

SPOTLIGHT ON MANGAUNG HERITAGE SITES

This month, the city's Communication Unit is running a series of articles on heritage sites across the city, in celebration of Heritage Month. The second article pays attention to Bloemfontein's oldest township, Batho Location.

Batho's red brick houses

Batho was ahead of other locations in South Africa regarding the housing scheme that was implemented. In accordance with the Housing Act of 1920 the Council used a system that allowed either the Council to build the houses, or residents to build their own houses with or without the Council's assistance. Building materials such as doors, window frames and corrugated iron sheets were supplied at a low cost.

Batho's houses were built mostly according to plans drawn up by the Council's architects. Because the late Victorian architectural style was still fashionable in Bloemfontein during the 1920s and 1930s, Batho's oldest houses display an English character. Typical elements include red bricks, gables, wood-framed windows and doors, bay windows, arched lintels and corrugated iron roofs.



People who were moved to Batho Location had an option of choosing from five different designs of houses, what the house had in common is the red bricks. Even today, one can still see some of the red brick houses in Batho Location.

UNEARTHING THE PAST: BATHO LOCATION

Batho is Bloemfontein's oldest township, a place with a rich vibrant history. One can't talk about the history of Batho Location, without looking at the history of Waaihoek and how Batho came to be.

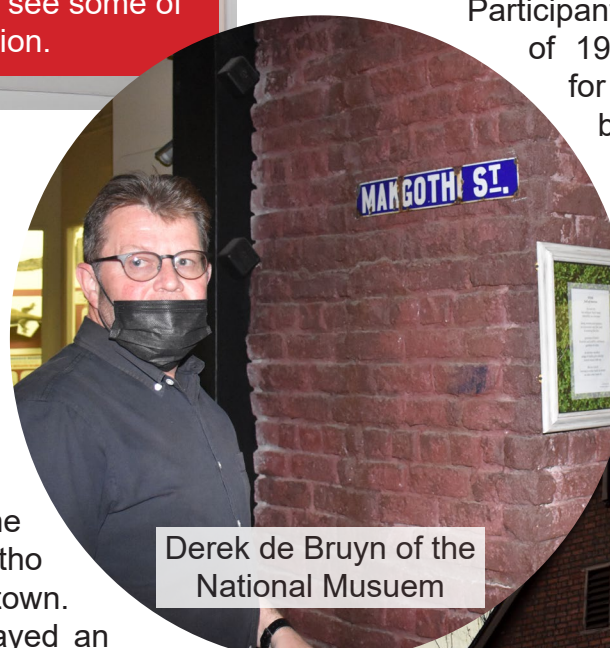
The Communications Unit recently visited the National Museum to see the Batho exhibition and talk to Derek du Bruyn who is doing extensive research into Batho location to preserve the history of the place.

In 1918, the Bloemfontein Council felt that Waaihoek was turning into a slum and it had become overcrowded; this called for an intervention as most of the houses in the area have become unsuitable for human habitation. As a result, the Council reached a decision that the houses in Waaihoek will be demolished and African people would be moved from across the railway - which acted as a physical

barrier to keep Africans from the white neighborhoods.

In 1919, it was decided that the new location will be called Batho Town, which means the people's town. Over the years, the township played an important role in South Africa's liberation struggle and is now home to some of the heritage sites in the Mangaung Metro Municipality.

These sites include houses such as the **Mapikela house**. Thomas Mapikela was one of the founding members of the African National Congress, which was established in Bloemfontein in 1912. Mapikela House was the venue for ANC executive council meetings held during the 1930s and 1940s. It was one of the first double-story houses in the location and has since been declared a provincial heritage site.



Derek de Bruyn of the National Museum

The house of Caleb Motshabi is also a point of interest. Motshabi was the member of the FS provincial executive committee of the ANC and played a key role in establishing Umkhonto we Sizwe and became the commander of MK in the Free State. Political meetings were held at his house and banned publications such as The New Age were distributed there.

Other houses in the area that are of interest and important to the history of Batho Location include the following:

- Moipone Motlhakwana's house
- James Dixon Mogaecho's house
- Rev. Gabriel Yster's house

Batho Location is also home to other significant buildings such as the Old Central (Ramkraal Prison) which is the oldest existing prison in Mangaung.

Participants of the Defiance Campaign of 1952 were imprisoned there for ten days. Sadly, this unique building has been badly vandalized in recent years. The Magasa Hall, which was renovated in 1978 was a popular venue for political gatherings

organized by the ANC during the apartheid years. During the 1940s and 1950s the ANC held some of its national executive council meetings and conferences in the original hall.

De Bruyn said the museum is in constant engagements with the community of Batho location. "We have this exhibition because we understand the importance of history and we want to preserve it for future generations to come. We encourage residents to visit the museum to look at this exhibition and see how far Batho location has come," conclude de Bruyn.



The red brick house on display at the National Museum. The windows are an original taken from a house in Batho



Waaihoek has since come to be one of the heritage sites in Mangaung Metro