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Notes on uMzimkhulu town

Debbie Whelan from Archaic Consulting was requested by Gavin Anderson of Umlando to carry out a short preliminary investigation of the centre of uMzimkhulu town with respect to the map produced for the uMzimkhulu Local Municipality demarcating the 'study area' by SEF. The author was also sent the photographs which are included in the document, by Gavin Anderson from Umlando and requested to comment on them within the context of the town of uMzimkhulu.

Given that the uMzimkhulu region has recently been incorporated into the province of KwaZulu-Natal the area falls under the provincial legislation and thus ***any alteration or demolition to the built fabric which is over the age of 60 years is subject to the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Heritage Act no 10 of 1997.***

uMzimkhulu town is particularly important in that it has always served as a border, being situated on the river separating provinces, tribal groups, and identities. It is also important as the development of the drift into a town was largely as a result of Strachan and Co. who started one of the earliest rural trading posts in the province, and indeed, the town. Buildings associated with this empire are thus an important part of the historical and architectural fabric of the region, in addition to the more recent histories of the Transkei and apartheid, as well as providing integrity as starting points in terms of scale and architectural language in the development process. Design and development does not need to happen in an incoherent and random manner. Given its transient status, there has been no assessment to date with respect to heritage of the built environment.

Donald and Thomas Strachan opened their first store at the drift at Umzimkulu in 1858. They were orphan brothers, whose parents had been Byrne settlers. The brothers had taken to transport riding for survival, at the ages of 10 and 12 respectively, and started trading on the Umzimkhulu drift when barely out of their teens. The history of the town, the magistracy, the farms around it and all civic buildings including the stores and hotels, is thus bound up in this history, and many of the buildings date from the second half of the nineteenth century¹. This places most of the structures within the 60 year clause of the Amafa Act, and subject to a full architectural impact assessment and application process. In addition, the attached aerial photograph dated 1937 shows clearly the development of the town to the south of the main road, and following roughly the demarcation of the 'study area' in the map provided. This is particularly reinforced given the age and vernacular status of the homesteads in the attached photographs submitted to the author by Gavin Anderson from Umlando.

¹ Comprehensive information is provided in the publications about the town cited in the references.

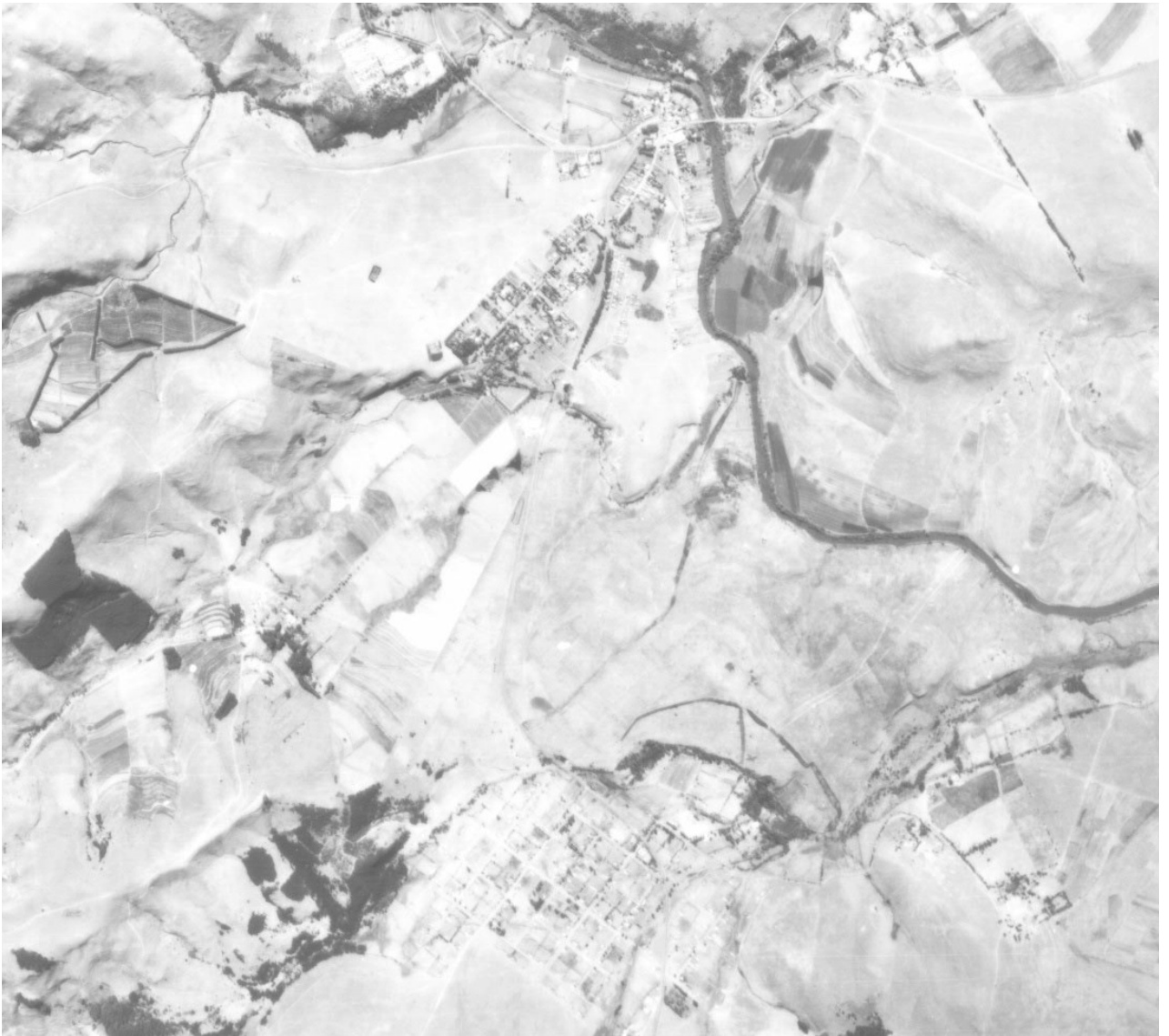


Fig 1: Aerial Photograph 731-4-00036



Fig 2: House within demarcated area

Fig 3: house within demarcated area

Recommendations: given the development visible on the 1937 photograph, publications by Milner Snell and Margaret Rainier about the development of the town and the fortunes of Strachan and Co, and the photographs provided to the author, the following is recommended.

All pictures show buildings which are constructed at the turn of the century and in the first few decades. The entire site has to be systematically surveyed with each structure separately assessed in terms of its potential, condition and merit. It is the strong recommendation that a full audit of the built environment of uMzimkhulu town be carried out, and that Amafa aKwaZulu-Natali be 'on board' with the process. It is also strongly recommended that the Heritage/Architectural Impact Assessment include the input of Milner Snell in connecting the history of the buildings with the architecture for expediency sake.



Fig 4: House within demarcated area

**Fig 4: House within demarcated area
(rear of house in Fig 2)**

References

- Snell, M (2005) *Strachan and Co. (Pty) Ltd, Merchants and Importers*
Kokstad, Self-published
- Snell, M (2006) *A small river in a great valley- a journey through old Umzimkulu*
Kokstad, Self-published
- Rainier, M (2002) *Donald Strachan, Autocrat of Umzimkulu*
Grahamstown, Mark Rainier