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PALACE BARRACKS

# Simon`s Town Provincial Heritage Site near collapse

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A FORMER national monument and current Provincial Heritage Site, the Palace Barracks in Simon`s Town, has become a shadow of its former self, with clear signs of collapse.

The two-storey building was built in 1785 on Palace Hill Road, Simon`s Town. The Palace Barracks was declared a national monument under the old National Monuments Council (NMC) legislation in 1971. The NMC has since been replaced by the South African Heritage Resources Agency (Sahra).

The Simon`s Town Historical Society`s Online Walking Tour said the Palace Barracks was acquired by wealthy property owner John Osmond in 1814, who due to his lavish entertaining, gained the title of “King John” and the building was known as his “palace”.

The building was later purchased by the British government as a headquarters for the Royal Engineers and became known as the Palace Barracks.

In 1899, it was converted to a hospital for Boer prisoners of war dying from enteric fever. The building was extensively restored in 2005, as naval officers` accommodation.

Sahra Built Environment Unit manager Ben Mwasinga said the former national monument was a Provincial Heritage Site.

“What that means is that it is under the jurisdiction of Heritage Western Cape, and it is indeed a protected building. The building was previously used as a military barracks, but that was in the 1700s. In the 1800s, it was then converted to a residential building. I think for the then governor,”



A PORTION of the Palace Barracks, built in 1785, in Simon`s Town has collapsed.

Mwasinga said.

All national monuments were converted into Provincial Heritage Sites under the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA) 25 of 1999.

“I am very disheartened by the fact that it`s in such a terrible state. The Western Cape has a well run and fully functional Provincial Heritage Authority (Heritage Western Cape, HWC).

“The Western Cape also has very active conservation bodies with people who are extremely passionate about conservation. The historical buildings

in the province are in generally good condition and are actively monitored as well.”

Heritage Western Cape CEO Michael Janse van Rensburg said HWC as the Provincial Heritage Authority was responsible for ensuring the proper management of Provincial Heritage Sites.

Van Rensburg said HWC was alerted to the collapse of a portion of the northern wall, and a site inspection was undertaken as an initial assessment of the damage.

“HWC has issued a compulsory repair order in terms of Section 45 of the NHRA to the national Department of Public Works and Infrastructure as the owner of the site on September 26, outlining the immediate measures that must be taken to secure the resource, and only after that will the further action that will be necessary to restore the resource by the department be established.”

Van Rensburg said HWC did not provide funding for the restoration or maintenance of sites.