

## **Report of visit to WSU to see new storage space for BBC, locate accessions registers, and attempt to re-sort the Broster from Lamla collections, 5 – 6 August 2014.**

The purpose of this short visit was twofold. The first was to spend time in the recently finished, refurbished storage space, to check that all the specifications requested, had been completed to the satisfaction of Nolitha Ngcai from SAHRA, and June Hosford. The second task was to attempt to 'untangle' the two collections now crammed into the partitioned area in the Africana & Special Collections Library. This situation arose after the Inventory Unit from SAHRA had digitised and numbered the objects of both collections, without the relevant role players being informed.

Instead of the collections each being allocated a separate set of numbers, they were mixed up when they were digitised. The method of numbering each object, has not been done according to any conservation, or collections management principles, or practice. This means that both processes will have to be redone.

### ***The new storage space***

Nolitha Ngcai (NN) and June Hosford (JH) spent the first part of 5<sup>th</sup> August at the Sasol Library, inspecting the 'new' storage space. As you will see below, there are a few critical changes to be made:

- **The doors:** the main entrance doors are glass, with a glass panel on the left and two on the right hand side. They have been covered with a smoky film, which makes it difficult to see what's inside the space (this is good & adds to the security of the collections). However I understand from the architect, that this film doesn't screen the collections from UV and heat. A better quality film will be sourced so that the collections will be protected from UV and heat.

There is a single, glass door, to the right of the main doors (see image below) which leads to the two small offices, the workshop, toilets, and ultimately the storeroom. It is understood, however, that all the glass is safety glass, which is again an additional security feature.



JH has requested that the locks on both doors should be 'tamper-proof', and because the single door is more vulnerable in terms of access, a 'Trellidor' must be installed over the single glass door as added security.

- **The storage space**, or large, open area where the collections will be stored, has the correct, practical floor surface – a 'self-levelling, epoxy screed'. There are sufficient plug points around the perimeter of the room.  
**LED lighting** has been installed in the ceiling, with sensors that are sensitive to movement of people, i.e. lights will go on when people come into the storage area, and go off once they have moved away.
- **The work top (approx. 2.5 m long x 1 m deep)** in the store has not been built according to JH's specifications (see image below). It slopes from the back, where it is attached to the dry walls of the offices, to the front 'stop', made of wood, to prevent objects from slipping off. Apart from the surface not being flat, it is not covered with white melamine, as was requested. It is a dark, mottled grey. This will not easily show up damage, conservation problems in the beadwork, or other material. Changes will have to be made so that the table meets the necessary requirements.



- **The workroom** is well designed, and amply supplied with cupboards and shelves. A 'wet' working area, containing double sinks with a draining board, has been installed on the left hand side as one enters the workroom. A number of computer points have been provided, that can accommodate staff and/or researchers, making it unnecessary for researchers to work in the storeroom (see images below).



- **The two offices** will be fitted with the University's standard desks with drawers.
- **A small room** off the main storage area, has been earmarked as a store for cleaning equipment, but JH requested that shelves be built in the recessed section. It could be used for records, but perhaps filing cabinets can be accommodated in the offices, leaving the small room as a store for cleaning equipment and stocks of storage materials, & stationery.
- **The bathroom** has been well renovated, and they have been able to retain the original toilet (a 'disabled' toilet) and basin in one space, with a locking door, as well as an open cubicle with a urinal. When the urinal needs to be used, the main door can be locked to give privacy.



- **Lighting in the workshop and offices** is by fluorescent tubes, but they don't have diffusing Perspex covers on them, to screen the area from damaging UV. Next to sunlight, fluorescent tubes emit the highest amount of UV radiation.



According to Dugald Barnard, the University's Facilities Manager, the covers will have to go into the 2015 budget, as the funding is at an end for this year.

**(The Africana & Special Collections (A & SC) Library will hopefully be included in the next budget, because JH strongly recommended covers for the fluorescent tubes in the Library at the time of her assessment in 2009.)**

- **Fire protection:** there are smoke detectors in the ceiling throughout the facility, and two smaller extinguishers have been installed at the entrance of the storeroom. They contain a powder which is suitable for extinguishing most kind of fires.

### ***The collections housed in the partitioned-off section of the A & SC Library***

The rest of the time, on the 5 & 6 August, was spent attempting to sort out, and re-organise the collections, both of which have been crammed into this small space. We moved everything that was cluttering up the floor area in order to avoid breakages and other damage. As has been mentioned, both the Broster Beadwork, & the Lamla Collections have been 'documented' and photographed, but they have been returned to the one space, mixed up and 'dumped' in a haphazard way (see images on p. 6):

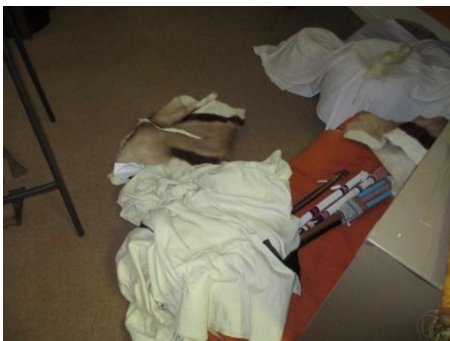
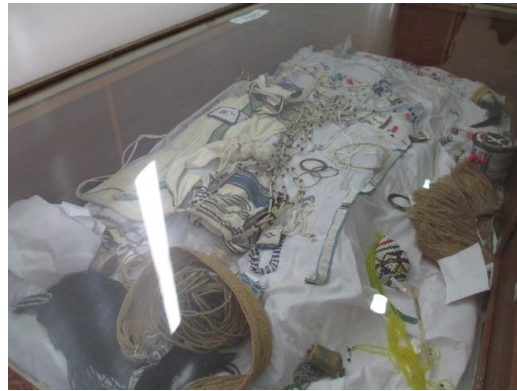
- untangled beadwork in one of the desktop cases in the partitioned area;
- stored, for safety, all long, thin objects, like sticks, spears & clubs, out of the way under the cabinets with glass doors, desktop cases & tables;
- sorted and folded carefully, the random piles of skirts, breastcloths and cloaks – stacked clothing on top of the two desktop cases in the partitioned section;
- some skin & fur hats, in bad condition were laid in the glass fronted cupboards, or on open shelves;
- some brooms, food mats and strainers were also laid in cupboards, or under cupboards and desktop cases – a strainer & food mat still showed much evidence of prestick on them, and an attempt was made to remove as much as possible from within the weave.

### **Problems JH encountered with the marking, and documenting of the two collections:**

- the number prefix that was used by the SAHRA Documentation Unit, is **WSBC**, but there is no clue as to what it stood for – perhaps 'Walter Sisulu Beadwork Collection'? The two collections were completely mixed up for the numbering process, which means that the Documentation team weren't informed that there were two distinct collections. It is also not known what their brief was;
- number tags were not purchased, - 'tags' were made by cutting strips of paper and punching a hole at one end. Sewing sheen was used as the attaching strings, several strands were used for one tag, and on average, were at least 150 mm long. This caused problems when we tried to separate the beadwork, as the homemade 'tags' became seriously entangled with the beadwork, and with one another;
- accession numbers were written on one side of the 'tag' only;

- black koki (felt-tipped) pen was used to write the number on three-dimensional objects like pots, clay heads, and wooden figures. They were written disproportionately large, in an obvious place on the object, which will make it difficult to use for an exhibition;
- although all objects were given tags, a second number was not attached to each of them. The tags could easily become detached, or tear away from the sewing thread, leaving the object without any identification.

It was evident from going through the collections, that the Inventory Unit have little, or no knowledge, or experience of collection management & conservation principles and practice. Any work done on the two collections under review, should be to the highest standards, particularly as the Broster Beadwork Collection has recently been declared as a Heritage Collection by SAHRA (see p. 7 for the correct procedures of marking & labelling social history collections.).



## **Marking & labelling objects:**

### ***Introduction***

***Each object that is accessioned into the collection must be marked with its unique identity number, in a way that is as permanent as possible without damaging it. Each object must carry its number at all times, so that it can be linked to the information held in the data base or written records.***

### ***Guidelines for labelling or marking objects in the collection***

- ***Security – the chances of accidental removal of the number from the object must be extremely low.***
- ***Reversible – it should be possible for a label or mark to be removed intentionally from an object, even after 50 – 100 years, with as little trace as possible.***
- ***Object safety – neither the materials used, nor the method by which they are applied, should cause any damage to the object.***
- ***Discreet but visible – the method of marking should not spoil the appearance of an object, nor obscure any important detail. However the number should be visible enough to reduce the need to handle the object.***
- ***The accession number should be written neatly and clearly on each object, in a place that is not immediately obvious.***
- ***The number is written in the same place on each category of object (photo. of several objects of same kind to illustrate here)***
- ***The number is marked directly onto objects unless there isn't a suitable surface to write on, using Indian ink, a suitable alternative black ink, or an archival marking pen.***
- ***Attach tie-on card labels or paper tags to objects where the number is written underneath, or in some less obvious place, which is not easily visible in storage. The number is written on both sides of the card/tag, and is tied close to where it is marked on the object.***
- ***Choose a tie-on label/tag relative to the size of the object, for example, the smallest size tag for a tiny pair of beaded earrings.***

### ***Marking the number directly onto an object:***

- ***Use only good quality black Indian ink, white ink or paint, with mapping pens, & fine brushes; or water-proof, archival marker pens.***
- ***Some object surfaces, like baskets, will not accept the ink directly, a consolidant, Paraloid B-72, can be used as a barrier coat, so that the number can be written on more easily with ink***

The final task was to locate Joan Broster's accession register and Dr Lamla's card catalogue to assist in the documentation process of both collections. Phefumla Nyoni, Anthropology lecturer, who is in Dr Lamla's post, and office, was able to arrange for NN & JH to meet Dr Lamla and discover where the documentation was being housed.

Dr Lamla told us that after the University acquired the Broster Beadwork Collection, he worked with Joan Broster in Port Alfred, to annotate her handwritten register into a formal publication with detailed descriptions and terminology. Fortunately there are a few copies in the Africana & Special Collections (A&SC) Library. Dr Lamla told us that his card catalogue was also lodged in the A&SC Library, but we didn't have time to find it, as we had to drive back to East London.

In conclusion, this trip has highlighted the urgent need to have a plan of action regarding the short-, medium- and long-term recommendations originally proposed for the BBC & Lamla collections, in the Conservation Assessment of 2009, but not carried out. Once the recommendations have been implemented, the training programme and the Conservation & Management Plan can then be put into practice for the long-term care of the WSU collections in their new permanent storage facility.

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Heritage Collections Conservation & Training

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