

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/084/0024
	Site Name	Rhenish Church, Blom Street, Stellenbosch
	Date	
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-33.937932, 18.858960

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Site Category: Building

SiteComments:

Archive Import History: The lovely old Rhenish Mission Church with its fine gables, built in the form of an incomplete T, faces the southern side of the Braak. This is one of the oldest mission churches in South Africa. It was built by Het Stellenbosche Medewerkende Zendelings Genootschap ("The Stellenbosch Co-operative Missionary Society"), which was, for practical purposes, a branch of the first local missionary society, Het Zuid Afrikaansche Maatschappij ter Bevordering van de Uitbreiding van Christ us Koninkrijk ("The South African Society for the Advancement of the Extension of the Kingdom of Christ") established in 1799. The Stellenbosch Society was established in 1801 and was managed by a Board of twelve people which included members of some of the best-known old Stellenbosch families such as Neethling, Faure, Roos, Joubert, Roux, Cloete and Krige. The Society concentrated on ministering to the spiritual and educational needs of the slaves. The first missionary was M. J. Bakker, who used his own house as a school and meeting-house. At first progress was very slow, but in the 1820s the work began to meet with greater success and in 1822 Erasmus Smit, who later became the Minister to the Voortrekkers, succeeded Bakker. In that year the Society decided to build a mission church and acquired the site to the south of the Braak for this purpose from the Stellenbosch Turf Club. Whites and Non-whites alike contributed to the fund for the church, with the result that work on the building could start in the following year. The Church that was built then consisted only of the back portion that runs from east to west, and a small bell-tower. The delicate architectural treatment which betrays strong Renaissance influence, is typical of early nineteenth century architecture. The gable, which bears the date of its erection, 1823, is one of the finest of its kind. The Church was formally opened on 5th February, 1824. The Governor, Lord Charles Somerset and various other dignitaries from Cape Town and Stellenbosch attended. The Minister of Stellenbosch, the Rev. Meent Borchers, delivered the inaugural address, and the Rev. Abraham Faure of the Groote Kerk in Cape Town, the Rev. Mr. Evans of Paarl and the Rev. James Archbell, destined to become famous as a Wesleyan missionary, took part in the proceedings. It is interesting to note that Erasmus Smit and Archbell, who opposed each other bitterly at Thaba Nchu in 1836, must have met for the first time on this occasion. The church could hold 400 people at most and soon became too small, for the membership increased rapidly, especially after the Rev. P. D. Lflickhoff succeeded Erasmus Smit in 1831. In 1838 it was decided to demolish the wall between the consistory and the rest of the church, and to put in a gallery. This work was completed the following year, but did not provide much relief, so the Board decided to enlarge the church. In 1840 the northern wing was built. Care was taken to see that the new addition harmonized with the original building. The enlarged church was inaugurated on 1st December, 1840. The Rev. T. J. Herold, the Dutch Reformed Minister of Stellenbosch, delivered the opening address, and the Rev. P. E. Faure of Wynberg and the Rev. P. K. Albertyn led the services which were attended by between 1 100 and 1 200 people. Nearly 80 years were to pass before the attractive bell-towers of the western side of the church were built; they were designed by Mr. W. Blersch, the Town Clerk. In the same year that the church was enlarged (1840), the activities of the Stellenbosche Genootschap were taken over by the Rhenish Missionary Society. Since then the building has been known as the Rhenish Church. Proclaimed 1963 Visual Description: Colours: Site Features: Condition: Construction Date: 1823, 1840 Materials: Catalogue: , No: , Significance Category:

AdminComments:

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Bibliography archive: Oxley, John 'Places of worship in South Africa', 1993, pp 81-83

Damage Types: