

**Heritage Impact Assessment of the old railway shed situated on the site
of the taxi rank, Ixopo, Sisonke District Municipality**



**Prepared for: SiVEST Civil Engineering Division
VCC Estate
North View Building
170 Peter Brown Drive
Montrose
3201**



archaic consulting

architecture: research: conservation: anthropology: impacts consulting

**debbie whelan
po box 21834
mayors walk
3208**

**tel: 033 3442522
fax: 033 3443122
cell: 083236 0410
email: debbie@archaic.co.za**

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1. Introduction

Debbie Whelan of Archaic Consulting was requested by Mr. Stephen Burton of SiVEST to inspect the old railway shed at Ixopo with the view towards its destruction. The building is located, and has been for many years, within the taxi rank at the entrance to the town (see Fig 1 below). This is evidently an undesirable state of affairs, particularly as the intention of the local Municipality is to develop and formalize the taxi rank space. This necessitates its destruction. In terms of the KwaZulu Natal Provincial Heritage Act no 4 of 2004, this building is protected, being over the age of 60 years.

2. Methodology

Debbie Whelan visited the site on Saturday 7 September 2013. A number of photographs of the building were taken, which form the basis of assessment in this report. Further to this, limited archival investigations were undertaken in order to establish the value of this particular building within its history.



Fig 1: Google Earth image showing the building in its proximity to the taxi rank.

3. Short history of railway at Ixopo / Stuartstown

Archival evidence points at the arrival of the railway line at Stuartstown as being at the turn of the 20th century. This is reinforced by the 1940 Masson Map (see below) which shows the railway line running north to Mabhedlane.

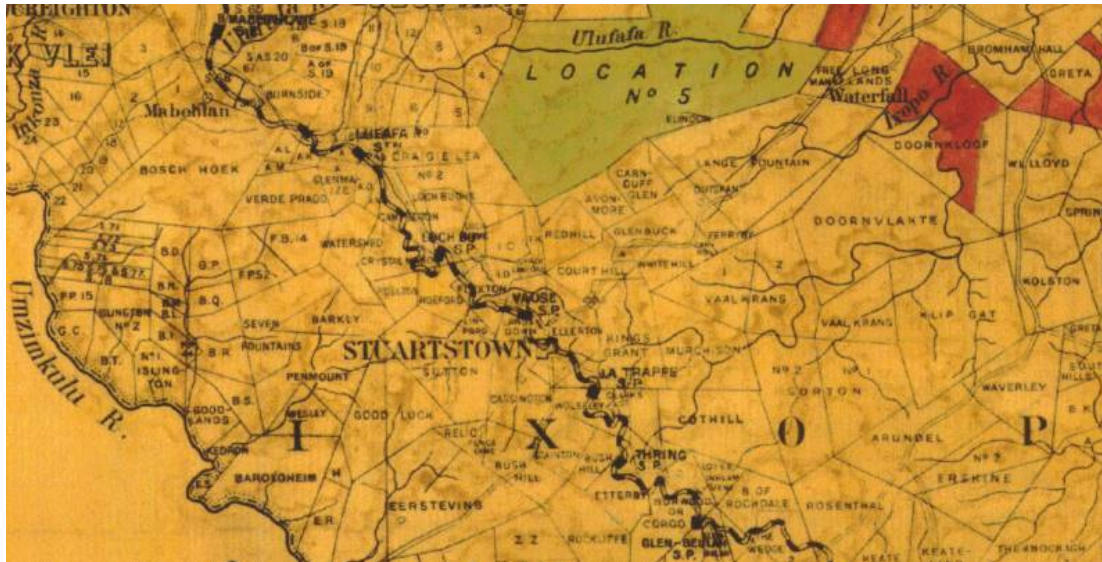


Fig 2: Excerpt from Masson Map showing the railway line running through Stuartstown

4. Assessment of building

4.1 Exterior

The structure is an elongated wood – and - iron building which forms part of the southern interface within extant the taxi rank. It has a double pitched roof, and timber louvered ventilators to the ends. It has had accretions added to over the years, all without planning and permission. Some original timber sliding doors are still evident, but these have also been patched and altered. The width of the building changes along its length, which alters the pitch of the roof. It has been painted in the past, but has not been maintained in recent years.

The building most likely operated as a goods shed.

It is important to note that this building is occupied by a variety of tenants, notably a number of residents who have sectioned off the internal space into around ten different rooms, in which they live. There also appears to be an informal shebeen operating out of this building.

According to local informants, the Esperanza – Donnybrook railway line closed over 25 years ago. It appears as though this building was abandoned by the Railways and handed over to the Ixopo Municipality. This means that the building has been located within the taxi rank for over 20 years, and in this period has historically been occupied by resident tenants. Informers from shops around the rank note that the Municipality had given notice to these people over a decade ago, but after a change in governance this had fallen through.



The **Fig 3: North Elevation**



Fig 4: Showing the front elevation, accretions and alterations in roof pitch



Fig 5: Accretions to the west



Fig 6: Elevation along the west



Fig 7: Eastern elevation showing hawkers stands in the foreground

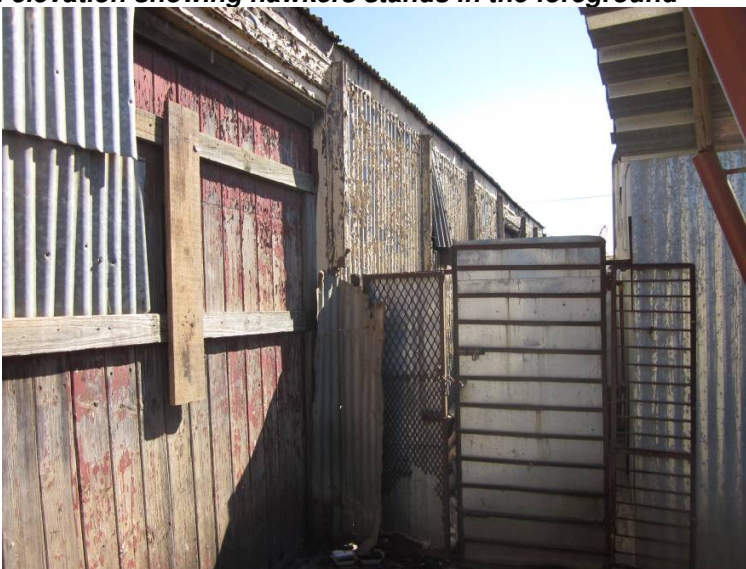


Fig 8: Looking down length of the eastern elevation at accretions



Fig 9: Condition of base of building



Fig 10: Showing sliding timber door, patched



Fig 11: Base of wall adjacent to door (above) with concrete plinth



Fig 12: View of south elevation and hawkers stalls to the right of the photo



Fig 13: View of south elevation looking down the space between the large building to the west and the western elevation

4.2 Interior

As noted, the building has been sectioned off using gumpoles and cardboard packing cases into a number of different rooms, which are tenanted / occupied, along its length. The condition of the trusses is good, but the quality and the integrity of the internal space is severely compromised. In addition, there are numerous holes in the corrugated sheeting roof.



Fig 14: Trusses in roof space – note ad hoc additions in terms of space dividers



Fig 15: View along the length of the interior of the shed



Fig 16: Detail of room dividers inside the shed

5. Adjacent buildings and street context

As indicated, there is little in terms of context to support this building, situated as it is within the local taxi rank. There is no railway infrastructure such as lines, etc remaining. To the north of the site is the open rank with a number of face - brick buildings of recent construction housing small businesses. To the east is a building of relatively informal construction housing an eating house, and behind this a series of locally constructed hawkers stands in variant stages of disrepair. To the west of the building, and overshadowing it, is an elevated face – brick building of recent construction with a 'Brown – Built' type roofing, housing a wholesaler, a bakery, and a liquor outlet, as well as an undecipherable covered space. To the south of the building is wasteland and a small, double - pitched utilitarian building of recent construction which has limited relationship to the old goods shed.



Fig 17: Informal structures immediately to the east of the building



Fig 18: Raised building adjacent to the taxi tank on the west



Fig 19: Small utilitarian building to the south of the site



Fig 20: Other businesses on site looking back northwards through the taxi rank

6. Conclusion

6.1 Significance of railway goods shed

Railway shed	local	regional	national	international
architectural	low	low	low	low
social	low	low	low	low
scientific	low	low	low	low
historical	low	low	low	low
technical	low	low	low	low

This modest structure is the only surviving remnant of the railway which ran through Ixopo from the beginning of the 20th century until around three decades ago. It has low significance on all levels from a local, national and international perspective. However, it is in a compromised position physically, being located in the centre of what has been a taxi rank on the outskirts of Ixopo for at least the last two decades. Furthermore, although there have been few alterations over the years and the core of the building is reasonably intact, the condition of the material that constitute this structure is not very good.

It is in the opinion of the author that the structure contributes little to the streetscape or architectural fabric of the area, being subsumed as it is into the workings of the taxi rank. It is devoid of any historical or social context. Reuse is a possibility, given an appropriate and practical context. It is recommended that the building be offered to the Alan Paton railway for incorporation into their operations, and failing this, that it be removed and the roofing timbers be offered to Amafa aKwazulu-Natali for storage towards reuse.

7. References

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Remarks AGR3107/1909. GW828/1909
- MJPW 68 LW2954/1899 Thomas Foster: Deputation from Stuartstown to present resolution of public meeting that that district be connected by railway extension with the main line, such extension to touch as near the village as possible. Remarks CSO5434/1899 ECR1291/1899 LW2954A/1899.
- MJPW 68 LW2954A/1899 Thomas Foster: Deputation to present a resolution passed at a public meeting held at Stuartstown on railway extension through the Ixopo Division.
Remarks: placed with LW2954/1899.
- MJPW 110 LW1475/1904 Esperanza - Stuartstown Railway.
Remarks CSO3203/1904 LW7021/1903 AG804/1904 LW703/1904 LW6878/1903.
- MJPW 110 LW703/1904 Engineer - In - Chief, Maritzburg: Stuartstown Branch Railway - Mr. RM Archibald asks for information. Remarks ECR235/1904 placed with LW1475/1904.
- MJPW 120 MPW11/1905 Acting Engineer-In-Chief, Natal Government Railways: Stuartstown, Railway. Minister of Public Works asks for information concerning.
Remarks RH15/1905 ECR4/1905 RH204/1905 GM151/1905 ECR49/1905.
- MJPW 133 MJ3179/1906 John Stone Contractor Durban: is prepared to hire two - hundred persons for work on the Stuartstown Railway.