

# AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF ERVEN IN THE PRESTWICH PRECINCT, GREEN POINT, CAPE TOWN

Assessment conducted in terms of  
Permits issued under sections 35 and 36 of the National Heritage Resources Act

Prepared for

**The Department of Public Works and Transport**

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## Summary

ACO Associates was appointed by the Department of Public Works and Transport, Western Cape Province to investigate 4 portions of land in Green Point that make up the Prestwich Precinct. All of this land was used as historic burials grounds in the past. These were exhumed with varying degrees of thoroughness in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the land developed thereafter.

The property owner is exploring future development options for the land known as the Prestwich Precinct. The assessment was made through archaeological excavation to determine the extent and diligence of the early exhumations, and whether there were any possible restrictions to development.

Trail excavations were conducted on all the affected erven. In terms of possible restrictions imposed by the presence of human remains, all the Prestwich Precinct sites discussed in this report are developable. Some will require pre-development exhumation projects.

### *Provincial Pavement Testing Laboratory (Erven 738 and 734).*

This site remains archaeologically sensitive but not sensitive enough to preclude development activities. If any surface penetrating construction work is envisaged, it will be necessary to exhume human remains, record and document vaults and possibly identify a number of these subsurface structures for conservation (if feasible). It is important to note that any development activity must allow upfront time for this to happen. The amount of time needed will be dependent of the proposed extent of any development.

### *Prestwich Primary School (Erf 202)*

This site has been well exhumed. Development of ground within the school yard is feasible subject to a watching brief. While we believe that the site has been cleared of graves, it is possible that a few “stragglers” may be on site.

### *Erf 564 (Provincial Government Buildings)*

This erf which was the site of the old Somerset Hospital has been transformed by construction activities and is therefore not considered to be sensitive. Development of this site should require a precautionary watching brief as the area in general contains graves under the streets.. The surrounding roads and pavements are sensitive therefore any potential developer is alerted to the possibility of some risk if re-installation of services is envisaged. Here formal archaeological intervention may be required.

### *Salesian Institute (Erf 566)*

The site has been exhumed but there are still human remains that were missed in the early exhumation. This site remains archaeologically sensitive but not sensitive enough to preclude development activities. If any surface penetrating construction work is envisaged, it will be

necessary to exhume human remains that lie in the deeper levels (below 2 m). It is important to note that any development activity must allow upfront time for this to happen. The amount of time needed will be dependent of the proposed extent of any development.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The report contains the findings of a series of trial excavations conducted on properties owned by the Department of Public Works and Transport (Western Cape Government), South Africa. The sites in question were previously the subject of a detailed stage 1 HIA conducted by the Archaeology Contracts Office of the University of Cape Town (Hart 2012). Heritage Western Cape required that before the planning process could move forward, trial excavations had to be completed to determine the affectivity of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century exhumations, and what the risks were for future development.

The Precinct consists of a collection of contiguous erven:

- Provincial Pavement Testing Laboratory (Erven 738 and 734).
- Prestwich Primary School (Erf 202),
- Erf 564 (Provincial Government Buildings)
- A portion of land leased by the Salesian Institute (Erf 566)

All the aforementioned erven previously formed part of the Somerset Road burial area and represent both official and unofficial burial grounds and cemeteries from 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Cape Town.. The Prestwich Precinct lies within a part of the City that is experiencing a commercial boom. The Provincial Government wishes to maximise the potential of its assets within this area. Of concern is the possible presence of human remains on the sites, the degree of which could in a worst case scenario, be a significant constraint or even a fatal flaw in terms of possible development opportunities. This report follows on the Stage 1 HIA.

## 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 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century “Maitland” or cemetery area of the city. The process started during the earliest years of the Cities 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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. 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 backdrop: 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.

Three of the four sites investigated during this project were formal cemeteries, while one may have been an informal burial ground in the past. The findings from each of the four sites, as well what is known of the history of each site are presented in the following pages. Much of this report is presented as a series of drawings and photographs documenting the findings and describing the excavations.



## 1.2 Location

The study area is located in Green Point in Cape Town. The land involved consists of contiguous properties bounded by the city street system as depicted in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1 Location of the study area.

### 1.3 Terms of reference

The historical cemeteries were exhumed on an as-needed basis by convict labour between 1909 and 1930. The land was set aside for education and humanitarian purposes. Although the clearance of the old cemeteries is mandated by a valid Act of Parliament, new legislation in the form of Section 36 of the National Heritage Resources Act applies.

Recent development activities along with a number of archaeological studies have revealed that the effectiveness of exhumation was variable. Clearly where burial vaults were in use, these were opened and the human remains collected and removed. Excavations conducted in the Anglican Cemetery (now the Victoria Junction Hotel) located a number of complete human skeletons missed by the early process. A similar situation appears to have occurred on the grounds of the Dutch Reformed Cemetery, whereas the situation at the Lutheran and Catholic cemeteries (subject of this study) remained unknown until now.

The proposed project was to trial-excavate the cemeteries to determine the quality of the exhumation and the implications for future development of the sites. Conditions of each of the three sites are slightly different and required different approaches.

ACO was appointed:

- To obtain the necessary authorisations in terms of sections 35 and 36 of the National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999 to do the required work.
- To conduct trial excavations on Provincial Pavement Testing Laboratory (Erven 738 and 734). Prestwich Primary School (Erf 202), and Erf 564 (Provincial Government Buildings), a portion of land leased by the Salesian Institute (Erf 566).
- To record the findings and prepare a report indicating the condition of the erven and make recommendations as to what future work is required.
- Make good excavations after project completion.

## 2 METHODS

### 2.1.1 Permits

A significant amount of planning went into this operation. Sensitivities with respect to the fallout from the Rockwell excavations conducted a decade earlier raised a great deal of debate over how the work should be done. Iziko Museums of Cape Town, due to internal policies, were reluctant to accept any material from the burial grounds unless the human remains from the sites in question accompanied them. This was in contradiction to the National Minister's recommendation that human remains should go to the Prestwich Ossuary, which at the time was not environmentally suited to the storage of artefacts. The conundrum was eventually resolved after the City of Cape Town demonstrated willingness to upgrade the Memorial to museum standards. This opened the way for granting of the necessary excavation permits. Resolution took 8 months to accomplish with the result being that the Prestwich Memorial will be the repository for human remains and associated artefacts. Permits under section 36 were issued by the SAHRA burial unit and permits under section 35 were issued by Heritage Western Cape.

### 2.1.2 Health and safety

ACO Associates in fulfilment of their contract with the client arranged for *contractors all risk* as well as *lateral support* insurance as it was expected that some of the excavations would need to be quite deep and were a potential health and safety risk. Surrounding buildings were subject to an engineering inspection and the resulting recommendation of a 5 m setback from any building was adhered to throughout the project. In accordance with safety procedure a safety plan was developed for the project and project staff was trained with respect to its contents. Being mindful that two of the sites housed educational institutions, portable fencing and warning signage was obtained for installation around the excavations. Wearing of personal protective equipment was required for both staff and visitors behind the fences. Security was arranged for Prestwich School, while both the Salesians Institute and Pavement Testing Laboratory had their own in-house security. The team used the "Old Post Office" at the Pavement Testing Laboratory as a site office (thanks to the organisations helpful and accommodating staff). The project was completed without any accidents requiring medical attention.

### 2.1.3 Excavations

It was anticipated that better and more conclusive results would be obtained from large excavations. Furthermore the potential need for lateral support demands an excavation size large enough for implementing stepping or shoring. A 4.5 ton Yanmar tracked mechanical excavator was

hired for the duration of the project. Although mechanical excavation was used, the excavations took cognisance of visible stratigraphy. Much use was made of photography, measured drawing and sketches with respect to recording the finds. Maximum mechanical excavation depth is 2 m, thereafter excavation by hand was necessary thereafter. Grave shafts and sensitive areas were excavated by hand by an experienced team. Finds were taken to the company premises for photography and analysis before the eventual return of the material to the Prestwich Memorial. The approach that was adopted was that excavations had to reach bedrock or basal clays where ever possible. This was to establish if there were layers of burials – that is burials under each other. It was necessary in places to remove human remains to check if there were further burials in place underneath. Human remains that did not justify removal or were not fully accessible were left in place and reburied. During excavation, tailings were continuously monitored for human bone.

All excavations were backfilled and compacted. Tar surfacing at the Prestwich School and Provincial Government Buildings were re-instituted after the excavation had been backfilled and compacted.

The use of a proton magnetometer (Courtesy of Mr Jaco Boshof, Iziko Museums of Cape Town) was obtained and implemented on the first site (PTL 1), however such equipment is highly sensitive to sources of magnetism in the environment. Since much of the open land was used as parking, interference from parked cars limited the physical extent of its use. The proton-magnetometer successfully identified grave features and areas of high disturbance in the area of PTL 1. The technology does unfortunately not provide depth information.

### **3 LIMITATIONS**

Aside from the initial difficulties with respect to obtaining permits, the study progressed according to plan. The excavation restriction of having a 5 m buffer from structures did preclude some areas and restricted the size of the excavations in some areas. The fact that all of the land portions were in use required consideration be paid to the needs of the occupants – in particular, Prestwich School where a single large excavation was carried out to limit the impact on school activities, and similarly on the ground used by the Salesian institute. One excavation at the pavement testing laboratory was terminated due to a very deep shale rubble layer. Continuation would have affected the safety of the excavation.

## 4 FINDINGS

The section of the reports covers the individual erven, the test excavations carried out and findings and recommendations for each erf.

### 4.1 Provincial Pavement Testing Laboratory (Erven 738 and 734)

#### 4.1.1 History

Erven 738 and 734 originally formed part of the 1755 and 1802 grant of additional burial ground to the DRC (Dutch Reformed Church) and extended to the Buitengracht (the western boundary of the settlement of Cape Town at the time). At the time of the closing of the Somerset Road cemeteries, the Select Committee (1875) found that the DRC burial grounds were in an appalling state, better only than the White Sands Paupers' burial grounds (Clift 2005).

In 1907 Buitengracht Road was widened. The municipality negotiated with the DRC for a portion of the land required for the road widening. The church agreed, on condition that the municipality recover and rebury any human remains (AG 1440 in Clift 2005). The remainder of the DRC cemeteries were only formally disinterred in 1920 (November 1920-March 1921). The exhumation process was managed by Edward Hutt, the Secretary of the Board of Trustees and Superintendent of the Maitland Road Cemetery. A team from the cemetery staff had the duty of collecting and re-coffining the human remains before transporting them to the Maitland Road cemetery. Convict labour was used to do the trenching and breaking down of vaults. About 893 coffins filled with human remains were reinterred in the DRC allotment at the Maitland Road cemetery and 132 wagon loads of memorial stones were moved (PAS 2/1064: Letter dated 3/4/1922). Reference is made to the sites being levelled and sown with barley.

The Pavement Testing Laboratory was constructed sometime between 1921 and 1926. It is visible on the 1926 aerial photograph. It is located partially on a portion of Erven 734 and 738. The first structures were built as an adjunct to the first Somerset Hospital as a convalescent facility, and thereafter took on the role as an interment centre for foreigners intent on entering South Africa. Indications are that many European Jewish families who left Europe prior to the Second World War would have endured their first introduction to South Africa at this facility. The pavement testing laboratory was apparently established temporarily on the site in the 1940's and has remained there to this day. While this report is mainly concerned with the archaeological sensitivity of the site, it is relevant to note that the social significance of the older structures is very high being the last remaining vestiges of the Old Somerset Hospital, and thereafter an interment centre.

# Pavement Testing Lab Excavations

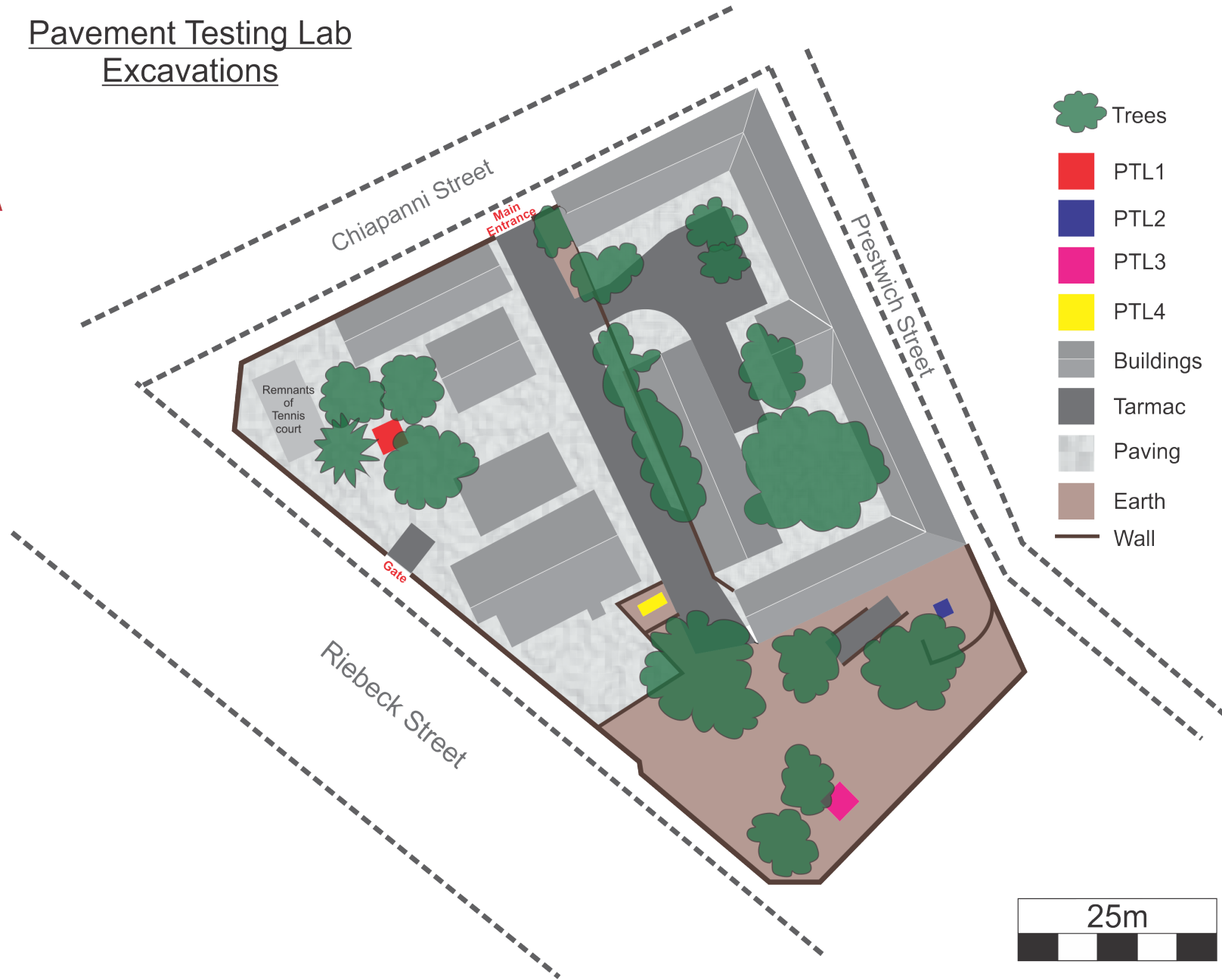


Figure 2. Map of excavations at the Pavement Testing Lab

## Pavement Testing Lab (PTL) 1



**Figure 5. Excavation PTL 1 was a generous sized hole located towards the south west side of the erf among trees behind the prefab structures. This image depicts the excavation at the point at which bedrock is reached. The deposits were highly disturbed, and contained very little articulated bone.**

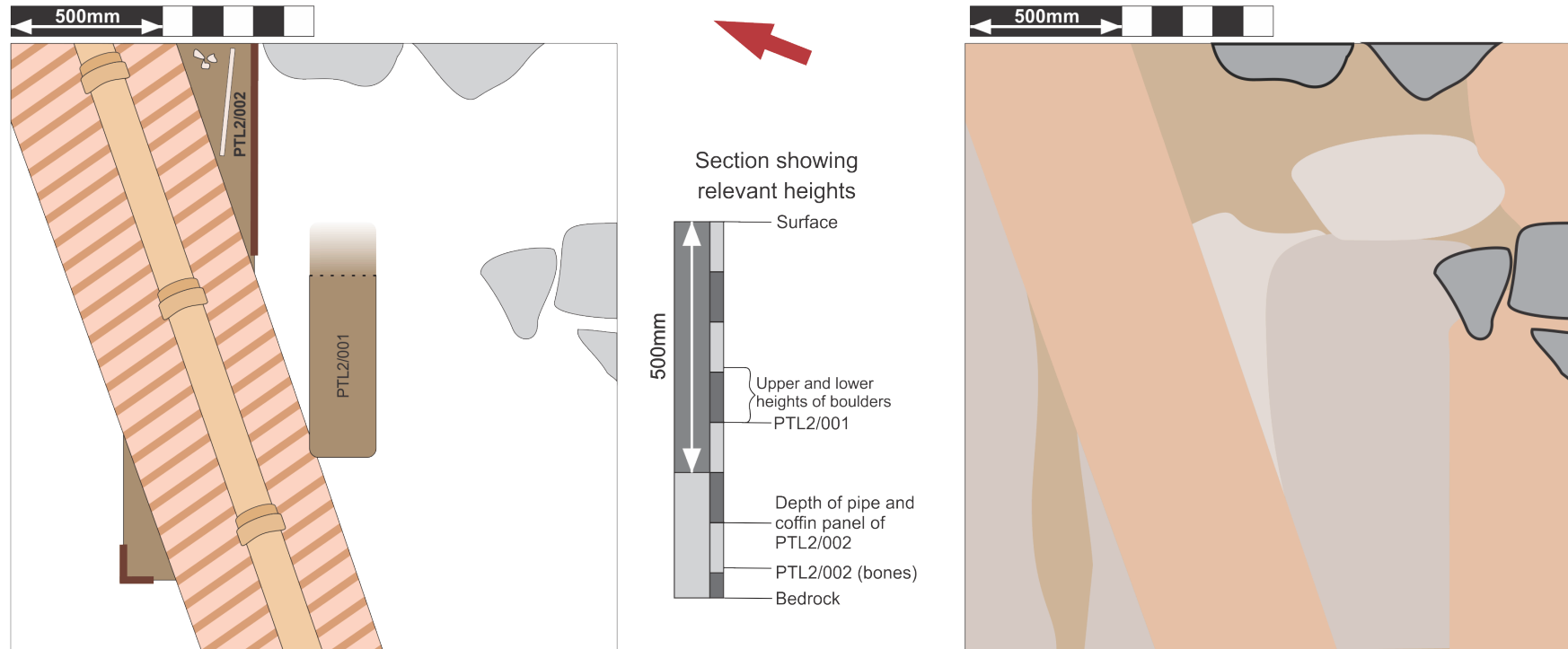


**Figure 5 A cluster of human bone found just above bedrock. It was not articulated. No burial vaults were found in this excavation.**








**Figure 5 Showing a grave shaft dug into the basal clay. Grave was fully exhumed**

## Pavement Test Lab (PTL) 2



Schematic of PTL2 showing where the graves were found, the boulders, and the ceramic waste pipe.

PTL2/001. Remaining grave as defined by coffin wood. Only upper limbs found, head positioned at south west end. Lower part of coffin cut through and is missing.

-  PTL2/002. Right fibula, and some tarsals, metatarsals and phalanges of the right and left foot. Grave also lying facing north east.
-  Coffin wood
-  Pipe trench. Appears to go through PTL2/002, and was in place before the graves were exhumed. Though it was lower than PTL2/001 it is believed to post date the burial, and just missing the corner of the grave.
-  Boulders
-  Outline of the coffin, as defined by the coffin wood and nails found.

Rough sketch of PTL2, at approx 500mm below the surface, (showing boulders in grey with black outlines), and the various soil colours. The change in soil colours are indicators of soil disturbance. The drawing depicts an arbitrary layer, that is below PTL2/001, and above PTL2/002 and the pipe.

**Figure 6. Excavation of PTL2**

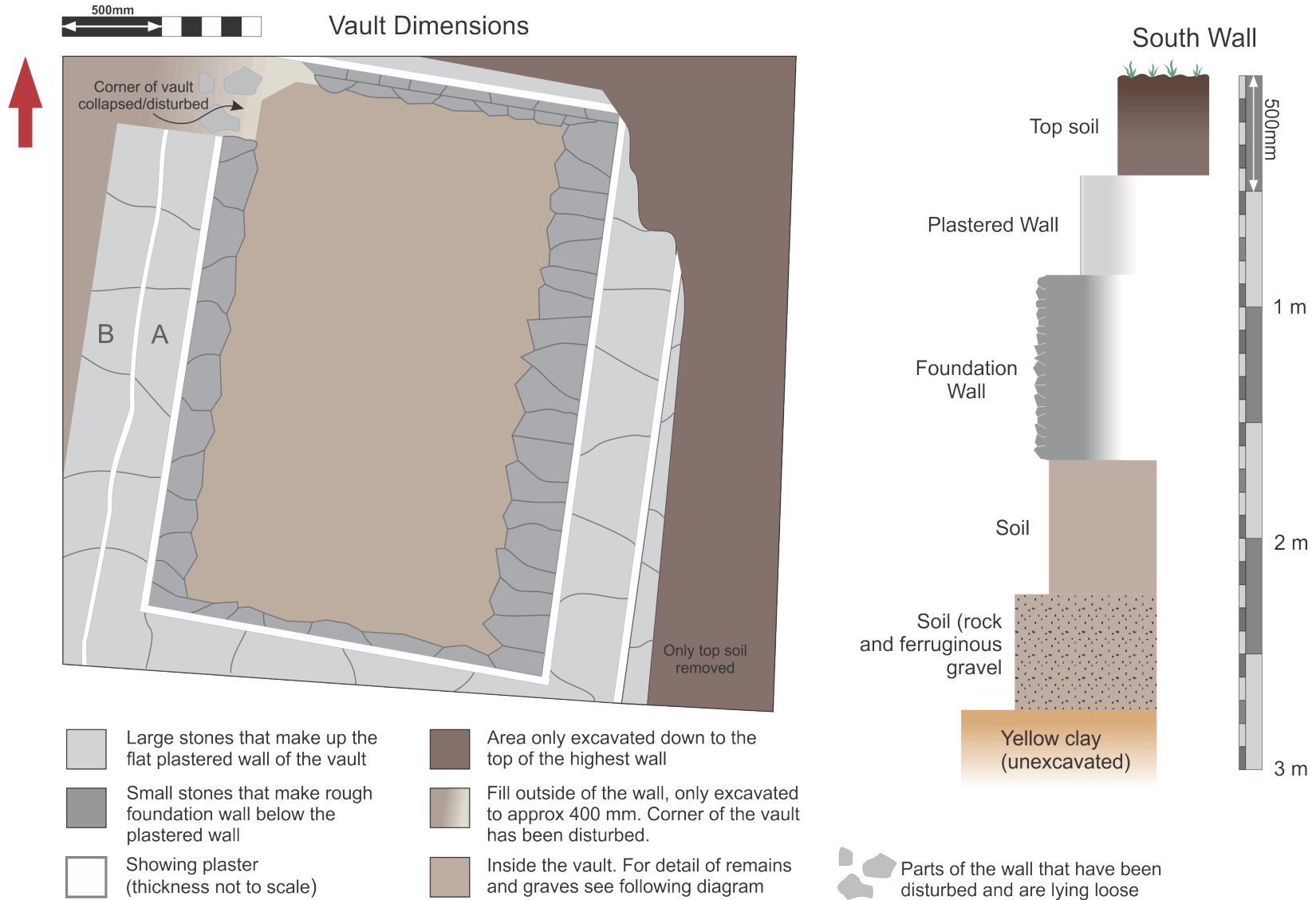




**Figure 8** Excavation PTL 2 showing complex patterns of disturbance in the soil caused by burial shafts, and on the right the trench of a large ceramic pipe.



**Figure 8** The upper body of a child in a coffin (PTL2/001). The torso had been truncated possibly by a later pipe trench



Wall **A** is part of the vault that was excavated.  
 Wall **B** abuts this wall, with a layer of plaster between. It is may be that wall **B** belonged to a vault that stood adjacent to the vault we excavated.

**Figure 9. Excavation of the vault PTL3**



Figure 12 (left) Members of the ACO team expose the foundations of a burial vault in PTL 3.

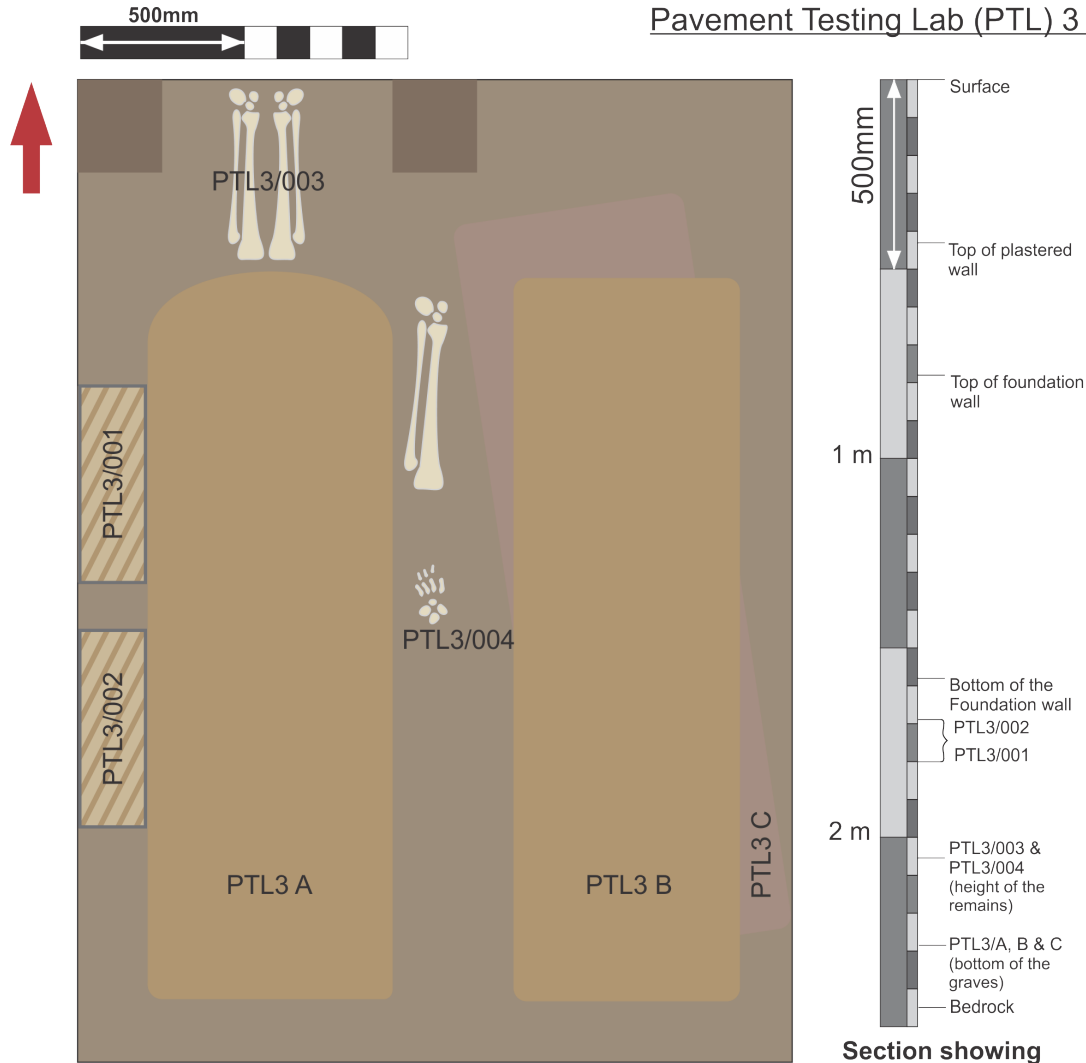


Figure 12 The remains of a very young child buried in the side of the vault but missed during exhumations (PTL3/002). There is copper staining on the cranium.



Figure 12 The outline of a grave shaft that was below the floor of the vault. Just below the orange scale rod is a set of lower limbs of another individual.

## Pavement Testing Lab (PTL) 3 Burials



Burials and graves within the vault, but below the vault walls

- Greyish soil below a layer of rubble
- Dark soil seen either side of PTL3, maybe original earth
- Juvenile burials
- Vault Graves
- Human remains

**PTL3/001** and **PTL3/002** predate the vault, as the wall was built over them and they were disturbed by the vault graves. They were also situated higher than PTL3A & B (1450 mm whereas the vault graves were at a depth of approx 2300mm).

**PTL3/001**  
Almost complete small juvenile (deciduous teeth erupting). Head lying at the south end. All bones below the femur are missing, and believed to have been lost when the grave PTL3A was first dug. There is coffin wood beneath the child.

**PTL3/002**  
Small juvenile, possibly perinatal. Still a large portion of the coffin wood remained. Coffin was greatly disturbed by the digging of PTL3A grave shaft, causing it to have slid at an angle towards PTL3A, and has lost many of the bones.

**PTL3/003**  
All most complete adult lower limbs from the tibia down (including the patellas). The remains predate the vault graves, as the feet were beneath the wall, and the top of the remains were intercepted by PTL3 A. PTL3/003 was lower than 001 & 002 but slightly higher than PTL3 A (see height diagram).

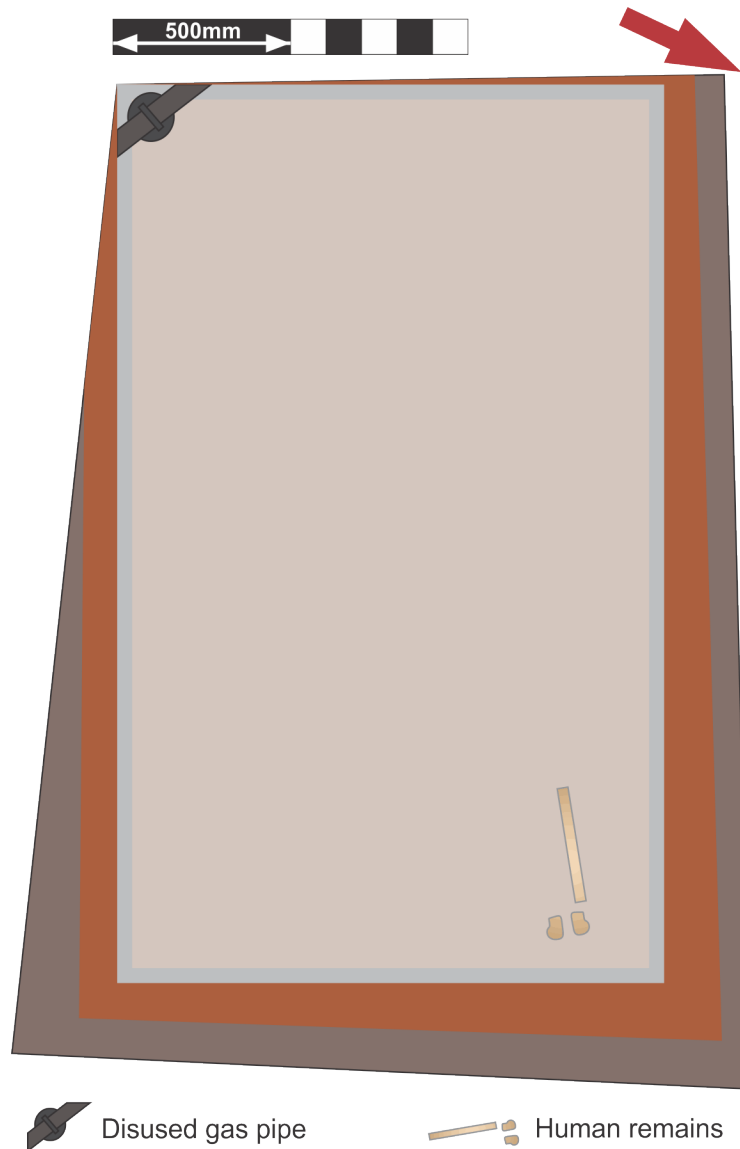
**PTL3/004**  
Only the left tibia and fibula, with tarsals, and parts of the left hand. Remains were recovered from the same soil type as PTL3/003, though it is unclear if they were contemporaneous, or one intercepted the other, the graves would have been very close. PTL3/004 was intercepted by both PTL3 A & B

**PTL3 A & B**  
It is believed that PTL3 A & B were the graves for which the vault was built, due to their central position and that the grave shafts intercept all other graves. They were also completely exhumed, barring some coffin nails. PTL3 B & A rest on top of the bed rock and are the deepest graves. They have been filled with a distinguishable reddish soil after exhumation, showing that the surrounding areas and graves were missed by the diggers.

**PTL3 C**  
The top can be clearly seen at the south end, it may have been an earlier grave than PTL3/B, however as the two overlap- it is filled with the same reddish soil, and has blurred the edges of PTL3 B. It is orientated at an angle to the vault, suggesting it was there before the vault was built.





Figure 13. Humans remains inside vault PTL3


## Pavement Testing Lab (PTL) 4



The vault walls were uncovered at a depth of approx 150 mm. Thereafter only the interior of the vault was excavated. The remaining vault dimensions are 2530 mm x 1540 mm and 2400 mm deep. The vault walls are plastered, beneath which is red brick. Around the edges, at the bottom are the remains of the plaster floor, however the majority of the floor has been removed. Below this were many complete and broken sun-fired red bricks, these were not *in situ*, nor did they cover the floor. Below this uneven reddish sand became grey sand with patches of clay and ferracrete, believed to be close to the basal clay. Excavation was halted at below this due to large densely compacted rocks. No human remains are believed to be below this.

Humans remains were found, two patellas, some fingers, a fibula and an articulated ankle. The only signs of a grave that remained were coffin nails. There was no sign of a grave shaft in the floor or in the excavation. A very large number of coffin handles were found in the vault. It is believed that vault was fully exhumed and filled in, unlike PTL3 which looks like only the vault graves were targeted.

-  Earth below tar only excavated to the height of the top of the vault.
-  Decomposing red brick. This was only partially uncovered, as it was fragmenting. Believe to be the top of the wall and/or old pavement surface (also seen in PTL3)
-  Bottom of the vault.
-  Wall of the vault is plastered is plastered with shell/lime plaster, still in good repair

 Disused gas pipe

 Human remains

**Figure 14. Excavation of vault PTL4**



**Figure 15** PTL 4 burial vault. The tomb was filled with very large shale boulders.



**Figure 16** The brick work and lime cement mortar construction of the vault is clearly visible.



**Figure 17** Vault at PTL 4 after it had been fully excavated to its shale slab floor.

#### **4.1.2 Observations (erven 738 and 734)**

Erven 738 and 734 make up a complex archaeological site which is primarily a historical burial ground. The excavations have revealed that there is evidence of multiple layers of burial, extensive use of vault burials (Figures 7-14), the structures of which are largely still in place, as well as extensive use of the vaults themselves for multiple burials. Indications are that the vaults were the last layer that was used as earlier sets of human remains have been located under vault structures.

It would be fair to say that this site has been largely but crudely exhumed. However it is clear that a large number of human bones were left behind including a number of partial and complete skeletons. In particular it was noted that exhumation process was unsuccessful at identifying the remains of children, who given mortality rates in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries would make up some 40% of the population of the cemetery. It is also necessary to consider the possibility of unregulated use of the cemetery after its official closure.

Most of the site still contains evidence of burials, however a large disturbed area was found through proton-magnetometry in the area of PTL 1. This area appears to have very few vaults, some loose human remains. The disturbance may relate to the re-routing of Somerset Road.

The site has significance due to:

- The presence of a number of un-exhumed bodies – particularly children whose numbers may be in the order of several hundred across the site.
- The presence of a number of partially exhumed bodies and large quantities of loose bone lying in the fill down to some 2.5 meters in depth across the site.
- The presence of relatively well preserved burial vaults, some of which could date back to the earliest years of Cape Town.

#### **4.1.3 Recommendation (erven 738 and 734)**

The amount of complete human remains, loose bone and in-tact tombs means that development of this site will have to be preceded by quite a lengthy exhumation process which will see retrieval of human remains and their interment at the Prestwich Memorial. It is anticipated that the number of remains involved will be several hundred which is easily accommodated at the Prestwich Memorial, considering that the other erven that make up the precinct are not as sensitive and will need less resources.

The exhumation work will be necessary in any areas where new structures with footings or basements are required. Even if all the available land on the erven were developed, the exhumation required is completely feasible in terms of availability of storage space for human remains, which has been a concern.

It is also recommended that not all burial vaults be destroyed, but where possible they should be conserved *in situ*, or even presented for public display purposes (a vault is conserved *in-situ* under a restaurant in Stellenbosch and may be visited by appointment). This will help retain the historical meaning of the site for tourism and education purposes.



## 4.2 Prestwich Primary School (Erf 202).

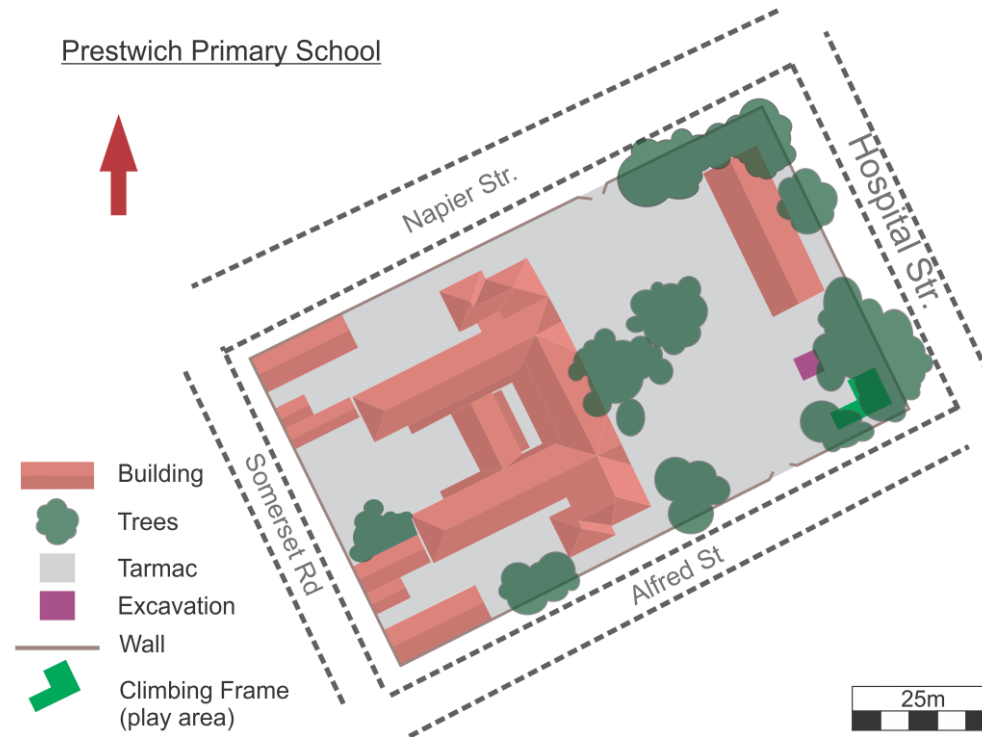


Figure 18. Position of excavation at Prestwich Primary

### 4.2.1 History

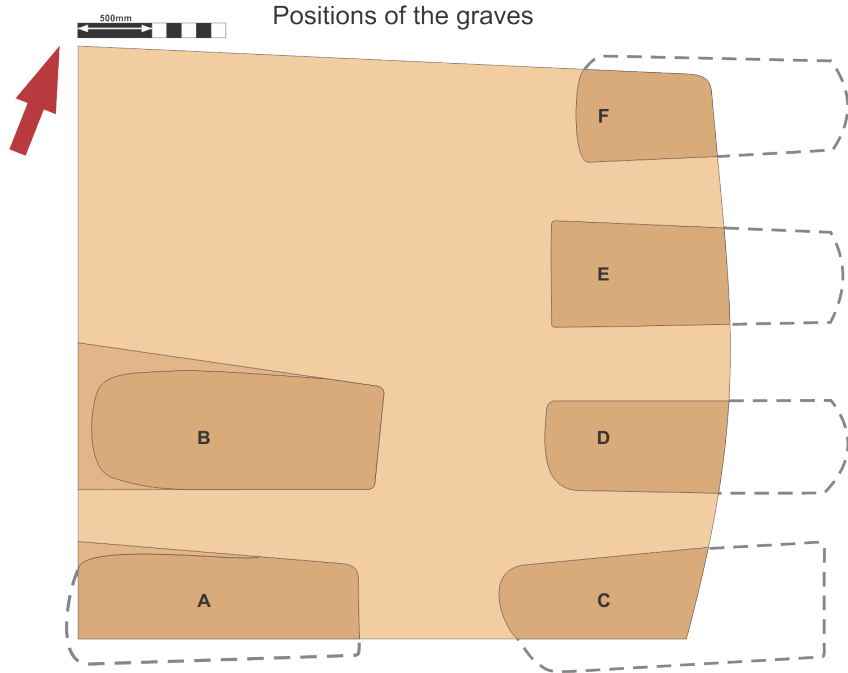
Prestwich Primary School is situated on the site of the old Lutheran Cemetery which was granted in 1833 as a formal burial ground. Prior to its formalisation as a cemetery the site would have conceivably formed part of the informal burial ground. Immediately opposite the school lies Prestwich Place (the Rockwell), where the remains of up to 3000 people were found (1 person per square meter) outside of any known historically demarcated cemetery. Furthermore, human remains have been recently found adjacent to the school under Prestwich Street showing that this pattern was not confined to the Rockwell site (Halkett in.prep)

Minutes of the Cape Town City Council (1909) indicate that in 1909 the contents of 9400 graves were exhumed from the Lutheran Cemetery and re-interred at Maitland Cemetery No 1. The headstones were also to be relocated and re-erected.

The process of layering colonial burial grounds over informal burial grounds along with subsequent exhumations would have been highly destructive for the earlier pauper burials on the same land. It is unclear as to how well the 1909 -1930 exhumations were performed or whether there were any burials left behind that were not in marked graves. The number of human remains exhumed indicates that the exhumation process may have been thorough. As per the requirement that the land was to be used for education or religious purposes, the Prestwich Primary School was built in 1910, at the same time as the Salesian Institute.

An important relic of the Lutheran Cemetery is the stone wall which surrounds the property. This is an original feature that dates to the establishment of the cemetery in 1833. The outlines of burial vaults can be seen against the interior of the wall indicating that burials and vaults were crammed into the site to accommodate the 9400 or more graves. The boundary wall is made of mixed materials but dominantly blue shale. The wall around the sides and front is an important heritage indicator which must be conserved. The boundary wall facing Prestwich Street is more recent and not part of the 1833 wall.

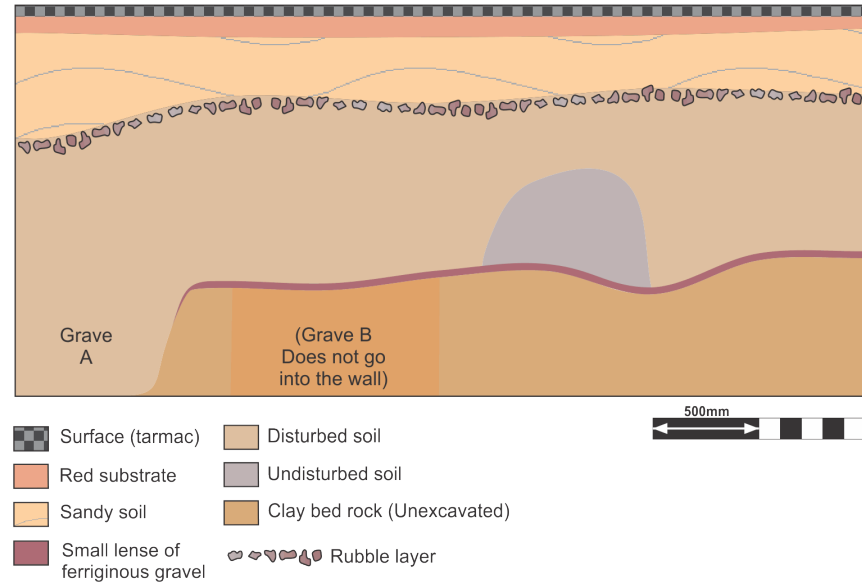
# Prestwich Primary School (PPS) 1



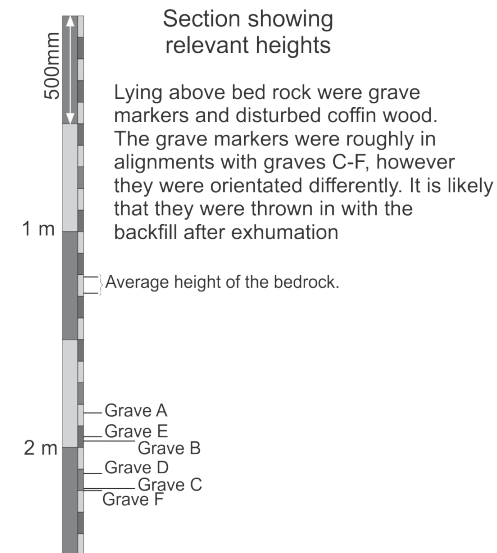
- Clay Bed Rock
- Intermediate height, where grave diggers have narrowed the trench in the harder substrate
- Fully excavated graves into the bedrock

- A** Found Two teeth, one copper stained and a small round copper object (similar but unlikely a coin). Also much coffin wood, nails and coffin handles still *in situ*. There were also four eyelets found, that were punched into canvas.
- B** No human remains, but coffin remains were found.
- C** No human remains, but coffin remains were found.
- D** Significant amount of metal plating, still in position of coffin, as well as handles, nails and wood. Fingers bones (PPS1/001) were found, as well as a coin.
- E** Coffin remains were found
- F** Coffin remains were found
- - - Line showing the expected extent of the graves in the unexcavated sections.

# West Wall PPS1



- Surface (tarmac)
- Disturbed soil
- Red substrate
- Sandy soil
- Clay bed rock (Unexcavated)
- Small lense of ferruginous gravel
- Undisturbed soil
- Rubble layer



**Figure 19. Prestwich Primary excavation**



**Figure 20 Commencement of Excavations at Prestwich School**



**Figure 22 The first signs of grave shafts can be discerned to the left of the scale rods.**



**Figure 21 Grave shafts, which are clearly visible after excavation penetrated basal clays. They were empty apart from wood fragments, coffin nails and handles.**

## **4.2.2 Observations**

The identification of the outline of 6 empty graves (Figure 21 - 22 ) points to a thorough exhumation process. Furthermore the relatively small quantities of loose human bone in the fill indicates that an unusual amount of care had been taken in making sure that almost all human bone was removed from the site. Artefacts found on the site included simple iron grave markers, casket handles, one coin and four eyelets, (these suggest burials in sail cloth or canvas). A human tooth that was found had copper staining, which may indicate a coin being placed in the mouth. This was on all accounts an austere cemetery, with the burials placed in neat rows. Little evidence of burial vaults was observed in the excavation, yet it is known that they were present on the periphery of the cemetery. Artefacts found are depicted in Appendix A (Figures 35 – 37).

Indications are that the Prestwich School site has been carefully exhumed. If any development activities were planned for the site, it is not necessary to conduct a pre-development exhumation.

## **4.2.3 Recommendation**

The likelihood of finding human remains is low, although there are isolated fragments of human bone in the fill. Precautionary monitoring by an archaeologist to rescue bone fragments, handles and grave markers is all that would be required. It is not impossible that there are articulated human remains on the site as the early exhumation process may have occasionally failed to locate small children and infants. In the unlikely event of such finds occurring they can be removed during the course of any development related bulk excavation earthworks that may be planned for the site.

## **4.4 Provincial Government Buildings (Erf 564)**

### **4.4.1 History**

The site itself was the location of the Old Somerset Hospital, which was demolished in 1938. After a number of failed development attempts the site appears to have been left vacant until it was utilised by the Provincial Government for its current purpose.

The significant aspects of the site's history relate to its use as a hospital for slaves and the underclass, but before that time its use as an informal burial ground is supported by various forms of evidence. Historical accounts of human remains being found on the site when the Old Somerset

Hospital was built. Human remains have been found under the pavements and street surfaces of the adjacent Prestwich Street and under the adjacent Red Brick building during construction. In February 2014 a human skeleton was located in Hospital Street during service excavations.

The existing Provincial Government Buildings were apparently built in the 1960's after the site stood vacant for many years. Unfortunately no drawing plans for this substantial structure seem to exist.

#### **4.4.2 Observations**

An attempt was made to dig a trial excavation in the northernmost covered ally within the erf; however the mechanical excavator refused against solid concrete immediately after removal of the surface tarmac. It became apparent that the only available area where a trial excavation could be sunk was underlain by heavy structures supporting a nearby basement parking facility. It was felt that disturbance of the erf was so extensive as to not warrant any further work.

The site was used as a place of informal burial for paupers and slaves prior to its first period of development. A site inspection has revealed that sub-surface disturbance across the erf has been significant. There is a significant parking basement over at least half the site, while the construction of ramps, footings for the building and general lowering of levels below street elevations will have largely destroyed or displaced the human remains that existed here. Furthermore the archaeological traces of the Old Somerset Hospital are unlikely to have survived. The possibility of undisturbed pockets of landscape along with human remains cannot be ruled out; although it seems that the likelihood of such areas surviving is very low.

It is probable that there is still human bone on site, but in the form of un-articulated fragments that have been left behind after being disturbed by the clearing of the old hospital, and later on by the excavation of basement and footings for the set of government buildings. Had this site not been previously disturbed, it has the same potential for contestation as the Rockwell which would mean that no below surface excavations would be permitted. Given the fact that the damage was done years ago, this concern is greatly reduced.

The only possible areas of sensitivity are the pavements and streets around the erf where it is known that burials exist. These could be impacted by demolition, basement excavation and laying of new services under the pavement (which is a likelihood if a new development is planned).

#### **4.4.3 Recommendation**

If sub-surface redevelopment or excavation is required for redevelopment, it will be necessary to obtain a precautionary Section 36 excavation permit from SAHRA for the relocation of human remains. If any human remains are found, these must be interred at the Prestwich Memorial built

to house human remains found in the Green Point area. Other than this comparatively minor archaeological issue the site presents an unrestricted development opportunity.

#### 4.5 Salesians Institute (Erf 566).

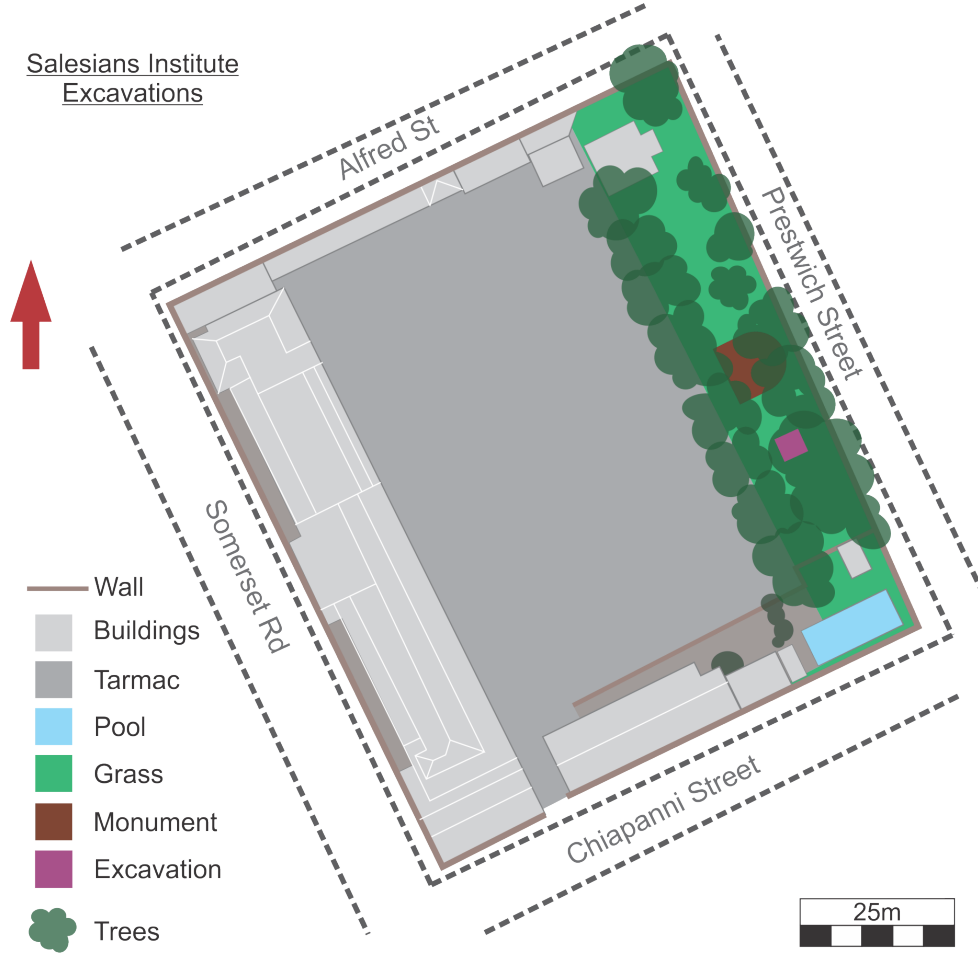


Figure 23. Location of the excavation at the Salesians Institute

### 4.5.1 History

Erf 566 currently forms the north eastern portion of the Salesian Institute grounds. The land is nominally rented by the Institute from the Government. Today much of erf 566 is a well-established garden containing a central devotional area with a statue (present in 1926), the Institute's swimming pool (situated at the north east corner). A training facility for brick laying and cement work has been established at the north-west corner. The ground is considered important by the institute as a peaceful green enclave used for both religious and recreational purposes which breaks the view onto the monolithic utilitarian buildings on erf 564. A surprising aspect of the institute grounds is the fact that within the boundary walls it is elevated along the northern edge almost 2000 mm above street level.

Despite its relatively undeveloped appearance, the history of Erf 566 is very complex. Its origins date to 1720 when the Council of Policy of the VOC government at the Cape identified what was a desolate area of dune for a new burial ground for soldiers. It is possible that even before 1720 the land received informal burials. Successive small pox epidemics saw to it that the burial ground was heavily used. The land was demarcated by a stone wall with gates. Together with the adjacent Dutch Reformed Church cemetery built a few years later, the walled burial grounds are visible on almost every panorama and early photograph of the area, hence together they formed a significant landmark. In the early 19th century  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the military burial ground (probably already full) was assigned to re-use by the Catholic Church while erf 566 was subsequently re-assigned for use as the Scottish Cemetery. Indications are that the Somerset Hospital also had rights to use the ground. In 1907 the Roman Catholic cemetery was made available to the Catholic Church for educational and charitable purposes. Construction of the south eastern wing and chapel of the Salesian Institute took place in 1910 while the twin south-western wing was built in 1935. The human remains were exhumed from the site and reburied at Maitland.

The military burial ground which exists today represented by the boundary wall of the Salesian Institute, was the first formal burial ground in Cape Town other than that which was associated with the Groote Kerk. It is clear that Erf 566 was subject to extraordinarily heavy use as a burial ground. The raised soils levels that characterise the site are not a 20th century landscaping event but reflect the enormous quantity of building materials and fill that was brought gradually onto the site to cover over successive layers of burial and burial related construction. Etchings of the site in the mid-late 19th century show that by that time soil levels within the Erf were considerably artificially raised. The implication of this is that as the military burial ground became progressively overfull, soil was imported onto the site to create depth to accommodate additional human remains. Hence Erf 566 was a layered burial ground which contained tens of thousands of human bodies. The implication of this is that there may have been up to 4 m depth of human remains on the site. While the historic records indicated that the



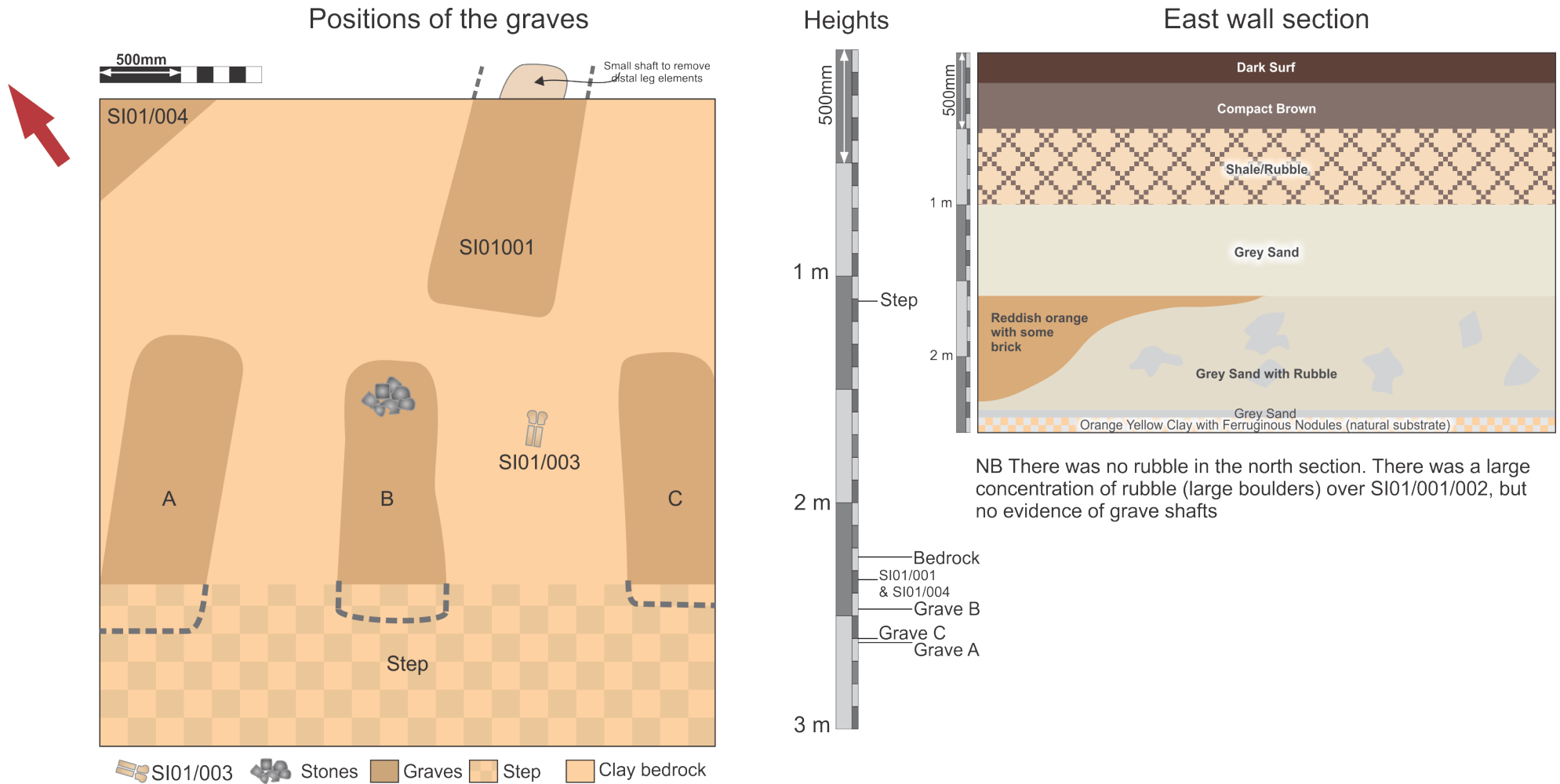
cemetery was exhumed, the trial excavation on this site was motivated by the fact that this was a very old heavily used cemetery that probably contained multiple layers of bodies. This brought into question how well the historical exhumations were conducted.

#### **4.5.2 SI1**

A single large excavation was carried out. This revealed that the soil all the way to a depth 2m had been heavily disturbed indicating that a major exhumation had taken place. Interestingly the basal clay horizon/ bedrock was encountered at a depth of just below 2m. The shafts of 5 graves could be clearly identified. These were excavated by hand to maximum depth of 2.6 m. Human remains were found in two of the 5 graves – both of these were articulated burials of adults. One set of human remains was left *in situ* as they projected under the northern profile of the excavation which could not be widened any further without risk.

Loose human skeletal material was present in the fill throughout all levels, along with coffin handles and wood fragments.

# Salesians Institute (SI) 01



SI01/001/002 An undisturbed burial, disturbed by excavator. Bones were SI01/001. Further excavation removed SI01/002, which was later joined with SI01/001 when they were confirmed to be the same burial. The grave is orientated west to east. The lower parts of the legs went into the section, but were removed from the wall by digging into the section.

SI01/003 Two distal fibulas and calcaneus, with two tarsals from the left ankle. Though they were found *in situ*, there was no discernable grave. It may have rested directly on the clay.

SI01/004 Majority of grave still in un-excavated section. Adult distal femur, proximal tibia found with small juvenile. Remains were left *in situ* (except a small number of loose bones).

Grave A, B & C Previously fully exhumed, only disturbed fragments were found, and a few artefacts. Grave B had a small selection of stones piled at the east end. The ends on the graves slightly extend into the section of the Step.

**Figure 24. Salesians Institute excavation**



**Figure 27 David Halkett (ACO) commences excavation on SI01**



**Figure 27 A partially disturbed but articulated adult human skeleton found at SI01 (SI01/001). The cranium (left) has been damaged, but most of the facial bones were retrieved. The lower limbs extended into the wall, and were taken out at the end of the excavation.**



**Figure 27 Archaeologists investigate the appearance of human bone at 2 m deep at SI01.**

### 4.5.3 Observations

Indications are that the site was as predicted, multi-layered and that fill had been brought in to accommodate burials. The depth of burial is less than anticipated – it is unlikely that any will be found at more than 3 m below surface.

The bulk of human remains have been exhumed from the upper layers of the cemetery. The presence of two sets of human remains and 3 empty shafts points to a scenario where the early 20<sup>th</sup> century exhumations successfully removed the bulk of human remains, but were not entirely successful at identifying earlier grave shafts deep down. Implications of this is that there are still a number of human burials on this *erf*, however the situation is not as serious as previously hypothesised by Hart (2012). Exhumation of these finds is feasible should development of the site be considered.

### 4.5.4 Recommendation

An exhumation process will be required should *major* development of the site be envisaged. Provided that interventions do not penetrate deeper than 1.5 m below present surface of the site, the human remains can remain *in situ* under any proposed structures. If deep piling is required or a basement excavation, human remains will need to be exhumed.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Of the 4 erven investigated, it has been established that 3 erven were subject to an exhumation process.

On erf 202 (Prestwich School) the exhumation was complete and apparently thorough. There is very little human bone on site, although coffin handles, grave markers and wood fragments were discarded in the fill.

On erven 738 and 734 (Pavement Testing Laboratory) the exhumation process was not quite so thorough. All obvious vaults and graves had been exhumed; however it is apparent that a number of early burials under vault floors were missed, as were remains of young children and neonates. An interesting feature of this site is the good preservation of the burial vaults themselves. While a somewhat morbid subject matter, these are historic structures that were particular to the time. It is suggested that a few examples are worthy of conservation.

On erf 566 (Salesians), a solid but not quite complete exhumation has taken place. There is evidence that thousands of bodies, possibly buried in layers were removed from the site. However there are still a number of bodies in the very deepest levels. While the extent of the trial excavations was more limited here due to the layout of the land, no surviving vaults were found. There is sundry human bone in the fill as well as discarded burial "furniture": such as wood, handles, nails and decorative plating.

Erf 564 (Government buildings) is so transformed that the likelihood of finding intact human skeletons is extremely low. Recent finds in surrounding streets indicate that the likelihood of encountering human material under pavements and streets around the site is high. The streets and pavements remain sensitive.

## 6 RECOMMENDATIONS

In terms of possible restrictions imposed by the presence of human remains, all the Prestwich Precinct sites discussed in this report are developable. Some will require pre-development exhumation projects.

### *Provincial Pavement Testing Laboratory (Erven 738 and 734).*

This site remains archaeologically sensitive but not sensitive enough to preclude development activities. If any surface penetrating construction work is envisaged, it will be necessary to exhume human remains, record and document vaults and possibly identify a number of these subsurface structures for conservation (if feasible). It is important to note that any development activity must allow upfront time for this to happen. The amount of time needed will be dependent of the proposed extent of any development.

### *Prestwich Primary School (Erf 202)*

Development of ground within the school yard is feasible subject to a watching brief. While we believe that the site has been cleared of graves, it is possible that a few “stragglers” may be on site.

### *Erf 564 (Provincial Government Buildings)*

Development of this site should require a precautionary watching brief. The surrounding roads and pavements are sensitive therefore any potential developer is alerted to the possibility of some risk if re-installation of services is envisaged. Here formal archaeological intervention may be required.

### *Salesian Institute (Erf 566)*

This site remains archaeologically sensitive but not sensitive enough to preclude development activities. If any surface penetrating construction work is envisaged, it will be necessary to exhume human remains that lie in the deeper levels (below 2 m). It is important to note that any development activity must allow upfront time for this to happen. The amount of time needed will be dependent of the proposed extent of any development.

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## 8 Appendix 1

## 8.1 Selection of the Remains and Artefacts from PTL

### 8.2 PTL1



Figure 28. An assortment of artefacts including shoe leather and a wooden acorn, as well as a shoe polish tin.

### 8.3 PTL2



Figure 30. PTL2/002. Foot bones that were missed in the early exhumation.



Figure 29. Human remains found in association (PTL1/001), with coffin nails



Figure 31. Juvenile remains PTL2/001

8.4 PTL3



Figure 32 PTL 3/001 Almost complete remains of a juvenile.



Figure 33 PTL3/003. The lower limbs that were cut off by PLT3 Gave A

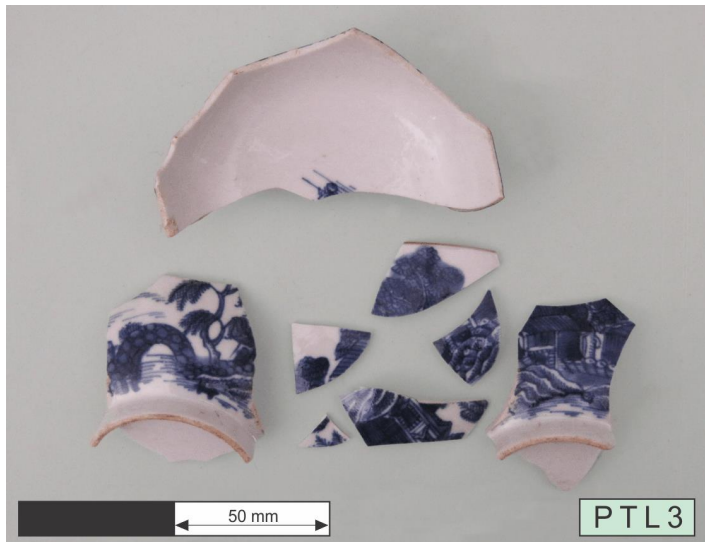


Figure 34 Ceramic bowl with Willow Pattern



Figure 35 Example of decorative acorns found. They are copper stained

## 9 Selection of artefacts from Prestwich Primary School



Figure 36 Grave markers and coffin handles, as well as a horse shoe



Figure 37 A complete (but bent) grave marker



Figure 38 Eyelets, a copper stained tooth found with a small metal object (but is not a coin) and a small stone, possibly an archaeological flake.



Figure 39 Metal plating and a coin found in the grave shaft with PPS1/001

## 10 Selection of remains and artefacts from Salesians Institute



Figure 40 An elaborate coffin handle, nails and metal plating. Some coffin wood and broken human remains that were found in Grave A



Figure 41 Assorted bone fragments, and metatarsal and a tooth, with some glass and coffin nails found in Grave C.