



Background to the declaration of the UmQwashu Memorial Site

The history of the umQwashu Memorial Site is directly linked to the history and identity of the amaMfengu people, the history of Christianity in the region and their role in spreading it. The formation of the Mfengu stems from the history of the conflicts and migrations that took place as a result of the rise of the Zulu nation, in what has been referred to as the Mfecane, on the one side, and the expansion of the British occupation of the eastern frontier, on the other.

The arrival of Christianity and the spread to other parts of South Africa, through the Amamfengu clan began at the umQwashu Memorial Site. On 14th May 1835, the Mfengu migrated from the area under King Hintsa near Butterworth to the land offered to them by the British near Peddie and took an oath under a milkwood tree of loyalty to God, the British throne and to educate their children.

These vows represented a pivotal moment in the history of the Eastern Cape as they resulted in changes in the socio-political life of the Mfengu and the eastward expansion of the colonial administration and Christianity.

The significance of the umQwashu Memorial is two-fold. On the one hand, it represents the turning point in the self-determination and perception of the Mfengu, while on the other hand, it represents the role of Missionaries in expanding British rule and the methods of interference in traditional governance and politics to accelerate their own endeavors.

Brief Statement of Significance:

The umQwashu Memorial represents a pivotal point in the history of the Eastern Cape. Following the oath that was taken on 14th May 1835 after the migration from Butterworth to Peddie by a group of Mfengu, the Mfengu were among the first African Christian converts, the first to make use of a plough and to plant wheat. They also aligned themselves with the British and were exposed to missionary education the longest of the African groups. This exposure led to some of the first African academics to have come from the Mfengu, for example, DDT Jabavu, the first African to obtain a BA Degree.

The Memorial is a tangible reminder of the moment that represents, on the one hand, the success of the British eastward expansion and the methods used by both the Cape Administration and the British missionaries to ensure the Evangelisation of Africans and expand Colonial rule in Africa. Yet, on the other hand, the memorial is the embodiment of Mfengu identity. It represents the turning point for socio-cultural changes that had a lifelong impact on Mfengu. The Vows become a guiding principle on which the Mfengu self-perception is formed.

The umQwashu Memorial site situated on the Portion of the Farm 27 Peddie in the Eastern Cape, consists of the milkwood tree/umqwashu, an open-air interpretation of the Makanda heritage route and an old, corrugated iron shed.





An annual commemoration takes place at the site on the 14th May to remember the vows taken and celebrate the identity of the Mfengu. In 2007, the vows were adapted to pledge loyalty to South Africa and the Constitution rather than the British throne. In addition, people from Peddie joined political organisations and the mass democratic movement against apartheid, indicating that loyalty does not mean tolerance of oppression but acceptance of justice.

SAHRA intends to declare the site as a National Heritage Site.

