

The cowrie shell (*Cypraea moneta*), found in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, was used by slave-traders as articles of currency and / or worked into indigenous ornamental dress. Kilburn & Rippey noted, "that most South African specimens probably originate from the hold of old shipwrecks, and wash up as far as Table Bay"²³. During the 19th century vast quantities were shipped around the Cape to ports in West Africa, shipwrecks occurred in Table Bay regularly.

Buttons were found and assigned to every day clothing. Nothing fancy or ornamental, plain useful shirt, trouser, jacket and blazer buttons, manufactured from nacre, metal, glass and plastic (Fig. 35). No bone buttons were encountered, no uniform buttons, no metal fly buttons. The buttons are dated to over the last hundred and fifty years.

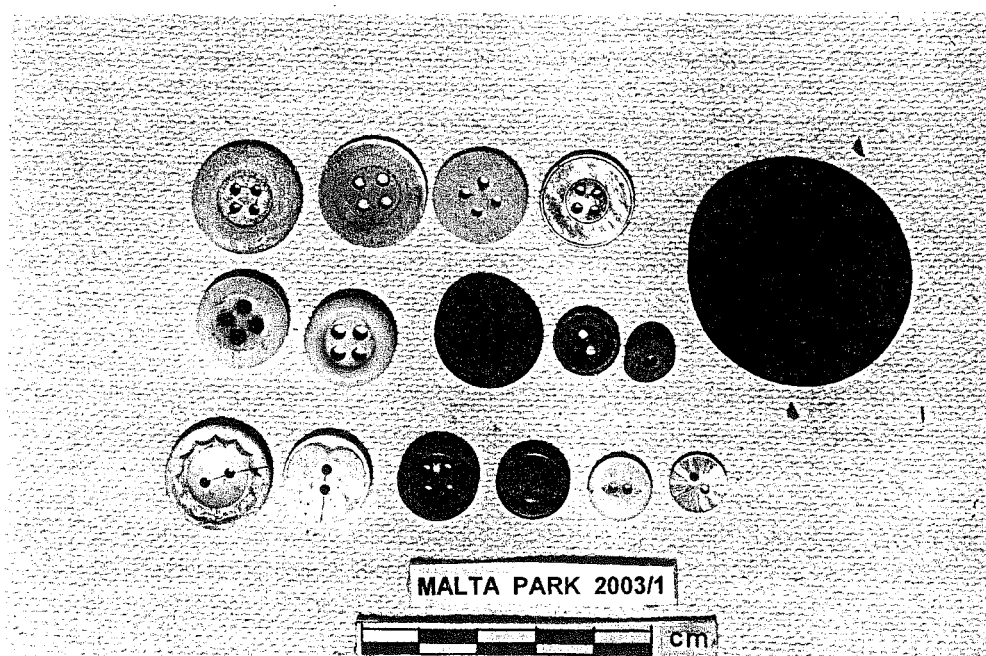


Fig. 35. Buttons from the Varsche Drift house, worn with 'everyday' clothes. Top: nacre buttons, middle: glass and metal buttons, bottom: plastic buttons.

Pipes are present in the form of Dutch and British claypipe fragments. Clay pipes are dated by bowl shape, ornamentation and stem fragment measurements. Stem fragments have a diameter of between 1.4 mm to 2.0 mm, the majority are Dutch, and date to the mid- to late 19th and the early 20th centuries.

²³ Kilburn, R. & Rippey, E. 1982. Sea Shells of Southern Africa. Johannesburg: Macmillan Publishers, page 67.

The claypipe bowl (Fig. 36) has the maker's stamp and mark of the town of manufacture – Gouda - on the heel, S stands for *slegte* quality, this and the shape and size dates it from 1850 to 1900²⁴.

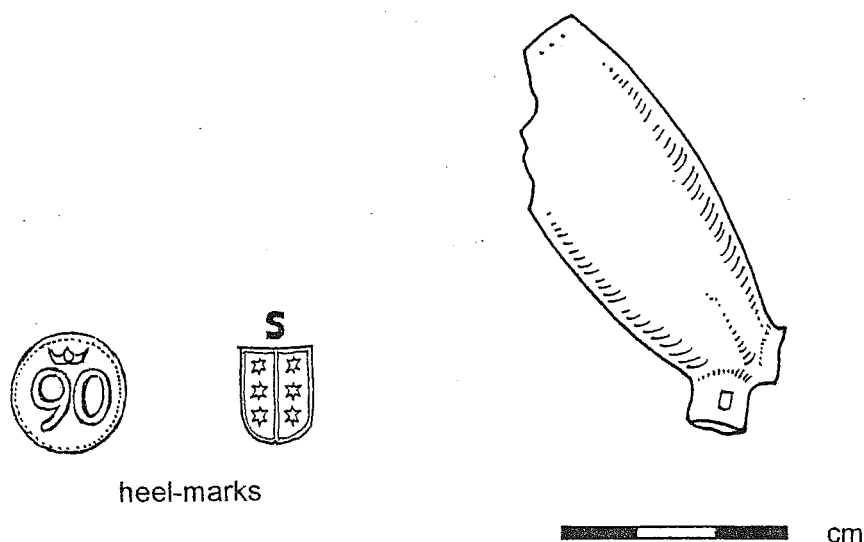


Fig. 36. A Dutch *slegte* claypipe bowl, dated 1850-1900.

A few metal pieces were collected, three possible knife blades, two spoon handles, one horseshoe fragment, a piece of drain cover, and one front door (?) key from area two, the front of the house in photographs of the late 19th century.

The rifle cartridge is of a .303 caliber, used by South Africans during the first half of the 20th century. Someone went hunting, poaching or snaring with a vicious gin-trap (Fig. 37).

Two slate pencils probably belonged to the children of the house, as did the nib and china tray for water-colour paint found in 2001; slate boards were used in schools and in the home in the first half of the 20th century. The people of Varsche Drift played 'Domino' in their leisure time and, no doubt, cards and other board games which left no trace in the archaeological record.

²⁴ Duco, DH. 1982. *Merken van Goudse Pijpenmakers 1660-1940*. Poperinge: Uitgeversmaatschappij De Tijdstroom Lochem.

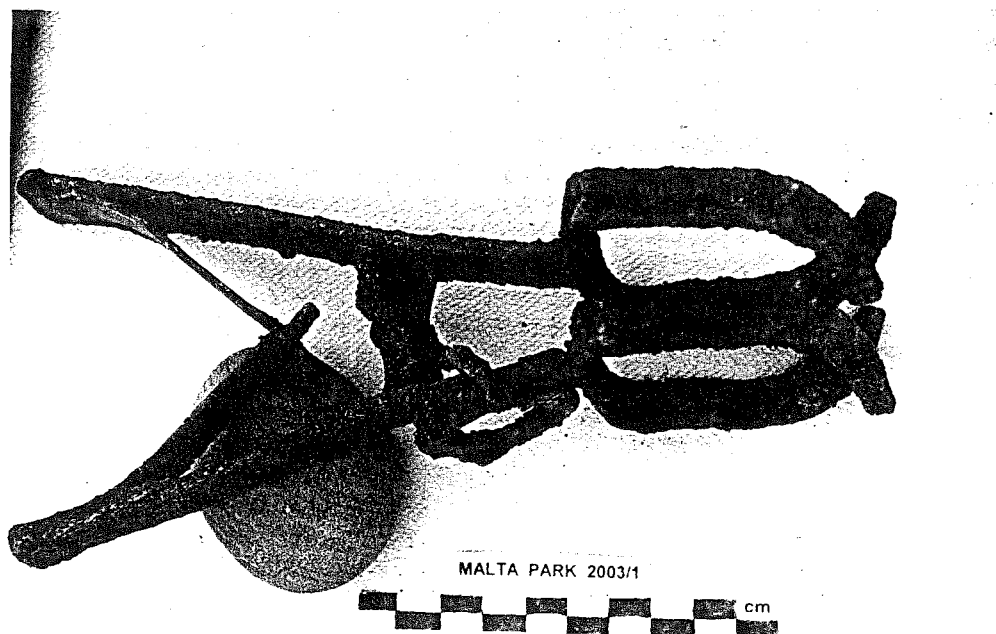


Fig. 37. A 'gin-trap' , found in area one, a vicious trap for small animals.

CONCLUSION

The archaeology of the architectural and household material remains of the farmstead thus reveal that three phases of intense occupation occurred:

1. A late 18th century initial substantial building of six to seven rooms of a hybrid Cape Dutch / Georgian ground-plan,
2. A mid- 19th century change of frontage of about ninety degrees with conversion to "Victorian" ideas of interior space allocation, a larger kitchen was added / or remodeled from an outhouse at the tail-end of the dwelling and finally,
3. The addition of modern indoor plumbing post- 1891 and subsequent heavy use of the building until about 1960.

The artifactual material collection from the site is relatively small compared to what has been found on other domestic sites in and around Cape Town. However, it makes sense, when one keeps in mind that the Varsche Drift *werft* was situated amongst marshy *vleis* and low-lying riverbanks, where household debris was dispersed to stabilize roads and pathways. In addition, a large number of outbuildings, workrooms and stables were located away from the main house and with it the rubbish heaps. One other factor must be mentioned, namely that the walls were only exposed to about 2-300 mm width on either side and to the same depth in most areas, to bedrock only in selected areas. The rest of the site was left undisturbed.

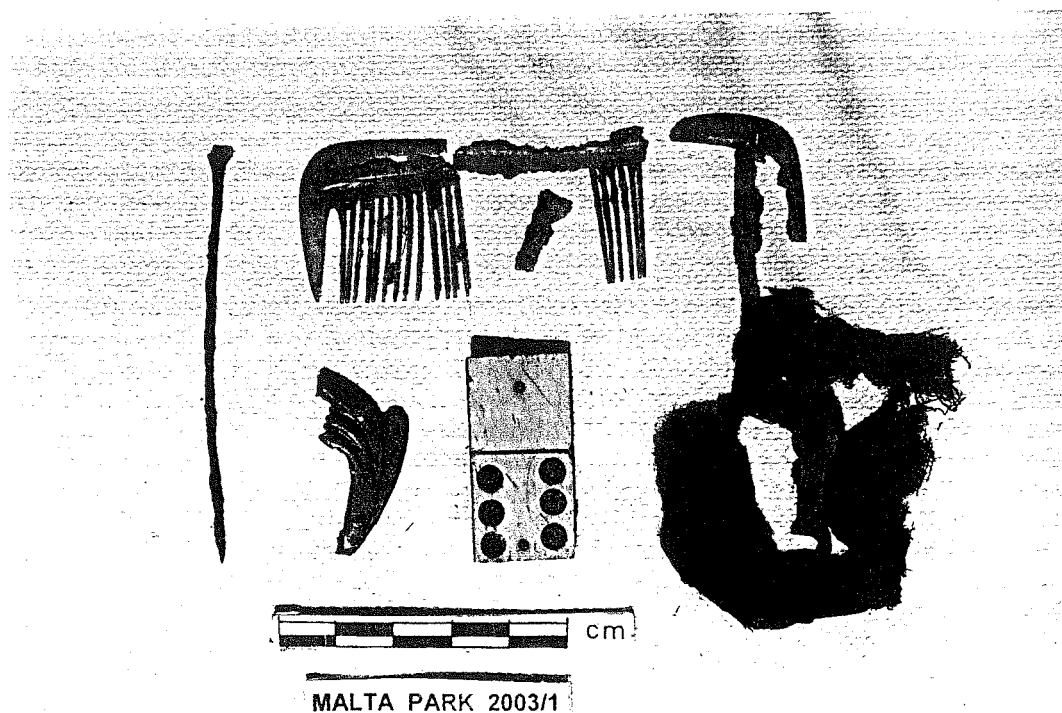


Fig. 38. Personal possessions of the people living at Varshe Drift. Probably early 20th century. Note the domino stone.

Due to the disturbed nature of the artefactual deposits, the portable material was combined into four broad area collections.

The artefact collection could be broadly into four distinct phases:

During the early years, after the house was built, the owners used their accumulated dinner and kitchenware, Chinese porcelain of the VOC period, cooking pots manufactured at the Cape and imported British glass, all of the highest export quality. The transitional period from Dutch to British possession of the Cape is represented by refined British tableware in the form of mostly fashionable undecorated creamware. Large amounts of wine and Champaign were consumed. The teatime ceremony is introduced with a few pieces of blue and white underglaze printed Staffordshire teaware, and some colourful hand-painted dishes. An opulent table was kept.

During the mid-nineteenth century the table was set with fashionable "Willow ware", an underglaze printed blue and white Chinoiserie pattern, which is still popular today. The lower classes ate and drank from multi-coloured banded ware bowls and mugs, cheaply available now. Beer and gingerbeer were drunk, at Varsche Drift, aerated water bought and some

wine. The kitchen was probably renovated at the 'tail' end of the house. Was the gas pipe installed at this time? For lighting? Glass chimney fragments for a table lamp, ornamental window glass, patent medicine and food storage bottles fragments show that the owners / occupiers consisted of a household of young and old. It seems – judging by the household rubbish collection - that the owners / occupiers were less affluent than those before them.

The late 19th / early 20th century is represented by very few fragments of ceramic, glass and household debris. Some underglaze printed, a few ironstone (a heavy, porcelain body) cups, saucers, hard wearing and durable fragments of ceramic survived. Electricity was installed, running water (the flush toilet) and sewerage pipes put in, the yard areas and staircases into the garden probably cemented and repaired at least twice during the twentieth century. Varsche Drift had lost in status and had become respectable working class, its decline visible in the archaeological record.

3. VARSCHÉ DRIFT AND ITS OWNERS

During the 1780s, when the house was built on a raised piece of ground along the floodplains of the Liesbeeck River and adjoining the marshes of Varsche Vlei, a wide-open wasteland covered with sand dunes and *fynbos* vegetation predominated (Fig. 39). The area to the east of the Castle walls, past the Lines of Fortifications (the French Lines) and along the main road to the Tygerberg and the interior had retained "some of the character of a frontier of interaction between the colonial newcomers and the indigenous inhabitants of the Cape"²⁵. Khoi shepherds, *trekboers* and their servants driving their cattle and sheep to market, slaves gathering wood, travelers, officers of the garrison and civilians pursuing recreational activities and so on made use of this ground before and during the time Varsche Valley farm was permanently inhabited.

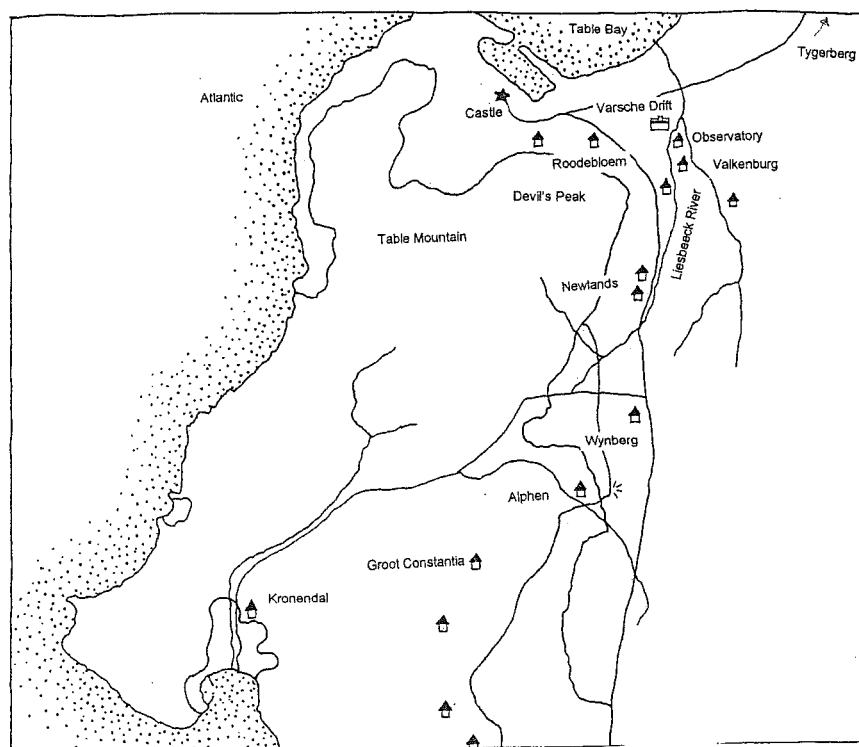


Fig. 39. Cape Town and Peninsula, country houses and farmsteads mentioned in the text. (After Fransen & Cook, *ibid.* page 116).

²⁵ Worden, N, van Heyningen, E & Bickford-Smith, V. 1998. Cape Town, the Making of a City. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, page 43.

3.1 Frederik Wilhelm Allemann, builder of Varsche Drift House, 1783 - 1790

The original dwelling on what was to become erf 26162 was most probably built between 1783 and 1790. The probate inventory of Frederik Wilhelm Allemann, the owner-builder, lists in 1790:

“...“En stuk Landen met de daarop staan de Gebouwen, gelegen aan deeze Zyde van de Liesbeek Revier, genaamt de Varsche Valley onder ‘t Caabsche bevindende zig ‘ter evengem plaatse / en aldaar ...”²⁶

The land with dwelling were valued at 2000 Rixdollars, compared to his other property in Cape Town, block D, valued at 6000 Rixdollars²⁷. Unfortunately for us, the probate inventory only listed the contents of the town house - room by room - the yard and workshops. A detailed list of the contents of the deceased's country estate was either not deemed necessary, left out of the record or did not survive. It would have added weight to the assumption that the house was originally built as a five to six roomed dwelling, fit for a family's country retreat²⁸.

Having used James Walton's terminology²⁹ to describe the layout of the house, it is nevertheless clear that we do not deal here with a classical Cape Dutch homestead but a hybrid between this and an emerging Georgian building style as far as the ground-plan is concerned. During the last quarter of the 18th century large residences for wealthy burgers were built in the 'new' style, with flat or low-pitched roofs hidden behind a plastered parapet (Fig. 40).

That the Varsche Drift farmstead was originally built with a Georgian façade is deduced from several historical sources. Panoramas and sketches of the time contain a flat-roofed house with outbuildings at the spot where Varsche Drift was situated, for instance this one, dated to after 1843 when the Montague bridge was built over the Salt River³⁰ (Fig. 41).

²⁶ Cape Archives, MOOC 8/50, document 66, dated 11 July 1790, my italics.

²⁷ Block D, according to Wentzel's Plan of Cape Town, 1751, was bordered by Heeregragt (later Adderly Street), Shortmarket and Hout Streets. Reference: Malan, A. 1995. *Beneath the Surface - Behind the Doors: the Historical Archaeology of Households in mid- eighteenth Century Cape Town*. University of Cape Town: Africa Seminar Paper, 6 September 1995.

²⁸ Cape Archives, MOOC 8/50, document 66. There were five surviving children in 1790. The estate also listed twenty-five slaves, a large number for an urban estate.

²⁹ Walton, James. 1952. *Homesteads and Villages of South Africa*. Pretoria: JL van Schaik LTD.

³⁰ Cape Archives, Eliot collection, E 8439 and E 3904.

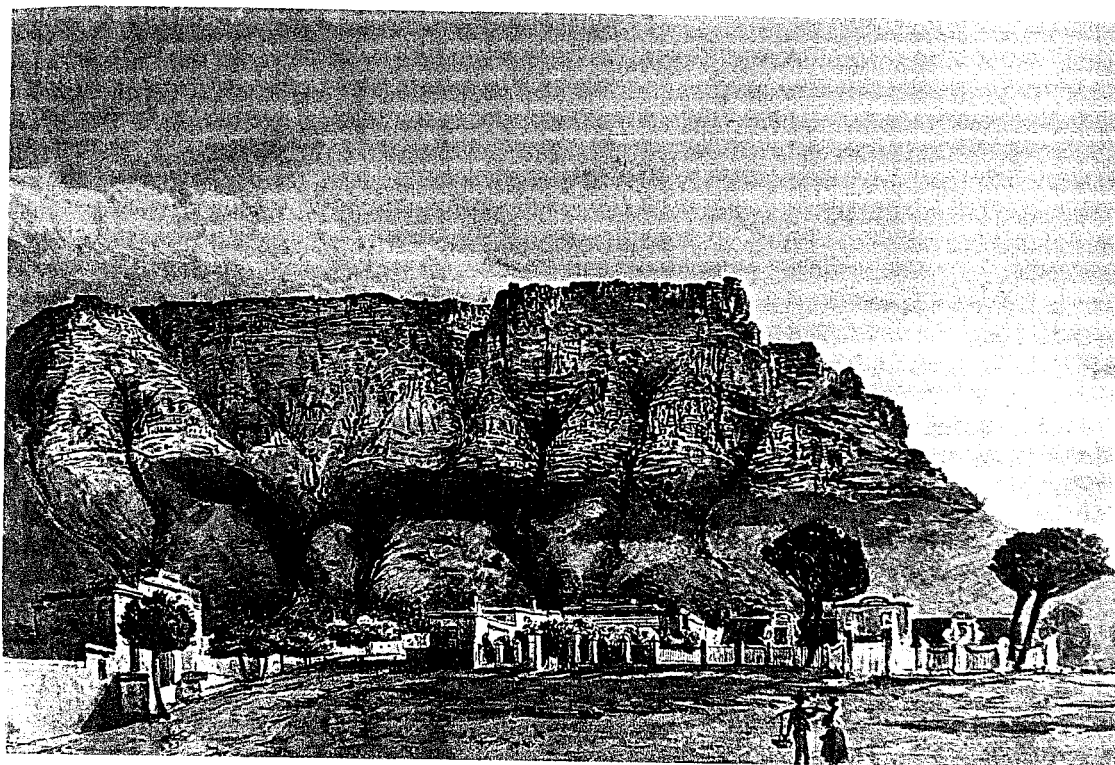


Fig. 40. Houses above the Stal Plain, upper Cape Town. These large, fashionable residences were built by wealthy burghers in the 1780s. (William Fehr collection, C42).

Frederik Wilhelm Allemann, son of Rudolph Siegfried Allemann, a wealthy VOC Company official, merchant and landowner³¹, belonged himself to the leaders of Cape Society. The fashionable elite was at the forefront of introducing a change in modes of living, new styles and a new kind of material culture during the last quarter of the 18th century. Cornelius de Jong, who visited the Cape between 1791 and 1797 gives a good description of the enthusiasm of the time: "Here building is nothing else but a fad, it is a craze, a madness, a contagious frenzy that has swept most people off their feet"³². This 'frenzy' probably partly explains why the ground plan of the earliest dwelling at Varsche Drift (according to the available archaeological evidence) is so irregular.

³¹ Of, for instance, the extensive Zonneblom Estate in what is now Woodstock.

³² Quoted by Antonia Malan, 1991. *Artefacts As Texts – Cape Dutch Architecture as a Discourse of Dwelling*. University of Cape Town: Department of Archaeology Seminar Paper, 13 February 1991.

Yvonne Brink?

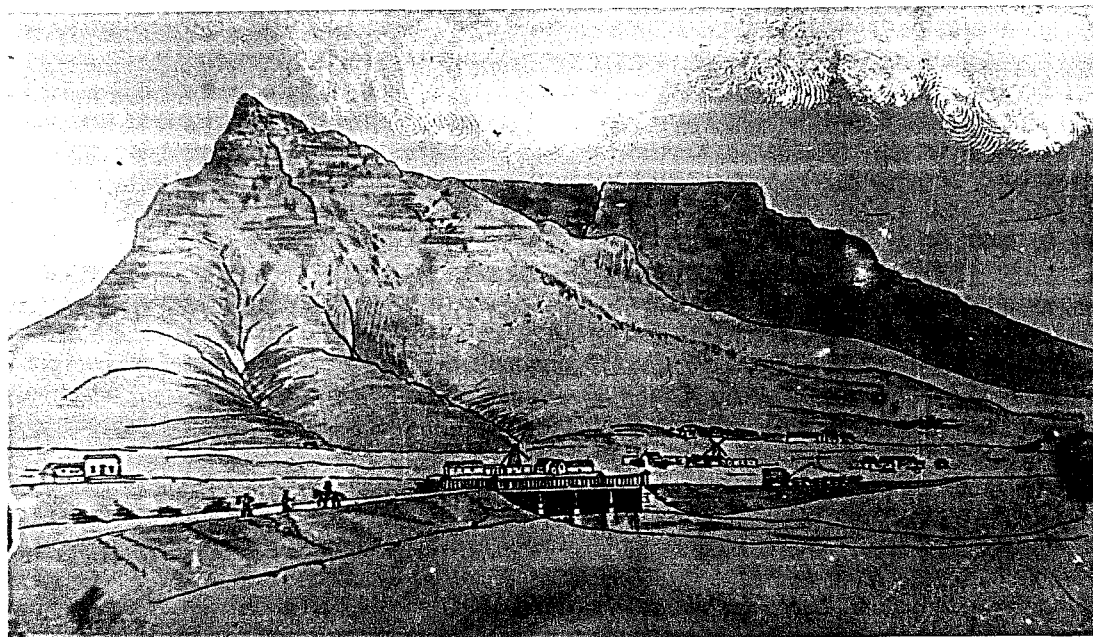


Fig. 41: The Allemann's house Varsche Drift in the late 1840s as seen from the Montague Bridge over the Salt River.

The Allemanns, with a large family and several house-slaves would have accumulated a considerable collection of household items, kitchen- and tableware. In the country, people used their *voorhuis* as combined reception area and eating room and displayed their best tableware there³³. Whether the wine and Champaign bottle collection belonged to the Allemanns, the Clement Matthiessens, the next owners or both is not quite clear. What comes out of the archaeology, however, are the evidence of fine dining and hospitality. As the drive out of town at this stage took an hour or two, a carriage was necessary to convey the family, so it seems reasonable to assume, that stabling facilities were provided at the long 'tail' of the house. Any farming activity on the property would have been minimal, as the ground was marshy, the soil exhausted and income from controlling the drift over the Liesbeeck River nil, roads into the *hinterlands* numerous.

³³ Malan, A. 1990. Fashion and Tradition in the Material Culture of Cape Households: Tablewares during the Transitional Period, 1795 to 1815. University of Cape Town: HARG Seminar Paper, 27 May 1990, page 3.

3.2 Clement Mathiessen or Matthiesson, wealthy merchant and official, owner from 1799 to 1830

Clement Matthiessen acquired Varsche Drift from the widow of FW Allemann in 1799³⁴ in partnership with Salomon van Echten, the son of a minister of the N.G.Kerk at the Cape and in Malacca³⁵. The younger Salomon was in the service of the Dutch East India Company (hereafter called the VOC) at the Cape and stayed behind when it was handed over to the British in 1795. FW Allemann owned Salomon van Echten 855,40 Rixdollars at his death. one wonders, if this property transaction has something to do with this debt. A day after the joint transfer another transaction was recorded in the Deeds Office. Matthiessen now owned the property outright.

Clement Matthiessen belonged to the upper echelons of Cape Society. He is listed in the African Court Calendar and Cape Almanac³⁶ for 1810 to 1815 at No's 10 and 11 Heeregragt, and thereafter until 1829 as living at No 48 Strand Street, both elite addresses in town. As president of the Lombard Bank, chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, merchant and landowner Matthiessen was one of the most influential men during the first British Occupation. As other wealthy burghers, he probably had aspirations for a country estate, shooting lodge or weekend retreat, which Varsche Drift amiably provided.

Originally from the Frisian town of Husum on the Northsea coast, Matthiessen came out to the Cape as a VOC official and quickly rose in the ranks of the administration. Married to Maria Magdalena Franke, they had three daughters: Catharina Margaretha, born 1777, Sara Johanna, born 1779 and Maria Margaritha, born 1783³⁷. Only the youngest daughter survived and married Hercules Sandenberg in 1799. The wedding was a large society affair, wrote Lady Anne Barnard, wife of the Secretary to Governor Macartney and First Lady of the Cape in her diary:

“... The mantuamakers having so much to do that she is obliged to reserve herself almost entirely for *brides* ... the Young Vrow Matheson [sic], the young daughter of one of the first men here, by profession an auctioneer, is to be married ... and I am told that all the acquaintances of the family are not only welcomed [sic], but their coming unasked is taken as a compliment³⁸”

³⁴ Deeds Office, Cape Town. Erf 25472, Diag 75/1799, D/T 486 dated 16 December 1799.

³⁵ De Kock, WJ. (Ed). 1968. Dictionary of South African Biography, Vol I, pp 823/4.

³⁶ Published by the South African Library, reprint 1981.

³⁷ De Villiers, Christoffel Coetzee. 1894. Geslagt - Register der Oude Kaapsche Familien. Kaapstad: van de Sand de Villiers, page 328.

³⁸ Lenta, M. & le Cordeur, B. 1998. The Cape Diaries of Lady Anne Barnard 1799 – 1800, Vol I, page 39.

Clement Matthiessen was, by 1801, Vendu Master of the Vice-Admiralty Court, President of the Lombard Bank and a member of the Court of Justice. Together with Judge Truter he was a leading figure in the establishment of a Chamber of Commerce in 1804³⁹. As President of the Colonial Treasury during the Batavian period at the Cape, 1802 to 1806, Matthiessen and Truter conducted a commission of investigation into the Colony's administration during 1804 to 1806. Truter's name is linked by historians with corruption in high places⁴⁰. Thus, Matthiessen was connected in all the right places.

Clement Matthiessen married again, in 1811, to Susanna Gerhardina Hemmij, widow of Carel Matthijs Willem de Lille, Varsche Drift may have been one of his many properties, besides the one in Strand Street. Somehow, Varsche Drift emerges at this time not as a family home so much, but as a country retreat, shooting lodge, male dominated place of outdoor pursuits, such a game hunting and indoor entertainment (gaming – a domino stone was found).

Consumption of large quantities of meat, wine and spirits⁴¹ are associated with the tableware debris of this time. Burchell, in the Cape from 1810 to 1815, dined at the house of a wealthy burgher in Paarl and recorded that:

"Several slaves followed each other with dishes of hot meat and stews, and as many of vegetables cooked in different ways. With these, and other things, a large table was soon covered, while wine glasses and bottles occupied the intermediate spaces"⁴².

"It is after 1815, writes Antonia Malan, "that a full range of new tableware is widely available and used, but the gap also increases between the fashionable and the majority of ordinary households. Fashionable ... equates with 'British' .. Different sets [of tableware] ... [were] brought in from the pantry for various meals"⁴³ The female influence is noticeable by the introduction of Staffordshire blue and white underglaze as well as multicoloured, painted teaware (Fig. 21) into the archaeological debris, augmenting the plain creamware plates and dishes, which hitherto dominated table settings.

³⁹ Immelmann, RFM. 1955. Men of Good Hope, the Romantic Story of the Cape Town Chamber of Commerce, pp 23/4.

⁴⁰ Worden et al, page 91.

⁴¹ The collection of square Dutch gin bottles is from this period.

⁴² Taken from: Malan, A. 1990, *ibid.* pp 5-6. William Burchell was a famous traveler during the Second British Occupation of the Cape.

⁴³ Malan, A. 1990, *ibid.* page 9.

It is also from this period that we have the first evidence of the layout of the house and *werft*, Thibault's map of 1812-14 (Fig. 42)⁴⁴. The plan shows a five or six-roomed house, essentially our excavated ground plan, with one werft wall connecting it to outhouses or stables. A narrow lane ran along the front façade of the house, which faced north, connecting it to the road leading to the drift across the Liesbeeck River.

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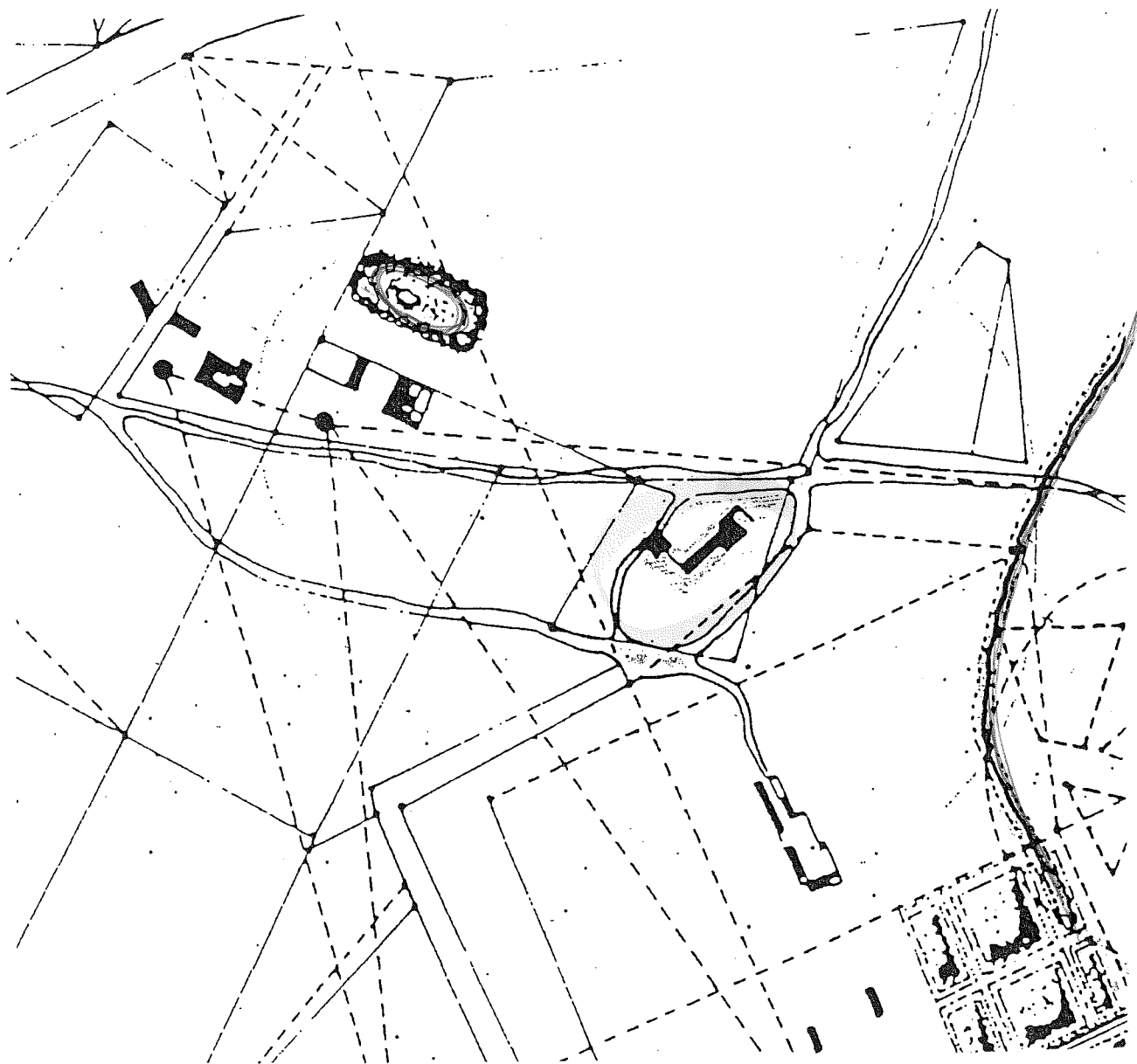


Fig. 42. LM Thibault's Plan of properties along the Main Road from Cape Town to Simon's Town, section Roodebloem with Varsche Drift homestead, dated 1813-14. Note: the dwelling is connected to the outhouses with one werft wall. (CMC, SG Folio No S/13342). The drift over the Liesbeeck River is still used.

⁴⁴ Cape Town City Council, City Engineers Department, Land Survey Branch, Surveyors Office, SG Folio No S/ 13342.

After this early 19th century period of 'high living' at Varsche Drift there appears a hiatus in the deposition of household artifacts around the main dwelling lasting about thirty or so years. This might indicate a hiatus in owner-occupation of the Varsche Drift main house, but it is equally certain that slave- and/or servant caretakers were living on the property, albeit in the outhouses, stables and farmyards. This area has been demolished before the start of the excavation.

3.3 PIETER VAN BREDA, owner, 1830 – 1847

Clement Matthiessen died in 1830. His heirs sold the property to Pieter van Breda, shortly after the Royal Observatory was built across the Liesbeeck River. This and the presence of a number of windmills in the vicinity made the area a favorite place of for visiting painters and drawing masters. One visitor was a M L'Quelbec, who painted "a View of the Salt River Estuary" in the mid nineteenth hundreds, showing the tall tower-mill at Pyotts (Pioneer) Bakery, Woodstock⁴⁵. A closer inspection recently revealed Varsche Drift farmstead clearly to the right (Fig. 43), its Georgian façade facing north, with a flat and a pitched roof and outbuildings. This is probably how Pieter van Breda found the homestead when he took possession⁴⁶.



Fig. 43. Varsche Drift farmhouse in mid 19th century, clearly identifiable amid the Salt River marshes. (University of Cape Town: Manuscript and Archives, BZD 85/4 and BZE 86/29).

⁴⁵ University of Cape Town, Manuscripts and Archives, BZD 85/4 and BZD 86/29, original in the possession of Miss NE Rawbone in 1970.

⁴⁶ Deeds Office, Cape Town, CQ 5.17 folio 401 dated 30 December 1830. Also on the map is OCF 4.2 as a reference to the house. Kathy Dumbrell provided me with this reference.

Pieter van Breda, a son of Alexander van Breda of Boshof in Newlands and grandson of Michiel van Breda of Oranjezicht was the scion of a wealthy and industrious Cape Town family. The van Bredas were known for the introduction of Merino sheep into the Cape, they were farsighted, systematic and progressive farmers. Michiel van Breda supported the movement towards self-government of the colony, representative council and the establishment of municipalities⁴⁷.

The 1830s were marked by an economic upturn for the predominantly Dutch local merchants and retailers⁴⁸. For Pieter van Breda, nephew of Servaas van Breda of Molenvliet and Coornhoop, Varsche Drift might have been just another addition to his property holdings. During the 1840s the track along the farmhouse and across the drift of the Liesbeeck River became marginalized with the construction of a well-engineered road - now known as Voortrekker Road - heading directly to the foothills of the Tygerberg and further inland. Montague Bridge over the Salt River was built in 1843, thus the main traffic bypassed the Varsche Valley property altogether.

3.4 CORNELIUS MOSTERT, 1847 – 1860

By the middle of the 19th century Cape Town had become an anglicized town. Its suburbs were spreading along the main arteries out of town. The 'modernized' practice of land subdivision of estates along the Liesbeeck River did affect Varsche Valley as well. Suburban country houses sprang up around Varsche Drift such as Malta Park, Zorgvliet and Bellevliet. Varsche Drift house was not as far from town as it once had been. Cornelius Mostert junior, who owned Oude Molen, Bloemendal and Valkenberg in the vicinity probably wanted to consolidate his landholdings. He took transfer of the Varsche Drift or Varsche Valley property in 1847⁴⁹. Obviously Mostert and his family did not occupy the farmhouse, their Valkenberg manor house being one of the finest homesteads along the Liesbeeck River. Again, it is assumed that a caretaker / *knechts*, servants or tenants resided around the Varsche Drift dwelling in one of the outbuildings.

⁴⁷ De Kock. WJ. (Ed). 1968. Dictionary of South African Biography, Vol I.

⁴⁸ Worden et al, *ibid.* page 102.

⁴⁹ Information supplied by Kathy Dumbrell. Deeds Office, Cape Town, from Transfer Deed 240, dated 25 April 1867, diagram attached says the summery book.

The homestead was portrayed several times, as shown in previous reports, but most often in connection with the Royal Observatory, which had been erected in 1827.

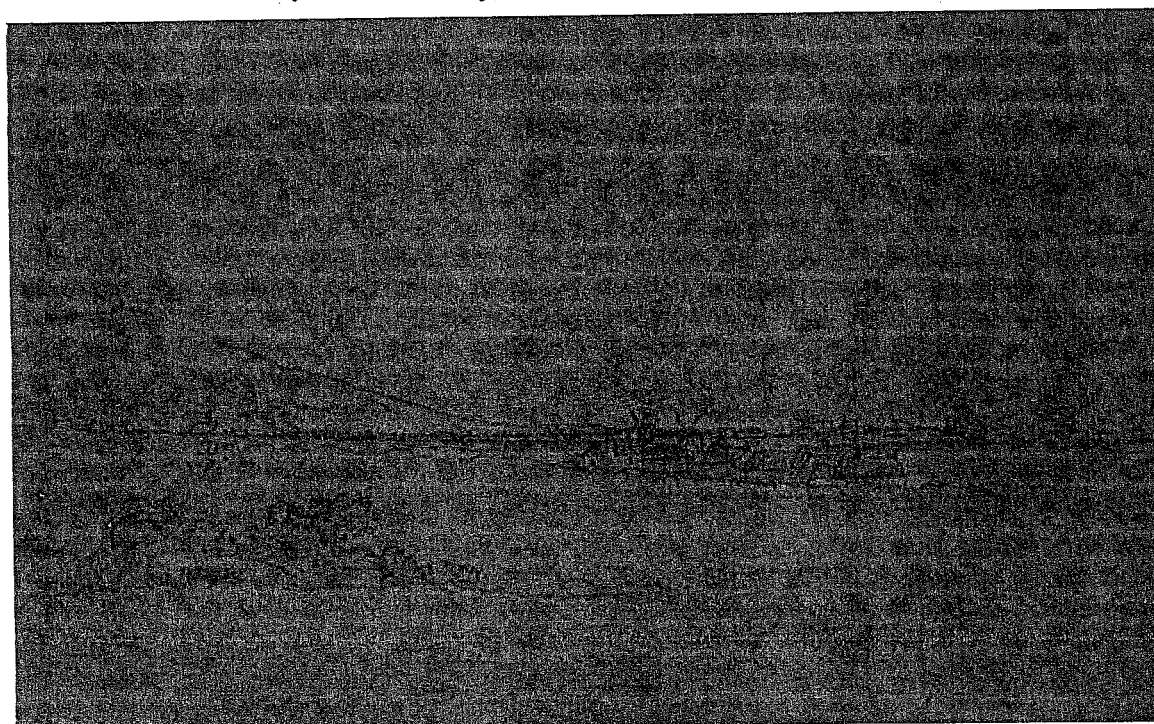


Fig. 44. Detail from Herschel's panorama, taken from the Royal Observatory in 1837. Drawn using a *camera lucida*. Varsche Drift on the left with the Salt River Mills behind. (Courtesy of Kathy Dumbrell⁵⁰)

The main façade with its flat roof was unchanged and faced north, the long 'tail' of outbuildings with thatched pitched roofs are clearly visible. Only a few ceramic fragments collected could be assigned with any degree of certainty to this period.

3.5 THE BROTHERS JOHN AND WILLIAM FELL, 1860 – 1867

The 1860s produced significant changes in the form and character of the environment of the Varsche Drift homestead. With an increase of population in Cape Town and greater economic activity in the interior of the country it was inevitable that a railway line should connect Cape Town with its *hinterland*. The railway line would follow the main roads out of town through the new suburb of Salt River and just north of Varsche Drift divide into two lines, one to Wynberg and the other across the Cape Flats to Wellington and Paarl. Along with this development by private enterprise came the first industrial buildings, the Salt River Railway Workshops

⁵⁰ SA Library, reference INL 9166, 'Panorama from Royal Observatory', sheet 2 of 2.

established in 1859 just to the north of Varsche Valley. Private capital was also invested in processing local agricultural products: breweries, distilleries, mills and tanneries⁵¹. These were located on the Liesbeeck River between Varsche Drift and Newlands. Brickfields and limekilns to the north and west of the homestead had existed since the 17th century and were enlarged to suit industrial production methods. These developments no doubt took place because of the relative cheapness of land on the Cape Flats side of the main roads, including the Varsche Valley marshland.

It was against this background that the brothers John and William Fell bought the land around Varsche Drift. Whether the sale of a portion of the land to the Railways Company took place before or after the transfer could not be established in the time allowed for this report. Maybe they traded their land for the "six shares in the Wynberg Railway" which were held in 1866 by the widow Mrs Busby as collateral⁵². Their father, John Fell, a tinsmith and 'bell-hanger' appears first in the Cape Almanac of 1823 as living at 8 Burg Street, Cape Town. He had come to the Cape with the 60th Regiment of Foot and on his discharge in 1818 elected to stay in the colony⁵³. His sons John junior and William seemed to have acted as partners for a long time. When the brothers had to file for insolvency in 1866 they co-owned the family property consisting of a dwelling, black- and tinsmith shop, yard and workshop at the corner of Market Square and Burg Street in the center of town, as well as the 'Vaarsche Valley' farm and dwelling house.

Inventories of "stocks and affects taken by trustees [of an] insolvent estate ... " are fascinating, detailed records of material things – buildings, domestic utensils, personal belongings, food, tools, livestock, etc –that people owned in the past⁵⁴. They signify a myriad of relationships: social class, status, gender relations, economic power, professional standing, religious affiliation, etc within a narrow range of dates. Thus the Fell families are revealed as belonging to the artisan / skilled working class, and living beyond their means. Their town property and Varsche Drift were mortgaged severely and they owed money to a large number of people, rich and poor.

⁵¹ Saunders, C. et al. (1988). *Studies in the History of Cape Town*. University of Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, Vol 6, page 65.

⁵² MOIB Vol 2/1160, ref No 251, inventory, property of John and William Fell.

⁵³ Philip, P. 1981. *British Residents at the Cape, 1795-1819*. Cape Town: D Philip, page 123.

⁵⁴ Hall, Martin. 1994. *The Secret Lives of Houses: Women, Gables and Gardens in 18th Century Cape Town*. University of Cape Town: Centre for African Studies Seminar, 9 March 1994, page 1.

For the purpose of this report the inventory of the Varsche Drift farmstead is revealing, as it describes the number of rooms and their designation, the number of people living in the house, their social standing and many more facts. Interestingly, some dairy activity took place within the homestead, which we would have not have been able to deduce from the found archeological record.

The following inventory of the Varsche Drift farmstead was found in the Cape Archives, reference MOIB, Volume 2/1160, ref No 251.

“Stocks and effects taken 4 December 1866 by trustees insolvent estate John (junior) and William Fell”, namely:

A farm with dwelling house Vaarsche Drift, part of Vaarsche Valley, Cape District, 20 morgen 572 sq, mortgaged £ 1000-00 [and £ 2500 for the property in town].

The Vaarsche Drift dwelling was “equitable assured for the sum of £ 1000-00” on 24 August 1860 when

“It consist[ed] of a building near the Observatory ‘Vaarsche Vlei’ of Stone, Brick, partly under thatch and partly under [a] Flat roof, detached ... occupied by John Fell as a dwelling and tannery containing nothing hazardous..”

Note here that the official said nothing about his wife and children, or the servants. Their presence is not “officially acknowledged”, but for our purpose, deduced from the documents and material possessions listed.

Six years later the sheriff of the court visited the farm and listed the following possessions (with their values attached, not copied here):

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| <u>In the parlour</u> | 1 Mahogany Sofa with horsehair seat and pillow, |
| | 11 horsehair seats, mahogany |
| | 1 Rosewood chiffonier ⁵⁵ |
| | 1 Round Table and cover |
| | 9 pictures, various |
| | 1 carpet |
| | 1 earthen rug |
| | 1 Fender ⁵⁶ |
| | 2 curtain poles and curtains |

⁵⁵ A movable low cupboard with a sideboard top.

⁵⁶ A fender is equated with a fireplace, therefore a fireplace is present.

Bedroom No1

1 double Mahogany wing wardrobe
 1 mahogany 4 post bedstead with mattress and Palliasse⁵⁷
 1 double mahogany washstand and ewer, basin etc
 6 bedroom chairs
 1 sofa
 1 dressing table
 1 Pocket glass

Bedroom No 2

1 double iron bedstead with bedding, Drill⁵⁸, with one mattress,
 2 pillows,
 1 Bolster⁵⁹,
 2 sheets,
 1 Woolen Blanket,
 1 mahogany chest of drawers,
 1 Deal⁶⁰ dressing table and cover,
 1 toilet glass
 1 Deal washstand with ewer and basin,
 4 bedroom chairs,
 1 dressing case
 1 clotheshorse,
 2 boxes containing various books,
 Some straw matting

In the dining room

1 Mahogany Table and cover
 6 Mahogany chairs with horsehair seats
 1 side table
 1 sofa
 1 carpet and straw floor mat
 8 pictures (various)
 1 fender
 3 ornaments
 3 samplers

In the Dairy

1 set of shelves
 1 Deal Table
 31 milk pails (various)
 23 tin milk pails and tin measures (various)
 3 wooden buttertubs
 1 churn

In the second bedroom

1 Deal cupboard
 1 Deal Table
 1 Deal dresser
 1 meat safe
 1 wooden stretcher and bedding

In the kitchen

1 Deal table
 1 dresser
1 Swedish stove [my highlights]
 1 chair
 2 stools
 9 saucepans, 3 kettles, 5 dishes, 10 plates
 6 knives, 6 forks, 4 spoons,
 sundries cups and saucers

In the farmyard

5 cows
 1 horse
 1 open cart

⁵⁷ Bolsters or headrests, same material as mattresses.

⁵⁸ A tightly woven, coarse, twilled linen or cotton fabric, hardwearing, used for bedsheets and working clothes.

⁵⁹ A long, thick round pillow often made with straw filling.

⁶⁰ Northern European pine.

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| <u>In the loft</u> | 1 set of harness |
| | A lot of forage |
| <u>On the premises</u> | 6 iron water tanks |
| | 1 wind pump (large size) |
| | about 500 feet more or less lead pipes and cocks |
| | 1 saddle |
| | 1 pair steps |
| | 2 washing tubs |
| | 1 Flag staff |

The above list of rooms and their contents can be 'read' in many ways, and, together with the archaeological evidence form a picture of a family aspiring to become members of the emerging middle classes. The rooms in the main house and their furnishings conformed to solid, mid-19th century 'Victorian' ideas of respectability. Rooms now had specific functions, such as dining, sleeping, entertaining guests or preparing food. Whereas in the Dutch house private and public spaces were interchangeable, in the Victorian period they were kept strictly separate. It is almost certain that it was John Fell, who re-arranged the interior layout of the main house. The reason for this major change is not far to find: the railway line cut across the original frontage of the house, the Salt River works obscured the view to the Salt River estuary, the former road to the Liesbeeck River drift was truncated.

The house was given a second entrance to the west side, with a *stoep* constructed and bricked with mid- 19th century bricks. Steps led down to the garden path, which were much later cemented over. An entrance hall was divided off from room six with a one brick wide wall (see Fig. and a new double door entrance to this room broken through from the hall. This created a neutral space in which to greet visitors, before deciding whether to guide them into the formal parlour or the informal rooms of the house. A subdivided corridor towards an additional kitchen at the end of the 'tail' created space for a series of small bedrooms, which were still there when the architect Hans Fransen visited the house the 1950s and drew a floor plan⁶¹ (Fig. 46).

John Fell might probably redecorated the house by installing new wooden floors, repairing ceilings, installing new sash windows, and he gave them a coat of the popular 'hunters green' paint.

Fig. 45 shows the new platforms for the joists of the wooden floors.

⁶¹ Fransen & Cook, *ibid.* page 87.

Fragments of window frames were found in the building rubble; and Fransen wrote that the windows he found on his visit dated back to the 1860s.

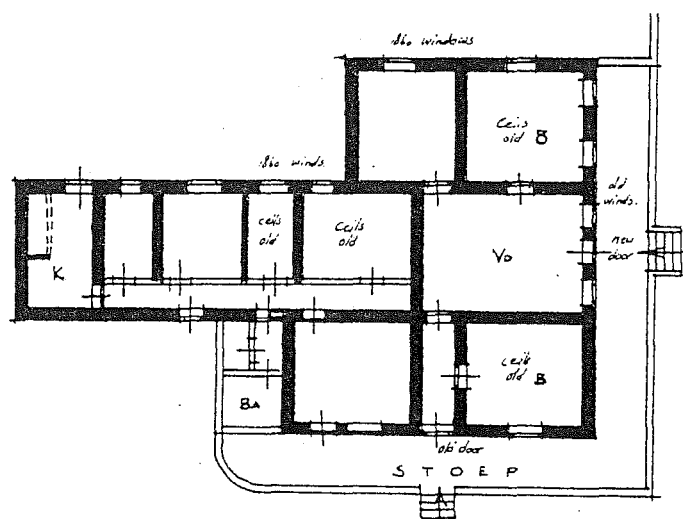


Fig. 46. Hans Fransen's plan of the Varsche Drift house as it survived into the 1960s.

Mr Fell added a 'modern' kitchen or converted an outhouse into one. A Swedish stove, the newest in cast iron technology, was installed, which must have been the pride and joy of Mrs Fell and her servant. The inventory of tableware in the kitchen represents the family's "good" china plates and dishes, most probably the fashionable blue and white "Willow Pattern" dishes and plate fragments found on the site. The colourful, banded slipware bowls, found in fragments on the site were popular from this period onwards with ordinary folks, but were not inventoried. The above are a few examples of interpreting the document and 'reading between the lines'. Many more deductions could be made.

Whether the chimney and fireplaces in the parlour and dining room were recent additions is not clear from the archaeology, as no foundations were found. It is generally assumed, that bodily comfort in the home was introduced by the British. The Fell family was numerous according to the number of beds which children shared. The family was also literate: slate and slate pencils, nibs, salt-glazed ink bottles were found in the artefact collection and books were listed in the inventory. The girls of the house were kept busy with sewing and embroidering samplers, watercolour painting – consider the china tray and the large number of pictures in the bedrooms – all genteel, female occupations.

In original report?

At the back of the house in the annex and outhouses, slightly lower down the slope of the mount were the workshops, tannery, stables for the horses, cows and the dairy. There was a loft over the house where fodder was stored. Amongst the farming utensils were water tanks and a wind pump, the latter a sign that John Fell kept up with modern technology, whereas the flagstaff signals patriotic favour. The house and outbuildings had still not changed its form since 1814, when Thibault surveyed the properties along the main road to Simon's Town, only its outward appearance, with the main façade facing now east. This should last until the house was demolished (Fig. 47).

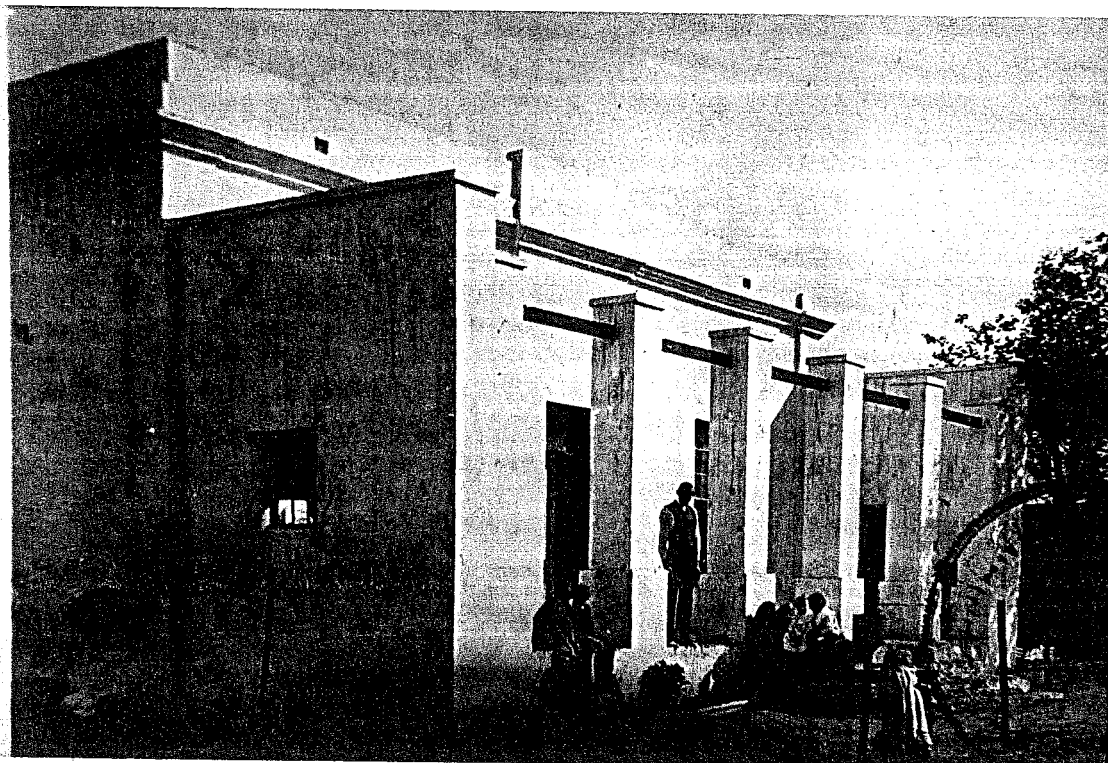


Fig. 47. The front of the Varsche Drift house in the 1890s. (Cape Archives, E 2115)

John Fell farmed and kept a tannery by the river. It was probably he who added the outbuildings between Mrs Fell's kitchen and the 'knee-bend' stables and barns, where previously there had only been a *werft* wall. Mrs Fell might have sold milk, butter (the churn) and other farm products for 'pin' money. They kept horses and a cart for visits to town. However, their income was not large enough to allow for the kind of lifestyle the family aspired to and so the farm and its content was auctioned in 1867 and sold to Charles van Reenen Barry.

3.6 CHARLES VAN REENEN BARRY, owner from 1867 to 1876

By the late 1860s urban sprawl had reached Varsche Drift. Then as now the poor were moved to the edges of the town. The suburbs of Salt River and Woodstock (formerly Papenboom) were laid out for housing development for the working classes. In 1879 the authorities formally gave permission to the African labour force recruited from the Eastern Cape, to build their own huts on waste ground between Salt River railway station and the main road through to the southern suburbs⁶². The beginnings of industrial development, "a wool washing works, Thesen's timber yard and Hare's brickfields with its pungent, sourish smell"⁶³ were erected next to tenant houses. Transport into town and the docks was provided by the railway, backed up by a tramway service. The culture of the Woodstock and Salt River became decidedly British working class, but appearances belied reality. Salt River was an ethnically mixed society, partly an overflow of District six, and life was harsh.

The Barry's were successful British merchants, wool traders and members of parliament. Joseph Barry (1796-1865) had married into the van Reenen family, giving him extensive farming connections in the Overberg, where he promoted superior merino sheep farming⁶⁴. His company, Barry and Nephews, represented - amongst others - the Equitable Fire Assurance and Trust Co., the Mutual, and had investments in the Cape Town Railway and Dock Company, and the London and South African Bank. Joseph Barry also acted as an attorney, a lawyer, an agent and auctioneer. Charles van Reenen-Barry was the eldest of seven sons and four daughters, he and his brothers Sir Jacob Dirk Barry, Thomas Daniel Barry and Michael Barry distinguished themselves in civic affairs, the first as a judge, and the others as members of the Cape parliament⁶⁵.

Varsche Drift seemed probably a good investment, as a new suburb, was about to be founded: Observatory, next down the line. Here its residents were at pains to distinguish themselves from the rougher working class mentality of Salt River. Terraced houses were built for clerks, and small tradesmen, who immigrated to South Africa, when gold was discovered on the Rand. Ownership of a house here was affordable for the lower middle classes and transport to work cheap.

⁶² Bickford-Smith, V. 1995. *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*. Witwatersrand University Press, page 82.

⁶³ Worden et al, *ibid.* page 257.

⁶⁴ Worden et al, *ibid.* page 160.

⁶⁵ De Kock, *ibid.*, Volume I, pp 56/7.

3.7 1876: VARSCHE DRIFT is divided up: Matthys Jacobus Pretorius, Daniel John May, J Meek, the SA Glass Company, Lever Brothers and the industrialization of Salt River

In 1876, when the portion of the farm on which the Varsche Drift homestead was situated, was transferred to Matthys Jacobus Pretorius, the diagram accompanying the transfer⁶⁶ "shows the house in almost the same form as that indicated on Thibault's map of 1814"⁶⁷ and which was to last until at least 1937⁶⁸. (Fig. 48).

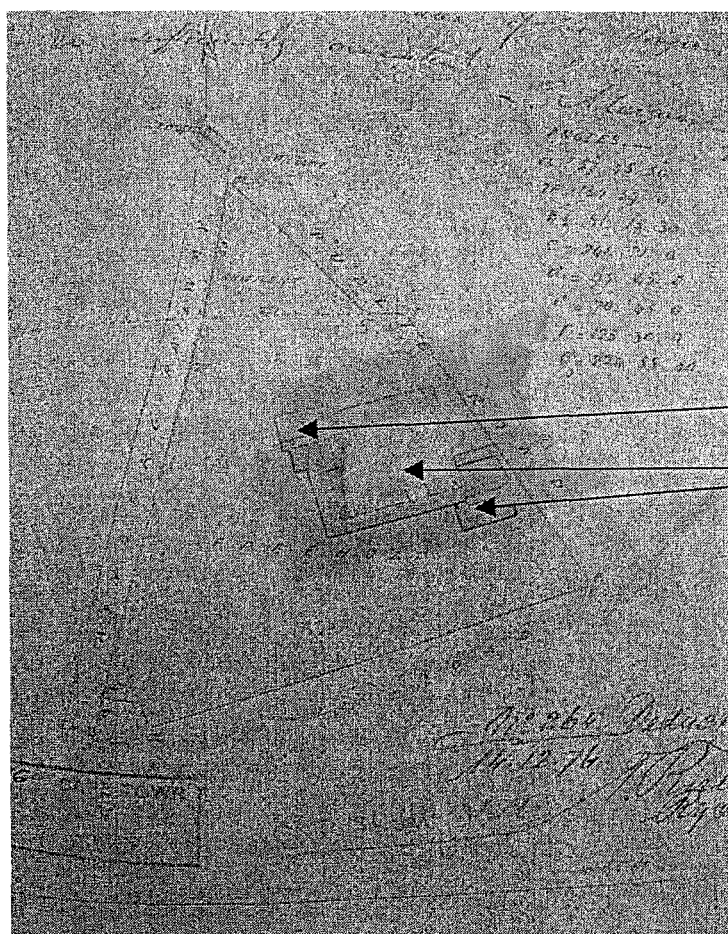


Fig. 48. Surveyor General's diagram 1622/1876, attached to Deed of Transfer 392, dated 23 December 1876. (Courtesy of Kathy Dumbrell).

⁶⁶ Deeds Office, Cape Town, D/T 392, dated 23 December 1876.

⁶⁷ Kathy Dumbrell, Varsche Drift, Malta Park, *ibid*, page 18.

⁶⁸ Department of Land Affairs, Director of Surveys and Mapping, Mowbray, Job 282/1937, strip 1, photo 19389, 91.

Unfortunately no documentary evidence could be located in the short time allowed for this project. The name of the owner suggests an Afrikaans background. Artefactual material from the late 19th century was scarce at the site. The only conclusion one would be able to draw here is, that the owner was one of many people who aspired to own land and – at the time – could afford to purchase the farm or part thereof. Pretorius owned his place probably until 1881, when the South African Glass Company bought a portion. This company manufactured table glass and ornamental wares, but folded within a few years. Surviving pieces are sold on the antique market today at high prices.

The Pretorius family might have owned the few late 19th century ceramic items found on the site, amongst them probably the lovely serving dish depicted in Figure 20. Patent medicine bottles, food storage bottles, the pink jam jar and the orange coloured jelly glass fragment are also probably from this or the next owner's household, as are the aerated water bottle, a 'Codd' bottle. The last contained a glass marble to prevent the carbonate bubbles to escape. When the bottle broke, the children used the marbles as toys. That the children went to school, and / or a slate was used in the house is evidenced by two slate pencils, which have been sharpened with a knife. It was in the late 1890s or early in the new century that the photographer Thomas Elliot came to photograph the house and its inhabitants. Here is the family:



Fig. 49. Varsche Drift House with its owners, late 19th century. Note the bathroom on the left. The husband probably had a 'white-collar' job, as clerk or shop assistant. The children are dressed nicely and the family presents a picture of poor, respectable folks. (Cape Archives, A3129).

Fig. 50. The eldest daughter
minds the baby.
Varsche Drift, late 19th century.
(Cape Archives, E2114).



Fig. 51. The back of Varsche Drift house. On the left is the former façade of the house, the original *stoep* is now covered with earth. (Cape Archives, A3129).

According to the Deeds Office portion 25472 of the land at Varsche Drift was transferred to J Meek in 1903⁶⁹. The portion of Varsche Drift opposite the farmhouse across the railway line was sold in 1910 to Lever Brothers, who erected a "soap works". It must have been around this time that a sewerage system and piped clean water reached the Varsche Drift house. Portions of the land would be granted to the Cape Divisional Council, registered as Crown Title, and the Government of South Africa Railways and Harbours. By the early 1920s Varsche Drift appears on the council maps as "Municipality Stables".

The property and its buildings thereon were now surrounded by industry, the new Malta Road to the north connecting the industrial part of Salt River with the Liesbeeck "woolwashing establishments" and the new suburb of Maitland.

Varsche Drift farmstead and its surrounds had changed beyond recognition.

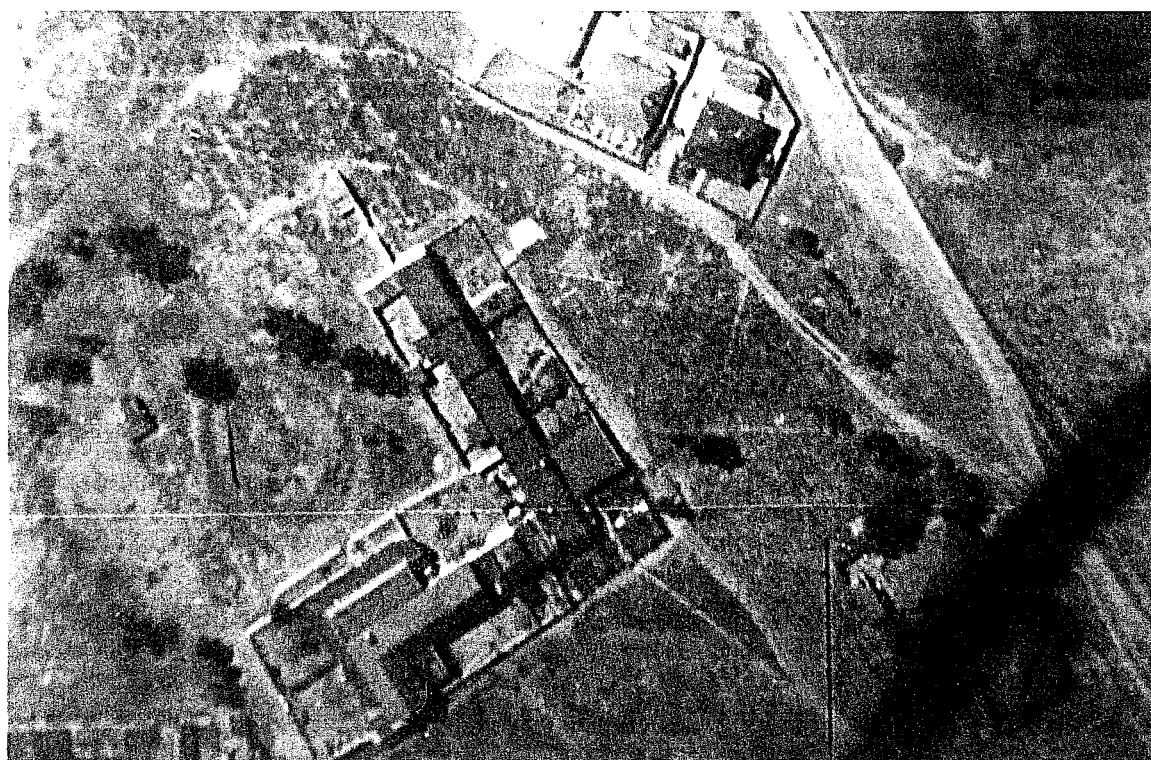


Fig. 52. Aerial photograph of Varsche Drift in 1937. (Dept. of Landaffairs, Director of Surveys and Mapping, Mobray, ref No 282/1937, strip 1, photo 19389,91.

⁶⁹ Deeds Office, Transfer Document 10914, dated 1 August 1903. (Kathy Dumbrell shared this information with me).

Between 1937 and 1943 the outbuildings beyond the "elbow" were demolished to make way for tenant houses for railway workers. When Hans Fransen visited the main house in the early 1960s, it was quite dilapidated and uninhabited. A short while later it was demolished.

4. BEYOND VARSCHE DRIFT

The historical archaeology of Varsche Drift House seems to be one of steady decline of the physical fabric of the building and the social standing of its owners and occupiers. Originally, the Varsche Drift House may have been designed as a small country house to entertain the owners, their family and friends outside their formal town house residence. We may take here Lady Anne Barnard's cottage in Newlands Forest as an example. She entertained her friends there informally, especially the younger set, away from the stiff social norms of her husband's formal residence in the Castle⁷⁰. The material goods, which were discarded during this period of occupancy, (ca 1783 to ca 1820) reflect the 'elite' status of its owners. Fine Chinese porcelain at table, followed by the 'new' fashionable Staffordshire creamware plates and dishes, English/Irish wine glasses, the large amount of imported Champaign and wine bottles all add to this picture. The better cuts of beef and sheep were served as roasts and stews on the master's table, and probably the odd *duiker* and fowl. It seems a thoroughly masculine household, entertaining British officers and officials for the hunt, perhaps? It was only later, that a feminine touch is discernible in the artefactual collection: fine British blue and white underglaze printed teaware.

Although FW Allemann had a large family and twenty five slaves when he died in 1790, Clement Mattheissen probably about ten to fifteen⁷¹, none of the material remains of slaves and servants were found during this excavation. Slaves and servants cooked their own food in the furthest corner of the yard and slept in outhouses, which in this case would have been destroyed – at the latest - with the erection of railway houses in 1943. Furthermore, not one *snoek* bone was found, which is indicative of the absence of slaves on the property.

⁷⁰ The Cape Journals of Lady Anne Barnard, 1797-1800. 3 Volumes. Van Riebeeck Society, Second Series, No's 24, 29, 30.

⁷¹ This number is an informed guess for a man of his standing, as the relevant pages (slave holders names beginning with Ma) were missing in the slave register of the Cape Archives.

Varsche Drift does not seem to function at this time as an independent economic entity. The owners kept up the house as an adjunct to their town and other property holdings. The owners' income from business activities, salary and perks (not always strictly within the law) as Officials of the VOC and later the British administration was more than sufficient.

Varsche Drift was sold after the death of Clement Matthiessen and became part of larger farming property holdings of established Dutch families. A hiatus of archaeological debris might indicate caretakers or servants occupied the farmhouse. Kitchen utensils, especially those made from metal were frequently repaired, recycled and re-used for a different purpose in the households of the poorer classes. Wooden household containers, such as wooden trenchers (flat eating bowls) left no trace in the archaeological record unearthed so far.

A second distinct episode in the composition of the artifact assemblage was created around the mid-nineteenth century, when John and William Fell bought the farm and buildings thereon. High status domestic refuse – such as was found – gives way to middle class “Willow pattern” tableware, beer and ginger beer bottles, household containers, a cheap Dutch claypipe, buttons for everyday working clothes. Documentary evidence tells us that the John Fell family tried to make a living at Varsche Drift, but not before they thoroughly removed and changed the interior of the house. The façade was turned ninety degrees to the east, maintaining its Georgian finish. Interior rooms were remodeled and an entrance hall divided off one room. A ‘modern kitchen’ was added. Victorian notions of respectable, comfortable living standards introduced. Mr Fell operated a tannery and did some farming, Mrs Fell supervised a dairy and probably sold farm products. The Fells did not succeed and declared themselves bankrupt in 1866 and had to sell.

In the meantime, the railways had encroached on the property, railway workshops been erected to the north of Varsche Valley farmlands. The working class suburbs of Salt River and Woodstock laid out. Industrial buildings and workshops were erected on both sides of the railway line. Varsche Drift house became – at one and the same time – a desirable residence, if one worked in town or the southern suburbs, on the other hand declined in status because it was surrounded by industrial development and its upkeep kept to a minimum. In the end, the provincial administration, and later the railways and harbour board bought what was left of the property to extend their workshops and provide cheap housing for its workers.

5. CONCLUSION

This report touched on many subjects intimately connected with one dwelling, Varsche Drift House in Observatory. We have tried to show that, in itself, an archaeological assemblage can reveal social status and personal preferences of the owners. It has also become clear, that a small collection such as the one we excavated has only tentative value for the presence or absence of certain classes of people. The presence of slave artifacts is almost undetectable, even on a larger site⁷². Besides, the majority of outbuildings were demolished and disturbed by 20th century building activities.

However, treating both documents and artifacts as 'text', one source complements the other and it was almost possible to construct a "footprint" of the many people who lived in and around the Varsche Drift homestead. Some people were more visible than others, but within the confines of this report, their stories become meaningful interpreters of a particular time and place in the history of the southern suburbs of Cape Town.

⁷² There have been numerous attempts during the last ten years. However, it is only on sites such as the Slave Lodge in town and Van der Stels farm Vergelegen with its hundred or so slaves, housed in a specially erected slave lodge, that material remains could be associated with these unfortunate people.

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Dr Ute A Seemann

Simon's Town, November 2003

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