

## Historical Background

The building was bought from the Bohra community for 2,000 English Pounds after a longer period of occupation by the Medical Department who had used the building to serve as the Malindi Native Civil Hospital. The exact date of construction is not known but when Thomas Alfree was buying the property from the Bohra community, as discussed in his undated autobiography, even the oldest Bohra who was then more than ninety years old could not remember when it was built. We can, nonetheless suggest a date of construction perhaps the last quarter of the 19th century, a time bracket that saw these type of building style fashionable especially in the old towns of Lamu and Mombasa. Thomas Alfree bought the house from a grant to the Marine Division of the Fisheries Department for purposes of establishing a Kenya Marine Fisheries Station in Malindi. Unfortunately, Alfree in his autobiography is silent on the date he signed the lease agreement of 99 years but definitely must have been during the first half of British Colonial period in Kenya.

After occupation by Fisheries department, the building became the office for Kenya Wildlife Services before it was handed over to the National Museums of Kenya in 1999. On 10th May 2004 the building opened its doors to the general public as Malindi Museum.

### Description of the Building

The building is a charming old double - storey structure with a roof terrace covered with roof tiles and is situated along the seafront, on an excellent site, some few meters from Malindi jetty and Fish Market. It is a veranda building, a building type of the 19th century with features identical to the Malindi District Commissioner's Building. It is rectangular measuring Ca. 12.9 x 18.7 metres and 12 meters to the highest point of the roof. The perimeter walls are ca. 65 cm thick made of plaster over lumps of coral set in lime mortar.

The building has four entrances. Two of them are on the east façade reached through a colonnade of 5 rounded pillars on square pedestal. One entrance is fitted with a Gujarati and the other with a Swahili carved door. The third entrance is on the northern façade at the N/W quadrant reached through a flight of a masonry stairway. It has a small trap door of the Indian type serving both the ground and the first floor of the building. The fourth entrance, exclusively for the first floor, is on the southern façade and is reached through an exterior wooden staircase, which evidently is a secondary addition to the building. The door to this entrance is simple and opens onto a balcony supported by the rounded columns covered with a roof resting on dressed wooden supports.

From the balcony, a door leads into the first floor unit through a corridor with two rooms on both side organized in such a way that they are directly opposite one another with beautifully carved Bajuni doors. At the back of the corridor is another door opening onto the back of the first floor level where a landing to the terrace, circulation space and toilet facilities are organised. From the landing there are two staircases; one leading up to the original terrace (now the library); the second staircase leads down to the ground floor or out of the building through a side entrance organized at the N/W quadrant of the north façade, discussed as the third entrance above.

Onversely, the original plan might have divided the building into two separate units all entered through the front facade. The ground floor unit was perhaps exclusively through the Indian door which opened onto three parallel long rooms one behind the other (probably used as a shop and store); while the first floor unit was through the Swahili door opening onto a corridor of two room deep leading to a masonry staircase and up to the first floor of the building and the terrace (the residential area). If this was the situation, then the idea that the exterior wooden staircase and the two doors along the south façade being secondary addition to the building is valid.

The museum currently houses temporary exhibitions. The museum also doubles as an information centre where visitors are able to find more information on attractions and happenings in Malindi. It is all about Malindi under one roof.

For more information contact:

The Curator Malindi Museum

P.O.Box 939-0800 Malindi.

Tel: 042- 31479