

The Pangani Children's Walk-About

The historic 18th and 19th century buildings of Pangani, built by African, Omani and Indian merchants, are testament to the vibrant networks of trade which once existed between Africa, India and Arabia.

Pangani, one of several such entrepôts along the Swahili Coast, ideally situated at the river mouth, saw goods trans-shipped from ocean-going vessels to river craft and caravans for dispersal inland. Similarly, goods from the African interior arrived for loading and exporting afar.

ArchaeoLink is working with the UK Arts & Humanities Research Council-funded *Co-Production Networks for Community Heritage in Tanzania* (CONCH) project researchers and Pangani community members to develop educational programmes showcasing this facet of the Swahili Coast's rich cultural history.

Working with children is always a delight ! One never knows quite what they will say or what thoughts will emerge.

Having had a good look at Pangani's historic buildings, I invited some children to walk with me, to talk about them and perhaps to sketch them too. I also mentioned the event to a couple of teachers. Nothing was formally arranged or advertised, I had no idea, other than a few names, who would come.

The aim was to facilitate knowledge exchange, to encourage an appreciation of their built heritage AND to have fun.



Looking at details and thinking what they tell us.

We began by looking at the outside of the Cultural Heritage building, the Pangarithi. "If this building could talk to us," I asked, "which question would you ask it?"

"Who killed Abushiri?" Came an almost immediate response, from a young lady who clearly knew the answer. So we talked about questions to which we did not know the answers and how archaeologists and surveyors might help us discover them.

As I had been told that schoolchildren were obliged to wash their clothes as Saturday morning chores, I opted for a 9.30 start. By 10.00am, 11 children aged from 7 to 15 had shyly joined Kassim, a guide from Pangani Coastal Cultural Tours and myself. Each received a sketch book and a pencil.



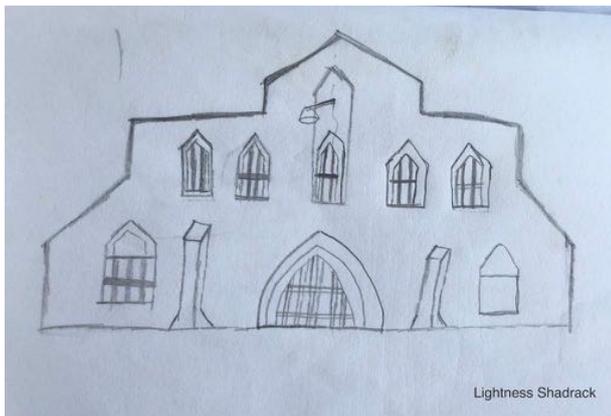
The Cultural Centre south side..

We looked at the side of the building and thought about what the holes in the coral stone, and the wall niches above, might tell us. At the front of the building, I asked them to look at the doors, to tell me about the differences and to think about what this might tell us. Encouraged to look at the details, they then dispersed to sketch what they saw, quiet as mice.



The Cultural Centre east side.

A while later we walked along the path pausing by the ruins of the building behind the Ibadhi mosque. We looked at the coral stone, mangrove poles, high ceilings and thick walls, discussing origins of building materials and methods of keeping buildings cool before fans and electricity.



The Customs House north side.

We paused to sketch again at the rear of the Customs House and discussed why it had been built so large, and the types of good which pass through today and passed through in the past. They brought up the subject of slavery clearly disconcerted that such a practice should have existed.

We continued to India Street where the same pattern as at Pangarethi of smaller and larger door revealed the former as the family entrance to the living areas and the latter as the entrance to a shop. This confirmed the Pangarithi to have originally been a shop-keeper's residence and place of commerce.



We noted all architectural details and designs of windows, louvres, balconies, trellis-work and doors, and discussed what this told us about Pangani when this street was built. They stopped and stared; imagining, I hoped, the splendour of sunlight falling through coloured glass, patterning a floor; or of a craftsman chipping away creating the design on a door. They sat and sketched what they saw.

We returned by the water-front. I asked them to look at the ruins of the CCM building and remember it's place in the road. We noted the dhows still bringing and taking goods to and from the customs house. At the Pangarithi we looked at the photograph of Pangani's 1900 water-front and I asked them to locate the CCM building thereon. The revelation of the splendid buildings, as they had once been, confirmed the former wealth of their town to the sketchers, before they reluctantly dispersed for lunch.

After lunch I returned to the Pangarithi to find an entire group of children arrayed against the wall quietly sketching away ! Most of the morning group had returned and I suggested they drew what they wanted while I took the 5 newcomers through the preliminary discussions before following a similar course to that of the morning.



Students from Al Hijra Secondary School.

My largest group arrived at the specially arranged time, to accommodate prayer, of 4.30 on Sunday afternoon. 18 girls aged 15 - 17, of whom all I could see were their eyes and occasionally their hands, grouped in a black cloud. Their enthusiastic teachers remained for the first part and then we continued alone with their chaperone. We managed to reach India Street and also sketch there before the call to prayer ended the session.

One of the teachers had remarked on the difficulties of arranging the outing from the strict boarding school; they have since told me that the girls really enjoyed the experience and so they felt it was worth the trouble.

The five Walk-Abouts were attended by a total of 44 pupils from 7 schools, some coming as many as four times, over the week-end. Some 100 sketches were produced. A few are on exhibition at the Pangarithi.

Click [here](#) to see the Pangani's schoolchildren's sketches...



The children were allowed to keep their sketch books and pencils in the hopes they will continue to sketch and appreciate their heritage.

Patricia Hart, Project Director.