

**The Castle of Good Hope**

Cape Town



A guide to the Castle of Good Hope, including interesting facts and it's history



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**The Castle of Good Hope**

Over the centuries six different flags have flown over the Castle, yet in all that time not a single shot has ever been fired in anger at it or from it.



**1** The Gateway and Bell Tower added (1682-1684) by Simon van der Stel and the visiting Commissioner van Goens. This entrance replaced the original one on the sea-facing curtain wall between Buuren and Catzenellenbogen.

**Why a fort at the Cape of Good Hope?**

With the expansion of world trade by the European powers in the 1500s, trade routes were vital to economic power. The main trade route to the East used to be overland, but in 1453 Constantinople was captured by the Turks which effectively closed off this trade passage. Other routes east had to be found.

The dominant European seafaring nation at that time was Portugal, so the Portuguese needed to find a way to the East by sea. After they had made many voyages down the west coast of Africa, sailing further each time, Bartholomeu Dias rounded the Cape in 1488, and in 1498 Vasco da Gama finally succeeded in making the voyage to the East and came back laden with spices. In 1503 Antonio de Saldanha put in at Table Bay and climbed Table Mountain to get his bearings. While doing so, he made a discovery that would change the course of southern African history: there was abundant fresh water, a key requirement for a halfway station to break the long voyage to the East.

Three factors, however, allowed the Dutch to gain a strong foothold at the Cape. Firstly, the Portuguese avoided the Cape after an incident in which 64 of their men were killed by the local inhabitants. Secondly, when Portugal became virtually a province of Spain, she suffered at the hands of Spain's enemies, especially the English and the Dutch. Thirdly, an attempt to claim the Cape for England was not

brushwork. Timber and brick were used on interior structures. The fort was surrounded by a moat, which was fed by the Varsche River. As a defensive structure it was very poor: the outer walls collapsed more than once under heavy rains. For several years it served its primary function as a provision station and, luckily, no major attack by the local Khoi-na or a foreign power threatened its existence. An accurate model of this fort can be seen today in the Military Museum in Block E.

At the same time as the fort was being built and subsequently maintained, the Company's Garden was planted to fulfil the primary goal of the endeavour – to supply passing ships with fresh produce.

Jan van Riebeeck left for Batavia in 1662, leaving behind the fort he had built and a defensive line of smaller forts along the Liesbeeck River and two small forts at the mouth of the Salt River. These defences along the Liesbeeck were to protect livestock and grazing land. By 1672 the little settlement had over 200 inhabitants.



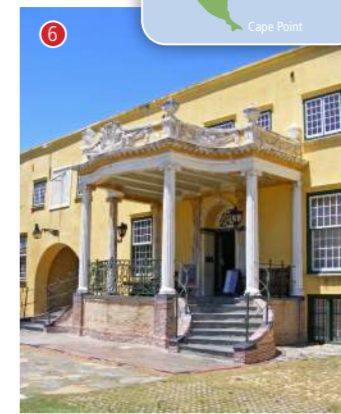
**4** The Ravelin was added in 1697 just after the new entrance and Bell Tower were moved to this position. The idea behind the Ravelin was the concept of 'defence in depth'. The entrance road angles right which does not allow an enemy a direct shot at the entrance gate.



**5** This corner of the Inner Court was first developed by Simon van der Stel in about 1690 with a flower garden and exotic and indigenous trees which surrounded a small circular pool. His son, Willem Adriaan van der Stel, enlarged the pool to its present size. The pool was demolished in 1860 and restored in 1984.

bastions would cover all fields of fire, even right up to the base of the curtain walls between bastions. Each bastion was given the name of one of the official titles of the Prince of Orange, these being Leerdam, Oranje, Buuren, Catzenellenbogen and Nassau. The average distance from bastion to bastion was 180 m; the average height of the curtain wall was 10 m.

Most of the materials needed for the Castle were found locally, the bulk of the raw material being stone and mortar. Materials that could not be procured at the Cape were brought in from Europe. These were more specialised materials like the *klompjes* (little yellowish or red bricks used as ballast in VOC ships) that can be seen at the main entrance gate. Wood was obtained locally at Hout Bay and from overseas.



**6** Strictly speaking, the name 'Kat Balcony' is incorrectly used; it seems to have stuck for this balcony or porch. It was referred to as the *puije* by those who built and first used it. Its creation is attributed to Anton Anreith and Louis Michel Thibault.

After the location of the Castle had been settled upon, the area had to be cleared of bush and levelled. Hendrik Lacus did all the measuring and the taking of levels. Foundations were started with the concentration of work on Leerdam Bastion. Foundations were 5 m wide, and a depth of 3.5 m was required to reach bedrock. While the digging was taking place, the stone for the foundations was being cut out of Signal Hill in large blocks; it was then broken up and transported by cart to the Castle. Blue slate used for the walls and shells used in making mortar were obtained from Robben Island. (The mortar consisted of one part lime from shells mixed with one part clay.)

The workforce needed for the biggest building project of its time in the Cape was first sourced from soldiers not on military duty. Slaves and a few Khoi-na where also roped into the project. As the urgency to finish the project escalated, incentives for the soldiers were put in place, free burghers brought in to help with the transporting of material, and, at one stage, a proclamation was made that anyone passing the Castle, male or female, regardless of rank, had to carry baskets of soil to help excavate the moat. At any given time 200 to 300 people worked on the Castle.

The laying of the foundation stone in Leerdam Bastion by Commander Wagenaer on 2 January 1666 was a big occasion in the small settlement. It was celebrated on site with a feast of two oxen, six sheep and much fanfare.

The Castle was not built by laying the foundation for the whole castle and then building the bastions and curtain walls up at the same time. Leerdam was the first bastion to be worked on; when it had been built up to the required height, its curtain walls were then constructed. Catzenellenbogen and its curtain walls were then brought up to the required height. Oranje and

supported by the king. The way was therefore clear for the Dutch to increase their trade with the East, stopping frequently at the Cape. In 1602 they had established the Dutch East India Company (VOC) which was a combination of many traders working together to share financial risk and resources. The VOC subsequently grew into a powerful international company which in 1649 decided that it would establish a formal refreshment station at the Cape, on the recommendation of Leendert Janzen. This was considered a good investment and Jan van Riebeeck was commissioned to establish such a post. On 6 April 1652 he anchored in Table Bay to establish a permanent settlement. One of his first tasks was to build a fort as the interests of the Dutch East India Company's latest asset had to be protected at all costs.



**2** A visible section of Van Rhee's cross-wall which runs from Catzenellenbogen Bastion to mid-point of the curtain wall between Leerdam and Oranje. This wall was built to make an inner and outer court for a better defensive solution.

**The first fort built at the Cape of Good Hope**

Two days after setting foot on the shores of Table Bay, Commander van Riebeeck started work on the Fort de Goede Hoop which was situated on the shoreline on the site of the present-day Parade parking lot next to the Golden Acre building. His choice of design was the novel square with two-gun bastions at each corner. These bastions were the same shape as the ones seen on the Castle today.

The four bastions of this original fort were named after the ships that brought Van Riebeeck's party to the Cape: *Oliphaant*, *Rijger*, *Drommedaris* and *Walvisch*. The outer walls were constructed using sods, clay, and

**The need for a castle**

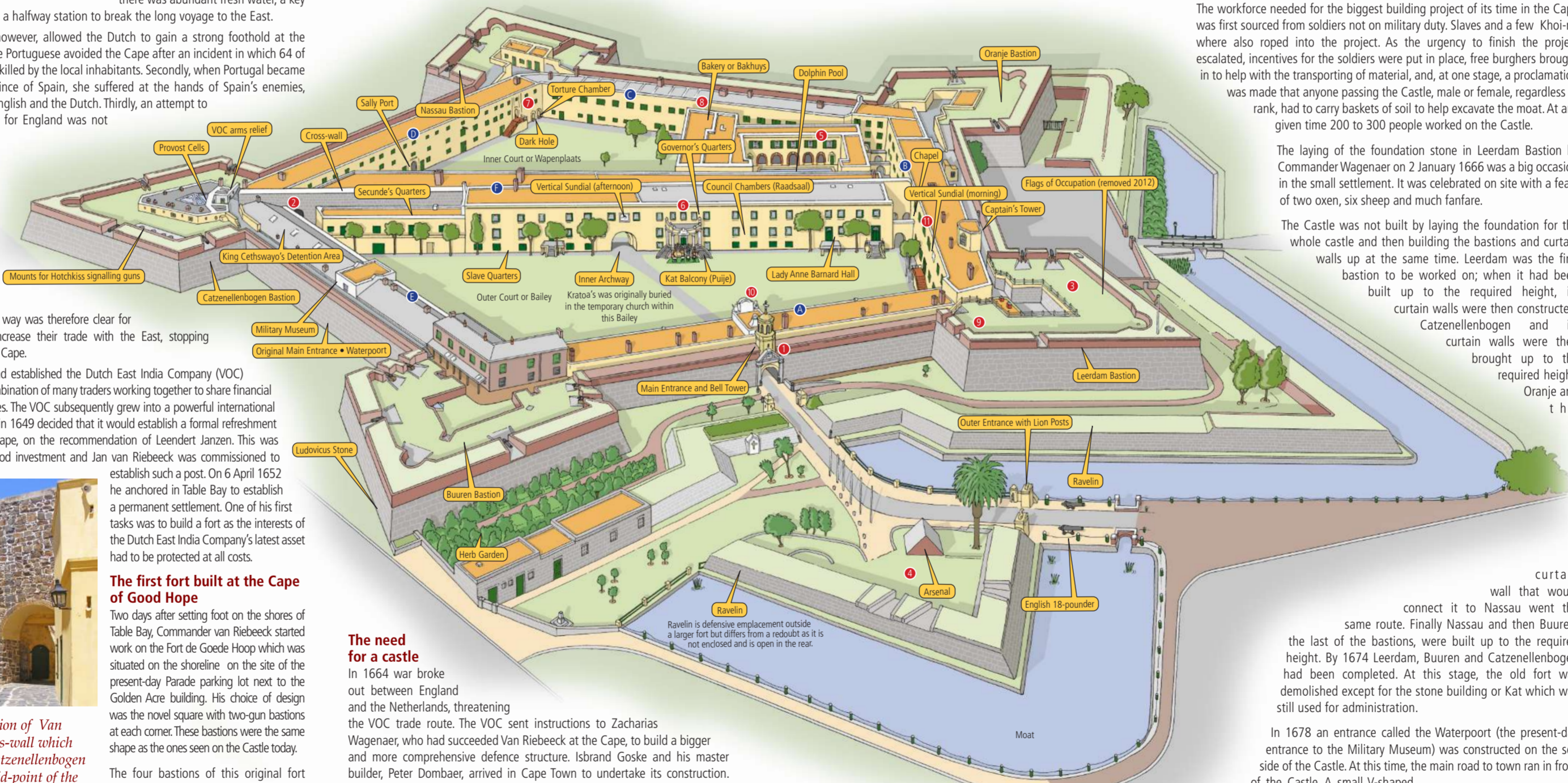
In 1664 war broke out between England and the Netherlands, threatening the VOC trade route. The VOC sent instructions to Zacharias Wagenaer, who had succeeded Van Riebeeck at the Cape, to build a bigger and more comprehensive defence structure. Isbrand Goske and his master builder, Peter Dombaer, arrived in Cape Town to undertake its construction. Goske brought with him up-to-date plans for a modern castle and defence line that could withstand an attack from the superior tactics, weaponry and firepower that had evolved during the Renaissance in Europe. These advances had rendered the design and structure of the original fort obsolete.

The design of this new castle was associated with the renowned French fortress engineer, Sebastien Vauban. Menno, Baron van Coehoorn, a Dutch artillery and military engineer, was also associated with the final design, a key feature of which was the introduction of tapering outer walls, extremely thick at the base, but thinner at the top. This revolutionary design made the cannon balls ricochet off the wall whereas a right-angle hit would weaken the wall far faster. Breaching the wall (by means of concentrated fire and explosive charges placed in the weakened area) became extremely difficult owing to the thickness of the wall and the nature of the tapering design, which did not easily collapse under its own weight. The other feature of this revolutionary design was the extensive defensive positions outside the main wall, based on the premise of defence in depth. This system allowed defenders to enfilade or fire into the flanks of attackers.

The Castle was designed in the shape of a pentagon with, at each of its corners, a bastion containing its own gunpowder magazine. Cannon positions atop these



**3** A view from Leerdam Bastion. This bastion and Oranje are higher than the bastions on the seaward side, allowing gunners from these positions to shoot over the seaward bastions.



curtain wall that would connect it to Nassau went the same route. Finally Nassau and then Buuren, the last of the bastions, were built up to the required height. By 1674 Leerdam, Buuren and Catzenellenbogen had been completed. At this stage, the old fort was demolished except for the stone building or Kat which was still used for administration.

In 1678 an entrance called the Waterpoort (the present-day entrance to the Military Museum) was constructed on the sea side of the Castle. At this time, the main road to town ran in front of the Castle. A small V-shaped ravelin was placed in front of the Waterpoort to protect the entrance; in 1860 this site was replaced by the Imhoff Battery which overlooked the sea.

Leerdam and Oranje, which are on the land side of the Castle, were built higher than their counterparts so as to allow the ability to fire over them to protect the seaward approach. Single- and double-storey utility buildings were erected along the sides of the inner curtain walls of the Castle.

In 1679 the Castle was declared finished and the bastions were named. Sadly, the man who had watched over the later part of this project, Governor Johan Bax van Herenthals, died in 1678, never to occupy the castle in which he had taken such an interest.



**9** The most common cannon at the Castle was known as a 'gun'. It is a smooth-bore muzzleloader. Note the red brickwork added during the British Occupation.

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### The Outer Court viewed from the Main Entrance

**Thoroughfare through the Cross-wall to the Inner Court.**  
The quarters of the Zulu king, Cetshwayo, when he was imprisoned at the Castle in 1879.

**The Cross-wall, of Robben Island slate, was built on the order of Van Rheeke in 1685. It measures 12 m high, 3.5 m wide and runs 116 m, the full length of block F.**

**The Vertical Sundial was used in the afternoon for keeping the official time for the settlement.**

**The William Fehr Collection of historical paintings and period furniture is housed in the Governor's Quarters.**

**Block B is the oldest section of the Castle. This section contains the main foyer, ceremonial offices, kitchens and the Captain's Tower.**

**The Waterpoort entrance to the Military Museum and Curio Shop. This was the original entrance to the Castle.**

**The Inner Archway which leads to the Inner Court. Within the Archway, there is wooden block paving to reduce noise and help in muddy conditions. Also found here are the Castle Well and a WWI Memorial dedicated to South African soldiers.**

**The Kat Balcony (Puije) was originally built in 1695 but changed in 1786 to the Baroque form we see today. All important proclamations were made from here.**

**The Governor's Quarters contained the Grand Hall where the Council of Policy met. Today it houses the William Fehr Collection, the Peacock Room and Banqueting Hall.**

**The Vertical Sundial was used in the morning.**

**Thoroughfare to the Dolphin Pool and Inner Court.**

**The Secunde's House, built in 1695, housed the second in command. The residence contained a kitchen, a living and dining floor and sleeping quarters at the top. The entrance to the Good Hope Gallery is found here.**

**Stairs to Buuren Bastion.**

### The Outer Court viewed from the Inner Archway towards the Entrance Gate

**The Inner Gable with an allegorical trophy of arms of which the original, carved in teak, can be found in the Grain Cellar (Block F). The two figures flanking the gable were reconstructed from Lady Anne Barnard's paintings.**

**Block A housed the Main Guardroom, Clothing Store and Salt Store.**

**De Goeverneur Restaurant**

**Stairs to Buuren Bastion.**

**Block A contained the Wheat Store, Powder Magazine under Leerdam Bastion and barracks for artillerymen. Today you will find the Information Centre here.**

**Main entrance. Canons on either side of the gate were placed here to protect the corners from damage from passing traffic.**

**The cast iron columns along the full length of Block A used to be wood but are now painted to resemble marble.**

**Powder Magazine under Buuren Bastion.**

### The Inner Court viewed from the Inner Archway

**Block D contained the Oil Cellar, Iron Store, Merchandise Store, Apothecary, Sally Port, Dispenser's Store and Carpenter's Shop.**

**Block C contained the Medicine Store, Clerk's Lodging, Laboratory, Bombardier's Room, new Blacksmith's Shop, new Wainwright's Shop and the new Cooper's Shop.**

**The Dolphin Pool was restored to its former glory after being uncovered in 1981.**

**The Sally Port is a small opening to the outside of the Castle from which troops could sally forth or flee suddenly from the Castle.**

**Stairs to Nassau Bastion.**

**The Dark Hole or Donker Gat is a dungeon that was originally used to store ammunition and gunpowder, but due to dampness it became a coal store room.**

**The Torture Chamber was a place for extracting confessions as required under Dutch law. The inverted horseshoe on the door suggested one's luck had run out.**

**The Bakhuys or Bakery which was rebuilt on its original foundations in 1987-89.**

### The Inner Court viewed towards the Inner Archway

**The Inner Archway. Old canons were placed at the edges to protect the walls from damage by passing carts.**

**The Cross-wall with a secondary thoroughfare between the Inner and Outer Courts.**

**The Bakhuys or Bakery also housed the Coal Cellar in 1710.**

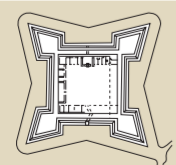
**The Textile Store and Lime Cellar.**

**The reddish shutters and doors of the Grain Store were to remind workers and soldiers of the need for caution regarding fire: no smoking was permitted in this area.**

**Beams and hooks were used for getting material and supplies to the upper floors.**

#### Timeline

**6 April 1652** Jan van Riebeeck sets up the first permanent settlement at the Cape under the VOC and Dutch jurisdiction. He builds the Fort de Goede Hoop.



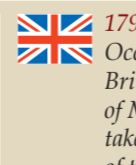
**1665** Under the guidance of Isbrand Goske work starts on a new castle. It is formally declared complete in 1679.



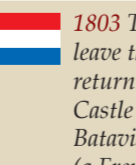
**1682** Under the command of Simon van der Stel the entrance to the Castle is moved to its present position.



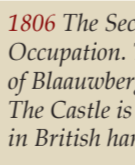
**1685** Commissioner van Rheeke, on visiting the Cape, recommends that a Cross-wall be built.



**1795** The First British Occupation. The British win the Battle of Muizenberg and take control of the Castle.



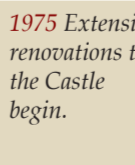
**1803** The British leave the Cape, returning the Castle to the Batavian Republic (a French vassal).



**1806** The Second British Occupation. The Battle of Blaauwberg is fought. The Castle is once again in British hands.



**1922** The Castle is transferred to the South African government.



**1936** The Castle is declared a National Monument.

**1975** Extensive renovations to the Castle begin.

**1994** New South Africa: a new flag flies over the Castle.

#### Other historical events in that year

**First Anglo-Dutch War:** the opening battle is fought off Dover, between Lt-Admiral Maarten Harpertzoon Tromp's 42 Dutch ships and 21 English ships divided into two squadrons, one commanded by Robert Blake and the other by Nehemiah Bourne.

**Margaret Porteous** is the first person recorded as dying of the plague in the Great Plague of London. Two-thirds of Londoners leave the city, but over 68,000 die that year.

**At the mouth of the Mississippi River, Louisiana,** Robert de la Salle buries an engraved plate and a cross, claiming the territory as La Louisiane for France.

**Louis XIV** issues the Edict of Fontainebleau and declares Protestantism illegal, thus depriving Huguenots of civil rights. Some Huguenots later move to the Cape.

**The French** occupy Utrecht in the Netherlands, revolution breaks out in Amsterdam and the Batavian Republic is proclaimed.

**Napoleon Bonaparte** begins making preparations to invade England.

**Francis II, the last Holy Roman Emperor,** abdicates, thus ending the Holy Roman Empire after about 1000 years.

**The British Broadcasting Company (BBC)** is formed.

**King George V** of the United Kingdom dies.

**Bill Gates** founds Microsoft in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

**Nelson Mandela** is inaugurated as South Africa's first black president.

www.wikipedia.org

Commander Simon van der Stel took up his position in 1680 and housed himself in the quarters between Leerdam and Oranje. His first contribution to structural change was the repositioning of the main gate to between Leerdam and Buuren as he found the old entrance, being so close to the sea, was not functioning well: at times, in big storms, waves would flood the courtyard. This new gate, completed in 1684, is one of the gems of the Castle. It comprised an octagonal bell tower made from *klompjes* with a bell which has the inscription in Latin: 'With the blessing of the Lord of earth, exalted on high, Claudius Frey made me in Amsterdam in the year 1697.' The gate is made of stone and the pediment bears a lion and crown. The lion holds seven arrows symbolising the seven provinces of the United Netherlands. Under this is a row showing the coats of arms of the VOC chambers, from left to right: Horn, Delft, Amsterdam, Middelburg, Rotterdam and Enkhuizen. These are flanked by the VOC monogram. A ravelin was constructed as an outer entrance in front of the new gate. The design of this ravelin forces the road into the Castle at a right angle. This approach to the main gate meant that an attacking force could not shoot directly at the gate.



#### Restoration of the Castle

Years of military use and neglect were the reason for a grand restoration project as the Castle had become an important tourist attraction. Plans were drawn up in 1975; 30 years and R32 million later, the Castle had been restored, not to its former glory, but to reflect the many periods it had gone through. The Kat Balcony was restored to its most elegant time of the 1780s and the Military Museum to the 1870s. The best and most interesting items from all the periods were combined to reflect its entire history. The big projects undertaken were the redigging of the moat and connecting it to its original water source, and rebuilding the Bakery and the Dolphin Pool. All the upper walkways had to be dug up and waterproofed, and the slate replaced with blue slate similar to the original slate. Major work was done on the Clock Tower and the inner gable was remodelled with the addition of the two flanking figures lost over time. Many hidden rooms were discovered and frescoes brought to light during the restoration, which lasted till 1993.

#### The Castle – a home to many

The Castle was a melting pot of people from all over the world – soldiers, slaves, civilians, European, Asian and African. Many passed through like shadows but some left their mark, generating stories that give life and soul to this stone fort. Simon van der Stel, the commander of the Cape from 1680, established the beautiful town of Stellenbosch and, after leaving the Castle, he established Groot Constantia – one of the best wine estates in the world.

Another person who lived at the Castle and made an outstanding contribution to life at the Cape was Lady Anne Barnard. She arrived in 1797 as the wife of the colonial secretary and acted as official hostess for the governor. In this role she held elegant parties which played an important part in the social life of the colony, not least because she encouraged contact between the Dutch and the English. She travelled widely and provided a valuable picture of daily life at the time through her diaries, sketches and paintings – these were even of indirect assistance with the renovations two centuries later. The uniform worn by Castle guards today is based on her illustrations of a 'coloured' soldier in 1800. An unwilling guest was Cetshwayo, King of the Zulus. After a great victory at Isandlwana in 1879 and then a defeat at his home at Ulundi, he was exiled to the Castle with his wives. His prison was the area used by the Military Museum today. However, the usual place for prisoners was the Provost Cells in Catzenellenbogen Bastion. Some interesting graffiti and drawings can be seen on the doors of these cells.

Pieter Kolbe, appointed as the first official astronomer at the Cape, arrived from Germany in 1705, and set up his observatory in Buuren Bastion. Anton Anreith was a German sculptor and woodcarver who did a great deal of work at the Cape, to which he brought the German Rococo style. He worked closely with military engineer and architect Louis Michel Thibault (as shown on the Kat Balcony) and also created the lions on the path to the Gateway at the Castle. He had his workshop in the Castle, and ran the first art school in the country.

Ghosts have long been part of the fabric of the Castle, from one which rang the bell in the tower to the cheerful ghosts of Lady Anne Barnard and her guests who are heard before there is suddenly silence once more. Another is a two-metre tall figure which steps off the rampart and vanishes. Then there is the ghost of Governor Pieter Noodt, who walks the Castle corridors at night. He was a cruel and hated ruler who sentenced many men to death. In 1729 one of these unfortunate men, about to die, cursed Noodt: that same day Noodt, relaxing in his chair, fell asleep, never to wake. One of the most loved characters that made the Castle his home was a shipwrecked poodle named Schiffer who was adopted by the soldiers. What made him so loved for over 20 years was that

he saved many soldiers from being punished for sleeping on guard duty. He made it his duty to walk about 20 paces in front of the night patrol; if he came across a sentry that he thought was asleep, a bark and a jump would put him back on his feet. What is even more remarkable about Schiffer is that for the last two or three years of his life he did this duty completely blind.

#### Exhibitions, displays and ceremonies

The key ceremony plays out daily in the morning and at noon. The morning ceremony at 10 am (for the convenience of visitors) entails the gate key being fetched under escort from the governor's quarters. It is taken to the main gate; the wicket gate (a small personnel door within the main gate) is opened and, if all is well, the bell is rung, the main gate is opened and the sentries take up their positions. A little bronze cannon is fired in the Outer Bailey. The key is then returned to the governor's quarters. The noon ceremony is similar but in reverse.

#### For More Information

##### Entrance Fees:

Adults: R50  
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(Please check [www.castleofgoodhope.co.za](http://www.castleofgoodhope.co.za) for current prices.)

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Thanks to Shelley Brown for editorial input.  
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*View of the Inner Gable, showing the iron pillars (painted to look like marble) which replaced the original wooden pillars. The remodelled sculpted figures can be seen on either side of the gable.*



*The Lodging for the Captain. The morning vertical sundial is seen on the wall. The Captain's Tower was used as a lookout. It is the only one remaining of several that were built.*

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