

Barry Morton and Jeff Ramsay, *Historical Dictionary of Botswana, Fifth Edition*

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Barry Morton and Jeff Ramsay's new edition of their *Historical Dictionary of Botswana* brought up to date, is a marvel, much like its predecessor volumes. It appears now with a different publisher, in a larger format, with a different type face and different paper. It has a good feel. Anyone interested in this country has lost their marbles if somehow, they fail to get their hands on it. It is costly, but it is also indispensable. It is also such a good read. Routinely it should be in all decent libraries and most certainly in all Botswana's ministries, the Embassies and High Commissions around the world. Once again, its revised and brought up to date content is an impressive work of scholarship. The authors explain that the invaluable bibliography has been greatly expanded. Self-evidently, the knowledge of the country's overall landscape possessed by the few editors of these now five volumes is awesome. Nevertheless, there are bound to be small problems. How could it not be so? But let's make a start.

Let's begin with the problems involved in keeping abreast of change. In so many instances, but certainly not all, the authors could not know what had occurred since the previous edition? Some changes, however, should have been obvious. Barolong Seboni's jolly newspaper column 'Nitty Gritty' disappeared some time ago. There are carry over, now outdated entries, which need revision –thus, the Botswana Society, the Mochudi Home Crafts Centre which was gutted by fire, the Phuthadikobo Museum which is not what it once was. The cooperative movement did not have its beginnings only in the 1960s, the first society in Lobatse was registered in 1909, a now not so recent historical discovery which has somehow crept through the cracks (p.69). It needs also to be noted that the Deborah Retief Hospital in Mochudi is now government run and presumably owned. The Motswedi Centre in Mochudi is an independent project, related to the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) Mission but not an offshoot of it (p.86).

But then there are other Mochudi or Mochudi related entries which wobble. Lowe/Matsieng is to be found in the Kgatleng District close to Rasesa not in the eastern Kweneng (p.174). The first Mochudi settlement was on the eastern side of Phuthadikobo Hill not the northern (p.195). The DRC Mission's publication, *Lesedi la Sechaba*, is incorrectly stated as lasting into the 1930s (p.219) but it continued into the 1950s. The information that the DRC opened a hospital in Sikwane in 1949 (p. 86) comes as a surprise. Is this really possible? A hospital abutting the border in South Africa and another a few kilometres away! Not so sure about this.

The ford across the Madikwe at Sikwane was where the Kgatla regiments passed to engage the Boers in the Battle of Derdepoort (p.252). It was also the point, not mentioned, where Mzilikazi's marauders crossed into this country on their way for a brief stopover at Old Palapye –also not mentioned.

Ray Molomo and Makwadi Kgopo appear to me to be putting in a first appearance, both fully justified, in fact long overdue, particularly for Ray, but the information provided about them is disturbingly inadequate. Kanye's Richard Rowland is described as a coloured who could pass as a white (p.255). The anthropologist Isaac Schapera was, apparently, of east European Jewish descent (p.258). Not sure that this kind of information has any value.

MEDU cultural ensemble (p.188) which appears in three entries bothers me, mainly I think because it belongs more to South Africa than here. Only few Batswana were involved. It also bothers me that half the entry for Peder Gowenius and Odi Weavers is devoted to MEDU where I would argue, it does not belong. Yes, it was probably what prompted the South African 14 July 1985 raid in Gaborone but it is with that entry that it really belongs (p. 136) The Gowenius entry, in any case, needs to be revised.

Large settlements in the reserves were known as towns (p.289) is an astonishing claim, the reverse

being true. Because towns, by colonial decree, could not be found in tribal areas every settlement therefore, regardless of size, was a village!

I struggle with the observation that in 1966 nearly all general dealer stores in the south were Indian owned. Ramotswa, Moshupa, Mankgodi, Sikwane, to an extent Kanye perhaps, but not Mochudi and not Gaborone? But why only in the south? What was wrong with the north of Gaborone? All the traders north of there were white traders? Why not give them a mention?

An observation which has always puzzled me relates to Mohumagadi Gagoangwe of the Bangwaketse who insisted that her son, Moeapitso, should be hanged by the British having assassinated her other son, Chief Seepapitso (p.263). How come that she had this power of decision? There is the occasional awkward entry which leaves us wondering what was actually meant – ‘Gladys Masire, so we are told, is the mother of the President’s six children’.

And now for the tricky subject of initiation starting with the word, *letsholo* (p.168). I have taken part in three *matsholo* which were hunting exercises for initiates which were not followed by secret meetings in the bush. The Macmillan English– Setswana Dictionary confirms that the word has two separate meanings which should not be interlinked: Professor Thapelo Otlogetswe to provide the nitty gritty.

The Balete are the only Tswana group to have maintained *bogwera* and *bojale* throughout the colonial era (p.167) and again, the Batlokwa and Balete are the only groups to have maintained initiation for men and women throughout the colonial period. (p.287). There is a need to be very careful about blanket statements of this kind. Balete *bogwera* is Nguni version not Tswana *bogwera*, and the 2012 exercise was not only the first for 31 years but the first ever and anywhere, to be headed by a woman. But yes, the reference was to the colonial period. But were the intermittent initiation exercises of the Balete and Batlokwa with or without circumcision? If without, the statement has to be modified because the Bakgatla not least, carried out such exercises during the entire colonial period. If with circumcision, the Bakgatla reinstated it in 1975, but in the hospital.

The entry for Art (p.36) tell us that the National Museum ‘has been vital in the collection and promotion of traditional and modern arts and crafts...which has grown into the largest and most comprehensive collection of objects by all ethnic groups’. Perhaps so, but how can they know? Have they seen these collections? Rumour has it that the most valuable items in the Art collection were looted some time ago and the rest is in poor condition. But do the old records still exist and how can such rumours be put to rest? On Crafts, which I find to be overstated, I suggest that Malcolm Thomas, long overlooked, be recognised as the architect of the basket revival in Etsha in the Ngamiland region.

Seemingly, so desperately sad, the country is still without monuments (other than archaeological sites (p.33) of any kind or indeed historic buildings. Go to Google and the country, unbelievably the only one in the world to be so unblest, possesses none!

Serowe appears with ‘the London Missionary Society providing the Batswana with their first schools and medical services’ (p.173). Schools maybe but as far as I am aware the London Missionary Society’s venture into medical/health care came to an end when David Livingstone pulled teeth in Manyana in the mid nineteenth century. There was, however, the one exception. According to Reverend JHL Burns in his book *100 Years of Christianity among the Bamangwato* (p.22) the first real involvement of the LMS with medical/health needs finally came in 1937 when a small hospital was established in Sefhare with Dr EE Barnet appointed in 1938. He lasted less than a year being succeeded by Dr Mabel Tribe in 1939. The hospital fell into disuse; in 1947 no doctor could be recruited and was eventually closed with the building(s) being used as a school. Somewhere along the line, however, the old buildings were taken over by a Swedish Mission. I don’t know from where it came or where it went? But this also came to grief and the government took over the place at some unknown date. Much of this tale is muddled by the author’s claim that ‘In 1909 a doctor was stationed in Serowe by the London Missionary Society’ (p 118). I am not

sure where that could have come from!

If all this is a touch confusing, consider the situation in Maun where the authors state that ‘the SDA opened a hospital there in 1937’ (p.270) Then consider the next bit of the puzzle: ‘As of 1966 a hospital was to be found in Maun’ (p.118). Whose hospital, the SDA’s presumably? I don’t know what happened to it but in 1968 Maun had a one off LMS maternity clinic run, and probably initiated by Sr Pat Holomby possibly using the old hospital buildings. This was taken over by the government in the early 1970s. I have a photo of a small boarded up (I think) building that I took, in I believe, 1968, of what I was told had been the Maun hospital. Somewhere I have noted that it was once an SDA church. I am totally confused.

The author of the next edition might think of including the national anthem and the coat of arms, poverty, architecture, capital punishment (weird word), Brink father and son, the 1952 Serowe Riot, Second World War granaries, Maru-a-Pula school, blacksmiths, Orapa House (by a measured mile, Gaborone’s most distinctive building) and Pierre Landell-Mills who is the founder of the Botswana Society and architect of the revised Customs Agreement with South Africa. The pivotal Landell-Mills affair was far more important than is currently understood.

Reviewed by Sandy Grant

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