

Report on the project „The Past is not Dead“

Liz Crossley

Time frame.

28th January till 24th March 2005-03-30

(Extension of time due to the death of my father. I thank Dr Arndt Hopfmann and his staff for being so flexible and human in helping me to continue this project under very difficult circumstances.)

The first workshop, 17th February was attended by people who were seriously interested in working on creative interventions relating to our history. There were so many ideas that the difficult job was to select those which could feasibly be carried out in the short time that I was there. Other ideas have been kept and the plan is for the group to continue to meet and develop some of these for the Garip Festival and later.

At that first workshop, we discussed the work done last year and looked at ways of developing ideas that had taken root then. I was delighted to discover that the Malay Camp Society, which consists of former inhabitants of Malay Camp, and other interested citizens, both young and old had received a new lease on life and had been more active since the intellectual and financial injection which the RLF project 2004 had made possible. The group plan to develop an installation of road signs, theatrical and musical elements for the Gariep Festival. For 2006, the head of Drama at the CBC is discussing the writing and production of a play on Malay Camp. This year they are producing „District Six“, so the theme of forced removals continues and gains local relevance. Corné Thompson, one of the organisers of the Gariep welcomes this contribution to the festival. Out of the more complicated proposals, the idea of Fiona Barbour, to have a map of Malay Camp as it was and with orientation points to the Civic Centre as it now is, was taken up and brought to fruition. On 23rd March, a group of former residents and interested young people gathered to look at the new map and discuss its installation on site. (See DVD) This event was very successful, as people immediately started exchanging information. The older citizens were delighted that there was finally some physical sign that this had once been the place where they lived and they hope that it will help to inform people about this formerly multi-cultural area in the centre of Kimberley. Mr Louis Mallett has been trying to get permission for an obelisk for some time now and it is hoped that the map and the obelisk will form the core of a growing reminder of what this area was like. The oral history archive has also grown remarkably in the last year and was a source of great interest to the youth, who got to hear some of the material, as well as see photographs and other documents on the archive day (11th March) at the museum. This material can now be used by the youth to develop songs, texts and visual elements. As a result of this project Mr Mallett and some of his colleagues, have been invited to speak at various schools and this work will continue. While doing this work it became more and more obvious that many people had no idea that Malay Camp had ever existed and those who knew about it were of the opinion that Malay people lived there. When people realise that there were representatives of many cultural and ethnic backgrounds living there, it helps them to identify and to accept this as part of our combined history.

You will have noticed that the projected titles have been dropped in favour of a quote from Christa Wolf, which I found on one of the RLF leaflets. At our first meeting, I put the quote up on the board and it was immediately taken up and played with by the group.

A sign bearing the text has been made and installed at the ancient Wildebeestkuil rock engraving site. A group of art students from the Art School based in what was the William

Pescot school in the former Malay Camp, where we were lucky to be able to meet regularly, decided to create a text wall using the quote. Anelle van Wyk, their teacher got permission for this to be painted on two walls of the electricity block in the corner of South Circular and Bultfontein roads and the RLF contributed the materials for the work. (See DVD for documentation of this action.) Passers-by got drawn into the work, one happened to be a former Malay Camp resident, who then learned of the map and was at that event and has now linked up with the project. Many people stopped and asked questions and got a copy of the text to take with them. I thought this was a particularly good intervention, as it was very public and created a lot of dialogue. A photo of this event was printed in the Diamond Fields' Advertiser with an article on some of the linked events.

Fiona Barbour supported the project wonderfully and in many ways. Just after my father died, I was not able to keep the jour fixe, but she did and reported to me on what ideas were developing. One of these, was a song, written by Carla Visagie and sung by her and Rhiannon Jones, which incorporated the Christa Wolf quote. When I returned to the group and heard it, I was very touched and decided that they should have the chance of recording it. I put them together with Abel Modiese, with whom I had worked in 2004 and a recording was made. (A copy of the CD has been sent to the RLF) They also sang it at the Wildebeestkuil book launch, as is documented on the DVD. This is but a small beginning. I shall encourage the various musical groups to get together and see if they can't develop something more out of this for the Gariep Festival. It would be interesting if Uxolo, Abel Modiese and the two young singers could co-operate here.

The linking of 23rd March was the idea of David Morris, the chief archeologist at the McGregor Museum. Initially there was to have been a link to the opening of the Heritage Learners' Exhibition, „The Sobukwe Clause”, which opened in the evening. The young people themselves entered into negotiations with us and were keen to have the singers and dancers at their opening, but word from Pretoria was that they were not permitted to enter into any ‚joint ventures' as this would change their assessment, so, at the last minute, we had to reorganise and relocate. This resulted in the co-operation with Mark Kotze, Reggie Phantzwa, Michelle van der Meulen and the projects, „Galeshewe Urban Renewal” and „Galashewe Tourism”. We tossed around various quotes from Robert Sobukwe and decided on the admonition that Reggie remembered hearing as a child from Robert Sobukwe's lips, „Grow up and go to school”. This was then painted and installed on the wall of Robert Sobukwe's office in Galeshewe and celebrated by Uxolo and The Real Pointers, who created a dance for this project. (See DVD documentation)

Two new signs for the words water and wind in !Xung were designed by the museum graphic department and put on swivel sticks, so that they move in the wind. These were installed on the Wildebeestkuil site 23rd March. The young guide on the DVD gives viewers an idea of why these words are relevant to the history of the site. It was very touching for me to hear his words about the wind, which carries away one's footprints when one dies.

Radio Tenameng hosted the first, of what the young people hope is to be one of many interviews between young and old. In this case, three young women interviewed Pastor Tommy Davis, radio presenter and old Malay Camp resident. The project was further publicised in an interview between Pastor Davis, Reggie Phantza and Liz Crossley shortly before the events of 23rd March.

Abel Modise did great work in spreading the word and getting the groups Uxolo and The Real Pointers to develop routines around our theme. The visit to the back yard in Galeshewe, where they practise was a good point of contact for the various actors.

As you can see, a number of co-operations resulted and links have been made between groups and individuals who were not formerly aware of the work that the others were doing. I consider this to be very important.

Short list of achievements:

CD produced – The Past is not Dead.

DVD Documentation produced

Event day 23rd March with Malay Camp map presentation, Wildebeestkuil signs and dance and Galeshewe sign and Phantswa dance

Workshops on a weekly basis

Galashewe dance visit

Archive day to introduce the youth to work with primary source materials.

Malay Camp stories at schools

Plans made for Gareip Fest

Contacts made to the Department of Arts and Culture for the continuation of the project.

It is to my mind the greatest success, that young people and old people from various parts of the community have come together to work creatively on their history.

For the RLF, it is, I think, particularly positive that German writers ideas were so positively taken up and their relevance for the South African situation recognised.

Once again,

I would like to thank Dr. Arndt Hopfmann and his team for helping me to help others who are in the midst of the conflict ridden process of intercultural dialogue towards creative cultural exchange in my home town.

Sincerely,
Liz Crossley