

REPORTS

REPORT ON FINDS AT THE VICTORIA AND ALFRED WATERFRONT, CAPE TOWN, BETWEEN 1990-1993*

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The Department of Archaeology at the South African Cultural History Museum was invited by the Victoria and Alfred (V&A) Waterfront Company to act as consultants on archaeological remains uncovered during developments on the site between 1990-1993 (MLH Architects and Planners 1989, 1990a, 1990b) (Fig. 1). Research excavations were not undertaken, save for the docum-

entation of features exposed (Fig. 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d) (Abrahams 1995), the salvage of scattered artefacts and work undertaken by the University of Cape Town on the Portwood Precinct and at the Amsterdam Battery (Seeman 1989, 1993; Hall 1991; Archaeology Contracts Office 1992).

A small feature, its function unknown, was uncovered

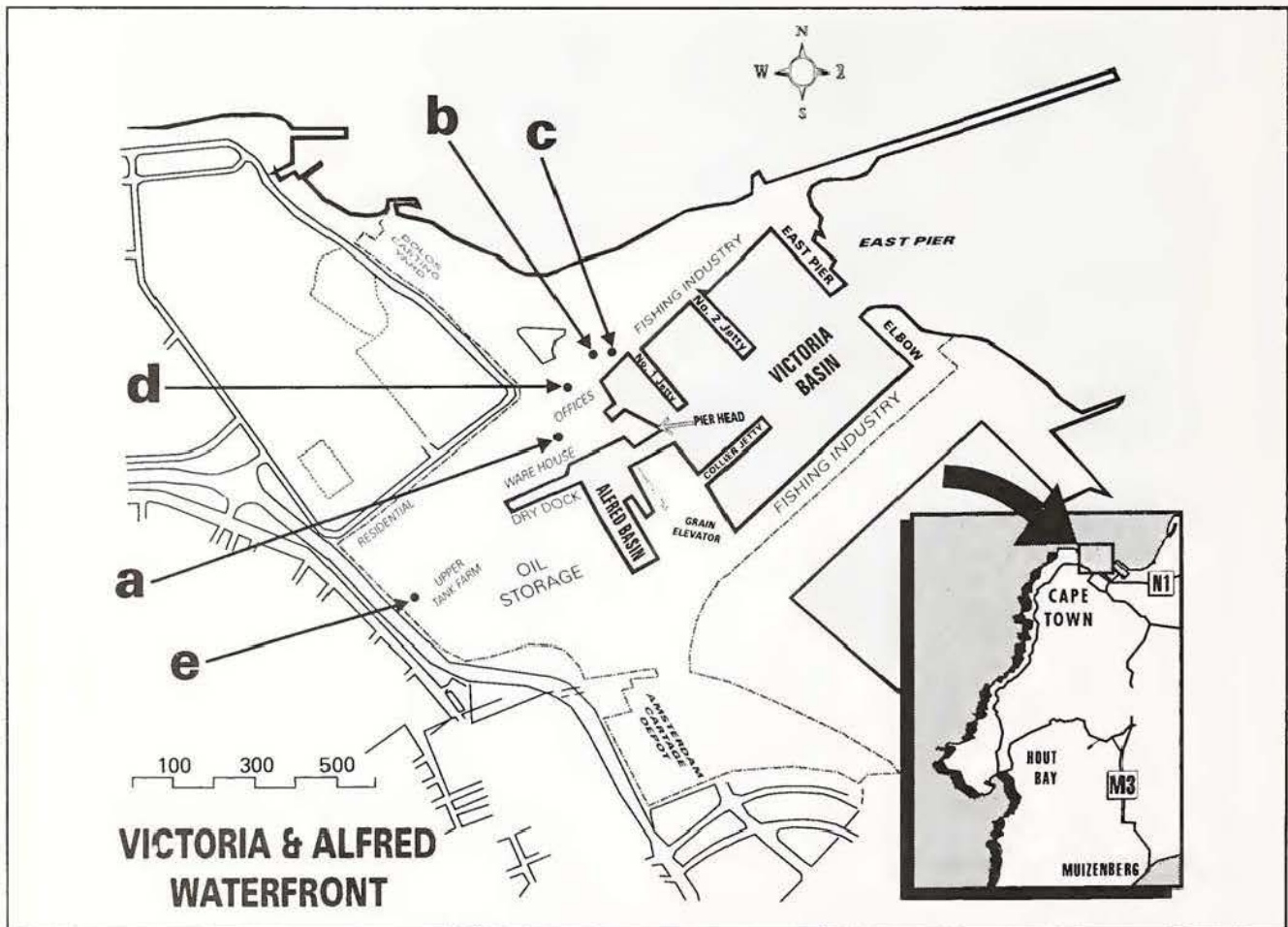


Fig. 1. Location map of the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront with particular sites marked. (Drawing by Linda Coetzee).



Fig. 2. Photographs depicting the feature uncovered in front of the Information Centre.

in the area opposite the present Information Centre (Figs 1a, 2). No associated artefacts were found with this fountain or ornamental-type feature and the area was largely disturbed by previous and contemporary pipe and cable-laying activities.

Until the mid-1860s, no harbour of refuge existed at the Cape (Peterson 1978:1980). Port facilities were primitive consisting mostly of wooden jetties, except for a stone jetty started at the bottom of Bree Street in 1832, which was, however, never completed. During the winter months, northerly gales from the Atlantic played havoc among ships in the bay. One such recorded incident

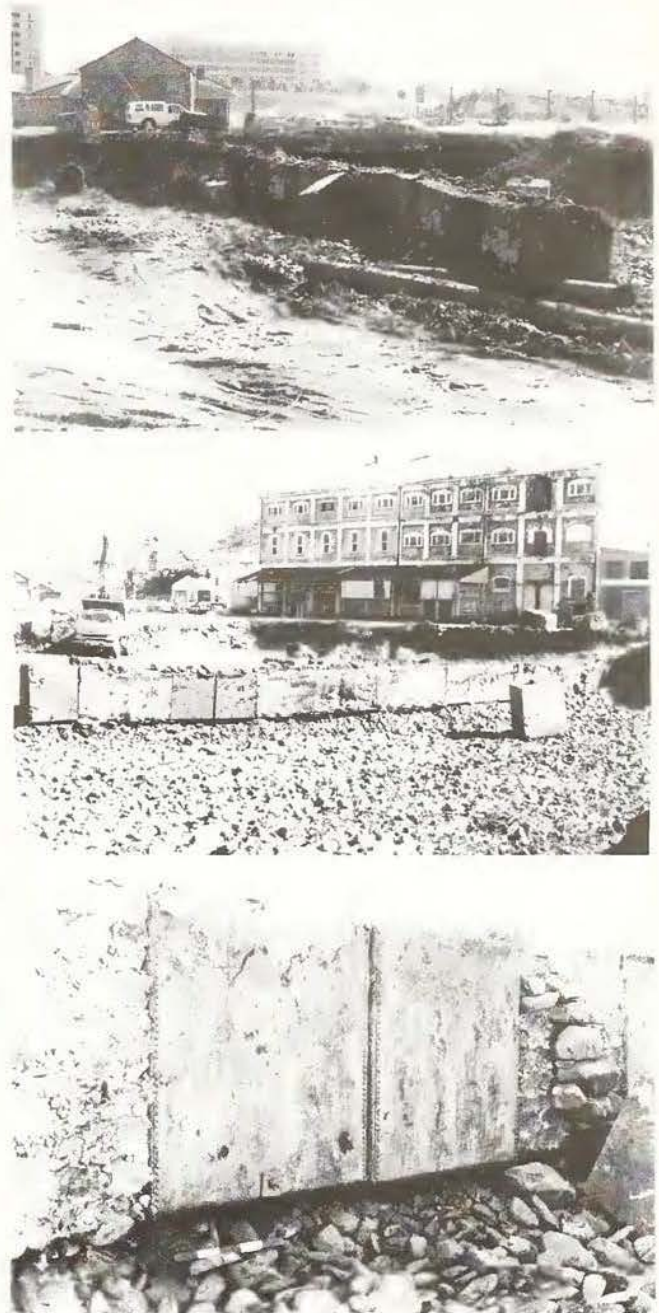


Fig. 3. Photographs of the jetty which was located under the present Victoria Wharf. Note the cobbles which form a platform under the jetty and the riveted iron boxes next to which are concrete blocks in places.

occurred on 17 May 1865 when fifteen vessels were wrecked during a fierce gale in Table Bay (Cape Town Directory for 1866; Theal 1919; Kennedy 1955; Burman 1976; Rawe & Crabtree 1978; Turner 1988). Table Bay remained out of bounds to ships for approximately half of the year, until the Table Bay Harbour was developed (Bickford-Smith, Qotole, Heyningen & Sittert 1994; Veitch 1994). This harbour of refuge was a project without equal in the Southern Hemisphere. However, at about the same time, at the opposite end of the African continent, another major marine engineering construction programme had started, namely, the Suez Canal. Despite

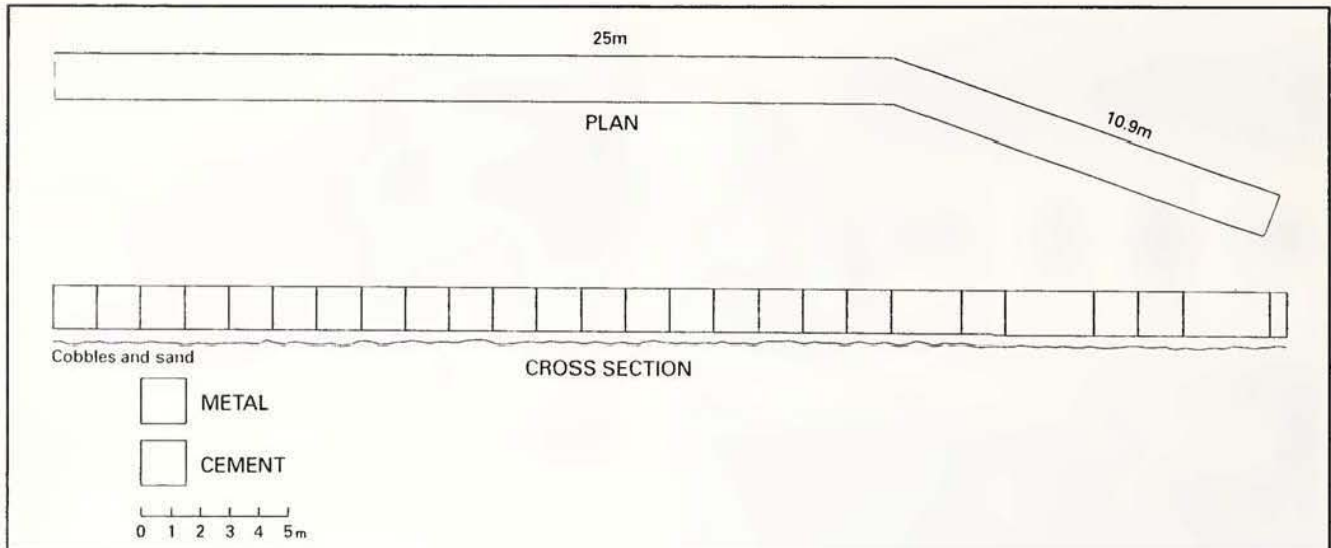


Fig. 4. Measured drawing of the iron jetty, done by Heinrich Mostert and Leon Kotze on 27 September 1990.

this threat to the maritime traffic around the Cape, effectively reducing the sea route passage from Europe to the East by nearly 10 000 km, the Table Bay Harbour plans continued. As part of the British Empire, immense pressure was placed on the strategic and commercial importance of Table Bay. Into the new century, more steamship lines, navigation companies and passenger liners used Table Bay Harbour and new plans, extensions and improvements continued to keep pace with the new demand in world shipping.

During developments by the V&A Waterfront Company between 6-21 September 1990, an iron jetty and a breakwater feature were located in the area forming the present basement parking of the Victoria Wharf Retail and Development Centre (Fig. 1b, 1c). This site was once part of the early Dockland Development and, according to maps of the area (Cape Town City Council, Land Survey Branch Map dated c. 1884; Cape Archives M1/2454; Regional Engineer of Harbours, Table Bay Historical Development Plan 1985), this section was developed sometime between 1870-1920, both features pre-dating at the least around 1885. The jetty was constructed on a base of stones/cobbles which formed a platform on which iron boxes filled with stones and cement were placed (Fig. 3). Figure 4 is a measured drawing of this feature. The iron boxes themselves were riveted and in certain places where the iron boxes were missing, the gaps of equal size were filled with concrete contained on the outside by planks nailed across the boxes. In the vicinity, hundreds of artefacts were salvaged (Fig. 5).

The artefacts are mostly dated to the 19th and early 20th centuries and many of them bear evidence of the passenger liners and other shipping lines which frequented the Cape Town docks at these times. They consist of everyday objects such as plates, bowls, cups, saucers, tooth paste pots, drinking glasses, tumblers and medicine bottles which would have been used on board any ship as well as on land. The quack medicine bottles

were common items of the time with the names of mixtures such as the "World Famed Blood Mixture" and the "Fellows Syrup of Hypophosphites" embossed on the bottles. The ceramics are mostly typical of the popular British export ceramics of the time, but certain of the specimens were specifically marked with the shipping line names *e.g.*, Castle Packets, Union Steam Ship Company, Union-Castle Line, D.O.A...Hamburg, British India Steamers, etc.

The breakwater feature was uncovered in close proximity to the jetty (Fig. 1c). It was constructed with what appeared to be quarried stone mixed with clay contained, at one end, with cast concrete barrels (Fig. 6). A short distance away, there was a small island in the road (Fig. 1d) which had a plaque marking the site of the original breakwater. It read,

At this point H.R.H. Prince Alfred tipped the first truck of stone for the breakwater on the 17th of September 1860.

The area between the breakwater feature and the jetty was filled with quarried stone and yellow clay, cobbles and rubble. The fill contained artefacts dating mostly from the latter part of the 19th century onwards, the period post-dating the construction of the original breakwater. The indications are that like the jetty, this was part of the docklands development which took place after 1870, but before 1884, alongside the original breakwater of 1860 (Regional Engineer of Harbours, Table Bay Historical Development Plan 1985).

The ruins of an oven and surrounding washing troughs were inspected in what used to be the Upper Tank Farm region or the Oil Storage area (Fig. 1e). The oven and surrounds featured in an article written by Andrew Brown, published by the Cape Times in January 1992 (Appendix A). The oven, troughs and foundations were fully documented (Figs 7, 8, 9). An appeal made to the V&A Company to preserve these features, was turned



Fig. 5. A random selection of artefacts of the 19th and 20th centuries uncovered in the vicinity of the present Victoria Wharf before it was constructed.



Fig. 6. Photograph depicting A part of the breakwater feature, constructed in one section of concrete barrels and filled with stone and yellow clay at the other end.

down. This was met with great disappointment considering that this was the site of an early camp or "location" built for the dock labourers around 1901.

The harbour was mainly built with convict labour, but systems of migrant and immigrant labour become established (Saunders & Phillips 1980; Bickford-Smith *et al.* 1994). Apart from those mentioned in the discussion to follow, Portuguese, Indians, Greeks and local labourers were employed at the docks. The Cape Harbour Board kept records which are preserved in the Cape Archives and these are a rich source of information on the history of dockyard labour at the Cape. They show how labourers were viewed, enforced regulations, their living conditions, how they were treated and controlled. Convicts were housed in the Breakwater Convict Station, Irish workers in a warehouse on the East Quay referred to as the "Coolie Barracks" and Mozambicans in an old coal warehouse, later in a wood store as well as stables in Hope Street, and Mfengu contract workers in the "Coolie Barracks". In 1901 the Harbour Board decided to build a "Location" for African workers who included Nqika, Gcaleka and Mfengu people. This was situated below Portswood Ridge. Accommodation was cramped. Christian services were

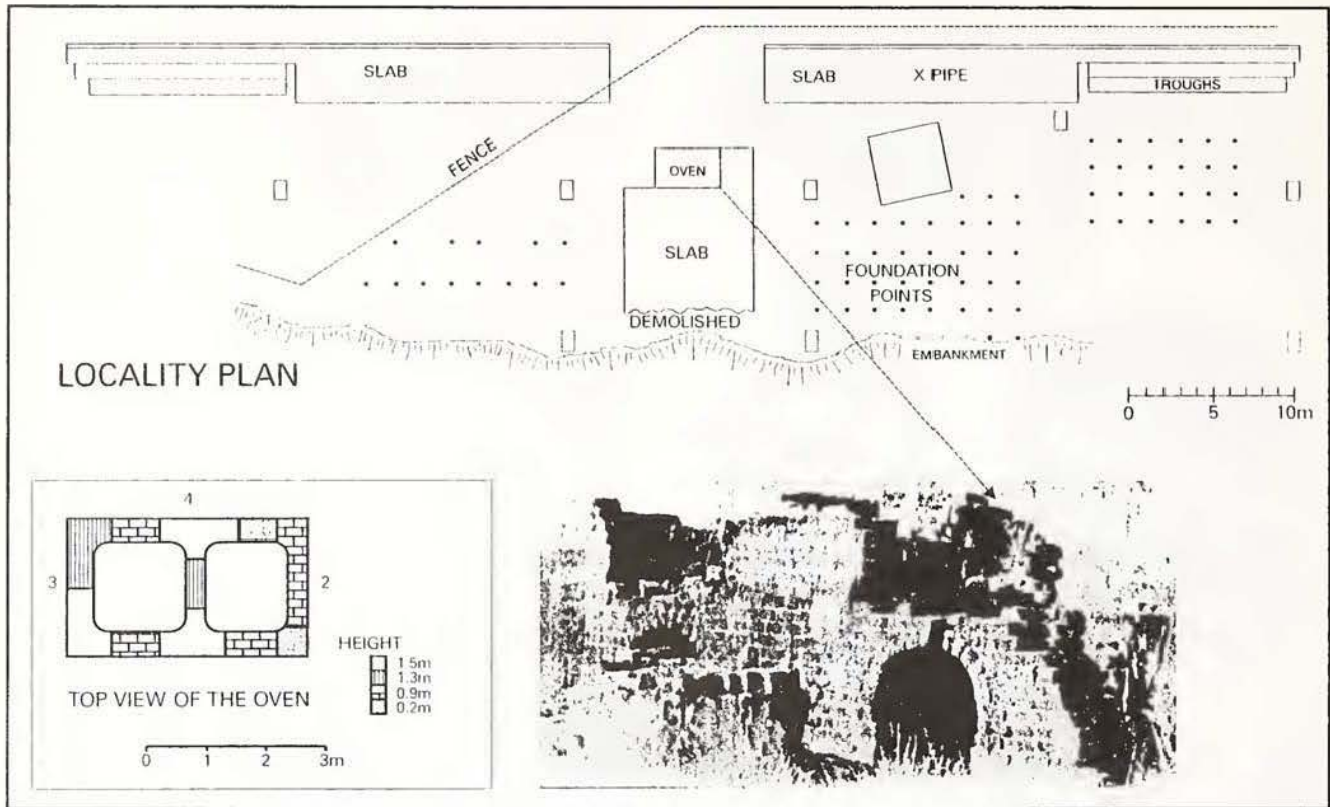


Fig. 7. The oven, troughs and foundation points, measured and drawn on 27 September 1990 by Heinrich Mostert and Leon Kotze. The scanned impression is a close-up view of the oven.

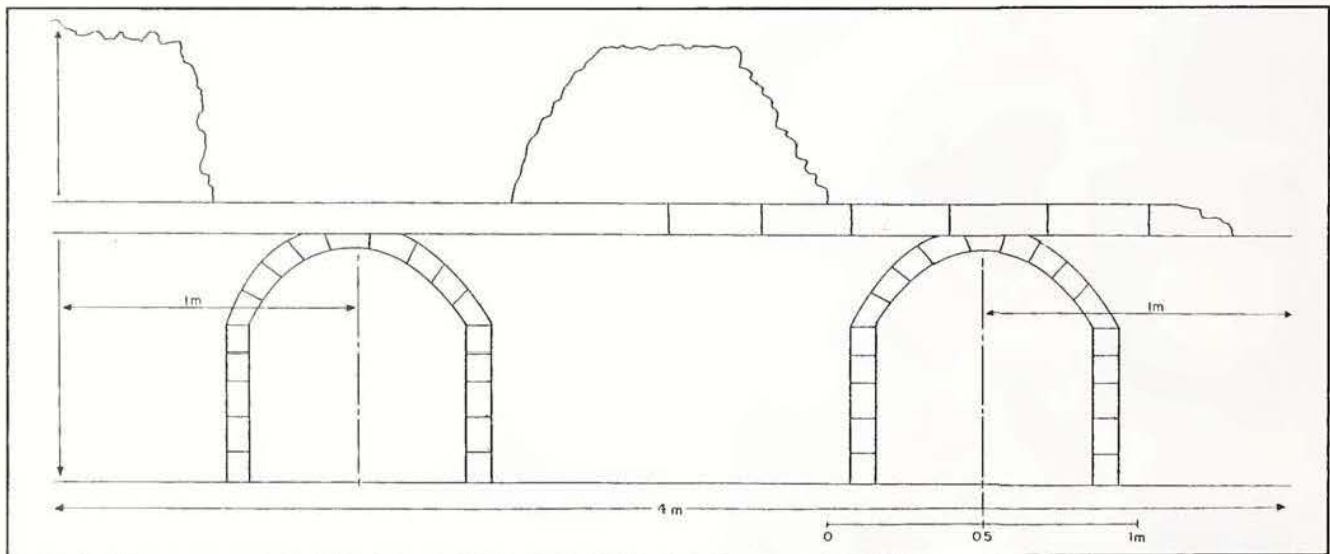


Fig. 8. Front elevation of the oven, measured and drawn on 27 September 1990 by Heinrich Mostert and Leon Kotze.

held, there was little entertainment, but music-making and dancing was often overheard. One such reported song spoke of "...the hard life of natives in Cape Town, banished from home and comfort, and compelled to eat calves' heads and such poor food..." (Bickford-Smith *et al.* 1994:46). Cricket was played, but an application by the Location Superintendent for African workers to use the Green Point Common, was turned down.

The location inhabitants were assisted by Alfred

Mangena in their protests and resistance about their living conditions and their conditions of employment (Bickford-Smith *et al.* 1994). Mangena was a young man who was saving up to study to become a barrister in London. He wrote to the newspapers and explained the sensitivities of "Natives" and, on his return to South Africa from England, became a founder member of the South African Native National Congress of 1912 which became the African National Congress (ANC) in 1923.

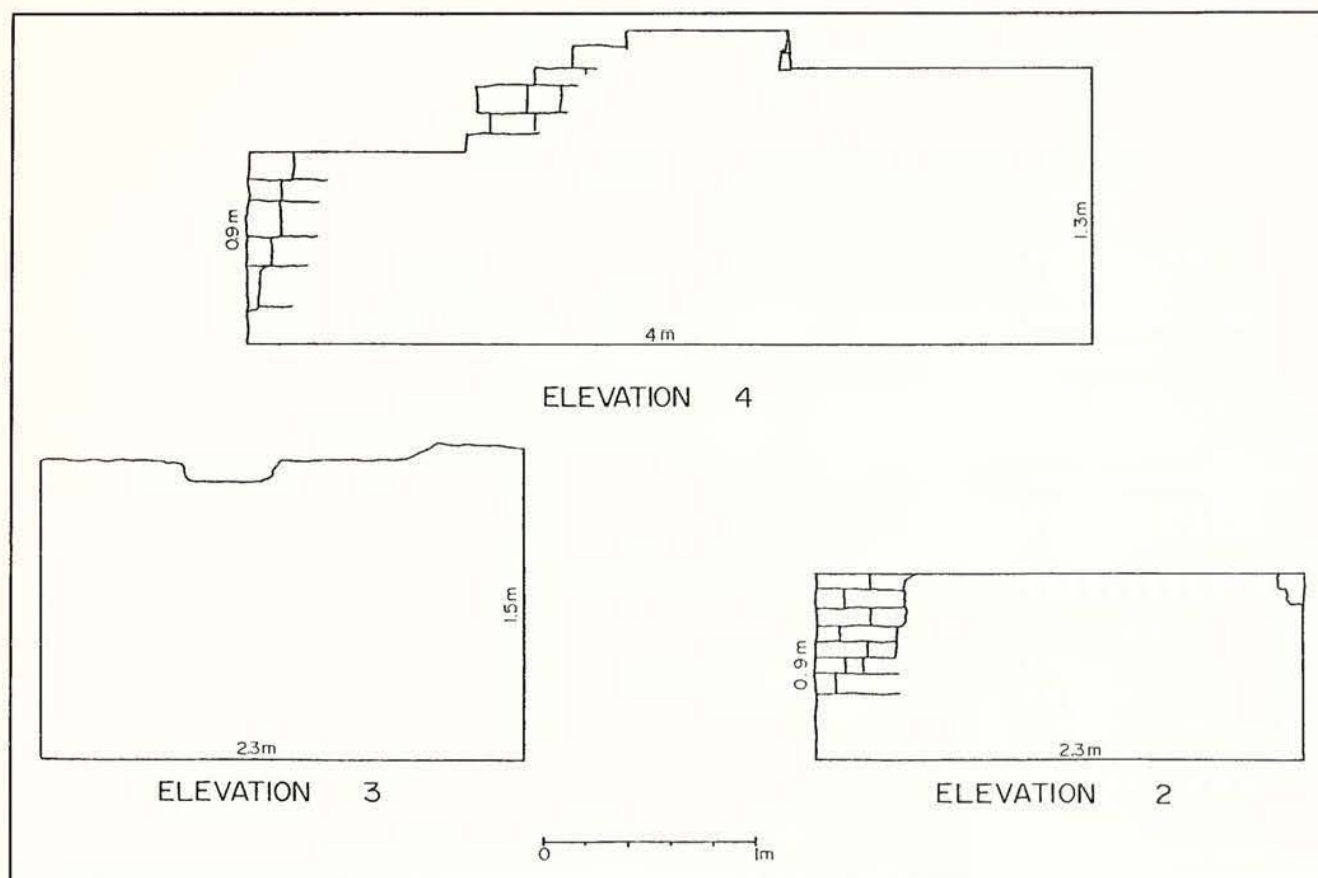


Fig. 9. Rear and side elevations of the oven, measured and drawn on 27 September 1990 by Heinrich Mostert and Leon Kotze.

In 1919 Cape Town dock workers started joining one of the largest labour organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa, namely, the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU), led by Clements Kadalie. From this stage, Union support in the dockyard labourers' rights was initiated.

The sites of preservation, the social history of the labourers and the paramount importance of their contribution to the development of the docks, is a field of research which has received very little attention. This, no doubt, requires urgent remedy so that the labour force responsible for our first harbour of safety can take their rightful place in the history of the dockland developments at the Cape.

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Thanks to David Jack, Director of the V&A Company, for inviting us to participate in the project. We are grateful to Andrew Brown for pointing out the oven and Neil Schwartz at MLH Architects and Planners for arranging with Heinrich Mostert and Leon Kotze to do the measured drawings. Linda Coetzee assisted in preparing the illustrative material for this article. Thanks to Ian Black for supplying information on the maps in the Land Survey Branch of the City Engineers Department.

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