

GARRISON CHURCH, ROBBEN ISLAND

REPORT BY JOANNA MARX

FOLLOWING SITE INSPECTION on 17 JANUARY 2011 and PERUSAL OF SOME RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

Robben Island is famous for various reasons and it contains several exceptional buildings and sites. Foremost is the Garrison Church. In the opinion of Hans Fransen:

“This handsome little church is the oldest extant building on the island; it also predates most Anglican churches in the Cape.”

Desiree Picton-Seymour, another respected historical architecture writer:

“The square-towered Cape Gothic church was built in 1841 and is now an interdenominational meeting place. Startlingly white and washed by sea salt, it is one of the prettiest examples of this type of church building.”

After the site visit a list of observations was compiled, as well as some comments on the fabric of the church and its condition. At the time only the Specifications, the quotation by Indawo and a ‘report’ (actually a list) of work done by Adler Price in 2004 were available. Subsequently the proper Adler Price Construction Report was added.

From the site visit and the available documentation it is clear that through the past decade or more the church has not been given adequate and appropriate attention. The authorities have not informed themselves of the nature of the building and have appointed inadequately qualified contractors to work on it without expert supervision.

Currently it appears that this unfortunate tradition is to be continued, to the detriment of the structure which has already suffered grievous insults. This was demonstrated by observation on a relatively brief and therefore not thorough inspection of the building. It is in a disgraceful state of disrepair as a result of inappropriate and/or inadequate interventions and ongoing neglect.

Therefore it is recommended that the present proposed work at the church be suspended until a survey by a properly experienced restoration architect has been undertaken, followed by detailed recommendations.

Joanna Marx

Vernacular Architecture Society of SA; SPAB; previously also NMC and SAHRA

19 January 2011

GARRISON CHURCH, ROBBEN ISLAND REPORT BY JOANNA MARX

AVAILABLE DOCUMENTATION:

Picton-Seymour, D (1989)

Historical Buildings in South Africa, p 29. Struikhof Publishers, Cape Town

Fransen, H (2004)

The old buildings of the Cape, p 61. Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg & Cape Town

Adler Price, Cape Town

Robben Island: Repairs and Renovations to church and resource centre

Construction Report: The Garrison Church, 1841

WCS: 021470. Nov 2004

Robben Island Museum, Architecture Department

Specification of the work for Contract: R & R and general maintenance, village church at Church Street, Robben Island. Oct – Nov 2010

Indawo Painting and Waterproofing

Village Church, Church Street, Robben Island: Repairs & Renovation.

26 November 2010

Joanna Marx

Vernacular Architecture Society of SA, previously NMC and SAHRA

19 January 2011