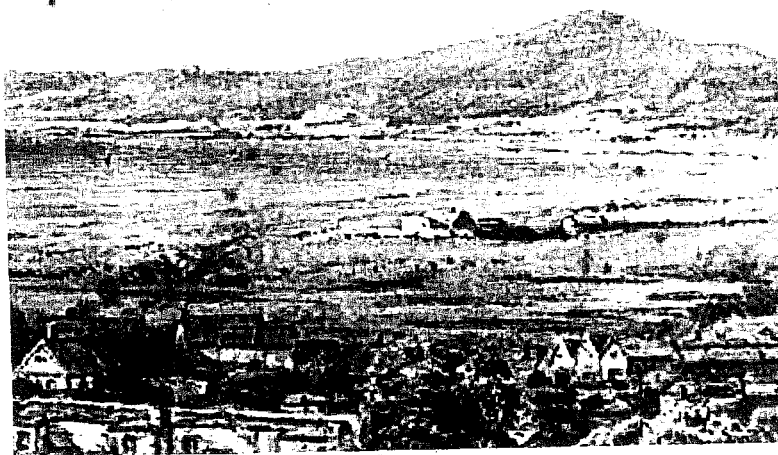


REPORT ON THE PHASE II ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
INVESTIGATION

**VARSCHE DRIFT HOUSE  
MALTA PARK, OBSERVATORY**

**ERF 26162  
MUNICIPALITY OF CAPE TOWN**



Ute A Seemann

Heritage Archaeologist and Consultant

1203, Simon's Bay Estate, Oatlands Road, Simon's Town, 7975

Tel: (021) 786 3656, Fax: (021) 786 5730 (Mrs Beretta), cell: 073 1632 754

e-mail: [ute@zoon8.co.za](mailto:ute@zoon8.co.za)

NOVEMBER 2003

*original with colour  
photographs in HWC files.  
A.J.*

HERITAGE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SERVICE  
ONTARIO / RECEIVED  
2009-12-12

## CONTENTS

---

	<u>PAGE</u>
Abstract and recommendations .....	1
1. Introduction .....	2
2. The Archaeology of the Varsche Drift Homestead .....	3
2.1 The wall foundations .....	4
2.2 The architectural fabric and layout of the main house.....	5
2.2.1 The yard areas .....	12
2.3 The outbuildings .....	13
2.4 The portable artefact material .....	14
2.4.1 The ceramic collection .....	15
2.4.2 Glassware .....	22
2.4.3 Food remains .....	26
2.4.4 Coins, beads, a <i>cowrie</i> shell, buttons, pipes and other paraphernalia .....	27
3. Varsche Drift and its Owners .....	33
3.1 Frederik Wilhelm Allemann, builder of Varsche Drift House, 1783-1790 .....	34
3.2 Clement Matthiessen, wealthy merchant and Official, owner 1799-1830 .....	37
3.3 Pieter van Breda, owner 1830-1847 .....	40
3.4 Cornelius Mostert, 1847-1860 .....	41
3.5 The brothers John and William Fell, 1860-1867 .....	42
3.6 Charles van Reenen-Barry, owner 1867-1876 .....	49
3.7 1876: Varsche Drift is divided up .....	50
4. Beyond Varsche Drift .....	54
5. Conclusion .....	56
Acknowledgements and thanks .....	57
Bibliography .....	58

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Fig. 1	Varsche Drift homestead, 2001 ..... 3
Fig. 2	The foundations for the earliest dwelling ..... 4
Fig. 3	Additional footings for outhouses ..... 5
Fig. 4	East <i>stoep</i> staircase for the new entrance to the house ..... 6
Fig. 5	The curved part of the east <i>stoep</i> ..... 6
Fig. 6	Remains of the 'modern' bathroom and toilet ..... 7
Fig. 7	Plan of the earliest dwelling, excavated 2003 ..... 8
Fig. 8	Orange soft row of bricks, room 1 ..... 9
Fig. 9	Auburn hard fired brick platforms ..... 9
Fig. 10	Partition wall in room seven, mid 19 <sup>th</sup> century ..... 10
Fig. 11	Earlier kitchen (?) in room nine ..... 10
Fig. 12	Door to the large yard from the 'new' kitchen ..... 11
Fig. 13	Plan of the Varsche Drift dwelling, 1950 ..... 12
Fig. 14	Cemented yard area ..... 13
Fig. 15	The farmstead's stable and working area ..... 14
Fig. 16	Schematic diagram of the excavated area, artefact collection Areas highlighted ..... 15
Fig. 17	Chinese export porcelain ..... 16
Fig. 18	British "Jackfield ware" ..... 16
Fig. 19	Earthenware pots, from the 18 <sup>th</sup> century Cape ..... 17
Fig. 20	British 'creamware', late 18 <sup>th</sup> century ..... 18
Fig. 21	Early 19 <sup>th</sup> century British teaware ..... 18
Fig. 22	"Willow Pattern" tableware, mid 19 <sup>th</sup> century ..... 19
Fig. 23	Banded ware bowls, popular 19 <sup>th</sup> century ..... 19
Fig. 24	Mid- to late 19 <sup>th</sup> century British ceramics ..... 20
Fig. 25	British stoneware household vessels ..... 21
Fig. 26	Cheap imitation of Chinese porcelain, ca 1950 ..... 21
Fig. 27	Glasses for the table ..... 22
Fig. 28	Squat, early 18 <sup>th</sup> century wine bottles ..... 23
Fig. 29	Constantia wine and French Champaign bottles, pre- 1800 ..... 23

	<u>PAGE</u>
Fig. 30	Household bottles, second half of 19 <sup>th</sup> century ..... 24
Fig. 31	Utility glass, ornaments and scent bottles ..... 25
Fig. 32	Unknown species of bi-valve, food remain, since extinct ..... 26
Fig. 33	British and South African coins ..... 27
Fig. 34	Trade beads and <i>cowrie</i> shell ..... 27
Fig. 35	Buttons ..... 28
Fig. 36	Dutch claypipe, ca 1850-1900 ..... 29
Fig. 37	Gin-trap, to trap small animals ..... 30
Fig. 38	Personal possessions found at Varsche Drift house ..... 31
Fig. 39	Map of Cape peninsula and some country houses ..... 33
Fig. 40	Houses above Stal Plain, Cape Town, ca 1780 ..... 35
Fig. 41	Varsche Drift house from Montague Bridge, late 1840s . ..... 36
Fig. 42	LM Thibault's plan of properties along the main road, 1813-14..... 39
Fig. 43	Varsche Drift farmhouse, seen from Woodstock, mid 19 <sup>th</sup> century ..40
Fig. 44	Detail of Herschel's panorama, with Varsche Drift house, 1837.....42
Fig. 45	Platforms for joists ..... 46
Fig. 46	Plan of Varsche Drift, ca 1960 ..... 47
Fig. 47	East frontage of Varsche Drift in the 1890s ..... 48
Fig. 48	Surveyor General's Diagram, 1876 ..... 50
Fig. 49	Varsche Drift house and its owners, late 19 <sup>th</sup> century .....51
Fig. 50	Eldest daughter and baby on the <i>stoep</i> , late 19 <sup>th</sup> century ..... 52
Fig. 51	The back of Varsche Drift House ..... 52
Fig. 52	Aerial photograph of the Varsche Drift <i>werft</i> , 1937 ..... 53

## ABSTRACT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

---

This report deals with one house in the Cape Town suburb of Observatory, Varsche Drift house. The investigation was commissioned by FAIRCAPE Developers, who wanted to develop the site as an office park. Two archaeological excavations were conducted on the site, of necessity restricted to the top of the mount, which contained some historical debris. However, the site had been heavily disturbed by 20<sup>th</sup> century building activities. The foundations of the early house, and subsequent extensions at the 'tail-end' were unearthed. Artifacts associated with the owners and inhabitants of Varsche Drift allowed a glimpse into their daily lives.

Together with new documentary evidence the story of Varsche Drift farmstead was traced from its erection in the 1780s to its demolition in the 1960s. The house, an architectural hybrid of Cape Dutch and Georgian style was built as a gentlemen's country residence, became the home of an upwardly mobile working class family and ended its days as rented property amid a working class, industrial area. The shape and size of the *werft* never changed during its one hundred and sixty years of existence.

Due to the farmstead's disturbed archaeological context and the relative abundance of gentleman's residences / small country houses, its value and significance in terms of Cape Town's archaeological heritage is limited. No traces of servants and slaves have been unearthed, except a few glass trade beads worn by indigenous people.

After careful consideration it is recommended that a representative sample of the footage of Varsche Drift house be preserved and the rest demolished after excavation, documentation and removal of archaeological debris. The preservation of the remains can occur in two forms. One, the site could be covered with builder's sand and sealed. Two, the alternative would be to leave the wall footings exposed for display purposes, with explanatory posters and artifacts under a glass display. This would add extra value to the development as – in Kathy Dumbrell's words "a site of interpretation, elucidating both the history of the area and of the personalities who were connected to the area in the past".

## 1. INTRODUCTION

---

Briefed by Heritage Western Cape and the Urban Planning and Conservation Department, City of Cape Town, a phase II archaeological investigation was commissioned by FAIRCAPE DEVELOPMENT for erf 26126, Malta Park, Observatory. The investigation was to focus on the remains of a farmhouse on the small mount. During a phase I archaeological survey<sup>1</sup> it was established that a sizable part of the outbuildings had been demolished prior to the building of some twelve railway cottages around the mount in 1943<sup>2</sup>, a further two cottages had been built before 1937 on the other side of Nelson Road<sup>3</sup>.

The excavation of the remains of the Varsche Drift farmhouse was conducted during September and October 2003 according to present professional archaeological standards. Portable artifacts were removed and bagged with the exception of any dating to after ca 1950, building materials and larger metal objects.

This report will therefore

- Describe the artefactual material found and puts it into the socio-economic context of the owners / occupiers of the farm,
- Relate some further historical / archival research results, and
- Discuss the geographical location of the farmhouse, everyday life of all the people living at Varsche Drift; and link these to the wider cultural landscape of Cape Town and its immediate environs.

---

<sup>1</sup> Seemann, E'Silva & Associates. 2001. Report on an Archaeological Investigation of the Varschedrift Farmstead, erven 26126 & 27661, Municipality of Cape Town. A Report prepared for Faircape Development.

<sup>2</sup> Dumbrell, Kathy. 2003. Varsche Drift, Malta Park, ERF 26162 Observatory, page 8.

<sup>3</sup> Director of Surveys and Mapping, Mowbray, job 282/1937, strip 1, photo 19389, 91, aerial photograph.

## 2. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE VARSCHÉ DRIFT HOMESTEAD

---

The archaeological remains unearthed are situated in what is now the boundary between the suburbs of Salt River and Observatory. According to Fransen & Cook, the Varsche Drift farmhouse was demolished some time in the early 1960s<sup>4</sup>. An archaeological survey was conducted by us in 2000<sup>5</sup> and an exploratory investigation in 2001<sup>6</sup>. This report should be read in conjunction with and augment the earlier reports.

The exposed area on top of the mount was heavily disturbed by 20<sup>th</sup> century building activities and previously demolished building fabric from what we now know to be the farmhouse (Fig. 1). This building rubble overlaid a previous infill (or possibly natural earth cover) of between 300 to 500 mm, almost devoid of artifacts over bedrock of fragmented shale. No man-made living- floor surface was encountered.

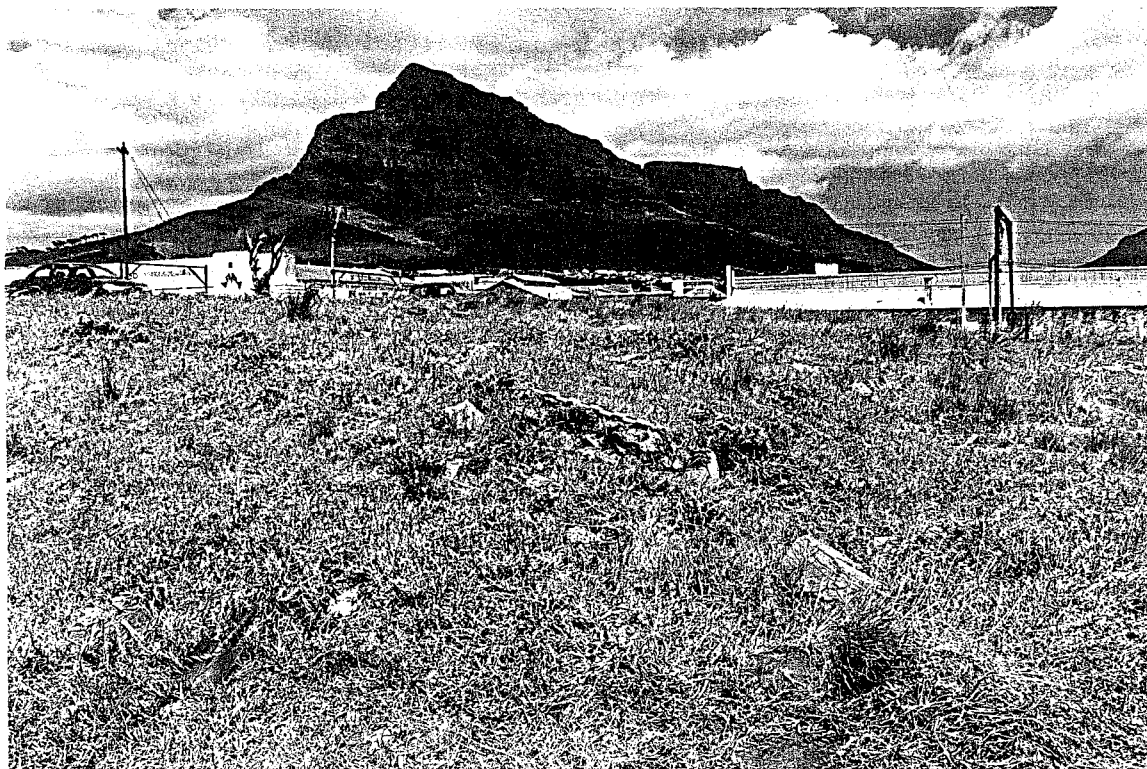


Fig. 1. Varsche Drift homestead demolished, photo taken 2001.

---

<sup>4</sup> Fransen, H, & Cook, MA. 1982. *The Old Buildings of the Cape*. Cape Town: AA Balkema, page 87.

<sup>5</sup> Seemann, E'Silva & Associates. 2000. *Archaeological Assessment and Recommendations*, Malta Park, Observatory. A report prepared for Jonathan Holtmann & Associates.

<sup>6</sup> Seeman et al, 2001. *ibid*.



## 2.1 The wall foundations

The wall foundations of the earliest dwelling were carefully constructed in one episode from semi-dressed stones, fragments of ferrocrete nodules found in the neighborhood on the slopes of the Table Mountain chain, placed in layers with narrow bands of flat shale fragments, yellow clay nodules, pebbles and a shelly mortar<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 2).

The consistency of the mortar is indicative of 18<sup>th</sup> century building material<sup>8</sup>. The interlocking foundations are between 630 mm and 670 mm wide, enough to support an outer brick wall of two bricks with a cavity in between<sup>9</sup>. The foundations were placed directly onto bedrock about 500 mm to 700 mm and are level. This and the amount of soft orange brick rubble and plaster with lime wash found all over the site supports the notion of brick- as opposed to dressed mountain stone outer wall superstructure. It appears that the foundations for the outbuildings along the long axis (called "tail" in T houses<sup>10</sup>) were built at a later stage as the workmanship is of an inferior standard and the foundations abutted the earlier walls in room nine.

(Fig. 3).



Fig. 2. The foundations for the earliest dwelling.

The width and depth of these additional foundations points to much flimsier wall construction as would be found in lean-tos, stables and temporary outbuildings. These were much rebuilt and enlarged during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>7</sup> Fransen & Cook, *ibid*, page 29: also known as plaster, made from burnt seashells, slaked and mixed with sand and salt.

<sup>8</sup> Found by archaeologists on numerous sites in the Cape Peninsula dating to that period.

<sup>9</sup> Aidan Jackson, site agent for Faircape Development, pers comm., 7 November 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Fransen & Cook, *ibid*, page 2.

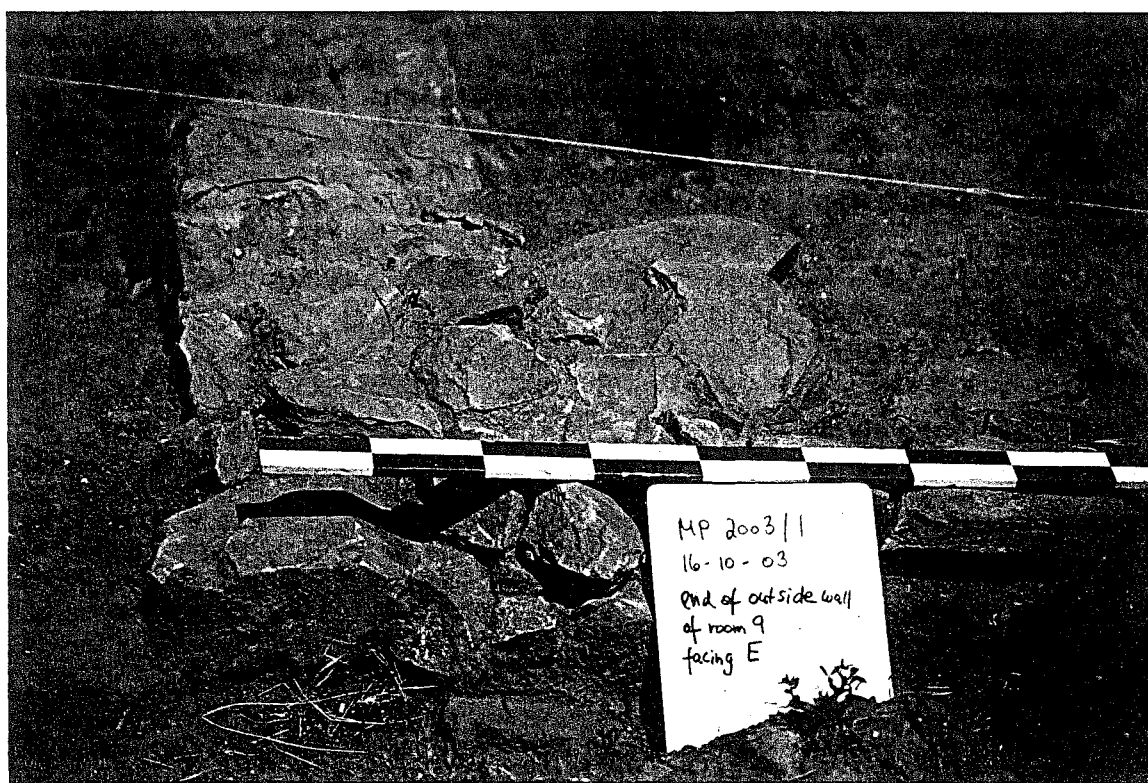


Fig. 3. Additional footings for the outhouses abut the earlier foundation of the dwelling.

## 2.2 The architectural fabric and lay-out of the main house

Material evidence uncovered on the north side of the dwelling suggests that the house's earliest main entrance was placed here. The *stoep*, demarcated with a low perimeter wall, plastered on the outside contains undisturbed earth infill throughout. Building rubble did not cover the *stoep* area to any extent, but it was in this area that most of the yellow *klinkers* were found. These were hard-fired bricks imported from the Netherlands as ballast in ships and used where resistance to wear was needed, i.e. for steps, *stoep* edges, entrances and kitchen floors. The *stoep* also contains foundations for a *stoep* bench on each end, a *stoepkamer* at the western end and a central staircase of three steps leading down to the garden or passing road. The front door opened directly into the main living area of the house, the *voorkamer*. The *stoep* wall on the east side of the house is identical in construction. Four steps at the center of the east *stoep* (Fig. 4) led down to the *werft* area via a cemented walkway. The curved part of the east *stoep* was added hastily, probably in mid-nineteenth century, and incorporated into the uniform appearance of the house by plastering and painting the outside (Fig. 5).

The "modern" bathroom and flush toilet near the southern end of the east *stoep* is typical for late 19<sup>th</sup> / early 20<sup>th</sup> century extensions to existing houses (Fig. 6). As we will see later it is depicted in one of the photographs of the house, dated to ca 1890.

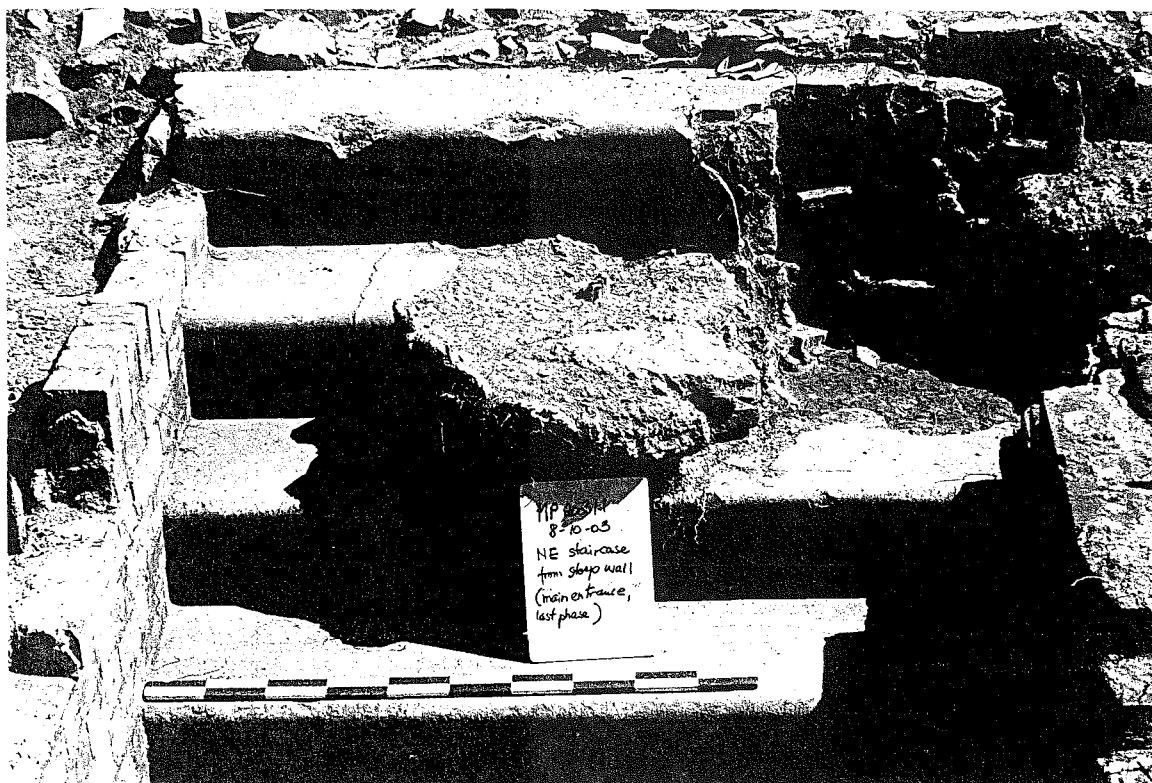


Fig. 4. East *stoep* staircase for the new entrance to the house.



Fig. 5. The curved part of the east *stoep*.



Fig. 6. The remains of the “modern” bathroom and flush toilet.

The earliest ground-plan of the dwelling (Fig. 7) – according to present evidence – is assumed to be a five- or six-roomed T shaped structure consisting of three rooms in a row along the street front - *voorhuis*, (room two), *regter kamer* (room one), *linker kamer* (room three) - *achterhuis* (rooms seven and eight), and kitchen (room nine) in the back wing. The three front rooms have a depth of about six meters; this roof span was well suited to the simple building methods generally used at the Cape<sup>11</sup>. None of the end-rooms showed evidence of a fireplace or hearth, as one would have expected from a ‘Cape Dutch’ house-plan. Additional rooms, four and six, were placed at the back of the right and left rooms, in the language of the time known as *linker en regter achterkamer*.

<sup>11</sup> Fransen & Cook, *ibid.* page 1.

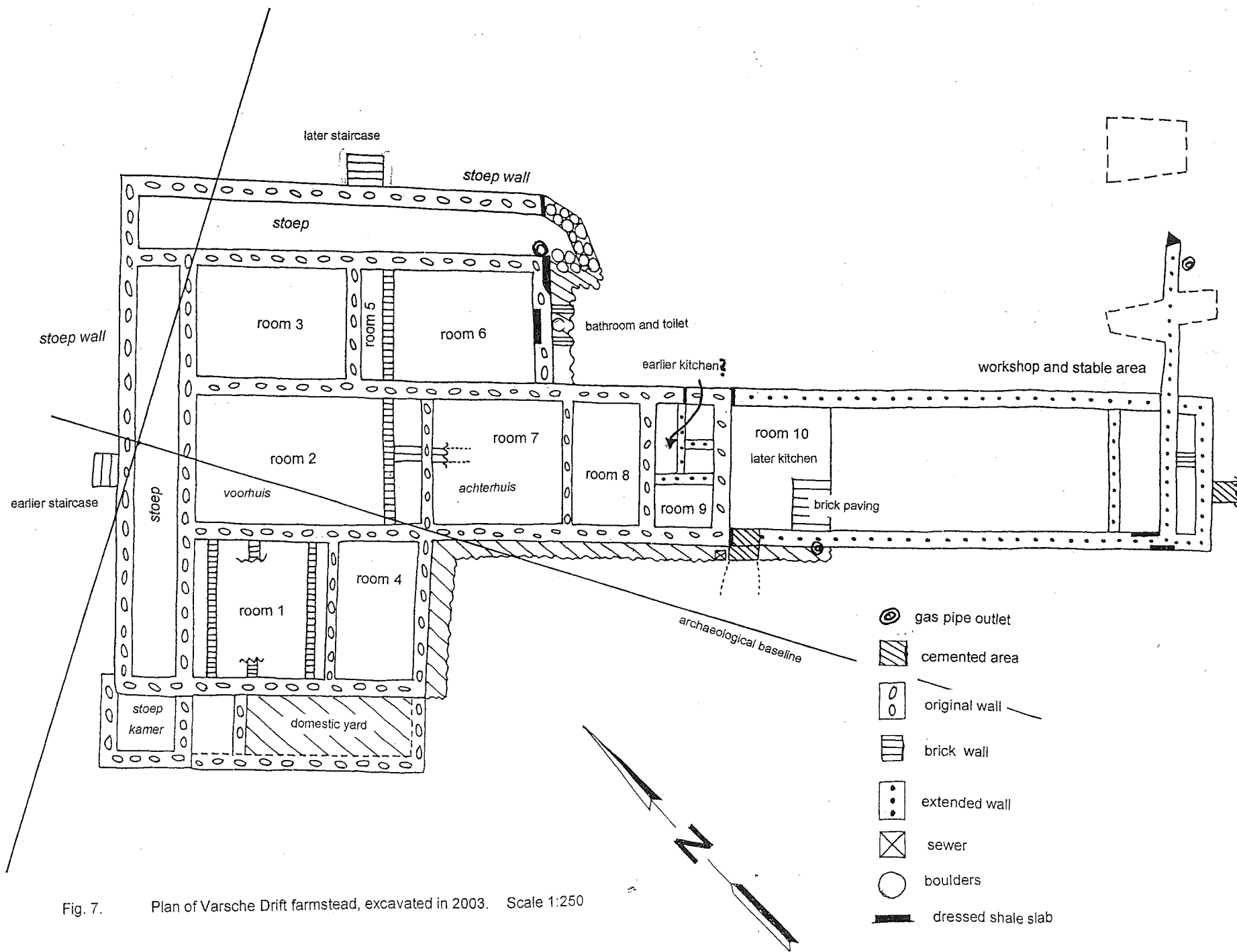


Fig. 7. Plan of Varsche Drift farmstead, excavated in 2003. Scale 1:250

Room one, an end room, contains three separate rows of a brick-width of orange soft-fired bricks (late 18<sup>th</sup> / early 19<sup>th</sup> century), possibly platforms for joists of a wooden floor put in during the time the house was built (Fig. 8)

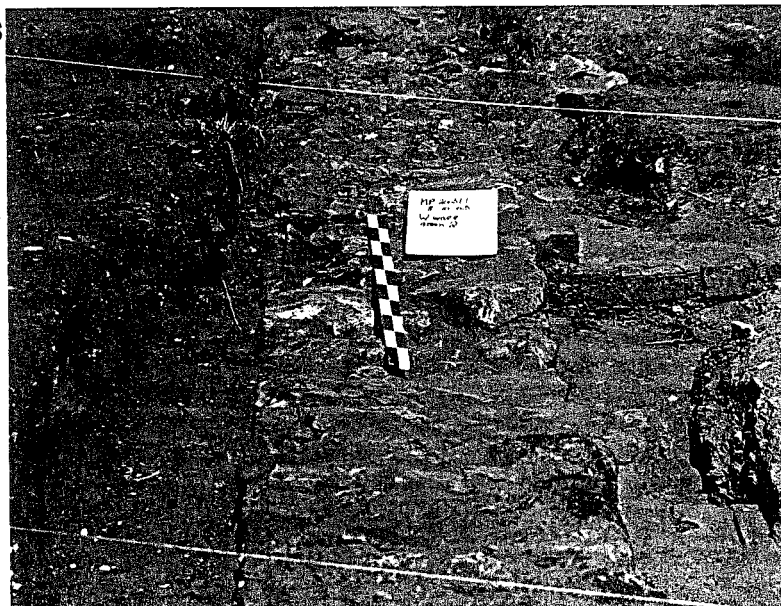


Fig. 8. Orange, soft brick row of bricks in room one, built with the house.

Rooms two to nine contain regular spaced platforms of two-brick wide, auburn, hard fired bricks, some of them laid onto original wall foundations indicating alterations to the layout of the interior (Fig. 9). The platforms most likely served the joists of wooden flooring throughout the dwelling during a later alteration of the interior. Partitioning walls of auburn, hard-fired bricks directly set on an earth foundation found in rooms two and seven (Fig. 10).

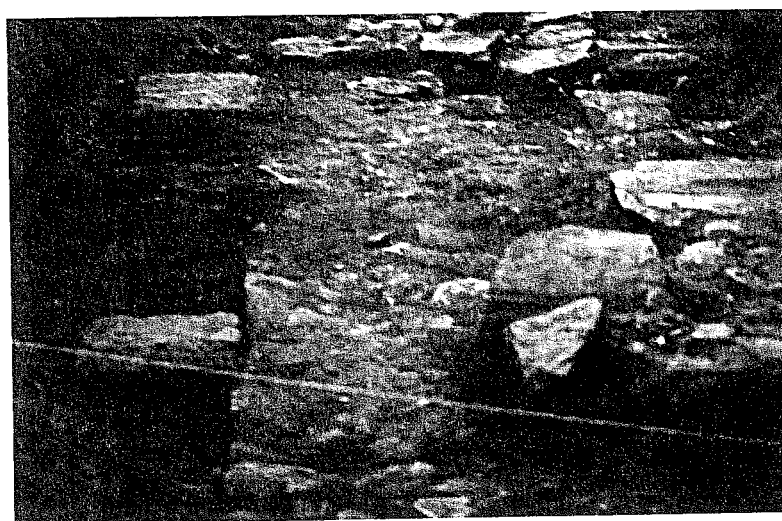


Fig. 9. Auburn, hard fired brick platforms, mid- 19<sup>th</sup> century, for floor joists?



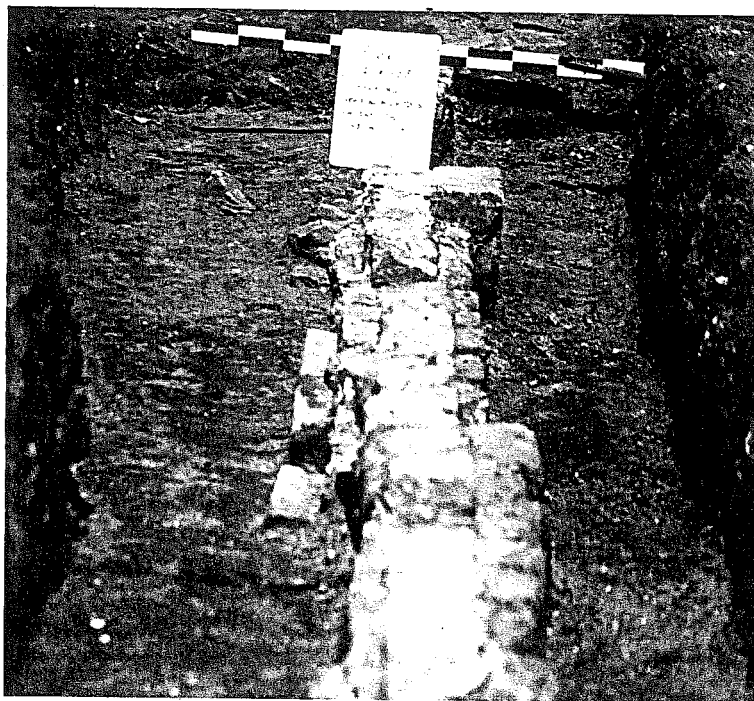


Fig. 10. Partition wall in room seven, mid 19<sup>th</sup> century

It is possible that the *achterhuis* (rooms seven and eight) was divided by a wall with wall cupboards. An early kitchen hearth has not survived, but foundations in room nine suggest a hearth and baking oven area and/or a pantry<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11. Possibly the earlier kitchen, room nine in our plan.

<sup>12</sup> Aidan Jackson, *ibid.* saw a similar arrangement recently in a Dutch farmhouse near Picketberg. Pers. comm, 7 November 2003.

Subsequent alterations and additions to the house are tentatively dated to the mid- and late nineteenth century respectively, as evidenced by the building materials used and the layout of the interior. A major alteration to the house was achieved when the main façade was orientated to the east. A 'new' entrance hall, "in the English taste ... a dislike for the lack of privacy [had developed]"<sup>13</sup>, was divided from room six by a single brick-wall of high-fired bricks, which were also used for the double door lintel from the passage to this room. At a later date, probably towards the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the earlier wall between rooms two and seven was taken out and a new one-course brick-wall erected (see Fig. 10).

The 'new' kitchen, a mid- 19<sup>th</sup> century addition to the 'tail' end of the house, is clearly demarcated in the archaeological record. A bricked hearth with cement lining, blackened by soot from wood and coal fires was found fragmented amongst the rubble in room ten. Surviving records of the Municipality of Cape Town suggests that piped water and sewerage disposal was installed after 1891<sup>14</sup>. A drain and some sewer pipe fragments just outside the east facing kitchen door survived the demolition (Fig. 12). The kitchen door lintel had been cemented over the remains of the earlier wall foundation and extended to the outside via a step.

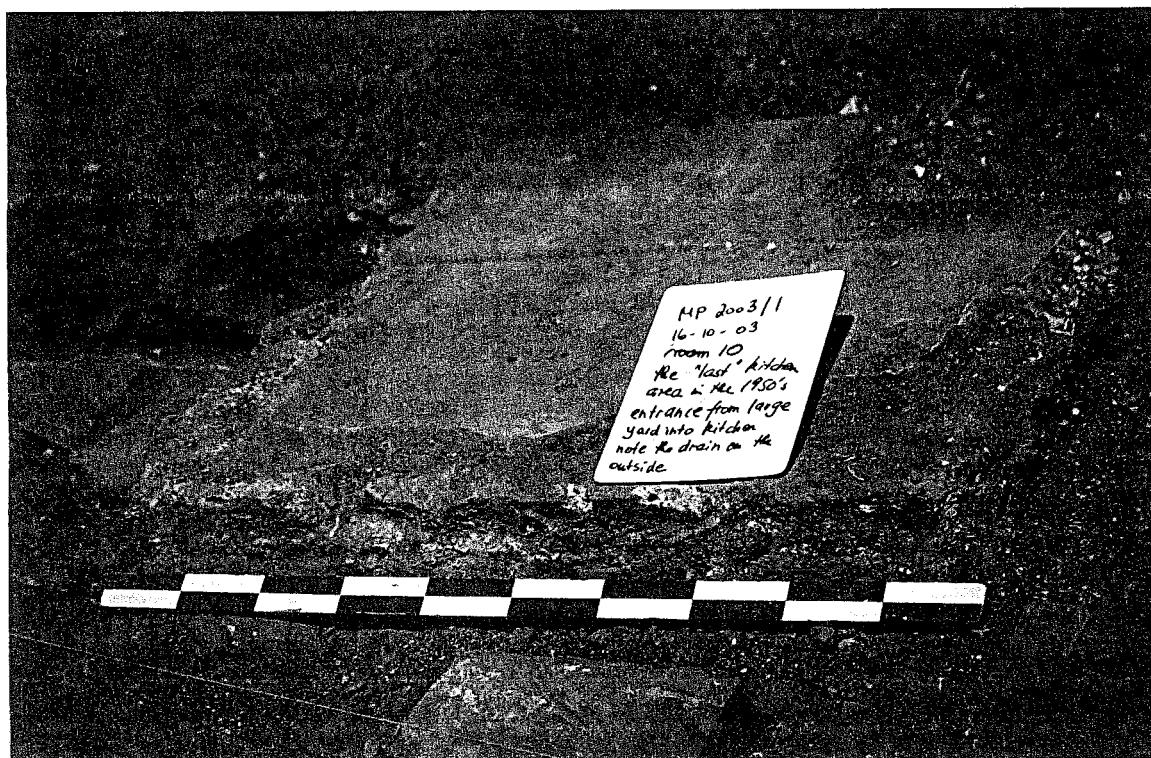


Fig. 12. Door to the yard from the 'new' kitchen, room 10 in our plan.

<sup>13</sup> Fransen & Cook, *ibid*, page 3.

<sup>14</sup> Cape Archives. M1/236. Plan of the Proposed Schemes of Sewerage and Sewage Disposal, Municipality of Woodstock, dated 1891.



Remnants of a gas pipe for town-gas<sup>15</sup> was found leading into this kitchen, the bathroom and toilet at the southeast of the *stoep*, as well as along a stable/workroom (?) at the knee-bend of the long axis of the farmstead.

## 2.2.1 The yard areas

The domestic yards of the farm house are demarcated by the foundations of a yard wall. There are two areas, a small and a large yard, which are depicted in a drawing of the property, dated 1950 (Fig. 13). The small yard is covered by 20<sup>th</sup> century cement and contains two water run-off channels for drainpipes from the eaves of the house. A narrow, rectangular space is defined between this yard and the foundation walls of a *stoepkamer*. Evidence for a domestic work or storage area in this corner comes from the retrieval of a great number of domestic rubbish further down the north slope, which will be described later. The larger domestic yard contained a cement collar along the main house, which was and still is a popular feature around working class houses (Fig. 14). Underneath it ran a sewer outlet pipe. This area was not investigated for the purpose of this report.

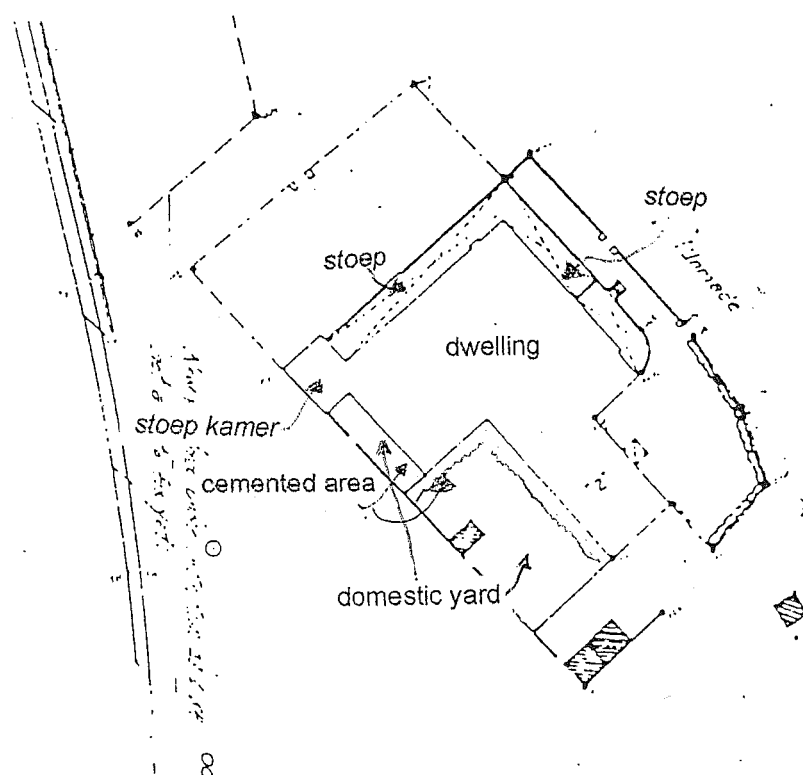


Fig. 13. Plan of the Varsche Drift dwelling, 1950. (CMC City Survey, sheet E1.24).

<sup>15</sup> The gasworks in Salt River nearby were founded in 1847.



Fig. 14. Cement 'collar' around the outside of the dwelling, yard area, 2003.

### 2.3 The outbuildings

Wall foundations of several outbuildings and a cobbled yard area towards the south end of the farmstead beyond the 'knee-bend' remained unexplored, apart from being exposed and a surface collection of portable artifacts made (Fig. 15). This area seemed to be the working area of the farm or smallholding. It contained wall footings of small sheds, stables, remains of broken tools, building material, broken and discarded farm implements and various other detritus of a semi-rural lifestyle. These were left *in situ*.



Fig. 15. The farmstead's stable and working areas, not much remained after the demolition in the early 1940s. photo taken 2003.

#### 2.4 THE PORTABLE ARTEFACT MATERIAL

During the exposure of the wall foundations it became clear that none of the artifactual material was in its original context. All deposits were shallow, less than 800 mm to bedrock and the ground heavily disturbed. Therefore it seemed prudent - after examining the collection - to group the artifacts into 'areas of collection' (Fig. 16). The area one collection consists of artifacts from rooms one, two, four, the north *step* and *stoepkamer*, the small yard, outside pantry or storage room, *stoepkamer* and adjacent areas downslope. Area two contains artifacts from the east *stoep*, rooms three, five and six and the bathroom with 20<sup>th</sup> century plumbing. Area three contains artifacts from the 'tail' end of the house, i.e. kitchen, pantry and large yard area. Finally, area four artifacts were collected in the stable, outhouse, cobbled working area and combined with surface finds over the whole site.

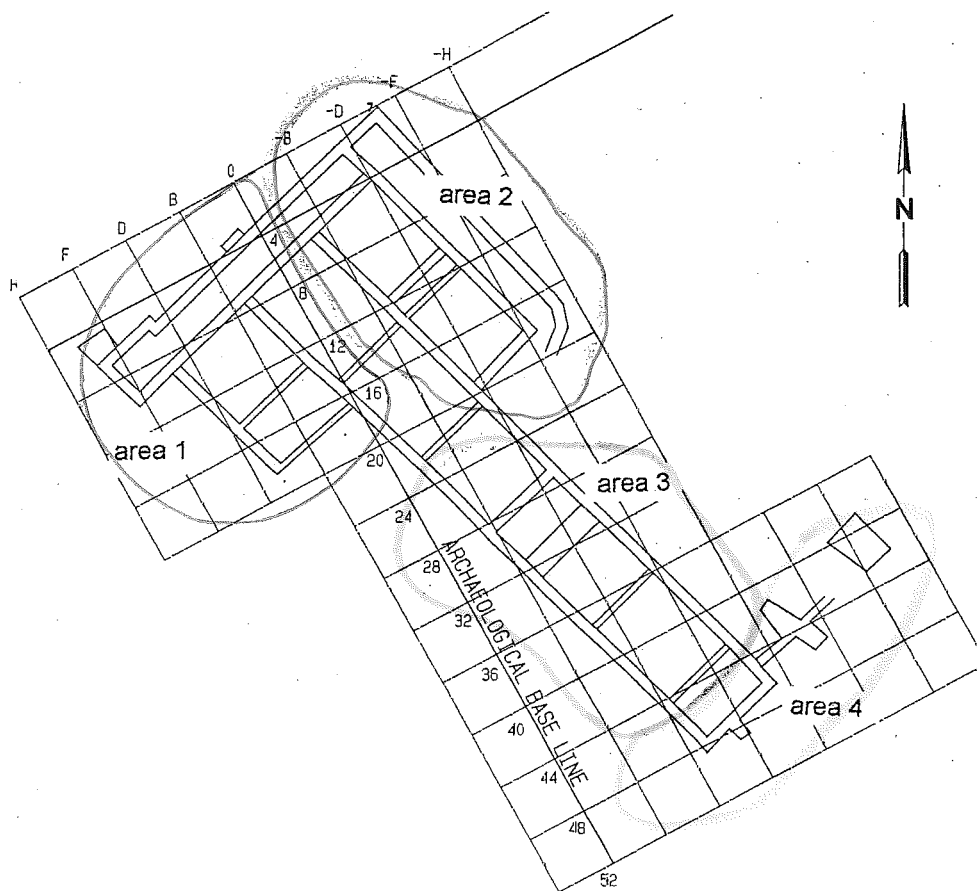


Fig. 16. Schematic diagram of the Varsche Drift excavated dwelling with our archaeological grid. Areas of artifact collection are highlighted.

#### 2.4.1 THE CERAMIC COLLECTION

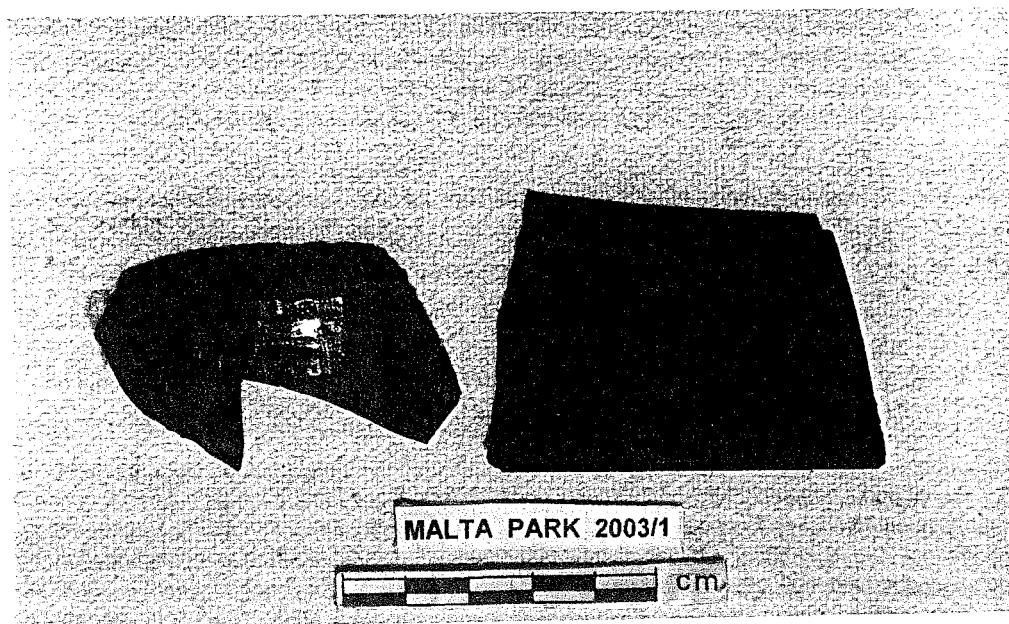
The ceramic collection can be divided into three very distinct periods of occupation of the site. The first cluster consists of a collection of Chinese export porcelain dating to the second part of the 18<sup>th</sup> / early 19<sup>th</sup> century, largely made up of fine tableware, with some *grof* kitchen bowls (Fig. 17). This Asian export porcelain component, the largest in the collection, indicates that people of means occupied the Varsche Drift House for some time. This is also borne out by the presence of fragments of mid-18<sup>th</sup> century British "Jackfield Ware"<sup>16</sup>, a black, basalt-like form of ceramics, symbol of high social status (Fig. 18). This distinct cluster places the first occupation of the site into the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

'black basalt'

<sup>16</sup> Seemann, UA. 2001. The Ground Floor and Courtyard of the 'Residency', Simon's Town. Simon's Town Museum: Unpublished report, page 86.



Fig. 17. Chinese export porcelain of the late 18<sup>th</sup> / early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Found on domestic sites all over the Cape.



*'Black-basalt' (refined stoneware)*  
 Fig. 18 "Jackfield Ware", British import, dated to the mid- 18<sup>th</sup> century. Not commonly found at the Cape.

Early to mid- 18<sup>th</sup> century kitchenware was found only in area one: the leg fragment of a coarse earthenware cooking pot with soot still attached, transparent glaze on the inside; three green-glazed knob lid fragments, a dish (lid missing) rim fragment and a pipkin or *skilletjie*<sup>17</sup> fragment (Fig. 19). Potters from the Netherlands, contracted by the VOC, manufactured the coarse earthenware at the Cape<sup>18</sup>.

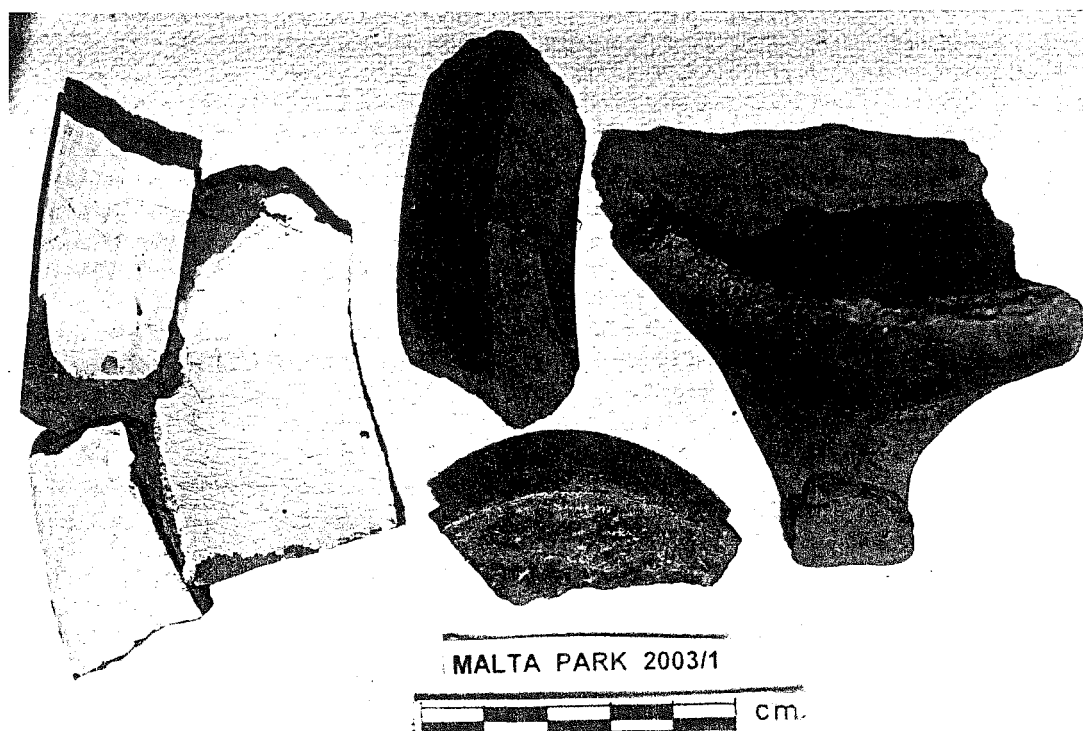


Fig. 19. From left: a large, coarse earthenware bowl, only glazed on the inside; dish or serving bowl (the lid is missing), lid knob fragment; the leg of a cooking pot with soot still attached, all manufactured at the Cape during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The second largest collection (after the Chinese export porcelain) of individual dinnerware items consists of British refined ware, manufactured in Staffordshire from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Undecorated cream coloured ware was most commonly used between 1780 and 1820 (Fig. 20). Plates, eating bowls and teaware are present.

The next period in fashionable British refined ware is only present in the collection with a few pieces: an occasional blue and white underglaze decorated teacup, small bowl and saucer from the period of about 1810 to 1830 (Fig. 21). The teacups had no handles and the saucers no footings at this time. The small bowls are underglaze printed in Chinoiserie patterns. A jar and a teacup fragment, hand-painted in soft mustard yellow, olive green, blue, red and yellow with a floral motif are fine examples of expensive teaware.

<sup>17</sup> A small pan with handle.

<sup>18</sup> Seemann, UA. 2001. The First British Occupation of the Cape – the Case of York Redoubt. University of Cape Town: unpublished PhD dissertation, page 68.



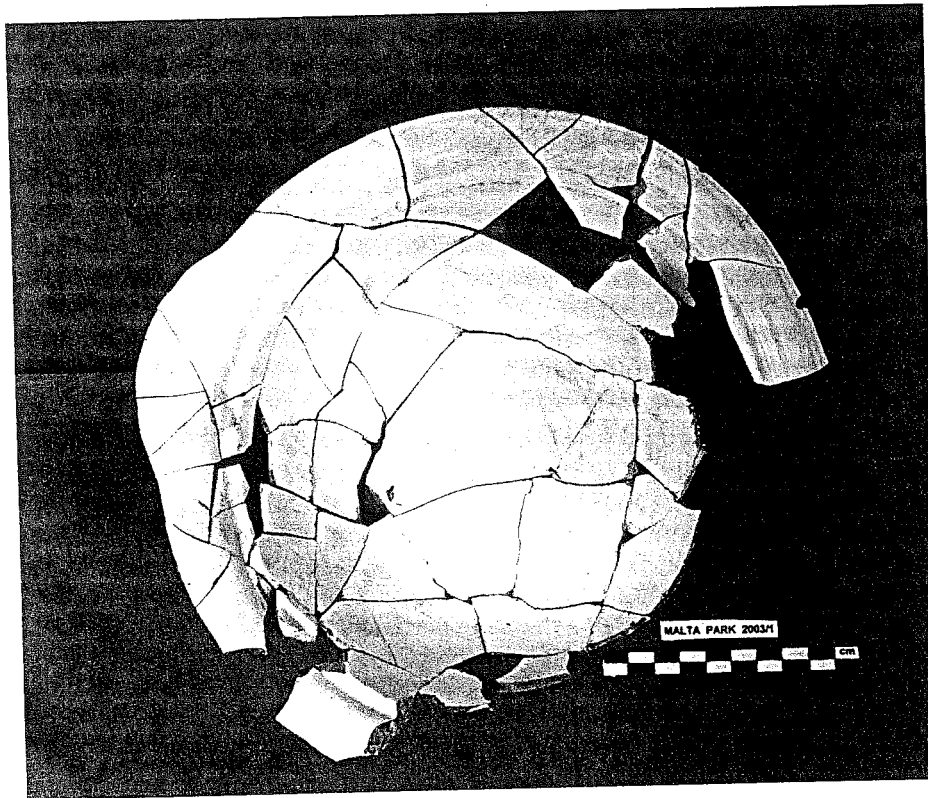


Fig. 20. British refined ware, called "creamware", the earliest mass imports after the British occupation in 1795. This dish is a replica, made one hundred years later.



Fig. 21. Left: Blue and white underglaze printed "Chinoiserie" bowls, British, early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Right: the colourful hand-painted teaware is of the same period.

The third homogenous ceramic collection dates to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the familiar British 'willow patterned' plates, servers and eating bowls (Fig. 22). The willow pattern was developed and standardized from Chinese porcelain patterns and has been in production ever since. The servants and working class people ate and drank from industrial slipware bowls and mugs, decorated with relief bands of bright colours or trailed 'cable' designs (Fig. 23).



Fig. 22. "Willow Pattern" tableware, still popular today. This British pearlware dates from the mid- 19<sup>th</sup> century.

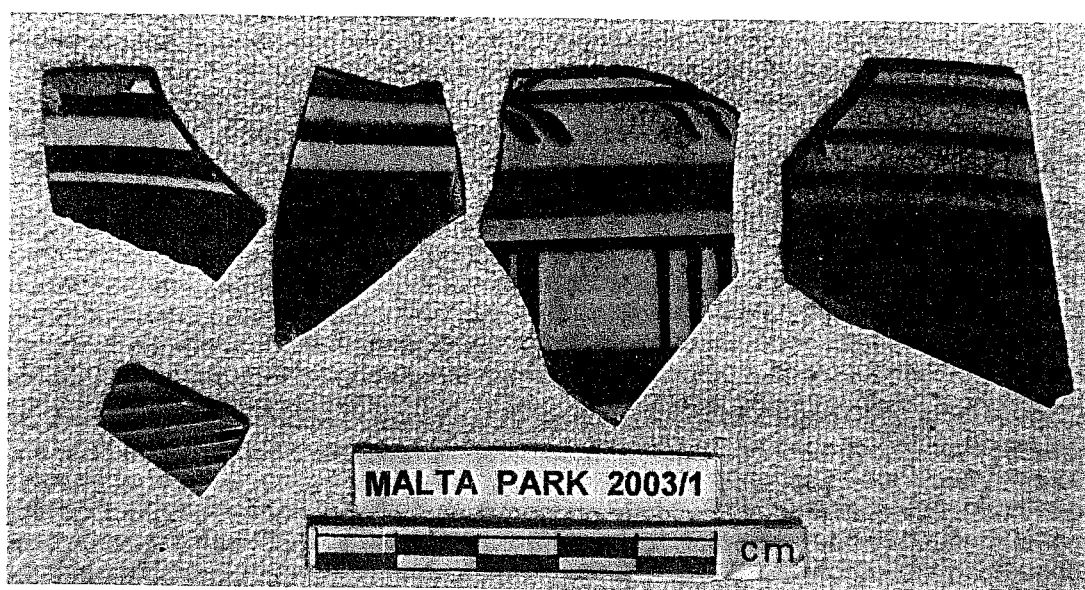


Fig. 23. British industrial slipware bowls and mugs. Extremely popular during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Missing in our collection – but found on almost all domestic sites at the Cape - are shell-edged pearlware plates and dishes, extremely popular from around 1820 to 1850. This can only be explained by a hiatus of occupation of Varsche Drift house during that period.

The late 19<sup>th</sup> century collection of ceramics is sparse: a cup and a plate fragment of 'flow-blue' underglaze printed pearlware, some green, grey and red underglaze printed creamware plates and dishes, band and line decorated dinner plates, brightly hand-painted "*boerbont*" ware of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 24). These are all evidence of respectable lower class family life.

Several British stoneware, salt-glazed bottle fragments for gingerbeer and beer, food storage, shoe-polish and ink were also found on the site (Fig. 25).



Fig. 24. Mid- to late 19<sup>th</sup> century British ceramics. Left: 'flow-blue' dish and cup, middle: '*boerebont*' bowl and cup fragments, right: band and line decorated dinnerplates. On the right are some underglaze printed dishes in black and green colour.



Fig. 25 British stoneware, from ca 1860 onwards. Left: gingerbeer bottle, middle: shoe polish bottle top, beer bottle stopper, right: ink pot and storage jar.



Fig. 26. This saucer needs to be included in the collection as it is often mistaken for 18<sup>th</sup> / 19<sup>th</sup> century Chinese or Japanese porcelain. However, it dates from the 1940s / 1950s,

## 2.4.2 GLASSWARE

Glassware dated to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was unearthed in area one complements the rich table setting of the first owners. Wineglasses and a tumbler are of imported British/Irish ware, hand blown and of fine quality. For the remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were no drinking vessels unearthed, but area one yielded a slightly pink jam jar and an orange coloured jelly glass, both manufactured from pressed glass during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century or later (Fig. 27).

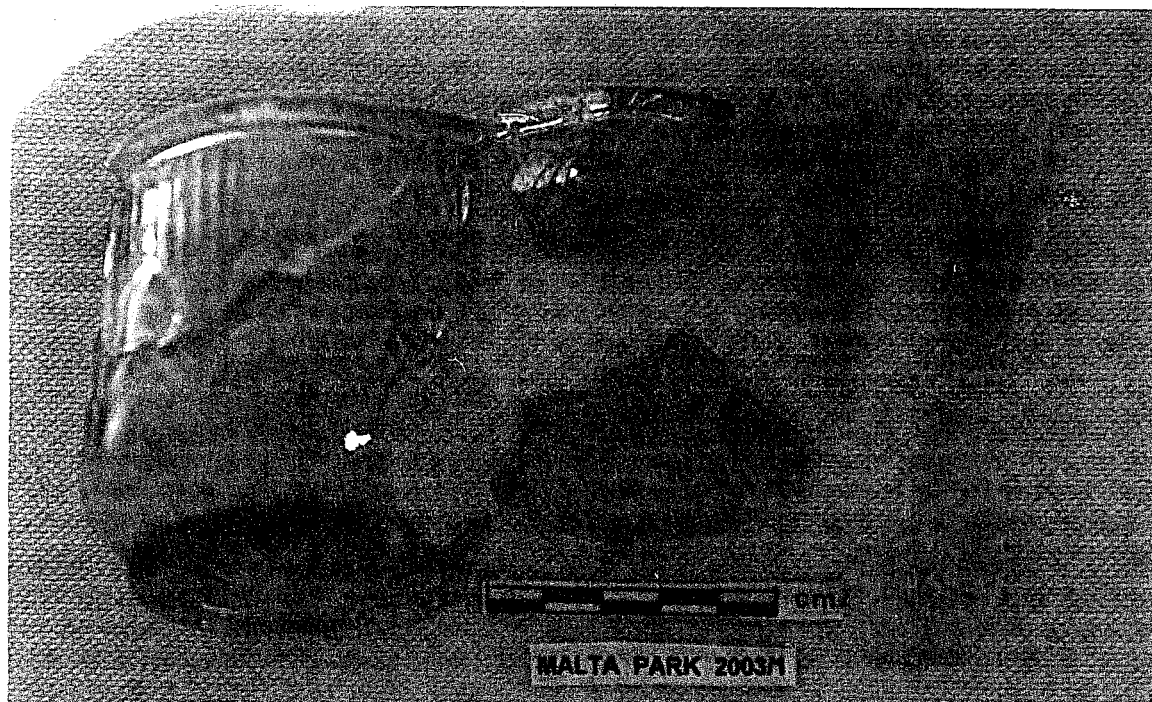


Fig. 27. Left: a pink jam jar, late 19<sup>th</sup> century, top: an orange coloured jelly glass of pressed glass, late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Right: four wineglasses, late 18<sup>th</sup> century, mouth-blown.

Three squat, early 18<sup>th</sup> century bottle base fragments are the earliest examples of wine bottles found on the site (Fig. 28). About thirty Constantia wine and French Champaign bottles could be counted, found in all areas outside the house and dated to before 1810 (Fig. 29), when two and three piece moulded bottles first appeared on the market. This collection of tightly dated wine and Champaign bottles suggest fine dinner parties and very many festivities at this country house.

The middle to late 19<sup>th</sup> century bottles are all of the food storage and medicine bottle variety, clear or aqua coloured and a few blue poison bottle fragments (Fig. 30). Aerated water in "Codd" bottles were sold from about 1880 and their marbles used by children as toys after the bottles broke<sup>19</sup>. Samples of 'Bashew Brothers' and a few 20<sup>th</sup> century cooldrink bottles were also collected.

<sup>19</sup> Lastovica E & Lastovica, A. 1990. *Bottles and Bygones*. Cape Town: Don Nelson.



Fig. 28. Squat, early 18<sup>th</sup> century European wine bottles.



Fig. 29. Constantia and French Champaign bottles, imported from Europe, dated to before 1810.

?  
dubious identification





Fig. 30. Left: a 'Codd' bottle for aerated water with marbles. Top: stopper of medicine bottle, food bottle, poison bottle. Right: medicine bottle. All mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> / early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Under the rubric of utility glass one would count several lamp chimney fragments of clear and ornamental glass, indicating first paraffin and later electric lighting. Dark green moulded and wine-red window glass fragments came possibly from the entrance door or fanlight above. Scent bottles, milky white ointment jars and globes, glass stoppers from decanters and mirrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are also present. One clear glass lid fragment, a moulded "Maria van Riebeeck" bust in the form of a lid handle was probably sold for the tri-century commemoration / festival in 1956 (Fig. 31).

We collected no mid- to late- 20<sup>th</sup> century bottle fragments, no window-glass, except coloured, pressed glass fragments, clear lamp or picture glass.

From the above it is clear that the majority of the glass vessels were used for drinking and storage of beverages and food. A few medicine and household cleaning bottles, ornamental containers for the parlour and living room, coloured window glass in the front door and lampshades complete the collection, signifiers of lower middle class aspirations.

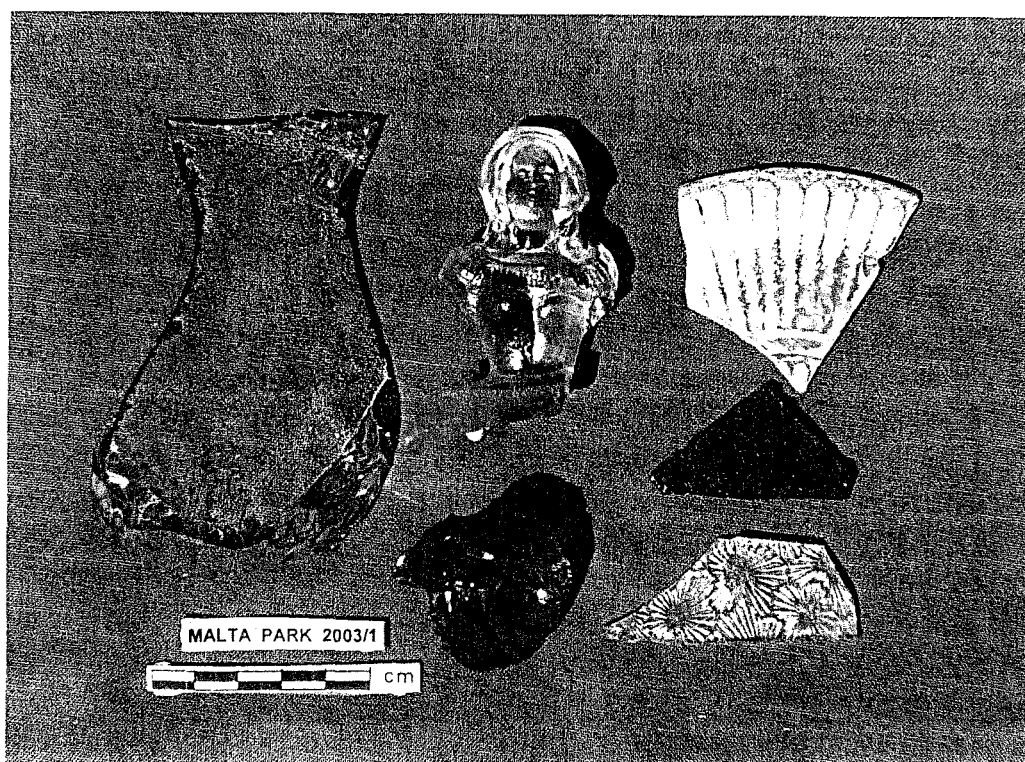


Fig. 31. Utility glass.

Top: scent bottles and a scent jar, top middle: "Californian Poppy" scent bottle, regarded as 'cheap' 1940s scent. Top right: "Posh(?) Blazer", men's scent 1950s, bottom: jar of "MUM, I never go anywhere without my MUM" underarm deodorant, 1940s and 1950s.

Below: left: lamp chimney glass, "Maria van Riebeeck" commemoration decanter, handle of a glass lid, dated 1952. Bottom: blue glass button of a lid, white and green window glass, probably from the front door.

### 2.4.3 FOOD REMAINS

The principal faunal diet of the Varsche Drift people consisted of the longbones of sheep and cattle, the rare chicken and some small *duikers* and a wading bird or two. According to the butchering marks, chop and chop-snaps, the majority of bones were cut up before electrical saws were available, that is before the 1880s. Longbones, ie roasts, signify a well-appointed table; people of low income and servants ate sheep heads, the innards and the extremities. Pork is absent from the collection, but it might have been consumed in some other form, as ham, bacon, pork sausage, etc.

Although Woodstock beach was fairly close, the mollusk collection is rather small. It consisted of limpets and bi-valve fragments, most of which had been burned for lime and mortar. A rare species of bi-valve, (not *donax*), since extinct in Table Bay, was encountered in some quantity (Fig. 32). This species has also been found at the bottom layers at the Chavonnes Battery excavations, dated to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>20</sup>.

Fish bones are common in archaeological assemblages in the Cape. Otto Mentzel mentions frequently in his "Account of Life at the Cape in mid-eighteenth Century"<sup>21</sup> that Atlantic line fish was eaten at the tables of Company officials and *snoek* was cooked by slaves around open hearths<sup>22</sup>. Yet, amongst the several kilograms of food remains retrieved not a single fish bone was found.

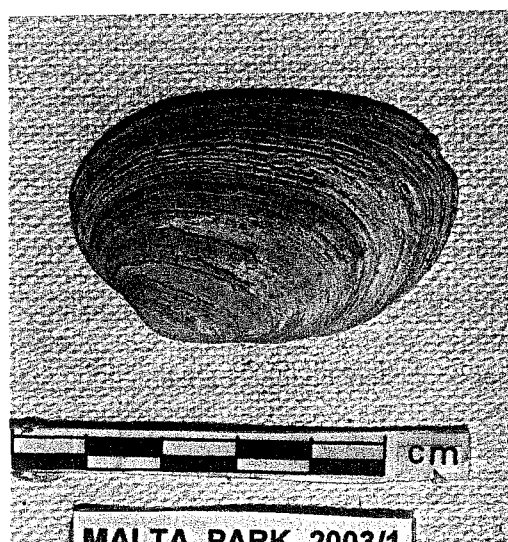


Fig. 32. Unknown species of bi-valve found at Varsche Drift, since extinct in Table Bay.

It might tell us several things: that either no slaves were present at the site, or that those slaves which accompanied their masters to Varsche Drift (probably domestic slaves, a coachman and stable hands) were eating the same food as their masters, or the slaves cooked their food on a site outside the present investigation area.

Vegetables and rice, off course, left no trace in the archaeological record.

<sup>20</sup> I only heard a second-hand account. Confirmation can be had from a Report of the Chavonnes Battery Excavation, by the University of Cape Town Archaeological Contracts Office, lodged at the SAHRA library, Cape Town.

<sup>21</sup> Mentzel, OF. 1785. A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope. Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1925.

<sup>22</sup> Slaves lived on a diet of *snoek* and rice.

#### 2.4.4 COINS, BEADS, A COWRIE SHELL, BUTTONS, PIPES AND OTHER PARAPHERNALIA

Four coins from area two, together with the previously found, dated 1826 and 1907, span the time of occupation of the house rather nicely: a George V one penny, dated 1917, one George VI penny dated 1941 (South African coin), a George VI half-penny (South African coin) dated 1946 and a South African one cent coin dated 1983 (Fig. 33).



Fig. 33. From left: British coin, dated 1917; South African coins dated 1941 and 1946.

Four lovely trade glass beads were collected (Fig. 34), indicating the presence of African people. The largest one is a wound, undecorated copper blue translucent bead. There is a flat turquoise green bead, a light blue wound bead and a small blue one. This last bead is still used for decorative beadwork. The beads probably date to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and are common on indigenous sites in South Africa. *and a cowrie shell*

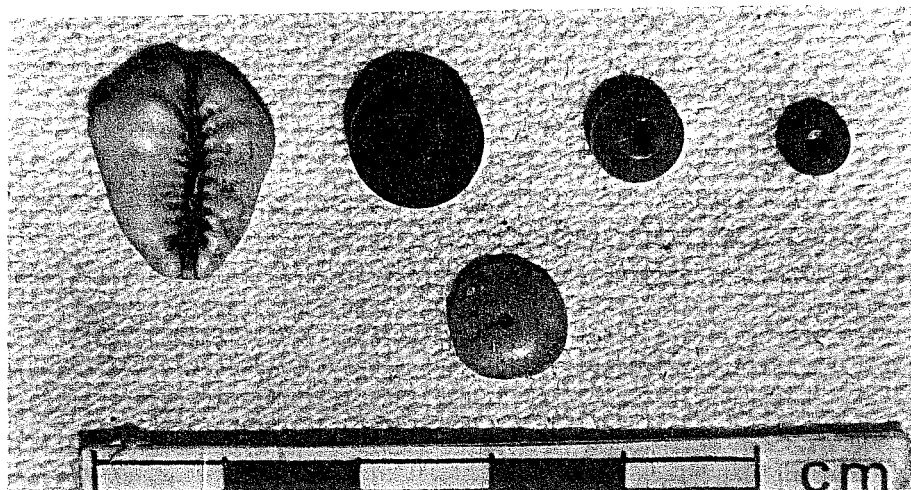


Fig. 34. Glass trade beads and a cowrie shell, worn by indigenous people.