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# The recent history of archaeology in Cape Town and its impact on the heritage practice of Prestwich Street Burial Ground

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## Abstract

This article explores the development of historical and contract archaeology in Cape Town, South Africa, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It argues that a particular set of disciplinary regimes, along with apartheid urban planning and institutional memory, shaped heritage practices associated with sites like the Prestwich Place Burial Ground (PSBG). Archaeologists already played a central role in determining heritage management practices in South Africa, and when new urban development agendas began to emerge in the late 1980s, contract archaeologists became an important cog in the City of Cape Town's spatial development planning agendas. These relationships between archaeologists, apartheid-era heritage institutions and developers not only shaped responses to the discovery of human remains at the PSBG in Cape Town in 2003. They also demonstrate that contract archaeologists were deeply implicated in socio-economic practices that perpetuate exclusionary, spatial planning practices in post-apartheid South Africa. The second part of this paper explores the development of historical archaeology, and the establishment of the Research Unit for the Archaeology of Cape Town (RESUNACT), a centre that focused on historical archaeological research in the Cape. Established in the late 1990s, RESUNACT had the ambition of using materiality to facilitate memory and the return of neglected histories, of the so-called underclass, to the people of Cape Town. They also developed education projects which became important tools for the transformation of archaeological practices in post-apartheid South Africa. Despite apparently erstwhile attempts to transform archaeological practices, the discovery of PSBG resulted in contestations about excavating a burial site, and subsequent attempts to research ancestral remains. Archaeologists assumed authority and prioritised research, while community representatives like the Prestwich Place Committee (PPC) argued that memory was much better served by keeping the burial ground intact. PSBG therefore revealed a

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contradiction between contract archaeologists who positioned themselves as part of transformative archaeology work, and communities who understood the burial ground as a place of potential reflection about the ongoing legacies of slavery and apartheid.

**Keywords**

Historical archaeology; contract archaeology; South Africa; post-apartheid; ancestral remains; community involvement; heritage management; neoliberal urban planning

## Introduction

Prestwich Street Burial Ground (PSBG) was uncovered after developers broke ground on Erf 166710, in Green Point, on 16 May 2003, to start building the Rockwell Hotel. As advised by South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA), the developer Styleprops hired the Archaeology Contracts Office (ACO) to manage the exhumation process.[1] By 9 June 2003, the ACO, which was managed by archaeologists Tim Hart and David Halkett, applied for and received a total exhumation permit from SAHRA.[2] When PSBG was uncovered, post-apartheid heritage legislation, the National Heritage Resources Act (1999) (NHRA), was in effect.[3] Section 36(6) of the NHRA departed from previous legislation in that it required public consultation when an unknown burial ground was discovered during development. However, the exhumation permit granted to the ACO allowed them to run the public consultation and exhumation processes in parallel.[4]

The first public consultation meeting only occurred on 29 July 2003. It was arranged by Antonia Malan from the Cultural Sites Resources Forum (CSRF), after more than 500 human remains were already exhumed.[5] There was an outcry at this public consultation, partly because developers, heritage agencies and archaeologists assumed that exhumation, development, and scientific research on the ancestral remains were inevitable steps toward the completion of the Rockwell Hotel. Archaeologists argued that research on the human remains could provide unique insights about the lives of Cape Town's so-called underclasses.[6] The assumption here was that living communities were disconnected from ancestral remains from archaeological sites, and through their research on human remains, archaeologists wanted to facilitate connections to the past for these communities. However, community representatives refused these assumptions and argued for the establishment of a memorial site. They understood the burial ground as a place of potential reflection about the ongoing legacies of slavery and apartheid. They also understood the economic exclusion of everyday Capetonians by neo-liberal spatial planning agendas to be part of these legacies. New spatial policies cemented apartheid spatial logics and facilitated marginalisation through making areas such as Green Point economically inaccessible.[7]

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1 N. Shepherd, 'Archaeology Dreaming: Post-Apartheid Urban Imaginaries and the Bones of the Prestwich Street Dead', *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 7, 1, February 2007, 3–28.

2 C. Ernsten, 'Stylizing Cape Town: Problematizing the Heritage Management of Prestwich Street' (Master of Philosophy in African Studies with a specialization in Public Culture, University of Cape Town, 2006).

3 National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999.

4 C. Ernsten, 'Stylizing Cape Town'.

5 PSBG was the latest development site subject to contestation and different interpretations of the heritage value of the site and impact of development on the site, but such contestations had happened before. Because of this the CSRF was formed in the early 2000s to facilitate dialogue between different stakeholders such as developers, heritage agencies and interested and affected parties.

6 In the context of PSBG, the underclass was made up of people who were not buried in formal church owned burial grounds either because they were not Christian or they could not afford to be buried in official cemeteries.

7 H. Grunebaum, 'Unburying the Dead in the "Mother City": Urban Topographies of Erasure', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America,* 122, 1, January 2007, 210–19.

By recognising the sacredness of burial grounds, section 36(6) of the NRHA decentres archaeologists and forces them to consider alternative approaches to managing burial grounds as heritage sites. However, in the case of PSBG, institutional memory resulted in an unimaginative interpretation of the NHRA (1999) dream passages, which are found in the preamble of the NHRA. Dream passages position heritage as providing an avenue for reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. The last paragraph of the preamble states the following:

> Our heritage celebrates our achievements and contributes to redressing past inequities. It educates, it deepens our understanding of society and encourages us to empathise with the experience of others. It facilitates healing and material and symbolic restitution and it promotes new and previously neglected research into our rich oral traditions and customs.[8]

According to Christian Ernsten, dream passages speak to the underlying principles of education, healing, empathy and restitution found in the preamble of the NHRA. Taking into account these principles may have resulted in heritage institutions and archaeologists having a different interpretation of the significance of the burial ground and the meaning consultation as stipulated by Section 36(6) of the NHRA. From the onset however, the dominant heritage discourse around PSBG was exhumation, research, and development.[9]

Ernsten has shown how this discourse arose in South Africa by exploring the involvement of three heritage institutions: the Heritage Resources Section (HRS), SAHRA and the CSRF.[10] The CSRF was an independent consultancy, hired by the Archaeology Contracts Office (ACO), to manage the public consultation process. Ernsten's analysis demonstrates that heritage practices related to PSBG were determined by the disciplinary practices of archaeology, architecture and town planning in combination with institutional memory of the heritage practices of apartheid institutions. In doing so, Ernsten establishes a sense of the continuities between apartheid and post-apartheid heritage practice informed by the discipline of town planning and architecture.[11] However, his engagement with archaeological institutions, particularly the crucial role of contract archaeology, remains incomplete.

Others have drawn on earlier disciplinary histories of archaeology from the 1930s and 1960s to explain heritage practices at PSBG.[12] Nick Shephard, for example,

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8 C. Ernsten, 'Stylizing Cape Town'; C. Ernsten, *Colonial Heritage and Urban Transformation in the Global South: Excavating the Ruins of Cape Town's Rebirth* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021); National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999.

9 C. Ernsten, 'Stylizing Cape Town'.

10 The HRS forms part of the City of Cape Town Department of Environmental Affairs and manages heritage at a municipal level. In 2003, SAHRA managed heritage at a provincial and national level. Heritage Western Cape, which currently manages heritage at a provincial level was established in January 2003 but did not manage the processes related to PSBG.

11 For example, he makes connections between HRS' relationship to its Apartheid predecessor, the Urban Conservation Unit (UCU). The UCU formed part of the Town Planning Unit set up in 1987 and managed the relationship between heritage conservation and development. Even though the NHRA (1999) is geared towards preserving intangible heritage, the heritage inventories available to the city were developed in the 1980s and 1990s and largely focus on listing heritage sites that are architecturally significant. The inventories informed the heritage assessments made by the city when considering a development application by Styleprops and did not consider issues of forced removals or informal burial grounds in Green Point. See: C. Ernsten, 'Stylizing Cape Town.'

12 N. Shepherd, 'Archaeology Dreaming'.

has used the term archaeoviolence to describe excavations at PSBG and Oakhurst, a Stone Age archaeological site.[13] As he argues:

> Oakhurst Cave begins to speak to us of the place of the ancestral dead in local lifeworlds and affective relations, and the corresponding violence of the act of excavation. It also speaks of a formative period in the development and "disciplining" of a local project of prehistory in the decade of the 1930s. Fast-forward 70 years to the city of Cape Town, and the most contested instance of archaeological work in post-apartheid South Africa.[14]

Shepherd attributes the detached attitude that archaeologists have to communities to the embrace of a positivist New Archaeology approach, adopted in South Africa in the 1960s. This positivist approach to archaeology disconnected potential archaeological research on PSBG from other societal issues.[15] Although important for understanding the establishment of positivist archaeological practices in South Africa, in this article I argue that these developments in the 1960s only partially explain heritage practices at PSBG. Because of the emergence of contract archaeology along with neo-liberal spatial development planning agendas in the 1980s, this latter period is crucial for understanding how archaeologists actively shaped – and continue to shape – heritage practice related to development in Cape Town. Situating the institutional memory of apartheid contract archaeology practices as shaping responses to PSBG, allows us to understand PSBG alongside broader socio-economic transformations in the late 1980s (a period of increased urban development in Cape Town) that gave archaeologists access to new sites, and new formations of power.

It was this period of heightened urban development and the concomitant establishment of contract archaeology in the 1980s in Cape Town which laid the basis for the heritage practice at PSBG. As I will demonstrate, it was also this period which shaped the institutional memory of heritage institutions such as the ACO that was key in carrying apartheid heritage practices into the post-apartheid period. Ernsten has already shown continuities in heritage practice, and between apartheid and post-apartheid institutions in relation to town planning. For example, even though the NHRA (1999) is geared towards preserving intangible heritage, the heritage inventories available to the city were developed in the 1980s and 1990s and largely focus on listing heritage sites that are architecturally significant. The inventories subsequently informed the heritage assessments made by the city when considering a development application by Styleprops and did not consider issues of forced removals or informal

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13 Photographic archives of excavations at Oakhurst Cave, a Later Stone Age archaeological site found in the Southern Cape Province are used to explore the limits of scientific excavation for comprehending burials and the relations they represent at an archaeological site. N. Shepherd, *The Mirror in the Ground: Archaeology, Photography and the Making of an Archive* (Johanessburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2015); N. Shepherd, 'Undisciplining Archaeological Ethics', in A. Haber and N. Shepherd (eds), *After Ethics*.

14 N. Shepherd, 'Undisciplining Archaeological Ethics', 16.

15 N. Shepherd, 'State of the Discipline: Science, Culture and Identity in South African Archaeology, 1870–2003', *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 29, 4, December 2003, 823–44.

burial grounds in Green Point.[16] This occurred even though a large informal burial ground had already been discovered in Green Point as early as 1994.[17]

## Shaping heritage practices of PSBG

PSBG was an historical archaeological site discovered through contract archaeological work for private development.[18] Contract archaeology in South Africa follows the same trajectory as in other countries. Often, legislation is put in place to prevent damage to archaeological sites due to the rapid pace of development.[19] Archaeologists are employed and paid to determine if an archaeological site will be impacted by a proposed development. If the development will impact an archaeological site, archaeologists excavate. They salvage the material and, in some cases, human remains, before development. Alternatively, if the site is deemed very significant, they may propose that development strategies are changed so that the site remains intact. In South Africa, an archaeologist is hired by the developer and submits all reports either to the provincial (Heritage Western Cape (HWC) in the Western Province) or national (SAHRA) heritage body.

This process at PSBG was managed by the ACO, formerly the Contracts Office (CO), which was set up by the Spatial and Historical Archaeology Research Centre (SHARC), based at the Department of Archaeology, University of Cape Town (UCT). In order to begin to understand this process fully, it is important to first understand the institutional histories and individual affiliations of the ACO, the CO, and SHARC. Developments within SHARC and the CO are important because contract archaeologists from the CO formed the ACO.

The CO was set up in 1988 to do contract archaeological work for private or public institutions who needed to adhere to heritage or environmental legislation requiring archaeological mitigation before development. In the 1980s, when contract archaeology was established, it was also viewed as an important source of funding, given decreased state funding for archaeological research.[20] The CO became the ACO in 1991 and Hart and Halket took over the management. They were also present at SHARC weekly meetings. From 1991 to 2008, the ACO was based at UCT's Department of Archaeology. In 2008, the ACO became a private company, ACO cc, that was located off the UCT campus. The ACO was thus affiliated with the

16 C, Ernsten, 'Stylizing Cape Town'.

17 A large burial that is contiguous with PSBG was discovered in 1994 during development. The ancestral remains from Cobern Street were exhumed, and subsequently became part of the collections held in the Department of Clinical Anatomy and Biological Anthropology at UCT. For information see L. J. Friedling, 'Grave tales: an osteological assessment of health and lifestyle from 18th and 19th century burial sites around Cape Town', (PhD dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2007).

18 Historical archaeology is a sub-discipline of archaeology that focuses on the historical period. In the context of South Africa, this is regarded to be archaeological research on post-1652 sites. Historical archaeology developed as a subdiscipline that deals with the colonial period. It is differentiated from pre-colonial archaeology in that it draws on the historical archive and the material archive. Africanist historical archaeologists have challenged the artificial divide between pre-colonial and colonial historiography. See P. R. Schmidt. *Historical Archaeology in Africa: Representation, Social Memory, and Oral Traditions* (Lanham, AltaMira Press, 2006).

19 M. Hall, 'Editorial: Contract Archaeology in South Africa', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 44, 1989, 63.

20 M. Hall and A. Markell. 'Introduction: historical archaeology in the Western Cape', *South African Archaeological Society Goodwin Series*, 7, June 1993, 3-7.

Department of Archaeology at UCT when the PSBG was discovered in 2003.[21] It was the ACO who hired Malan from the CSRF, to lead the public consultation process for PSBG. Malan was a researcher in the Historical Archaeology Research Group and a member of SHARC. Martin Hall, a professor in the Department of Archaeology at the time, was not part of the PSBG exhumation team. He was, however, a driving force behind the development of historical archaeology in Cape Town as he was key to setting up SHARC and the CO. Hall later became the Director of the RESUNACT.

In light of the above, it is perhaps unsurprising that one of the biggest criticisms of the heritage practice at PSBG was the close relationship between contract archaeologists, archaeologists working in heritage agencies such as SAHRA, and the developer Styleprops. This close relationship resulted in the dominant discourse soon after the discovery of the human remains being exhumation, research and development.[22] This discourse has been attributed to Janette Deacon and Mary Patrick, archaeologists working at SAHRA who advised the developer and were part of the PSBG permitting processes, and other archaeologists involved in contestations around PSBG.[23] However, the pattern of working in service of large development projects was already established within SHARC: the CO's primary work was exhumation (excavation), research and development. This was achieved through close collaboration with governmental heritage agencies.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, members of SHARC worked with staff at the National Monuments Council (NMC), SAHRA's predecessor. Together they shaped how contract archaeology figured in cultural resource management as it related to development in the City of Cape Town and the Western Cape. Members of SHARC actively cultivated relationships with developers and the Urban Conservation Unit. For example, in one of a series of monthly meetings, held by the group to manage research and contract projects, it was noted that the CO does not have to advertise their services in the urban context because 'urban developments are routed through the city council'.[24] The close ties to the NMC allowed the CO insight into upcoming developments. In a meeting in July 1989, it was noted that the NMC has referred at least three projects to the CO and that 'the NMC appears to be stipulating the [CO] by name as consultants before giving approval themselves to projects'.[25] SHARC members also actively campaigned for the NMC to use their services.[26]

The response to the discovery of PSBG from archaeologists is the result of contract archaeology being embedded in neo-liberal spatial development agendas since the late 1980s. The CO, while part of SHARC, worked on large development projects such as Club Mykonos (on the West Coast of South Africa), the Victoria & Alfred

21 ACO, 'About ACO', ACO and Associates Cc Archaeology and Heritage Specialists, https://www.aco-associates.com/about/.
22 C. Ernsten, 'Stylizing Cape Town'.
23 N. Shepherd, 'Archaeology Dreaming'.
24 Historical Archaeology Archive (HAA), Department of Archaeology, University of Cape Town (DoA), 1989a, SHARC Meeting Minutes, Thursday 8 June 1989.
25 HAA, DoA, 1989b, SHARC Meeting Minutes, Monday 21 August 1989.
26 HAA, DoA, 1989b, SHARC; HAA, DoA, 1989c, SHARC Meeting Minutes, 4 December 1989.

(V&A) Waterfront and the Old Mutual building in Cape Town CBD.[27] Those who have tracked the development of Cape Town, place the development of the V&A Waterfront in the late 1980s as a starting point of Cape Town's long-term neo-liberal spatial redevelopment project.[28] Drawing on models in the West, spatial planners imagined Cape Town as a new tourist destination which would develop through public-private partnerships. Thus, the city sold off state land in 1987 and the V&A Waterfront Company Pty Ltd, a private company, was set up to manage development of the docklands into a mixed-use area.[29] Contract archaeological work was actively pursued through writing to developers as was the case when Hall wrote to Young, a developer involved in the V&A Waterfront project.[30] In relation to the V&A Waterfront the following was written in SHARC meeting minutes from August 1989:

> Jack et al are intending to develop this area. It is on reclaimed land but there must have been wrecks underneath the 19th century industrial archaeology. Urban development unit have been notified about potential wrecks, but Bruno should promote himself in particular. Who is there to deal with industrial archaeology?[31]

The Jack referred to in the meeting minutes is David Jack. Jack worked for the city as an urban planner before becoming the Managing Director of the Waterfront Company in 1988. The informality and familiarity in meeting notes indicates that contract archaeologists working closely with developers was the norm and not the exception. Gearing development towards tourism was one of the first moves by the city indicating that they were taking on neo-liberal economic policies in the 1980s. As a development, the V&A Waterfront has had a knock-on effect resulting in the redevelopment of the foreshore. One could say that it was the development of the V&A Waterfront that paved the way for the development of the Rockwell Hotel in Green Point in 2003. A key element of neo-liberal spatial property development is efficiency. In post-apartheid South Africa this has been achieved through creating easier permitting processes for developers. David McDonald notes that 45 additional staff were hired in 2004 to assist with fast tracking development permits.[32]

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27 HAA, DoA, 1989b, SHARC; NMC Publication no. P021E , J. Deacon, *Archaeology for Planners, Developers and Local Authorities*, (Cape Town: NMC, 1992); T. Hart, 'Phase 2 Mitigatory Archaeological Excavations at Leentjiesklop 3 Club Mykonos, Langebaan. Prepared for Club Mykonos Langebaan' (ACO, UCT, February 2001).HAA, DoA, 1989b, SHARC; NMC Publication no. P021E , J. Deacon, *Archaeology for Planners, Developers and Local Authorities*, (Cape Town: NMC, 1992); T. Hart, 'Phase 2 Mitigatory Archaeological Excavations at Leentjiesklop 3 Club Mykonos, Langebaan. Prepared for Club Mykonos Langebaan' (ACO, UCT, February 2001).

28 P. de Tolly, 'Cape Town's Central Waterfront: Past, Present, Future: Challenge and Change', *Historic Environment Number* 22, 2, January 2009, 22; S. Didier et al., 'The Adaptative Nature of Neoliberalism at the Local Scale: Fifteen Years of City Improvement Districts in Cape Town and Johannesburg', *Antipode,* 45, 1, March 2012, 121–39.

29 P. de Tolly, 'Cape Town's Central Waterfront'.

30 HAA, DoA, 1989d, SHARC Meeting, 15 March 1989.

31 HAA, DoA, 1989b, SHARC.

32 D.A. McDonald, *World City Syndrome* (London: Routledge, 2012).

The NMC, which gave rise to SAHRA in post-apartheid South Africa (with many of the staff working at the NMC going on to work at SAHRA),[33] also produced a booklet for developers titled *Archaeology for Planners, Developers and Local Authorities*.[34] The booklet advocates for archaeological impact assessment before development and serves as a guide for developers and local planners to play an active role in conserving archaeological heritage.[35] When discussing reports produced by archaeologists and the possible outcomes based on reports it is noted that:

> The purpose behind mitigation is to sample the site so that the evidence can be stored permanently in a museum where it can be consulted at a later date for record and research purposes… More rarely, the site may be so important that it will warrant modification of the development in a phase three programme. If this happens, the archaeologist, the National Monuments Council and the developer can confer on the action to be taken. It may be possible to incorporate an Iron Age village into a green belt in a housing scheme, or to modify a high-rise building plan by covering rare eighteenth-century foundations and associated rubbish dumps beneath a parking lot to avoid destroying them completely.[36]

When writing about the heritage practice at PSBG, Ernsten notes that the main players early on were archaeologists, developers, and SAHRA. This configuration mirrored institutional practices which emerged as contract archaeology developed in an apartheid context. Heritage agencies and university-based contract firms such as the CO figured archaeologists as protecting scientifically significant heritage. Archaeologists were the main stakeholders along with developers for determining how to manage archaeological sites. Development was the desired outcome.

Another critique of the processes surrounding PSBG was the role that archaeology played in the erasure of the history of forced removals and slavery through facilitating the development of the Rockwell. The Rockwell advertises itself as a New York Jazz Style hotel, offering visitors a themed destination venue to escape to in Green Point. Shepherd notes that:

> The full force of the notion of 'forced removals' – a phrase used by the HOC [hands off committee] to describe the exhumation and relocation of the Prestwich Street dead – strikes home. It is as though history, memory, every rooted association between a group of people and a site on the landscape is evacuated, pulled up at the roots, to be replaced by a copy-writer's whimsy.[37]

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33 A. Malan, 'Contested Sites: Negotiating New Heritage Practice', *Journal for Islamic Studies*, 25, 1, January 2008, 17-52.
34 NMC Publication no. P021E.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid. 12.
37 N. Shepherd, 'Archaeology Dreaming'.

The Rockwell isn't, however, the first themed destination that the ACO worked in service of. The Club Mykonos holiday resort was built in 1987 and was described as 'a privately owned pleasure craft harbour on the open coast of South Africa and formed the nucleus of a 100 million US dollar private resort'.[38] Club Mykonos is themed after the Greek island of Mykonos. In 'view of the similarity in climate and scenery of the South African West Coast and that of the Greek Island settlements of the Aegean Sea, the architectural and aesthetic model of development was drawn from the latter'.[39] The development of Club Mykonos impacted archaeologically significant Later Stone Age archaeological sites – sites that showed the use and occupation of the area by hunter gatherers for at least 3500 years. When contract archaeology developed, the deeply rooted relationships between people and place evidenced by archaeological sites were not considered. Foundational to the work of archaeology was the erasure of possible connection to various sites and histories.

## The Research Unit for the Archaeology of Cape Town

The 2017 book, *Grave Encounters, archaeology of the burial grounds, Green Point, South Africa*, was authored by Malan, Halkett, Hart & Schietecatte, three of whom were part of the PSBG exhumation process.[40] The book explores the history of cemeteries in Green Point and what archaeological research has revealed about the informal burial grounds discovered during developments in the area. It attempts to fulfil the promise archaeologists made on 29 July 2003: that exhumation and research on human remains from burial grounds in Green Point could provide unique insights into the lives of the underclass of colonial Cape Town. The book was written despite protests against research on human remains from PSBG. Members of the PPC argued for maintaining the dignity of the dead and leaving them in peace, they thus rejected applications to do research on the human remains from PSBG. Instead, they advocated for a social historical approach to researching the history of the burial ground and for memorialisation.[41] *Grave encounters*, on the other hand, was a continuation of the historical archaeology tradition of the 1980s.

Public education about the archaeological past was a cornerstone of transforming archaeology as a discipline in post-apartheid South Africa. Archaeologists involved at PSBG were not just empiricists who wanted to access information under the guise of public education. Education as transformation was institutional practice. When considering archaeology's irrelevance to the general public, scholars recognised that

38 D.E. Bosman *et al*., 'Design and Construction of Pleasure Craft Harbour – Club Mykonos Langebaan', in B.L. Edge (eds.), *Coastal Engineering 1990* (New York: American Society of Civil Engineers, 1991), 3239–3253.

39 Ibid.

40 A. Malan et al., *Grave Encounters: Archaeology of the Burial Grounds, Green Point, South Africa* (Cape Town: ACO Associates cc, 2017).

41 Applications to do research on the human remains from PSBG by biological anthropologists were rejected by SAHRA in consultation with the PPC. The enslaved had been objectified in life and being reobjectified in death as research objects were not acceptable.

the discipline was inward facing and archaeologists were only accountable to themselves through academic publications, and in large part to the Global North.[42] The argument was that in order to transform the discipline, archaeologists had to be more accessible and accountable to the public through public education programmes. RESUNACT, which was set up in 1995, embodied this ethos.[43]

RESUNACT was a product of historical archaeological research. The Centre used material objects and archival sources to learn about the so-called underclass of colonial Cape Town. It focused on 'the ways in which material culture contributed to the history of the city of Cape Town, and the ways in which material traces of the past are utilized in the present day'.[44] Members of RESUNACT organised workshops and conferences to facilitate interdisciplinary research, tried to integrate research and civil society and disseminate information about the history of Cape Town, especially historical archaeological insights.[45] RESUNACT ran a public archaeology programme and worked with schools in the greater Cape Town area. They also organised a dig in District Six for school children in 1996, as an opportunity to engage with archaeology.[46] The students excavated a disturbed refuse dump (this is a secondary deposit and thus of limited archaeological value) under 'controlled circumstances'. The Cape Town Underground Project was one of RESUNACT's public archaeology programmes. The project produced pamphlets and newsletters that were distributed to schools and were available on the RESUNACT website for teachers to access.[47] The pamphlets and newsletters focused on what we could learn about the history of colonial Cape Town through research on historical archaeological sites. For example, a Cape Town Underground newsletter, published in March 1997, focused on the methods of maritime archaeology, and the history of VOC trade, informed by material culture and research on shipwrecks.[48] Members of RESUNACT firmly believed that public education was an important tool for creating a strong civil society.

A contradiction in the work of RESUNACT was that they were attempting to create a strong civil society by using material culture from contract archaeological sites. The contradiction lies in the different goals of various stakeholders that archaeologists were working with. Contract archaeologists were working on building projects that were intended to restructure the city such that it became attractive to investors and simultaneously more exclusionary for the average Capetonian. Historical archaeologists on the other hand were trying to cultivate a critical engagement with the colonial past and its legacies, including histories of enslavement and forced removals. Ironically, they were not making connections to contemporary practices of exclusion

42 N. Shepherd, 'Heading South, Looking North: Why We Need a Post-Colonial Archaeology', *Archaeological Dialogues*, 9, 2, December 2002, 74-82.
43 HAA, M. Hall, 'Research Unit for the Archaeology of Cape Town (RESUNACT) Report 1995/1996'.
44 RESUNACT 'About', https://web.archive.org/web/19991009070049/http://www.uct.ac.za:80/depts/age/res, accessed 13, December 2023.
45 HAA, M. Hall, 'Research Unit for the Archaeology of Cape Town (RESUNACT) Report 1995/1996'.
46 Ibid.
47 HAA, 'Cape Town Underground, Archaeology for Educators and Learning: Life at the Castle in Cape Town', RESUNACT, 21 January 1999.
48 HAA 'Cape Town Underground, school newsletter number 5' RESUNACT, March 1997.

that they were participating in. On the RESUNACT public archaeology webpage the following is written:

> The theme for 1999 is "Life at the Cape during the 18th century". The idea is to share the information gained through contract archaeology and individual research. We hope to put the living people back into the history of the Western Cape.[49]

By 1999, contract archaeology was used to facilitate the development of large private complexes such as the Marina Residential Estate in the V & A Waterfront.[50] The ACO was involved in exhuming human remains from the colonial period discovered in December 1999. The informal cemetery must have been discovered at a time of transition between the NMC and the newly established SAHRA. The ACO could not acquire an exhumation permit, so they exhumed the human remains without one. The ACO was facing pressure from the developer (the Waterfront Group) that there shouldn't be unwarranted delays.[51] At the time of writing this article, an apartment in Marina Residential Estate, touted as luxury living in the Waterfront, costs upwards of ten million Rand.

Hall used his work in RESUNACT to theorise what social archaeology would look like in Cape Town and the relationship between material and memory was foundational to this work.[52] Contract archaeological and educational work done in District Six was used as a basis for this work.[53] Hall argued that material objects are evidence of our choices and lives, and because they are evidence of history they are deeply connected to memory and the present. According to Hall, material objects have the capacity to facilitate memory as they cause different responses when engaged. Objects can evoke new memories which may not arise out of storytelling alone. However, memory is not only facilitated through engagement with material objects. It is also in the act of excavation in District Six and peeling through different layers of the site that provokes responses from passers-by and recall different histories of District Six. Archaeology is thus positioned as a powerful tool for remembering the past. These are important insights, and material culture can be a powerful tool for remembering. But the approach by RESUNACT decentred the relationship communities may have to place, and the actual site that archaeological material were removed from.[54]

The relationship between material and memory was foundational for the public facing part of RESUNACT's work. Everyday objects can certainly be important for reclaiming the past and facilitating memory. For example, in the District Six

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49 RESUNACT Public Archaeology, 4 December 1998 https://web.archive.org/web/20000708034920/http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/age/resunact/respubar.htm.

50 D. Halkett, 'A Report on the exhumation of human remains from an historic cemetery at the Marina Residential development, V&A Waterfront prepared for the V&A Waterfront'. ACO, February 2001.

51 Ibid.

52 Hall, 'RESUNACT Report 1995/1996'.

53 M. Hall, *Archaeology and the Modern World: Colonial Transcripts in South Africa and the Chesapeake* (London: Routledge, 2000)

54 Hall, *Archaeology and the Modern World*.

Museum, it is the mobilisation of everyday objects in exhibitions that are powerful reminders of what was lost, a sense of community, a home.[55] Street signs that were saved by an apartheid demolition worker prompted powerful memories for those forcibly removed from District Six.[56]

Material culture and objects themselves were not, however, sites of struggle. The District Six community mobilised around the return to District Six. Spatial apartheid, the history of forced removals and economic exclusion through neo-liberal development are still sites of political contestation in Cape Town.[57] The District Six Museum recognises the importance of the sense of place with an enlarged representation of a map of District Six that has become part of the museum's permanent exhibition.[58] On the map residents have inscribed where they lived and important sites in District Six. The exhibition is interesting because it subverts the relationship between materiality and memory: the material map is a product of memory. This can be contrasted to RESUNACT's approach where memory is facilitated by the presence of the material objects, excavated and interpreted by archaeologists.

I argue that RESUNACT's public facing programme could not focus on archaeological sites as places of memory. Firstly, the historical archaeological research project relied on the destruction of archaeological sites, albeit through careful excavation to know a history.[59] Secondly, as noted above, historical archaeological research was partially facilitated and funded by urban turnover and the excavation of sites through contract archaeology. Thus, RESUNACT's projects focused on the role of material objects, removed from the archaeological sites in facilitating memory.

As we have seen, the disconnection between place (the archaeological sites) and memory was a major point of contention at PSBG. There were two opposing views of how to recover the history of the site and conserve memory. The activist community believed that the most powerful way to remember and connect with the ancestors of PSBG was to build a memorial over the intact burial ground and to halt development of the Rockwell. For the community, the human remains, burial goods and the site were all linked, and their heritage value was based on keeping these important relationships intact.[60] Archaeologists believed that they could salvage and facilitate memory through exhumation and analysis of the material artefacts and human remains. Archaeological practice at PSBG was predicated on the idea that public history and education about the archaeological past were the best way for communities to remember the enslaved.

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55 V. Layne, 'The District Six Museum: An Ordinary People's Place', *The Public Historian*,30, 1, February 2008, 53–62.

56 M. Hall, *Archaeology and the Modern World*; V. Layne, 'The District Six Museum'.

57 A. Daniel, 'Housing as a Battlefield between Self-organization and Resistance: The Case of Reclaim the City', *Politics and Governance*, 11, 2, June 2023, 326–335.

58 C. McEachern, 'Mapping the Memories: Politics, Place and Identity in the District Six Museum, Cape Town', in S. Watson (eds.) *Museums and Their Communities* (London: Routledge, 2007).

59 M. Hall and A. Markell, 'Historical Archaeology'.

60 M. Weeder, 'Topographies of the Forgotten: Prestwich and Cape Town's Nineteenth Century Cemeteries', in B. Bennett et al. (eds), *City–Site–Museum: Reviewing Memory Practices at the District Six Museum*. ( Cape Town: District Six Museum, 2018); District Six Museum Archive, Prestwich Place Committee (PPC), 'PPC, Submission to DAC Tribunal', 20 May 2004.

On the other hand, for communities, social history and memorial practices were vital for keeping memory of the site alive.[61] The contestation about the importance of conserving the site and keeping the material in the ground was also connected to debates about who writes the history of the enslaved and the so-called underclass of colonial Cape Town. Archaeology could write an archaeological narrative about the past, but they could not speak for the enslaved or give them voice.[62] The different ontological understandings of archaeological sites and the 'objects' from archaeological sites were not considered by archaeologists when conceptualising RESUNACT's public archaeology programme.

## The Prestwich Place Committee challenging institutional practices

Coloniality embedded itself into archaeological practice in new and creative ways in the 1990s despite archaeologists' attempts to transform the discipline. Chameleon colonial archaeology practices shaped heritage practice when PSBG was discovered. These practices curtail the possibility for the site to push archaeologists to establish new heritage processes. The institutional practice of archaeologists, although presented as neutral and based on balancing the need to conserve heritage and facilitated development, participates in the City of Cape Town's prioritisation of economic growth over wealth redistribution and correcting historical injustices. A truly transformative archaeology cannot develop through the material provided by contract archaeology, a lesson that archaeologists only learned when community activists put other priorities for healing and restorative justice on the table. Groups like the PPC argued that PSBG was an important site of memory in post-apartheid South Africa. PSBG offered an opportunity to remember histories of slavery and forced removal that were made invisible in Green Point. The site also represented an opportunity to collectively grapple with the legacies of colonialism in Cape Town, which were not addressed by institutions like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.[63]

The PPC was constituted as a result of public contestation about the burial ground, and how it should be managed. They put alternative priorities on the table. They first applied to SAHRA and then to the Minister of Arts and Culture, to repeal the exhumation permit for PSBG granted to the ACO. They argued that the permit was not valid because exhumation of ancestral remains occurred without proper consultation as required by the NHRA. In the process, the PPC challenged the hold that archaeologists had over determining heritage management of burial grounds and ancestral remains.

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61 A. Haber and N. Shepherd (eds), *After Ethics: Ancestral Voices and Post-Disciplinary Worlds in Archaeology* (New York: Springer, 2015); G. Ralphs, 'Green Point, Globalisation and the Remains of the Prestwich Street Dead', *Archaeologies*, 4, 2, July 2008, 344–52.

62 Ralphs, 'Green Point, Globalisation'; R. Karating, 'Exhumations, Reburials and History Making in Post-Apartheid South Africa.' (MA degree in Forensic and Visual History, University of the Western Cape, 2018).

63 H. Grunebaum, 'Unburying the Dead'; Julian Jonker, 'Excavating the Legal Subject: The Unnamed Dead of Prestwich Place, Cape Town', *Griffith Law Review* 14, no. 2 (2005): 187–212.

The Minister set up a tribunal which subsequently concluded that there was appropriate consultation and that exhumation and development should continue. The tribunal did however offer a compromise: Once the human remains were exhumed, they were to be placed in an appropriate memorial in Green Point. The tribunal mandated that stakeholders such as the PPC, the City of Cape Town and SAHRA work together to establish a memorial in Green Point. Additionally, after the human remains were exhumed. The PPC along with SAHRA made the decision that no further research would be conducted on the human remains.[64]

Despite various challenges the PPC did shape how the ancestral remains from PSBG were managed. They ensured that there was some form of memorialisation in Green Point. The Prestwich Place Memorial, dedicated to PSBG, was completed in 2007 and is located on the corner of Buitengracht and Somerset Road in Green Point.[65] The ancestral remains from PSBG didn't enter a museum collection, as human remains from other informal burial grounds discovered during development did, they were not stored for their scientific significance.[66] The PPC envisioned the memorial as a site of dialogue and healing. But soon after the Prestwich Place Memorial was completed, a portion of the memorial was taken over by Truth Coffee Shop.[67] The Green Point City Improvement District (GPCID) lists Prestwich Place Memorial as its official office address.[68] City improvement districts are public private partnerships that have been set up in various Cape Town municipalities. Important public services such as security and refuge collection are taken on by CIDs. Outsourcing of public services is another hallmark of neo-liberal economic policies in South Africa.[69]

The PPC has thus had some wins and some losses. They have prevented the objectification of the ancestral remains through research. They also ensured that there is a memorial in Green Point that can be used by the descendants of the enslaved to honour the people buried at PSBG. The memorial, however, is tied up in the City of Cape Town's facilities management processes, and reclaiming PPM as a site of memory will require new mobilisation by groups such as the PPC.

## Conclusion

The PPM is still occupied by Truth Coffee Shop and the GPCID. The presence of ancestors existing alongside a coffee shop and the GPCID pushed me to re-examine the forces that shaped the heritage practice at PSBG. Thinking about what could, perhaps, be called a decolonial sensibility in archaeology, Alejandro Haber suggests to ask: 'What is there below our feet, making us move in one direction even when

64 N. Shepherd, 'Archaeology Dreaming.'
65 L. Green and N. Murray, 'Notes for a Guide to the Ossuary', *African Studies* 68, 3, November 2009, 575-586; Ralphs, 'Green Point, Globalisation'.
66 Human remains from sites such as Cobern Street burial ground have for example entered the University of Cape Town anatomical research collections.
67 C. Ernsten, 'Colonial Heritage and Urban Transformation'.
68 'GPCID Budget 2024/2025', GPCID, 2024, https://gpokcid.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/GPCID-Proposed-2024-25-budget.pdf.
69 S. Didier, 'The Adaptative Nature of Neoliberalism'.

we walk in the other?'.[70] PSBG and the contestations around it exemplify this issue in archaeology. Even when archaeologists were trying to make archaeology more accessible through education, like with the work of RESUNACT in the 1990s and early 2000s, institutions such as SHARC and the CO had already started moving in the opposite direction through contract archaeological work, which focused on facilitating development in the City of Cape Town, in the 1980s. PPM as a site where human remains from the colonial period, some of whom were enslaved, were exhumed by contract archaeologists and now work in service of a commercial coffee shop chain and a public private partnership in Green Point, is material manifestation of the history of contract and historical archaeology in South Africa.

70 A.F. Haber, 'Un-Disciplining Archaeology', *Archaeologies* 8, 1, May 2012, 55.