

## **5<sup>th</sup> Report from Africa**

### **26-28 November – Johannesburg**

I was met at the airport following a 2 hour flight from Harare, by Mandy Wood of the South Africa National Heritage Trust, a member of INTO. She drove me to the hotel and later picked me up to take me to a restaurant for dinner with Mike Moriarty and Henry and Sally Paine. Mike had been instrumental in trying to establish a National Heritage Trust for South Africa and Henry, an architect, is on the Steering Committee

Saturday morning was spent on an inner city tour, led by Eric Itzkin who manages the City Council's heritage in his capacity as Deputy Director of Arts, Culture and Heritage.

The first stop was the Worker's Museum which tells the story of migrants who came to Johannesburg from throughout the southern African region. Having left their homes and families, black migrant workers faced slave-like conditions shown by the original dormitories, concrete bunks, and punishment room at the old compound building. The museum reveals the hardships of workers under the migrant labour system, a cornerstone of apartheid, from the early 1900s through to the 1970s, when the system of job reservation began to break down. More positively, it shows the vibrancy and creative resilience of migrant workers' culture.

Thereafter we walked through the city taking in a number of iconic buildings including the old Rissik Street Post Office, gutted by fire last year after being unused for a decade, but likely to be rebuilt, a number of Art Deco buildings and Gandhi's old legal premises.

From there we went to Constitution Hill to the old Fort which later served as a prison where Mandela was briefly incarcerated while awaiting trial, and where Gandhi had served time years earlier

Mike, Mandy and I then went on to the Johannesburg Country Club for lunch and a meeting, supposedly of the National Heritage Trust of South Africa Steering Committee, but for various reasons no one could make it. In the event this turned out to be a useful opportunity for a serious dialogue between the three of us regarding the formation of a National Trust and the way forward.

The Country Club is the intended venue for the first INTO Africa conference in June or July next year so I was able to look at the excellent facilities on offer.

On Sunday we drove to Liliesleaf on the outskirts of Jo'burg where we were welcomed for breakfast by Nic Wolpe, the manager. Liliesleaf, once a farm, became a place of refuge for leaders and stalwarts of the liberation struggle in 1961. Its rôle as the nerve centre of the resistance came to a dramatic end with the police raid on 11

July 1963 when Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki and others were arrested for treason in plotting to overthrow the apartheid regime. This led to the Rivonia trial which resulted in life imprisonment on Robben Island.

Today Liliesleaf has been restored as an amazing state of the art, interactive, multi media exhibition and learning experience.

From there we went on to Soweto and saw the site of the June 1976 uprising by schoolchildren opposed to being forced to learn Afrikaans instead of English and where Hector Pieterse was the first of 23 to be shot on that fateful day by the police.

Next we visited Mandela's house (No. 8115 Orlando West) where he and Winnie had lived for a number of years before his imprisonment and where he went back to for 11 days following his release from prison before moving to his present house in Houghton, Johannesburg. It is now a museum.

Intriguingly 50 m along, and on the opposite side of the road is Archbishop Desmond Tutu's home and so Soweto is able to boast having two Nobel laureates in the same street!

Finally we went to see the Regina Mundi Catholic church where the students fled from the police on 16 June 1976 when they started firing. Sadly it did not stop them and there are signs today with bullet holes in the roof and walls. A Gospel choir was singing when we arrived which added a very special dimension to this emotional day.

