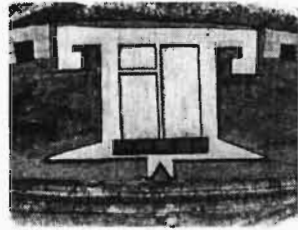


**THE RECENT TRANSMUTATION OF THE INDIGENOUS VERNACULAR  
ARCHITECTURE OF THE PEOPLE AT KWAMTHEMBU AND KWAMCHUNU,  
MSINGA DISTRICT, KWAZULU-NATAL, SOUTH AFRICA**



SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF  
ARCHITECTURE IN THE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, PLANNING AND HOUSING, FACULTY OF  
COMMUNITY AND DEVELOPMENT DISCIPLINES, UNIVERSITY OF NATAL, DURBAN

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Architecture As A Material Culture: the Response of the People of KwaMchunu and KwaMthembu, Msinga Valley, KwaZulu-Natal to the influence of Climate, Geography, Politics and Social Factors in the Building and elaboration of Their Homesteads

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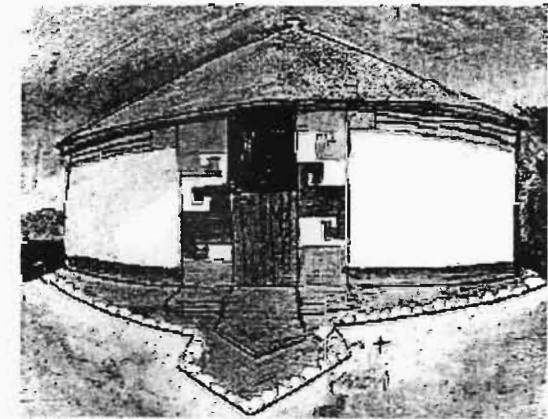
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## ii) ABSTRACT

The Msinga magisterial district, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa is notable because it has for many years been regarded socially as a pariah region by residents of the Province. Over the decades it has been a 'dumping ground' for people and cultures, an infertile land where gun-running, the illegal cultivation of marijuana, and continuous stock theft has relieved some of the abject poverty, but has also exacerbated the local incidence of faction fighting.

However, the people of the area have responded to this ongoing social submission by reacting with creativity and colour in their clothing, cultural goods and homesteads. The cultural material of the district is, in my opinion, unsurpassed anywhere else in the Province, from the traditional interpretation of the Msinga dolls to the exuberant architecture of the contemporary homestead.



The layout and elevational resolution of any type of vernacular homestead, defined by Oliver in the first chapter, is a result of a broad number of factors, most importantly resources in terms of materials, economy, climate and culture.

The response of the people of Msinga in the Tugela Valley embraces all of these factors to produce a surprising resolution that distills a fresh response to the architectural depiction of a social emergence from the peasantry.

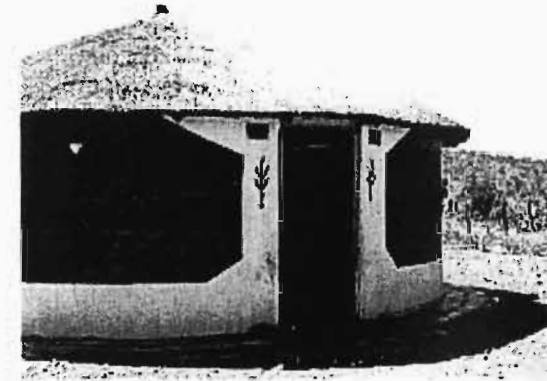
The internationally acknowledged prominent form of Zulu architecture, the beehive hut, has been adequately documented in the past. Biermann, Walton and Knuffel carried out different levels of work on this building type from the 1950s onwards. Nowadays, dwindling natural resources in KwaZulu-Natal have resulted in the creation of a new set of vernacular architectures, responding to the environment and resources available, and reflecting the specific needs of the builders, from the expression of social and economic values, to the pragmatic reality of protection from political strife. On the one hand, the buildings in the Msinga Valley are changing rapidly with the natural life course of each building. However, on the other, the development of new architectural styles with the continual building of new units within

homesteads demonstrates a dynamic architectural and decorative tradition. The co-existence of the material cultures of Msinga and their architectural expression has to be documented and an attempt made at analysis.

The threat of indigenous vernacular traditions disappearing at the expense of development is visible on the horizon. Regional planning initiatives are pressured to deliver houses and services on a large scale, which would be severely detrimental to the continuance of a vernacular architectural tradition. The architectural culture, although currently dynamic, is at risk, and thus begs for documentation.



I aim to present the unique decorative tradition of Msinga as an architecture within the contexts of place and extant material culture. Adopting anything but a broad socio-cultural perspective in this case is both short-sighted and ill-focussed.



The architecture of rural areas is a material culture that is embedded in the history, social and political struggles, and economic strife. Yet, in contrast with these negative influences, it demonstrates an exuberance that is continued in the other material cultures in Msinga. I begin with an overview, pull out the thread of Msinga as an area, then distil the material culture and, ultimately, the architecture and the decoration.

## DISCLAIMERS

Please note that the use of the following terms is not intended as derogatory in any sense. Where necessary they are explained further in the glossary.



**Kraal** has been replaced in most places by the word *uMuzi* (homestead) but its colloquial use in the past bears no political slight in this work. The *kraal* is a word used for to describe both a cattle byre and a homestead.

**Peasantry** is a recognised anthropological term as defined by Bundy (Chapter 3)

**Tribal** is used in the context of a group of people through a commonly acknowledged leader, with a consistent and traceable genealogy. A group of nominally independent communities occupying a specific region, sharing a common language and culture, which are integrated by some unifying factor (Haviland;1996:330).

**Keates Drift** is spelt without an apostrophe

**Vernacular** is as defined by Oliver (see page1)



**Hut** is used to refer to basic rural shelters (Frescura;1987:34)

**Indigenous** as defined by the Collins Concise Dictionary(Collins;1995:658) as originating or occurring naturally (in a country) native. Innate, inherent.

**Liminal** is an anthropological term defining a transistional cathartic experience such as initiation (see glossary for additional)

**Umsinga** and **Msinga**, and **Umzinyathi** and **Mzinyathi**: the new demarcation maps of the Province note the spellings Umsinga and Umzinyathi. These are apparently correct from a vocal Zulu point of view, but not in spoken English. For simplicity's sake, in the bulk of the text, I am keeping the use of Msinga and Mzinyathi. For the same reason, **Tugela** is spelt anglicised throughout rather than the more correct Thukela.



*Umsinga*, 40 miles (64 km) away, is best accessible via Greytown. It is situated at the junction of the Buffalo and the Tugela Rivers, and can be reached from Dundee or Waschbank. Horses and other means of transport can be hired.

There may be those who would wish to explore the TUGELA VALLEY from Krantz Kop to Umsinga, and it will be an advantage to know that guides are obtainable at a reasonable fee on application to the Magistrate at Greytown. As previously stated, horses can be hired in the town.

Artists, photographers, scientists, prospectors, sportsmen, students of native customs, and others, would derive much enjoyment from this expedition, and the following excerpt from the Colony of Natal<sup>1</sup> may usefully be given:

"passing up the river a succession of noble mountain ranges is viewed. Queer and fantastic shaped hills, some in the form of tents, others like ancient feudal castles, appear through the forest glades. The Tugela, broad and powerful, lashed in wild waves over its bed of boulders, some of which are as round as cannon balls and weigh many tons. Wild fig-trees flourish. A curious type of wild thyme with a rich aroma covers the ground in places; tangled forests of thorn and cactus clothe the hills, whose debris is mixed with the fragments of gold-bearing quartz and copper ore. At one point near the Episweni Mountain, a veritable castle of snow-white quartz occurs, and in the dark forests looks like a fairy palace of enchantment"

(South African Railways;1911 :308-9 )



## CHAPTER 1

### OVERVIEW OF INDIGENOUS VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE IN KWAZULU -NATAL

#### 1.1 Introduction

The term 'indigenous vernacular architecture' is a construct initially specific to this study. The definition of indigenous as 'originating or occurring naturally in a country, etc. native' describes the type of architecture not only being created by, but as being steeped in the traditions of the people of the region (Collins;1995;658).

The term 'vernacular' in an architectural context has many definitions, starting, perhaps with the seminal term by Rudofsky where he calls it 'unpedigreed architecture'(Rudofsky;1965:1). Frescura mentions specifically the incorporation of 'found' and 'natural materials', which is certainly appropriate in an African context (Frescura;1981:7). The lack of any other local Southern African definitions specific to architecture leads me to adopt Oliver's definition (Oliver:1997;xxiii):-

*'Vernacular architecture comprises the dwellings and all*

*other buildings of the people. Related to their environmental contexts and available resources they are customarily owner or community built utilising traditional technologies. All forms of vernacular architecture are built to meet specific needs, accommodating the values, economies and ways of living of the cultures that produce them'.*

Vernacular architecture is thus broader than farmhouses or fishing cottages. Because of the colonial influence, and indeed the huge available stock of colonial vernacular buildings in KwaZulu-Natal, I choose to call the architecture that I am discussing 'indigenous vernacular'. I see it as a dynamic, ongoing, building phenomenon, whereas 'traditional' tends to relate to something more entrenched in the past.

Vernacular buildings are more contemporary and dynamic than their traditional counterparts, despite the fundamental world view

of their builders often being in the past.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, it should also be qualified as to the appropriateness in calling what is essentially a rudimentary building form 'architecture'. This is discussed by Polwarth<sup>2</sup> who, connecting threads of Biermann's work, noted the intimate connection between sociology and architecture, and that:

*'Assessed by contemporary standards of excellence in architecture, considered as absolutes and not relative to any preconceptions, the Zulu hut stands in the forefront of architectural designs. Unless mere lip service is paid to the ideals of functional efficiency, constructional economy and exploitation of the nature of the material, the Zulu hut has achieved more in its own right than the latest advances of contemporary architecture'* (Biermann;1971:97)

Thus, the relevance of the buildings to the people that build them, the extant culture, the environment, and the possible excellence

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<sup>1</sup> Papanek has recognised the varying interpretations of the term. Indeed, the brevity of influence has to be included in any study of vernacular architecture(Papanek;1994:6).

<sup>2</sup> (Polwarth;1994:42)

in execution, can be paralleled with the notion of architecture.

In addition, the basic tenets of African traditional architecture change little in their variations. This is carried through into the relatively unexplored realms of indigenous vernacular. Claude notes 13 principles (Claude;1995:2-3). This definition underpins the traditional aspects of the Msinga buildings, in addition to informing the processes of the development of the new indigenous vernacular.

1. **Definition of place** in a landscape
2. **Generalised**, often implied, **symmetries** in units and settlements.
3. **Apparent informality** in the lack of formal orthogonal layouts.
4. **Limited vocabulary** of built form, where dominant forms exist.
5. **Complicated /irregular spaces** from simple, repetitive forms.
6. **Scale** is usually low.
7. **Small openings**, if any, with a high ratio of solid to void.
8. **Concordance with natural forms**: landscape organically connected
9. **Articulation of forms** as distinct from each other.
10. **Homestead spaces non-specific** (except for kitchen areas)
11. The relationship between **inside and outside** is strong.
12. **Skills and materials** local to the region and the people are used.
13. **Colouring and embellishment** are specific to groups and take the form of surface treatments.

## 1.2 Historic Background



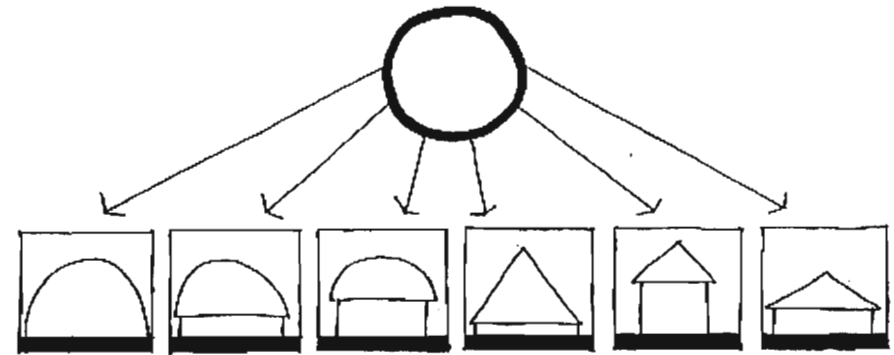
For years, academic establishments have perpetuated the cliché that Zulu architecture is the grass dome: the beehive hut, *indlu*, or *iqhugwana*. Colloquialisms may also call this *ixhiba* (Mnweni Valley; pers.comm:1999)<sup>3</sup>. From recent perambulations around the province of KwaZulu-Natal, I would argue that this is not necessarily so, that the beehive dome (*iqhugwana*) was once rather the architecture of a particular clan, and a regional vernacular of an area that had sufficient natural materials to sustain the building type. This has been reinforced by the preliminary isolation of at least six different types of contemporary indigenous vernacular architectures that exist in the province.

On their arrival, the Southern Nguni displaced peoples that had been living in the area for millenia. These included the San, who left the fertile lands of the southern Drakensberg over the next two centuries and moved to less fertile and less politically stressed areas. Early Nguni speakers appear to have been resident as far south as Durban as early as AD1100, and many iron age sites of

<sup>3</sup> According to Mhlongo, the naming of a type of building may be related to taboo, and the informants may have not been allowed by society to call the *ixhiba* an *iqhugwana*. This I feel is not the case as the group concerned was unanimous in its definition (Mhlongo; pers.comm:2001). It would appear that in many other communities, the *ixiba* is the cooking hut.

other language and cultural groups abound in the region which point to agrarian settlements dating back before the arrival of the Nguni. Maggs and Hall's excavations of stone homestead circles on the Babanango Plateau, (Hall;1994:55) and Whitelaw's work at Green's Farm, Estcourt, testify to a fieldstone technology existing in the Late Iron Age (Whitelaw;1999:pers.comm). Prior to these, Stone Age sites such as Border Cave near Ingwavuma, Maputaland, point to inhabitants of great antiquity in the eastern grasslands, with anatomically modern humans existing here at least 120 000 years ago (Deacon and Deacon;1999:103).

The details of prehistoric building methods and structures rarely exist in an oral tradition. The organic nature of the materials used in the past for house construction means that decay is rapid, especially in the rich soils of the littoral. Few remains save a post hole or two often remain to betray evidence of an ancient settlement. In addition, the interpretation of the archaeological record with regard to drawing up an elevation of an excavated plan is problematic as the form an elevational resolution above ground level can assume has a myriad of options. The circular building form is dominant in the traditional indigenous styles, and can be resolved in many ways.



*Possible elevational projections from a typical circular plan form (Author;2000)*

The Zulu thus moved into an area where settled people had been building dwellings and creating shelters for centuries. With the physical formalisation of housing, the natural shelter of caves was reserved for ritual, storage or concealment in times of strife. A vernacular architecture such as the pre-colonial ruined homesteads in the Estcourt area would have thus been in place. In addition, a set of architectural and environmental clues would have been available from which the newcomers could draw their inspiration. With this as a backdrop, the spread of the Nguni fitted into a well populated, dynamic cultural framework. Hall suggests that the different chiefdoms coexisting on the Babanango Plateau in the 18th century would have had different types of domestic architecture (Hall;1994:55). This would

reinforce my suggestion that the *iqhugwana* (beehive hut) at one stage may have represented a specific clan-architecture over a specific period of time, and could make an historic case for the ever growing diversity of solutions to the housing problem.

### 1.2.1 The arrival of the Zulu

The Zulu people are relative newcomers to the area, having arrived on the eastern coastal littoral in the 16th and 17th centuries, as southern waves of a number of migratory clans of the southern Nguni. Zulu was the descendant of a chief of one of these localised clans. His name was inherited by his descendants who then became known as Zulu. These people were the progenitors of the conglomerate tribe as we know it today.

With the rapid and despotic rise to power of Shaka kaSenzangakhona<sup>4</sup> (Shaka, son of Senzangakhona, c1797-1828) in 1818, the image of the southern Nguni changed markedly. Shaka, an illegitimate member of the Zulu clan by parentage, rose rapidly to power, defying social norms, structure and taboo, to

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<sup>4</sup> In Zulu: "ka" means 'son of', thus Shaka kaSenzangakhona would mean, Shaka, son of Senzangakhona

push the Zulu clan into the limelight. Many clans that did not support him fled the area, landing as far afield as Zimbabwe, where Lobengula carried on the grass building tradition<sup>5</sup> (Natural History Museum;1997:1), and Malawi where the Ngoni continued building modified grass domes (Denyer;1978:115)<sup>6</sup>.

Closer to home, many people moved rapidly around the Province in this chaos, which became known as the *mfecane*. This period from the 1820s to the 1830s was marked by massive movements of people (Worden;1998:101). Some fled south to the Eastern Cape, others hid in the Drakensberg, and many were subsumed into the new Zulu Nation.<sup>7</sup> As a result, ideas moved very quickly and change happened fast.

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<sup>5</sup> The reconstruction of Lobengula's Kraal was carried out in 1997 as a culmination of archaeological excavations and in conjunction with the then KwaZulu Monuments Council (Natural History Museum;1997:1ff)

<sup>6</sup> Omer-Cooper (Omer-Cooper:1980:3)reinforces this with the observation that 'the Ngoni and the Shangana took the northward direction' during the *Mfecane*.'

<sup>7</sup>The northern word for this upheaval is the *difeqane*.

### 1.2.2 Early Settler Descriptions

Not only did the indigenous peoples of the province have the liminal effect of the *mfecane* to overcome, but also the influence and disruption of the first traders and settlers who arrived in 1823. People had sporadically landed on the coast of the then Natal since the arrival of Vasco da Gama in the Bay of Natal in 1497, but apart from those early shipwrecked survivors, and passers-by seeking water and fresh food, little in terms of descriptive matter as to the nature and culture of the local inhabitants of the time has been handed down to us. Büttner did comment of the inhabitants of Natal in 1716-1721 that (Nienaber, Raven Hart; 1970:126):-

*'Their huts are not very large, and unfurnished, but they have very good roofs so that the rain cannot harm them'*

The early settlers and traders conscientiously noted in both written and graphic form that much of the extant architecture in the Province was of grass construction.

Eliza Fielden, an early resident of the Berea, Durban in 1855,

comments of the local Zulu that:<sup>8</sup>

*'they are very jealous of intruders in their craals (sic) which are built (if I may call it building) in a circle, looking like so many bee-hives, with a hole about as large in proportion, through which they creep in and out.'* (Fielden; 1973:16)



***Part of painting by G.F. Angas 'Zulu women making beer at Gudu's Kraal, on the Tugela River' circa 1845 (Herman et al; 1970:224) . Note the jointed form as documented by Biermann (See 1.4.2)***

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<sup>8</sup> This is reinforced by Kearney, that 'other settlers, especially those in the outlying districts, erected huts which closely followed the Zulu pattern.' (Kearney; 1973:14)

The settlers responded by taking cognisance of this extant building form, and constructed their early houses in the traditional Zulu style:-

*'our hut was shaped like a beehive, but instead of the usual hole to creep in at, such as serve the Caffre huts, Leyland had sent over a door with glass in it, serving to admit both our persons and the daylight more freely'* (Fielden;1973:294).

Nathaniel Isaacs in the early 1820s gives clear accounts of the buildings and traditions that he encountered, including trips across the Tugela to pay homage to the Zulu King, Shaka (Herman et al;1970;224). There seems to be little else from this period that describes houses built out of anything except grass, and 'rude huts' could be a descriptive term of any kind of amorphous architecture. Drawings, particularly those by G.F.Angas in the late 1840s often depicted the *iqhugwana* (beehive hut), but these may also be fanciful representations of a perceived ideal. Baines, in 1866, noted in detail that: -

*'In Kafirland, the huts are hemispherical, like beehives, or rather like inverted bowls, slightly flattened on the top. The thatching is very neatly and compactly done, and generally small ropes of*



**Zulu huts circa 1900: note the distended bases typical of pre-wattle use of *Dichrostachys* (from Shepherd et al;1947;83)**

*grass are carried many times round and round the outside of the hut, and laced with smaller strips through the thatching to the inner frame.'* (Lord et al;1975:246-7)

Early photographs generally show the pre-wattle-withie, squat, oval shaped huts, characteristic of the traditional use of *Dichrostachys* (Sickle Bush) for the frame. The short lengths of the branches of this tree meant that bowing would occur at the joints in the frame. Baines mentions also the use of lengths of mimosa fibre in the fixing:-

*'Smaller rods are wattled all round, or bound tightly to the ribs with strips of the inner bark of the mimosa, or other tree..'*

(Lord et al;1975:246)

Lack of early written and drawn documentation inland from the rich grasslands of the coastal littoral towards the Drakensberg Mountains could also be as a result of the limitations of the exploration to the interior. Certainly, use was also made of stone as the excavated homesteads outside of Babanango, attributed to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, testify(Hall;1994:55).

### 1.2.3 Diasporas and resettlements

Large movements of people in and around the Province are fundamental factors in the appreciation of the ever-changing architectures in KwaZulu-Natal. These people movements were not only characteristic of the *Apartheid* years, but are embedded in the history of the southern part of the African continent.

Internal disruptions in the Zulu Kingdom were not unusual. The great battle of Ndongokasuka (near Mandini) between Shaka's descendant Cetshwayo ka Mpande (1826-1884) and his brother, Mbuyazi, in 1856, was a civil war by anybody's standards (Webb

et al;1986:61). Ongoing internecine battles between clan groups were part of a royal allegiance issue. The cataclysmic Anglo-Zulu War in 1879 saw the placing of a large number of amaHlubi (people who had been displaced during Shaka's reign) in the area abounding the Buffalo (Mzinyathi) River. The Colonial Government conceptualised this settlement as a buffer to the possible continued onslaught of the Zulu after the defeat of Cetshwayo at Ulundi in 1879. Together with the baTlokwa people (of South Sotho origin) in the nearby Nqutu-Nondweni area, the Hlubi have had a significant influence on the development of indigenous architecture of this part of the Province.<sup>9</sup> A massive implant of people with a different culture disrupts the immediate *status quo* in an area. This effect was also caused by the arrival of the settlers in the Bay of Natal. These people movements within the Province should be seen as an influence that enriches the cultural integrity of an area.

The political placing of peoples in the Msinga valley over the years, and for a variety of reasons, has had similar repercussions on the local material culture of Msinga in recent years. Jolles has

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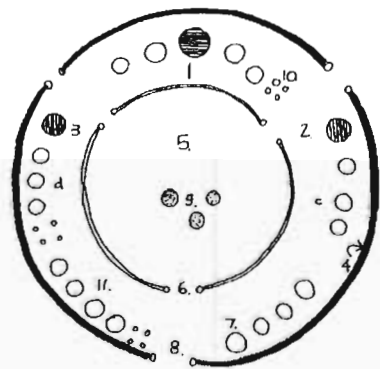
<sup>9</sup> Frescura (Frescura;1981:13) reinforces this by his observation that the Sotho-built buildings in the Nqutu area are a testimony to the excellent building standards of the Sotho being maintained.



noted the incidence of people from Msinga moving out and taking their beadwork styles with them (Jolles:1993:45). This simple transportation of style and local technology has created the layers of influence seen in areas like Msinga today.

I feel that this huge amount of people movement in, out and around the province since 1818 assisted in the dynamic cross-pollination of ideas, assisted in cultural transferrance, and ultimately created the greater diversity of traditional buildings and variations on a specific theme that we notice today.

### 1.3 Homestead Layout



1. +a,b; indluNkulu and the women in her care
2. +c: the inGqadi and the women in her care
3. +d: ikholwa(second wife)and women in her care
4. uThango (fence)
5. Isibaya: Cattle kraal
6. Isango: gate
7. IzimVali: Gate keeper
8. Main entrance
9. Grain pits beneath the isibaya
10. Fowl pens
11. Bachelors quarters and strangers huts

source: (Erasmus:1975:5) and (Argyle;1992:3) *Erasmus also mentions that the homestead always faces with the entrance towards the east(Erasmus;1975:5).*

The homestead layout<sup>10</sup> is fairly generic and holds its own across the spectrum of contemporary indigenous vernacular housing types as the underlying conceptual structure of the homestead includes them. The individual huts would usually be found as part of an *umuzi* (homestead) in the spatial layout of what Evers has described as the 'central cattle pattern' (after Evers;1988) where the the cattle byre, or *isibaya* is central to the homestead with a number of huts surrounding it, defining the perimeter.

The hierarchy of the huts and their uses remains fairly standard, and today, often different huts are identifiable by their specific form within the homestead. A contemporary homestead may have a mixture of different building shapes, each of which has subtle cultural undertones. The retention of this traditional cognitive and hierarchical layout is important in the development and change of the Msinga buildings in the evolution from the *iqhugwana* (beehive hut) to the decorated *rondawel* vernacular.

<sup>10</sup>A description by Erasmus (1975) was used as it was more contemporary than the examples of Walton and Krige. This was supplemented by Argyle and Buthelezi (Argyle et al;1992:3)

Thus the deeply embedded traditions of the people of the area enrich their adaptation in an altered form. This will be described further.

The spatial arrangement of the homesteads is distant. The Zulu do not demonstrate aggregation into groups or villages. Distinction should also be made here between the oft depicted 'Royal Kraal' that houses men from many different clans and areas, and the domestic *umuzi* (homestead), that is the focus of attention.

The homesteads consist of undecorated buildings. The *iqhugwana* (beehive hut) has grass ropes looping around the perimeter in huge circles. This simple approach to elaboration is heightened in the Swazi and amaNgwane examples (See 1.4.2). Decoration is the exception in the Zulu housing tradition. This is reinforced by Frescura (Frescura;1981:66).

### 1.3.2 Hut Layout

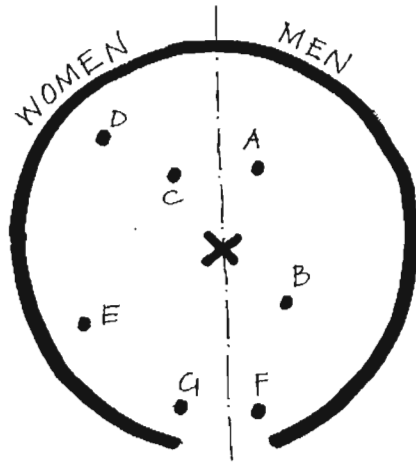
The layout of the actual hut, as a part of the homestead, is also important, as this pattern is reflected in the Msinga samples.

The left side of the hut (*isandla sokunxele*) is reserved for women, and is known as the *isilili sesifazane*. The right side (*isandla sokudla*) is the male side of the hut (*isilili samadoda*) (Argyle;1992:15). This protocol was observed in many of the Msinga homesteads where the men were at home and, conceivably, in charge.

Within this basic division, there are further specific spaces that people of different status occupy. There are then further complicated allocations based on ritual purity, but are not relevant at this level of study.

More important is the use and layout of the *indluNkulu*, or Gogo's hut. This is the main hut in the homestead, and will usually be the house of the paternal mother(Gogo), should she still be alive, or the principal wife. Since the assumption is that sexual relations will not happen in the case of a widow, this hut is the situation for the *umsamo*, placed at the rear. This *umsamo* can only be likened to an altar for sacrificial gifts to the ancestors. In many homesteads around Zululand, the Gogo's hut will be an *iqhugwana* in a homestead of differently constructed buildings. In Msinga this is not the norm and many homesteads with only one or two wives will have a separate hut for the veneration of the

spirits.



**Hut Layout (Argyle;1992:3)**

A *umnumzane* (head of homestead)

B *amadoda*(other men of the *umuzi*)

C *izihambeli* (male visitors)

D *inkosikazi yomuzi*(principal woman of the *umuzi*)

E *umakoti* (recently married wife)

F other women of the *umuzi*

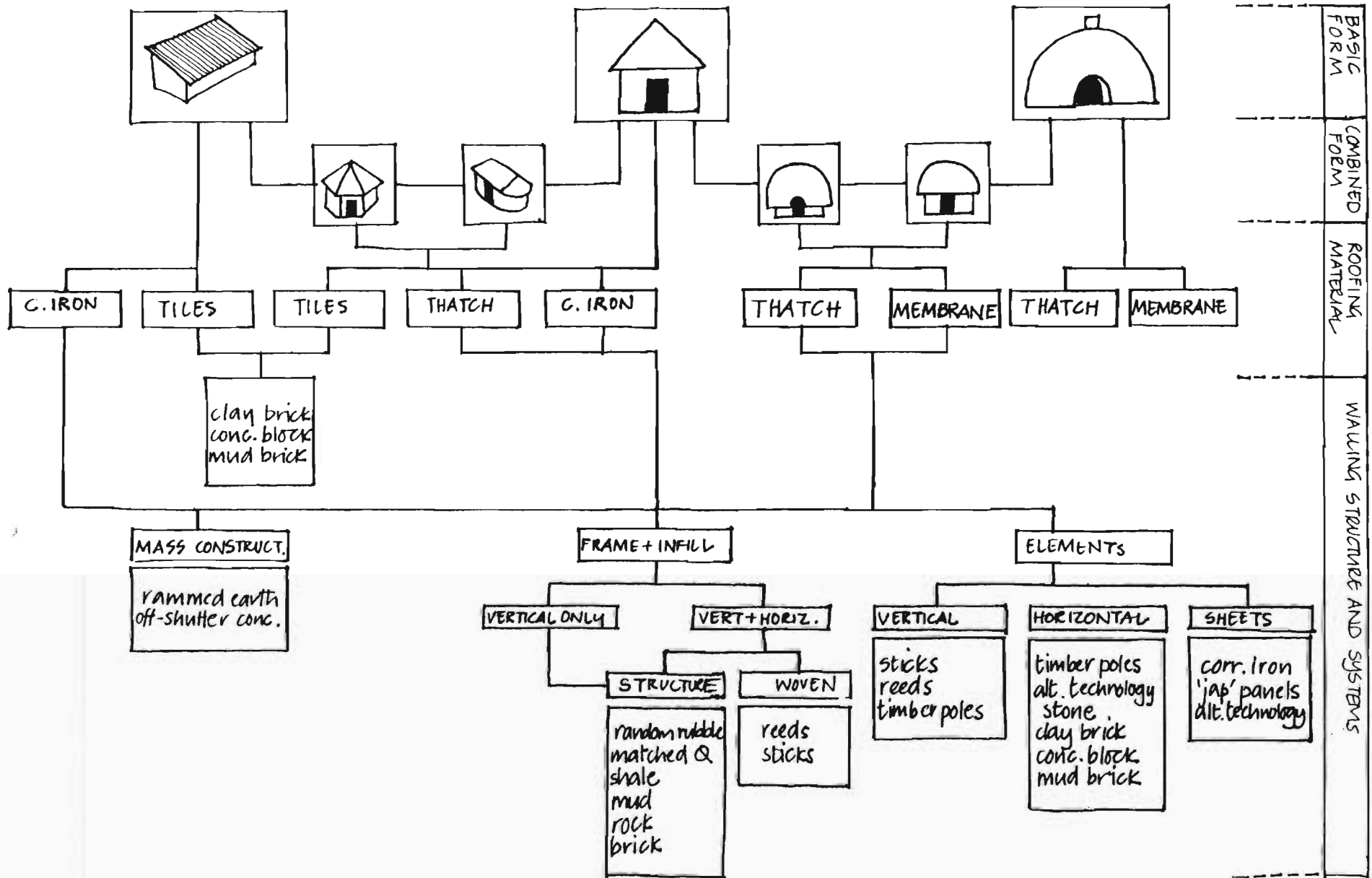
G women visitors

## 1.4 Taxonomy of building forms

### 1.4.1 Introduction

The precedent works in the field regarding taxonomic studies have been done by Walton and Frescura. Walton (Walton;1956:130) examines specifically the variants of the *iqhugwana* (beehive hut) whereas Frescura expands the typology palette broadly to include a wide ranging set of building types encompassing buildings across South Africa (Frescura;1981:20). Using these as a rough guideline, these two studies could be combined to produce a more specific taxonomy for the architecture of KwaZulu-Natal.

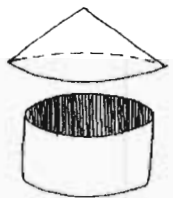
There are thus four different classes of indigenous vernacular building in KwaZulu-Natal. They are fundamentally based on form, and can be further expanded by definition of structural and material use. The distillation into particular types acknowledges the contemporary ethnography of peoples, the environment and the buildings they produce in KwaZulu-Natal.



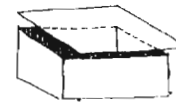
Circular buildings can be resolved primarily in two ways. The form tends to determine the roofing resolutions, as the possibilities are limited.



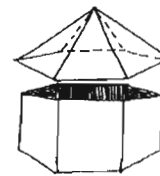
The **domical form** includes the archetypal *iqhugwana* (beehive hut), and its vertical variations on what Frescura considers a major cylinder and minor cylinder (Frescura;1981:45). His description of a 'grass orientated technology' encompasses these buildings (Frescura;1981:11). The domical form would also include a dome raised on a low or high stone wall, which is more common nowadays as this variation is not subject to the same level of degradation by both insects and livestock as is a hut that has grass touching the ground.



The **cylindrical form** is described by the-cone-on-cylinder/*rondawel*. This is constructed in a host of ways, largely defined by the materials used.



The **regular or rectangular** buildings are becoming more and more popular. They may be colloquially described as a 'two room', or in a stylistic reference, a 'cottage'. There are many examples of square buildings as well, found on the grasslands near Hluhluwe in the Hlabisa magisterial district. The latter are characterised by pyramid shaped thatched grass roofs. Regular buildings break away from the prescription of the circular, in that the plan form dominates and determines the possibilities for roofing.



Other regular forms include **Octagonal and Hexagonal** buildings, but these are not widely represented. They appear mostly to be a practical resolution of the circular form with a sheet metal or tiled roof.

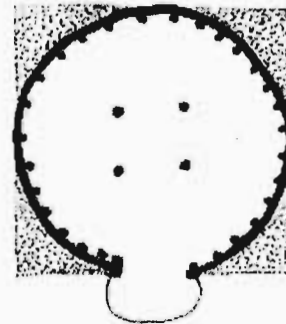
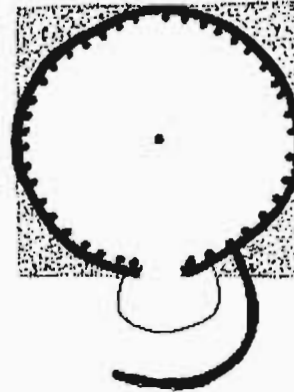
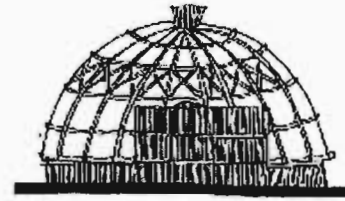
### 1.4.2 The Domical Form

The *beehive hut/iqhughwana/indlu/ixhiba* is the archetypal dome shaped Zulu hut. It is a complex building that embraces generations of tradition and culture, and today is often built to appease angry ancestors, an apology for living in contemporary untraditional buildings. Indeed, the building was likened by Biermann to the sophistication of a Boeing 747 aircraft (Frescura;1981:12).

The building of these *iqhugwana* has been documented in the last half century by Biermann, Knuffel and Walton, and a photograph of a 1950 example from the Qudeni region was included in Denyer's *African Traditional Architecture* (Denyer;1978:114).

Frescura, in his definitive volume, *Rural Architecture*, discussed mainly the form and style in relation to context of other regional architectures, concentrating much more on the buildings of the Sotho-Tswana language groups (Frescura;1981). Although the *iqhugwana* has been well documented thus far, it needs further, more up-to-date work.

There are four basic types of beehive hut in the Province.

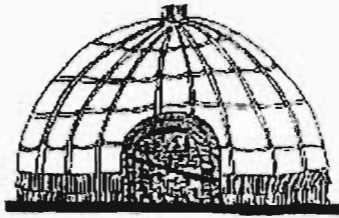


The *Swazi style* is highly elaborated with geometric patterns in woven grass. This would include the buildings of the *amaNgwane*, (originally of Swazi descent) in the Bergville district of KwaZulu-Natal. Knuffel's study is a detailed anthropological approach to the specific construction procedure of the *amaNgwane* in particular (Knuffel;1973).

*The Swazi style buildings typical of the amaNgwane: plan and elevation*

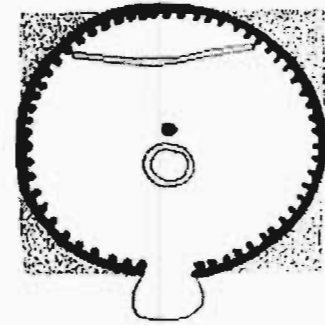
The *jointed house (indlu esikuthulo)* is somewhat outdated, involving the layering of mats as depicted by Biermann (Biermann;1971:104). This resolution he saw as a result of climate, where mats are a regional solution to the colder climate in the highlands. The use of mats, he says, is also a marker of position and class.

*The jointed house: plan and elevation. This is a rare building form nowadays.*



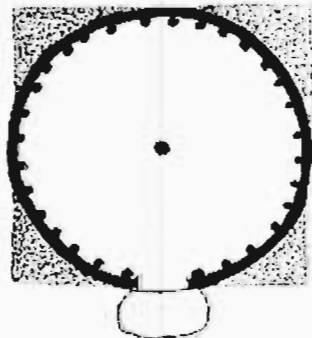
The **stitched work** (*ukwakha umduzo*) house as seen at homestead reconstructions at Ondini (Ulundi) and Umgungundlovu (eMakhosini), where the circulating grass loops are carefully executed, but unembellished with the geometry of the Swazi buildings (Biermann;1971:104). The rope work does serve a practical function in the securing of the thatch.

*Stitched work house: plan and elevation*



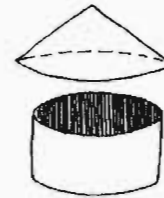
The fourth style is a **thatched dome**, in the same manner as a conical roof would have been thatched. It is not characterised by any of the decorative rope work that one sees on the Swazi or amaNcwane style buildings. They can sometimes look dishevelled. Towards the north of the Province, they are thatched in layered steps (*ukwakha umdeko*), typical of the thatching of the Tembe (Biermann;1971:104).

*Thatched dome plan and elevation*



A marriage between the dome and the cylinder is the dome-on-cylinder, which is a practical resolution of the impracticalities of the beehive home. The height of the non-organic wall makes insect infestation less likely, and many people say that it prevents the goats from eating the thatch.

### 1.4.3 Cylindrical form



This form embraces many of the traditional architectural types, the cone-on-cylinder being a common resolution in terms of structure and strength. This form is further divisible into variations depending on material. Hull sees the cone-on-cylinder as the most widespread building form south

of the Sahara Desert (Hull;1976:51). He suggests that it was prevalent amongst settled, agrarian societies, and that the pole-and-mud structural system predates by centuries the arrival of the European settlers (Ibid:51).

Frescura suggests that the lack of central sovereign control with the Zulu after the war in 1879 helped with the spread of the cone-on-cylinder in KwaZulu-Natal. This is in addition to the influence of the missionaries (Frescura;1981:55). The 'contamination' of the indigenous architecture by European settlers is noted, both from a social and political (Hut Tax) point of view.

The **Tembe-Tsonga** basket-style houses of the northern Maputaland area are a regional adaptation to the humid coastal climate and available materials, which are largely reeds and *lala* palm leaves. They have been investigated by Felgate and Claude.



*Tembe homestead near Ndumu (photo; Author:1997)*

Traditionally the roofs were made separately and upside down, and were placed in their correct position after completion (Claude;1997:2). The undersides of the roof were often highly embellished with geometric patterns in *lala* palm and grass (Ibid:2). The walls are either vertically tied reed or woven circular structures which, nowadays, are usually square.

The homestead layouts also differ from the 'central cattle pattern' of the Zulu, with a much more discreet pattern of entry and due

protocol. Felgate notes this seclusion in the bush, often far from other homesteads (Felgate;1982:28).<sup>11</sup> He also notes that a characteristic homestead has homes that face east in a straight line.<sup>12</sup>

Sadly, the adaptation to modernity has begun, with a western influence pervading the Tembe homesteads, and very few if none of the decorated ceilings documented by Claude and Biermann still exist (Claude;1999:3). The contemporary square buildings thus rather fit into the regular building category of taxonomic study.

The **stone cylinders with thatched roofs** of the Nondweni region appear to be a Sotho tradition that has been adapted to KwaZulu-Natal. This is reinforced by the historic introduction of the Hlubi after the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879, and the Sotho-derived baTlokwa. The technology may have been introduced afresh by the settled people in the area, replacing the old stone homesteads of the Khumalo and Buthelezi clans as mentioned earlier (Hall;1994:55). The extremely well made drystone houses are cut from dolerite

<sup>11</sup> It is this characteristic that helps in identifying the cultural background of householders in new homesteads in the Richards Bay region. The Tembe influence is betrayed in the siting of the house as well as the departure from the central cattle pattern.

<sup>12</sup> This is consistent with Erasmus's (Erasmus;1975:5) comment on the similar orientation of the Zulu homestead.

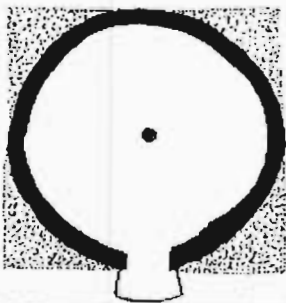


which is abundant in the area. Frescura alludes to the superior building quality of this area as being an inherent characteristic of Sotho technology (Frescura;1981:3). The buildings belong to a culture that is physically resident in the centre of the Zulu domain, and the people have been subsumed into the Zulu nation.

As the Hlubi have been resident here for the last 130 years, this can be described as a form of Zulu architecture. Often, the homesteads are gathered together in communities. The



aggregation of buildings into village clusters is not a marker of Zulu homestead culture either, and may be attributed to the original external cultural derivation of their builders.<sup>13</sup> Frescura specifically differentiates between the scale of the Royal and domestic homesteads, the latter housing clan fragments (Frescura;1981:145).



*The stone cylinders built by people around Nqutu. Plan and elevation.*

<sup>13</sup>

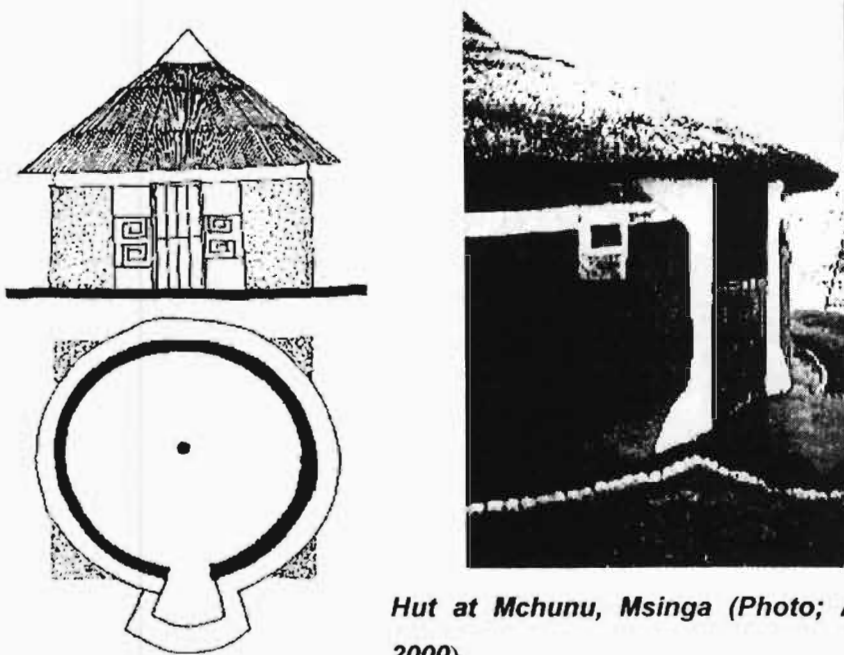
The findings of the Tomlinson Report in 1957 also point to the attempt at the aggregation of communities. The Nqutu area was a prime target for the Land Betterment Scheme, and thus may also have villages as a result of this.

The **wattle and daub cylinders with thatch roofs** (*rondawels*) have become an icon of rural vernacular architecture, with the postcard style pastoral '*kraal*' set upon the hillside. Frescura classes these as 'wattle and daub technology' (Frescura;1981:11). They are likely to have Sotho-Pondo roots (Walton;1956:142). This technology has been carried to the modern cities in the construction of *imindjondolo*, where wattle and mud is more readily available, and corrugated iron replaces the scarcely available thatch.

**Timber and infill buildings** characterise many types of cylindrical building which are constructed of an exposed timber pole structure with pebble and mud, mud ball or broken brick infill. These are very common in the Msinga area and examples exist across the Province. Frescura sees the approach to the cone-on-cylinder from a technological point of view as differing in KwaZulu-Natal in terms of wall construction (Frescura;1981:66). Three types are identified: post and infill, post, band and infill, and posts with minor supports and woven saplings, which are then plastered (see 4.6.6).

The **embellished stone/mud and wattle cylinders** of the Msinga valley have very low pitched thatched roofs. These are unique in the Province and occur within the defined area of the Msinga

Magisterial district.<sup>14</sup>



*Hut at Mchunu, Msinga (Photo; Author: 2000)*

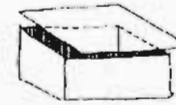
The Msinga buildings are steeped in a regional cultural tradition. They are much larger than the usual hut diameter of about 6m, and have been identified as exceptions by T. Maggs and Mikula but not recorded. The architecture as a cultural art has been largely sidelined in the shadow of the spectacular beadwork, ceramic items and other cultural material goods that come out of this area in particular. This indigenous vernacular architecture constitutes my

<sup>14</sup>It should be mentioned that a group of people from this region were moved to Mahlabathini, which would account for similar buildings in that area (Clegg;pers.comm:2001). I have followed up on this and found building styles in the area that would date back stylistically to the very early decorative styles. (See 4.10)

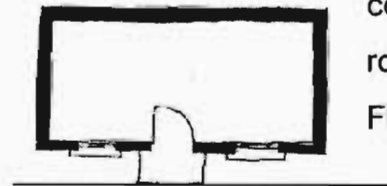
specific field of study. Not only has it not been formally documented, but it is rapidly changing, and may soon be lost to the global 'cottage style'(see 1.4.4).

#### 1.4.4 Rectangular buildings

Regular shaped buildings are becoming more and more common as a building with squared edges is perceived as a status symbol. Historically, the use of the rectangular building extends back in Zulu culture to 1879, where the ruins of Cetshwayo kaMpande's Royal Kraal at Ondini show a regular shaped building as part of the *isigodlo*.<sup>15</sup>

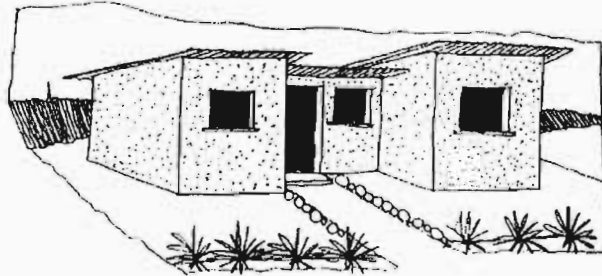


Contemporary buildings, if consisting of more than one or two rooms, are often embellished in form, with articulated roofscapes, and walls which are broken out of the rectangular block form. Harber comments on the colloquial extension of the basic two room principle calling it an 'American Flat'(Harber; 2000:37). The prestige and



<sup>15</sup>Hull sees the rectangular building in Africa extending far back into history, but the relevance to the Zulu in this context is slim (Hull;1976:55).

practicality of regular shaped buildings, whether articulated or not, is becoming more and more popular.



It is interesting to note that in the Msinga area this is not the dominant building form. However, Alcock does say that the Mabaso area north of the Tugela River is characterised by this building form as the corrugated iron roof is more fire resistant (Alcock;2000:pers.comm). This is a more recent socio-cultural development, adopted out of practical necessity.

The **cottage, ifokona, two room** appears to be a possible cultural universal; an architectural manifestation of the rise and spread of the peasantry. King backs up this observation of universality by calling it 'the production of a global culture' (King;1995:1).<sup>16</sup>

What I term a cottage here is essentially a two roomed building,

<sup>16</sup> This is used in reference to what he calls a bungalow, but differs essentially little in form or context. The bungalow is a designed structure, and the cottage could well be an undesigned progenitor.

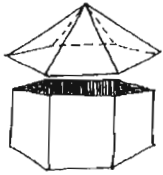
preferably (in the aesthetic context of an emerging economy) built of brick or block with a central door and two flanking windows. A monopitch roof is usually of corrugated iron sheeting. The 'cottage' is seen as a prestige building type amongst many, and more modern than a circular one. This building type is rapidly becoming a part of the architectural typology of the province. Its use was possibly initiated and encouraged by the colonial Hut Tax system begun in the 1840s, where the owners of all circular buildings in the Colony of Natal were charged a tax. This was a mechanism intended to discourage polygamy as each wife in a homestead would have her own hut (Ramdhani;1985:6).



**Cottage form in bachelors quarters, Homestead I, Msinga**

In addition, the contemporary construction of rectangular buildings is an architectural response to a particular transitional economic group or stage in life. In the Msinga area, the bachelors quarters are often in this form (see fig. above)

### 1.4.5 Other regular building forms



Hexagonal and octagonal buildings are found occasionally around KwaZulu-Natal, but as mentioned earlier, are a localised resolution between the options of circular and square buildings, as well as accommodating the roof sheeting more comfortably. They are also out of necessity usually built of regular components: brick or block and mortar. They are very much an exception to the norm in the Province. Square buildings, as mentioned earlier, are abundant, this form presenting a waterproofing problem with the resolution of the thatching at the apex.

### 1.5 Indigenous Architecture at Risk

Building in a consistent vernacular tradition in KwaZulu-Natal has faced a number of obstacles, in addition to the havoc wrought by the nineteenth-century *mfecane*. The Hut Tax system of 1849-1906 was the British Colonial Government's response to the need to extract taxes from the Zulu people, and was imposed on the owners of any building not of 'European construction', especially those that were circular (Ramdhani;1985:21). Buildings on mission stations were exempt as the feeling was that their converts (*amaKholwa*) paid their taxes in service. The Hut Tax system was

largely responsible for the prompting of people to reject the traditional circular building shape and instead opt for a regular shaped building.

The other legislative mechanism that altered perceptions of traditional architecture was the outcome of the Tomlinson Commission of Enquiry into the economic viability of Reserves of 1955-56. This attempted to implement a Land Betterment Scheme in tribal areas by encouraging people to group homesteads and release land for farming and subsistence, rather than the traditional homesteading on a particular patch of land far from one's neighbour (Houghton;1956:28). In the scheme, land was divided into residential, arable, and grazing zones. No homes were to be built on land that was not zoned for housing. This led to the creation of village societies amongst a community that had traditionally occupied discrete portions of land owned by a chief.

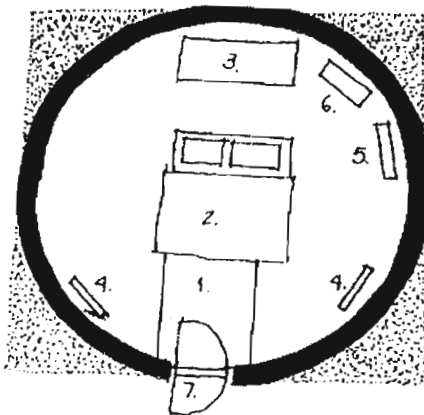
The emergence of people from a barter and trade society to a consistently monetary based economy heralds the rise of the peasantry in the transition process. This paradigm shift also encourages social change, as a newly monied society looks to an extant class system for clues for the concepts of quality and prestige. Frescura comments that :-

*'the greatest threat to our vernacular heritage comes from the blind*

*borrowings of false values and aesthetics* '(Frescura;1981:185).

I disagree that this so as this clue-seeking merely adds to, and enhances, the emerging vernaculars. An example is the common perception amongst many communities that a square building of concrete block with a tiled roof is socially better than a thatched hut of wattle and daub (Whelan;pers experience). In Msinga, however, this economic transition happens with interesting, and unique, consequences; here a circular building is perceived as being modern, which it is in contrast with the grass dome, which has died out in the last 25 years, but not in contrast with a 2-roomed cottage.

The move to the adoption of square buildings is also given momentum by the difficulty in reconciling the furnishing of a circular hut using western furniture, particularly double beds. This renders space useless unless placed in a ceremonial position as in Homestead IV.



**Homestead IV indluNkulu:**

- 1. Linoleum flooring**
- 2. Double bed**
- 3. Kas**
- 4. Mirrors**
- 5. Mat racks**
- 6. Shelf**
- 7. Double leaved entrance door**

Items of western furniture are also perceived as prestige goods, and their successful incorporation is important. The option of division of space of the *rondawel* into quarters, or creating separate internal spaces with straight walls to accommodate regular shaped furnishing is not culturally seen as a comfortable solution in Msinga.

In addition, the rapid rebuilding and development of buildings in the last decade heralds the constant creation of new traditional and vernacular architectures, which should be documented in their whimsical and concerted manners of addressing problems from a cultural, material, social aesthetic and spatial points of view.

## 1.6 Conclusion

The background to the architectures includes that from which I shall derive my comments on the architectural style of the Msinga valley. As is apparent, the Province does not lack in a supply of influences, whether in form or material. Rather, there is a large inventory of types and styles, and a still further fund of creativity that is often tapped out of necessity. The strong influence of traditional Zulu culture has a permeating nature in the material culture; this extends to the architecture where the forces of change and modernisation wreak less havoc than in more urban environments.

The need to take a socio-economic and cultural approach is important in this context. Msinga's particular set of constraints are broader than the need for survival- the people there survive despite their isolated social, cultural, economic and political environment.

Hut Burnings and murder, fence cutting and theft, starvation and ignorance, tribesmen feuding with automatic weapons, tribesmen working in South Africa's towns and cities as migrant labour, women hoeing rocky fields or sitting at roadsides selling produce imported from Natal: all this is part of the fabric of Msinga life.

David Robbins

***What's the matter with Msinga?***

Carnegie Conference no 55

Second Enquiry into Poverty and Development in South Africa

1984

Cape Town

## CHAPTER 2

### INTRODUCTION TO THE MSINGA VALLEY

#### 2.1 Introduction

A more structured explanation as to the choice of study of the decorated architecture of the Msinga Valley over the other types of vernacular architectures in the province is needed. Firstly, the embellished buildings are a recent phenomenon, and, in addition the heroic rising above the local socio-economic difficulties, it is important to catalogue new regional architecture. Secondly, it is a consistently decorative form across space, unusual to the Zulu (Frescura;1981:66). Thirdly, the effect of rapid cultural variation means that the early architectural styles are dying, and have died out. This means that a temporal framework for the art has to be established quickly. In addition, it is interesting to note that the 1996 census provided a statistic of 95.57% of the buildings in the Msinga district being 'traditional in nature'(Scott-Wilson;1998:79). It is reassuring to note that, despite sporadic internecine warfare and the resultant constant new building, an indigenous vernacular is maintained, and the perceptions and icons of formal suburban architecture are not as readily adopted in the context that one would suspect.

A number of different ways of spelling Msinga have been used over the years. This is probably due to the lack of consistent lexicography through translation to a newly written language. Msinga is the name of the magisterial district as it stands at the moment and has done for many years, but spellings of uMsinga and umSinga are also found. The word is Zulu, and, according to Smail and Lugg, (Smail;1969:42,Lugg;1970:43) means '*the scanner of mountains with extreme views*'. Stayt's definition of the region is as '*the place of open clearness, village and administrative centre in Zululand*' (Stayt;1971). Msinga mountain, a geological massif, or its correct name, *umSingantaba*, is the physical focal point of the region. It not only has a commanding position, but a long history of legend attached to it. Lugg states that :-

*'Much myth and lore has been associated with Msinga mountain. The (Ma) Baso tribe has always asserted that its western slopes contain a vast cavern sufficiently large to contain the whole of their tribal cattle in times of trouble. But access can only be gained by presenting the large python lying guard at the entrance with a white*



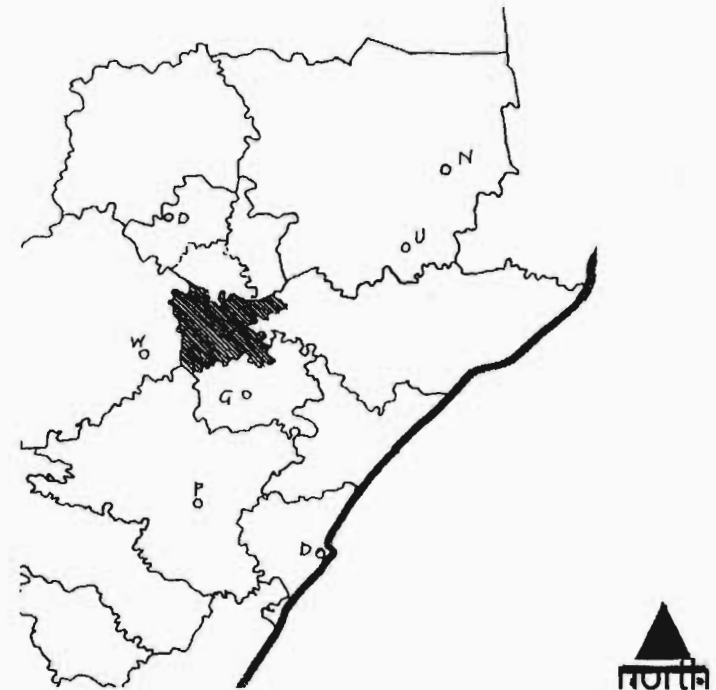
*goat-a story spread no doubt to discourage attacks from those with whom they were always at war'* (Lugg;1970:85).

The Msinga district has also had a particularly chequered past, politically, socially and economically. In today's politically fraught society, it remains a stalwart Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) area, and is thus one of the bastions of strong traditionalism and Zulu nationalism in the province. Jennings points to the lack of accessible information in his preface, and rightly points out in his introduction that statistics are useless in understanding the mechanics of the workings of an area such as Msinga. To ignore the social fabric is a fundamental failing in the understanding of the area (Jennings;1993:preface). Thus an holistic approach to the study of the area is necessary in the appreciation of any one of its component parts.

The notorious past of gun-running, violence and faction-fighting have emblazoned the name Msinga with a danger sign, to the extent that the number of people who still refuse to drive through the area is alarming. However, it is remarkable how the people of Msinga still rise to the occasion, producing clothing, adornment and architecture of a creative colourful intensity and depth unusual to the Zulu. Jennings also points out that the unusually high number

of immigrants to Msinga from urban township areas is attributed to the perception that the latter are too violent (Jennings;1993:preface). This immigration is reinforced by Scott-Wilson(Scott-Wilson;1998:42).

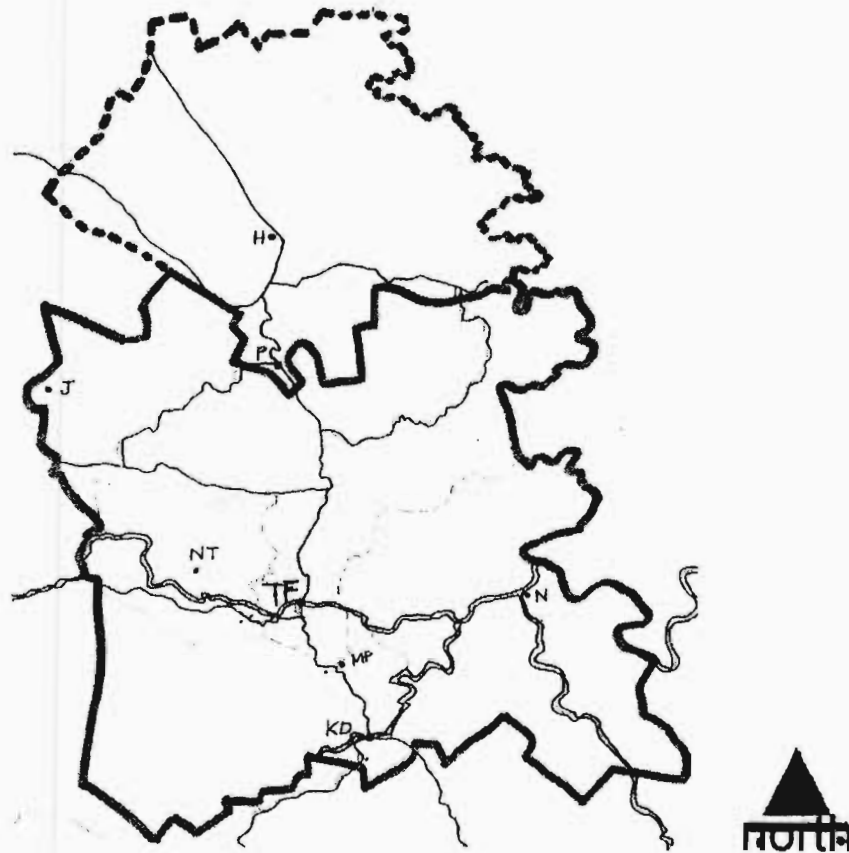
### 2.2.1. Geographical and Political Boundaries



**Map of KwaZulu-Natal: Msinga is the shaded area in the centre.**

**P=Pietermaritzburg, D=Durban,G=Greytown, U= Ulundi, N=Nongoma, W=Weenen**

The Msinga magisterial district is particularly defined, forming part of the historical magistracies of Impafana and Umsinga that spanned the Mooi and Tugela rivers with the town of Pomeroy on its Northern boundary.



**Map of Msinga: the dotted area to the north indicates the new boundaries of the Umzinyathi Regional Council, but the study area is contained within the hard edges. TF=Tugela Ferry, KD=Keates Drift, J=Job's Kop, Nt=Ntunjeni, Mp=Mpofana, H=Helpmekaar**

The Mooi River (Mpofana) forms the southern boundary with Greytown (Umvoti). To the west lies Klip River, consisting mainly of formal agricultural land. The Buffalo River (Mzinyathi) forms the eastern boundary before the land rolls into the deep reaches of Zululand towards Nkandla. Looking at an aerial photograph, it is obvious as to where agriculture stops and horticulture commences. In addition, the physical demarcation into farms seen on the topocadastral maps highlights the area, showing its proximity central to settled farmland, and its total isolation in the comparative empty, undivided spaces.

In today's political structures, Msinga has not changed as far a magisterial boundary is concerned, and it falls under the administration of Umzinyathi Regional Council<sup>17</sup> in Dundee. It makes sense to examine the architecture of this specific area using this political boundary, as few examples of the Msinga decorated homesteads exist much beyond the Mooi River and Pomeroy in the north.

Altogether, the district covers some 174 000 hectares of rocky,

<sup>17</sup> With the political redemarcation of the Regional Council borders, Umzinyathi Regional Council has extra land to the north. Thus, this work is placed politically in AD2000 for simplicity's sake. The different parties are still at odds as to what land the new Council consists of.

largely infertile and arid thornveld (Robbins;1985:83). The Mzinyathi Regional Council has six tribal authorities under traditional leaders: Baso, Bomvu, Cunu, Mthembu, Ngome and Qamu (Scott-Wilson:1998;24). (See 2. 9 for further discussion)

### 2.2.2. Transport and Access

Msinga spans the main road (R33) between Greytown and Dundee. From this arterial route, smaller unsurfaced secondary roads and footpaths venture into the countryside (See map). The R33 was surfaced in 1968 (Larkan;pers.comm:2000). This lack of formal road structure, noticed in the *Natal Book of 1911* (South African Railways;1911:308) certainly added to its inaccessibility and the remoteness.<sup>18</sup> Things have changed little as the area is still networked by unsurfaced secondary roads and tracks.<sup>19</sup>

The closest main town is Greytown, some 47km from Tugela Ferry, and Dundee, some 75km away.

<sup>18</sup> This reference recommends that, to get to Tugela Ferry, one should take the post cart to Dundee or Washbank and then hire horses. (SAR;1912,309)

<sup>19</sup> The Natal Directory of 1913 on postal services advises that to get post to Tugela Ferry, it had to be conveyed by 'Native runners' from Greytown. Tugela Ferry had telephones as early as 1912 (Ibid:517)



*Young man on bicycle, Msinga 1983 (Hartley 1983)*

Pietermaritzburg is the closest city, about 120km distant. Robbins also noted this proximity to urban environments and the pervading feeling of 'so near but, oh, so far' could have persuaded him to give it the ironic title of a 'rural slum' (Robbins;1985:65). Nowadays, the main forms of transport to and within Msinga for the inhabitants is by taxi and bus. They may also use donkeys (which are prolific in the area) and horses for goods transport (Jennings;1993:22). Bicycles can be used on the more formal roads. Interestingly, the cost of addressing the backlog in road provision in 1998 was seen as 41% of regional funds (Scott-Wilson;1998:77).

The implications of transport on house building is the limited access to materials. The remoteness exacerbates the need for using materials found *in situ*.

### 2.2.3 Access to Provisions and materials

In the past, the people of the Tugela Ferry area depended on a chain of trading stores which formed an economic backbone, and created the focus of economic nodes. They were supplied by travelling salesmen who set up a spirited network of supply of everything from pots to sweets. Mr. Ovens became an expert in cloth sales, selling cloth for the Frame Group and Marshall's<sup>20</sup>, as well as designing Zulu blankets. He remembers 7 stores in the area (Ovens;2000:pers.comm). Indeed, the importance of the trading store in the infrastructure and development of rural areas cannot be overstated. As a social and commercial node, they formed a transitional focus between cultures and facilities, to the extent that the trading store has given its title as a colloquialism for a style which incorporates the parapet wall: 'trading store style' (Whelan;1998:pers exp).

These stores were in the Msinga area long before the turn of the twentieth century. Lugg mentions a store run by a Mr. Brickfield on the slopes of Msinga mountain in 1879, as well as a number of Indian traders at Pomeroy (Lugg;1970:84). This is corroborated by

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<sup>20</sup> Both companies providing textiles to the rural areas

Larkan who confirms that these Indian storekeepers are still to be found as the backbone of Pomeroy commercial activity (Larkan;2000:pers comm).

As a town, Tugela Ferry has, in the last few years, seen massive injections of finance, particularly by Ithala Bank<sup>21</sup> which has developed a regional shopping centre. This is located opposite the Magistrate's court. There is a ready market for cultural items and clothing, fresh fruit and vegetables. Hawkers line the streets which are criss-crossed by freely roaming goats and cattle looking for greener pastures. In addition to the regional shopping centre, there is a credible hardware store, a number of smaller liquor stores, 'eating houses', and a petrol station. The SPAR supermarket is owned by the Tugela Ferry Mission Church. The latter has a lively industry baking bread with which it supplies most of the shops in the region. The Church of Scotland hospital is part of the main economic node. Meat is procured from Múden some 50km distant, paint, dairy and fresh produce from wholesalers in Greytown, and cosmetics and other luxuries from Pietermaritzburg.

The setting up of larger stores has been considered as problematic

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<sup>21</sup> the successor to KwaZulu Finance Corporation who were active for many years in the provision of economy in these areas.

as the electricity supply is erratic, despite the huge ESKOM servitude running through the valley (Jennings;1993:25). Although the electricity availability is sparse according to the broad-based Scott-Wilson(Scott-Wilson;1998:77) statistics where 39.89% of the region's electrical backlog is in Msinga, people appear to be making use of solar power on an increasing basis.

Keates Drift is a much smaller village than Tugela Ferry, consisting of the Keats (sic) Drift Trading Store, Mr Majola's store and tavern, and a couple of cash and carry outlets. The Mooi River at Keates Drift is also the origin of a popular type of mock ashlar cement block (size M140) which are made in a local blockyard on the river's edge. They sell for R3.10 each.



*Blockyard at Keates Drift (Photo; Author;2001)*

The Umzinyathi Regional Council has recently funded the building of taxi shelters and hawkers' stalls at the Mooi river. 'Bata' Footwear had a fashion shoe factory at Keates Drift. Schlemmer refers to its operation in the 1980s as a major employer in Msinga, having opened in 1977(Schlemmer;1983:22). The factory was closed in the mid-1990s due to economic instability (Futura Footwear;2001: pers.comm).

The implications on house building also depends on access, and yet again the limited production of materials within Msinga, and the cost of imports, means again that people resort to the use of locally found building materials.

### **2.3. Climate**

The area is characterised by extremely undulating land. This means that more rain falls at high altitudes than low. Summer is the rainy season, with an annual average of 650-700mm. This precipitation level is achieved largely through erratic summer thundershowers, and maybe hailstorms. The winter season is long and dry and the area is prone to droughts. Light frost may occur in winter. Msinga is also characterised by drastic changes in temperature; very hot in summer, and cold in winter.

The climate has implications on building as the temperature changes impact on the efficacy of the roofing and the wall insulation needed. Climatically the beehive hut was appropriate in addressing these needs. Practically, however, it was a disaster.

## 2.4 Geology

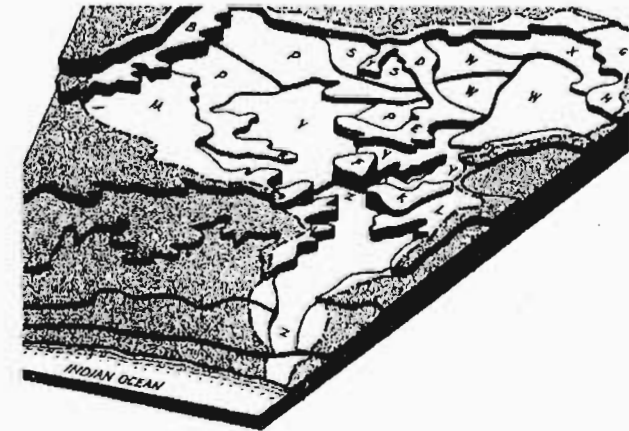


*Women washing clothing in the Tugela (Photo: Hartley:1983)*

The extremes in altitude range drastically from the valleys at 600m above sea level, to the Msinga mountain plateau (massif) 1000 metres higher. This contrast happens within a distance of less than 5 kilometres. The nearby confluence of the Tugela, Buffalo, Mooi and Sundays Rivers mean that the deep river valleys are characterised by rich alluvial soils on their banks, which have made agriculture in these riverine areas feasible in the past. The high

waterless plateaus have thin layers of topsoil, and the slopes in between are characterised by soil erosion. The unreliable rainfall, sparse vegetation, shallow soils and the 'socially desirable livestock accumulation policy' (Jennings;1993:11) exacerbate this problem.

The geological map reflects a Karroo system with Ecca series consisting of shales, mudstone, sandstone, and limestone (Edwards;1967:16). The implications on the environment for both subsistence farming and construction of buildings results in the overuse of the limited plant resources. This restricts building construction to stone, rubble and imported goods. The unfavourable topography is also seen as a hindrance to government-driven development (Scott-Wilson;1998:83).



*The topographical map shows the variations in level: f in the centre is the Msinga massif. The lower part of 'v' is Msinga(Thorington-Smith;1969:18)*

## 2.5 Vegetation

The position at the rivers' confluence infers that there is an abundance of water in the deep river valleys. The plateaus, however, are left high and dry. A predominance of aloe sp exists, and acacia, especially *Acacia karroo*, *Acacia nilotica* and *Acacia tortillis*. The latter has been beneficial to Msinga in an obscure way, as, for many years, the CAP Farm Trust bartered *A.tortillis* seed pods for food and money. Alcock's report of September 1980 (a particularly bad drought year) mentions a figure of 96 tons of seedpods brought in at the end of September (Alcock;1980a:2). These were packed in orange bags, and each bag fetched 20c. This provided food for the needy, and limited the spread of the *Acacia* which is exacerbated by overgrazing. Similarly, the dried leaves of the *Aloe marlothii* are used as firewood generating the intense heat needed for the making of clay pots. *Aloe spectabilis* is most characteristic of the area. The incidence of *Euphorbia ingens* on the steep valley sides and the spread of *Euphorbia tirucalli*, often planted as hedges demarcating the edges of homesteads, point to the sustainability of succulents in the region (Edwards;1967:98). This *Euphorbia (umsululu)* is also used in the firing of pots (Armstrong et al;1997:109).



**Women of the Magwaza family firing pots at their homestead near Middledrift, using the dried leaves of the Aloe and Euphorbia trunks (Photo: Author:2001)**

The incidence of *Phragmites communis (umHlanga)* reed in the riverine areas is noted by Edwards (Edwards;1967:89) as used in the thatching of homes. Indeed, the raked ceiling of a hut at Homestead Sithole, where people were informally interviewed,<sup>22</sup> is characterised by the use of *Phragmites communis* reeds on the inner thatch, which, according to the homesteader, were acquired locally at Mpofana (See Map 2.2.1). Homestead Magwaza, on the Middledrift side of Jamesons Drift and outside of the study area also had *umHlanga* reeds as part of the ceiling structure.

<sup>22</sup> Mr Sithole is a painter-plasterer, and was reluctant to share information.

Phillips (in Schlemmer) specifically notes that there are three types of vegetative areas. The 'Riverine and Lowland' consists of mixed short to medium thicket, and woodlands. 'Upland' is characterised by mixed thicket and woodland, and has drier faciation. The 'Highland-montane' is medium thicket and found on the top of Msinga massif. The vegetation is commonly referred to as 'Valley Bushveld' (Schlemmer; 1983:6).

The rapid spread of the succulents and aloe species is as a result of the constant overgrazing and 'slash and burn' agriculture practised. This was noted by Edwards (Edwards; 1967:113) at the end of the 1960s and little has changed since.

The implications for house building are the limitations presented by the few plant resources of the area. This means that timber has to be imported, as there are few trees that offer the lengths needed for structural members. In addition, the lack of local grasses means that virtually all thatch has to be imported.

## 2.6 Population

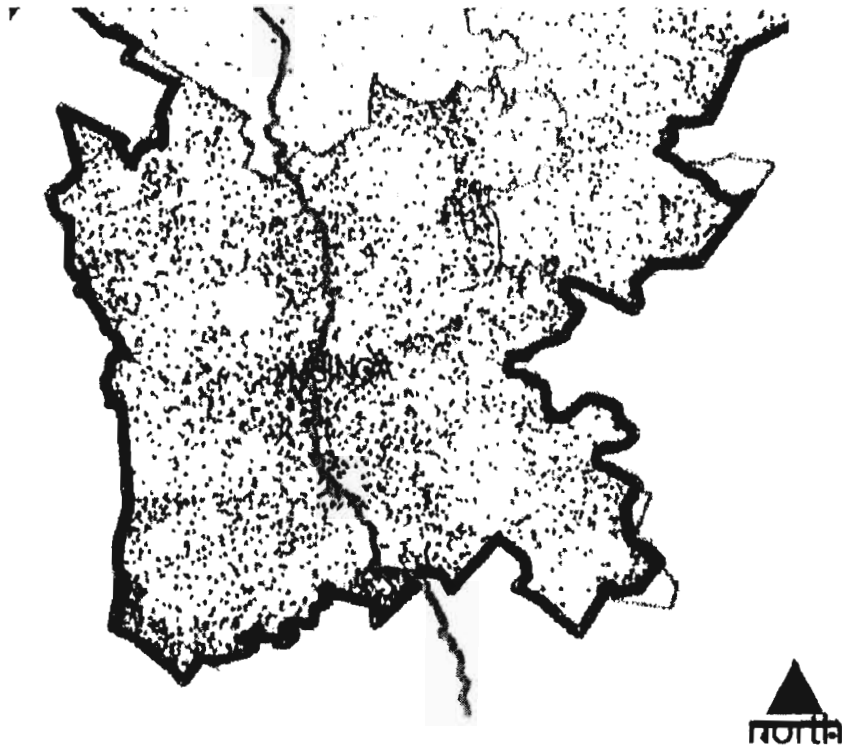
Msinga is essentially African populated, falling within the area administered by the former KwaZulu Homeland Government.

However, the presence of trading posts and river crossings at Tugela Ferry and Keates Drift, as well as religious institutions such as the historic Gordon Memorial and Tugela Ferry Mission Church means that different race groups have been settled in the area for decades. Despite this, Jaster mentions that the area was designated 'white' in the early years of *apartheid* (Jaster; 1993:134).

Msinga was only included in the KwaZulu Administration in 1945. Tugela Ferry and Pomeroy are magisterial seats and historically had White Magistrates and Interpreters. Lugg started off his illustrious career after a comfortable post in Pietermaritzburg with an interpretive post at Pomeroy in 1901. He says:-

*'Pomeroy was a most miserable spot. Most of the buildings had been destroyed during the War, (Anglo-Boer) still in progress. Its inhabitants consisted of the magistrate, Major Thomas Maxwell, a widower who lived alone at the Residency, his clerk, a couple of Police and some Indian storekeepers living in shacks. Our nearest neighbours were some German farmers several miles away and Dr Dalzell of the Gordon Mission. (Lugg; 1970:83)*





*The dots represent population density: Msinga is in the southern portion (Source: Scott-Wilson, 1998a: appendix) It also shows the fairly even spread of people across the district.*

Government postings, extension officers, and hospital staff provided short term itinerant populations. Larkan was resident in the Msinga valley as a recruitment officer for the Chamber of Mines (KwaTEBA) from 1958-1972. He still lives at the Tugela Ferry Mission Church.

Robbins<sup>23</sup> notes that the 1970 census puts the population of the area at about 115 000, the 1980 census apparently not being completed in Msinga. His estimate in the mid 1980s ran to 160000 (Robbins; 1985:83). Certainly the lack of growth between Robbins' estimate and the last census could be attributed to the current empirical method of census counting, (rather than the previous estimate per hut, death through AIDS related disease and/or actual numbers of people actively counted).

In addition, fluctuating populations rely on immigration as well. Between 1969 and 1972, about 20 000 people were moved into temporary camps in Msinga from the Weenen area (Robbins; 1985:84). The new blood in these forced settlements has added to the brevity of architectural influence at the same time as exacerbating political and social tension.

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<sup>23</sup> This is contrary to the figures supplied by the Central Statistical Service, which reveals total figures as shown in the chart. Indeed, confusion as to population varies between Department and source.

Census figures over the years reflect the following:

	1996	1991	1970	1951	1921	1911#	1904*
African	162313				60535	22011	29429
Asian	10				122		62
unspecified	1155						
Coloureds	129				40		5
Europeans	39				120	27	260
<b>Total</b>	<b>163736</b>	<b>154623</b>	<b>121701</b>	<b>60817</b>	<b>51276</b>	<b>22028</b>	<b>29756</b>

source: Central Statistical Service: 2000

# *The Natal Directory* 1913;1912: 517

\* *The Census of the Colony of Natal April 1904*;727

Jennings in 1993 mentions a count per household for census purposes at 11 people.<sup>24</sup> The gender disparity is consistently high, with women representing 50% for all ages over 25. This is attributed to faction fighting, male absenteeism and migrancy, and explains the dominance of women in many of the homesteads that we visited (Jennings;1993:15). Ngwane, the social worker at Tugela Ferry, mentions that absenteeism is a large contributor to the current social problems(Ngwane;2000:pers.comm).

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<sup>24</sup>The 1904 Census mentions an average count of people per hut as being 3.56 (Census of the Colony of Natal:1905:835) Compare this with Jennings count in 1993.

## 2.7 Community Facilities

### 2.7.1 Educational

The 1904 Census reported an unusually high number of schools in the area; 7 mission schools, 1 home school, 1 'aided denominational', and 1 private school (PAR:NCP8/3/6 ;1905:727).

This is perhaps not surprising in the light of an European population of 260. Lugg mentions that the Church of Scotland had 15 outstations and schools in the Msinga district (Lugg;1949:94). An article in *Bantu* (Anon:Aug1964) quotes the numbers of existing schools in the area in 1964 as being 34 government schools and 4 private schools. More were being built. The 1970 census revealed that over 80% of the population was illiterate (Robbins;1985:87). Robbins' information from the Department of Education in Ulundi two decades later revealed that there were 123 schools, mostly primary, with 35 742 pupils enrolled. He, however, found these numbers difficult to believe as his observation did not substantiate them (Ibid;87). This had not improved much by 1998 with the Scott-Wilson (Scott-Wilson;1998:64) report of a functioning literacy level of 30%. A recent call put to the Education Circuit officer at Tugela Ferry elicited the information that there were 150 senior schools and

'50-something' junior primaries (Education Circuit Officer;2001;pers.comm). Jennings mentions a low standard of education,interpolated from the 1991 census. This was attributed to lack of resources in schools, badly located or inaccessible schools, gender prejudice, (where the education of female children is not seen as a priority in the education process) teenage pregnancies, faction-fighting disrupting the school year, and some schools not offering the matriculation exam (Jennings;1993:19).

Pre-school education was seen as a growth industry. 'World Vision' had been active in attempting to alleviate some of the malnutrition by offering food at schools, but the poor can not afford to even send their children to these schools (Ibid:20).

Ngwane says that at the moment access to tertiary education of any kind means travelling, and need for even a technical college in the area is great, as its lack inhibits the prospects of potential personal growth (Ngwane;2001;pers.comm).

### **2.7.2 Social Organisations**

The facilities delivery system of the Umzinyathi Regional Council has ensured that each of the *amaKhosi* in Msinga has a community

hall and a football field(Ngwane;2001:pers.comm). However, the founding of football teams to use these fields, for example, has not been as successful. At kwaMabaso(the tribal area), there is an active football team(Ngwane;2001:pers.comm). All the fields are surrounded by a high concrete palisade to keep out the goats.

Social problems such as child abuse exist, but are peripheral enough to lack statistics. The high incidence of HIV infection (See 2.7.6) results in a large amount of post-trauma counselling by the social workers. Ngwane has observed in her three years of service in the area that overall malnutrition is evident, and that there are also many physically and mentally disabled children (Ibid;2001).

However, there has been a focus on correcting gender inequality in the area, and this has been addressed in part by the active promotion of sewing groups, as well as the Department of Agriculture's community gardens programme. Other craft groups such as beadwork and sewing ventures help alleviate poverty and address the low available skills issue(Ngwane:2001;pers.comm).

### 2.7.3 Security

The first Police Post was established in 1902 at Tugela Ferry (PAR, 1/UMS/30). The attached cells have been necessary as the number of murders and rapes, stock thefts and arson have been high since the days of the early magistrates.<sup>24</sup>

At present, there are police stations at Tugela Ferry and Pomeroy, and there is an identified need in the assessment carried out by Scott-Wilson for more security forces to be deployed in the area (Scott-Wilson;1998:62).

The present situation of the police force in Msinga differs little from the rest of the country. The low wages, staff shortages and insecure work conditions lead to allegations of corruption. Indeed, the police at Msinga are perceived as being corrupt and prone to inflicting torture (Jennings;1993:28). Crimes such as stock theft are committed under the cloak of faction fighting. Fear of recrimination leads to reticence to follow up crime by the police and, also, by the public (Ibid;28).

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<sup>24</sup>During recent faction fighting, those Mabaso guilty had to be incarcerated in Dundee as the Tugela Ferry Gaol is in Mthembu territory, and thus unsafe(Alcock:2001;pers.comm).

### 2.7.4 Welfare and Pensions

This social service office is based in Tugela Ferry and its employees spend much time in the tracing of family members. Lack of basic documentation by residents such as birth and death certificates, cause problems and long delays (Jennings;1993:28). A note in the Scott-Wilson survey five years later states that welfare services in the area were benefiting from state investment, and that the situation had improved (Scott-Wilson;1998:62). Ngwane says that much time is spent trauma and grief counselling as a result faction fighting and AIDS(Ngwane;2001:pers.comm).

The International Red Cross has assisted in the past, but only in dropping off emergency aid. It is not a permanent fixture in the Msinga Valley.

### 2.7.5 Religious Organisations

The Gordon Memorial Mission Station was the site of the original mission started up by the Rev. Dalzell of the Free Church of Scotland in 1870 (*Amafa KwaZulu-Natal*;2000:database). It still functions as a religious institution with an attached school.

Tugela Ferry Mission Church consists of a congregation of some 1500 people and is headed by Rev. Mabaso who hails from KwaMabaso, Msinga. The mission has been in operation for many years (Mabaso;2000:pers.comm).

In the late 1930s there were concerted efforts by various religious denominations to build church buildings for congregations which had held services for years at private homesteads and now wanted to formally move onto tribal land. These would have had schools attached, but it seems that permission for most of these was denied by the Secretary for Native Affairs in 1938 (PAR, CNC 45/465-475).

The influence of Revivalist churches is strong. The Nazarites (Shembe) have a large following, indicated by the number of 'temples', each consisting of a tree surrounded by a ring of white painted stones. The implications of religion on the material culture are the strongly defined items of beadwork, such as those by the Shembe in particular, that correlate with the decorative tradition on the buildings.

### 2.7.6 Health Care

The Cottage Hospital at Gordon Memorial Mission Station was originally run by the indomitable Rev. Dalzell with the able political support of Henry Francis Fynn (Jr) who was magistrate at the time. The medical work of the mission was moved to the hospital at Tugela Ferry (Lugg;1949:94).

As in most rural areas, recourse to traditional healers is common.

The Church of Scotland hospital at Tugela Ferry has been a single source of formal treatment in the valley for many years. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health reports that, at present, there are 13 clinics, 2 provincial mobile clinics and the Hospital at Tugela Ferry. The Church of Scotland Hospital has the following statistics: 250 beds of which the occupancy rate is 118. The average length of stay is 8 nights, with a bed turnover rate of 5. There were 51 deaths between April 1998 and March 1999, 278 live births, 194 operations, with 3406 admissions and 18 754 visits by the community (KZN Department of Health Informatics;1999:30). The HIV statistics for the entire Mzinyathi region for 1999 was 27% infection on ante-natal tests(Ibid:48). The hospital is administered

by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health <sup>25</sup>, although it still retains a strong missionary ethic. Again, the remoteness is problematic as ambulances may have to be called to convey people to Edendale hospital in Pietermaritzburg, a trip of about 6 hours (Jennings;1993:26).

Robbins quotes the main source of deaths and disease in the Tugela Ferry Hospital in the 1980s as being malnutrition and lack of nutritional education. Larkan estimates 4 deaths a day in 2000 as being AIDS-related. This excludes those AIDS sufferers sent home for care.

Larkan also supports Robbins in his observation that the types of food being sold as prestige goods such as refined maize meal contribute to the severe lack of proper nutrition in the area. This number is corroborated by Ngwane. A 1991 study in Msinga by Stellenbosch University and 'World Vision' indicated that 30% of children under 5 years old suffered from malnutrition, stunting growth (Jennings;1993:26). 1% had to be hospitalised. World Vision used to sponsor a retail outlet in Tugela Ferry which provided subsidised food for children, but this seems to be no longer in

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<sup>25</sup>The census figure used by the Department of Health in 1998, is calculated at 161 827 people with a density of 92 people per km<sup>2</sup>.

existence (Ngwane;2001:pers.comm).

The summer rains also herald diarrhoea and cholera as most people are dependant on rivers and run-off water for drinking.

The high death rate has implications on the house building tradition, as the hut belonging to a person that dies is abandoned and left to crumble.

## 2.8 Social History

According to Bulpin (Bulpin;c1953:42), it would appear that the aboriginal inhabitants of the Msinga area were the amaBele people, who were subject to the domino effects of the *Mfecane* from the invasions of the neighbouring amaNgwane by the Mthethwa and the Ndwandwe. The amaBele peoples' broken peace continued, with the subsequent invasion by the Mthembu and then the arrival of the Mchunu in 1821. These disruptions and their new fugitive lifestyle led them to cannibalism, and for many years Job's Kop (see Map 2.2.1) on the western reaches of the Msinga area was reputed to be the hiding place of the Bele cannibals (Bulpin:c1953;42 ). Other local clans, such as the Ntlangwini that were resident in the confluence of the Tugela and Mooi Rivers fled south to the Cape.

1849 saw the establishment of the Mzinyathi and Impafana locations, which were administered by the Klip River authority. Russell's map of 1904 (Russell;1904:map) shows the area between the Mooi and Tugela Rivers as being named Impulwana(See Map 1.2).

The Mthembu and Mchunu tribes supported the Colonial Government in the Anglo-Zulu War, as their feeling was that their autonomous power was greater under British rather than under Zulu rule, which would have relegated them to petty chiefdoms. They provided many of the Native regiments in the Anglo-Zulu War battles (Clegg;1979:177).

The Ferry on the Tugela was also known as Smit's Drift for many years, after Mr. N.Smit who was the ferryman and the owner of the Tugela Ferry Hotel at Pomeroy.

In 1899, an order from the Prime Minister of the Colony of Natal in office, Sir Albert Hime, resulted in the destruction of the ponts across the Mooi and Tugela Rivers, and the breaking up of the road by Umvoti Mounted Rifles to keep the Boers at bay (PAR:CSO2584:C521/1899). The ferries were an integral part of the Msinga life: the road to Helpmekaar was well used by travellers and

salesmen. This is reinforced by an earlier motivated application for outspan on the North side of the Tugela by Henry Francis Fynn Jr. in 1882 (PAR:SNAI/1/52/1882/55).

In keeping with the violent theme, the Bhambatha Rebellion of 1906-07 began in Msinga, initiated by Bhambatha Zondi at Mpanza (Keates Drift).

In 1910, the Union Government placed Msinga under the magisterial administration of Helpmekaar. A letter to the Postmaster General from the Secretary of Justice in 1926 informed that Mpofana and parts of Msinga were to be included in a new magistracy (PAR:3/1/1/5:4/534/14). The district became known as Msinga in 1945, and was transferred from European administration to the Department of Native Affairs in Ulundi. In this shift, the Mchunu tribe held power and represented Msinga at KwaZulu Government cabinet level.

Notable in the region are the underlying power struggles which manifest themselves in bloodshed. These faction fights date back to the turn of the twentieth century: the 1922 and 1945 faction fights created the foundations for the ideological differences central to present power struggles(Clegg;1981:175). The 1922 faction-fighting

ended effective Mthembu dominance by Mchunu who were defeated in 1945 (see 2.14.6).

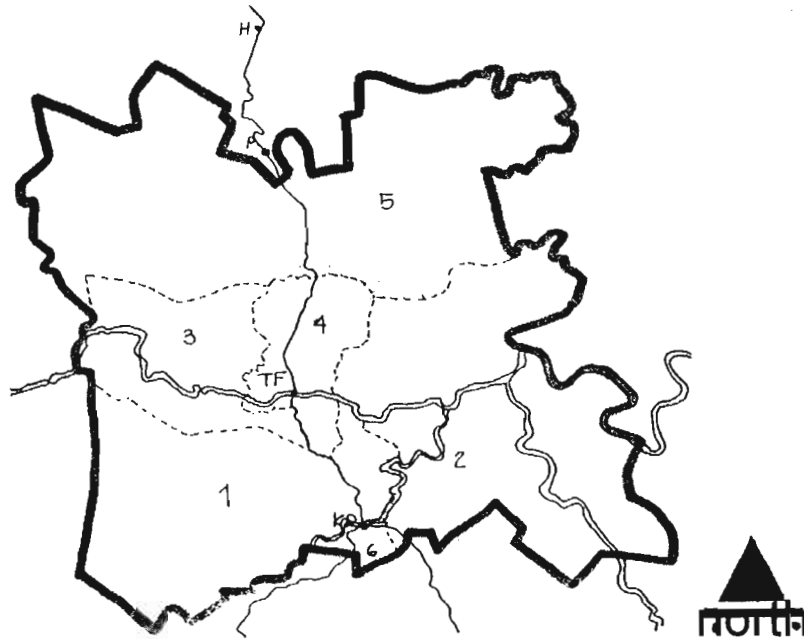
Other important bits of social history from this area include the finding of precious metals. In 1887, a Mr. C.Tatham claimed that he had found gold at Msinga, and the Golden Eagle Mining Company was formed. This was not a viable venture. (Bulpin;1956:203). An application to mine lime was made by a Mr Barrow in 1919. The outcome of this was not documented(PAR:CNC 343A:1919/3625).



*Panning for gold at Ingebevu, Msinga circa 1895 from (Ingram;1895:209)*



## 2.9 Political Background



Map of tribal demarcations (KZ-N Dept Local Govt. and Housing)

1=Mchunu, 2=Bomvu, 3=Mthembu, 4=Mabaso, 5=Qamu, 6=Ngome(Zondi)

According to Alcock, (Alcock;1981a:map) there are 7 main tribal groups in the Msinga area. These are the Mvelase, Mchunu, Mabaso, Mthembu, Sithole, Zondi, and Bomvu.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Schlemmer notes that the tribal groups includes Majosi, and excludes Mvelase and Sithole (Schlemmer;1983:8). However, Clegg says that the Qamu and the Majosi are one and the same, the latter being a conglomerate tribe formed by Shepstone in 1869 (Clegg;1981:170). Scott-Wilson (Scott-Wilson;1998a:10) mentions the Qamu as a resident tribe.

Clegg's description of the political structure within Msinga is that a homestead (*umuzi*) is part of a sub-district of a neighbourhood (*umhlati*), within a district (*isigodi*), lying in a region (*isifunda*), and as part of a nation (*isizwe*) (Clegg;1981:172). This strongly hierarchical structural system is fundamental in the appreciation of how the local political system should interface with regional structures, and how regional structures can theoretically in turn eventually devolve responsibility to a single homestead unit. This conforms with the larger political theory of national devolution to provinces.

The huge number of different familial groupings that fall into this structure and within such a small area exacerbates the faction fighting phenomenon (see 2.14.6) which has placed strain on peace and co-existence. Peoples such as the Mthembu were relatively early settlers in the area, displacing the amaBele in their settlement, whereas others were subsequently placed by the *Apartheid* Government.

The larger political context is that Msinga is a magisterial district within the Umzinyathi Regional Council, who are responsible for the regional administration, roads, healthcare, etc. However, the *amaKhosi* (traditional leaders) are prominent in the political

structures, and are represented at Regional Council level. These *amaKhosi* in turn are traditional leaders within a specific tribal area, and their needs are further disseminated to ground level in the appointment of *iNdunas*. To get, and interpret information, one has to work from both sides of the political spectrum. On the one hand, individual homesteaders, and propriety insist that due process be through the correct channels of the *iNduna* and *iNkosi*. On the other hand, inquiry at Regional Council level is important, as the impact of its decisions ultimately reach the ground. The Regional Council's personnel are intimately connected with the interpersonal and intertribal dynamics, as well as the dealings at institutional and government level.

The fractious politics of the area has been one of the leading factors that has contributed to the perception of Msinga as a 'no-go' area. (See 2.14.6)

## 2.10 Migrant Labour

The lure of the prosperous gold mines of the former Transvaal formed a strong part of the formative development of the present-day culture of the Msinga valley. For many years, this area was a centre for the drafting of Zulu men as labourers for the gold mines.

The Chamber of Mines had an active recruiting office in Msinga for decades, which not only performed the actual draft and interview process, but also the valuable follow-up interface between the miners and their families back at home. Larkan tells that 85-90% of its work involved the maintenance of liaison with families and other social issues. The officers worked within the existing social networks. Larkan tells that guaranteed success in contacting people to pass on news or information was to visit the dipping tank on cattle dipping day and send messages saying who wanted to contact whom (Larkan; 2000:pers.comm).

The Native Recruiting Corporation later became TEBA (The Employment Bureau of Africa). In the mid 1960s there were an estimated 4500 Zulus on the goldmines, which rose to an estimated 45 000 Zulus in 1990. After the retrenchments of recent years and the closing of many mines, an estimated 4-6000 Zulus are left working on the mines, many having returned home. This loss of reliable income is telling in the current poverty of the Msinga area (Ibid;2000:pers.comm).

The influence of the mines on the migrant labourers was both good and bad. It was a valuable source of income, particularly around Christmas when buildings were redecorated with new vigour (and a

full pocket!). the experience gained formed a valuable education and capacity-building conduit between a rural area and the streetwise Johannesburg, and promoted the learning of English and Afrikaans amongst many of the miners. Migrant culture also had a detrimental effect on the greater society where absentee labourers had wives in the city as well as Msinga Valley, spreading social disease as well as limiting the spending power of their income. Ramdhani comments that as early as the 1890s, the homesteads were characterised by the poor maintenance of huts due to the rise in migrant labour (Ramdhani;1985:140).

Nowadays, pure absenteeism is a social problem: men go to the cities to look for work, and settle there as work seekers. This compounds the migrancy problem and gender imbalance in Msinga (Ngwane;2001:pers.comm).

According to Alcock and others, this migrant labour issue was an important stimulus in the development of the Msinga painted hut, and in fact, could have contributed to the blossoming creativity of the area as a whole(Alcock;2000:pers.comm).

## 2.11 Social Organisations

NGOs and other organisations have been active in the area for many years. 'World Vision' and the International Red Cross assisted in poverty relief, emergency feeding, mobile health centres, community gardens, and subsidised food for infants (Jennings;1993:54). CAPFarm Trust (Mdukhatshani), mentioned earlier, has also been active in the area for 25 years. Local groups and Community Based Organisations such as Msinga Peace and Development Committee (MPDC) exist: the latter is a group of local people dedicated to social upliftment; ending faction fighting, crime, corruption and violence and developing Msinga culturally, economically and socially (Jennings;1993:54).

## 2.12 Pastoralism

The cognitive system of the 'central cattle pattern' has had a drastic influence ecologically and structurally on the area and perhaps has been the largest determinant in the physical landscape of the Msinga area that we see today. The Zulu are pastoralists rather than agriculturalists, and their culture sees cattle as its central focus. The social acceptance of cattle as a marker of wealth, and the necessary keeping of goats *in lieu* means that the restricted

available environment is too small to sustain the livestock. It thus becomes overgrazed and suffers from a resultant predominance of the *Acacia sp.* Historically the livestock numbers are high: the 1904 census mentions 20796 cattle, 825 horses, 20 sheep, 9391 Nguni sheep, 67136 goats and 2897 pigs. There were also 70000 chickens (PAR: NCP;1905:830). This is a high livestock count per capita compared to May and Trompeter's more recent reports. Few households nowadays are wealthy enough to have extensive herds.<sup>27</sup> The Jennings report mentions 57 dipping tanks (Jennings;1993:37), whereas Alcock mentions 60 tanks (Alcock;1980:1). As commented elsewhere, these tanks are a social node for the men in the same manner that water collection points are often a gathering node for women (Larkan;2000: pers.comm). The Tomlinson Commission of Enquiry mentioned an average herd size of 8 in its 1956 report.

## 2.13 Agriculture

Much has been written over the years as to the amount of

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<sup>27</sup> May and Trompeter quote the following in their 1992 report that 80% of the population had no cattle, 15.4% had 1-10 cattle, 3.0% had 11-20 cattle, 0.5% had 21-30 cattle, and .5% had 31-44 and 41-50 cattle (May,Trompeter,Stavrou;1992:208).

agriculture and the brevity of produce grown along the Mooi and Tugela Rivers. Robbins noted the irony of producing strawberries and gooseberries for sale in the big cities when most of the local population was on the borderline of starvation (Robbins;1985:87). The introduction of irrigation schemes in 1902 (Thorrington-Smith;1960:136) promoted farming on a large scale in the river valleys, where the Government-run irrigation scheme rented two acre plots to farmers at R4 per annum. Crops such as maize, potatoes, pumpkins and rice were grown (Anon;May1963:199). Along the Mooi River 1/1/8 acre plots grew maize, beans, sweet potatoes, vegetables, lucerne, ground nuts and Egyptian giant confectionary peanuts.

The establishment of the Msinga Farmers Association in 1963 (Anon;August 1964:340) was an attempt to organise 'farmers days' to encourage retail and exchange of produce, and at the same time, educational lectures about farming methods etc. could be conducted.

However, despite all this reputed industry, Robbins says that in the 1980s his visual experience of crops was limited to maize. According to him, other crops had been grown but they had been the victims of theft(Robbins;1985:83).

One of the most important informal and illegal crops grown in the area is *dagga* (marijuana/ *Cannabis sativa*). An excerpt from the Church Agricultural Project (CAP) Newsletter cited by Robbins states that:-

*'it's the most important crop in KwaZulu. A multimillion rand industry. Some dagga gardens are barely five paces square, yet even these bits of ground can yield the grower R200'* (Robbins;1985:92).

Robbins states that in 1979/80 nearly 600 000 kilograms of *dagga* valued at over R100 million were destroyed(Ibid:92).

Indeed, the Church Agricultural Project, under the CAPFarm Trust steered in latter years by Mrs. Creina Alcock after the murder of her husband Neil, has been fundamental in the promotion of soil conservation, grass production and education regarding general agricultural practices. The promotion of community gardens since the 1940s has met with some success, with the growing of beetroot as a popular crop (Jennings;1993:38). Despite this, the latest commissioned report (Scott-Wilson;1998:13) saw Msinga as an area of low agricultural potential, with pockets of arable land. The outcome report, *The final strategy plan for Mzinyathi Regional Council* (Scott-Wilson;1998b:28) recommended the growing of

specific crops such as chillies, Japanese beans and green maize.

## 2.14 Particular Social Issues in Msinga

Jennings writes:

*'presently the area is known for its poverty, its faction fighting, its gun-running and its dagga- quite simply most of the references to Msinga in recent times have been negative and this contributes to the areas marginalisation'* (Jennings;1993:10).

Furthermore, Jennings did notice a sense of order that seemed to permeate the area at the time, to the extent that people developed coping mechanisms. This may be reflected largely in the creativity of the material culture. Certainly, Msinga has a special set of characteristics which have influenced its development or lack thereof.

### 2.14.1 Poverty

Almost all written documentation, historical and contemporary, has defined Msinga in terms of its extreme poverty, to the extent that

one of the main projects of the 'Church Agricultural Project' (CAP) set up by the Alcocks in 1975 was the trading of animal bones and *Acacia* pods with the poverty struck farmers in the Msinga Valley for yellow maize. The health problems experienced at the hospital are largely related to bad nutrition. The 1998 report by Scott Wilson recognised Msinga as the most poverty stricken area of the region. The informal sector in Msinga was the largest employer with more than 75% of the people earning less than R1440 per month.<sup>28</sup> A high backlog of services was identified, with 44% provision of water for the region, 57% sanitation, 76% electricity, 91% telephonic communication, and 80% waste management. The cost of addressing the backlogs in this area was a substantial portion of the budget of the new Umzinyathi Regional Council (Scott-Wilson;1998a:10).

### 2.14.2 Gunrunning

The Msinga area has for many years been notorious for the concealment of people, goods and arms cachés. This social turmoil exacerbated the incidence of faction fighting, also promoting the

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<sup>28</sup> This poverty was reflected in the earlier income and expenditure survey by May, Trompeter and Stavrou of 1992.

stigma of Msinga. Larkan says that the numbers of guns that gun squads were consistently discovering made it reasonable to deploy the 'squads in the area for 18 years. Indeed, according to Alcock, cited by Jaster;-

*' We didn't know when we first came here that Msinga was the country's leading source of dagga (marijuana) and illegal firearms. It was the only district in South Africa to have three special police squads: one for firearms, one for dagga, and another for cattle theft' (Jaster;1993:135).*

### 2.14.3 Illegal Crops

As mentioned earlier, the active production of *dagga (cannabis sativa)* is integrally connected with Msinga, as it was, and remains, one of the biggest *dagga* growing areas in the country. In her newsletters, Alcock tells of much unwitting involvement in the smuggling of *dagga* across the Tugela (Alcock;1977:3). Although the crop is illegal, it is the main source of income for an impoverished and sidelined community, and the rocky and infertile nature of the land beyond the river valleys can sustain the hardy *dagga* as an income generating crop, but little else.

According to Ngwane the homesteads were sited at the top of the hills as this was the safest place to grow dagga (Ngwane;2001:pers.comm). This also explains a fairly even settlement spread seen on population maps (see 2.9), unusually distant from the reliable water sources.

#### 2.14.4 Cyclical Nature of the Year

The artificial impetus of the returning itinerant mineworkers at Christmas time has created an annual cycle that revolves around the summer months. Both the physical and the financial return were welcomed, to the extent that people say that the repainting of the homesteads was done just *before* the Christmas period, not necessarily *after* the men had arrived home with funds. The painting also responded to the cycle of hut building, which itself relied on the seasonal availability and the cutting of thatching grass. This meant that the structures of the houses were begun in August and September, the thatch was cut in October at the latest, and then the walls packed and the hut finished before Christmas time.

The hospital refers to September as 'baby month', as the men returning from the mines in December led to much activity (Robbins;1985:89). For the same reason, incidences of Sexually

Transmitted Diseases are high in January (Jennings;1993:26). In addition, December is the month for victims of trauma as the returning migrants create new tension; this means faction fighting is on the increase.

Even on the seemingly modern buildings, the financial boom in December is evident. A homestead a few hundred metres up the pass north of Keates Drift has had incremental extensions every December for the last four years.

This cyclical nature of the year was also emphasised by the visits of the police helicopters on *dagga* burning raids in the summertime.

#### 2.14.5 Overgrazing

Consistently, reports in *Bantu* referred to the Msinga area as being overgrazed (Anon;Aug1964a:329). Historically, periodic droughts exacerbate the lack of grass, and Braadvedt recalls a drought in the early 1930s that left 40 000 head of cattle dead (Braadvedt;1949:94). Alcock also mentions severe drought in recent years (Alcock;1980:1). This not only left many stock dead, but people starving, resulting in the trade of *Acacia tortillis* pods for food (see 2.14.1). Overgrazing is also constantly mentioned in soils and

vegetation surveys (Edwards;1967:113).

The issue of overgrazing is one that CAPFarm Trust has been trying to alleviate, rectify and re-educate in the last twenty years.

### **2.14.6 Faction Fighting**

Faction fighting is intimately connected with the built environment as the burning of homesteads not only meant that they had to be rebuilt often, with a quicker turnover in the development of characteristics, but also the threat of conflict constantly pushed back territory, increasing the relative densities of homesteads, and forcing people to move onto steeper gradients, creating terraces (Clegg;1981:175).

Clegg writes that the issue of faction fighting rose out of a difficulty to reconcile neighbouring factions which would historically, under central Zulu rule, have been controlled and determined by the king. As other areas such as Mahlabathini and Nongoma in Zululand had developed stick fighting as a control mechanism, Msinga, in transition to European rule, and initially on the Colonial side of the Tugela, ended up developing a faction fighting

culture(Clegg;1981;173). In stick fighting, a person accidentally killed is not deemed murdered. This is so in faction fighting, except people are murdered intentionally. As Alcock puts it:-

*'A faction fight, defined as 'at least 8 (black) men fighting with or without weapons' is essentially a legal loophole in Natal/KwaZulu customary law where murder goes unprosecuted or perpetrators are charged with public violence or armed assembly' (Alcock:1976).*

Jennings (Jennings;1993:84) reinforces this, saying that a plethora of crimes are committed under the guise of faction fighting, and cites rape, arson, murder, stock theft, assault, common theft and looting as examples. Clegg says that the earliest perceived faction fight was in 1905, although boundary disputes had been bitterly contested throughout the latter years of the nineteenth century (Clegg;1981:175). The incidences of 1922 and 1945 showed shifts in power between Mthembu and Mchunu. Braatvedt was brought in to assist in the mediation of these problems in 1931, and he describes a reign of terror:-

*'Open warfare broke out between the tribal factions, (two factions of the Mchunu regarding succession) and regular battles took place in which many were killed; and kraals burnt down and looted on a*



*large scale.*'(Braatvedt;1949:94)

Alcock's husband, Neil, was killed in an ambush returning from mediation efforts between Tribal leaders in the area.

It is important to note that the faction fighting is not only intertribal, but intratribal as well. Ngwane says that in her experience, the incidence of faction fighting in recent years has been reduced (Ngwane;2001:pers.comm).

## 2.15 Conclusions

One cannot study any aspect of material culture in isolation. The socio-economic and political backgrounds are of paramount importance, as is the immediate geography and issues of accessibility. The Msinga area as both a pariah region and the source of an unusual decorative tradition in the Zululand context, has to be particularly studied with as full a background as possible. The swelling population growth, together with the high death rate from AIDS and violence has created its own set of dynamics,

affecting the building tradition in the sense that an unused building is left to rot and collapse. In the same sense, the current Government's commitment to delivery means that as 95% of the population of Msinga live in traditional homes, 35 000 houses should be provided (Scott-Wilson;1998:10). Do the people of Msinga, some in polygamous homesteads of up to 20 buildings, really want to move into small 'boxes'? What effect will this have on the the vernacular architecture? Statistical details regarding a variety of issues thus have a direct influence on the built environment. A major example would be that of the faction fighting; this has had its set of influences, one of the least is the abandoning of a grass building tradition of the *iqhugwana* for a sturdier, more arson-proof variation. This is probably the most drastic decision in the initial creation of the contemporary vernacular architecture of Msinga.

## ***Msinga***

*Rocky country  
Very dry in vegetation  
Filthy rich in humanity  
You are a beer brewing land  
Pot-making is your industry  
And you derive your income from dagga  
But humour is your remarkable trait  
I've seen your smiles in my brief stay with you  
And I've heard stories of your yesteryear's sadness*

**Bongani Ndhlovu (with thanks)**

## CHAPTER 3

### MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE MSINGA VALLEY

#### 3.1 Introduction

Material Culture is defined by Fagan as '*material and artefact*' (Fagan; 1991:530). He includes in this artefacts, houses and the products of human culture' with examples of non-material culture being concepts such as kinship and social organisation (Ibid:140).

One cannot begin to examine a type of material culture or artefact such as houses in isolation, particularly when a vernacular tradition is being discussed. The interpretation of material culture, such as that in Msinga may be dependant on a new set of references in the semantic argument between art and craft, but nevertheless, the material culture is the product of a temporal expression of being and may be aired in any number of ways. The material cultures of a specific people are often interwoven, reflecting a plethora of belief systems and aesthetic ideals.

The material culture of a group of people, and the items that they produce is indicative of their status in life and the community and

strongly reflects their world view. World view is defined by Haviland as '*The conceptions, explicit and implicit, of a society or an individual of the limits and workings of its world*' (Haviland; 1996:353). The world view of a people is fundamental in their perceptions of life, and is thus a strong underlying influence on the architecture. The non-material culture is reflected in the material culture.

Another non-material concept important in the Msinga study is the notion of peasantry.<sup>30</sup> Generally, the inhabitants of Msinga

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<sup>30</sup>Bundy describes the notion of peasantry as:

*'An African peasant was a rural cultivator, enjoying access to a portion of land, the fruits of which he could dispose of as if he owned the land; he used his own labour and that of members of his family in agricultural or pastoral pursuits and sought through this to satisfy directly the consumption needs of his family; in addition he looked to the sale of a portion of what he raised to meet the demands (taxes, rent and other fees) that arose from his involvement in an economic and political system beyond the bounds of his immediate community. Like peasants elsewhere, he had recourse to a specific traditional culture; and under colonialism, with the sudden introduction of the religious, educational and ideological aspects of the colonists' culture, the peasant could not but have a different cultural identity from that of his immediate forbears. Like peasants elsewhere, he was dominated economically, politically and culturally by outsiders in a wider society-involved in relations of coercion and obedience-but*

are, by virtue of their isolation, deep sense of tradition and position on the edge of an urban society, members of this economic group, and the entrenched traditional characteristics thus translate into the vernacular of the architecture and the ornament.

Indeed, the beginnings of diversity of expression is also a part of the emergence of peasantry from a tribal norm. Creativity and diversification in the manufacture of pottery, translation of materials from bone, beads and hide to cloth, and a paradigm shift in terms of time periods and created goods, begins to have effect on material cultural expressions across the spectrum. For instance, the dating of sites in the archaeological record is enabled by the consistency of decoration and artefact that is excavated. This notion is termed phased pottery. Phased pottery has a tribal norm and has a set manner of decoration which changes little over space (Anderson;2000:pers.comm). Time introduces the feature of inevitable variation, but patterns in an area remain relatively constant at specific periods. This

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*under colonialism the extent to which the state or its representatives could enforce these relations differed sharply from time to time and from place to place.'*  
(Bundy;1988:9)

phenomenon perpetuates traditional architectures and has correlations with the Msinga vernacular, although they are transitional material cultures.

In the Msinga valley, experimentation and elaboration in the ceramic ware, for example, is a physical expression of creativity and striving for difference. This is the same with the decorative panels on the walls. Beinart has the following comment on the issue, referring to the wall decorations of people living in the Western Native Township in the 1970s:

*'The process of people copying designs from each other spontaneously produced a limit to the whole language of decoration. While none was identical, all the decorations were really variations of about half a dozen basic shapes.'*  
(Beinart;1977:176)

This is true in the Msinga case, where the immediate design style has to transmute into a new concept of decoration, and could explain the variety of different decorative types within a local constraint.

Examination of material cultures in isolation from each other and

the social and economic generators behind them is both dangerous and short-sighted. The context of this *raison d' être* where architecture is a part of the broader local material culture is of paramount importance.

## 3.2 The Non-material Culture

### 3.2.1 Traditionalism

Despite the Msinga Valley's history as an area for recruiting willing miners and thus having a shifting population, its geographical isolation in two great valleys, and its social isolation as a political 'hot spot', it has a deeply entrenched traditionalism. This may be the binding force for the creation of the specific material culture of the area as it is, and further spurs on the responses to fashion and creative experiment. Indeed, part of the traditional cultural decree insisted that the women had to be particularly well groomed, and this has certainly not changed. (Mhlongo;2000:pers.comm)

The local partiality for the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) spearheads the promotion of Zulu nationalism. The households are mainly female-headed, as a result of male absenteeism. They also support the IFP women's groups, and this strongly tradition-

based party upholds cultural values, influences the material culture. This results in a glorious 'fashion show' of colour and adaptation of materials in the creation of 'traditional' clothing. Local fashion, with a traditional bent, permeates the society on every level imaginable.

Indeed, this allegiance to the IFP is one of the reasons for the production of cultural goods. According to Klopper, the IFP actively encourages the crafts of beadwork and the wearing of earplugs (Klopper;1989:33). Jolles notes that ear piercing was an important mark of ethnicity (Jolles;1996:172) and thus was condoned. Craft production in Msinga may thus have been encouraged by political influence with the recent revival of traditionalism.

### 3.2.2 Sign and Symbol

Symbolism is an intangible concept that also has a very important role in the elaboration of the material culture, whether it refers to clothing, ornament or furniture.

Symbols permeate the buildings particularly. For instance, the importance of having preformed ventilation units in the wallplate

area, or reflected in the painted dados is a local symbol of modernity.



*The use of airbricks in this particular example is often decorative, rather than practical (Photo:Author;2000)*

In the same vein, little real difference may exist between having a window with opening casements inserted in the wall, or an elaborately plastered blind window. They both serve a similar purpose giving the sign of modernity. In fact, the latter, the symbol of the window, is more secure, and gives the sign that the homestead is modern, and also manages to appease those fundamental traditionalists who do not see a real window as appropriate in a traditional building (Mnweni Valley;2000:pers.exp). Interestingly, this concept is not restricted to the South African context: Oliver makes a similar observation of houses of the Hausa people of Nigeria:-

*'As a sign, the plaster surface of a Hausa mud building denotes*

*'brickwork'; as a symbol it has the connotations of western technology, and hence sophistication and prestige'(Oliver;1977:10).*

### 3.2.3 Religious Beliefs

The Zulu set of belief systems is more intangible than the direct issue of formal religion, as the religious beliefs influence the production of material culture. Alcock says that the created artefact is imbued with respect for the ancestors, and that decoration is also related to real respect for them (Alcock;2001:pers.comm).<sup>31</sup> Thus the deep traditional religious belief itself influences the production of material culture. In the same manner, the way in which the pottery is created, with senses of sacred rituals and spaces, is part and parcel of the artefact itself. This is extended to the blackening of pots after firing; this is a ritual *hlonipa* for the ancestors (Armstrong et al;1996:109). The black finish is accessible to the ancestors, who then drink from the pots. This religious affinity of the pots is transferred to the *umsamo*, that part of the hut which is reserved as a sacred place for the ancestors. A more direct influence on

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<sup>31</sup> A similarity could be drawn with craftsmen working on Gothic Cathedrals; the work is spirited rather than necessarily iconic.

the architecture is evident in the need to provide a specific place for the worship of the ancestors; they may be entertained in their own hut, often that of the paternal grandmother, known as 'gogo's hut'(see 3.2.4). Cairns has noted that the cylindrical house form is seen as being more appropriate for the veneration of the ancestors, and that the traditions influence the shape and form of the houses(Cairns;1997:18). These huts are often signified by the skull of a ritually slaughtered beast in the thatch over the entrance.

The mixture between Christian belief systems and ancestral worship is reflected in the material culture. An example is the iconic representations of the Virgin Mary in locally made furniture (see 3.3.4)

### **3.2.4 Anthropological issues**

It is important to realise that the sense of tradition and privacy amongst this particular group of the Zulu is strong. This means that information is not gathered easily, and that when information is offered, it is not necessarily a correct answer. In addition, some homestead owners will not answer questions, and some sources like Mr Sithole are not prepared to willingly divulge information.

In addition, the sense of time is very different from a western chronological system. As mentioned in the text, the seasons are a large influence to the people that live on the land. This has also made questions relating to time periods difficult to qualify. It should also be realised that the complexity of *hlonipha* (ritual respect) for certain people, the ancestors, etc. imbues standards of behaviour, encompassing social, political and economic systems and the entire cognitive way of life.

### 3.3 The Material Culture

#### 3.3.1 Dress



*'I glance at the audience. Most of the spectators are wearing traditional costumes. The married women have plaited, red coloured hair. They are wearing distinctive multi-coloured robes and short skirts with thin black blouses. The young girls are skirted but bare to the waist. Their hair is short and many are adorned with strings of coloured beads. The men are all carrying "knobkieries", and some even have skin shields. This, I think, is South Africa, but it is also foreign country. The customs are different, the clothing is different and the people are different.'*  
 Anon; August 1964b:343: *Farmers Day for the Zulus*

The main feature for which the Msinga valley is notable from direct visual observation is the adherence to traditionalism in dress, by the women in particular. Nowhere else in the province is traditional dress so exalted as here. The women revel in the wearing of *isicolo* (headdresses), and the *isidwaba* (married

women's skirts of ritually slaughtered cowhide or goat) are more often than not worn under the western skirts. These heavy *isidwaba* are worn to regulate relations between migrants and wives, eliciting assistance from the ancestors. Again, this was encouraged by the IFP (Klopper;1989:37). *Isicolo* in the past was a hairstyle where the hair was intricately woven around a grass frame and supplemented with fibres, fat and red ochre. Klopper has noted that new headdress styles originated after the mid-19th century amongst the Mthembu and Mchunu (Klopper;1989:32). Morton describes the construction of *isicolo*:



*Married women at Tugela Ferry (Mertens et al;1975:fig49b);the perpetuation of the dress tradition is still alive and well.*



'I saw two young married women helping one another to build up the peculiar cocoa coloured head cone, the *isiChola*, which as distinctive of Zululand as the women's white eye paint is in the Transkei.' (Morton;1948:227)

He goes further to liken the hair style to that of Nefertiti (Ibid:227) Nowadays, *isicolo* is a broad, cone shaped hat that is clipped onto the hair and worn on special occasions. It is usually dyed a deep red. It is also interesting to note the pervading fashions of *isicolo*. Many years ago in Zululand, they were almost bulb or cone shaped headdresses, now that they are clip-on-and-go hats they are shaped anywhere between an inverted cone to almost halo like, floating like an umbrella (almost fulfilling the shading function of a parasol) above the women's heads. This is teamed with a royal blue, purple or black cape or *amabhayi* which is a more everyday garment (Mabaso;2000:pers.comm). The *amabhayi* is a social requirement as the covering of the shoulders is seen as proper (Mhlongo;2000:pers.comm).

Another dress tradition that still exists is the wearing of a black net vest, usually without underwear. This is consistent with the comment made as to the clothing in the above 1960s quote from *Bantu*.

The fence along the road at the Magistrate's court at Tugela Ferry is adorned with a gay display of aprons, made from a plethora of fabrics and translating the *isidwaba* and beadwork skirts of the past in the use of pattern, cloth and lace. The ready market for these garments is indicated by the quick turnover of stock, and the increasingly more elaborate choices of material. These aprons are worn over the *isidwaba* or western garment.

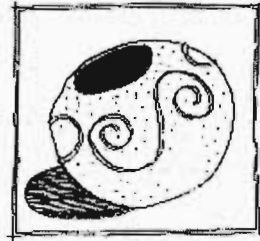
The men do not seem to respond to the sense of traditionalism with dress in the same manner as the women.<sup>32</sup> This is perhaps another response to the physical distance implied by migrant labour, and less of a need for self-expression. *Ibeshu* and *isinene* (the hide rear apron and monkey tails) are worn but only on special occasions. It is not uncommon to see young boys playing with hide shields. Young girls often wear the fringed loin cloth known as *isigege*. These again are readily available 'off the fence' at Tugela Ferry, and are made out of strips of knit fabric rather than the traditional beads.

Msinga is also noted for its beadwork and its earplugs, both of which are forms of dress, and shall be discussed later.

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<sup>32</sup>Klopper (Klopper;1989:37) reinforces this by mentioning that men wear traditional dress only on festive occasions.

### 3.3.2 Ceramics



The ceramic ware from this area is beautifully made and sometimes has elaborate decorations called *amasumpa* (warts) which are raised nodules in the landscape of the pot. The pots are also noted for bearing realistic depictions of everyday items, AK47 firearms are often the case. The pots are blackware, carefully fired using the dead leaves of the aloe, which are plentiful (but getting scarce) in the area, and the trunks of the *umsululu* (*Euphorbia tirucalli*) (see 2.5). There is a great sense of ritual in the making and firing of these wares (Reusch et al) as well as the handling, use and storage of the final finished goods. In addition, the seasonal variations in temperature may be locally important. Pottery firing is often carried out in winter so that the pots do not dry out too quickly (Armstrong et al; 1996:109). The firing is usually away and downhill from the homestead, and sheltered from prevailing winds.

### 3.3.3 Beadwork



The beadwork from Msinga is coveted by collectors and is special because of its colour reflection of particular time periods, and the styles associated with them. The colour and pattern choices of beadwork are reinterpreted in the vertical plaster bands flanking the doorways of the buildings, beginning a discussion as to the cross-pollination of ideas across the boundaries of cultural items. Reusch identifies different styles in terms of name, depiction, colour and rhythm (Reusch; 2000:pers.comm), whilst Jolles has determined a system of repetitive harmonics in the choice of colour and bead (Jolles; 2000:pers.comm). The oldest named style is known as *isishunka* which dates back to the turn of the 20th century and predates by far the earliest observed elaboration or decoration of homesteads. *Isilomi* and *isimodeni* styles followed the *isishunka* with the *isimodeni* sometimes being called *isipalifini*. This was named after an area where people bought paraffin. *Umzansi* is characterised by post-1965 work (Jolles; 1996:174). Over the years, there has been an introduction of realism into the beadwork, and this trend has been echoed in

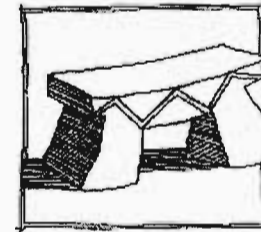
the new decorations on the buildings (Jolles;2000:pers.comm). Certain colours were also used for certain items. Jolles (Jolles;1996:173) also recognises a cross-pollination between beadwork and earplugs, the latter relying on the beadwork colour functions. This cross-pollination between material cultures is also seen in basketry; patterning systems as revealed by Jolles are often reflected in the basket work (Jones;pers.comm:2001).

The correlation between beadwork and buildings is mentioned by Ovens (Ovens;2000:pers.comm) who said that decoration of the mud walls in the 1950s was derived from patterns of the beadwork. This is reinforced by the name of a certain style of wall decoration, originally known as *isimodeni* in the same manner as the beadwork is named (T.Maggs;2000:pers.comm). However, the word *isimodeni* merely means 'modern', and the unfortunate result is that all the new and modern wall decorations are also known by the same name.

The beadwork tradition is far from dying out, and has been expanded into the international market. In the 1980s Alcock set up a workshop at Mdukatshani (CAPFarm Trust) that produced bead jewelry, which was sold overseas and has graced the necks of celebrities such as Paloma Picasso and Princess Michael of

Kent (Jaster;1993:143). Yves St. Laurent were also purchasers (Sunday Tribune: 31.10.82).

### 3.3.4 Woodcarving



Wooden items are functional rather than purely decorative. Newman and Hillebrand's catalogue of Zulu headrests shows that the type of carvings on the woodwork does not necessarily reflect the designs on the walls of the homesteads, and are much less of an influence on the buildings compared to the beadwork (Newman et al;1999:1)<sup>33</sup>. The carvings are very geometrical and regular. However, woodcarving has also long been part of the decorative tradition of the area. Mr Elliot Mzila for many years had a thriving woodcarving studio at Keates Drift on the Greytown side of the river. His son, Apostle Mzila still runs the business though it seems to be more of a trade and procurement industry

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<sup>33</sup> Klopper states: 'it would, however, be dangerous to assume that the designs found on headrests and other carver artefacts are invariably or necessarily meaningful' (Klopper;1989:36) and that they should rather be seen as an index of wealth and taste of the patron.

(Mzila;2000: pers.comm). Newman mentions a man by the name of Mduka Ngubane who was active in the Keates Drift area in the 1970s and 1980s and states that his work was highly sought after (Newman et al;1999:4). He attributed this popularity to a more efficient road network after the tarring of the road in the late 1960s. He also says that there are few carvers left.

It was interesting to note the following in the context of investigations into the building tradition:-

*'A question that is frequently asked is whether the decorative carving on the body of the headrest has any meaning? Neither the owners nor carvers still practising their craft have offered a clear answer. Carvers often claim that the type of wood used, whether it be a hard or soft wood, determines the kind of decoration the wood will receive'* (Newman et al;1999:3).

This was interesting, as the same type of answer comes up when interviewing homesteaders about the decoration on buildings. We are tempted as outsiders to attribute a deep anthropological meaning to a decorative form which may be pure self expression, inspired by respect for the ancestors, though not necessarily carrying out representational art in their honour. Alcock is

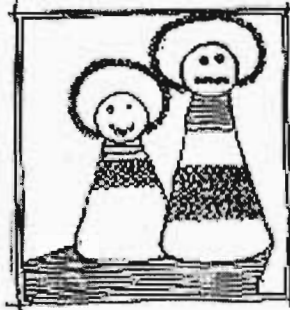
adamant that the artistic tradition is paramount, and that many households have an artistic member (Alcock;2001:pers.comm).

Many different types of wooden carvings may be made. The design of *Isigqiki*, or wooden headrests is directly related to the pervading fashion in *isicolo*, particularly before the days of detachable headdresses. The larger the *isicolo* the higher the headrest had to be. Nowadays, the headrests are much lower, owing to the new detachable headdresses. The headrests were given as marital gifts (Newman et al;1999:4).

The cost of the article also depended on the type of wood used and the quality of the carving. Meat platters (*izinqwembe*), spoons (*izinkhezo*, *izixembe*) and earplugs (*iziqhaza*) are also part of the carving tradition.

Part of this intangible thread binding the material cultures came to light on visiting homesteads in the Mchunu area. Many had an elaborate wooden 'kas' made locally by a Mr Nkhala, adorned with mirrors and glossy reproductions of icons of the Virgin Mary. Its symbolism was in the applied art, such as the icons and the handles and rails, rather than the base carvings, which were geometrical and linear.

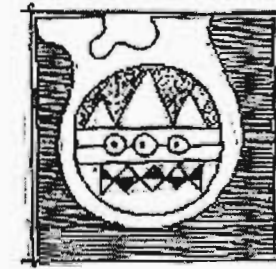
### 3.3.5 Dolls



Dolls are closely connected to the beadwork as one of their main constituents are beads. Klopper sees the dolls as Sotho inspired (Klopper;1989:34). This gives stronger impetus to the similar inspiration for the decorations on the buildings. They are also the only figurative forms in Zululand. She says that the dolls were not produced before the 1950s and the early examples are traced to Msinga. They are cylindrical and wear replicas of headdresses or long beaded hair. Current examples convey a direct representation of the tribal dress that the women would normally wear, to the level of detail extending to a band of sweets in the hair depicting a bride at a wedding celebration. (Whelan;2000:pers.ex)

### 3.3.6 Earplugs

(Iziqhaza)



*Iziqhaza* have been collected extensively by Mikula and Raats and are possibly the most interesting of cultural artefacts as they are specifically personal and, taken in the context of a period of time, directly represent gradual discard and incorporation of materials in terms of fashion and availability. In this sense they are a portable microcosm of the current issues regarding the indigenous vernacular architecture of Msinga.

Jolles sees these as an important distinguishing mark of ethnicity, and notes that they are connected to the ceremonial process of *Qhumbuza*, the liminal ear piercing ceremony that marks coming-of-age (Jolles;1996:172). The *iziqhaza* (earplugs) were originally items of wood or bone, described by Bryant as polished ivory, horn, or baked clay (Bryant:1967:141). In the early twentieth century, these progressed to be highly polished plain discs of red ivory (*Berchemia Zeyheri*) and then a move to lighter wood with fretwork cutouts in the 1930s (Jolles;1996:174). By the 1950s the

advent of new materials on the market heralded a heyday in the making of earplugs with the beautifully detailed decoration of applied vinyl asbestos (Marley tile), a material that was relatively easy to work and could be easily cut. The contemporary move to using perspex and ABS sheeting created rougher earplugs as the plastic was less forgiving and harder to work. Earplugs were worn in a distended lobe, made larger by the insertion of bigger earplugs, rather than a single piercing.

The new proliferation of coloured materials on the market meant that the beadwork traditions could be followed, and beadwork colour functions from the early *isishunka* to the *umzansii* of the late 1960s were reinterpreted (Ibid;174).

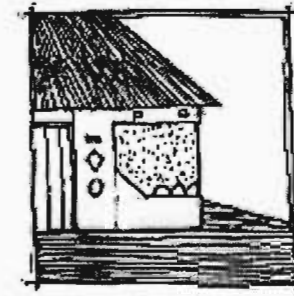


*Earplugs and isicolo: (Mertens and Schoeman;1975:Fig 48a)*

The earplug designs may be graphically representative and often

depict political inclinations. The main colour groups chosen in the early decorated buildings and traditional beadwork styles are largely adhered to, with minor infringements. These are red, black white and green. Yet again, a cross-pollination between cultural artefacts is evident.

### 3.3.7 Architecture



As mentioned in the introduction, many of the homesteads of the Msinga area are decorated. This is unusual in Zulu architectural culture. This peculiarity was noted by Frescura in his comment

*'broad packed earth panels were formed on either side of the door and were then painted with a red, white and green chevron pattern-an usage highly unusual in Zulu architecture'* (Frescura;1981;66).

Furthermore, the huts in Msinga are generally much larger in diameter, with resultant roofs of a much shallower pitch than

those found in the rest of Zululand. People seem unaware of this, and when questioned, it would appear that these decisions relating to size and decoration are merely a matter of individual choice. As with Newman's observation regarding the derivation and meaning in the woodcarving (Newman et al;1999:3), it is quite tempting to try to ascribe these traditions to a deep and meaningful cultural trait, when maybe simply a need for decoration and lightening up one's life in the smallest way instantly improves one's immediate environment. In the same manner that the common set between self-expression and reliance on the traditions of a culture has created the distinctive beadwork and the pottery, so the decoration in the architecture responds to a series of specific clues, whilst the hosting form and structure is reliant on environment and taste.

### **3.3.8 Conclusion**

In the same way that one cannot study a material culture without examining the socio-economic, political and geographical background, so architecture cannot be seen as an element of culture displaced from its counterparts in an artistic tradition. The mixing and matching amongst and between the cultural traditions in Msinga is notable, with basic forms and stylistic elements

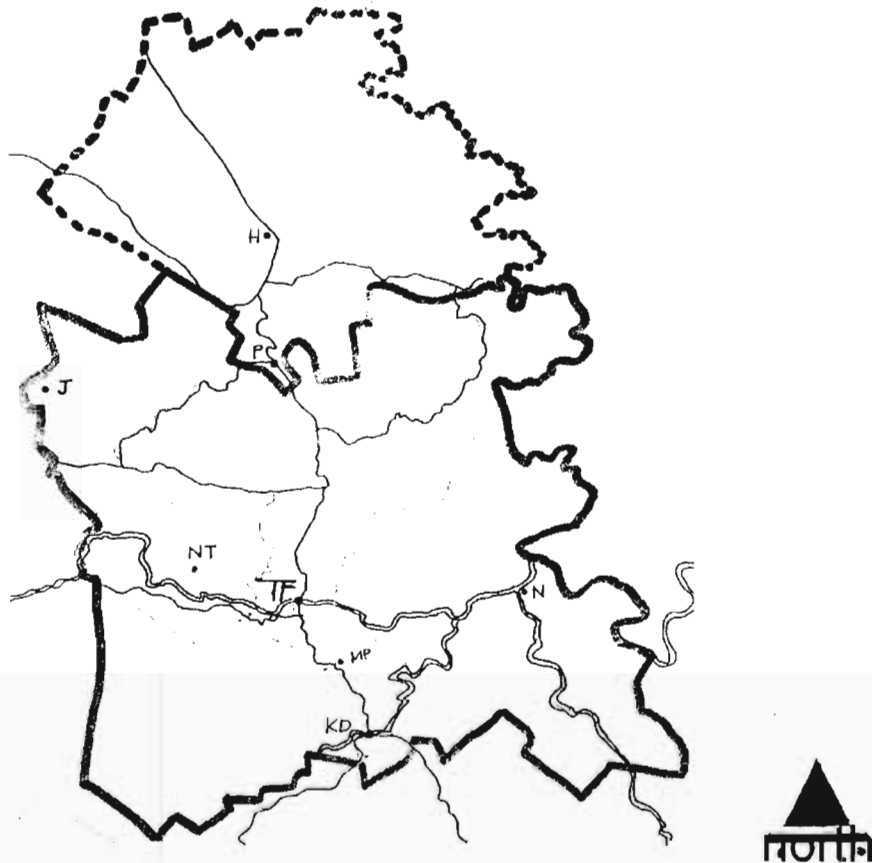
repeating themselves across different artistic traditions in form, colour and name.

Only now, without the bias of cultural isolation, can we begin to examine the essence of the material culture, shelter being the immediate necessity before the considerations of comfort and the embellishment of person and home. The *need* for shelter thus translates as the most urgent of material cultures.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE MSINGA VALLEY

#### 4.1 Map Of Survey Area



*Map of Msinga magisterial district. the boundaries discussed are the solid lines, and the new extended(2001) boundaries those dotted to the north. TF=Tugela Ferry, KD=Keates Drift, MP=Mpofana, Nt=Ntunjeni, J=Job's Kop and N=Ngubevu*

#### 4.2 Synopsis of Method of Study

Most of the roads through the Msinga area are unsurfaced, and the suspicious treatment of strangers by local people does not bode well for information gathering or personal security. The areas of KwaMchunu and KwaMthembu were chosen, as they exhibited the most examples of the decorated homesteads. This does not mean to say that the inhabitants of the other areas do not decorate their buildings, rather that examples are few and far between. The initial houses in the study were originally, and subsequently chosen largely by means of a 'windscreen survey' over a period of four years of travel through the area, as well as using the recommendations of Jolles and Reusch who have been familiar with the area for many years. This enabled a recent pictorial history to be built up, and an idea as to how the buildings have changed across time, to develop. Both Reusch and Jolles saw no problem with the north bound R33 arterial road being used as a starting point, as the gravitation of people to the arterial roads in the last twenty years is evident. In addition, the Scott-



Wilson report shows a slightly higher density of population along this conduit (Scott-Wilson;1998:map). The population map in 2.6 shows a broader spread of settlement than imagined, and thus, an unexpectedly even density.

The homesteads with the brightest and newest homes attracted the first interviews. Their proximity to the road, the inhabitants being at home and, more importantly, willing to talk were largely factors in choice.<sup>34</sup> A number of questions were developed which would be asked in every household out of a sample of six (see 4.5). The homestead was paced and one building measured, for a spatial analysis and usage study. Questions relating to the acquisition of materials and gender roles in the building process were important. Photographs of the vertical plaster bands to each side of the door in the early types, or of the entire house in the later, were taken and documented to reflect the exuberance of the colour and design. This sample size did not affect the categorising of homesteads, as the general characteristics of the different houses and their decorative traditions were visible without direct interview.

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<sup>34</sup>They were surveyed with a female anthropologist colleague, an advantage as most of the interviewees were women, and the questions posed by another woman are treated with less suspicion, as well as being conducive to more elucidating private information

A approach on two levels was needed as the decorations usually graced only one or two buildings in a homestead. Where homesteads were clumped, the decorative style was similar in the area and thus repetitive in recording local variations. This made it impractical to directly approach each home for a full survey, when the essence of the individual embellishments could be photographed. Thus, the sample size of the *decorative* tradition is larger, and more embracing. It also includes homesteads that are no longer standing, and thus the decorative tradition is interpreted in history. In addition, this two-level approach was applied to both the space between homesteads and the homestead itself.

Homestead Ngubane (thatching) and Homestead Sithole (decorating) were also closely visually studied, but the owners were reticent to part with information, or allow any documentation to take place.

In addition, the study tried to be inclusive of tribal groups, not leaving out the amaZondi, for example, who inhabit the small pocket of territory south of the Keates Drift crossing, where there was only one painted hut. This attempt at inclusivity revealed that the majority of decorated buildings fell between the Tugela and

Mooi Rivers, in what is mainly Mthembu and Mchunu<sup>35</sup> territory. Focus was thus placed on these areas.

A tip from Jolles resulted in us leaving the main route between Keates Drift and Tugela Ferry, thus unearthing a much more recent stylistic decoration system (Type 5) peculiar to the area, which turned out to be the work of a contractor in the field. This was further investigated, with the result that a catalogue of different wall design types *within* the Msinga Valley began to be evident, creating a localised vernacular. The first area to be extensively studied with this in mind was the dominion of *iNkosi* Mchunu, about 12km west of Tugela Ferry.

### 4.3 Historical Homestead Layout

The development of the types of contemporary decorated homesteads found in Msinga did not initially subscribe to any particular pattern. The origins of the decorated homesteads and their genealogy was often shielded in myth. Reasons for the demise of the beehive hut, which, according to the many sources,

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<sup>35</sup> In the light of Klopper's statement, and a mention by Mhlongo that the women dressed in traditional garb were colloquially known as Mchunu. One is tempted to attribute a specific creativity to this clan.

were prolific in the area until at least the 1960s, are quoted below.

Tyrrell remembers beehive huts in the late 1940s together with undecorated *rondawels* (Tyrrell;2000:pers.comm). Ovens backs this up and his recollections of the area in the 1950s include the beehive, which was elaborate in the style of the amaNgwane (see introduction), as well as

*'Pondo rondawels<sup>36</sup> painted white with designs scratched into the mud that were geometric and typical of their beadwork'.(Ovens,pers.comm:2000)*

Chatterton, in his novel set in the valley, *Return of the Drums* mentions the beehive hut throughout (Chatterton;1956:2).<sup>37</sup>

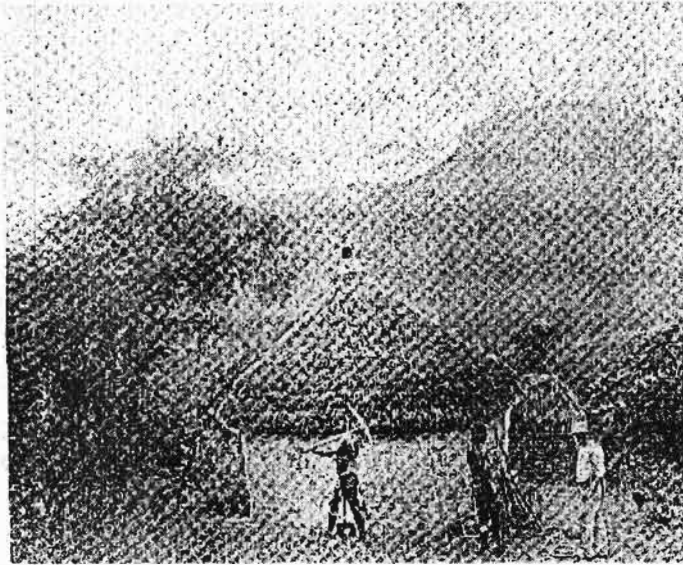
In 1968 Larkan can remember sitting on the northern bank of the Tugela River watching the beehive homesteads on the other side being successively razed to the ground during the height of the factions fights (Larkan;2000:pers.comm). Frescura in the early

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<sup>36</sup>The buildings of the Pondo people in the Eastern Cape, which were cone-on-cylinder in form and thatched

<sup>37</sup>This reference can be seen as credible as Chatterton was a resident Magistrate at Tugela Ferry in the 1950s.

eighties notes the last strongholds of the beehive hut as being Tugela Ferry, Pomeroy and Bergville (Frescura;1981:55).



***Early prospectors hut in the Msinga valley circa 1895( Ingram;1895;201)***

Reasons for the beehive hut disappearing are also manyfold. More academic suggestions such as that by Frescura suggests that the building as a type could have entered an architectural cul-de-sac (Ibid;55); forward development was impossible.

Jolles says that the contemporary villages are certainly relatively new as they are devoid of old implements (Jolles;2000: pers.comm). He further describes one of the benefits of the

beehive hut as being portable, being able to transport the homestead with the movement of cattle and people. He suggests that this traditional mobility was not necessary with the growing and sedentary population, and that people then tended to settle down and build more permanent homesteads. He also quotes the cost of thatch, and its rapidly growing unavailability as being a key factor. This is reinforced by Edward's thesis of 1967 on the gradual loss of all grasses in the area. *iNduna* Nxumalo says that people build the 'new' *rondawel* type of building as a striving towards modernity (Nxumalo;2001:pers.comm). Schlemmer remembers a combination of beehives and cone-on-cylinder structures whilst he was working in Msinga in the mid 1970s (Schlemmer;2001:pers.comm).

The cost of thatching of the *rondawels* remains expensive, though it is still cheaper than a beehive hut. Jolles mentions teams of thatchers working as sub-contractors rather than traditional reciprocal work parties who carry out the work. The roofs were seldom repaired, and would deteriorate after about four years. Preference (which features strongly) and religious belief dictate that the building rather be rebuilt when it begins to collapse (Mhlongo;2000:pers.comm). Organic decay happens rapidly and is exacerbated by the high incidence of termites and woodborer,

particularly in the sleeping huts. The kitchen huts last longer as the lighting of smoky cooking fires in them deters the insects. Because of this infestation, the structural integrity of the building is affected and ongoing repair is not really practicable.

The other reason for the change from beehive huts to a cone-on-cylinder variant is the ease with which the former burn. Rev. Mabaso, of the Tugela Ferry Mission Church sees this as the reason, and Larkan bears this out with his memory of the faction fights in kwaMabaso (Larkan;2001:pers.comm). Mabaso also says that his family built one of the first '*rondawels*' in his father's *kraal* in kwaMabaso in 1965, and it was painted to add an aesthetic identity and to make it 'look good' (Mabaso;2000:pers.comm).

Knuffel echoes all of these recent statements in his definitive work of 1973, and cites the following as problems:

*'The lathes are prone to borer and white ant infestation. Apparently there was a feeling that the grey poplar (Populus canescence) was more durable than the wattle. The grass rope is attacked by fungal rot. Fire is the third major factor in their demise. With all of the above, alternatives are suggested. The*

*relative temperatures<sup>38</sup> of the inside of an amaNgwane hut and the outside are also cited for their appropriateness'* (Knuffel;1973:53).

The homesteads were laid out following the traditional 'central cattle pattern' as defined in Chapter 1, where possible. The steep gradient of the terrain made adherence to this prescribed plan difficult in many places and was probably the reason for what Maggs calls the 'opening out' of the homesteads along the contour as seen in the area today (T.Maggs;2000:pers.comm). The contemporary homestead plans are more rectilinear, yet still follow the basic principles of the central cattle pattern with the *isibaya* in the centre.

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<sup>38</sup> Fitch has a more academic approach to the appropriateness of indigenous architectures regarding climatic needs (Fitch;1960)



*The central cattle pattern, Msinga 1983 (Photo:Hartley;1983) . Note the central cattle pen, the isibaya, as the focus.*

#### 4.4 Present Homestead Layout

A study by Data Research Africa (DRA) in 1992 (May, Trompeter and Stavrou; 1992:201) based on the census figures from the previous year, showed that the incidence of traditional homes in Msinga was 26.4%. Brick and mortar homes counted for 12.9%, and a mixture of these two technologies in a single homestead counted for 41.9%.<sup>39</sup> More up- to-date figures by Scott-Wilson (Scott-Wilson;1998:79) from the 1996 census show an increase

<sup>39</sup>The 1904 census was specific on type of building, but not on location. The Scott-Wilson numbers are calculated largely on the Tugela Ferry Settlement which is more of an urban aggregation.

in traditional homes: 95.57% of people said that they lived in 'traditional' homes, whereas formal (rectangular of western construction) buildings counted for 721 out of a sample of 24445 and informal buildings 1.44%.<sup>40</sup>



Msinga is characterised by steep gradients.. This forces the homesteads to be built in a series of terraces, sloping down the hill. Despite this topography, it is interesting to note that even amongst the layouts of the newer homesteads, the tradition of the central cattle pattern continues. The *isibaya* is central (see 1.3), with the goat compound to the side, usually the left. All the *imizi* have formal ascending entrances from the downhill slope. This was also apparent in historical homesteads such as at Umgungundlovu and Ondini, both near Ulundi in central Zululand. The *isibaya* usually has an entrance on the lower slope, (which

<sup>40</sup>Whether the discrepancy arises as a result of the manner in which the counting is done, or a difficulty in definition of traditional or informal, or a perceptive interpretation as to what is perceived as traditional is intriguing.

may assist in preventing the buildup of manure in the cattle *kraal*), and an entrance from the upper *isigodlo* end for the male members of the family. The huts belonging to the predominant wives for both sleeping and cooking are on the top terrace, the man sleeping in the hut of his choice. The cooking huts are usually closely related to the hut of the wife concerned. The children sleep in huts on the terraces usually on the downhill slope, and on rare occasions (such as Homestead VI) up the slope. Boys of an age are grouped together, as are the girls. Instead of the *umuzi* being constructed in a circular pattern to reflect the larger ethic of the hut itself, as in historic examples, the Msinga homesteads are usually constructed around a square *isibaya* (as the sloping landscape allows) with terraces forcing a regular pattern rather than the circular. Activity areas are also discernable, where occasionally outside ovens or cooking places, *inqolobane* (pantry) and woodpiles are related. Near some homesteads there may be ancestral grave sites and, if applicable, specially designated areas, away from the homestead, for the process of firing pots. Reusch sees the fact that the pots are fired away from the home as significant and part of the whole ritual (Reusch; 1996:123).

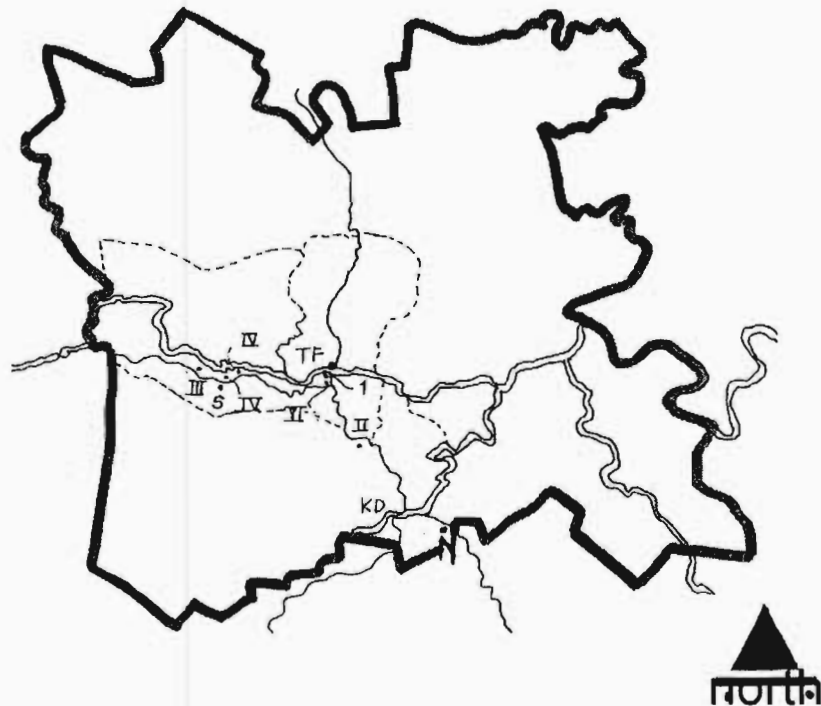
#### 4.5 Homestead layouts

A sample size of 6 homesteads is presented, originally intended to examine with as broad a brush the Msinga area as possible. The lack of painted buildings in the other tribal areas forced a focus in study on the Mthembu and Mchunu areas.

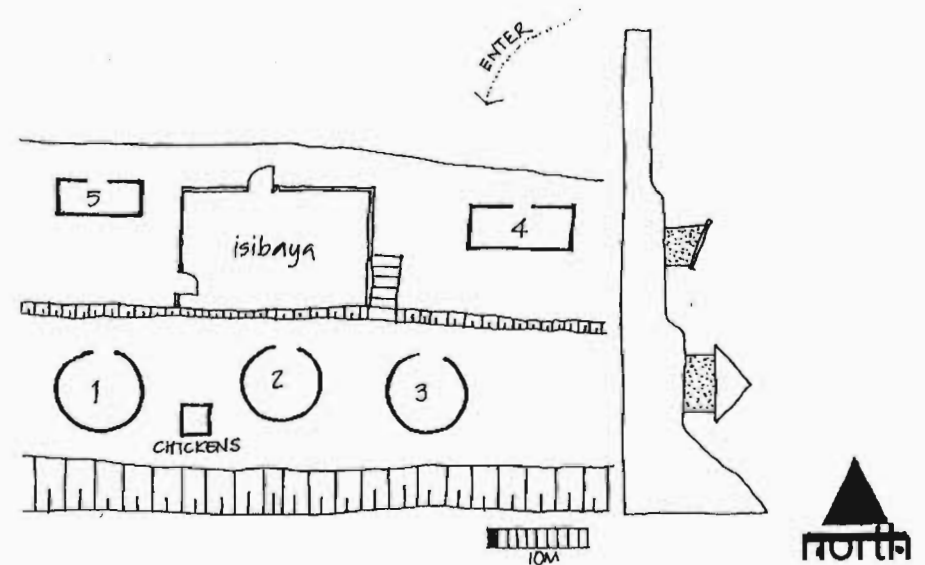
It was thus necessary to concentrate on specific areas, and many homesteads could, for example, have been surveyed in the Mchunu area. However, this would have limited the variations in wall decoration. The decision to conduct interviews in fewer homesteads over as broad an area as feasible meant that although the perceived sample size may be small, the spread of possible decorative types is greater. In addition, close study was made of the Ngubane (kwaZondi) and Sithole (kwaMchunu) homesteads, although they were not formally interviewed.

It should also be borne in mind that each homestead consists of more than one building, in fact, Homestead VI had as many as nineteen structures. Thus automatically, the sample size increases hugely.

#### 4.5.1 Homestead 1



*the above map showing the location of the homesteads surveyed in the context of the tribal areas, roads, and major centres. TF=Tugela Ferry, KD=Keates Drift, N=Ngubane Homestead (Thatching) and S= Sithole Homestead (Decoration)*



**Homestead 1 plan and site profile**

Homestead 1 is relatively small, and consists of only 5 buildings. It is 2.5kms up the hill south of Tugela Ferry bridge, on the left hand side, and nestled into the rocky ridge behind. It is very visible from the R33.

The family, have been resident in Msinga for many years. They are Shembe, and say that the wall decoration patterns reflect their beadwork.

The entrance to the site is off the road and to the North east. The homestead faces North. The approach is up the hill past the *isibaya*, and up onto the top terrace where the *indluNkulu* is sited.

The *isibaya* stockade is neatly constructed of gum poles, and holds 5 goats as the family do not possess any cattle. A low stone wall retains the ground to the top terrace, and white stones mark edges and paths. This is characteristic of Shembe (Mhlongo;2000;pers.comm).



*The isibaya looking north-west from the top terrace*

The homestead is home to 2 adults and 7 children, and dates back to the 1980s. This does not mean that the buildings seen today were present at that time.

The symmetry of the homestead is enhanced by the two similar

rectangular buildings no's 4 and 5 (9 and 10m x5m) on either side of the *isibaya*. These house the children. The stairs to each side of the *isibaya* lead up to the top terrace, which consists of two decorated huts, (1 and 3) and a cooking hut (2) in the centre which is undecorated. These painted buildings are new (in the last 3 years). The women of the homestead, which carefully follows the idea of the central cattle pattern, say that the layout of the homestead is a matter of choice.



*hut 4 perspective from north-east*

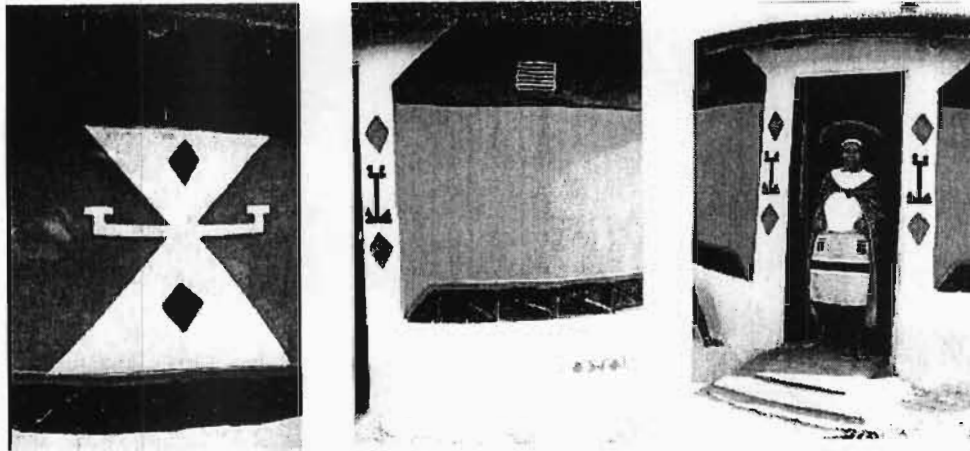


*view of hut 3 from west*

The main hut (*indluNkulu*) is highly decorated, and has pronounced elaboration in the Type 4 variety. The women of the homestead say that they carried out the decoration themselves, using spoons to carve out the plaster to achieve the relief work. The buildings do not have *isitupa* (aprons), but the steps are overlaid forms, rather than specific and regular risers and treads. The women say that to build each hut took them a month. The roof and structure are built simultaneously, and these consist of



a timber frame which is then packed with stone and mud. The infill was gathered locally. Cement was used in the final plaster.



Motif from rear of hut 3

Door detail, hut 3

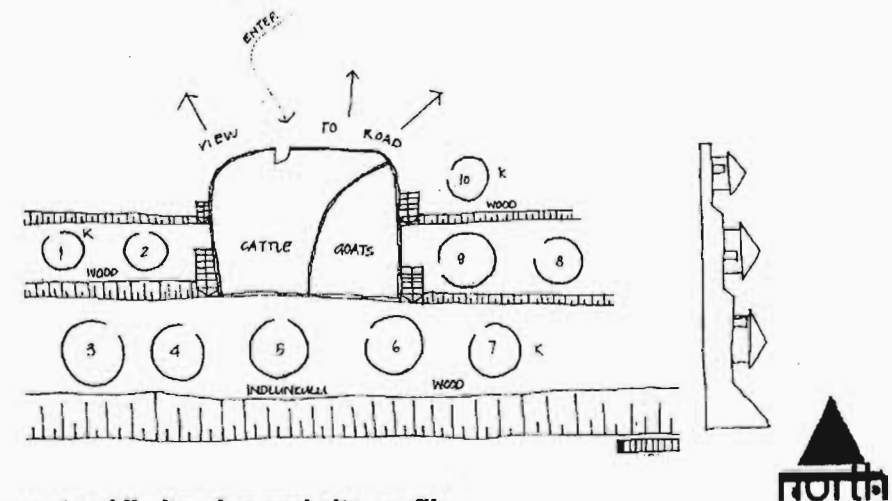
front view of hut 3

The rectangular buildings, 4 and 5, differ from each other in construction methods. Hut 4 is built of timber frame and packed with river pebbles. It has a narrow *isitupa* to the front edge, and steel N-type windows, with a corrugated iron roof. Hut 5 is built of mock ashlar, and painted grey. It also has a narrow (500mm) *isitupa* in the front to the north, and steel windows.



Relief plaster motif details from Homestead 1

## 4.5.2 Homestead 2



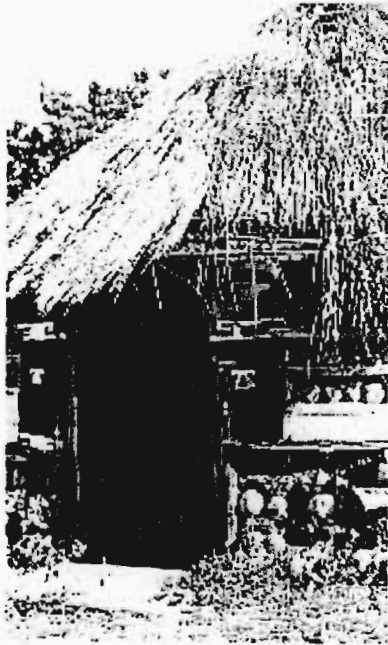
Homestead II site plan and site profile

This homestead at Fabeni has been in existence for 20 years, and the inhabitants are constantly building new huts.

It is a short distance uphill from the road (R33), and thus has a good surveillance over its surroundings. There are 10 huts in this homestead, so it is a much larger sample. The buildings vary in technologies and styles, with the collapsing remains of a Type 3 *isimodeni* building, in the midst of Type 4 huts.

The homestead is also relatively wealthy: they own 16 cows and

20 goats. The men are responsible for the construction of the structure and the roof, and the women pack the rubble into the walls, and paint the building. The poles are purchased in Greytown, and the stone and mud is procured locally. There is cement used in the plaster, but none in the mortar. It takes the women 4 weeks to finish building a hut. Thatching is redone every two years.



*Hut 8 at homestead II; isimodeni house that has been abandoned; the owner has moved away (Photo: Author; 1999)*

Hut 10 is characterised by plaster that covers the wall half way up to the eaves, as in the Sotho style of building. The space between the plaster and the eaves (*isicala*) was apparently left like that because of the costs of the plaster. This building is a kitchen hut, thus the necessity for plaster to the underside of the eaves was not perceived as important. This building is 7-8 years old.



*Hut no 10, Homestead II*

The decoration on the walls of the other buildings is seen as a matter of taste. The variety of decoration is broad, from creative interpretations of the mock ashlar buildings, to the relief plastering of blind windows and fancy door frames. It also has one of the best examples of isimodeni houses, which is in the process of collapse as its owner 'has left'.



**Hut 7 from Homestead II**  
**Raised Plaster architrave (Right)**

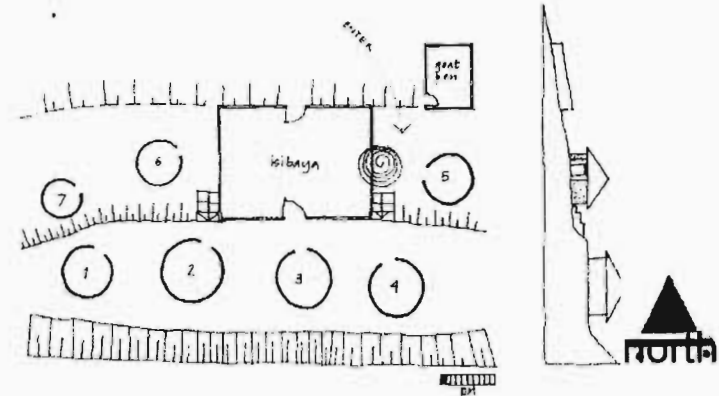


Huts no 3,6 and 2 are all huts belonging to the wives of the homesteader. Hut 4 is the *indluNkulu*. Each of the wives huts has an associated cooking hut and woodpile. This homestead is noted for the blind windows and raised architraves seen elsewhere in the text.



**Hut 3 (above) from Homestead II**

### 4.5.3 Homestead 3



Homestead III was the first site visited in kwaMchunu, off the beaten track. This homestead is in the Mbangweni area. The family is Khoza, under *iNkosi* Mchunu. The family is Christian.

Again, entrance is from below and to the North, and the Homestead generally faces North. The owners were reticent to divulge the numbers of livestock owned.

The building work was contracted to a man from Newcastle, who had take about 3 months to complete the task.

This is the household that told us that they had chosen their designs from a catalogue which thus led us to Mr. Sithole, who had done the Type 5 work. There are 7 units on site, all of them

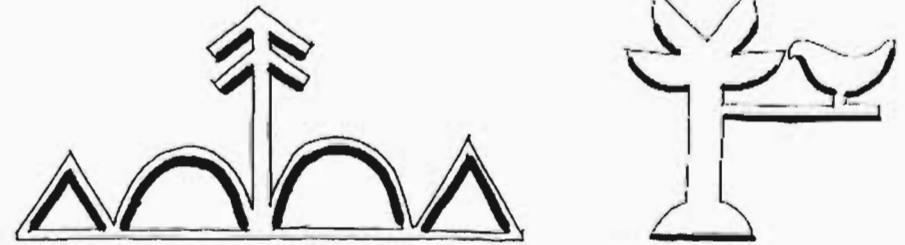
*rondawels*. The buildings here are a mix of the isimodeni style (3), and the Type 5 realism (4). The type 5 building were 1-3 years old. The function of the *isicolo sikarondi* was seen as decoration, and not functional.



*An old man from Homestead III during a beer drink (Photo:Author:2001)*

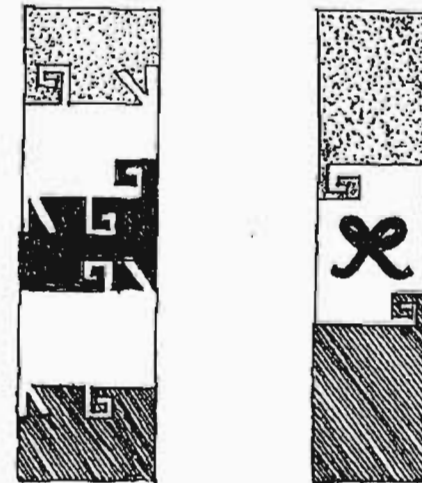
There are two kitchen buildings, Hut 5 and Hut 7. Hut 2 and 4 belonged to the wives, Hut 1 belongs to the first wife's son, and Hut 3 is the Gogo's Hut. No 6 on the lower terrace belongs to the

children, of which there are 9.



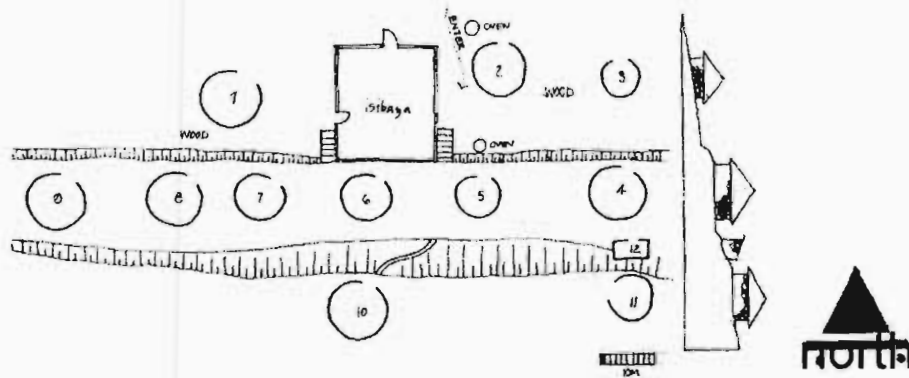
*Motif from hut 2*

The women of the homestead say that they buy everything in Greytown. When questioned, they said that were not able to build an *iqhugwana*.



*Isimodeni type decorations from huts 5 and 7*

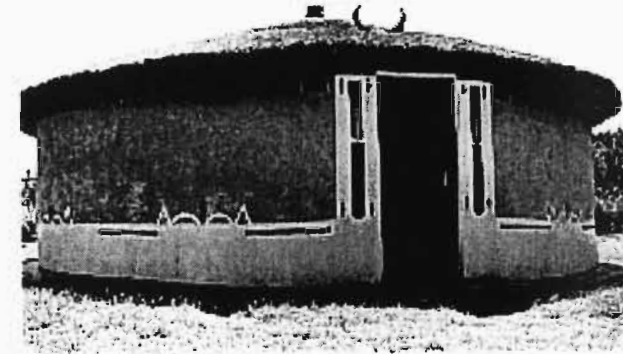
#### 4.5.4 Homestead IV



##### *Homestead IV site plan and site profile*

The area is known as Mbangweni. The homesteader is Mchunu, under the chief of the same name. This homestead in its entirety consists of 15 units, 9 of which are bedrooms, 5 are kitchens and one is a 'flat.' The family are Christian. They have 10 cows and 30 goats. Entrance is from the north.

The present dwellings on site have been there in one form or another for 20 years. Three sons and their 6 wives live here, with 6 children and the paternal grandmother. The homestead has been sited here for 20 years.



*Hut 6, Sleeping hut(Photo:Author 2001)*



*Hut 10, the indluNkulu(Photo;Author;2001)*

The new buildings on the site were contracted out: Mr. Sithole carried out the building of the brick house and Mr. Conco built the frame of the pole and stone house. The infill was carried out by the women of the homestead, who packed the stone and plastered the building. Mrs. Dladla was contracted to thatch the

units.

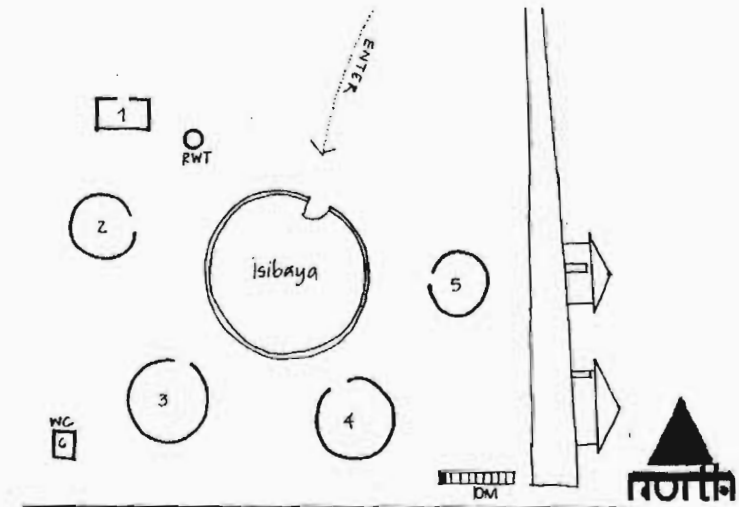
Hut 1,3,5 and 7, are all kitchen buildings. Hut 1 is the main wife's hut, and is very western in furnishing. This homestead had an enclave to the west with a smaller group of buildings, one of which had been used as a practice hut for Mr Sithole to teach his wife the trade of painting and plastering. Hut 12 is a stone packed cottage where the boys sleep.

This homestead is also unusual because each kitchen generally had an associated oven type space which was probably effective as a windscreen. These are circular mud structure, some 1m in height.



*Hut used as demonstration model by Mr Sithole for teaching his wife decoration (Photo;Author;2001)*

#### 4.5.5 Homestead V



*Homestead V site plan and site profile*

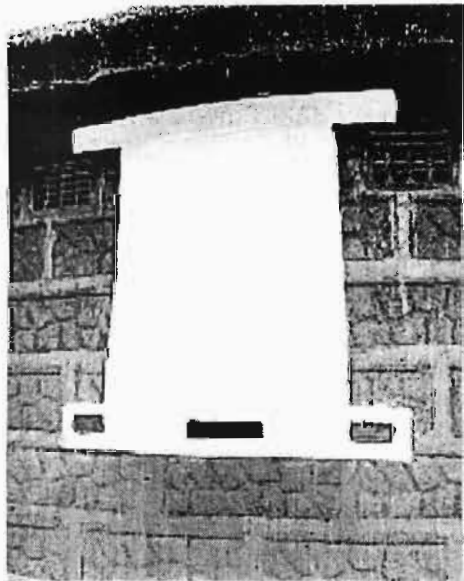
Homestead V is one of the smaller complexes visited, and it is special because of the decorative *isicolo sikarondi* as mentioned in 4.6.1. These were bought as leaks occur frequently at the apical region. The owner paid R400 for them in Johannesburg, where he works. There were also industrial lightning conductors on the site.

In addition, the oldest house in the complex was moved from the paternal home to the site.

The double door, as mentioned in 4.6.9 is deemed as an external windbreak, or *ihongo*.



*Hut 3 showing flyscreen and ashlar construction*



*Isicolo sikarondi (Photo; Author: 2001)*

Informal entrance is from the east, and the formal entrance is from the North. The homestead faces North. The *isibaya* is beautifully constructed of split poles on a drystone base, and is perfectly round.



*Isibaya showing split pole construction and entrance to the north.*

This and Homestead VI were the only examples of complexes where rainwater was collected.

The Grandmothers hut (Hut 4 was used for ancestral worship) There is only one wife, and the daughter has left home.

Hut 3 is built out of concrete mock ashlar blocks, and is painted grey. It has blind windows to two elevations. Hut 5 is a visitor's

hut, Hut 2 is a kitchen and H 1, a corrugated iron shed, is a storeroom. A large rainwater tank is also in close proximity.



*Kitchen hut (Hut 2) (Photo; Author; 2001)*

This was the only homestead that had any sanitary considerations (Hut 6) apart from using the bush. A beautifully finished corrugated iron pit latrine is situated near the *indluNkulu* (Hut 3).



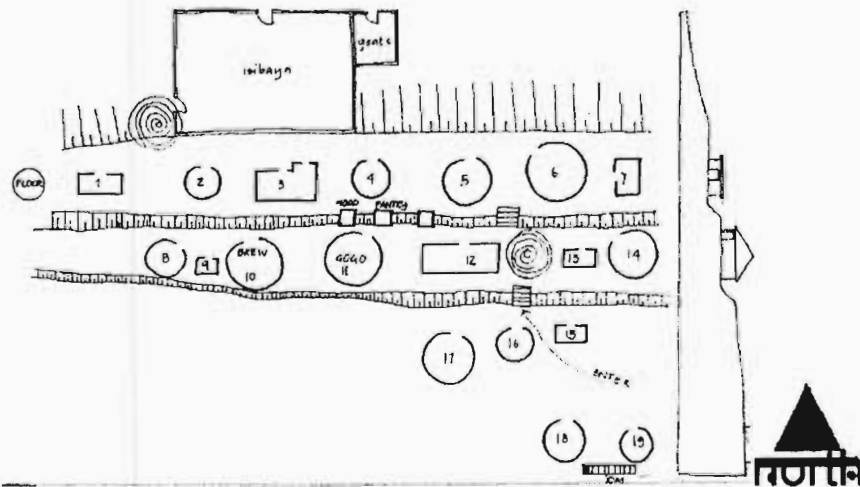
*This hut was moved bodily from the paternal homestead on marriage. It is now used as a visitors hut (Photo; Author: 2001)*



*isicolo sikarondi (Photo; Author; 2001)*



#### 4.5.6 Homestead VI



**Homestead VI site plan and profile**

This was by far the largest homestead surveyed, and is a few hundred metres up the hill from Tugela Ferry, above Homestead I. The Dubazana family live here. The household consists of 2 Grandmothers, 3 wives and 3 husbands, and a myriad of children. The informal entrance is from the North, the formal from the road to the West.

Homestead VI was notable for a number of reasons: it was the only one to have an articulated American Flat, it was the only one to have a covered outside pantry, and it was the only one that had

a hut dedicated to the brewing of beer.



**indluNkulu Hut 3 (Photo; Author: 2001) note rainwater tanks.**

The women said that the embellishments were copied from other buildings, and they did it because it was a matter of taste. The hut takes a month to build: 3 weeks for the building and 2 week for the thatching. The painting was carried out by the women of the homestead.

Each of the major rectangular buildings in the homestead had drums collecting run-off from the roof. Collecting rainwater off thatched roofs is problematic.

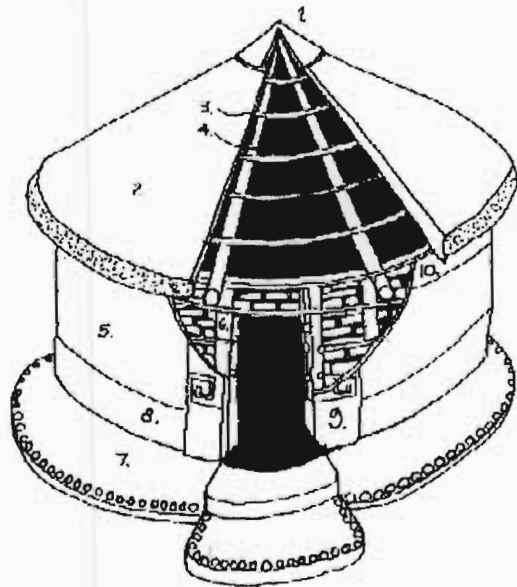
Here the IndluNkulu is the articulated house, Hut 3. A remaining

hut floor is to the extreme west of the site, indicating prior occupation. Hut 10 is the brewing hut, consisting of round river stones packed into a timber frame. Hut 11 is the Gogo's Hut. Most of the rectangular buildings are storerooms or sleeping huts. Hut no 19 is the girls hut, a surprisingly long way from the density of the main homestead.

The pantry (*inqolobane*) is a hipped roof shelter, where the roof consists of beaten oil drums.



## 4.6 Structure



1. *Isicolo sikarondi*
2. *Utshani*
3. *Ikapha/umgod*
4. *Uthingo*
5. *Udonga*
6. *Isicapha*
7. *isitupa*
8. *isitaladi*
9. no real name; vertical plaster bands
10. No real name; *isicala*

The structure of the individual huts is notable for two reasons. The diameter of these *rondawels* is unusually wide, between 7 and 9m. In addition, many of the roofs are very shallow, some below 20°. This may be purely due to the bigger width of the buildings and the use of standard lengths of poles over a wider span. This shallow pitch defies regulations for thatch, which stipulate a pitch of 45°. Interestingly, the earlier buildings such as the surviving kitchen huts have higher pitched roofs than contemporary examples.

### 4.6.1 *isicolo sikarondi*

*Isicolo* means hat, and this term refers to the termination or resolution of the thatch at its crest.<sup>41</sup> This can be resolved in sheet iron, or tied and bound grass, such as the *inqonqwana* of the beehive hut, or finished with the occasional encircling by a motorcar tyre (see 4.6.12). The sheet metal option, known as *isicolo sikarondi* -the hat that is cut round- is usually pre-made for a standard pitch, and thus often sits uncomfortably on the apex of the roof where the roof pitches vary between 15° and 40°. These are available ready made for sale on the pavement in Pomeroy.



*'isicolo sikarondi' on the pavement in Pomeroy (Photo: Author; 2001)*

<sup>41</sup> The term *mqadine* is also used (Magwaza; 2001: pers. comm)

A comparative idea of cost is provided by the *isicolo sikarondi* vendor at Pomeroy, whose 450mm $\varnothing$  unit cost R65 and the much larger, more ornate 900mm $\varnothing$  unit, cost R105.

Elaborate variations on the theme may occur as Homestead IV showed, with a half-blue-half-red sheet iron cap topped with a cockerel, under which the date 1999 was punched out. A second house in the homestead boasted a capping of a knight on a charger, with the same date underneath. These had been bought in Johannesburg, and, according to the owners, had been expensive.



*'isicolo sikarondi' on the apex of homestead IV roof (Photo: Author:2000)*

The variation of tied grass into a top knot (*isiqongo*) is most likely derived from the technological tradition of the beehive hut. This could be finished off in a number of ways, with the most sophisticated using a particular type of grass, *Hyparrhenia hirta*, known in the Bergville district as *iNca ebomvana* (Knuffel;1973:14). The local perception is that the manufactured sheet iron *isicolo sikarondi* has no direct function, apart from aesthetic. This is despite the fact that structurally it is the weakest part of the roof, in the light of its exposure to the elements.

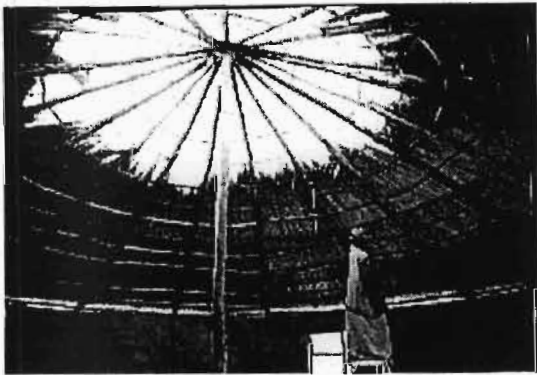
The commercial method of plastering the pinnacle of the roof with cement is not common in Msinga.

#### 4.6.2 Roof

The roof structure is integral with that of the house in buildings built of poles and infill. The radial rafter elements often continue the vertical lines of the wall structure, with the purlin elements carrying on the rhythm of the horizontal wall lathes. The roof is thatched starting at the eaves and moving up to the apex.

Thatching may be executed before the wall infill is carried out, but its availability is dictated by the seasons. The winter cold dries out

the grass, thus it is only practical to harvest it after August, when the worst of the cold, dry winter is over. Thatching grass is normally cut in September and October. Jolles<sup>42</sup> suggests the reason that the thatch works successfully is that it is laid (seed-end up) with every stalk leading to the outside of the roof (Jolles;2000:pers.comm).

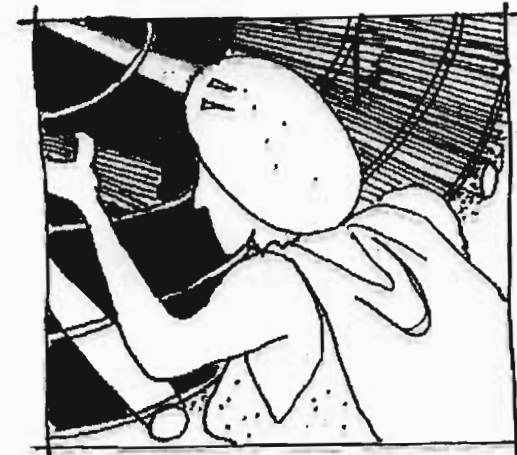


*Women thatchers at Mpanza:note the thatch being fixed from the eaves line up (Photo:Author:2001)*

A trend in the area at present is the mixing of the darker thatch from the previous year's collection with the lighter, newer thatch from the current year, making a chequerboard effect on the roof.

<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the prowess of the Zulu thatcher is renowned: A gang of thatchers from Zululand regularly work on Disney projects in Florida, USA. They are entirely male crews (Deer;pers.comm:2001).

The thatch, according to informants, appears to take up to 4 years before it deteriorates enough to leak, although the new houses, Type 4 and 5 tend to leak more quickly as their pitch is often below 20°.



Thatching grass nowadays is cut alongside the road verges (particularly the N3) as these are the only remaining patches of land not grazed by cattle and goats. The women also buy grass from commercial farmers: in 1995 the grass cost R2.00 a bundle and 4-500 bundles were needed to thatch a roof. The price these days is estimated at R5.00 a bundle (Jolles;2000:pers.comm) which makes the relatively low maintenance corrugated iron a more viable option. Thus the building of a beehive hut is not only very labour and maintenance intensive, but also prey to termites, woodborer and goats (Alcock; 2001:pers.comm). Thatching

contractors that we interviewed gave us a much more reasonable cost for the thatch (Zuma; 2001:pers.comm).

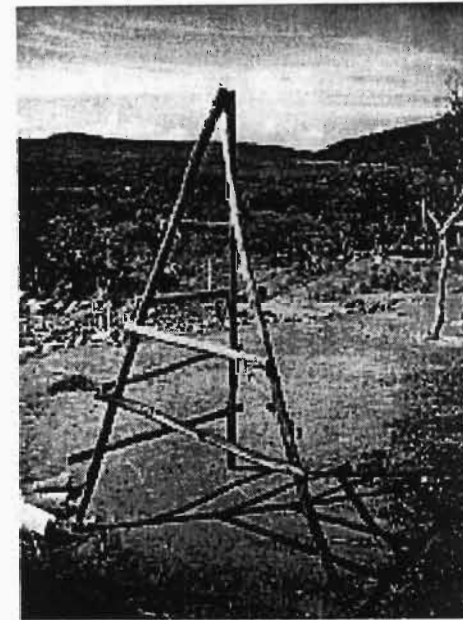
#### 4.6.2.1 Thatching at Ngubane Homestead

Thatchers from the area take up to three days to thatch a roof, beginning at the eaves, working up, and overlapping concentric layers. The cut end of the grass is laid facing down, with the 'seed end' up. This gives the thatch a good water casting property, as well as giving the thatch an even texture.

*Mcele* grass is used at the apex as it is shorter grass. The bulk of the building is using grass known as *uqungwa*, which is longer in length. This roof, which is about 10mm thick, will have to be recovered in 2-3 years time. The cost of the thatch was R110, and the cost of the labour for the thatchers was R220. The thatch is sewn on by two people using a long thatching needle, worn smooth through long use. One of the thatchers operates from inside the hut, passing the long needle through the thatch to the other on the outside.

Occasionally, one will see corrugated iron used as a skirt beneath the thatch. This was evident at the Ngubane household. The

thatchers said that in many cases, the lack of availability of the longer thatching grass means that it is better to use corrugated iron instead.

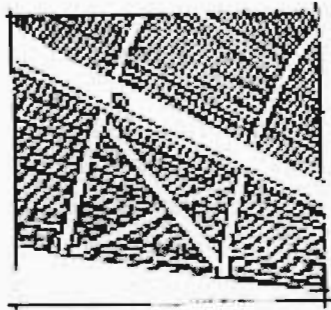


*Thatchers ladder/scaffold, Ngubane homestead (photo:author 2001)*

#### 4.6.3 Ceiling

The raked underside of the thatch forms the ceiling of the hut. This is usually left undecorated, but some thatchers do leave a signature on their work. Mrs. Dladla at Homestead V had left criss-crossed grass decoration above the door, immediately on

the opposite side, and on each cardinal point opposite to that. Mr Sithole's homestead had used a local *Phragmites communis* (*umHlanga*) reed from the Mpofana area (see map in 4.1) which was, according to them, close by, to create a ceiling.



According to the informants at the Sithole Homestead, the reeds were cut by the women at no cost.<sup>43</sup>

The thatchers at the Ngubane home at kwaZondi use the same type of thatching grass throughout, but the thatch on the inside edge is cleaned and peeled for a consistent appearance.

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<sup>43</sup>It is interesting to note that on the extremely hot day in early January that we visited Mr Sithole's house, a spirited discussion regarding the insulating qualities of thatch was overheard. The women of the house were observing how much cooler it was living in a thatched house than their friends who owned houses with corrugated iron and tiled roofs. I found this appreciation of indigenous technologies interesting and refreshing.

According to the women of the Sithole homestead, there are two types of thatch needed in the 'proper' roof. A finer thatch is needed to the inside for aesthetic purposes, with a more robust, durable thatch to the outside<sup>44</sup>. *umHlanga* reeds were used as the acquisition of this finer thatch at the time was difficult.

#### 4.6.4 Eaves

The high annular shoulder line (*isicala*), the space at wallplate level that encircles under the eaves, is generally accentuated in the decorated examples with the application of a different paint colour, and often in undecorated buildings is left unplastered, showing the base construction of the wall. Architecturally, this is interesting as it echoes the shadow line of the roof. This is also often the location for preformed ventilation units which appear to be important as an aesthetic symbol, sometimes even being represented in paint. The eaves rarely oversail more than 500mm from the edge of the wall. The treatment of the *isicala*, and the vertical panel bands that flank the door is likely to have derived from the style of the South Sotho, following Walton. (Walton;1956:fig88). Fescura also writes of Sotho origins in the

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<sup>44</sup> The women were unaware as to the particular grass types involved in this.

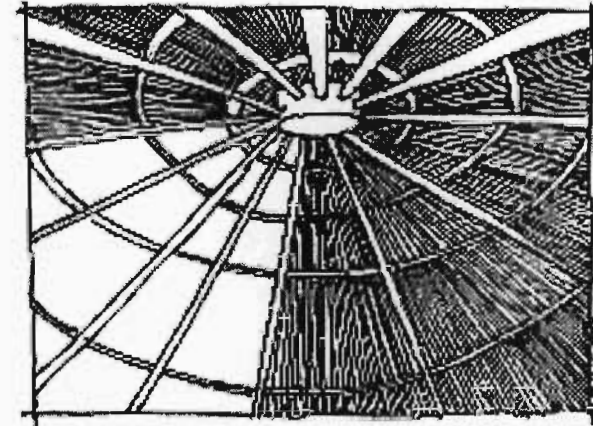
Province, and comments on the high level of finish on these buildings (Frescura; 1981:66).

#### 4.6.5 Centre post (*insika*)

The centre post (*insika*), usually of debarked wattle (*Acacia meamsii*) may or may not be present. This reflects a perception that it is vestigial in the structure. Its presence does create some internal physical limitations, which is why in many cases it is removed.<sup>45</sup> The rafters are skew-nailed into the post or haunch (*ithunga*). During construction the centre post is present, resting on a haunch (*isithunga*) under the apex of the roof. It is removed once the thatching is complete. The haunch is carved or constructed in such a manner that the post is simply pushed or kicked out.

The centre post, whether present or otherwise, can be treated in a number of ways, and in the ancestral huts is also the location point for the hearth, as in the beehive huts (eg Dingane's hut at Umgungundlovu). The post in the Msinga huts can either be terminated at the top, have a stub return as a kingpost of about

500mm, or is unembellished and embedded in the ground at the base. In the latter case, it is subject to insect attack.

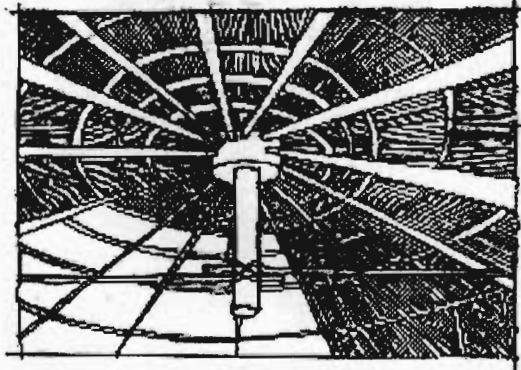


*The centre post is often removed once building is complete*

If it does connect with the ground, the centre post may terminate behind the hearth which is a mud plastered depression in the floor (*iziko*) surrounded by a low rim known as *izimpundu* (Walton; 1956:130).

<sup>45</sup>The *Indlunkulu* (see ch1) of Homestead IV was not to have their layout compromised by the positioning of a centre post.





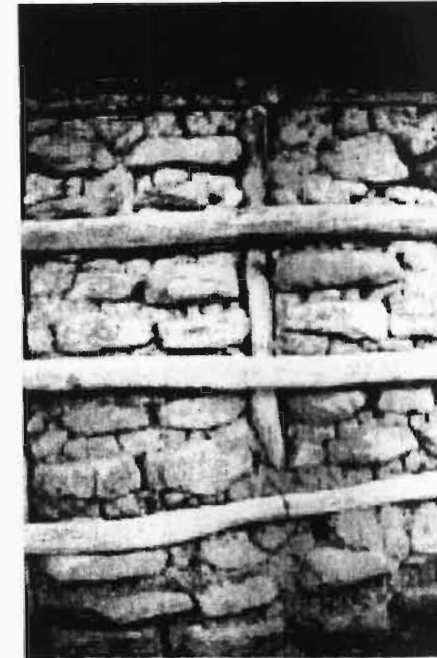
Where a stub kingpost remains, cross bracing to the walls may occur in three or four directions

#### 4.6.6 Walls

There are three general variations of wall construction as identified by Frescura, in addition to there being three specific approaches within the same technology in Msinga. These are post and infill, the posts with minor saplings, and the woven sapling option (Frescura;1981:66). The Msinga examples tend to use the first and second variants.

The walls of the *rondawel* buildings are thus usually a framework of poles and laths with a rock or rubble infill. The vertical elements (*umgodi*) are usually of the more substantial 100mm $\varnothing$  *Eucalyptus* spp. (Blue Gum), or *Acacia mearnsii* and the horizontal lathes

(*itingo*) of 50-75mm $\varnothing$  *Acacia mearnsii* (Black Wattle) or of horizontally split strips of Blue Gum.

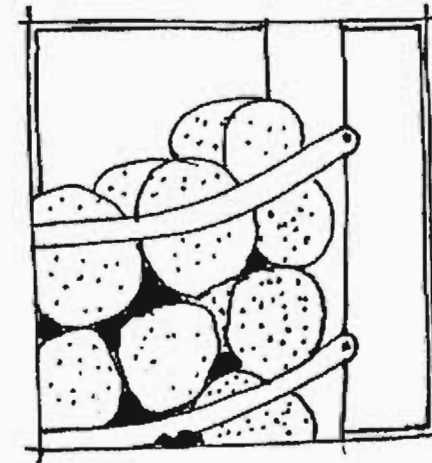
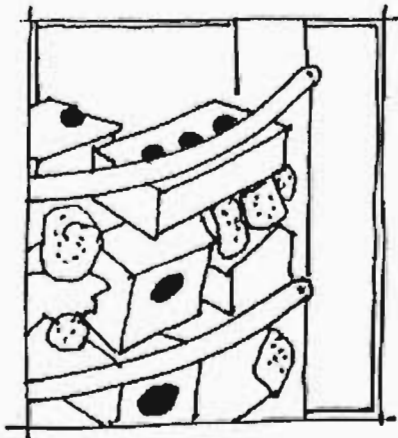


*The wall structure of vertical posts and cross members is packed with an infill of stone and mud mortar (photo:author 2000)*

The poles form the vertical framework at about 800mm centres sunk in a shallow trench of about 500mm. Around this framework, the lathes are horizontally bound, at about 150mm centres both inside and out, with a gap of 100mm and a total unplastered thickness of about 250mm. This gives a double layered gap into which rubble can be packed. This cavity is then filled with

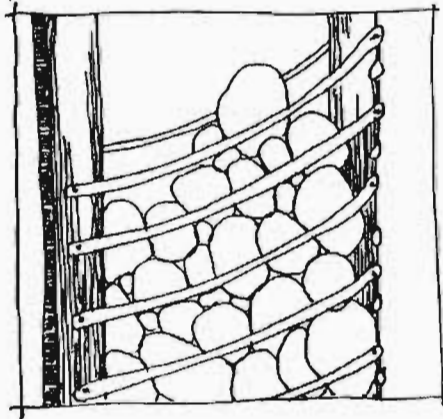
available materials, mud balls, broken bricks, stones, depending on the immediate environment, economic circumstance and social contacts. Mud may be inserted in the vertical joints if available and if needed, but cement is being used more and more often.

There appear to be three local approaches to the infill method, and no hierarchy has yet been identified. The *rubble and mortar style*, where stones of unequal size are used as infill, a system where *regularly sized rounded river stones* are used, and a third where the local *ecca shale* is packed in courses (Homestead VI). The methods are not area specific, nor building type specific, as the entire range is found across Homestead VI for example. There was no mixing of technology within one hut.



The walls are then plastered with a mud or cement plaster up to the beamfill level, or sometimes only as far as lintol height. The high annular shoulder below the beamfill level is often left unplastered, or else is plastered and painted a different colour. Vertical joints may be left open to allow free passage of air for ventilation. Often, prefabricated commercial ventilation (*iventilator*) units are put in at this level and are perceived as prestige items, a sign giving a symbol of modernity. (They may only occur on the outside). In addition, these form a practical function in buildings without windows, allowing for a measure of passive cross-ventilation.





It is becoming more common, especially with contractor-built houses, to use concrete block, or, as mentioned earlier, the mock ashlar blocks (M140) which are popular and made down at the rivers' edge. They are usually stretcher bonded and may be characterised by fancy raised pointing, but generally have a ruled treatment.



*House built of the popular mock ashlar, made down at the rivers  
(photo;author:2000)*

The need to plaster buildings seems to have arisen in recent years, as the possible Sotho progenitors as shown by Walton (Walton;1956:fig 88) show walls remaining unplastered. This leads to a discussion on levels of prestige, where the sleeping huts are generally plastered both internally and externally, and the cooking huts are usually left unplastered, or may be plastered internally. The cost of procuring rare plastering mud (Alcock;pers.comm:2001) or cement is not justified in a fully plastered kitchen hut. The women interviewed generally state that they plaster and paint as a matter of taste.

#### **4.6.7 Floor (*iphansi*)**

The floor is highly polished and, as Mabaso says, is preferably made from a clay procured from Mthembu territory (Mabaso;2000: pers.comm). In traditional Zulu building the floor is formed of mud and ant heap, and polished highly with stones using repeated applications of cow dung. Knuffel states that the amaNgwane huts are not finished off with cow dung, but that a juice made from the indigenous *iGudu* (*Hypoxis oligotricha*) is applied to shine the floor (Knuffel;1973:45). This acts as a sealant to the charcoal stain. He also states that red doleritic soils are chosen for the floor as they get hard. The clay mixture is left to dry and crack,

with the cracks being repeatedly filled in with more mixture. Once it is totally dry, a liquid mixture of cowdung and water is polished on the floor and the mucus in the dung aids in binding the clay (Ibid:45).

Bryant's<sup>46</sup> much earlier observation differs, with :-

*'Once a week the whole floor of the hut was smeared (ukuSinda) with a thick dilution of cowdung and water. This was a girl's job..'*<sup>47</sup>  
(Bryant;1967:204)

*Ukusinda* was being executed at Homestead VI during our interview. On questioning, we found that this is only smeared on when needed, and not as regularly as Bryant's comment. A wet slurry of cowdung and water was being used.

Alcock has observations of a slightly different recipe (Alcock;1975:1):-

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<sup>46</sup> The reference quoted is a reprint of a work printed originally in 1949.

<sup>47</sup> Baines noted in 1866; 'the floor is nicely clayed with a compost of 'kraal mist' or cattle dung and the fine clay of anthills broken up and well mixed' (Lord et al;1975:246)

*'We were invited to look round a new hut, almost completed. Thump, thump, thump went a rough wooden block,pounding cowdung, limestone and mud to make a marbled floor. It was warm underfoot. The walls were made of stone slabs, plastered inside with mud, brightened with ochre.'*

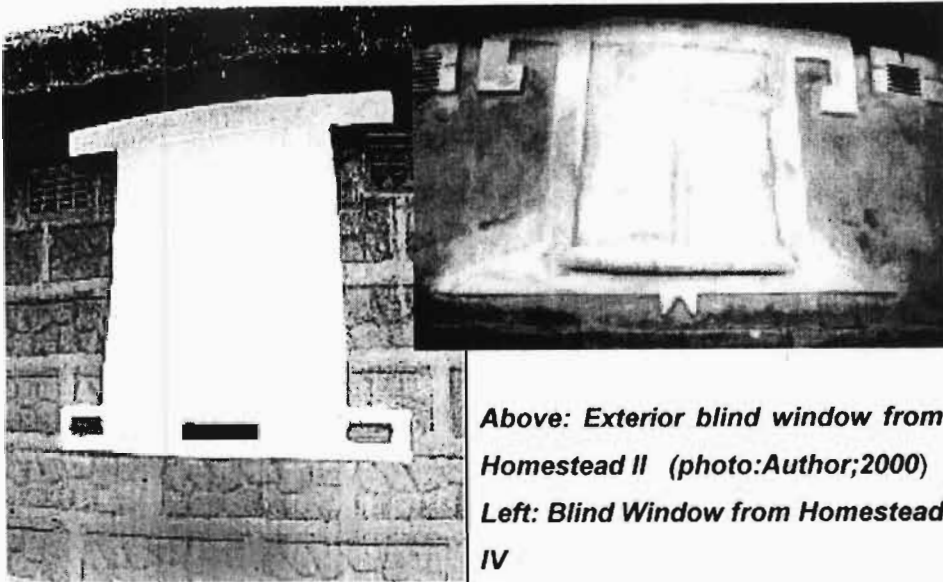
Frescura shows a photograph of the floor of a hut in Msinga where the whole floor area has had pebbles inserted as a base to the cowdung covering (Frescura;1981:142). This underfloor structure has not been evident in questioning.

Nowadays, the majority of buildings have concrete floor slabs or cement toppings. This is only practical, as the cowdung encourages the attraction of termites. Concrete slabs do not have the maintenance implications that the traditional mud and cowdung floors have.

Generally the floors are left uncovered with a bare concrete screed, and usually the traditional *icansi* are used as sitting mats.

#### **4.6.8 Windows (*iwindi*) and Cills**

In the more traditional homes, standard-framed glass-paned



*Above: Exterior blind window from Homestead II (photo:Author;2000)*  
*Left: Blind Window from Homestead IV*

windows are simply not accepted. Many old people do not recognise windows as being part of a proper traditional building, which the ancestors will accept (Mnweni Valley;2000:pers.comm). This perception has led to a translation in the decorative tradition where lifesize blind windows are relief plastered and painted onto the walls, 'keeping up with the Joneses' yet retaining the all important traditional integrity. These blind windows only appear to be on the external elevation. They often have expressed lintols and cills, with ears to the lintol and the cill. A tongue is occasionally in a symmetrical position as seen above. The use of blind windows is common on Type 3 houses.

Windows used in more urban influenced homes are standard steel steel casement types, often with decorated wall panels to each side in the same manner as the doors. The cills are either plastered to imitate quarry tiles, or are commercially available highly glazed speckled brown Dappled Amber(Corobrik;1997) or green Forest Blend cill tiles (Corobrik;1997).<sup>48</sup> When windows do exist, they often have ornate round section steel burglar guards painted black and highlighted in gold.

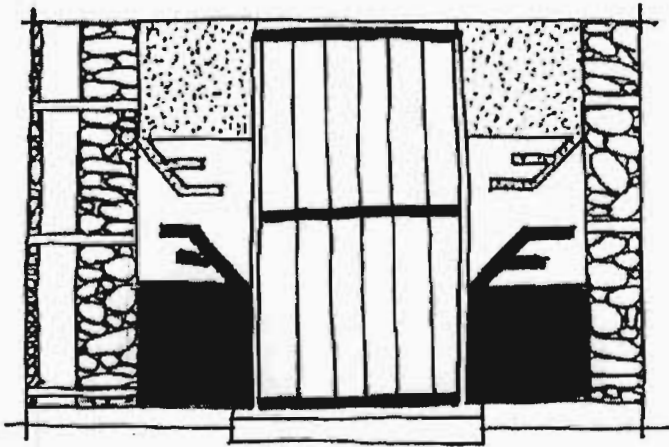
#### 4.6.9 Doors (*isikapha*)

The type of door may also indicate the use of a hut. The older buildings, particularly the kitchens, have stable doors, which allow for cross ventilation whilst keep out the animals. The ancestral hut, (*indluNkulu*) if there is one, may also have a stable door for the same reasons. These doors have generous width:height proportions. The lintol heights vary, but may be as low as 1400mm from the ground, reminiscent of the low nature of the doors of the earlier beehive huts.<sup>49</sup> There is often no frame

<sup>48</sup>Investigation at the hardware store in Tugela Ferry revealed blue and white glazed clay cill tiles, made by an entrepreneur from Pietermaritzburg. These sold for R7.50 each.

<sup>49</sup> The fact that one had to bend to enter the beehive hut was important in the culture of the Zulu as it showed respect.

*per se*, but vertical timber jamb linings to which the door is hung and fastened. Where the frame is made of steel on these small doors, it is simply cut to size to accommodate the door.



Hut Types 4 and 5, being contractor built and thus subjected to standards in the interpretation of the National Building Regulations (learnt whilst working on building sites in the cities) have standard hardwood doors in standard steel frames with a variety of elaborate, commercially available hardwood doors.

Another variation was Homestead IV which had a twin door to the *indlunkulu* (main hut). The inside door was a stable door, with the date of the building (1986) in carved wooden relief numbers, and the external door was a flyscreen, with a reflector mounted

centrally to the lower wooden leaf. There are also many examples of huts where only the lower half of a stable door is used, in addition to the use of a modern, full sized standard hardwood door.

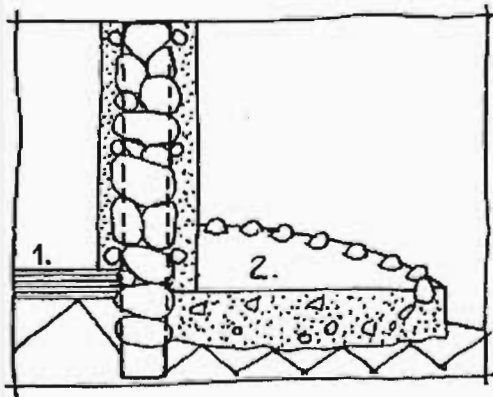


*There is a trend for elaborate hardwood doors with opening peephole sections in the upper portion (Photo:Author;2001) Note separate stable door portion in the lower half.*

*Hut types 4 and 5 are characterised by standard doors with embellishments in standard steel frames (photo:Author;2000)*

#### 4.6.10 Skirts (*isitupa*)

What Frescura calls the external perimeter seat (South Ndebele) or Veranda seat (Ibid:70) in reference to the Tswana houses, the local Msinga people call *isitupa*, in the same manner as the South Ndebele (Frescura;1987:63). This is a concrete or earth kerb encircling the perimeter of the building, varying in height and width.



1. Cowdung floor made with repeated applications
2. (Usually) concrete *isitupa* to the outside

Most of the sleeping huts have an *isitupa* around the base, varying in height from skimming the ground to over 100mm high. These may be as much as 4-500mm wide, and usually painted

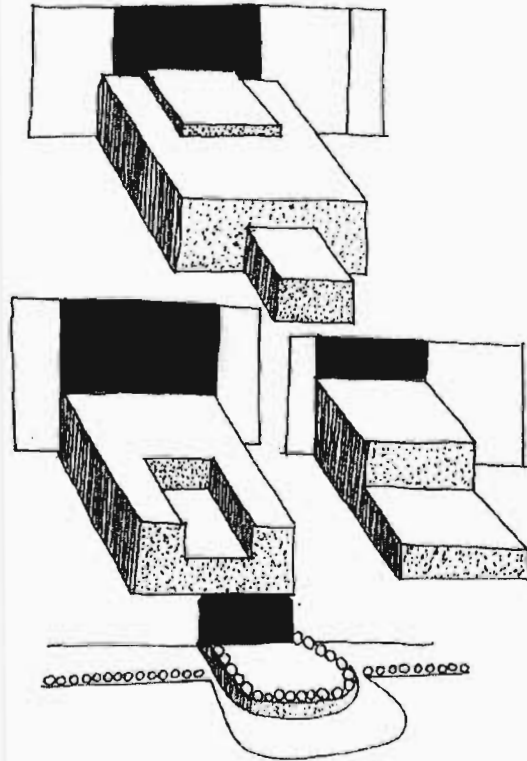
with stoep paint. There may be small pebbles inserted, delineating the edge, as a protection against weathering but this seems to be more common in the earlier, or the more decorative houses. The cooking huts rarely have *isitupa*. This element architecturally formalises a shady spot around the house in a part of the world where shade is scarce.



*River pebble edge treatment for isitupa (photo:Author 2000)*

It is interesting to note that the photographs by Hartley of the Msinga buildings dating to 1983 resemble the South Sotho examples, in that they have the distinctive hardening of the building edges where it meets the ground in the form of an *istupa*.

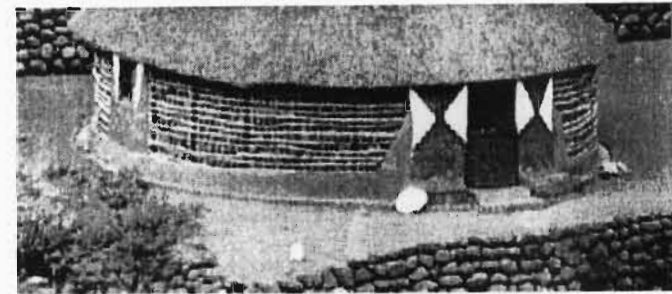
#### 4.6.11 Steps (*isitebhisi*)



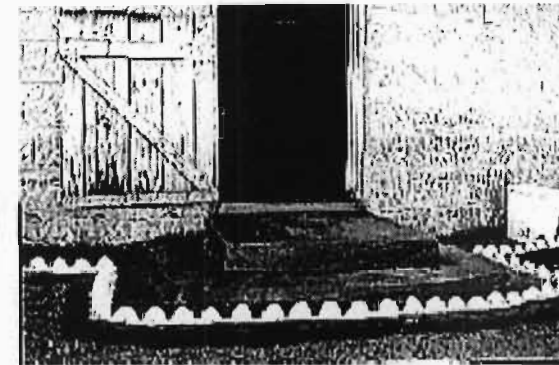
##### *Variations in the treatment of steps into a house*

The steps into the hut are also often elaborate, and occasionally formed of a series of layers as opposed to formal risers and treads. This has historical and cultural precedent, as the threshold in the beehive hut was similarly well treated, and is an important item in the process of arrival to a hut.

There is, in many cases, a designed step, which transforms it from a purely functional building element to an object of art.



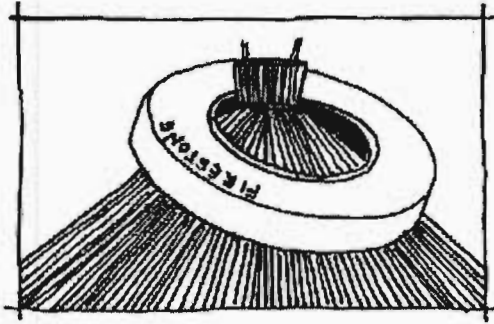
The edges are often also delineated with small painted pebbles, often picked out in white.



*Steps to hut showing double layers and stone edging. Photo: Author:2000*



#### 4.6.12 Lightning protection



Protection against lightning is met using a mixture of western and traditional methods. The perception of the danger of lightning is very real, particularly when the historic tradition of living in vulnerable grass buildings is a recent memory.<sup>50</sup> The rocky, exposed nature of the landscape in Msinga adds to the risk.

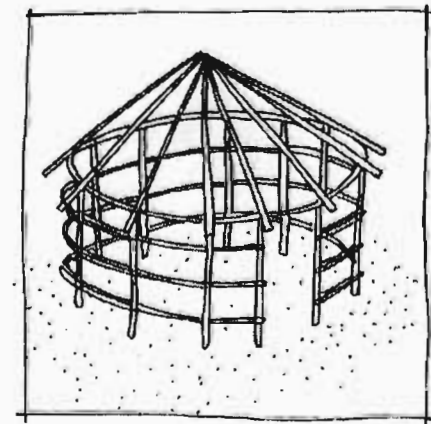
Traditionally, a homestead was protected by a 'lightning doctor', a different practitioner from other traditional healers. The 'Lightning Doctor' planted sticks and stones in the ground and poured *muti* around the homes to ward off lightning (Krige;1956:316). Nowadays, the pastor of the church will often fulfil this role, visiting the homestead shortly after construction.

<sup>50</sup> A hut struck by lightning at the reconstruction at Umgungundlovu took three days to burn. (Van Schalkwyk;1998:pers.comm)

Other different physical methods may apply. Homestead V had a traditional *ingqongwana* (lightning stick) in the apex of the thatch, whereas the owner of Homestead IV had two commercially available lightning conductor poles, purchased in Johannesburg in his yard. The *isicolo sikarondi* of the majority of the buildings in Homestead VI were encircled by a thin strip of motor car tyre rubber. This was perceived as a lightning conductor. For the same reason, many homes have whole motor car tyres encircling the apex of the roof.

#### 4.6.13 Structure and Process

Regarding the variety of *rondawels* across the Msinga district, it is interesting to note that a recent economic initiative of employing contracted builders results in the building of *rondawels* using brick and concrete block with extremely shallow roofs (sometimes as low as 20°).



Despite this, the traditional and homemade buildings of the Msinga valley are not disappearing as the economics of poverty eventually dictates. The contemporary huts are also distinctive in that the structure is finished before the thatching is done or the infill is packed, ie the structure of the roof and the walls are built at the same time, then this is thatched and infilled, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes roof first, depending on material availability and urgency. The main time of year for the building of the structure is Springtime, August and September, and then the thatching is carried out when cut and dried in October. (See 4.6.2)

#### 4.7 Gender Roles

Gender definition allocates specific roles in traditional societies, and because of the strongly traditional roots in Msinga, the separation of duties continues. Jennings points out that the women are locked into gender roles to a large extent, and rely on the land and the surrounding community which ties them inextricably to the area (Jennings;1993:50). They are the tillers in the fields, the bearers of children and the builders of homes. With respect to home building and decoration, this is still defined, though the male absenteeism for part of the structural house building work has meant that the women have become more

resourceful, carrying out a broader defined set of duties.

In the 18th century, Büttner, observed that the men built the huts (Nienaber,Raven-Hart;1970:127). Biermann, in his article *Indlu, the Domed Dwelling of the Zulu*, says that;-

*'the women built the shelters- sometimes with assistance from the menfolk on the framework of larger units - and they maintained the ageless tradition of weaving and plaiting the grass covering.'*(Biermann;1976:100)

This was true in the days of the relatively lightweight beehive hut, but the contemporary shift to the use of poles, mud, stones and thatch represents a shift in materials use that could indicate a change of gender roles. These roles are strictly defined across the board in the production of cultural items. However, the prevalence of female-headed households due to the migrant labour system and male absenteeism has meant that women more readily take over the roles of their menfolk and are capable of building the entire structure.

Traditionally, the women's duty is to pack the infill and *pahleka* (plaster) the walls once the structure has been built, and thatch

the roof once the structure has been built by the men.

Women are still often the thatchers, despite inroads into this aspect of the building industry by men, and some of the most glossy and creative thatching is produced in this area. At Homestead V, it was stated that the structure was executed by Mr. Conco, the infill was carried out by the women of the homestead, and that thatching was by a Mrs. Dladla. In this case, the decorative plastering of the walls was carried out by Mr. Sithole, whom we interviewed, and for which he was paid. He is the undisputed decorator of his particular part of kwaMchun u, and was using the walls of one of the huts in Homestead V as an instructional building, teaching his wife the skills of the plasterer-painter.

The distinguishing feature of the Msinga homes, the contemporary decorative plaster and painting is usually applied by the women. This is an extension of the decorated vertical plaster bands that define the doors, that were a feature of the houses from the 1980s until recently. Initially, it was thought that this work was done to attract their men back to the homesteads at Christmas time. Alcock has supported this, saying that it was done to welcome back the men (Alcock;2001:pers.comm). As the

fashion grew in the area, the painting work took place largely at Christmas whether it was part of a courting ritual, holiday celebration or the result of extra cash is still unclear. Nevertheless, Mabaso says that in the 1980s only a few litres of paint were sold in the Msinga valley stores. Now, thousands of litres are sold by the SPAR supermarket in Tugela Ferry every Christmas time. Clegg corroborates this rapid development of the painted hut, saying that in his term of experience, (1979-1987) the painted hut was the exception (Clegg;2001:pers.comm).



Construction in the case of a brick or concrete block house may be carried out by a contractor such as Mr Sithole, in which case he project-manages the building. Should he be appointed to build a pole and infill structure, he sub-contracts Mr Ndlovu, who carries out the structural assembly of the poles for him.

It was interesting to note that the women at Homestead 3 did not appear to know how to build at all; whether it was a beehive or a *rondawel*. It seems peculiar that the technique of building which would have been part of the imbued culture, has been so rapidly lost. Much of the transfer of knowledge of these buildings relies on indigenous knowledge systems. Appropriate materials, their properties and performance, and symbolic meanings are passed on implicitly from generation to generation.

#### 4.8 Materials Procurement

Materials such as cement and limewash are usually bought locally. For the *isicolo sikarondi* that characterise many of the apices of the roofs, a consistent resolution is still elusive, and pre-made items are not necessarily adequate because of the huge variation in roof pitches. This often results in startled looking pinnacles on top of a relatively flat roof. Homestead III had grass top-knots (*inqonqwana*) not dissimilar to the resolution of a beehive hut, and the feeling of the owners was that the *isicolo sikarondi* was merely for aesthetic purposes and did not serve any practical use. In the same valley in kwaMchunu under *iNduna Nxumalo*, we found *isicolo sikarondi* that had been

painted and highlighted as an architectural focus. These are the ones brought from Johannesburg. As mentioned earlier, simple variants made out of sheet iron are also sold ready made on the side of the main road through Pomeroy, and also at the market in Tugela Ferry.

The timber for the lathes and poles is readily available from the large plantations near Greytown, where many of the local women are employed, and on the roads to Mispah and Kranskop. Mud and infill material is local or located through contacts. Sometimes, people travel a distance within the region to find a specific material. Mabaso says that as a boy he used to travel to the Mthembu area (as a person from the Mabaso clan travelling in the Mthembu area, this was a dangerous thing) to get a special clay for the floors, known as *unThunjani* (See Map in 4.1). This was apparently so resilient that the floor does not need the additives of anthill and oxblood like other Zulu buildings. It is compacted (*isipati*) and then polished with cow dung (Mabaso;2000:pers.comm). *Phragmites* Reeds are available in the Mpofana region as a replacement for internal thatch. The thatch itself is largely purchased from commercial farmlands. Much of the paint is bought locally at Tugela Ferry and Pomeroy.

## 4.9 Maintenance

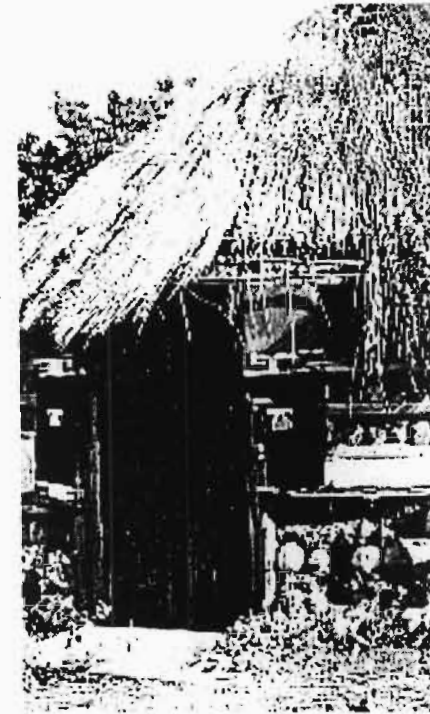
Maintenance of buildings is not a marker of many traditional societies as the imbued culture often insists that a building be left to crumble on the death of an inhabitant. Sometimes the homesteads would be set alight. At the site of Homestead II, a perfectly reasonable house was left to collapse as the 'sister' who lived in it had moved away. A year later (March 2001) it has virtually disappeared.<sup>51</sup> This is an irony in the battle to preserve indigenous vernacular buildings. Once the house has served its purpose, it is abandoned, left to crumble, and return to nature.

Biermann again shed light :

*'There was also the requirement of portability, since custom decreed that when an inhabitant died, the unit assigned to him be burnt or abandoned, the others being moved bodily, or the thatch stripped and framework moved to a new site some short distance away. '(Biermann;1977:100)*

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<sup>51</sup>This is a veritable death sentence for *in situ* conservation efforts of traditional buildings.



It was interesting to discover that the contemporary residents of Homestead IV had in fact moved their oldest hut in the homestead from the groom's family homestead during their courting days. This had the thatch and infill removed, then the structure was uprooted and physically carried down the hill. This, is an interesting translation in the application of technology from the portability of the grass *iqhugwana* to the more cumbersome pole and rubble *rondawel*.

However, localised repair may be done if a storm washes away the base of a building. Sporadic patching using a cement plaster

can be seen on some buildings. This is not seen as damaging to the mud substrate of the wall, but rather the use of cement is seen as a 'cure-all' miracle product.



*An old cooking hut from the Sithole Homestead showing signs of degradation (Photo: Author; 2001)*

#### 4.10 Decoration

The Zulu rarely exhibit any form of decoration, though Baines did note an interesting embellishment in beehive huts in 1866:-

*'Sometimes the inner wall for 2ft or 3ft high is plastered with the same (cattle dung and anthill), and pumpkin seeds stuck into it in fanciful patterns, and picked off again, when the clay is dry, leaving a glazed film sparkling in the hollow' (Lord et al: 1975, 246)*

Little else has been similarly documented, which places the Msinga buildings in an unique context in the architecture of the Province historically and presently.

*iNduna* Nxumalo from kwaMchunu suggests that the house decoration started as people were trying to emulate houses that they had seen in the cities. As stated earlier, one is tempted to attribute a deep meaning to the painting, but it is emphasised again and again by the home-owners that it is matter of choice and taste.

Alcock says that a women will often deliberately seek out coloured clays to replaster the home in the event of her husband's death (Alcock; 2001: pers. comm). The new layers of mud are applied at the sacrificial post-liminal returning of the spirits. She does mention in one of her letters the case where:-

*'with ochre, blue shale and white clay she had painted bands of colour on the mud-plastered walls' (Alcock; 1976:2).*

The precedent for the painting or elaboration of the walls thus exists: ascertaining how the high level of elaboration that we see today was developed is a matter of years of work with oral

traditions. The Msinga decorative tradition can at present be divided into 5 broad categories, roughly following a time scale.

#### 4.10.1 Type 1

(c 1975-2001)

The Southern Sotho practice of painting bands onto the walls with vertical plaster bands to the sides of the doors is a source of inspiration (Walton;1956:fig88). Also, the presence of the Hlubi in this area is historic. Their banded wall painting is reminiscent in location on the wall to the contemporary Msinga houses. Today, the simpler examples follow this, and could possibly be the earliest type of decoration. However, the case for the Sotho derivation is stronger, given the examples by Walton below. The Type 1 house is characterised by broad earth panels to each side of the door, painted but unembellished, with a painted dado (*isitaladi*) and a painted or open stonework area at the eaves known as *isicala*.

Walton mentions of the South Sotho that:-

*'The wide border on each side of the entrance is often coloured differently from the wall and deep bands are sometimes found*

*around the top and bottom of the wall;especially in north Basotholand and Griqualand East.'* (Walton;1956:145)



*Walton's study of the Hlubi house (Walton;1956:fig 102)*



*Walton's study of the South Sotho house (Walton;1956:fig 88)  
Note the broad packed earth panels to each side of the door.*

The style may have been incorporated in the conceptual move from *iqhugwana* to cone-on-cylinder.

As mentioned previously, in the 1950s Ovens recalls the walls being incised with patterns resembling beadwork. Jolles supports this perception wholeheartedly in that the early wall paintings are definitely reflections of the beadwork designs (see 3.3.3), and more particularly those of the *isishunka* patterns.



*Hut reminiscent of the South Sotho, Msinga 1999 (Photo:Author;1999)*

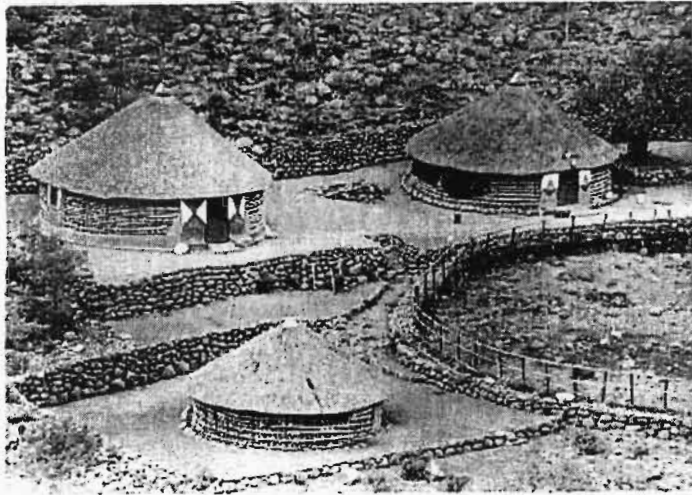
#### 4.10.2 Type 2

(c 1975-?)

House decoration really is the *piece d' resistance* of the special characteristics of the Msinga buildings, and the reason for their particular uniqueness and noteworthiness. The wall decoration peculiar to the Msinga area came about in the late 1970s and early 1980s (as far as can be ascertained) as a visual enhancement to the walls (Mabaso;2000:pers.comm). Robbins and Hartley, researching in the area in the late 1970s and early 1980s, remember decorated homesteads which helps place the type of embellishment as consistent. Schlemmer is convinced that there was no decoration during the time he was familiar with the area, about 1975 (Schlemmer :2001; pers.comm). However, his report which was compiled by Zingel shows buildings with triangle panels to each side of the door (Schlemmer;1983). These photographs were supplemented by photographs taken by Hartley, which clearly show the layout of the early *rondawel* homesteads, as well as the paintings to either side of the door. There does not appear to be a proper name for these panels.

This description is consistent with Frescura's observation regarding chevrons.



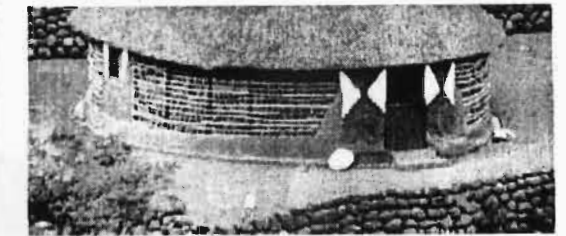
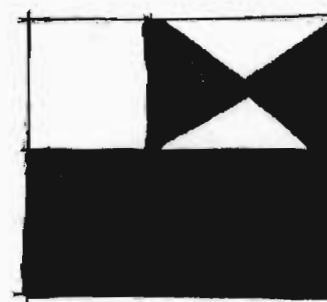


**Homestead c1983, Msinga (Photo:W.Hartley:1983)**

He mentions the exception of the Msinga decorated homestead in *Rural Shelter of Southern Africa*, which would have been observed in 1978 (Frescura;1981:66).<sup>52</sup> This would appear to be an early stylistic progenitor to the elaborate panels that abound in the contemporary buildings.

This chevron wall pattern was described, photographed, and a contemporary example seen, but it does not have the same level of preservation as the more recent *isimodeni*, nor has been

retained in memory.



**left: sketch of contemporary triangle pattern at Jameson's Drift (Author:2001)**

**right: homestead painting detail circa 1983 (Photo: Hartley:1983)**



**Homestead c1983, Msinga (Photo:Hartley:1983)**

<sup>52</sup>Interestingly, chevron panels similar to this are seen today on a homestead near Jamesons Drift.

### 4.10.3 Type 3

1985-1998)

Type 2 appears to be superseded by the *isimodeni* style, which I shall call Type 3. This is because the new styles are still referred to as *isimodeni*, an anglicism for 'modern'. The following Types 3, 4 and 5 are really a product of the last couple of years. They exhibit a steady approach to a total degree of elaboration.

The *isimodeni* decoration fills vertical plastered bands that flank the door, and the remaining wall area may or may not be plastered.

In the same way that there is a fixed palette of bead colours used in the Msinga beadwork, the *isimodeni*, now called *umadala* (old) according to the Sithole homestead (Sithole;2001:pers.comm), type of wall decoration relies on similar colour representations. There is a consistent use of Brunswick green, Carmine red and black, and often a brighter Lime green and Maize yellow. These are usually in the same order, with the dark green at the base and the red above, separated by white and a myriad of different formal possibilities regarding pattern reflected into the white.

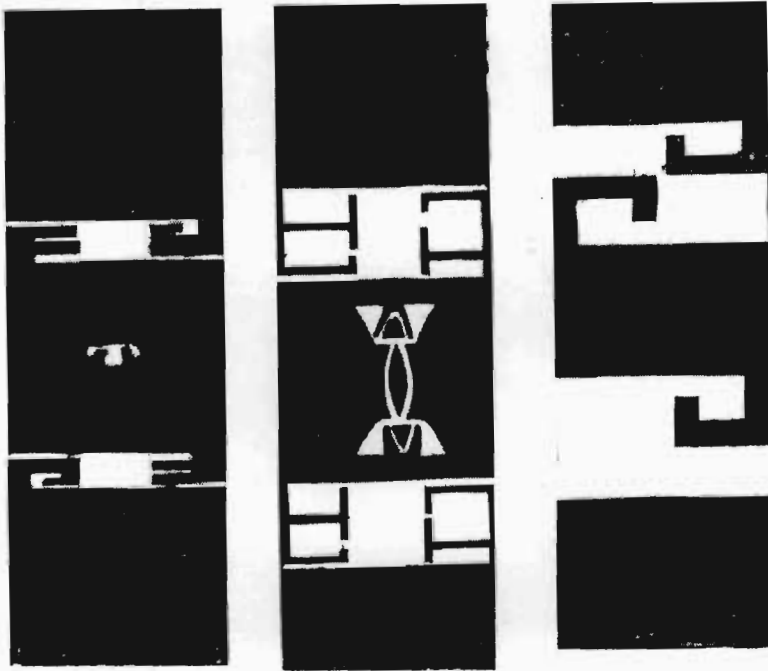
The level of elaboration on the Type 3 examples is more complex than the Type 2 chevrons.

Women decide upon the decoration of the buildings, choosing the designs and colours should the project be managed by a contractor. The man at Homestead IV (a Type 4 decoration) declared that his wife liked bright colours, and thus chose the yellows, reds, olive greens and aqua blues. The salesman at the hardware store in Tugela Ferry qualified the predominant participation of the women in the paint choice process.

Mabaso and Larkan both mention that limewash is common. The hardware store stocks paint in large quantities, (25l, 10l, 5l) and powdered distemper of a particularly bright pink hue was also readily available.

Nowadays, a much more exuberant use of colour, choices not normally picked in the beadwork, are used. The colours will reflect the royal blues and purples of the *amabhayi* capes.

The *isimodeni* graphics are structured like the beadwork, and have repetitive patterns set out in the manner Jolles has identified. They consist of three basic colour groups.



*Three different types of isimodeni architrave panels from around Msinga*

V. Maggs has suggested that these designs represent a pure art form, where the graphic triangle, circle, horizontal line and vertical line feature in various combinations to create form and picture (V. Maggs; 2000: pers. comm).

A painted dado (*isitaladi*) of not more than 400mm high is characteristic. The annular shoulder (*isicala*) at the eaves may often be highlighted by using an unplastered or painted band.

The *isimodeni* houses are also generally smaller in diameter and thus have higher pitched roofs, ( about 30°-40°) as the standard pole lengths have less distance to cover. Kitchen buildings, due to their longevity, also represent many of the examples.



The Khoza family at Homestead III says that the kitchen buildings last longer than the bedroom as the thatch is preserved by the cooking in the hut (Khoza; 2000: pers. comm). This also suggests the inevitable problem of insect activity, where the smoke from the cooking fire acts as a pesticide. There is no evidence to suggest

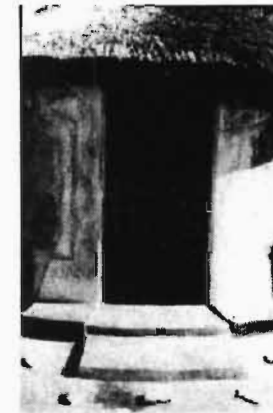
that the surviving kitchen buildings were ever used as bedrooms in the past. The idea of recycling the building and changing its use did not meet with much enthusiasm.

Because the kitchen huts last longer, they are not replaced as often, and thus the ones still standing and in daily use are a relic of the recent past. The immediate outside spaces often have an *isitupa* (stoep) that extends about 350mm from the edge of the wall painted a stoep green or red, and may have a ring of white stones set into it to demarcate the edge. This edge itself is carefully treated, usually splayed and may consist of one or two layers.

#### 4.10.4 Type 4

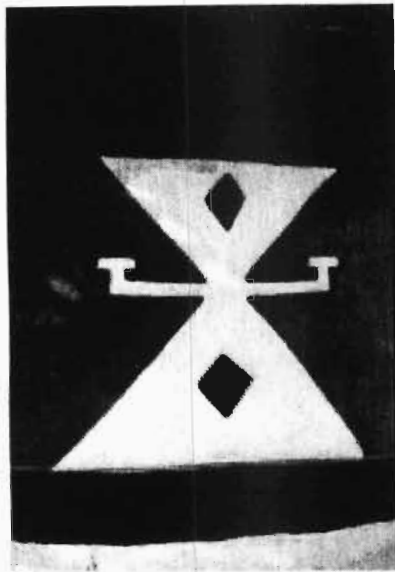
Type 4 and 5 both involve the use of the entire hut as the palette, extending the boundaries of the paint to the use of relief plaster. Type 4 examples are seen in Homesteads I and II, at Tugela Ferry and Fabeni. The type is distinctive for being carefully sculpted, with the use of sea green and ochre yellow paint being predominant. The building is divided with a strong dado (*isitaladi*) and usually a painted high annular shoulder (*isicala*). Brown and black feature frequently, and the *isimodeni* decoration is updated

on the flanking door panels in a more graphic and simplistic manner. This still appears to reflect the beadwork in its graphic simplicity. The *isitupa* is a consistent feature though not as strongly defined as an element as in Type 3.

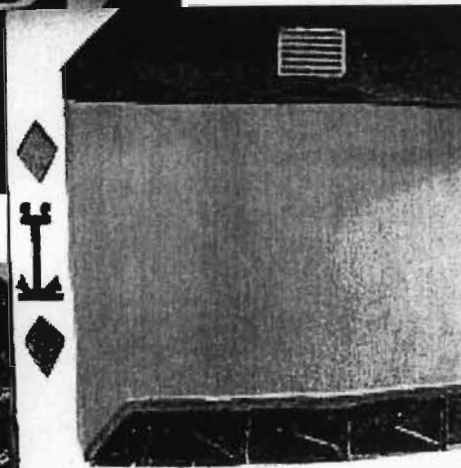


*Plastered entrance way to hut at Homestead II (Photo:Author:2000)*

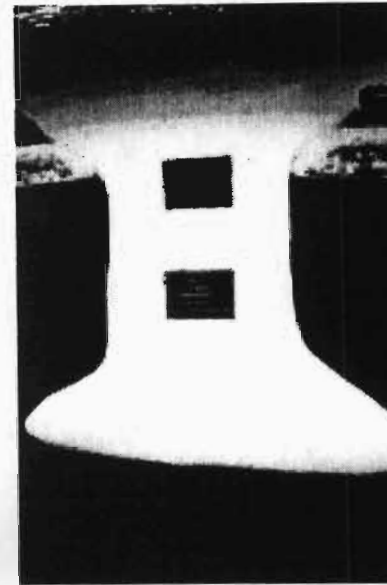
The use of mockashlar blocks is a fashionable trend. The blocks are obtained from Keates Drift, where the trading store itself is built out of these. A lively industry on both of the Mooi and Tugela river banks produces these blocks. Buildings of mock ashlar are often painted a flat grey.



**Type 4 Decorations from Homesteads 1 and 2**  
**4 decorations from Fabeni house**



*showing the use of premade airvents as part of the decorative language as well as the plastered architrave panels prior to painting (Photo: Author 2000)*



*Type 4 Decoration from Homestead III (Photo; Author: 2001)*



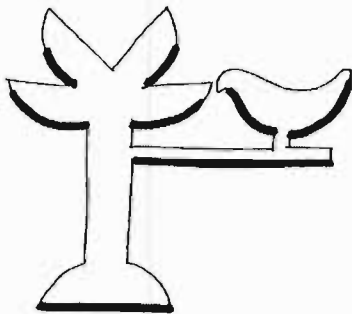
*Type 4 decoration on practice hut at Homestead IV (Photo; Author: 2001)*

#### 4.10.5 Type 5

Type 5 houses are generally contractor built with a sub-contracted plasterer/painter and are prevalent in kwaMchunu near the descent into Tugela Ferry.

They are characterised by a prominent dado (*isitaladi*), as in Type 2, and broad swathes of background colour, usually more understated than the generous decoration on Type 2. The walls

are often roughcast and patterned relief plaster applied by the painting contractor. The clients choose their graphic of choice from an extensive catalogue, and the painter carries out the work. The annular shoulder (*isicala*) will be reflected in colour, but again, it is more understated. The main difference between Type 4 and Type 5 is the treatment of the subject matter: no longer are geometric triangles and lozenges the order of the day. They are replaced with depictive work: palm trees, birds, and chickens interspersed with delicately executed half circles and triangles in an almost lacy pattern.

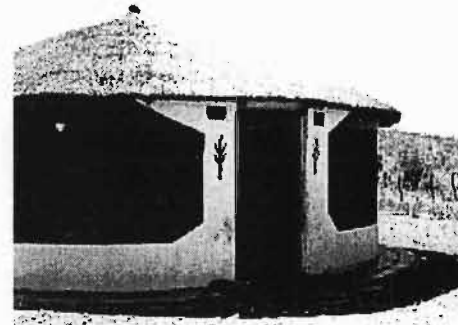


*Mr Sithole's work: left: motif, and right, the plaster relief around the window prior to painting.*

Mr Sithole is one of many contractors in the area available for hire to the local people. He is currently executing Type 5 wall

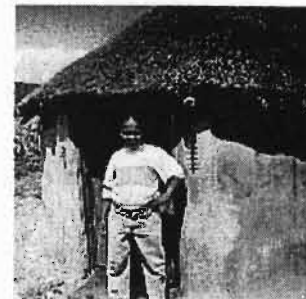
decorations and says he is responsible for some of the early flanking door panel Type 1 decorations. He has been carrying out this work since 1992, when he left his job in the construction industry in Johannesburg.

The treatment of the immediate outside space is simplified: an *isitupa* of about 500mm usually surrounds the building, and some have stones, coloured or unpainted, set at intervals around the circumference.









#### 4.10.6 Type 6

Type 6 is characterised by simple motifs on a plain ground. They are not very well represented, but are pictorial enough to be granted categorisation.



*Hut 19 at Homestead VI, the Girls hut showing the simple motif at the sides of the door (Photo; Author: 2001)*

						
	type 1	type 2	type 3	type 4	type 5	type 6
roof pitch	greater than 20°	greater than 20°	greater than 20°	often less than 20°	often less than 20°	greater than 20°
plaster	none excluding the dado	none excluding the dado	yes, to door head height	relief, full	relief, full	no specific standard
ann shoulder	open	open	open	painted	painted	open or painted
dado	plastered and painted	plastered and painted	painted	relief plaster and paint	relief plaster and paint	none
window	none	none	none	none, blind or standard steel	none, blind or standard steel	no specific standard
steps	simple	simple	simple or decorated	simple or decorated	simple or decorated	no specific standard
apron	simple	simple	simple or decorated	simple or decorated	simple or decorated	no specific standard
construction	frame and infill	frame and infill	frame and infill	frame and infill or concrete block	concrete block	frame and infill or concrete block
door	usually stable	usually stable	usually stable	usually standard hardwood with stable lower half	usually standard hardwood with stable lower half	standard hardwood or stable
decorative tradition description	colour	chevrons, simple geometric on sides of doors only	more complex forms in standard patterns on sides of doors only	whole building painted: geometric patterns	whole building painted: motif patterns	simple linear graphics, or swathes of colour

#### 4.10.7 Other Types

Other types of decoration do exist but do not appear in sufficient numbers to identify a trend. A house opposite Homestead I has swathes of brown-purple paint applied to the basic mud-cement colour of the wall.

#### 4.11 Internal Elaboration

Earlier mention has been made as to the decorations on the inside of the Zulu beehive hut. Despite historical documentation, this is certainly not the norm.

Internal decoration is very under-represented in the Msinga examples, and was only seen in a couple of huts. The need to elaborate internally seems to be done with furnishings and curtaining, rather than embellishment on the wall.

The Sithole Homestead had a simple graphic on the inside walls, which was executed in relief plaster and painted red. Interestingly, the forms were reminiscent of the *isimodeni* type work.



*Internal relief plaster motif at the Sithole Homestead*

#### 4.12 Adaptation and Change In Buildings

This is a potentially extensive topic as it covers both detail such as the use of preformed elements to the complete transformation of form such as the development of the cottage. The latter is not the predominant building form in Msinga as in other areas, but is still represented in large numbers. Each homestead may have one or two of its constituent huts as rectangular buildings.

The changes in building form may be in part conceded by the statistical evidence in the census figures projected by May (May et al;1992:) in 1992 where 25% of the building stock was traditional, compared with the Scott-Wilson(Scott-Wilson;1998:79) number of 95%.

One must bear in mind that the sample interviewed by the latter



was largely in Tugela Ferry area<sup>53</sup>. Notwithstanding, the building tradition is constant and ongoing. Each homestead appears to add on a new hut every year. In Homestead VI, the living and cooking quarters were largely circular, with storage and children's sleeping often rectangular. Where there is a new building, the experimentation of the form is taken to the greatest length, with the form informing the spaces inside, rather than following the function.

This retention of the circular form is probably due to the strong traditional element. The Khoza family at Homestead III hired a contractor to build them *rondawels* out of brick and block with windows and standard doors; the important point is that they still built *rondawels*. The fact that they hired somebody indicates specialization, a marker of sophistication. The presence of western doors and windows reflect this. They felt it was up to date and modern yet still had elements of social acceptability.

Like other peoples who emerge from the peasantry, the new Msinga homesteads project a life and a home as an aspirant perception of what should be.

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<sup>53</sup> This is one of the three main urban areas of Msinga, and thus numbers quoted may be a misleading figure.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

#### **Architecture as a Material Culture: The response of the People of the people of KwaMchunu and KwaMthembu, Msinga Valley, KwaZulu Natal, to the influence of climate, geography, politics and social factors in the building and elaboration of their homesteads**

Fitch, (Fitch;1966) in an early work relating to traditional architectures, noted that environmental factors inform the style and form of architecture as a response to the environment. The metaphysical and social environments that surround us are also considered influences in that they strongly dictate the layouts and spaces between and within buildings.

The Msinga area is physically challenged, and challenging; the soil arid and begging for rain, yet the abundant water in the deeply incised river valleys is too far below to help the sustenance of life on the mountain plateaus a kilometre above. The vegetative landscape is scrubby and sparse, and though striking for those who enjoy a dramatic landscape, does not make the the growing of crops easy nor the effective herding of beasts. Long dry seasons and hot summers, and a noticeable drought cycle restricts suitable materials for building, meaning that timber is in

short supply. The cognitive cultural practise of the central cattle pattern has ensured that years of overgrazing has led to the current lack of resources, and, consequently, abbreviated the availability of the traditional and cost- effective prestige roofing material, in this case, thatch.

Msinga district is also noted for a variety of difficult sociological factors that give it an unique status in the broader South African context. Historical records tell of its aridity, soil erosion and overgrazing. These documents also mention political disturbance, poverty, gunrunning and concealment. *Marijuana* is grown copiously, and in such huge quantities that at the height of the *Apartheid* era raids, the police destroyed only minscule amounts of the grand total. The povery is abject, with malnutrition being a serious problem, stunting emotional, physical and intellectual growth and making whatever schooling is available largely

ineffective. Crime and death prevail, the inhabitants of Msinga walking a forever tightrope for mere physical survival.

Despite this horrific background of hopelessness and despair, the people of Msinga, whose culture is steeped in a strong tradition, have, over recent years, developed a spirited and colourful response to this, one which brightens lives and keeps a thread of respectability alive.

As stated earlier, it is imperative to adopt an holistic approach to the background study, in particular, to embrace the brevity of material cultures that are produced in the district. These material cultures include architecture. In the same way that televisions and microwave ovens influence the design and everyday functions of an urban household, so the material accoutrements that the people of Msinga hold dear inform their homestead design and ultimate function. This connection between belief and artefact is deeply entrenched in the traditionality of the area. Whether a *rondavel* may or may not have windows is a marker of what that specific household's level of traditional awareness is, as well as reflecting an aspiration towards western modernity.

This traditionalism is also often the spur for the creation of highly

decorated material goods such as earplugs and headrests, which are cultural material goods of a Zulu society. The recent revival of cultural awareness through organisations such as the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) has promoted the increased energy with which such cultural goods are made. Adding to this, the interaction with monied cultures in the last century and a half has provided both new materials and fresh ideas for these deeply traditional objects. Sometimes, Christian religion plays a part, as seen by the laminated Madonna on Mr Nkhala's wonderful "kasse". Indeed, the Christian doctrine has deep influence in much of the art, particularly those of the Revivalist Churches such as the Shembe.

Similarly, the creation of the homestead is yet another part of the whole material culture, and these complexes are as individual in as much as they represent the whole family and its ideals. It would seem that the women of the homesteads make most of the considered aesthetic decisions. It is they, for example, who will choose the particular design and the colour of the paint.

Architecturally, the buildings themselves are simple. Cone-on-cylinder units are the norm, with the occasional, more up-beat four-cornered two-room. The forms remain pure and

uncomplicated, and are the backdrop for a myriad of solutions to providing aesthetic elaboration. This enrichment, reflected in the effervescent decoration, is realised more fully once one delves beyond the immediate physical painting and examines the work in the context of the history of the area, the trauma and the bloodshed, the complexities of existence, survival. One sees on an everyday basis the simple, bold colouring of the clothing and the houses.

The development of the style of the elaborated homes appears to have spiralled once the logical and necessary departure from the cul-de-sac form and material of the *iqhugwana* attained a tacit social acceptance. Historic reports suggest occasionally at the possibilities of cone-on-cylinder buildings, but the recorded norm was the beehive shapes. The last twenty-five years has seen the development of this decorative form in parallel with changes in the manner of execution, subject matter and material of dress, beadwork, ceramics, woodcarving, etc.

Not every homestead has decorated buildings, and architectural elaboration it is still rather the exception than the norm. Alcock is not aware of any decorated homesteads in her area, which is a long distance (25km) upstream from Tugela Ferry town, without

ready access to materials. However, following tracks in kwaMchunu, one finds a prevalence of the decorated houses, often clumped, and following a local fashion spurred on by a creative individual. Fashion does seem to be a big determiner in the process of house building as much as it is with clothing.

The possibility for variation in design types between and within homesteads is huge. This variation is a strong marker of breaking out of the bounds of socially accepted norms of tribal systems and the movement towards the expressing of a personal philosophy. Homestead IV with the *isicolo sikarondi* of a knight on a charger on the apex of the roof could not be more incongruous in its remote African valley context, yet it works as part of the eclectic decorative concept of the homestead whilst enriching the total perception of the man and his status in the community. It also shows the man of the homestead's need for connection with home. As a migrant labourer working on the gold mines, his roots are deep in the valleys of Msinga. His considerations of home are still paramount during his absence.

Variation is also strongly exhibited in the emerging differing house decoration types. The recent breakaway from the early geometric influence of the beadwork in the wall painting shows a need for

experiment and personal expression, and creates an evolutionary path for contemporary design which is unique in South African indigenous vernacular architecture. In addition, the integration of plaster, paint and materials shows a conviction and commitment in design. Once the relief plasterwork is executed, the design is final, and variation can only happen in the choice of paint colours .

The intrinsic details of the external plastered designs as a part of the whole structure are as important, as the carefully executed wall decorations by Mr. Sithole show. Levels of design, such as the type of door, how the entrance threshold is tackled, and how siting of the homestead reflects the extreme physical gradients reveal a conceptual minefield, which is tackled again and again with varying degrees of success. The building may be seen as a whole palette, the wall decoration, choice of door and window, their symmetrical positioning, how this informs the subsequent paint work, etc. and how this interreacts with elements such as steps, whilst keeping a strong cultural integrity is interesting.

Perhaps the most fascinating point is the fact that decorative contractors exist, who execute the designs in plaster and paint to the whims of the wife of the homestead. This level of specialisation reflects a perceived need for this work as well as

the variety within a set of basic design types. A catalogue exists for the type 5 buildings, and choices are made from this.

The level of artistic conviction amongst the builders and painters of Msinga is strong. The sense that one's decision is the correct one, even during the experimentation process, is quite obvious. There are certain challenges that are addressed using a specific approach, and then there are others which are really the result of experimentation. An example is the *isicolo* on the top of the roofs: the standard manner of finishing off the *iqhugwana* was with the use of a grass top knot known as *ingqongwana* (Walton;1956;129). With the change of form and structural material from beehive dome to conical, this apical completion had to be reresolved; did one stay with the original solution, or did one try to change it, not only for efficiency sake, but also aesthetics and current fashion. Tradition and the indigenous knowledge system that taught the construction of the beehive hut through the generations has been challenged, leading to the variety of approaches that we see today. These types of resolution questions have been addressed in a number of ways which vary from the interpretation of the traditional top knot to the wonderfully anomalous knight on a charger heralding in the year 1999! This level of conviction has sped up the local possibilities for

adaptation. It is not restricted to the elements of the building, but the varied approach to the external elaboration, and its possibilities.

The personal perception as to what a proper house consists of is a total mix, in many instances combining the urban building code learnt through interaction with urban areas, with the traditional needs of the homesteader. The prevalence of local building contractors to carry out the work is part of this shift of influence, as well as the high proportion of constantly moving men who work in urban areas. This means that literal copying or integration of the elements of 'proper' buildings such as ventilation units seen in those 'correctly' built houses of the 1960s in suburbia exists. Thus, when Mr Nxumalo says that the houses are painted and built to be similar to those houses in the cities, he is probably right. In the same sense, the comfort with which Mr Sithole's family regards thatch is totally different to the attitude of urban people, who, living in formal or informal housing, see thatch as both impractical and old-fashioned. Certainly, the people in Msinga realise its shortcomings. They are too aware of its incendiary properties in arson and lightning strikes. They are also painfully aware of its cost; of finding, cutting and conveying it, or buying it, somehow, locally. Yet their realisation as to its superior

insulating ability was revolutionary for me.

A 'real' house in the Msinga context is often not a two-roomed cottage as with many other emerging economic groups around the world. The Msinga people use the two-roomed dwelling occasionally as it forms the bachelors quarters of some of the homesteads. The bachelors are perceived as more worldly-wise and have more claim to a rectangular building, perhaps, as they are on the brink of joining the absentee male statistic base.

Other more modern homes also abound, particularly around the villages of Keates Drift and Tugela Ferry where a need for local rental stock has extended the two room principle to the building of 'train' houses, consisting of a number of single rooms in a terrace. The syncopated 'American flat,' the term coined by Harber (Harber;2000), may also often form the focal point of the homesteads, both rural and peri-urban. The wealth of these families is greater, and they are usually the only rectangular building amongst the cylindrical buildings of the homestead. Generally, the need for the circular buildings, perceived as proper homes, is determined by the innate cultural respect for the ancestors.

The Msinga idea of a modern house is a cone-on-cylinder<sup>54</sup> one preferably made of block (modern) with a thatched roof. New *rondawels* are constantly being built, the circular form being preferential to the rectangular. This notion is reinforced by the Scott-Wilson survey that reflects that by far the largest proportion of buildings in the area are 'traditional'. An ultra-modern house in the Msinga context has glass-paneled windows and a standard, commercially available hardwood door. Should cement block be out of reach in the budget, a good house can be built out of timber and infill. These are still large units, with furnishings of western import, with, as seen in Homestead IV, the double bed being placed ceremoniously central on a linoleum carpet leading to the door. Compromises with western furniture are more possible in a large hut, as the furnishings can line the walls and exist on the periphery. The modern house also has to have ventilator bricks. It is peculiar how these particularly arbitrary building materials have accorded such a status symbol in this area.

The cross-over from traditional to western, or to satisfactorially

<sup>54</sup>The cone-on-cylinder certainly is modern in the context of the disappearance of the beehive hut in the last three decades.

compromise between western ideals and traditional values must be a very difficult one to make. The conundrum is evidently not a new one, as historic photographs often show. However, this problem is well depicted in the woodcut below, executed by Sandile Goge. Msinga is almost a rural example of this depicted paradigm shift, which is both conceptual and integrated into a lifestyle. Translation of this can be seen in the group of decorated thatched huts with clay tiled porticos in the Mchunu Tribal authority. Here the grandeur of a mini *porte-cochere* is acknowledged, whilst the essence of the traditional building is retained. The indigenous hut has embraced the new millennium with aplomb, modernity reflected in both element and material.



**Sandile Goge;**  
**Meeting of two**  
**cultures (1993)**  
*l i n o c u t ,*  
**350x500mm**  
*from Hobbs et*  
*al;1997:147*

## 6. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<b>amabhayi</b>	cloth cape worn by the women to cover the shoulders
<b>amakohlwa</b>	the believers (Collins;1995:399)
<b>amasumpa</b>	raised warts on the landscape of the pot
<b>apartheid</b>	the Nationalist Government policy of separate development and seperated living, where non-whites were relegated to living in designated areas.
<b>central cattle pattern</b>	cognitive system exhibited by the Zulu, and other Nguni groups. This was spatial in the sense that the cattle byre formed the central focus of their homesteads, as well as cognitive in that the accumulation of cattle as a form of wealth was central to the cultural system. The concept was proposed by Evers (Evers;1988), and then described by Huffmann.
<b>dagga</b>	colloquial term for <i>cannabis sativa</i>
<b>gogo's hut</b>	the indluNkulu: the hut of the chief wife (widowed) or the paternal mother:it may even be a separate building to host ancestral worship.
<b>hlonipa</b>	ritual respect
<b>hut</b>	( <i>From Frescura;1987:34</i> )generic term applied to basic rural shelters and farm structures. The Concise Oxford Dictionry

has defined it as" a small men house of rude construction". Thus care should be exercised not to extend its meaning to cover more substantial rural dwellings nor structures constructed in alternative technologies.

<b>ibheshu</b>	skin buttock covering worn by the men (Collins;1995:34)
<b>icansi</b>	sleeping mats
<b>ifokona</b>	colloquial term for a square or rectangular building
<b>ikapha</b>	vertical post
<b>imindjondolo</b>	slang for a shack or very small house
<b>inca ebomvana</b>	Hypharrenia Hirta
<b>indhlu</b>	more common term for house or shelter. House, hut or room (Collins;1995:540)
<b>iNduna</b>	headman appointed by the nKosi
<b>indigenous</b>	as defined by the Collins Concise Dictionary (Collins;1995:658)as originating or occurring naturally (in a country) native. Innate, inherent.
<b>ingqongwana</b>	resolution fo thatch at apex of roof on beehive hut, and also appears to refer to the ritual lightning sticks that are placed within this apex
<b>iqhughwana</b>	beehive shaped hut (Collins;1995:704)
<b>isibaya</b>	zulu term for the cattle byre, usually in the centre of the homestead. This enclosure may be fenced with tamboetie or agave
<b>isicapa</b>	annular shoulder at eaves level



**isicolo** hat. But more correctly, the headdress of the Zulu married woman. Nowadays, the isicolo is detachable

**isicolo sikarond** the metal roof capping, literally the hat that is cut round

**isidwaba** ritually slaughtered cow or goat hide skirt of the married woman

**isifunda** region (Clegg;1981:172)

**isigege** fringed apron worn by young girls

**isigodi** district (Clegg;1981:172)

**isigodlo** the upper end of a traditional homestead, where the huts of the primary wives were located

**isigodlo** the royal enclosure/headmans quarters

**isigqiki** native head rest formed of a wooden log with three or four short legs (Collins;1995:263)

**isikaladi** dado

**isilomi** beadwork style that followed the isishunka (isimodeni) about 1960

**isimodeni** anglicism of the word modern

**isinene** male loin covering to front

**isiphalafini** colloquial style of beadwork, named after the area where the paraffin was obtained, another name for the *isimodeni* beadwork.

**isishunka** early beadwork style

**isisizwe** nation (Clegg;1981:172)

**isitupa** apron around the edge of the Msinga hut

**ithingo** horizontal lathe

**isithunga** haunch upon which the rafters sit in a hut

**ixhiba** a cooking hut, but also used in the Bergville district to signify a beehive hut

**izingwembe** meat platter

**izinkhezo** Spoon

**iziqhaza** earplugs

**izixembe** spoon

**izimpundu** the mud plastered rim surrounding the hearth in the beehive hut

**izoko** hearth

**knobkieries** fighting sticks with a knob at the dorsal end

**lala palm tree** in the maputaland area which is not only used for the making of buildings and thatch, but also the brewing of a particularly potent wine

**liminal** anthropological term coined by Van Gennep in 1908 from the Latin meaning threshold. There are rites of separation, being pre-liminal, the actual separation, being liminal and the rites of incorporation being post-liminal. This term has broader applications. (De Beer et al;1994:248)

**mfecane** the widespread dispersal of peoples in the wake of Shaka's armies. The effects to the North were known by the Sotho *difeqane*

**mngadine** Magwaza family name for the *inqongqwana*

**pahleka** the act of plastering

<b><i>qhumbuza</i></b>	ear piercing ceremony for coming of age
<b><i>rondawel</i></b>	a circular building
<b><i>sinda</i></b>	smear as a floor covering with cow dung (Collins;1995:757)
<b><i>umsamo</i></b>	the sacred part of the hut where a space for the ancestors is reserved.
<b><i>udonga</i></b>	plaster
<b><i>umgodl</i></b>	vertical post
<b><i>umhlanga</i></b>	Phragmites Communis
<b><i>umhlati</i></b>	neighbourhood (Clegg;1981:172)
<b><i>umsululu</i></b>	Euphorbia tirucalli
<b><i>umuzi</i></b>	homestead (pl imizi)
<b><i>umzanzi</i></b>	post 1965 beadwork
<b><i>utshani</i></b>	thatching grass
<b><i>vernacular</i></b>	using Oliver's definition: see ch 1

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## 8. PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

**Mrs Creina Alcock** has been steering the CPA Farm Trust since the death of her husband in the mid-80s. She has been resident in Msinga since 1975.

**Mr G. Anderson** is an archaeologist with the Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg, specialising in the Iron Age in KwaZulu- Natal

**Mr Jonathon Clegg** is better known for his musical prowess, although his paper quoted here is a superb piece of anthropological writing. He visited the Msinga area extensively until the mid-1980s.

**The Education Circuit officer**, an officer of the Provincial Education Department based in Tugela Ferry.

**Futura Footwear** was known as Bata Shoes, and they had a factory in Keates Drift until the mid 1990s.

**Prof. Frank Jolles** was a Professor of German at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg. He has a large collection of Zulu cultural artefacts, and takes care with the provenance and cataloguing. His work in the beadwork field is well published internationally.

**Ms. M Jones** is completing a Masters in Fine Arts at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, specialising in Zulu basketry

**Mr William Larkan** worked for TEBA for many years based in Tugela Ferry. He still lives on the mission with his family, and has a clear recollection of his years there. He is deeply interested in Zulu culture.

**Valerie Maggs** taught fine art at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, and through her connection with Professor Tim Maggs, has been involved in cultural materials of the region for many years. She teaches Art in the city.

**Prof. Tim Maggs** retired, has been actively involved in the African Iron age and contemporary culture in the province. He was largely responsible for pointing me in a number of directions in the Msinga study.

**Mnweni Valley** project undertaken by the Author where much interaction with a reasonably conservative community occurred

**iNduna Nxumalo** the iNduna assisting us around kwaMchunu on behalf of the iNkosi Mchunu

**Mrs. Zuma** the lady running thatching operations at Homestead Ngubane

**Mr Paul Mikula** has a large collection of cultural artefacts from the province, and has been involved in the study of the Tembe architecture in particular.

**Rev. Mabaso** is the Reverend at the Tugela Ferry Mission Station, and hails from kwaMabaso, Msinga.

**Ms. Nelisiwe Mhlongo** is an anthropologist who was working with Heritage KwaZulu Natal for a while. She was indispensable in the interviewing of the homesteaders in Msinga.

**Mr Apostle Mzila** the son of Mr. Elliot Mzila, a noted woodcarver

**Ms L. Ngwane** is a social worker working at Tugela Ferry in the Department of Welfare

**Mr Cyril Ovens** Mr Ovens was a trader who worked for Frame and Marshalls for many years. He sold cloth to the trading stores around the province, and is in demand not only for his knowledge of Zululand in the middle of the twentieth century, but also cloth types sold by him which were then used in the making of cultural items.



**Mr. Dieter Reusch** is the anthropologist in residence at the Provincial Museum services in Pietermaritzburg. He has worked tirelessly in the Msinga area, kwaMabaso in particular.

**Prof. L. Schlemmer** worked on studies with many marginalised groups in the 1980s. His report in this study was compiled by Zingel, although Schlemmer was familiar with the case area.

**Mrs Barbara Tyrrell** is noted for her carefully detailed paintings of people in indigenous dress. She is well travelled and has a good memory of her days in Natal.

**Mr G. Whitelaw** is an archaeologist with the Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg, specialising in the Iron Age in KwaZulu- Natal

**Mr. J Zingel** is a sociologist who compiled the schlemmer report. He was resident in Msinga during the research.

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