



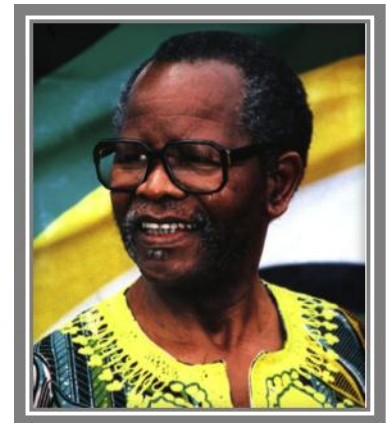
**Historical Synopsis and Heritage Statement for the OR Tambo Homestead at Mdikiso,  
Bizana District, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa**

**INTRODUCTION**

The South African Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) have initiated a number of Legacy Projects to honour prominent Liberation Struggle icons. The objective of the OR TAMBO LEGACY PROJECT is to create a living link between the legacy of OR Tambo and the greater South Africa, while recognizing both the tangible and intangible heritage inherent to his natal district.

The intention of the project includes:

- Expounding the legacy of OR Tambo as a hero of the struggle and an international iconic figure;
- Regenerating a heritage site of national significance;
- Implementing a broad spectrum of interventions for community development; and
- Honoring the family of OR Tambo through the rehabilitation of existing infrastructure, including the home of his sister, Mrs. Gertrude Tambo.



The interventions herewith proposed relate specifically to the upgrade of the OR Tambo family homestead at Mdikiso.

In due course it is the intention of the DAC is to submit an application for nomination of the OR Tambo Homestead at Mdikiso and the OR Tambo Memorial Site at Nkantolo as National Heritage Sites to SAHRA, the South African Heritage Resources Agency, in terms of Section 27 of the National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999 (NHRA).

## – **OR Tambo in the Liberation History of South Africa**

Oliver Reginald Tambo was born on 27 October 1917 to Mzimeli Lokomane Tambo and his second wife, Julia (MaNzala), at Kantolo in the Bizana District of eastern Pondoland. He started school at the local Ludeke Methodist Mission School and was subsequently enrolled at the Holy Cross Mission School in the Flagstaff District. He completed his high school career at St. Peters School in Johannesburg. On matriculating he qualified to enrol for degree purposes at Fort Hare University. In 1940 he, along with several others, including Nelson Mandela, was expelled from the University for participating in a student strike. In 1942 Tambo returned to his former high school in Johannesburg to teach science and mathematics.

Along with Mandela and Walter Sisulu, OR Tambo was a founding member of the African National Congress Youth League in 1943, becoming its first National Secretary and later a member of the National Executive in 1948. The youth league proposed a change in tactics in the anti-apartheid movement. Previously the ANC had sought to further its cause by actions such as petitions and demonstrations; the Youth League felt that these actions were insufficient to achieve the group's goals and proposed their own 'Programme of Action'. This programme advocated tactics such as boycotts, civil disobedience, strikes and non-collaboration.

In 1955, Tambo became Secretary General of the ANC after Walter Sisulu was banned by the South African government under the Suppression of Communism Act. In 1958 he became Deputy President of the ANC and in 1959 was served with a five year banning order by the apartheid government. Oliver Tambo, the co-founder of the modern South African state, came to London penniless and unknown in 1960, with the police on his tail. His wife, Adelaide, and young children were smuggled out to join him and they settled in Muswell Hill, north London, where he lived until 1990.

When Tambo first began the work of lobbying for international recognition, almost the only head of government prepared to support him was Kwame Nkrumah, in Ghana. But over the years he established ANC missions, shadow embassies for a future South Africa, in 27 countries, which by then was more than the number that continued to recognise white South Africa. He also founded the military wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe. When the Portuguese empire collapsed in 1975, Tambo moved his guerrillas out of training camps in Tanzania and Zambia, into Angola, near the South African border, as a warning that if the apartheid system was not dismantled peacefully, the ANC was prepared to use force.

Tambo was involved in the formation of the South African Democratic Front and in 1967 he became Acting President of the ANC, following the death of Chief Albert Luthuli. In 1985 he was re-elected President of the ANC. He returned to South Africa in 1991 after over 30 years in exile, and was elected National Chairperson of the ANC in July of the same year. Tambo died aged 75 due to complications from a stroke on 24 April 1993.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

- **Brief Site Description & Location**

The OR Tambo homestead at Mdikiso is located in a typical rural Pondoland setting of rolling grassland interfluvies between steeply incised streamlines and river courses. Nguni language-speakers, including the amaPondo, have traditionally lived in dispersed nuclear homesteads

scattered across the landscape as resource availability prescribed. However, from the late 1950s, recommendations of the Tomlinson Commission (1954) were implemented, whereby many people were forcibly moved into villages (*amalali*) and the surrounding landscape was formally demarcated into crop-lands and grazing camps. This social engineering and land management was enforced by local magistrates and fed into the anger and wider

frustrations and disenfranchisement that gave cause to the Pondo Uprising of 1960. Whilst some individuals have broken from this mould, *amalali* remain a characteristic feature of the modern rural settlement pattern. With the relaxation of controls over communal grazing camps and dedicated agricultural fields, fenced homestead precincts have become a necessity to protect vegetable gardens and maize fields from free-ranging cattle and small-stock.



Typical fenced homestead precinct. Nkantolo, Bizana District.

## HISTORIC BACKGROUND AND OWNERSHIP

“In circa.1942, Mzimeli Tambo established the Mdikiso homestead for his third wife, Lena (MaSwazini). She is OR’s sister, Aunt Gertie’s, mother. As there was no male head-of-household Mzimeli invested OR as *inhlokoyekhaya* to look after his ‘younger mother’ and so the place became OR’s” (Vernon Tambo pers. comm. August 2012<sup>1</sup>). The homestead is currently home to a fourth generation of Tambo descendants and this lineage is poignantly attested to in the family graveyard located in the maize field down slope of the residential precinct:

1977	Lena (MaSwazini)	Aunt Gertie’s mother
1978	Lydia	Aunt Gertie’s older sister
1979	Jeffery	Aunt Gertie’s nephew
1985	Allen (Motshwa)	Aunt Gertie’s brother
1996	Greta	Aunt Gertie’s sister
2009	Infant	Babongile’s daughter
2011	Babongile	Vernon’s daughter
*	Isaac	Greta’s younger brother
*	Infant	Isaac’s daughter
*	Neonate	Aunt Gertie’s child
*	Neonate	Greta’s child

\* To be confirmed



OR Tambo Homestead Precinct.



OR Tambo Homestead Layout.

The homestead site has been continuously occupied for the past sixty years and has seen episodes of growth and demise depending on the family's needs and means. The most recent intervention has been the building of a modern style bungalow dwelling, of questionable construction quality, to the rear of the historical domestic locus, provided for Aunty Gertie by the District Municipality.

The historical domestic locus comprises an *indlunkulu* (a meeting place), a hexagonal thatched dwelling, a "4-corner" house that was the private residence of OR Tambo on his return from exile and two rondavels. The smaller of the two rondavels is the family shrine or *indluyamadlozi*, where the ancestors reside and are honoured.

The cattle byre and small-stock pen is located immediately in front and down slope of the residential units. The cattle byre is a spiritually sacrosanct place also associated with the ancestors, birth, life and death; and consequently subject to pollution and ritual taboos.

## **SITE SIGNIFICANCE**

### **Statement of Significance**

The site has **high historical value at all levels** for its strong and special association with a person whose life, works and activities have been significant within the history of the nation, province, region and community.

The site has **high social value at all levels** for its social, cultural, spiritual, symbolic, aesthetic and educational associations with the life of a prominent South African. Furthermore, it contributes to the sense of place of the local community and their association with a person of social and political eminence. The homestead comes to symbolise all that OR Tambo stood and fought for, his sense of social justice and the significance that he ascribed to family cohesion and family values.

The **site is unique**, as the rural home of an individual who made an indelible contribution to the socio-political development of South Africa.

## HERITAGE RESOURCES

The historical precinct of the OR Tambo homestead, comprising the following elements, is the fabric and physical manifestation of the site's significance:

- *Indlunkulu*,
- Hexagonal thatched dwelling,
- OR Tambo's "4-corner" residence,
- *Inluyamadlozi*,
- Second rondavel and
- The kitchen garden and maize fields.

No demolition of any of these buildings should be countenanced. Any interventions on these elements must be sanctioned by the family members who live at or have a close relationship with the homestead. Intervention strategies must be overseen by a conservation architect. Similarly, any interventions at the cattle byre must have family approval.

The layout and position of the vernacular dwellings on the site has to remain unchanged in order to maintain the domestic scale of the site. Any change in layout and position would immediately affect the overall morphological integrity and 'sense of place' of the site.

## PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS

However, the following immediate interventions may proceed:

1. Appropriate perimeter fencing of the homestead precinct and the vegetable garden using a mesh that considers security and longevity and is in keeping with the extant cultural landscape.
2. Fencing the grave yard within the maize field as requested by the Tambo family. Consideration should be given to engage with the family regarding headstones to mark the currently unnamed graves.
3. Reconstruction of the palisade surround of the cattle byre and small-stock pen with wattle and eucalyptus uprights and horizontals, and finished with a wattle-lath weave.
4. Roofing of the small-stock pen with corrugated iron.
5. Rethatching of the rondavels in order to preserve the walls and floors prior to further maintenance interventions that are the subject of ongoing research and debate.

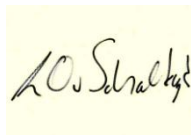
Note: Roof timbers must be treated, since regular fires will be burnt only in the *indluyamadlozi*, thus providing fumigation.

### - **Conclusion**

We have compiled this document in the understanding that it will be reviewed imminently by the SAHRA Built Environment and Landscape Permit Committee (BELCOM) as part of the process of undertaking a full Phase 1 Heritage Impact Assessment for the site in compliance with Section 38 of the NHRA.

We wish to emphasise that tight timeframes on the overall project have necessitated the hasty composition of this document. We request that any omissions or mistakes should be considered in this context, and in no way reflect on the merits of the project or the abilities of the authors.

Yours sincerely



Len van Schalkwyk and Elizabeth Wahl



