





Mapping and excavation of the Plaatberg Mission Precinct, Free State, South Africa

Amanda Esterhuysen^{a, b, *}  & Tamsin Hunt^b 

^aArchaeology Department, University of Cape Town, Private Bag, Rondebosch, 7700, Cape Town, South Africa

^bSchool of Geography, Archaeology and Environmental Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa

*Corresponding author email: amanda.esterhuysen@uct.ac.za

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of an investigation into three structures situated at the centre of the 19th-century Plaatberg Mission Station, in the Free State province, South Africa. First, we locate the study site within the larger Mission Station. Second, excavated data are presented according to spatial context, and then variations within the midden dataset are used to suggest different periods of occupation and missionary presence. Lastly, these findings are interpreted against the broader context of historical events.

ABSTRACT IN SESOTHO

Pampiri ena e phatlalatsa sephetho sa liphuputso tsa likarolo tse tharo tse fumanoeng botebong ba 'mishone oa Plaatberg lilemong tsa bo 1800s. Re qala ka ho hlakisa sebaka sa liphuputso ka hare ho 'mishone ka kakaretso. Ebe seo se lateloa ke lintlha tse epollotsoeng li hlahisoa ka har'a moelelo oa sebaka, 'me ho fapakanngoa ha data e bohareng ho sebelisoa ho totobatsa mekhahlelo e fapaneng ea mesebetsi hammoho le boteng ba baromuoa. Qetellong, liphetho tse na li hlalosoa ka ho bapisoa le moelelo o pharaletseng oa liketsahalo tsa nalane.

Keywords: Plaatberg, Wesleyan Mission Station, historical archaeology

1. A brief history of the Plaatberg Mission Station

The Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) was established in England in 1811, with Methodism introduced to the Cape in 1813 by Reverend Barnabas Shaw. By 1832, Methodist centres were established throughout the Western Cape and were steadily expanding northwards into the interior.

The Plaatberg (also known as Platberg) Mission Station was founded in what is now the Free State in 1833 to serve a group referred to as Bastaards or Newlanders. Between 1833 and 1839, five itinerant missionaries passed through before James Cameron brought stability in 1840, overseeing the planning and construction of its physical infrastructure (van Heerden 1993; Esterhuysen et al. 2019). Richard Giddy managed the station from 1845 until 1855 (WMMS 1856), although war between the British and Moshoeshoe left the station largely unoccupied between 1851 and 1853 (Esterhuysen et al. 2019).

In 1854, British sovereignty was withdrawn, and the Vrystaatse Republiek (Free State Republic) was declared (Venter 1960). Over the next 10 years, three different missionaries tried to navigate the conflict between the BaSotho and the Free State Republic. By November 1865, the station was abandoned, and in 1866, the land was subdivided into farms for Boer settlers (Bosch 1967). Plaatberg fell within this 'conquered territory', and when the BaSotho continued to fight to reclaim their land, additional Boer commandos were dispatched to expel them (Bosch 1967; Esterhuysen et al. 2019).

The site

The Plaatberg Wesleyan Mission Station is located within a gorge on the southern aspect of a sandstone escarpment on a farm called Pinekloof (portion 291), 5 km south-west of Ladybrand, and 10 km west

of the Caledon River (Fig. 1). Notably, the name Plaatberg or Platberg, despite being an appropriate descriptor of the topography, originates from an earlier Wesleyan Bechuana Mission Station on the Vaal River that was abandoned in 1833 (Broadbent 1865).

This temperate grassland region receives an annual rainfall of between 600 and 750 mm, with most of the precipitation falling during the summer months (Mucina & Rutherford 2006). However, the presence of a perennial spring contributes to the abundant growth of shrubs and trees, including *Buddleja*, *Euclea*, *Olea*, *Leucosidea*, *Rhamnus*, and *Searsia* (*Rhus*) in the deep, sheltered kloofs.

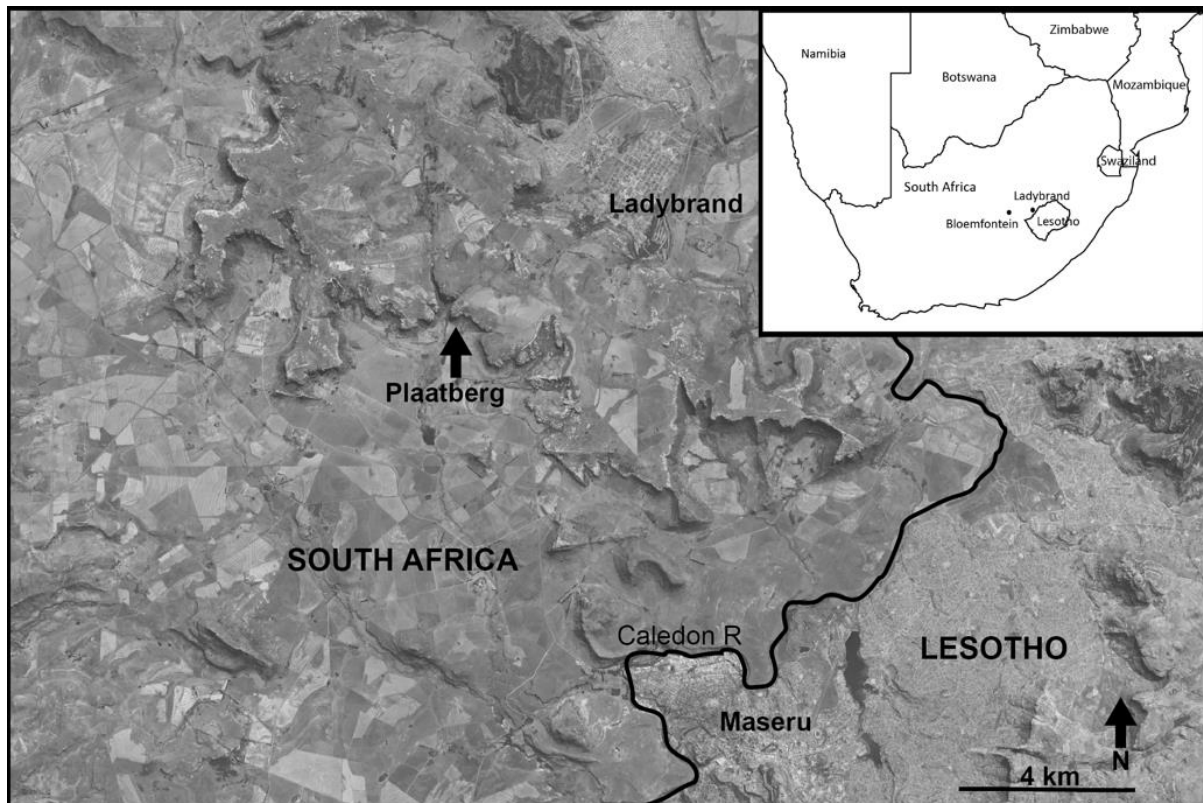


Figure 1. Google map showing the topography and location of Plaatberg Wesleyan Mission Station in relation to present-day Ladybrand, South Africa and Maseru, Lesotho.

This paper reports on excavations of three structures at the Mission Station. The purpose is to situate the site within the wider mission layout and present spatially, and where possible, chronologically contextualised excavation data.

2. Methods

Mapping the Mission Station

Over four seasons, all visible walling and structures were mapped and documented. The process began with a foot survey, during which notable features such as walling and vegetation – including non-native plants like cypress, rosehip, almond, peach, and pomegranate – were recorded using a Garmin Oregon 550 GPS device. These data points were uploaded to Google Earth Pro and used to generate a foundational reference map.

Over the next three years, the site was systematically mapped using a Nikon Total Station (DTM-330). Data points gathered in the field were uploaded into AutoCAD and QGIS in the field, allowing for immediate verification and checking. Google Earth Pro and 1:50 000 digital maps were used to cross-check and verify the constructed maps.

The Mission Station featured a main north-south street, lined with houses (Fig. 2). The houses were often connected to enclosure walls and were either mudbrick, reed-walled hartebeest houses or a

combination of both (see Klatzow 2023). Enclosed fields and/or gardens extend away from the main street. A secondary north/south street may have existed further west, but the area has since been converted into ploughed fields. The ephemeral walling in this ploughed field is represented by dotted lines (Fig. 2).

To the east of the station, more ephemeral remnants of circular structures were documented. Material eroding out of the north-west side of the hill (wash) led to a platform with circular stonewalling concealed from plain view. Structures on the west-facing hillslope, also concealed within the treeline, may also have served the purpose of hiding stock or people if the vegetation line was the same in the past.

A graveyard was located to the north, across a small ravine formed by a mountain spring (Fig. 2). It consists of approximately 105 graves distinguished by stone capping and/or headstones, or cypress trees planted in the grave surround. Due to substantial overgrowth, each grave was numbered to mitigate against double counting. In this area no other building foundations were visible, and there was minimal animal or insect disturbance, unlike the settlement, which has been extensively disturbed by ground squirrels, mice, termites and antbears. It should also be noted that, over the years, the sandstone foundation stones have been repurposed for construction elsewhere, and topsoil has been scraped or removed for agricultural activities. Features ‘a’ and ‘b’ (Fig. 2), for example, are suggestive of more recent human intervention. These mounds appear to have been created by a tractor scraper, or grader. We were later made aware that the farmer had used heavy machinery to extend his fields and obtain topsoil.

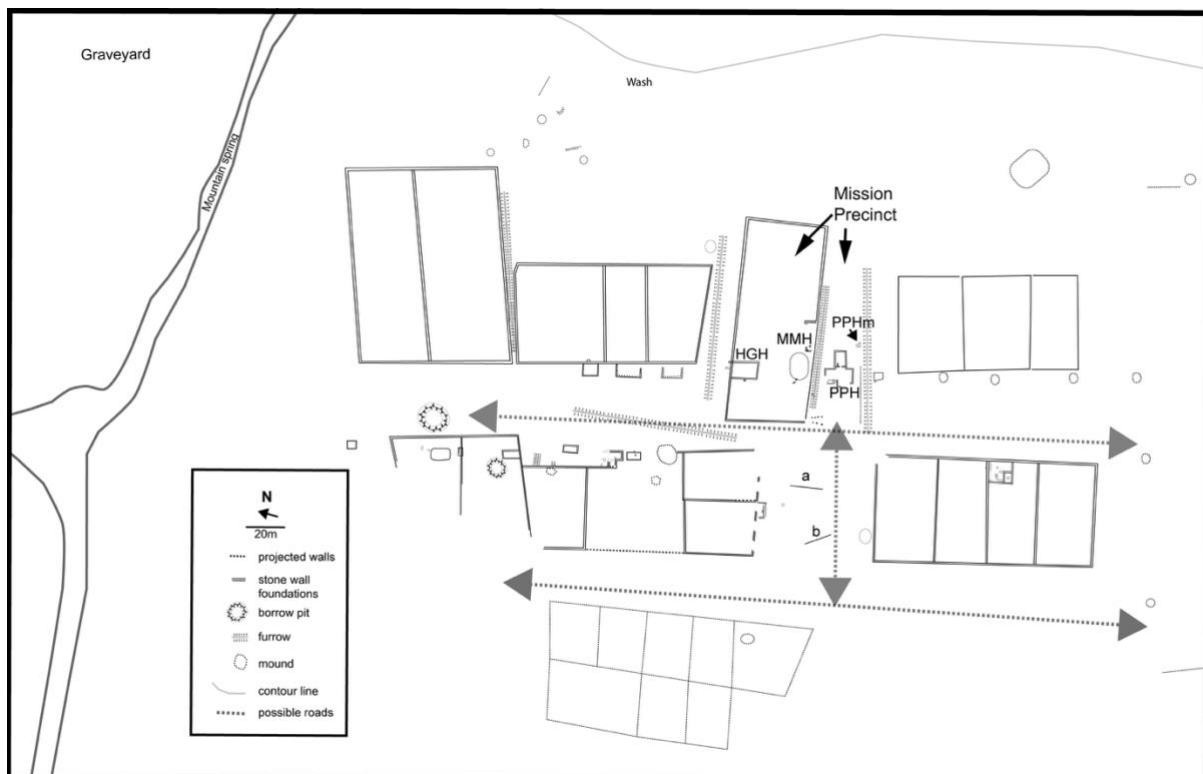


Figure 2. Map of the Plaatberg site showing excavated structures PPH, MMH and HGH, and midden PPHm, with possible recent earthworks indicated by a and b.

Excavation of the central precinct

In this section, we present the findings from our investigation of three structures situated at the centre of the station. Two of these structures are enclosed by an outer wall, while the third stands prominently between two furrows. Remnant walling suggest that this structure may have been enclosed separately. Collectively, we refer to this area as the ‘mission precinct,’ with the individual buildings designated as PPH, MMH, and HGH (Fig. 3; see also Esterhuysen et al. 2019).

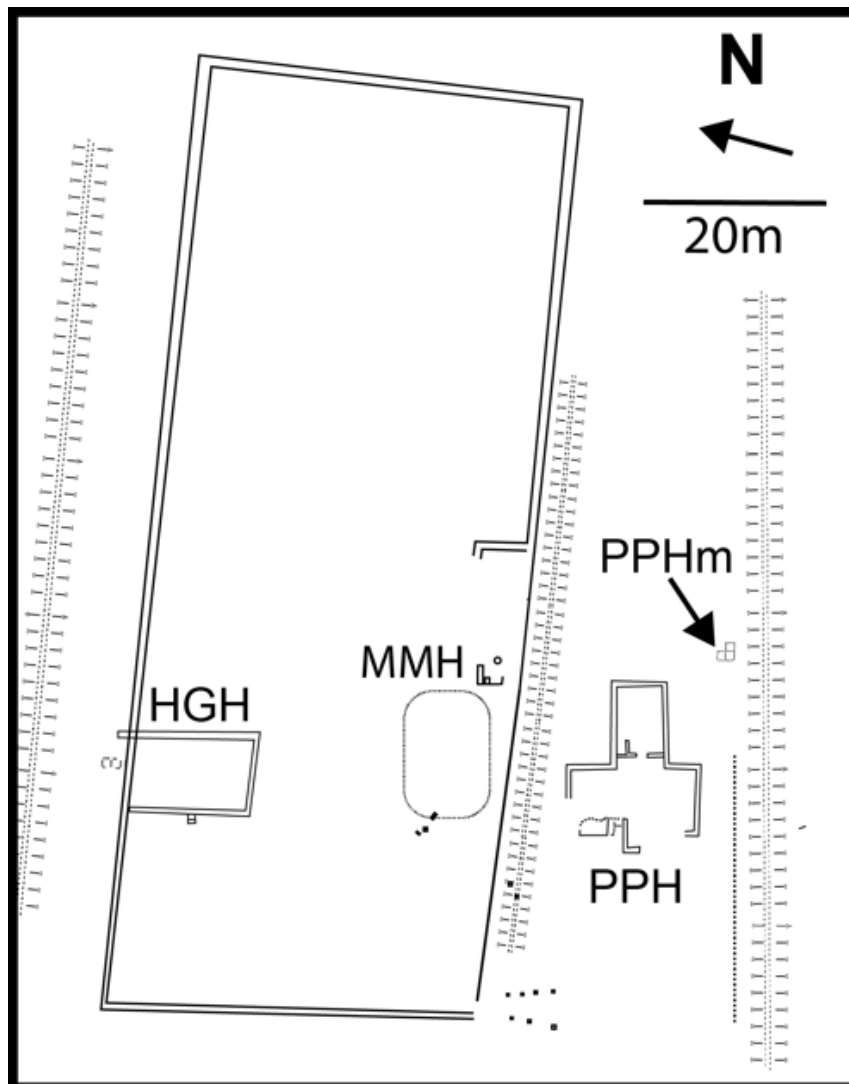


Figure 3. Map of the mission precinct showing the positions of structures PPH, MMH and HGH.

The foundations of structures for the most part consist of two wythes of dressed sandstone. The walls of structures are between 43-45 cm thick: each stone measuring approximately 20 cm in width. In instances where buildings retained their foundation stones, multiple tiers were observed, constructed to a height of up to 60 cm. Mudbrick, or reed walling with daub, were used to complete the various structures.

The boundary walls that enclosed the precinct and fields were wider (60 cm) with the gap between the wythes measuring 20-30 cm, potentially serving as a space for fence poles.

PPH: On the southern side of the mission precinct, the foundation of a distinctly cross-shaped structure was discovered, measuring 18 m in length and 15 m across (Fig. 4). The walls of the structure were exposed and subsequently mapped, along with associated artefacts. Small 25x25 cm test pits (STPs) were excavated in and around the structure. A witness trench (25x50 cm) was opened inside the eastern wall of the structure to reveal the stone foundations and expose a ledge that had been incorporated into the foundation wall to support joists for a wooden floor (Fig. 5).

Walling along the western front of the structure was inconsistent, and several attempts to probe for walling and define the building's shape proved unsuccessful. Two additional trenches, PPHt (1 & 2), were excavated to the base of the visible walls to explore the possibility of an entrance between the parallel walls, or to identify a foundational layer of connecting stones that might complete the corner (Fig. 6).

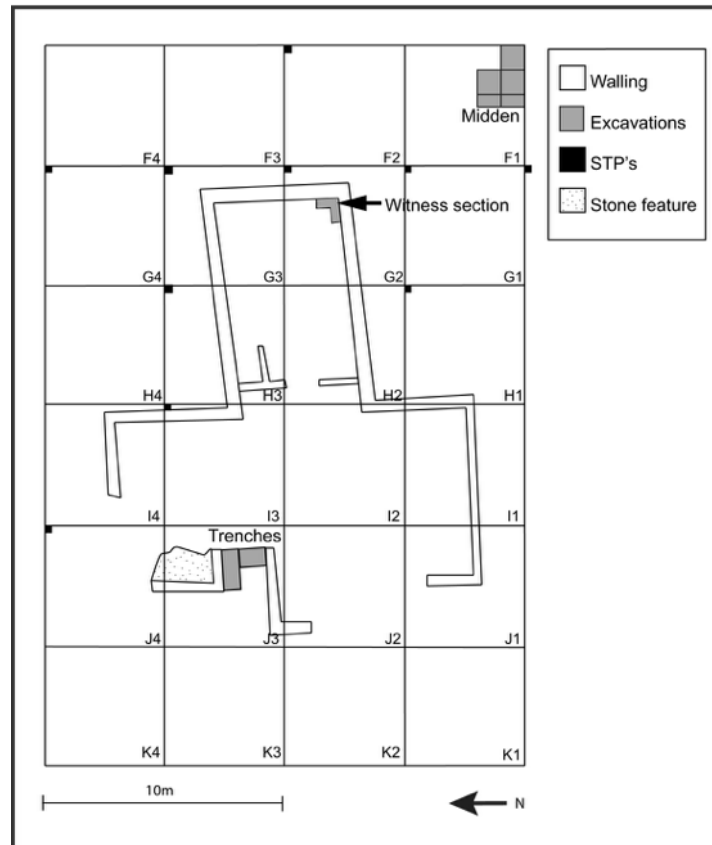


Figure 4. Foundations of PPH showing trenches (PPHt), midden (PPHm), STP's & witness trench.



Figure 5. Photograph of the ledge in the stone foundations excavated at the PPH structure.

PPHt – Trench Excavation: PPH trenches reached the base of the sandstone foundations on both sides, but no connecting stones were found. Significant material remains and mud brick had accumulated between the walls, with the original walking surface located approximately 60 cm below the datum.

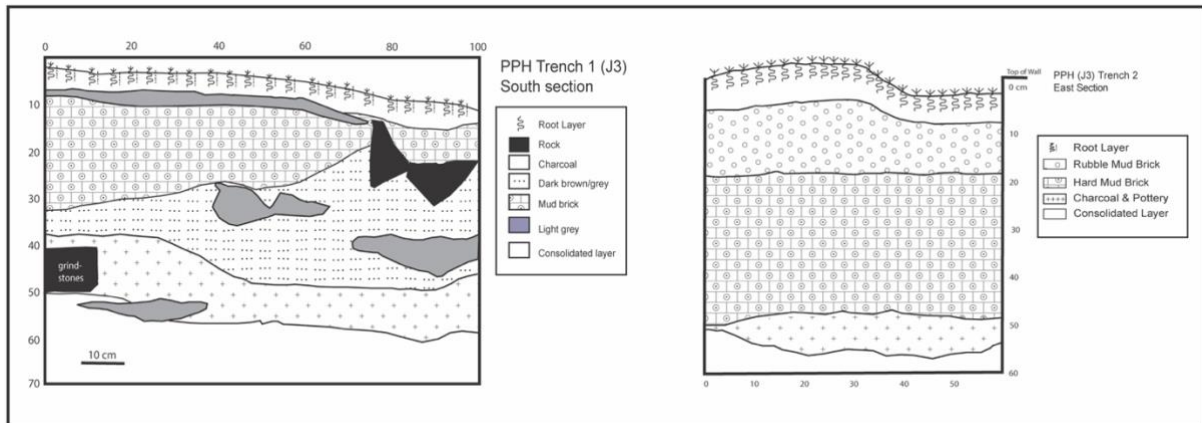


Figure 6. Drawing of the stratigraphy of the south wall of J3/T1 (left) & the east wall of J3/T2 (right).

The trenches were excavated in 20 cm spits because much of the material had either collapsed or washed in between the walls. However, some material, like a large earthenware pot and grindstone, at the base appeared to be *in situ*, and are suggestive of activity prior to the collapse of the structure.

PPHm – Midden Excavation: There was only one midden found in the mission precinct, located directly behind PPH. This extensive midden was utilised continuously over a significant period, resulting in a substantial accumulation of debris. The absence of any other nearby middens suggests that PPHm served the entire enclosed precinct.

The excavation of the midden took place over two field trips in 2015 and 2016. Four square metres were excavated, which represents only a fraction of the midden. The excavation targeted three full square-metres (F1.1, F1.2 and F1.7) and two half-square-metres (F1.3A and F1.8A). These were dug in 5 cm spits and reached a depth of approximately 80 cm below datum. Animal disturbance, caused by squirrels and termites, was evident (Fig. 7). Notably, due to burrowing and disturbance in F1.1, the deposit between 40-63 cm was analysed as a single unit.

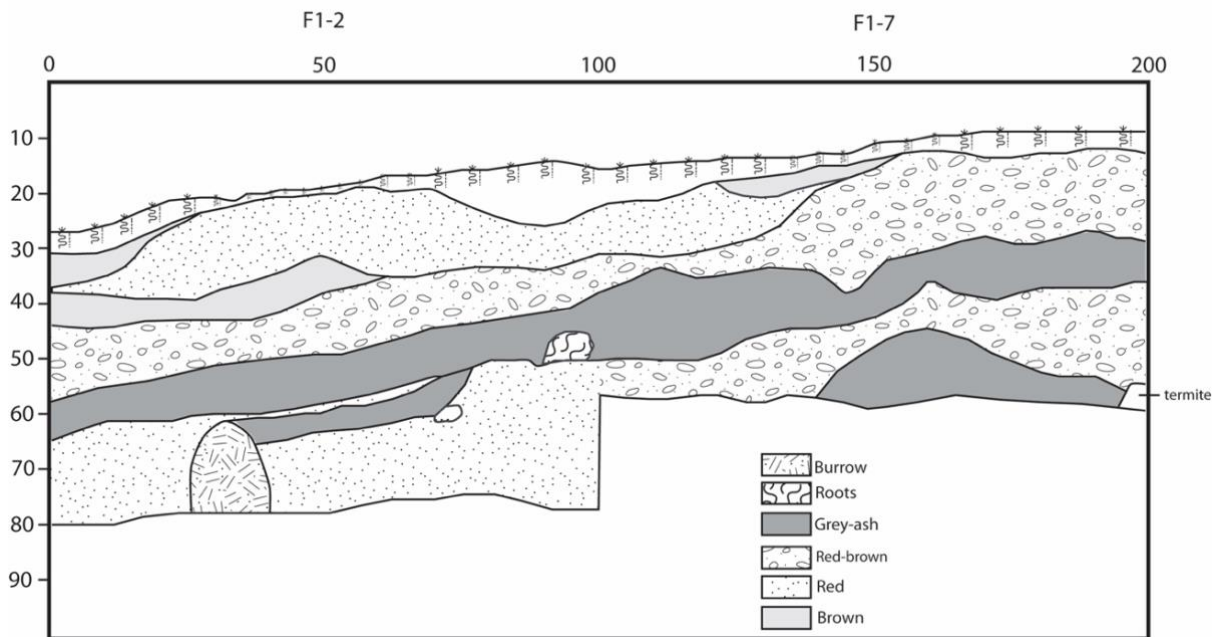


Figure 7. Stratigraphic drawing of the F1.2 and F1.7 west wall.

Square F1.7 was excavated down to about 60 cm, at which point a hard, red layer was encountered. This layer is labelled 'red' in Figure 7, and it also extends through F1.2. It was excavated down to 80 cm to investigate whether there were any artefacts beneath the mudbrick, but at that depth, a hard, stony layer was reached, believed to be the original surface.

MMH: The structure situated in the centre of the mission precinct stands out as the largest mudbrick mound on the site, possibly due to internal mudbrick wall divisions. The approximate dimensions of the mudbrick mound on MMH were 15-20 m north-south, and about 30 m east-west. The exact dimensions of the house were difficult to determine as the foundations were entirely covered in collapsed walling. Attempts to excavate the main structure proved futile, as we could not break through or lift the hardened mud brick without mechanical digging equipment. Consequently, most work around MMH involved trying to expose the outer structure, probing for a house midden, and excavating around stone features behind the main house.

There were two dressed flagstones situated on the western end of MMH (Fig. 8). These stones, and those below them, were cleared in the hopes of uncovering steps like those found at HGH (see HGH excavation). It appeared the stones had either collapsed or been removed. Only the two flagstones at the top, and possibly the large stone at the bottom, remained (Fig. 8).



Figure 8. Photograph of what may be the remains of steps at the western end of MMH.

Wall segments visible at the eastern end of the mound were exposed and excavated but were studied as two separate entities: MMH-a and MMH-b (Fig. 9), because MMH-a walling was much rougher in style and gave the impression of a different utility space. The MMH-a walls were exposed and surface soil was removed to a depth of 20 cm within the walled area (K10) (Fig. 10). A two-metre strip was then extended from the western end of the wall to establish whether the walling continued west to meet up with the main MMH structure. The walling did not extend beyond the L11 square. Part of the trench in M11 was dug deeper to check for foundational walls, considering the possibility that the top courses of stone had been repurposed or stolen. No walling was found, but the test trench revealed distinct layers of very hard mud brick followed by a very soft ashy deposit (Fig. 11). The excavations within and around the structure yielded little in the way of material culture.

MMH-b revealed an interesting feature with a distinctive shape (Fig 12). On the northern end, there was one long wall that ended abruptly, and in proximity a shorter U-shaped structure. Towards the east, a small circle of raised stones was observed that may have functioned as a plastered platform of some kind.

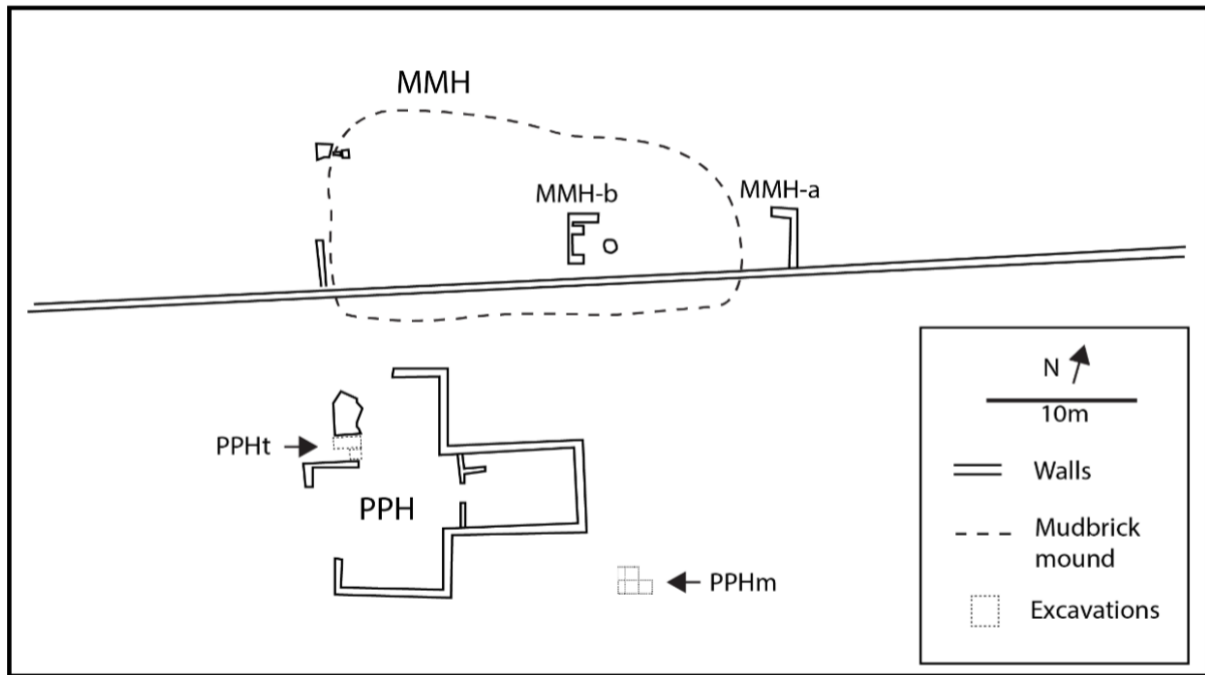


Figure 9. MMH-a & b position in relation to the mound of mud brick and relative to PPH.

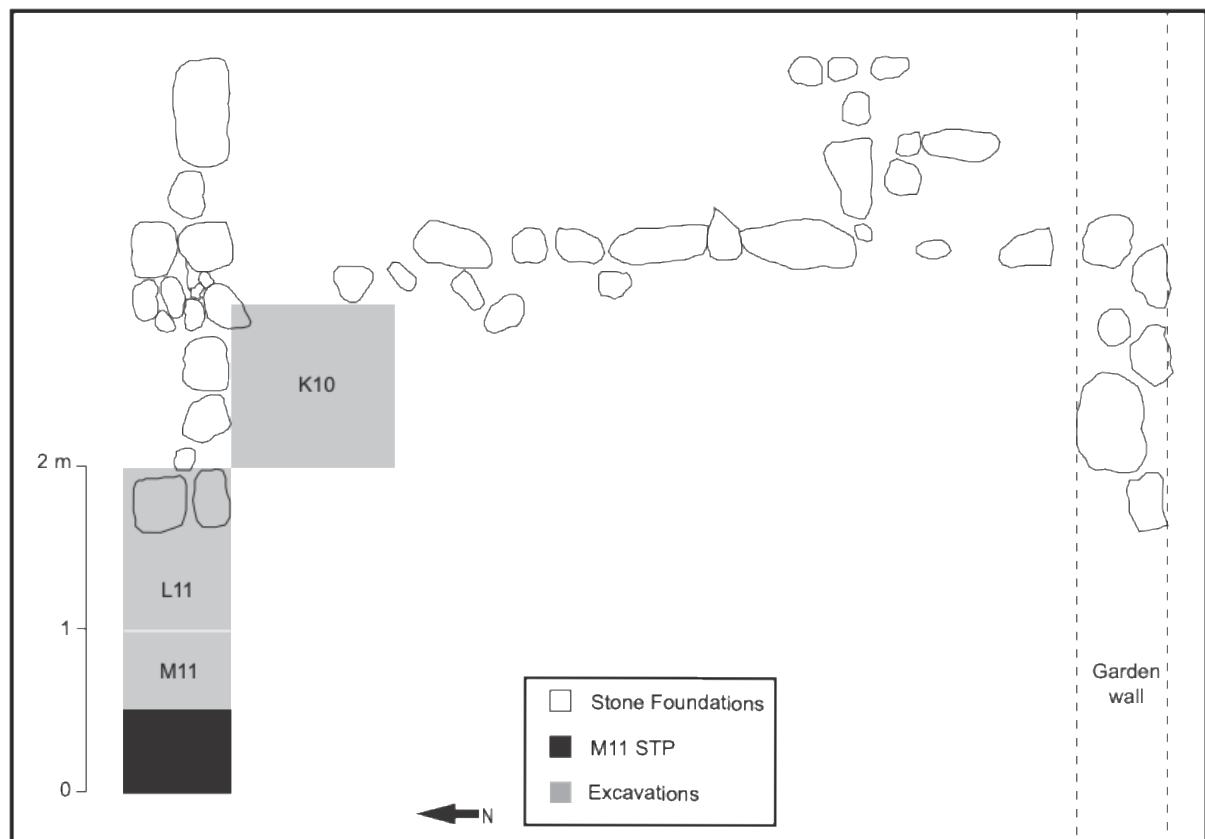


Figure 10. Plan drawing of the walling of MMH-a.

This area was cleared and the extent of the walling exposed. Two square metres were excavated in the U-shaped walling to establish its function. These two squares were labelled K-S and K-N; only K-S was excavated.

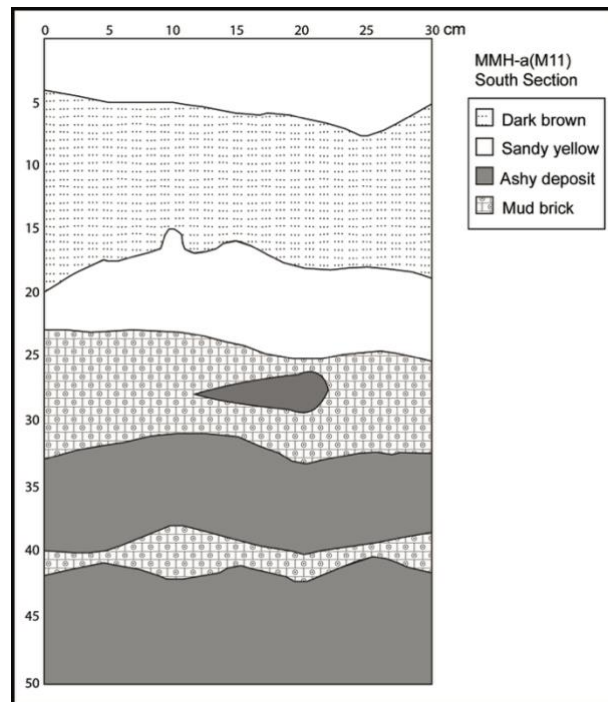


Figure 11. Section drawing of the southern wall of M11 (MMH-a).

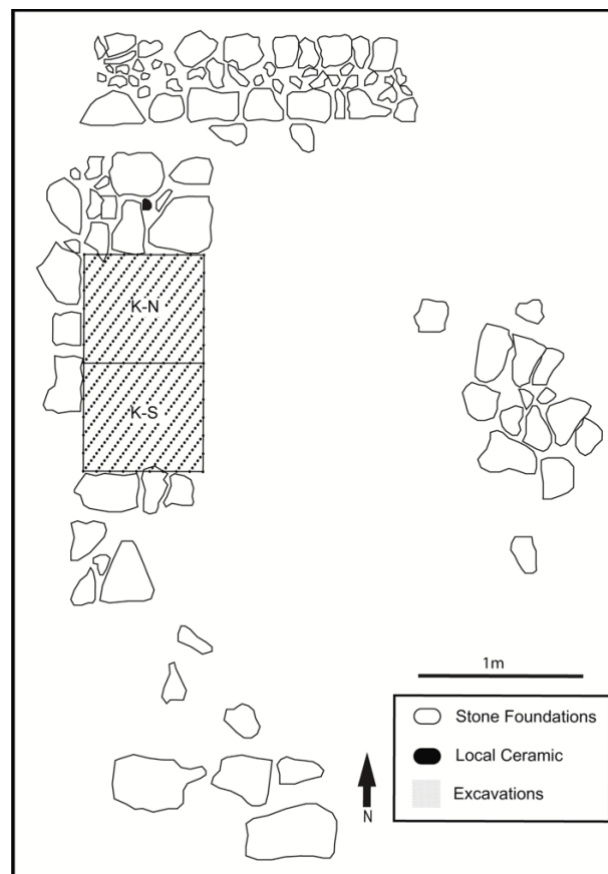


Figure 12. Plan drawing of the MMH-b walling.

The goal of excavating K-S was to uncover the base of the stonewalling, determine its depth, and identify any remains. The stonewalling extended approximately 40 cm below the surface and has a base of compacted mud brick (Fig. 13). From 40 cm downward, a large upright stone was found near the centre of the square, and between 45 and 60 cm below that, individual mud bricks were exposed and

removed whole. The cluster of rocks on the eastern side of MMH-b was excavated down to the base of the stones to establish if the feature continued in any direction. The eastern corner of the feature was probed by digging a STP to establish whether more foundation stones existed deeper underground (Fig. 12). It was found that this was a solitary, circular stone feature.

HGH: Foundations on the northern end of the mission precinct (HGH) were uncovered, revealing a simple rectangular house ($\pm 15 \times 8$ m) with a set of steps located midway along the west-facing wall (Fig. 14). A door latch found next to the steps suggests that this was the formal entrance to the house, opening onto the main street.



Figure 13. K-S 40 cm below surface.



Figure 14. Map of HGH including the stairs, buttress and excavation (left). Photo of the steps on the western wall leading into the HGH structure (right).

Two square metres were excavated outside of the structure on the northern side of the foundations (M10 and M11). The decision to excavate in this area was prompted by numerous finds brought to surface by rodent activity. After two auger tests yielded some artefacts and identified an ash lens at 80 cm below the surface, the two squares were excavated to a depth of 120 cm.

The initial intention was to excavate in 10 cm spits, but the sloping ground made this impractical. Instead, we shifted to exposing layers and features (Fig. 15). Significant overburden caused by rodent burrowing was recorded with the most substantial displacement of soil in M10 (40-50 cm), coincident with a large burrow. Beneath this overburden we encountered a layer of mudbrick and broken window glass. The mudbrick was underlain by a sterile layer of clay. At the north end of the square, an ash layer emerged, extending into M11. Considering the lack of finds in M10, the decision was made not to excavate through the hard mudbrick in M11. The extent of the mudbrick suggested that the north wall of the house had collapsed outwards.

3. Results

For this paper, we first set out the data spatially to highlight palimpsests of material categories, which may loosely indicate different activities or provide information about structures across the precinct. In the case of PPH we distinguish between the midden (PPHm), in which material was intentionally discarded, and material found from PPHt, STPs, and surface clearing, which was incidental or event related. We then present the changes within the midden dataset that may point to different occupation periods and different missionaries. For detailed appendices of finds see Hunt (2020).

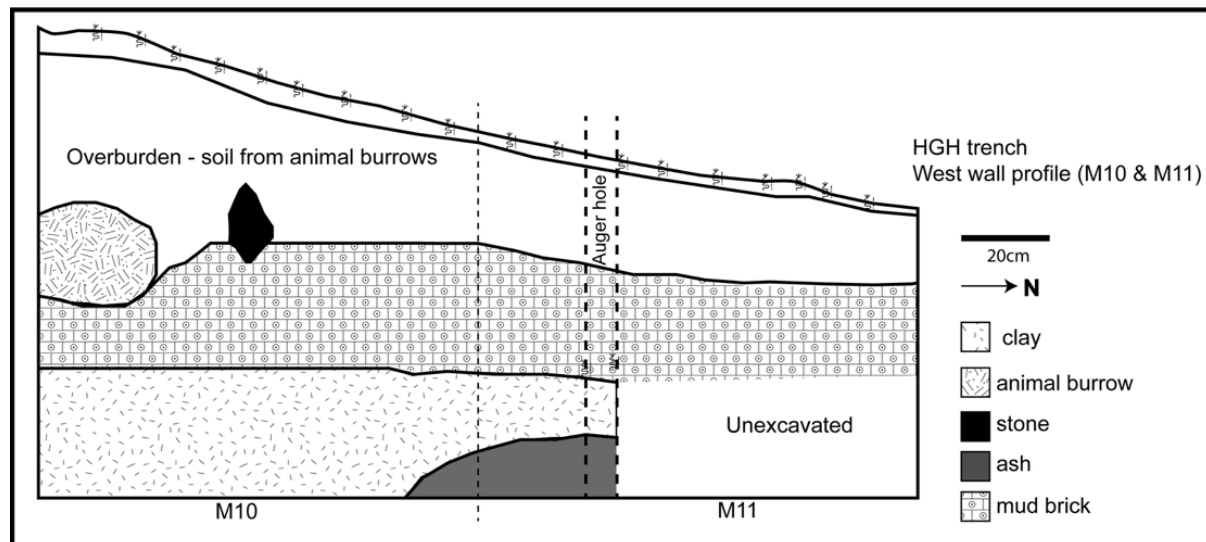


Figure 15. HGH excavation west wall.

Faunal remains

Most bones originated from domestic mammals such as cattle, sheep, and goats, with a few exceptions of wild animals (Table 1). Differentiating between sheep and goat was challenging, and only seven sheep and three goats were definitively identified from a total of 65. Most bovid bones were classified to size class.

PPH: PPHm contained over 2370 fragments of bone of which only 210 were diagnostic. Domestic animals predominated, but several bird bones, including those from chickens, possible Guinea fowl, and a duck or goose, were also recovered from PPHm, along with a fish bone and two bivalve mollusc shells, likely from a local stream or river. Additionally, bones from a wildebeest, a possible blesbok, and a domestic dog were found, as well as two pieces of ostrich eggshell (OES).

Twenty-seven diagnostic bones showed cut marks, three exhibited sawing marks, and one had been chopped. Among undiagnostic bones, only 58 fragments out of a sample of 2161 showed evidence of butchery. Just over half of the assemblage was unburnt (52.6%), while 42.6% were burnt brown. Only 12 bones were burnt black, grey, or white, indicating prolonged burning. Signs of weathering, including fractures, flaking, erosion, cracks, and root etching, affected roughly half of the assemblage.

Bone fragments from across the rest of PPH (n=567) were largely undiagnostic (91.1%). Only 25 from PPHt and 14 from the STPs were identifiable. Bones from the PPHm were generally in better condition than those found outside of the midden, suggesting regular use of the midden and therefore shorter exposure of discarded bones.

MMH: Only five out of 118 bones could be identified to species: two *Bos taurus* (cattle), one *Ovis/Capra* (sheep/goat), and two wild animals (*Connochaetes* sp. and *Herpestidae*). Additionally, two bones were identified as Bov I/II and Bov III, respectively. Most bones (63.6%) came from MMH-b, and 34.7% from MMH-a, with the remaining few bones recovered from test trenches (eight bones) and the western steps.

All bones from MMH-a were burnt black, grey, or white, indicating severe burning. In contrast, 54.1% of the bones from MMH-b were burnt brown, while the rest were burnt black, grey, or white. The severely burnt bones from MMH-b were primarily from the K-S excavation. Five bones from MMH showed signs of butchery, with four from MMH-b and one recovered during wall clearing.

Table 1. Number of Identified Specimens.

Species	PPHm	PPHt	PPH STPs	MMH	HGH
Canidae (canid)	1				
<i>Bos taurus</i>	24	1	1	2	7
cf. <i>Bos taurus</i> (probably cattle)	3		3		
<i>Ovis aries</i> (sheep)	7				
cf. <i>Ovis aries</i> (probably sheep)	1				
<i>Capra hircus</i> (goat)	3				
cf. <i>Capra hircus</i> (probably goat)	2				
<i>Ovis/Capra</i> (sheep/goat)	34	11	1	1	3
cf. <i>Ovis/Capra</i> (probably sheep/goat)	1	1			
cf. <i>Damaliscus pygargus phillipsi</i> (probably blesbok)	1				
<i>Connochaetes</i> sp. (wildebeest)	1			1	
Bovidae I (small bovid)	1				
Bovidae I/II (small/medium bovid)	2			1	
Bovidae II (medium bovid)	73	9	4		2
Bovidae II (medium bovid - wild)	1				
Bovidae II/III (medium/large bovid)	2				
Bovidae III (large bovid)	23	1	4	1	
Bovidae III/IV (large/very large bovid)	1				
<i>Xerus inauris</i> (South African ground squirrel)			1		
Rodentia (rodent)	9				
cf. Leporidae (hare)	1				
Mammalia (small mammal)	6				
<i>Gallus/Numididae</i> (chicken/guineafowl)	4				
<i>Gallus gallus domesticus</i> (chicken)	2				
cf. <i>Gallus gallus domesticus</i> (probably chicken)	3				
<i>Herpestidae</i>				1	
Anatidae (duck/goose)	1				
Aves (bird)	2				
Anura (frog)		1			
Anura/Reptilia (frog/reptile)		1			
Fish	1				
Total	210	25	14	7	12

HGH: HGH produced a small bone sample (n=116). Only 33 of the total bones showed signs of having been burnt, and all of these were burnt brown. Two bones showed cut marks, while six showed carnivore damage. Eight out of the twelve diagnostic bones (cattle [7], sheep/goat [3] and Bov II [2]) were severely weathered, with large cracks, fine-line fractures, flaking, and erosion present. All diagnostic bones were recovered from M10 and M11.

Flora

Plant remains were recovered through sieving and flotation of soil samples from PPHm, PPHt and the STPs. A small charcoal sample from PPHt was analysed using a dark field microscope at 50 and 100X magnification. Seeds and charcoal included *Celtis africana*, *Leucosidea sericea*, and *Searsia (Rhus)*, species commonly found in ravines and near the spring in the area (Esterhuysen 1992, 1996). The seeds also mark the introduction of 'foreign' trees to the Mission Station, as evidenced by *Melia azedarach* (Pride of India) and remains of *Prunus persica* (peach) and *Prunus dulcis* (almond). Other trees, such as pomegranate, rose, and cedar, which are still growing on the site, may have been introduced as early as the 1840s.

Both peach and almond were reportedly planted by the missionaries; but, the outer shells of the *Prunus*

pits are nearly identical, so they were classified collectively in this study. Interestingly, all the shells (n=24) found in PPHm were broken, with 79.2% showing signs of burning. Of the 508 *Prunus* shells recovered from PPHt, 89.6% were broken and 96.7% were burnt. This suggests the shells were broken to remove the kernel and may have been almonds. A total of 71 whole pits, potentially then peach pits, were identified in the assemblage (Table 2).

Cereal remains in PPHt included burnt and broken *Zea mays* (corn) cobs, while sorghum seeds were found in PPHm. Additional plant remains from test trenches and around the walls comprised mostly burs and corms from local flora (n=429 and 168, respectively), together with numerous White Stinkwood seeds (n=130) and a significant number of broken peach/almond seeds (n=105).

Table 2. Number of identified seeds and pieces of charcoal.

Species	PPHm	Burnt	Broken	PPHt	Burnt	Broken	STPs	Burnt	Broken	PPH Total
<i>Celtis africana</i>	32	0	7	24	1	7	130	0	14	186
<i>Searsia</i> sp.	10	10	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	10
<i>Leucosidea sericea</i> (charcoal)	8	8	-	0	-	-	0	-	-	8
<i>Melia azedarach</i>	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	3
<i>Prunus persica/dulcis</i>	24	19	24	508	491	455	105	16	89	637
<i>Sorghum bicolor</i>	8	0	5	0	-	-	0	-	-	8
<i>Zea mays</i>	0	-	-	77	77	77	0	-	-	77

Glass

Over 4000 fragments of glass were recovered from the precinct. A total of 154 shards were classified as ‘bottle’ due to their colour, curvature, or shape. Five bottle necks were recovered, one of which from the PPHm midden, with a clear screw-top rim, belonged to a later period. A perfume bottle stopper, the most elaborate item found, was recovered from the surface of PPH (H1), without a firm context.

The flat glass varied in thickness and colour, indicating different uses such as window glass, flat-panelled bottles, or cabinet glass. Most of the glass was clear but with heavy patination.

Weiland (2009) argued that window glass could be dated by its thickness, noting that as the 19th century progressed, people wanted bigger windows, requiring thicker glass. This trend continued until the early 20th century when machine-manufactured window glass standardised the thickness to between 3 and 3.3 mm (Weiland 2009). The average thickness of flat glass across the precinct is approximately ± 1.8 mm, suggesting small panes were transported in by wagon from trade centres (see Hunt 2020).

A concentration of window glass was found around the flagstone in MMH, and in the excavation next to HGH. Many flat glass shards were found in the PPHm midden (744), but these panes would have been broken elsewhere and discarded here. The distribution of flat glass around the PPH structure is possibly the most interesting. Figure 16 represents the distribution of flat glass on the map of PPH. Each circle represents the relative number of shards of flat glass, suggesting the presence of windows. The glass clusters predominantly around the west-facing side of the structure, with smaller amounts to the north and south.

Ceramics

The ceramic assemblage was divided into local and imported ceramic. Local ceramic is traditional coarse earthenware, while imported ceramics predominantly comprise refined industrial ware and stoneware. The local ceramic component was sorted into diagnostic (shape, rim and body, burnish, and decoration) and undiagnostic categories.

Local ceramics

PPH: Few sherds (64) were found while looking for wall foundations and carrying out STP surveys. Local ceramics were almost equally divided between the F1 midden (259) and the J3 Trenches (219). A total of 24 rim sherds were found across PPH: 12 from the F1 midden, 11 from the J3 Trenches, and one from the K3 STP. Of the 11 from the J3 Trenches, four belonged to a single pot (Fig. 17).

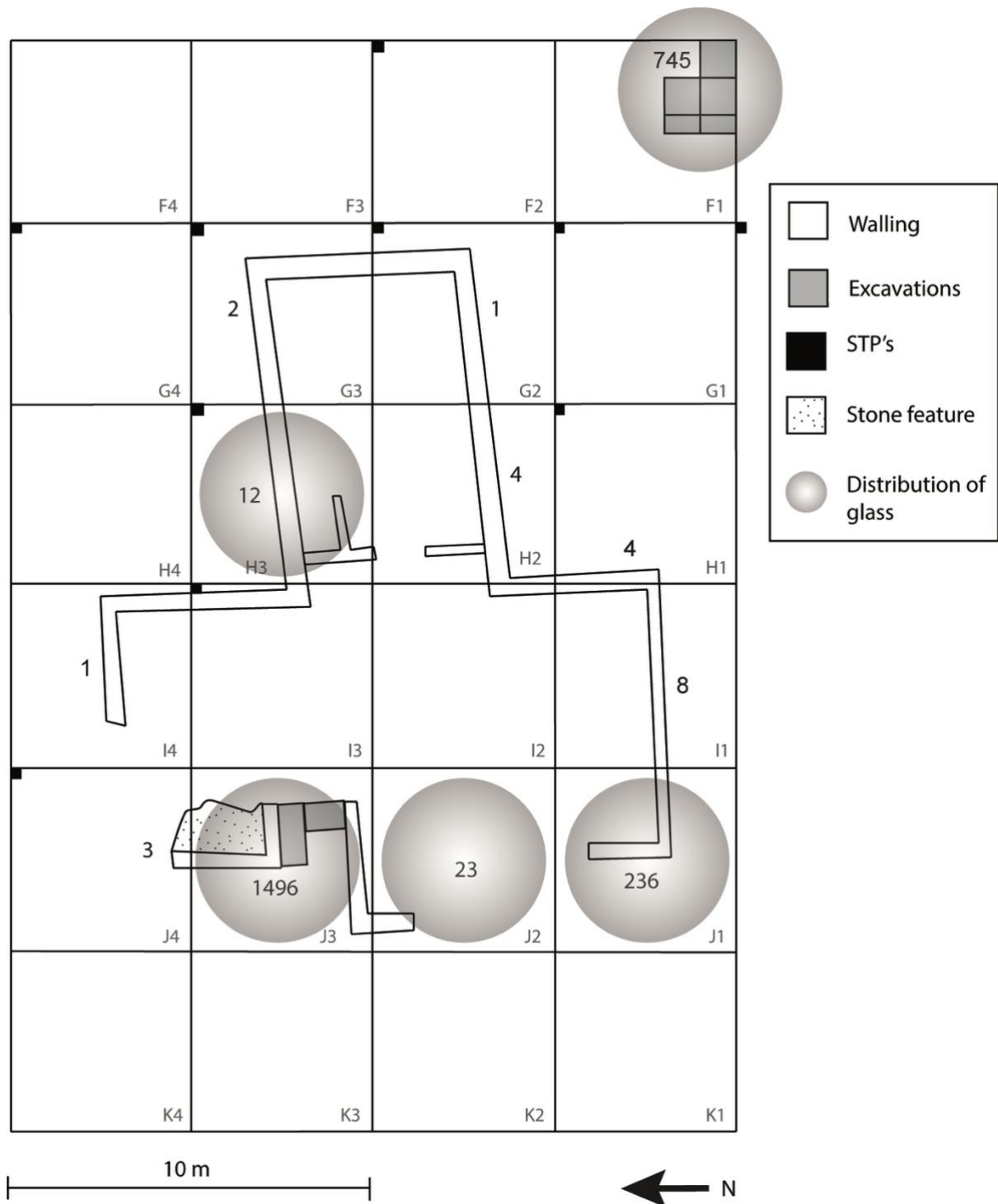


Figure 16. Distribution of flat glass around PPH. Numbers in circles show the exact number of shards found in each context.

Sherds recovered from the STPs, wall-exposure, and the F1 midden were generally very small, with few pieces that could be refitted. In contrast, nine fragments from PPHt were successfully refitted, revealing the profile of a large pot featuring a decorative ridge running perpendicular to the rim (Fig. 17). This pot is one of the few examples of decorated ceramic in the local assemblage. Additionally, PPHt sherds exhibited a higher proportion of burnishing compared to those from PPHm. Only five decorated sherds were found: two with single incision (PPHm), one with multiple incisions and the other with a ridge (PPHt), and one with comb-stamping (F2/STP).



Figure 17. Refitted pot from the base of the PPHt J3 trench (40-60cm Ash lens).

MMH: At MMH, 160 sherds were distributed mainly towards the eastern end of the structure, with four found on the main house mound. At MMH-b, 69 of the 95 sherds were found at or near the surface during clearing and wall exposure. MMH-a yielded a total of 61 sherds, four of which were burnished. Most of these sherds were also close to the surface. There were 15 undecorated rim sherds. Most of the burnished pieces were found at MMH-b (51) with the remaining pieces (4) occurring in MMH-a, and these were burnished either black (six) or a deep red (49). Nine sherds showed evidence of burning and were found in MMH-a (six), MMH-b (two) and on the northern edge of the enclosure (one).

HGH: At HGH, 27 local ceramic sherds were found, all very small, with the largest measuring 68 mm long. Only one was a rim sherd, and none were decorated. Most of these ceramics (70.4%) were found in M10 and M11, with a few others found augering, and foundation exposure. Six sherds were burnished (four red, two black), nine showed evidence of burning.

Imported Ceramic

A wide range of decorated, imported ceramic – mostly from England, with some Asian porcelain – was recovered from the mission precinct. The analysis followed the methods set out by Klose (2007).

PPH: A total of 709 sherds were recovered from PPHm, with a working count of 707 due to evidence of fresh breakage. The minimum number of vessels (MNV) was 104. Most of the decorated sherds were transfer printed (TP) in various colours, but primarily blue, and with Willow Pattern or other designs present (Table 3). Three sherds refitted to form a carinated bowl decorated with industrial slipware. The ceramics found in the midden were generally very broken and incomplete, suggesting that whole or mendable vessels were not being discarded even when chipped or slightly broken.

At PPHt 185 sherds were recovered (174 working count); TP blue earthenware predominated (46.6% of the assemblage), with three sherds of European porcelain also being identified. Three ceramic pieces, coloured red, blue and green, were reshaped into round discs, possibly for a game or for educational purpose (Fig. 18).

A total of 130 imported ceramic sherds were found during the wall exposure and STP surveys (working count of 119). The assemblage included five pieces of stoneware and six pieces of porcelain (two Asian and three European). The rest were white-bodied ware, decorated with TP in various colours (Table 3).



Figure 18. Repurposed ceramic pieces found in PPht include pink and blue (J3/T1 surface-20cm), and green-black (J3/T2/surface-20cm).

Table 3. Imported ceramics from PPH (total number of sherds).

WARE	PPHm	PPHt	STPs
Stoneware			
British/European	50	2	5
Porcelain			
Asian	3	0	2
European	15	3	4
RIW (white bodied white wares)			
Hand painted harsh	10	11	7
Transfer printed: blue Willow	142	10	12
Transfer printed: blue other	175	50	28
Transfer printed: flow blue	38	26	11
Transfer printed: brown	10	7	7
Transfer printed: green	10	4	5
Transfer printed: pink	11	0	3
Transfer printed: purple	0	5	0
Transfer printed: black	44	4	6
Transfer printed: black. Colour-glazed	9	0	0
Sponge	31	5	3
Feather	0	1	0
Moulded	9	0	10
Industrial slipware	39	16	0
Colour-glazed light green	11	0	0
Colour-glazed blue	4	0	0
Colour-glazed green	3	0	0
Colour-glazed brown	5	0	0
Undecorated	85	31	23
RIW (colour-bodied wares)			
Jasper	0	1	0
Red-bodied ware	2	0	0
Unidentified	3	9	4
Total	709	185	130

MMH: The 136 pieces of imported ceramic pieces mostly came from MMH-b (66%), with few found at MMH-a (7%) (Table 4). The MNV for MMH is 34, which includes a total of 18 rim sherds and four foot-rings. Some sherds were diagnostic of their original forms, such as TP blue sherds forming a small bowl and TP black sherds forming a vessel lid. One large rim sherd found in spit 1 of the excavation of K-S appeared burnt or stained with charcoal.

Sixteen pieces of porcelain were found, one from Asia and the rest from Europe. Four sherds were found at MMH-b, and the rest were found on the northern edge of the MMH near an animal burrow. The small European porcelain assemblage included two rim sherds, and two-foot rings. Fourteen pieces of stoneware were found, one from MMH-a, eight from MMH-b and five from test trenches.

HGH: A total of 46 imported ceramic sherds were found across HGH, 39% of which were found in and around the structure, and the rest found in M10 and M11 (MNV=19). Ten rim sherds, and three-foot rings were identified. White-bodied wares comprised 60.5% of the sherds of which 53.8% of them were decorated in TP in various colours (Table 5). Only one sherd of European porcelain was found in M10.

Fourteen stoneware sherds were found (nine found in M10 and M11, and five around the foundation). The MNV for the stoneware was estimated at eight. It is possible that these stoneware vessels were used to transport ink when considering the high number of printing press pieces (see section on printing press pieces). Two red-bodied earthen-ware sherds (see Klose 2007), possibly from the same vessel, were found in M10 and M11 respectively.

Table 4. Imported ceramics MMH (total number of sherds).

WARE	MMHa	MMHb	MMH STP & exposure
Stoneware			
British/European	1	8	5
Porcelain			
Asian	0	1	0
European	0	4	11
RIW (white bodied white wares)			
Handpainted harsh	0	13	3
Transfer printed: blue Willow	0	0	1
Transfer printed: blue other	4	11	6
Transfer printed: flow blue	0	13	1
Transfer printed: brown	0	0	0
Transfer printed: green	1	0	0
Transfer printed: purple	0	2	0
Transfer printed: black	0	7	2
Transfer printed: black. Colour-glazed	0	0	0
Embossed	1	0	1
Sponge	0	4	0
Notched	0	1	0
Moulded	0	1	0
Industrial slipware	2	3	3
Embossed	0	1	0
Colour-glazed blue	0	0	0
Colour-glazed green	0	0	0
Colour-glazed brown	0	0	1
Undecorated	1	19	2
RIW (colour-bodied wares)			
Red-bodied ware	0	0	0
Unidentified			
	0	2	
Total	10	90	36

Buttons, buckles and fasteners

A single metal button was recovered from PPHm (F1.1/spit 9), one buckle from (F1.1/spit 4), and two hook fasteners (F1.2/surface and F1.7/spit 4). Six buttons were found in PPHt. Three of the buttons appeared to be made of mother-of-pearl, two of metal, and one of either ceramic or glass. The metal button found in J3/T1 was a large (18 mm diameter), flat button, with a shank on the back that has since fallen away. Eyes of hook and eye fasteners were excavated from MMH-b (K-S spit 4) and HGH (M11 spit 2), respectively.

Beads

The bead analysis followed Marilee Wood's (2005) method, which includes noting characteristics such as the manufacturing process, shape, end treatment, size, length, and diaphaneity.

PPH: A total of 972 beads was recovered from PPH; this included the PPHm midden, the PPHt Trenches, STPs and those found during the process of exposing the walls. The midden yielded the most beads (795), followed by PPHt (143).

All the beads recovered from the midden were drawn beads of different shapes. There was only one barrel-shaped bead and four sphere-shaped beads, while the rest were almost evenly split between cylinder (41.3%) and oblate (55.3%) beads. Twenty-two beads were broken and could not be measured accurately. Most of the sample consisted of small beads (65.6%). Minute beads (those smaller than 2.5 mm) comprised 24.8% of the sample, medium beads 9% and there were five large beads in this assemblage.

Table 5. Imported ceramics HGH (total number of sherds).

WARE	M10/11	Auger wall exposure
Stoneware		
British/European	9	5
Porcelain		
Asian	0	0
European	1	0
RIW (white bodied white wares)		
Handpainted harsh	0	0
Transfer printed: blue Willow	0	2
Transfer printed: blue other	5	3
Transfer printed: flow blue	1	1
Transfer printed: brown	0	0
Transfer printed: green	0	1
Transfer printed: purple	1	0
Transfer printed: pink	0	0
Transfer printed: black	1	0
Feather	0	0
Sponge	1	0
Moulded	0	0
Industrial slipware	2	3
Undecorated	5	3
RIW (colour-bodied wares)		
Red-bodied/terracotta	2	0
Unidentified	0	0
Total	28	18

White beads and white-hearts (a translucent red bead with a white centre) predominate, making up 80% of the PPH bead assemblage (Table 6). In terms of diaphaneity, 54.6% of the assemblage was opaque, while 45% were translucent. Most of the white-hearts were heavily patinated and some of the beads extremely fragile. Only one bead was completely transparent, and this was a clear, cylinder-shaped bead with a diamond pattern on the surface. The length categories revealed one disc (extremely short bead) and three long beads, while the majority were either short (69.5%) or standard in length (30%).

The beads collected from PPHt included one wound bead, while the rest were drawn beads. Cylindrical-shaped beads were slightly more prevalent than oblate, making up 56.6% and 39.2% of the assemblage, respectively. Additionally, there was one spherical bead and one ellipsoid bead. Only three beads in this assemblage were broken, which corresponded with the relatively low level of patination. The colours of the beads were like those of the F1 midden, with a large proportion of them being either white or white-hearts (Table 6).

Thirty-four drawn beads were found during the wall-clearing and STP processes (Table 6), and three of these were broken. The sizes varied between minute (45.5%) and small (54.5%) and in terms of shape, they were either cylindrical (36.4%) or oblate (60.6%) with only one being spherical. Almost all the beads were short in length, with only three being of standard length. Very few beads were heavily patinated (21%). In terms of diaphaneity, 63.6% of this small assemblage were classified as opaque, while the rest were translucent.

MMH: A total of 28 beads were found at MMH, with 21 recovered from MMH-a and the remaining seven from MMH-b. This distribution contrasts with other artefacts, where most were collected at MMH-b and comparatively fewer at MMH-a. The discrepancy may be attributed to the use of a very fine, 2 mm mesh sieve during the MMH-a excavation, while a slightly larger mesh was used at MMH-b, potentially causing some beads to be lost in the sieving process.

Of the total beads, 13 were classified as minute, 12 as small, and only three as medium-sized, suggesting that sieve mesh size impacted bead recovery. The most common colours were white followed by white-

hearts (Table 6). Diaphaneity was predominantly determined by colour: all white-hearts and one pale blue bead were translucent, while the black, blue, pink, and white beads were opaque.

In terms of length ratios, most beads were either short (16) or standard (11), with only one pale pink bead categorised as long. The beads fell into two shape categories: 15 were cylindrical and 13 were oblate.

HGH: Only nine beads were found at HGH (Table 6). Two beads (one blue and one white) were minute in size, four were small, and two were medium, aligning with the trend of most beads being small or minute. All the beads were short in length. Five beads were opaque, while the translucent ones included the white-heart, the blue bead, and one white bead. In terms of shape, five were cylindrical, and three were oblate.

Table 6. The number of individual beads according to colour from across the mission precinct.

Beads	PPHm	PPHt	STP & Walls	MMH	HGHt	Totals
White-hearts	336	41	11	7	1	396
White	297	75	13	11	4	400
Black	50	5	3	3	2	63
Blue	35	8	4	5	0	52
Green	40	7	0	0	0	47
Red	11	0	2	0	0	13
Brown	1	0	0	0	0	1
Pink	17	6	1	2	1	27
Yellow	2	0	0	0	0	2
Orange	2	0	0	0	0	2
Clear	1	0	0	0	0	1
Striped	2	1	0	0	0	3
Unidentified	1	0	0	0	1	2
Total	795	143	34	28	9	1009

Slate

A total of 64 flat pieces of slate, including five with ruled lines and seven slate pencils, were found in the midden. Several flat pieces of slate had multiple, non-parallel scratches etched into their surfaces. Three unlined flat pieces were found at PPHt, and 10 (one lined) were found during the exposure of the foundation and STP surveys. Thirty-one flat pieces were recovered from MMH-b, along with two from around the house, and one pencil. Additionally, 10 flat pieces were recovered from HGH, with nine coming from the trench.

Metal

A total of 120 nails were found around PPH, 95 of which came from the midden. Of the nails that were not too corroded, 20 were handmade and three were early machine-made. Diagnostic forms included rose-headed (13), round flat-headed (16), rectangular flat-headed (12), and T-headed nails (seven). A few bolts (one), nuts (three) or washers were recovered from PPH, and four pins/needles were found in the midden, but only one, still with its head, could definitively be identified as a pin.

A total of 19 nails were collected at MMH, with 12 from MMH-b, three from MMH-a, and two from the west steps. Nine nails were handmade, with rose-headed (six), T-headed (one) and L-shaped forms identified. An iron brace drill was also recovered from MMH-b (E13 sub-surface). At HGH, 15 nails were found in total: one during wall-clearing, one during augering, and the remainder in M10 and M11. Most were degraded, with only three possible T-headed and one rose-headed nail being identifiable. A door latch was found at the top of the steps on the western wall and a small padlock was recovered from along the same wall. The front of the padlock preserves the arm that once covered the keyhole, while the back cover has fallen away, exposing the corroded lock mechanism inside.

Printing press pieces

A total of 14 printing press pieces, or moveable type, were found in the midden. All these pieces were

made of the same lead alloy that survived very well over time. Only five of the 14 pieces had a letter. The remaining nine pieces of metal were of similar shape and had the same indented notches along the long edges. These were presumably either used as spacing tools to break up words, or have since been broken and the letters not found. At MMH, three printing press pieces were found, all at MMH-b. Two could be classified as letter pieces but the letter was only identifiable on one: a very ornate capital E. The third press item was a miscellaneous piece.

A total of 58 pieces of printing press metal was found across HGH, a far higher number than those found elsewhere on the precinct. Of these 58, 16 were definite letter pieces with the letters still visible on the end.

Other

A ring was found in the PPHm (F1.1/40-63) and analysed by the School of Earth Sciences at Wits University, using an electron microprobe. The ring comprised a metal alloy with two blue/green glass stones. A pipe stem and a few pieces of embossed tin, and a container roughly the size of a modern sardine tin, was also recovered from the midden. A sample of lead shot pieces (15) was also found in the F1 midden, of varying sizes (from 2 to 10 mm).

In PPHt (J3 40-60 ash lens) a piece of the inner workings of a musical instrument, like a harmonica or accordion, was recovered.

Chronological markers

We present items using stacked bar charts to identify patterns or trends in the midden over time. In the first chart (Fig. 19), we have selected items with known or associated dates of arrival, or periods of high demand, as in the case of lead shot. Most of these items cluster between spit 2 and 12. In the second graph, European ceramics are displayed to detect changes over time. Flow blue and blue TP are ubiquitous, while sponge and hand painted occur above spit 13 and TP green between spit 10 and surface. These trends are further explored in the discussion section.

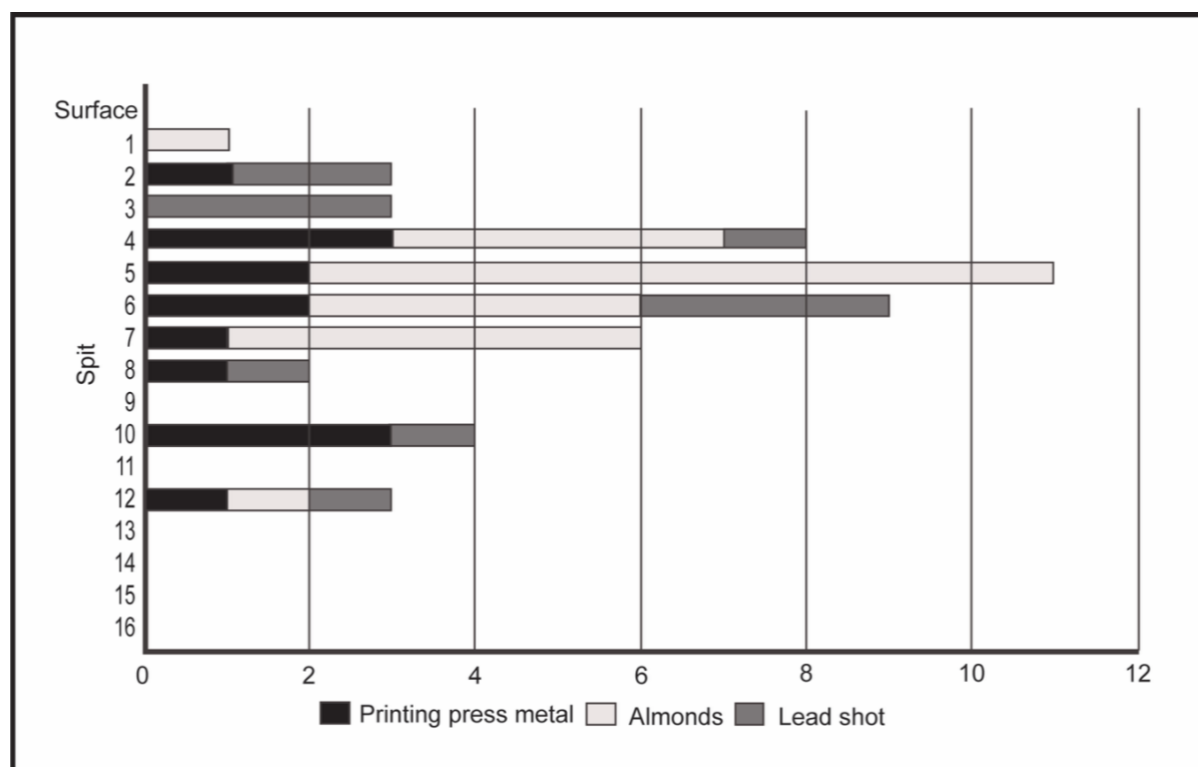


Figure 19. Items associated with Rev. Richard Giddy.

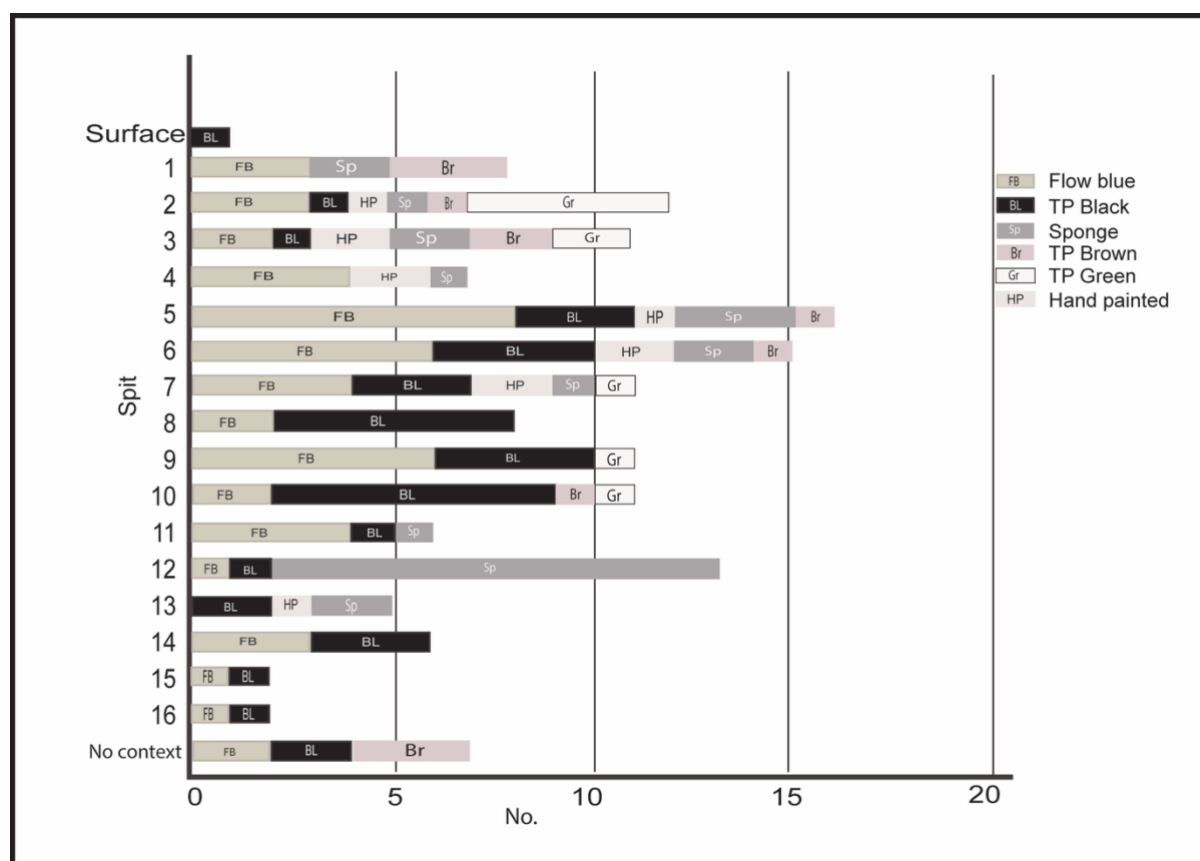


Figure 20. Change in European ceramics over time based on raw counts.

4. Discussion

The PPH structure was possibly enclosed by a wall and strategically positioned at the main intersection's crossroads. It is cross-shaped, matching the shape and dimensions depicted in Wesleyan missionary John Ayliff's sketch of a chapel (ca. 1861) (Fig. 21) and is situated at the highest point on the site, standing approximately 5 m above the station's northern edge and about 6 m higher than the western edge. Based on its shape and prominent location, we propose that this structure is the chapel. The centrality and visibility of this whitewashed building arguably symbolised the chapel's pivotal role in daily life. Its commanding position on the landscape would have conveyed both a sense of protection (watching over) and surveillance (watching) of the community (Spencer-Wood 2002). This dual purpose may also be reflected in the placement of the windows facing the road. Elsewhere, we have argued that the crossroads and walled enclosures created an illusion of 'order', 'class', and 'industry', allowing the missionaries to shape and control social, religious, and legal perceptions of community membership and land ownership (Esterhuysen et al. 2019).

Unfortunately, from an archaeological standpoint, the home and domestic spaces of the missionaries and their families remain largely elusive. The evidence for spatially defined activities or subdivided spaces that might have represented the 'ideal' missionary home (Ashley 2018) is obscured beneath collapsed walls and within disturbed deposits.

The archival records, however, provide some insight into the mission house, as described in a letter by Cameron (n.d.: 148) dated 10 March (*Letter to the secretaries of the Wesleyan Missions. Thaba N'chu 10 March 1845 in the James Cameron. Letter Book, OFS Archive, Bloemfontein*):

The Mission House at Platberg is a very good one of the kind, affording ample and comfortable accommodation for a missionary and his family. It consists of five rooms, a kitchen, and a pantry, stands near the Chapel, and is otherwise very pleasantly situated.

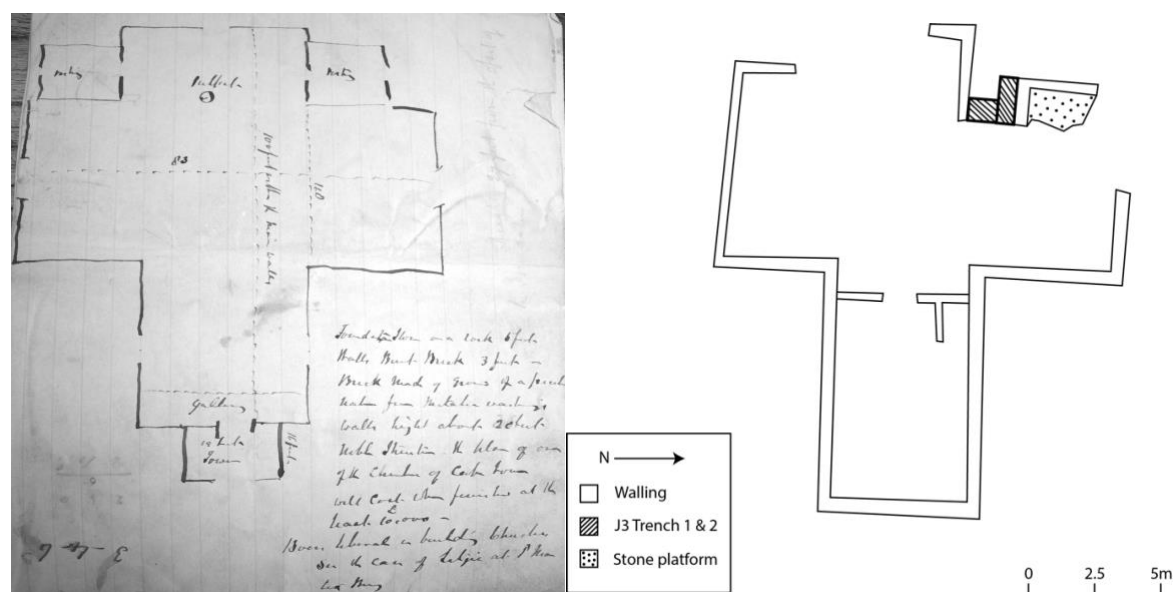


Figure 21. Drawing of a chapel from Ayliff's diaries 1861 placed alongside the map of PPH.

The proximity to the chapel and the size of the mudbrick mound suggests that MMH, with its internal brick divisions, was the original missionary's house. GHG may have housed additional family members, but the discovery of numerous printing press pieces (of moveable type) and stoneware ink bottles suggests that this building also served as Richard Giddy's printing office. As a trained printer (Smith 1971; Picton 1982), Giddy reinstated the printing press in Thaba N'Chu in 1840 and later moved it to Plaatberg in 1845 (Picton 1982). The presence of printing press pieces in PPHm thus provides a marker of Giddy's occupation. The majority were concentrated in levels 4-10 (Fig. 19). Notably, this coincides with almond pips. Trees planted by Cameron would have reached reproductive maturity during Giddy's tenure and anecdotal evidence passed down through the Giddy family suggests that Giddy significantly expanded the variety of fruit at the site (Taylor 1927). The unpublished document suggests that a member of the Sephton family, from Giddy's second marriage, planted almond trees along with a large orchard of pomegranates, figs, cherries and other fruits.

The mission precinct survived attacks by the BaSotho and was probably only destroyed by the Boers in the 1860s, as a measure to prevent the BaSotho from using the structures and surrounding hills for shelter. The protection afforded to the missionaries by the BaSotho allowed Giddy to continue printing several publications between 1851 and 1853. This protection was likely a strategic and diplomatic move by Moshoeshoe, possibly influenced by the Paris Evangelical Missionaries (PEMS) stationed at Morija. This immunity enabled Giddy to collaborate with the PEMS missionary Joseph Ludorf to print the SeSotho versions of the Epistle of St. John and Revelation (Picton 1982). In 1855, Giddy also printed Psalms for Arbousset, another PEMS missionary (Smith 1971). The Wesleyan-Methodist Report for the year (1856: 59) praises the press for printing two proclamations issued by Moshoeshoe against witchcraft and "the strong drink of the white people".

The chapel served as a public space, frequently used for sermons and as a schoolhouse for teaching literacy and religion to both adults and children (WMMS 1848, 1857). The 'home-made' counting pieces and slate tablets and pencils are testament to these activities.

By contrast, the missionary's home next door was a more private space, reserved for the missionary and his family. The midden (PPHm) at the back of the precinct seems to have served the entire precinct. The area behind MMH may have had various functions over time, possibly as a workshop, cooking area, or even a space for more private instruction of the missionary's children.

Regarding European ceramics, blue TP ware and Willow Pattern was ubiquitous across the mission precinct. This is unsurprising, as blue was the most popular colour for printing on English earthenware

(Samford 1997) and the Willow Pattern gained popularity during the 19th century in both the Cape and Britain. Its popularity may have been linked to it being one of the first patterns to have its price fixed by potters to below that of other transfer prints (Miller 1980; Copeland 1999; Klose & Malan 2000). Levels 4-10, which correspond to the transition from Cameron to Giddy, are also associated with inexpensive hand-painted, dipped, and sponge-decorated ceramics (Fig. 20). These types of ceramics were among the most affordable decorated wares on the market, as their decoration was applied by relatively unskilled labour (Miller 1980). Sponged refined industrial ware became popular in the mid-19th century (Majewski & O'Brien 1987; Klose & Malan 2000), as did the introduction of flow blue ceramics into the American and South African markets (Samford 1997; Klose & Malan 2000; Klose 2007). However, unlike standard TP and hand-painted plates, flow blue ceramics were considered much more expensive (Miller 1980). It is tempting to suggest that the smaller number of flow blue pieces reflects a distinction between everyday crockery and those reserved for special occasions (Miller 1980), but a larger sample size would be needed to confirm this. Overall, the utilitarian nature of the ceramic assemblage reflects both the Wesleyan ethos and the general affordability and availability of British tableware in South Africa during the mid-19th century.

The beads recovered from the site are also typical of the period and were no doubt cached by the missionaries for trading purposes. The white hearts, made in Venice, arrived in South Africa sometime after the mid-1830s, and together with white beads appear at contemporary sites (1840s-1860s) in the interior of South Africa (Wood 2008). The presence of pink and some of the green beads suggest a possible trade link with Port Natal or trade through the Natal mission (Wood 2008). It should be noted that some of the beads were heavily patinated and disintegrated into powder when lifted from the soil. It has been suggested that the pH of the soil – and in this regard the presence of termites – may have played a role in altering the chemistry of the glass. The original elemental composition of the glass, however, would determine the response of the glass to corrosive agents including acidic and basic solutions, water and general atmospheric substances (Pollard & Heron 2008). This would also hold true for some of the flat glass that was highly leached and patinated.

The bone analysis reveals the presence of domesticated animals that were reportedly kept at the station. Notably, very few wild animal remains were recovered from the mission precinct. Only a possible Blesbok (*Damaliscus* sp.), a Wildebeest (*Connochaetes* sp.), and a waterfowl were identified. These wild animals were found in the section of the midden associated with Reverend Giddy, suggesting that the missionaries may have resorted to hunting for game meat after Carolus Baatjes' people left with the British in 1851 to fight against the BaSotho at the Battle of Viervoet. According to the British Resident's memorandum, approximately 90 wagons, 800 women and children, along with cattle, marched with the British troops, fearing an attack by the BaSotho while the fighting men were away (Theal 1883). These fears were not unfounded, as the British lost the battle, and the BaSotho attacked, set fire to houses, and destroyed properties outside of the precinct at Platberg (Lucas 1878; Schoeman 1991), and no doubt claimed the remaining livestock. The situation worsened when Carolus' men, along with Fingo and Barolong, retaliated on October 17th, seizing significant numbers of cattle and horses from both the station and the BaSotho who had settled around the abandoned area (Midgley 1949; Kirk 1989).

However, the limited presence of these game animals may also reflect the dwindling numbers of large antelope in the region (Grab & Nash 2022). By 1856, members of the Paris Mission Society began to note the stark decline in what was once a hunting ground for big game (Grab & Nash 2022), a change driven by the shift from hunting to agropastoralism and undoubtedly exacerbated by the ongoing conflict in the area.

Once the station and chapel fell into disuse, sections of the buildings and the hills were variously used to take refuge, shelter and to cook or process food. The high number of locally made earthenware ceramics together with the fruit pips and a grinding stone indicate some activity at the entrance to the chapel prior to the final collapse of the walls. The final collapse of the station was brought about by the Boers repeatedly 'sweeping' through to 'clean out' all the BaSotho from in and around the Platberg (Bosch 1967).

Later disturbances caused by both humans and animals have contributed to the loss of contextual information. Accordingly, although the site was initially approached with caution and excavated in spits, excavation strategies were adapted in response to these disturbances and shifted towards the excavation of features. Klatzow (2023) successfully excavated domestic structures along the street, and forthcoming publications are expected to provide comparative analyses and assess different approaches.

5. Conclusion

The study of the mission precinct reveals various activities and events that took place over time. The shape and position of PPH suggest it was the chapel, while MMH likely served as the associated mission house. The concentration of moveable type printing press items suggests that HGH also functioned as the printing office. The other areas behind MMH are less defined and may have been multipurpose spaces, adapted to the missionary's needs. The midden offers insight into the different occupations of the site, while other sections around the chapel hint at the later use of the space before it ultimately fell into disuse. The collapsed walls and remains of burnt structures point to the final destruction of the station during the 1860s.

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