

Logo of Khama III
Memorial Museum

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Director, Department of Culture and Youth
to the attention of Ms T.S. Bolokoe
Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs
Private Bag 00185
Gaborone

Reference: DCY 7/2 VII (141)

Dear Ms Bolokoe,

We refer to your letter of 4th September, requesting comments on the Draft Inventory and asking for proposed new sites and further historic information.

We at the Khama III Memorial Museum, together with the Bessie Head Heritage Organising Committee, believe that this is a good moment to request that a famous house and plot in Serowe be considered for designation and proclamation as a Heritage Site. This is the house built for and occupied by the internationally known writer, Bessie Amelia Head, for over 16 years.

Attachment A to this letter outlines the history of the plot and the buildings currently standing on it. A sketch map and a photograph are included.

Attachment B links the history of the plot and house to the life and writing of Bessie Head: her emergence as renowned novelist and later as an Ngwato historian.

We stated above that now is an opportune time to designate her house as a Heritage Site. This is because the year 2007 will bring a series of literary commemorations of Bessie Head's life and writings. July 6, 2007 marks the 70th anniversary of her birth, and her fans will come to Botswana from all over the world for celebrations in Gaborone and Serowe. [see the website www.bessiehead.org/bessiefest/bessiefest.htm]

The University of Botswana will host a two-day Symposium and cultural festival on July 5 and 6. A few days later, on the 16th and 17th July, this Museum and a local organising committee will host events in Serowe. We anticipate tree plantings, a book launch and book sale, a play and other live performances, a photo exhibit, several performances recorded overseas, speeches, discussions, and musical entertainment.

It would be an excellent occasion for the Minister of Labour and Home Affairs to visit Serowe, proclaim Bessie's house a Heritage Site, perhaps shake hands with her son Howard Head, and stress the importance of preserving cultural sites so that we do not lose the collective memory of what happened there. A distinguished audience will be present to hear the Minister's words.

Regardless of the potential for publicity, we wish to repeat our emphasis on the importance of this site to Botswana's literary history. Bessie Head is, to date, the only Botswana writer who has achieved worldwide fame. Further, much of her work concerns traditional Tswana lifeways, attitudes, and stories. One of her books, *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*, chronicles the history of Serowe via oral interviews, a unique contribution to our knowledge of ourselves. Her last long work, *A Bewitched Crossroad*, follows the intertwined stories of Khama III, the Sebina family, Shoshong, and the emergence of Ngwato supremacy in our region.

Bessie Head left behind thousands of letters, manuscripts, reviews, and other documents when she died. These have been lovingly kept together and are housed in the Khama III Memorial Museum as the Bessie Head Papers. The Museum has also created a Bessie Head Room in its main exhibition space, where many photos and a number of her personal effects are on permanent display.

Turning to her house, built in 1969, it has reached an age when certain key renovations will soon be required, most notably the renewing of the corrugated iron roof. With the support of Howard Head, a Bessie Head Heritage Trust is in formation, with one of its objects being the permanent preservation of the Head house and gravesite. Its work will be made much easier if the house and plot are designated as a Heritage Site by the Minister shortly after the registration of the Trust.

Thus we request that the Bessie Head house and plot in Morula Ward, Newtown, Serowe, be added at this time to the Draft National Inventory of Heritage Sites and Facilities.

A secondary request is that the Department of Culture and Youth take part in the Bessie Head literary celebrations in July next year and that the Minister designate her house as a Heritage Site at that time.

Yours faithfully,

Scobie Lekhutile for the Khama III Memorial Museum

Gasenone Kediseng for the Organising Committee, Bessie Head Heritage Trust

Encl: Attachment A
Attachment B