

HERITAGE OBJECTS MONITORING REPORT: DIAS CROSS

Prepared By: Nkosazana Queenie Machete {nmachete@sahra.org.za}

HERITAGE PROTECTION UNIT

APP Indicator Number: 2.1

DATE: 15 APRIL 2019



Introduction

Section 5 (1)(a) of the National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999 (NHRA) states that “Heritage resources have lasting value in their own right and provide evidence of the origins of the South African society and as they are valuable, finite, non-renewable and irreplaceable they must be carefully managed to ensure their survival”.

On the 12th of April 2019, South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) Heritage Protection Unit conducted an inspection at the University of Witwatersrand to monitor the Dias Cross.

1. Locality and Description of the Building

The William Cullen Library building is located at the University of Witwatersrand. The building is currently used as a daily library for students.

The Dias Cross is located at the foyer inside the museum. It is displayed in a glass frame, with the history inscribed on the wall.



Figure 1: The Library Foyer

2. Significance of the objects

Bartolomeu Dias erected the cross in 1488 at what is today known as Kwaaihoek in the Eastern Cape, the most easterly point of his voyage. The broken pieces were discovered in 1936 by Professor Eric Axelson, a former staff member of the University of the Witwatersrand.

Fragments of the original cross were assembled and given into the care of the University of the Witwatersrand, the reconstructed fragments are nestled in the foyer of the William Cullen Library.

This is South Africa's oldest historical monument held within Wits University. The cross was declared a national Monument in 1939.

The discovery of the Cross or Padrao erected by the intrepid Portuguese explorer, Bartolomeu Dias, in the year 1488 on a promontory at what is now known as Kwaaihoek, in the district of Alexandria, its salvage and its reconstruction by experts of the Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg, forms one of the romances of our times. Happenings such as this bring flutters of excitement into the austere precincts of the learned and shed a glow of popular interest on subjects which the average man is too inclined to regard as extremely dull. Thus it was that Bartolomeu Dias came into the news again after a lapse of over four and a half centuries.

As a replica of the Dias Cross has recently been erected on the site of the original, it is fitting to recall the story of the Cross and its discovery. It is only a year or two ago that the details of this story were told by Dr. Eric Axelson of the Department of History at the Witwatersrand University. The replica of the Dias Padrao erected at Kwaaihoek, District of Alexandria, on the exact site of the original. The replica was made in Johannesburg. It was cast in white cement in a gelatine mould taken from the original. The base and surrounds were constructed on the site with local materials. Cement for the purpose was transported to the site by ox-wagon. Bronze explanatory plaques in English, Afrikaans and Portuguese have been fixed to the monument.

3.Object and Building Assessment

The Dias Cross has been reconstructed, using cement and mortar to ensure that it stands upright and remains balanced. The cross has been reinforced with steel at the back.

The building has front door access security measures in place. There is one security guard in the building. The building is secured with CCTV. Fire detectors are in fixed in the ceiling, and the building also has two fire extinguishers.

4. Status of the objects

The Dias Cross is in a good condition.

Conclusion

In conclusion the Dias Cross is safe and well conserved. It is reinforced and thus cannot be stolen.

Manager: Nkosazana Machete

Executive Officer: Mamakomoreng Nkhasi



Date: 19 April 2019

Date: