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**Athlone in the early twentieth century - a precursor to
working class housing on the Cape Flats**

1900-1930

Kathy Dumbrell

November 1998

This long essay is submitted to the School of Architecture and Planning, UCT in partial fulfilment of the requirements of BA (Hons) in African Studies.

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Contents

1. Acknowledgements	i
2. List of maps	iv
3. List of figures	iv
4. Introduction	1
5. Methodology	6
6. Research method	9
7. Historiographic concerns	
Athlone as part of the spatial and social history of Cape Town	13
Conservation issues	28
8. The spatialisation of socio-political issues	
Urban issues: space and society	30
Architectural issues: technology and society	35
9. The Assisted Housing Scheme, 1920's	51
10. Conclusion and recommendations	53
11. References	56
12. Appendix	
Sample of survey data sheets	59

List of Maps

Map 1. Key map of survey area	2
Map 2. Key map of survey area showing survey numbers	8
Map 3. Plan of proposed schemes of sewerage and sewage disposal..., 1891	17
Map 4. Cape District survey, Sheet 6 (extract), 1902	18
Map 5. Street grid map	31
Map 6. Cadastral map, c.1900	32

List of Figures

Figure 1. Deed diagram of Cape Freehold of Lot 299, granted 1846	14
Figure 2. Deed diagram of 1865 subdivision	15
Figure 3. Aerial photograph, 1926	19
Figure 4. Aerial photograph, 1935	20
Figure 5. Aerial photograph, 1944	21
Figure 6. Township plan: Lawrence Township	23
Figure 7. Township plan: Pliny Township	24
Figure 8a. Sheet EP73 (July 1969)	25
Figure 8b. Information from 1960's series transcribed onto survey map	26
Figure 9. Erf 33632	35
Figure 10. Plan no. 66770	36
Figure 11. Plan no. 36758	37
Figure 12. Plan no. 162457	38
Figure 13. Plan no. 16644	39
Figure 14. Plan no. 291139	40
Figure 15. Lot 19, Block W	41
Figure 16. Erf 33385	42

Figure 18. Plan no. 67734	44
Figure 19. Diagrammatic plan of 12 Plender Avenue, NTS	46
Figure 20. 12 Plender Avenue, c.1940's	47
Figure 21. Foundation detail near brick hearth	47
Figure 22. Foundation detail along east elevation	48
Figure 23. Sketch of typical brick support	48
Figure 24. New window, west elevation	49
Figure 25. Original sash window, east elevation	49
Figure 26. Threshold detail	49
Figure 27. Previous position of door	50
Figure 28. Internal view of old church entrance	50

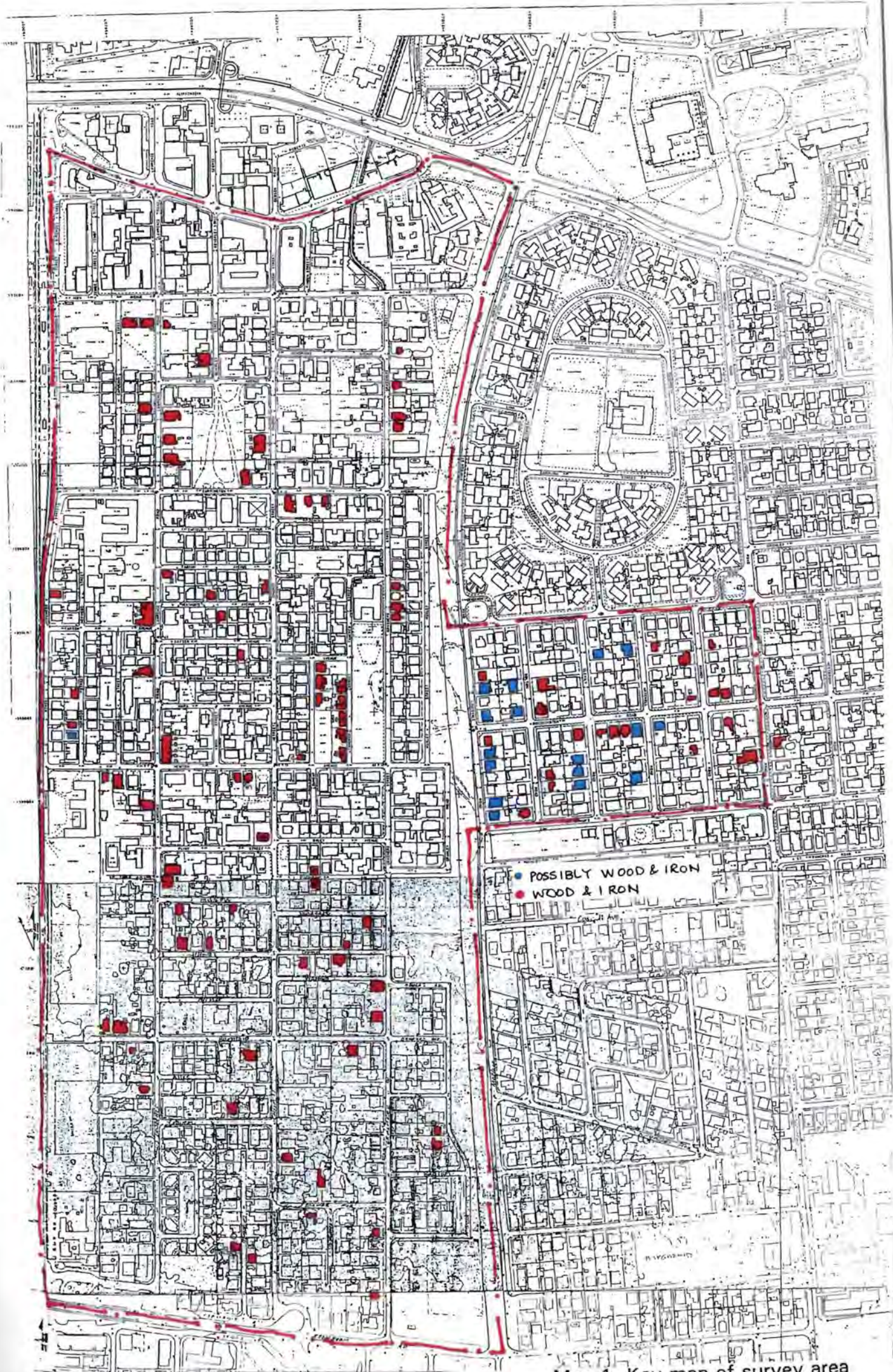
1. Introduction

The initial work for this project was a photographic survey of the existing wood and iron buildings in Athlone. I was at the time a volunteer in the Urban Conservation Unit of the Cape Town City Council (hereafter UCU). My task was to document the existing wood-and-iron buildings in order to aid later development control decision-making. To a large extent, it was the results of the fieldwork, which both uncovered a need for further research and directed later archival and textual research.

The so-called "wood-and-iron" building technique dates to the 1840's (Herbert 1978:42), when SW Brooke proposed a timber-framed portable cottage, the external panels of which could be lead, zinc, "marine metal" or corrugated iron. Brooke's accompanying detail drawings illustrate the corrugated iron option. Wood-and-iron buildings are generally timber-framed structures clad externally with corrugated iron sheets as both wall and roof material and internally with timber floors, walls and ceilings. The later buildings lined the interior with concrete, brickwork or blockwork.

Work on wood-and-iron buildings in South Africa is scarce. Two important sources are Rodd (1989) and the work of Radford (1994; 1998), both of whom identify the need for further work on the subject. Therefore, though this study is an attempt to add to their body of work, the focus of this work is on the role of the building type within a social history, rather than the "history" of a building type. The work leading to this essay has also exposed the lack of a spatial/architectural component to the history of both Cape Town and the Cape Flats.

Athlone is a working class residential area situated on the Cape Flats. Its northern boundary is the M18 (Klipfontein Road) and it is bounded to the east by Alicedale



Map 1. Key map of survey area

and Jamestown, both developed later. Originally, Alicedale, Jamestown, Gleemoor and Sunnyside were all considered part of Athlone. As in Athlone, Jamestown has had a number of names. During the 1920's, it was considered to be part of Milner Estate (later Athlone). Gleemoor and Jamestown were developed as part of the Assisted Housing Scheme, which was a housing provision scheme run by the Cape Town City Council between 1925 and 1930. The progress of this scheme is documented in the Cape Town City Council Mayor's Minutes annually from 1925 to 1930. (Mayor's Minutes 1925-1930). Alicedale was built as a rental scheme by the Cape Town City Council in 1939 (City Council 1993:2). Spatially and temporally, these later areas, in my view, did not form part of the original township of Athlone and so are treated as separate areas in this study. The survey and study area is marked in red on Map 1.

The development of Athlone prior to 1920 was piecemeal and *ad hoc*, driven, it would seem from the evidence presently to hand, largely by speculators. It marked, however, one of the early incursions of housing into the Cape Flats. Contemporary with its growth was that of Ndabeni. Athlone, unlike Ndabeni, has not been the subject of much historical study. It would seem that this was a working class area, which became perceived by Capetonians as being for those classified "Coloured" by the Population Registration Act (1950), which was, in fact, inhabited by a mixture of working class Capetonians. A number of owners listed in the Cape Town City Council's Valuation Rolls as early as 1900 and before the declaration of the area as a "Coloured" Group Area in mid-1957 (Kinkead-Weekes 1992:459) could possibly have been Xhosa-speaking. Kinkead-Weekes (1985:172) quotes a Health Department letter of 1912 as saying that, by then, "African" people had set up squatter settlements at "such places as West London, Ysterplaat and Maitland". Kinkead-Weekes (1992:460) mentions that, in 1960, there were about 400 African families in Athlone. As Bickford-Smith (1994; 1995) has shown, Cape Town was not entirely free of racial segregation in the social, residential or employment spheres. The growth of a working class suburb in

Athlone in the first quarter of this century is thus a neglected part of the urban history of Cape Town.

Three themes will be explored in this essay. The first is the historiographical significance of Athlone in the spatial and social history of Cape Town, with mention being made of the problems facing the conservation of the built fabric and cultural landscape which has evolved in Athlone. Working class environments create quite difficult problems for conservationists to resolve, as experience in both the National Monuments Council and UCU have shown. The second theme is that of the spatialisation of socio-political issues. Urban issues around wood-and-iron buildings centre on the relationship between space and society. They include the role of the state in the development of Athlone, where else wood-and-iron buildings occurred in South Africa, the world and what value people ascribed to them and the social status implied by living in them. Architectural issues relate technology to society and are chiefly concerned with the construction methods and details used in wood-and-iron buildings. The third theme is of the Cape Town City Council's Assisted Housing Scheme, which operated in the 1920's. This scheme had its origins in the critical housing shortage in Cape Town after the 1918 Spanish influenza epidemic (Shorten 1963:452) and marks the beginning of a municipal bureaucracy for housing provision. The scheme had two thrusts - the provision of "brick-built" homes (generally for the wealthier working class) and wood-and-iron houses for the poorest members of society (Mayor's Minutes 1924-1930). The way in which the scheme was applied in the provision of wood-and-iron building will be explored.

Much remains to be done in order to understand fully both the wood-and-iron building phenomenon and the development of Athlone. In order to limit the study to one appropriate for an Honours level, much has had to be glossed over or left out. The study focuses on the period from 1900-1930. In 1930, the nature of state housing provision changed significantly. After a letter, dated 15 February

1928, from the Citizen's Housing League urged the City Council to eliminate wood-and-iron from its housing schemes (CAD 3/CT 4/1/5/1033 H1256/5), the City Council stopped using wood-and-iron. This date seemed the natural cut-off for this study. In the conclusion to this essay, a number of recommendations for the kind of direction that further study could take are made. This first study has shown that the research process could well point one in other directions or force one to re-evaluate the questions being asked. The recommendations, therefore, cannot be more than ideas and the tentative posing of questions.

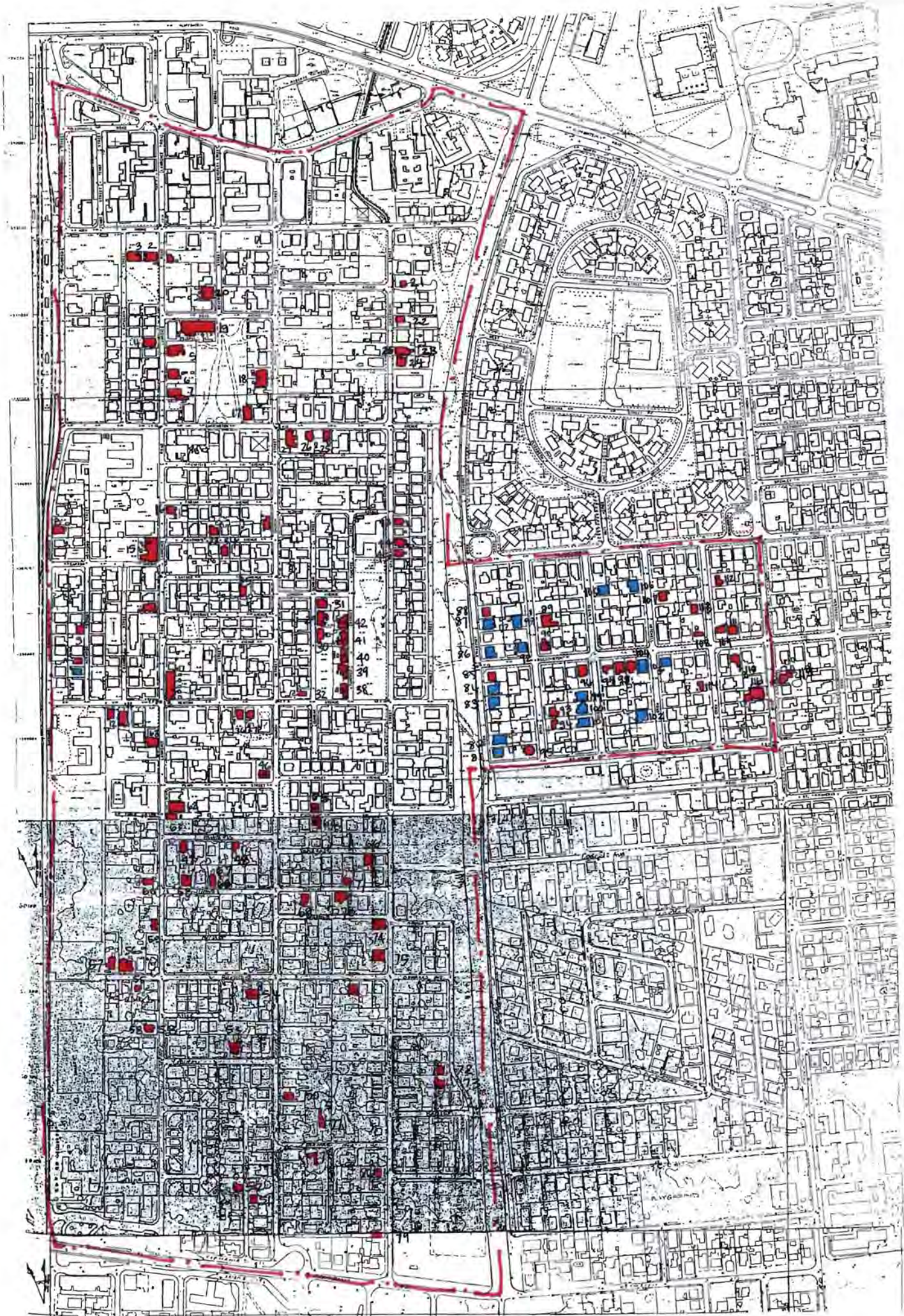
2. Methodology

This project started as a photographic survey for the UCU, in order to assess how many wood-and-iron buildings still stand in Athlone today. It then broadened into the study that this essay documents. Methodologically, one can encounter problems when a project starts in one form, with related research questions and a particular methodological framework, and later changes its purpose or scope. The research questions and methodological approach underlying a research project are crucial. It is imperative that both these be clearly articulated, as then the research process is most likely to yield relevant and useful material.

A number of concepts have influenced the methodology of this project. The first is that I believe that there is a need for architectural historians to examine buildings as more than material objects, classified in "styles". Buildings are an expression in material form of the cultural values and aspirations of both the builder and user. The environments in which buildings exist are just as important as the individual buildings, which comprise them. Le Grange (1991) uses this notion as the starting point in his work on mission stations. It is important to explore the relationships between, on the one hand, space and society and, on the other, technology and society in order to begin to understand the complex social and cultural forces which act upon places and buildings. A study of these forces necessitates an interdisciplinary study. This is the second concept, which has directed the methodology of this study. The methodological differences between disciplines mean that each has its own, valuable contribution to make to an understanding of a time or place over time - the "cultural landscape". As each understands and investigates both "culture" and "landscape" in a different way, each contributes a different facet to the collective academic understanding of the cultural landscape. The third concept, which underlies this study, is my belief that an examination of

the role of space in social history has a valuable contribution to make to the historical understanding of places and cities. Pinnock's (1989) article on the effect of apartheid planning on the urban form of Cape Town is an example of this. It raises awareness amongst planners, architects and historians of the interconnected nature of the relationship between state policy, urban planning and the nature and quality of the lives of those who inhabit the cities. It is important to re-populate architectural history with the ordinary people whose lives are most affected by the space of the city.

Athlone, as an important, well-established working class area, which has not received the attention that places like District Six has, but which now houses many displaced people from "the District", is a good place to start this re-population. The fact that a building technology, which has not elsewhere been documented as part of the Cape building tradition, was a dominant feature of early Athlone makes this study essential as a contribution to architectural history.



Map 2. Key map of survey area showing survey numbers

3. Research method

The research process has had two thrusts. The first is the fieldwork, which aims to survey a given area of Athlone in order to determine how many wood-and-iron buildings are still extant and to photograph them where possible. The second is the text and image-based research, which is not based in the field, but in institutions such as libraries, the archives, Deeds Office and Council. These two processes have been conducted in parallel, resulting in an overall process that has not been linear. The two directions of research - the fieldwork and the historical research - complement one another and each has informed the direction of the other.

An important result of this dual thrust in the research work is that a wide variety of sources have been used in this work. Different sources were accessed during different phases of the project.

The Fieldwork

The preliminary photographic survey, undertaken for the Urban Conservation Unit in February 1996, documented only partially the survey area of this dissertation. This year, that original study was expanded. The study area for the fieldwork comprises two areas: firstly, the area bound by Old Klipfontein Road, the railway line, Kromboom Road and Jan Smuts Drive and secondly, the area bound by Louisvale, Denchworth, St Athan's and Thornton Roads. (Refer to Map 2)

The survey involved marking the location of each extant wood-and-iron house on a City Council 1:2000 area map (Map 2). The occupant was then, where possible, asked for permission to take a photograph before one was taken. The street address and the name of the occupant (where the person was prepared to give that information) were then noted. Though it would have been preferable to fill in the

pro forma data sheets (refer Appendix) while in the field, this was not possible as they were only set up after the fieldwork was well underway.

The *pro forma* data sheets were designed as a result of discussions with David Worth of the RESUNACT research group in the Archaeology Department, UCT. RESUNACT is presently engaged in a survey exercise for Woodstock. The methodological concerns which informed their data sheet design are ones which I felt it appropriate to use in my own data sheet design. These concerns were that it should be easy for data to be transferred onto a computer database and should allow a number of different research questions to be posed to the survey material. These questions need not be asked by the same researcher, nor even at the same time. The fields included in the data sheets do not necessarily have to all be filled now and can also be added to, allowing the survey to grow as different research questions are asked. Using similar *pro forma* data sheets means that the two studies could, potentially, be used together, with each containing similar data to facilitate comparative studies.

Each building marked on the 1:2000 map has been given a number, which corresponds to the "record number" on each data sheet. The erf number, property reference number, physical address and any photographs of the property are then entered on this sheet for each building. In the computer database form, this information will be linked to GIS information, using the erf number as the means of linking the GIS and database information. As other information on any one building is found, it can easily be added to the relevant data sheet and to the computer database. This will mean that the database can be used for both academic and development control purposes. The UCU is currently setting up a "Conservation database" (Melanie Attwell pers. comm) and it is envisaged that my database could link up into their larger database and so aid their work.

Historical research

The first phase of archival and other research involved searching the City Council collection of old plans for plans of wood-and-iron buildings and the collection of historic maps for maps of the area. At this point the Mayor's Minutes (c1900-1930) were searched for references to Athlone. This revealed the existence of the Assisted Housing Scheme in Athlone in the 1920's.

After the search for plans and maps, the South African Library and National Monuments Council library were searched for material. There primary and secondary textual sources, such as Herbert's Pioneers of Prefabrication (1978), were consulted. Only a few sources were found, the most important of which were Kearney (1973), Hartdegen (1989) and Conservation Awards Committee of the Durban City Council (1992). Pictorial sources, such as photographs in the Archives and South African Library, deed diagrams and other survey information from both the Deeds Office and Archives were then searched. In the African Studies Library at UCT relevant material was most often to be found in theses. The most useful of these was Budow (1976) and Dawood (1994).

Information from oral sources, gathered through both informal and formal interviews, has also guided the project. Through the Housing Branch, contact was made with Alderman Mrs Stott, who had been active in the provision of housing during her time as a Councillor for the City of Cape Town. As her interest was primarily in Alicedale, a transcript was made of the interview conducted with her, which was not used in this project.

Writing a history of Athlone

The two sets of material gleaned in the two processes outlined above complement one another. Just as historical archaeology finds historical (or text-based) research immensely valuable in the study of excavated material culture, so architectural

history, I feel, benefits from the complementary use of fieldwork and historical research. In writing this essay, all the material, irrespective of how it was gathered, is drawn on to formulate the argument. But different kinds of material obviously have different limitations and usefulness. This is borne in mind as the argument is constructed and different sorts of evidence are drawn on at different points in the essay. As architecture is a discipline, which communicates graphically, I feel that architectural history should be considered and communicated by both text and graphics. Illustrations (and the close integration of text and image where appropriate) are therefore integral to this text. The intended result is a text, which communicates architectural historical subject matter in a manner befitting a discipline, which is, in fact, a discipline within the discipline of architecture.

4. Historiographic concerns

Athlone: an interesting component of the spatial and social history of Cape Town

With the relocation of Black Capetonians to the Uitvlugt camp (later to be called Ndabeni) in 1901, the first incursion of residential areas into the Cape Flats had begun. The "sanitation syndrome" (Swanson 1977; Bickford-Smith 1995), which gripped Cape Town's municipal leaders at that time, was one of the factors at play in an increasing desire to remove the poor from the centre of Cape Town, where slums had grown up during the nineteenth century. Judges (1977) describes the work of the Wardmasters in 1840, which gives evidence of the extent of overcrowding even then. Shorten (1963:451) implies that similar conditions existed into the early years of this century. Radford (1998:8) notes that, from 1896, Mowbray, Rondebosch and Claremont all required the external walls of new buildings to be of brick or stone. As wood-and-iron construction was cheaper than these, this ruling effectively prohibited poorer people from building in those areas. Athlone, while close to those suburbs, did allow wood-and-iron construction. The working class residential areas of the Cape Flats are, in part, the result of complex and subtle initiatives such as these. The extension of rail services meant that the poor could be moved onto the periphery of the city and still get to their places of employment.

A chronology of the different names given to Athlone during its history, was compiled from the comparison of maps, plans and deeds from different periods. Athlone was first referred to on official survey information as "Black River" as it is across the Black River from Rondebosch. After this the area became known as West London, before changing its name to Milner. The present name of Athlone came into usage in the 1920's. Oral sources say that this re-naming was in honour of the Countess Athlone.

For subdivisions of this diagram see outline Cape 5,3, 272.

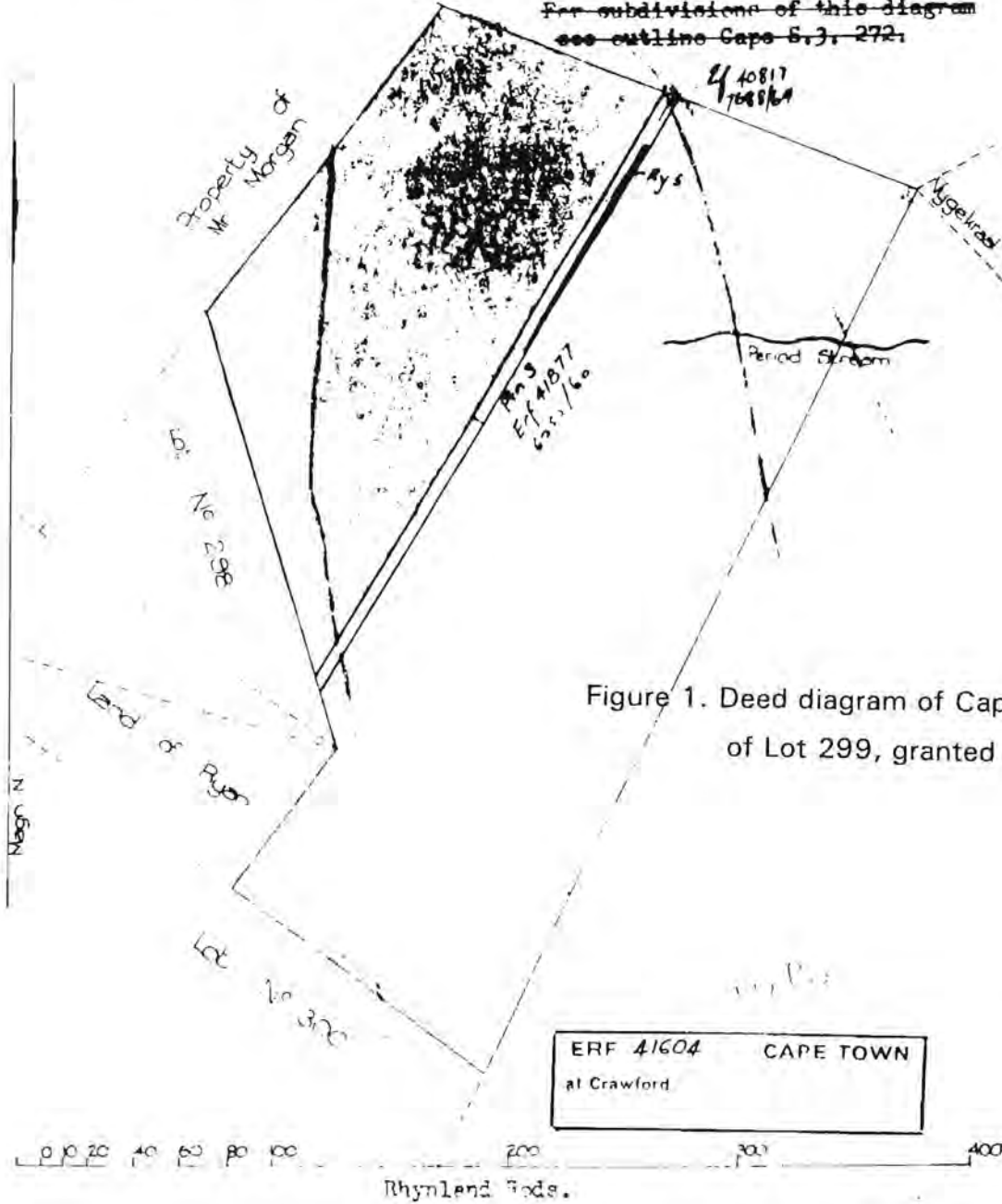


Figure 1. Deed diagram of Cape Freehold of Lot 299, granted 1846

The above Diagram represents 130 Morgen 521 Square Rods of Land situate in the Cape Division, near the Krombooms river, being the Lot No. 299.

Bounded N by Government Ground

E " the Outspan Place

S " Lot No. 300

W " Property of Mr. Ryan & property of Mr. Morgan

SW " Lot No. 298

Surveyed by me.

(Sgd.) J. Knobel.

Sworn Surveyor.

G.F. 12 (Pt. 1) 38

14th June, 1846

Charles Mc Kenzie.

John G. Cow

9 AUG 1951

For list of deductions see back of diagram

CHECKED DATA 24-4-51

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The earliest record of ownership of the area now called Athlone is the diagram (Figure 1) of the Cape Freehold of Lot 299 granted to Charles Mackenzie on 30 June 1846.

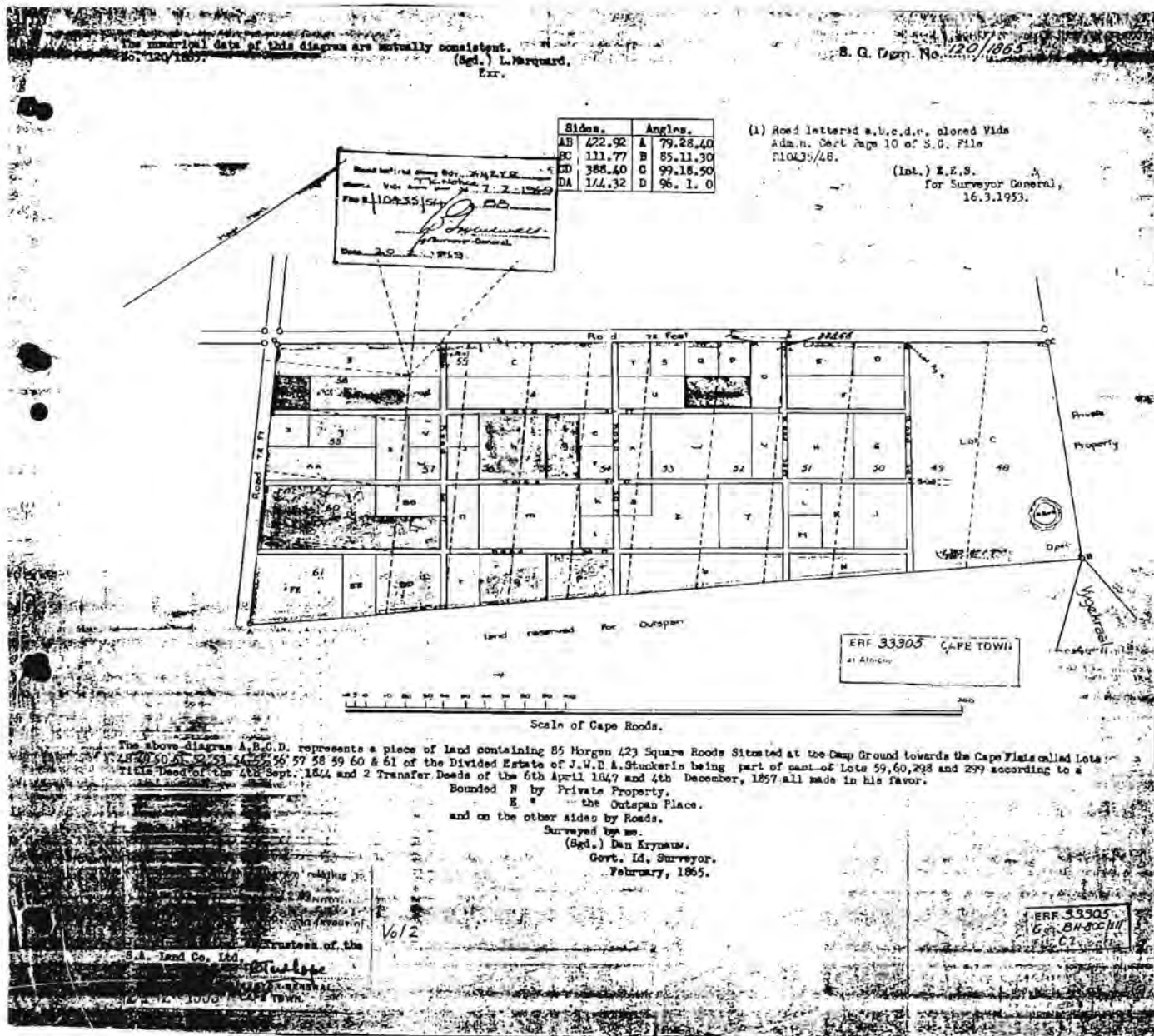


Figure 2. Deed diagram of 1865 subdivision

The deed diagram of 1865 (Figure 2) shows Lot 59, Lot 60, Lot 298 and Lot 299 consolidated and then subdivided into 56 Lots. The transfer, dated 1866, is in favour of the SA Land Co. Stuckeris had taken transfer of Lot 60 on 6 April 1847 and of Lots 298 and 299 on 4 December 1857. The subdivision is dated 1865. On this diagram, seven streets are shown. The township layout looks like that of present-day Athlone. The position of those streets corresponds to the positions of St Aden's Avenue, Carrington Avenue, Newton Avenue, Bamford Avenue, Lawrence Avenue, Church Street, and Grasmere Street. Of these 56 lots, Lot H became Lawrence Township and Lot g became Pliny Township. The "9 Doors" stands on portions 3 and 4 of Lot X (refer No. 13 in Appendix). It is a well-known landmark in the area, a terrace of nine tiny cottages on two consolidated erven, where each dwelling has a door and a window onto Lawrence Road.

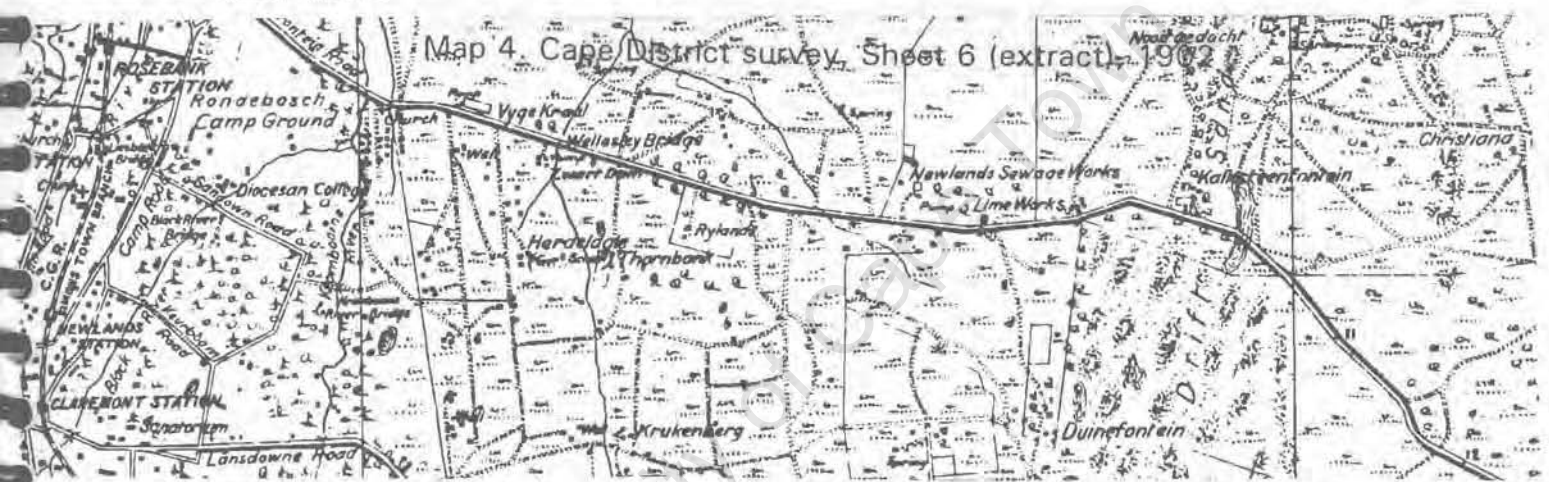
The large tracts of land into which the area was divided and the subsequent development of "townships" lead me to believe that speculative development played a significant role in the development of Athlone. In this context, "township" is used in its pure town-planning sense, meaning an area of urban development. The recurrence of a few names as owners of the lots lends credence to this proposition. Whether those owners were absentee landlords would have to be verified by other means, such as investigating each lot further and collecting oral histories from older inhabitants of the area. Why they were not living on their properties would have to be investigated in order to understand the social composition of turn of the century Athlone. The crucial question would be whether landlords owned a number of properties, but lived within Athlone or whether they owned pieces of land both in Athlone and elsewhere and lived elsewhere. During the nineteenth century, landlords, like JAH Wicht, occupied what researchers have called the "rising commercial class" (Warren 1988:45) and often lived in an entirely different area from their rental properties. Where the landowners lived would indicate to what extent Athlone reflected the social composition that characterised other Cape Town suburbs at the turn of the century. After 1875, segregation "gradually reached down into Cape Town's lower classes and separated Africans,

Coloureds and Whites" (Bickford-Smith 1995:210) and so urban residential space became more segregated. Further research into individual landlords and landowners would indicate what position those landowners occupied in an increasingly segregated Cape Town and whether land ownership in particular areas was restricted in any way to any particular class or socially or legally defined ethnic group.



Map 3. Plan of proposed schemes of sewerage and sewage disposal..., 1891

Map 3, dated 1891 (Surveyor General's Office 1891) does not show any subdivision in the area, which was to become Athlone, while Map 4, from about 1900, shows that Lot 299 and Lot 298 had been consolidated and divided into Lots 39 to 61. This is consistent with the information on the 1865 deed diagram. On the 1900 map two strips of land are shown. The one was later to become Kromboom Road and the other the railway line. Map 4 of 1902 shows the area as, according to its key, "ground not under cultivation, mostly heavy sand and scrub" on which there are a few scattered houses. A well is shown next to a "veldt road". From its position, this track could have become the site of the present railway line. This map would tend to indicate that building activity only intensified after 1902.



The growth of Athlone is clearly illustrated in a series of aerial photographs. The earliest (Figure 3) dates to 1926 (refer aerial photograph references). It does not capture the whole area, but a number of the houses found in the survey can be identified. These are highlighted in red. The aerial photograph (Figure 4) is from 1935 (refer aerial photograph references).

Unfortunately the photographs discussed here are not all to the same scale. A comparison between the 1926 and 1935 photographs shows the way existing lots of land were divided up and developed. First the large tract of land was developed to become Athlone. The irregularly-shaped piece of land, which borders on Klipfontein Road remains undeveloped in the 1935 photograph, but the lot of land immediately below it has been developed. This is Gleemoor. The layout of the



Figure 3. Aerial photograph, 1926



Figure 4. Aerial photograph, 1935



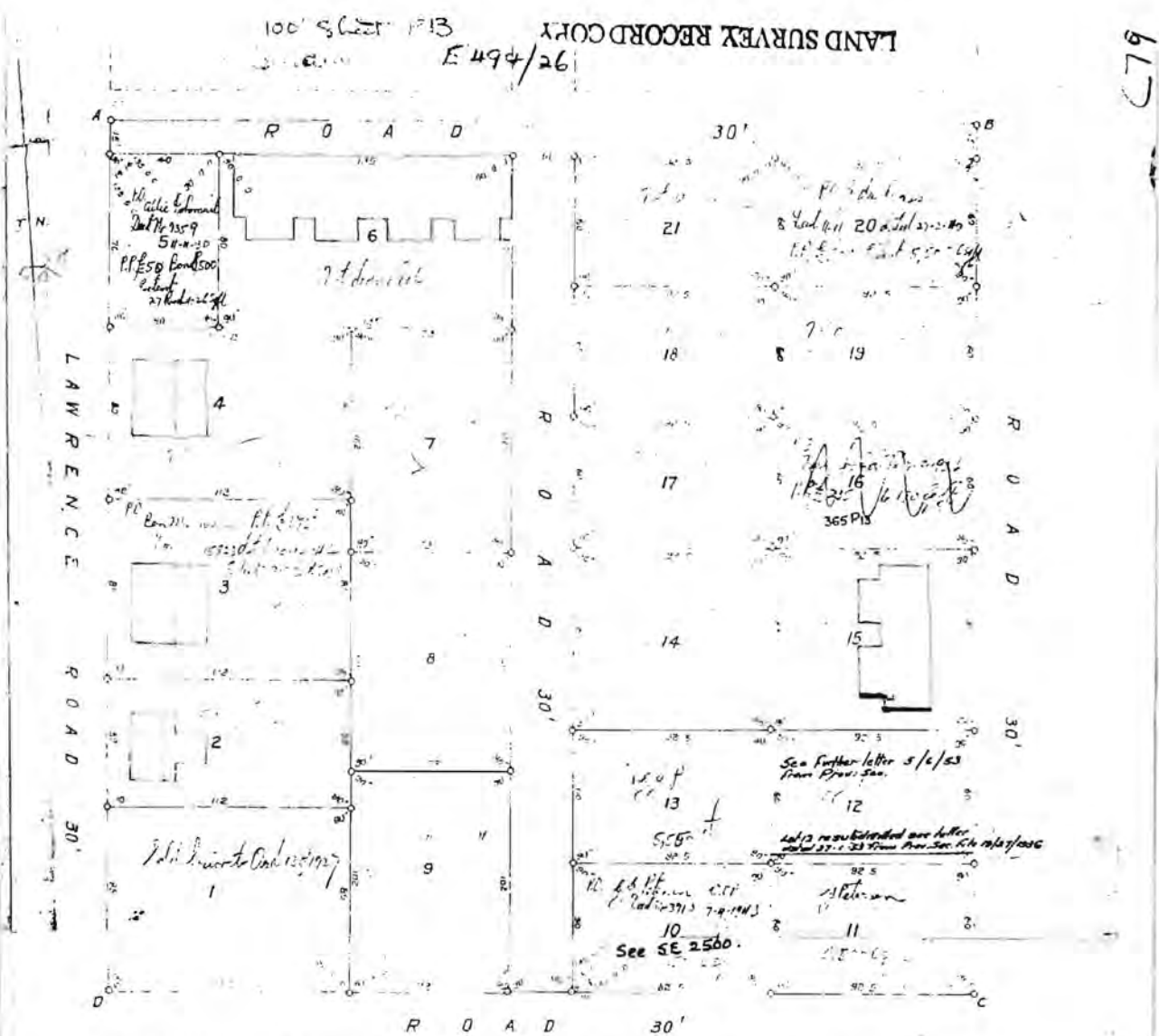
streets is very clearly planned. Unlike the irregular roads and differing block sizes in Athlone, Jamestown and Gleemoor are defined by a grid. The last aerial photograph (Figure 5) dates from 1944 (refer aerial photograph references). On it, Athlone, Gleemoor, Jamestown and Alicedale can be seen. Alicedale, developed in 1939, shows the influence of Modernist planning principles in its layout.

What is curious in the development of Athlone are the "townships" to be found within the existing suburb. Two of these are Lawrence Township and Pliny Township.

Lawrence Township (refer Figure 6) was created in 1926 (CAD PAA 245 Reference: AF 20/1/171) by the subdivision of Lot H. The township was approved in the Government Gazette of 29 November 1929. The land was owned by Mrs MJ Mossop who held it by a deed of transfer dated 22 January 1897. Seven buildings existed on the land at the time of the subdivision. These included the row of 8 terraced cottages on Boyd street and a terrace of three cottages on Church street. These two buildings were dated by the owner's lawyer in a letter to Council (dated 30 November 1928) as having been built in about 1902. Lot 10 of the township, on which a wood and iron house stands, was sold to the City Council in 1946 for open space. The other wood and iron houses which are still on this lot are also shown as existing on the subdivision drawing.

Pliny Township (refer Figure 7) was declared in the Government Gazette on 21 August 1931. The land was owned by S R Haybittel, who had bought it from T Lawton, a lawyer. Lawton had owned the land since 1893. The land was subdivided in 1931 into ten erven. Two of these measured 80 and 85 foot and eight measured 60 and 85 foot. The two lots bounding on Church street were zoned for business or ecclesiastical use, while Lot A was zoned for ecclesiastical use. The township conditions imposed included that the lots were not to be further subdivided, there was to be no more than one building per erf, all buildings were to

Figure 6. Township plan: Lawrence Township



PLAN T.P. 21@
LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP

Situate at ATHLONE City of CAPE TOWN

SIDES	ANGLES
AB 400	A 90° 0' 0"
BC 400	B 90° 0' 0"
CD 400	C 90° 0' 0"
DA 400	D 90° 0' 0"

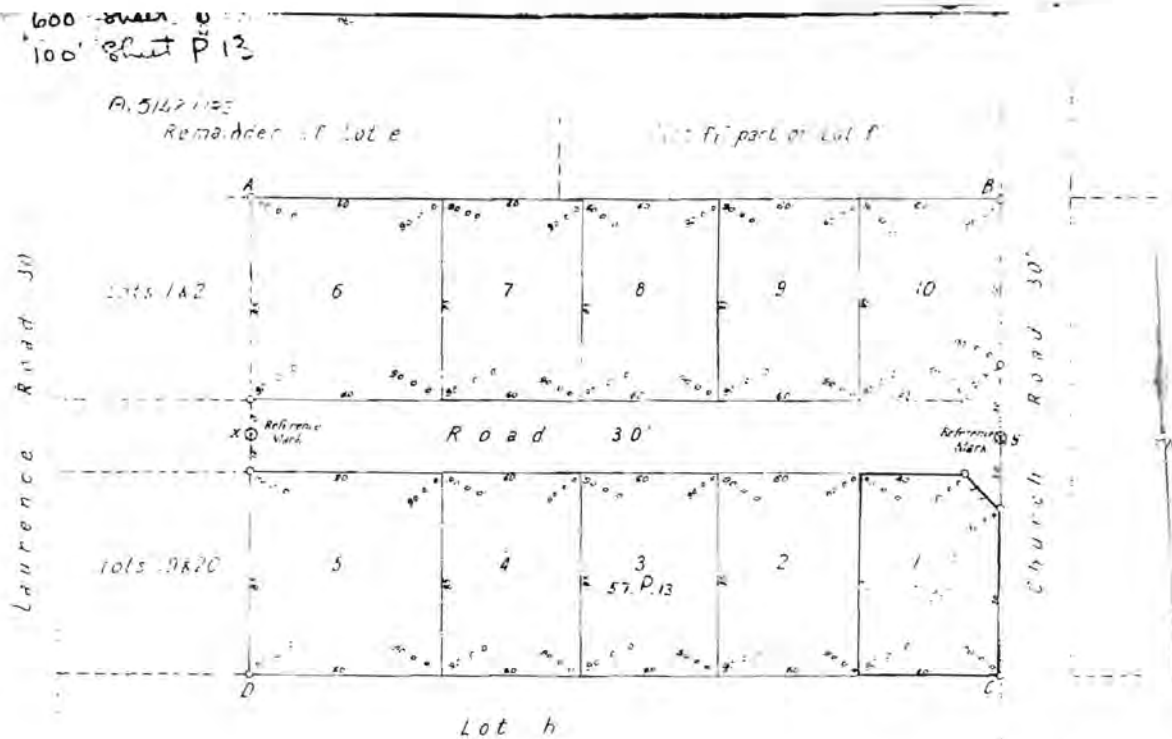
Scale 40 Cape Feet = 1 Inch
 Portion of Lot H transf'd to M.J. Measop on the 12th Jan 1897 1897 S 327
 All corners at junction of roads are staked in ft except those of Luts 6 & 11
 Surveyed and beaconed by me
 139d Charles Armin
 Govt Land Surveyor Dec 1926
 Notified as an Approved Township in terms of Section 17(1) of Ord. N° 13 of 1927
 Sec. Notice N° 549 dated 28 Nov 1929 Prov. Ord. N° 1238 Jaled 29 Nov 1929 (link) F.F.E. 6 12 1929
 In terms of Section 15 of Ord. N° 13 of 1927 the Administrator has granted
 the application to establish this Township. See Prov. Sec. Minute L.10/c/459
 dated 28 2 1929 T.P. File 16/77
 Approved under the provisions of Ordinance N° 15 1927 File 510-35/7
 139d A.J.J. Simons
 General Surveyor
 9 4 29

79

79

79

Figure 7. Township plan: Pliny Township

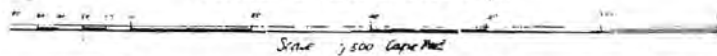


LAND SURVEY RECORD COPY

Lot No	Sq. Feet
1	4980
2	5120
3	5120
4	5120
5	5120
6	4820
7	5120
8	5120
9	5120
10	4980

General Plan
of the
PLINY TOWNSHIP
situate at
RONDEBOSCH
in the
CITY of CAPE TOWN
Province of Cape of Good Hope

Sides	Angles
45	90 0 0
50	90 0 0
52	90 0 0
54	90 0 0



Area of lots	15.7
Perimeter	343
Area of road	1341
Perimeter of road	21.8.31
Surveyor	(Init'd) A. J. S.
Date	24. 8. 31

Note The figure lettered ABCD represents the remaining extent of the diagram belonging to the Deed of Transfer No 329 made in favour of W P Murray and dated 22nd January 1897 being Remainder of Lot g or the Remainder of the ground called Lots 4 & 5

The beacons of each erf or part mentioned on this plan are in accordance with regulation and have been placed by me under my supervision

650/83.

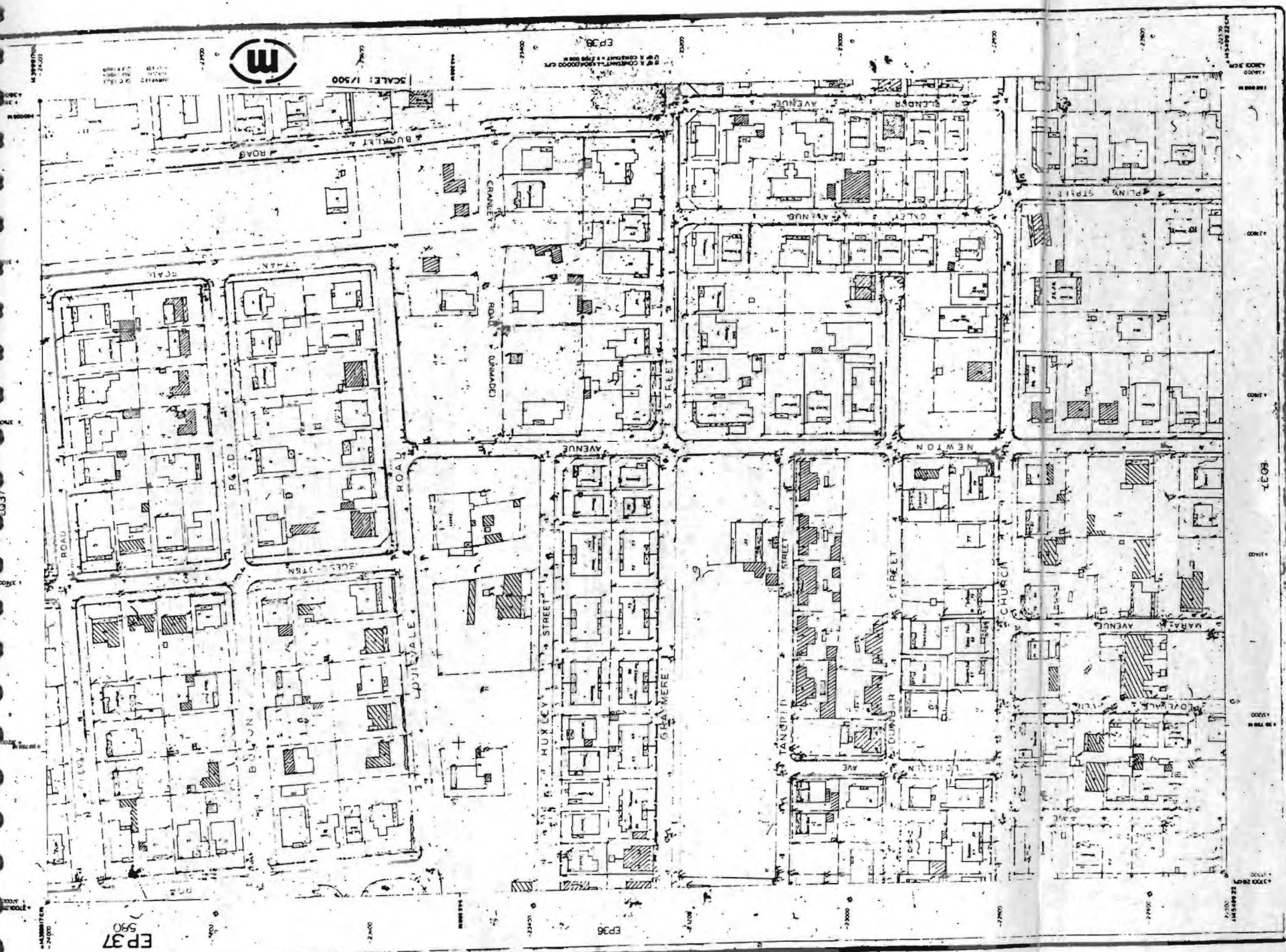


Figure 8a. Sheet EP73 (July 1969)

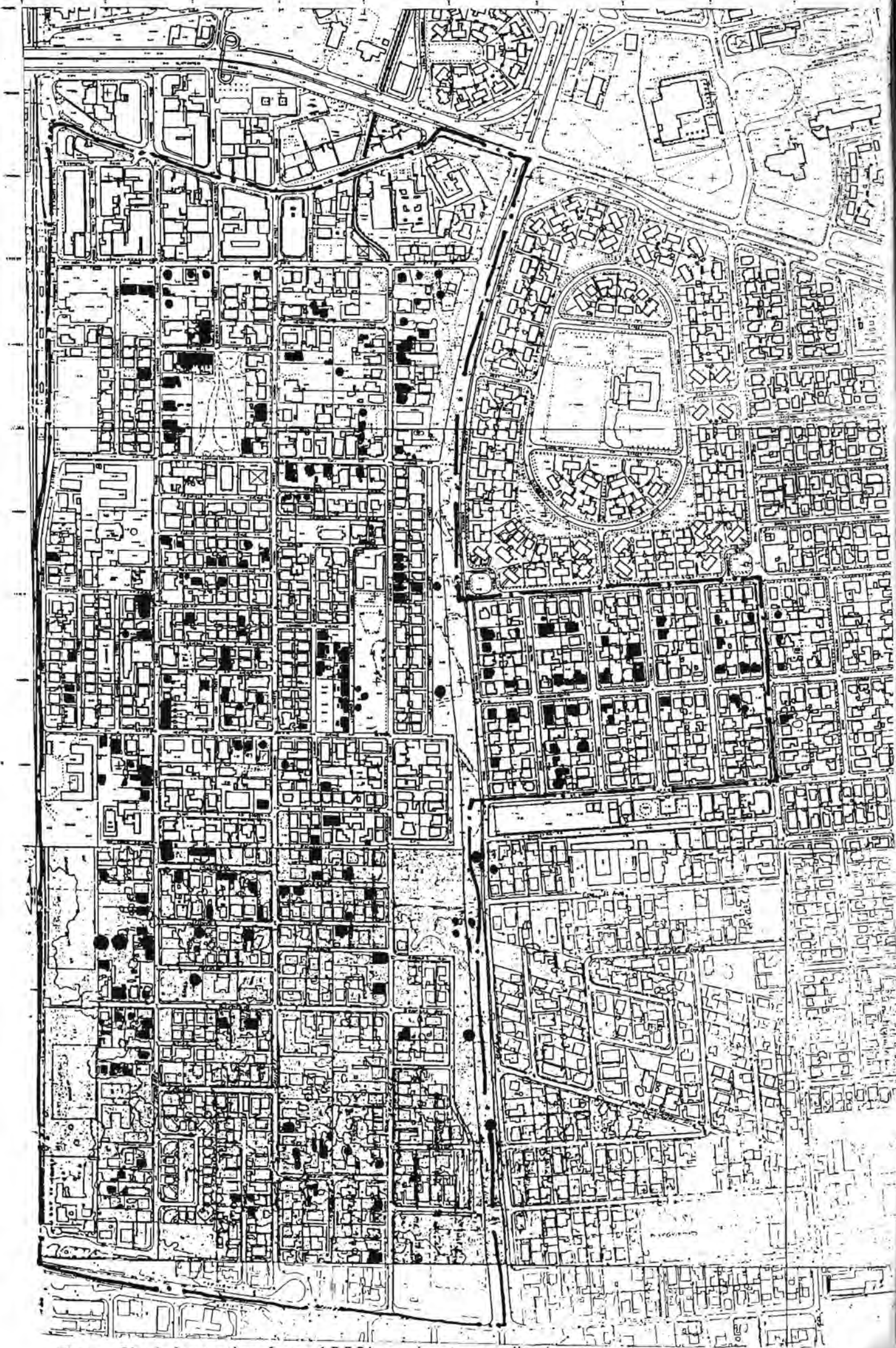


Figure 8b. Information from 1960's series transcribed onto survey map

have a 15 foot setback and the junctions between the erven and the road were to be splayed.

The survey work revealed two kinds of wood-and-iron construction in the study area. In the one, which only occurred in the area between Klipfontein Road and Kromboom Road, the Railway and Jan Smuts Drive, the corrugations on the wall cladding ran vertically, while on the other, in the Assisted Housing Scheme areas of Jamestown and Gleemoor, the corrugations on the wall panels ran horizontally. This seemed to indicate that the buildings had been built by different builders or that the buildings were built at different times. The information to be found on the earliest deeds for a sample of buildings showed that, firstly the ones with the corrugations running horizontally on the walls were all built as part of the Assisted Housing Scheme and, secondly, that the buildings with corrugations running vertically were generally older.

In dating buildings, the most efficient method is the use of "dating screens". This is particularly helpful when one cannot find the original plans of the building being dated. Thus, while one can often not say exactly when a building was built, one at least can say that it was before a certain date. A very useful series of plans, drawn to 1:500 scale by the City Council in the 1960's (Figure 8a), has served as a definitive dating screen for the existing houses found in the survey. A few buildings, which were not identified in the survey, are shown as wood-and-iron on these plans. In highlighting wood-and-iron buildings on the aerial photographs, these are also shown. This proves that the houses currently extant in Athlone, Jamestown and Gleemoor were already there in the late 1960's (refer Figure 8b). Many of them can in turn be traced to the 1935 and 1926 aerial photographs, providing evidence that they are at least that old.

This history is intentionally brief, as its purpose is to introduce the piece of land, which became Athlone. The later themes in this essay will add to the material presented here.

Conservation issues

The issues raised for urban conservationists in areas such as Athlone, Jamestown and Gleemoor are complex. The inhabitants generally do not have much money. The built fabric has generally remained intact because owners or occupants either do not want to or cannot afford to maintain the buildings. Thus, they are often in a deteriorated condition, making restoration an expensive option. For most people, demolition is the only real alternative, as a new house can often be built for less than restoration would cost.

The fact that the wealth of wood-and-iron buildings on the Cape Flats and particularly in Athlone was not known to urban conservationists before this study began, highlights a problem which has existed in Cape Town conservation circles. It is one shared by urban conservation authorities and practitioners throughout South Africa. This is that only the monuments, public buildings and other buildings associated with the powerful were recognised as being of significance. The Burra Charter considers that "the places that are likely to be of significance are those which help an understanding of the past or enrich the present, and which we believe will be of value to future generations". As wood-and-iron buildings were an integral part of the history of Athlone, it is not difficult to argue their significance, but until now the past that was protected did not include the past of the poorer members of society. According to Melanie Attwell (pers. comm.), current thinking on urban conservation is changing, however. There are moves to consider whole environments, rather than individual buildings, conservation-worthy. The problem of just how to protect impoverished areas without encouraging gentrification and

the inevitable alienation of the original inhabitants of the area is yet to be solved, however.

In the absence of any form of protection, wood-and-iron houses continue to be demolished. Since the fieldwork started in 1996, two houses in the study area have been demolished. Because they are viewed as inferior to brick houses, inhabitants want to replace them with brick. This perception of wood-and-iron will be examined later as part of the relationship between space and society.

The conservation-worthiness of wood-and-iron buildings is indisputable, but it is important that the people who live in them and near them believe that they are worth conserving before authorities implement conservation strategies "from above". Community participation in the conservation process is vital. Without it, the conservation of people's environments will not be an empowering process, but yet another instance of others determining what is best for those directly affected.

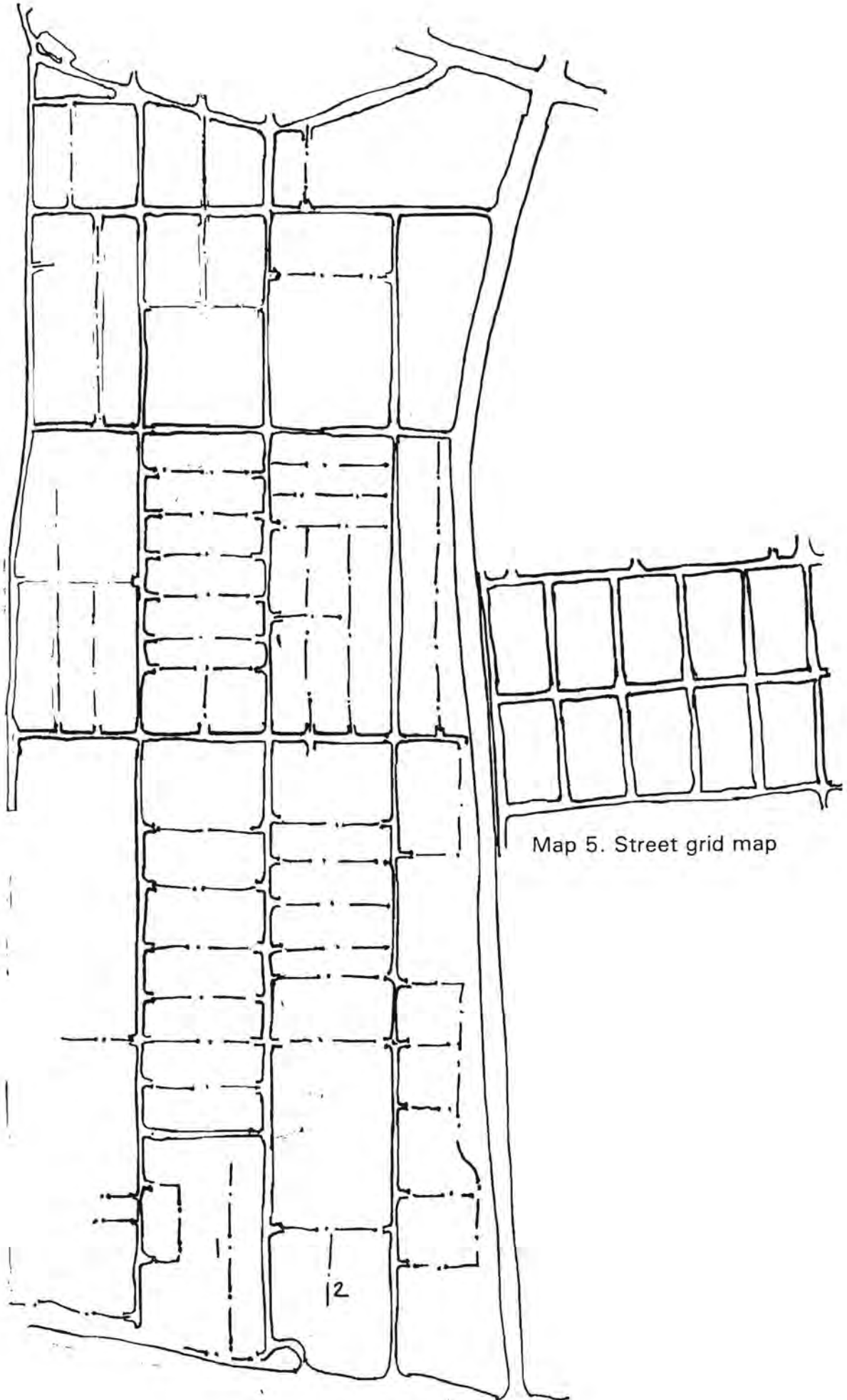
4. The spatialisation of socio-political issues

Urban issues: space and society

In this section, two parallel themes are explored. Both are urban issues, however, in that they relate to groups of buildings rather than individual buildings. The first is comprised of two sections and relates specifically to Athlone, Jamestown and Gleemoor as places. The second concerns wood-and-iron buildings as a building type influenced by both local and overseas trends.

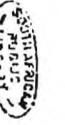
From speculation to municipal housing schemes

The early phase of Athlone's development was the product of land speculation. By 1865, the land that comprises the Athlone part of the study area (erf 33305) had been subdivided into lots and the basis of the primary street grid had been laid. The existence of "townships" within that matrix was caused by the further subdivision of larger lots into individual erven. The case of Lawrence Township is interesting, as the name of the owner at the time of the declaration of the land as a "township" occurs twice on the 1942 Town Planning map (TPR 840). The lot contained a variety of housing types. There were a number of individual houses, a terrace of four cottages and a terrace of eight cottages on the land in 1926. It is doubtful that Mrs Mossop lived in any of these buildings, as the fact that her name occurs twice would suggest that she was a landlord and did not live in her property. The Haybittel family owned seven pieces of land in Athlone according to the 1942 map, including the "Nine Doors". Who these people were, what their professions were and where they lived would need to be investigated further in order to ascertain the level of absentee landlordism in Athlone in the early twentieth century.

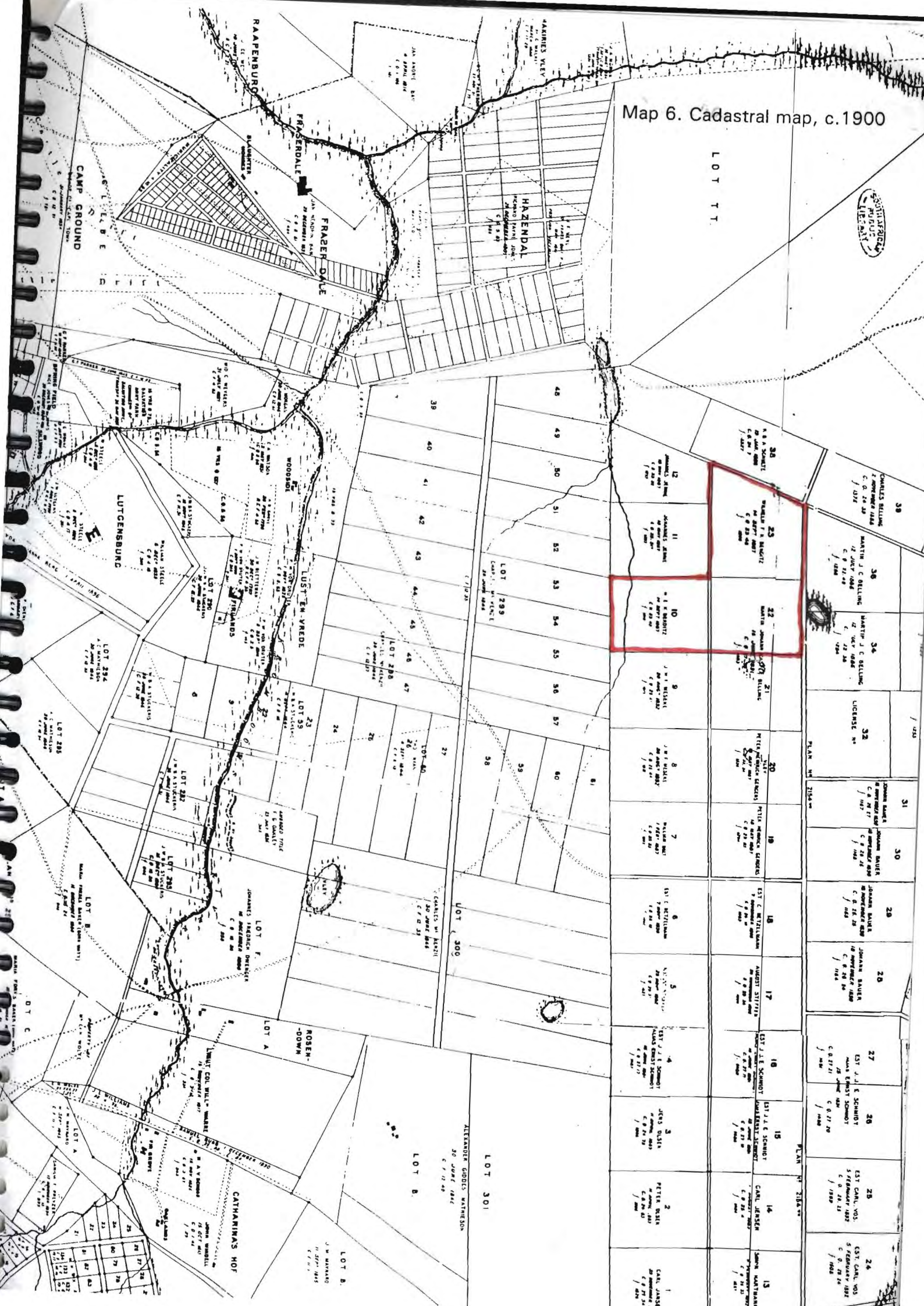


Map 5. Street grid map

Map 6. Cadastral map, c.1900



LOT T T



38	CHARLES BILLING	2 NOVEMBER 1888	C. O. 24 23	1/102
36	MARTIN J. C. BILLING	12 JULY 1888	C. O. 21 24	
34	MARTIN J. C. BILLING	12 JULY 1888	C. O. 21 24	
32	LICENSE			
31	JOHANN SAUER	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
30	JOHANN SAUER	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
29	JOHANN SAUER	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
28	JOHANN SAUER	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
27	EST. J. J. E. SCHMIDT	28 FEBRUARY 1887	C. O. 27 20	
26	EST. J. J. E. SCHMIDT	28 FEBRUARY 1887	C. O. 27 20	
25	EST. CARL. WOS	5 FEBRUARY 1887	C. O. 28 23	
24	EST. CARL. WOS	5 FEBRUARY 1887	C. O. 28 23	

23	BRUNNEN F. H. BUCHTITZ	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
22	MARTIN JOHANN	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
21	PETER WILHELM SCHMIDT	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
20	PETER WILHELM SCHMIDT	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
19	PETER WILHELM SCHMIDT	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
18	EST. C. WITZLI	9 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
17	AUGUST STIFFER	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
16	EST. J. J. E. SCHMIDT	28 FEBRUARY 1887	C. O. 27 20	
15	EST. J. J. E. SCHMIDT	28 FEBRUARY 1887	C. O. 27 20	
14	CARL JASPER	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
13	JOHANN HARTMANN	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	

12	JOHANNES ALBERT	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
11	JOHANNES ALBERT	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
10	JOHANNES ALBERT	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
9	J. J. E. SCHMIDT	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
8	J. J. E. SCHMIDT	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
7	J. J. E. SCHMIDT	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
6	EST. J. J. E. SCHMIDT	28 FEBRUARY 1887	C. O. 27 20	
5	EST. J. J. E. SCHMIDT	28 FEBRUARY 1887	C. O. 27 20	
4	EST. J. J. E. SCHMIDT	28 FEBRUARY 1887	C. O. 27 20	
3	JESUS DUBIS	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
2	PETER WILHELM SCHMIDT	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
1	CARL JASPER	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	

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31	LOT 31			
32	LOT 32			
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57	LOT 57			
58	LOT 58			
59	LOT 59			
60	LOT 60			
61	LOT 61			

LOT 294	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 295	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 296	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 297	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 298	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 299	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 300	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 301	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 302	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 303	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 304	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 305	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 306	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 307	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 308	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 309	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 310	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 311	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 312	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 313	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 314	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 315	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 316	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 317	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 318	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 319	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	
LOT 320	A. C. WITZLI	18 SEPTEMBER 1887	C. O. 28 24	

After the First World War and the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918, Cape Town had a severe housing shortage. The City Council had to become active in housing provision in order to alleviate the crisis. (Shorten 1963:452) The Assisted Housing Scheme is first mentioned in the Mayor's Minutes of 1924. There had, however, been mention of a "Municipal Housing Scheme", a "Municipal Provision of Homes Loan" and a "Government Housing Loan" from 1922 (Mayor's Minutes 1922:ii). State and local authority involvement in housing provision was increasing during the 1920's. Gleemoor and Jamestown were developed as part of the Assisted Housing Scheme, which will be dealt with in further detail later in this paper.

From *ad hoc* development to planned schemes

The initial subdivision of Athlone put in place a grid of major roads, but the subsequent speculative development created an *ad hoc* planning layout for the area. This resulted in the street grid illustrated in Map 5, where the streets laid out originally are shown in a heavier line thickness than those laid out later. As further subdivisions of larger plots took place, more roads were laid out to facilitate direct access to the subdivided properties. Examples of this condition are Hendon Road and Dormer Close (marked 1 and 2 respectively on Map 5).

Jamestown and Gleemoor were planned areas. They were built on the plots of land shown on the c.1900 map (Map 6) as Lots 10, 22 and 23. The study area includes Lot 10 (Jamestown), but not the other two Lots. They are therefore not shown in their entirety on Map 5. The Municipality laid out roads and sold plots to prospective residents. As a result, a uniformity of street layout is evident in the area.

Jamestown and Gleemoor became one of the major sites for the Assisted Housing Scheme in wood-and-iron during the 1920's, which represented the systematisation of a previously *ad hoc* building system.

Wood-and-iron in Cape Town and elsewhere

The wood-and-iron building technique has its origins in nineteenth century Britain. Gilbert Herbert (1978) has documented very thoroughly the exportation of this technology to all the corners of the British Empire. As Dennis Radford (1994:88) argues, however, this work of Herbert's is primarily concerned with prefabrication and, as a result, only hints at the "more vernacular response". But Herbert (1978) does acknowledge that it is difficult to differentiate between wood-and-iron buildings built *in situ* and those imported as fully prefabricated units and that many structures must have been "site-built from materials available in the locality and put up quickly by local workmen".

Radford (1994:90) refers to the 1904 census information to give an indication of the extent of the use of wood-and-iron buildings in the four colonies of the time - the Cape, Natal, Orange River and Transvaal colonies. The "solid" housing stock in the country in 1904 then comprised 65772 dwellings, of which 23% were wood-and-iron houses. The largest proportion of these were in the Transvaal (which had 40% of the total), followed by the Cape with (34% of the total) and Natal (with 22% of the total).

Kimberley has long been considered a "wood-and-iron centre", with wood-and-iron buildings being preserved as part of the mining heritage of the town. Similarly, Pilgrim's Rest has valued and restored its corrugated iron buildings. Mine-workers' houses in Johannesburg, also built in this tradition, were also valued and restored. Cape Town was not considered to have a significant surviving heritage of these buildings. In Rodd's thesis (1989), which attempts a broad survey of wood-and-iron buildings and where they are to be found, a few examples in the City Bowl, Clifton, along the Peninsula and on the Cape Flats are identified. None were found in Athlone, Jamestown or Gleemoor.

Radford (1994:95) touches on the notion of building construction methods being viewed in a hierarchical fashion, at least by the white census takers. Wood-and-iron, in the tables of the census results, occupied a position just below materials such as stone and brick, but above materials such as wattle-and-daub. This hierarchy would seem to correlate with race - the adoption of the technology by the Indian community in Natal and the black community in Johannesburg is cited as evidence of this. He also acknowledges the fact that wood-and-iron was cheaper than the brick and stone construction technologies but more expensive than wattle-and-daub and so this hierarchy seems also to reflect the wealth of the inhabitants of the various "classes" of building.

Herbert (1978) considers the Victorian attitude towards corrugated iron to have been ambivalent. He argues that its applications proliferated because of its "obvious utility" but, at the same time, "it was looked upon with a critical eye and was spoken of derisively". Rodd (1989) quotes a series of newspaper reports from East London in 1905, which reflect a popular dislike on aesthetic grounds to corrugated iron buildings. These continued to be built well into the 1920's, despite this. Many of the people in Athlone and Jamestown, whom I informally interviewed while doing the fieldwork, considered their homes to be inferior to brick homes. Locally, people seem to refer to wood-and-iron homes as "shack homes". The wood-and-iron tradition seems, in Athlone at least, to have acquired the stigma of an association with poverty. This association with poverty and perception as an inferior construction method is perpetuated by the fact that homeowners cannot readily get finance for their homes, or for additions, alterations or improvements to their homes.

Architectural issues: technology and society

This section deals with the issues of construction, which, of necessity, relate to individual buildings. The buildings described in this survey are not prefabricated in

Figure 9. Erf 33632

Proposed Drainage & W.C. 1015 3rd A Blk X R. Indebesch Extension - Allstone.

Designed by R. B. Reynolds
141 Reynolds

Scale 20' - 1" - Side 1 to 40



15' 0" Gravel
11' 0" Level
8' 0" Trenches

W.C. Plan Scale 8' - 1" = 1'



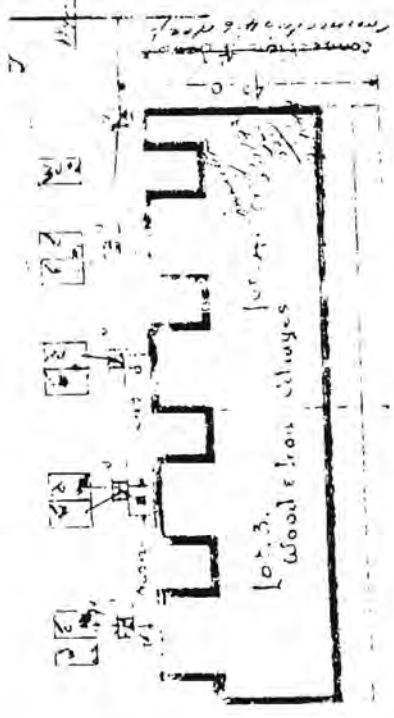
W.C. Plan Scale 8' - 1" = 1'



Side Elevation

FOR CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL
SEE REVERSE SIDE OF PLAN

Red on Venture
CONNECTION NOT TO
BE MADE
WITH THE
PHONE



Lawrence Road

1015 3rd A Blk X R. Indebesch Extension - Allstone
CITY OF CAPE TOWN
18 July 1944
Erf No. 33632

SSK
3/16

PLAN OF PROPOSED DRAINAGE AT ATHLONE

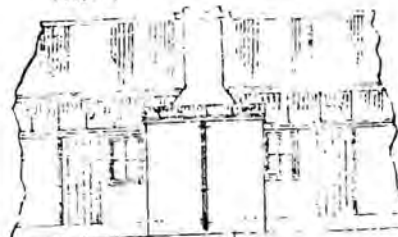
To the City Engineer and Surveyor

Whereas the City Engineer and Surveyor has received from the above-named Applicant a plan of proposed drainage for the premises situated at the above-named place and whereas the said plan has been approved by the City Engineer and Surveyor in accordance with the provisions of the Public Health Act, 1907

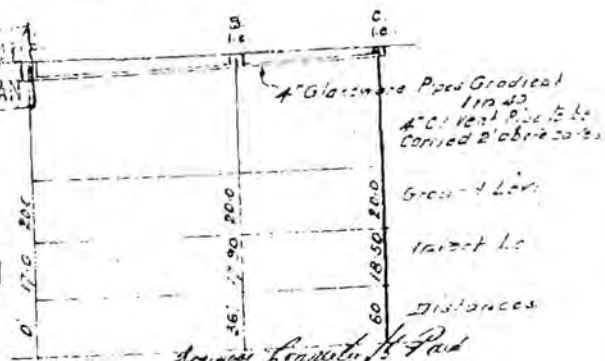
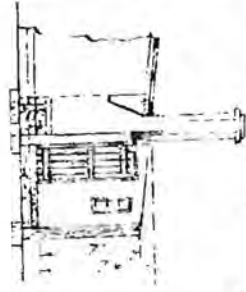
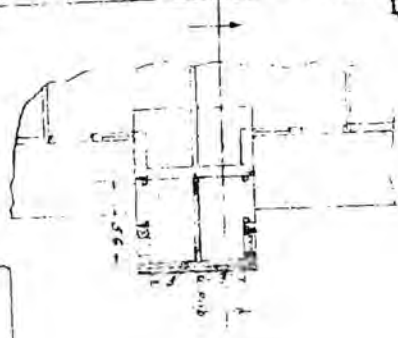
Signature of Proprietor *J. A. & L. I. Smith*
 Date 25-5-14
 Address BROAD RD. WYBERG
 Architects J. A. & L. I. SMITH, M.M.A.
 Address WYBERG, DISTRICT
 Property of A. EBRAM

Approved by Plans Committee
 on -5 JUL 1944 B.

Cost of Construction
 The above-named Applicant has estimated the cost of the proposed drainage works to be as follows:
 1. Inspection chambers to be built on in the line of the gutter of the 1 1/2" wing internal downpipes
 17 feet deep 24" x 18"
 1 lower 3 feet deep 24" x 18"
 2. Inspection chamber to be built on in the line of the gutter where several branches meet
 24" x 18"
 17/6/44



FOR CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL
 REVERSE SIDE OF PLAN



Drainage Committee's Paid
 Plan No. 66770
 PAYMENT FOR THE YEAR 1944
 £ 10 0 0
 Turnpike Commission

CITY OF CAPE TOWN
 City Engineer's Department
 APPROVED
 30 JUL 1944
 Plan No. 66770

For City Engineer's Office

GRASMERE RD.

TELFORD RD.

NOTE: EXISTING CONNECTION NOT TO BE JOINED UP OR CLOSED UNTIL ABOVE WORKS HAVE BEEN MADE COMPLETE WITH THE DISTRICT ENGINEER.

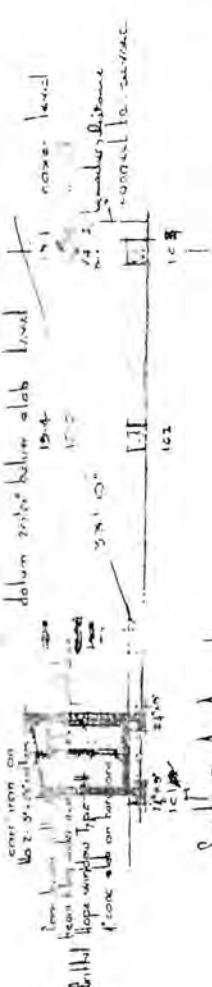
Figure 10. Plan no. 66770

- WYBERG DISTRICT 2.12.22. ENGINE
- W.C. Water
 - S. Sewer
 - G. Gutter
 - 4" Glassware Pipe
 - 4" Oil Seal Pipe
 - 4" Water Pipe
 - 4" Lead Pipe
 - 4" Cast Iron Pipe
 - 4" Cast Iron Chamber
 - 4" Cast Iron Chamber
 - 4" Cast Iron Chamber
 - H.M.S. Hoop Mark Sheet
 - S.D. Stormwater Drain
 - I.E. Inspection Eye
 - S.W. Stormwater Pipe

Scale 1/4" = 1'-0"

CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
 DISTRICT ENGINEER
 DISTRICT NO. 1
 DISTRICT OFFICE
 317559

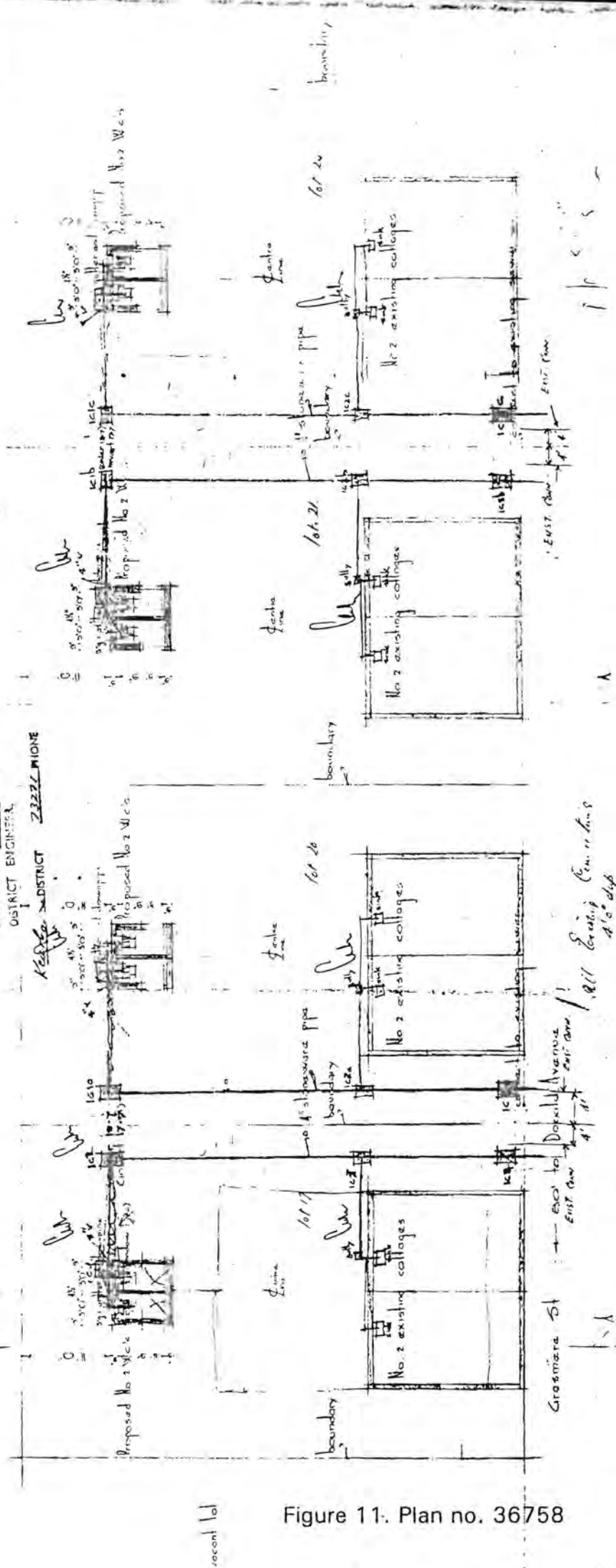
1-1-50
 15
 36



Section A-A

NOTES: EXISTING CONNECTION NOT TO BE JOINED UP OR UTILIZED UNTIL ARRANGEMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE ON SITE WITH THE DISTRICT ENGINEER.

DISTRICT 22222-MIONE



EXISTING COLLAGE GRASSMERE ST ALTOUGH COLLAGE
 PROPOSED NEW W.C. TO EXISTING COLLAGE
 GRASSMERE ST
 4' 0" dip
 all Existing Connections
 4' 0" dip
 43,44,45
 1950
 47-53 Grassmere St
 1950
 50 W. roll - maps

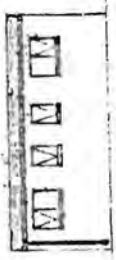
Figure 11. Plan no. 36758

CITY OF CHICAGO
 CITY ENGINEER
 APPLICANT: [illegible]
 NOT CORRECTED FOR [illegible]
 CASE NO. [illegible]

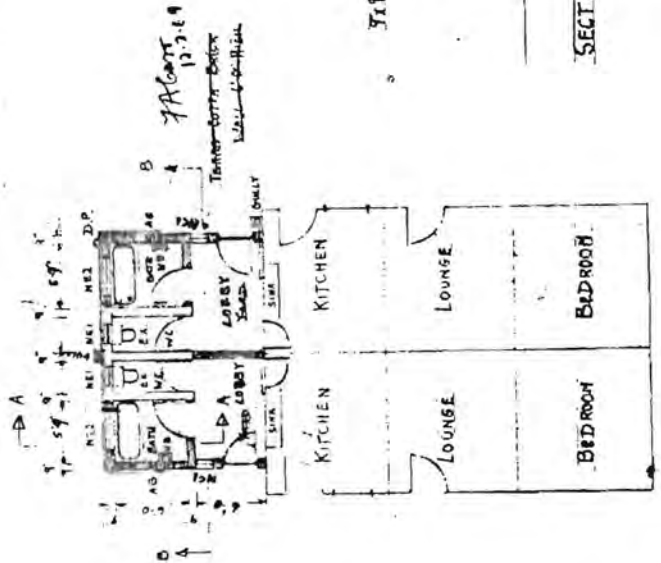
PROPOSED ADDITIONS AT
 GRASMERE STREET
 ATHLONE FOR MR. F.A. GARR

CITY OF CHICAGO	BE BLDG
Permit No. 18	50
Maximum Fee \$200	100
Receipt No. 10887	10887
Date 2/11/19	2/11/19
Site Inspector 28-1-69	28-1-69
Building Inspector [Signature]	[Signature]
Special Collector [illegible]	[illegible]
Scale = 1/4" = 20 FT	

EVERY PORTION OF EVERY
 MASONRY WALL WHICH IS
 NOT OTHER THAN
 IN FROM ANY MASONRY
 PROPERTY IS TO COMPLY
 WITH THE REQUIREMENTS
 OF REGULATION 894, Sec.

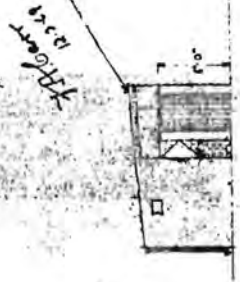


REAR ELEVATION



PLAN VIEW

CORRUGATED IRON SHEETS ON
 3"x2" PURLINS AT 4'-0" C/C
 ON 4"x15" RAFTERS AT 4'-0" C/C
 PRECAST CONCRETE LINTELS OVER WINDOWS

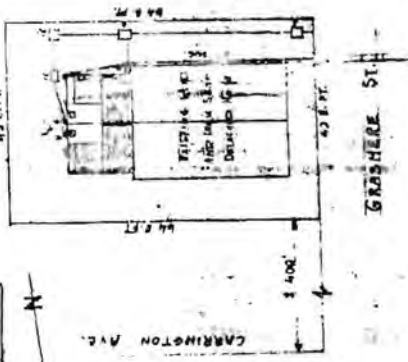


SIDE ELEVATION

SCALE = 1/4" = 8'-0"



SECTION A-A



3/4" BRICK PIERS ON 27"x27" FOUNDATIONS

SECTION B-B

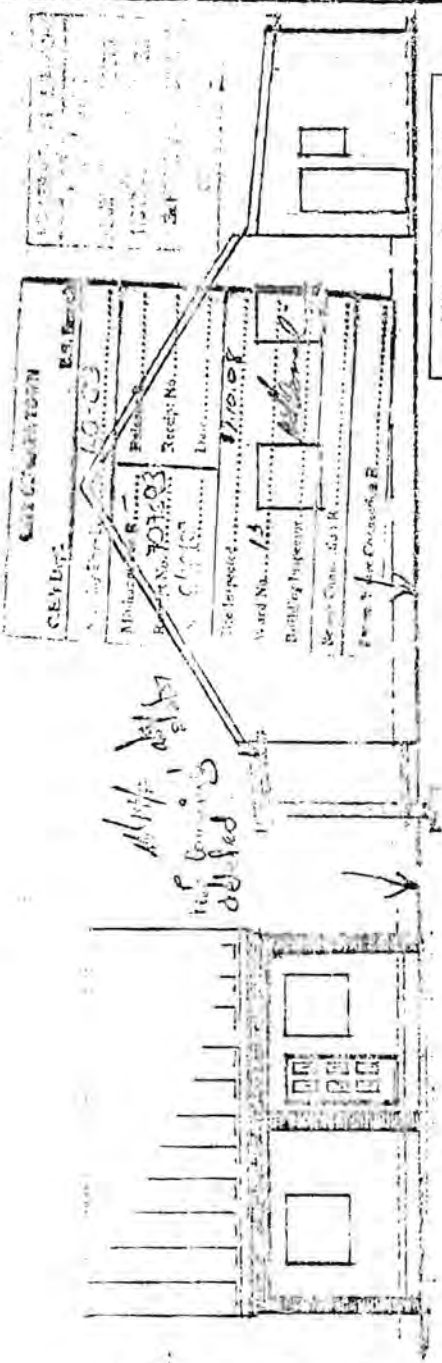
Owner: [illegible]
 9 Ashford Pl.
 Hawthorne, Ill.
 1917

Figure 12. Plan no. 162457

Proposed addition to house of an Garage and Mill for Mr. J. W. Newstead

8700

North



Roof covering added

Side 11'4"



elevation to road.

with supplied by Alfred Conestoga

elevation of wall

Concrete bases 4x10x160
below D.S.L.
constructed in accordance
with City Council's specs.

Sectional elevation

Roof construction:

Roof covering added
Roof framing on 114 x 38 mm
battens at 1600 centres
on 114 x 76 mm beams spaced
to wind and rain wall and
on 38 x 240 mm brick gable,
foundations 700 x 250 mm

LANE CLEARED - NO COLLECTION
TO APPROVAL

DATE 24/07/1914

BOUNDARY REASONS TO BE
CONSIDERED BY THE BOARDING ENGINEER
Before work is begun.

1057 S. FRANKLIN ST.
P.O. BOX 100
MONTREAL, P. Q.

Figure 13. Plan no. 16644

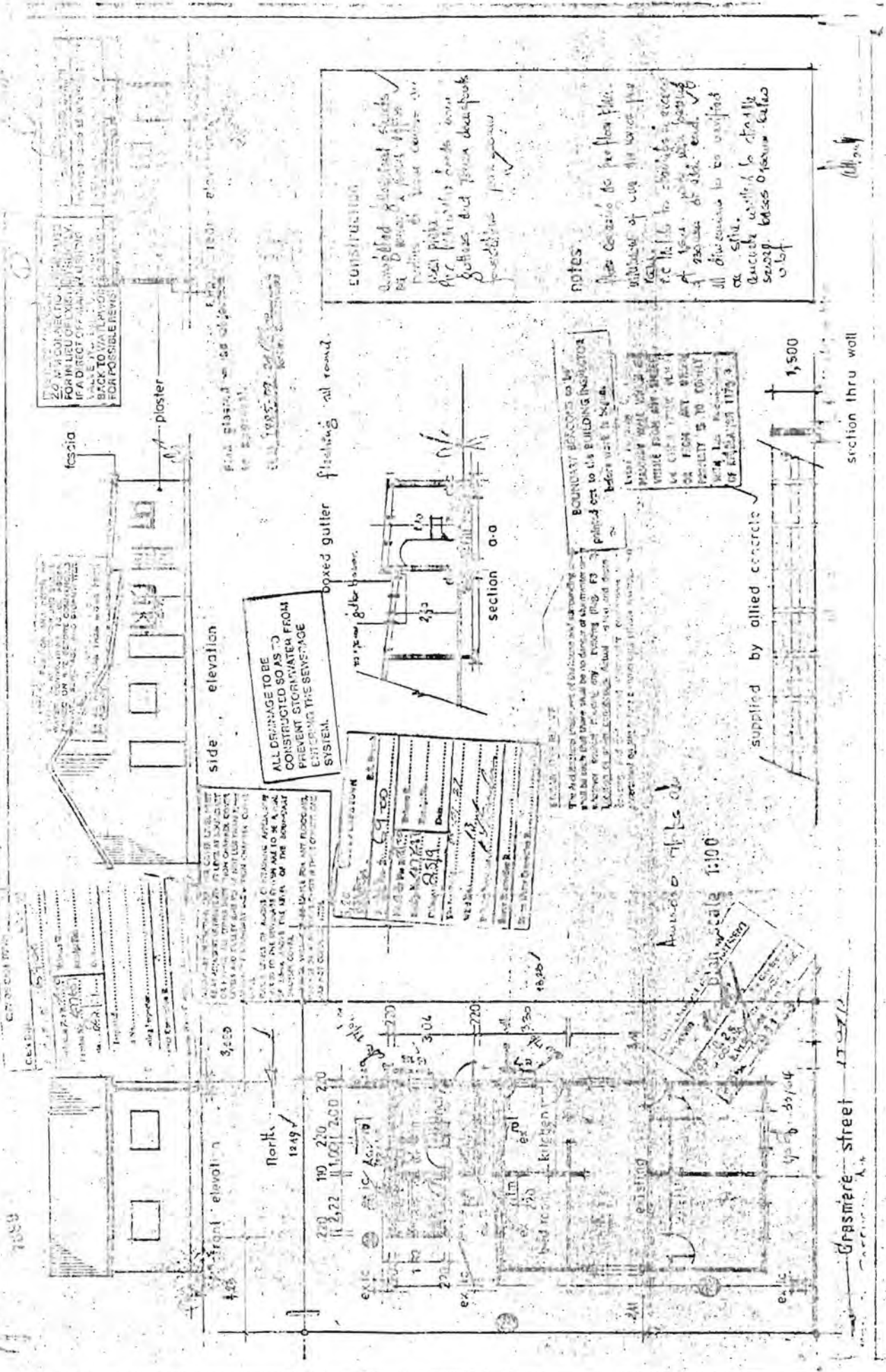
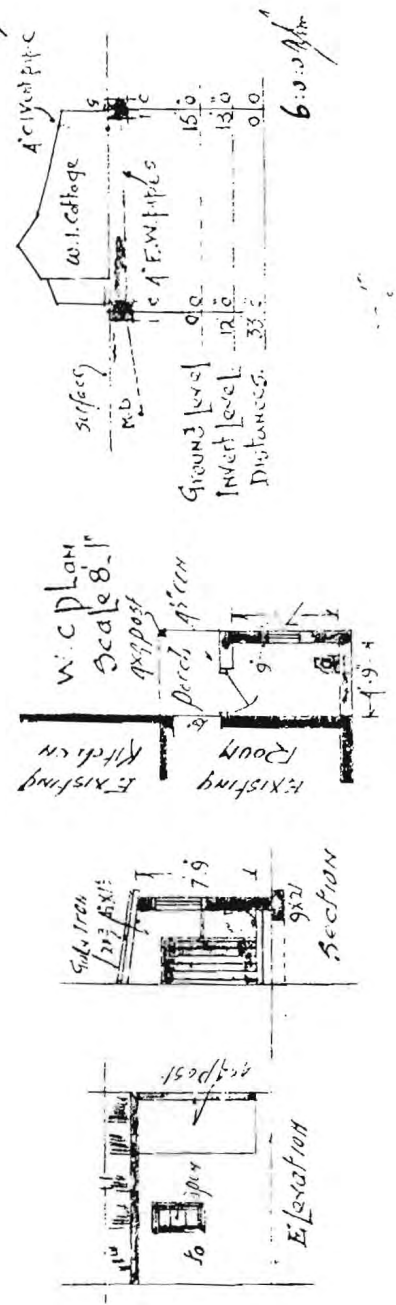


Figure 14. Plan no. 291139

Proposed Drainage Lot No 19, Blk W, Roadway Extension, Afthonne.
 owner designed - *M. W. Lawrence*
 Scale 20' 1 inch - Grade 1 in 40.

19-
 15014
 1/10/14
 1/10/14
 1/10/14
 1/10/14



Planning Board
 70 Oct 14/14
 9/10/14
 9/10/14

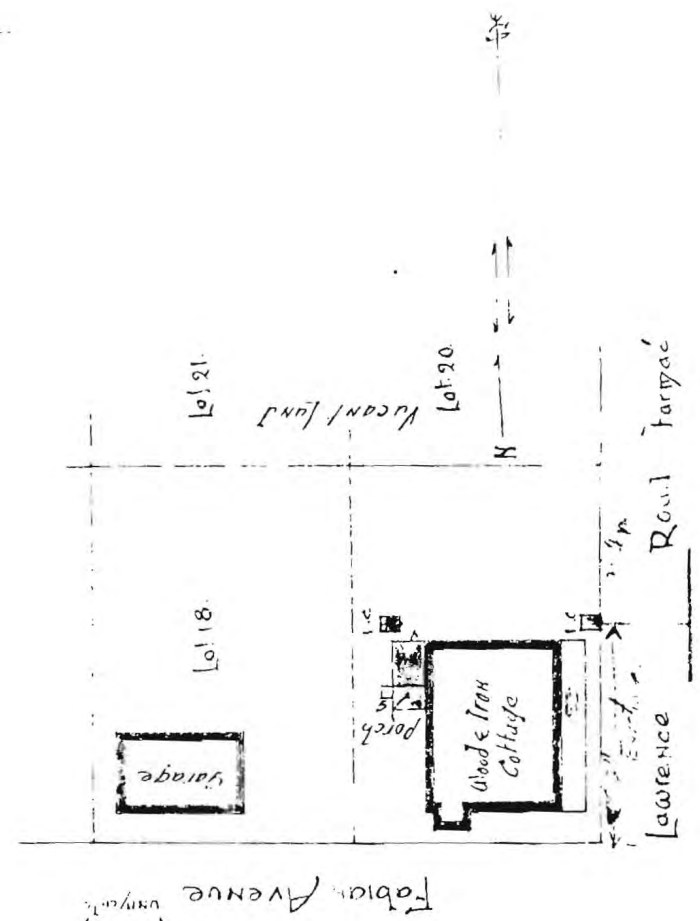


Figure 15. Lot 19, Block W



Figure 16. Erf 33385

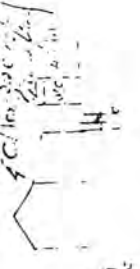
Proposed Plan

1919-1920-1921-1922-1923-1924

W.R. North Fixation on All Lots

Feed and Lined - Trade 1940

cutland for



Section to Church Street
 20.0
 18.0
 0.0
 Ground Level
 Invert Level
 Distances

Section to Church Street
 20.0
 18.0
 0.0
 Ground Level
 Invert Level
 Distances

Section to Heathcote Avenue
 20.0
 18.0
 0.0
 Ground Level
 Invert Level
 Distances

Section to Heathcote Avenue
 20.0
 18.0
 0.0
 Ground Level
 Invert Level
 Distances

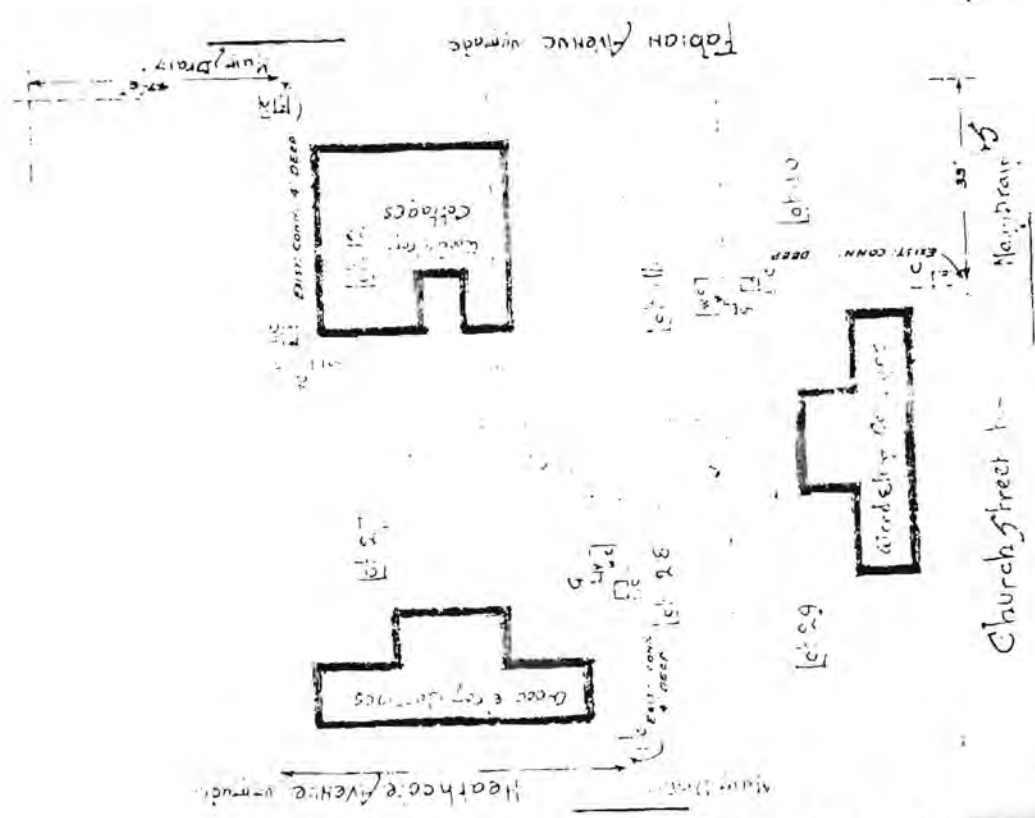
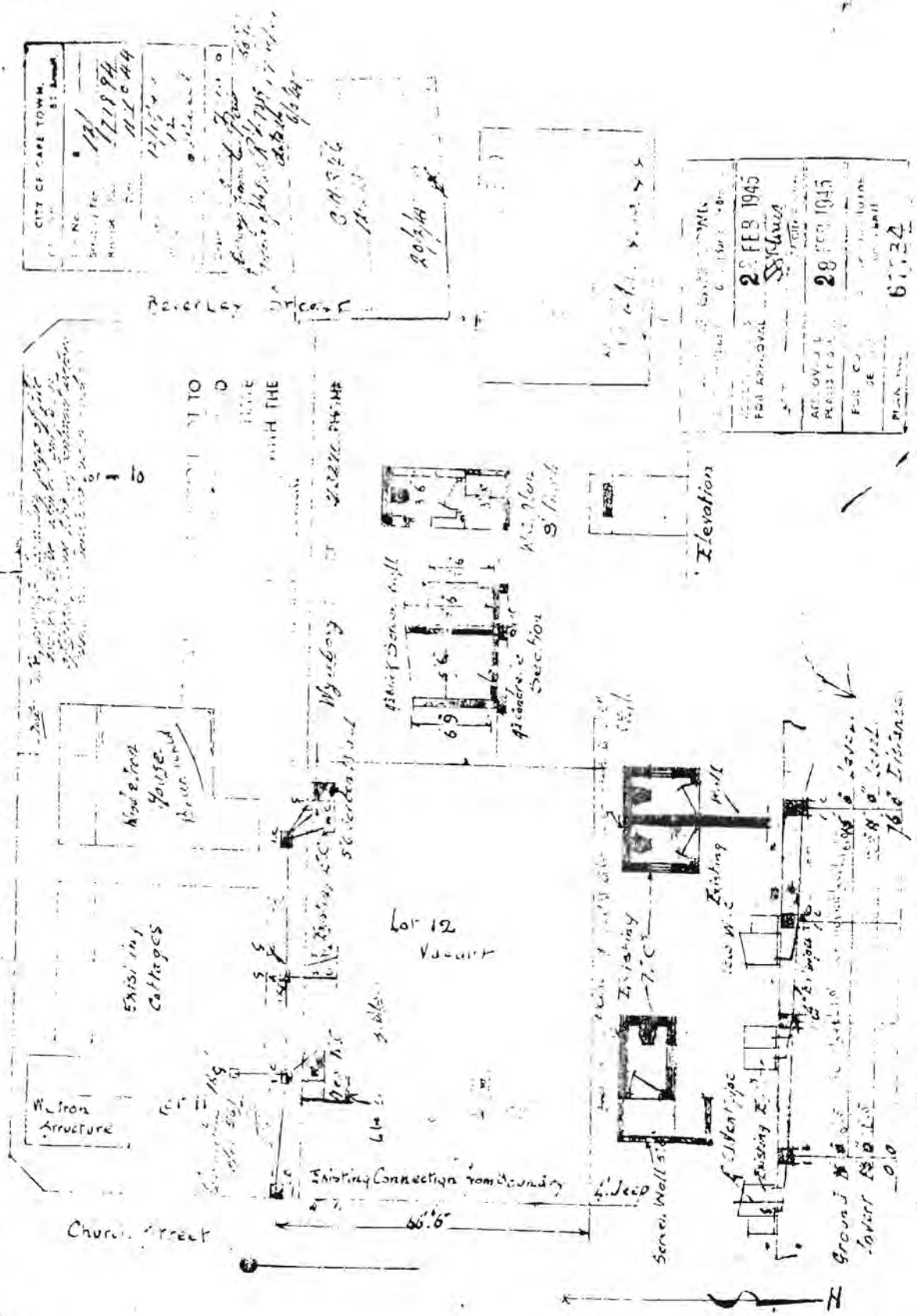


Figure 17. Lots 10, 11, 12, Block W

Proposed Drainage (lots 10 & 11 Blk 11) Rondebosch Extension, All. Lone.
 owner: J. J. Peterson
 15331
 15331
 15331

DASS-44



CITY OF CAPE TOWN	
Case No.	17/11/94
Drawn By	11/06/94
Checked By	
Scale	1:100
Notes	1. All dimensions in meters unless otherwise stated.
	2. All structures to be built on concrete foundations.
	3. All structures to be built on concrete foundations.
	4. All structures to be built on concrete foundations.
	5. All structures to be built on concrete foundations.

FOR APPROVAL	28 FEB 1945
APPROVED BY	J. J. Peterson
FOR APPROVAL	28 FEB 1945
APPROVED BY	J. J. Peterson
PLAN NO.	67734

Scale 20' high. Gra 3e. 11/40.

Figure 18. Plan no. 67734

their entirety and merely assembled on site. All the available evidence suggests that both the older buildings in Athlone and the Assisted Housing Scheme houses (1920's) were built *in situ*.

No original plans have been found, but a number of plans (refer List of Plans) depicting later alterations and additions to houses in Athlone have been found (Figures 9-18), most of which only depict the footprints of the buildings (Figures 9-15). From the survey (refer Appendix) and the plans, it is clear that, in Athlone, building form varies considerably, from terraces of cottages (Figure 9) to semi-detached cottages (Figures 10-14) and free-standing houses (Figures 15-18). Overly complex footprints, which would complicate roofing plans, are not generally seen in the field, except where additions have been added, piecemeal, over time. Often buildings were originally square or rectangular, with the only protrusion visible on plan being the brick hearth (refer Figure 15). Lean-tos are sometimes present. The most complex footprint included in the plans here is that of the two houses on Figure 16. These two houses are numbers 2 and 3 in the survey (refer Appendix). Figure 12 illustrates the simple planning of the four identical cottages, which stood in Grasmere St in 1950 (Figure 11), of which three now stand. These were semi-detached cottages each comprising three rooms, with a toilet in the back yard, which was joined to the house to form a bathroom in 1969 (Figure 12).

As no written record of construction techniques (in the form of plans or archival documents) could be found, the only way to gather that information is to observe as buildings are demolished. The first building to be demolished after the start of this project was 12 Plender Avenue (No. 64 in survey; refer Appendix), which was demolished in May 1996. The findings of that observation process will be used to inform the following discussion of building construction, as will information gleaned during informal interviews conducted with residents of the survey area. As 12 Plender Avenue is not, as far as can be seen in the fieldwork, one of a standard building type, principles, rather than details, of construction will be discussed. In

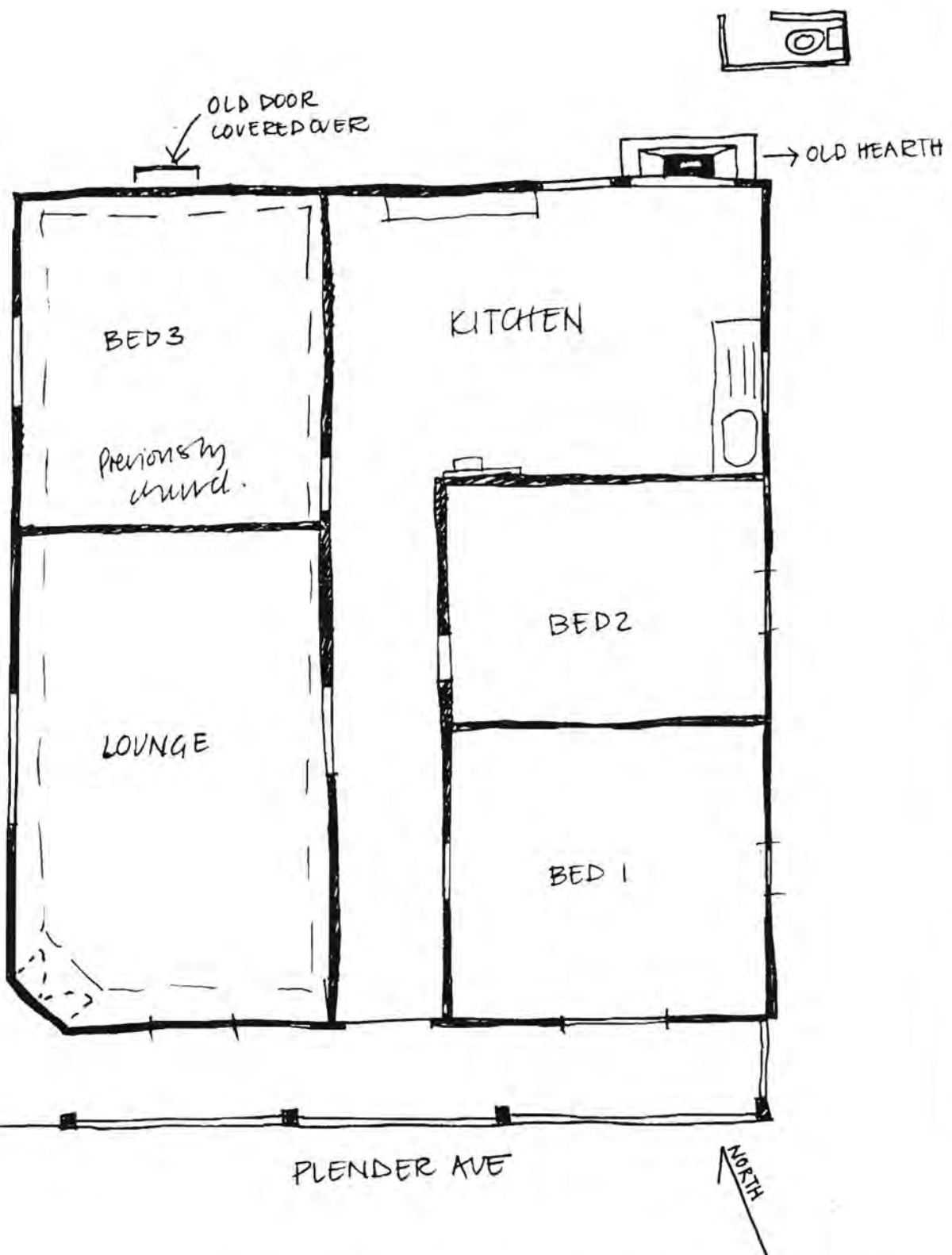


Figure 19. Diagrammatic plan of 12 Plender Avenue, NTS

some respects, as in the roof construction, little difference can be discerned in the finished building between a wood-and-iron structure and any other. The roof construction is therefore not discussed here.

12 Plender Avenue, according to local residents, was the first Catholic Church in Athlone. It was a free-standing building (Figure 19) which (according to oral sources) originally had its entrance on the corner of the building, into what was the lounge at the time of demolition and what had originally been the church. The church space also incorporated Bedroom 3. Figure 20 shows what the informant described as members of his family outside the building while it was still a church. The entrance is visible on the right hand side of the picture. The other half of the house was used as office space at first, but a caretaker later lived there. The church was sold in the late 1940's or early 1960's to private owners. Detailed historical research into this building has not yet been done.



Figure 20.



Figure 21. Foundation detail near brick hearth

Foundations

The building did not have subterranean concrete or brick foundations. As can be seen in Figures 21 and 22, the floor joists were supported by a single row of bricks laid directly onto the ground and not mortared together. The roof was supported on columns, under which four bricks were placed in two courses (also not mortared) on the ground to form a square (refer Figure 23).



Figure 22. Foundation detail along east elevation

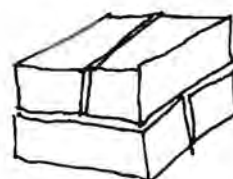


Figure 23. Sketch of typical brick support

An informant in Jamestown says that local oral tradition in Gleemoor and Jamestown has it that foundations there consisted of a large paraffin can filled with concrete.

Walls, ceilings and openings

In 12 Plender Avenue, as in many of the houses I visited in Athlone, the internal walls and ceilings were made of matchboarding, often of Oregon pine. In Jamestown, however, not all use that technology. Many of these homes, such as No.90 in the survey (refer Appendix), are "slab-lined" (as they are described in the official documents of the time). Whether these linings are cast concrete, prefabricated concrete slabs or concrete blockwork is impossible to determine without removing the plaster.

Both internal and external wall cladding is fixed directly to the timber frame in the case of 12 Plender Avenue, with the corrugations running vertically. The Jamestown houses all have external corrugated iron wall cladding with the corrugations running horizontally.

Figures 24-28 show the way in which openings are treated in 12 Plender Avenue. Figure 25 shows the original sash window on the east elevation after the cladding had been removed, while Figure 24 illustrates how easily the original window

opening can be adapted to accommodate another window frame. Doors are accommodated into the timber substructure in the same way as windows. The door in Figure 27 has been blocked up, but the frame remains able to be re-adapted for a door. Figure 26 is the back door threshold detail, while Figure 28 shows the old church door, which was later closed up with corrugated iron externally, but just obscured with curtains internally. By the time the house was demolished, these rather nice Victorian French doors were irreparably rotten. Internal doors, cornices, mouldings and other details were similar to those seen by the author in other late nineteenth century and turn of the century houses elsewhere in Cape Town and are also possibly Victorian.



Figure 24. New window, west elevation



Figure 25. Original sash window, east elevation



Figure 26. Threshold detail



Figure 27. Previous position of door. Figure 28. Internal view of old church entrance.

Floors

The floors in 12 Plender Avenue were wooden, with the planking resting on timber joists supported by the brick supports described elsewhere. Spans, estimated visually, seemed to be the same as those of similarly sized joists in other buildings of approximately the same age, which the author has had experience of. Other wood-and-iron buildings in Athlone, Jamestown and Gleemoor, which I have visited, have had timber floors or concrete floors where the timber floors have been replaced.

5. The Assisted Housing Scheme, 1920's

The First World War (1914-1918) and the influenza pandemic of 1918 (Shorten 1963:452) brought to the public attention the conditions under which many Capetonians lived. In 1919 the Provincial Administration gave the Cape Town City Council powers to grant housing loans to "people of limited means" (Shorten 1963:452) to enable them to build their own homes. A Housing and Estates Branch was established in the Cape Town City Council soon after this to deal with the increased Municipal involvement in housing provision. By 1920 permission had been granted to private people to build wood-and-iron houses to "approved designs" (Shorten 1963:452).

The Assisted Housing Scheme, as it is known in the Municipal files housed in the archives, is first mentioned in the Mayor's Minutes in 1924. It was a means of alleviating the housing shortage, while maintaining Council control over the type and quality of wood-and-iron dwelling being built and represented a systematisation of an existing building tradition, which had been practised in an *ad hoc* manner until then. Both central and local government was involved in the initiative. Shorten (1963:453) mentions a loan of £20 000 made by the Central Housing Board to assist a Council building scheme started at Milner Estate, now known as Gleemoor in 1926.

In March 1924, the City Council Sub-committee on Assisted Housing (wood-and-iron) reported on the Cape Flats (CAD 1/3A 1/4/9/1/1/7). Three cottage types are listed, all three of which can either be "lined" or "unlined". These ranged in cost from £152 10s 0d (for a lined Type A) to £73 10s 0d (for an unlined Type C). An "earth closet" would cost an additional £7 10s 0d irrespective of the type bought.

Before applying for assistance, the prospective applicant had to have bought a plot of land. In Athlone, Jamestown and Gleemoor plots cost on average £10 during

the 1920's. The Assisted Housing Scheme was a loan system. Once the loan was approved and the house-type chosen, Council appointed contractors were sent in to build the house. The new owner could then take occupation of the house.

University of Cape Town

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The development of Athlone prior to 1920 was piecemeal and *ad hoc*, driven largely by speculators. A study of the history of the area is important in that its development marked one of the early incursions of housing the Cape Flats. Work on the subject of wood-and-iron buildings in South Africa is scarce. This work sought to explore the role of a building type in the history of an area.

The research process comprised a fieldwork component and an historical research component. These have culminated in the writing of a history of Athlone, which draws on a number of different sources. The fieldwork comprised a photographic survey of extant wood-and-iron buildings in Athlone, the results of which were entered into data sheets (Appendix). The historical research involved systematic searches for primary and secondary sources in the Cape Archives, South African Library, National Monuments Council Library, Cape Town City Council Library and Cape Town City Council historic map collection. Aerial photographs and oral sources were also used. The product of these two processes is a history of Athlone, which draws on a wide variety of sources, while understanding and allowing for the limitations of each kind of source.

Athlone had a series of names before adopting the current name in the late 1920's. As a place, it was created by the consolidation of four erven, subsequently subdivided into lots, which established the major road grid still in place today. Speculative development played an important part in the development of the area. The growth of the area can clearly be seen in a series of maps and aerial photographs. The origins of Pliny Township and Lawrence Township are described in order to illustrate the role of the development of the "townships" declared on larger lots in order to subdivide the land further and sell the plots on individual title. Two kinds of building construction were identified in the houses found in the

survey, which were later shown to be related to the date of construction of the buildings. Urban conservation in areas such as Athlone face complex problems. The lack of funds for restoration has both saved and doomed the existing built fabric, as demolition is often a cheaper option than restoration. At the same time, conservation initiatives should be driven by a community desire for the protection of the buildings in order to be successful and gentrification (and the alienation of those historically associated with the area) should be guarded against.

The period 1900-1930 marked a number of changes in Athlone on an urban scale. The nature of housing provision changed from speculative development to municipal housing schemes and urban planning was less *ad hoc* as Municipal involvement in housing provision increased. Jamestown and Gleemoor display a regular street grid, while the piecemeal subdivisions of Athlone after 1865 are apparent in the irregular street grid. Existing work on the history and occurrence of the wood-and-iron construction method throughout the world emphasises its origins in mid-nineteenth century Britain as a prefabrication system. Similar work on the *in situ* use of the technique is more difficult to chart and is possibly best done as detailed studies such as this. As no literature or primary evidence could be found documenting the construction methods employed in Athlone, preliminary statements based on fieldwork are made.

- The Assisted Housing Scheme (1924-1930) represents the rise of a bureaucracy for housing provision and the systematisation of an existing *ad hoc* system. The intervention of local and central government was prompted by the post- World War One housing shortage. The Cape Town City Council solution was a series of Council housing schemes, of which Gleemoor and Jamestown represented the main wood-and-iron scheme. The Assisted Housing Scheme was a loan scheme, which sought to alleviate the housing shortage for the poor. By the late 1930's, however, this scheme had been stopped in favour of rental schemes such as that at Alicedale.

In researching and writing the history of Athlone, a number of issues and themes have arisen. These themes include the role of speculative development, landlordism, the Assisted Housing Scheme and associated legislation, apartheid legislation and the Community Development Board in the evolution of the present cultural landscape of Athlone. As these themes would broaden the scope of this Honours project beyond one appropriate to an honours project, they have not been extensively explored in the long essay, but are highlighted here as directions which further research could take.

Athlone occupies an important place in the history of Cape Town and its working class. Piecing together the nature of the composition of the original occupation and ownership of Athlone, in order to attempt an understanding of the composition of the working class at the turn of the century, would be a valuable contribution to the history of Cape Town. An appropriate means of piecing this knowledge together would be to use oral histories in conjunction with the primary sources cited here.

7. References

Primary sources:

Archival sources

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3/CT 4/1/5/1033 H1256/5: letter from Citizen's Housing League to CCC, 15/2/1928

PAA 245 Reference: AF 20/1/171: Lawrence Township

PAA 319 Reference AF 20/1/570: Pliny Township

Cape Town City Council Library:

Cape Town City Council Mayor's Minutes, 1922-1930

Maps, plans and deeds

Surveyor General's Office, Plan of proposed schemes of sewerage and sewage disposal... (1891)

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Cape Town City Council Photogrammetry Section, now part of Cape Metropolitan Council, Photos 31444, 31445, 31428, 31427, 31457 (1935)

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Radford, D, "The 'anarchy of iron', official attitudes to wood and iron construction in South Africa", SA Journal of Cultural History, 12 (1998), 1-18

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12. Appendix

Sample of data sheets from photographic survey

University of Cape Town

Record 2	Area Athlone	Recorder KD	Date Sept 98
Street Address Lawrence Rd			
Erf Number 33424		Property Reference Number EO 36 D/21 (33+37)	
Current Owner		Current Occupant	
Class Type		Site Type	
Current Usage			
Date of Building			
Architect		Builder / Developer	
Roof		Windows	
Framing		Walls	
Changes through time – additions etc.			
Other			
Photographs: Date Feb 96			

Textual sources (incl. Deeds Office, Valuation Rolls, CAD references)

Image sources (historic and contemporary photos)

Map sources (historic maps, plans)

Historical Information (incl. secondary sources)

Other information (oral sources)

Record 3	Area Athlone	Recorder KD	Date Sept 98
Street Address Capuchin St			
Erf Number 33424		Property Reference Number EO 36 D/21 (33+37)	
Current Owner		Current Occupant	
Class Type		Site Type	
Current Usage			
Date of Building			
Architect		Builder / Developer	
Roof		Windows	
Framing		Walls	
Changes through time - additions etc.			
Other			
Photographs: Date ref. 2			

Textual sources (incl. Deeds Office, Valuation Rolls, CAD references)

Image sources (historic and contemporary photos)

Map sources (historic maps, plans)

Historical Information (incl. secondary sources)

Other information (oral sources)

Record 1	Area Athlone	Recorder K Dumbrell	Date Sept 98
Street Address Lawrence Road			
Erf Number 33385		Property Reference Number EO 36 D/69(7)	
Current Owner		Current Occupant	
Class Type		Site Type	
Current Usage			
Date of Building			
Architect		Builder / Developer	
Roof		Windows	
Framing		Walls	
Changes through time – additions etc.			
Other			
Photographs: Date Sept 98			
			


Textual sources (incl. Deeds Office, Valuation Rolls, CAD references)

Image sources (historic and contemporary photos)

Map sources (historic maps, plans)

Historical Information (incl. secondary sources)

Other information (oral sources)

Record 5	Area Athlone	Recorder KD	Date Sept 98
Street Address Lawrence Rd			
Erf Number 33395		Property Reference Number EO 36 D/ 34(4)	
Current Owner		Current Occupant	
Class Type		Site Type	
Current Usage			
Date of Building			
Architect		Builder / Developer	
Roof		Windows	
Framing		Walls	
Changes through time – additions etc.			
Other			
Photographs: Date			
			


Textual sources (incl. Deeds Office, Valuation Rolls, CAD references)

Image sources (historic and contemporary photos)

Map sources (historic maps, plans)

Historical Information (incl. secondary sources)

Other information (oral sources)

Record 13	Area Athlone	Recorder KD	Date Sept 98
Street Address "9 Doors", nr Newton + Lawrence Rds			
Erf Number 33632		Property Reference Number EP37 A /2(3+4)	
Current Owner		Current Occupant	
Class Type		Site Type	
Current Usage			
Date of Building			
Architect		Builder / Developer	
Roof		Windows	
Framing		Walls	
Changes through time – additions etc.			
Other			
Photographs: Date			
			13

Textual sources (incl. Deeds Office, Valuation Rolls, CAD references)

Image sources (historic and contemporary photos)

Map sources (historic maps, plans)

Historical Information (incl. secondary sources)

Other information (oral sources)

Record 43	Area Athlone	Recorder KD	Date Sept 98
Street Address 47 Grasmere St			
Erf Number 33767		Property Reference Number EP 37C/49	
Current Owner		Current Occupant	
Class Type		Site Type	
Current Usage			
Date of Building			
Architect		Builder / Developer	
Roof		Windows	
Framing		Walls	
Changes through time – additions etc.			
Other			
Photographs: Date			

Textual sources (incl. Deeds Office, Valuation Rolls, CAD references)

Image sources (historic and contemporary photos)

Map sources (historic maps, plans) *Plans found*

Historical Information (incl. secondary sources)

Other information (oral sources)

Record 44	Area Athlone	Recorder KD	Date 1 Sept 98
Street Address 51 Grasmere St			
Erf Number 33765		Property Reference Number EP 37C/12	
Current Owner		Current Occupant	
Class Type		Site Type	
Current Usage			
Date of Building			
Architect		Builder / Developer	
Roof		Windows	
Framing		Walls	
Changes through time – additions etc.			
Other			
Photographs: Date			

Textual sources (incl. Deeds Office, Valuation Rolls, CAD references)

Image sources (historic and contemporary photos)

Map sources (historic maps, plans)

Historical Information (incl. secondary sources)

Other information (oral sources)

Record 45	Area Athlone	Recorder KD	Date sept 98
Street Address 53 Grasmere St			
Erf Number 33764		Property Reference Number EP 37C/51	
Current Owner		Current Occupant	
Class Type		Site Type	
Current Usage			
Date of Building			
Architect		Builder / Developer	
Roof		Windows	
Framing		Walls	
Changes through time – additions etc.			
Other			
Photographs: Date			
			

Textual sources (incl. Deeds Office, Valuation Rolls, CAD references)

Image sources (historic and contemporary photos)

Map sources (historic maps, plans)

Historical Information (incl. secondary sources)

Other information (oral sources)

Record 65	Area Athlone	Recorder ICD	Date Feb '96 + Sept 98
Street Address 12 Plender Ave			
Erf Number 33882		Property Reference Number EP 38 B/47(23)	
Current Owner Petersen family		Current Occupant	
Class Type		Site Type	
Current Usage			
Date of Building		DEMOLISHED MAY '96	
Architect		Builder / Developer	
Roof		Windows	
Framing		Walls	
Changes through time – additions etc.			
Other			

Photographs: Date Feb 96



Textual sources (incl. Deeds Office, Valuation Rolls, CAD references)

Image sources (historic and contemporary photos)

Map sources (historic maps, plans)

Historical Information (incl. secondary sources)

Other information (oral sources)

Record 90	Area Athlone	Recorder KB	Date Sept 98
Street Address 56 Boeschoten Rd			
Erf Number 34 227		Property Reference Number EQ 37A/20(39)	
Current Owner Mr Hendricks		Current Occupant Mr Hendricks + family Mr + Mrs Lakey	
Class Type		Site Type	
Current Usage			

Date of Building	
Architect	Builder / Developer

Roof	Windows
Framing	Walls

Changes through time – additions etc.

Other

Photographs: Date



Textual sources (incl. Deeds Office, Valuation Rolls, CAD references)

Image sources (historic and contemporary photos)

Map sources (historic maps, plans)

Historical Information (incl. secondary sources)

Other information (oral sources)

Record 99	Area Athlone	Recorder KD	Date Sept 98
Street Address Clevilly Road			
Erf Number 34179		Property Reference Number EQ 37B/26(48)	
Current Owner		Current Occupant	
Class Type		Site Type	
Current Usage			
Date of Building			
Architect		Builder / Developer	
Roof		Windows	
Framing		Walls	
Changes through time – additions etc.			
Other			
Photographs: Date			

Textual sources (incl. Deeds Office, Valuation Rolls, CAD references)

Image sources (historic and contemporary photos)

Map sources (historic maps, plans)

Historical Information (incl. secondary sources)

Other information (oral sources)

Record 104	Area Athlone	Recorder KD	Date Sept 98
Street Address Boeschoten Rd			
Erf Number 34163		Property Reference Number EQ 37 B/42(73)	
Current Owner		Current Occupant	
Class Type		Site Type	
Current Usage			
Date of Building			
Architect		Builder / Developer	
Roof		Windows	
Framing		Walls	
Changes through time -- additions etc.			
Other			

Photographs: Date



Textual sources (incl. Deeds Office, Valuation Rolls, CAD references)

Image sources (historic and contemporary photos)

Map sources (historic maps, plans)

Historical Information (incl. secondary sources)

Other information (oral sources)

Record 108	Area Athlone	Recorder KD	Date Sept 98
Street Address 34 Boeschoten Rd			
Erf Number 34257		Property Reference Number EQ 37A/46(91)	
Current Owner		Current Occupant	
Class Type		Site Type	
Current Usage			
Date of Building			
Architect		Builder / Developer	
Roof		Windows	
Framing		Walls	
Changes through time – additions etc.			
Other			
Photographs: Date Sept '98			
			

Textual sources (incl. Deeds Office, Valuation Rolls, CAD references)

Image sources (historic and contemporary photos)

Map sources (historic maps, plans)

Historical Information (incl. secondary sources)

Other information (oral sources)