

A Brief History of the Germiston Presbyterian



*The earliest known photograph of the present church.
By courtesy of 'The Star' from the week-end magazine 1906.*

Church

Preface

The St. Andrews Presbyterian Church building of Germiston celebrates its centenary in 2005. This booklet captures the history of a building that took less than a year to construct, suffered numerous financial difficulties and is now a National Monument.

As part of the centenary celebration several events have been organised during the year. Reverend John McKane designed a special logo for the event. Although simple in design, the logo encompasses a great deal of symbolism.

Germiston in the early days

In 1849 Johan George (Schalk) Meyer bought the farm Elandsfontein, which measured the distance that could be travelled on horseback for an hour in each of the four wind directions, in exchange for an ox wagon.



In 1885 half of the original farm, Elandsfontein, was given to two merchants (August Simmer and John Jack) who ran a trading store at Lake Chrissie in Mpumalanga, in lieu of payment for provisions supplied to Johan Meyer. Prospecting and mining started in and around Johannesburg and when Elandsfontein No. 1 was proclaimed as public diggings in 1886, John Jack rushed back to retain the land rights.

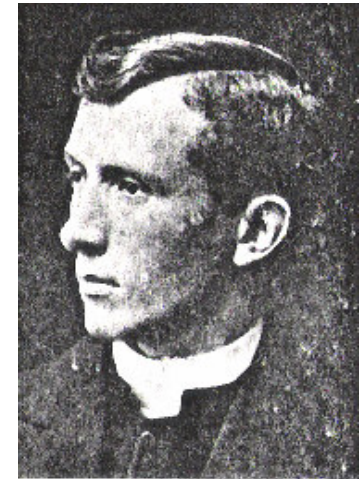
In August 1887 John Jack registered the Simmer & Jack Gold Mining Co. A village developed as a result of the influx of miners and merchants. John Jack affectionately named the village Germiston, after the farm in Scotland, east of Glasgow, where he was born in 1849. The Dinwiddie family had owned the Germiston manor in Scotland since the early 1700's. From this dusty start, Germiston was soon to become the largest railway centre in South Africa.



The Germiston Presbyterian Church was the first church to be established (1890) in Germiston in a simple wood and iron building on the corner of President and Church streets, opposite the Clement Mine Shaft, which was opened in 1893. John Jack had given the four stands, running from President to Meyer streets in addition to 500 Pounds, for construction. Germiston entered an era of prosperity with escalating property values in the area. Church finances were not very robust and so the church stand was leased and would later become the site of Ward & Sammons. The wood and iron church building was physically lifted by a hundred Simmer & Jack mine labourers and moved to the adjacent stand in Church Street.

The new site

Worship was almost discontinued during the Anglo Boer war years, except for the services held for the troops by Major Murray. In 1902 a Call was made to the Reverend John Scott, previously from Yeoville and in 1904 the Session, under his guidance, decided to build a new church. Two elders of the Session, Dr Strachan and Mr Ross, were requested to find suitable sites. Stands 244 and 245 in Germiston



West on Broad Street (later renamed Odendaal Street) were deemed to be the most suitable and an offer of 2,500 Pounds was made for the stands to the Consolidated Gold Fields Co. in May 1904. The alternative was to build on the vacant stand, on Meyer Street, owned by the church.

The congregation was divided over the new Broad Street site, which was located on the edge of town on what was generally known as Market Square. A water well existed on the site chosen for the church and is directly below the present day altar. During later years as a result of the floor collapsing, the well was filled with rock and sealed.

The frenzy

In October 1904 a competition for the best church design, with a first prize of 50 Pounds and a second prize of 25 Pounds, was advertised in a two column advert in the Rand Daily Mail. Within four weeks 12 designs had been received and the Session had selected the two finalists whose submissions best demonstrated that the church could be built on the proposed budget of 6,000 Pounds.

A R Le Gerche submitted a "Cosmo" design and A W Simpson submitted an "Octagon" design. The Octagon design was typically Neo-Gothic with a prominent octagon interior roof and would seat 550 people. Nothing is known about the Cosmo design or any of the other designs. Both architects were interviewed on 7 December 1904 and questioned on their designs especially on whether the church could be built for 6,000 Pounds or less. Simpson was adamant the Octagon design would cost no more and staked his prize money and architectural fee as a guarantee. Le Gerche however, was not as confident. The Session thus awarded the first prize to A W Simpson of 30 Empire road, Johannesburg. The prize money was, however, held back until the builder's quotes had been received.

Tenders for construction, based on a 40 page specification, with the internal pillars removed at the Session's request, were placed in the East Rand Express and The Star newspapers.

The Annual General Meeting in January 1905 approved the raising of a 7,000 pound bond to cover construction and including furniture which had not been considered in the original estimate. Thirteen tenders were reviewed on 20 February 1905 at the Session meeting with quotes varying between 5,375 and 9,220 Pounds - some using stone while others used a brick construction. Amended tenders were then called for from the three most suitable tenderers. The final contract was awarded to Smith and Saunders and was signed on 24 February 1905 for the construction of the Octagon design, with a foundation of "Boksburg stone", brick walls and cement fascias with stucco mouldings, at a firm price of 5,942 Pounds. Simpson had thus been right and received the 50 pound prize as well as the 148 pound architectural fee.

Preparations for construction got underway immediately. Plans were approved by the local authorities on 7 March 1905 and construction advanced at such a rate that the cornerstone could be laid eight days later on 15 March 1905!

Laying of the corner stone

Proceedings commenced at four o'clock in the afternoon during a rainstorm with the singing of Psalm 100 accompanied by the Police Band conducted by Mr. Smith.

The cornerstone was laid by Viscount Alfred Milner, born 1854 and the son of a university lecturer. He was educated at Oxford, became a newspaper editor and after a parliamentary career was appointed as Colonial Secretary to South Africa. He died in 1925.

The silver trowel used for the stone laying was purchased from Mr Bold, the local jeweller.

Lord Milner declared the stone "well and truly laid" and the scripture was read by Reverend R B Douglas of Jeppestown, followed by a short overview of the church history by Mr Brammer, a church elder. The moderator of the Transvaal Presbytery, Reverend Ross, thanked Lord Milner and Reverend Millward read the benediction. Lord Milner received three cheers from the enthusiastic crowd.



Construction period

Construction then advanced at an unbelievable pace and was closely monitored by the Session members. One of the modifications made during construction was to change the proposed pillars at the vestibule entrance to granite on a stone base at a cost of 2 Pounds. The original church had a second wooden spire in the center of the roof, but was later removed due to it becoming unstable and dangerous.

In June 1905 a further contract was placed for the hall and manse on the adjacent stand at a cost of 3,311 Pounds (the budget had been 3,260 Pounds). The manse was to be on the corner of President Street. The design was a combined submission by Simpson and Le Gerche.

The first church service at the new location was held 8 October 1905 in the hall that had already been completed and was conducted by Reverend John Smith of Pietermaritzburg and Reverend John Scott.

Designs were sought for the organ, pulpit and church seating. The pulpit was designed by Moffat Hutchins & Co. and cost 65 Pounds.

Church seating designs were for a “straight” or a “curved” arrangement and Simpson decided on a compromised straight pew design, but arranged in a curve. Canadian oak, finished to “light antique” was selected for all furniture.

In 1905 a contract for a hydraulically driven pipe organ was placed with organ builders Norman & Beard Ltd. in England at a contract price of 1,500 Pounds. The organ, one of three built and commonly referred to as the three musketeers, was delivered duty free (church organs were exempt from duty at that time) in May 1906. Water to drive the organ was obtained via a 3-inch pipe off the Broad Street water connection. In true Presbyterian style, nothing was wasted and the expended water was to be sold to Dr Gairdner, but it is not clear as to what he used the water for.

The organ was soon entralling the locals with its magnificent sound that filled the great church building during services and very popular organ recitals. The recitals were held on a monthly basis with the organist receiving half of the ticket sales.

In 1910 the cost of water for the organ had risen significantly and Reverend Scott analysed the cost and advantages of electrifying the organ. He concluded it would be more cost-effective to electrify the bellows of the organ due to the favourable electricity tariff of the Victoria Falls Power Co. In

1971 an electronic organ was contemplated, but after being demonstrated at a service, the congregation firmly resolved to keep the pipe organ with its 1800 pipes. During a re-organisation of the pulpit and altar area in later years, the organist was moved from being in the center where the present day stairs are, to the Western wall.

The St. Andrews’ organ is the only one of the three musketeers still in operation today. Although costly to maintain and tune, the organ has served the church well and is truly a great asset.

With the inclusion of the manse, hall, organ and seating, the budget had now been increased to 14,455 Pounds. Realising the financial pressure looming, an Organ Fund was established to lessen “the debt burden” – a phrase that was to become a major factor in the years ahead. As was customary at the time seats were rented to the congregation. Single seats were 1 pound per year, while eight-seater pews cost 5 Pounds.

Official opening

In the meantime excitement was at an all time high and the official opening and dedication of the church, in the name of St. Andrew, took place before the organ was installed, on



Saturday afternoon 27 January 1906 at 4.20pm. Lord Selborne, the High Commissioner for South Africa, performed the ceremony and other dignitaries included Reverends Ross, Millward and Gray from surrounding churches; the Germiston Mayor, Mr. James Blaine and his council; Mr John Jack & his wife Jane and many of the 230 church members.

The Central South African Railways Volunteers Brass band was under the command of Major Dickburn.

The Session later recorded "their sense of joy and gratitude that the building of so excellent a Temple for the worship of God has been accomplished". On 11 February 1906, 88

members held the first Ordinance of the Lord's Supper in the new church. In March 1908 the bell from the old church in Church Street church was transferred to the new church. In 1960, the bell ringing was replaced with bell recordings played through speakers in the belfry. The amplifier system was dedicated in honour of Mr Brammer in December 1960. The bell ringing has since been discontinued entirely due to complaints received from the public.

Paraffin heaters were purchased in May 1908 ahead of the forthcoming winter. These served well until they were replaced with electric heaters in 1947. These are still in use today.

The troubled years

The church continued to attract members, hundreds of baptisms were performed and the church became a favourite wedding venue. The congregation really enjoyed their worship in this fine church. However, all was not well with the church finances. The National Bank in Germiston stopped honouring the church's cheques and demanded a payment of 1,000 Pounds if foreclosure of the bond was to be avoided. Many meetings were held with the bank manager in an effort to resolve the situation, to no avail. The bank wanted their money and the church was unable to pay. In a desperate effort all options were considered, including the selling of the church to the Dutch Reformed Church for 10,000 Pounds and the selling of the organ to the Wesleyan Central Hall for 1,800 Pounds. The congregation was not in favour of either.

Then the solution appeared in the Call of a new minister, Reverend Barnes from Maitland in the Cape. Reverend Barnes established "congregational fund raising circles" and established the debt relief fund. The congregation stood together on the plan and raised an average of 600 Pounds per year to reduce the debt. Finally in 1932 the



bond had been paid off. There was great excitement as recorded in a special "Debt Extinction Souvenir edition" of the Church Messenger.

At a special service the bond papers were physically burned, with a vow being taken that never again would the church be bonded. Congratulations flowed in from far and wide.

In Barnes's words to the congregation: "Something attempted, something done".

The church had been saved !

Memorials

In 1929 Mr Philips, one the church founder members, passed away and was honoured with a tablet on the eastern wall. The tablet was unveiled with a few verses of "Abide with me". A second tablet was later mounted in honour of Mrs Philips.

A plaque to those who fell in the two world wars is mounted on the eastern wall.

1955 saw the new floor tiles being laid on the steps and the porch at the vestibule.

The 50th Jubilee Service was held 22 November 1955 and the 75th Anniversary of the church on Wednesday, 25 February 1981 when the church building was declared a National Monument. It is still the only National Monument in Germiston. The then-Administrator of the Transvaal, Mr. Willem Cruywagen, unveiled the National Monument Plaque which is mounted on the porch. A porcelain plate was also produced to commemorate the proclamation.



The Stained Glass windows

When one enters the church, one is greeted by two striking features. Firstly, the magnificent organ which has previously been discussed and secondly, the awesome stained glass windows. These windows carry much of the history in their brilliant colours that filter down on the seated congregation.

On 22 September 1929 Mr Charles Brammer, one of the founder members was honoured with the unveiling of the "Charles Brammer Window" on the eastern side of the church.

The "War Window" was dedicated in November 1947 and unveiled by the Governor General. The window depicts many wartime scenes with a strong presence of Jesus.

In 1983 the third eastern window" was dedicated to Mr Westfield who had long served the church as an elder. The style of the glass is more modern and less traditional in design than the other windows.

1986 saw the unveiling of two of the “Apostle Windows” (St Mark & St. John) in honour of Mr Kenneth MacDonald. The remaining two “Apostle Windows” (St. Luke & St. Mathew) were unveiled in 2005 in memory of his wife Grace..

The winged creature, as one of the most ancient and enduring Christian symbols, is common to all four windows. The windows were designed and crafted by Mrs. Estelle Valle.

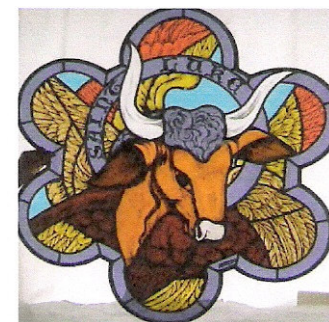
St. Matthew is depicted by a winged creature with a man’s face because his Gospel traces the genealogy and human aspects of Jesus.



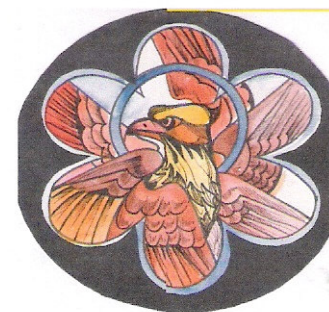
The St. Mark window with a winged creature and a lion’s face symbolizes the opening of his Gospel “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” suggests the roar of a lion.



The third window has an Ox with the winged creature to symbolize the sacrifice of an animal in St Luke’s story of Zacharias, the temple priest.



Finally, the St. John window has the head of an Eagle with the winged creature suggesting height, because St. John rises to the loftiest heights in dealing with the mind of Jesus in his Gospel.



The three rose windows at the rear of the church were a gift from Mrs Burniston in 1987.

Reverend Nicol Binnie had the centre rose window above the gallery (The Triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem) decorated in 1988 in honour of his wife, Doris. The window receives a great deal of acclaim in books on church stained glass.



The smaller windows represent the life of Jesus. Those on the left, being prior to the entry and the ones on the right, being after the entry. The six smaller ones were commissioned in 2006 by the Jooste family.

All ten of these windows are quatrefoil, representing the four Evangelists and are the work of Estelle Valle.

Centenary Renovations

A wooden cross made from Baltic Deon was introduced to the church on Palm Sunday 2003 and now stands proud alongside the pulpit.



2005 saw the replacement of the West side windows which were originally a semi-clear green glass, with amber coloured glass, giving the church a beautiful "sunset golden" ambiance. Set into the windows at large are 12 plates

In 2006 a generous donation was received from a member which allowed the entire church to be renovated and restored to its previous glory.

What value to a vow?

In 1966 it had been proposed to build a manse in Lambton on a stand donated by Mr Gibb. The budget was 6,000 Pounds and a bond of 5,000 Pounds was proposed. Older members reacted to the very thought of a bond in view of the vow that had previously been made in 1932. Presbytery was consulted without success and eventually a compromise was reached to bond the manse itself rather than the church.

Name change

At a Session meeting in 1951, under the leadership of Reverend Copeland, it was decided to rename the church "St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church of Germiston" from the previous name of "Germiston Presbyterian Church". This was done because when the church had originally been opened in 1906, it was dedicated to St. Andrew. The name change was finally ratified in 1973 at an Extraordinary Congregational Meeting when the Deeds of the church were transferred to the congregation from Presbytery.

Looking back

The St. Andrews Presbyterian Church of Germiston has served its congregation well over the past 100 years. The Church rose up from the dusty streets of a typical mining town at the turn of the century and was most definitely the most gracious building at the time. There had been problems with the roof leaking which proved to be the weakest point of the entire design. Due to financial difficulties the Church was almost sold during the debt burden period. Many adornments have been added during the years and both the interior and exterior has been repainted many times. Thousands of baptisms, confirmations, marriages and funeral services have been conducted over the years. The building was declared a National Monument and today remains one of the most glorious buildings in Germiston.

We trust in God that St Andrew's Presbyterian Church of Germiston may stand to His glory for another 100 years.

Researched and compiled by Ken R. Mutch in
association with John Cubitt & other members.
All rights reserved - 2007