

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/018/0106
	Site Name	Groote Kerk, Adderley Street, Cape Town
	Date	
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-33.924732, 18.420855

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Site Category: Building

SiteComments:

Archive Import History: The first church on this land was built in 1678. It was replaced by the present building in 1841, but the original tower was retained. The pulpit is the work of Anton Anreith and the carpenter Jacob Graaff and was put into use in 1789. Jan van Riebeeck brought the Reformed religion to the Cape and the practice of this religion played an important part in the lives of the pioneer community. Consequently it was a matter of course that the provision of a place of worship occupied the minds of the authorities, the officials and the free population from the beginning of the settlement. Van Riebeeck's ship, the Drommedaris, served as the first church on our shores. The first Sunday service at the Cape was held on board on 14th April 1652. After the settlers landed on 24th April, the "Christian exhortations" probably took place in one of the temporary shelters. In building the Fort of Good Hope, provision was made in the complex of buildings opposite the entrance for a hall in which religious services were held. The hall soon became too small as the population expanded, so, when work on the Castle was begun in 1666, one of the timber sheds in the inner court yard was converted into a church by giving it a stone floor and a front gable. Meanwhile the building of the Castle proceeded slowly. In the long wall joining the Leerdam bastion to the one called Oranje, a "small new church" was provided and this was probably occupied as early as 1675. Now a new problem arose that made the building of a church on its own site essential. Since 1666 burials had taken place inside the inner courtyard of the Castle, but the space taken up by the graveyard was now required for other purposes and the removal of the graveyard to some other place had become urgent. So, on 16th December, 1677, Commander Johan Bax and his Council set aside a suitable area "in the Company's abandoned garden" as a burial ground. This was the land on which the Groote Kerk now stands. At first it was merely to be surrounded by a wall and in the course of time "a suitable and proper church" was to be built there. Commander Bax and members of the Public Council laid down the foundations of a cruciform church on this site during the following year but almost a quarter of a century was to pass before the "proper church" was built. In 1685 the well-known commissioner Hendrik Adriaan van Rhee de gave instructions that a cross-wall or "kat" be built across the court of the Castle, and that provision be made in it for a new residence for the Governor and several halls. This "kat" was only completed in 1695, whereupon the Church was moved to one of the halls. On the day of Pentecost, 22nd May 1695, the first sermon was preached there. In the same year as the church was removed to the "Kat", the Rev. Petrus Kalden arrived as the Minister. In 1699 he and his Church Council asked the visiting Commissioner Daniel Heyns and the Governor for permission to use the charity fund for a new church. Permission for this was granted, plans for the church were drawn up and a contract was concluded for the building. The foundations laid by Johan Bax were pulled up and on 28th December, 1700, Governor W. A. van der Stel and several of his councillors laid the first stones of the new church. A spirit of collaboration and goodwill prevailed amongst the officials, the government and adherents of the church, so that by the end of 1702 the work was nearing completion. The spire was left to the last and was erected in 1703. A fine pulpit was made. The traveller, the Rev. Francois Valentyn, described it as "a very neat octagonal pulpit" entirely supported on "a heavy ebony base decorated with carved wreaths", while the copper lectern on which the Bible rested was so fine that he had seldom seen a better one. Valentyn calls the church "a very fine building" and the Rev. H. C. Hopkins in his authoritative work *Die Moeder van ons Almal* describes it as follows: "The old Cape Church did not have the usual cruciform shape that became so popular in our country because in this case the arms of the Greek cross were joined by oblique cross-walls that filled a portion of the four

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angles". The church was built on the plan of the seventeenth century "preekkerke" designed round a central focus. In each of the walls that joined the arms of the cross, there were two windows, between six and nine metres in height, reaching practically the full height of the walls. The spout-shaped gables facing Church Square and the Heerengracht were finer than the small pointed gables on the mountain side, while the steeple formed a part of the elevation on the seaward side. The church was opened with great ceremony on 6th January, 1704. The new church had neither an organ nor a vestry. In 1737 the church bought its first organ from Governor Jan de la Fontaine, but about 1853 it broke down and had to be replaced. A vestry was added in 1744-45. While the church was being built, the graveyard which had become "a scandalous spectacle" was restored and Abraham Hartog contracted to build a wall round it. Inside the church provision was made for about 180 numbered vaults and some unnumbered graves. There were six graves on either side of the pulpit, and in front of it the vaults were apparently arranged in rows, fifteen in a row, up to the organ. Some of the vaults could hold from six to nine cadavers. The vaults could be purchased or hired, and nearly all people of standing of those times were buried here. Among those laid to rest here were the following governors : Simon van der Stel (1712), Louis van Assenburgh (1712), M. P. de Chavonnes (1714), Adriaan van Kervel (1737), Ryk Tulbagh (1771) and Pieter Baron van Rheede van Oudtshoorn (1773). By the middle of the eighteenth century the church had once again become too small for the growing congregation. The Kerkraad first tried to gain space by building two galleries above the doors and moving the pulpit back, but when restoration work became necessary in 1779, the opportunity was taken to enlarge the church by building out the four corners. In this way the building took the form of a rectangle, but the pitched roof retained its cruciform shape. In 1779 the old pulpit was replaced by the remarkable Anton Anreith pulpit which still graces the church today. The flat roofs of the extended corners of the church constantly leaked and required costly maintenance. The condition of other parts of the building also gave cause for concern, so the Kerkraad had it investigated in 1835 by the experienced builder, Hermann Schutte, and the master carpenter, L. F. Anhuysen. They recommended that the roof be replaced, but also drew attention to moisture in the foundations, mainly due to the water that collected in the vaults. The Church Council, wishing to avoid the high costs involved, merely propped up the roof from the inside, but this only increased the congregation's fear that an accident might occur. Once again Schutte and Anhuysen, together with other building contractors, inspected the building. Their reports gave rise to the opinion that it would be best to demolish the building and build a new one, so at the end of August 1835 the church was vacated and services were held in the Lutheran Church in Strand Street. Unfortunately a bitter controversy now arose between the members who advocated demolition and those who opposed it. In desperation the Church Council consulted the government who advised them to obtain the opinion of Lt.-Col. Robert Thompson of the Royal Engineers. When Thompson also declared that the roof was in a dangerous condition, the Church Council decided to replace it and commissioned him to draw up plans not only for the replacement of the roof, but also for providing more seating accommodation. Schutte was to supervise the work. Before the work began, the beautiful pulpit was protected from damage by building walls round it where it stood. Then the roof was removed but, to the consternation of the congregation, Schutte now found that the foundations could not bear the weight of the higher walls and new roof. Now there was no alternative : the entire building excepting the steeple and the vestry was demolished, and a new and larger church built in accordance with a design by Schutte. When this was done, the vaults were filled in and many of the gravestones were lost. The style of the building was a peculiar combination of Greek and Gothic traditions, but taken as a whole, strong and pleasing. Schutte's greatest achievement was the fine stucco ceiling with its impressive vault. The inauguration of the building took place on 31st January, 1841, and gave great satisfaction. Although hardly any alterations have been made to it during the past century and a quarter, the church now looks very different. This is because buildings on two sides of the church have disappeared and on another side a much taller building has been erected. Each of these has its own history. The old sexton's house which stood facing the former Heerengracht and partly in front of the church, at first a simple little house, was enlarged to become one of the finest old Cape buildings, but was eventually demolished to widen

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Adderley Street. The vestry in Bureau Street was enlarged by giving it a second storey but disappeared when Bureau Street was widened. On the opposite side of the church the large Groote Kerk Building was erected in 1941. Proclaimed 1962 Visual Description: Colours: Site Features: Condition: Construction Date: 1678,1841 Materials: Catalogue: Rennie, Vol 2, No: 065.26, Significance Category:

AdminComments:

Bibliography archive: f & c, 01.004, p 42 Oxley, John 'Places of worship in South Africa', 1993, pp 34-36

Damage Types: