

Design of the memorial

The ossuary contains human remains of the City's 17th and 18th century underclasses – the indigenous people, the poor, slaves and victims of shipwrecks and has been designed on a piece of the former Dutch cemetery. Thousands of human remains have been uncovered through property redevelopment in the 1990s and 2000s.

Following contestation between development pressures, community objection to the insensitive exhumation of these human remains and a long appeal process by the heritage authority, the national minister of Arts and Culture requested the City of Cape Town to assist the South African Heritage Resources Agency to establish a dignified place for the re-interment of these and future remains unearthed through redevelopment in the area. It was also seen that this ossuary could serve as a place of memory from which to tell the story of the area formerly known as District One, incorporating the discriminatory treatment of the marginalised people of Cape Town from the 18th century to the period of forced removals under the Group Areas Act.

The concept is one of a dignified reinterment chamber, a well-lit visitor centre, and a shaded green memorial garden. The building has been carefully positioned to protect views of St Andrew's Church and the nearby Lutheran Church complex. The adjacent memorial garden and stone walling are placed on the alignment of the historical cemetery. The Interpretive Centre is located on an historically significant site in as much as it was formerly part of the Dutch Reformed Church cemetery - a piece of original cemetery wall stands left of the main door - and adjoins the original alignment of old Somerset Road where the old horse-drawn trams to Sea Point once ran.

Today, this is the Waterkant Fan Walk to the Cape Town Stadium. Furthermore, the new building also bounds the northern edge of St Andrew's Square and is part of a larger urban design/landscape proposal that seeks to engage with the history of the site by way of combining a variety of elements in an attempt to construct a social landscape - an engraved palimpsest - that contests the dominant gentrification of this part of the city.

★ Location of today's Prestwich Memorial



Learn more about Prestwich Memorial and Visitor Centre

The Prestwich Memorial and Visitor Centre serves as a place of memory and provides an ossuary for the human remains uncovered during the course of developments in the Green Point area. The centre has been designed to serve local communities in multiple ways. It is envisaged that the centre will provide an environment that encourages individuals and groups to interpret and express the voices of past communities to present and future communities by providing the following:

- An ossuary and memorial garden for reflection and commemoration.
- A starting point for walking through the historic District One, the old burial grounds to the batteries of Table Bay and the Slave Route to Table Mountain.
- A place for community activities and education.
- A place for learning about our past and present.
- A place to hold public exhibitions and memorials.
- A place to host seminars and workshops and for use by heritage organisations.
- A place for outdoor theatre and performances as a means of expressing the history of the area.
- A place where living memories can be recorded.

To learn more about the Prestwich Memorial and Visitor Centre and its possible use, kindly refer your enquiries to:

Fagmee Jacobs at telephone: 021 487 2755

E-mail: Fagmee.Jacobs@capetown.gov.za

Visit: www.capetown.gov.za/environment

Donations to the Prestwich Memorial Trust Fund are welcome

Banking details for the Prestwich Memorial Trust Fund:

Standard Bank

Acc. Name: Cape Town Heritage Trust

Acc. No: 070056838

Branch: Adderley Street - Branch Code: 020009

Please include your name as reference for payment.

With great appreciation, on behalf of the Cape Town Heritage Trust and the Prestwich Memorial.



CAPE TOWN HERITAGE TRUST
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PRESTWICH MEMORIAL

Ossuary, memorial garden & visitor centre

CITY OF CAPE TOWN HERITAGE SERIES



Heritage places and walks

Dedicated to the memory of Cape Town's slaves and marginalised people - those 18th and 19th century inhabitants who helped to build this city, and whose remains are reinterred on this site.



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Cape Town's District One

Most visitors to Cape Town, and Capetonians, will have heard of District Six – but what of the other Districts? The Prestwich Memorial is in the part of town which was known as District One – extending from the Castle to Sea Point. The Prestwich Memorial is situated between the alignment of the old edge of the city, the Buitengracht, and the 1755 Dutch Reformed Church cemetery. The memorial itself stands on an early 19th century extension to this cemetery. Although no longer a place of burial and having fallen prey to apartheid-era forced removals under the Group Areas Act, much of earlier District One may still be glimpsed between the many faceless buildings of the 1970s and 1980s. Street names and layouts remain largely in place – some of which conjure memories of previous times – such as Hospital Street, adjacent to the site of the old Somerset Hospital. The stone walls lining many of the streets bear testimony to the old cemeteries and many old buildings still exist in the area, including churches, schools and mosques. Most of these will form part of a historical walking route, linking the Prestwich Memorial to the V&A Waterfront.

It is this historical and contextual understanding which informs the building design concept. Perceived as a series of walls into which – and behind which – the recovered skeletal remains are stored, the building constitutes a strong edge along Somerset Road and in so doing defines a 'gateway' into the Green Point precinct. The storage area – or Ossuary – is made up of linear spaces which ramp down into the earth and includes a timber shelving system for the storage of some 4,500 boxes of skeletal remains. These dark linear spaces are primarily top lit, allowing for shafts of light to penetrate the 'route' at different angles with the movement of the sun. The walled spaces are interrupted in the middle with an open multipurpose space, the Interpretive Centre, in which different installations and interpretations of the area's history can be exhibited. Compared to the 'Ossuary' space, this multipurpose space is filled with light and has views into Somerset Road and the adjoining St. Andrew's Square. The palette of simple materials has in part been drawn from the surrounding context. The external stock-brick walls which have an outer skin of Malmesbury shale stone, which the City secured from the excavations in the V&A Waterfront, resonate with the way cemetery boundary walls were built in the past. Within selected openings in this wall, mirrored glass windows have been introduced to allow for moments of (literal and figurative) reflection by passers-by.

Earliest burial places

While there is evidence of early burial places near the Fort of Good Hope and later the Castle, during the early years of European settlement at the Cape, the earliest officially consecrated burial ground was outside the Dutch Reformed Church or Groote Kerk built between 1700 - 1704. This burial place was located between the Groote Kerk and the Company's Slave Lodge (see picture above centre). In 1755 Cape Town was in the throws of a smallpox epidemic and the Dutch Reformed Church graveyard or Kerkhof was filled with burials to overflowing. Thus the Governor, Ryk Tulbagh, took the decision to open up a new burial place just beyond the western boundary of town demarcated by the Buitengracht

(outermost water canal) at the foot of the Leeuwenbijl (Lion's Rump) and beside the existing Soldaaten Kerkhof (soldier or military graveyard). During these early years of VOC rule the only recognised religion at the Cape was the Dutch Reformed Church and hence the only formal burial grounds were those of the DRC. Anyone not of this denomination and especially slaves and those persons classified as 'heathens,' were buried outside the confines of these established burial grounds as can be seen in the picture of Cape Town below by Johannes Schumacher c. 1776.

Greater Religious Freedom

Apart from the Lutheran Church, which was granted permission to establish the Evangelical Lutheran Church collection of buildings nearby on the Corner of Strand Street and Buitengracht in 1780, no other religions were officially allowed to practice during the time of the VOC. Then, following the First British Occupation of the Cape (1795 - 1804), the Batavian Republic brought a brief return to Dutch rule and with it many enlightened ideals sweeping Europe at that time which included greater religious tolerance. In 1805, Frans van Bengal, a Mohammedaansche Veldpriester and freed slave, was granted a piece of land for a Muslim burial ground. This became the Tana Baru cemetery on Signal Hill near where the growing Muslim community had unofficially buried their deceased for years.

Later burial grounds

With the Second British Occupation of the Cape in 1806, burial grounds for Christian denominations other than the Dutch Reformed Church began to be established in the Green Point area. Apart from extensions to the Dutch Reformed Church cemetery the earliest new cemetery was that granted to the South African Missionary Society in 1818 as a special burial ground for, "instructed heathens". In that same year Lord Charles Somerset also granted a plot of land - diagonally across from the Dutch Reformed Church graveyard - to Dr Samuel Bailey. Here Dr Bailey establish a hospital to serve the disadvantaged civilian population of Cape Town, as the only hospitals at the time were exclusively for military, naval and government personnel.

In 1832 the Anglican or 'English' church was next to be granted a plot of land off Somerset Road followed by the 'Scottish' (St Andrew's Presbyterian Church) and Lutheran Church in 1833. Finally there were plots allocated to the Catholic Church and Ebenezer Church in 1840.

All the while informal burials took place outside the confines of these 'formal' burial grounds particularly of individuals who died without means at the nearby Somerset Hospital. These included slaves, ex-slaves, Khoekhoen workers, itinerant sailors and paupers who - dying without means - were often buried with little ceremony nearby. Other land in the Green Point area was being sold off over this period by the Burgher Council in order to raise funds from much needed civic improvements. The result of this was that while land allocated as burial grounds remained for the time being sacrosanct - land in between was divided into plots, sold and in time, built over, with little thought for what proved to be many informal burials beneath.

Disused Cemeteries Appropriate Act (Act 26 of 1906)

As the century wore on the formal cemeteries filled to capacity until 1887, when the last official burial took place. After this the cemeteries devolved to an unacceptable state of neglect. To address this situation the Disused Cemeteries Appropriate Act was passed in 1906 (Act 26 of 1906). This Act allowed the exhumation and removal of the human remains from the Green Point burial grounds to the Maitland Cemetery and for the land to be used for 'worthy causes'. Meanwhile many informal burials remained beneath surrounding buildings and roads.

In 1995, the remains of over 120 individuals were excavated by archaeologists from along Cobern Street, one with a broken manacle (iron leg ring and chain links). More recently, over 3 000 informal burials were discovered outside the areas of the known formal burial grounds in the course of construction works in the Green Point and V&A Waterfront area. Close to 1800 of these were exhumed from one site at the corner of Prestwich and Napier Streets. The City and heritage authorities along with community groups, have developed the Prestwich ossuary, visitor centre and memorial park on the site of the former Dutch Reformed Church cemetery to house these remains and tell the story of the people buried here and their respective communities.



Artist's impression of the slave lodge precinct during the 17th century. Courtesy Iziko Museum.

- A Silk Factory
- B Slave Auction Tree
- C Lodge Matron's House
- D Church Square
- E Spin
- F Slave Lodge
- G Company's Garden
- H Groote Kerk
- I Grave Yard
- J Heerengracht
- K Company's Hospital

★ Location of today's Prestwich Memorial



Two short- one hour - self guided walks

WALK NUMBER ONE - PRESTWICH MEMORIAL TO SLAVE LODGE

1 Dutch Reformed Church Cemetery Wall Remnant

The Prestwich Memorial, ossuary, interpretive centre and memorial garden, is built on the site of the historic Dutch Reformed Church cemetery. (est. 1755 and 1802). During the rule of the VOC the only official burial grounds in Cape Town were those of the Dutch Reformed Church. A remnant of the old walling can be seen to the left of the Prestwich Memorial interpretive centre's entrance. In addition to serving as a formal burial ground, this part of town also served as an informal burial place for slaves, the City's poor and the dispossessed khoekhoen (sometimes referred to as khoi-san) who were typically buried in unidentified graves outside of the 'official' cemetery walls. The remains of over 2 000-2 500 people were uncovered at sites such as Cobern Street in the 90s, in nearby Prestwich Street in 2003, and in the Dock Road area, outside the walled burial grounds.



2 St. Andrew's Church

Founded in 1828, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church openly welcomed slaves as congregates. It was here that the Presbyterians and the neighbouring Lutherans held the first service for freed slaves on December 1st 1838. The triangle of land in front of the church became known as St Andrew's Square, and opposite the church (on the right) was the Dutch Reformed Church cemetery, first set out in 1775. St Andrew's Church is closely associated with the emancipation of slaves. The church is a proclaimed heritage site.



3 Tramway Tracks

Uncovered during the construction of the Prestwich Memorial and landscaping of St Andrew's Square in 2007, these tram tracks have been preserved as part of the memory and story of District One. The tram lines stretched from Cape Town to Camps Bay and the horse-drawn trams ran along a single track along this original alignment of Somerset Road.



4 Lutheran Church, Sexton's House, Martin Melck House and VOC Warehouse

In 1780, the Lutheran "warehouse" church became legal and slaves were welcomed. The 1781 Melck House was the parsonage. Melck owned 204 slaves and 11 properties. The VOC store is on the right of the block. On the left is the 1787 Sexton's House. The complex forms a unique surviving example of VOC period buildings showing a mix of ecclesiastical, domestic and commercial structures all in one block.



5 Slave Mission Church & Koopmans De Wet House

The 1799 Slave Mission Church in Long Street was built in a street where gambling and alcohol abuse were rife. Around the corner in Strand Street is Koopmans De Wet House dating to the 1770s. The house is a museum where you can visit the slave quarters.



6 Greenmarket Square & the Town House

Greenmarket Square was developed in 1696 and is overlooked by the 1756 Town House from where the Slave Code was read ordering slaves to go barefoot, carry passes, refrain from singing, and stating that they would be put to death should they strike a free man.

In the centre of the square, a steel water pump commemorates the history of the square as a trading place and site where slaves gathered at a town fountain to collect water.



7 Groote Kerk

The 1704 Groote Kerk steeple still stands. Across the street stood the 1699 VOC hospital, staffed by slave nurses. In 1713, a smallpox epidemic started at the VOC hospital from infected ships' linen brought in for cleaning, sparking the epidemic which ended up killing a quarter of all Europeans, a fifth of all the slaves and 90% of the Khoekhoen in the Cape.



8 Slave Lodge & Slave Memorial

The 1679 Slave Lodge housed up to 1 000 people comprising around 600 slaves as well as bandieten (convicts serving time at the Cape), political prisoners and so-called 'lunatics', in cramped, squalid quarters. Today, this building houses the Iziko Slave Lodge Museum.



On Church Square, you can see the Slave Auction Tree marker and memorial put up to commemorate the bicentennial of the 1808 Swartland Slave revolt which ended at Salt River.

WALK NUMBER TWO - PRESTWICH MEMORIAL TO WATERFRONT

9 Cemeteries of District One

Until the late 1700s the VOC ruled that slaves were not allowed to be buried in a Christian cemetery. Burial grounds were developed outside old Cape Town. Some 2 000 - 2 500 human remains recently discovered on building sites and professionally excavated by archaeologists, are now interred in the Prestwich ossuary.



10 Amsterdam Battery

With a new war between England and the Netherlands, in 1781 the previous Heer Hendricks Kinderen redoubt on this site was further developed into a major fortification which was called the Amsterdam Battery. Coupled with the Chavonnes Battery to the north and Imhoff Battery in front of the Castle, the Amsterdam Battery with its cannon and mortars completed the 'formidable' defences of Table Bay, but did not prevent the British from capturing the Cape in 1806 by landing at unprotected Blaauwberg beach and marching on Cape Town from the north.

11 Breakwater Prison

An important feature of the development of the harbour was the use of convict labour to reduce construction costs. Convicts used to build the breakwater at the harbour were held in the Breakwater Prison, now part of the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront. The Bushman (San) convicts from the Northern Cape held at the Breakwater Prison were to contribute hugely to our knowledge of their language (/Xam), folklore and way of living through the recording of their knowledge in the 1870s as part of the research of William Bleek and Lucy Lloyd.



12 The Victoria & Alfred Waterfront

The story of District One is inextricably linked with the sea – from the Cape's strategic position on the sea trade route between the West and the East to the local fishermen of Roggebaai who made their living from the sea and provided food for the inhabitants of the settlement.

Trade, fishing and defence against attack from the sea for many years provided the main occupations of Table Bay. This is reflected in structures built along its shores, such as the early quays and the fortifications - Fort Knokke, Imhoff Battery, the Castle of Good Hope, Roggebaai Battery, Amsterdam Battery, Chavonnes Battery, and Kyk-in-die-Pot (now Fort Wynyard).

The reputation of Table Bay as the "Bay of Storms" had grown from the loss of hundreds of lives through shipwrecks over two centuries, with no natural safe harbour to protect anchored ships from the Cape's storms. The first harbour in South Africa, the Alfred Basin, was opened in 1870.



13 Clocktower

Local and overseas tourists flock to the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront each year. A famous landmark near the end of this walk is the historic 1883 Victorian Gothic-style Clocktower (on the south side of the bascule bridge), which was used for tide measurements, and 1905 Port Captain's Office (on the north side).



Nearby to the Clocktower is the Nelson Mandela Gateway.

14 Nelson Mandela Gateway to Robben Island

Robben Island has played a pivotal role in the history of Cape Town and of South Africa. From the first travellers who used it from the 15th century as a potential victualling station, to its use by the VOC as a place of banishment for leaders from the East Indies.

It served as a hospital for lepers during the 19th century and during apartheid for the incarceration of political prisoners, the most famous being Nelson Mandela. Before becoming a museum and World Heritage Site, it served as a correctional facility.



15 Chavonnes Battery

This battery was built under the direction of Governor Chavonnes between 1715 and 1726 to augment the inadequate fire power provided by the Castle over the Table Bay anchorage. In later years this fortification also served as a gaol for slaves and prisoners condemned to hard labour.

Excavated during the construction of the adjacent BoE offices, a reconstructed portion of the 1715-1726 Chavonnes Battery can be seen on the dock side of the office building, which now houses a museum detailing the history of this battery and early Cape Town.



A first-hand observation of the burial ground outside of old Cape Town

In 1805, returning from a walk on Signal Hill along the Green Point coastline, Robert Semple observes:

"Whilst I was giving my friend a description of these batteries, which did not seem to interest him very much, he interrupted me rather earnestly, with 'What are these small stones, some of them dark and others white, which shine in the moon light, and seem not to have been set there by chance?' They were not indeed, Charles, said I. 'Tread lightly, tread lightly, my friend, we now approach a region sacred to silence and deep repose. These black and white stones are memorials of the dead - and of the neglected dead. Yonder is the slaves' burying ground.'"

To this, my friend answered not a word: at the mention of the slaves' burying ground, he stopped suddenly, and then as quickly walked on. We soon reached the spot, where it was plain, from the number of little hillocks, and the disposition of the stones, that it was indeed a burying ground: a mournful silence reigned around us: Table Bay was hushed, or at most, a faint murmur was heard upon its shores - the moon was muffled up in the spreading clouds, and we remained as if riveted to the earth in silent meditation, when we heard the sobbings of someone at a little distance; we turned round and beheld the bended form of a female sitting by a newly closed grave.

How long did Charles and I remain looking at this unfortunate female? I know not; the feelings count not the moments as they pass. We walked slowly away, and on turning round, the mourner appeared to have taken no other notice of our absence than by again bending her head between her knees, and remaining in that posture till we were out of sight. The slaves' burying ground is close by the road, and perfectly open; beside it, near to the town, are two burying places belonging to particular inhabitants, and walled round.

From Robert Semple's WALKS AND SKETCHES AT THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE, 1805



Transience and displacement

District One has been associated with transience and displacement, with the poor, the indigent and the sick. It is the story of slaves torn from afar, of soldiers billeted to a remote posting, and of sailors passing through - or being carried by unknown hands to unmarked graves in a distant land. It is the story of the early migrant labourers brought in from their homelands to work in the docks, and of their forced removals, fifty years before the Group Areas Act.

By 1900 Black Africans who made up about 10 000 of Cape Town's total population of 160 000, were being seen as a threat: "they live all over the place and they are learning all sorts of bad habits through living in touch with European and Coloured surroundings. We can not get rid of them, they are necessary for work, what we want is to get them practically in the position of being compounded.

Keep the natives out of harm's way, let them do their work, receive their wages and at the end of their term let them go back to the place whence they came, to the native territories." W.P. Schreiner Prime Minister of the Cape Colony. This philosophy was given an opportunity to be implemented with the arrival of bubonic plague in 1901.

The plague which arrived by ship from Argentina was to infect the Black dockworkers first - having come into contact with the plague-carrying fleas from the rats off the ship.

As a result the Cape government was able to use the Public Health Amendment Act of 1897 to force Black Africans into locations - one a barracks at the docks, the other a compound at Uitvlugt (later Ndabeni) fashioned on the 'successful' compound system developed on the mines in Kimberley and Johannesburg.

