



CITY OF CAPE TOWN
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STAD KAAPSTAD

Stories of the South Peninsula

**Historical research, stories and heritage tourism opportunities in
the South Peninsula**



SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM

The peninsula from Cape Point Nature Reserve

*Prepared for the City of Cape Town by C. Postlethwayt, M. Attwell & K. Dugmore Ström
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Background

The primary objective of this project was to prepare a series of 'story packages' providing the content for historical interpretive stories of the 'far' South Peninsula. Stories cover the geographical area of Chapman's Peak southwards to include Imhoff, Ocean View, Masiphumelele, Kommetjie, Witsand, Misty Cliffs and Scarborough, Plateau Road, Cape Point, Smitswinkel Bay to Miller's Point, Boulders, Simon's Town, Red Hill, Glencairn and Fish Hoek to Muizenberg.

The purposes for which these stories are to be told are threefold, namely to support tourism development; to stimulate local interest; and to promote appropriate and sustainable protection of heritage resources through education, stimulation of interest and appropriate knowledge.

To this end, the linking of historical stories and tourism development requires an approach to story-telling that goes beyond the mere recording of historic events. The use of accessible language has been a focus. Moreover, it requires an approach that both recognises the iconic, picture-postcard image of parts of Cape Town (to which tourists are drawn initially), but extends it further to address the particular genius loci that is Cape Town's 'Deep South', in all its complexity and coloured by memory, ambivalences and contradictory experiences. We believe there is a need to balance the more conventional approach, which selects people or events deemed worthy of commemoration (for example, the Battle of Muizenberg) to tell the story of places, by interweaving popular memory and culture into these recordings (for example, the rich Muslim culture that existed in Simon's Town before the removal under the Group Areas Act).

Thus, these are stories, familiar and unfamiliar, that link intangible heritage with (largely) material forms and are about real-life characters and events that have shaped our past. The tone of these stories is conversational in order to engage local residents and tourists alike, and can be utilised in story-telling mode (by tour guides for example) or to fulfil on-site interpretive requirements.

Stories have been selected to balance historical themes from prehistory, through pre-colonial to colonial settlement, apartheid and democratic South Africa. The history of Cape Town's South Peninsula has been very ably and comprehensively recorded by many of its residents, and we wish to acknowledge and give thanks to all those cited as references.

Referencing

The stories are intended for popular consumption. Therefore, the traditionally detailed referencing that would be expected of historical research was not regarded as appropriate in this instance, although full accuracy in terms of content and referencing has been sought. All references utilised have been listed. In respect of images, reference sources have been provided, which are open-source as far as possible.

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Contact details

Email: heritage.management@capetown.gov.za

Web: www.capetown.gov.za/environment

Environmental & Heritage Management branch

Environmental Resource Management department

City of Cape Town

Good Hope Subcouncil Building

5th floor, 44 Wale Street

Cape Town, 8001

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7. Stories from the graves, graveyards and memorials of the South Peninsula

(M. Attwell)

The South Peninsula contains many, disparate stories about people who lived in the area, stretching back into pre-history. Sometimes, there is a glimpse of these stories in the burial sites, graveyards and memorials scattered along the peninsula.

Burial sites and graveyards

Graves can identify social practices or the 'discrete traits' of a culture, and tell us something about the people they memorialise and, by implication, the society in which they lived. There are remaining graveyards in Muizenberg, St James, Kalk Bay, Glencairn and Simon's Town. Each has its own history and tells the collective history of those who are buried there. Some of the graveyards of the South Peninsula are overgrown; some remains have been disinterred and reburied elsewhere; some remain strongly in the public eye, and some retain strong links with the communities the deceased served.

Types and styles of memorial stones and grave markers changed over time and differ from one culture to another. This is reflected in the memorials found in the graveyards of the South Peninsula. Many of the Christian gravestones are simple, and many are crosses.

Gravestones themselves are tributes to the departed, but also carry visual devices and symbols within the memorial stones. The stone itself is an image, a sculpture or a marble cross, for example. Apart from a verbal description, a language of visual symbols, there is the intention to honour the dead and declare faith in the afterlife.¹³ For researchers of cemeteries and family genealogists, the shifting fashions in markers and symbols denoted cultural shifts away from an 18th-century preoccupation with the inevitability of death, towards a 19th-century iconography of gentler forms of remembrance. There were flowers, trees (representing the tree of life), angels and cherubs representing eternal life. Clapsed or praying hands represented fidelity. Children's deaths received their own symbols of doves and the cut-down tree.

¹³ Keister p 7.

Personal details, occupation, achievements and sacrifices are more commonly recorded on gravestones, either through words or words and markers. The Commonwealth War naval graves at Glencairn, for example, are commemorated by a headstone containing an anchor together with personal details, linking the remembered dead as naval personnel.

Peers Cave, Fish Hoek

The South Peninsula is unique in that it has known burial sites stretching into the distant past – some twelve thousand years ago.

Victor Peers and his son, Bert, discovered stone tools and deep, extensive shell middens near a rock shelter in the vicinity of Fish Hoek, which they, as amateurs, excavated themselves.

The site revealed even greater treasures according to Cobern including “the remains of six people, two women and four children, (who) were buried below this layer, and with them were found ostrich eggshell beads, shell pendants and a piece of rusted European iron said to have been a spear head. There were also the remains of small leather bags that possibly contained medicine, for one of the women appeared to have been lame, together with pieces of mother of pearl and stone tools. Below the midden were the remains of two more people; and subsequently a ninth skeleton was found, a male of about thirty years old.”



Victor Peers at Peers Cave archaeological site.

According to Cobern one of the skulls, that became known by 1929 as the ‘Fish Hoek Man’ was dated to about 12 000 years, proving that the area had been populated by the Khoi for many thousands of years. Equally the presence of ostrich beads and other personal; artefacts suggested that people were buried with their personal belongings and revealed interesting insights into the Khoi culture. Some burials were undertaken with sorrow and compassion. A baby had been rolled in buckskin and placed in a bed of leaves. Walker describes a string of shells with cut edges for stringing (a baby's rattle) found alongside the skeleton as well as three strings of ostrich eggshell beads which were placed around the infant's neck. The second skeleton was that of a young woman aged eighteen to twenty and according to Walker was “accompanied by an outstanding display of bead-work.” Some of the men's skulls showed death by violence. The fact that they had been carried from elsewhere to be buried in the gravesite suggests a sense of honouring the dead.



View of Fish Hoek from Peers Cave.

JUNOR, I.

The graves were a short distance from the rock shelter which also suggested a form of custodianship or care. This shows that the early Khoi, the earliest inhabitants of the South Peninsula. This shows that the early Khoi, the earliest inhabitants of the South Peninsula, like so many, honoured their dead and mourned their loss.

Subsequently, Peers Cave has been the subject of further excavations by qualified archaeologists, and the material excavated has been subject to further intense study. The material excavated is scattered, but most is on display in the Iziko Museum in Cape Town.

The Garden of Remembrance and the Old Burying Ground, Simon's Town

The Garden of Remembrance off Runciman Drive in Simon's Town is part of the Old Burying Ground. It is magnificently situated against the mountain slopes with a view of the sea, where many of those it memorialises in fact perished. It is unusual in that it is an historic graveyard, but has been given a modernist make-over. It was redesigned by the Cape Town modernist architect Roelof Uytenbogaart.

The presentation and layout of the Garden of Remembrance, part of the extended graveyard, was stripped of its religious references and, instead, turned into a strong, bold modernist statement – devoid of the iconography and sentiment that are typically present in historic graveyards. The slate grey memorial stones tilted upwards create enclosed spaces that mimic the sea. While the reorganisation of space makes it easy to access the memorials, the blankness and bunker-like qualities are disconcerting, particularly in relation to such a deeply historical place, with so many narratives to absorb.

In stark contrast is the graveyard at the stone Church of St James in Main Road, St James. Although less significant historically, it is true to its historical traditions, has a sense of peace, and functions as a garden of contemplation.

Simon's Town was established as a Dutch East India Company settlement in 1743. It became a British naval base in 1814, with the intention to protect the valuable sea routes to India – the 'Jewel in the Crown'. In 1875, it was ceded to the British Admiralty as a naval station. Because of its British military status, it played a significant role in the Anglo-Boer War.

The Old Burying Ground and the Garden of Remembrance are a unique and varied record of the past and the history of Simon's Town, containing early graves from the British colonial period, the graves of foreign sailors, those killed by pirates or in shipping accidents, and those who died of illness.

The Garden of Remembrance was originally called the naval cemetery, and contains the military graves.

A stroll through the Old Burying Ground, now sadly derelict in places, gives the visitor a sense of the varied, hard, multi-cultural life of Simon's Town, and the powerful presence of Navy life at the heart of the town's origins.

What do the Old Burying Ground and the Garden of Remembrance tell us about the conditions under which people lived from the late 18th century until the recent past?

The Italian graves, the Russian monument and the many references to sailors who died in these parts tell of a naval settlement connected to major international sea routes. Life for sailors was hard, dangers were frequent, illness was always a possibility, and accidents had

fatal consequences. There were shipwrecks, and accidents and deaths at sea. Occasionally, there is an oblique reference to a war. W Bailey, a "boy first class", is recorded as having died in June 1795 aboard the HMS Rattlesnake, which fought at the Battle of Muizenberg. He probably died of illness, as the battle itself took place in August and there were known casualties due to disease.

Medical records at the Simon's Town Museum for those who perished and were buried at the Old Burying Ground also suggest that the early sites may also contain the remains of desperate poor, unnamed children and the unremembered and unacknowledged. These records provide insights into how people died and, by implication, the conditions under which they lived.



Memorial to the prisoners of war from the Anglo-Boer War who died in detention, Simon's Town.

Some death records illustrate dire hardships and death, with no memorial or name, such as "an unfortunate found at the back of Admiralty Gardens in a state of nudity benumbed with cold died in prison on Morning of 12th September". Others record long lives and a suitable benediction, such as John Callas, who died on 17 January 1859 at "about 106" after receiving the holy sacrament.

Some of the Navy dead were memorialised with funds collected by their crewmates. One such memorial is to William Brunton of the HMS Raleigh, who died at sea at the age of 17. His memorial was paid for by the officers and men of his ship.

There were 160 Boer prisoner-of-war graves at Simon's Town. Most of them perished as a result of typhoid, a sign of very poor sanitary conditions – a fact recorded by traveller and activist Mary Kingsley, who nursed many at the Palace Barracks. Just one such name is one "JS Ackerman who died on 11.9.1900. From Vereeniging and was captured at Paardeberg". They have their own memorial at the Old Burying Ground.

The most recent of the graves at Simon's Town is from one of the most famous naval disasters along the False Bay coast – the wreck of the Birkenhead, which went aground at Danger Point near Gansbaai. The remains of five casualties of the HMS Birkenhead were re-interred in the Garden of Remembrance.



The re-interment of the remains of five victims of the Birkenhead disaster, at Simon's Town Garden of Remembrance, 21 February 2002.

The wrecking of the Birkenhead in 1852, and the bravery of its crew, is a stirring naval story and one that has been kept alive in literature and naval traditions. The Birkenhead was an iron-hulled ship built for the Royal Navy in 1845, but was converted into a troopship. She sailed from Simon's Town on 25 February 1852 with about 830 passengers on board. The following day, the ship struck an unmapped rock near Danger Point. The captain ordered a turn astern to ease the ship off the rock, but a gaping hole in the stern allowed the sea to rush in, flooding the engine rooms and buckling the plates of the forward bilge. As water flooded in, 100 soldiers were drowned in their berths.

There were not enough lifeboats for the passengers. Of the boats, only three were serviceable. The surviving officers and men assembled on deck, where Lieutenant-Colonel Seton of the 74th Foot took charge of all military personnel, and stressed the necessity of maintaining order and discipline to his officers. As a survivor later recounted: "Almost everybody kept silent, indeed nothing was heard, but the kicking of the horses and the orders of Salmond (the Captain), all given in a clear firm voice." The soldiers famously stood silently to attention to allow the women and children to board the lifeboats. Once the lifeboats had left the ship 20 minutes after first striking the rock, the vessel broke in two with the men standing to attention on deck. Most drowned or were taken by sharks. Some managed to swim the two kilometres to shore, but the shark danger was ever present. A survivor recounted: "I saw men taken by them close to me, but as I was dressed (having on a flannel shirt and trousers) they preferred the others."

Their chivalry and bravery gave rise to the 'women and children first' protocol that has characterised naval responses to shipwrecks. It became known as the 'Birkenhead drill' and was immortalised in Rudyard Kipling's poem "Soldier and Sailor too": "But to stand an' be still to the Birken'ead drill is a damn tough bullet to chew, An' they done it, the Jollies -- 'Er Majesty's Jollies -- soldier an' sailor too!"

The 'drill' came to represent British naval discipline and chivalry at its best, and in the face of the direst and most dangerous of consequences. Of the 643 passengers of the Birkenhead, only 193 survived.

In the court martial that followed, Captain Edward WC Wright of the 91st Argyllshire Regiment described the scene as follows: "The order and regularity that prevailed on board, from the moment the ship struck till she totally disappeared, far exceeded anything that I had thought could be affected by the best discipline; and it is the more to be wondered at seeing that most of the soldiers were but a short time in the service."

The graveyards of the Muslim community

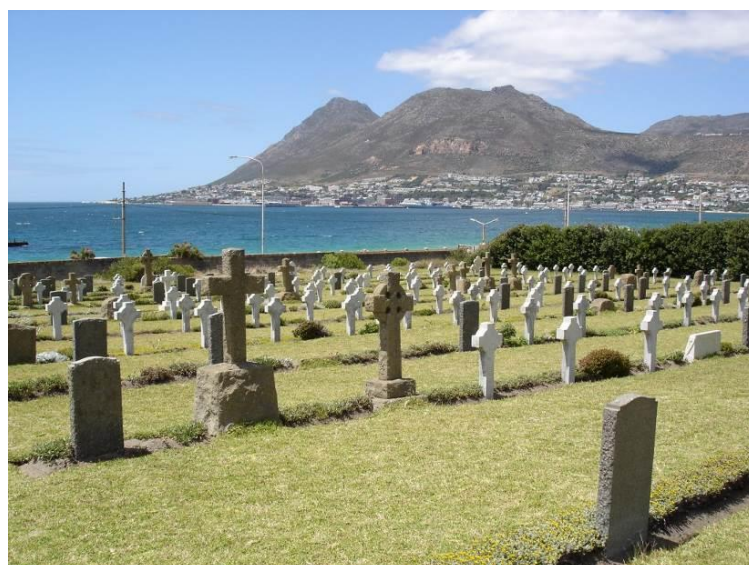
The Cape Muslim community played a significant part in the history of the South Peninsula. Their graves, in accordance with Islamic tradition, are separate. The Muslim graveyard in the Old Burying Ground contains the graves of the early Muslims, some of whom were the founding members of the Simon's Town community. By tradition, the graves are unadorned.

The Muslim burials in Die Land, the Kalk Bay graveyard, were exhumed and reburied at Muizenberg in 1940. The Dido Valley cemetery also contains graves to the fallen and those who served in the war.

Other graveyards

Other graveyards in the South Peninsula also have some stories to tell:

- The graveyards of Dido Valley, divided into Protestant Catholic and Muslim religions as well as the Navy graveyard. This includes the Commonwealth and war graves. Dido Valley contains 77 burials from World War I, and 106 from World War II, mostly of naval personnel. The graves, appropriately, look out to the sea.
- The Church of the Holy Trinity, St James. This is the most visible of the cemeteries and churches along the Main Road, and certainly the most beautiful. Memorials and tombstones are simple, with the Celtic cross and the simple cross predominating. It is beautifully and simply landscaped and serves as a garden of contemplation.
- The Muizenberg cemetery. The oldest part of the Muizenberg graveyard has the most ornate of the memorial stones and funeral art.
- The graveyard above Rust en Vrede for Sir Abe Bailey and family.

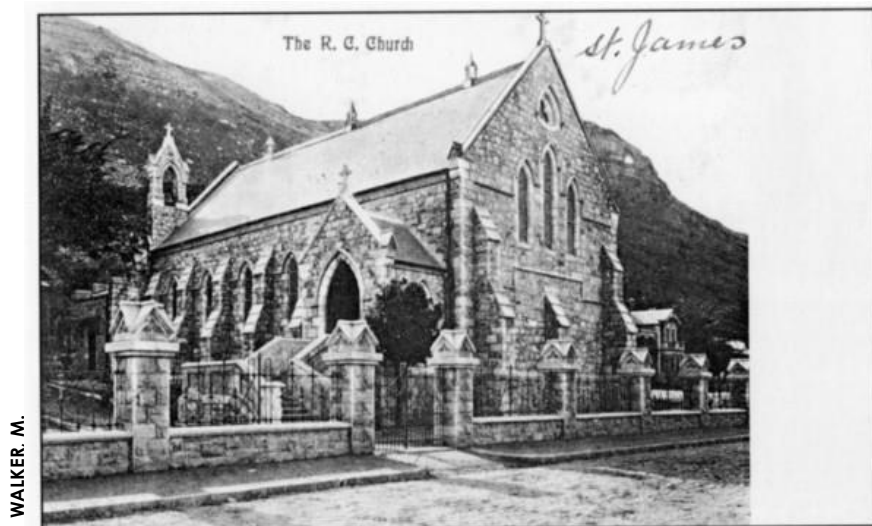


View of the Dido Valley Commonwealth graveyard.

Father Duignan and the Filipino community

The early Filipino fishermen are at the heart of the story of Kalk Bay, having introduced successful fishing methods and established fishing as a viable economic activity.

The Catholic Church of St James supported the Filipino fishing community, being the founders of the fishing industry at Kalk Bay. St James was the patron saint of fishermen and of Spain, and was of huge significance to the Filipino community, who were fishermen and for a



An early image of the Catholic Church of St James, 1900, taken from an historic postcard.

period of time spoke in a Spanish dialect. The church was first established along Main Road in 1858 by the early Filipino community, who also had a graveyard situated behind the Seahurst Hotel, which was known informally as the Hillside cemetery. A new catholic church was built in 1900 on the mountain side of Main Road built, with local stone from the mountain. This still stands today.

The Catholic community received a champion for their rights with the arrival of Father Duignan in 1875. He learnt their language, established a school, and made the support of the Filipino Catholic community his life's work.

A newspaper report dated 1946 described a funeral cortege led by Father Duignan, saying: "They [the Filipino Community] attended funerals in black suits, silk top hats, starched shirts and white gloves. The procession was always in double line with the coffin bearers in front. The entire community attended and many of the older people at Kalk Bay will tell you that it was a most impressive sight to see 200 people walking reverently behind the bearers. At the head of the line, in solemn dignity like a patriarch of old, walked Father Duignan, leading his beloved charge to eternal rest."

A Memorial: Just Nuisance, Simon's Town

The most famous memorial in the Southern Peninsula, oddly enough, is to a dog – Just Nuisance. His statue is situated at Jubilee Square in Simon's Town, and his grave is located on Red Hill at Klawer, where he died.

Just Nuisance was more than a dog – he became a mascot and a symbol of resilience in the face of war. He caught the public imagination more than 50 years ago during World War II, and held it throughout those troubled times. He was a morale booster for the Navy and the troops who visited Simon's Town. For a war-weary public, he became a source of deep affection. His story ranks with Jock of the Bushveld as the most told and retold South African stories about dogs.



The statue of Able Seaman Just Nuisance, Jubilee Square, Simon's Town.

Just Nuisance was very large – a Great Dane – and something of a rascal. It was not clear who his owner was, but he was adopted and then 'employed' by the Navy. He started out with a love of uniforms and took to following uniformed naval and army personnel, using the suburban train system to get around. He became a familiar sight on the trains and, when shooed off, would simply wait for the next one.

He undertook to escort drunken servicemen back to their barracks. His love of train travel eventually got him into trouble. The Royal Navy chose to enlist him to allow him to continue with his travels for free. He received the rank of Ordinary Seaman, eventually promoted to Able Seaman – the only dog ever to be enlisted in the Royal Navy, and the only dog to be buried with full military honours. It was an inspired decision. For the next few years, he would be a morale booster for the troops serving in World War II.

He was enlisted on 25 August 1939, and his surname was entered as 'Nuisance', a remnant of his scrounging days. Instead of not having a first name, he was given the name 'Just'. With his rank went certain privileges, including the right to wear a Navy cap and the right to free train travel.

At the age of only seven, he began to weaken as a result of an old injury. On 1 April 1944, he was taken to Simon's Town Naval Hospital, where, on the advice of the naval veterinary surgeon, he was put to sleep. His body was draped with a Royal Naval White Ensign and he was buried at Klawer, the former SA Navy Signal School, with full naval honours.



Map of graveyards in the Southern Peninsula.

Acknowledgements and disclaimer

The history of Cape Town's South Peninsula has been very ably and comprehensively recorded by many of its residents, and we wish to acknowledge and give thanks to all those quoted as references. These stories are intended for popular consumption, and the traditionally detailed referencing that would be expected of historical research was therefore not regarded as appropriate for this purpose. However, all references utilised have been listed.

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