

# *History & Background*

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## Homo Naledi - *Mystery Man: Placement of Bodies and Ritual Hypothesis*

Discovered in the remote Dinaledi and Rising Star cave system close to Swartkrans in the Province of Gauteng are the remains of an extinct species of hominin related to the Genus Homo. Professor Lee Berger believes the remains to be more than 2 million years old. (Shreeve, 2015)

Anthropologist John Hawks states that out of the remains discovered in the cave all re hominid except from the bones of one owl. There are no remains of predators or teeth marks on the bones, and that the layering of bones suggest that they did not accumulate all at once, but instead through an extended period of time. Inside the cave there is also no evidence of water having been present or even an opening to the surface. The distribution of the bones within the cave also suggest that there was no disturbance as the placement of the skeletal remains are exactly as they would be should a corpse be placed in the cave. Thus Hawks suggest that the only possible hypothesis could be that Homo Naledi deliberately placed the bodies of the dead in the cave. This evidence by the species homo Naledi suggest a form a burial practice that is not found in early Hominin but can similarly be found in apes and chimpanzees as they have been found to mourn the death of companions and even relatives. Studies with chimpanzees in Guinea show a mother carrying and caring for the copse of her deceased young one. This again suggests and supports the hypothesis brought forward by Hawks. Even if the “disposal” of these Homo Naledi bodies are not a form of burial it is likely that homo Naledi had an understanding of death to some degree and was able to take action to be able to deal with it in some manner. (Shreeve, 2015)

It is known that Neanderthals buried their dead 40 000 years and even 100 000 years ago. Thus if Homo Naledi is found to be much older than Neanderthals, which their features and bone characteristics suggest it would mean that anthropologists and archaeologist would have to re-examine ritual and burial practice of the Homo Genus. (Shreeve, 2015)

This poses an important point of departure when viewing burial rituals and understanding death. The place of burial becomes a space where members can safely dispose of the dead in a respectful manner through ritual practice.



fig 5.1. Photographs of Homo Naledi Exhibition at Marapang. (by Author, 2015)



fig 5.2. Painting depicting the act of disposing of the dead by Homo Naledi. (edited by Author, 2015)



fig 5.4. Interior view of the Rising Star cave system. (edited by Author, 2015)

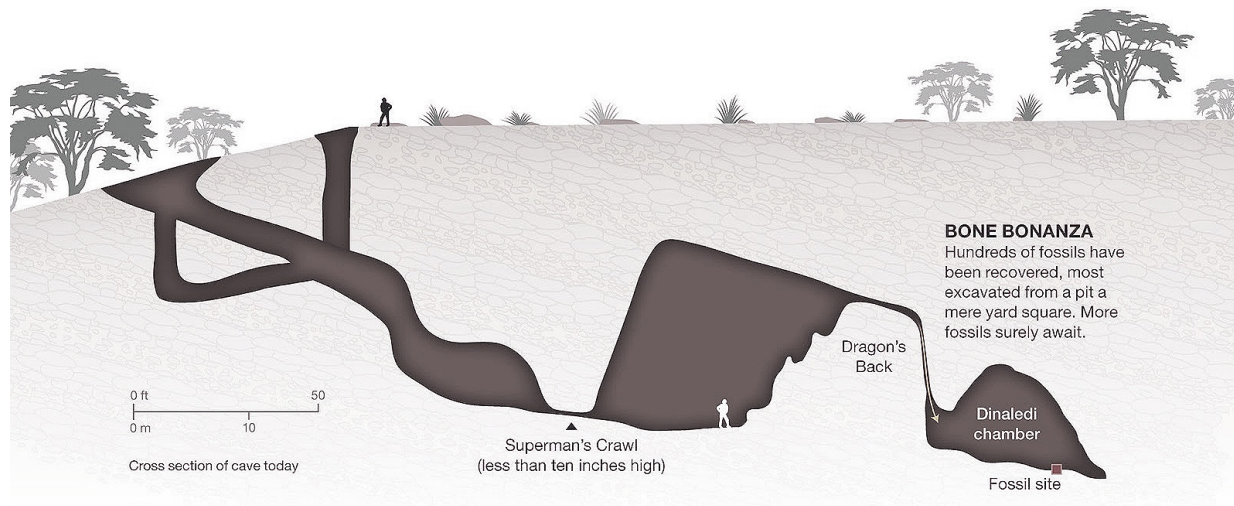


fig 5.3. Section of the Rising Star Cave showing the location of the find along with the route that was taken by archaeologist and possibly Homo Naledi partaking in the burial ritual. (edited by Author, 2015)

## Ponte City - *The Story*

Situated on the periphery of Hillbrow alongside Joe Slovo Dr you can find one of the most iconic structures in Johannesburg. A structure shrouded in myth and legend. A structure that, like Johannesburg, has had its fair share of the good, the bad and the ugly. The brutal concrete cylindrical tower known as Ponte City.

Throughout its existence Ponte City has become something of a legend within the Johannesburg city skyline. Having been built in 1976 as a symbol of Apartheid planning and design, the structure soon followed a downturn as it became inhabited by illegal immigrants, brazen crack rings and prostitutes. This formed as a result of the exodus by the white middle class towards the safety of the northern suburbs. The structure forms some sort of a metaphor for the development of Johannesburg. Revealing aspects of its Psyche, its projection of myth and legend, its isolation within the development of the city. (Subotzky & Waterhouse, 2009, p. 1)

Ponte City has always been a structure shrouded in myth and legend. It speaks of determination and aspiration, desire and dreams. As a symbol of hope and prosperity for both the affluent and poor. Since its inception it has transformed from a symbol of prosperity and wealth to a beacon of hope and new beginnings, something similar to a piece of gold. Ponte City has an alluring character about it that draws people from all over the continent, promising them better lives, for them and their families. But just like the Gold on which Johannesburg is built, in all its incarnations fulfils the dreams of very few that live in Johannesburg. Yet the everyday struggle is perpetuated by a sense of nostalgic hope. (Subotzky & Waterhouse, 2009, p. 1)

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fig 5.5. Photographs of Ponte City taken during a tour of the structure explaining its history from during Apartheid until now. (by Author, 2013)

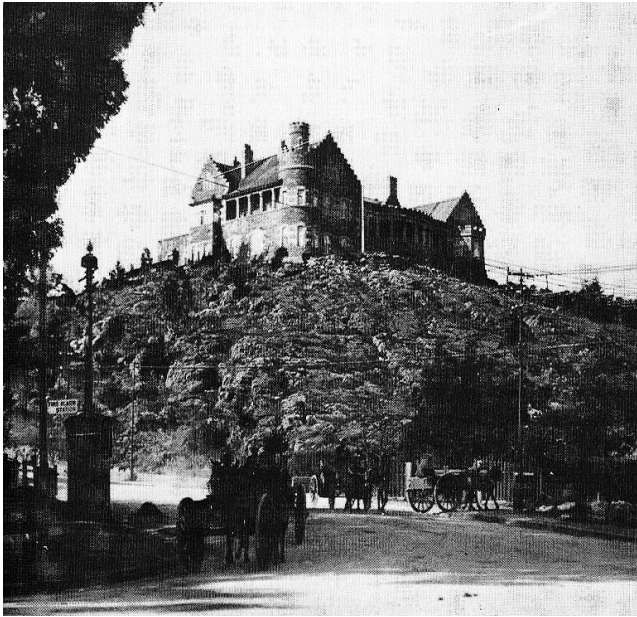


fig 5.6. Image of Eastington Manor from Saratoga Avenue.

## The World around Ponte - Harrow Road and Eastington Manor

The area surrounding Ponte hold great value in the development of Johannesburg. Previously known as Harrow road, the 6 lane highway which passes through a natural gateway between Ponte City and Yeoville ridge was widened to make way for the new overpass known today as Joe Slovo Drive, which was completed in the early 1970s. Today this transportation network play an important role in the mobility of Johannesburg. With the building boom came the demolition of most of Doornfontein and Hillbrow smaller town houses and the construction of larger more high density apartment blocks. Alongside Harrow road opposite were Ponte situated today one finds the "Ruins" of an incomplete Pentecostal Church where Eastington Manor once stood. Little is known about the manor itself except that numerous Randlords once resided in it. It is also unclear when exactly the structure was demolished but according to aerial photographs of the alterations of now Joe Slovo Drive its can be estimated that the demolition took place in the early 1960s. Other than the "ruined" Pentecostal church and Eastington manor there has been no further development on the isolated piece of ridge. (Latilla, 2013, p. 1)

The road below Yeoville Ridge, Saratoga Avenue was once the home to most of Johannesburg's founding fathers and Randlords. The street was later known as Millionaires row as many of the Randlords later built their manors there. This allowed Doornfontein to become prime property because of its close proximity to the early mine fields.

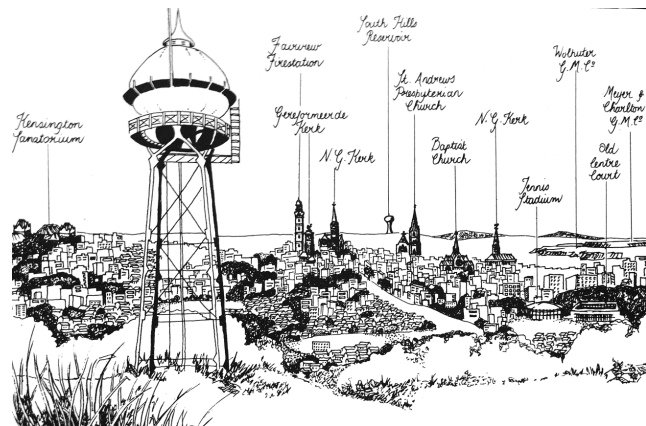


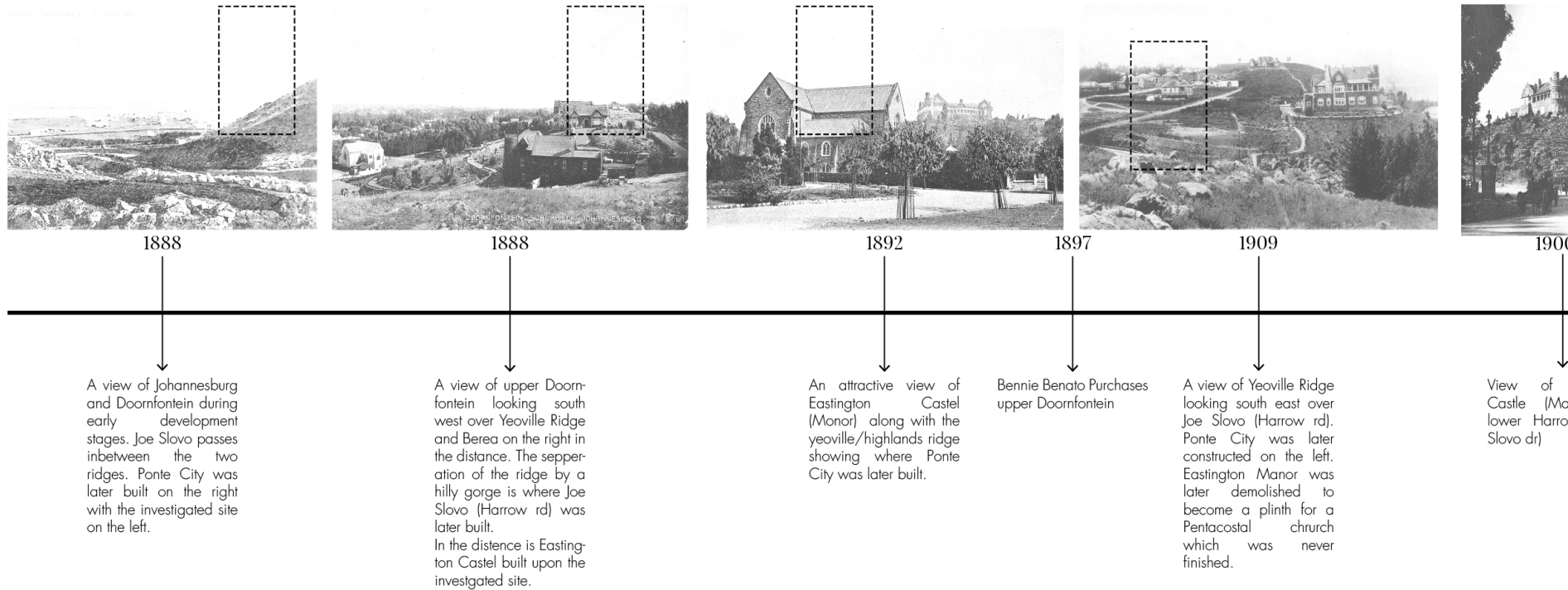
fig 5.7. Sketch of spires around Observatory Ridge and Troyville Ridge

## The Reservoir behind Ponte and Yeoville Water Tower

Until 1888 the residents of Johannesburg gathered their water from streams and shallow wells, whilst those without ease of access to these streams and wells purchased water from carts, cost which was dependent of distance from source.

Later Johannesburg waterworks, estate and Exploration Company and the Braamfontein Estate Company exploited the springs discovered beneath Harrow road on a piece of farmland called Andrews Reserve which is where the headwater of the Jukskei can be found. The newly discovered spring flowed down Bez Valley from where the water was pumped into a newly constructed concrete reservoir behind Ponte. The 4.5 million litre reservoir still exists today and lies on the periphery between Berea Park and Ponte bordering Joe Slovo. Water was first pumped to surrounding houses in June 1888. In 1914 the Sivewright's Johannesburg Waterworks, Estate and Exploration Company constructed the first water tower on the highest ridge in Yeoville. The water tower was the first of its kind in South Africa. Situated near the Doornfontein fountain. (Heritage Portal, 2013, p. 1)

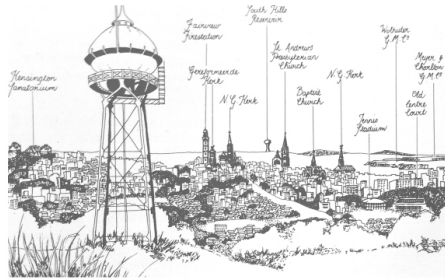
fig 5.8. Timeline of transformation on and around site depicting Ponte City as dotted rectangle for perspective and orientation. (by Author, 2015)





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1914

Sketch from Yeoville Ridge overlooking Berea depicting important landmarks such as churches and water towers. The original water tower on the left was completed in 1914 and was imported as an assembly model from England.



1975

Aerial photograph of the site where Ponte City was to be built, also depicting the widening of Harrow rd (now Joe Slovo dr). The site under investigation is on the right and is still heavily overgrown and uncept.



1975

Aerial photograph of Ponte City just after construction was completed in 1975. The Building was at the time the tallest residential building in africa, 175m high with 54 levels. Ponte City declined into slum status during the 1990's but has undergone a renewal process.



2001

View of the Unfinished Pentacostal Church Plinth that started construction in 2001 but was never finished due to funding. the structure has been stading derelict for the past 14 years and can be seen as n modernday ruin. The terreaed construction consists of rock from the site as well as brick.

## Cemeteries in Johannesburg - *A Short History told in Cemeteries*

While strolling through the cemeteries of Johannesburg one is reminded of its persevering character and rich history which is experienced first-hand. The gold hungry pioneer, local farmers, the Randlords, the heroes and those who have fallen in battle, striking African and Asian mine workers, Boer concentration camp victims, those of various religious beliefs, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish all form part of this deeply rich history. These cemeteries are the places where all of these important factors that helped build Johannesburg and South Africa are equal, all made equal in the earth.

For every new beginning there is a place of rest for those that have come before us. And that have paved the way towards greatness and success be it great or small. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 4)

Johannesburg is a city of hope, a city that developed from fantasy, where new beginnings were made, a city that desired to grow from strength to strength, but instead endured dramatic turmoil and decline along with heroic rise and development. A city that constantly changes and adapts to the Zeitgeist. The city of Johannesburg is heaped with rich history, from the discovery of gold and the mines all the way to the fight for freedom and peaceful protests. Johannesburg's history can be extracted through its cemeteries, places that echo nostalgia, longing and sadness. These cemeteries, like walled gardens consumed the dead but kept the living at a distance.

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The first burial grounds in Johannesburg were farm graveyards. These were used for the farmer and his family along with the farm workers and their families. A few of these graveyards are still in existence.

The first cemetery in Johannesburg came into being as a result of rapid development of the large mining camp which made up most of the city itself. Located between Bree, Diagonal and Harrison Street. Due to the unforeseen rapid expansion of Johannesburg the cemetery had a short lifespan as it was quickly filled and outgrew its boundaries. The remains of those buried at the original cemetery were exhumed and later reinterred into Braamfontein in 1897. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 4)

In the 1880's Johannesburg had grown from a large mining camp into a still developing city. As a result of this Braamfontein cemetery was established in 1888 near the city centre. Along with the establishment of Braamfontein cemetery, many other cemeteries, under the control of the church, hospitals and mines came into being. The Anglo-Boer war ravaged the country from 1899 until 1902. During this time many Boers died in the war, along with women and children who died in the concentration camps. One such concentration camp was located in the Turfontuin Racecourse. Today most of those who passed away during the war are buried in the Suideroord cemetery. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 4)



*fig 5.9. Image of Funeral in Johannesburg  
(Johannesburg City Parks & Cemeteries brochure  
2008, edited by author, 2015)*





During a meeting in 1907 of the town counsel the issue of the city parks and cemeteries was brought to light. The following was reported:

‘The Parks Department has, since its inception in 1904, been a sub-department of the Town Engineer’s Department. We are of the opinion, that, owing to the increase in the volume of work in connection with the Parks (which included cemeteries), the time has now arrived for the formation of a separate Department of Parks. We have issued instructions accordingly.’  
(Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 4)

During this time the Park Department reported that the cost of the already established and newly established parks and cemeteries was £3,222.47. The recorded burial of one cemetery which was still under the control of the town engineers had an average of 50 burials per week which was racial divided between 22 white and 28 coloured. Even at this stage racial segregation was prevalent in cemeteries within Johannesburg. With the continuous rapid growth of Johannesburg as a mining camp into a fully-fledged city, came a drastic increase in the mortality rate. In 1905 it was estimated that Braamfontein cemetery would be fully occupied within 20 months. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 4)

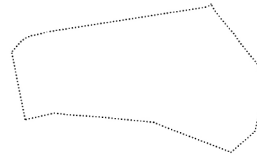
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Three years later a new cemetery was established on an 84 acre plot of land in the suburb of Brixton. During the year of 1908 there was a recorded 3410 burials. At this point in Johannesburg’s development the number of parks had surpassed 20, these parks varied greatly in size from a modest 1 acre to 290 acres along with two cemeteries, Braamfontein and Brixton. On the 1st of October 1910 the first burial took place at the new Brixton cemetery. This extreme growth and constant development of Johannesburg posed as a challenge for the town planners of the time and can still be regarded as a major condition that is grappled with by planners today. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 5)

During this time the public requested that the cemeteries be divided into sections for various religious and racial groups. These cemeteries were laid out in the European fashion, with long rows of graves divided by long narrow roads in even sections for the various groups. The graves of the soldiers of the Anglo-Boer war were laid out in the fashion of the war memorials in Europe. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 5)

fig 5.10. Aerial photograph depicting the location and outline of centers within the city of Johannesburg.  
(google earth image edited by Author, 2015)

1 *West Park*



2 *Brixton*



3 *Braamfontein*



4 *Primrose*





## The First Crematorium in Johannesburg - est. 1918

During the early 1900s Mahatma Gandhi requested on behalf of the Hindu community that the city council construct a crematorium. The first crematorium in Johannesburg was constructed at the most north western side of the new Brixton cemetery and was completed by 1918. By 1956 a new crematorium was constructed next to the old crematorium in order to accommodate the increasing capacity of cremation in the city. The crematorium implemented by Gandhi was later awarded heritage status and is now a National Monument. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 5)

In 1932 the crematorium at Braamfontein cemetery was opened as a result of the unpredictable increase in cremation. It was proposed that a secondary furnace be added to lighten the growing load on the single fire burning furnace already in place. During this time the number of cremations at the Braamfontein cemetery rose to 481 and the total number of burials to 6,196 which included whites and coloured. In 1941 the number of cremations at Braamfontein cemetery rose from 481 to 641. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 13)

During an uprising in Soweto in 1976 the building which housed all the burial records for the first cemetery in Soweto was destroyed. This resulted in a large part of the history of Johannesburg being lost. Today, under the control of Johannesburg parks and cemeteries the city of Johannesburg has 35 cemeteries and two crematoria which are no longer divided along racial lines. But the ways of the past still remains in those first cemeteries that facilitated as resting places for the dead during a time of growth and development. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 6)



fig 5.11. Archive image of Hindu Crematorium circa 1939. (Johannesburg City Parks & Cemeteries brochure 2008, edited by author, 2015 )

## Braamfontein Cemetery - est. 1888



fig 5.12. Archive image of Cemetery Avenue lead up to Braamfontein Cemetery entrance. (A Johannesburg album : historical postcards, 1986)

Upon entering Braamfontein cemetery one is immediately faced with the morbid sense of isolation. The entrance gatehouse, partially hidden from site by tall old Tipuana and plane trees guards the realm of the dead, it enforces that threshold barrier between living and dead and makes one aware that you are entering through a gateway into the history of Johannesburg. The narrow road leading through the cemetery tells stories of those that have passed on, a story of a horse-drawn hearse followed by a long narrow string of mourners. Like a matriarch, the Braamfontein cemetery protects Johannesburg's rich history. It facilitates for a parallel world between the living and the dead. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 13)

The cemetery was laid out in a formal manner with straight roads that sweep between the various religious and racial sections, allowing access through a main road which passes through the middle of the cemetery. On both side of Graf road, lie the graves of those who founded Johannesburg, their large carved granite angels, crosses and epitaphs faded and stained with the weathering of time. At the entrance to the cemetery one will be able to find the leather bound registry book that goes back through the history of the cemetery. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 14)

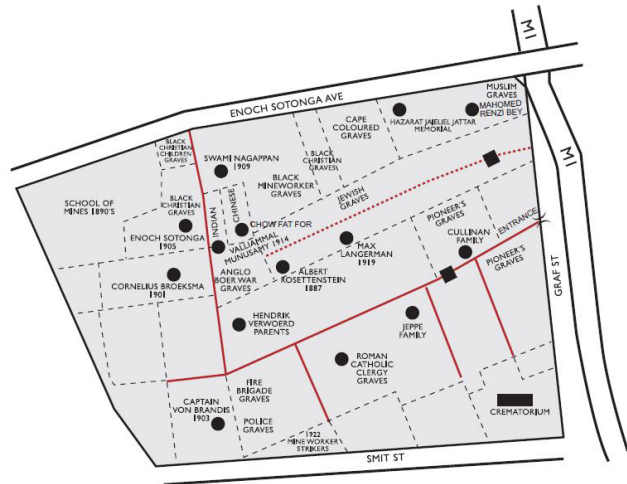


fig 5.13. Map of Braamfontein Cemetery (Johannesburg City Parks & Cemeteries brochure 2008, edited by author, 2015 )

While meandering through the cemetery one is given perspective on the history of Johannesburg, a deeper understanding and connection between what has been and what is still to come. The narrow roads that wind between the lined trees, previously used by horse and carriage are now wide walkways for those seeking solitude and isolation within a spiritually calm place. After passing graves of various denominations and memorials for the heroes of the city the road makes a sharp turn and winds back to the entrance. But not before being greeted by the silent smoke haze of the crematorium (est.1932). This experience puts the idea and process of death into a whole new perspective. To walk the journey of Braamfontein Cemetery is to honour our past and acknowledge the opportunities of the future. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 15)

## Brixton Cemetery - est. 1912

Upon entering Brixton Cemetery one is greeted by the faded pink washed walls of the Hindu Crematorium surrounded by a forest of Bluegum trees. In the distance the sound to call for prayer can be heard from the Mayfair Mosque. Similar to Braamfontein, Brixton is one of the oldest cemeteries on Johannesburg, and as a result of this houses most of the cities Famous and infamous.

During the rapid expansion of Johannesburg, a six year period in which its pollution tripled. This allowed for the existing cemetery to rapidly fill up resulting in the construction of a new cemetery. This cemetery was known as the "New Cemetery" until 1912 when the first burial took place. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 16) At the entrance of the cemetery one will find a war memorial that commemorates the lives of those South Africans who fought in the First World War. Moving along Main Drive one encounters the Second World War memorial that commemorated the South African Scottish Regiment. Brixton cemetery holds the most war memorials of any cemetery in South Africa, not just of the first and second world wars but also of the wars and battles that formed part of and shaped the history of the country. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 16) Famous people buried in Brixton cemetery are the likes of Randlord Lionel Phillips and his wife Lady Florence. Known for their luxurious and extravagant lifestyle, they funded the Johannesburg art gallery along with numerous other items that hold dear to the cities history. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 16)

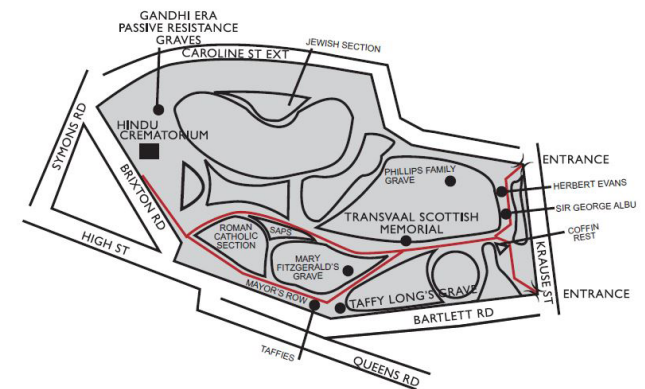


fig 5.14. Map of Brixton Cemetery (Johannesburg City Parks & Cemeteries brochure 2008, edited by author, 2015 )

Mahatma Gandhi, played a very important role in the development of the Brixton cemetery, not just for Hindus, but for cremation as an alternative form of interment within the South African, and African context. In 1908 Gandhi was approached by the Hindu community to find a location suitable for the erecting of a crematorium. Gandhi negotiated with the city of Johannesburg for land. The city allocated land within Brixton cemetery resulting in the first crematorium in Africa completed in 1918. This crematorium was a traditional wood firing oven, later brick gas firing ovens where added. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 16)

Even though the cemetery is full it still hold space for family members already buried there as well as space for cremated remains. Today Brixton cemetery plays an important role in protecting the history of Johannesburg. It forms a pivotal point for remembering those before us and looking towards the future. (Johannesburg City Parks, 2008, p. 16)



fig 5.15. Photograph of gravestone at Braamfontein Cemetery (by author, 2015)

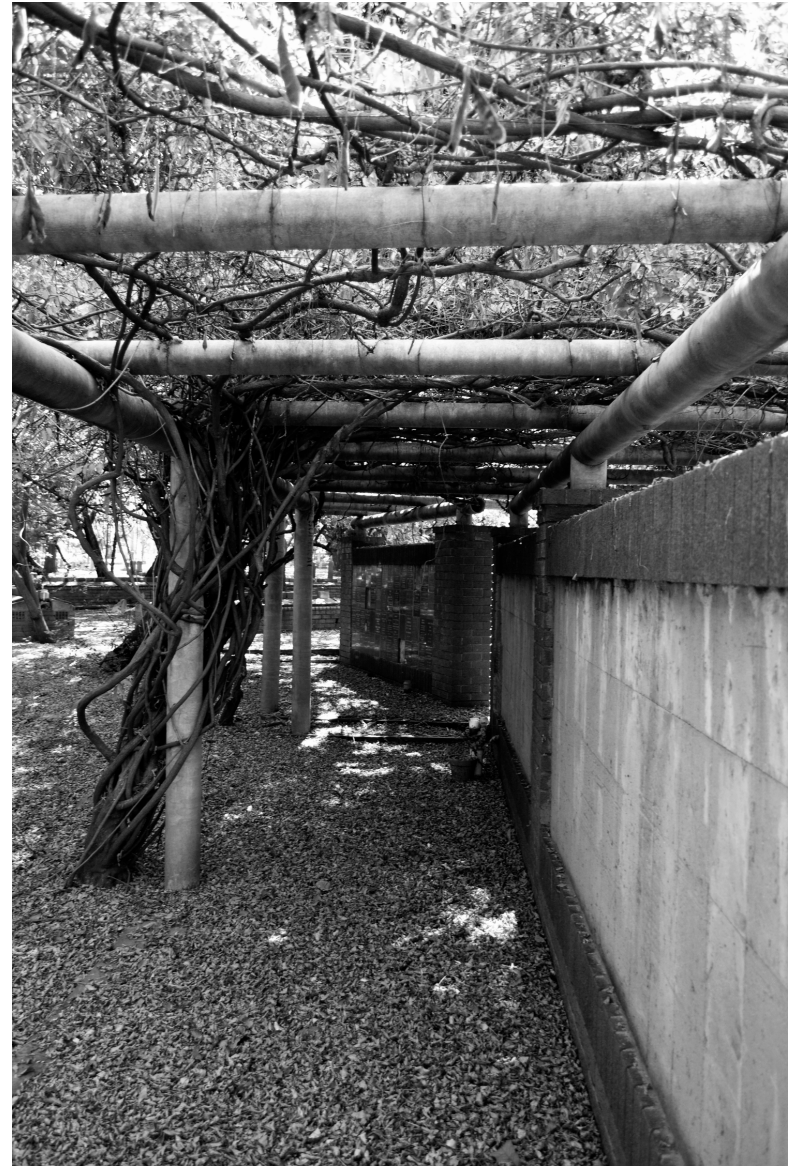


fig 5.16. Photograph of Braamfontein Cemetery pergola system (by author, 2015)

