

**AN HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EAST  
LONDON REGIONAL WASTE DISPOSAL SITE ON THE GRAVE OF THE XHOSA POET  
LAUREATE, S. E. K. MQHAYI (1875-1945), AT NTAB'OZUKO, BERLIN, EASTERN CAPE**

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**Abstract:** The report assesses the impact of the development of the East London regional waste disposal site on the grave of the Xhosa poet laureate, S. E. K. Mqhayi (1875-1945), that is situated on the edge of the waste disposal site's south-western perimeter. Various sections of the report describe and detail the situation, extent and operation of the waste disposal site; the situation and condition of the grave of S. E. K. Mqhayi (1875-1945), his historical and cultural significance as Xhosa poet laureate, an assessment of the site in terms of current heritage legislation, and recommendations regarding the grave and its future as a heritage site of provincial and national significance. Relevant maps, plans and photographs are contained in APPENDIX I and II of the report.

**Acknowledgements:** In the preparation of this report the authors gratefully acknowledge the generous assistance provided by staff of Arcus Gibb Pty. Ltd., the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) in Grahamstown and the Amathole Museum in King William's Town. The opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors, rather than of any of the fore-mentioned bodies.

### **1.1 The East London Regional Waste Disposal Site.**

The development of the East London regional waste disposal site was started in 1991 under the auspices of what was then the East London Municipality, now known as Buffalo City Municipality and incorporating, *inter alia*, the old municipal areas of Berlin and King William's Town. The East London consultancy firm, Arcus Gibb Pty. Ltd., became involved in the development and management of the waste disposal site in 1996.

The geographical co-ordinates of the waste disposal site are Y- 57691 and X- 3641048, and the survey system is W. G. S. 84". Both the waste disposal site and the grave of the Xhosa poet laureate, S. E. K. Mqhayi (1875-1945), are located on Mncotsho Location Farm no. 285 in the magisterial district of East London. The land is owned by the Department of Land Affairs. See APPENDIX I for a 1 : 50 000 map of the area showing the precise location of the waste disposal site in relation to the poet's grave and the developer's plans to upgrade the grave site and provide an access road to it.

The waste disposal site is 30 hectares in extent and a projected 300 tons of waste per annum will be disposed of at the site. The waste will be disposed of following a sanitary land filling method, involving the disposal of waste on lined cells. The exposed waste will be covered daily with soil to reduce odours, litter and nuisance and to manage liquids emanating from the waste body. Waste will arrive on site via conventional collection vehicles and/or waste containers.

### **1.2 The Grave Of S. E. K. Mqhayi.**

The Xhosa poet laureate, S. E. K. Mqhayi, was buried at *Ntab'ozuko* in July 1945. Since 1984, the Mqhayi family has used the grave site as a family cemetery. Thus, in addition to S. E. K. Mqhayi's grave, there are three more recent graves of members of his family, namely his son, Zatsoba Herbet Mqhayi (1910-84), his son's wife, Nolusapho Mqhayi (1923-2003) and his granddaughter, Miselwa Julietta Mqhayi (1957-98). All the graves are in good condition and members of the Mqhayi family have been maintaining the site, clearing and cutting the grass, and at least one sapling has been planted at the site. In APPENDIX II find photographs of S. E. K. Mqhayi, his tombstone, with inscription, and the graveyard taken by the developer, Arcus Gibb in 2004.

A distance of some 200 metres separates the grave site from the outer perimeter fence of the waste disposal site, a clear view of which is concealed from the graveyard by trees and the slope of the hill, picturesquely named *Ntab'ozuko*, Mount Glory, by S. E. K. Mqhayi. Presently, the only means of access to the poet's grave is through the waste disposal site, which is obviously unacceptable, both to members of the Mqhayi family and the public wishing to visit the site for historical and cultural reasons. However, if the boundary fence was moved 100-200m down the eastern slope beyond the existing tree line at the foot of the hill, the grave site, as it is at the moment, will be accessible to passers-by and vagrants, with the ever-present danger of vandalism and/or desecration of the site. A large boulder below the grave site is already painted with graffiti, which is unacceptable and it should be cleaned or removed as soon as possible. The boundary fence, separating the grave site from the railway line at the bottom of the hill, is in a state of disrepair. The grave site as a whole is inadequately fenced and as previously pointed out, does not have a suitable access road.

### 1.3 The Historical And Cultural Significance of S. E. K. Mqhayi (1875-1945).

In an obituary to the poet published shortly after his death in 1945 A. C. Jordan points out that “within three miles of the little township of Berlin, C. P., less than half-a-mile away from the railway line between King William’s Town and East London, is a hillock named *Ntab ’ozuko*, Mount Glory. The hillock, as such, hardly deserves this dignified appellation. Indeed, twenty years ago, it was known to the Ndlambe people as *isiXhoba sikaTilana*, Tilana’s Rocky Ledge - Tilana being the name of the then occupant. This rocky ledge owes the name *Ntab ’ozuko* to a more illustrious occupant, S. E. K. Mqhayi, late poet, novelist, historian, biographer, journalist, translator. It was on the summit of this hillock that he lived for nearly twenty years; it was here that he died ...” (Jordan 1945: 135). *Ntab ’ozuko* is situated on land that was apparently bestowed on Mqhayi by an Ndlambe chief for his services as Xhosa Poet Laureate, *Imbongi yeSizwe-Jikelele*.<sup>1</sup>

Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi was born in the Tyhume valley, at Gqumahashe, near Alice on 1 December 1875. He was the only son and the youngest of five children born to Ziwani Mqhayi and his first wife, daughter of Bhedle, a Gcaleka of Bomvana stock.<sup>2</sup> Apparently, the name Samuel was bestowed on him because his Christian parents attributed his birth to an answer to their prayer for a son, as occurred with Samuel in the Old Testament.

By 1882 Mqhayi was attending a school at Evergreen, Alice, some six miles from his home at Allandale, receiving from his teacher, Joseph Fondini, additional names, an English name being considered more respectable by the missionaries. In August 1885 Mqhayi accompanied his father and sisters to Kentani in Transkei where, apart from gaining a deeper appreciation of Xhosa custom and idiom, his education was interrupted because he had to herd his father’s stock, and he did not get beyond the third standard. After being fetched by his elder sister in May 1891, he attended the station school at Lovedale, where he made such progress in the primary school that, on passing the fifth standard, he was enrolled for training as a pupil-teacher.

After school and at weekends he did odd jobs at staff homes and during the long school holidays, he took temporary employment in East London, where he stayed with the family of the Rev. W. B. Rubusana, whose wife was his great-aunt. In March 1894 he passed through the customary Xhosa circumcision ceremony, even though the missionaries were strongly opposed to it. Back at Lovedale in 1895, he was among the first pupils registered for a teacher-training course, and he was also confirmed into full membership of the Presbyterian Church. His literary career began in 1897, the same year in which he took a teaching post at the West Bank Location, East London. With the encouragement of W. B. Rubusana and Messrs N. C. Mhala, G. Tyamzashe and A. K. Soga - all distinguished leaders of the time, he contributed praise songs to *Izwi La Bantu* (‘The Voice of the People’). He served on the editorial board of *Izwi La Bantu* for six years and when it was discontinued in 1910, he went to teach among the Ndlambe at Mncotsho and later at Mpongo, where he remained for more than ten years before joining the editorial staff of the Xhosa newspaper, *Imvo ZabaNisumdu*, at the request of J. T. Jabavu.

According to Jordan (1945: 136), “on leaving Lovedale,” circa 1925, after a short period teaching there, Mqhayi “went to make his home on the summit of *Ntab ’ozuko* - a Mount Helicon, whence he descended in his impressive kaross on great tribal or state occasions to sing the praises of important personalities. The last of such occasions was the meeting held by the Minister of

Native Affairs at King William's Town last July."<sup>3</sup> Presumably, that was in 1944, as Mqhayi died on 29 July 1945. Mqhayi married three times, and had four sons and three daughters.<sup>2</sup>

On 26 March 1951 a large group of people assembled at *Ntab'ozuko* for the unveiling of the memorial erected on his grave. The dignitaries present on the occasion included the president of the Ntsikana Memorial Cultural Society, Rev J. A. Calata, Prof. D. D. T. Jabavu, Dr A.B. Xuma and a former president of the ANC, Mr A.W. Champion, and all delivered speeches eulogising Mqhayi. The presence of the fore-mentioned men is visible testimony to the cultural significance of Mqhayi's literary productions, which are part of South Africa's national heritage. The centenary of Mqhayi's birth was celebrated on Monday, 1 December 1975 and in a tribute paid by Mr Z. Qangule, over Bantu Radio, he was described as the father of Xhosa literature and one of the best praise poets ever produced by the Xhosa nation.<sup>4</sup> Mqhayi's literary productions are as follows:

*Usamson*, a novelette.

*Iyala lamaWele*, poetry and prose.

*Udon Jadu*, a novel.

*UmHlekazi uHintsa*, a poem in eight cantos.

*ImiHobe nemiBongo*, poems for children.

*Inuzo*, collected poems.

*Ibandla labaNuu*, poems celebrating the establishment of the Presbyterian church.

*IsiKhumbuzo sikaNtsikana*, an essay on Ntsikana.

*Usogqumahashe*, the biography of N. C. Mhala.

*ubom bomFundisi uJ. K. Bokhwe*, biography.

*uAggrey umAfrica*, a translation of C. K. Williams' *The Life of Dr Aggrey*.

*uAdonisi waseNilango*, translated from the Afrikaans, *Kees van die Kalahari*, by G. C. and S. R. Hobson.

*Incwadi yolimo, Agricultural farming*, translated at the request of Rev. W. G. Bennie.

*Umqhayi waseNtab'uzuko*, his autobiography.

*Zemk' iinKomo, maGwala Ndini* and *ImiBengo*, anthologies of historical writings published in the press and edited by W. B. Rubusana and W. G. Bennie respectively.

Material was also published in the Stewart Xhosa Readers.

With Albert M. Jonas he wrote the words and music for *Amagora e-Mendi*, 'Heroes of the Mendi'.

Seven verses of the hymn, *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* ('God Bless Africa'), composed by E. M. Sontonga, who wrote only the first verse.

He was a member of the advisory board entrusted with the revision of the Xhosa translation of the Bible.

"His contribution to Southern Bantu Literature is easily the largest and most valuable that has hitherto been made by any single writer. He has done more than any other writer to reveal the beauty of Xhosa. He dominated the Xhosa literary field until his death in 1945 and for many years was the model for everybody who tried to write in the language" (Jordan 1973: 105).

#### **1.4 Assessment Of The Site In Terms Of Heritage Legislation.**

Various sections of the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25, of 1999 (No. 19974, Government Gazette, 28 April, 1999) are relevant to the grave of S. E. K. Mqhayi and these will be detailed here.

According to section 3 of the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25, of 1999, "(1) For the purposes of this Act, those heritage resources of South Africa which are of cultural significance



or other special value for the present community and for future generations must be considered part of the national estate and fall within the sphere of operations of heritage resources authorities.

- (2) Without limiting the generality of subsection (1), the national estate may include-
  - (g) graves and burial grounds, including-
    - (v) historical graves and cemeteries;
- (3) Without limiting the generality of subsections (1) and (2), a place or object is to be considered part of the national estate if it has cultural significance or other special value because of-
  - (a) its importance in the community, or pattern of South Africa's history;
  - (b) its possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of South Africa's natural or cultural heritage;
  - (c) its potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of South Africa's natural or cultural heritage;
  - (d) its importance in demonstrating the principle characteristics of a particular class of South Africa's natural or cultural places or objects;
  - (e) its importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group;
  - (f) its importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period;
  - (g) its strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;
  - (h) its strong or special association with the life or work of a person, group or organisation of importance in the history of South Africa; and
  - (i) sites of significance relating to the history of slavery in South Africa."

For the reasons outlined in the foregoing section 1.3 of this report, the grave of the Xhosa poet laureate, S. E. K. Mqhayi, is certainly a site of historical and cultural significance, and the sections of the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25, of 1999 cited above all apply, save section 3(i) relating to the history of slavery in South Africa. Thus, the grave of S. E. K. Mqhayi is and *should be* protected in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25, of 1999 - "it must be considered part of the national estate and fall within the sphere of operations of heritage resources authorities".

Section 5(7) (a) and (b) of the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25, of 1999 clearly states that: "The identification, assessment and management of the heritage resources of South Africa must take account of all relevant cultural values and indigenous knowledge systems [and] take account of material or cultural heritage value and the least possible alteration or loss of it."

Under the heading dealing with heritage assessment criteria and grading, that is, section 7(1) of the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25, of 1999, it is explicitly stated that "SAHRA, in consultation with the Minister and the MEC of every province, must by regulation establish a system of grading of places and objects which form part of the national estate, and which distinguishes between at least the categories-

- (a) Grade I: Heritage resources with qualities so exceptional that they are of special national significance;
- (b) Grade II: Heritage resources which, although forming part of the national estate, can be

considered to have special qualities which make them significant within the context of a province or a region; and

(c) Grade III: Other heritage resources worthy of conservation.”

Because of S. E. K. Mqhayi's unique literary contributions, albeit in Xhosa, it can be argued that the poet's grave falls into Grade I, namely “heritage resources with qualities so exceptional that they are of special national significance”. That is particularly the case with S. E. K. Mqhayi's unique contribution to the composition of seven verses of *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* (“God Bless Africa”), which presently constitutes an important part of South Africa's current national anthem. Further, it can be argued, S. E. K. Mqhayi's importance as an unique South African literary figure has been underestimated and understated in the past. If his works had long ago been made available in translation in English and other foreign languages, he would now be a Xhosa literary figure of wide international repute. Clearly, that is an oversight, however much our apartheid past is to blame for it, which should be remedied as soon as possible.

The responsibilities of heritage resources authorities and local authorities are clearly defined in section 8(1) of the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25, of 1999: “There is a three-tier system for heritage resources management, in which national level functions are the responsibility of SAHRA, provincial level functions are the responsibility of provincial heritage resources authorities and local level functions are the responsibility of local authorities. Heritage resources authorities and local authorities are accountable for their actions and decisions and the performance of functions under this system.” According to current provisions, the provincial heritage resources agency (PHRA) should nominate the grave site to obtain provincial heritage status before it would be eligible to obtain national heritage status. However, it is presently unclear to what extent PHRA is a functioning heritage resources agency. In the event it is not, the suggestion is that SAHRA assume the responsibility for motivating the future protection of S. E. K. Mqhayi's grave as an important national heritage site.

Regarding any development near a heritage site, the Act states in section 9(1): “All branches of the State and supported bodies must give heritage resources authorities such assistance in the performance of their functions as is reasonably practicable.” And under (f) it is stated that each State department and supported body must “at the initiation of the planning process of the project, or at least 90 days before taking any action that could adversely affect such heritage resource, whichever is greater, inform SAHRA of the proposed action and give them a reasonable opportunity to consider and comment on it”. There is a general tendency for local authorities to act in ignorance or to claim ignorance of the relevant provisions of heritage legislation, even though ignorance of the law is no mitigation before the law. The foregoing would appear to be the case in the particular instance regarding the development of the East London regional waste disposal site because in the course of more than a decade of the project's development since 1991 recourse to SAHRA on the part of the developer, Arcus Gibb, has only recently occurred during 2004 in respect of the development of an access road to the grave site, which suggests that Buffalo City, formerly East London Municipality, has been acting in ignorance of the current provisions of heritage legislation. Under the heading relating to heritage resources management, namely section 38(1) of the Act of 1999, it is stated that “subject to the provisions of subsections (7), (8) and (9), any person who intends to undertake a development categorised as-

(a) the construction of a road, wall, pipeline, pipeline, canal or other similar form of linear development or barrier exceeding 300m in length; must at the very earliest stages of initiating such a development, notify the responsible heritage resources authority and furnish it

with details regarding the location, nature and extent of the proposed development.

(2) The responsible heritage resources authority must, within 14 days of receipt of a notification in terms of subsection (1)-

(a) if there is reason to believe that heritage resources will be affected by such development, notify the person who intends to undertake the development to submit an impact assessment report. Such report must be compiled at the cost of the person proposing the development, by a person or persons, approved by the responsible heritage resources authority with relevant qualifications and experience and professional standing in heritage resources management; or

(b) notify the person concerned that this section does not apply.”

In view of the current problem of local authorities acting in ignorance of relevant heritage legislation it is even more critical, than would otherwise be the case in another example, for SAHRA to assume full responsibility for the future management of the S. E. K. Mqhayi grave as a heritage site.

In section 30(1) of the Act “a provincial heritage resources authority must compile and maintain a heritage register listing the heritage resources in the province which it considers to be conservation-worthy in terms of the heritage assessment criteria set out in section 3(3) and prescribed under section 7.” Mqhayi’s grave is not listed in either the provincial or national heritage registers. However, in terms of section 37 of the Act, “public monuments and memorials must, without the need to publish a notice to this effect, be protected in the same manner as places which are entered in a heritage register referred to in section 30”. As previously mentioned above in section 1.3 of this report, the stone erected over the poet’s grave in 1951 by the Ntsikana Memorial Cultural Society using money collected by public subscription is, in fact, not a tombstone, but a public memorial erected to the memory of the Xhosa poet laureate, S. E. K. Mqhayi. Principally for that reason the grave site is not only the possession of the Mqhayi family, but the wider South African public. Thus, there *must be* controlled public access to the site.

### **1.5 Recommendations Regarding The Future Of The S. E. K. Mqhayi Heritage Site.**

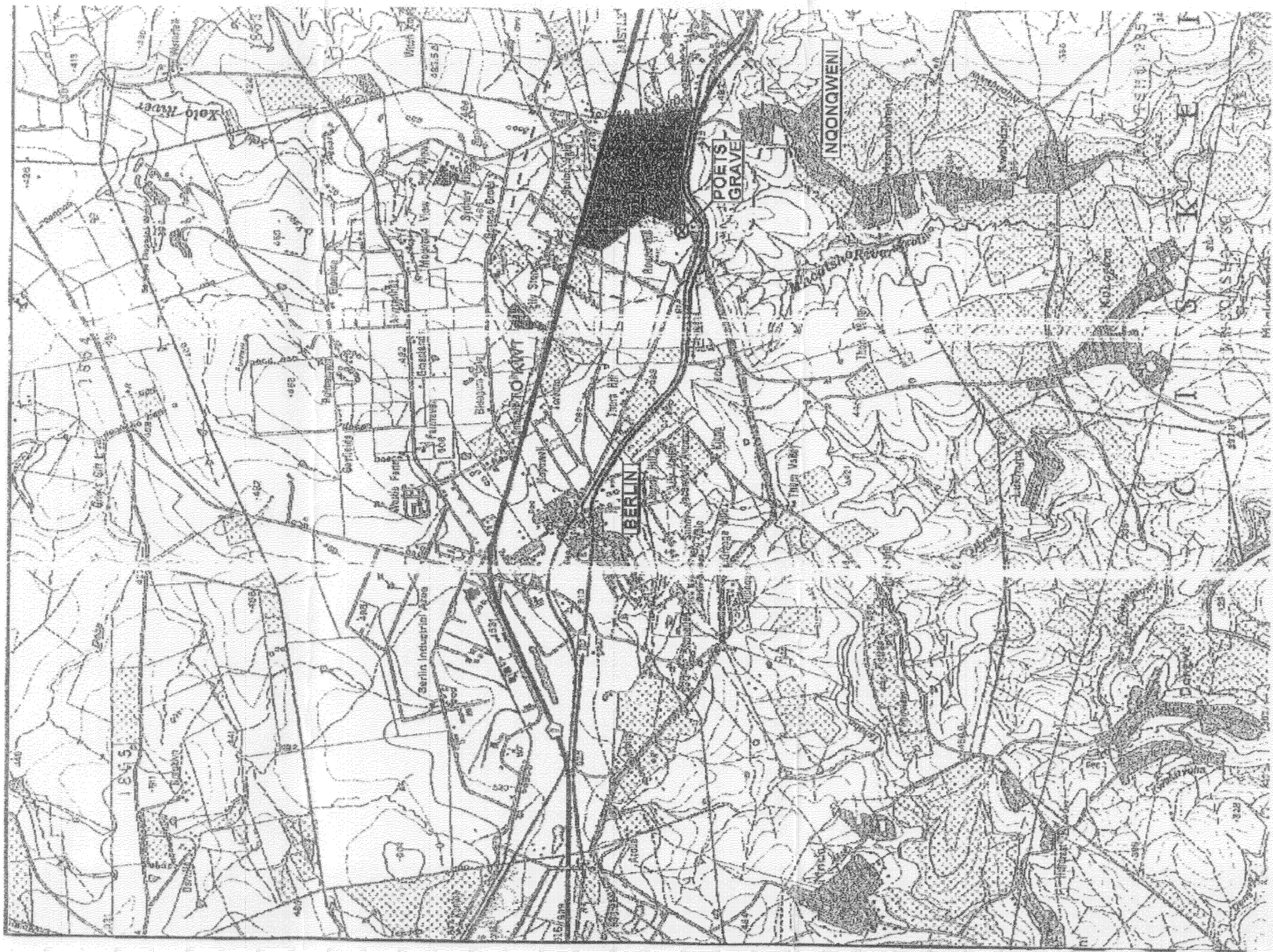
Unequivocally and without reservation, this report proposes that any future development adversely affecting the grave of the Xhosa poet laureate, S. E. K. Mqhayi, can and should be avoided by the proclamation of the site as a heritage site of provincial and national significance, which would enable the future management of the grave site as a national heritage resource. A conservation management plan is urgently required to rescue the site from any further unchecked development. It is clearly a shortcoming of the involved local authority, in this case Buffalo City (formerly East London) Municipality, in the first instance to have evolved a plan for the development of a regional waste disposal site of considerable extent, without taking into account the presence of a site of national historical and cultural significance on its very perimeter. Now the dilemma has to be faced to develop the poet’s grave site as an afterthought or *ad hoc* add-on, when it should have been an integral part of the development of the regional waste disposal site right from the start. In view of the recent past history of the development of the East London regional waste disposal site, it is highly recommended that SAHRA take charge of the situation and in consultation with the Mqhayi family, Buffalo City Municipality and the site developer, Arcus Gibb, forge an immediate and urgent conservation management plan for the future of the grave site as a national heritage resource which, for historical and cultural reasons, is part of our

national estate.

**Sources:**

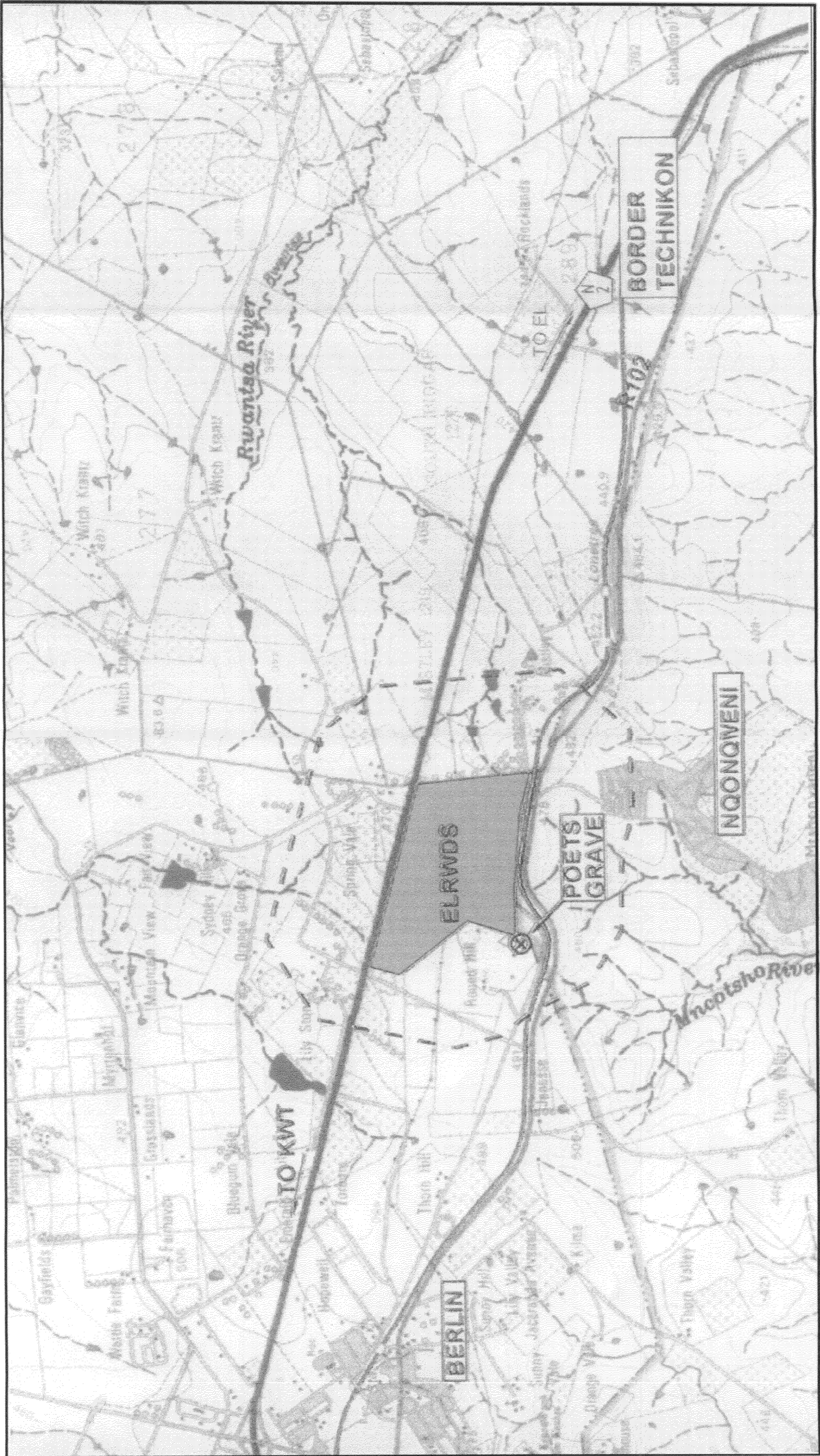
- (1.) Matthews, Prof. Z. K. 1961. 'S. E. Krune Mqhayi.' *Imvo*, 14 October 1961.
- (2.) *Dictionary Of South African Biography*, Vol. 1, pp. 565-7.
- (3.) Jordan, A. C. 1945. 'Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi.' *The South African Outlook* (September 1<sup>st</sup>. 1945) 75: 135-38.
- (4.) *Eastern Province Herald*, 29 November, 1975.
- (5.) Jordan, A. C. 1973. *Towards an African Literature; The Emergence of Literary Form in Xhosa*. Los Angeles: University of Berkeley Press.

APPENDIX I



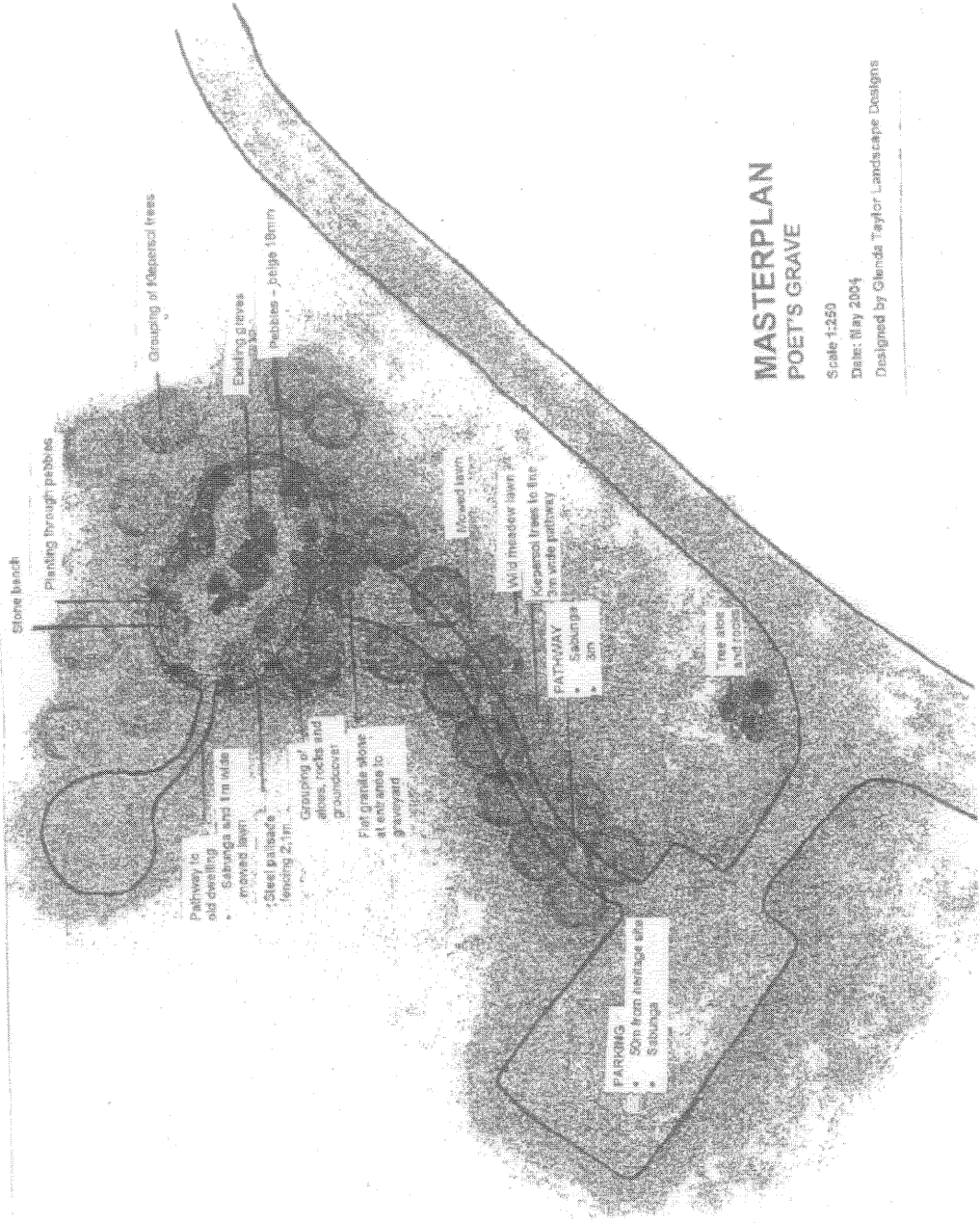
1: 50 000 map of the area showing the location of the East London regional waste disposal site (shaded area).





The precise location of the waste disposal site relative to the poet's grave.





**MASTERPLAN  
POET'S GRAVE**

Scale 1:250  
 Date: May 2004  
 Designed by Glenda Taylor Landscape Designs

Plan to upgrade poet's grave site.

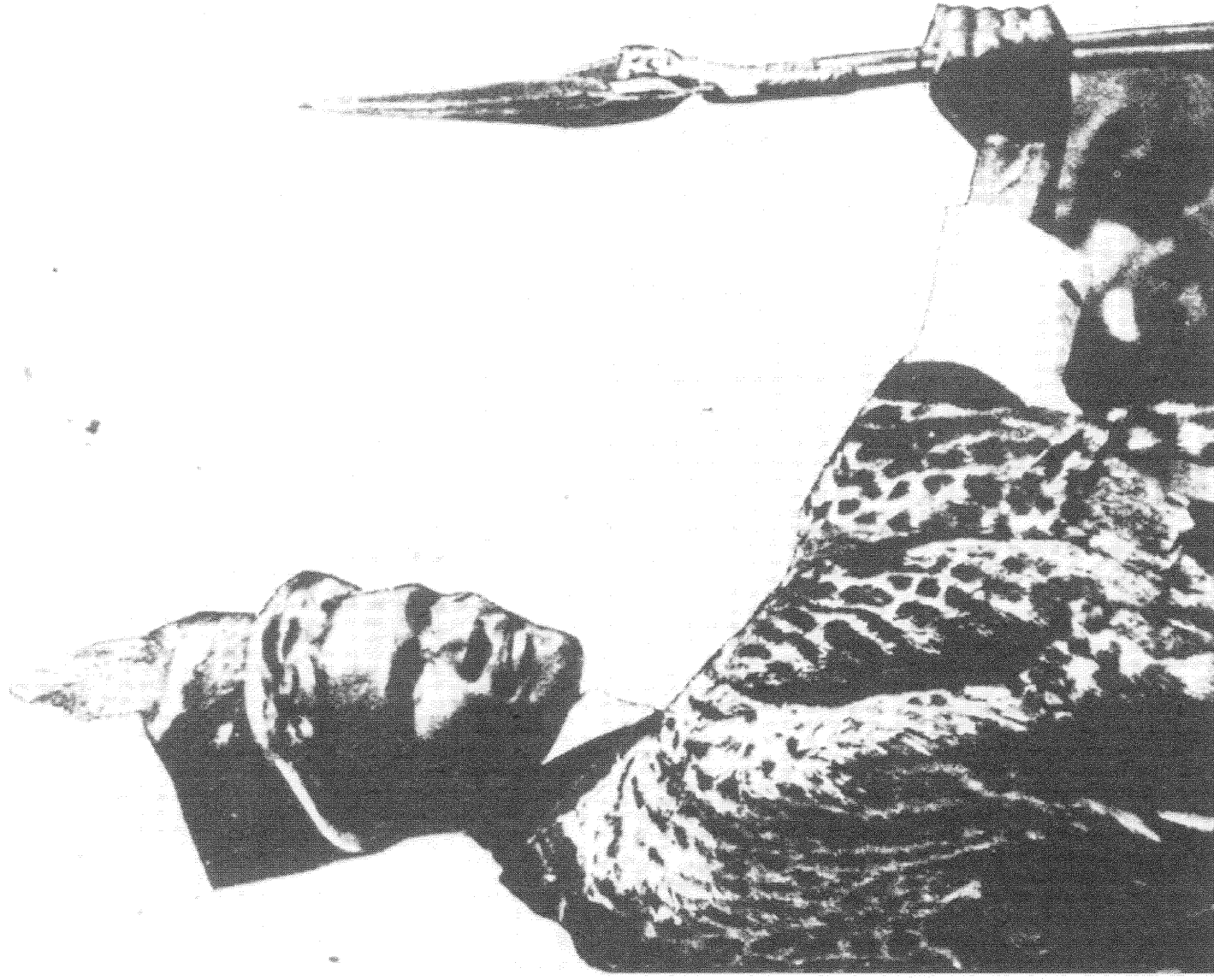


Planned access road to the poet's grave.

APPENDIX II



Portrait of S.E.K. Mqhayi (1875-1945) in the Amathole Museum,  
King William's Town.

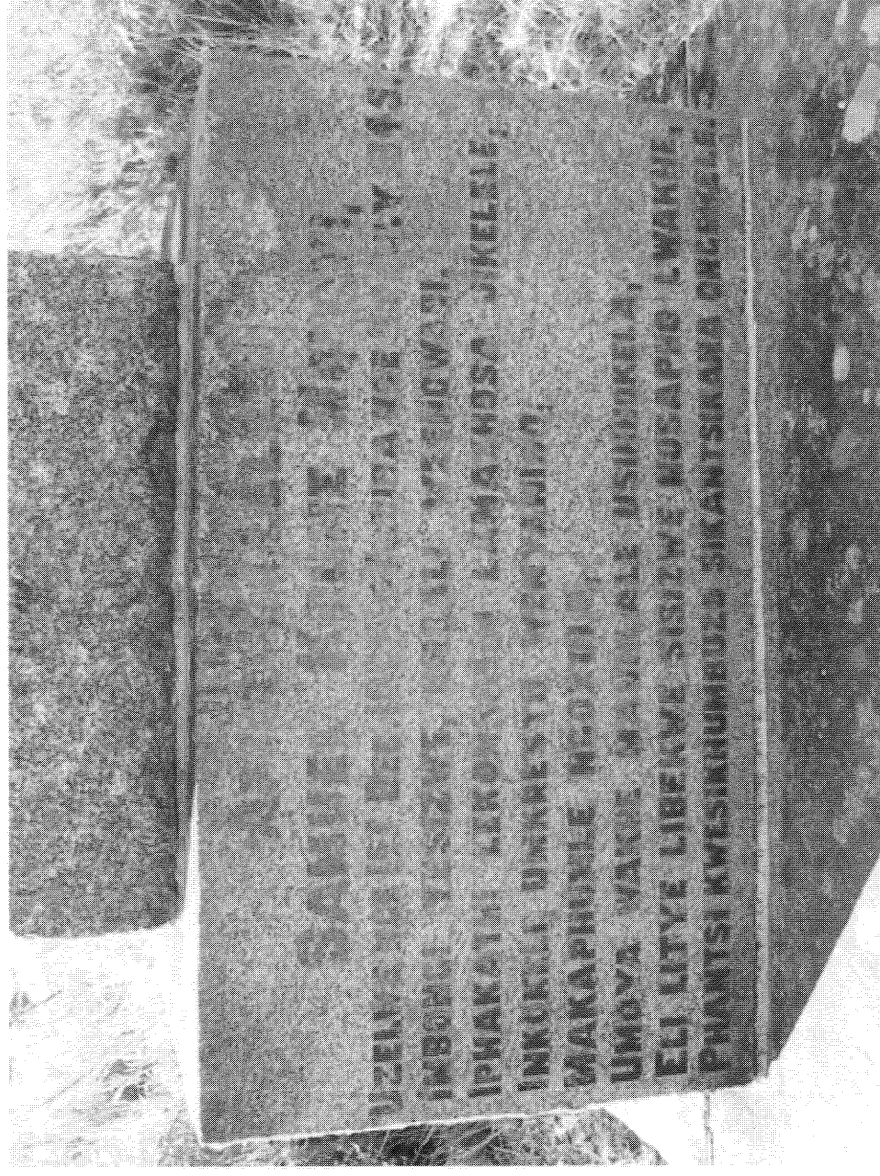


S.E.K. Mqhayi in the regalia of a Xhosa praise poet (*imbongi*),  
*Cape Times*, May 1925.

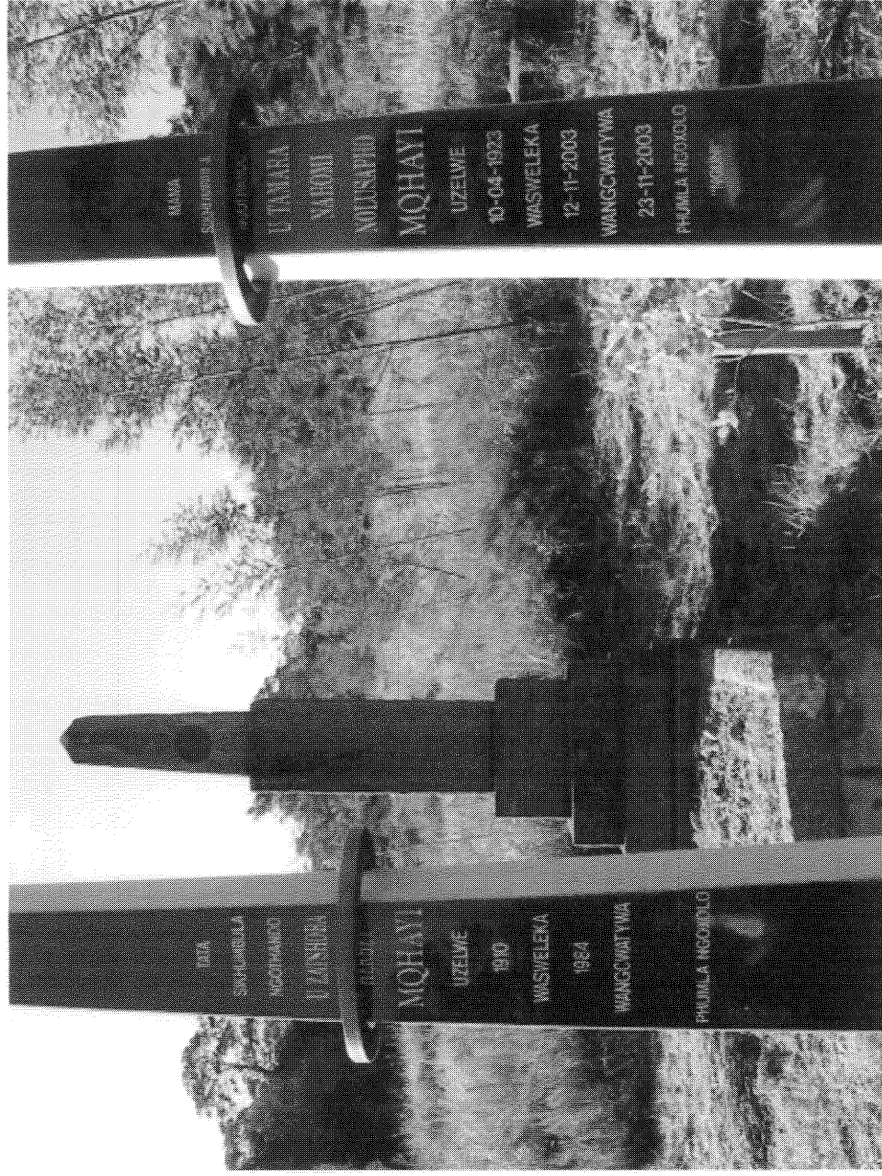




The graves at the site, with S.E.K. Mqhayi's grave in the background.



The memorial erected on the grave of S.E.K. Mqhayi (1875-1945) by the Ntsikana Memorial Foundation in 1951 acknowledging his contribution as Xhosa poet laureate.



The graves of the poet's son, Zatsoba Herbet Mqhayi (1910-84), and his son's wife, Nolusapho Mqhayi (1923-2003).



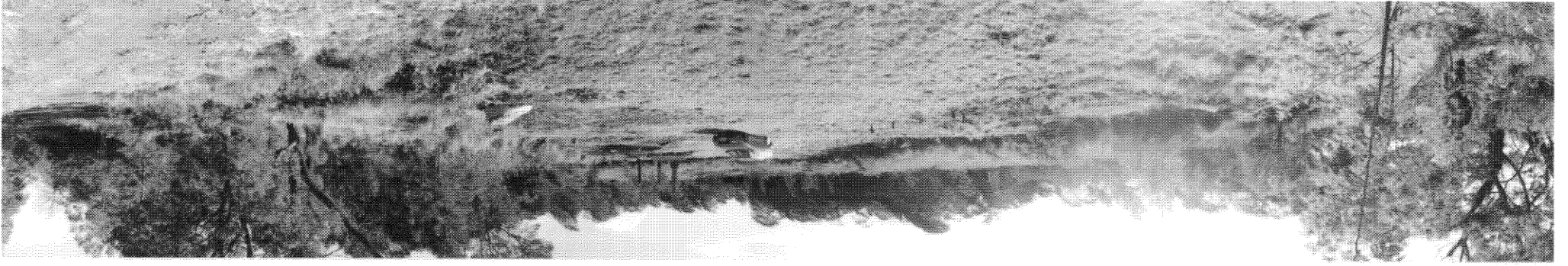
The grave of the poet's granddaughter, Miselwa Julietta Mqhayi (1957-98).





Cleared grass and bush to the left of the graves.

A view from the opposite side.



A back view of the graves

