

St George's Cathedral Cape Town



Union, and later of the Republic of South Africa.

St George's Cathedral (also referred to as The Cathedral Church of St George the Martyr) is the Anglican cathedral in Cape Town, and the seat of the Archbishop of Cape Town. St. George's Cathedral is both the metropolitan church of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa and a congregation in the

Located on the south western side of the African tip, Cape Town is at the same latitude as Busselton, Western Australia. The city has a population twice the size of Perth, and a history of European occupation that goes back to the Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias in 1488 who was the first European to reach the area and named it "Cape of Storms".

The town was settled in 1652 by the Verenigde Oost-indische Compagnie (VOC) as a way-station for trading with Indonesia and South-East Asia. British forces occupied the Cape in 1795, by treaty it was returned to the Dutch in 1803, and finally occupied again by the British 1806. In 1910, Britain established the Union of South Africa and Cape Town became the legislative capital of the

Diocese of Cape Town.

Topical news at the beginning of this New Year has been the death and state funeral for Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a hero of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. On 01 January 2022 the funeral was held in St George's Cathedral, where he once preached against racial injustice, after a week of national mourning. His ashes have been





designed by the famous architect Herbert Baker.

The foundation stone was laid in 1901 by the future King George V and can be seen from the bottom of the Avenue leading into the Company's Garden. Construction did not begin until 1906, however, starting at the eastern end, and the completion of the north transept in 1936 finally brought Herbert Baker's design to life. In 1963 the Lady Chapel and south aisle were completed, and in 1978 the Bell Tower and the Link were built. The Cathedral

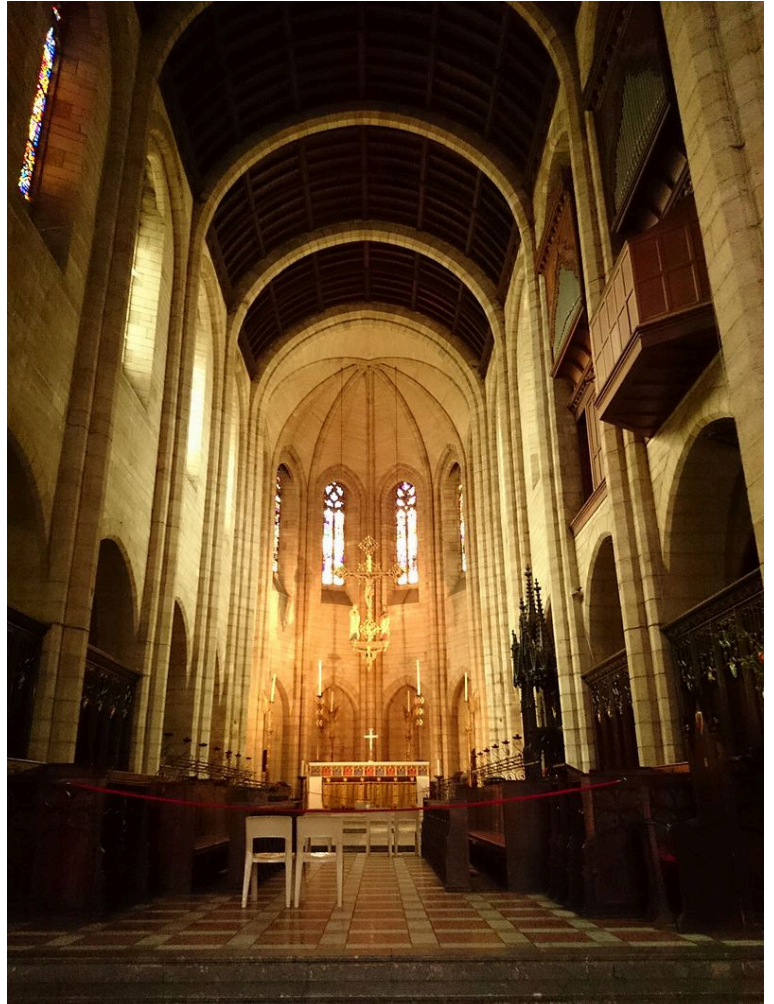
remains a work-in-progress, however, as there was intended to be a Chapter House attached to the end of the Link.

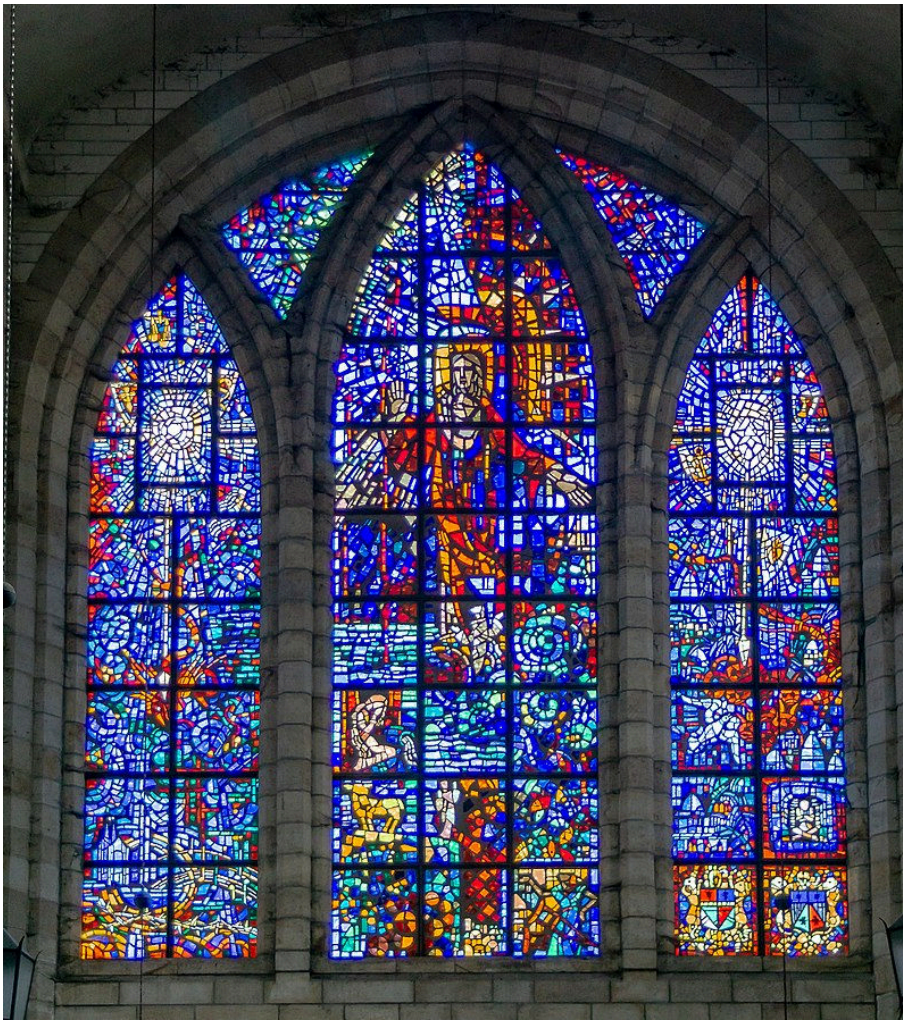
The central panel of the great west window is dominated by the figure of

interred under the Cathedral floor in front of the high altar. Tutu passed away on 26 December 2021 aged 90.

St George's Cathedral is the oldest Cathedral in southern Africa and is the Mother Church of the diocese. The gothic church is a classic cruciform building, with a courtyard garden which includes a Labyrinth. The administrative offices of the Cathedral are housed in cloisters facing the courtyard.

The original St George's Church had been built in the style of St Pancras Church in London, featuring six stone pillars whose places are marked today by oak trees on the Cathedral steps. It opened at Christmas 1834, and was made a cathedral in 1847 in anticipation of the arrival of the first Anglican Bishop in Africa, Robert Gray. However, he didn't like it. Both Bishop Gray and his successor William West Jones wished for a grander cathedral, but neither lived to see it built. The current building was





the triumphant black Christ. The right-hand panel of this work includes the figure of Mahatma Gandhi.

The cathedral has other fine stained glass windows, including Gabriel Loire windows. The most recent glass is his Christ in Triumph over Darkness and Evil in the great west window in memory of Earl Mountbatten. The centre light was erected in 1982; the two side panels on the left and right were added in 2001.

On either side of the nave are eight Gabriel Loire windows on the theme of the creation. Over the south transept is the rose window and in the centre, Christ in Majesty, clothed in purple, the colour of the passion and, radiating outwards, cherubim and seraphim, the angels, and

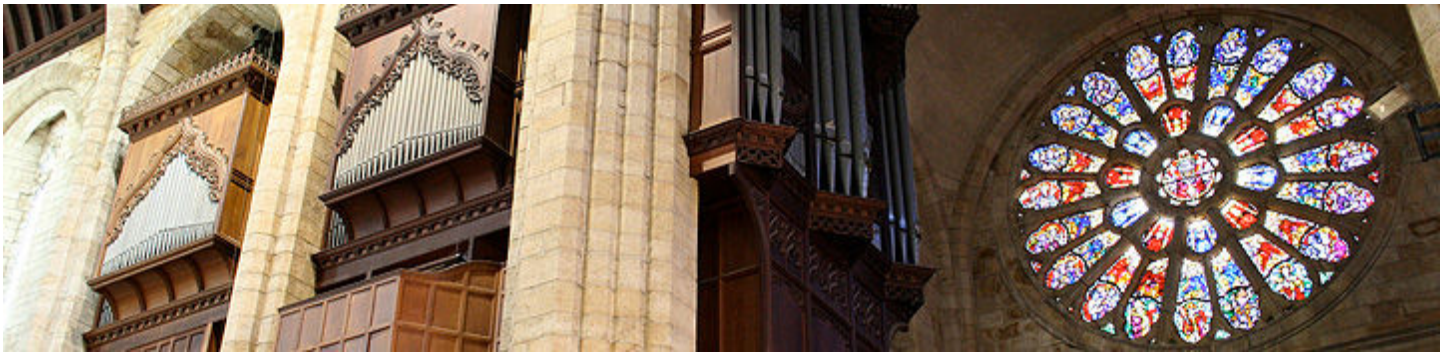
the apostles, prophets, martyrs and saints.

The present instrument in St George's Cathedral, Cape Town, has a long and interesting history, which begins in the latter half of the seventeenth century. It originally stood in the church of St Margaret, Westminster, London, next to Westminster Abbey, and its earliest history goes back to 1675, fifteen years after the Restoration.

The earlier organ in St Margaret's suffered at the hands of the Puritans, as did many English organs in Cromwell's time. In 1644

organ-playing had been prohibited in divine worship by an ordinance of the Lords and Commons 'for the speedy demolishing of all organs, images and all matters of superstitious monuments in all Cathedrals [sic] and Collegiate or Parish Churches and Chapels, throughout the kingdom of England and the Dominion of Wales, the better to accomplish the blessed reformation so happily begun and to remove offences and things illegal to the worship of God'. Records of 1644 and 1645 in St Margaret's refer to parts of the organ - screen and pipes -being sold to various people and for almost thirty years there was no organ in the church.

The organ of 1675 was built by one of the most famous of all post-Restoration



organ-builders, 'Father' Smith (Bernhard Schmidt, c.1630-1708). There is no doubt of his pre-eminence in his art and that he was responsible for many fine instruments, including those of St Paul's Cathedral, London (1697), the Temple Church (1684), the Banqueting Hall, Whitehall (1699), Durham Cathedral (1683), and the Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford. 'Father' Smith was evidently also a competent organist and served in this capacity at St Margaret's from the time the organ was completed until his death in 1708, his salary being £20 a year. He was finally appointed Organ Maker in Ordinary to the King, with apartments in Whitehall allocated to him.

So in 1675 the St Margaret's records show that the sum of £200 was paid to Mr Bernard Smith for the organ newly erected. Nearly one hundred and fifty years later, in 1804, the organ-builder John Avery (? - 1808) was engaged to build a new organ for St Margaret's for which he was paid 800 guineas. Not a great deal, however, is known about Avery. Hopkins and Rimbault refer to him as 'a dissipated character', but he seems nevertheless to have been a first-class craftsman. He took the old organ, which he valued at £200, and in all likelihood incorporated some of the 'Father' Smith pipework in his new

instrument, as he had done with the organ at King's College, Cambridge, which he rebuilt in the same year. The Avery instrument was placed in a gallery at the west end of the church, in a Gothic-style case with pinnacles. At a later stage, when the galleries were removed, the organ was placed in a chamber on the north side of the chancel where the present instrument now stands.

This organ had the unusual arrangement of the manuals with the Swell the highest and the Choir in the middle.

In 1842 J. C. Bishop, who had founded his organ-building firm at about the end of the eighteenth century, renovated the organ. He was one of the leading organ-builders of his day and famous for his rebuild of the 'Father' Smith organ in St Paul's Cathedral. In his rebuild he replaced the Stopped Diapason on the Choir with an Open Diapason, removed the Vox Humana and modified the Furniture stop, renaming it Mixture. This latter step meant that the Mixture stop probably lost much of its brightness and colour as Bishop introduced more and more unison and less mutation ranks in the higher compass of his mixtures. The top octave and a half in these stops is often composed almost entirely of 8, 4, and 2 fts. Then in no less than twenty-

five years the organ underwent three separate rebuilds: in 1859 by Holdich, in 1868 by William Hill & Son, and yet again in 1883 as a large three-manual instrument by Hill, completed just nine years after the firm had built the first organ for our own St. George's Cathedral in Perth.

This 1883 organ was the one which the great romantic player Edwin Lemare (1865-1934) found when he was appointed organist to St Margaret's towards the end of the nineteenth century. However, what Lemare really wanted was an instrument more suited to his repertoire of orchestral transcriptions so popular at the time. So in 1897 the Hill organ was replaced by the present instrument built by the firm of Walker's in 1897. It is at this point that the connection with St George's Cathedral, Cape Town, begins.

The Hill organ was bought by a Mr W. H. Baxter of Harrogate, a maker of stone-breaking machinery in Leeds who had extensive business connections in South Africa. He had originally intended the instrument to be erected in a church, for which, however, it was found to be too large, and so it was temporarily erected in the west end of St Barnabas Church, Holbeck in Leeds. When in 1902 Mr Baxter happened to read in the newspapers that a new Anglican Cathedral was being built in Cape Town, he decided that the gift of the organ would be a way of showing some tangible appreciation of the considerable profits he had derived from that part of

the world. He accordingly wrote to the Bishop of London making the offer, which was enthusiastically accepted. Mr Baxter showed even further generosity by paying for the rebuilding and enlarging of the organ, with Sir George Martin (1844-1916), the organist of St Paul's Cathedral acting as adviser. In addition, a number of additional pedal stops and a solo organ were added as well as a new console and new action chests, making a total cost of something like £3000. He also paid all the shipping charges to Cape Town and for the re-erection of the organ in St George's Cathedral, leaving the Cathedral authorities to purchase only the electric blowing apparatus, which cost £300.

The Cape Times Weekly Edition of 5 April 1903 gives an account of Mr Baxter's 'noble gift':

'Mr Baxter, the well-known Leeds engineer, has made a munificent offer to the new building of an up-to-date four manual church organ of 61 stops . . . it is to have a frontage of twenty-five feet in the church, while another front, decorated in the same style will appear outside the south transept. The decoration of the organ case is particularly beautiful, being a special creation of Mr Arthur Hill, whose reputation in this direction is well-known to be unique.'

Arthur Hill (1857-1923) was one of the partners of the firm of Hill and also the author of a monumental two-volume work, *Organ Cases and Organs of the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (1883). The case is an especially fine example of

SPECIFICATION OF THE ORGAN in St GEORGE'S CATHEDRAL, CAPE TOWN

I CHOIR

C - cccc

Stopped Diapason	8
Gamba	8
Flute	4
Gemshorn	4
Nazard	2 2/3
Flautina	2
Nineteenth	1 1/3
Contra Posaune	16
Corno di Bassetto	16
Posaune	8
Clarinet	8
Clarion	4
Super Octave	
III-I	
IV-I	

II GREAT

C - cccc

Double Open Diapason	16
Open Diapason 1	8
Open Diapason 2	8
Open Diapason 3	8
Stopped Diapason	8
Gamba	8
Principal	4
Harmonic Flute	4
Twelfth	2 2/3
Fifteenth	2
Mixture	III
Contra Posaune	16
Posaune	8
Clarion	4
I-II	
III-II	
IV-II	
Super III-II	

III SWELL

C - cccc

Bourdon	16
Open Diapason	8
Rohr Gedackt	8
Salicional	8
Vox Angelica	8
Principal	4
Flute	4
Fifteenth	2
Mixture	III
Double Trumpet	16
Cornopean	8
Oboe	8
Vox Humana	8
Clarion	4
Under expression	
Super Octave	
IV-III	

SOLO

C - cccc

Harmonic Flute	8
Rohr Gedackt	8
Concert Flute	4
Tuba	8
Orchestral Oboe	8

Cymbelstern

Under expression

Super Octave coupler

PEDAL

C - f

Double Open Wood	32
Open Diapason	16
Open Diapason	16
Double Open Diapason	16
Bourdon	16
Violone	16
Octave	8
Bass Flute	8
Violoncello	8
Contra Bombarde	32
Ophicleide	16
Trombone	16
Contra Posaune	16
Tromba	8
Posaune	8
Clarion	4

I-P

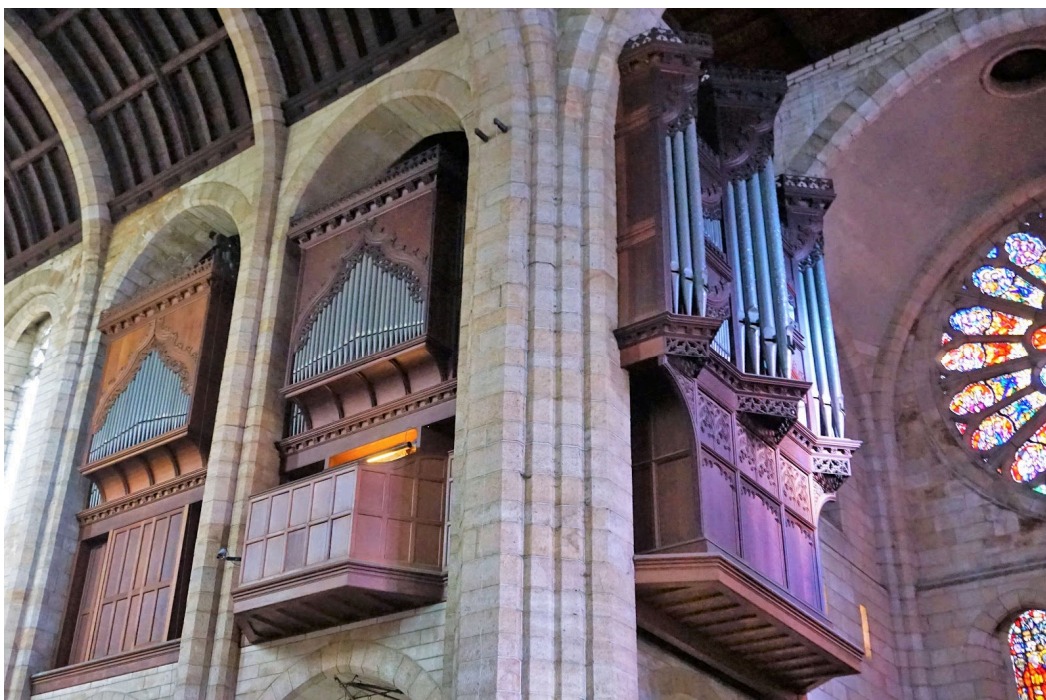
II-P

III-P

IV-P

4 Manuals
3,058 Pipes

52 Ranks
48 Registers



his designs with its three towers of pipes and richly carved woodwork. A particularly interesting feature are five large display pipes in the main south transept case which have elaborately embossed designs beaten into thin sheets of lead wrapped around the plain zinc of the pipes. Such embossing was a feature of Renaissance organ case design and only a few examples of this particular art survive in England, notably in the organs of Exeter Cathedral (c.1665) and Tewkesbury Abbey (c.1580).

In the seventies two interesting additions were made to the instrument. The first was in 1973 when St Mary's, Nottingham, disposed of its 1914 Walker organ. St George's bought the 32/16/8 pedal reed unit, the principal reason being to add a 32-foot to the existing pedal department. As such, it fulfils its function admirably, although the 16 and 8-foot pitches are less successful, mainly because the voicing of the Walker pipes is so very different from that of the Hill reeds, being somewhat bland in comparison.

Yet another interesting addition took place in 1975 when the swell 4 flute was bought from Trinity College, Cambridge, when the Harrison and Harrison organ was replaced by the present Metzler. Strangely enough, the 1909 Cape Town Hill organ lacked such a stop on the swell and, as the Trinity organ contained much original Hill pipework (it had been rebuilt by Harrisons), the flute blends perfectly with its fellows. It also adds to the distinguished history of the Cape

Town instrument as it was a stop regularly used by Stanford, Alan Gray, Vaughan Williams, and no doubt by Saint Sains when he gave a memorable organ recital in the Trinity College Chapel on the occasion of his visit to Cambridge to receive an honorary D.Mus. in 1893. The other recent addition (inspired by the one added to the St John's College, Cambridge organ) was a Cimbelschnitzel and, although there is (as yet) no revolving star, the bells jingle enchantingly in the Bach Christmas chorale preludes.

The only other changes to the original specification (prior to 1998) were the extension of an 8 foot Octave from the pedal 16 Open Wood; the changing of the composition of the Great mixture (from 17.19.22 to 15.19.22) and to the Choir organ where the Dulciana was replaced by a Nineteenth (using as many of the original pipes as possible), and the Lieblich Gedackt to a Nazard (once again using the existing pipes).

By 1988 numerous, recurrent problems had made it essential that something be done to keep the organ playable as all the pneumatic action was perishing. A major appeal was launched under the enthusiastic patronage of Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the citizens of Cape Town responded with unstinting generosity, showing their awareness of the musical treasure in their city.

A certain degree of soul-searching inevitably took place as to whether to restore the pneumatic action to its original condition. After due deliberation

and consultation it was finally decided to electrify the action, at the same time installing a solid state capture system. As a result it was possible to make a number of stops playable on other manuals, the choir and pedal organs benefiting particularly in this respect. A number of new couplers were also added, notably a choir to great, strangely absent in Hill's original 1909 specification. The addition of more thumb and pedal pistons, as well as much-needed general pistons, immediately transformed the organ into an instrument both more versatile and user-friendly. The over-riding decision had always been to make no tonal changes whatsoever; the instrument was simply to be restored, rebuilt and made more versatile and the pedantic purist need make no use of any of the recent borrowings and mechanical aids if he or she wishes to play the instrument as it sounded in 1909. Though I doubt if even in the year of its installation in St George's the speech and action was ever as prompt as it is now.

It is always difficult to describe the sound quality of any particular organ. As someone once quipped, 'the best stop on the organ is the building'. Here the Hill organ is fortunate to be housed in Sir Herbert Baker's fine French-style Neo-Gothic Cathedral with its sympathetic acoustic. Though how much more glorious it would doubtless sound if Baker's original design were complete, the nave still lacking several bays. Since the

organ is placed in a chamber high above the south side of the choir, the sound is somewhat trapped in both the choir and transept crossing and its full power is somewhat diminished as one moves down the nave. In a sentence, however, one might very well describe it as one of the finest examples of Hill's work, the typical romantic English cathedral organ, a Rolls Royce of instruments.

This noble Hill organ has enriched the music in Sir Herbert Baker's cathedral for almost a century and is one of the most precious musical treasures of the city of Cape Town. It has been much admired and praised by visiting organ-builders, organists and many other distinguished visitors to St George's.

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With information from:

www.sgcathedral.co.za
www.wikipedia.org

Photographs by Luke Cabading, Nkansah Rexford, Rainer Halama and Danie van der Merwe

