Cultural informants for Harrington Square, District Six

Draft interim report for comment

Naomi Roux for Infinity Environmental | May 2026

Introduction

This report is work-in-progress framing of the cultural informants emerging from previous research and current public processes for the redevelopment of Harrington Square, District Six.

The current concept design process for Harrington Square follows on from previous participatory processes, and builds on the research and informants from the District Six Public Realm Strategy. It includes a Phase 1 Heritage Impact Assessment, running concurrently with a concept design process intended to more fully articulate the design needs, constraints and options for Harrington Square. This report intersects with both of these processes. As the public participation and design processes are still in early stages, this report should be read as an interim draft and not as a finalised document: it will evolve as the process unfolds, and should be seen as a suggested starting point for unravelling some of the cultural threads of Harrington Square rather than as a set of firm conclusions.

There have been extensive previous public participation processes to develop the District Six Public Realm Strategy, which includes a Culture and Memory Strategy for District Six. This document builds on the outcomes from this work, including the Culture and Memory Strategy's framing of District Six as a landscape of memory that calls for innovative, non-monumental, multi-sensory memorialisation.

Harrington Square was identified through the Public Realm Strategy as a key potential public space within District Six, in the context of restitution and returning communities. At present, it is a car park, an open space created through traumatic processes of forced removals and demolitions in the 1960s-70s. Unlike formal civic spaces like Church Square and Greenmarket Square, it was never designed to be a public space. This opens up room for new and different understandings of how public space operates and what it can do, including how it can support and hold multiple layers of historical memory and cultural practice alongside contemporary and future needs.

The area now called Harrington Square contained a church, homes, streets (which also functioned as public spaces), businesses and industries. Most material remnants of an extremely complex, multi-layered, contested and painful history have almost completely been erased, except for a few traces and remaining buildings. Harrington Square connects with layers of history, memory, and cultural practice that cover a time span predating colonial incursion, through the creation of Kanaladorp and District Six and the trauma of 20th-century forced removals, up to present-day debates about gentrification, restitution, and urban place-making. As a starting point for discussion and further development, this report suggests 13 cultural layers or themes which may inform the square's design in different ways.

Process and methodology

The draft report draws on the insights, materials and themes identified in the District Six Public Realm Strategy and the District Six Local Spatial Development Framework. It draws extensively on the 2024 Social History report prepared by Tracey Randle, supplemented by additional secondary research and, most crucially, insights from the current ongoing public participation process aimed at developing a concept design for the square.

To date, there have been two participatory events linked to this phase of the design process, which took place on 21 April and 9 May 2026. These will be supplemented by the planned heritage Open House in June 2026 and two additional design workshops in July-August 2026. Cultural themes and informants are emergent through this process and will continue to shape future drafts of this report.

This draft report should be read as a work-in-progress with an invitation for commentary and further development.

Themes from the socio-historical report

The 2024 social history report (Randle, 2024) provides a set of historical themes that have shaped the area now known as Harrington Square. Randle's identified socio-historical layers include:

- Water as connector to pre-colonial and indigenous history
- Foundation of a diverse Cape Town
- Cradled by iconic buildings
- Mixed residential and commercial character
- Freedom of religion
- A centre for Catholic faith
- Kanaladorp
- Holy Trinity Church and school
- A complex urban nexus
- Jewish immigrants
- Race and segregation
- Vibrant mixed-use urban character
- Apartheid planning, removal and destruction and resistance

These thematics provide a useful starting point for reading the layers of history and memory that have shaped Harrington Square, and to translate this history into cultural informants for inclusion in the current public space design process. This existing research has been supplemented by additional public processes and engagements, as well as desktop research to translate the socio-historical themes and contemporary layers into cultural informants for design. This report should be read in conjunction with Randle's socio-historical research.

Cultural informants

This draft report identifies 13 key cultural informants for Harrington Square:

1. **Water and land: precolonial histories, spiritual belonging**
2. **Slavery and emancipation**
3. **Stories of arrival, a foothold in the city**
4. **Religious and spiritual multiplicity**
5. **Domestic cultures, home and family life**
6. **Social connection, community-building practices**
7. **Children's lifeworlds, education, play**
8. **Commercial cultures: informal trade, shops, street traders, home industries**
9. **Theatre and performance space, creative cultures**
10. **Queer cultures and expression**
11. **Memories and experiences of forced removals**
12. **Street name stories (Canterbury, Harrington, Lamb's Lane)**
13. **Contemporary cultural layers**

1. Water and land: precolonial histories and spiritual belonging

Memories of water and ancient links between mountain, water, land and ocean are connected to indigenous histories and knowledge systems, colonial displacement and genocide, and spiritual and generational links to the land and its stories.

Background	**Informants & heritage values**
Hidden deep under the asphalt of Harrington Square is the remnant of a watercourse that runs from the slopes of Table Mountain towards the ocean. This stream was originally part of a network of fresh water from the Table Mountain aquifer, which fed the valleys and rivers at the mountain's foot and emptied into the ocean at what is today called Table Bay. It carved a deep ravine running towards the bay and was later named the Capelsloot. The memory of these watercourses is carried in the Kora name for Cape Town, ǁkhamis sa (or Camissa), meaning "sweet water for all" (Randle 2024). The water that connected mountain, land and sea was part of a rich, verdant landscape which supported indigenous transhumant practices and grazing lands prior to European colonisation of the Cape. When the Castle of Good Hope was built in the 17th century, the stream was diverted to fill the moat as part of the Castle's defensive structures. The water, in other words, became part of a system of boundaries and defences, closely connected with colonial land settlement and the displacement and eventual genocide of indigenous people in Table Bay and the Cape Peninsula. A short distance away in the Liesbeek Valley, the first Dutch land grants were made along the banks of the Liesbeek River, effectively forming the first colonial boundary and cutting indigenous people off from their historic grazing and travel routes. This boundary was the site of early segregationist	The presence of the hidden waterways, particularly the stream later known as the Capelsloot, are linked to deep historical connections to land, water, spiritual and material landscapes, and the movement of people. Access and connection to this landscape was severed by colonial incursion, as the water itself became shaped into a defensive landscape of moats, boundaries and controlled crossings in the early colony. The redevelopment of Harrington Square offers an opportunity to re-establish the visibility, form and historical memory of the waterway. The waterway is not just a physical feature or resource but connects with indigenous knowledge, ancestral memory and spiritual connections, and a larger story about the diversion and channeling of natural resources into the colonial project and the shaping of the city itself. The submerged waterway connects the iconic view of Table Mountain from Harrington Square to the presence of the sea and Table Bay to the north, a connection that is now visually severed but that long predates the presence of the city. It also invites a recovery of pathways and routes that would have been walked along

displacement and violence, and the flashpoint for the first Dutch-Khoi wars of the late 1650s.

The Company Gardens were initially laid out along the course of one the Camissa streams, with the garden's layout ultimately shaping the first urban grid and streets. Canterbury Row (now Canterbury Street) was built following the line of the stream's ravine, establishing its memory in the urban grid. Like many of the mountain waterways, the Capelsloot was diverted underground as part of the stormwater draining system in the early 19th century. However, its material memory persists in the layout of the city itself and the flow of movement of people and vehicles that unknowingly retrace these routes via the city streets.

its banks by people and their animals, both before VOC settlement and in the early years of the colony.

There is also an opportunity to reflect on the qualities of the landscape that predates the city's presence, through soft landscaping, greenery, organic forms and indigenous planting. If indigenous planting is considered, there is also an opportunity to draw on the intangible medicinal knowledge of the women of District Six: rooi laventel, wilde als, Alwyn, olieblaar and many more.

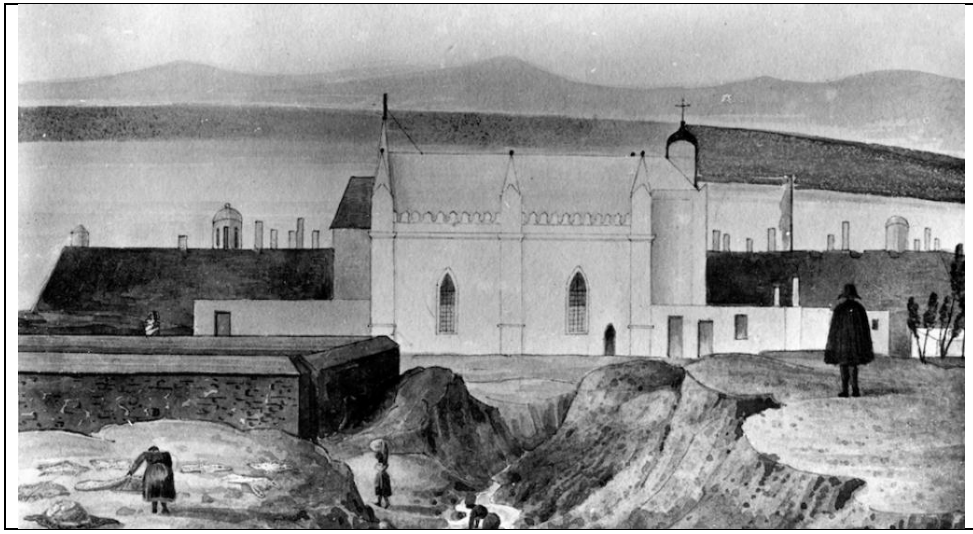
Map c.1700, showing the channeling of water from the mountain into canals and defensive moats as well as early farms and land grants in the area behind the Castle. (Dutch National Archives, VEL828)

2. Slavery and emancipation

From the washerwomen who worked and gathered at the Capelsloot to the first permanent residents of what eventually became District Six, the area around Harrington Square carries memories of slavery, women's labour, and post-emancipation stories of self-determination.

Background	**Informants & indicators**
The early formation of District Six, including the area around Harrington Square, is closely connected to histories of slavery in the Cape. The landscape "behind the Castle", as noted in Randle (2024) was well-traversed by a wide mix of people even while it stood beyond the formal boundaries of the early city. Like many of the city's waterways – the most well-known of which in this regard is probably Plattekloof Stream, further up the mountain – the Capelsloot was used by laundresses who would bring bundles of washing from homes and businesses down to the stream. This provided an otherwise rare opportunity for free and enslaved women to connect with one another. As Jordan (2006) has noted, enslaved women in domestic service generally had fewer opportunities than enslaved men to engage in public life and make connections with others; laundry was one of the few activities that allowed for a small measure of physical and social mobility. Loos (2004 p.22, cited in Randle 2024 p.16) notes that these social connections between free and slave women helped to foster a "common underclass culture". Jordan (2008) has also pointed out a generational connection via laundry and washhouses that draws a thread between this 19th century history, and memories of District Six. After publishing an article in *Muslim Views* about her archaeological research at Platteklip, she was contacted by several women with memories of mothers and aunts carrying laundry to the Hanover Street Washhouse in District Six, and women using washing to establish savings and keep families afloat.	Histories and memories of slavery and emancipation are closely connected to the hidden waterway that gave shape to Canterbury Street, alongside the associations with the water noted in Section 1 above. Treatment of the watercourse and/or its route needs to draw on and reflect this historical layer. The memory of the church's footprint (the Roman Catholic Church that predated Holy Trinity) also carries a tenuous link to slavery, through the practice of illegal baptisms. Histories of slavery and emancipation also shaped the materiality and character of the area known as Kanaldorp in the 1830s and 40s, setting the foundations for what would become District Six. The Harrington Square area connects in this sense to themes of self-determination and collective agency, as people carved out autonomous lives in the city and built community in the wake of slavery's abolition. Slavery is often a hidden layer in memorialisation in the city, so it is important that these histories are made visible and the Capelsloot's route is an opportunity to do so.

After emancipation in the 1830s, this land including the Harrington Square area became home to many formerly enslaved people, who established homes and livelihoods in the city. Some, as Randle (2024) points out, built homes near the farms they had worked at, including Zonnebloem. Many emancipated people established themselves as artisans, carrying skills that were passed down in families across generations. Randle (2024) also notes claims made in 1821 that the Roman Catholic Church's Father Scully, located on what is now Harrington Square, had been accused of illegally baptising enslaved people. At around this time, the area took on the name "Kanaladorp", until it was formally proclaimed District Six in the 1860s. The first formal settlement of Kanaldorp/District Six and the area around Harrington Square was established by emancipated and free people, soon joined by those arriving in the city from outlying farms and European immigrants. The early establishment of District Six, or its older name as Kanaladorp, is thus intrinsically linked to histories of slavery and emancipation.	The presence of washerwomen on the site also offers a link to women's histories in the Harrington Square area, which also connect thematically to the site of the Peninsula Maternity Hospital where many District Six residents were born. The hospital has been replaced by the District Six Clinic, incorporating a memory and art project and the surfacing of cultures of midwivery and medicinal knowledge. The link between the clinic and Harrington Square should be supported, including the need raised in public processes for a space to pause and rest for people coming from the clinic back into the city.

	*This c. 1824 painting by Henry Clifford de Meillon (WCARS M993) shows the presence of washerwomen in the Capelsluit, near the Catholic Church built on what is now Harrington Square in 1824.*

3. Arrivals, migrations and footholds

In the 19th century, the Harrington Square area became home to multiple waves of people looking to make a life and gain a foothold in the city, bringing a mix of cultures, beliefs and ways of being to the area. This cultural layer calls for a space that speaks to this history through a sense of welcome, comfort and arrival for all who use and pass through it.

Background	**Informants & indicators**
Well before the area "behind the Castle" was formally settled and the first homes and structures started to appear on it, it was a busy space of social mixing. In this open space at the edges of the city, enslaved and free people, soldiers, officials, merchants, the wealthy and the working class traversed and congregated here (Randle 2024).	The practice of new arrivals seeking a foothold in the city to build new lives and ways of being is not new to Cape Town, and remains an intrinsic part of how the city is shaped and experienced today. The key informants linked to this cultural/historical layer is in the idea of *arrival* and *footholds*. This intersects with needs articulated in the public process for Harrington Square's redesign which have called for a

As the 19th century city outgrew its borders and spread beyond Buitenkant towards what is now Harrington, Canterbury and Caledon Streets, the area around Harrington Square became home to multiple waves of new arrivals and migrants, alongside early communities of freed slaves, business owners and urban residents. Worden (1998) notes the arrival between the 1820s and 1840s of Irish and Scottish immigrants, fleeing poverty and seeking new lives in the British colonies. Many settled in what would later become District Six, in the shadow of the Roman Catholic Church that once stood on what is now Harrington Square and for a brief time giving the area the name "Irish Town". These new immigrants joined a growing population of emancipated slaves and new urban arrivals, in the absence of residential segregation. This created a new, densely populated and culturally, racially and religiously mixed area beyond the historic boundaries of the city, sowing the seeds for what would become District Six. From the 1880s, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe added a new cultural layer to District Six – explored further below in Section 4, Religious Freedom and Spiritual Multiplicity.	reimagining as a site of welcome, where *all* people who use and traverse the space can feel a sense of belonging: "From the smallest baby to the oldest granny". The site's design needs to support this sense of arrival and belonging. This is also linked with the sense described in Section 13 below, of Harrington Square as a gateway or connecting point between different parts of the city. It has the potential to offer a moment of pause, a comfortable seat and a sense of welcome to everyone: urban workers, clinic visitors, children and their parents, new arrivals to the city, returning communities in housing restitution projects, and many more. To support this, it is important that the use and design of the square remains non-transactional, in other words that nobody should have to spend money in order to belong or use it (for example, a commercial market or private events). A multitude of different uses is supported but the overall sense should be a space where anyone and everyone is welcome to sit, walk through, use amenities and facilities, and spend time.

This drawing by Charles D'Oyly provides a small sense of the range of people populating and using this part of the city by the 1830s: soldiers, merchants, traders, migrants, workers, children, enslaved people and indigenous people. The spires of the Catholic Church mark the location of Harrington Square to the middle right.

Charles D'Oyly, View of the Catholic Chapel from the Suburbs of Cape Town, pen drawing, 1832 (Plate 15 in Balkema 1968)

4. Religious freedom and spiritual multiplicity

The footprint of the demolished church on Harrington Square, while a contentious site in its own right, offers a link to a deeper story of diverse and inclusive religious practice and spiritual beliefs in District Six.

Background	**Informants & indicators**
Closely connected with Section 3, Arrivals and Footholds, is the theme of religious freedom and spiritual multiplicity. Through the 19th century, the area around Harrington Square became home to many layers of religious practice and belief, some of them converging within Harrington Square itself.	There are many important religious spaces, cultures and narratives that have played out in and around the Harrington Square area. These have fundamentally shaped not only District Six but the city as a whole, and also intersect with other cultural themes and

Up to 1804, the Dutch Reformed Church was the only sanctioned religion at the Cape and other practices – including Catholicism and Islam – had to be practiced in secret. De Mist's declaration of religious freedom opened the way for new places of worship to be built and for existing religious multiplicity to become increasingly visible in the city. This period saw the growth in particular of different Christian practices as well as the cementing of Islam as a major religion in the Cape (Randle 2024). The Catholic Church was built in 1824, under the direction of Father Patrick Scully who had been representing the Church in Cape Town since 1820. Worden (1998) notes that it mainly served Scottish and Irish troops and those living around "Irish Town", serving "a distinctly poorer community than other denominations". The church building collapsed in 1837, and in 1846 the Anglican Holy Trinity Church was built in more or less the same place. Holy Trinity was associated with a breakaway from St George's Cathedral and while the building remained in place until 1970, the congregation dwindled as racial segregation took hold. Holy Trinity established a new church in Gardens in 1970 and the building was demolished following the District Six forced removals. Although not on Harrington Square itself, District Six was (and remains) home to several mosques and was strong centre of Islamic faith. Surviving mosques like Al Azhar (founded in 1887) and Zeenatul Islam (founded in the early 1900s) act as connections in the present to these strong cultural threads. Jewish religious and cultural presence was also strongly felt in District Six from the 1880s with the arrival of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, many from Lithuania, Poland and Russia. Many settled in central urban areas including District Six which was affordable and accessible, and	narratives around cultural diversity, inclusivity and multiplicity. However, this history is also complicated and contested. For example, an architectural/archaeological approach may suggest marking the footprints of the Holy Trinity Church as a way to make this history visible. However, as has emerged through the public participation process, the church is also connected to painful histories of segregation and racism as it began to exclude congregants who were not white as apartheid took root the 1940s and is not necessarily remembered with fondness or nostalgia for this reason. The cultural thread of religious multiplicity connects strongly, however, to themes of diversity, connection and belonging as informants for the square's redesign. In memoirs, oral histories and within the public participation process for Harrington Square's design, many District Six residents recall strong cultures of religious mixing and sharing within District Six, including shared foods and religious celebrations, especially between children. While the church is historically significant, and it perhaps offers a symbolic link to cultures of religious diversity, these practices of sharing, tolerance and multiplicity are much stronger informants than the church itself (or any specific religious practices).

quickly established strong communities and new synagogues. The Beth Hamidrash in Constitution Street dates to 1897. Over time, many came to own properties and businesses in District Six, including the famed Beinkinstadt Books (today Charly's Bakery on Harrington Square). Hislop's (2026) report on property ownership on Harrington Square also shows high levels of Jewish business and property ownership in this area specifically.	

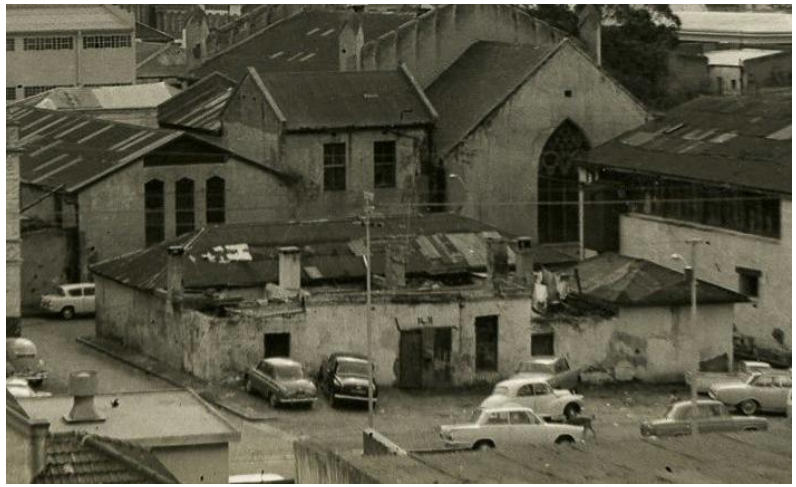
5. Domestic cultures, home and family life

While Harrington Square was occupied mostly by the church and commercial buildings, it also included homes – many dating back to the 19th century. The memory of these homes connect to domestic cultures and practices, and invite the creation of new spaces for families to gather and connect on the square.

Background	**Informants & indicators**
The area in and around Harrington Square, particularly after the Catholic Church was built in the 1820s, included several homes. These were not large or ostentatious mansions, like Harington House a short distance away in Darling Street: they were mostly row or semi-detached housing, nestled in between the church and a network of shops, stores and workshops. Snow's 1862 map indicates homes with small yards arranged along the outer edges of the block on which Holy Trinity Chapel stood. By the 1940s, some of these remained in place while others had been replaced with commercial buildings or had been turned into small shops. There is also a double row of housing nearby along Primrose and Canterbury Streets to the north-east – not part of Harrington Square itself but part of the domestic fabric of the area. All of the domestic housing in and around Harrington Square was demolished during the forced removals of the 1960s-70.	As envisaged, Harrington Square will become a public space in an open square – a very different proposition to its previous life as a network of streets, homes, businesses and religious buildings. Unlike other civic public squares in the city such as Church Square or Greenmarket Square, Harrington Square was never designed or intended to be a formal public space. It has been created through a process of forced removal and erasure of what was once here, and is now intended for recreation as a designed public space that holds the memory of District Six. Given its unique nature and history, it is important that these ordinary spaces of domestic practice, intimacy and connection should not be forgotten and need to

The presence of these homes connects Harrington Square to domestic cultures and family life, which many former residents recall as especially important in the tight-knit community environment of District Six. One participant in the public participation meetings, on a walk around Harrington Square, recalled that "family was the centre of everything": she explained that extended families often lived together or near each other, and children grew up in extended networks of aunties, uncles, grandparents and cousins. Everyday domestic practices of sharing food, supporting family and neighbours, visiting one another, creating comfortable home spaces, sharing resources and religious practices within the home created an immensely important sense of identity, belonging and safety. Linda Fortune (1996, p6-7) recalls that in a typical District Six family house "the long passage, where lace curtains, seldom drawn, could shield the intimate scene in the small, compact kitchen at the end, was found in most houses. Front doors were seldom locked, and neighbours and friends rarely knocked." At the time of the demolitions, there were homes at numbers 9-15 Glynndale Street and 76-82 Caledon Street, a "dwelling" next to Beinkinstadt Books, and possibly also homes in the previous church rectory facing onto Harrington Street. Hislop (2026) has traced the known ownership and tenancy of the buildings on Harrington Square, but many of the details of domestic spaces are unavailable. The only tenancies identified in 1965, just before District Six's declaration as a White Group Area, include a Mrs C. Cullen and a C. Holt at 49 and 51 Harrington respectively (the church rectory semi-detached); and City Meat Market Stores at 78 Caledon, indicating that some houses had by this time been transformed into smaller shops. It is not recorded who lived in the houses on Glynndale Street or the houses neighbouring the City Meat Market on Caledon.	find expression in the square despite its intended 'publicness'. This cultural thread opens up possibilities to design spaces that are public but that also invite new forms of family connection and leisure. This may include more intimate spaces that operate alongside larger spaces designed for gathering or events, enabling a sense of semi-privacy and marking these intimate histories of home. It is also crucial to design with the needs of families in mind, closely linked to Section 7 below (Children's Lifeworlds). This may include space for family gatherings, picnics and other leisure and connective uses, rather than flattening the site into one large shared space (or for these uses to find a way to co-exist). The notion of intimacy, family and interpersonal connection also connects to the networked spaces of streets and stoeps, and their historical value as public and semi-public spaces. This is especially important when considering the square's orientation towards returning communities and descendants, as a means of reinscribing family life and cultures into a space where these networks and practices were so brutally halted with the removals.

Left: Snow (1868) map, showing housing at the edges of the square along Constitution, Glynndale and a small block on Caledon. There is also a "dwelling" marked alongside Beinkinstadt Books, and the semi-detached homes in the converted church rectory along Harrington Street. (City of Cape Town Map Viewer)
Right: 480 series map (1944-1966), showing remaining houses along Glynndale and on Caledon Street, plus nearby further north on Canterbury and Primrose. (City of Cape Town Map Viewer)



Left: detail of photograph looking up Glynndale Street towards Beinkinstadt Books, showing the small block of row housing to the left. (Wissema, c.1970s, reproduced in Rennnie Scurr Adendorff Heritage Scoping Report, 2024)
Right: detail of view of Harrington Square c.1970, showing the old rectory building of the church, by this time fallen into disrepair. (District Six Museum, reproduced in Hislop 2026).

6. Connecting and community-building practices

Recollections of District Six are often framed in terms of a close-knit, supportive community held together by everyday practices of support and connection that enabled everyday survival and provided a sense of safety and belonging. Harrington Square is an opportunity to foster and support this sense of belonging and connection for all who use it, including returning communities.

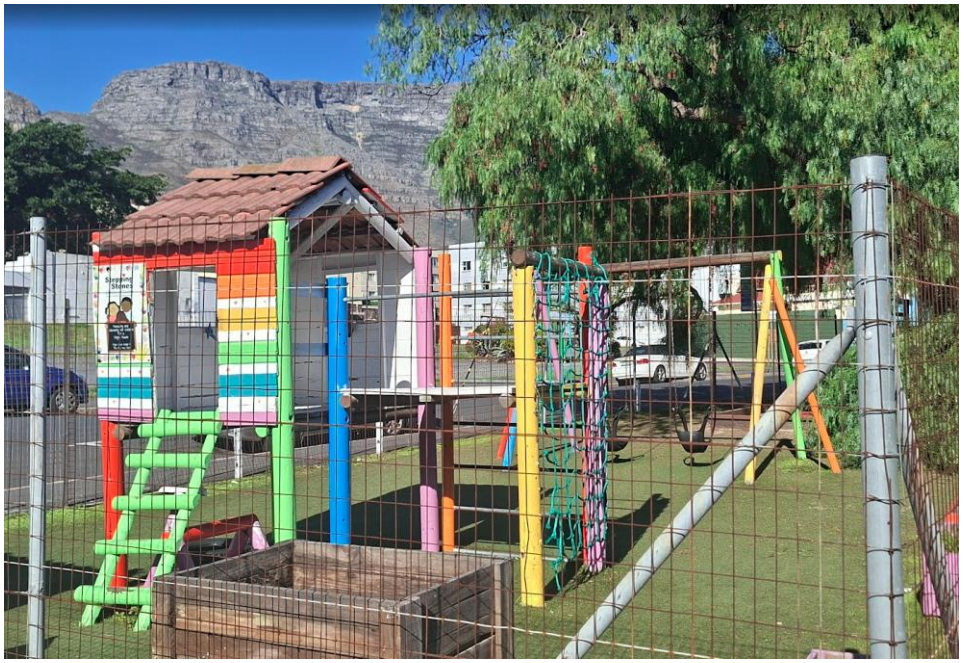
Background	**Informants & indicators**
Memoirs and oral histories of District Six, including many of the recollections emerging in the public participation process for Harrington Square, are rich with descriptions and memories of the tight-knit sense of community of District Six. Often, these memories are juxtaposed with the sense of disconnection and dislocation that followed forced removals to what one participant refers to as "the wasteland" of the Cape Flats. On a walk around Harrington Square in May 2026, one of the participants in the participatory design process recalled that "apartheid began on Buitenkant Street". In other words, District Six functioned as something of a haven and a place of safety and autonomy under the brutality of apartheid and segregation. Noor Ebrahim (1999, p.16), for example, describes a community that "lived together in great harmony" before the shock of forced removals, where if a family was struggling, neighbours would always step in to help: "The people of District Six shared and cared for each other in this way, no matter what colour the were". Irwin Combrinck (2001, p.9) has described this sense of community as a matter of survival, which required "close relationships with their neighbours, in what has been described as a 'helpmekaar' or 'kanala' spirit."	These and similar memories do not mean that life was always completely harmonious, or that there were no moments of discord, exclusion and tension. However, this culture of mutual support and community-building is present across recollections of District Six and what it meant to those who lived here. These practices of mutual support and community building are a key cultural thread and informant for any future development in the area. As a cultural informant for design, this thread is connected in general terms to District Six and not necessarily to the cadastral boundaries or specific spaces within Harrington Square. However, its importance in the history of District Six makes it a crucial informant for design, especially in the context of a public space intended to also serve returning communities. This cultural and memory thread calls for a space which encourages, supports and enables places of connection, at different scales and levels: from the small and interpersonal to larger events (including events hosted by the District Six Museum and other bearers of memory). It also connects to a need articulated through several cultural themes for a space that is accessible, inclusive and non-transactional.

7. Children's lifeworlds, play and learning

Children have been strongly present on Harrington Square for at least 200 years, from the early church school through the street-as-playground of District Six and the presence of Stepping Stones on the square today.

Background	**Informants & indicators**
Children have been actively present on the Square for over two centuries. The Catholic church and Holy Trinity both had schools attached, the best known of which is Mr Lamb's School at Holy Trinity. (Glynndale Street was previously called "Lamb's Lane" after this.) The school served around 200 children, both coloured and white, and so was inclusive to a certain point (as there were certainly African families and children in District Six at this time, and right up to the 1970s – Nomvuyo Ngcelwane (1998) has written on the experiences of black families in District Six prior to forced removals).One participant in the public participation process has traced their family's presence in the direct area via an ancestor's childhood vaccination records from 1895, administered at the corner of Caledon and Harrington Streets. In District Six, the street served as public space and play space for children. One former resident in the participatory design process recalled that "District Six always echoed with the sound of little children", who would often treat the streets as a playground for hopscotch, kennetjie, and many other games. Many photographs of District Six include images of children, including at least one taken on what is now Harrington Square which indicates that while there were not a huge number of homes on the block, children remained present here throughout. The presence of children also invites a connection to themes of intergenerational sharing and storytelling cultures. The same participant recalls the family gathering around the radio in the evenings, as well as	Inviting play and social space for children is a crucial informant for the square, both as a continuation of historical patterns and current usage. This theme provides a link between the children who have been present on the square for over 200 years, and children of Cape Town's inner city today with a general lack of urban spaces for children's play, imagining, connection and rest. At present, this cultural connection is carried by the presence of Stepping Stones and the small play space carved out of the eastern side of Harrington Square. Stepping Stones should not lose access to safe space for the children in their care and their inclusion in public design processes is vital. However, there is an opportunity here for design and public space oriented towards children and their needs and perspectives, who are often not strongly considered in public space design. This also connects strongly to domestic cultures and family life, as noted in Section 5 above. This thread, and its connection to intergenerational transmission and storytelling, could find expression in spaces designed for family use and for different kinds

hearing stories from elders in the family and how this shaped her own experiences and work as a storyteller. This intergenerational work of sharing and transmission is powerfully held by the work of the District Six Museum and its communities today. Children maintain a contemporary presence on Harrington Square, via a small fenced-off play space maintained by Stepping Stones Children's Centre. Stepping Stones in located just half a block away from Harrington Square next to the District Six Museum, and provides an important link to longstanding patterns of children's presence and life on the block.	of play (which does not have to be over-programmed, but should be inviting and child-scaled). There may also be room for design interpretation linked to the games played by the children of District Six: Kennetjies, Jimjim, Hopscotch, Blikkies, Bok bok, Hide And Seek, skipping ropes, and more.



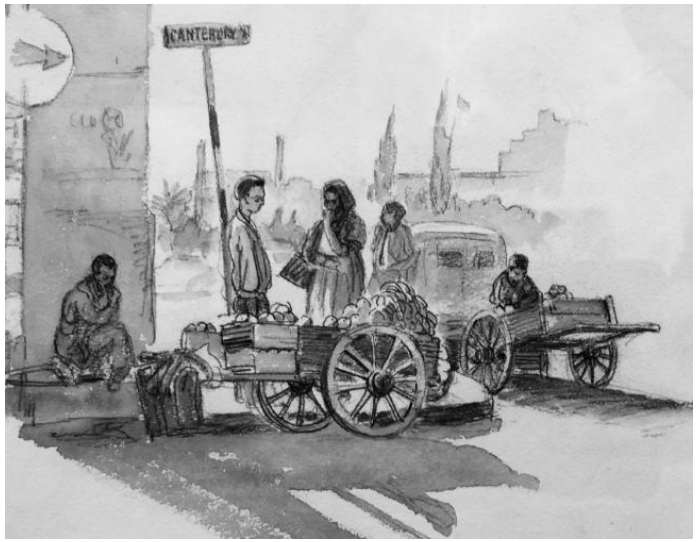
Above left: Children playing outside on Glynndale Road, date unknown. Photographer Jan Gresshof, reproduced in Rennie Scurr Adendorff 2024, p.45
Above right: Stepping Stones playground, along Canterbury Street. Photo by author, 2026.

8. Commercial cultures: street trade, retail and home industries

The Harrington Square area includes several historical layers of different commercial cultures, including retail, light industry, home industries and informal trade. It could become a space that not only supports existing commercial activity, but invokes the many cultures of trade and livelihoods that built and sustained District Six in an accessible, non-transactional way.

Background	**Informants & indicators**
As is visible in maps and photographs of what is now Harrington Square, the site was home to a dense network of businesses of all types and sizes. By 1965 these included general stores, several warehouses and storage units, printing works, a smithy, the Harrington Bottle Store and the Harrington Fish and Chips Shop, butchers, the leather merchants Woodhead & Sons, a Standard Bank branch, and the Lucky Star Café. (Further details are found in Hislop 2026). These 20th century commercial cultures are linked to much older networks of trade and artisanal skill. Many of District Six's first residents were skilled artisans, who used their knowledge to establish livelihoods after emancipation. One of the participants in the Harrington Square public process described longstanding traditions of skills and livelihoods being passed from father to son and mother to daughter: tailoring, dressmaking, hairdressing, carpentry, building, baking, and many other specialist skills. For women, these skills often translated into home industries and services that could help keep families afloat in difficult times.	Although much transformed, there is some continuity between the current layer of retail and business in and around Harrington Square, and its historical layering. These remnants of earlier practices should be supported and retained, and are likely to benefit from the presence of a well-designed, accessible public space on their doorsteps. However, development and usage of the square should be managed so as not to inadvertently foster processes of gentrification, or commercial activities that only cater for higher-income consumers. Connecting with this cultural layer (which could take several forms, including occasional or regular markets on the square, or spaces for

Several of the remaining buildings at the edges and around Harrington Square speak to these commercial and retail cultures, although they reflect only a small part of it. These include the Charly's Bakery building, which housed the iconic Beinkinstadt Books (also closely linked to history of Jewish migration and life in District Six). Woodheads has remained in its premises on Caledon Street, and the Castle Hotel continued to operate for over 120 years as a restaurant and bar. Other commercial spaces are remembered only by the presence of their buildings: the printing works on Constitution Street, for example, now occupied by Nude Foods and StudioMAS. District Six also had strong cultures of informal and street trade, including fresh vegetables and fruit and other goods. As Randle (2024:30) notes, Yaqoob Noordien ('Boeta Dal') was a well-known trader who sold blatjang, atchar and fresh produce outside the Castle Bar. This mix of formal business, light industry, street trade and home industry converged into a strong network of commercial cultures of all scales and types. Businesses were not only commercial: they were also part of supportive community networks. Many ex-residents recall the importance of shopkeepers who would allow families to buy "on the book" and pay off their purchases later, while there are also many memories of particular shopkeepers' kindness and generosity to children.	informal trade, etc) requires careful management and design to insure inclusivity and affordability. As noted above, the square should not be a transactional space, even if occasional commercial activities take place in or around it. Alongside the existing business and retail layer, consideration needs to be given to the needs of returning communities in the context of restitution. There are many important memories ad stories of people running their own businesses, including family businesses within District Six, or of the value of being able to walk to work nearby. Forced removals led to a traumatic loss of not only community, but also livelihoods and access to work.



Above left: Beinkinstadt Booksellers, date unknown; reproduced in Randle (2024), p.28
Above right: Informal trade on Canterbury Street, painting by Bruce Franck, date unknown; reproduced in Randle (2024), p.30

9. Theatre, performance and creative cultures

The 19th- century Theatre Royal connects with contemporary performance and creative cultures embodied by the Star Theatre at the Homecoming Centre. This thread also evokes memories of the cinemas of District Six, and with the District's performers, artists and musicians.

Background	**Informants & indicators**
The Theatre Royal (sometimes called the Harrington Theatre) anchors historical cultures of theatre and performance in the area. Today, just a few doors up, this culture is continued at the Homecoming Centre by the presence of the Star Theatre, previously the Fugard.	This cultural layer connects past and present, and speaks to the strong artistic and performance cultures of District Six more broadly. It suggests the possibility of space for performance, storytelling or

Although not on Harrington Square itself, District Six also had strong cinema-going cultures and several bioscopes, including the famous Star Bioscope. The British dramatist Sefton Parry built a wooden theatre called The Harrington Street Theatre on the corner of Harrington and Caledon in 1859, and replaced it with the Theatre Royal in 1860. The Theatre Royal was used for performances by Parry's Alfred Dramatic Club, the first professional theatre company in the country. Parry left South Africa in 1863, and the building burnt down in 1868. Worden (1998) notes that although short-lived, the theatre was more than just a venue for productions: it was also a space of social mixing, connection, leisure and entertainment. The site of the Theatre Royal and the contemporary link to performance via the Star Theatre intersects with the stories of District Six's many well-known musicians, performers, writers and artists, including Abdullah Ibrahim, Taliep Petersen Johaar Mosaval and many others.	other events in Harrington Square, which also potentially foster spaces of social connection and community-building. This usage may also be connected to the important memory work of the District Museum to include spaces suited for storytelling and sharing. As such, any performance-oriented space in the square should not be overprogrammed, ie it should lend itself to multifunctional use.

10. Queer cultures and expression

Although less visible than others, District Six is home to long-established queer histories and communities. Harrington Square offers connection to these histories through the figures of Canterbury and Kewpie, as well a contemporary cultural layer.

Background	**Informants & indicators**
While this is perhaps a less visible cultural layer both in the landscape and in public memory, Harrington Square offers at least two close historical connections to queer cultures and expression.	This cultural layer is less overtly visible than many others, but is an important one to acknowledge within the history of District Six.

The first requires us to read between the lines of the archive a little. Canterbury Street is named after the famous wigmaker and hairdresser Hendrik Canterbury. Canterbury was bought out of slavery by his father in the early 18th century, making this potentially the only street in Cape Town named after a formerly enslaved person. He became a famous wigmaker and hairdresser, known as a flamboyant personality whose salon was the centre of juicy gossip and tall stories. Queer cultures and history are also written into the area through the figure of Kewpie, who was a hairdresser and a well-known queer figure in District Six. Kewpie's extensive photographic archive, which captures not only her life but also those of her friends and District Six's queer community, formed the centre of an exhibition at the District Six Museum in 2018 (GALA and District Six Museum, 2019). Today, Kewpie's memory and legacy and the history of queer life in District Six find expression in the Kewpie Legacy Project, which invites young queer people to a week of learning, creative work and self-development facilitated by Cape Town drag and performance artist Cheshire Vineyard. The Legacy Project takes place annually at the Homecoming Centre, half a block from Harrington Square. A contemporary link to this cultural thread is found in LGBTQIA+ nightlife and performance spaces around the edges of Harrington Square, including Zer021 nightclub on the corner of Constitution and Canterbury Streets.	The figure of Canterbury represents some of the challenges of reading queerness in the archive. While his salon was not in District Six, the street that bears his name is – a little-known story which deserves greater visibility. The memory work linked to Kewpie, who was well-known within District Six, is closely connected to the District Six Museum and the Homecoming Centre. In interviews and her descriptions of her photographs, Kewpie often mentioned the extraordinary level of acceptance that she and others in her circles had within District Six. This does not mean that the challenging aspects of this history should be ignored or flattened, but – like many other cultural threads associated with District Six – it further supports the concept of Harrington Square as a space that foregrounds practices of community, social mixing and belonging.

Salon Kewpie zine cover, 2024. Kewpie is photographed here amid the rose bushes in Trafalgar Park, District Six.
(Source: https://gala.co.za/salon-kewpie/)

11. Forced removals, resistance and restitution

The story of forced removals from District Six remain powerfully present in living memory, as a source of intergenerational grief and trauma. The redevelopment of Harrington Square must engage with this memory as a primary layer, with a view to the restitutive processes and the return of displaced communities and descendants to District Six.

Background	**Informants & indicators**
Harrington Square is not unique in District Six in the sense that it was one of many places that was erased wholesale by the Group Areas bulldozers. However, it offers an opportunity to intersect with this history of erasure in a	The story of forced removals in Harrington Square cannot be separated from the full story of removals (as well as those of resistance and restitution) in District

unique way. Harrington Square was never designed to be a square, or a formal public space: it was literally created through a process of destruction and erasure, which forms the foundation of its future development.

District Six was declared a white group area in 1966. Many ex-residents recall the heavy impact of this announcement, and the eviction notices that followed. Forced removals did not happen immediately: people continued to live in the District even as homes emptied and bulldozers moved in, over several years. In Harrington Square, maps and aerial photographs tell a stark story: the overall pattern and many iconic buildings of the block remain in place for decades, as some occupants change but the overall structure is remarkably stable. By 1970, however, the square has been almost completely emptied out, remaining as a stark scar in the urban landscape. Hislop (2026) lists the ownership histories of the various buildings in and around the square, concluding with a sombre list of expropriations. Most buildings in Harrington Square itself were expropriated by the city, while those on surrounding streets were expropriated by the ironically named Community Development Board. The buildings that remained, as Randle (2024) points out, were either established larger commercial buildings and/or were white-owned.

The trauma of evictions and removals stays extremely present in living memory, and is often evoked by former residents speaking about what District Six meant and what happened to them after the forced removals. The square itself remains contested as a site of memory, including a 2021 fundraising event hosted by the District Six Museum that was shut down in response to noise complaints, which many saw as another layer in a long history of exclusion and marginalization.

Six more broadly. Over 60,000 people were removed from the area between 1968 and 1982, and there are thousands of devastating stories in living memory, archives and literature about the enduring traumatic impact of those removals.

With some restitutive processes underway, and more in the pipeline, the redeveloped Square has the potential to not just commemorate what happened here but to also act as a space of homecoming and collective memory for returning communities and their descendants.

There are many potential pathways to this, including via landscaping, artworks, interpretive layers, interpretation of building footprints, and – most importantly – creating a welcoming space of reflection and memory for returning communities and ex-residents. Within the public participation processes, there have been calls for a permanent form of memorialisation in the Square, rather than ephemeral interventions such as murals or other temporary interpretive or decorative layers. Harrington Square must be enfolded in larger processes of restitution. Interpretation of this cultural layer requires careful consideration and collaboration through the participatory design process.

Aerial imagery from 1968-1980 tells a stark story of the erasure of the space today known as Harrington Square. From left to right: 1968 imagery with the historic fabric still intact; 1971 imagery, with the church and surrounding buildings demolished; 1980 imagery, transformed into an urban car park. (Source: City of Cape Town EGIS Map Viewer)

12. Street name stories

Street names act as tiny memorials, sometimes to painful or contested histories. Street names open up a necessary conversation about naming practices and politics in Harrington Square.

Background	**Informants & indicators**
The street names (past and present) around and in Harrington Square provide an additional layer of historical storytelling and spatialisation. They also open up the question of naming: Harrington Square is named after the	If street names are read as little memorials, it is important to give thought to what is remembered and

street along its western edge, but this name was appended after the block's erasure in 1970. This opens the possibility of renaming the square as part of its reimagining. At the same time, many of the street names connect with painful and difficult colonial histories. These are part of the city's story but their presence and valorization in public space require serious interrogation, especially at this moment of renewal and remaking. **Harrington**: Named after Captain Thomas Harington, a wealthy merchant who built a large home on nearby Keizergracht (today's Darling Street) and a neighbouring store and warehouse. Harington's home became a landmark property and helped shape the mixed sought-after residential and commercial character of the area around what is today Harrington Square in the early 19th century. As Randle (2024) notes, by the end of the 19th century the area had significantly industrialised, and this change is evident in the businesses on Harrington Square in this period. **Canterbury:** For more detail see above, Section 10, on Queer Cultures and Expression. The street is named after the wigmaker and hairdresser Hendrik Canterbury, possibly the only street in Cape Town named for a formerly enslaved person. **Caledon:** Like many street and place names in the Western Cape (including the town of Caledon and the Caledon River), the street is named after Colonel Du Pré Alexander, the 2nd Earl of Caledon. Caledon was a colonial administrator and Governor of the Cape under British rule from 1806-1811. He is closely associated with some of the country's earliest pass laws, the Caledon Code, which restricted the free movement of Khoe people in the Cape and required proof of a "fixed place of abode".	embedded in the streets around and within Harrington Square. This layer opens up possibilities for an interpretive layer through artwork or other methods. Many of the street names also connect with specific stories and cultural informants, and offer an opportunity in the design to anchor these. Street name and place name stories also call for a discussion around naming practices and politics, as the redevelopment also offers an opportunity for renaming. This needs to be addressed and unpacked further through the public participation process.

Lamb's Lane/ Glynndale: Lamb's Lane was named for Mr Lamb's School, which was linked to the Holy Trinity Church and where Emma Rutherfoord taught in the late 1840s/early 1850s. This older name carries a close connection to Section 7, Children's Lifeworlds as a marker of the memory of children's longstanding presence in what is now Harrington Square. Glynndale may be a reference to H.A. Glynn, a mid-19th century builder/developer: he is also recorded as having built the Theatre Royal, on the corner of Caledon and Harrington, to the order of Sefton Parry in 1860. This requires more investigation. **Constitution:** The street name is given as "Constitution Hill" in Snow's 1862 map and Constitution Street thereafter. The name may be a reference to the 1853 Cape Constitution, which established a representative Parliament for the Cape in place of rule by a governor. It introduced a qualified, non-racial franchise, meaning that any male regardless of race who met a minimum wealth and property threshold could vote. Although nominally non-racial, in practice it excluded many people (including all women) from the vote, and its limited extension of voting rights to people of all races was gradually eroded and stripped.	

	Corner of Constitution and Canterbury Streets, 2026. Source: Google Street View.

13. Contemporary cultural layers

Many historic cultural layers in and around Harrington Square find some form of expression in current practices and uses. These include its role as a connector and crossing point; commercial, retail and food cultures; nightlife; and – perhaps most significantly – its role as a site of memory, return and restitution.

Background	**Informants & indicators**
Many of the historic cultural threads outlined here have elements of continuity in the present, although in much-transformed ways. Others were effectively erased and the connection broken with the apartheid demolition	Many of these contemporary cultural threads (and more to be articulated through the ongoing design process) have deep historical connections which

of the homes, shops, businesses, church and streets on what is now Harrington Square. **A connector and crossing point:** Sitting at the edge of District Six, Harrington Square and its surrounds have long acted as a connecting point from the CBD into District Six and beyond to Woodstock and Salt River. In a walk around the square, a former District Six resident pointed out that Longmarket Street – just one block away – was a main connector through District Six which has now been lost. In the first public design workshop, a participant pointed out that many people move between the District Six Clinic and the city centre through and across the space, and would value a calm, green place to sit and rest before continuing their journeys after a long day at the clinic. There are also many memories of what it meant for District Six residents to be able to walk easily to workplaces, the docks, shops, and other spaces in the central city. Harrington Square's historic "edge" quality is somewhat evident in maps and photographs in its light industrial character and its many warehouses, printing works and stores, with rows of homes nestled in between. It was different to both the more densely residential areas of District Six and to the busy retail and commercial strip of Hanover Street. Redevelopment will transform it from historic edge into a new and central public space, but it remains a hinge or crossing point between District Six and the CBD. This quality of spatial connection is important to retain and support through an inviting, human-scale environment, and also invites the design of spaces for pause and rest. **Commercial, retail and food:** The area around Harrington Square and surrounding streets are home to several business, including retail, restaurants and offices. Some, like Charly's Bakery, Nude Foods,	persist despite the fragmentation of forced removals and demolitions. Harrington Square has the potential to support the layers that are already here, while linking them back to historical patterns and reinscribing the memory of what was here before demolitions. The existing threads offer the potential to act as anchors for many of the historical stories and memories. Harrington Square has the potential to play many roles in this part of the city: from a connecting point between places, to a moment of respite in a busy urban landscape, to an important locus of memory and one element in a larger process of restitution. While the redesign of the square must be rooted in the past and in memory, it also faces forwards. Its position as the first realized project from the District Six Public Realm Strategy gives it the opportunity to redefine what public space is and can be – accessible, open, welcoming, soft, memorial, connecting, healing, social, intimate, and many other aspirations that are being articulated more fully through the public processes.

Woodheads and Trimtique Tailors, are located in buildings that act as physical links to what remains of the built heritage of the area. Many others have been erased from the map. The survival of the larger commercial and retail buildings at the edges of the square have allowed for a continuation of older commercial cultures, although the nature of businesses and their target consumers have changed significantly and are generally relatively expensive **Nightlife and entertainment:** The streets surrounding Harrington Square are home to several bars and nightclubs, which means the square has a layer of potential nighttime use that may differ significantly from the daytime. Bars and clubs include Dias Tavern, District, ZerO21, Harrington's, and Saints. There is a thread of historic continuity in the form of the Castle Hotel Bar, which Randle (2024) notes is remembered as a well-loved "watering hole" and at times a space of racial mixing under apartheid. The District Six Homecoming Centre often hosts events, conferences and gatherings, while the Star Theatre linked to the Centre – formerly the Fugard Theatre – provides a link of continuity to the long-demolished Theatre Royal, just a few doors away on the corner of Caledon and Harrington. **A continuing site of memory, restitution and resistance:** Perhaps the most powerful contemporary cultural thread remains the square's potential as a site of memory linked to the forced removal of District Six, and as a site of reclamation and restitution. The square occupies a crucial space that potentially connects the work of the District Six Museum and the Homecoming Centre, and acts as a pathway into District Six both as a space of memory, and a site of restitution and return. This layer is a core informant to any transformation that takes place on the site.	

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