

**Maritime Archaeology and its publics in Post-
Apartheid South Africa**



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Declaration:

I know what plagiarism entails, namely to use another's work and to present it as my own without attributing the sources in the correct way.

I, Heather Wares, declare that *Maritime Archaeology and its Publics in a Post-Apartheid South Africa* is my own work and that it has not been presented for any other degree at any other university. I also declare that all of the sources I have used or quoted have been referenced and acknowledged in full.



Heather Lynne Wares, Cape Town, July 2013



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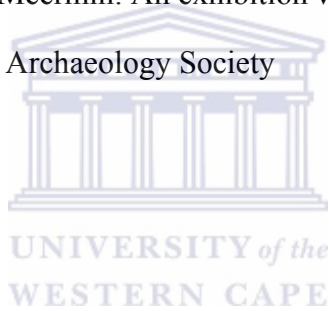
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Contents

Declaration		i
Acknowledgements		ii
Contents		iv
Images		v
Abstract		vii
Introduction	Bringing publics into being	1
Chapter One	Enquire at Reception: Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum	21
Chapter Two	Finding Meermin: An exhibition without objects	79
Chapter Three	Nautical Archaeology Society	129
Conclusion		186
Bibliography		192



Images

All photographs by Heather Wares, unless otherwise stated.

- Cover A piece of shipwreck on the Robben Island rocky shore with Table Mountain in the background, Cape Town.
- Figure 1 Ankhor Temples, Cambodia, the site where a scene from the ‘Tomb Raider’ movie was shot. The tour guides insist on the tourist taking pictures such as this one, creating the link to the movie.
- Figure 2 The front entrance to the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, note the signs revealing the conflicting names for the museum.
- Figure 3 A sign advertising Cape Agulhas as a tourist destination erected along the road coming in and out of the town of Bredasdorp.
- Figure 4 Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum entrance hall, framed shipwrecks.
- Figure 5 Shipwreck Hall - shell display, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 6 Shipwreck Hall - a label accompanying a shipwreck display, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 7 Shipwreck Hall - wooden chest, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 8 Shipwreck Hall - objects displayed outside of the glass cabinets, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 9 Shipwreck Hall - display of portholes, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 10 Shipwreck Hall - the *Birkenhead* display, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 11 Shipwreck Hall - display of the shipwreck *Merestijn* (1702) and *Fame* (1822), Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 12 Shipwreck Hall - Label for the wreck of the *Arniston* and the date it sank, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 13 Shipwreck Hall - Cardinal points situated on the ceiling, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 14 Shipwreck Hall - Cape Agulhas lighthouse mural, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 15 Shipwreck Hall - site map of the *Nicobar* drawn by salvagers, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 16 Shipwreck Hall - underwater survey performed on the *Nicobar* by salvagers, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 17 Shipwreck Hall - SAHRA notice on the protection of historical shipwrecks, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 18 Shipwreck Hall - objects representative of a maritime history, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 19 Shipwreck Hall - the display of the *Arniston*, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 20 Shipwreck Hall - information board 'Independent Church (1863 - 1875)', Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 21 Shipwreck Hall - provincial government endorsement printed on the 'Independent Church' information board, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 22 Rectory - silverware from the wreck of the *Lisboa*, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.

- Figure 23 Garden - a display of different types of anchors, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 24 Memory Lane - an exhibition of objects representative of the medical profession, donated by individuals, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 25 Memory Lane - 'Fytjie' (1935) the oldest doll (donated by Mrs M. Spamer), Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 26 Attic of the Rectory - donated collections in storage, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.
- Figure 27 Iziko Maritime Centre - *Finding Meermin* poster.
- Figure 28 Mendi Exhibition - 'The last voyage of the Mendi: Death in Foreign Waters' display board, Iziko Maritime Centre.
- Figure 29 *Meermin* Exhibition space - the layout of the panels of the *Finding Meermin* exhibition, Iziko Maritime Centre.
- Figure 30 'Search for the Wreck of the Dutch Slaver *Meermin*' - the poster presented at various international conferences provided by Jaco Boshoff, leader of the *Meermin* Project.
- Figure 31 *Finding Meermin* Exhibition – 'Finding *Meermin*' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre.
- Figure 32 *Finding Meermin* Exhibition - shackles representative of slavery on the 'Slavery at the Cape' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre.
- Figure 33 *Finding Meermin* Exhibition - pictures depicting a slave history at the cape on the 'Slavery at the Cape' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre.
- Figure 34 *Finding Meermin* Exhibition - 'Slavery at the Cape' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre.
- Figure 35 *Finding Meermin* Exhibition - '*Meermin*: The Story' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre.
- Figure 36 *Finding Meermin* Exhibition - 'Resistance and Legacy' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre.
- Figure 37 *Finding Meermin* Exhibition - 'The *Meermin* Ship' panel showing the ship's plan, the inventory list and objects, Iziko Maritime Centre.
- Figure 38 *Finding Meermin* Exhibition - 'The Search' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre.
- Figure 39 *Finding Meermin* Exhibition - 'Maritime Archaeology' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre.
- Figure 40 Robben Island – graveyard, 2012 Field School.
- Figure 41 Robben Island Field School 2012 – Barrels found on the 'Barrel Wreck'. (Photograph Jon Carpenter)
- Figure 42 Robben Island Field School 2012 – Student taking measurements on the 'Barrel Wreck'. (Photograph Bill Jeffrey)
- Figure 43 Robben Island Field School 2012 – Vicki Richards giving a demonstration of one of the methods used for testing the corrosion level of certain metals affected by an underwater environment.
- Figure 44 Robben Island Field School 2012 – Lead ingot recovered from the 'Barrel Wreck' site, treated and stored at Iziko Social History Centre. (Photograph John Carpenter)
- Figure 45 Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum - Finding *Meermin* Exhibition.

Abstract

Since the end of apartheid and with that the construction of a new South Africa, archaeology has experienced what can be seen as a resurgence in the public domain. With the creation of a new nation imagined as existing since time immemorial, there has been an emergence of archaeological pasts providing evidence of a nation believed to have existed before apartheid and colonialism. Due to this resurgence of interest in the pre-apartheid and pre-colonial pasts, there has been a ballooning of research and exhibitions around paleontological finds, rock art sites and Iron Age sites indicative of early state formation. This has transported the nation back into what Tony Bennett has called ‘pasts beyond memory’. Where mainstream archaeology focuses on sites which reflect a history outside of a colonial past, maritime archaeology has had difficulty. Being a discipline with its main object of focus being the shipwreck, it is difficult to unravel it from a colonial legacy.

In an attempt to move away from these older notions of ‘public’ through the allure of the shipwreck, some maritime archaeologists have looked at different mechanisms, or what I call ‘modes of representation’, to construct new South African publics. Two such mechanisms are discussed in this thesis: the temporary exhibition of the *Meermin Project*, and the Nautical Archaeology Society courses on Robben Island. This is in contrast to the older Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, where I argue by using Greenblatt’s notion of ‘resonance and wonder’, that the wonder of the object salvaged is the central feature of the way it constructs its publics. This thesis discusses how a group of maritime archaeologists, located at Iziko Museums and the South African Heritage Resources Agency, attempted to construct new publics by locating resonance with its subject in an exhibition, and by making new archaeologists through a hands-on course.

Introduction: Bringing publics into being

Since the end of apartheid, and with that the construction of a new South Africa, archaeology has experienced what can be described as a resurgence in the public domain. With the creation of a new nation imagined as existing since time immemorial, there has been an emergence of archaeological pasts providing evidence of a nation believed to have existed before apartheid and colonialism. Due to this resurgence of interest in pre-apartheid and pre-colonial pasts, there has been a ballooning of research and exhibitions around paleontological finds, rock art sites and Iron Age sites indicative of early state formation. This has therefore transported the nation back into what Tony Bennett has called ‘pasts beyond memory’.¹ But where mainstream archaeology focuses on sites which reflect a history outside of a colonial past, maritime archaeology has had difficulty. Being a discipline with its main object of focus being the shipwreck, it has proven difficult to unravel it from a colonial legacy.

The aim of the research for this thesis is to discuss how a group of maritime archaeologists, located at Iziko Museums and the South African Heritage Resources Agency, attempted to construct new publics through locating resonance with its subject, and through making new archaeologists. I will first look at how public archaeology has emerged more broadly and what this has come to entail. Following this, I will look at the ways in which public archaeology has built itself within the context of post-apartheid South Africa. My main focus will be on examining three different ways that maritime archaeology has connected itself to its publics, through the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, through a slave history demonstrated by work related to the slave ship *Meermin*, and by the Nautical Archaeological Society (NAS) courses.

¹ T. Bennett, *Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

Looking back, with a great deal of hindsight, this thesis began in 2009 with a view, through the tempered glass of a scuba mask, of the endless blue of the South China Sea. Diving beneath the surface of the rippling tide, surrounded by the underwater world, I could not help but notice that every degree turned revealed new bursts of colour radiating from the immediate environment. In this space, it was easy to ignore the other divers doing their mandatory recreational dive courses whilst visiting Thailand. The warm, clear waters made it difficult to surface, this action forced only by the depleting air in the SCUBA tank clamped to my back as a temporary appendage. While not knowing it at the time, this first experience of diving was a turning point, which set me on a career path leading to heritage, and *underwater* heritage in particular. It validated what I already knew, that my passion for water was strong and, while immersed in it, I was introduced to the possibility of working with shipwrecks.

My engagement in museums and heritage began in 2007. While completing my final year of a Bachelors Degree majoring in History, Politics and English at the University of Cape Town, I made a simple phone call to the Gold of Africa Museum. With an interest in museums and cultures since a young age, I thought it a good idea to explore the possibility of a career path in the space of museums. The museum was taken aback at first by my request, as it was one they did not often get, but with a little persuasion the manager agreed to a voluntary position for me with the museum's education program. I was welcomed by the head of the department with enthusiasm, and my year spent there resulted in me my gaining of experience with running an educational program for school groups, and designing a holiday program for children. In addition, I found a mentor in the museum educator who introduced me to the African Program in Museum and Heritage Studies at the University of the Western Cape (UWC).

After graduation and a year of volunteering, and still unsure about where my future lay, I settled the UWC museum program in the back of my mind, and opted to gather some life experience while teaching English in South Korea. Although I was based in South Korea during that year, I was able to take short trips to Bali and China where my priorities were visits to temples, heritage sites and local markets. This introduction to Asia felt like a bombardment of heritage, which continued in a more structured and focused way during a three month trip through South East Asia at the end of my teaching contract. Following on from diving in Thailand, I experienced the well-known UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Ankor Temples, and solemnly walked through the Killing Fields, evidence of the ravages of war in Cambodia.

I was drawn in by the histories told and by the temples, ruins, routes and museums acting as visual evidence for the stories. Where each of the countries convinced me piece by piece of the importance placed on heritage by each person in their own ways, it was also starkly clear that those in positions of power were as aware of the importance of heritage for different purposes. These heritages were harnessed and developed into specific narratives to serve a purpose for national identity formation and fed into the tourist industry, a well-oiled machine in South East Asia.



Figure 1 Ankhor Temples, Cambodia, the site where a scene from the ‘Tomb Raider’ movie was shot. The tour guides insist on tourists taking pictures such as this one, creating the link to the movie. (Photograph by Heather Wares)

Although I did not realize it at the time, it was through experiences such as this one that I saw my own inherent interest in heritage, history, diving and archaeology come together, and lead me on a path to maritime archaeology. It was here that I saw the value in understanding the creation of histories rather than the mere existence of a history, the way in which different histories come together, appear and disappear as different publics are imagined. This influences much of the discussion which follows in this thesis.

I decided one day while I was in Hanoi, Vietnam, to apply for the African Program in Museum and Heritage Studies at the University of the Western Cape and returned to Cape Town at the beginning of 2010 to begin the program. It was during this year that I made a last minute decision to attend a talk on Museum Day at the Iziko South African Museum. Perhaps because of the spontaneity of my attendance, I did not take my usual notes nor do I recall the topic of the presentation or even who presented it. However, as it is with small details, I do recall browsing the program and settling on

the credentials of one of the speakers. In small letters beneath the name, together with other titles, was “Maritime Archaeologist”.

This led me to investigate further, and with the support of my professors Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, I contacted Jaco Boshoff, the maritime archaeologist at Iziko Museums of South Africa, and Jonathan Sharfman, the manager of the Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage Unit at the South African Heritage Resources Agency at the time, both of whom worked in the field of maritime archaeology in South Africa. When I asked what I needed to do to get involved in maritime archaeology, they said a Masters degree and a commercial diving course were essential. At the time I had neither. In January 2011, shortly after being given this advice, I enrolled for a commercial diving course with the Research Dive Unit at the University of Cape Town, and a Master’s degree with the History Department at the University of the Western Cape, specialising in museum and heritage studies.

For the year of 2011, I volunteered at the Iziko Social History Centre with Jaco Boshoff, who welcomed me with enthusiasm and was pleased to have help with the collection. Although I have recounted how I became interested in maritime archaeology, it may still seem strange that maritime archaeologists such as Jaco Boshoff would be interested in accepting me, a historian, as an archaeologist in training. It is only through an examination of what maritime archaeologists constitute as their publics that can explain this eagerness to absorb a person such as myself into the field. In South Africa, the field of maritime archaeology remains on the periphery with regards to its standing in the academic institutions. It is so disregarded by these institutions that there are no formal programs offering training to students interested in becoming maritime archaeologists. Yet, in recent years, maritime archaeology has grown in strength. This

growth has come from outside of the academy² in the form of coffee table books, novels, popular television shows, films and tourist brochures, appearing mostly in public spaces such as museums and hands-on courses. This therefore shows that, despite finding little space in the university, there was, and still is, public interest in maritime archaeology outside of the disciplinary bounds of academic archaeology.

For the majority of my time at Iziko, I sorted out boxes of artifacts. I felt I learnt much from this exercise as it was my first contact with archaeological material. Being a trained historian, I had a lot to learn when it came to maritime archaeology and I continue to learn every day. Apart from having access to the work that Jaco Boshoff was doing, I was also invited to join the team in the field, which involved visiting and diving shipwreck sites in Table Bay and also, at times, in False Bay. Being a volunteer, I helped where an extra diver was needed, often with underwater surveys, dredging of a site or performing searches. Here I gained valuable experience through time spent performing in various aspects of the discipline and I started to learn the intricacies of working on an underwater archaeological site.

Another way in which this type of learning can be solicited is by means of the Nautical Archaeological Society (NAS) courses which, hailing from the United Kingdom, are designed to relay the methodology and skills seen to be an important part of performing best archaeological practice. These courses are an international initiative with the goal of teaching practical maritime archaeological skills, such as underwater surveying, to interested members of the public.³ The underlying assumption of these courses is that the public needs access not only to the final research that is delivered, but also to the processes of the archaeological project itself.

² My use of the word ‘academy’ refers to the general formal academic structure such as academics, institutions, and trained professionals.

³ Nautical Archaeology Society, “What is the NAS Training Programme”, Nautical Archaeology Society, , <http://www.nauticalarchaeologysociety.org/content/what-nas-training-programme>. [accessed April 18, 2012].

It was through these courses that my practical lessons in maritime archaeology continued as, in July 2011, I was led to Durban with the maritime and underwater cultural heritage (MUCH) unit at the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA). It is because of this experience that I today describe myself as a product of the NAS course, something which will influence the discussion in the chapter of this thesis focused on these courses. Shortly after returning from Durban, I applied for a position to work as a contractual field officer with the MUCH unit at SAHRA, and on being accepted I started what was initially a six month contract on 1st January 2012. This is how I was absorbed into the field of maritime archaeology, and a year and a half on, I remain at SAHRA, continuing work on the protection and promotion of underwater heritage resources.

My absorption into the field can be considered as perhaps one which might not have occurred had maritime archaeology been more established in South Africa. I emerged out of the Nautical Archaeological Society (NAS) and perhaps can be called a ‘success story’ of the courses as I have, through careful tutorage, learnt the skills necessary to perform archaeology in an underwater environment. I continue to refer to myself as a historian, and would argue that I have been trained in the skills of archaeology to do archaeology in a practical and, to an extent, theoretical nature, without actually becoming an archaeologist. This is perhaps illustrative of one of the ways that public maritime archaeology is being constructed in post-apartheid South Africa. What then does the notion of public imply in this instance? Here I draw on debates around public history to think about archaeology’s publics.

There are three different ways of thinking about public history that need to be considered. The first is that discussed and followed by Wieble, who sees the role of public history as mainly assuming an audience and making findings of the academy

accessible to this given audience.⁴ Wieble demonstrates his thoughts on public history, and the role of the local population in conjunction with the role of the academic, both of which are seen as separate entities. He remains with the view that it is the job of the institutionally-connected public historian to help the given public tell their story by providing credibility to the story. ‘What resulted, in other words, was a synthesis—not a compromise—in which locals provided the passion to make the Lowell story meaningful and in which outsiders provided the dispassion to give it credibility.’⁵ He therefore considers public history in relation to popularisation, where the historian provides a way of representing a history to ‘the public’, which is parallel to what was practiced by social historians in South Africa in the 1980s. In South Africa, this was called ‘popularisation of history.’⁶

The second type of public history which is prominent in the literature is public history as shared authority, in which one thinks about how the public and the academy are sharing relations of knowledge and power with each other.⁷ ‘All good historical practice is reflective, but public history requires a special commitment to collaborate, to respond, to share both inquiry and authority.’⁸ Here the public historian understands and accepts the importance of not only listening to what those outside of the academy think about or remember about a topic but also includes these thoughts in their practice. In this way, it is not only the people outside of the academy gaining and learning from

⁴ R. Weible, “The Blind Man and His Dog: The Public and Its Historians,” *The Public Historian* 28 (2006): 12.

Lowell is a city in Massachusetts, the United States, where Weible was hired in 1979 as a historian for The National Park Service. It was through this experience, made possible by much of the city’s downtown being made a National Park, that Weible draws his arguments.

⁵ Weible, “The Blind Man and His Dog,” 12.

⁶ Nicky Rousseau, in her paper ‘Unpalatable Truths’, refers to the popularising projects of the 1980s under the Witwatersrand History Workshop, and including the Write Your Own History Project. She draws an outline of the various popularising projects and concludes, that although the intention is to broaden the academic field of history in the hands of a prescribed public, it is narrowed by the need to be controlled by the rules of the academy. N. Rousseau, “‘Unpalatable Truths’ and ‘Popular Hunger’: Reflections on Popular History in the 1980s,” (paper presented at the South African Contemporary History Seminar, University of the Western Cape, July 25, 1995), 5.

⁷ K. Corbett and H.S Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry,” *The Public Historian* 28 (2006): 18.

⁸ Corbett and Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry,” 1.

those within, but it is also a process by which the professional historian can gain insight from those they are studying. ‘The special character of public history derives less from formulaic definitions than from the nuances and contexts of practice.’⁹ Although by nature shared authority is a collaboration, there is still emphasis placed on the expert, and there is a divide between the different roles each person plays. ‘Public History’s authority ultimately depends on institutional roles defined by their employers.’¹⁰

Thirdly, public history can be seen to be examining the ways that history is produced in a range of different genres by different types of historians, as argued by Minkley, Witz and Rassool.¹¹ ‘Internal to heritage is expertise, drawn from disciplines such as archaeology, architecture, history and anthropology that provided the ‘ground’ for a spectacle of the past.’¹² This illustrates that a history and its publics are not given, they are ‘provided’ by the particular history being presented in a particular way. Furthermore, this way of thinking is about knowledge transactions between different interested parties and relations of power. It is necessary to stress that in this third type of public history, there are no pre-existing publics; but instead, through processes of production and representation, publics are conceived. This is expressed by Minkley, Witz and Rassool in ‘South Africa and the spectacle of public pasts’:

A heritage complex of disciplinary and ‘productive’ power and knowledge, and its disciplines and apparatuses, formulated and constituted the relationships and articulations between past and present in such a way as to allow ‘the people’ to become both the subjects and the objects of knowledges about, and of, the past. This argument draws on what Bennett called an ‘exhibitionary complex’, a self-regulatory form of knowledge, where the ‘populace’ are transformed into ‘a people or citizenry’ who are placed ‘as seeing themselves from the side of power... knowing power and what power

⁹ Corbett and Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry,” 5.

¹⁰ Corbett and Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry,” 8.

¹¹ G. Minkley, C. Rassool and L. Witz, “South Africa and the Spectacle of Public Pasts: Heritage, Public Histories and Post Anti-apartheid South Africa” (paper presented at the Heritage Disciplines symposium, University of the Western Cape, October 8-9, 2009), 22.

¹² Minkley, Witz, and Rassool, “South Africa and the Spectacle of Public Pasts,” 8.

knows, and knowing themselves as (ideally) known by power [and], interiorizing its gaze as a principle of self-surveillance.¹³

A similar approach is followed by Nicky Rousseau in her analysis of the popularisation projects in South Africa in the 1980s that are referred to above. It is the notion of ‘calling a public into being’ that Nicky Rousseau examines in her paper, “Unpalatable Truths and Popular Hunger”. She discusses the popularising projects developed by a South African academic community in the 1980s, which were intended to connect the public with a more accessible historical narrative. The need to write an alternative history, a ‘history from below’, was born from the political situation in South Africa, where the emergence of the trade unions and the Black Consciousness movement started to show a demand for a different kind of history,¹⁴ or rather a demand perceived by a grouping within the academy to exist. It can be thought that the popularising projects arose as a way in which social historians could remain connected to or even in control of these contemporary South African histories. The two popularising projects that Rousseau uses to illustrate her arguments, and which I draw on as comparisons for maritime histories and archaeologies, are the University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop (WHW) popular histories¹⁵, and one of its other components, the Write Your Own History Project (WYOHP).¹⁶

While each of these projects follows different strategies of public accessibility, Rousseau argues that ultimately the mechanisms of accessibility stayed the same. The production of the historical narrative remained within the control of the trained historians, who produced a ‘history from below’ for a public that was waiting to receive

¹³ Minkley, Witz, and Rassool, “South Africa and the spectacle of public pasts,” 8-9.

¹⁴ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 2.

¹⁵ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 4-5.

¹⁶ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 7.

it.¹⁷ This assumption is derived perhaps from the notion that a history produced about the ‘oppressed’, and made more accessible through popularised materials, will attract the interest of those who share a history of oppression. It is therefore assumed that these imagined publics, who share a history of oppression will take ownership of these popularised histories as this link will emerge ‘organically’. Rousseau argues instead that the link between a public and an assumed popular history focused on ‘histories from below’ is not a natural link but rather a manufactured one.¹⁸

Rousseau looks specifically at the popularizing projects of the University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop (WHW) to illustrate the above point. These projects focused largely on the popularising of academic texts for the benefit of the ‘ordinary person’ who would not otherwise have access to this kind of history, seen as their own history.¹⁹ History therefore becomes accessible in two ways: through popularised texts, and a more relatable context for a contemporary public. However, whereas the texts were meant to attract the attention of the ‘ordinary person’, Rousseau questions not only its accessibility but also whether there is in fact a pre-existing public waiting for this kind of history to be made available to them.²⁰ Instead, Rousseau argues that the public does not exist, but by assuming it to exist, the popularising projects bring it into existence.

This same idea of publics being constituted by processes of representation or through the means of addressing the public is followed by Warner, who states, ‘...public discourse says not only “let a public exist” but “let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way.” It then goes in search of confirmation that

¹⁷ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 5.

¹⁸ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 10.

¹⁹ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 5.

²⁰ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 3.

such a public exists...'²¹ Warner, therefore, argues alongside Rousseau that publics exist through the creation and presentation of text by demanding attention from possible interested audiences. It is through this demanding of attention that a public comes into being. Again asserting this notion of public history in a South African context Rousseau argues that, 'The "...development of a popular taste, indeed, a hunger, for an alternative version of the past"' is the dominant representation of 'the audience' throughout this period.'²²

If popular histories write narratives to satisfy an assumed audience with an 'organic' hunger for a certain kind of history, where then is this history being produced? As the public only comes into being because of the existence of that particular version of history, then those writing the history must be controlling both the narrative and the characteristics of the audience. Returning to the WHW, although the histories might be alternative to those usually produced from within the academy they remain tethered to the rules deemed acceptable by the academy. Thus, Rousseau maintains that "for the WHW a commitment to popularisation has never meant letting go of the idea that historical production is a highly skilled enterprise' involving notions of 'the craft', 'the guild', 'critical historical skills' and so forth."²³

It is through this analysis that Rousseau extends this criticism to the second project, the Write Your Own History Project (WYOHP). While WYOHP differed from the WHW in the way in which these histories were produced, there remained a need to apply 'proper' historical practice, and this was relayed to participants by those with the expert skills.²⁴ People could tell and write their own stories and be their own historians,

²¹M. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 114.

²² Rousseau, "Unpalatable Truths," 10.

²³ Rousseau, "Unpalatable Truths," 9.

²⁴ Rousseau, "Unpalatable Truths," 12.

as long as they followed specific guidelines and wrote their histories in the correct format.

Ultimately for the Write Your Own History Project, a ‘critical engagement with the past’, which is what defines the above, remains a central feature and way in which public history should be approached. Although the assumed public is encouraged to be the authors of what they are told is their own history,²⁵ emphasis is placed on a ‘critical engagement with the past’.²⁶ This approach to the production of history therefore comes with a condition that these histories are written following strict guidelines. In other words, the Write Your Own History Project provides these ‘ordinary people’ with a template from which to create their own histories. With the two examples given above, Rousseau argues that ‘there has been a tendency for popularisation to remain bound and circumscribed by the rules and procedures of guild history.’²⁷

For the Witwatersrand History Workshop Popularisation Project and the Write Your Own History Project, there is then an importance placed on giving to ‘the public’ what it is perceived to be lacking, i.e. knowledge and expertise.

Indeed, even where consciousness or understanding is held to be complex, there is an implicit inference that popular history and historians are able to offer something that ‘audiences’ lack or need to be made fully conscious and thus the effect remains the privileging of the academic site.²⁸

How then do these debates relate to the ways that public archaeology is practiced and written about?

A great deal of public archaeology is defined through methods of making archaeology popular. ‘Throughout the world, public agencies, professional societies, and individual archaeologists have recognised the need for more and better public

²⁵ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 7.

²⁶ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 7.

²⁷ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 18.

²⁸ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 11.

education about archaeology.²⁹ This is almost the same approach as popular history and the way that Wieble conceives of public history as the academy bringing its findings to an already constituted public.

The debates around public archaeology are related in the archaeological literature to the emergence of alternative archaeology. Alternative archaeology emerged out of a perceived need for a reworking of the purpose of archaeology, where it was argued that archaeology needed to aim its focus beyond the object. Conventional archaeology has a scientific focus drawing from material evidence. Alternative archaeologists suggest that although the scientific nature of archaeology is still an integral part of the practice and results of the practice of the discipline, it is also important to look at the culture attached to the objects. In other words, the meaning attached to the objects, such as where they came from, why they were there, who made them and for what reasons, are vital to the production of knowledge generated by the discipline.³⁰

Practitioners of alternative archaeology argue that there are the possibilities of many different pasts and different truths depending on the context which the objects are found in and to which they are attached.³¹ These are important arguments because the thinking around the new practice associated with archaeology is that the objects which are found and have been the focus of the practice for so long now need to be placed in a context.³² Don Rice, in his paper on 'New Archaeology', quotes Binford as saying: 'instead of viewing culture as simply a collection of shared values, which regulate

²⁹ F. P. McManamon, "The Many Publics for Archaeology," *American Antiquity* 56 (Jan. 1991): 121.

³⁰ C. Holtorf, "Beyond Crusades: how (not) to engage with alternative archaeologies." *World Archaeology* 374, Debates in "World Archaeology" (Dec., 2005): 548.

³¹ Holtorf, "Beyond Crusades," 549.

³² D.S. Rice, "The 'New' Archaeology," *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 9 (Spring, 1985):128.

behaviour within a society, why not look at culture as a means of human adaptation to both the natural and social environment?’³³

A good way of illustrating this concept of connecting the object to its different meanings is by closing the gap between the wreck and the ship.³⁴ At first glance, not much sense can be made of this analogy. However, as I thought about it a bit longer, I started to understand the image. A wreck is interesting for different people for different reasons, such as for its monetary value or its historical value. However, it is the wreck as an object which is the focus. The ship, on the other hand, is seen in a very different way. It is connected to a human history of commerce, trade, industry, politics and a part of peoples’ everyday lives. Or, as Rice puts it: ‘To demonstrate why pasts took place rather than to just demonstrate that they did.’³⁵

It is through this analogy that connections are made between the public and the academic field of history. The debate which emerges out of the introduction of alternative archaeologies is one around public accessibility to the knowledge of the discipline. As in the case of the popularising projects of the Witwatersrand History Workshop referred to as public history, the public is assumed as given. The ‘needs’ of that assumed public are brought into being by the development of popularised texts and images.

I argue that some maritime archaeologists in South Africa are reconstituting publics in two ways: by creating a new context on which to base a maritime history, and by developing a new type of archaeologist through the training of ‘ordinary people’ in archaeological skills. What means of address was used to address publics in maritime archaeology prior to the shift? As a way of answering this question, and of illustrating

³³Rice, “The ‘New’ Archaeology,” 128.

³⁴J. Adams and D. Gibbons, “Shipwrecks and Maritime Archaeology,” *World Archaeology* 37(2001): 284.

³⁵Rice, “The ‘New’ Archaeology,” 127.

the transformation of a maritime public, in this thesis I examine the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, a museum which follows conventional methods of representation as a case study. For maritime archaeology, the conventional assumption has been that it is the allure of the objects salvaged from the ocean floor which are of interest to their imagined public.³⁶ Walking into the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, surrounded by objects representative of maritime exploration and salvage, it is clear that the maritime history addressing this museum's audience is one largely based around the wonder of the objects retrieved from shipwrecks.

Greenblatt points out that, in museum display, objects can entice a person's wonder by representing that which is unusual or unattainable.³⁷ When applied to the realm of maritime history, wonder is generated around the objects because they represent what cannot be experienced by most people: that which lies on the ocean floor. Due to many of these objects being salvaged from ship wrecks, salvage and objects are what are used to address the public. What does this mean? Although in this case most of the objects do not represent great monetary value, salvage operations are driven by monetary gain thereby creating an undertone of the promise of treasure. It is not so much the town of Bredasdorp or the people that live there that are used as subjects of interest, but rather the objects themselves, evidenced by the museum often being referred to as simply the Shipwreck Museum, omitting the name of the town of Bredasdorp entirely. The public, which is constituted by the representation of the object as wonder, is one interested in the ultimately unattainable object: the shipwreck.³⁸

³⁶ N. O'Connor, "Underwater Archaeology," *Archaeology Ireland* 3 (Spring, 1989): 26.

³⁷ S. Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 43 (Jan., 1990): 19-20.

³⁸ For the most part the whole object of the wreck of the ship itself is unattainable due to very few shipwrecks still being intact from the wrecking, as well as the expense of an excavation of this kind if an intact wreck is found. The wreck of the *Vasa*, found and raised from the Stockholm harbour in Sweden in 1961, is an exception to this circumstance as the whole ship is on display at the Vasa Museum in Stockholm. Official Vasa Museum website, 'Vasa Museet,' <http://www.vasamuseet.se/en/>. [accessed May 23, 2013].

In an attempt to move away from these older notions of public through the allure of the shipwreck, some maritime archaeologists have looked at different mechanisms to make maritime history popular to a contemporary South African public. Two such mechanisms are discussed in this thesis through the *Meermin Project*, and the NAS courses on Robben Island.

It is in the *Meermin Project* that this is more evident, where the making of a new context for maritime history, and therefore maritime archaeology, is the focus. This traveling exhibition came into being through funding from the National Lotto Distribution Trust Fund for a larger project to research and look for the remains of the *Meermin* by maritime archaeologists. It can be argued that the *Meermin* was selected for this project because of the connection which can be made between maritime archaeology and a new South African national narrative of resistance and rebellion. The story of the *Meermin* also aligns itself neatly with the global lean towards a slave history, creating resonance with both a local and a global public assumed to want a representation of history provided by the exhibition in discussion. It is here that the reconstituting of a public for maritime archaeology comes to light. The *Meermin* exhibition assumes there to be a public out there which is both interested in and will find an affiliation with a slave history, not only of suffering but also of resistance and rebellion.

The narrative attached to the wreck of the *Meermin*, rather than the shipwreck itself, is exhibited and used as a platform from which this new context is reached. This turning away from the central attraction of the wonder of the object, along with turning to a narrative achieving resonance with an audience imagined to have an interest in a narrative of slavery, could relate to two aspects. The first, and possibly the most obvious, would be the lack of success in finding the object of the wreck itself; and the

second, a need for maritime archaeology to move away from a colonial history in order to attract a public in a post-apartheid setting.³⁹ In making the objects secondary to the history/story of the ship, what is commonly used as the definition for archaeology, the study of material remains, would not so easily apply. This would bring into question whether the Meermin project can strictly be seen as archaeology? Would it not rather be viewed as a historical endeavour? On the other hand it could be argued that, through the making of new publics by means of the focus on context, the Meermin is redefining the definition of what archaeology is.

A further mechanism to conceive of new publics has been through the Nautical Archaeological Society training courses. While remaining focused on transformation instead of context, the NAS courses run at SAHRA's Robben Island Field School in 2012 looked at ways of making new archaeologists. Like the Write Your Own History Project described by Rousseau, the NAS courses looked at ways of changing archaeology's methodology in two ways. Firstly by providing a template from which 'ordinary people' could learn the skills of an archaeologist, and secondly, by including different notions of what are considered, other than shipwrecks, to be subjects of maritime archaeology, such as maritime landscapes.⁴⁰ While I argue that the intention of the NAS courses is to make new archaeologists, especially in South Africa where maritime archaeology is not offered on a university level, I would go on to argue that it seeks to teach 'ordinary people' the skills to do archaeology rather than be archaeologists.

While inclusivity might be what is intended by many public archaeologists, in practice the participation of the public is controlled by those coming from the academy with the requisite expertise. This is illustrated by both the *Meermin* Project and the NAS

³⁹ Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," 27.

⁴⁰ Rousseau, "Unpalatable Truths," 7.

courses reviewed in this thesis. Although there is a clear distinction between these two case studies and the ‘old’ style of audience engagement for maritime history seen in the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, much like the Witwatersrand History Workshop and the Write Your Own History Project critiqued by Rousseau, they remain bound by the rules of the academy.

At the same time, though, as suggested earlier, this direction itself is not without problems and even where the production of history has become the focus of contestation, there has been a tendency for popularisation to remain bound and circumscribed by the rules and procedures of guild history.⁴¹

It is important for me to note at this point that I am aware that this is by no means a complete study of a public engagement with the field of maritime archaeology, or of the way in which it is presented to all potential publics. In that it is a Master’s Thesis, this dissertation is limited in its scope and acknowledges that any one of the themes drawn on would need a much larger study.

Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I would like, at this point, to acknowledge what this thesis is *not* doing. It is not looking at audiences through the lens of ‘who goes to museums and exhibitions, why they go to museums, and what their responses are’.

Leading from this, I am not looking at the ways in which maritime archaeology is making itself more accessible. In other words, I am not carrying out a project of popularising the field. Instead, I am defining maritime archaeology through underwater heritage, drawing on the attempts to create a broader sense of sites and systems considered to be under this banner. This being said, while I acknowledge different ideas around shorelines as associated with underwater heritage, such as the various examples of human settlement along the shorelines, fossils, rock art and engravings in caves, and

⁴¹ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 18.

shell middens , in this work I am concerned with the ocean. I am also not doing a survey of maritime archaeology and the different ways it is represented in the public domain. These take on many forms such as coffee table books, films, television shows, novels and popular histories.

To introduce this focus on the ocean, I will now turn to the Shipwreck Hall at the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. As the case study in the first chapter of this thesis, this museum represents a conventional outlook on maritime archaeology, based on the importance of objects salvaged from shipwrecks along the South African coast. I look at the ways in which these objects are used as the main method to illustrate South Africa's maritime history, leaving the audience with what I would call questions around the context potentially surrounding these objects.



Chapter One

Enquire at Reception: The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum

‘Enquire at reception’ are the words in bold black letters that appear in one of the cabinets in the Ship Wreck Hall at the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. I was somewhat startled and intrigued when I saw this notice on the first of a series of visits to the museum on 12th August 2012.¹ As I made my way around the exhibition spaces, I found myself wanting to ‘enquire at reception’ at every turn.

The blue cardboard label is placed amongst a seemingly random collection of objects, consisting of shells, broken glass bottles, small rocks and various pieces of metal. They lie together on a bed of sand scattered on the floor of the cabinet. The haphazard collection, in a glass case with this somewhat bizarre label, seemed to speak to the entire museum. While looking at the exhibition, there were constant questions in my mind surrounding provenance and context. What was the background of these masses of objects? Where did they come from? How were they found, and by whom? How have they found their way to the museum? The only clue was on the museum’s website, and even then it was very vague: ‘The museum collection, consisting only of donated artefacts, illustrates the influence of the numerous shipwrecks along the Southern Cape coast on the Strandveld.’²

In line with the above description, at this museum there was a context of the ship, its wreckage along the coastline, and the objects found from different wreck sites. However, this revealed very little to me. I wanted to know what ships the objects came

¹I visited the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum various times in order to experience the exhibit and perform research for this thesis. During some of these visits I was able to interview employees of the museum, had access to all the exhibition halls, the library and archives as well as to collections in storage.

² Official Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum website, ‘The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum’, www.bredasdorpmuseum.co.za. [accessed October 6, 2012].

from. Who was on the ships? Where they were coming from? Where they were going to and for what reason? I also found myself searching the displays in vain for information about the people aboard the vessels and their fates. Provenance and a broader historical context seemed not to be the museum's concern, and when I went to enquire at the reception there were few answers given.

This apparent lack of further information could either be a deliberate ploy on behalf of the museum to evoke curiosity and questioning, or else it could be merely a lack of attention to detail, since detail beyond the objects seemed immaterial to the museum. One explanation for this form of display may be that visitors do not all have the same fanatical need for more information and are satisfied with the object at face value, and perhaps are more interested in the maritime history of the area as representative of shipwrecks and the objects which have been salvaged from said shipwrecks. Perhaps text and in-depth information are not quite as appealing to all that pass their gaze over museum displays of objects as I first assumed them to be. However, it is this assumption of publics that provides this discussion with relevance as, in the same way that I assume a public to be asking for more, the museum assumes a public to be satisfied with the wonder of the object.

But what it seemed to evoke for me on my visits, was a museum that appeared to be arbitrary, random and without substantial context of either provenance or historical background, and yet at the same time was seeking to instil a broad theme through its collections on display. This thematic is one focused around the shipwreck, and the objects are displayed on its walls, and within its cabinets as symbols of evidence of the shipwreck history dominating the area of the Overberg. This flows from one cabinet to another, starting with collections of types of objects, such as shells, bathroom scenes, and portholes, shifting to displays of shipwrecks such as the *Lincoln* and the

Birkenhead, and moving finally to the displays of underwater projects that highlight the salvaging of wrecks as the primary means to recover a maritime past.

The Museum, though, is not restricted to shipwreck history. This is obvious in its naming and in its collections. The Museum is known under two names: Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, and Bredasdorp Museum. Besides the already-mentioned collections, it also displays artefacts that are not related to maritime archaeology, such as the *Collection of Automobiles* and *Memory Lane*, a collection of memorabilia and everyday objects donated from various individuals residing in Bredasdorp such as framed photographs of councils and committees, and clothing over different time periods. I will discuss these briefly later. For me, then, the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, sometimes called the Bredasdorp Museum, was a bit of an enigma. It claimed and asserted a history of the shipwrecks along the Cape coast through the lens of salvage, providing little information on the items on display. There was also an arbitrariness that seemed to point to a collection lacking any coherence, and that was rather an assemblage of curiosity.

Since the aim of this research is to demonstrate and discuss how maritime archaeology has attempted to construct new publics, this chapter acts as an illustration of more conventional methods of representation. The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, therefore, through the display of objects donated by salvors and those associating their heritage with Bredasdorp, constructs a public assumed to be drawn in by their interest in the wonder of the object. Taking the reader on a tour of the museum, pausing at the Shipwreck Hall specifically, I use Greenblatts analogy of ‘Wolsey’s hat’ to discuss what it means to display objects in a space, and the different associations of meaning a

display space can evoke.³ In this instance, objects are used as a means of address to publics assumed to be interested in a shipwreck history based on the salvage of these objects.

The Bredasdorp Museum OR Shipwreck Museum?

The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum is difficult to find. Although advertised on its webpage as “the only one of its kind in South Africa”⁴ and therefore what can only be assumed to be a ‘must-see’, there are no noticeable signs in the town directing visitors to its location. This might speak to the state of maritime archaeology itself in South Africa, or to the way in which I became involved in it, as I also only found the field after a few U-turns.

The above statement: ‘the only one of its kind in South Africa,’⁵ gives a clue as to why the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum is a focus for a chapter of this thesis, discussing the production of maritime histories in South Africa post-1994. Both in the past and today, the focus on maritime histories is on shipping and the shipwreck site. To illustrate this kind of conventional maritime museum display, the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, with its collection of donated objects displaying a shipwreck history of South Africa, seems a logical choice. Furthermore, as indicated by the difficulty I have had in finding information on its history, there is a need for research to be done on this museum and its contribution to public perceptions of South Africa’s maritime history. As representative of a base from which the production of a maritime

³ S. Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” 4. Wolsey’s hat, representative of Cardinal Wolsey and, therefore, King Henry VIII rule, has significance for Greenblatt as an object because it illustrates how objects can take on different meanings depending on where they are displayed and who owns them.

⁴ “The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum”, also to be found in the Official Publication of the Cape Agulhas Tourism Bureau, *Discover Cape Agulhas: Southern Most Tip Of Africa*, 2012 edition, 24.

⁵ “The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum”, 24.

history for a constructed public can develop, the museum provides a good introduction to the discussions in this thesis.

Due to this predominant ‘history of shipwrecks’ expectation created for the museum complex by its marketing media, on walking up to the entrance of the museum I was anticipating what had been so vividly advertised on the official website and tourist brochures as ‘The Shipwreck Museum of Bredasdorp’.⁶ This expectation is slightly misleading. Presumably fuelled by the parallel and at times conflicting histories of the museum complex itself, there are two different signs present on the wall at the entrance. One reads ‘Bredasdorp Museum’ at the top, with ‘Member: Cape Overberg Meander’ below, placing this museum on a tourist route. The other reads ‘Shipwreck Museum, main entrance’ explicitly stating the thematic approach of the museum inside. It is unclear if the name of the museum is ‘The Bredasdorp Museum’ or ‘The Shipwreck Museum’. However, it creates symmetry with regards to the theme, which is stated as being: ‘Shipwrecks along the dangerous Southern Cape coast and their influence on the development of the Strandveld.’⁷ Although this provides a general theme, it too is a contradiction. The display had little to connect the shipwreck objects on display to the development of the area, as it is a collection on objects with little given to provenance or context.

⁶ “The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.”

⁷ Official Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum website, “The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum,” <http://www.bredasdorpmuseum.co.za/> [accessed March 9, 2012].



Figure 2: The front entrance to the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, note the signs revealing the conflicting names of the museum. (Photograph by Heather Wares)

Although many of the brochures, the website and various tourist articles seem to give the impression to viewers and readers that this is predominantly a museum about shipwrecks, there is an additional parallel history attached to the museum complex. This parallel history is one focused on Bredasdorp as a town and settlement, one which would be assumed to attract a visitorship other than those interested in the shipwreck history of the surrounding area. It is these parallel and sometimes conflicting histories, as well as what seems to be a constant confusion around the naming of the museum, that demands a look into this museum's history.

Delving into the history of the development of the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, it was not easy getting even the most basic information. The museum's own website does not reveal much about how it came to be and where the collection came from, although there is an acquisitions register at the museum itself, revealing who donated individual objects.⁸ Interviewing museum staff proved to be the most useful in

⁸The official Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum website, "The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum," <http://www.bredasdorpmuseum.co.za/> [accessed March 9, 2012]. When interviewing the museum manager, Odette Everlee Weir, she admitted that there is confusion around the official name of the

answering some of these questions. Once I drew together the threads of histories told around the development of the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum was completed, two parallel histories emerged. The first, it appears, is one of an effort to save the building complex, made up of the church and the rectory of the Independent Church, which was built due to a split from the Dutch Reformed Church by some members of the local church community in 1864.⁹ Museum literature states that “the community accepted the project as their own, and contributed to its growth, collecting articles for display and helping to raise funds. It still has the ongoing support of the friends of the museum.”¹⁰ Who this ‘community’ is, though, is not specified.

The second narrative I have identified is one of producing a shipwreck history of the Agulhas coastline known as ‘The Graveyard of Ships’.¹¹ Marius Slammat,¹² in his interview, said that initially the search for the building to house objects associated with the shipwreck history of the area was focused in towns such as Arniston, situated on the actual coastline. But in the end, Bredasdorp was settled on, as the Independent Church building was in disrepair and, in order to save it, the Municipality and Divisional Council was looking for new ownership. ‘The idea for a museum for Bredasdorp and the surrounding area was born in 1967 when the dilapidated former Independent Church and its’ Rectory came up for sale’ and demolition.¹³

Local resident Suzanne van Rensburg and her architect husband Jack started campaigning for the preservation of the building for the establishment of a museum. The community rallied about them ... with

museum. She says that she makes a point of referring to the museum as ‘The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum’, incorporating the two main contexts presented by the museum complex, that of the Overberg tourist route, and that of the shipwreck.

⁹ M. Mouton, “Shipwreck Museum Turns 30.” The ‘Village Life’ www.villagelife.co.za, [accessed March 9, 2012].

¹⁰ Mouton, “Shipwreck Museum Turns 30.”

¹¹ The ‘Village Life’ www.villagelife.co.za, [accessed August 21, 2012].

¹² Marius Slammat is one of the museum staff members that I interviewed. He started working behind the receptionist desk, and has expanded to giving tours and general administration. The interview took place in the shipwreck hall with me asking questions as we walked around the exhibition space, relating my questions to different displays as we walked by.

¹³ The ‘Village Life’ www.villagelife.co.za, [accessed August 21, 2012].

a sympathetic ear on the part of the Municipality and Divisional Council lent by Ben Neethling, Johan Coetzee, Jurie Matthee and others.¹⁴

On 23 March 1967 the Independent Church was declared a National Monument, and on 4 December 1968 the Bredasdorp Museum officially became a provincially supported museum. The property was finally transferred to the Bredasdorp Museum on 19 May 1970.¹⁵

The making of the museum within the walls of the old Independent Church gave the building a use enabling it to be restored, and providing the objects a space to be housed. In the popular articles that have been cited here, the project is presented as one which was supported by a ‘united’ community, presenting ‘the community’ of Bredasdorp as whole and coherent. However, this was not necessarily so. As with many communities, it is made up of different facets. Where some see shipwrecks as an important part of Bredasdorp’s history, others do not feel the same affiliation.

By placing the donated objects in a museum in Bredasdorp, a connection was made to the Tourist Route of the Overberg. It is possible that the objects related to shipwrecks being placed within the walls of the Independent Church, and in so doing making a museum, was a mechanism to make the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum a destination marked on the above tourist route. This follows Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s discussion on making a museum space into a place. Although I do not intend to do a detailed analysis of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s discussion, the point that I would like to make is that the shipwreck hall is made into a space which associates it with the place in which the shipwrecks are found, through the use of objects in a themed environment.¹⁶

The objects salvaged from these wreck sites stand in for the ‘real thing’, as few visitors

¹⁴The ‘Village Life’ www.villagelife.co.za, [accessed August 21, 2012].

¹⁵ M. Mouton, “Shipwreck Museum Turns 30.”

¹⁶ B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 145.

would have the chance to see them *in situ* for themselves.¹⁷ It is this which created the dominant theme for the museum, perhaps silencing the history connected to the building.

What therefore started off as a campaign to preserve the building of the Independent Church as a piece of Bredasdorp history, was transformed into a way in which Bredasdorp could be connected with the shipwreck past of the Overberg area. As can be seen by the above parallel and conflicting histories, the naming of the museum has been a complicated matter. In order to gain more clarity, I looked into the annual reports starting from 1993-1994. This date is telling, as it also marks significant changes in the country, with the end to apartheid and a restructuring of the government. With the restructuring of the government in South Africa, attempts were made to reconstruct a national identity, and museums were one of the vehicles to do this.

The 1993-1994 report shows by its title that the museum at this time was still referred to as the Bredasdorp Museum.¹⁸ In looking at the names given to the museum, Odette Weir revealed that there was a distinct shift to include the word 'shipwreck'.¹⁹ This connection is strengthened by a mention of the museum's involvement in a campaign to take custodianship of and to restore the 'historic Cape Agulhas lighthouse'.²⁰ As a result, the lighthouse was re-commissioned in 1988 under the protection of the Bredasdorp museum.

¹⁷ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage*, 132.

¹⁸ Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport, Bredasdorp Museum, (2004) *Annual Report 2003-2004*, Cape Town: Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport.

¹⁹ Interview with Odette Weir, Bredasdorp Museum Manager, conducted by Heather Wares, Bredasdorp Museum, 12 August 2012.

²⁰ South Africa's official media site "A Storehouse of Shipwreck Memories: Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum," , <http://www.southafrica.net/za/en/articles/entry/article-southafrica.net-bredasdorp-shipwreck-museum#.Ua32I6dd-QI>. [accessed May 18, 2013].



Figure 3 A sign advertising Cape Agulhas as a tourist destination erected along the road coming in and out of the town of Bredasdorp. (Photograph by Heather Wares)

As shown in the annual reports, in 1994-1995 the Bredasdorp Museum and the Lighthouse were still regarded as separate. However, in 1996-1997, there is mention of the two joining.²¹ It is interesting to note is that even though the museum in the reports was known as the Shipwreck-Lighthouse Museum, the visitor statistics were recorded separately. Until the two museums separated again in June 2000, these statistics revealed that the Lighthouse Museum always attracted more visitors in general than what was then called the Shipwreck Museum.²² Above recording total visitor numbers, these statistics divided visitors in three separate categories: Local, Overseas, and Groups.²³ The statistics from the 1995-1996 Annual Report and the 1996-1997 Annual Report reflect these divisions:²⁴

²¹ Bredasdorp Museum, (1997) *Annual Report 1996-1997* (Cape Town: Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport).

²² Bredasdorp Museum (2001) *Annual Report 2000-2001* (Cape Town: Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport).

²³ Bredasdorp Museum (1996) *Annual Report 1995-1996* (Cape Town: Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport).

²⁴ Bredasdorp Museum (1996) *Annual Report 1995-1996* and Bredasdorp Museum (1996) *Annual Report 1996-1999*.

1995-1996 Annual Report		
Statistics	Shipwreck Museum	Lighthouse Museum
Total Visitors	9117	20761
Local	8266	17131
Overseas	851	3630
Groups	40	48

1996-1997 Annual Report		
Statistics	Shipwreck Museum	Lighthouse Museum
Total Visitors	9245	25113
Local	8484	19071
Overseas	941	6042
Groups	33	80

From June 2000, the museum was referred to as the Shipwreck Museum. The separation of the museums put great financial pressure on the Shipwreck Museum, as it had fewer visitors than the Lighthouse Museum.²⁵ This speaks to a later discussion on the Shipwreck Museum's exhibitions, as financial setbacks are described as one of the reasons for a lack of upgrading at the museum, especially in the year the museums separated.²⁶ In the 2001-2002 annual report, there is a comprehensive listing of the type of visitors who came to the museum, on what dates and how many per group. Most of these are on organised tours or as school groups.²⁷

Besoekers en Toergroepe (visitors and tour groups)	
April 2000 – Maart 2001	8 199
April 2001 – Maart 2002	8 412

²⁵ Bredasdorp Museum: *Annual Report 2001-2002*. (Cape Town: Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport).

²⁶ Bredasdorp Museum: *Annual Report 2000-2001*.

²⁷ Bredasdorp Museum: *Annual Report 2001-2002*.

Ten years later, in the 2011-2012 report, the museum is referred to as the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.²⁸ This illustrates an additional change in the naming of the museum through the addition of 'Bredasdorp'. In the report, there is no indication as to why this change occurs. I would assume, from what Odette Weir, museum manager, revealed in her interview, that the addition of 'Bredasdorp' could be an attempt at including a narrative outside of the shipwreck, and extend its publics within the locality.²⁹

At first glance: The entrance exhibition

The connection between the two narratives, of the history of Bredasdorp and that of the shipwrecks in the Overberg area, is detailed below in a tour through the museum. The overshadowing of the town's history by the shipwreck history is clear. I indicate this in my description and draw on arguments around a maritime history being produced by the wonder of the object, as outlined by Greenblatt. The politics of representation is of particular interest because as the way in which the objects came to be housed at the museum, through salvage, is a topic of dispute for maritime archaeologists. I will be discussing this dispute by taking the reader on a tour of the display within the Shipwreck Hall of the museum, leading from a display of object types, to a collection of shipwrecks in the area, to an exhibition of the salvage operations responsible for these collections being present in this museum.

As I came to the entrance of the museum, I was met by a security gate barring the threshold, clearly a modern addition to what used to be the Independent Church of

²⁸ Bredasdorp Museum: *Annual Report 2011-2012*. (Cape Town: Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport).

²⁹ Interview with Odette Weir, Bredasdorp Museum Manager, conducted by Heather Wares, Bredasdorp Museum, 12 August 2012.

Bredasdorp, described as important to the community on the museum's website.³⁰ As discussed, this invokes the community as a seemingly singular and united entity. This notion of the community is perhaps used as a tool to attract more support for the restoration of the church building and, in turn, for the making of the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. The language used in the below quotation seems to be an attempt to convince website visitors that the decision was unanimous and that it was the right decision. Perhaps, hinting that some visitors are not convinced.

In 1967 the community *wisely* decided to use the old church, built due to a split in the local church community a century earlier, as a museum focussing on the central role shipwrecks had played along the Southern Overberg coast. This *widely acclaimed* grand old church still remains the heart of *modern day Bredasdorp* and draws visitors from around the world.³¹ [my italics]

On being 'buzzed' in, I enter. At the reception desk are tourist brochures of the area including 'Discover Cape Agulhas: Southern Most Tip of Africa'³² and 'Museums of the Western Cape'³³. As I look around, I take in a replica map of the Agulhas coast line, depicting the numerous wreck sites which have been identified, introducing the shipwreck theme so carefully displayed within the exhibition space to come. I soon recognise the reception hall exhibit as a precursor to what I can expect in the Shipwreck Hall, and of what I would describe as three distinctive display themes: collections of objects, shipwrecks of the area and salvage.

³⁰ Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, www.bredasdorpmuseum.co.za. [accessed October 6th, 2012].

³¹ Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, www.bredasdorpmuseum.co.za [accessed October 6th, 2012].

³² Cape Agulhas Tourism Bureau, *Discover Cape Agulhas: Southernmost Tip of Africa*, brochure, Official Publication of the Cape Agulhas Tourism Bureau, 2012: 12.

³³ Museums Van Die Wes-Kaap: n' Beter begrip van en trots op ons diverse erfenis. Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport, Kaapstad, (no date).



Figure 4 Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum entrance hall, framed shipwrecks. (Photograph Heather Wares)

The replica map is one of a collection of framed maps depicted as associated with the ‘graveyard of ships’.³⁴ Neighbouring the framed map are three framed collages of images, objects and text of different well known wrecks and salvage projects in the area, the *Arniston* (1815), the *Schoonenberg* (1722) and the *Birkenhead* (1852). All of these wrecks were sites well-known in the area for the salvage work done on them at various times, introducing a display theme of underwater projects performed through the means of salvage.

All of the above framed maps and displays, together with other souvenirs, such as mini bottles with models of sailing ships inside them and shells, are prominently for sale to visitors as reminders of the shipwreck history experienced at the museum and as part of the Agulhas tourist route, as illustrated by the embellished heading present on the map ‘Le Agulhas’. The selling of these mementos could be seen as a way in which the museum expects its audience to take away with them the museum experience, literally and metaphorically, the object of the shipwreck.

³⁴ Cape Agulhas Tourism Bureau, *Discover Cape Agulhas: Southern Most Tip of Africa*, 24.

Two additional framed maps are for sale. These maps depict ‘Marine Casualties in Southern African Waters’, with two time periods identified, 1552 to 1913, and 1914 to 1945. All of the frames appear to be memorialising the wrecks shown in location as a point on the map and named in text, once again pointing to the theme of the shipwreck. These particular maps locate the museum and the shipwreck history it depicts in the larger context of South Africa, placing it not only within a local history, but a national one too.

Some of these frames for sale are hung on a divide blocking out a portion of the collection directly behind it, leaving enough in view to reveal an extensive collection of bottles. This collection reveals the third display theme used in the upcoming shipwreck hall, a display of objects by type, including bottles ranging from those used for shampoo to those used for medicine and poison. This collection is 6000 strong, of which 2000 are on display. This is the first clue to the strategy of exhibition decided upon by museum management, namely various collections of objects, arranged by type, behind the protective shield of glass and cabinet walls.

This entrance space creates an expectation of the shipwreck hall to come. The bottle collection seems to be a prime example of a collection of objects as type, and representative of objects collected for the sake of a collection. The maps depicting locations of shipwrecks along the Southern Cape Coast introduce the main theme of the shipwreck, and the area to which they are associated. Finally, the framed ‘collages’, which include images, a small amount of text and a collection of miniature objects representing well known wrecks in the area on which salvage projects had been performed, introduce the display around maritime salvage.

This entrance space is flooded with natural light through the windows framing the back of the room. This is in strong contrast to the shipwreck hall, which is presented

to the visitor as a recommended first port of call and as the ‘main event’. It is this contrast in lighting that Kratz refers to when she examines the ways in which an exhibition uses different methods of representation to present an exhibition to a potential audience. She shows that lighting, like colour and other strategies of design, is used to evoke a particular sense of emotion in the audience. ‘We use light as we use words, to elucidate ideas and emotions. Light becomes a tool, an instrument of expression.’³⁵ Light, however, is not used alone as a method of designing the mood of an exhibition space. Colour is often used together with lighting to accentuate the effect.³⁶ The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, by means of contrasting the entrance hall with the Shipwreck Hall, follows these strategies of using light and colour to evoke emotion. The strategy is to use light to set a mood rather than to point the audience on a particular path.

This is immediately experienced when, stepping through a door opposite the reception desk in the entrance hall, I am led to the Shipwreck Hall which slowly envelopes me into the dark space. This effect is created by a dark sombre blue paint that covers the walls and the windows, blocking out any natural light. Again referring to Kratz’s analogy of ‘rhetorics of value’, the use or blocking out of natural light is seen to communicate certain values to the audience. Natural lighting tends to inspire an admiration as it is seen to be an expression of authenticity, realism and authority. However, as is mentioned by Kratz, natural light also has a destructive effect on museum displays because of its ultraviolet rays, therefore often needing to be controlled by additional artificial light.³⁷

³⁵ C. Kratz, “Rhetorics of Value: Constituting Worth and Meaning through Cultural Display,” *Visual Anthropology Review* 27 (2011): 22.

³⁶ Kratz, “Rhetorics of Value,” 29.

³⁷ Kratz, “Rhetorics of Value,” 30.

In the case of the Shipwreck Hall at the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, the blocking out of natural light is less for the protection of the collection and more for the effect that it creates, in two senses. The first is to create a threshold, making a distinction between the entrance hall, which lets in vast amounts of natural light, and the beginning of the Shipwreck Hall.³⁸ The second is to set a mood or atmosphere, perhaps with the intention of providing an atmosphere of vast stormy skies.³⁹ This image is built upon by the ocean and seagull sounds which are presented to the visitor's ears on entry to this exhibition hall.

Throughout my exploration of this exhibition hall, the sounds of the seagulls and waves faintly follow me. The dark atmosphere remains a constant, while the displays subtly transform from one theme to another. At first I am faced with cabinets filled with objects of the same type, with little explanation other than their name as object, such as 'portholes'. The display then moves on to displays of specific shipwrecks, accompanied by texts revealing their nationalities, and the dates of their sinking. These culminate in displays of the salvage projects responsible for the presence of the objects displayed throughout the Shipwreck Hall. This is a museum that collects and displays objects found in the sea according to type, employs the theme of the shipwreck to advance its narrative, and glorifies the salvage operation. All of these result in the production of a public for maritime history, through the wonder of the object by means of their attachment to the underwater environment, embedding in these objects a unique value.⁴⁰

³⁸ Kratz, "Rhetorics of Value," 18.

³⁹ Kratz, "Rhetorics of Value," 22-23.

⁴⁰ Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," 19-20.

An exhibition of types:

While my ears force the seagulls and waves into mere background sound, my eyes adjust to the dark space, allowing a room filled with objects to emerge. At first appearing to be organised in a haphazard way, and for the most part, continuing in this vein, some objects are carefully ordered and displayed in cabinets locked behind glass screens. This order is created through a method of displaying objects by type, from a display of shells to that of the portholes flanking the entrance.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has described a museum's progression, from a space displaying a random assortment of curious objects to that which aims to display these objects within a certain context, one which mimics the environment from which it came.⁴¹ In this case, the storm-like ambiance, created by the dark painted walls and overhead sounds, attempts to place the objects within the context of the stormy Cape seas responsible for the many shipwrecks scattered along the coastline of the Southern Cape Coast.⁴² This context, a believable space in which the audience can start to imagine the environment from which these shipwrecks came, is built upon by the collections of ordinary objects.

This type of display is noticeable on my immediate left as I enter the Shipwreck Hall, as one of the confined cabinet displays shows itself. This cabinet holds a collection of shells, which seems not to be ordered according to any particular categories, but rather is just a collection of the shells as objects from the sea. There is no size, species, level of value, or even colour order which might be expected from this kind of display, often used in natural history museums. Instead, they seem to be placed

⁴¹ B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," in *Exhibiting Cultures*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 389.

⁴² Cape Agulhas Tourism Bureau, "Discover Cape Agulhas: Southern Most Tip of Africa," 2012 edition, 24.

there as a collection which has become merged to be shown as representative of one object.⁴³



Figure 5 Shipwreck Hall - shell display, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum (Photograph Heather Wares)

The placement of seemingly ordinary objects tells us about the kind of meanings the exhibition wishes to project through their collection and display. Through the analysis of ‘Wolsey’s hat’, Greenblatt illustrates what he calls the transmigrations of meaning associated to the display of objects.⁴⁴ He argues that the meanings associated with objects change depending on where they are displayed, what they are displayed with, what they are used for, and who owns them or controls their means of representation. Ordinary objects can, therefore, be transformed into objects of importance by being placed in a particular display together with other objects, with the purpose of representing a particular history. Therefore, by means of the creation of a mimetic environment representative of a shipwreck history, the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum transforms the meaning of ordinary objects, such as shells, to objects

⁴³ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Ethnography,” 389.

⁴⁴ Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” 4.

considered unique by virtue of their association with this particular history, and therefore of value.⁴⁵

This production of meaning is enhanced through the placement of labels providing a small amount of information to explicitly tell the audience how to order these objects.⁴⁶ Despite slightly different methods of display - some objects confined by cabinets and others by chain dividers - the objects share one obvious display technique: scattered amongst each collection are the above-mentioned labels that follow a unified design of blue cardboard backing with a white sheet of paper stuck on top of it, leaving a blue border with the words printed in black ink, in a font similar to those used by the first word-processing computer programs. The label is then laminated and either stuck to, or placed among objects, creating an association between text and object. They almost appear as signs on a hastily prepared school poster project.



Figure 6 Shipwreck Hall - a label accompanying a shipwreck display, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

These labels can be found accompanying objects throughout the collections lining the walls of the Shipwreck Hall. The only information revealed by them are singular definitions, names and dates of the ship from which the object originally came,

⁴⁵ Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," 19-20.

⁴⁶ Kratz, "Rhetorics of Value," 35.

and perhaps the provenance of the object by means of a name and date. There is little background information, leading me to assume that representing the material culture of the shipwreck is what is seen as important by those who produced the exhibition, overshadowing any other possible meanings associated with an interpretive maritime history. These objects provide evidence of the existence of these underwater ‘marvels’ outside of the epic tale, reminding me of the broad thematic of the shipwreck which exists throughout the exhibition. However, I found myself constantly asking for more.

Questions start to build in my mind as I examine the collection of shells, the foremost being, why include a seemingly random display of shells, unconnected to shipwreck sites, with no apparent cohesion such as size, place or name? The only explanation I have been able to deduce is that these objects play the part of adding to the ocean ambience of the space. The shell collection sets the tone for the collections to come. The issue of the lack of background information or context within the various collections continues from cabinet to cabinet, and more so with those objects which are ‘free’ of total confinement and placed in an open space only separated from the visitor by a rope divide. The function of these objects appears to be only as a means to create an ambient space, as illustrated by a life-boat, an image indicative of the shipwreck theme.

These displays interrupt what is usually expected from this kind of exhibition: a collection of treasure. This expectation is brought on by a common popular perception of what the shipwreck represents, and how it is portrayed through myths and legends.⁴⁷ This connection to a public imagination, with the promise of treasure, is hinted at throughout the Shipwreck Hall collection, without ever actually presenting a collection of treasures. One tangible example is the placement of a wooden treasure chest on the

⁴⁷ R. Asher, “Archaeology and the Public Image,” *American Antiquity* 25 (1960): 402.

floor of the Shipwreck Hall, amongst displays depicting the development of diving technology. By showing these ordinary objects together with the processes of salvage and the advent of new diving technology, the idea that these enhance the potential of finding treasure is suggested.⁴⁸ While this is the case, these objects end up standing in the place of that treasure, rather displaying value because of their uniqueness. The objects are engrained with this unique trait because of what they represent, providing the audience with the experience of laying their eyes on something that they otherwise would not have the opportunity to see and interact with.



Figure 7 Shipwreck Hall - wooden chest, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

Although the novelty value of the collection begins to give clues to questions around the inclusion of ordinary objects, this still does not fully answer the questions so often asked: ‘Why save, let alone display, things that are of little visual interest? Why ask the museum visitor to look closely at something whose value lies somewhere other than in its appearance?’⁴⁹ In the case of the shipwreck, Adams and Gibbons, writing on the value of ships and boats as archaeological material, provide a possible answer. ‘Ships themselves have been described as the most complex artefact routinely produced prior to the Industrial Revolution, and their crews and material culture as unique

⁴⁸ O’Connor, “Underwater Archaeology,” 26.

⁴⁹ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Ethnography,” 386.

manifestations of society as a whole.⁵⁰ Although this museum does not focus on cultural history, perhaps the choice of displaying objects not representative of treasure is made in order to focus on the shipwrecks themselves. Alternatively, perhaps their collection simply does not include items of commercial value. Either way, this is a museum of objects, with the focus on the object as displaying the importance of the material culture itself,⁵¹ rather than monetary value, of a maritime past. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes a museum exhibit as displaying representatives of a whole.⁵² The collections, therefore, can be considered to be material evidence of the existence of shipwrecks, below the ocean's surface, in the absence of the whole ship,⁵³ it being near impossible to display the entire wreck site.⁵⁴

In the case of the shipwreck specifically, the shipwreck site is large and removing the entire site, as it was found, to place in a museum display would require advanced technology and vast amounts of funds. Evidence on this kind of extensive work can be seen only in a few unique cases where museum buildings have been constructed around nearly intact shipwrecks. However, these are rare examples.

In South Africa, the Dias Museum⁵⁵ is, to some extent an example of this. 'To commemorate the quincentenary of the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope by the Portuguese captain, Bartholomeu Dias' a replica of the caravel, or vessel that Dias sailed in 1488, was constructed.⁵⁶ The construction of the replica was part of a bigger commemoration festival, which was funded by the South African Government.⁵⁷ The

⁵⁰ J. Adams, "Ships and Boats as Archaeological Source Material," *World Archaeology* 32, Shipwrecks (Feb., 2001): 280.

⁵¹ Adams, "Ships and Boats as Archaeological Source Material," 293.

⁵² Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," 394.

⁵³ I. Hodder, "Theory and Practice in Archaeology", in *Material Cultures*, eds. Daniel Miller, Michael Rowlands, Christopher Tilley and Annette Weiner (London: Routledge, 1995), 9.

⁵⁴ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," 394.

⁵⁵ "Bartholomeu Dias Museum Complex," <http://www.diasmuseum.co.za> [accessed January 22, 2013].

⁵⁶ L. Witz, "Eventless History at the End of Apartheid: The Making of the 1988 Dias Festival," *Kronos* 32 (November 2006): 162.

⁵⁷ L. Witz, "Eventless History at the End of Apartheid: The Making of the 1988 Dias Festival," 162.

festival coincided with the voyage of the replica, from Lisbon to Mossel Bay, with the arrival at Mossel Bay as the finale.⁵⁸ In order to create a home for the replica, as well as for the recounting of the festival, ‘the Bartholomeu Dias Museum complex was built in Mossel Bay and opened in the year following the festival.’⁵⁹ The vessel, artefacts and photographs of the various festival activities are displayed on the walls of the museum complex, a custom-made building named the Maritime Museum. Where the Mossel Bay Bartholomeu Dias Museum houses a replica, the *Vasa*, in Stockholm, Sweden, boasts the real thing. The project to lift the *Vasa* and place it in public view was an enormous task.

After being commissioned by King Gustav II Adolf in 1625, construction of the *Vasa* got underway in 1627.⁶⁰ By 1628 the building of the ship was completed, and on the 10th of August of the same year she set off on her maiden voyage. This voyage was not long, as shortly after her launch the *Vasa* keeled over and sank in Stockholm harbour. Although there were attempts to salvage the vessel over the years, it was finally raised in its entirety in 1961. After spending some time at the Vasa Shipyard, she made her final voyage to the new Vasa Museum, built specifically to house the complete remains of the wreck.⁶¹

This project took place over several years and cost a considerable amount of money and resources. Even if sufficient resources exist, many shipwrecks are found scattered and broken up on the ocean floor. The *Vasa*, which lay protected by silt in a harbour at a depth of 32 meters is somewhat of a rarity.⁶² The conditions in which it lay kept the wreck largely intact, making it possible for much of it to be recovered and

⁵⁸ Witz, “Eventless History at the End of Apartheid,” 179.

⁵⁹ Witz, “Eventless History at the End of Apartheid,” 189.

⁶⁰ The Vasa Museum, “The Ship: Important Dates,” <http://www.vasamuseet.se/en/The-Ship/Important-dates/> [accessed January 21, 2013].

⁶¹ The Vasa Museum, “The Ship: Important Dates.”

⁶² The Vasa Museum, “The Ship: Important Dates.”

displayed. Considering the difficulties in achieving this kind of display, most maritime museums have to find ways of presenting the history of ships without providing their audiences with a visual representation of the whole.

In order to create a display which makes an audience feel like they are presented with ‘the real thing’, alternative strategies for representation are called upon.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett introduces the idea of the mimetic environment, creating an atmosphere closely linked to the actual site from which the objects came. Through sound, colour and lighting, the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum creates the environment of the shipwreck along the southern Cape coast, leaving the object of the ship to be represented through recognisable collections representative of the whole, such as the collection of portholes.

This representation is presented through the various collections of objects as type. Again following the thoughts of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett about the importance of the collection, ‘...they are at their most documentary when presented in their multiplicity, that is, as a collection’.⁶³ With its object-heavy collection, the Shipwreck Hall is an ideal example of the ordinary, representative of technologies and activities aboard ships. In addition to the display of the shell and porthole collections, I encounter what could be described as the most representative of the ordinary: a collection of various objects used for washing aboard a ship. This is a display outside of the confines of the cabinet, creating a more fluid link between the visitor and the object, separated only by a chain divide.

⁶³ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Ethnography,” 391.



Figure 8 Shipwreck Hall - objects displayed outside of the glass cabinets, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

In some displays, there is an attempt to create a ‘false’ context, presenting the audience with a connection between an object and a background picture, while on closer inspection it becomes clear that this connection is random. As a background for the porthole exhibition, there is a black and white photograph of people waving farewell to a ship leaving the dock complete with handkerchiefs and streamers. This placed as the background of such a cabinet gives the impression that these objects are part of one collection salvaged from one wreck site.

The photograph has its own official label attached to its top right hand corner, explaining its significance as part of the mail lines in text: ‘Harris, C. J. & Ingpen, B. D. 1994. Mailships of the Union-Castle Line. Vlaeberg: Fernwood Press, p.11’.⁶⁴ This therefore adds to the ‘false’ context as they are not from one specific ship, but are simply a collection of portholes from various wrecks. However, the lack of consistent labelling, and the presence of one label with the heading ‘portholes’ followed by an

⁶⁴The label goes on to explain where it was made; ‘Photograph produced by: Test Flight and Development Centre, Photographic & Reconnaissance Section, Bredasdorp.

explanation of what they are used for in general, reveals no connection. This was evident throughout these displays of collections, as often I found myself looking for a connection in a cabinet, first drawn in by a label, but finding nothing more than the word ‘porthole’ printed in front of me.



Figure 9 Shipwreck Hall - display of portholes, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

These collections are presented as ordinary objects awarded value as material evidence of what the visitor can expect: the shipwreck itself. These objects are placed within cabinets and presented as a whole, through the display technique of a collection representative of a type. While these objects fit within a theme of the shipwreck, setting the stage for the introduction of the specific shipwrecks to follow, they seem haphazard in display. The labels reiterating their display as type are inconsistent. At times they provide the names of associated shipwrecks and their time of wrecking, and at other times they provide only the type of object.

The shipwreck:

Where the collections of type provided the material evidence for the displays of shipwrecks, these collections of shipwrecks are further evidence of their existence⁶⁵ off the Southern Cape Coast. My reading of the way in which the two types of displays work together is to see the collections of type as an example of the kind of object to expect, introducing the viewer to the ship. The displays of ships appear to feed off the object display, adding to it a small degree of context. This allows the exhibition hall to progress towards the main theme.

Moving on from the collection of objects typically found in a ship's bathroom, and remaining on the right hand side of the exhibition space, I find myself looking at a cabinet containing a small collection of artefacts that are described as having been salvaged from the *Birkenhead*. This well-known ship, wrecked in 1845, was found along the Cape coast, and salvaged between 1986 and 1989. It provides the shift the museum makes from a collection of type to a display of shipwrecks.⁶⁶ I find that the way in which the museum is laid out carefully guides me on a path from the intrigue of objects to the extensive history of shipwrecks related to the area. Both the objects and shipwrecks are displayed in such a way that they present as evidence of the dominating shipwreck theme found throughout the museum complex. This is an easy and seemingly natural adjustment to make, from type to ship, and I hardly realised the shift until I started to re-examine the photographs I had taken of the exhibition space.

⁶⁵ I. Hodder, "Theory and Practice in Archaeology," 10.

⁶⁶ Iziko Museums of South Africa, 'Maritime Archaeology Acquisitions Register: H.M.S Birkenhead (MA 89/1)' 1989.



Figure 10 Shipwreck Hall - the *Birkenhead* display, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

The *Birkenhead* collection is the first of a series of known shipwrecks placed on display by means of objects having been salvaged from the ocean floor. The display is small. Only two objects in the collection, a pair of marble vases hint at a larger collection of more valuable items. The collection is accompanied by text revealing the name of the ship and the date of its wrecking, as well as the provenance of the various including the vases. Images complete the collection, depicting the ship in working condition, in contrast with the ship in the process of being wrecked. It appears from the objects, text and images that wrecks such as the *Birkenhead*, which hold importance for the shipwreck history of the area, are afforded a more in-depth historical context than the objects described as type.

However, this generosity of context is not long-lasting as, with a move from the *Birkenhead* display to others representing specific shipwrecks of the area, the minimalist labelling returns. A series of cabinets with a uniform method of display comes into view. Each holds a sparse representation of objects placed within the context of a specific known shipwreck, the date it was wrecked and the country of origin.



Figure 11 Shipwreck Hall - display of the shipwreck *Merestijn* (1702) and *Fame* (1822), Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

The objects are placed side by side behind a glass shield. The slated backing, painted a dark grey, acts as a backdrop on which the blue laminated cardboard placards continue to offer scant information about each of the wrecks. With only labels to hint at provenance, I am left with similar questions to Greenblatt about what these objects represent outside of their cabinets and the four walls of the church-turned-museum. The label generally only reveals the name of the ship and its date of wreckage, both of which are illuminated with back-lighting together with the objects, seldom giving any other information. The only other clue as to the context of this wreck is the cut-out square upon which a flag of origin of the ship is printed.



Figure 12 Shipwreck Hall - Label for the wreck of the *Arniston* and the date it sank, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (photograph Heather Wares)

As the various displays of shipwrecks continue from one to the other, they culminate in a rudimentary interactive display, offering up a chance for the visitor to set a globe of the world and a series of figurines representing different maritime nations in motion. As the button is pressed, each of the figurines present themselves in sequence, with their corresponding shipwreck and its date of wrecking illuminated on boards both right and left of the display. There is nothing to indicate who the figurines are supposed to represent, where the ship was wrecked, or the circumstances of the wrecking. The very limited interaction provided by pressing a button is one that gives a singular answer to my myriad of questions of context, stressing multiplicity of places and notions of national origin. This, therefore, places the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum within a global maritime, mercantile and exploration history.

The question of where the ships were wrecked is partially answered, as I find myself lead by the floorboard, which transforms from simple museum flooring to the decks of a ship, to face the mural of the Agulhas Lighthouse. This mural projects out from the uniform blue that covers the rest of the room, firmly taking charge of my attention as I walk towards the 'ship's railing', acting as a figurative barrier between

myself and the open ocean. The effect of this construction of place is completed,⁶⁷ as I look skywards, by the criss-cross of cardinal points pinned to the ceiling of the exhibition space.⁶⁸



Figure 13 Shipwreck Hall - Cardinal points situated on the ceiling, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

The museum's website echoes this intention, revealing the floor layout of the museum complex as a whole. In dragging the cursor over a text box connected to the perfectly square outline of the shipwreck hall, the area and text is magnified, disclosing the words: 'Stand on the slop and hold the rail, close your eyes and listen!!!! Imagine you are on a sail Ship in 1889.'⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," 389.

⁶⁹ "Room Layouts," The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, <http://www.bredasdorpmuseum.co.za/index.php/roomlayouts> [accessed October 14, 2012].



Figure 14 Shipwreck Hall - Cape Agulhas lighthouse mural, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

In my transportation to this lighthouse, I am placed upon the tourist route of the Southern Cape Coast, more specifically the route to Cape Agulhas.⁷⁰ The Southern Cape Coast is made up of a series of tourist routes including whale watching, fauna and flora (portrayed as unique to the area), and vast mountain ranges.⁷¹ The Cape Agulhas route is built upon notions of a shipping tradition with the ‘dangers’ of a ‘rugged and stormy’ coast line faced by sailors.⁷² A connection is made between the stormy seas of Agulhas and the fate of the ships intending to make their way past this coastline centuries earlier.

The mural is a vivid way in which the museum has placed the collection of both object types and shipwrecks in a context of the ‘Graveyard of Ships’.⁷³

The strong winds and currents, gigantic storms, dangerous off-shore reefs and the unforgiving coastline of Cape Agulhas and the Overberg are the reasons that this area is known as “The Graveyard of Ships” – along this coast-line ships have been lost at more than one ship-wreck for every kilometre.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ The Official publication of the Cape Agulhas Tourism Bureau, ‘Discover Cape Agulhas: Southernmost Tip of Africa’, 2012 Edition.

⁷¹ SA-Venues, www.sa-venues.com [accessed 23 January 2013].

⁷² “Discover Cape Agulhas: Southernmost Tip of Africa,” 19.

⁷³ Official Publication of the Cape Agulhas Tourism Bureau, *Discover Cape Agulhas: Southern Most Tip of Africa*, 24.

⁷⁴ Official Publication of the Cape Agulhas Tourism Bureau, *Discover Cape Agulhas: Southern Most Tip of Africa*, 24.

There is an attempt to take what is experienced by the objects of type, and place that experience in the context of known shipwrecks of the Southern Cape Coast. This plays to the strategy of placing the collection within the overall theme of shipwrecks in the area, providing the visitor with a powerful atmosphere⁷⁵ through the mural situated after the unified shipwreck display. The mimetic environment is produced to create wonder around the object as part of the theme, evidence that the environment was representative of something ‘real’.⁷⁶ That ‘reality’ is the image of the Cape as the site where two oceans tumultuously converge at the southernmost tip of Africa.

Exhibition of salvage:

With seeming ease, the museum begins the third shift of display by placing the theme of salvage intermittently amongst the last few cabinets of shipwrecks. Breaking with the fluid museum tour, I am faced with an off-white basic map of a shipwreck site, named in clear bold letters as “the *Nicobar* (1783)”⁷⁷. It is the first clue about the third shift of display, from the shipwreck to the salvage operation. This display seems partially out of place, as other displays of this kind are predominantly featured within a separate section of the exhibition space, with the mural preceding them. This separate section provides a focus for the visitor on salvage operations and the technology of diving as a means of accessing these sites below the ocean’s surface.

⁷⁵ H. Lidchi, “The Poetics and Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall, (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 153.

⁷⁶ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Ethnography,” 391.

⁷⁷ Wording on the poster display of the *Nicobar* salvage project where the process of mapping and salvaged is presented to the visitor, with a focus on the objects recovered.

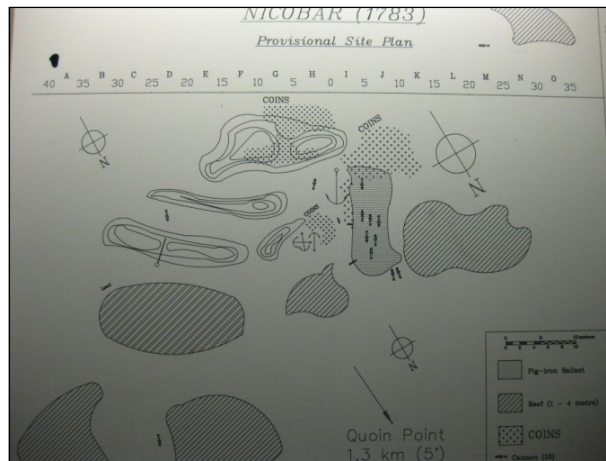


Figure 15 Shipwreck Hall - site map of the *Nicobar* drawn by salvagers, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)



Figure 16 Shipwreck Hall - underwater survey performed on the *Nicobar* by salvagers, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

These displays include images of underwater survey work, accompanied by text giving an explanation of the activities shown in the images. In addition, some of the images reveal material evidence⁷⁸ of the particular shipwreck, providing some answers to my questions of provenance. Where the first two forms of display focus on the physical object, the displays presenting salvage operations focus on the projects performed to retrieve the objects. This provides the museum with an opportunity to relate their collections of objects with tangible underwater sites, making it easier for the

⁷⁸ Hodder, "Theory and Practice in Archaeology," 9.

visitor to make a connection with the history of the coastline and the objects found within the museum cabinets.

Although I argue that this museum largely bases its exhibition on the assumption that the audience will be attracted by the wonder of the object, the above demonstrates an attempt at a form of resonance. Returning to Greenblatt, by attaching the objects to a particular maritime history the museum is assuming a public which will resonate with this history. With the inclusion of the exhibitions demonstrating the salvage operations responsible for the removal of these objects from the wreck site and placement within the museum, the audience gets a ‘sense of the historical transactions’.⁷⁹

This draws from Greenblatt’s analysis, ‘The display cases with which I am most involved – books – characteristically conceal this process, so that we have a misleading impression of fixity and little sense of the historical transactions through which the great texts we study have been fashioned.’⁸⁰ This is the case for most of the objects housed at the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, which represent one version of a maritime history.

The displays of salvage, however, in a sense break free from the glass cases, providing for the audience a clue as to how these objects came to be at the museum. The Shipwreck Hall, though revealing the means of displacement of the object through the exhibitions of salvage, makes an attempt to resonate with its imagined public. However, despite this openness around their displacement, the precariousness of the object in its shifting of meaning is not available for viewing by visitors. Instead, salvaging is set as the natural and only way of bringing these objects to the surface, giving the objects one set of meanings.⁸¹ Perhaps to fix this meaning in the view of the audience, the salvage operations are blended into the constructed mimetic environment of the Shipwreck Hall,

⁷⁹ Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” 13.

⁸⁰ Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” 13.

⁸¹ Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” 20.

representative of the ‘natural’ environment from which they came.⁸² The mimetic environment creates a sense of authenticity, depicting the surfacing of objects from shipwreck sites so as to present to the audience an authentic representation of that site. Therefore, although the museum can be seen to be resonating with a public through exposing the processes involved in acquiring the objects, this exposure is controlled.⁸³ The museum therefore produces a particular kind of visitor, one supportive of - and interested in - the object as salvaged.

If the museum reveals one acceptable means of underwater exploration, what are the others that are not presented? This introduces a long-standing and often volatile debate between salvagers and maritime archaeologists. Again referring to the *Nicobar* display as an example, the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum appears to lean more to the side of the treasure hunter, or salvor. This is not surprising given that the display in the Shipwreck Hall is made up of donated objects once salvaged from the ocean floor.⁸⁴ Although the salvage operation largely dominates these displays, there are hints at the contentions voiced by maritime archaeologists, who argue for sound archaeological work and a focus on the maritime history rather than the material value of the shipwrecks.⁸⁵

One example of this debate almost hides itself within a section of the museum display, housed within a makeshift cabin which is wedged between the mural and displays of salvage to follow. Between what could be described as objects struggling to fit neatly within the three parameters of the exhibition space laid out - type, shipwrecks and salvage - a simple poster caught my eye. There is an A4 notice from the South

⁸² Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” 21.

⁸³ Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” 21.

⁸⁴ “The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.”

⁸⁵ P. Forsythe Johnston, “Is It Treasured or a Worthless Piece of Ship?” *Historical Archaeology* 26 Advances in Underwater Archaeology (1992): 118.

African Heritage Resources Agency⁸⁶ with the words; ‘Notice to Divers: Concerning the status and protection of Historical Wrecks’ at the top of the page. At the bottom of the page, with the same capital letters, are the words, ‘Preserve our maritime heritage, leave it undisturbed for all to enjoy.’⁸⁷ This statement is a clear indication of the kind of contrast existing around the subject of shipwrecks,⁸⁸ as the objects which make up the collection housed in the Shipwreck Hall are products of underwater salvage, which by its nature disturbs a site.



Figure 17 Shipwreck Hall - SAHRA notice on the protection of historical shipwrecks, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

The debate not only exists within the walls of the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, but is rather part of a larger series of opposing views. One of the major disagreements is that salvors are amateurs unable to perform sound archaeological work, ‘A section on

⁸⁶The South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) is a Government agency on a national level which holds the mandate to protection South Africa’s heritage resources, including the countries underwater heritage resources. “The South African Heritage Resources Agency,” <http://www.sahra.org.za/> [accessed August 12, 2012].

⁸⁷ These words were found on a notice which I only paid attention to on my last visit to the museum on 19 October 2012.

⁸⁸ A. Cohn, “A Perspective on the Future of Underwater Archaeology,” *Historical Archaeology* 34 (2000): 19.

the “secular debate” rightly broaches the subject of who should conduct maritime archaeological investigations: Only professional archaeologists? Also amateurs? Salvors?’⁸⁹ Where those in the academy often regard their standards of practice and motivations as the only way of performing research, the display at the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum reveals the possibility of different project motivations, by people other than academically-trained archaeologists.

This friction starts to emerge as I continue on my exploration of the Shipwreck Hall. Stepping out of the other side of the ‘ship’s cabin’, I am again faced with a bombardment of various objects standing free of glass cabinets, most of which are representative of different functional objects vital for vessels traversing oceans. Among these are objects including a wooden sign with bold white lettering spelling out “Malagas”,⁹⁰ which reflects the area in which the shipwrecks displayed within the Shipwreck Hall wrecked. This can be seen to be a device by the museum to provide the visitor with a connection between the objects of type and displays of shipwrecks, with how the objects came to be above the water and how the ships lost below the surface were found.

⁸⁹ D.J. Blackman, Review Article: ‘Is Maritime Archaeology on course?’ *American Journal of Archaeology* 104, no. 3 (Jul., 2000): 104.

⁹⁰ Malagas is a farming area on the banks of the Breede River about 50km by road from Bredasdorp. The mouth of the Breede River opens into the Indian Ocean at Witsands.



Figure 18 Shipwreck Hall - objects representative of a maritime history, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

To make this attempt at context clear, the displays that follow focus attention on underwater salvage projects presumed to be familiar to the visitors from the area of the Overberg. Moving my attention from the objects of everyday shipping life, I come across a display in a dark corner of the exhibition hall. A cabinet on the left-hand side with back lighting and bold lettering catches my eye. As I position myself in front of the glass, there are three commanding aspects of the display which dominate my view: a collection of objects, a large picture of a sailing vessel being assaulted by angry waves, and bold blue lettering spelling out ‘*Arniston*’.



Figure 19 Shipwreck Hall - the display of the *Arniston*, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

Written in bold red lettering are the words: “The salvage of the *Arniston* was the first attempt at Marine Archaeology in South African waters.”⁹¹ In this display salvage and maritime archaeology appear to be presented as synonymous, or as one existing because of the other. The museum seems to be proud of their connection with the objects having been salvaged from wrecks, making the argument that the visitors to the museum deserve a chance to lay their eyes on these objects. They argue that they should be accessible for all to see and enjoy the connection between the objects and the salvage projects responsible for their retrieval.⁹²

It was through speaking to the museum staff that it was revealed to me that those who did the underwater survey work on the projects displayed in the Shipwreck Hall refer to themselves as maritime archaeologists.⁹³ This is a contentious issue for those who are qualified maritime archaeologists, as they express a concern that their work is mistakenly equated with the work done by salvors. They argue the opposite to synonymous partnership: salvage exists despite maritime archaeologists attempts at outlawing the main objectives of salvage, exploiting the artefacts largely for monetary gain.⁹⁴ It is within this tug of war that I would like to dwell for a moment, not only to explain the background to this apparent contradiction, but also to place the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum at the centre of it. This discussion is not a new one. On the contrary it is one which is a staple in the discussions around underwater sites and the practice of underwater research and the objects which remain at the centre of that research.⁹⁵

⁹¹This quote is taken from the display of the project conducted on the wreck of the *Arniston*, a ship display in the Shipwreck Hall.

⁹² Everlee Wier, Bredasdorp interview.

⁹³ Everlee Wier, interview.

⁹⁴ J. Boshoff, R. Parthesius and J. Sharfman, “Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage in South Africa: The Development of Relevant Management Strategies in the Historical Maritime Context of the Southern Tip of Africa,” *Journal of Maritime Archaeology*. (2012), 10.

⁹⁵ Cohn, “A Perspective on the Future of Underwater Archaeology,” 19.

So the question that needs to be asked is what the difference is between maritime archaeologists and salvagers? This difference seems to be obvious to many maritime archaeologists: “In many cases, the archaeological contexts for these materials had not been carefully recorded by the divers or treasure salvagers, especially those who were under financial pressure from their investors to raise the sea booty as quickly and efficiently as possible.”⁹⁶ This implies then the main difference, as projected by maritime archaeologists, is that the primary aim of salvors is monetary gain, whereas the main aim for maritime archaeologists is gaining information through research. The differences between the two are indicated in the writings of Boshoff, Parthesius, and Sharfman, who introduce the legal standpoint as well:

Legislation has struggled over the years to accommodate treasure hunting, salvage and archaeology as alternate means of managing and preserving maritime archaeological sites. It has attempted to incorporate international trends, local pressures and individual philosophies.⁹⁷

The legislation, in South Africa, does not outlaw salvage, but restricts it to certain conditions. This is contrary to international law pertaining to the same issues, specifically the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage (2001) where salvaging for monetary gain is outlawed.

The Convention states:

Article 4 – Relationship to Law of Salvage and Law of Finds

Any Activity relating to underwater cultural heritage to which this Convention applies shall not be subject to the law of salvage or law of finds, unless it:

- (a) is authorized by the competent authorities, and
- (b) is in full conformity with this Convention, and
- (c) ensures that any recovery of the underwater cultural heritage achieves its maximum protection.

Article 2 – Objectives and general principles

⁹⁶ Forsythe Johnston, “Is It Treasured or a Worthless Piece of Ship?” 118-119.

⁹⁷ Sharfman, Boshoff, and Parthesius, “Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage in South Africa,” 9.

7. Underwater cultural heritage shall not be commercially exploited.⁹⁸

In the case of South Africa, Section 35 (4) of the National Heritage Resources Act (25 of 1999) requires that:

No person may, *without a permit* [my italics] issued by the responsible heritage resources authority:

- (a) destroy, damage, excavate, alter, deface or otherwise disturb any archaeological or palaeontological site or any meteorite;
- (b) destroy, damage, excavate, remove from its original position, collect or own any archaeological or palaeontological material or object or any meteorite;
- (c) trade in, sell for private gain, export or attempt to export from the Republic 45 any category of archaeological or palaeontological material or object, or any meteorite; or
- (d) bring onto or use at an archaeological or palaeontological site any excavation equipment or any equipment which assist in the detection or recovery of metals or archaeological and palaeontological material or objects, or use such 50 equipment for the recovery of meteorites.

Furthermore, Regulations stipulate that:

‘(2) The following information must be supplied: ... (i) in the case of a wreck deemed by SAHRA to be significant or a wreck older than 1850, the name, identity number, - address, telephone and/or fax number, qualifications and relevant experience and signature of the maritime archaeologist or archaeologist who will work on the project;...’⁹⁹

This, in theory, allows for salvage operations to continue and therefore objects to be brought up to the surface legally and under strictly-controlled conditions. Often, however, due to lack of resources and human capacity to uphold these conditions, there are those who take advantage of the situation for their own gain.

If artefacts are allowed to be salvaged under certain conditions, one being that there needs to be a collaborating museum on the project, it would be appropriate to consider the discussions introduced by Paul Forsyth Johnston who questioned whether

⁹⁸ “Underwater Cultural Heritage: Text of the 2001 Convention,” <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/underwater-cultural-heritage/2001-convention/official-text/> [accessed June 29, 2012].

⁹⁹ National Heritage Resources Act, Act 25 of 1999, Government Gazette, 28 April 1999, Vol. 406, No. 19974, Notice No. 506.

in fact museums should hold objects in their collections that have been obtained via salvage operations:

Should these items, representing valuable (if not unique) materials from our national or international maritime heritage (and often located on public lands), be purchased or accepted for donation by museums, or should they be declined on ethical grounds as archaeological materials which had been raised for personal profit and the artefact assemblages split up and sold?¹⁰⁰

The above is a question needs to be considered when viewing the collection at the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, as a large portion of its collection is donated by people who I would label primarily salvors,¹⁰¹ but who at times call themselves maritime archaeologists.¹⁰²

Where then does that leave museums, which have a need to provide objects for the sake of public interest and accessibility? Paul Forsythe Johnston recounts the different stances of museums on the issue of salvage. He suggests that although there are also museums which take objects and are involved in the practice of treasure hunting, there are those museums which are strongly against it, and those which are somewhere in the middle and are unaware of the disputed history that is attached to some of the objects they acquire.¹⁰³

John Gribble, in referring to what he terms ‘the sad case of the SS Maori’ has pointed out that, in South Africa:

Although underwater heritage has enjoyed blanket legislative protection since 1986 (under the terms of the National Heritage Resources Act any wreck older than 60 years of age is protected) a long tradition of salvage dating back to the early 18th century left a

¹⁰⁰ Forsythe Johnston, “Is It Treasured or a Worthless Piece of Ship?” 118.

¹⁰¹ Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum website, <http://www.bredasdorpmuseum.co.za/> [accessed October 14, 2012].

¹⁰² As with terrestrial archaeology, the archaeologist is attached to many different popular images such as wise old academic or treasure-hunter.

¹⁰³ Forsythe Johnston, “Is It Treasured or a Worthless Piece of Ship?” 118.

widely held perception that the contents of shipwrecks are there for the taking.¹⁰⁴

But he is optimistic that this has been rectified:

However, two decades of legislative protection and a huge amount of work done by the South African Heritage Resources Agency, the Iziko Maritime Museum and others to publicise the protected status of shipwrecks has slowly borne fruit. There is now a general awareness and grudging acceptance, particularly within the diving community, of the protected status of shipwrecks.¹⁰⁵

The above might be the case in theory; however, the reality is that with the many loop-holes in South African legislation and the demand for objects salvaged from shipwrecks, the pillage of historically-significant wreck sites continues to take place. In speaking to the management of the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum about the apparent disjuncture between underwater salvage and maritime archaeology, it is clear that although they are aware of the contests, they do not see it as their fight. Ultimately, those in charge of the museum are of the opinion that if the objects have been salvaged in the past, they deserve to serve a purpose to the public by being placed in collections and on display. Their concern is for the museum, and therefore do not see themselves as party to the debate. However, through their display of maritime artefacts and the projects involved in surfacing them, the Bredasdorp Museum glorifies the salvage operation and conflates it with maritime archaeology. I argue therefore that their displays do not place them outside of the debate, but rather project a particular standpoint within it.

Up to this point, underwater salvage has been associated with the retrieval of treasure and the focus of monetary gain.¹⁰⁶ However, many maritime archaeologists are not only against the excavation of wreck sites for the motivation of monetary gain.

¹⁰⁴ J. Gribble, "The Sad Case of the SS Maori," *Underwater Cultural Heritage at Risk*, 42. <http://www.icomos.org/risk/2006/14gribble2006an.pdf> [accessed June 28, 2013].

¹⁰⁵ Gribble, "The Sad Case of the SS Maori," 42.

¹⁰⁶ N. Brodie and C. Renfrew, "Looting and the World's Archaeological Heritage: The Inadequate Response," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005): 348.

Their preferred method is not to excavate any objects, whether valuable or not. This methodology is known as “*in-situ* preservation”. Where excavation and the subsequent removal of objects from the water, in the past, was a common practice on underwater heritage sites such as shipwrecks, according to Vicky Richards: “... in more recent times the archaeological community has moved away from the more traditional excavation and recovery methods and further towards on-site examination and *in-situ* preservation of underwater cultural heritage sites.”¹⁰⁷

What this means is that, where possible, the methodology employed in analysing any object that is part of an underwater archaeological site should be done on the site rather than after removing it from the water. *In situ* preservation is preferred as a first-option.¹⁰⁸ This methodology includes, where possible, finding ways of protecting the underwater site from further environmental damage and human interference.¹⁰⁹

Although this has become common practice for maritime archaeologists, it is not supported by all as a preferred methodology. Many argue that objects of monetary value are at risk from looters and, in order to protect them, they should be excavated and placed under the care of institutions, such as museums, rather than leaving them on-site or *in-situ*. Most of the objects housed in the Shipwreck Hall and throughout the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, however, would not be considered to be treasure.

Why then would a museum continue to support the work of salvage in bringing objects to the surface? Perhaps one argument supporting this would be the concern of museums pertaining to artefacts and sites being under threat by the very underwater environment in which they are found. Many maritime archaeologists respond with the

¹⁰⁷ V. Richards, “In Situ Preservation – Application of a Process Based Approach to the Management of Underwater Cultural Heritage”, in *Proceedings of the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Underwater Cultural Heritage, 8-12 November 2011, Manila, Philippines*, eds M. Staniforth, J. Craig, S.C. Jago-on, B. Orillaneda & L. Lacsina, (Jericopim Publishing House: Manila), 1.

¹⁰⁸ Richards, “In Situ Preservation”, 1.

¹⁰⁹ Richards, “In Situ Preservation”, 1.

argument that sites considered to be protected by heritage status are usually older than 100 years and therefore are considered to have ‘reached a state of equilibrium with the environment and so are no longer “in peril” from the sea...’¹¹⁰

Another argument for salvage could be that when it comes to historically significant wreck sites, salvors are given permits on the condition that a certain percentage of what is excavated is given to a collaborating museum, which is legally given first choice on what to claim. However, what often happens is that salvors keep the most valuable objects for themselves, with the intention of selling them at auction houses, while only revealing to museums objects with little monetary value. Many museums agree to become collaborators because they are of the opinion that these excavated objects need to be made accessible to the public.¹¹¹

Following these debates, some maritime archaeologists argue that, in contrast to many museum displays, the practice of *in-situ* preservation is viewed from a holistic approach, looking not only at the individual objects but also the environment in which they are found.¹¹² This allows those working on these sites to monitor the degradation of sites and the effectiveness of the various methods of *in-situ* preservation. What is imperative in this kind of practice is that constant monitoring takes place, because one of the concerns is that these methods are not yet proven as entirely effective in preventing the deterioration of objects by the immediate environment.¹¹³

Another major concern archaeologists have about removing artefacts from the underwater site is that, once these objects are removed, they have to be looked after by trained individuals who are versed in the preservation of waterlogged artefacts. This is

¹¹⁰ J. Blake, “The Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage”, *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 45 (Oct., 1996): 833.

¹¹¹ Richards, “In Situ Preservation,” 1.

¹¹² Richards, “In Situ Preservation,” 1.

¹¹³ Richards, “In Situ Preservation,” 1.

not only a costly exercise, but there are only a few people with these kinds of skills.¹¹⁴

This is not to say that there are not times when it is preferable and necessary to excavate artefacts from the site. However those performing the excavation must have the means, space and expertise to do so and to ensure the long-term conservation of the objects.

Where then does this leave museums such as the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum with regards to the future of their displays?

With respect to this particular museum, there are plans for new exhibitions displaying objects related to salvage projects in order to attract audiences to the Shipwreck Hall. Despite efforts by maritime archaeologists to stress the importance of and the potential interest generated by the unveiling of historical contexts related to the objects, the museum conceives of its audiences as wanting to see the objects obtained through salvage in their materiality. This places the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, therefore, on the side of salvors, supporting the need to recover instead of leaving the objects *in-situ*. All three techniques used to display the shipwreck theme - type, shipwrecks, and salvage - support the argument that salvage remains the primary means to recovering maritime history, as illustrated by the exhibition in the Shipwreck Hall.

The journey through the museum seems to continue to glorify underwater salvage as it introduces me to the different stages of maritime exploration through salvage. I was drawn in by the objects which are collected from the ocean floor. However, at this stage I was given few clues as to where these came from. I was then lead from the objects to displays of shipwrecks, giving small clues to their actual existence, enticing my interest. This culminated in displays of maritime salvage, presenting the argument that the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum is made up of objects because of such underwater operations. The visitor is presented with maritime salvage

¹¹⁴ Richards, "In Situ Preservation," 1.

as being beneficial for a public waiting to see what has been reaped and to wonder at its material presence.

Outside of the Shipwreck Hall:

In my exploration of the Shipwreck Hall, where incongruence's might appear, I have given the display a congruency through my reading of the exhibition. This is shown by the shifts made from displays of objects as type, to shipwrecks and finally salvage, which the museum is anxious to take ownership of and present as archaeological salvage. But another history is present in the background, one that intercepts that of the shipwreck. In the Shipwreck Hall itself, this interception is shown through the use of contemporary information boards, not only interrupting the dominating history, but also the display style evident in cabinets, objects and labels.

At the entrance/exit of the Shipwreck Hall, an information board seems oddly out of place. Entitled 'The Independent Church'¹¹⁵ it uses three languages - Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa - to convey a history of the building in which the museum is housed. The use of only English on the other labels throughout the Shipwreck Hall is a clue that, apart from a few information boards such as this one, two of which are placed in the entrance hall named 'Establishment of the Town' and 'History of Bredasdorp', the museum itself was developed before the change of government in 1994. This leads me therefore to the second notable feature of this information board: the logo and name of the Western Cape Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport at the bottom.

¹¹⁵ This quote is taken from the official information board in the Shipwreck Hall exhibition space, presenting the history of the Independent Church, see figure 20.



Figure 20 Shipwreck Hall - information board 'Independent Church (1863 - 1875)', Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

The museum includes this government-endorsed information board to reflect upon the chosen history displayed through text and photographs, making their association permanent on one solid board. The difference in look and execution gives these boards a more contemporary feel. These boards can be seen as an attempt by those working at the museum to make simple upgrades in a time where the museum was experiencing financial trouble, caused by the split between the Lighthouse Museum and the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.¹¹⁶ Judging by the other displays, a commitment to upgrading the museum has not been possible.

'The Independent Church (1863-1875)' information board stands in contrast to the object-heavy collections displayed in the rest of the Shipwreck Hall, making the history of the building prominent for a moment. This not only diverts from the haphazard blue labelling, but also seems to be a strategy by more recent museum staff to extend the representation of history by the museum to that of the town of Bredasdorp,

¹¹⁶ Bredasdorp Museum: *Annual Report 2000-2001*.

trying to connect with a contemporary audience beyond that of the one enthralled by the shipwreck past. The existence of this board and others like it may seem to contradict my assertion that the shipwreck history overshadows other possible histories which could be attached to the building in which the museum is housed, or the area in which it is found. I would suggest, however, that despite this effort to include a history of the town, the boards are few and this one in particular is not integrated into the Shipwreck Hall display but rather set apart from it, having little effect on the main theme of shipwrecks.



Figure 21 Shipwreck Hall - provincial government endorsement printed on the 'Independent Church' information board, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

Stepping beyond the Shipwreck Hall, this interception of histories continues into the Rectory, where contemporary boards can be found dispersed between the displays. What is found at the Rectory can be described as a display of objects placed within a theme, presenting a typical lived environment in the Bredasdorp area when the Rectory was still in use. In creating this theme, the issue of collection comes to the fore, with objects covering every available surface space. These objects at first seem arbitrarily displayed, solely for the purpose of providing material evidence of a place and time depicting a particular history. However, on closer inspection it appears that the rectory

brings together two histories, with the shipwreck and Bredasdorp intercepting one another.



Figure 22 The Rectory - silverware from the wreck of the *Lisboa*, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

Much like the displays in the Shipwreck Hall, each of the objects are associated with labels revealing their origins aboard ships which wrecked along the Southern Cape Coast. The museum attempts to use these objects and labelled descriptions to place what would ordinarily seem to be incongruent collections and histories together. What is revealed by the website, and possibly assumed by the layout of the rectory collection, is this link between the ‘people of Bredasdorp’ and the ships that wrecked in the surrounding area. ‘It was not uncommon to find furniture from Shipwrecks in houses bought on auctions held on beaches directly after a ship was wrecked.’¹¹⁷ The shipwreck theme is placed amongst various other exhibition spaces in the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum complex, possibly attempting to create a common thread. And there are continual reminders through these displays of the shipwreck, even when you reach the garden where there is a collection of ships’ anchors on display. Metaphorically, they anchor the history on display in the Shipwreck Hall.

¹¹⁷ “Room Layout,” Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, <http://www.bredasdorpmuseum.co.za/index.php/roomlayouts>, [accessed October 14, 2012].



Figure 23 Garden - a display of anchors identified as different types, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

Much of the remainder of the museum appears to be quite arbitrary, odd and out of place. An automobile collection and *Memory Lane* complete the museum exhibits. These two exhibition spaces seem to be the result of a different kind of salvage, much like the collection of bottles shown in cabinets in the entrance of the museum. One assumption about museums is that they are places awaiting any objects which hold importance to those who donate them.¹¹⁸ On this assumption, objects which people either have no space for or feel should be put somewhere more appropriate to protect them, find their way to the storage rooms of the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. Although there is pressure from the donors for these objects to be placed on display, there is often no space.

This reveals two things. The first is the obvious need for new exhibition spaces and the second is that different strategies around the acquisition of objects are required. Everlee Wier, the museum manager, gave insight into these strategies as she explained that the new museum collections policy is to only accept objects which represent something that the museum does not have and that does not require complicated

¹¹⁸ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," 389.

conservation.¹¹⁹ If this type of selection is not done, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett states, ‘the danger... is that museums amass collections and are in a sense condemned ever after to exhibit them.’¹²⁰

The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum is already an example of the dangers of the ‘amassing of collections’,¹²¹ shown by the arbitrary nature of its various exhibitions. *Memory Lane* can be described as a collection of curiosities, because of the arbitrary nature of the objects on display. It is home to various objects either representative of the first, smallest or oldest object of its kind, as well as objects indicative of the lives of some people living and collecting in Bredasdorp.



Figure 24 Memory Lane - an exhibition of objects representative of the medical profession donated by individuals, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

Many of the labels associated with the objects in the cabinets express to the visitor the special nature of the object as the ‘oldest’ of its kind or the ‘only one’ of its kind. A doll is laid down at an angle, placed in a cabinet amongst objects classified as ‘toys from years gone by’. The label reads ‘Fytjie 1935 – Die oudste pop (geskenk deur Mev. M. Spamer/ ‘Fyfjie 1935 – The oldest doll (Donated by Mrs. M. Spamer)’.

Another display illustrating the importance of the unique is that of a pair of silk

¹¹⁹ Everlee Wier, interview.

¹²⁰ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Ethnography,” 389.

¹²¹ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Ethnography,” 389.

stockings, still in its packaging, with the label: ‘The first silk stockings after the war!!!!!! Silk stockings were unobtainable as the silk was used for parachutes during the war.’ They are objects which hold personal value for the individuals who donated them, making it difficult for them to be made into a coherent exhibition.



Figure 25 Memory Lane - 'Fytjie' (1935) the oldest doll (donated by Mrs M. Spamer), Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

The collection of motor vehicles, although less arbitrary and more organised than the display in *Memory Lane*, remains a collection on display due to donations. There are carriages, fire engines and passenger vehicles, all representative of past eras. Not being an expert of vehicles, I rely on the website to tell me what types of vehicles I am looking at. ‘The old coach house houses Cape carts, a skotch-cart, two horse-drawn hearses and a splendid old fire-engine.’¹²² In an effort to make a connection with the automobiles and the rest of the collection, it seems that, like *Memory Lane*, it is merely a random collection of objects which were donated to the museum and which they were expected to house.¹²³

In doing some general internet research for information on the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, only a few articles came up. The articles were mostly on tourist

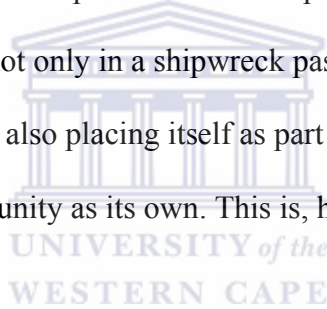
¹²² “Room Layout”

¹²³ Marius Slammat, Bredasdorp Museum Employee, interviewed by Heather Wares, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, August 12, 2012.

websites, simply mentioning the museum as a place worth stopping over at on unrelated tourist routes of the Overberg area, leading to Cape Agulhas, including such tours as Whale Watching or driving over winding mountain passes, following in the footsteps of those who first ventured past the vast mountain ranges¹²⁴. But one article exposed the origins of the barn collection of automobiles, through a quote from ‘Hercules Wessels, who served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees for more than 20 years.’¹²⁵

It was also important that the museum was made the focus of all festivals and events for the town and the farming community. With the growth in tourism in the 1980s the museum became the pivot. Also with the launch of the Wool Routes at the time, and the Church and town festivals in 1988. The wagons and other carriages used for festivals, journeys and films were all donated to the museum.¹²⁶

This collection therefore can be interpreted as an example of how the museum was finding ways of placing itself not only in a shipwreck past, although this was evident in all aspects of its collection, but also placing itself as part of Bredasdorp’s past as a town, imagining a Bredasdorp community as its own. This is, however, nowhere to be seen on the actual display.¹²⁷



Conclusion:

The Shipwreck Hall was a snapshot of what I could expect from the rest of the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. Through my ordered reading of the exhibition, from the collections of type, to shipwreck, to underwater projects operating by means of salvage, a narrative of possible meaning was constructed. But it is evident that even in my reading there are in-congruencies, between the Shipwreck Hall and other exhibitions in the museum complex. One of the reasons for this, I have suggested, is a tradition of

¹²⁴ “The Overberg: A Short Drive Over the Mountain,” Overberg, www.overberg.co.za [accessed January 29, 2013].

¹²⁵ “Shipwreck Museum Turns 30,” Village Life, http://www.villagelife.co.za/11_museum.html, [accessed October 14, 2012].

¹²⁶ “Shipwreck Museum Turns 30.”

¹²⁷ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett “Objects of Ethnography” 389.

object donation. Museums are often seen as places that are obliged to inherit objects that people donate.¹²⁸



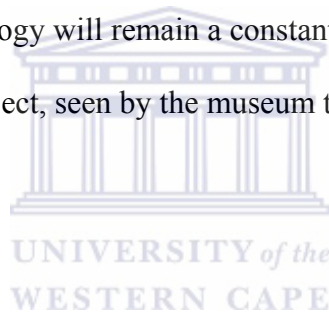
Figure 26 Attic of the Rectory - donated collections in storage, Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. (Photograph Heather Wares)

Much of the arbitrary nature of the displays seemed to be explained by issues of storage plaguing the museum. The museum manager said to me that *Memory Lane* was a result of a lack of storage. This really struck home for me when, on one of my visits to the museum, I was taken up the steep stairs into the attic of the Rectory. This space is crammed full of boxes holding many of the same objects as are already represented in the museum collection and exhibition. There are objects ranging from all forms of kitchen-ware to framed photographs, and navigational instruments, mannequins and a post office sign. It is not only the attic which is crammed full of items making up the museum's collection. Cupboards that are part of the display in the Rectory bedroom exhibit are opened to reveal clothing that was donated to the museum and is

¹²⁸ An example of this kind of collection housed at the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum is the collection of bottles which was donated by a local Bredasdorp resident. This collection now stands in glass cabinets in the entrance hall of the museum for visitors to encounter on first entry. The back story of how the bottles came to the museum illustrate the way in which museums are seen as spaces obliged to accept objects people deem to be important. The collection consists of various bottles of different kinds, shapes and sizes, having been built up by people in the community who came to know about the women's hobby and started adding to it by giving her any bottles they thought she might like. The story goes that once she was satisfied with her collection she relinquished the bottles to the museum for them to care for.

representative of various eras. Although the collection in storage appears unordered and haphazard, there are acquisition registers naming all of the objects making up the collection in alphabetical order.

Aware of the short-comings of the museum, management has expressed plans for an upgrade, which will include better storage facilities and additional displays in the Shipwreck Hall.¹²⁹ However, the museum is using these future plans to illustrate how they are intent on improving, rather than changing, their displays.¹³⁰ This means that, despite plans for expanding and creating new exhibitions, the museum intends to keep with the theme of salvage as a means of acquiring maritime history. The collection of objects by type in cabinets, the narrative of the shipwreck and the concept of salvage as standing for maritime archaeology will remain a constant. All of these hinge on the notion of the wonder of the object, seen by the museum to be the essence of how its publics are constituted.



¹²⁹ Interview with Odette Everlee Wier.

¹³⁰ Interview with Odette Everlee Wier.

Chapter Two

Finding Meermin: An exhibition without objects

If the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum constitutes its publics around the representation of a maritime history and archaeology focused on the wonder of the object, what kind of public is constituted when there is no object to represent?

In post-apartheid South Africa, where some maritime archaeologists have struggled to break away from associations with colonialism, this chapter, following the discussion by Greenblatt in his paper ‘Resonance and Wonder’, aims to suggest that the wonder of the object is replaced as a method of representation by that of resonance.¹

The events of the rebellion aboard the Dutch slave ship, the *Meermin*, sets the stage for the reconstituting of a public around a new context with which they are assumed to feel resonance.

A distinctive agenda is developing which emphasizes the unusual quality of maritime data and the possibilities of inductive analysis, yet seeks to expand and diversify the contexts in which ships and their material culture are viewed; new approaches have been derived from symbolic, contextual and critical archaeology, and from wide-ranging socio-economic models. Diversifying the contexts in which wreck evidence is interpreted underlines its essential richness and its unique contribution to archaeology.²

I draw on not only Greenblatt’s notion of ‘resonance and wonder’ when discussing the reconstitution of a public for maritime archaeology, but also on Rousseau’s arguments

¹ S. Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 43 (Jan., 1990): 19-20.

Keeping in mind, of course, that what Greenblatt concluded regarding his notions of ‘resonance and wonder’ is that they are mutually beneficial, rather than used as separate methods of representation. Where I use them as a way to compare two exhibitions, Greenblatt noted that exhibitions would benefit from the use of the wonder of the object as well as inspiring resonance with its publics through giving those objects a context.

² D. Gibbons and J. Adams, “Shipwrecks and Maritime Archaeology,” *World Archaeology* 32, Shipwrecks (Feb., 2001): 279.

around the way in which these publics come into being.³ Again, where the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum brings its publics into being by means of the object as a centre of focus, the *Meermin* uses the context of slavery and more specifically resistance and rebellion to bring its publics into being. Thinking along these lines, it is assumed that those who can identify with oppression in the past and present will resonate with the context in this travelling exhibition.

Through a careful examination of my own experience of the exhibition panels on display, at the time situated at the Iziko Maritime Centre at the V&A Waterfront, the above issues are discussed. This reading is shaped by various influences, including my own background and interest in heritage, history and maritime concerns. Although this is a temporary exhibition intended to be placed in various venues, the crafted space of the V&A Waterfront for consumption by tourists had an impact on the way in which I viewed the exhibition. While the V&A Waterfront aims at a broad audience including tourists, families and school groups, it may be a more exclusionary environment than its producers would like to acknowledge.⁴

Following the arguments of Van Heyningen and Worden in their research on this space, the V&A Waterfront was constructed as an exclusive place, producing a particular kind of visitor and ‘... by 1992 ... ranked ... as the prime tourist venue in South Africa.’⁵ However, when viewing the *Finding Meermin* exhibition in this setting in 2012, the V&A Waterfront no longer resembled the version of itself from 20 years previously. The shopping complex has vastly expanded: apartments have been built, bringing a residential space into the V&A Waterfront complex; it has been reintroduced

³ N. Rousseau, “‘Unpalatable Truths’ and ‘Popular Hunger’: Reflections on Popular History in the 1980s” (paper presented at the South African and Contemporary History Seminar, Institute for Historical Research and the Department of History, Cape Town, July 25, 1995): 5.

⁴ E. Van Heyningen and N. Worden, “Signs of the Times: Tourism and Public History at Cape Town’s Victoria and Alfred Waterfront,” *Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines* 36 (1996): 215.

⁵ Van Heyningen and Worden, “Signs of the Times,” 215.

into the city through interlinking bridges and walk-ways, all built in time for the 2010 Soccer World Cup; and narratives of post-apartheid South Africa have been introduced through statues of the South African Nobel Peace Prize winners (Nelson Mandela, F.W. De Klerk, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Albert Luthuli) in what is known as Nobel Square. The placement of the Nelson Mandela Gateway as the start of the Robben Island Tour, the place from which the ferries depart, again makes this narrative prominent in the V&A Waterfront. A few signs, put up by University of Cape Town (UCT) academics in the 1990s to depict a social history of the area, have been incorporated into a fully guided or self-guided walking tour of the V&A Waterfront, visiting sites and stopping at information boards recounting the different histories of the area in which the complex now stands.

Take a stroll down memory lane on our new self-guided walking tour. Starting and ending at the information Centre, visitors can collect a map here and make their way around the V&A Waterfront. Follow a series of numbered boards placed at key points of interest and watch as history is brought to life through various interesting facts, anecdotes and visuals along the way.⁶

It is within this reconstituted V&A Waterfront complex that I first encountered the *Finding Meermin* exhibition. I realise that, just as the intended public for the V&A Waterfront is constructed in a particular way, the *Finding Meermin* public is too.

Accessing the V&A Waterfront by foot or by car, the visitor is greeted by a ‘mini-city on its own’, separated from the bustle and intrusions of the homeless population, grime and rush-hour traffic that makes up the city of Cape Town. This ‘mini-city’ is put together with the illusion of a tranquil bay surrounded by buildings painted white with

⁶ The official V&A Waterfront website, www.waterfront.co.za/pages/historicalroute.aspx, [accessed May 4, 2013].

light blue finishing. These buildings are imposing, with their regal facades and looming archways.

The atmosphere is both vibrant and calming, introducing the visitor to what would seem like another world, starkly different to what Cape Town city centre has to offer. However, pieces of Africa are inserted into this world by means of entertainment groups singing and playing the marimbas. The insertion is carefully controlled, as those entertainment groups allowed to perform on the V&A Waterfront property, a privately-owned complex, are carefully selected and designated a strategic performance area. This is a clue to the kind of controlled experience the visitor is getting, thereby resembling what Martin Bombardella and Hall refer to as a themed environment.⁷

This gives the visitor the illusion of an interactive experience, of seeing the ‘real thing’ without the danger and uncomfortable moments. Being enveloped by this themed environment, I wander over stone cobbles, along path-ways lined with buildings, leading past shops and restaurants, both of which have a feel of a welcoming openness. Breaks between the buildings reveal the calm ‘bay’ of ocean, with boats bobbing in the quay. Completing this illusion is the restaurant named Quay Four.

This calm ocean quay is contrary to the kind of experience many of the first visitors to the Cape would have had, as they dubbed it ‘The Cape of Storms’.⁸ This, which became a term of endearment, was what caused Table Bay alone to be the site of 300 known shipwrecks, out of South Africa’s 3000 plus known shipwrecks.⁹ It is these shipwrecks which have become the focus for Cape Town’s and, in a broader sense, South Africa’s maritime history. Many of these shipwrecks are evidence of the Dutch East India Company’s (VOC) control over the Cape in the 17th and 18th Centuries.

⁷ P. Bombardella and M. Hall, “Las Vegas in Africa,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 5, no. 1 (2005): 21.

⁸ Boshoff and Parthesius and Sharfman, “Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage in South Africa,” 4.

⁹ J. Sharfman, “Maritime Archaeology Development Project: Proposal.” South African Heritage Resources Agency.

Cape Town was used as a refreshment station for passing ships carrying various cargos and supplies. The commerce of the Cape was reliant on supplies reaching ships anchored in Table Bay, which was made difficult by frequent storms experienced by ships anchored in Table Bay. 'In 1836, prominent shipowners, merchants and others concerned with the commerce of the Cape Colony and the safety of passengers and crews on ships, petitioned Governments to improve maritime conditions in Table Bay.'¹⁰ This led to the construction of the North Wharf, opened in 1842, ensuring better and more secure supply of goods to the vessels. Following this, the harbour grew, providing much-needed reprieve for the ships from the storms, allowing them to hide in a constructed tranquil bay from 'the Cape of storms'. The V & A Waterfront replicates the harbour as a place which escapes the stormy seas of Table Bay, a tranquillity that is experienced by those visiting the Iziko Maritime Centre.

The safety of the Cape Town harbour, however, was a short reprieve for ships as, after taking on-board supplies in Cape Town, they continued on their journeys both East and West along the South African coastline, where some again were caught up in storms and wrecked. As has been discussed in the previous chapter around the display of a shipwreck history, many of these took place in the area of Cape Agulhas, where today the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum is located.

During the time of VOC control of the Cape in 1766, the *Meermin*, a slave ship carrying a 'cargo' of Madagascan slaves, was reported to have wrecked along the coast near what is now known as Struisbaai.¹¹ Despite many ships passing the South African coastline being wrecked due to strong winds and stormy seas, the sinking of the *Meermin* was due to a slave rebellion which broke out aboard the ship on its return

¹⁰ S. Sharma, U. Seemann and M. Hall, "The Development of Cape Town's Waterfront in the Early Nineteenth Century: History and Archaeology of the North Wharf," *Goodwin Series 7*, Historical Archaeology in the Western Cape (Jun., 1993): 98

¹¹ A. Alexander, "Shipboard Slave Uprisings on the Malagasy Coast: 'The Meermin' (1766) and 'De Zon' (1775)," *Kronos* 33 (November 2007): 85.

voyage to the Cape.¹² It is exactly this point which makes it a focus for a more contemporary South African maritime history. The narrative accompanying the wrecking of the *Meermin* is different to the usual shipwreck story. It is not the downfall of a magnificent ship but rather what the people aboard the ship experienced that is the focus.

The head of what became the National Lottery Development Trust Fund (NLDTF) project to locate and popularise the story of the *Meermin*, Jaco Boshoff¹³, the maritime archaeologist at the Social History Centre at Iziko Museums of South Africa, has revealed that there were specific reasons for choosing the two themes of maritime archaeology and slavery.¹⁴ At the time of submitting the project proposal in 2002, he was aware that there was a pointed focus on areas considered to be niche. Maritime archaeology was, and still is, a small field with little research having been done on topics related to it. In addition, globally work done on slave ships was particularly rare, as expressed by the funding proposal for the *Meermin* project: ‘Only two slave shipwrecks have been investigated internationally. One of which was no longer a slaver when it wrecked. The other slave wreck was excavated by a commercial concern with dubious credentials.’¹⁵ This would potentially make the *Meermin*, the second recovered slave ship and the first maritime archaeology project performing work on a slave ship internationally.

Salvors show minimal interest in slave ships, as they hold very little promise of monetary gain and require a large amount of research beyond excavating physical

¹² Alexander, “Shipboard Slave Uprisings on the Malagasy Coast,” 85.

¹³ Jaco Boshoff, Iziko Maritime Archaeologists and Meermin Project Leader, interview by Heather Wares, Iziko Cultural History Centre, January 18, 2013.

¹⁴ Boshoff, interview.

¹⁵ J.J. Boshoff, “Uncovering The Slave Ship Meermin, A project to reclaim the hidden heritage of slavery in South Africa,” Funding Application (Oct. 2002), 3.

remains.¹⁶ One of the reasons for this is that slave ships were often modified merchant vessels, made up of temporary modifications often crafted from wood and constructed for a single journey on which slaves were captured and delivered. On arriving at the intended destination, the temporary structures were dismantled and often the ship returned to its function as an ordinary merchant vessel.¹⁷ What this has meant for maritime archaeologists is that it was difficult to attract funding for these kinds of projects, as they are costly and do not guarantee successful results of recovery. The *Meermin* has proved to be an example of these kinds of difficulties and the ship has evaded search efforts despite funding being available.

The *Meermin* as the vessel of choice for this project offered both a narrative of slavery and the opportunity for research in the field of maritime archaeology. The maritime archaeologist at Iziko Museums and leader of the *Meermin* project Jaco Boshoff, recounted that the *Meermin* first enticed interest in 2002. With the vessel making up a part of the VOC fleet in Cape Town at the time of its fatal voyage, it drew interest from a committee which was formed to oversee the 400 year commemoration of the VOC.¹⁸ The little that I have been able to find out about the committee came from a website dedicated to the Dutch East India Company. It is here that I found out that each country had what I would call delegates, who formed a committee for the purpose of the commemoration. Other than this, I do not know who the specific individuals were. Initially the committee expressed plans to build a replica of the ship based on the blueprints of the vessel found in the archives. However, it was soon realised that this

¹⁶ N. O'Connor, "Underwater Archaeology," *Archaeology Ireland* 3 (Spring, 1989): 28.

¹⁷ J. Webster, "Slave Ships and Maritime Archaeology: An overview," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 12, The Archaeology of Slave Ships (March, 2008): 7.

¹⁸ Jaco Boshoff, interview.

was going to be an expensive project, causing the interest of the committee to falter and eventually stagnate.¹⁹

Although the idea of using the *Meermin* as a focus for a maritime archaeology project was put on hold, it was not long until it was picked up again. In the same year Jaco Boshoff decided, with the consent of Iziko Museums of South Africa management, to work on and submit a proposal for lottery funding. Once this had been done, the team waited a year before the money for the project was approved. Despite the delay, forcing the planned schedule of activities to shift, the team took it upon themselves to start work in the interim, performing initial site visits where equipment was tested.²⁰ The initial team was made up of the project leader, Jaco Boshoff; two historians, Dan Sleight and Helena Sheffler; the then-manager of the Maritime Unit at the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), John Gribble; Patricia Davison, the then Director of Social History at Iziko Museums; Mzwandile Wana, in charge of collections at Iziko; Ewald Herbert, in charge of Research; and June Hosford, in charge of conservation and the Iziko Education Department.²¹ However, in the field there were two additional space made for field researchers and a project assistant, Tara Van Niekerk, who joined the team.

Officially, research on the *Meermin* started in 2003 with one of the initial phases involving constructing a history. It was during these initial phases of archival research that a history student from the University of Cape Town, Andrew Alexander, was brought on to the project ‘to transcribe the original Dutch court case records, letters and minutes of meetings pertaining to the *Meermin* episode housed in the Cape Archives’.²²

¹⁹ Jaco Boshoff, interview.

²⁰ Jaco Boshoff, interview.

²¹ JJ. Boshoff, “Uncovering the Slave Ship Meermin,” 5.

²² J. Boshoff. “First Report for the National Lotteries Distribution Trust Fund.” Iziko Museums of South Africa, 3, no year.

Some of the material that he transcribed was used for his honours dissertation, and later he began a Masters degree based on the *Meermin* records. Alexander was unable to complete his thesis due to his death.²³ The account of the events of the *Meermin* that has been used in this thesis is from an article taken from one of the chapters of Alexander's masters, as well as sections of the story which have been recounted in the project proposal and on the panels of the exhibition. I have not looked at the transcribed notes directly translated from the archive, as my interest is less in the story of the *Meermin* and more in the politics of production of a maritime history.

Therefore, my account is influenced by Alexander's interests, which were focused on the stories of those who are seldom reflected in the written record. He used the story of the *Meermin*, together with other slave ship rebellions, as an example of a story which reflects the actions of people often seen to be docile and weak. Alexander's research and narrative objective is not solely to tell the story of the *Meermin*, but rather to use it as an example, among others, of the determination and will of an enslaved people.²⁴ The account of the *Meermin* rebellion reflected below is largely based on that told by Alexander, as well as from project reports.

Although rare, violent slave rebellions had occurred on a number of occasions on VOC vessels, including those trading for slaves in Madagascar. The most notable of these slave rebellions, however, took place in 1766 on the *Meermin* in which Commies Krause was senior merchant.²⁵

The *Meermin* is a story significant not only because of the rare nature of slave ship mutinies by slaves but also because of the extraordinary events which lead to the final fate of the ship as a wreck. Alexander relates how in 1765 the VOC slave ship, the

²³ In the editor's note on the first page of the article (Alexander, Andrew. 'Shipboard Slave Uprisings on the Malagasy Coast: The "Meermin" (1766) and "De Zon" (1775)'. *Kronos*, No. 33 (November 2007), pp. 84-111), it is explained that this article is an 'edited and amended version of the third chapter of Andrew Alexander's Master's thesis in Historical Studies at the University of Cape Town, submitted in 2005.'

²⁴ A. Alexander, "Shipboard Slave Uprisings on the Malagasy Coast," 85.

²⁵ A. Alexander, "Shipboard Slave Uprisings on the Malagasy Coast," 85.

Meermin, was dispatched from Cape Town with the task of purchasing 140 slaves from Madagascar. Merchant John Krause was in charge of acquiring the slaves and once he had his quota of 140, he and the Captain, Gerrit Muller, prepared the ship for its return voyage in late January 1766. The records reveal a story of a voyage fraught with problems stemming from bad leadership and ill-discipline.²⁶

Shortly after the ship left Madagascar, the captain was faced to make a decision which would influence the course of incidents to follow. Illness was starting to spread through the slave population on the ship, and in order to thwart it from spreading any further, the captain decided to release a number of the male slaves from their shackles and allow them on deck to do manual labour and to entertain the crew.²⁷ The slaves on deck were given local Madagascan spears, which had been bought as souvenirs, to clean.²⁸ It was at this moment that the slaves seized their chance to mutiny, led by three men, one of whom was Massavana.

The slaves and the Dutch crew fought a hard battle, which ended in the slaves taking control of the ship and the surviving crew members being forced to retreat to the supply cabin. This, however, was not the end of their battle. The slaves, being unversed in the skill of sailing a Dutch ship, spent two days struggling to command it in the direction of home, Madagascar. It was after these two days that they realised that they needed the remaining Dutch crew to sail them back to their home land. They made a deal with the remaining crew. In exchange for their lives, the crew would sail the slaves back to Madagascar. The crew appeared to be doing exactly this during the day; however, when the sun dipped below the horizon, they headed for the Cape at full sail.

29

²⁶ A. Alexander, "Shipboard Slave Uprisings on the Malagasy Coast," 89.

²⁷ A. Alexander, "Shipboard Slave Uprisings on the Malagasy Coast," 102.

²⁸ A. Alexander, "Shipboard Slave Uprisings on the Malagasy Coast," 90.

²⁹ A. Alexander, "Shipboard Slave Uprisings on the Malagasy Coast," 85.

It was in this way that they managed to outmanoeuvre the slaves, and at the first sighting of land declared to the slaves that they had reached their home land. At first, the Madagascans were sceptical, pointing out that the land did not look the same as that which they had left behind. The Dutch crew once again managed to calm the scepticism by making an argument that they had returned to a different side of the island. Almost convinced, the slaves decided to send a contingent to land, who were given the instructions that if they had in fact arrived on their home soil, to indicate this by lighting three fires on the beach.³⁰

During the time that the *Meermin* was anchored in what is now known as Struisbaai, farmers in the area noticed the ship and started to get suspicious, as it was not flying a flag indicating her origin. When the first contingent of Madagascans arrived ashore and climbed over the first sand dune, it was these farmers, who had formed a commando unit, which they encountered.³¹ After eight days the Madagascans remaining on the ship built another boat and sent another group to investigate. This group came back, sure that they had found Madagascar.

It was also during this time that the Dutch sailors managed to send three messages in bottles over board, two of which surprisingly made it to shore and were picked up by ‘local’ people who passed it onto the farmers.³² The letter in the bottle explained the situation and gave instruction to light three fires on the beach.³³ On seeing the three fires, another group of slaves paddled to shore, only to be met by an ambush of gun-fire when walking up the beach. The Madagascans remaining on the ship saw the gunfire and, realising they had been misled, attacked the Dutch crew. During the scuffle, one of the Dutch crew on the vessel decided to chop the anchor cable. This

³⁰ J. Boshoff, “Meermin Project: The Meermin Timeline,” Iziko Museums of South Africa. No-year.

³¹ Boshoff, ‘First NLDTF Project Report: Search for the Wreck of the Slave Ship Meermin’, 16.

³² Boshoff, ‘First NLDTF Project Report: Search for the Wreck of the Slave Ship Meermin’, 16.

³³ “Meermin Project: The Meermin Timeline.”

caused the ship to drift towards the shore and run aground on soft sand, ultimately bringing an end to the slave rebellion and resulting in the capture of the surviving slaves. For a week after the ship run aground, it was accessible from land, ‘making it possible for most of the trading goods still on board to be recovered. Bad weather finally made further salvage impossible and the vessel became a total wreck.’³⁴

On the return of the crew and the slaves to the Cape Colony, the VOC started a trial not only for the judgement of the slaves, but also of the Dutch men in charge of the ship during the voyage. These men were found guilty of neglect of their duties and were demoted and banned from the Cape.³⁵ Although the slaves did not officially go on trial, they were sentenced to a life of slavery at the Cape, the same sentence given to them on capture in Madagascar.

Alexander’s version of the *Meermin* events is framed by a distinctive context of searching for social meaning and the act of rebellion. Jaco Boshoff, was more interested in the importance of the process needed in order to locate the physical wreckage of the ship itself. The *Finding Meermin* exhibition, which opened in 2011, brought these two aspects of research together.³⁶

The *Finding Meermin* exhibition was first displayed at the Iziko Maritime Center at the V&A Waterfront. Across from the National Sea Rescue Institute (NSRI) base, where one of the organisation’s boats are suspended above the slipway, the visitor soon comes across the entrance of the Maritime Centre, opposite the Victoria & Alfred Hotel.

Just as it is difficult to find clues within the surrounding environment of the town pointing to the location of the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, the entrance to the Iziko Maritime Centre seems hidden from view. There are no signs in the surroundings

³⁴ Boshoff, ‘First NLDTF Project Report: Search for the Wreck of the Slave Ship Meermin’, 16.

³⁵ A. Alexander, “Shipboard Slave Uprisings on the Malagasy Coast,” 103.

³⁶ Jaco Boshoff, interview.

of the Waterfront leading to the museum, and it is only when a visitor is facing the entrance that a small sign to the left of the door-way, ‘Maritime Centre, Iziko’, appears. A comparatively larger sign was also present below the entrance sign to the Maritime Centre: ‘*Finding Meermin: An exhibition about a slave ship*’.



Figure 27 Iziko Maritime Centre - *Finding Meermin* poster.
(Photograph Heather Wares)

South African maritime museums come from a tradition of collecting. This tradition is adopted from that of European institutions, which follow European maritime endeavours during the 18th and 19th centuries from which various objects were brought back to the continent.³⁷ It is through this period of global expansion that South African maritime history became intertwined with that of the colonial history. In more recent years, since the official end of apartheid in 1994, there have been initiatives aimed at rethinking maritime archaeology, transforming maritime museums and reconstituting their publics.

³⁷ J. Owen, “Collecting artefacts, acquiring empire: A Maritime Endeavour,” *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 18 (May 2006): 141.

Through the *Finding Meermin* exhibition Iziko Museums attempted to transform South Africa's maritime history by reconstituting a public around a context of the narrative of slavery.

Slavery was also the focus of a Memorandum of Agreement concluded in December 2006 between Iziko and The Freedom Park Trust, which will guide our cooperation in future regards to the public presentation of the history of slavery in South Africa.³⁸

This focus on change is driven by a national initiative to transform and reconstruct a central grouping of museums to present a new national narrative. With the ushering in of a new government in 1994, official calls for transformation of museums began.³⁹

The official end to apartheid in South Africa saw demands for government to make this transformation a reality through the transforming of policies and re-imagining of institutions. The vision for these new institutions was to align them with a new national identity in order to showcase what would be envisioned for the 'new' South Africa. This identity was made official by the new African National Congress (ANC)-led government, through documents issued at a national and provincial level.⁴⁰ This was part of a bigger project in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, with the goal being a cultural mapping on a national level.⁴¹

The amalgamation into what became Iziko Museums of Cape Town was formed as a result of the policies of the new Ministry of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology.

On 1st April 1999, the national museums in and around Cape Town joined forces to become one of the largest museum services in the country. After decades of separate and competitive existence, our complementary roles and expertise are at last harnessed together under a unified management and a single vision.⁴²

³⁸ Annual Report of Iziko Museums of Cape Town, 2006-2007, 7.

³⁹ K. J. Goodnow, J. Lohman, and H. C. J. Bredekamp, *Challenge and transformation: Museums in Cape Town and Sydney*, (London: UNESCO, 2006), 38.

⁴⁰ H. C. J. Bredekamp, "Transforming Representations of Intangible Heritage at Iziko Museums, SA" (paper presented at the Concurrent Session *Museums and Living Heritage*, ICOM General Conference, Seoul, October 2-8, 2004), 1.

⁴¹ H. C. J. Bredekamp, "Transforming Representations of Intangible Heritage at Iziko Museums, SA," 1.

⁴² Goodnow, Lohman, and Bredekamp, *Challenge and transformation: Museums in Cape Town and Sydney*, 42.

In terms of the Cultural Institutions Act, 1998 (Act 119 of 1998), five State-funded museums in the Western Cape – the South African Cultural History Museum, South African Museum, South African National Gallery, the William Fehr Collection and the Michaelis Collection – were amalgamated as the Southern Flagship Institution (SFI). In July 2001, the SFI was officially renamed Iziko Museums of Cape Town (Iziko).⁴³

In 2012, this group of museums was renamed Iziko Museums of South Africa, making the link to a single national vision more vivid.⁴⁴

With the bringing together of museums in 1999 came the pressure for museums to ‘find ways to combine the representation of diversity and the achievement of unity.’⁴⁵

However, it is clear that for many of the museums this was difficult to achieve.

Museums such as the Maritime Museum were expected to transform and restructure when budgets were remaining ‘static in the face of a rising number of demands and expectations.’⁴⁶

The Maritime Museum was drawn into the transformation process, beginning in 2006 when Iziko implemented restructuring phases, bringing the Maritime Museum under the South African Cultural History Museum. It was then decided that the museum should be relocated from the Red Shed at the Waterfront. The collection went into storage for some time while management at Iziko decided what should be done with it.

One possibility for the Maritime Museum could have been to go a similar route taken by the Greenwich Maritime Museum in London. In finding new ways of representing a maritime history outside of the constraints of the ‘do-not-touch’ cabinets,

⁴³ Annual Report of Iziko Museums of Cape Town, 2006- 2007, pp. 15.

⁴⁴ Iziko www.iziko.org.za/news, posted September 19 2012, accessed October 31, 2012.

⁴⁵ Goodnow, Lohman, and Bredekamp, *Challenge and transformation: Museums in Cape Town and Sydney*, 43.

⁴⁶ Goodnow, Lohman, and Bredekamp, *Challenge and transformation: Museums in Cape Town and Sydney*, 43.

the Greenwich Maritime Museum introduced a more interactive display, or what Bombardello and Hall would call the experiential economy.⁴⁷

The experiential economy emphasizes the individuality of experience and the game-like qualities of participation, inviting the visitor to become a partner in admiring the quality of the simulation before moving on to another fulfilling experience.⁴⁸

The experiential economy refers to the notion of spaces of entertainment making use of different associations with history and heritage which are perceived to be that of a particular place and people. These places of experience draw on stereotypical histories to attract an audience, with the main objective being consumerism. The audience is aware of their participation in the making of an illusion of ‘the real’ thing, giving the constructors of these ‘theme parks’ the agency to create the most economically effective experience. It also allows the audience to make their consumer choices as to what they want to see and experience.⁴⁹

When the experiential economy is measured by the ability of these ‘heritage’ destinations to entertain, it becomes ‘the appropriation of any version of the past that will make money for corporate.’⁵⁰ This Vegas-type does not have education as its main focus, but museums such as the Greenwich Maritime Museum have to find ways of joining entertainment with education. On a global level, institutions such as this one have developed strategies to encourage research and interpretation, and made education a primary function.⁵¹ The museum space is made interactive as visitors are faced with a museum complex offering various interactive displays. From my own memory of a visit to this museum in 2005, I joined the other visitors in boarding a replica of a vessel placed within one of the exhibition halls. This allowed the visitors to interact with the

⁴⁷ P. Bombardella, and M. Hall, “Las Vegas in Africa,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 5(1) (2005): 17.

⁴⁸ Bombardella, and Hall, “Las Vegas in Africa,” 17.

⁴⁹ Bombardella, and Hall, “Las Vegas in Africa,” 22.

⁵⁰ Bombardella, and Hall, “Las Vegas in Africa,” 17.

⁵¹ J. Owen, “Collecting artefacts, acquiring empire: A Maritime Endeavour”, 141.

space, giving an impression of what it might have been like for the crew members. This experience was complete with sounds of ocean, wind and seagulls to make the experience feel more ‘authentic’.⁵² The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum makes use of these methods to a limited degree.

Judging by the current website, this National Maritime Museum has continued to embrace this mode of representation by including exhibitions which engage children through display. One such display is ‘The ship’s interactive bridge simulator (in the Ship Simulator gallery) [which] brings to life the excitement, difficulties, hazards and skills of handling ships at sea.’⁵³ You can ‘join the crew and experience the sights and sounds of the vessel in operation, from the bark of the captain’s commands and the vibration of the ship’s engine.’⁵⁴

You could find yourself at the helm of a fishing boat navigating buoys in New York Harbour, following a helicopter rescue mission to a sinking vessel, navigating a frigate into position off Sydney shores or steering a P&O ferry into port in Denver.⁵⁵

This kind of interactive exhibition illustrates ways in which experience is used to entice visitors to show an interest in their maritime history.⁵⁶ Although effective, these initiatives are costly and were beyond the ambit of Iziko.

On opening its doors in January 2007, it was clear that the new Iziko Maritime Centre was no longer being called a museum. Having been relocated to the Union-Castle House at the V&A Waterfront, it had been down-scaled, rather than remodelled

⁵² B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1990, “Objects of Ethnography,” in *Exhibiting Cultures*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press), 391.

⁵³ Royal Museums Greenwich, <http://www.rmg.co.uk/visit/exhibitions/on-display/all-hands-and-the-bridge-interactive-galleries#simulator>, [accessed April 17, 2013].

⁵⁴ Royal Museums Greenwich, <http://www.rmg.co.uk/visit/exhibitions/on-display/all-hands-and-the-bridge-interactive-galleries#simulator> [accessed: 17 April 2013].

⁵⁵ Royal Museums Greenwich, <http://www.rmg.co.uk/visit/exhibitions/on-display/all-hands-and-the-bridge-interactive-galleries#simulator> [accessed: 17 April 2013].

⁵⁶ J. Owen, “Collecting artefacts, acquiring empire,” 141.

around an interactive space.⁵⁷ This downscaling was due to budget constraints, forcing the Maritime Centre to find alternative ways of attracting its public. One way in which this was attempted was through invoking a new context which will resonate with its publics.

Budget constraints in particular also made it necessary for the individual museums to appeal to outside funders in order to produce more contemporary exhibitions. These funders often looked to support projects or exhibitions which matched a new national narrative, making it relevant and interesting to a South African audience. It was in an effort to satisfy the need for ‘representation of diversity and the achievement of unity’⁵⁸ and to attract outside funding, that the Maritime Centre focused on the *Meermin*. In so doing, the Maritime Centre was aligned with other Iziko Museums with a focus on the presentation of the slave narrative.

A major lottery award was received to locate and recover the wreck of the slave ship *Meermin*. Transformation funding from the Department of Art and Culture was received for the development of an orientation auditorium at the Iziko Slave Lodge, and an orientation centre exhibition at Iziko Groot Constantia that will include the history of slavery on the estate. Collectively these projects, together with the Memory Centre at the Iziko Slave Lodge, will make Iziko an important centre for increasing public awareness of slavery.⁵⁹

However, this is not immediately evident when faced with the poster at the entrance as it sets a different kind of scene for the visitor experience. An image is shown of a ship run aground and in line with the horizon, lapped by the oceans waves and surrounded by blue skies with bellowing white clouds. This all gives a romantic notion of the

⁵⁷ Iziko Museums of Cape Town, Annual Report 2006- 2007, <http://www.iziko.org.za/static/page/annual-reports> [accessed: 4 May 2013].

⁵⁸ Goodnow, Lohman, and Bredekamp, *Challenge and Transformation: Museums in Cape Town and Sydney*, 43.

⁵⁹ Iziko Museums of Cape Town, Annual Report 2003- 2004, 15, available at <http://www.iziko.org.za/static/page/annual-reports> [accessed: 4 May 2013].

discovery of shipwrecks and places the object of the ship as the central focus. As will be discovered later, the poster, hinting at an object-centred exhibition, is contradictory to the story of the search for the *Meermin*.

Enticed by the posters, on stepping over the threshold and into the Maritime Centre itself, the visitor is met with a similar sort of maritime display to what is advertised on the poster. The entrance space showcases a maritime history of Table Bay, which focuses on the era of colonial rule and the commercial value of shipping from industrialisation to the present. This all comes into view as the visitor walks past the reception to the stairs inviting them to explore the upper level. On ascending the stairs, the visitor is presented with large images of ships at sea and figureheads, going on to modern-day Table Bay and cargo ships illustrating what was said about the lower level maritime display.

Once at the top of the stairs, the theme of maritime history begins to transform, from the object-focused display of ships to exhibitions placing an importance on context. This creates a partial contrast for the visitor's experience of the Iziko Maritime Center, between a more traditional object-focused display and the *Meermin* exhibit focused on context without objects. The upstairs section presents the visitor with a choice: either turn left to the permanent exhibition space presenting the story of the *Mendi* or turn right to the temporary exhibition space, where they can experience what was advertised on their initial entrance to the centre: the *Finding Meermin* exhibition. Let us turn our attention left, to the exhibition of the *Mendi* as it presents a middle ground in the transformation process. While still holding on to various previous methodologies of the representation of maritime history, there is an embrace of the interest in a narrative around the human experience.

The *Mendi* exhibition in the permanent exhibition space told the story of a cargo vessel turned troopship, which ‘... in 1917 ... carried a group of the South African Native Labour Contingent to help with the war effort in France’.⁶⁰ On their journey to London, the ship was involved in a collision with the British cargo vessel *Darro* on 21 February 1917,⁶¹ under conditions of severe fog, causing the *Mendi* to sink. Many of the soldiers lost their lives.

The room holding the *Mendi* exhibition is illustrative of the friction between the different demands placed on South Africa’s maritime history. On first entering the display space, I am faced with a board headed, ‘The Last Voyage of the Mendi: Death in foreign waters’.⁶²



Figure 28 *Mendi* Exhibition - 'The last voyage of the Mendi: Death in Foreign Waters' display board, Iziko Maritime Centre. (Photograph Heather Wares)

This has all the signs of a maritime history attempting to change its narrative focus, to a context more interested in the experience of the people on board than the vessel on which they were sailing when they were wrecked at sea. The exhibition places a prominence on encouraging words delivered to the soldiers by one man while the ship

⁶⁰ Iziko Museums, “The Last Voyage of the Mendi: Death in Foreign Waters”, <http://www.iziko.org.za/calendar/event/the-last-voyage-of-the-mendi-death-in-foreign-waters> [accessed 23 October 2012].

⁶¹ Iziko Museums, “The Last Voyage of the Mendi: Death in Foreign Waters”.

⁶² On a visit to the Maritime Centre in 2011, this is the display of the *Mendi* that I encountered.

was sinking. It is in this figure that a connection to contemporary South Africa is clear, as he is represented as a symbol of strength in a desperate situation, a theme which is a common thread in the telling of the history of the South African people in the post-apartheid setting.

However, on stepping past these display boards with images and text, a more conventional maritime history is on display. It consists of a display narrative and methodology not much different to what I have described at the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. A maritime history is largely represented by objects, as bottles found on the ocean floor stand in cabinets alongside model ships representative of the Mail Liners carrying passengers between continents over vast expanses of ocean. The purpose of these displays is to make reference to the building in which the exhibition stands, which was the Union-Castle House.⁶³ This seems to celebrate the role of the ship as a cargo vessel and passenger liner, and the technological wonder of the ship as machine. There is the object of the life-boat which, instead of protected from touch within cabinets, is standing free, much like the one described as on display at the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, which is also only separated from the visitor by a barricade of rope.

It is this focus on the object which creates the contrast as I turn my back on the *Mendi* exhibition space, walk past the top of the staircase and stroll into the room directly opposite, where the *Finding Meermin* exhibition is on display. Apart from a model of Table Bay, and the vast John Marsh Maritime Research Centre at the back of the room, I notice one very obvious omission – there are no objects in the *Finding Meermin* exhibition. What does this mean for the representation of maritime archaeology in this exhibition?

⁶³ Iziko Museums of Cape Town Annual Report, 2006- 2007, 15.

In a more traditional definition of a museum, the *Finding Meermin* exhibition would not be considered a museum display, as a narrative is only considered legitimate if it is told with objects as the focus of the tale.

Without objects, there can be no creation of environments for the presentation of objects that exist in museums. Thus, when professionals discuss the importance of objects, they recognise that museums cannot exist without objects and that almost everything that happens in museums hinges upon them, including the shaping of place.⁶⁴

Similarly an argument is made that it is commonly a given that any museum display can only be called that if it contains objects. The Lwandle Museum, situated in a settlement borne from a migrant labour system, is considered to be a community museum displaying the area's history of migrant labour settlement.⁶⁵ It is often criticised for not having a collection of objects and many state that it therefore cannot be considered a legitimate museum. This effects the reputation and perception of the museum and in turn negatively effects the museums ability to get recognised and attract funding.

The two museum displays compared in this thesis up to this point seem to have a different relationship with objects. The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum presents a maritime history solely focused on the wonder of the object, excluding for the most part a connection with a context. The *Finding Meermin* exhibition, on the other hand, discards the object as a point of attraction and rather focuses its attention on the display of a context which is assumed to resonate with a contemporary South African audience. This move away from what has been archaeology's traditional object-focused museum displays is what makes the *Finding Meermin* exhibition one of interest in the discussion framed by this thesis.

⁶⁴ D.B. Leach, 'Dynamic museum place: exploring the multi-dimensional museum environment', *The Journal of Museum Education* 32, No. 3 (2007): 204.

⁶⁵ This description does not do the Lwandle museum justice, as this is a contested space. See B. Mgijima and V. Buthelezi, 'Mapping Museum: Community Relations in Lwandle', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32, Heritage in Southern Africa (Dec., 2006): 795.

Replacing rows of glass cabinets filled with objects and life-boats protected by rope barricades, are four panels standing shoulder to shoulder, depicting the *Finding Meermin* exhibition. They are large panels, curved in shape, with eight different themes depicted on both sides of each panel: 'The Search', 'Maritime Archaeology', 'The Slave Route', 'The *Meermin* Ship', 'Slavery at The Cape', 'Resistance and Legacy', 'Finding *Meermin*', and '*Meermin*: The Story'.



Figure 29 *Meermin* Exhibition space - the layout of the panels of the *Finding Meermin* exhibition, Iziko Maritime Centre. (Photograph Heather Wares)

These themes are depicted through images and texts illustrating the intended narrative, which tell a history of the *Meermin* and the processes of archaeological investigations. They are printed on cotton canvas stretched out over frames with a blue background, creating uniformity and setting the scene for a link to the ocean. The information and images displayed on the panels are organised in a style that reminds me of a presentation, with bullet points and logical pieces of information, while using strong images to evoke emotion from the audience. These images are inserted in between the text, illustrating the archaeological process, artists' impressions of Cape Town, slavery in the Cape and maps depicting the different slave routes. In addition,

there is a touch-screen display, the only attempt at making the exhibition more interactive. All of the above displays, panels and touch screen, with their depictions of a specific context, are the first hint that the audience is being brought into being through the use of images and text that substitute for the object.

As discussed in the introduction, Rousseau relates this ‘bringing a public into being’ with popular history projects in South Africa in the 1980s. The *Finding Meermin* exhibition and the broader project can be compared to the way in which the University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop (WHW) produced and presented an alternative historical narrative for the ‘ordinary’ people through the popularising of academic texts.⁶⁷ Although popular history claimed to provide the audience with a certain amount of agency, Rousseau argues that the aim is not to hand over agency to the audience so much as to create a resonance with that audience through a transformation of context presented with the use of popular images and ‘easy to read’ text. The text and images are specifically selected, creating a particular historical narrative; in this case the narrative of slavery, resistance and rebellion. This narrative and popularised text are presented in the form of the above-mentioned panels and educational packs intended to fit into the national school curriculum.

For many museums, visitors are lead along a specific path from one exhibition to another, dictating to the audience in what order they should experience what is being represented. This is done in many different ways, such as through corridors or divides, providing only one route for the audience to take. ‘Exhibition design functions as a language of form manifesting ... aesthetic, social and political concerns.’⁶⁸

Following from my analysis of the way in which the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum uses light to create a particular mood, in the case of *Finding Meermin* I would

⁶⁷ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 9.

⁶⁸ Kratz, “Rhetorics of Value,” 16.

suggest that, being a temporary exhibition, the design is different to that of a permanent display. Here the exhibition relies solely on the lighting provided by the venue in which it is displayed. At the Iziko Maritime Centre, the room has permanent general overhead lighting, which creates a stark lighting effect. However, to soften this effect there is a warmer light entering through the sash windows on the one side of the exhibition space.⁶⁹ The exhibition itself has no individual lights aimed exclusively at the panel displays.

The visitor could be left confused as to where to aim their focus, thereby making them more likely to hasten their viewing of the exhibition material. On the other hand, the visitor is left with the freedom of agency to decide what is more significant in relation to their own interests or objectives, giving them more space to make their own conclusions about the histories presented to them. An argument for the latter could be that letting visitors direct their attention where they please in their own selected order leaves space for individual interpretation. This individual interpretation is not always possible as many exhibitions direct their audience on a particular path hoping to unite them in the experience of viewing his particular history in one particular way.⁷⁰ In keeping the narrative and exhibition display within the hands of the experts, the project is satisfying the need of maritime archaeologists to find a place for itself in academia. The project makes this visible by presenting a poster, also visible on *The Search* panel of the exhibition, depicting the different stages of the project at international and local conferences. In March 2008 a project poster was produced and presented at the national

⁶⁹ Kratz, "Rhetorics of Value," 30.

⁷⁰ G. Minkley, C. Rassool and L. Witz. "Thresholds, Gateways and Spectacles: Journeying through South Africa's hidden pasts and histories in the last decade of the twentieth century," (paper presented at *Future of the Past Conference*, University of the Western Cape, July 10-12, 1996), 17.

conference of ASAPA (Archaeology Professionals of South Africa) and again at a series of international conferences.⁷¹



Figure 30 'Search for the Wreck of the Dutch Slaver *Meermin*' - the poster presented at various international conferences provided by Jaco Boshoff, leader of the *Meermin* Project.

A commitment to presenting the technical stages of a maritime archaeology project is revealed on what appears to be the introductory panel of the exhibition at the Iziko

⁷¹ The project itself was presented at various other conferences:

- World Archaeological Congress, Washington D.C 2003. *Uncovering the Slave Ship Meermin. A project to reclaim the hidden heritage of slavery in South Africa.*
- Barologia National Underwater Science Symposium 2005. *The Wreck of the Meermin.*
- Maritime Heritage in the Western Indian Ocean Conference, Zanzibar 2006. *The Potential for Comparative Slave Wreck Studies in South Africa*
- Conference Poster ASAPA National Conference 2008 *Search for the Wreck of the Dutch Slaver Meermin*
- Conference Poster IKUWA International Maritime Archaeology Conference, London. 2008 *Search for the Wreck of the Dutch Slaver Meermin*
- International SAVE Tourism Workshop Cape Town October 2009. *The Dutch Slaver - Meermin, More than a Wreck.*
- International SAVE Tourism conference, Maputo Mozambique, March 2010. *The Southern African Slave Wrecks Project: A South African Example in Progress.*
- Archaeology of Colonial Slavery. Musee du quai Branly, Paris (France), 9 – 11 May 2012. *South African Slave Ship Archaeology. With special reference to the wrecks of the Dutch Slaver Meermin (1766) and the Portuguese Slaver Sao Jose (1794).*⁷¹

Maritime Centre. At first glance it is the picture of the ship superimposed onto a background of cotton-wool clouds upon a pale blue skyline, lapped by waves crashing onto a sandy beach, which dominates this panel. This furthers the notion that the object of the ship is what the audience can expect to encounter while exploring the exhibition. The search for this particular ship is further presented to the audience by the main lettering, 'Finding *Meermin*'. However, on reading further, underneath the heading there is written 'The *Meermin* Project: A South African Archaeology initiative'. This draws the focus away from the *Meermin* and towards what can be described as the second narrative of the *Finding Meermin* exhibition: the practice of maritime archaeology.



Figure 31 *Finding Meermin* Exhibition – 'Finding *Meermin*' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre. (Photograph Heather Wares)

What I cannot help but notice is that there is a difference between the title of this panel and the one which stands at the entrance to the Maritime Centre, the latter containing the words 'an exhibition about a slave ship'. In a sense, this creates a dual purpose for this exhibition. Although slavery is a dominant context (as reflected by the other panels), maritime archaeology and finding the ship is presented as the main theme in this panel.

The *Finding Meermin* exhibition is the result of a larger project which got underway due to Lottery funding. As per the criteria for a project funded by the Lottery, the *Meermin* project produced its own archive of reports, records, field notes and papers presented at conferences.⁷² This archive has given me insight into the way in which the project was proposed, planned and executed, as well as the exhibition itself.

The proposal to Lotto included the many different components which would make up the *Meermin* Project: the search, including archival research and field work; excavation of the site; conservation, which would include the development of a conservation laboratory; education and interpretation with the development of an education-pack for schools; and finally a public awareness initiative, with the making of a documentary and newspaper articles.⁷³

Much archival work had already been done when Lottery funding came through in 2003,⁷⁴ after which the field work component took top priority. As a part of this field work, environmental research was performed. The results of surveys revealed that in 1939 a dune reclamation project was initiated, which involved the creation of an artificial dune in order to stabilise the position of the river mouth within the Heuningnes estuary area. This was deemed necessary by the Department of Forestry following appeals from farmers in the area who suffered damage and loss of crops due to flooding caused by the ever-changing estuary area and dynamic sand movement patterns.⁷⁵ This stabilisation of the estuary had a devastating effect on the *Meermin* project, as a very different environment was created from the one people would have experienced in 1766, when the *Meermin* wrecked. Together with the existence of many unidentified

⁷²All of this was provided to me by Jaco Boshoff, the project leader, who also agreed to be interviewed about the process.

⁷³JJ. Boshoff, "Uncovering the Slave Ship *Meermin*," 3-4.

⁷⁴Iziko Museums of Cape Town Annual Report, 2003 –2004, 15.

⁷⁵J. Boshoff, "First Report for the National Lotteries Distribution Trust Fund," 3.

shipwrecks known to have wrecked in the area, this made it difficult for archaeologists to locate the *Meermin*.

In 2004, as part of the environmental survey, the first beach magnetometer survey, conducted by the Hermanus Magnetic Observatory, and marine magnetometer survey was done. This was initiated when the Marine Geoscience Unit (MGU) of the Council for Geoscience assisted in performing the magnetometer survey from 18 - 21 May, 2004.⁷⁶ A magnetometer survey consists of individuals trained to use the magnetometer instrument in order to measure changes in the earth's magnetic field. During this time, a series of surveys was performed which showed evidence of there being traces of objects which were not natural to the sea bed. However this was not enough to give a definitive location for a shipwreck. Therefore, in addition to these magnetometer surveys, an airborne survey was conducted in March 2005.⁷⁷ The airborne survey resulted in 22 potential targets, which could be remains of shipwrecks along the Struisbaai coastline.⁷⁸

What this meant for the *Meermin* research team was that the potential for finding the wreck was promising, as there was evidence of non-natural materials beneath the surface. On conducting searches, which included the development and testing of a water probe in January 2006, designed to push into the sand in the inter-tidal region (in shallow waters along the beach) testing for materials under the surface, 'three wreck assemblages (were)successfully excavated' in June of that year.⁷⁹ Field work continued into 2007 and in May additional hand-held magnetometer surveys were performed on the beach, which together with non-invasive excavation uncovered a further three wreck assemblages. While these finds can be seen as recognisable achievements for the

⁷⁶ J. Boshoff, "First Report for the National Lotteries Distribution Trust Fund," 6.

⁷⁷ J. Boshoff, "First Report for the National Lotteries Distribution Trust Fund," 7.

⁷⁸ J. Boshoff, "First Report for the National Lotteries Distribution Trust Fund," 10.

⁷⁹ H. Wares, Field Notes, 'The Search', *Finding Meermin* exhibition at the Iziko Maritime Centre (2011).

research team, despite their efforts and considerable historical records the wreck of the *Meermin* continued to evade them.

Each of the panels in the exhibition reflects the aims of the project and the findings, which resulted from archival research and the field work described above. These aims are clearly presented on the first board which comes into view when entering the exhibition space, what I have described as the *Finding Meermin* introductory panel.

Aims of the *Meermin* Project:

- Find and excavate the wreck of the slave ship *Meermin*.
- Exhibit and publish the results of the excavation.
- Create education packs for learners and teachers on slaves, shipwrecks and archaeology.
- Provide opportunities for hands-on training in Maritime Archaeology for students and the public.
- Contribute new knowledge about the slaves and slave ships by analysis of the archaeological remains.⁸⁰

Where the Introductory panel prepares the audience for what they can expect to encounter, the layout of the rest of the panels in the exhibition reflect a commitment to the two niche topics proposed to the Lottery board when applying for funding: slavery and maritime archaeology.⁸¹ Through an analysis of the panels to follow, I draw on these two topics as focal points to illustrate the way in which the narrative of the *Meermin* has been constructed around the context of slavery, and more specifically its connection to a history of resistance and rebellion and the practice of maritime archaeology.

In my analysis, I follow the discussion by Davis Ruffins in her exhibition analysis of ‘Jim Crow: Racism and Reaction’ in the New South’, displayed at the Valentine Museum in Richmond, Virginia, where she discusses an exhibition with a

⁸⁰ H. Wares. Field Notes: Visit to the *Finding Meermin* exhibition at the Iziko Maritime Centre (August 2011).

⁸¹ J.J. Boshoff, “Uncovering the Slave Ship Meermin,” 6.

focus not on objects, but rather around the idea of segregation.⁸² Here, in revealing a history of slavery resulting in the oppression of the people forced to identify themselves as slaves, a unity can ultimately be formed with a national affiliation with the idea of resistance and rebellion. I propose that this link between the oppression of slavery and that of apartheid, is created through the positioning of the panels, creating a path which the audience follows.

Although previously, through an analysis of the lighting I proposed that the audience has the illusion of agency when exploring the exhibition space, the way in which the panels are ordered has more of a controlling effect than would initially be expected. Each of the panels is printed on both sides, forcing those putting up the panels for an exhibition to make a selection around which side will face forward. The audience will therefore encounter the panels according to this selection, with the panels facing forward to automatically come into sight first.

While there is the possibility that the audience will make their own path, I argue that it is more likely that this selection, which causes the audience visiting the exhibition in the Iziko Maritime Centre to first encounter one of the panels depicting a slave narrative, is intentional. It is this encounter which creates a distinctive trail of thought, from 'Slave Route' to 'Slavery at the Cape', leading to 'Meermin: The Story', and finally creating the link for the intended contemporary South African audience with 'Resistance and Legacy'. It is an encounter of this kind which calls this exhibition's public into being.⁸³ A public is presumed to feel resonance with a slave history which speaks to a history of oppression. Each of the panels draws on recognisable images of the slave trade and narratives depicting a slave history to create this resonance.⁸⁴

⁸² F. Davis Ruffins, "Jim Crow: Racism and Reaction in the New South," *The Journal of American*, 78 (June., 1991): 265.

⁸³ M. Warner, *Publics and Counter Publics*, (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 50.

⁸⁴ Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," 19-20.



Figure 32 *Finding Meerman* Exhibition - shackles representative of slavery on the 'Slavery at the Cape' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre. (Photograph Heather Wares)

These images could be standing in the place of objects, keeping with Greenblatt's notion of resonance, where an attachment to an object is still a central point. What changes are the different associations placed on that object, or in this case the image. It could be argued in this case that the object of the ship, although not physically present, is being given a new meaning through the context of slavery. In addition, this can be linked to Alberti's notion of the biography of an object, in which the significance of an object is affected by those who own and attach meaning to it.⁸⁵

The notion of the biography of an object is adopted from Samuel Alberti who, in his book 'Objects and the Museum', follows the life of objects through collecting and display. 'Throughout their lives, museum objects were attributed varied meanings and values: collectors, curators, and audiences encountered objects in very different ways.'⁸⁶ Where the notion of the object as central remains, Alberti recognises that objects do not stand alone in their wonderment, as they were represented in the 'rooms of curiosity'. He follows a similar thread to that of Greenblatt, who illustrates through his description of Wolsey's Hat that the meaning attached to an object is affected and transformed by

⁸⁵ S.J.M.M. Alberti, "Objects and the museum", *The History of Science Society* 96 (Dec 2005): 561.

⁸⁶ Alberti, "Objects and the museum," 561.

the place in which it is displayed, the people to which it is associated and the era in which it is viewed. This is what he calls transmigrations of meaning.⁸⁷

The use of recognisable images for the creation of an imagined community who feels an affiliation to the slave history is not unique to the *Finding Meermin* exhibition. Ebron, who will be discussed at a later point, also points to the use of images of slaves: ‘Pictures of rows of African bodies chained together without room to move for weeks at a time have helped shape a contemporary memory of that voyage.’⁸⁸ This slave history is carefully produced to lead an audience from the broader ‘Slave Route’ to one connecting the Cape Town experience with that of slave histories around the world.

Slavery has attracted much attention internationally as a topic. African Americans in the United States are sometimes automatically assumed to find resonance with slavery and the slave trade as they, as an imagined community, are assumed to feel that the silenced voices of their ancestors need to finally have a space and time to tell their story.

A physical breaking of this silence has come in many forms, however one is a ‘return’ to Africa, the ‘homeland’.⁸⁹ Ebron points out that ‘Travel routes in such contemporary “return” journeys to the continent are maps of collective memory; to participants the visit becomes a “revisit”, tending to the trauma of capture – the capture of Africans taken to the New World as slaves.’⁹⁰ On visiting sites considered to be significant to slavery and the slave trade and following them back to the United States, on trips referred to as pilgrimages, these routes are reversed.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” 4.

⁸⁸ P.A. Ebron, “Tourists as Pilgrims: Commercial Fashioning of Transatlantic Politics,” *American Ethnologist*, 26, No. 4 (Nov., 1999): 923.

⁸⁹ Ebron, “Tourists as Pilgrims,” 916.

⁹⁰ Ebron, “Tourists as Pilgrims,” 912.

⁹¹ Ebron, “Tourists as Pilgrims,” 916.

This notion of the pilgrim is repeated many times in Ebron's writing. "You are on a pilgrimage, not a safari",⁹² as she writes about a physical tour which is initiated through a competition run by the fast food chain, McDonalds. All of the winners of the competition embarked on a 10-day trip to Senegal and the Gambia, inspired by the book and television series *Roots*.⁹³ The trip was organised around the idea that the group were not tourists, but rather pilgrims coming back 'home'. The idea was to return to the sites of capture and departure from where their ancestors were transported to the New World. In so doing, the 'pilgrims' were symbolically following the same route, as at the end of the 10 days, and back on US soil, the trip ended at the symbolic site of where slaves arrived on the continent.⁹⁴

This is just one example of the kind of significance these slave routes have for different communities, in this case an African American community. However, the context of slavery has been made visible as a historical focus through the creation internationally of various projects focused on the slave narrative. For example, the UNESCO Slave Routes Project, launched in Ouidah, Benin in 1994, presented itself as part of an initiative to 'break the silence around slavery and the slave trade'.⁹⁵ The way in which this project aimed to break the silence was through the identification of various sites representing the Atlantic slave trade. This project was brought to South Africa, '...where it played a significant role in securing recognition by the United Nations at the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban in 2001, of the slave trade and slavery as crimes against humanity'.⁹⁶

⁹² Ebron, "Tourists as Pilgrims," 916.

⁹³ Ebron, "Tourists as Pilgrims," 910.

⁹⁴ Ebron, "Tourists as Pilgrims," 916.

⁹⁵ UNESCO Slave Routes Project, 'The Slave Route', <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/dialogue/the-slave-route/> [accessed 6 May 2013].

⁹⁶ UNESCO Slave Routes Project, 'The Slave Route'.

South Africa followed and became part of this international focus on the slave trade through institutions such as Iziko Museums, and legislation, namely the National Heritage Resources Act. Slavery is specifically mentioned and sites of slavery are protected under Chapter 1, Part 1, under the title ‘National estate’, in the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999.

National estate

3. (1) For the purpose of this Act, those heritage resources of South Africa which are of cultural significance or other special value for the present community and for future generations must be considered part of the national estate and fall within the sphere of operations of heritage resources authorities.⁹⁷

This section of the act continues; ‘(2) Without limiting the generality of subsection (1), the national estate may include ... (2)(h) sites of significance relating to the history of slavery in South Africa’. It is again mentioned in the legislation under ‘National estate’ sub-section 3, where ‘a place or object is to be considered part of the national estate if it has cultural significance or other special value because of ... (i) significance relating to the history of slavery in South Africa.’⁹⁸

The Iziko Slave Lodge was taken up as a focus for the institution, with the development of projects and the renovation of the exhibition space.⁹⁹ It is through this concentration on the slave trade that the *Meermin* made a convenient connection for Iziko with the Maritime Centre. While the *Meermin* served a singular purpose for Iziko, it was also drawn into a larger international project, The Southern African Slave Wrecks Project, later named the African Slave Wrecks Project (ASWP), an international collaboration between the Iziko Museums of South Africa, the South African Heritage

⁹⁷ National Heritage Resources Act, Act 25 of 1999, Government Gazette, 28 April 1999, Vol. 406, No. 19974, Notice No. 506: 12.

⁹⁸ National Heritage Resources Act, Act 25 of 1999, Government Gazette, 28 April 1999, Vol. 406, No. 19974, Notice No. 506: 12.

⁹⁹ Iziko Museums of Cape Town Annual Report, 2003- 2004, 15.

Resources Agency, Smithsonian Museums and George Washington University. The aim of the project is to identify slave wreck sites along the African coastline which will feed into an African slave wrecks route, connecting these sites together in a potential tourist route.¹⁰⁰ The ASWP is focused on international collaboration, with the transferring of skills and knowledge through field schools, both in South Africa and America. My experience with the ASWP is through these field schools, as part of the ‘local’ contingent of maritime archaeologists and historians working on a wreck site in Clifton, Cape Town. In 2012, I attended the field school in Florida in the United States as one of the students, and in 2013 I will return, going on to undertake an internship with United States National Park Service Submerged Resource Centre.

This project takes discussions around international and ‘local’ initiatives on slavery and the slave trade full circle, with the official signing on of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) as a partner. With the museum still in the initial stages of development, the hope is to eventually showcase findings of the African Slave Wrecks Project (ASWP) in the museum on its opening. In essence, this adopts Ebron’s notion of the pilgrim ‘returning’ to Africa to follow their ancestors’ routes over the Atlantic back to America.¹⁰¹ It also allows for a different kind of slave history to emerge, one around the life of the slave aboard a slaving vessel, making that journey more tangible.

This was further displayed in the public sphere through the making of the documentary *Slave Ship Mutiny* which was released on United States television channel

¹⁰⁰ J. Sharfman, J. Boshoff, and R. Parthesius. ‘Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage in South Africa: The Development of Relevant Management Strategies in the Historical Maritime Context of the Southern Tip of Africa’, *Journal of Maritime Archaeology*. Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2012, 17.

¹⁰¹ P.A. Ebron, “Tourists as Pilgrims,” 916.

PBS in 2010.¹⁰² Many of the images which are shown on the panels of the *Finding Meermin* exhibition are actually still images taken from the documentary.

This documentary can be likened to the use of the film *Amistad* in the making of slavery as indicative of an African American experience. It was the emergence of the popularisation of slave roots in the African Diaspora that altered the significance attached to these vessels.¹⁰³ In the United States, the topic of slavery has become one of central importance and a lot of research has been done with slavery as the focus. There has been an attempt at making the research available in various ways, as many African Americans find their history and heritage explicitly present in a history of slavery. The movie *Amistad* was released in 1997 as a depiction of an attempted slave uprising aboard a slave ship, bringing the topic of slavery vividly into the living rooms of people around the world.¹⁰⁴ These visual images reflected both a deep feeling of strength and determination, as well as revealing the horrific reality of the conditions the slaves aboard these ‘cargo’ vessels had to endure.

The Meermin Project could be seen to be trying to do the same thing in South Africa, with the filming and release of a documentary-style movie on the uprising of the Malagasy slaves aboard the ship. A central focus for both movies is that of a leader amongst the slaves, a strong male character fighting against the odds for his freedom, being awarded agency.¹⁰⁵ Where the story of the *Amistad* was used as a tool for the re-imagining of slavery in the past, the *Meermin* can be seen as signifying a post-apartheid vision of a liberated united South Africa.

¹⁰² H. Wares, Field Notes: *Meermin: The Story*, in Finding Meermin Exhibition, Iziko Maritime Centre, August 2011.

¹⁰³ J. Webster, “Slave Ships and Maritime Archaeology: An overview,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 12, The Archaeology of Slave Ships (March, 2008): 9.

¹⁰⁴ S. Lipkin, “When Victims Speak (Or, What happened when Spielberg added *Amistad* to his list?),” *Journal of Film and Video* 52 (Winter 2001): 15.

¹⁰⁵ Lipkin, “When Victims Speak,” 15.

If sites in Africa are being drawn into the slave routes to be used as pilgrimages for ‘returning’ African Americans, how then does this translate for a South African audience? As Ebron suggests, although it has been attempted many times, it is problematic to superimpose a blue-print of one imagined slave route onto a local audience.¹⁰⁶ Looking specifically at the slave routes that have been globally imagined, these imaginings are then placed upon local sites, and it is this which Ebron questions. How do, what she calls, these ‘global scapes’ translate within the local?

In the case of the *Finding Meermin* exhibition, while the blue print has been adjusted, the foundations remain, as the same underlying notion of strength and unity triumphing over adversity is used as a base, indicated in the documentary on the *Meermin*. For a South African public, it is moulded to fit with the more recent past of the oppression of apartheid. Here there is an attempt to link images of slavery with those of apartheid and making them come together to symbolise “the same” event, thereby creating a warping of time to bring them together in the same moment. This is hinted at on the ‘Resistance and Legacy’ panel in the exhibition, with the words: ‘By remembering slavery we acknowledge the origins of our shared history of oppression and injustice. Through knowledge of the past, we can collectively challenge injustices of today.’¹⁰⁷

The panel headed ‘Slave Routes’ begins this connection with clues to the specific slave routes associated with the Cape, revealed through the use of a basic map with arrows clearly indicating the route. In addition, there are widely-circulated abolitionist images of slaves crammed into the hull of a ship while being transported across the seas, making the connection with the slave narrative. Other images visible on this panel depict Cape Town in the 1800’s, with sketch drawings of Table Mountain in

¹⁰⁶ Ebron, “Tourists as Pilgrims,” 910.

¹⁰⁷ H. Wares. Field Notes, *Finding Meermin* exhibition: Resistance and Legacy. Iziko Maritime Centre (2011).

the background of many of the images to solidify a local connection with this slave history.



Figure 33 *Finding Meermin* Exhibition - pictures depicting a slave history at the Cape on the 'Slavery at the Cape' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre. (Photograph Heather Wares)

From here, the next panel, 'Slavery at the Cape', makes a smooth transition from a focus on a general slave narrative to one which is more particular to the Cape. The information relayed here by the same means, text and images, paints a picture of the life of a slave in the Cape community during the Dutch East India Company control of the area. The text narratives are under headings such as 'Why the Cape depended on the Slave Trade' and 'The Experience of Enslavement'. It seems that these show the importance of slavery in the Cape community, and therefore history, also creating a resonance with a local audience and slavery at the Cape. Inserted into this is the human element, the stories told now for those who did not have a voice then: the slaves.



Figure 34 *Finding Meerman* Exhibition - 'Slavery at the Cape' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre.
(Photograph Heather Wares)

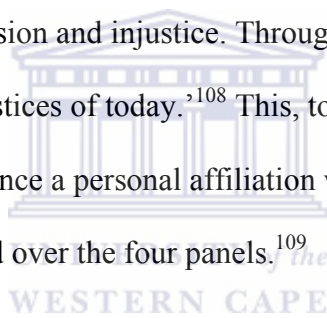
Following on from the experiences of enslavement depicted in the above panel, which would be described as a story of oppression, the experience of the slaves aboard the *Meerman* is depicted as one of resistance and strength. '*Meerman: The Story*' is the heading of the following panel, progressing the narrative of slavery for the audience from the general experience, to the typical experience and then to the stories that were untold illustrated by the narrative of the *Meerman*.



Figure 35 *Finding Meerman* Exhibition - '*Meerman: The Story*' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre.
(Photograph Heather Wares)

Finally, the move is made to connect the audience to South Africa's more recent history, one which is imagined to resonate with a contemporary South African public, as it encompasses a slave history within the specific story of the *Meerman*. The connection

between the oppression experienced by slaves and that experienced by South Africans under apartheid is made and the united rebellion against both is cemented under the title ‘Resistance and Legacy’. The images included on this panel are of slave life at the Cape as well as the slave lodge, shown in different eras of its existence. The plans of the lodge are included, as well as two images, one of the lodge while it was used to house slaves, another of the lodge as a museum space. The second image makes a clear connection with a national narrative, as the Slave Lodge Museum is part of the Iziko Museums, which was named the Slave Lodge in 1998. The connection between slavery and a contemporary national narrative of resistance is completed with a sentence printed on this panel in bold and italics: ‘By remembering slavery we acknowledge the origins of our shared history of oppression and injustice. Through knowledge of the past, we can collectively challenge injustices of today.’¹⁰⁸ This, together with the use of the word ‘legacy’, assumes for the audience a personal affiliation with, and therefore an ownership of, the narrative told over the four panels.¹⁰⁹



¹⁰⁸ H. Wares. Field Notes: Visit to the *Finding Meermin* exhibition at the Iziko Maritime Centre, Resistance and Legacy panel, 2011.

¹⁰⁹ The effort to relate the various themes to a national narrative was extended by the creation of education-packs. The idea was for it to be presented to teachers who could easily integrate it into the school curriculum, creating both an interesting project for the learners and creating a space for maritime archaeology in the curriculum. Once the pack was designed and put together, teachers were invited to attend a workshop in March 2008, and a second one in September of the same year. It was envisioned by the project developers that teachers could take what they had learnt from the workshops and apply it in the classroom through a lesson plan, preparing the students for a visit to the exhibition. After visiting the exhibition, the learners would return to the classroom to complete the post-exhibition activities provided in the education-pack. The aim to get schools to incorporate the *Meermin* into their curriculum and classrooms is one which has not been fully realised, suggesting that perhaps the interest imagined for the South African audience by the producers of the project is not necessarily a reality.



Figure 36 *Finding Meermin* Exhibition - 'Resistance and Legacy' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre. (Photograph Heather Wares)

The 'Resistance and Legacy' panel sets the context for a slave history. Once this context has been set, hidden on the other side of the 'The Slave Route' is a panel with the title 'Meermin Ship'. This title has a close resemblance to that of 'Meermin: The Story', perhaps suggesting to the audience that the panel depicting the ship follows on from that of the story revealing the series of events that happened aboard the *Meermin*.

This leads the audience from a discussion around a context of slavery to one which examines the practice of maritime archaeology. The presence of this panel illustrates the importance still placed on the object of the ship, even though it has not yet been found. However, the *Meermin*, being part of the Dutch East India Company Fleet, had details about the ship and the events which lead to its wrecking found in court records and archives. There was a large paper-based archive to draw from and it was thanks to this archive that so much about the story of the *Meermin* is known.¹¹⁰ It was these records which sparked the interest in the *Meermin*, as at the time of proposing this particular ship and narrative for the Lottery project, it had seemed that locating the wreck would be guaranteed from what was found in the archives.

¹¹⁰ M. Lenta, "Sentencing Slaves: Verdicts of the Cape Courts, 1705-1794," *English Africa* 35 (Oct., 2008): 39.

During the archival research, Jaco Boshoff and his team came across an image depicting the ship's draft, the hand-drawn plans of the structure of the *Meermin*. On digging deeper, they found out that the original ship's draft was being held in the Netherlands Maritime Museum in Amsterdam. Through contacting the museum, the team managed to obtain a high resolution copy of the Draft, providing a more tangible idea of what kind of ship the *Meermin* was. In addition to the image, the team managed to obtain an inventory of goods recovered from the *Meermin* on the 31st March 1766, which included objects such as sail cloth, muskets, compasses, a globe and various others.¹¹¹ It should be noted that it was not the objects themselves that the team acquired. It was the inventory listing the objects, leaving the team without any sign of tangible objects.

Images of both the ship's draft and the inventory list are shown on the 'Meermin Ship' panel, showing as much as is possible about the ship, short of displaying the ship itself.

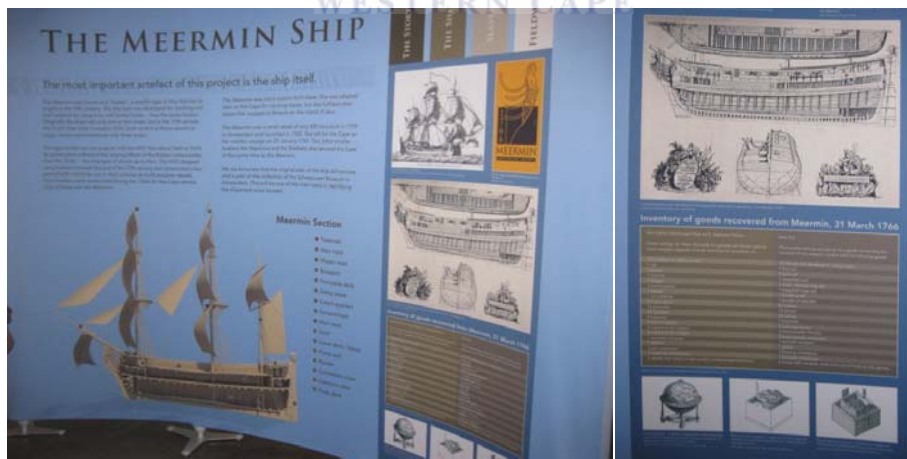


Figure 37 *Finding Meermin* Exhibition - 'The Meermin Ship' panel showing the ship's plan, the inventory list and objects, Iziko Maritime Centre. (Photograph Heather Wares)

¹¹¹ H. Wares, Field Notes, visit to the *Finding Meermin* Exhibition: 'The Meermin Ship' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre.

Once the audience is familiar with the *Meermin* by means of the above panel, ‘The Search’ comes into view. With this progression, it seems that the audience is ready to receive information about the production of maritime archaeology. The public for maritime archaeology is therefore being brought into being from an introduction to a context of slavery and then its link to the ship the *Meermin* through the work of maritime archaeologists.

Following from panels representative of the slave context, ‘The Search’ and ‘Maritime Archaeology’ panels show the means through which this history is produced. At first, the ‘Maritime Archaeology’ panel is hidden from view, as it is printed on the other side of the ‘The Search’ panel, once again revealing a display choice made by the producers of the exhibition. Kratz states that rhetorics of value are used in exhibits ‘... to present and communicate thematic content most effectively’.¹¹² Presuming that ‘The Search’ panel is meant to be viewed first, the details of the ship lead on to a time-line of the search for the wreck of the ship, once again illustrating the importance placed on the ship and material culture by those producing this particular history.



Figure 38 *Finding Meermin* Exhibition - 'The Search' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre. (Photograph Heather Wares)

¹¹² Kratz, “Rhetorics of Value,” 10.

Directly under the heading of the panel are the following words:

The archaeological quest for the *Meermin* began in the Cape Archives where old documents in High Dutch outline what happened in 1766. Although historical records indicate where the ship ran aground, and ship blueprints indicate the vessel's size and shape, the search for the *Meermin* has been a long, arduous and often frustrating process, despite access to sophisticated instruments and techniques.¹¹³

This sentence seems to summarise what some of the previous panels, such as 'Meermin: The Story' and 'Meermin: The Ship', have presented, thereby creating a link to what the panel 'The Search' has to add: the production of a maritime archaeology project. The panel does this through a timeline of the project achievements, as well as a strip along the bottom highlighting these achievements. The tone of the above quote can be compared to that used on the salvage exhibition section of the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum. While the narrative of salvage champions the practice of underwater exploration, that of depicting the techniques and methodologies of maritime archaeology shows the difficulties experienced during the search. As was the case of Write Your Own History Project, which Rousseau has discussed, the audience's attention is drawn to maritime archaeology as a highly specialised practice in this instance.¹¹⁴ By means of these two panels, 'The Search' and 'Maritime Archaeology', the importance of the skills of maritime archaeology is emphasised as a highly specialised endeavour.

The production of a maritime archaeology project, versus that of a salvage project, returns me to the discussion around revealing to an audience the environment from which the object comes. In the case of the *Meermin*, the illustration of the maritime archaeology search techniques used in the search for the object can almost be seen as presented in anticipation of finding the object of the ship. As has been said

¹¹³ H. Wares, Field Notes, *Finding Meermin* exhibition, 'The Search' panel, at the Iziko Maritime Centre (2011).

¹¹⁴ Rousseau, "Unpalatable Truths," 9.

before, the text and images in the interim take the place of that object, much like the objects of salvage take the place of the whole shipwreck in the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum.

These images accompanied by captions are used to illustrate the ‘Evolution of the Project’, in date order from 2002 to 2011.¹¹⁵ These are intended to give an audience an idea of how the project came about, what the different phases were and who was involved, and the the means through which the exhibition came to be produced. The willingness to provide evidence of the stages of production, from research to field work to the creation of a public through display, could be seen as a strategy to attract attention to the field of maritime archaeology in the place of the object of the ship. This ‘opening’ of the field of maritime archaeology to its publics, through revealing the means of production, also restricts the level of involvement the public can have in the production of this history, as specific archaeological skills are necessary. These are skills which need to be learnt and which only a relatively small number of people in South Africa have undergone the training necessary to achieve.



Figure 39 *Finding Meermin* Exhibition - 'Maritime Archaeology' panel, Iziko Maritime Centre. (Photograph Heather Wares)

¹¹⁵ H. Wares, Field Notes, *Finding Meermin* exhibition, ‘The Search’ panel, at the Iziko Maritime Centre (2011).

These skills are presented to the audience on the accompanying panel, 'Maritime Archaeology', with text explaining the search technique of 'Magnetometry', and the field of 'Maritime Archaeology' itself. This revealing of skills is further depicted at the bottom of the panel, under the heading 'maritime archaeology methodology': Research Design, Archival Research, Searching and Identifying Sites, Recording the Process, Excavation of Materials, Materials Conservation, Report Writing, and Public and Exhibition. This is a step by step montage of the processes involved in the production of maritime archaeology. The layout of this panel and the inclusion of the images and text, suggest that those producing the exhibition assume that the audience would not have previous knowledge of this kind of project.

I would argue that this panel is an attempt at making the audience aware of the processes of production of a maritime archaeology project, making the audience more aware of how archaeology is done. However, in keeping with Rousseau's arguments around the South African popularising projects of the 1980s, the illusion of accessibility is framed within the control and selection of the experts. It is this notion of public accessibility and control over knowledge which leads me to a discussion around the different ways in which this particular project created interest and awareness within educational and popular spaces for maritime archaeology.

The practices of maritime archaeology and the scientific methods used to do this kind of research, do not often attract interest from the general public, as they use many technical terms and show images of data retrieved from survey methods. As with the popularising projects of the Witwatersrand History Workshop (WHW) in the 1980s, the *Finding Meermin* project therefore endeavoured to provide the general public with ways in which to interact with the different aspects of the project which would be seen as more interesting, such as the story recounting the events aboard the *Meermin* and the

unique circumstances of the slave rebellion. The aspects of the project which were put in place to create this resonance, were perhaps an attempt to compete with publics similar to those drawn into salvage as the realm of maritime archaeology.

Salvage, as has been widely discussed in this thesis, is seen as interesting to a general public as it is associated with well-known stories of sunken treasure and explorations to find it. With this in mind, the producers of the *Finding Meermin* exhibition could be attempting to draw this public's attention to maritime archaeology through the production of popular materials, not only by means of the exhibition but through other mediums, such as the documentary and the placement of articles of the project in popular magazines. As early as April 2004, there was a press release in national media, as well as on Dutch TV, about the potential of the *Meermin* Project; and in August 2005, an article about the research project appeared in the New York Times. Local newspapers, radio stations, and television news channels ran stories on The *Meermin Project*, reporting on all of the initial research done, including the above-mentioned archival research and survey techniques.¹¹⁶

Conclusion

The *Finding Meermin* exhibition was one of a series of the different popularising projects used by the *Meermin* Project. Ultimately, the exhibition sought to make maritime archaeology resonate with a more contemporary South African public. It does this through invoking a slave narrative, which has been adopted both by the international community, most notably the African Americans, and locally, for example, through the re-design of the Iziko Slave Lodge exhibitions.

¹¹⁶ J. Boshoff, "First Report for the National Lotteries Distribution Trust Fund," 13.

This chapter has looked at ways in which some maritime archaeologists attempted to move from a colonial history towards a more amenable fit with a new national narrative of resistance and rebellion. The way this thesis argues for the notion of ‘public’ is one which is created by maritime archaeologists through these assertions of transformation. Therefore, in the introduction of a resistance narrative into maritime archaeology through tracing the wreckage of a slave ship, the *Meermin*, the argument is made that a new public is being formed. It is being created through the exhibition in which the maritime archaeological process is displayed and culminates in a national history linking slavery and apartheid.

Where the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum draws a public assumed to be interested in shipwrecks by means of the salvage of objects, the *Finding Meermin* exhibition assumes a public which resonates with the context of slavery presented through the practice of maritime archaeology. Although the *Meermin* exposes the different elements involved in the production of a maritime archaeology project, this openness is still limited to information disseminated by experts, as they make popular the mechanisms of maritime archaeology. As with the popular history projects in the 1980s discussed by Rousseau, publics are expected to follow the information supplied by the academy.

The Nautical Archaeology Society courses, on the other hand, aim to take the popularisation project to a broader level, as participants, ordinary people, are taught the skills necessary to perform maritime archaeology by following a course curriculum. The Nautical Archaeology Society courses, as we shall see in the next chapter, also attempt to invoke a contextual basis, as it not only makes maritime archaeologists, but heritage practitioners as well, through the incorporation of what can be considered as

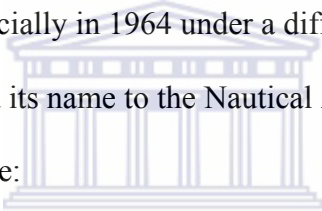
heritage sites on Robben Island, continuing with the broadening of the context considered as relevant for a maritime archaeology project.



Chapter Three

The Nautical Archaeological Society: The making of new archaeologists

If the exhibition on the *Meermin* is trying to make popular findings of archaeology, appealing to envisaged publics by explicitly attempting to resonate with a context of resistance and rebellion, then the Nautical Archaeology Society (NAS) courses, that have been in operation in South Africa since the 1990s, have attempted to make new maritime archaeologists under the banner of Underwater Cultural Heritage (UCH). These courses first made their appearance in the United Kingdom in 1972 when the organisation, which started officially in 1964 under a different name, the Council for Nautical Archaeology, changed its name to the Nautical Archaeological Society.¹ As described by the official website:



The Nautical Archaeology Society is a non-government organization formed to further interest in our underwater cultural heritage. We are a registered charity based in the United Kingdom, but with strong links to sister organizations around the world.²

These courses strive to impart a set of skills in maritime archaeology to selected applicants, who in an ideal world will pass on their enthusiasm and skills to another eagerly waiting public.

Within the objective of broadening maritime archaeology, there is also the notion of ensuring it remains tied to specific skills, such as underwater surveying, mapping and, where necessary and appropriate, excavation.³ By remaining bound to this skills base, any other meanings and usages of water or the sea are either excluded or

¹ Nautical Archaeological Society, "About us," <http://www.nauticalarchaeologysociety.org/about/index.php> [accessed April 19, 2012].

² Nautical Archaeological Society, "About us".

³ C. Ward, "Integrating Maritime Archaeology," *American Journal of Archaeology* 107 (Oct., 2003): 655.

remain at the periphery. The emphasis remains on the object and technique is ‘always depicted as the special alchemy of the expert’. As Ascher maintained in a different context in the 1960s, ‘it might be concluded that to be an archaeologist, is to have knowledge of technique’.⁴

This chapter will address the issue of broadening archaeological knowledge through the conveying of expertise through a series of short courses. I look in particular at the field school run on Robben Island at the beginning of 2012 by the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) and the International Centre for Heritage Activities (CIE), in connection with the Embassy to South Africa of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.⁵ The 2012 field school followed two other field schools of its kind in previous years.

My interest in and knowledge of the Nautical Archaeology Society courses started with my participation both in the introductory sections of the 2010 Robben Island Field School, as well as my training in underwater survey by means of the Nautical Archaeology Society courses at a field school in Durban in 2011, where I was effectively the only participant, as others withdrew.⁶ Since those initial NAS courses, where I was involved in the field of maritime archaeology purely as a volunteer and participant, during the 2012 Robben Island field school that is examined in this chapter, I was involved as an employee of the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) and a facilitator of the field school.

⁴ R. Ascher, “Archaeology and the Public Image,” *American Antiquity* 25 (1960): 403.

⁵ The Maritime and Underwater Heritage Unit of the South African Heritage Resources Agency, ‘Draft Project Design: Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage (MUCH) Field School, Barrel Wreck and Land-Based MUCH Survey on Robben Island’, 16 January – 10 February 2012, 4.

⁶ The Maritime and Underwater Heritage Unit of the South African Heritage Resources Agency, ‘Draft Project Design’, 22.

Mary Rose: A story of the birth of NAS

The official story of the genesis of NAS dates back to 1965, when the wreck of the *Mary Rose* (1545), a vessel used as part of King Henry VIII's fleet, was discovered. On the *Mary Rose* website, the narrative is presented that, after a long history in service, the *Mary Rose* sank during a battle with the French in Portsmouth. During the battle, the boat tilted too much to one side and water gushed into port holes left open for canon fire. Given the environment in which she sank and her naval history, this was a surprisingly insignificant end to such a valued ship.⁷ Out of a crew of about 400 men, only about 30 survived.⁸ When the wreck of the *Mary Rose* was discovered, and maritime archaeologists started work on the research and excavation of the site, it soon became clear that there was a great deal of interest. Sports divers flocked to the area wanting to know how they could assist in the project and, although help would have been appreciated, there was a problem in that most lacked the necessary skills for an archaeological project. It is this lack of skill and knowledge around the practice of maritime archaeology that is presented as the originating force behind the development of the Nautical Archaeological Society (NAS) in England.

The aim of NAS is to provide a means by which maritime archaeology can create a more involved public through a standard of practice, to make sure that any archaeological work done on underwater heritage sites is done to an 'acceptable' standard, so as to ensure the protection of these sites and to initiate research through a proliferation of technique.⁹

The NAS International Training Program ... aims to provide not just an introduction to the subject but also to offer people a chance to build

⁷ J. Adams, "Ships and Boats as Archaeological Source Material," *World Archaeology* 32, Shipwrecks (Feb., 2001): 294.

⁸ *Mary Rose*, <http://www.maryrose.org/> [accessed May 23 2012].

⁹ The Nautical Archaeology Society, "What is the NAS Training Programme?", <http://www.nauticalarchaeologysociety.org/content/what-nas-training-programme> [accessed March 12 2012].

their skills and experience, allowing them to take part in projects and fieldwork around the world and perhaps to run their own projects.¹⁰

The programme was developed in response to the practice of salvage diving, which remains the livelihood for many wreck divers who are either in search of big treasure or, on a smaller scale, in search of metals such as brass and copper which can be sold for scrap. The tradition of salvage is less interested in research revealing an historical context of these sites and more interested in the profit that can be made. This is a battle which continues and one which inspires those who claim to be maritime archaeologists to teach their skills in a way that asserts standards of practice. The objective is to shift the focus from profitability to historical value, through what is asserted as precise scientific methods.¹¹



Preserving a record of the past is vital, and it is important that this record is as accurate as possible. To achieve this we aim to improve archaeological techniques and encourage publication and research. We publish a members' newsletter of events (ISSN 0602-60980), which welcomes substantive contributions to the art from around the world.¹²

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The interest in the project of the *Mary Rose* and maritime archaeologists' responses through the development of the structure of NAS, is telling of a contradiction which remains clear throughout my discussions of NAS, and specifically its use in a South African context through the Robben Island Field School, 2012. NAS wants to open up the world of maritime archaeology and yet it also wants to limit it. The website illustrates this point several times:

The society welcomes the contribution of those who want to represent groups affected by maritime cultural heritage, people with publishing or editorial skills, photographers, videographers, tutors, fundraisers,

¹⁰ Nautical Archaeology Society, "What is the NAS Training Programme?"

¹¹ A.B. Cohn, "A Perspective on the Future of Underwater Archaeology," *Historical Archaeology* 34 (2000): 18.

¹² The Nautical Archaeology Society, www.nauticalarchaeologysociety.org/training/index.php [accessed March 12 2012].

marketers, IT specialists, web-designers, archaeologists and conservators or all types... the list is almost endless.¹³

Where this states that all are welcome, ‘the list is almost endless’, they are more welcome if they stick to their fields, doing what they do best. Where all aspects of running a Non-Governmental Organisation, from fund raising to IT to doing the actual archaeological work, are important, it seems that the disciplines remain divided, leaving the archaeological experts to impart their knowledge to their public through the variety of popularising skills which others can provide.

The NAS Statement of Principles excludes any public either not in agreement with its principles, or already taking part in other activities, such as treasure hunters.

The Society: 5. Will not associate itself with, not derive a profit or advantage from, the sale of cultural heritage material for private benefit. This clause is not intended to apply to the disposal of such material to bona fide cultural institutions for conservation, research or public display or to the payment by such an institution of a reward for the remuneration of expenses or the furtherance of activity that supports and promotes the understanding or management of cultural heritage.¹⁴

The vision of those running the NAS courses is that, through carefully planned and relayed presentations around the ethics and importance of standards of practice, those attending the courses will understand why maritime archaeology is done the way it is. The words of Arthur B. Cohn epitomise the relationship between NAS and its envisaged public: ‘It is the responsibility of the archaeological community to engage its public constituency and to demonstrate that the irreplaceable reward offered by shipwrecks is enlightenment about our own pasts.’¹⁵

¹³ Nautical Archaeology Society, “Volunteer Policy”, http://nas.projectcosmic.org.uk/sites/default/files/u9/NASVolunteerPolicy_2007.pdf, [accessed June 6 2013], 3

¹⁴ The Nautical Archaeology Society, “NAS Statement of Principles,” <http://www.nauticalarchaeologysociety.org> [accessed October 18 2012].

¹⁵ A.B. Cohn, “A Perspective in the Future of Underwater Archaeology,” 19.

NAS Structure

One of the ways in which the Nautical Archaeological Society displays and fosters its public programming is through the structured curriculum it presents at field schools.

‘The Training Programme has a modular structure, starting with a one day Introduction Course and working through the Part I, II and III Certificates and finally the Part IV Diploma.’¹⁶ Those interested in getting involved in NAS projects are encouraged to take part in the different levels, from Part I to conclusion. Each of these sections teaches skills in a specific way and makes sure that these skills are used in conjunction with a certain way of thinking about maritime archaeology, placing importance on the skills and methodology needed to perform the research, as well as finding ways of broadening this research.

The Nautical Archaeology Society describes the aims of their courses as teaching skills through progressive lectures and practice: ‘The structure of the program enables participants to progressively improve their theoretical knowledge and develop the practical skills needed for participation in the discipline of nautical (maritime, underwater) archaeology.’¹⁷ The theoretical knowledge is introduced to the participant through stages of lectures, under topics such as ‘What is Survey?’ and ‘Survey Types’, in an ‘Introduction to 3 Dimensional Surveying Underwater’. Following these, case-studies both globally (such as the *Mary Rose*) and locally (such as the *Grosvenor*), illustrating an actual archaeological site survey and excavation, are presented to the participants to introduce the practical skills.

The lectures also provide the participants with examples of sites which are not shipwreck sites, such as submerged or dry maritime infrastructure, submerged lake settlements and land-based sites showing maritime-related iconographies, such as rock

¹⁶ The Nautical Archaeology Society, www.nauticalarchaeologysociety.org/training/index.php.

¹⁷ Nautical Archaeology Society, ‘Introduction to 3 Dimensional Survey Underwater’, Course Lecture Slide, (2010).

paintings or engravings.¹⁸ These site types can be seen to be broadening the notion of maritime archaeology. However, through lecture topics such as ship construction and artefact conservation, it is clear that the sites mostly focused on by maritime archaeology, the NAS courses and the Field School are shipwrecks.¹⁹

This way of thinking, and the specific lecture topics, pointedly excludes the excavation of underwater sites for monetary gains. This structure provides the key educational tool for NAS.

This policy lies at the heart of NAS objectives and seeks to promote accessibility and inclusivity to the knowledge, skills and practices of nautical archaeology and to the variety of mechanisms for enhanced learning. The NAS recognises that archaeology can serve as a valuable tool for education in both the sciences and humanities. The NAS aims to facilitate learning both inside and outside of the education system and by the widest possible audience.²⁰

The structure is the back-bone of the NAS philosophy around education, providing each participant with the skills in one section to progress to the next level. Once all levels have been completed, newly-certified NAS participants are encouraged to get involved in either projects designed by NAS or their own projects, employing the same criteria that they have learnt.

NAS projects and field schools offer the chance to get more involved in maritime archaeology and to put into practice those skills learnt during Introduction and Part 1 courses. They also offer a great opportunity to collect the survey data for your NAS Part II Certificate and can count towards the fieldwork component of your NAS Part IV as well as offering the chance to have fun, meet some new people and visit new sites.²¹

Here it seems to assume a public to be both one which is interested in learning the skills to perform maritime archaeology, as well as one which stands ‘out there’, eager to

¹⁸ Nautical Archaeology Society, ‘Maritime Archaeology Site Types’, Course Lecture Slide, (2010).

¹⁹ J.J. Boshoff, “NAS Courses in South Africa,” *Bulletin of the Australian Institute for Maritime Archaeology* 22(1998): 133.

²⁰ The Nautical Archaeology Society, “Education Policy,” <http://www.nauticalarchaeologysociety.org> [accessed October 18 2012].

²¹ The Nautical Archaeology Society, “NAS Projects and Field Schools,” <http://www.nauticalarchaeologysociety.org> [accessed October 18 2012].

receive knowledge learnt, produced and shared. What stands out in this section is that it is clear that one of the major aims of NAS courses, on a general level, is for its participants to come through the courses with a certificate at the end, providing accreditation for participants as NAS graduates.

It should, however, be noted, that when the courses were introduced in South Africa, the certificate for accreditation was attached to the internationally-recognised NAS courses, rather than being recognised by the South African Qualifications Authority. The course, therefore, although with the objective of being the equivalent to a tertiary education in the practice of maritime archaeology, in reality is recognised more on an international level in the circles of maritime archaeology, rather than at a local level. The courses are therefore assumed by those facilitating them to be filling in for the lack of maritime archaeology in universities in developing a certain set of skills and knowledge, rather than certification. Although this is the case, the certification is valuable in the sense that it is recognised by a local and international set of maritime archaeologists working in the field. It therefore remains a way in which the skills levels of those performing maritime archaeology globally can be standardised and evaluated.

This then associates participants with a certain level of skill and knowledge with regards to the practice of maritime archaeology, becoming part of a group of new archaeologists. In a somewhat utopian vision, those having achieved the NAS certification are able to prove that they have achieved a certain level of practical skills and theoretical understanding, giving them the freedom to work on their own projects. Where wreck sites in South Africa are open to divers to view, the NAS certification allows those having attended the courses to be recognised as people with the appropriate skills to perform limited research on historically important wrecks. Maritime archaeologists are a small group in South Africa and help is constantly required; thus,

participants from the NAS courses can form the basis of a potentially readily available pool of assistants. The NAS certification therefore provides maritime archaeologists with a ‘database’ of people with a certain philosophy of maritime archaeology and specific skills to perform basic surveys. Given the *Mary Rose* project as the inspiration for the conception of the NAS,²² it is not a surprise that there is a particular focus on the search for the object and, once found, the scientific methods used to protect that object.

A South African Context

The structure, methodologies and philosophy of careful tutorage in archaeological skills for the assistance in protection of underwater sites, set out by the NAS courses in the United Kingdom, were adopted by the Maritime Archaeology Development Project (MADP) as it partnered with the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) in making the Robben Island Field School possible. In an effort to assess and build on the skills and infrastructure currently available in maritime archaeology in South Africa, the Maritime Archaeology Development Project ran a project in partnership with the Dutch Embassy and Centre for Heritage Activities (CIE). As stated in the Maritime Archaeology Development Programme project proposal:

The Maritime Archaeology Development Project seeks to develop sustainable capacity and infrastructure in the field of maritime archaeology with special focus on geophysical survey, conservation, excavation and education.²³

The NAS field schools, which ran over three consecutive years from 2010 to 2012, were implemented as a result of the Maritime Archaeology Development Programme. But the actual NAS courses in South Africa had started some 17 years earlier. The first Nautical Archaeology Society courses in South Africa were specifically aimed at divers.

²² J. Sharfman. ‘Maritime Archaeology Development Project Report: Training and Education’, (no date).

²³ J. Sharfman. “Maritime Archaeology Development Project: Proposal.” South African Heritage Resources Agency, (no date).

In July 1993, the National Monuments Council appointed Lynn Harris to update their shipwrecks database and to introduce the NAS system of courses for divers in South Africa. We ran the first NAS course at the SA Maritime Museum in November 1993 with 17 participants. Courses in Knysna, Port Elizabeth, East London, Durban, Namibia and again in Cape Town followed this.²⁴

These first courses were run on a part-time basis, where participants attended courses, theoretical lectures and practical activities on the weekends and after hours. This basic format remained constant, with lectures and practical skills development over the four-part qualification system.²⁵ Due to the part-time nature of the courses, participants committed to each part separately, building onto these when time allowed.

In 1998, at the time of publication of Jaco Boshoff's article on 'NAS in South Africa', there were only three tutors able to provide NAS training in the country: himself and two others, whose names are not disclosed in Boshoff's article.²⁶ By 2012, the Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage Unit of the South African Heritage Resources Agency was the only organisation offering NAS courses in South Africa.

Weekend courses continued and while these courses have been well-attended and interest continues to be shown, there was the problem of follow-up. Many participants did the Introductory and Part 1 courses with interest in progressing to Part II, but there was a shortage of time, facilities and staffing available to offer any sustainable follow-up courses.

One way in which the Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage Unit tried to solve this was through the introduction of the field schools. These take on a slightly different format, as they offer the NAS courses in a complete set. Participants are given a chance to spend an intensive three weeks focused on learning the principles and practices of maritime archaeology. These are done, like the weekend courses, by means

²⁴ J.J. Boshoff, "NAS courses in South Africa," 133.

²⁵ J.J. Boshoff, "NAS courses in South Africa," 133.

²⁶ J.J. Boshoff, "NAS courses in South Africa," 133.

of lectures and practical sessions, both on land and in the water.²⁷ The field school thus aims to provide an opportunity for a more advanced education in the skills NAS deems necessary for the proper practice of underwater survey. A series of field schools have been run in both Cape Town and Durban since 2010, with the Cape Town Robben Island Field School being an annual event over the three-year period.²⁸

In the vein of continuing the field school strategy, January 2012 saw the start of a three-week-long field school based on Robben Island, focused on what was termed underwater cultural heritage, looking to expand on the idea of maritime archaeology. The aim of the programme was to build capacity in the field of maritime archaeology, as well as to create projects which would encourage public accessibility.²⁹ As stated in the ‘Introduction of the Draft Project Design’, ‘part of this program involves the continuing education and training of South Africans and partnering institutions that are involved in Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage (MUCH), to build capacity and awareness within the heritage sector, particularly MUCH.’³⁰ In the development of the Robben Island Field School, the Maritime Archaeology Development Programme looked at achieving both of these goals, using the NAS curriculum, as well as being conscious of a South African context. The use of Robben Island located the Field School within a narrative that linked history with a post-apartheid present.

The journey for the students, organisers, and experts on the 2012 NAS field school on Robben Island began in the late afternoon of Wednesday 18 January. As participants gathered at the Nelson Mandela Gateway to Robben Island at the V&A Waterfront, a modern catamaran, named Sikhululekile, pulled in to dock, off-loading

²⁷J. J. Boshoff, “NAS courses in South Africa,” 133.

²⁸S. Winton, “Draft Project Design,” Maritime and Underwater Heritage Unit of the South African Heritage Resources Agency, 4.

²⁹J. Sharfman, J. Boshoff, and R. Parthesius. ‘Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage in South Africa’, *Journal of Maritime Archaeology* 7 (2012): 17.

³⁰S. Winton, “Draft Project Design,” Maritime and Underwater Heritage Unit of the South African Heritage Resources Agency, 4.

passengers and readying itself for the last journey of the day back to the ‘Island’.³¹ The participants of the field school, together with the tourists who were fitting in their last activity of the day, were surrounded by reminders of a history of repression and resistance within the gateway as they queued for entrance onto the ferry through the security check. ‘From the 17th to the 20th centuries, Robben Island served as a place of banishment, isolation and imprisonment. Today it is a World Heritage Site and museum, a poignant reminder to the newly democratic South Africa of the price paid for freedom’,³² the signage proclaims. The first impression of ‘the Island’ at the gateway is one that proclaims a new post-apartheid history that is embodied in Robben Island Museum’s slogan of the ‘triumph of the human spirit’.³³

This narrative continues as the participants boarded the ferry for their journey to the Island. Once all passengers were seated and the ferry left the harbour, those sitting within the cabin are presented with a short film, making a connection between the experience the passengers are about to have with that which was experienced by individuals in the Island’s multiplicity of histories. A history is weaved, with the main focus being the Island as a political prison and, most importantly, the place where Nelson Mandela was held during his years of imprisonment during apartheid. Although this is the overarching history, there is an effort to highlight other histories, such as its role as a defence station in World War II and a hospital for leprosy patients, as well as aspects of its natural environment. All of these histories in the film culminate with an image of political prisoners aboard the *Susan Kruger*, one of the ferries of a bygone era, the vehicle delivering the prisoners to freedom. The tourists and participants of the field

³¹ G. Minkley, C. Rassool, and L. Witz, “Thresholds, Gateways and Spectacles: Journeying through South Africa’s hidden pasts and histories in the last decade of the twentieth century,” (presented at *Future of the Past Conference*, University of the Western Cape, July 10-12, 1996), 30.

³² Robben Island Museum, www.robben-island.org.za [accessed June 16 2012].

³³ Minkley, Rassool, and Witz, “Thresholds, Gateways and Spectacles,” 27.

school are therefore reversing the journey, leaving from the Waterfront to the Island, to encounter a past that those who were freed in the early 1990s went through.

The engines pulled back to a low hum as the ferry slowed with its approach to the harbour entrance of Robben Island. The students, together with the tourists, were welcomed to the island and given instructions as to where to go to. The tourists disembarked from the ferry, minding their step, and followed the crowd to waiting buses, separating the visitors into manageably-sized groups. Some groups would start their Robben Island experience with a bus tour circumnavigating the Island, while others would begin with a prison tour, given by ex-political prisoners, before embarking on the Island tour.

The participants of the 2012 Field School were at this stage separated from the tourists, as they were ushered to their designated bus and driven to what was once the common-law prison, now a space converted and used as accommodation for those involved in education programs run on the island. Known as the Multi Purpose Learning Centre, this became home for the participants and facilitators for the duration of the field school, providing a space not only for accommodation, but also for learning and research at the resource centre, which contains an extensive collection of material related to heritage issues.

But who were these students and what were they expected to learn while on their stay on Robben Island?

The selection of participants for the 2012 Robben Island Field School was influenced by experiences derived from previous field schools, run in 2010 and 2012. The notion of the field school as a base for the dissemination of maritime archaeological skills and practices through the Nautical Archaeological Society courses came from the

implementation of the Maritime Archaeology Development Programme (MADP) of SAHRA and the Centre for Heritage Activities (CIE).

Part of this Program involves the continuing of education and training of South Africans and partner institutions that are involved in Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage (MUCH), to build capacity and awareness within the heritage sector, particularly MUCH. One of the long-term aims of the Maritime Archaeology Development Project is to develop an academic framework at tertiary level that will develop specialists in the Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage sector as it grows in South Africa.³⁴

It is this aim of ‘capacity building’ which is supposed to be the key criteria for selection. The Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage Unit (MUCH) of the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) posted advertisements on the underwater cultural heritage blog,³⁵ as well as with dive clubs and with universities through their own dive clubs and departments such as archaeology, history and anthropology. The Underwater Heritage blog was created by Jonathan Sharfman, the then-manager of the Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage Unit at the South African Heritage Resources Agency. The reason behind creating the blog was to make the subject of underwater cultural heritage more accessible to an interested public, through the posting of different projects underway and different developments in the field. It provides a way for a broad range of people who might be interested in the field to interact and get involved.³⁶ Finally, advertisements made their way to heritage organisations in an attempt to make other heritage practitioners aware of underwater cultural heritage. The advertisement ran:

³⁴ Sharfman, Parthesius, and Boshoff, “Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage,” 17.

³⁵ J. Sharfman, *Underwater Heritage: Maritime and underwater cultural heritage in South Africa and the Developing World*, www.underwaterheritage.org [accessed June 11 2012].

³⁶ Sharfman, *Underwater Heritage: Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage in South Africa and the Developing World*.

The course is designed for both divers and non-divers who want to gain experience in Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage. You will gain experience in various archaeological activities such as surveying methods, site reconnaissance, recording, drawing, mapping, position fixing, *in situ* conservation, lab processing and artefact conservation. You will also attend lectures presented by internationally recognized specialists in heritage management, maritime archaeology, and conservation. Through archaeological investigation and archival research, you will learn about the history and culture of the colonial Cape and assist SAHRA and Robben Island in the management of some of South Africa's unique heritage resources.³⁷

As the extract from the advertisement suggests, one of the aims was to attract participants who would use the skills learnt in the field school to get involved in the field of maritime archaeology or underwater cultural heritage in some way in the future, with the intention of growing the field.³⁸ This is a first clue to the argument that the field school, largely following the NAS curriculum, is designed in a way that teaches a particular view of maritime archaeology, providing an interested and varied public with the skills to perform research, both archival and in the field, together with a broadening of the notion of maritime archaeology. This broadening is located largely in the land-based section of the field school, focused on different aspects of underwater cultural heritage found on Robben Island.

These aims suggesting inclusive participation are supported in a journal article, written by Sharfman, Boshoff and Parthesius, discussing Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage in South Africa:

MADP addressed capacity challenges by providing Nautical Archaeological Society training to a wide range of individuals from a wide range of backgrounds. Members of institutions managing coastal parks, museum practitioners, heritage managers, students, vocational divers and politicians from seven countries attended courses and workshops and received foundational knowledge of MUCH.³⁹

37 J. Sharfman, "Announcement: SAHRA Field School 2012," *Underwater Heritage: Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage in South Africa and the Developing World*, www.underwaterheritage.org [accessed June 11 2012].

38 Winton, "Draft Project Design", 4.

39 Sharfman, Boshoff, and Parthesius, "Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage in South Africa," 18.

I suggest that the field schools are not as all-inclusive as the above suggests, being limited by specific criteria. The wording in the extract of the advertisement hints at the differentiation which emerges in the involvement of participants in the field school: learning skills in maritime archaeology and broadening this field through an association with heritage. However, the wording also limits this heritage association with: ‘... you will learn about the history of the Colonial Cape...’, reverting to a conventional theme researched by maritime archaeology: a shipping history. It goes on to mention the methodologies of archaeological investigation and archival research planned to be used to research this history, further limiting the criteria of the field school.

One of the aims of the Maritime Archaeology Development Programme, and therefore of the field school, was 'capacity building'. This entailed the possibility of broadening interest and participation in a learning environment that could provide the basic skills for those interested in getting involved in maritime archaeology for the first time.

As the following discussion will show, I describe the field school as having two distinct groups: those who were part of the diving group and those who were part of the land group. The above could be seen as aiming to attract those who would potentially join the land team, where the aim of the NAS courses to offer an alternative form of training in maritime archaeology could be seen as attracting participants for the diving team. Although this distinction, between Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage and Maritime Archaeology, might not have been intended, this is what I interpret as having emerged from the field school.

Where archaeology in general is offered at four South African universities, University of Cape Town (UCT),⁴⁰ University of the Witwatersrand (Wits),⁴¹ University of Pretoria (UP)⁴² and the University of South Africa (UNISA),⁴³ none of these offer specialised courses in maritime archaeology. ‘South Africa has no academic programme catering to MUCH management or maritime archaeology and capacity in the field is limited to four full time government employees.’⁴⁴ There are institutions such as UNISA which offer thesis-based Masters in maritime archaeology,⁴⁵ but the course offers no classroom-based training.

The reason given by South African universities for their lack of training in the area is that there is not enough interest from students and courses such as these are therefore not cost-effective. NAS field school facilitators argue that the opposite is the case. They maintain that it is the failure to supply students with the opportunity to study the necessary courses that causes low capacity in the field.⁴⁶ One prospective set of participants for the NAS field school is university students, who can relate to the material taught at the field school with the degrees and courses they are studying, such as history, heritage management, archaeology, anthropology. The hope of the NAS courses is that, with the combination of the university environment and the field school courses, participants will be encouraged to study further so as to pursue a career in maritime archaeology, or maritime and underwater cultural heritage.

⁴⁰ Archaeology Department of the University of Cape Town, <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/age/> [accessed June 28 2013].

⁴¹ University of the Witwatersrand, <http://www.wits.ac.za> [accessed June 28 2013].

⁴² Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Pretoria, <http://web.up.ac.za/default.asp?ipkCategoryID=802> [accessed June 28 2013].

⁴³ Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of South Africa, <http://www.unisa.ac.za/Default.asp?Cmd=ViewContent&ContentID=154> [accessed June 28 2013].

⁴⁴ Sharfman, Boshoff, and Parthesius, “Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage in South Africa,” 18.

⁴⁵ Two colleagues have recently enrolled in masters degrees at UNISA with a maritime archaeology focus.

⁴⁶ Sharfman, Boshoff, and Parthesius, “Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage in South Africa,” 21.

For the 2012 field school there were university students from the University of Witwatersrand, University of Cape Town, University of Pretoria, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, University of Fort Hare, and the University of South Africa.⁴⁷ In addition there were students from international universities, such as Leiden University in the Netherlands and Simon Fraser University in Canada. It would seem that space is made specifically for university students in the field school, because it is assumed that the students have an interest in the field of maritime archaeology but do not have the opportunity to pursue this interest. The field school thus seeks to fill a perceived gap in the tertiary education sector in South Africa.

South African university students were by no means the only public envisaged for participation in the field school. There was clearly the hope of a much wider public, as the entire programme was fully funded through the association with the Netherlands government. There was no registration fee, all participants had their food and accommodation funded, and participants coming from parts of South Africa other than Cape Town were awarded funds to cover their transport to and from the city. It is unusual for a field school of this kind to offer this opportunity without charging students to attend. On the contrary, it is usually very expensive to attend an archaeology field school, creating an elite atmosphere. On Robben Island, the idea was one of openness and accessibility for all those who were interested.

This offer therefore attracted potential foreign participants as well. These foreign participants had to fund their journey, but once they landed in Cape Town, expenses for food, accommodation and the components for the field school itself were covered. Given the funding partnerships with the project's Dutch partners, The International

⁴⁷ S. Winton, Robben Island Field School Participant Contact list, The Maritime and Underwater Heritage Unit of the South African Heritage Resources Agency, 2012.

Centre for Heritage Activities (CIE) and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, it is not surprising that a large contingent came from the Netherlands.

Most of the Dutch participants were Masters' students from Leiden University, enrolled in the university's Archaeological Heritage Management course within the Faculty of Archaeology.⁴⁸ Given the discussion around the development of the field school as an alternative for South African participants to the non-existent programmes at South African universities, the Dutch students' involvement seems somewhat out of place. Their involvement is fuelled by their connection to the Maritime Archaeology Development Programme and their enrolment in a University-run course which offers the field school as part of their course prerequisites.

Perhaps the presence of the Dutch students is as a result of these initial plans, where initiating Dutch / South African connections could be facilitated through the field schools by means of integrating students studying in the field. It now seems that the Dutch students are the way in which this connection is facilitated. However, this creates a difference in priority between the Dutch and South African participants. Although this causes confusion in the aims of the field school itself, it provides a convenient juxtaposition to discuss the different expectations participants had of the field school.

The Dutch participants had to focus on their masters' research, and therefore had added pressure to meet these ends, compared to other participants who perhaps were attending as part of or in addition to their jobs or for interest's sake. At times this created frustration for the Dutch participants, as they were expected to work in groups with other participants who had different objectives, or did not have the same necessity

⁴⁸ Leiden University, "Archaeological Heritage Management," <http://archaeology.leiden.edu/research/archaeological-heritage-management/> [accessed 20 October 2012].

to produce tertiary level work from their field school projects.⁴⁹ The field school took on less of a schooling role for the Dutch participants and more of a site in the field in which research could be performed.

All of the participants were split into a diving team and a land team. This meant that the participation was not restricted only to those who had interest in the underwater work, but was also open to those who had an interest in broader maritime heritage. This offered heritage practitioners who were employees of the Robben Island Museum the chance to partake in the Field School. Robben Island Museum staff have an intimate knowledge of the way in which the Island had been portrayed and the Conservation Management Plan that has been put in place. On the other hand, for Robben Island Museum staff the field school was part of their job, and at times there was a lack of enthusiasm shown for maritime heritage. Added to this contingent of heritage practitioners taking part in the field school was a participant from the Cango Caves, who joined the dive team, and a woman working in heritage in Swaziland.

There were also those people who wanted to expand their awareness of the field and perhaps help to do research and protect the sites as a hobby. Therefore, apart from aiming at participants who could make this field a career, thereby building professional capacity, the field school also aimed at building awareness amongst the recreational diving community and other individuals interested in underwater survey. In this way, participation was envisaged as creating and sustaining interest in the artefact for an historical rather a monetary value. Participants were therefore going to be schooled in principles of the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the protection of underwater heritage, stating that there should be no selling of historically important artefacts for monetary

⁴⁹ This is something which was expressed by some students during the field school as, during the research section of the land projects, some South African students were not as committed to the same standard of work as an end result.

gain: ‘Underwater cultural heritage shall not be commercially exploited.’⁵⁰ By default then, a group of people I would call treasure hunters or salvagers, as discussed in the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum chapter, are excluded from the school because of their practice of valuing a shipwreck for its monetary value.

Up until now, this thesis has recounted a public for the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum as one envisaged through wonder and for the *Finding Meermin* exhibition as one envisaged through resonance. With the NAS field schools, however, the public was being envisaged as participants in the field of maritime archaeology. In addition, that participation was being regulated through a series of transactions. These transactions have been discussed and can be divided into various parts. One is the advertisement posted on various websites and at universities, which sets the parameters of the field school very broadly, but not entirely so, as there is an insistence on abiding by restrictions and regulations.

A second transaction is performed through Leiden University, where the field seems to be more important than the school, as Dutch students use NAS case studies and reports as university assignments. Thirdly, through the involvement of Robben Island as a partner, Robben Island staff became involved as participants through what seems to be part of their job. A fourth transaction seems to be invoking maritime archaeology with a heritage public and thus seeming to make a space in which maritime and underwater cultural heritage can settle. Finally, the inclusion of amateur practitioners, who outside of the NAS courses, can be seen as potential dangers to the profession without the ‘proper’ and controlled training and motivation.

⁵⁰ UNESCO, “Underwater Cultural Heritage: Text of the 2001 Convention,” www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/underwater-cultural-heritage/2001-convention/official-text/. Article 2(5) [accessed June 29 2012].

This grouping of participants seems to be one which is inclusive of a variety of different publics, brought together under the broad rubric of ‘underwater cultural heritage’. The public envisaged by the field school is one that falls into two broad categories, making maritime archaeologists to making underwater heritage practitioners, who at times were brought together. With separate expectations and separate agendas, the field school used the NAS structure of courses to bring them together and the course material to ‘put them on the same footing’. But what held them together in the end were the facilitators, who appear as experts as they guide the participants through the structure and course material with particular philosophies of practice.

In order to make sure that these standards of practice were adhered to by the learners and upheld by the particulars of the field school, the participation of facilitators, field experts, and assessors were required. This was particularly true when following the particulars of the NAS curriculum, following principles connected to Underwater Cultural Heritage and a methodology claimed to be scientific,⁵¹ with certain ‘standards of practice’.

These facilitators were also considered to be participants, as their presence affected the dynamics of the field school. Each of the facilitators was involved for their particular expertise and they were divided into the core team, in charge of logistics, and the expert team, which was there to provide the expertise. The core team was made up of various individuals, representing four organisations. The South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) and the Centre for Heritage Activities (CIE) were the main coordinators responsible for the running of the field school. Those making up this group were four employees of the South African Heritage Resources Agency: Jonathan Sharfman as the manager of the unit, project director and dive team leader, Shawn Berry

⁵¹ S. Winton, “Draft Project Design”, 9.

as excavation team leader, Sophie Winton as project coordinator and myself as assisting in project coordination and dive team operations. Those making up the Centre for Heritage Activities team were Robert Parthesius as consulting heritage expert/maritime archaeologist and the Land-Based Team Leader and Arnout van Rhijn as Land-based Team Heritage Management Leader.

Other organisations essential to the facilitation of the field school were the Robben Island Museum, Iziko Museums and past students from Leiden University. The maritime archaeology sector of Iziko Museums, being a close partner in many of the maritime and underwater cultural heritage projects researched and surveyed by the South African heritage Resources Agency provided expertise and experience: Jaco Boshoff, the maritime archaeologist at Iziko Museums, worked as a consulting archaeologist and conservator; Tara van Niekerk, also working at Iziko at the time, provided her skills as a consulting archaeologist. The cooperation and assistance of the Robben Island Museum was important, as it became home-base, and many of the experts involved in sites around the Island, such as those in charge of the natural habitat, added to achieving the aim of broadening the notion of maritime sites during the field school. Vincent Diba, as the Robben Island Environmental and Cultural Heritage Education Unit manager, assisted in the field school with heritage management of the land team, as well as co-ordination.

Finally, a group of past students, all from Leiden University, volunteered their time and experience to assist on the field school with both the land and the dive teams. This group of four was made up of Thijs Coenen, Mareille Arkenstein, and Laurens Jansen as volunteer assistants to the dive team and Bert Zandberg as a volunteer assistant in aspects of historical archaeology with the land team.

The team of experts also included people from different organisations and specialties. Bill Jeffrey, one of the assessors of the field school, with an association with the Centre for Heritage Activities provided expertise as a consulting heritage expert and maritime archaeologist. Vicki Richards and Jon Carpenter, both conservators at the Western Australian Museum, provided expertise in artefact conservation and were brought in to facilitate the *in situ* conservation module as one of the NAS Part 3 components. They both provided expertise in the specialist field of artefact conservation. They were able to give a theoretical background to *in situ* conservation and a practical demonstration, both in the field with their customised equipment, and in the newly-acquired conservation laboratory at Iziko Museums.

Vanessa Maitland, a consultant maritime archaeologist, was the holder of the pre-disturbance and excavation permit for the dive team's site, the 'Barrel Wreck'. With her specific interest in conducting her masters on the 'Barrel Wreck', she was a co-facilitator of the field school, as well as assisting in expertise on shipwrecks and the historical research module. Finally, Peter Holt, a GIS expert and creator of the computer program used to record all of the data collected by the dive team in the field, called a 3H Site Recorder, was present to assist with the creation of a digital site map. The aim for the dive team was to create this site map as the final product of the field work.

In order for the dive team to perform their field research and survey, a dive support company was hired, called the Frog Squad. They are familiar with the way in which the South African Heritage Resources Agency performs underwater survey, and the philosophies of underwater survey. The Frog Squad provided two inflatable boats, three skippers, and three deck hands, all of whom are highly experienced divers. In this way, they could provide expertise in running diving operations, adhering to safety standards and ensuring that underwater survey was done effectively and efficiently.

While the facilitators had the job of disseminating knowledge and expertise in order to adhere to a standard of practice associated with the NAS courses, the course and the way in which it was presented was under scrutiny with the presence of course assessors, John Gribble and Bill Jeffery, both experienced practitioners in the field of maritime archaeology and underwater cultural heritage.⁵² John Gribble is a South African maritime archaeologist who now lives in the United Kingdom working in the private sector. However, his connection to the field school and the field of maritime archaeology in South Africa has its roots with the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) where he was the manager of what became the Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage Unit (MUCH). John Gribble, during his time at the South African Heritage Resources Agency, was also one of the first three NAS tutors in South Africa. Gribble therefore came to the 2012 field school with intimate knowledge of both the field of maritime archaeology and its development into maritime and underwater cultural heritage, as well as the way in which the legislation through the South African Heritage Resources Agency affects this development.

Bill Jeffrey, also a trained maritime archaeologist, studied at James Cook University in Australia, his native country. While Gribble has a connection with the one partner of the field school, the South African Heritage Resources Agency, Bill Jeffery works for the other, the Centre for Heritage Activities (CIE). Jeffrey's area of expertise is also maritime archaeology and heritage. He has worked, and continues to work, with field schools aimed at capacity building and skills development in many developing countries around the world, such as Tanzania. Many of these skills, like at the 2012 Robben Island Field School, are based on the NAS structure and curriculum. It is these

⁵² Winton, 'Draft Project Design', 5.

various skills and experiences that both Gribble and Jeffrey brought to their role as assessors in this particular field school.

Because of the different ways that the NAS courses are structured, assessors are required, after a period of time, to note the progress of that particular country in the development of the field and capacity building through NAS. The role of the assessors is to observe all aspects of the field school and submit a report on their opinions on the progress made, adding to the need to keep to the NAS structure. In this case, it was mainly the Maritime Archaeology Development Programme which was under assessment, making sure it was achieving its proposed goals of developing and building capacity in the field of maritime and underwater cultural heritage in South Africa.⁵³ The two assessors were chosen for their intimate knowledge of the project and the state of the field of maritime archaeology in South Africa.

An overview of participants would not be complete without including myself. I had joined the South African Heritage Resources Agency in the same month as the field school, January 2012. This put me in the role of co-ordinator, making sure that catering was supplied to participants at correct times, dormitory accommodation was allocated, participants had what they needed and answering any queries participants had. This, together with coordinating lectures and timetables, was done with a colleague who had worked in the same position for six months before the field school.

Given that I had been a participant in a previous NAS field school, held in Durban, I was in a position to assist with activities. Although I had been trained in maritime archaeology skills through NAS, my training outside of NAS gave me a unique perspective. Rather than studying archaeology, my background as a historian and as a graduate of the African Programme in Museum and Heritage Studies at the

⁵³ Winton, 'Draft Project Design', 5.

University of the Western Cape, gave me a certain amount of expertise in heritage. In a way, I sat at a crossroad: I was not an expert, but I had, through experience, gained a certain amount of knowledge. I was not a maritime archaeologist or an archaeologist, but I provided assistance in the field for the dive team, able to provide a limited amount of expertise from a unique perspective.

Structure

The structure of the field school was designed around the Nautical Archaeological Society course curriculum. The content of the various components was drawn from the curriculum and from what had been learnt from the previous field schools in 2010 and 2011.⁵⁴ Where the aim of the field school was presented as finding ways to broaden the field of maritime archaeology, it had to adhere to the NAS criteria. In addition, the objective of the various stakeholders, The South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), The Nautical Archaeological Society (NAS) in South Africa, the Centre for International Heritage Management (CIE) and Robben Island, had an influence on the way in which the field school was structured.

Although I have mentioned some of these objectives in previous sections, I would like to expand on it here. The South African Heritage Resources Agency, a statutory organisation established in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act (No. 25 of 1999) as the national body responsible for the protection of South Africa's cultural heritage resources, aimed to broaden maritime archaeology in terms of maritime and underwater cultural heritage.⁵⁵ The South African Heritage Resources Agency can be seen to stand on both sides of the creation of publics: for the field school, by means of maritime archaeologists and as heritage practitioners. With an intimate knowledge of

⁵⁴ Winton, "Draft Project Design", 13.

⁵⁵ The South African Heritage Resources Agency, "National Legislation and Regulations," <http://www.sahra.org.za/about/legislation> [accessed May 16 2013].

the misgivings of the legislation in protecting the national resources and the lack of capacity and expertise to do so, specifically relating to underwater heritage, SAHRA lobbies for the building of skills and creation of awareness. Skilled maritime archaeologists are seen as being necessary to help perform the practical surveys in order to monitor the protection of sites. Heritage practitioners, on the other hand, with an understanding of underwater cultural heritage, are essential for the broadening of the field.

The Centre for International Heritage Management (CIE), as another stakeholder, is an organisation which also provides skills training internationally through the NAS courses. As its name suggests, its aims are for the development of skills around the heritage sector, in this case specific to maritime and underwater cultural heritage (MUCH), a term coined by the Maritime Archaeology Development Programme (MADP). This suggests that, like the South African Heritage Resources Agency, CIE aims to develop maritime archaeology to be integrated into the concept of maritime and underwater cultural heritage.

Both of the above organisations are affiliated with the Nautical Archaeology Society and the courses that it develops and supports. One of the ways these courses was being introduced to a South African public was through the Robben Island 2012 Field School, with the aim of training as many suitable South Africans as possible in the skills and methodologies of the NAS courses.

The aims of the Robben Island Museum, providing the base for the field school and many of the sites and resources to make the field school possible, contain much more of a focus on the heritage research and management skills taught to create heritage practitioners. One of the prerequisites of being a UNESCO World Heritage Site is that Robben Island needs to continuously add to the research done on different historical

aspects of the Island. Their aims, therefore, include providing their staff with heritage management skills, through what I have identified as the field school's objective of creating heritage practitioners, and to gain from the research done by the land-teams focused largely on the maritime landscape.

With these aims in mind, I move on to consider the lectures adopted from NAS in the United Kingdom, which were largely based on technical practices of archaeology and were, for the most part, transplanted into the Field School Program on Robben Island. These archaeological practices reflected a shipwreck focus for maritime archaeology. Topics for the lectures were standardised, falling under headings such as 'Ship construction', 'Best ways of practice', 'History of maritime archaeology', and 'Law'.

Practically, the dive team could put these theoretical skills into use quite easily, as they applied them to their chosen site, the 'Barrel Wreck'.⁵⁶ This is an unidentified ship, although there was a manufacturer's mark found on one of the lead ingots acting as ballast to balance the ship, giving a clue as to where this ship might have come from. What is known about the wreck, though, is what the site looks like and what it is made up of. On first inspection, it seems like a non-descript site, with little resemblance to a ship at all. However, on closer inspection by means of survey dives, features start to take shape. Examples of basic features that were found on the wreck are the cargo of barrels thought to be carrying tar, as this was a common cargo.⁵⁷ These barrels remain stacked the way they were stored when the ship went down, found closer to the bow (front) of the wreck site. Other features include a number of cannons, sheets of glass, musket guns and a small brass clothing pin. It is through the survey and identification of

⁵⁶ The convention for the naming of ships has been to use italics. However, in the case of the 'Barrel Wreck' I have selected inverted commas to indicate that this ship has not yet been identified, and it is a name that has been given to the wreck in lieu of identification.

⁵⁷ L. J. Jansen, C. Ngivingivi and L. Nozuzo, 'Chapter 1 History and Environment of the Barrel Wreck', *Nautical Archaeological Society Report Course Part 2* February 2011, unpublished, 19.

these aspects of the site that shows the ways in which the principles and practices presented through the lectures could be put into place.

The ‘Barrel Wreck’ was a good case study to practice the prescribed skills. However, the focus meant that the lectures were very shipwreck-orientated, leaving little room to include aims of the field school which looked beyond the shipwreck, at a maritime landscape. Robben Island, however, as a base for the field school represented many histories which would fit into the notion of a maritime landscape, such as World War II structures, the lighthouse, the harbour, and the prison. In an attempt to incorporate these other histories, the Field School included non-divers, who focused their NAS II projects on the landscape and aspects other than the shipwreck. Incorporating these histories into the Field School required adjusting the content of the lectures for what was called an ‘Africanised’ context.⁵⁸

This was done through using familiar South African case studies, such as the wreck of the *Grosvenor* along the South African coastline near to Port St. Johns. This site is used to demonstrate the various techniques and methodologies used, such as survey, in typically difficult diving condition in South African waters. In addition to the South African case studies, an attempt at ‘Africanising’ the NAS content was made by including specialised lectures on the surroundings of Robben Island itself, representative of alternative maritime histories.

The tension between making a public of new maritime archaeologists and underwater heritage practitioners played itself out in the way participants were initially prepared for the field school. As part of pre-preparation, ‘NAS training took place in Cape Town over 2 weekends in October/November 2011’,⁵⁹ with the objective of offering the potential participants the NAS Introduction and Part 1 courses. The

⁵⁸ Winton, “Draft Project Design”, 5.

⁵⁹ Winton, “Draft Project Design”, 7.

importance of all completing the two courses mentioned above is stated in the project plan:

Since the Field School will involve participants from several different backgrounds and academic levels, it is vital that all students are on an even footing when we begin. This will ensure that the Field School team consists of committed participants and that everyone has the required background for the work.⁶⁰

In partaking in the NAS Introductory and Part I courses, the participants would show that they understood the basic principles attached to maritime archaeology. This understanding is measured by participation in the lectures and practical modules, culminating in the accumulation of points.⁶¹ Participants have to gather a certain amount of points in order to participate in the main field school projects, both land or diving based, describe as NAS Part II criteria.⁶²

Those participants who were unable to attend these courses prior to the field school were afforded the opportunity in the first few days of the field school. In this time, both components were presented at the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) satellite office at the Castle of Good Hope, in which the Built Environment and Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage (MUCH) Units are housed.⁶³ Lectures were held in the boardroom, while practical sessions took the participants outside, with the grounds of the Castle of Good Hope providing substitute archaeological sites and artefacts. A site was identified, in this instance containing a bench, a cannon and a tree and a strategy of survey was decided upon and put into practice. According to the project design, this introduction to the skills of archaeological survey could later be

⁶⁰ Winton, "Draft Project Design", 7.

⁶¹ J. J. Boshoff, "NAS Courses in South Africa," 133.

⁶² Winton, "Draft Project Design", 9.

⁶³ The first three days of the field school, with an introduction to NAS, were originally planned to be presented once the students had settled into the Multi-Purpose Learning Centre on Robben Island. However, due to a miscommunication around dates, they were instead given at the SAHRA satellite offices at the Castle of Good Hope.

applied to sites for the NAS 2 field work projects on Robben Island, with all participants on the same level.

It was during the first three days in Cape Town that the field school participants were separated into two distinctive teams: the dive team and the land team. The participants would remain with their respective teams for the field work section of the field school later on Robben Island, the dive team focusing on what has been dubbed the ‘Barrel Wreck’ and the land team being further divided into smaller groups focused on various project topics, such as developing a Robben Island Walking Tour, researching the significance of the grave sites and conducting oral history interviews with the community living on the island. Although all participants, as discussed above, were required to learn the skills associated with archaeological practice, land teams were largely more heritage focused.

One of the criteria for joining the dive team was to have official dive certification through one of the recreational diving organisations.⁶⁴ All of these were put in place so as to comply with the South African Diving Regulations and The Diving Code of Practice.⁶⁵ This later proved to be absolutely necessary as, on the first day, as the field school boat left from Granger Bay on the mainland on its way to Robben Island, the boats were stopped before leaving the dock by police to check everyone’s accreditation.

During this time, while based at the Castle, the land team was familiarising itself with the city of Cape Town, as one of their activities was joining a tour of the Castle of Good Hope. This cast a spotlight on the separation between the two groups, with the dive team testing equipment necessary for maritime archaeology projects and the land team becoming familiar with a significant heritage site, thereby being set up as heritage

⁶⁴ Winton, “Draft Project Design”, 5.

⁶⁵ Winton, “Draft Project Design”, 14.

practitioners. This continued with the structure on the Island, participants making the first ferry trip on 18 January 2012, embarking on the 17:00 ferry.

The aims outlined in the Field School Project Draft indicate that, although participants of both teams attended the same lectures, their field work activities were largely different. In order to satisfy the aims of the Field School facilitators, as well as the NAS curriculum, once settled on Robben Island the field school became more structured, with specific times of the day scheduled for activities. Each hour of each day was accounted for and planned before the field school began.⁶⁶

Participants would work in the field during the day, recording the survey data that they had gathered on site. Once back at base, they attended lectures in the evening as part of the NAS criteria. The lectures in the evening covered certain topics seen to be essential to the scientific and ethical practice of maritime survey. Some such topics were different archaeological search methods, diving safety and project logistics, handling and conservation of finds, the legislation pertaining to underwater heritage sites and site recording.⁶⁷ To satisfy the aim of broadening the field to incorporate underwater heritage, additional experts were asked to talk about heritage issues specific to Robben Island, such as the effects of tourists on the natural environment, as well as how the protection of the natural environment is not necessarily supported by those living on the island, as the growing bird population was dictating where they could and could not go to on the island.

These lectures were an integral part of the field school and participants were expected to attend if they wished to be certified. This satisfied one of the aims of the field school, for all ‘Old and new students’ to ‘gain accreditation from the

⁶⁶ S. Winton, “Maritime and Underwater Heritage (MUCH) Field School Project Design,” Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage Unit of the South African Heritage Resources Agency, 2011.

⁶⁷ Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage Unit of the South African Heritage Resources Agency, “NAS training information”, 1.

internationally recognised institution as well as fieldwork experience and instruction from internationally respected facilitators.⁶⁸ To complete the criteria for certification, what was learnt in the lectures was then applied in the field. This was done through specifically selected research topics, which were connected to the Island and therefore feasible to be put into practice.

The projects were influenced by the work done by participants on the previous field schools, held in 2010 and 2011 on Robben Island. The dive team would follow up on survey and mapping work that had been done in previous years, giving them a chance to monitor any changes which had occurred on the site. It was envisaged that the findings and final project report would contribute to a Conservation Management Plan for the respective sites, which the organisers of the field school, SAHRA and CIE, aimed to put together.⁶⁹ Some land team groups would add to projects which had been started previously, such as the ‘Island’s VOC slave gardens’.⁷⁰ The aim prescribed for the land team was to continue ‘the work begun during the Crossroads of Cultures Field School in 2011’, which involved plans for the team to ‘examine various heritage management issues pertaining to the Island and explore ways of implementing the walking tours that were designed in 2011.’⁷¹

In the first week, while in the evenings all participants attended NAS part 1 lectures, during the day the land teams went about selecting topics and groups, doing initial research in the archives and getting to know the sites in relation to the rest of the Island. It was through the land projects that the field school made an attempt at broadening the field of maritime archaeology to that of maritime and underwater

⁶⁸ Winton, “Draft Project Design”, 14.

⁶⁹ Winton, “Draft Project Design”, 7.

⁷⁰ Winton, “Draft Project Design”, 5.

⁷¹ Winton, “Draft Project Design”, 10.

cultural heritage. The public envisaged for this part of the field school was one which participated with the goal of learning the skills of heritage practitioners.

This was illustrated by the way in which the land team was structured. This was slightly different to the way the dive teams were divided, as while the dive team focused on the same site, different land teams worked on very different projects, focusing on various sites around Robben Island and some in Cape Town itself. Satellite groups were formed, allowing students to focus on their specific topics of interest. For the duration of the field school, these projects were planned, researched and developed into research proposals, eventually producing projects focused on oral histories, grave sites, a walking tour of the Island, a geophysical survey and ceramics.



Figure 40 Robben Island – graveyard, 2012 Field School. (Photograph Heather Wares)

One of the land-based projects which received a great deal of attention was the development of the walking tour, which was adopted from research done in previous years. This research was instigated by the Dutch Students, as they focused their master's projects on the lesser-known land sites on Robben Island.⁷² Given that there had been much attention given to the prison and 'Sobukwe House',

⁷² D. van den Bout, T. Coenen, C. de Hoogd,, and A. Rhijn, "Robben Island Field School: Season 2011 and 2012," 31 in Leiden University Internship Masters Students: Archaeological Heritage Management, "Out in the Field," 2011-2012, <http://media.leidenuniv.nl/legacy/out-in-the-field-2011-2012.pdf> , 27 [accessed May 16 2012].

The goals of this field school were to gather more information about the lesser known sites, to focus on the presentation of the proposed heritage walking trail, to have a look at the sustainability of Robben Island and to look for the maritime connections of this specific heritage site.⁷³

Some examples of the sites that they focused on were environmental sites, such as areas where birds were nesting; shipwreck sites, both on land and visible from land; and churches. The sites that were eventually proposed to be included in the walking tour were ones which were depicted in photographs found in the archives. Using these images was the proposed method of display.⁷⁴

The oral history project further expanded the focus of history on the Island beyond that of the Political Prison History, by collecting oral history interviews with members of the ‘local’ community living there. These oral histories focused on the way in which the fact of Robben Island being a National and World Heritage Site has impacted on those residing there. For example, as indicated previously, the decision to protect the colony of birds on the island had caused challenges for the island community, as the protected bird’s habitat has encroached on the daily living space of the residents.⁷⁵

Continuing with a focus on the lesser-known sites of the island, one of the land teams focussed on the various grave sites. The interest in the grave sites asked many questions: what did it mean to have a name engraved on a tomb stone versus remaining a nameless grave? What did it mean if there was a graveyard boundary or not? Who were the people who were buried on the island? The team’s interest extended to the

⁷³ Van den Bout, Coenen, Hoogd, and Rhijn, “Robben Island Field School”, 30.

⁷⁴ Van den Bout, Coenen, Hoogd, and Rhijn, “Robben Island Field School”, 31.

⁷⁵ The plan was for these projects to be submitted to the organisers of the 2012 Robben Island Field School. However, for many of the teams the projects are yet to be formally handed in. This makes for difficulty in referencing the information about the projects. The information that I give about the oral history project is from my own memory of discussions I had with participants during the field school.

connection between the grave sites on the island and one of Cape Town's more controversial sites, the Prestwich Place graves.⁷⁶

Adding to topics which had a connection between the island and sites on the island, one of the land teams focused on ceramics for their project. They aimed to look at collections of ceramics found on Robben Island, as well as those found on a shipwreck in the Table Bay area. These artefacts were housed at the Iziko Cultural History Centre, resulting in the participants who worked on this project doing much of their research at Iziko, rather than Robben Island.⁷⁷

One team focused on the more technical aspects of maritime archaeology, by performing a geophysical survey of sections of the island. To determine the extent of possible archaeological land sites on the island, a hand-held magnetometer was used. Once the initial survey was done, the students put into practice what they had learnt about 2-Dimensional survey techniques and performed these on sites which were identified as possible archaeological sites.⁷⁸

Many of the research topics dealt with specific issues around heritage interpretation on the island and in Cape Town, linked by the position of Robben Island within Table Bay. The land teams spent much of their time doing research in the Resource Centre at the base that we were staying at on Robben Island.⁷⁹ This helped them to discuss how to narrow the focus of their respective research topics. They also

⁷⁶ *Robben Island Grave Sites and Prestwich Burial Grounds Report*, Maritime Archaeology Development Program, Robben Island Field School, 2012.

⁷⁷ As both participants working on this project are unable to provide me with the report, I have gathered this information from conversations with them and from my memory of my experience of the field school at the time that it was being run.

⁷⁸ As with the Ceramics and oral history projects, the report for the Geophysical Survey of parts of Robben Island were not handed in, forcing me to draw on my memory. This situation perhaps reveals a major downfall of the 2012 Robben Island Field School, where although emphasis was placed on research and report-writing. It was not followed through. In order to achieve NAS accreditation, reports need to be submitted. Although the bulk of the reports were completed, many were not submitted to the organisers. This suggests that the NAS certification was not a priority for the participants of the field school, especially those participating in the land team research projects.

⁷⁹ Winton, "Draft Project Design", 21.

did extensive field work, both on the island and in Cape Town. Some of them spent a great deal of their time in the National Archives depository in Cape Town.

The land teams, like the dive team, were expected to produce a tangible research project by the end of the field school in order to achieve NAS II accreditation. Many afternoons were spent consolidating research and dividing the project up into sections for team members to focus on. By dividing the larger land team into smaller satellite groups, the projects reflected various aspects of the island's maritime history. In addition, as outlined in the Project Design, the land teams examined heritage management issues affecting the island, contributing to the Integrated Conservation Management Plan (ICMP) of the island, which was due for renewal in 2012.⁸⁰ The research and field work done for the projects, and the examining of heritage management issues, were stages of learning which lead to the making of heritage practitioners with an understanding of underwater cultural heritage. It was maintained that

by examining sustainable methods of diversifying the visitor experience to the Island while maintaining the cultural and environmental integrity of the Island and creating jobs, the student team stands to make a valuable contribution to the new ICMP.⁸¹

Where the land projects focused largely on heritage, the dive site put maritime archaeology skills to practice. In the first week of the field school, it was planned that the dive team would carry out a non-disturbance survey on the chosen wreck site, the 'Barrel Wreck'. This included doing initial dives to orientate the new participants. Those who were returning students from the previous field schools, which also focused its research on the 'Barrel Wreck', were on hand to assist, together with the skilled maritime archaeologists as experts.

⁸⁰ Winton, "Draft Project Design", 5.

⁸¹ Winton, "Draft Project Design", 5.

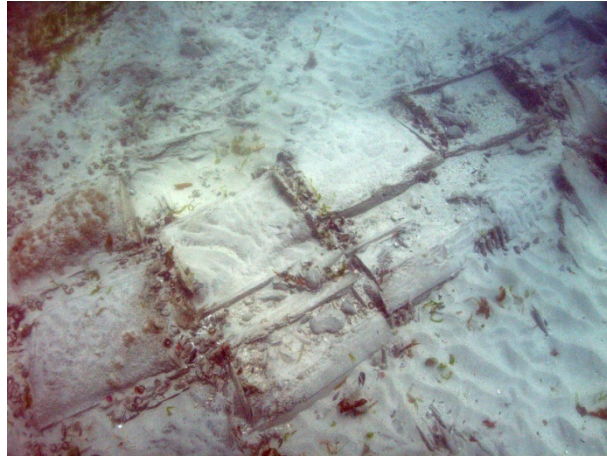


Figure 41 Robben Island Field School 2012 – Barrels found on the ‘Barrel Wreck’.
(Photograph John Carpenter)

The pre-disturbance survey included assessing the condition of the site and whether there had been any degradation since the work done during the field school held the previous year. During this week, following techniques taught in the NAS Part 1 and 2 lectures, the team of ten students (three of which were returning Dutch students, one a private archaeologist, one a heritage practitioner working at the Cango Caves, and five were university students from the universities mentioned above) identified the extent of the site and laid out a control network. This was a set of fixed points marked around the site to act as an indication of the extent of the site and to measure significant features of the wreck site.



Figure 42 Robben Island Field School 2012 – Student taking measurements on the ‘Barrel Wreck’.
(Photograph Bill Jeffrey)

Following these initial activities, the dive team began taking measurements. The final product expected from the dive team was a detailed site plan showing different aspects of the wreck site.⁸² The idea was that this plan would be produced from sketches and measurements taken during fieldwork. Due to there being many students involved in the diving aspects of the field school, the dive team was split into teams of about three each, creating three separate teams, to make sure that all participants had a chance to perform the practical application of what they had learnt in the lectures. The diving teams all focused on the same site. Although they performed different surveys on different parts of the wreck, it all contributed to the same research and survey project.

The reasons for choosing to work on the ‘Barrel Wreck’ were varied. One was that it had been used as a site for a previous field school and therefore any work done in the past could be drawn on and built upon, creating a body of work on one significant site in Table Bay. Originally being a known wreck and dive site in the area, the ‘Barrel Wreck’ was extensively dived on in the 1980s by Charlie Shapiro, a known salvager,

⁸² Winton, “Draft Project Design”, 5.

who is in possession of various salvaging permits for wrecks along the South African coastline. During his time working on the ‘Barrel Wreck’, he ‘raised several objects including wood stocks, brass trigger bars and side and back plates of flintlock muskets’.⁸³ This previous activity on the wreck site needed to be taken into consideration when the 2010, 2011 and 2012 teams of the Robben Island Field School worked on the site. As part of the NAS criteria to learn the survey process from the beginning, all of the teams, despite work done previously, had to set up their survey using the methodology from beginning to end. This, however, did not mean the previous research was not useful, as with each new survey changes on the site could be detected.

The ‘Barrel Wreck’ is also a shallow site, at between 4 and 7 metres below the surface (depending on the swell),⁸⁴ and therefore ideal for teaching, as participants could stay underwater for longer than if it was a deep site and the dangers of doing consecutive dives were lessened. It was a site with many points of interest to draw on, both in terms of the wreck itself and the cargo it was carrying, and it was located relatively close to Robben Island, making it suitable to visit every day.

The discovery of a few artefacts provided a good example of the way in which the principles and method of the NAS lectures were applied in the field, as knowledge of ship construction was used to identify features of the wreck site and archaeological methodology by means of survey was used. Some of these artefacts were excavated from the site. However, before the decision was taken to remove them, proper archaeological practices and methodologies had to be followed, such as researching the position of the artefact in relation to the rest of the site, measuring it according to this position and documenting it *in situ* (where it is found) by means of photographing it and

⁸³ Jansen, Ngivingivi and Nozuzo, “History and Environment of the Barrel Wreck,” 9.

⁸⁴ Jansen, Ngivingivi and Nozuzo, “History and Environment of the Barrel Wreck,” 8.

recording any significant features. Those features proved vital in bringing the team closer to identifying the wreck, as the foundry names and lessee (the name of the company that manufactured the ingot), ‘Wanlock’ and ‘RC co’, was imprinted along the one side of the lead ingot.⁸⁵ The presence of the manufacturer’s mark and the nature of the materials used to make the ingot, provided enough reason to remove the object from its waterlogged environment.

These decisions were guided by conservation experts from Western Australia Museum, Vicky Richards and Jon Carpenter, who presented lectures in artefact conservation and went into the field with both teams to assist in the practical application of their methodologies. These lectures were included as a module for the NAS 3 certification, offered to both land and dive teams.

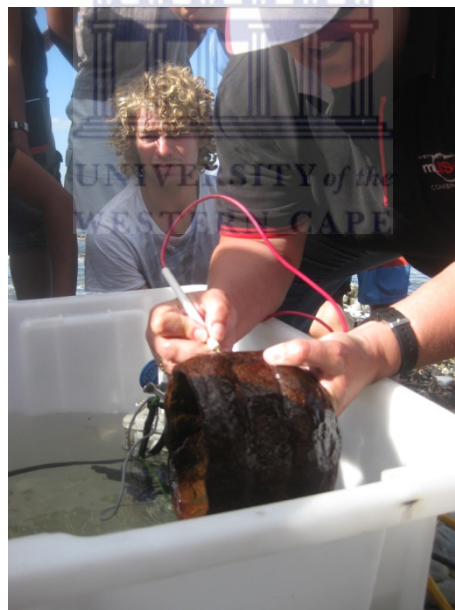


Figure 43 Robben Island Field School 2012 – Vicki Richards giving a demonstration of one of the methods used for testing the corrosion level of certain metals affected by an underwater environment. (Photograph Heather Wares)

Although the basic principles for artefact conservation of objects excavated from a dry environment and a waterlogged environment are largely similar, it must also be recognised that the effect of the underwater environment on the objects is different to

⁸⁵ Centre for Heritage Activities, “MUCH News: News CIE’s Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage (MUCH) Activities”, <http://www.heritage-activities.org/> [accessed May 24 2013]

that of a dry environment. One of the more prominent philosophies of the conservation module was to conserve sites and artefacts *in situ*. This was applied to the site where possible, especially in the case of objects such as musket guns, which are made up of a combination of materials, such as wood and different metals, which would need to be conserved using different methods. For some of the objects, however, such as the lead ingot and a clothing pin, a decision was made to excavate in the interest of conservation research.

The argument for *in situ* preservation to be first option is, however, not agreed upon by all. There are those who consider this to be unsatisfactory, as they question the safety and preservation of objects which are left under the water. Many of their concerns reflect an opinion that an underwater environment is a volatile one. Therefore would it be better to excavate the artefacts, either of historical or monetary value, and place them in the care of museums. Others who argue against *in situ* preservation say that by leaving historically important artefacts, which hold significance for the history and heritage of a particular community, you are denying the community access to these recourses. They argue, therefore, that these artefacts need to be placed in museums on display, in order for the public to have access to these objects of their heritage.⁸⁶

The reasons given in favour of *in situ* preservation as a standard underwater archaeological practice come from two avenues of thinking. The first is that certain artefacts have a better chance of survival if their *in situ* environment is a stable one, especially organic materials, which are preserved better in wet environments because of a lower oxygen content.⁸⁷ These kinds of materials often prove to be better protected on underwater sites than terrestrial ones, because of less exposure to natural and human

⁸⁶ Sharfman, Boshoff, and Parthesius, "Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage in South Africa," 15.

⁸⁷ Adams, "Ships and Boats as Archaeological Source Material," 293.

elements of destruction.⁸⁸ The second, and something which would have an effect on the deterioration of artefacts, is the availability of suitable storage facilities, such as museums. Placing artefacts in the care of such facilities is usually very expensive, something which also has an effect on decisions around taking artefacts out of the water versus leaving them *in situ*.

In the case of the field school and the decision to excavate certain artefacts, thereby removing them from their *in situ* environment, what is taken into account is that Iziko Cultural History Centre, thanks to funding from the Lottery awarded to the *Finding Meermin Project*, has a well equipped conservation laboratory. This provided a space in which the conservation experts could take their practical demonstrations out of the field and into a next possible phase of archaeological research. It is here that the field school can be seen to be attempting to merge the two distinguished groups of maritime archaeology and the practice of heritage. As one of the last phases of the field school, both the land team and the dive team made a trip on the ferry back to the Cape Town mainland to visit the Iziko Conservation Laboratory.

This laboratory is set up for both dry and waterlogged artefacts and much of the collection, which is housed in the archive attached to the laboratory, was excavated from terrestrial archaeology sites. However, with the use of the lead ingot found on the ‘Barrel Wreck’ site by the dive team as the case study artefact, it does lean the teachings towards a maritime archaeology skills base. Students were first shown around the laboratory and archive, while the conservator experts highlighted examples of different materials and the possible techniques used to conserve those particular materials. Once the theoretical part of the conservation of excavated materials module was complete, participants were given a chance to put into practice the techniques which were lectured

⁸⁸ Adams, “Ships and Boats as Archaeological Source Material,” 293.

about. With the soaking of the ingot in a carefully measured out formula for some time, the remains of the natural environment of the ocean softened and participants were able to start to scrape this away. It is through this first stage of conservation that the engraving on the side of the ingot revealed itself clearly as ‘Wanlock’.



Figure 44 Robben Island Field School 2012 – Lead ingot recovered from the ‘Barrel Wreck’ site, treated and stored at Iziko Social History Centre. (Photograph John Carpenter)

With this clue, more research was done on where the ingot might have come from, bringing the team closer to identifying it. After the field school, Jaco Boshoff, together with the conservators Vicki Richards and John Carpenter from the Western Australia Museum, through contacting the Museum of Lead Mining in Wanlockhead, Scotland, ‘indicated (that) a Ronald Crawford & Co. Leased the mining grounds at Wanlockhead from 1755 – 1777.’⁸⁹ What seems like a small piece of information gives the researchers, such as Vanessa Maitland who is using the ‘Barrel Wreck’ as her Master’s thesis topic, she is doing her masters through the University of South Africa (UNISA) a correspondence university⁹⁰, an idea of the dates that this ship might have been in commission. This can then be compared with shipwreck records of ships which

⁸⁹ Centre for Heritage Activities, MUCH News: News CIE’s Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage (MUCH) activities, <http://www.heritage-activities.org/> [accessed: 24 May 2013].

⁹⁰ Although this may seem like a contradiction to the argument in this thesis that there are no formal courses in maritime archaeology, this is a thesis-based masters, not including course-work to teach the archaeological skills needed for such a research project, These skills therefore need to be acquired before registering for a masters focusing on maritime archaeology at UNISA.

went down in the area around that time period, allowing for cross-referencing and therefore a narrowing of possibilities of which ship this might be.⁹¹

This research brings multi-disciplinary practices together, with scientific methodologies and archival research influencing one another. It may seem strange to conflate archival research with heritage, as the practice of maritime archaeology involves archival research as much as heritage, or what could so easily be named history. However, the designations of the field school shape the way in which these terms are associated with the two teams. The diving team, which performs maritime archaeology, includes historical research in their project report, but focuses on the scientific methodology of underwater survey during the field school itself. The land team, on the other hand, had more focused time to do archival research, making it seem like the archive is associated only with heritage. It is the structure of the NAS course which creates these definitions and designations.

As the debate around *in situ* preservation and conservation continues, the field of Underwater Cultural Heritage (UCH) continues to find ways to protect these objects, following certain standardised guidelines. This therefore brings into question the effectiveness of maritime archaeology, through the NAS courses, at developing new and more included publics. With the need for a standard of practice, it can be argued that UCH and maritime archaeology fall back into the philosophy of the expert imparting knowledge. Where the NAS course can claim to be developing new publics, it is also limiting these publics through its careful tutorage and the classificatory divisions it utilises.⁹²

Publics are being drawn into the field of maritime archaeology as individuals interested in learning the practice of maritime archaeology. ‘The public’ then becomes

⁹¹ Centre for Heritage Activities, “MUCH News”.

⁹² Warner, “Publics and Counter Publics,” 8.

those involved in pursuing maritime archaeology as a career through the acquisition of expertise. It does not leave much room for other ways of practice, creating a somewhat standardised methodology of practice, opening up the discussion around the need for the stamp of legitimacy through acceptable standards of practice often gained through an academic framework.⁹³ Perhaps the inclusion of those participants with more of a focus on heritage, rather than maritime archaeology, is a way in which the field school and the Maritime Archaeology Development Programme attempts to break from this narrowing. These participants, however, are also subject to the restraints of the structure of the field school and therefore are also confined to the specific standards of practice laid out by the facilitators of the field school, based around the skills of individual experts.

Hodder, when talking about the difficulty of involving non-specialists in the practice of archaeology (keep in mind that he speaks of archaeology and not maritime archaeology specifically), makes the point that in training the local participants within the particulars set out by the ‘academy’, one may be compromising the ability to provide an alternative voice.⁹⁴

Popularising projects

The way in which the Nautical Archaeological Society (NAS) courses were presented during the 2012 Robben Island Field School reveals the type of publics which it has imagined. This highlights a discussion which has arisen in the discipline of history and its relationship with publics. What was commonly known as the popularising project was taken on by many historians, who initiated programmes in South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s which sought to create a more involved public, much like what has

⁹³ N. Rousseau, “‘Unpalatable Truths’ and ‘Popular Hunger’: Reflections on Popular History in the 1980s,” (paper presented at the South African Contemporary History Seminar, University of the Western Cape, July 25, 1995), 18.

⁹⁴ Hodder. ‘Archaeological Reflexivity and the “Local” Voice’, 60.

been discussed in this chapter based on the Nautical Archaeological Society courses. One such programme was the Write Your Own History Project, with the aim of providing step-by-step ways in which an assumed audience could learn the skills of the academic to “write their own histories”.

Like the NAS courses, these projects assumed an interested public, seeing them more as audiences replicating practiced skills to write the ‘right’ kind of history, rather than active producers of their own types of history.⁹⁵

The major contradiction presented within the functioning of the field school is that the NAS, despite its aim of broadening the context and the audience of maritime archaeology to what has become known as maritime and underwater cultural heritage (MUCH), is framed in a way which provided for and reinforced a divide. The public for the Field School therefore finds ways, through different topics of focus, to interpret maritime archaeology and underwater cultural heritage in different ways, while still assuring that this public is trained and involved in the practice of maritime archaeology and heritage studies. To achieve these goals of adhering to particular practices, the field school, through the presentation of the NAS courses, provides set guidelines. This method of public participation reflects what was done with the Write Your Own History Project initiative for public participation⁹⁶ which, if followed, empowered the individual with the necessary skills to perform best practice maritime archaeology and underwater cultural heritage.

In her analysis, Nicky Rousseau argues that the Write Your Own History Project was based upon the assumption that there is a public out there which has an interest in the topic of history and wants to share their knowledge with others through newly-

⁹⁵ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 8.

⁹⁶ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 8.

acquired practitioner skills.⁹⁷ She also argues that projects of popular history were often seen to be outside of the academy and that projects such as the University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop (WHW), and within this the Write Your Own History Workshop Project (WYOHP), were a way of giving academic legitimacy to popular history.⁹⁸ Connecting popular history to the academic institution meant “sticking to some of the rules”, which for Rousseau meant that, “...for the WHW a commitment to popularisation has never meant letting go of the idea that historical production is a highly skilled enterprise”.⁹⁹

It is this ‘sticking to some of the rules’ that has thwarted history’s and maritime archaeology’s attempt at liberating the practice of their disciplines. The Write Your Own History Project remained tethered to the institution, as ‘ordinary people’ were only encouraged to write their own histories if they abided by certain criteria that were deemed necessary for the proper production of history. It is here that the Write Your Own History Project and the Nautical Archaeology Society courses coincide.

The need for maritime archaeology to be accepted by academic institutions comes from it continuing to be seen as a sub-discipline of terrestrial archaeology by South African universities, as maritime archaeology is not officially represented.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the need for maritime archaeology to use the Nautical Archaeology course as the basis for teaching the discipline's skills is driven by what would ultimately be recognised by the institutions as legitimate practice.

This aim to be seen as legitimate is evident both in the Write Your Own History Project and in the NAS courses, as the nature of the way in which they are structured assures a particular kind of learning, aligned with rules set out by institutions. However,

⁹⁷ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 8.

⁹⁸ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 9.

⁹⁹ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 9.

¹⁰⁰ Cohn, “Perspectives on Maritime Archaeology,” 18.

a key difference is that history is a major discipline at South African universities and internationally. The structure of the NAS curriculum internationally aims to provide participants with the archaeological skills to produce their ‘own’ archaeological projects, dictated by a particular methodology of practice. In so doing, NAS is giving ‘ordinary people’ the skills to perform archaeology within the terms it sets.

As has been explained, the lectures presenting the theoretical component of the NAS courses lead the participants in a particular way of thinking and imparted skills that were necessary to perform maritime archaeology in a specific way. By participants being expected to attend evening lectures to prepare them for the following day’s field work, the way in which they thought about and produced archaeology in the field was influenced by methodologies taught in the lectures. The Robben Island Field School encouraged its participants to produce their own archaeologies, as long as they followed the rules of production put in place by the institution of NAS.

It could be argued that the land teams were granted more freedom than the dive team, as many of them selected their own project topics, whereas the dive team was prescribed the ‘Barrel Wreck’. However, the land team participants were also expected to attend lectures and to apply what they learnt in the lectures to their project research and findings. In addition, the topics that they ‘chose’ were either adopted from previous field schools, or were made prominent in the lectures themselves, as well as during island tours. Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage, as described above, has particular types of sites which it believes make up a maritime landscape. Many of the land team topics satisfied the Maritime Archaeology Development Program’s need to include these aspects of the maritime landscape, such as the lighthouse and grave sites. The projects themselves were produced through resources made available by the Field School, again moulding what would be produced.

The needs of stakeholders, such as Robben Island Museum, also dictated to the participants what kind of archaeology and history should be produced through their projects. These aims of the Field School were outlined long before the participants arrived. These aims assumed to speak to the kind of participant who was expected to be interested in the Field School, thereby assuming that this interested public existed before it came into being. The Write Your Own History Project did the same thing, as it assumed a public which was interested in a history from below, along the lines of an ‘oppressed’ people which would resonate with a history of ‘oppression’.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

Although by the end of the 2012 Robben Island Field School participants gained Nautical Archaeology Society (NAS) certification for the courses which they completed during the three weeks, this certification is not officially recognised by institutions outside of the Nautical Archaeological Society. South African universities do not provide dedicated courses in the discipline to students and the South African Qualifications Board does not recognise the NAS courses. The Nautical Archaeology Society courses, as presented at the 2012 Robben Island Field School, produce people with the skills to do archaeology, rather than archaeologists, as its new public.

One aspect of participation in the Field School, the making of heritage practitioners, largely by means of the inclusion of non-divers focusing on land sites, attempted to broaden the field of maritime archaeology. The focus on heritage in part satisfied the need for the field school to find a space outside of academia, perhaps echoing the *Meermin* project in its need to find resonance with a contemporary South African and international public through the context of slavery. In this case, heritage is

¹⁰¹ Rousseau, “Unpalatable Truths,” 5.

attracting more attention than the practice of maritime archaeology and perhaps those working in the field recognise this and are finding a compromise within the structure of the field school and the envisaged public.

This public has been described as being brought into being through participation, therefore being made into maritime archaeologists or heritage practitioners. In this way, those who facilitated the field school claim to hold onto the carefully-guarded skills of maritime archaeology, while at the same time broadening the field of maritime archaeology under the term maritime and underwater cultural heritage (MUCH). The Robben Island Field School claimed to be aligned to Underwater Cultural Heritage (UCH), as it was one of the many initiatives born from the aims of the Maritime Archaeology Development Program which looked towards primarily alternative ways of capacity building in the unique Underwater Cultural Heritage (UCH) environment, and the cultural and political context of an ever-changing South African public post-1994.

Part of this aim was to find alternative sites of focus for the field, which represent different notions of the meaning and associations with water relevant to a contemporary South African public. This is illustrated by the vision of Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage to develop what have become the legacy sites, including the ‘Barrel Wreck’, Robben Island, Fish Wiers and Lake Fundudzi.

The vision for this approach sets current trends in MUCH in South Africa against the context of past legislation and management strategies. It examines the scope of contemporary MUCH by considering four “legacy sites” and investigating the heritage development needs and strategies that make these sites relevant and integral to South Africa’s broader heritage themes.¹⁰²

¹⁰² South African Heritage Resources Agency, “Towards Best Practice in Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage in South Africa,” South African Heritage Resources Agency (2011): 5.

These four case studies represent different possible meanings and associations of water. As indicated in the Annual Report of the Centre for Heritage Activities on Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage project, 'These legacy sites are not intended to become an exhaustive list, they are simply 'highlights' to begin to describe how diverse South Africa's relationship with water actually is.'¹⁰³

Two of the four legacy sites, as I have mentioned, are represented at the field school, showing the desire of the facilitators of the field school to incorporate the notion of Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage, Robben Island as a maritime landscape and the 'Barrel Wreck' as a shipwreck site. Where Robben Island provided the possibility of a broader concept of maritime archaeology, the field school seemed to fall short in using it to its full potential. The Nautical Archaeology Society as illustrated by the structure of lectures and topics of the projects produced by the various groups, once again becomes about the shipwreck or the sites associated with the shipwreck, thereby drawing attention to finding and researching the object. I would argue that, in attempting to introduce a broadening concept within the institutional walls of archaeological practice, public archaeology, in adopting the terms given above of popularising academic skills and texts for public consumption, narrows its scope.

Although land teams developed research projects involving a variety of topics associated with the layered history of Robben Island, these remained attached to an overall focus on the search for an object. Even land teams which focused on highlighting histories of the island which were not associated with typical examples of maritime history, such as a walking tour looking at maritime infrastructure, or significant environmental sites and histories of unsung political heroes, did not look at

¹⁰³ Annual Report of the Centre for Heritage Activities, 2011.

other associations people might have to water. Topics researched by land teams included grave sites, a walking tour of the island, a geophysical survey and ceramics.

So, if the field school ultimately does not satisfy the full aims of the maritime and underwater cultural heritage vision, how could this notion of ‘broadening’ be applied? The meaning associated with water on the NAS courses is generally one of a positive nature, drawing on the fantastic images many conjure up around the search for the ship lost long ago beneath the waves. However, even for the three weeks that I stayed on the island, I was affected negatively by the temperamental nature of the ocean, as on some days it made for a rough ferry journey, at times rough enough to strand island dwellers. The small community living on the Island, I would assume, have their own meanings associated to the water. I would hazard a guess that one such association could be water as representative of a barrier; another could be the practical daily necessity of making sure there is fresh running water; or the kind of fauna and flora that grows as a result of the proximity of sea water.

Although the field school did not harness the potential for different associations with water, the Maritime Archaeology Development Programme (MADP), which bears ownership for the field schools, has a vision for the growth of maritime and underwater cultural heritage in countries such as South Africa. This includes a focus on developing research around sites which are not typically associated with a maritime history. The two additional Legacy Sites not represented at the field school are examples of this focus, representing vastly different notions of underwater cultural heritage. These sites aim to go beyond a history of the ocean hinged on the shipwreck, by recognising that there are many different meanings which can be associated with water.

The first of these is associated with the ocean. However, it illustrates the way in which different communities can stake separate claims on the same site to represent two

different sets of history and heritage. The fish weirs, which are found in Stilbaai and Arniston along the Southern Cape coast of South Africa, have a contested history. Where there are records in the archives of Dutch settlers using fish weirs, it is unclear whether these were built by the settlers or whether they existed before. These stone technology traps therefore ‘could be anything from 200 to 2000 years old’.¹⁰⁴ ‘This raises questions relating to intangible heritage since, as yet, there is no archaeological evidence that ties the traps to any particular group but various groups have claimed stewardship of the site.’¹⁰⁵

What is important for those involved in the Maritime Archaeology Development Programme is not so much to definitively prove which community has the right to claim the fish traps as their heritage, but rather to use the fish traps as an example of a site which can have cultural significance to multiple communities. When it comes to maritime heritage, often the natural environment needs to be considered. This is clear in the case of the fish weirs, where in addition to contested histories, the site falls within a Marine Protected Area, stopping the ‘local’ fishing community from removing fish from the traps. This therefore causes tension between those wanting to protect the natural environment, in this case the fish populations, and those wanting to protect cultural practices and heritage.

The importance of intangible heritage and the need to find a balance between the natural and cultural environment, is further represented by the legacy sites through the fourth site, Lake Fundudzi. The lake is located in the Northeast of the Limpopo Province and is viewed as the only natural inland lake in Southern Africa. Because of its unique nature, there is potentially ‘a wealth of information on the geological history of

¹⁰⁴ South African Heritage Resources Agency, “Towards Best Practices in Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage in South Africa”, 8.

¹⁰⁵ South African Heritage Resources Agency, “Towards Best Practices”, 8.

the area in the form of sediments that have washed into the lake since its formation'.¹⁰⁶

A traditional maritime archaeology project would plan to do an underwater survey of the lake in order to discover this wealth of information. However, the lake holds an alternative meaning to the Vhavenda people who live in the area surrounding the lake. To these communities, 'the lake is more than just a natural water body, as it forms a rich heritage of folklore, myths and ceremonial rituals.'¹⁰⁷

Like the fish traps, these conflicting meanings associated with the site and therefore with water, are a topic of discussion. Where the scientists see the importance of entering the lake to gather data for their research to protect the site for its natural significance, the Vhavenda people believe that their ancestors inhabit the lake and disturbing the lake would be disturbing their ancestors, thereby going against strict traditional customs.

Lake Fundudzi is in the last stages of being declared a National Heritage Site by the South Africa Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) complying with Section 3 of the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), which states that 'sites such as Lake Fundudzi that have strong cultural significance for local communities should be conserved.'¹⁰⁸ The Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage (MUCH) Unit of the South African Heritage Resources Agency was instructed to oversee the initial stages of the declaration.

The need to protect the site, as both geographically unique and as a heritage site, is not supported by all of those who stake a claim to the lake. There are seven known communities who live in the surroundings of the lake, all of whom stake a claim to it. Some have expressed worry that those declaring the site are going to bring tourists who will disturb the sacred lake and their ancestors. Others have the opposite concern, as

¹⁰⁶ South African Heritage Resources Agency, "Towards Best Practices", 11.

¹⁰⁷ South African Heritage Resources Agency, "Towards Best Practices", 11.

¹⁰⁸ South African Heritage Resources Agency, "Towards Best Practices", 11.

they recognise the potential for development which will attract tourists and therefore money. They are concerned that the declaration of Lake Fundudzi as a heritage site will prevent this kind of development from taking place.¹⁰⁹

Where the case of Lake Fundudzi is a complicated one, much more complicated than I have recounted above, there is not space in this thesis to examine it in full. I have mentioned the site with an interest in its selection as a Legacy site for Underwater Cultural Heritage for its illustration of possible alternative meanings associated with water through the intangible heritage associated with the lake. In contrast, the Nautical Archaeology Society courses presented at the 2012 Robben Island Field School were restricted to what can be seen as a more conventional way of thinking about water, based on the tangible object of the ship and water as representative of a maritime history, rather than underwater cultural heritage.



¹⁰⁹ South African Heritage Resources Agency, "Towards Best Practices", 12.

Conclusion:

In each of the chapters, through an examination of the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, the ongoing project of the search for the slave ship *Meermin* and the teaching of the archaeological skills by through the 2012 Robben Island Field School, I show how some maritime archaeologists have imagined and produced publics for maritime archaeology in a particular way.

The ‘Enquire at reception’ chapter examining the exhibition of the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum presents an illustration of a reluctance to move away from a traditional public of maritime archaeology. This public is assumed as one interested in the intrigue of the exploration of an underwater world, one made accessible to them by means of salvage projects. It therefore presents an appreciation and connection with what the museum would call salvage archaeology. Through the display of their collection of objects as type, the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum chooses a dominant theme of the shipwreck along the Southern Cape Coast.¹ There is a pride in this collection as originating from a salvage past, with plans for continuing the relationship between the museum and the practice of salvage in future displays.²

The following two chapters propose different attempts that some maritime archaeologists make in imagining new publics to find a foothold for the discipline in a post-apartheid setting. This is done through the making of a new context through the *Finding Meermin* exhibition. Here the context of the slave ship is used, invoking a maritime past separated from its colonial legacy of the shipwreck. It stands in contrast

¹ The official Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum website, ‘The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum’, accessed 6 October 2012, www.bredasdorpmuseum.co.za.

² Interview with Odette Everlee Wier, Bredasdorp Museum Manager, conducted by Heather Wares, at Bredasdorp Museum, August 12, 2012.

to the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, not only in the way it imagines its audience but also in its omitting of the object.

Where the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum presents a somewhat rigid display of objects void of much historical context, the *Meermin* project remains in search of an object to display. The focus therefore turns away from the shipwreck, so admired by the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, and places the focus on the context of slavery and the practice of archaeology itself. The context is plentiful, provided by the meticulous record keeping culture of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Context is also the focus, with the hope of connecting with a contemporary heritage of slavery, resistance and rebellion.³

This context of slavery could be seen as popular in the making of history in a post-apartheid South Africa in an attempt to pull away from the dominating colonial histories of the past. I would argue however that the Nautical Archaeological Society courses return to the ship as the main focus and object of maritime archaeology. This is despite the aim to broaden the focus of maritime archaeology, illustrated by the inclusion of the land team projects which looked at the different maritime landscapes of Robben Island.

The NAS courses control a view of how maritime archaeology should be practiced and that sites are surveyed ‘properly’ Much of the philosophy of the NAS courses emerges from a debate between those who are largely characterised as ‘salvagers’ and those who claim to be ‘maritime archaeologists’ around the importance of archaeological sites. Salvagers see the objects as most important, often relying on the potential “resale” value due to the status held by the mystique of treasure. The argument used to support this practice is that the objects found on maritime and underwater sites

³ H. Wares, Field Notes: Finding Meermin exhibition, visited August 24 2011.

should be placed in museum exhibits for greater accessibility as few have the opportunity to actually view the sites in their underwater environment.

Where some maritime archaeologists agree with salvagers on the need to create greater accessibility outside of the academy, they clearly disagree with how this is done. The answer proposed by some maritime archaeologist to the issue of ‘public’ accessibility is the introduction and implementation of the NAS courses. I argue that instead of creating greater accessibility, the courses provide participants with the skills to perform limited archaeological practices following a particular methodology. In other words, following Rousseau’s discussion about popular history projects in the 1980s, the ‘ordinary’ person can perform the basic archaeological work as long as it follows the rules dictated by trained maritime archaeologists through the NAS courses.⁴

Each of the chapters discussed in this thesis present different ways publics are conceived of around maritime archaeology. Throughout though, in Bredasdorp, in the *Meermin* exhibition and the NAS courses, maritime archaeology is defined around a meaning of water pertaining to the ocean and the object of the shipwreck . In the conclusion of the chapter on the NAS courses I suggest briefly that there are other possibilities starting to present themselves in South Africa through a strategy of Underwater Cultural Heritage.⁵

These possibilities make the association of different meanings of water available to the field of maritime archaeology. Although not discussed in depth in this thesis I acknowledge that alternative maritime histories which turn away from the narrow focus of the object in the ocean, exist in various parts of South Africa. What my narrow

⁴ N. Rousseau, “ ‘Unpalatable Truths’ and ‘Popular Hunger’: Reflections on Popular History in the 1980s,” (paper presented at the South African Contemporary History Seminar, University of the Western Cape, July 25, 1995), 8.

⁵ J. Sharfman, J. Boshoff, and R. Parthesius. ‘Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage in South Africa’, *Journal of Maritime Archaeology*. dates, volume etc. . 17.

maritime focus reveals is the way in which maritime archaeologists in South Africa are still in the initial stages of assessing alternative maritime histories. Many of the associations are still with a more conventional maritime history attached to the object of the shipwreck.

What I call a difficulty in broadening the field is illustrated through the merging of the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum and the *Finding Meermin* exhibition. This merging, which I was unaware of when I started to write this thesis, has forced me to consider the question: What happens when an exhibition of context, *Finding Meermin*, is placed within the walls of an exhibition with objects, the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum?

The four panels of the *Finding Meermin* exhibition were designed to be a travelling exhibition housed in different museum spaces. As part of the plan for this exhibition, the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum was an obvious location,⁶ being ‘the only shipwreck museum in South Africa’.⁷ On discovering these plans and that they had been fulfilled, my first reaction was to imagine this to be problematic for the arguments and comparisons I had presented. On stepping over the threshold of the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum with this apprehension on April 19th 2013, I encountered the introductory panel of the *Finding Meermin* exhibition standing in the entrance hall.

The panels, having no objects to speak of at the Iziko Maritime Centre, now were flanked by the vast collection of bottles. These bottles together with the maps representing the locations of ships which have wrecked along the coast of South Africa on sale give these panels from the Meermin exhibition a different kind of context to that which was experienced at its original location of display, the Iziko Maritime Centre.

⁶ Interview with Jaco Boshoff at his office at Iziko Museums Social History Centre in Cape Town, conducted by Heather Wares, January 18, 2013.

⁷ “The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum” also to be found in the Official Publication of the Cape Agulhas Tourism Bureau, *Discover Cape Agulhas: Southern Most Tip Of Africa*, 2012 edition, 24.

On closer inspection, although the *Finding Meermin* exhibition was somewhat transformed by the change of location, the shipwreck exhibition at the museum was not much interrupted. The reason for this absence of ‘interruption’ I suggest is the placing of the panels within the entrance hall rather than in the Shipwreck Hall. On one of my interviews with the manager of the museum, the kind of temporary exhibitions placed in the entrance hall were meant to represent a history of Bredasdorp with the aim of attracting visitors who were from the town.⁸ This association separates the *Finding Meermin* exhibition from the shipwreck focus of the museum. So what at first I assumed would give the *Finding Meermin* travelling exhibition the objects it seemed to be missing, the placement of the panels in the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum once again denied this exhibition an associated maritime history. Placing the panels in the entrance hall associates the *Finding Meermin* exhibition with other temporary exhibitions previously presented in this space such as period dresses and ‘traditional’ bread making.⁹

Although it brought an important context of slavery within the walls of the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum, like the temporary exhibitions displayed in this space before it, the *Finding Meermin* exhibition looked out of place. The panels, aside from the introductory panel, could not be seen as they were stacked behind one another, forcing the audience to follow a very distinctive path.

⁸ Interview with Odette Weir, Museum Manager at the Bredasdorp Museum, conducted by Heather Wares, at her Ms. Wiers office in Bredasdorp, August 12, 2012.

⁹ Interview with Odette Weir, Museum Manager at the Bredasdorp Museum, conducted by Heather Wares, at Ms. Wiers office in Bredasdorp, August 12, 2012.



Figure 45 Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum - Finding Meermin Exhibition.
(Photograph Heather Wares).

This path reveals the panels in a different order to that which was viewed at the Iziko Maritime Museum, with the narrative of slavery less prominent and that of the ship and the maritime project more so. This could be due to the small space of the entrance hall as the exhibition's new home. But what it did was that it minimized the key aspect of a link between maritime archaeology and the recovery of a past around slavery, colonialism and resistance.

The placement of these two exhibitions, the *Finding Meermin* and the Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum Shipwreck Hall, in one display space reveals the conflicts experience in the making of maritime histories in a post-apartheid South Africa. Despite concerted efforts made both by the *Finding Meermin* exhibition and the NAS courses conducted at the 2012 Robben Island Field School, maritime archaeology remains trapped by the recovery of the shipwreck as the primary object of study. As with the popularising projects of the 1980s associated with the field of history in South Africa, publics are being constructed through the representation of maritime archaeology by means of different modes of representation. Moving away from the wonder of the object is proving very difficult. Although concerted efforts are being made to construct new publics through different contexts and creating new archaeologists the limits remain fixed on the recovery of an archive on the ocean floor.

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