

29 November 2003

Saturday the 29th November dawned at 30°C. - The day for 'writing up' headstone inscriptions. A limited amount of free tickets were issued to our group, as we met in the early hours at the Waterfront: Allie Semmelink, Ann Henderson, Peter Ross, Elise Smit, Marina Faber [non-member], Anna-Marie Meyer [non-member], Mahdi Mohamed, Chalid Mohamed, [both nonmembers], Glenda and husband Ralph Raad [non-member], Johann Janse van Rensburg, Fred Deas and myself. This time with ample water and food from home (we were also supplied with a crate! of bottled water later on by Irene, which also came to good use and was much appreciated).

We waded through knee-high prickly bush to the Irish Cemetery, (near the 'used to be' Government Gardens - no sign of it now), which consists of 8 rows with 36 graves per row [= 288 graves] and 2 'vacant' rows where graves could possibly have been. All in all about 360 graves, including many children's graves. This cemetery is badly neglected and unattended, and headstones difficult to read, or non-existent. It is apparently also a tourist attraction, we were told. (I would like to know what the tourists think...?) The Leper (and Prison?) Cemetery is in an atrocious state. The fenced off part still has some headstones with (bronze? - now blackened) plaques screwed on low down under the ground surface. Some hardly legible, others torn off and missing. Outside this



fence are hundreds of scattered graves, all over the show.

Disgustingly vandalised! Stuck and buried under bush, scrub and rubble, underneath which we could not in anyway get to, not even on hands and knees. As far in as we could see, every single stone was damaged or broken to pieces.

Penguins and their chicks were happily sitting around and claimed the area as theirs.

Another large graveyard next to the prison is covered thickly with low growing bush. Only a single headstone protrudes forlornly on its own, which ironically and sadly states: "Verlate maar nie vergete"... [Gabriel Jacobus le Roux 2.6.1877 - 14.11.1899]. We were told that on enlarging the prison at some stage, it was built on part of a graveyard. So also a building [workshop] in 'town'. The latter was discovered only during building operations. Also, 3 skulls were dug out while putting in new water pipes [sewerage?] near the beach, a while ago (what did they do with them, one wonders?) The above-mentioned Leper Cemetery consists of 23 rows with 15 graves per row (= 345 graves). We had to dig right down in front of most of the headstones to find (or not to find) the plaques. Afterwards, the place looked as if ant-bears had a whale of a time there! To read them, we had to copy the posture of warthogs! On knees, bottoms up, and on elbows! (Wonder why the passing tourist buses suddenly slacked down? I'm sure I heard cameras clicking!) For others it must have been a hilarious and colourful sight! By

2.45pm. we had completed what we could. Some men left on the 3 o'clock Ferry, the other 4 (Fred, Peter, Johann, Ralph) and Marina still had some oomph left and decided to walk all along the road around the island. We others were clapped, so we 'adorned' the Prison steps in the shade so as to rest our feet and backs. We were all booked on the 4 o'clock return Ferry. After just over half an hour later, a bakkie stopped - and off jumped the five! Smiling broadly and very pleased with themselves! They had been all around and 'seen the lot!', they said... I wanted to throttle them! "What about us??!" I asked. "Oh? We never gave it a thought" was the lame reply.... (Apparently, just as they rounded the first corner on leaving us, a bakkie came past, so Fred, realising they were not going to make it back in time for the Ferry, hailed the bloke to a stop, twisted his arm to take them to see what they have not seen yet, and off they went...) They will never be forgiven for 'not thinking'!! We walked down to the harbour to board the Ferry at 3.45 PM. The Ferry was rather heavily loaded with tourists; the engines seemed to labour somewhat; and I felt a bit dubiousbut then, the sea was also quite choppy with the strong South Easter. People on the South East side were quite wet from the spray by the time we were back at the V&A Waterfront.

- Yvonne Robinson