

# Valuing historical context of three individuals exhumed from desecrated historic graves in Zeerust, North West Province

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## *Abstract*

Since the promulgation of heritage legislation in 1999, under the new government after the end of Apartheid, stricter rules and regulations determine the management of cultural heritage in South Africa. This includes the processes related to the exhumation and reinterment of human skeletal remains. However, from time to time, projects are experienced where the rules are discarded, resulting in extraordinary circumstances. These need to be handled in a different way in order to protect and preserve the cultural heritage as well as the dignity of the buried individuals. Such an example is that of three desecrated historical graves from the town of Zeerust, in the North West Province. Despite the legislation, and the fact that the three graves were visible, the developer continued with the development. Only when members of the public complained, the heritage authorities were consulted. By this time the development had almost been completed. It was unfortunately impossible to preserve the graves *in situ*. Negotiations with different stakeholders were necessary and, based on the legislation, a solution accepted by all, was reached.

Although the discussion to follow stems from a mainly archaeological study, the aim is to provide and value historical background research on the graves and the three individuals buried there. Also the value of the larger historical context is pointed out. This would provide information on the deceased which would to some extent restore their dignity. Apart from the archaeological methods that had to be utilized to exhume the graves, methods include a literature survey and archival search on the property, as well as on the graves and the individuals buried there. The article will also briefly discuss relevant aspects of heritage legislation in South Africa.

It will be debated that historical context is extremely important, and perhaps could contribute in restoring the dignity of buried individuals. Though not ever complete, it does provide a legacy of the life of the three people to be discussed.

**Keywords:** Historical context value; Restoration of dignity; Exhumation; Reinterment; Human skeletal remains; National Heritage Resources Act; JAL Montgomery; CS Dickinson; CH Coetzee; Zeerust; North West Province.

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## **Introduction**

The National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999) was promulgated in 1999 and became the main legislation related to the heritage of South Africa. The act inter alia resulted in stricter control related to the management of the cultural heritage in South Africa. This also includes processes related to the management of human skeletal remains.

Unfortunately, sometimes, instances are experienced where legislation was ignored, be that deliberately or not. This results in extraordinary circumstances. This especially happened when the Act was still newly promulgated and not well known by a number of people, including developers. Under such circumstances the cultural heritage needs to be taken care of in a different way in order to ensure its protection and preservation.

Such an example is that of three historical graves from the town of Zeerust, which were threatened by the erection of a shopping centre. Archaetnos CC was requested by Cornelius du Rand Attorneys on behalf of Bhyat Motors CC, to conduct an investigation into three historical graves on Plot 1242, Zeerust. The investigation dealt with both acquiring historical information on these graves, as well as the excavation thereof as the mortal remains of these individuals had to be relocated.

This historical information gives insight into who these people were in life and the contribution they made to history. It thus provides the basis for the possible restoration of their dignity.

## **Site description**

The site where the graves were identified is located in Voortrekker Street, Zeerust.<sup>2</sup> This is in the Marico magisterial district of the North West Province. Zeerust is situated approximately 250 km north-west of the City of Johannesburg.

Development of the property had already commenced by the time when the heritage authorities were notified. Two of the graves were enclosed within a newly built shop, with the third in the courtyard. According to the client's

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<sup>2</sup> In 1994 the Zeerust municipality was changed to Ramotshere Moila, a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century chief of the Bahurutshé, an indigenous group of people from the Tswana tribe. The municipality includes various small villages and towns, including Zeerust.

attorney, Mr Cornelius du Rand, all three graves were originally located in the courtyard or garden of the El Dorado Freemason's Lodge, the building which is situated behind this newly built shop.

## **Research methods**

It always was important to place emphasis on the historical methodology as this was crucial in the determination of the role of these people in history. Methods implemented include a literature on the history and an archival survey.

The literature survey was done in order to obtain background information regarding the area. An archival search on the property, as well as on the three graves and the individuals buried there, gave additional contextual information. Accounts from local people were also utilized, although in the end this did not contribute much to the investigation.

Since the project initially was an archaeological rescue operation, the methodology of this discipline, specifically the aspects related to the exhumation of graves, were followed. In accordance with the standard procedures for grave documentation and exhumation, the graves were recorded photographically, while all relevant information visible on the tombstones of the graves was documented. All related features were also documented and the location of the site was recorded using a Global Positioning System (GPS).

In this instance the documentation comprised of the following:

- Photographic - Photographs of the site and each grave prior to excavation and exhumation. Each burial, with its contents *in situ*, is also photographically documented.
- GPS Data - A GPS reading for each grave was taken in order to locate it on a map of the area.
- Burial Recording Forms - These forms are used to record all relevant details of each grave and burial, such as dimensions, position, contents, preservation of remains, cultural material found, and all other observations regarding the skeletal remains.

## Heritage legislation

In South Africa the following legislation deals with human remains, namely the National Heritage Resources Act (Act no 25 of 1999) (abbreviated NHRA), the Human Tissues Act (Act no 65 of 1983) and the Ordinance on Exhumations (No 12 of 1980).<sup>3</sup> The procedures as set out in the legislation were followed, including social consultation and meetings with the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA).

Two options apply when dealing with graves:

- Option One – Leave the graves *in situ*;
- Option Two – Exhumation and relocation.

Option One is implemented when there is no direct impact from a development on the graves. The site is fenced in and a management plan drafted for the preservation and maintenance thereof.

Option Two is only permitted in cases where there is a direct impact on the graves. It needs to be approved by the SAHRA Burial Grounds and Graves (BGG) unit after which the necessary permits will be issued.<sup>4</sup> The grave relocation process will not be discussed, since the article focus on the historical context.

It is nevertheless necessary to provide some insight into the physical exhumation of graves as it does provide context to the historical data. The methods employed during exhumation aim to systematically expose the burial and associated artefacts *in situ* and to recover all the remains, to minimise damage thereto, to accurately record the three-dimensional context of the remains, and to preserve and respect the dignity of the buried individuals.<sup>5</sup>

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3 AC van Vollenhoven, "Die wet op nasionale erfenishulpbronne", *South African Journal of Cultural History*, 17(2), 2003, p. 24.

4 AC van Vollenhoven, *The grave relocation process* (Unpublished report, Wonderboompoort: Archaeos, 2010), pp. 1-4.

5 WC Nienaber & M Steyn, "Exhumation and analysis of the remains of a black native participant in the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), KwaZulu-Natal", *South African Journal of Culture History*, 13(2), 1999, pp. 94-110; WC Nienaber, "Exhumation and reinternment of Burger C.G. Naude", *South African Journal of Culture History* 11(1), 1997, pp. 123-133; TR Hester et.al, *A guide to field methods in archaeology* (Palo Alto, Mayfield Publishing, 1975); M Joukowsky, *A complete manual of field archaeology* (New Jersey, Engelwood Cliffs, 1980); WM Krogman & MY Iscan, *The human skeleton in forensic medicine* (Springfields, Charles C Thomas, 1986); D Morse (ed.), *Handbook of forensic archaeology and anthropology* (Tallahassee, Rose Printing Company, 1978); M Steyn, WC Nienaber & MY Iscan, "Excavation and retrieval of forensic remains", JA Siegel, PJ Saukko & GC Knupfer (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of forensic sciences* (Sidcup, Academic Press, 2000), pp. 235-242; JE Buikstra & DH Ubelaker, "Standards for data collection from human skeletal remains", *Arkansas Archaeological survey research series*, 44, 1994.

By doing this the reconstruction of historical events and the interpretation of evidence related to a specific individual, will be preserved.<sup>6</sup> This can then be investigated further by historical methods.

### **The three historical graves in Zeerust**

The Zeerust graves became an example where the historical context was explicitly used as agent for the restoration of dignity. Despite legislation, the developer continued with the development over the area where graves were located. It was only when members of the public complained, that a process was instituted to address the matter in responsible manner.<sup>7</sup>

Image 1: The graves of Jacob AL Montgomery and Catherine S Dickinson inside the shopping centre



Source: Photo by AC van Vollenhoven.

As the development had almost been completed before the heritage authority was made aware, this case had to be managed by extending conventions regarding the exhumation and relocation of historical skeletal material. A different approach had to be formulated, still based on legislation. Negotiations with different stakeholders eventually led to solutions accepted by all. Unfortunately the solutions did not include penalizing the developer.

6 WM Krogman & MY Iscan, *The human skeleton in forensic medicine* (Springfields, Charles C Thomas, 1986).

7 AJ Pelsler & AC van Vollenhoven, *A report on the preliminary investigation of two historical graves on Plot 1242, Zeerust, Northwest Province* (Wonderboompoort, Archaetos, 2007), p. 1. A member of the Freemasons complained on the state of the graves.

## **The value of historical research in grave excavation**

Historical background research was undertaken during the initial investigations in order to provide a solid as possible historical framework for each individual grave, as well as to place the burials and site in a larger historical context. During the exhumation work, further-historical evidence was obtained, through discussions with descendants, and information retrieved from the Zeerust Library. This also assisted in giving identity to these individuals in order for them to be remembered, resulting in an attempt to restore their dignity.

### ***Grave of JAL Montgomery***

Grave One is that of Jacob Andrew Lewis Montgomery. Unfortunately the tombstones (flat-lying slabs of slate) were already removed from the graves when the first site investigation occurred and they were in a bad state of repair, but it was possible to record some of the information.

The style of inscription on his tombstone is very similar to that of Grave Two, which is discussed below. It therefore was possibly done by the same J Harley of Potchefstroom (see discussion below on the grave of Catherine Dickinson). This indicates a number of things, of which the most important is the possible link between the Montgomery and Dickinson families. The inscription reads as follows:

**Sacred to the memory of Jacob Andrew Lewis Montgomery**

Died May 2 1873 Aged 39 Years 4 Months

Beloved Husband of ELSIE S MONTGOMERY born ROBERTS

As for man, his days are as grass, as a flower of the fields, so he flourish

For the wind passeth over it and it is gone, and the place thereof, shall...

Both this grave and Grave Two were plastered with bricks and mortar. The skeletal remains of Montgomery were in a very good condition with only the ribs, vertebrae, and some of the finger and toe bones poorly preserved. The remains were found at a depth of more than 2 metres, and the complete skeleton could not be exposed as a result of the concrete floor placed over the area by the developer. The tibiae and feet extended into the wall of the burial pit, and were only removed after photographic documenting was completed. This was also the case with Grave Two.

Cultural remains recovered from the grave included: fragments of coffin wood, coffin nails and screws, and a single white shell button recovered from the right wrist of the individual. This may have been from the cuff of the shirt he was buried in. He was buried with his arms extended along his sides.

Some archival documents refer to him as Jacob Andries Louis Montgomery.<sup>8</sup> One can safely assume that the spelling of the names on the grave, Jacob Andrew Lewis Montgomery, is correct. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century few people in the former South African Republic (ZAR or Transvaal Republic) were able to spell properly and it was typical to translate English names into Dutch.<sup>9</sup>

JAL Montgomery was born in January 1835 at Smith River in the Cradock district. He was the son of John Montgomery and Susanna Jacoba van Zyl. It is not known when he moved to the Marico area. He was a farmer who owned the farm *Uitkyk*, but his portion of the farm was known as *Montgomery's Hope*. In 1871 and 1872 he was the Member of Parliament for the town of Potchefstroom.<sup>10</sup>

It is known that Montgomery was the first *Landdrost* (Justice of the Peace) of the town Zeerust. Numerous archival documents show that he was involved in state affairs since at least 1869 and that he was indeed the Justice of the Peace for the district of Marico and seated in this town. He seems to have played an important role in the Marico area even before the establishment of the town of Zeerust.

At some point he was the Acting Field Cornet (an administrative military rank). This was probably for the ward of Marico, as it was not yet a district. In those days districts were divided into wards. During this time, on 2 September 1869, he requested that Zeerust obtain its own Justice of the Peace.<sup>11</sup> It is interesting that the name Zeerust is mentioned, as the town was only established in 1872.<sup>12</sup> This is due to the fact that a settlement had already been established there (see later).

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8 National Archive of South Africa (NASA), Pretoria, Transvaal Archive (TA), Master of the High Court (MHG), Vol. 0/01, Reference 01/ 0/4: Will of J Montgomery, 1873.

9 AC van Vollenhoven, *Historical background on graves from plot 1242, Voortrekker Street, Zeerust* (Unpublished report, Wonderboompoort, Archaeos, 2007), p. 1.

10 H Rex, *Die voorgeskiedenis en geskiedenis van die Nederduitsch Hervormde gemeente Zeerust (Marico) vanaf die predikantskap van Ds. Daniël Lindley (1840-1844) tot dié van Ds. Samuel Young (1947-1971)* (Pretoria, NHW Pers, 1971), p. 189.

11 NASA, Pretoria, TA, Office of the State Secretary (SS), Vol. 113, 01, Reference R1013/69, Letter, J Montgomery/ State Secretary, 2 September 1869.

12 JS Bergh (ed), *Geskiedenisatlas van Suid-Afrika. Die vier Noordelike Provinsies* (Pretoria, JL van Schaik, 1999), p. 20.

Montgomery delivered regulations for the town of Zeerust to the State Secretary on 6 September 1871.<sup>13</sup> It was however only on 26 September 1871, that a formal request was made to the Government for the establishment of this town. The Secretary of the House of Parliament of the South African Republic (old Transvaal Government) indicated that Montgomery and a Mr Jeppe wanted to present a memorandum to the House in which they asked for the establishment of a new town, called Zeerust.<sup>14</sup> This is also very interesting as his name is rarely mentioned when the establishment of the town is discussed, whereas Diederik Jacobus Coetzee is commonly mentioned.

CB Otto requested, a day later, that Montgomery be proposed as Justice of the Peace for the Marico district.<sup>15</sup> This was probably in preparation for the establishment of the district as the district of Marico, was only established in 1872.<sup>16</sup>

Montgomery was a member of different commissions regarding various issues, such as land affairs. Proof that he had been an active and outstanding citizen can also be deduced from various other documents. One of these indicates that the Justice of the Peace (of the ward of Marico) requested on 19 February 1872 that Montgomery be appointed in a similar position (likely for the district of Marico).<sup>17</sup> The letter proves that Montgomery was regarded as a leader and someone with the ability to administer a new district, indicating his importance as a local historical figure. On 21 February of the same year it was also requested that he be appointed as the representative in Marico for the Orphan Master.<sup>18</sup>

These requests were successful as he accepted the position as the first Justice of the Peace for Zeerust on 4 July 1872.<sup>19</sup> Although the document indicates that he was appointed for Zeerust, it actually only means that he was seated at Zeerust as the position was linked to an entire district and Zeerust was the main town in the Marico district. On 6 July 1872 he requested the necessary support to furnish his office in the Marico.<sup>20</sup>

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13 NASA, TA, SS, Vol. 135, 01, Reference R954/71, Regulations for the town of Zeerust, 6 September 1871.

14 NASA, TA, SS, Vol. 139, 01, Reference SUPL70/71, Notice, State Secretary/House of Parliament, 26 September 1871; NASA, TA, SS, Vol. 136, 01, Reference R1056/71, Notice, J Montgomery/State Secretary, 26 September 1871.

15 NASA, TA, SS, Vol. 136, 01, Reference R1057/71, Letter, CB Otto/State Secretary, 27 September 1871.

16 JS Bergh, "Administratiewe en ruimtelike ordening. Grense, distrikte en dorpe, 1860-86", JS Bergh (ed), *Geskiedenisatlas van Suid-Afrika. Die vier Noordelike Provinsies* (Pretoria, JL van Schaik, 1999), p. 20.

17 NASA, TA, SS, Vol. 141, 01, Reference R300/72, Letter, TWD Morkel (Justice-of-peace)/State Secretary, 19 February 1872.

18 NASA, TA, SS, Vol. 141, 01, Reference R253/72, Letter, Orphan Master/State Secretary, 21 February 1872.

19 NASA, TA, SS, Vol. 145, 01, Reference R839/72, Notice of JAL Montgomery being ready to be sworn in as Justice-of-peace, 4 July 1872.

20 NASA, TA, SS, Vol. 145, 01, Reference R847/72, Letter, JAL Montgomery/State Secretary, 6 July 1872.

Unfortunately JAL Montgomery was not in office for very long. The date on his tombstone indicates that he died at the age of 39 years, on 2 May 1873. The official notice of his death was given by JE Hutten as 6 May 1873.<sup>21</sup> The last document in the archives regarding him is one indicating that his surviving spouse was Elsje Susanna Montgomery, née Robberts.<sup>22</sup> Her names on his grave are indicated as being Elsie S Montgomery.

It is interesting to note that his estate was handled by JE Hutton and DJ Coetzee as both these persons are associated with Montgomery. His son, John Henry Montgomery born in 1844 (sic) later got married to the daughter of DJ Coetzee, Maria Isabella. After the death of Montgomery, Hutton became the second landdrost for Zeerust.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Grave of CS Dickinson***

Grave Two, that belongs to Catherine Sarah Dickinson has a tombstone, made of slate and has the following inscription:

**Sacred to the memory of Catherine Sarah Dickinson**

The Beloved Wife of George Dickinson Born 23 November 1837

Died on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1876 Aged 38 Years 9 Months

Unveil thy bosom, faithful tomb take this new treasure to thy trust

And give these sacred relics room awhile to slumber in the dust

J Harley Potchefstroom

Her remains were in a similarly good condition as those of Montgomery, and found at a depth of around 1.60 metres. She was buried with her arms folded over her chest. Cultural remains recovered from her grave included some coffin screws, brass/copper buttons or eyes, which may originate from clothing, and a small silver pin.

Catherine Sarah Dickinson was the wife of George Dickinson. The tombstone indicates that she was born on 23 November 1837 and that she died on 1 August 1876.

There is only one document in the National Archives regarding her. In this document her names are also translated into Dutch. It is also notable that she

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21 NASA, TA, SS, Vol. 156, 01, Reference R685/73, Death notice of J Montgomery, 6 May 1873.

22 NASA, TA, MHG, Vol. 0, 01, Reference 0/4, Will of J Montgomery, 1873.

23 H Rex, *Die voorgeskiedenis en geskiedenis van die Nederduitsch Hervormde gemeente Zeerust...*, p. 189.

is indicated as being Sarah Catharina instead of Catherine Sarah, born Reid.<sup>24</sup> This document, dated 1876, also indicates her husband as being George Dickinson.

Two documents were found in the archives regarding her husband. The first document indicates that he was also involved in state affairs. The document, dated 22 February 1872, states that DJ Coetzee, J Bekker and G Dickinson from Zeerust reported that it was in order for their commission to start operating from an office in Zeerust.<sup>25</sup> The second document is a letter, dated 20 October 1876, from G Dickinson and others from Zeerust objecting to the introduction of a war tax.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Grave of CH Coetzee***

Grave Three is that of Casper Hendrik Coetzee, the brother-in-law of Diederik Jacobus Coetzee, the man mainly credited for the establishment of Zeerust. The headstone on the grave CH Coetzee indicates him as being a co-founder of the town of Zeerust. This stone was placed on the grave in 1948 by the Burger Graves Committee. The inscription on his headstone is as follows:

Ter Gedagtenis aan Casper H. Coetzee  
Medestigter van die Dorp Zeerust  
Opgerig deur die Sentrale Burgergraftekomitee 1948

[In Remembrance of Casper H. Coetzee  
Co-founder of the Town Zeerust  
Erected by the Central Burger Graves Committee 1948]

No skeletal remains were recovered from the grave and the excavation was stopped at a depth of around 2.10 metres on a sterile hard layer. The only cultural remains recovered from the grave, and fairly high up in the excavation, was a small piece of porcelain and a small bone fragment. It was not possible to determine whether this bone fragment had a human origin as it was too small.

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24 NASA, TA, MHG, Vol. 0, 01, Reference 0/597, Will of G Dickinson, 1876.

25 NASA, TA, SS, Vol. 158, 01, Reference R515/75, Letter, G Dickinson and others/State Secretary, 22 May 1875.

26 NASA, TA, SS, Vol. 158218, 01, Reference R2871/76, Letter, G Dickinson and others/State Secretary, 20 October 1876.

Although no human remains were found, family members indicated that this was indeed the position of the grave.<sup>27</sup> In such cases a soil sample is taken. This was done and with the consent of the descendants it was reburied next to the grave of Diederik Coetzee, who is indicated as being the founder of Zeerust, outside the town.

Not much is known about CH Coetzee and the headstone on his grave does not indicate the dates of his birth or death. The few archival documents referring to him do not shed light on his life and actions. It is known that he owned the farm *Hazenjacht*, which he had bought in 1858 from a certain person called Rickers. The name of the farm originally was *Sefathlani*.<sup>28</sup> Coetzee died on 27 May 1865.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Connections of the deceased with the town of Zeerust, and the district of Marico***

The Marico area has been recognised since 1851 when JA Enslin was appointed as Commander General for this area.<sup>30</sup> Diederik Jacobus Coetzee received approval from the Government in 1858 to establish a town on his farm *Nooitgedacht* in the Klein Marico area. He was, unfortunately, unsuccessful in implementing it. Agitation for a town to be established there nevertheless continued.<sup>31</sup>

The Government also tried to establish a town at the nearby Moilastat, but after many attempts this was unsuccessful. When CH Coetzee died in 1865, his farm, *Hazenjacht*, was bought from his estate by his brother-in-law, DJ (Diederik Jacobus) Coetzee. This made the establishment of a town possible. The town of Zeerust was named after CH Coetzee, brother-in-law of DJ Coetzee.<sup>32</sup> Coetzee succeeded in obtaining permission for *Hazenjacht* to become a town and he even started selling plots in 1867. In 1870 TWD

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27 G Hartmann (Personal collection), interview, G Hartmann (Descendant of CH Coetzee) / AC van Vollenhoven (Director Archaetnos), 13 February 2008.

28 Anon., *Die ontstaan van Zeerust*. (n.p., n.d.), p. 5; Anon., *Geskiedenis van die dorp Zeerust en hoe die naam ontstaan het*, (n.p., n.d.), p. 5.

29 H Rex, *Die voorgeskiedenis en geskiedenis van die Nederduitsch Hervormde gemeente Zeerust...*, pp. 174-175.

30 JS Bergh & OJO Ferreira, "Administratiewe en ruimtelike ordening. Grense, distrikte en dorpe tot 1860", JS Bergh (ed.), *Geskiedenisatlas van Suid-Afrika...*, p. 134; H Rex, *Die voorgeskiedenis en geskiedenis van die Nederduitsch Hervormde gemeente Zeerust...*, p. 174.

31 H Rex, *Die voorgeskiedenis en geskiedenis van die Nederduitsch Hervormde gemeente Zeerust...*, p. 174.

32 Anon., *Die ontstaan van Zeerust*, p. 1; Anon., *Geskiedenis van die dorp Zeerust...*, p. 1; H Rex, *Die voorgeskiedenis en geskiedenis van die Nederduitsch Hervormde gemeente Zeerust...*, p. 175.

Morkel was appointed Justice of the Peace for the ward of Marico. This led to requests that the ward be made a district with its own Justice of the Peace.<sup>33</sup>

On 30 October 1871 the House of Parliament decided that Marico should become a separate district and that a landdrost should be appointed. This was formalised by a proclamation on 24 February 1872.<sup>34</sup> Zeerust was formally established as a town and Montgomery became the first Justice of the Peace.<sup>35</sup> The House of Parliament decided that the people should vote to elect either JAL Montgomery or DJ Coetzee for this position.<sup>36</sup> Apart from the support for Montgomery, mentioned above, a petition in support of Coetzee was also drawn up.<sup>37</sup> In the election Montgomery received 133 votes and Coetzee 67.<sup>38</sup> Montgomery therefore became the first landdrost.<sup>39</sup>

From the above-mentioned information there does not always seem to be a clear distinction between the town of Zeerust and the district of Marico. The establishment of the town and that of the district goes hand in hand, but strictly speaking it would be correct to say that Zeerust was the seat for the district of Marico, established in 1872.

### ***The Freemasons connection***

The *El Dorado Lodge* of the Freemasons was established in Zeerust in February 1892.<sup>40</sup> The Freemasons symbol is indicated on the tombstone of JAL Montgomery. He was a member of the society, but died before a lodge could be established in the town. It is interesting that the graves were found on the site where the *El Dorado Lodge* is situated. It may be coincidence, but it is also possible that this plot was donated to the Freemasons because of the grave of a former member being situated there.

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33 NASA, TA, SS, Vol. 128, 01, Reference R1481/70, Letter, DJ Coetzee and others/State Secretary, 25 November 1870; JS Bergh, "Administratiewe en ruimtelike ordening...", JS Bergh (ed.), *Geskiedenisatlas van Suid-Afrika...*, p. 143.

34 JS Bergh, "Administratiewe en ruimtelike ordening...", JS Bergh (ed.), *Geskiedenisatlas van Suid-Afrika...*, p. 140; H Rex, *Die voorgeskiedenis en geskiedenis van die Nederduitsch Hervormde gemeente Zeerust...*, pp. 187.

35 JS Bergh, "Administratiewe en ruimtelike ordening...", JS Bergh (ed.), *Geskiedenisatlas van Suid-Afrika...*, p. 143.

36 H Rex, *Die voorgeskiedenis en geskiedenis van die Nederduitsch Hervormde gemeente Zeerust...*, p. 187.

37 NASA, TA, SS, Vol. 134, 01, Reference 723/71, Letter, HP Beukes and others/State Secretary, 14 March 1870.

38 H Rex, *Die voorgeskiedenis en geskiedenis van die Nederduitsch Hervormde gemeente Zeerust...*, p. 189.

39 JS Bergh, "Administratiewe en ruimtelike ordening...", JS Bergh (ed.), *Geskiedenisatlas van Suid-Afrika...*, p. 143.

40 LB Verster, *The El Dorado Lodge, no 2314 EC Zeerust, Republic of South Africa. An overview of the lodge after 100 years February 1892 to February 1992* (available at <http://eldoradolodge.blogspot.co.za/>, as accessed on 31 December 2015), p. 1.

## Conclusion

The value and available historical context regarding the individuals whose desecrated graves were being investigated is extremely important. Although it is impossible to fully restore the dignity of these people, their proper reburial and establishment of their history provides some dignity and restoration of their life. When realizing who they were in life, it provides a legacy for the future.

The Zeerust case study may have a unique background, but the exhumation and relocation of graves is relatively common practice in South Africa today. It results from the progress being made to improve the management of the cultural heritage. Although developers used to disregard heritage, as happened in this case, it seems as if this is decreasing. Thus, heritage practitioners and the community needs to be vigilant to sustain the progress that has been made. This will go a long way to prevent a reoccurrence of the events described in this article.

Regardless of the sensitivity regarding graves, the relocation thereof sometimes is the most appropriate way of restoring some dignity to the buried individuals. Therefore the grave relocation process referred to above, was developed by SAHRA to manage this. Over the last number of years this also resulted in the reburial of historical and archaeological graves, previously hosted in research collections as the restitution and relocation of human remains is seen as one way of correcting the wrong-doings of the past.<sup>41</sup>

The burial site uncovered in Prestwich Street, Cape Town, is perhaps the best known example where Archaeology and History were used to restore the dignity of buried individuals. Development projects at the Waterfront, led to the discovery of a large cemetery mostly containing slaves. After extensive social consultation, the site was excavated, the remains carefully catalogued, studied and eventually placed inside of a chamber in the memorial. By doing this these people have now been celebrated, and the presentation of research results provide some acknowledgement of these people.<sup>42</sup>

Similarly graves exhumed and relocated from the Du Preezhoek cemetery to the old cemetery in Pretoria, provided insight in 19<sup>th</sup> Century pioneer

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41 M Steyn, AG Morris, MN Mosothwane, WC Nienaber & GJR Maat, "Opening the cupboard – lessons in biology and history from African skeletons", *South African Archaeological Society Goodwin Series*, 11, 2013, pp. 1-5.

42 E Finnegan, T Hart and D Halkett, "The 'informal' burial ground at Prestwich street, Cape Town: Cultural and chronological indicators for the historical Cape underclass", *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 66(194), 2011, pp. 136-148.

history,<sup>43</sup> and that of Chinese labourers on the Witwatersrand, provided a glimpse into this forgotten past<sup>44</sup> The reburial of the Mapungubwe human remains provided recognition to indigenous people of the importance of their ancestors and their contribution towards history.<sup>45</sup>

Sometimes legends are being exposed by the exhumation of individuals, such as was the case with King Mgolombande Sandile Ngqika in the Eastern Cape. Legend has it that he was beheaded and that his head was taken as trophy to England. It was however found intact in his grave. This contributed to the ending of embarrassing speculations in traditional circles.<sup>46</sup>

In some instances the methodology is being critically reviewed in order to expose loopholes and improve the protection of graves and the descendants of the deceased.<sup>47</sup> The restoration of dignity therefore not only has bearing on the deceased, but also on their living relatives.

In the Zeerust case elements of all of the mentioned issues were present. The historical information on people who may have been easily forgotten, provides an acknowledgement of their role in history and recognises them as important historical figures. It further more provided insight into their lives and the establishment of Zeerust. Perhaps it even exposes a bit of a myth that DJ Coetzee was the sole founder of the town, as the three people discussed in this article, also played a vital role.

It is clearly demonstrated in the article that JAL Montgomery was an important historical figure in the history of the town of Zeerust as well as the Marico district. He definitely deserves the same respect as DJ Coetzee, whose grave is indicated by tourist information signs in the town. Such an important historical figure does not deserve to be forgotten and it is a sad state of affairs that his grave was desecrated.

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43 A Meyer, "The skeletal remains of Du Preezhoek, Pretoria, South Africa", *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 64(190), 2009, pp. 156-165.

44 A Meyer, M Steyn & AG Morris, "Chinese indentured labour on the Witwatersrand mines, South Africa (AD 1904-1910): A bioarchaeological analysis of the skeletal remains of 36 Chinese miners", *South African Archaeological Society Goodwin Series*, 11, 2013, pp. 39-51.

45 WC Nienaber, N Keough, M Steyn & JH Meiring, "Reburial of the Mapungubwe human remains: An overview of process and procedure", *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 63(188), 2008, pp. 164-169.

46 WC Nienaber, M Steyn & L Hutten, "The grave of King Mgolombane Sandile Ngqika: Revisiting the legend", *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 63(187), 2008, pp. 46-50.

47 B Saccaggi & AB Esterhuysen, "Sekuruwe grave relocation' a lesson in process and practice", *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 69(200), 2014, pp. 173-181.

It is also clear that George Dickinson was an important figure in the early days of Zeerust. Therefore the grave and remains of his wife deserve similar respect.

The headstone of CH Coetzee's grave indicates that he was also involved in the establishment of the town. Although he died before that time, he may have been involved in initial talks in this regard. He should therefore receive the same respect, and his remains should not be left in the backyard of a shopping complex. Even if he did not play a role in the establishment of the town, Zeerust was established on his farm (after his death) and it appears as if the town was named after him. He therefore deserves the same respect as the other pioneers of the Zeerust area.

The examples given above indicates that a definite effort is made in South Africa to manage the reburial of human remains within the framework of heritage legislation. The remains of these three individuals were therefore treated with as much respect and in a similar fashion during the exhumation and reburial process. One can safely assume that should the necessary impact studies have been done, the relocation of these historical graves would never have been permitted, but rather the development would be amended. Unfortunately, the damage was done and thus the exhumation and reburial of these remains were the only option.

It would be just to minimize the desecration by reburial and provide a proper historical account on their lives. This was done and plaques were erected at their new resting places to memorialise them. The historical information on these plaques affords them some measure of the respect they deserve. Montgomery and Dickinson were reburied in the old Zeerust cemetery. The information also includes contextual information on their original burials and the inscription on the original headstones.

Jacob Andrew Lewis Montgomery now rests in Grave T126 and Catherine Sarah Dickinson in grave T127. Casper Hendrik Coetzee was reburied next to Diederik Jacobus Coetzee, in a family grave yard just outside and to the east of the town.

Image 2: The headstone of J Montgomery and C Dickinson (this being Montgomery's) was placed inside of the new grave as is common protocol if headstones cannot be re-used



Source: Photo by AC van Vollenhoven.

Image 3: The old and new information signs were erected at the new graves of J Montgomery and C Dickinson



Source Photo by AC van Vollenhoven.

Image 4: Casper H Coetzee was reburied next to his brother-in-law, Diederik J Coetzee. The headstone erected on his grave is the one placed on his original grave by the Burger Graves Committee in 1948. Also note the information plaque



Source: Photo by AC van Vollenhoven.