

MALAWI

Zomba – Turning The Clock

The cultural landscape of Zomba town in Malawi is of great value and needs definition and protection as a unique cultural landscape. Zomba is a district lying at the foot of the Zomba Mountain plateau (2085 metres at its summit), 69 kilometres from Blantyre on the old MI road in the southern region of Malawi. Zomba is a major town, with a rich political history because of its role as the former administrative capital for the British colony of Njasaland and slave trade along the shore of Lake Malawi.

The Old Residency and State House

The town boasts some of the more-impressive old British colonial type of buildings in the country. The 'Old Residency' was built for Consul Hawes in 1886 (known as Masongola or The Points), and afterwards used by his successors and as government offices, and as the Government Hostel, hosting the nation's representatives during National Assembly. 'State House' is also one of several old-style architectural examples which have become obsolete in modern times. It was originally built as a six-roomed bungalow in 1898, on the slopes of the plateau in a beautiful surrounding boasting a temperate climate (it was enlarged in 1902). It was used as the official residence of a succession of governors during the colonial era. After Malawi gained independence in 1964, State House remained one of the official residences of the self-styled Life President of the country, Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda. It was closed to the public and any form of photography in the immediate vicinity was not allowed. It has a unique architecture with an octagonal tower that forms its central feature. Its appearance is informal because of the various renovations undertaken by a variety of its occupants over a number of years. State House used to host a number of important diplomatic functions and State activities. It has a stadium lying in the vast, well-manicured terraced gardens – reminiscent of the sprawling English landscapes of the Capability Brown era. Today, with the building of Sanjika Palace in Blantyre and the New State House in Lilongwe, the Zomba State House no longer hosts significant State activities. In fact, until recently, the Zomba State House has been used as the official residence of the second wife of the current President of the Republic of Malawi, Dr. Bakili Muluzi. It is still not freely accessible to the public and an opportunity to admire, study and compare its unique architecture and its beautifully landscaped English gardens is lost.

The Secretariat and Parliament Buildings

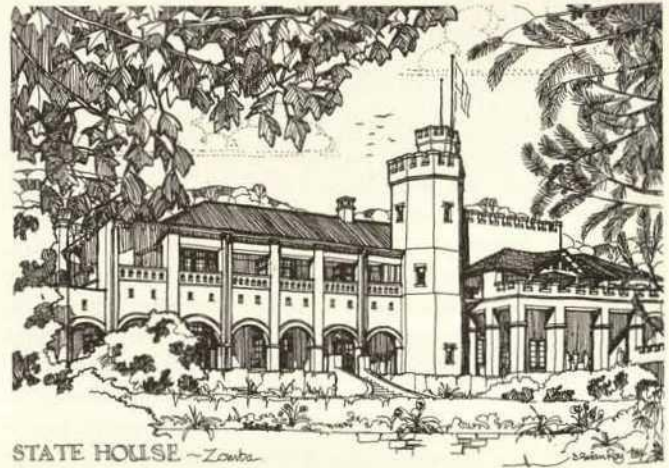
Nearby are the Secretariat and Parliament Buildings where members of Parliament meet for their annual deliberations, alternating with the modern new State House in Lilongwe. The Government Press, next to the Parliament buildings, was conveniently situated to provide a daily Hansard to the Assembly, as well as to produce all government printing and publications throughout the year.

The Traditional Courthouse

Down the road, behind the Regional Police Headquarters, is the Traditional Courthouse. It has earned a special mention as one of the few colonial attempts to use traditional African 'round house' design, rather than to impose a European plan for an essentially traditional function.



THE OLD RESIDENCY - ZOMBA



STATE HOUSE - Zomba



TRADITIONAL COURTHOUSE - Zomba

Gymkhana Club, War Memorial and University

Below the State House is the famous Gymkhana Club established in 1896. It has lush green fairways with 'sand' greens. The field in front of the clubhouse was used for sports, and socialising. The King's African Rifles (KAR) also conducted their parades on the British Monarch's birthday on the field. These activities have since ceased, and today the field is mostly used for sporting activities such as soccer, rugby and hockey.

As you enter the heart of the city on the main road from Blantyre, there is the War Memorial to the fallen heroes of the two World Wars. It is visible from the main road. A memorial function is held annually on Remembrance Day at 11:00 hours. The Armed Forces and the Commonwealth ex-Service League of Malawi take centre-stage to lead the nation in remembering the fallen heroes.

The town of Zomba is also famous as a University centre. The main campus of the University of Malawi, Chancellor College, was opened in 1973. The Great Hall, a Post-Modern building where degrees and diplomas are conferred, was completed in 1982. In 1975 the capital was moved from Zomba to Lilongwe as a political move to meet the increased government demands and the expanding bureaucracy.



ZOMBA GYMKHANA CLUB

Zomba, examples of colonial heritage

Commercial Precinct

At the heart of Zomba is a commercial precinct with 19th and early 20th-century veranda-style shops and the Mosque and madrass (of the Yao Malawians) surrounding the busy agricultural market complex. This mix in architecture of the buildings in Zomba makes the city unique and rich and provides an excellent memory of the Colonial period as well as the slave history. As new and modern buildings are erected in the town, there is need to preserve the old architecture, landscapes and spatial experience for historical and educational purposes to benefit the new generation of Malawians and visitors. Zomba has the potential to be declared a Heritage and Tourist Attraction District, and desperately requires an integrated heritage conservation policy.

References

- J.G. Pike & G.T. Remington, *Malawi, a Geographical Study*, Oxford University Press, 1965.
 D.B. Roy, *The Malawi Collection*, Institute of Architects, Malawi, 1984.

(edited by K.A. Bakker)
 ICOMOS South Africa