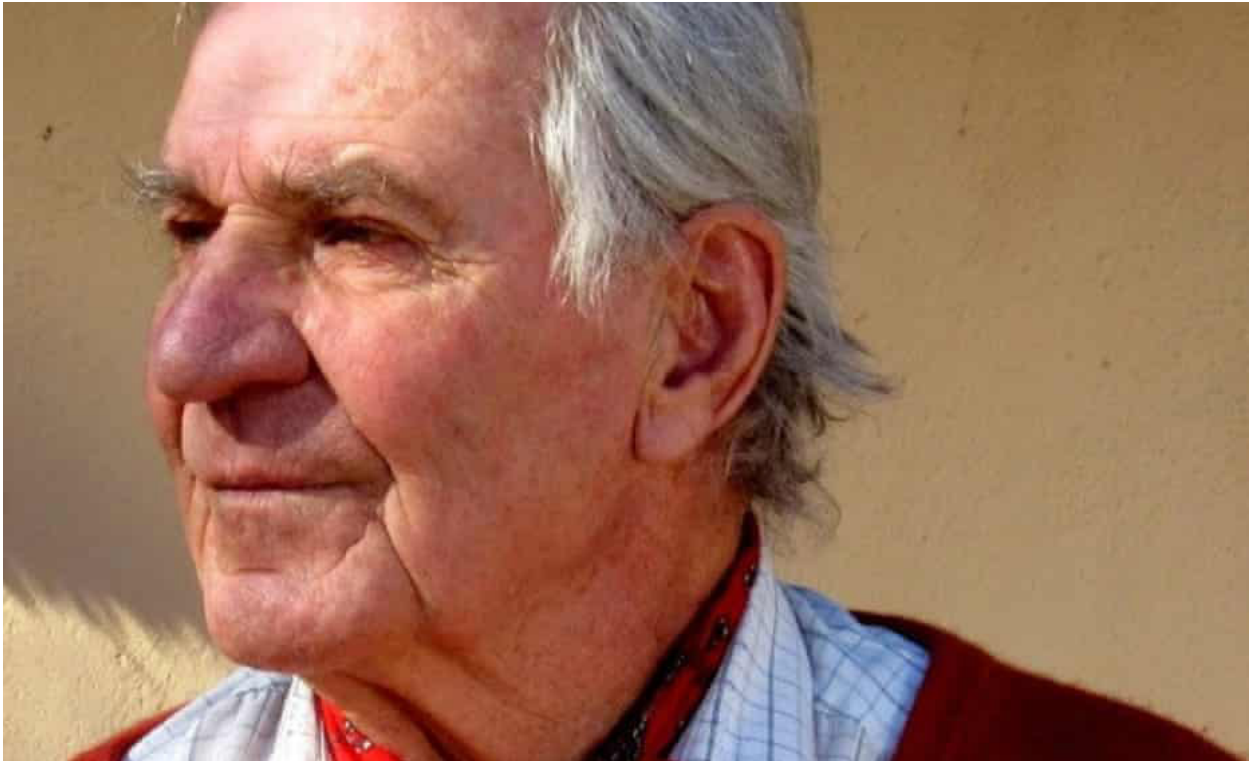


Sandy Grant, 1937 to 2021

*Johnny Gumb**



Sandy Grant first helped to set up a centre for activists fleeing apartheid South Africa. He stayed on after Botswana became independent in 1966. My friend Sandy Grant, who has died aged 84, was a community development worker and historian who worked hard on the development of post-colonial Botswana around its independence in 1966, and stayed there for the rest of his life. In 1963 while working in publishing in London, Sandy was recruited to help set up a refugee transit centre in what was then the Bechuanaland Protectorate for activists fleeing apartheid South Africa. The site then became a community development centre for Botswana.

Thus Sandy spent five years working with local people, setting up a building brigade to build a classroom and community hall; promoting economic self-sufficiency through schemes such as vegetable gardens, leather workshops and marketing co-operatives; and establishing the first consumer co-operative and the first printing press in the country. He worked closely with teachers, students and craftspeople as well as international volunteers, and was supported by Kgosi Linchwe II, the chief of the local Bakgatla tribe.

After this, Sandy remained in Botswana, organising a wide variety of projects. He served on many committees and organisations in the country, including the Kgatleng District Council and the national electoral commission. Above all, he became a historian, committed to recording and preserving Botswana's cultural heritage. After completing an MSc in heritage conservation at Heriot-Watt University in 1975, he

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established, in Mochudi, the first Botswana regional museum called Phuthadikobo Museum.

Sandy was born in London to publicans, Roy and Otys Grant. He attended Canford school, Dorset, and studied history at St John's College, Cambridge. After graduating, in 1960-61 he spent six months as a United Nations officer in the Southern Cameroons (now Cameroon). After that he taught history for six months at Rhodes University in South Africa, before settling in London, where he worked in publishing as an assistant editor. It was then, at the age of 26, that a chance meeting led him to be recruited for the Bechuanaland job.

He took citizenship of Botswana in 1982. He wrote columns for several of Botswana's newspapers and published four books on Botswana culture, history and life. In recognition of his devoted service to the country, he was awarded the Presidential Order of Honour by President Festus Mogae in 2002. Sandy's memoir, *Botswana: Choice and Opportunity*, was published in 2020.

In 1989 Sandy married Elinah Masitara, who was a collaborator on his history projects. Sandy and Elinah continued to manage the museum until 2006. They welcomed many friends, overseas visitors, and extended family to their home in Odi, near Gaborone. An expansive host, Sandy was a raconteur and disputant who loved sharing stories and arguments: a loyal friend, a fierce critic and a mentor to many, he was devoted to his adopted homeland.

He is survived by Elinah, and their son, Alex Setso.

He was one of the pioneers of the Botswana Society, serving in its executive committee for many years. He also contributed immensely in terms of articles, notes and obituaries to the Botswana Society's flagship journal, *Botswana Notes and Records*. He helped steer the Botswana Society ship at the turn of the twenty-first century when the Society declined and faced a serious existential threat until the arrival of Professor Fred Morton towards the end of the first decade of the new millennium. Professor Morton breathed the much needed 'fresh air' into the Botswana Society and made it a vibrant entity despite challenges of declining membership and funding.

Acknowledgement

This obituary first appeared in *The Guardian*, 30 August 2021. The last paragraph on the Botswana Society was contributed by Christian John Makgala, editor of the *Botswana Notes and Records*.