

SITE INSPECTION REPORT: FOR MIRACLE CANNON HOUSED AT PORT ELIZABETH MILITARY MUSEUM

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

HERITAGE PROTECTION UNIT

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Miracle Cannon housed at the Military Museum in Port Elizabeth

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 3/08/18, South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) Heritage Objects and Heritage Protection Unit conducted an inspection at the Military Museum in Port Elizabeth Eastern Cape Province.

Purpose of the site visit

The site visit was conducted as part of monitoring national heritage objects in Eastern Cape Province. This was done to ensure that the authority responsible follows section 5 of the NHRA which states that “Heritage Resources contribute significantly to research, education and tourism and they must be developed and presented for these purposes in a way that ensures dignity and respect for cultural values.”

Background

The miracle cannon of the Sacramento was part of a consignment of bronze cannon that were cast in the Bacorro Foundry in the Portuguese colony of Macao as a gift for João IV, king of Portugal. The ship in which the cannon was being transported to Portugal, the Sacramento was lost off the South East coast of Africa in 1647, about 10 km from Port Elizabeth. This cannon was salvaged in 1977 and is now housed in the Prince Alfred's Guard Museum in Port Elizabeth.

When the cannon was on the sea-bed it rested on two cast-iron cannons that acted as sacrificial anodes preventing corrosion of the bronze cannon, hence the name the "Miracle Cannon". The cannon itself weighs about 4 tonnes and has a length of 3.7 metres and is one of the few remaining examples of this cannon in the world. It is decorated with the coat of arms of the colony of Macao and the monogram of the Governor of India Antonio Telles de Menezes who ordered the guns cast in 1640. The oriental, half human, LIFTING DOLPHINS were designed and placed on the cannon so it could be easily lifted on to a mounting. The CASCABEL (Clenched fist with protruding thumb) is a Sacro-magical fertility symbol used by Indian women to increase their chances of pregnancy or as a guardian against the evil eye. It was declared a National Monument under old National Monuments Council (NMC) (legislation no 28. of 1969, on 7 March 1986.

Assessment

SAHRA officials were accompanied by the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Arts Museum official. Ms Emma O'Brien the acting director said the Miracle Cannon is no longer housed at 7 Castle Hill Road in Port Elizabeth. The place has been closed temporarily as there is no curator currently. The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Arts Museum decided to house the cannon at the Prince Alfred's Guard Museum in Port Elizabeth which is the military museum. It is in good condition as it was cleaned by the cleaners in the museum. It is at the entrance of the museum and it is the tourist attraction hence it is kept clean.

Conclusion

SAHRA need to conduct regular inspections of the heritage objects as the objects disappear or moved without SAHRA being informed by the curators or museums. People responsible for taking care of the heritage objects retire and the information about the objects is known after they retire. There is no transfers of skills or sharing of information. As results heritage objects disappears without a trace.

Heritage Protection Manager: Ms. Nkosazana Machete Executive Officer:

Date:

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