

Attachment A – Description and history of the Head plot and buildings

The Bessie Head plot comprises about 3,000 square metres situated on top of a low ridge in Morula Ward, Newtown, Serowe, along the north side of the old Serowe-Palapye Road, at a point about 120 metres east of the intersection of this untarred road with the modern highway to Orapa. Swaneng Hill School lies 250 metres to the west; the new Sekgoma Memorial Hospital lies some 700 metres to the east and south. Please see the rough sketch map attached.

The plot is well-fenced, with a double gate for vehicles on the south side and a single gate on the north side.

The plot contains 3 structures. These are the Bessie Head House, a large tuck shop with shed, and a major residential building under construction (the walls have been put up to roof height).

History of the plot

The plot was allocated to Ms Head in two parts. The first part comprises about 1,000 square metres and forms the western end of the present plot. The larger part of the plot was allocated later, after the establishment of the Ngwato Land Board.

The Bangwato Tribal Authority allocated the first part in October 1969. At that time it was part of a parcel adjoining Swaneng Hill School and extending east along the Palapye Road. In 1969 Mr van Rensburg acted on Ms Head's behalf and arranged that some of that land be assigned to her. Shortly thereafter she built a 3-roomed bungalow 8.5 x 4.5 metres near the centre of that first plot.

In 1973 she contacted the new Ngwato Land Board and asked to extend her plot eastwards. By the late 1970s it had awarded her an additional 2,000 square metres. Although she fenced the entire area and arranged for a water connection, she built no further buildings. She used part of it for gardens and trees.

History of the buildings

The Bessie Head House was built in brick and plaster with a corrugated iron roof by the Serowe Builders' Brigade in October-November 1969, following a sketched plan by the author herself and elaborated by the brigade architect. The house was fitted with toilet, septic tank, and running water from the beginning — initially provided by Swaneng School — but electricity was not installed until after her death. She and her son Howard moved into the house in late November 1969. Please see the simple floor plan and photo attached. A literary account of these developments may be found in Attachment B.

Bessie Head continued to live in this house until her death in April 1986. She made no additions or structural changes to it. Since her death it has been occupied by her son Howard. For heritage reasons he too has made no structural changes (although he has added a temporary veranda of poles and shade cloth, visible in the photo). The foundations, walls, roof, and ceiling are exactly as originally built and lived in by the author — a very well-preserved house, now 37 years old, and almost as old as Botswana itself.

The other buildings in the yard were added later by Howard Head. The strongly built tuck shop was put up in 1999-2000. Construction began on the large residence in 2002. It has not yet been completed.