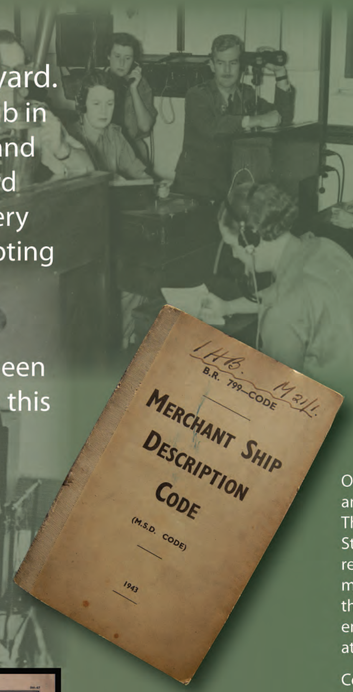
# Fort Wynyard

CITY OF CAPE TOWN ISIXEKO SASEKAPA STAD KAAPSTAD

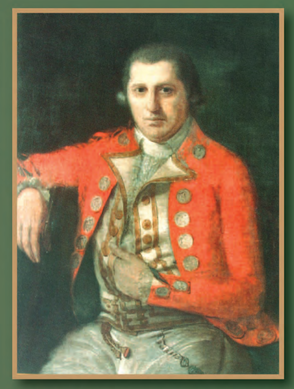
THIS CITY WORKS FOR YOU

The camouflaged structure before you is Fort Wynyard. During the Second World War this fortification was the hub in the circle of defences that protected the Cape Peninsula and the all-important Cape Sea Route. The role of Fort Wynyard was that of a close defence and examination service battery tasked with determining the identity of any vessel attempting to enter Cape Town Harbour and taking defensive action should this prove necessary.

While this Second World War period can be said to have been Fort Wynyard's 'finest hour', the history of fortifications on this site began much earlier.



A map showing the 'arc of fire' or 'fall of shot' from the 'counter bombardment' batteries of Robben Island, Llandudno (Apostle Battery) and Simon's Town. The Mark X, 9.2 inch guns of these batteries were able to hurl a shell weighing 170 kg over 28 km. Should any attacking vessel make its way under this cover it would then come under fire from the close-range batteries armed with Mark VII, 6 inch guns.



Colonel Robert Jacob Gordon
(1743-1795)
In the uniform of the Cape Garrison c.1780

On 1 June 1795 a squadron of nine British warships dropped anchor in Simon's Bay with orders to take control of the Cape. This was reported by the British to be at the behest of the Stadholder, William V, the Prince of Orange, who had taken refuge in England when the French invaded Holland some six months earlier. Given the means of communication of the day, there was no way for the Cape authorities to verify this and so ensued two months of negotiations between the Commander at the Cape, Commissioner A. J. Sluijsken, and the British.

Commissioner Sluijsken's military commander, Colonel R. J. Gordon, used this window of opportunity to bring the Cape's defences up to readiness - which included ordering a new battery, armed with four 24-pounder brass cannons, to be hastily erected on this site. It was named *Kyk in de Pot*, apparently because this elevated position overlooked a fishery and sometimes whaling station below and the large try pots here, used for rendering blubber.

Lieutenant-General Robert Henry Wynyard
(1804-1864)
Acting Governor at the Cape
August 1859 - July 1860
August 1861 - January 1862

The fortifications at the Cape were allowed to fall into a state of neglect with the period of peace (*Pax Britannica*) which followed the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Then in 1861, with the start of the American Civil War and the chance that Britain may become embroiled in this conflict - steps were taken to assess the state of the Cape's defences. When Britain's neutrality was challenged during the 'Trent Affair' in November 1861, war with the United States seemed imminent. Military Commander and Acting Governor Wynyard ordered that five 68-pounder cannons be mounted in a work to be erected on the *'Kyk in de Pot'* which henceforth came to be known as Fort Wynyard.

The next period of development at Fort Wynyard arose from Russian intrigues - in of all places, Afghanistan - that were seen to threaten British interests in India. Czarist Russia was also in a quest for warmwater ports and developing a fleet of modern warships. The mood over these developments at the Cape was captured in the above cartoon from the *Lantern* (23 March 1878) depicting the 'defenceless', Lady of Good Hope, threatened by the Russian bear.

In reaction the British government established the Royal Colonial Commission into the Defence of British Possessions and Commerce (1881-1882) to make recommendations. With regard to the Cape the commission concluded that:

*The safety of the whole empire might hang one day upon control of the naval base at Simon's Bay and the South African shores.*

Accordingly, a major modernisation of the Cape's defences was initiated, from which what is essentially the Fort Wynyard of today emerged - apart from alterations over time to accommodate more modern armaments.

South Africa's *'Big Bertha'*
1903 - 9.2 inch breech-loading, Mark X gun weighing 28 tons displayed on the parade ground of Fort Wynyard.

## *Fort Wynyard from the air*

9.2 inch breech-loading Mark X gun mounted on a disappearing carriage photographed at Craig's Battery, Table Bay Defences, (c. 1900). Fort Wynyard has the last disappearing carriage in South Africa.

The 9.2 inch breech-loading, Mark X gun at Scala Battery, Simon's Town, being test-fired during the Second World War.



Mark VII 6 inch gun of which Fort Wynyard has the last two on the Cape Peninsula.