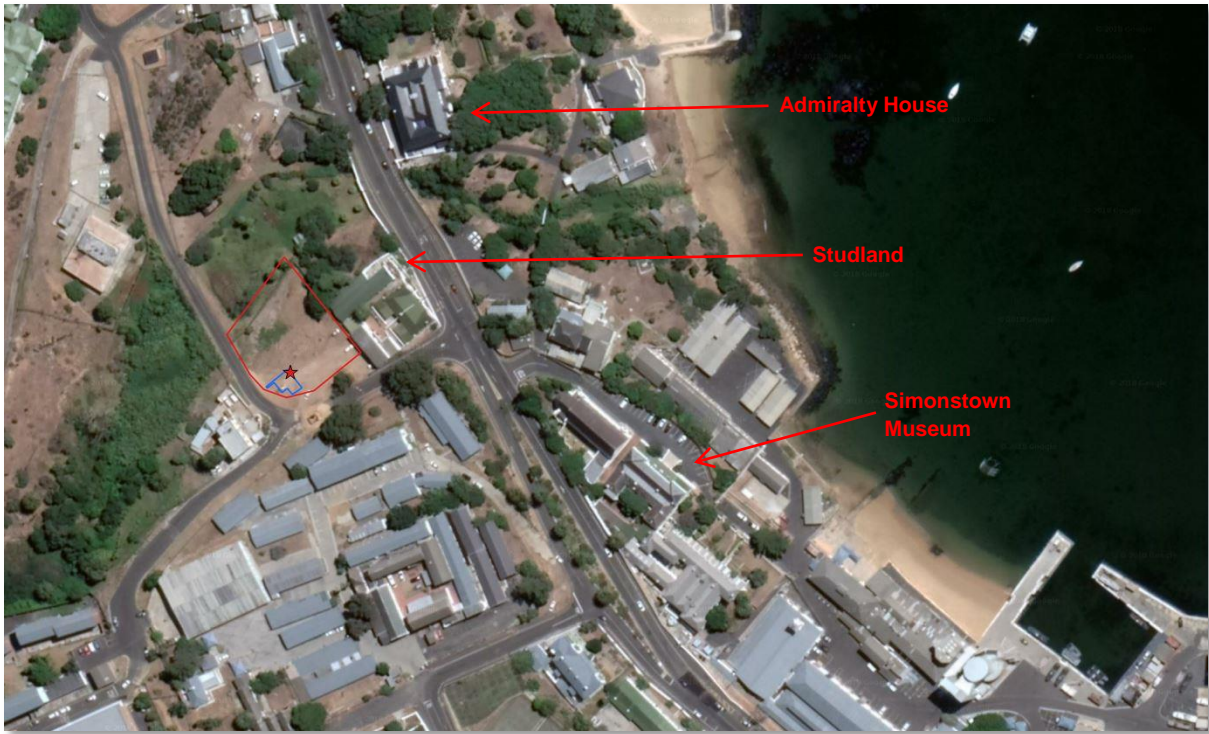


Figure 1: Location of Erf 4995 (red polygon) showing the excavated part of the new building foundation footprint (blue polygon) and the position of the human bones noted in the foundation trench section by ACO Associates on 8 June 2018.



Plate 1: Human skull fragments found on erf 4995 by machine operator

At the request of the developer, ACO conducted a site visit on 8 June 2018 and noted the presence of further scattered and fragmentary human remains in the walls of the foundation trenches, to a depth of approximately 600mm below the surface. No obvious grave shafts were visible in the foundation sections and the scattered and fragmentary nature of visible bone suggested that it was in secondary context.

This short preliminary report on the history of Erf 4995 and the surrounding area forms part of the application to Heritage Western Cape (HWC) for a Section 35/36 permit to carry out an initial, small-scale investigation of the site, with a view to better understanding the nature, context and possible provenance of the human skeletal material.

2 Background

Erf 4995 is located on the corner of Waterfall and Palace Hill Roads in Simonstown and although now empty, was previously occupied by early 19th century cottages (Figure 2) .

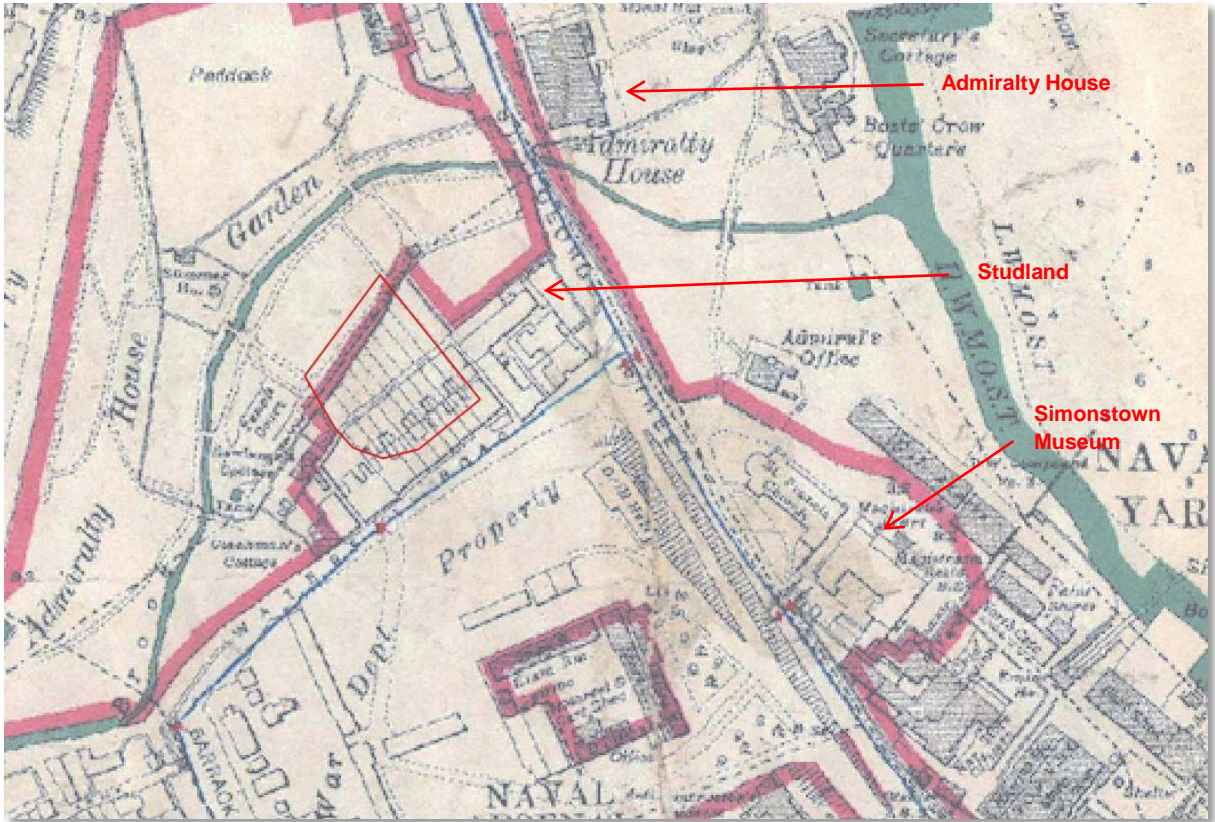


Figure 2: : Location of Erf 4995 superimposed on the 1910 Cape Town Survey. Note the row of now demolished row houses on the erf.

These buildings were demolished under the Group Areas Act in the early 1970s and their occupants forcibly removed. Following a successful land claim, the property was sold by the claimants (the Waterfall Road Claimants' Association) to Global Pact Trading 299 (Pty) Ltd circa 2004, who planned to develop the site. Global Pact Trading 299 (Pty) Ltd subsequently changed its name to Regent Blue Sayers' Lane (Pty) Ltd, and has obtained planning permission to develop the site.

In November 2006, Cape Archaeological Survey cc (CAS) was commissioned to monitor the excavation of nine geotechnical test pits on Erf 4995 "for the presence of archaeologically significant remains from previous dwellings and associated cultural material" (Cape Archaeological Surveys 2006:1). This archaeological evaluation took place despite a Heritage Western Cape record of decision dated 2004 which stated that "trial excavation and further archaeological field work was not required as the site had been significantly disturbed over the years" (Cape Archaeological Survey 2006:i).

The test pits monitored by CAS were excavated variously to depths of between 1.7m to 2.5m. Some cultural material – ceramics, glass, animal bone and building rubble - was encountered in Test Pits 6-8 which were located on the northern side of the erf, furthest from Waterfall Road (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Surveyor General diagram showing the 2006 geotechnical test pit locations, the new foundation trenches and the position of the bone notes by ACO Associates

In June 2016 Dr Ute Seemann reported the collection of fragmented human remains from Waterfall Road. These remains, comprising some skull and long bone fragments, came to light after City Council workers dug a trench for cables at the base of an embankment on the southern side of Waterfall Road, adjacent to the naval barracks and in the block above Erf 4995 (Figure 4). During the excavation and backfilling of this trench, bone fragments were unearthed and left scattered on the surface. These were collected by a local resident and given to the Simon’s Town Museum who requested advice from Dr Seemann as to their likely provenance and age (Seemann 2016).



Figure 4: Location of human remains reported in 2016 (yellow polygon)

3 Preliminary Site Assessment

Dr Seemann's report and ACO's preliminary site assessment work for Erf 4995 both suggest that the human remains being encountered in the Waterfall Road area are probably associated with the VOC hospital established in Simon's Town in the mid-18th century.

According to the Resolutions of Council, a decision was taken on 23 March 1745 to construct a Company storehouse and hospital to serve the fleets that called in at the Simon's Town during the Cape's winter months (Cape Town Archives Repository, C. 123, pp. 94-138). In February 1752 the Resolutions note the need for a suitably qualified person to oversee the hospital in False Bay, which suggests that a hospital had been constructed. It appears that the original hospital was close to the beach, as an annex to the storehouse, because in 1759 the Resolutions of Council record that the damp sea air was found to be unsuitable for invalids and a proposal is made to resite the hospital. An engineer's report to the Governor proposed a location for the new hospital higher up the slope from the beach, and presented two alternative building layouts (Cape Town Archives Repository, C. 137, pp. 457-485, Brock and Brock 1976).

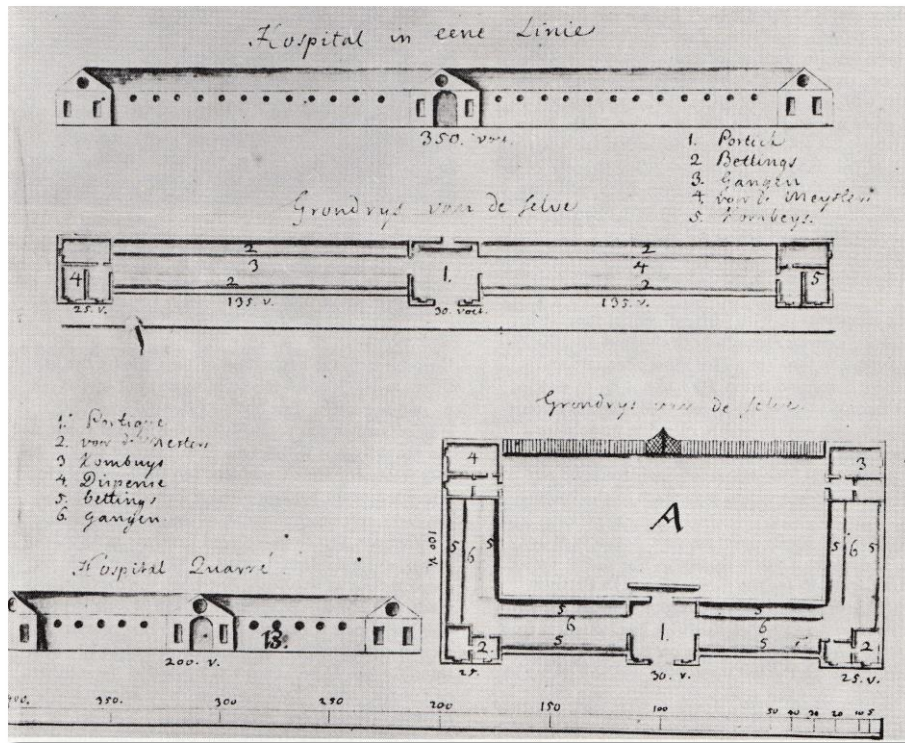


Plate 2: 1759 proposals for new hospital building (Brock and Brock 1976)

According to Brock and Brock (1976) building work commenced in 1760 and the hospital, ultimately built on a square pattern with an internal courtyard, was complete by 1765. A map of proposed artillery batteries in Simon's Bay dated 1772 by the Company land surveyor and mapmaker, CF Brink, shows the storehouse and square hospital building (<http://www.atlasofmutualheritage.nl/en/Plan-several-batteries-be-built-Simons-Bay.2489>) (Figure 5).

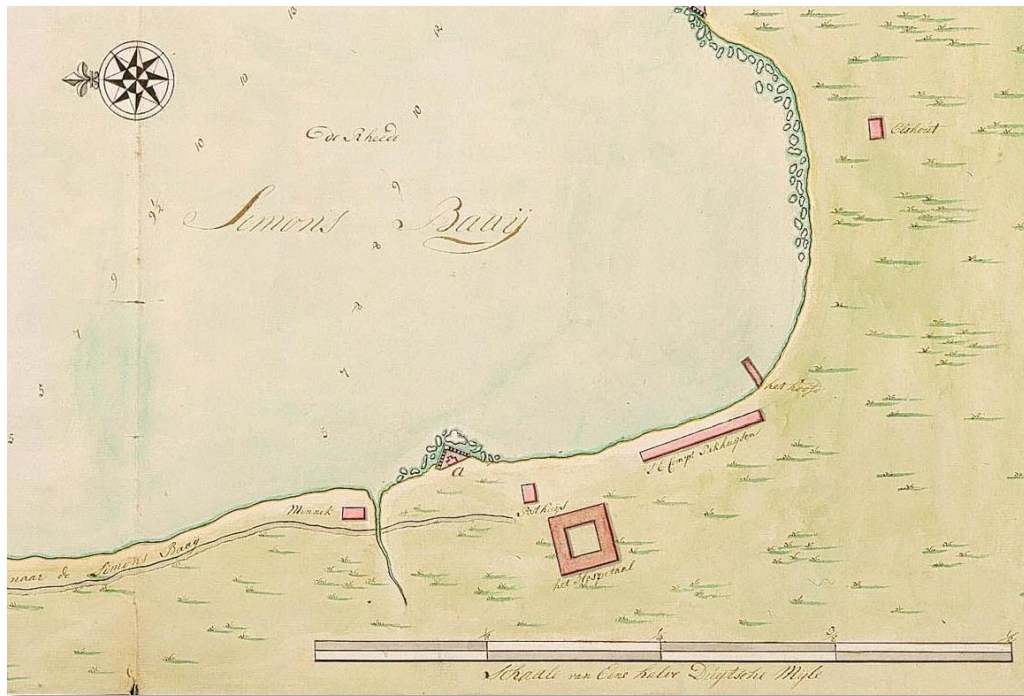


Figure 5: Map by CF Brink dated 1772 showing the new hospital built on a square groundplan. The VOC storehouse is the long building on the coast (Atlas of Mutual Heritage)

In 1796, shortly after the start of the first British occupation of the Cape, the hospital was given up and converted for use as an army barracks (Brock and Brock 1976) and in 1798 a new hospital was established in the former Governor's House, now the Magistrate's Court and Residence. Simon's Town's formal cemetery, the Old Burial Ground between Queens (Main) Road and Runciman Drive, was established in 1813 adjacent to the new hospital.

Where burials took place prior this is unclear as none of the maps consulted in this preliminary study show evidence for a cemetery elsewhere in Simon's Town. However, it is more likely than not that there was a burial ground close to the VOC hospital where those who died while in the hospital were buried. This would seem to be borne out by a report by Johannes Brand, Deputy Fiscal of Simon's Town to the Governor of the Cape dated 19 December 1810 which states:

"It has been a constant practice to inter the bodies of all civilians and of all persons either in the Military or Sea Service behind the Barracks, there having been no other locality in the neighbourhood; the consequence is that ... the graves are so near to each other that it is scarcely possible to dig a new one without opening an old one [and] it must be an unpleasant sensation for invalids to have a view of this new last home from their rooms" (Brock and Brock 1976:82).

Brand goes on to recommend the establishment of a new graveyard on the site occupied by the Old Burial Ground referred to above.

This preliminary assessment suggests that the late eighteenth century VOC hospital and later army barracks form the core of the naval barracks that presently stand between Waterfall and Arsenal Roads (Figure 1 and Figure 2). It is further suggested that the human

remains which have been found in Waterfall Road and on Erf 4995 are associated with this VOC hospital and the burial ground that appears to have been attached to it.



Figure 6. Part of a long bone visible in section in foundation trench.

4 Proposed Way Forward

The permit application to which this preliminary assessment report is attached, is to conduct a preliminary assessment that will involve cleaning the sections and base of the existing construction excavations, and following through on at least one long bone visible in section to determine if it articulates with or has proximity to any other material.

In resolving this, understanding the context of the finds will be key in determining their significance, and therefore the work envisaged will be to gather information to build confidence in refuting or confirming a working hypothesis that the remains are in secondary context resulting from the formalising of the barracks embankment and roadworks associated with Waterfall Road. We believe that the finds are a “smoking gun” indicating that there may be a dense informal burial ground under the adjacent Navy Barracks which used to be the site of the VOC hospital.

- If it becomes apparent that there are grave shafts visible along with articulated remains, a formal process of grave relocation will be initiated along with the necessary public processes.
- If the bone is clearly in secondary context, it will be collected and housed at Iziko Museum or UCT Medical School. Both institutions have been approached as repositories. It is thereafter suggested that the developers proceed with their programmes, but works are monitored for further finds.

5 References

Brock, B.B. and Brock, B.G., 1976, *Historical Simon's Town*, A.A. Balkema, Cape Town.

Cape Town Archives Repository, C. 123, pp. 94-138.

Cape Town Archives Repository, C. 137, pp. 457-485.

Cape Archaeological Surveys, 2006, *Waterfall Road: Archaeological monitoring of geotechnical test pits on Erf 4995, Simon's Town*, Unpublished client report.

Seemann, U.A., 2016, *A report on some skull and longbone fragments found along Waterfall Road, Simon's Town*, Unpublished report.