



CLASSROOM BASED
ASSESSMENT

History

This is the story of the Castle of Good Hope. The Castle has stood at the heart of Cape Town since 1679. Six flags have flown over its walls. It has been a trading post, a prison, a military headquarters, and in its most remarkable chapter yet, a place that has chosen to confront its own difficult past as a national heritage site.



by

BASTIAN VAN JAARSVELD

REPORT TEMPLATE

Name:	Bastian van Jaarsveld
Topic:	The Castle of Good Hope
Locality:	Cape Town

My Topic:

My research topic is the Castle of Good Hope that has stood at the **heart of Cape Town** since **1679**.

It is the oldest surviving colonial building in South Africa, built between **1666** and **1679** by the **Dutch East India Company** in Cape Town.

Six flags have flown over its walls. It has been a trading post, a prison, a military headquarters and a national heritage site. Interestingly, the Castle has never been taken by force. But it has changed hands over time.

That **transformation** is the real story.



Why did I select this topic:

Growing up in Cape Town, the Castle was always just there - something I drove past often without thinking about it. But once I started looking into it properly, I realised how much of my own history was connected to it and how historically significant this building is.

I've always been interested in military history and in castles specifically - how they developed over time from basic wooden forts to the sophisticated stone fortresses with all their defensive engineering. The Castle of Good Hope sits at a really interesting point in that story. Its **five-pointed pentagonal shape**, with a projecting **bastion** at each corner was designed so that every wall could defend

the one next to it. It is a design that changed the way fortresses were built across the world, and the Castle remains one of the oldest and best-preserved examples of it in the southern hemisphere.

I also wanted to understand the history of the place I grew up in and how it shaped my country. That felt important. And it got personal when I found out that some of my own ancestors were held in the Castle's dungeons. Knowing that people from my own family were inside those walls, not as soldiers or officials, but as prisoners, made me want to understand the full story, not just the comfortable version of it.

Cape Town is also one of the most beautiful places in the world, and there is something striking about this massive, imposing building sitting right in the middle of it with Table Mountain behind it. It made me curious.

The more I looked, the more I found out about its rich history.

What started as a history project became something more personal than I expected. Between the military history, the family connection, and the remarkable stories I kept discovering along the way - a spider firing a cannon, a man escaping with an iron spoon, a king cursing his executioner from the gallows - I found a building that had far more to say than its walls first suggested.

Which of the 5R's (remembered, remarkable, resulting in change, revealing) is relevant to this topic:

Why does this building matter? Not every old building is historically significant. Age alone is not enough. The 5R Framework, developed by educator Christine Counsell, gives us five clear tests for whether something from the past truly deserves our attention.

The Castle of Good Hope **passes all five.**

Remarkable

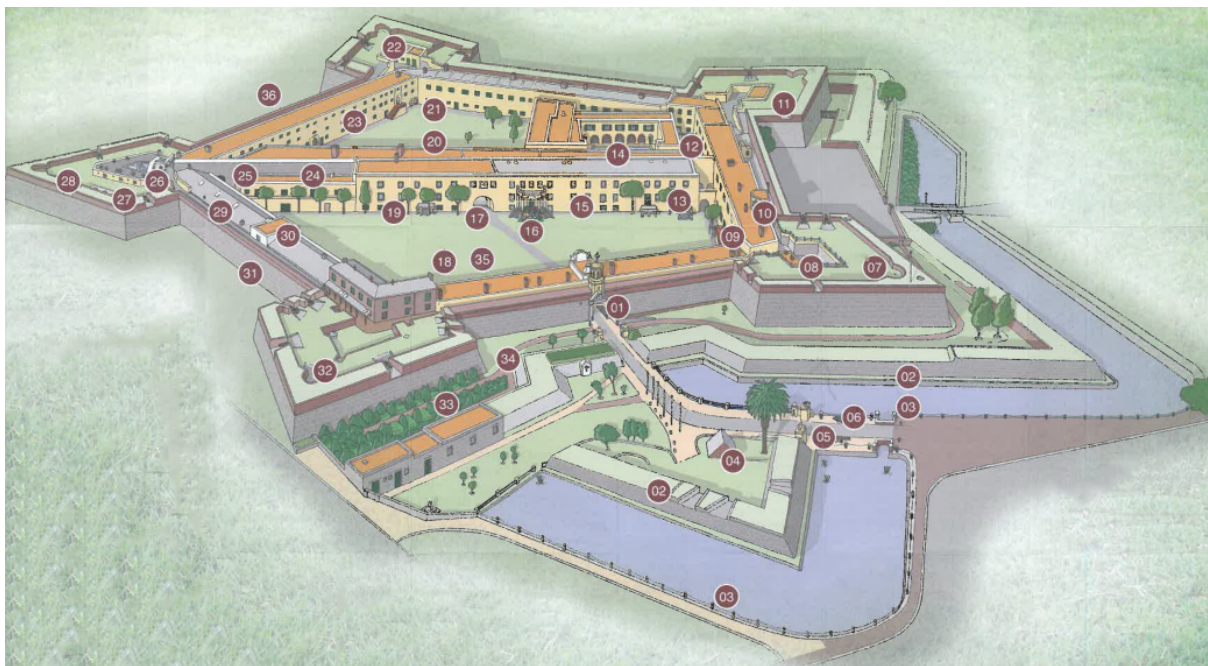
Stands out as exceptional

The Castle is South Africa's oldest surviving colonial building. It was built using a cutting-edge military design of the time, which makes it architecturally notable. What makes it even more remarkable is that it was **built by a trading company** rather than a government, and constructed using trafficked labour at one of the most remote corners of the world known to Europeans at the time.

<p>Remembered</p>	<p><i>Has been actively recalled and disputed over the years</i></p> <p>The Castle has been recorded, depicted, and debated for more than 350 years. It appears in VOC governors' letters, British officers' diaries, Boer prisoners' accounts, and apartheid military records. Hundreds of historical paintings show it, many of them now hanging inside the Castle itself (in the William Fehr Collection).</p> <p>But the more interesting question is not whether it has been remembered. It is how, and by whom. For Dutch settlers, it was the birthplace of their colony. For the Khoekhoe, it was the kui keip - the stone enclosure that began their dispossession of their land and ultimately a loss of their culture. For the enslaved people who built it, it was both their workplace and their prison. For African kings held within its walls, it was where colonial power displayed its victories over resistance.</p> <p>These are not competing versions of the same story. They are different stories, all true at once.</p> <p>What makes the democratic era's approach significant is its refusal to choose between them. There was a definitive choice taken to hold all of those memories simultaneously rather than erasing some to simplify others.</p> <p>That is a more honest form of remembrance than most historic buildings ever attempt.</p>
<p>Resulting in Change</p>	<p><i>Change the course of events</i></p> <p>The Castle of Good Hope has not merely witnessed history - it has been the mechanism through which history was made.</p> <p>Decisions made inside the Castle changed South Africa forever.</p> <p>Tens of thousands of people were enslaved because of choices made there. The Khoekhoe people lost their land because of it. Some of its laws still affect South Africa today.</p> <p>During apartheid, the military used it to enforce racial segregation. Now, in the democratic era, people around the world look to what South Africa has done with the Castle when they ask: what should we do with buildings that were part of terrible regimes?</p>

Resonant	<p><i>Speaks across time to people of today</i></p> <p>Who gets to enter a building, and who is kept out - that question is not just history. Many people feel it today.</p> <p>All over the world, societies are asking what to do with buildings that were part of dark chapters in their past. The Castle's answer was to transform it without erasing what happened there.</p> <p>This is one of the most thoughtful responses to that question anywhere in the world. Don't erase history. Remember it, so we can learn from it and not repeat those chapters that highlighted the darker side of humanity.</p>
Revealing	<p><i>Uncovers truth about the past</i></p> <p>The Castle shows how colonial power actually worked - how a trading company quietly became a government, how forced labour was built into the foundations of places that later called themselves civilised.</p> <p>It also shows how the same building can mean completely different things depending on which side of its walls you stood on. It could be seen as a refuge or a prison. And now as a national heritage site showcasing the journey of South Africans through time.</p> <p>It also shows something else: that history can be told honestly. Doing that is uncomfortable. But it is more powerful than pretending it never happened.</p>

The Castle At A Glance	
Built by	The Dutch East India Company (VOC) VOC = Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie , which translates literally to "United East Indian Company"
Construction	1666 – 1679 (thirteen years)
Design	Pentagonal (5 pointed) bastion fort (trace italienne style)
Walls	Up to 10 metres high; 3 metres thick at the base
Foundations	3.5 metres deep and 5 metres wide
Status	National Heritage Site (declared 1936)
Location	Darling & Buitenkant Streets, Cape Town
Flags flown	Six - over more than 350 years
Sieges survived	Zero - it has never been taken by direct assault



- | | |
|---|--|
| 01: Main Entrance & Bell Tower | 21: Torture Chamber & Dark Hole |
| 02: Ravelin | 22: Nassau Bastion |
| 03: Moat | 23: Centre for Memory, Healing & Learning |
| 04: Arsenal | 24: Secunde's Hall (<i>Fired Ceramic Exhibition</i>) |
| 05: Outer Entrance with Lion Posts | 25: Ammunition Room in Dungeon |
| 06: English 18-Pounder | 26: Jail |
| 07: Leerdam Bastion | 27: Hotchkiss Signalling Guns' Mounts |
| 08: Restitution Garden | 28: Katzenellenbogen Bastion |
| 09: Vertical Sundial | 29: King Cethawayo Detention Area |
| 10: Captain's Tower | 30: Military Museum |
| 11: Oranje Bastion | 31: Waterpoort (<i>Original Main Entrance</i>) |
| 12: Krotoa Memorial | 32: Buuren Bastion |
| 13: Lady Anne Barnard Banquet Hall | 33: Garden |
| 14: Het Backhuys & Dolphin Pool | 34: Cape Khoi Kraal Exhibition |
| 15: Governer's Quarters & Council Chambers * | 35: Restaurant |
| 16: Kat Balcony & "Kings of the Castle" | 36: Sally Port Entrance (<i>Sea Facing</i>) |
| 17: Inner Archway | |
| 18: Front Courtyard | |
| 19: Slaves Quarters | |
| 20: Back Courtyard (<i>Wapenplaats - Weapon Yard</i>) | |

INTRODUCTION: A Building That Has Outlasted Everything Built Around It

A City That Grew Around It

Stand at the corner of **Darling** and **Buitenkant Streets** in central Cape Town, look up at the ochre-yellow walls, and consider this: every single thing you can see around you - the roads, the offices, the Cape Town railway station, the entire city sprawling towards the mountain - none of it existed when this building was finished.



What This Building Has Been

The Castle of Good Hope has been standing since 1679. It has watched the city grow up around it from nothing. It has flown six different flags. It has held kings in its dungeons, sheltered governors in its halls, trained soldiers in its courtyards, and now, in its most remarkable transformation, It has chosen to place statues of the very men it once imprisoned at its very heart. To showcase history in all its ugliness and all its glory. Not to hide it, or whitewash it. But to learn from it. To be transformed by it.



Every Era Is Still Present

This is not just a fort. It is the oldest surviving colonial building in South Africa, and arguably the most layered. Layers of stone, yes, but more importantly, layers of meaning.

Every era of its history is still present in the building in some form, from the names carved into its bastions to the balcony from which death sentences were once announced, now gazing down at bronze figures of resistance.



A Matter of Perspective

The Castle holds more stories than any single visit can carry. Every stone in the Castle means something different depending on who is looking at it. Walk through the same gate and you walk through a different history depending on who you are. It's definitely a matter of perspective coming from South Africa's Rainbow Nation.

What Rainbow Nation Means Here

"Rainbow Nation" was Desmond Tutu's phrase for the idea that South Africa's many **different peoples** and **histories** could **coexist** after apartheid - that **no single group's story would dominate anymore**.

In the context of the Castle, it means that a **Khoekhoe memory** of the building, an **Afrikaner memory**, an **enslaved person's memory**, and a **British colonial memory** are all considered valid - all part of the same place.

Rather than choosing one official story, the democratic era tries to **hold all of them at once**.

You are invited...

If you have ever stood in Cape Town and wondered how this city came to be - who built it, who suffered for it, and who is working to remake it - read on...

Come and explore three and a half centuries of history: from a **mud fort** at the edge of the known world, to a **castle** at the heart of a colony, to a place now doing something rare - asking honest questions about its own past.

This is an invitation to see Cape Town the way a historian does - with curiosity.

The castle has never been taken by force. But it has been transformed by time.

That transformation is the real story.

CHAPTER 1: A Mud Fort by the Sea

Long before Cape Town existed, this was just a bay. **Table Bay** had been known to Portuguese sailors since the late 1400s, but it was the Dutch who decided to do something permanent with it. The **Dutch East India Company (VOC)**, at the time the most powerful trading corporation in the world, controlled the spice trade between Europe and Asia. Their ships took months to make the journey, and sailors were dying of scurvy on the way. They needed a **halfway house** where ships could stop for fresh water, fruit, and food. Table Bay was the perfect spot.

In **April 1652**, a Dutch official named **Jan van Riebeeck** arrived with three small ships and orders to build a **fort**, plant a **vegetable garden** and keep a **supply station** running for passing VOC ships. That was it. He wasn't sent to conquer Africa - he was sent to run a vegetable garden with walls (fortifications) around it.

The first thing he built, **Fort de Goede Hoop**, was a simple square fort made of mud, clay, and timber. Cape winters are wet and fierce. The walls melted. Workers repaired them. The walls melted again. This structure was completely inadequate.

For fourteen years, this soggy mud box was the entire European presence at the southern tip of Africa. Something better was clearly needed - and a war in Europe would provide the excuse to build it. The reason had nothing to do with the Cape itself.

Human Story: Jan van Riebeeck's Impossible Garden

Van Riebeeck was ordered to produce fresh vegetables for passing ships, but he arrived at the Cape in autumn, had no farming infrastructure, no established supply chains, and a workforce of sailors rather than farmers. His personal diaries record growing anxiety as he tried to establish gardens, trade with the local Khoekhoe people for cattle, and keep his small settlement from falling apart. He even proposed building a canal and hedge of bitter almonds to keep the Khoekhoe away from the settlement. Part of it survives today in Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens.

He stayed at the Cape for a decade, never entirely happy there, and left in 1662 without ever seeing the stone fort that would replace his crumbling creation.

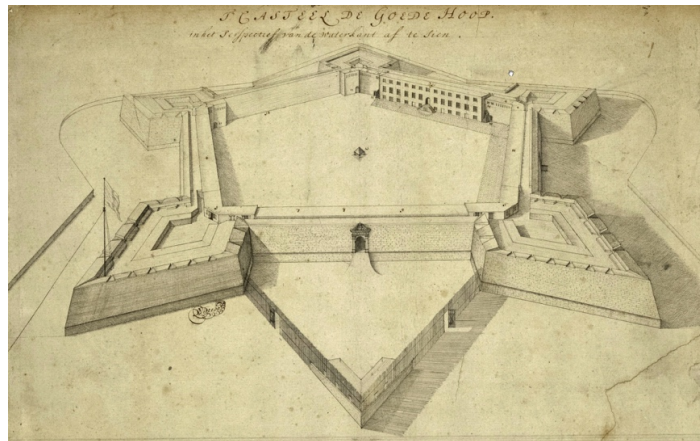


CHAPTER 2: From Mud to Stone - The Decision To Build A Geometric Fortress

The decision to replace the mud fort with something permanent was driven not by conditions at the Cape, but by events happening seven thousand kilometres away in Europe.

By 1664, England and the Netherlands were sliding towards war. Suddenly the Cape wasn't just a vegetable stop - it was a strategic chokepoint. Whoever controlled it controlled the sea lane to Asia. If Britain took it, the VOC's entire empire would be cut off from its source of wealth.

The VOC sent out a **commissioner (Isbrand Goske)** and a **master builder (Pieter Dombaer)** with a clear brief: design and build something that can actually survive a modern naval attack. They arrived with an architectural concept called a **trace italienne** - an Italian-style pentagonal bastion fort. This design had been revolutionising European military engineering for nearly a century already.



Why a Pentagon? The Military Geometry of the Bastion Fort

Medieval castles had tall, thin walls and round towers. They looked impressive, but the advent of cannon fire exposed a fatal flaw. One well-aimed shot could punch straight through a wall that had taken years to build.

Military engineers, mostly in Renaissance Italy, came up with a fix. Instead of building high, they built low and thick. The walls they built were so wide and heavy that cannonballs would simply bury themselves in the earth rather than breaking through. And instead of the usual square or rectangular shape, they arranged the walls in a five-pointed star, with triangular points - called bastions - jutting outward at each corner.

The clever part is the geometry. Each bastion can fire along the wall next to it, which means there is nowhere an attacker can stand that is not being shot at from at least two directions at once. Try to storm one section of wall and you are getting hit from the front and from the sides simultaneously.

For its time, if you had enough soldiers inside, it was basically impossible to take by force.

Why did the bastions have separate gunpowder magazines?

Each bastion contained its own **independent gunpowder stores**. This was a deliberate and clever piece of military engineering.

If one exploded - hit by enemy fire, or simply catching a spark - the others would survive intact. The Castle could lose one point of the star and still fight. It was seventeenth-century **compartmentalisation**, and it was brilliant.

This is the same logic that underlies modern ship design, where watertight bulkheads prevent a single hull breach from sinking the entire vessel.

13 Years to Completion

The **foundation stone** was laid on **2 January 1666**.

It took **thirteen years** and between **200 and 300 workers** at any given time to complete. The walls rose to **ten metres high** and **three metres thick**. The **foundations** went **three and a half metres** into the ground.

Nothing about this building was built to be temporary. It was officially **completed** on **26 April 1679** and it is still standing today.

CHAPTER 3: The Hands That Built the Walls

When we look at the Castle today, we see stone. We should also see people, because the story of who built this fortress is inseparable from some of the darkest chapters in South African history.

Workforce

The enslaved workers were forcibly trafficked from **Madagascar, Mozambique, the western coast of India, and the Dutch East Indies.**

Over the following decades, the VOC would bring approximately **60,000 enslaved people** to the Cape.

This reshaped the entire **demographic character** of the colony and whose legacy can be felt in Cape Town's culture, its cuisine, and the Afrikaans language itself.

Building Materials

The building materials were sourced locally wherever possible.

Stone for the outer walls and foundations was quarried from **Signal Hill** - the same hill that looms above the city today.

Blue slate and lime were transported from **Robben Island**, a few kilometres offshore in Table Bay.

It is ironic that the island which supplied building materials for the seat of colonial power would, three centuries later, be used as the prison where Nelson Mandela served eighteen of his twenty-seven years of imprisonment.

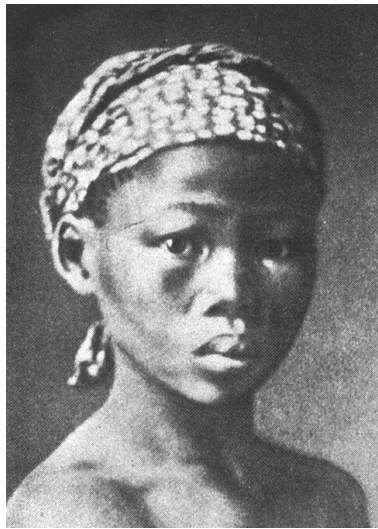


Human Story: Krotoa - The Woman Who Stood Between Two Worlds

Krotoa was a young Khoekhoe woman taken into Van Riebeeck's household as a child. She became the colony's most important interpreter. She was fluent in Dutch, Portuguese, and Khoe - bridging two worlds that had no other common language.

She was indispensable and invisible at the same time: tolerated in Dutch society, valued when useful, rejected when not. Krotoa married a Danish Sailor. After her husband's death she was exiled to Robben Island, where she died in 1674, five years before the Castle whose colonial world she had helped build was even completed.

In 2016, more than 340 years later, a ceremony at the Castle symbolically brought her home. A memorial to her now stands in the grounds.



CHAPTER 4: Five Points, One Prince - The Bastions & Their Royal Names

On 26 April 1679, the day the Castle was officially declared complete, its five projecting bastions were given their permanent names.

The naming ceremony was a political statement as much as a celebration: each bastion was named for one of the noble titles held by **William III of Orange-Nassau**, the Stadtholder of the Dutch Republic.

This is the man who would, within a decade, also become King William III of England, Scotland, and Ireland.

Who was William III of Orange-Nassau?

William was one of the most consequential political figures of seventeenth-century Europe. As Stadtholder of the Dutch Republic, he was effectively its head of state and commander-in-chief - the representative of the House of Orange, the ruling dynasty of the Netherlands.

Naming the bastions after his titles was a political act: this fortress, at the edge of the known world, was a **declaration of Dutch power**.

Ten years after the Castle was completed, William would cross the English Channel in the Glorious Revolution and become **King of England** too.

The Castle's bastions, already named for his titles, would find themselves part of an empire even larger than the one they had been built to serve.



How were the bastions named?

Naming the bastions after William III of Orange-Nassau titles was both an act of **loyalty** and a **declaration of identity**: this fortress, at the southernmost edge of the known world, was an extension of **Dutch power** and **Dutch glory**.

Each of William's titles reflected a different territory or county over which the House of Orange held authority. Giving the Castle's five points those five names was a way of writing Dutch imperial identity into the very geography of the Cape.

Bastion	Position	Named Title of William III	Significance
Leerdam	West	Count of Leerdam	First foundation stone laid here, 2 January 1666
Buuren	North-West	Lord of Buuren	First bastion completed (1674)
Katzenellenbogen	North-East	Count of Katzenellenbogen	Originally faced the sea; now faces the city after land reclamation
Nassau	South-East	Prince of Nassau	Provided overlapping cannon fire to defend the harbour approach
Oranje	South	Prince of Orange	The tallest bastion; guarded the inland approaches to the Cape

CHAPTER 5: A City Within A City

A Self-Sufficient City Within A City

The Castle was never intended as merely a defensive shell.

It was designed to be entirely **self-sufficient** and **survive a siege** of unlimited duration.

Within its walls were: a **church**, a **bakery** (known as Het Bakhuyts), a **forge**, **workshops**, a **bell tower**, **storerooms**, a **governor's residence**, **common soldiers' barracks** and a **formal courtyard** for civic ceremonies.

It was a **miniature colonial city**, complete with all the institutions of power:

Judicial, religious, commercial and military - all contained within a single set of walls.

The **bell tower**, built in 1684, holds a 300-kilogram bronze bell cast in Amsterdam in 1697. This is the oldest functioning bell in South Africa, still rung today.

The **De Kat Balcony**, an elevated platform overlooking the courtyard, was where governors made official proclamations, announced new laws, and read out judicial sentences to the population gathered below.

And below the courtyard's surface lay something far darker: **the Donker Gat** - the Dark Hole - a windowless dungeon used for high-profile prisoners and those awaiting execution. In Cape winter, the Donker Gat flooded. Some of the people chained inside drowned.

Why are the walls of the Castle yellow in colour?

Visitors to the Castle almost always ask about the Castle's distinctive **ochre-yellow paint**.

The answer is **practical** rather than decorative. In the African summer, thick stone walls absorb enormous amounts of heat, turning the interior spaces into near-unbearable ovens.

The pale yellow paint reflects rather than absorbs sunlight, keeping the internal temperature much lower. It is passive solar engineering, applied in the seventeenth century. A reminder that the people who built this place were solving real-world problems in the same way we do today, just without the benefit of modern materials.



CHAPTER 6: Six Flags Over Three Centuries - The Eras of the Castle

One of the most striking facts about the Castle of Good Hope is that despite being purpose-built as a military fortress, it has **never once been captured by direct attack**. Every time it changed hands, the actual fighting happened elsewhere. The Castle simply surrendered when the outcome was decided.

Its walls, in a sense, were always good enough that no one ever tested them properly.

What the Castle could not do was control who won the wars happening in Europe. Its fate was always decided far away, by people who had never seen Table Bay.



FLAG 1: The Dutch East India Company (VOC)

1652 – 1795 | 143 years

For 143 years, the Castle was the nerve centre of the Cape Colony - part logistics hub, part government, part military base, part prison and courthouse. It was the place where everything that mattered was decided. The colony that had started as a vegetable garden grew into something far more complex and far more troubled, fuelled by enslaved labour and the steady dispossession of the Khoekhoe people.

In 1682, Governor Simon van der Stel moved the main entrance from the seaward side to the landward side. Cape storms kept flooding the courtyard through the original gate. A practical fix. But it is also a neat metaphor for the whole VOC era: constantly adapting to a reality that never matched what the directors in Amsterdam had imagined.



Human Story: Governor Van Noodt and the Curse (1729)

Governor Pieter van Noodt sentenced seven soldiers to death for desertion. One of the condemned men cursed him from the gallows, calling divine judgement down on his head. Van Noodt dismissed it.

That same evening, servants found him dead in his chair - mid-conversation, no warning, no clear cause.

The castle records confirm his death.

The cause was never established.

His ghost, according to local legend, still walks the battlements..

FLAG 2: The First British Occupation

1795 – 1803 | 8 years

The first British takeover of the Castle had nothing to do with the Cape and everything to do with France.

In 1795, French Revolutionary forces swept through the Netherlands and established the Batavian Republic - effectively a French puppet state.

Britain, already at war with France, immediately worried about French access to the Cape. A French-controlled Cape would threaten British shipping to India.

British forces landed at **Muizenberg**, a coastal village south-east of Cape Town, in **July 1795**. The Dutch defenders made a stand, but they were outgunned and poorly supplied. After a brief but decisive engagement, the Dutch retreated.

The Castle, some distance away, assessed the situation and surrendered without a shot being fired at its walls. For the second time in the Castle's history - and it would not be the last - the fortress changed hands not because of any failure of its own defences, but because the battle that mattered had already been lost somewhere else.

A new flag went up. British uniforms replaced Dutch ones. English replaced Dutch as the language of official correspondence. But essentially the machinery of colonial government carried on as before.

At this point in time, the British had not come to transform the Cape - they had come to deny it to France. For eight years, that was enough.



FLAG 3: The Batavian Republic

1803 – 1806 | 3 years

The **Treaty of Amiens** paused the European wars in 1802. As part of the peace settlement Britain agreed to hand the Cape back to the Dutch - now reconstituted as the French-backed Batavian Republic.

New officials arrived. The flag changed.

Three years later, the peace collapsed and the whole process reversed again.

The people actually living at the Cape had no vote in any of this. Their home was traded back and forth between European powers like a commodity, decided by people who had never been to Africa.



Human Story: Governor Janssens on Horseback

Governor Janssens was not a desk man. He regularly rode out from the Castle unannounced to inspect farms and settlements. This was unusual behaviour for a governor and surprised a population accustomed to governors who remained firmly within the Castle's walls. He reportedly had a keen interest in the geography and natural history of the Cape, and his journals from this period describe the landscape with enthusiasm and excitement.

When the British returned in 1806, he led the Dutch defence at the Battle of Blaauwberg in person, on horseback, fighting long after the outcome was clear. He then rode back to the Castle to arrange its surrender. Even in defeat, he was in the field.

FLAG 4: The Second British Occupation

1806 – 1910 | 104 years

The Napoleonic Wars killed the peace. Britain landed 6,700 troops at **Bloubergstrand** in **January 1806**. The **Battle of Blaauwberg** lasted only a few hours. The Castle changed hands again, for the fourth time, without a shot being fired at its walls.

In **1814**, the **London Convention** made it official: Britain bought the Cape Colony from the Dutch for **six million pounds**, treating an entire continent's worth of people as an accounting entry.

By 1811, the colonial government had expanded sufficiently that it needed purpose-built administrative buildings, they moved out of the Castle and the Castle was handed over entirely to the military. It became a garrison, a prison, and a storage facility. It was during this period that the Castle acquired its darkest reputation as a place of detention, not for ordinary criminals, but for significant political and military opponents of British Empire and its colonial expansion.

The pattern that emerged in the Castle's dungeons during this century is worth pausing over.

Three African kings:

- Cetshwayo of the Zulu
- Langalibalele of the Hlubi
- Sekhukhune of the Pedi

were each imprisoned here after fighting to defend their people against colonial encroachment. They came from different nations, fought different wars, in different decades. But they ended up in the same building, behind the same walls.

The Castle, in this era, was where the British Empire put the men who had most effectively resisted it.

One on my ancestors was imprisoned in the Donker Gat too. Interestingly, he was on my Dad's side of the family, and was imprisoned for murdering people on my Mom's ancestral lineage!



Human Story: Fritz Joubert Duquesne and the Iron Spoon

During the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), the Castle held Boer prisoners and political detainees. Among the most colourful was Fritz Joubert Duquesne, a Boer officer of French Huguenot descent with a personality considerably larger than his prison cell.

Unable to accept captivity, Duquesne obtained an iron spoon and began, with extraordinary patience and determination, to scrape away at the mortar and cement of his cell wall. Over a period of months, he made slow but definite progress - enough to be optimistic about escape. He nearly made it until a falling stone trapped him in his own tunnel! He was dug out, his escape route sealed, and his spoon confiscated. He later escaped by other means and went on to become an international spy and adventurer of considerable notoriety. He claimed that the spoon had been the most dangerous weapon he ever carried.

The story has the air of legend, but the historical record confirms both his imprisonment and his escape attempts..

FLAG 5: The Union and Republic of South Africa

1910 – 1994 | 84 years

In **1910**, South Africa became a **self-governing state** within the British Empire. The four colonies of southern Africa - the Cape Colony, Natal, the Transvaal, and the Orange River Colony - were merged into the Union of South Africa.

The Castle, which had been a British military base for over a century, transferred to the authority of the new South African state. It became the headquarters of the South African Army's Western Cape command, a function it would retain for the next eight decades.

In **1936**, the Castle was declared a **National Monument** - a formal recognition of its historical importance that, in theory, protected it from demolition or insensitive alteration. The walls that had been built to defend a Dutch trading empire were now being preserved as a heritage asset by the country that had grown up inside and around them.

In **1948**, the **National Party** came to power and introduced **apartheid** - a system of legislated racial segregation that classified every person in South Africa by race, determined where they could live, work, and go to school, and enforced those determinations through state violence.

The Castle, as the headquarters of the army that gave apartheid its military backbone, was deeply implicated in this system. The same yellow walls that had once held African kings now housed the command structure of an army used to suppress the people those kings had once led.

This is the most uncomfortable section of the Castle's history to sit with. The building itself did not change. The flag did. The building continued doing what it had always done: serving whoever held power.



Human Story: King Cetshwayo - Dignity in Defeat

King Cetshwayo of the Zulu had humiliated the British Empire at the Battle of Isandlwana in January 1879 - the worst military defeat the British Army had suffered at the hands of an indigenous force in the entire Victorian era. Over a thousand British soldiers died in a single afternoon.

The British regrouped, returned with reinforcements, and defeated the Zulu at the Battle of Ulundi six months later. Cetshwayo was captured, brought to Cape Town, and held in the Castle. By all accounts, he bore his captivity with remarkable dignity. He was visited by curious Capetonians who came to see the man who had embarrassed an empire, and he received them with composure.

He was eventually taken to London to meet Queen Victoria - a meeting both parties reportedly found bewildering - before being allowed to return to Zululand, where he died in 1884. The bronze statue of Cetshwayo now standing in the Castle courtyard faces the De Kat Balcony.

The spot where his sentence of imprisonment was effectively read out. He is looking directly at it.

FLAG 6:
The Democratic Republic of South Africa

1994 – present

In **1994**, South Africa held its first fully **democratic elections**. Nelson Mandela became president. The country began, with enormous difficulty, the process of transforming itself. One of the questions this transformation raised was: what do you do with the buildings of the old order? Tear them down? Seal them away? Pretend they had a different history than the one they actually had?

The Castle of Good Hope became a test case for a different answer: transformation without erasure. The building remains a working military headquarters - the SA Army's Western Cape command still operates from within its walls. But it is now simultaneously a museum complex, a heritage site, and

something more deliberately ambitious: a place that has chosen to confront its own past.

The **William Fehr Collection**, housed within the Castle, contains one of the most important collections of historical art relating to the Cape - paintings, drawings, and decorative arts that document the colony's visual culture across three centuries.

The **Castle Military Museum** tells the building's martial history.

The **Centre for Memory, Healing and Learning** uses modern archival technology and educational programmes to engage directly with the traumatic dimensions of that history - the enslaved people, the imprisoned kings, the dispossessed communities.

But the most powerful transformation is the one that happened in the courtyard.

The **De Kat Balcony**, the elevated platform from which colonial governors once proclaimed laws and read out death sentences, now looks down on four bronze statues. The installation is called the Kings of the Castle.

The four figures are:

- **Doman**, the Khoekhoe leader who led the first armed resistance against the Dutch in the 1650s
- **King Cetshwayo** of the Zulu
- **King Langalibalele** of the Hlubi
- **King Sekhukhune** of the Pedi.

Three of the four were imprisoned in the Castle. All four resisted. All four lost their immediate battles. The balcony from which they were once condemned now faces their permanent, unbowed bronze gaze.

The colonial-era portraits of governors that once lined the Castle's interior walls have been taken down. In their place are images of resistance and resilience. The building has not been demolished, its difficult history has not been papered over - but its meaning has been deliberately and purposefully repositioned to one of learning and educating as opposed to glorifying the past..

We need to learn from history. Embrace our past. Not erase or whitewash it! How else will we be taught the lessons we need to learn and not repeat the same mistakes. We need to see the darker chapters in our history, shine a light on it. Shining a light on past mistakes is not about blame. It is about understanding.



Human Story: Krotoa's Return (2016)

In 2016, a ceremony was held at the Castle to symbolically bring Krotoa home - more than 340 years after she died on Robben Island. Khoekhoe elders, historians, and community leaders gathered in the courtyard whose colonial history she had helped shape but from which she had been excluded.

*A memorial was unveiled. It was not a reversal of history.
It was an acknowledgement of it.*

DID YOU KNOW? Curious Facts From the Castle's Three Centuries In Existence

A Self-Sufficient City Within A City

History is made from large forces - trade, war, empire, politics. But it is remembered through stories. Here are some of the Castle's most memorable details

1. The Castle was originally built right on the **edge of the sea**. Today it sits about a kilometre inland - not because the Castle moved, but because Cape Town reclaimed land from the ocean in the 1930s and 1940s. The coast moved. The Castle didn't.
2. The Castle has flown **six different flags** and has never been taken by direct assault. Every single time it changed hands, the fighting had already happened somewhere else. Its walls were never truly tested.
3. The **bell** in the Castle's tower was cast in Amsterdam in 1697. It weighs 300 kilograms and has been ringing ever since. This makes it the oldest functioning bell in South Africa. It has been ringing longer than the United States has been a country.



4. In 1895, the **Castle's signal cannon** (the Noon Gun), fired daily to allow ships in the harbour to set their chronometers as a tradition since 1806, fired 90 minutes early - at 10:30 instead of noon. The investigation found the culprit: a spider had crawled into the electrical relay and triggered the firing mechanism. Central Cape Town was not pleased.



5. During another firing, the rammer (the rod used to push the powder charge into the cannon barrel) was accidentally left inside when the cannon was fired. It flew across a portion of Cape Town and killed a horse.
6. The **Donker Gat (Dark Hole) dungeon** flooded in winter. Prisoners chained to the walls sometimes could not reach higher ground. Some drowned. It was used for the most significant prisoners - the people the authorities most wanted silenced.
7. **Governor Van Noodt** sentenced seven soldiers to death in 1729. One cursed him from the gallows. Van Noodt was found dead in his chair the same day. The cause was never established. His ghost, according to legend, still walks the battlements.
8. **Fritz Duquesne**, a Boer prisoner held in the Castle during the Anglo-Boer War, spent months tunnelling through the Castle's cement walls with an iron spoon. A falling stone trapped him in his own tunnel before he could finish. He survived, escaped by other means, and became an international spy. He was featured in a series of real-world espionage stories.



9. The Khoekhoe called the Castle **kui keip** - stone enclosure. The Dutch called it **Kasteel de Goede Hoop** - Castle of Good Hope. Same building. Two completely opposite meanings. A refuge for those allowed inside, and a wall keeping everyone else out. Whose name a place carries always tells you something about who it was built for.
10. The **De Kat Balcony**, where governors once proclaimed laws and read death sentences, now faces the four bronze Kings of the Castle. The colonial portraits that used to hang on the interior walls have been taken down and replaced with images of resistance.



THE FINAL WORD: What The Walls Remember

Outlasting the Builders

The **Dutch East India Company** collapsed in 1799.

The **British Empire** is gone.

The **apartheid government** fell in 1994.

Three of the six powers that flew their flag over this building have vanished from history entirely. A fourth, the **British Empire**, exists now only in memory and legacy. The only ones left are the **two versions of the South African state**.

They are the ones who will decide what the Castle becomes next.

Here is what the Castle proves: what gets built outlasts the people who built it.

The workers who laid the first stone on 2 January 1666 could not have imagined that their fortress would still be standing three and a half centuries later, flying the flag of a democratic republic they could never have dreamed of.

They built it to protect a spice trade. It ended up as something far more complicated and far more interesting - a monument to the full messiness of human history, including the parts that are uncomfortable to look at.

When you walk through the Castle today, you are walking through every version of it that has ever existed. The walls do not pick a favourite era. They hold all of them at once. What changes is who is doing the looking - and what they are willing to see. It's purely a matter of perspective, what this Castle means to you.

For me... I like the idea of it holding the entirety of its history between the Castle walls and on display for all to see. I love the fact that all 6 flags fly outside the Castle as if to say look at me, I am still here, through good times and bad. I survived and I will continue to thrive.

REFLECTION

The Research - Unexpected Finds

When I started this project, I thought I was writing about a building. What I ended up writing about was far more complicated than that and far more interesting.

The research took me to places I didn't expect. The first unexpected find was personal. While reading about the bastions, I came across the word itself - **bastion** - and realised I already knew it, because it is where my name comes from. A bastion is a fortified point that projects outward from a castle wall, designed to protect everything behind it. Then I found out that the Castle's five bastions were named after the titles of a Dutch prince called William of Orange - Willem in Dutch. My full name is **Bastian Willem**. My mom always told me she chose my name because she liked the idea of it meaning **strong protector** - someone who stands firm and shields what matters. Finding that connection inside the exact building I was researching was one of those moments that makes history feel less like something that happened to other people. It was an interesting coincidence

Also that is what I wanted this project to be - a bastion - something that **protects the real history** of this building. Not the comfortable version. The honest one.

Secondly, what I didn't expect was how there would be a personal connection to the history of the Castle itself. Discovering that some of my own ancestors had been held in the Castle's dungeons changed the way I read everything. It stopped being abstract. The **Donker Gat** wasn't just an interesting historical detail anymore. It was a place where people connected to me had actually been imprisoned, sometimes in floodwater, sometimes in the dark. That's not easy to think about, but I think it's important to be aware of anyway.

What makes it even more complicated is that the history is not cleanly divided into victims and bystanders in my own family. My Dad's ancestors were imprisoned in the Castle. They were imprisoned for killing people from the same community that my Mom's family descended from. My own family contains both sides of a history that the Castle was right in the middle of. I didn't choose that. But I think understanding it is part of why this project matters to me - and part of why I believe so strongly that the full story of this building needs to be told, not just the comfortable parts.

Research Skills and Source Evaluation

One of the most important things I learned during this project was how to properly evaluate sources. I used a wide range of them - the Castle's official site, Iziko Museums, South African History Online, SAHRA and Wikipedia as a starting point rather than a final source.

Early on I made the mistake of trusting a detail from a single source, only to find it contradicted somewhere else. That taught me to always check facts across more than one source before including them.

I also started thinking about who wrote each source and why - a colonial government record and a Khoekhoe account of the same event are both useful,

but they are telling the story from completely different angles. Learning to recognise that difference felt like a real skill.

Challenges I Faced

The most challenging part was knowing what to trust when stories conflicted. Some of the more dramatic details - Van Noodt's curse, Duquesne's iron spoon - are in the historical record, but have clearly grown in the telling over hundreds of years. I tried to be clear in the document about what is confirmed fact and what has become legend. I didn't want to just include the most exciting version of a story if it wasn't accurate. That was sometimes a hard call to make.

Organising everything was also more difficult than I expected. The Castle's history covers 350 years and six different governing powers. I had far more material than I could use, and deciding what to leave out was difficult. Structuring it all into something that actually flowed and made sense was probably the skill I improved most during this project.

What I Would Do Differently

One thing I would do differently is spend more time on the story of the enslaved people who built the Castle. Their story is the most important one and also the hardest to research, because detailed records were rarely kept about them at the time. That gap in the record is not an accident - it tells you something about whose lives were considered worth documenting. I noticed that, but I didn't explore it as fully as I could have.

What I Learned

What this project taught me most is that history isn't just a list of facts. It is about asking questions: who recorded this, why, and what did they leave out? The Castle looks different depending on who is standing in front of it. A historian's job is to try to hold all of those different views at once, rather than just picking the most comfortable one. I found that more difficult than I expected. I also found it more interesting than I expected. To try to not be biased. And to try to research based on facts and not opinions.

What I've learned is that old buildings are not neutral. The Castle didn't just witness South African history. It was the place where that history was made, announced, enforced, and eventually challenged.

The most thought-provoking thing I came across in this entire project was the decision to place bronze statues of the Kings in the Castle's own courtyard. These were statues of the very men who had been imprisoned within its walls, sentenced from its balcony, defeated by the power it represented. They are not hidden away in a corner. They stand at the centre, looking directly back at the balcony where their fates were once announced.

The building that held them now honours them. That reversal - done without demolishing anything, without pretending the difficult history never happened - felt like the most honest thing a building can do with its past.

It didn't erase anything. It just made sure the full story was finally being told. And that, to me, feels like exactly the right way to deal with history that is painful. You don't hide it. You face it. And then you make sure it is never forgotten..

What I'll Take With Me

I grew up in one of the most beautiful cities in the world, with one of the most complicated buildings at its centre. When I return, I'll walk past it differently now. Appreciating it more. Realising that it's presence shaped my country of birth.

We are a nation built from many different peoples, cultures, and histories. And as our slogan for our Springbok Rugby Team says - we are 'Stronger Together'. Just like the Castle, a fortress holding memories and sharing perspectives from the many different groups of people that make up South Africa's Rainbow Nation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES

I consulted the following sources while researching this project.

Where accounts disagreed, I used the most widely supported version.

The Castle has been written about for more than 350 years. I have tried to find the sources that told the fullest and most honest version of its history.

Castle of Good Hope - Official Site

<https://www.castleofgoodhope.co.za/>

Iziko Museums of South Africa – The Castle of Good Hope

<https://www.iziko.org.za/museums/the-castle-of-good-hope/>

South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA)

Castle of Good Hope – <https://www.sahra.org.za/castle-of-goodhope/>

Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa (VASSA)

The Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town, VASSA Journal 1999

<https://www.vassa.org.za/outing-27-june-1999-castle-of-good-hope/>

South African History Online

Dutch and British Coastal Fortifications at the Cape of Good Hope (1665–1829)

<https://sahistory.org.za/place/dutch-and-british-coastal-fortifications-cape-good-hope-1665-1829>

Wikipedia - Castle of Good Hope

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castle_of_Good_Hope

Wikipedia - Bastion Fort (Trace Italienne)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bastion_fort

Britannica Kids – Castle of Good Hope

<https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Castle-of-Good-Hope/606896>

Images

<https://www.gettyimages.ie/photos/castle-of-good-hope>

Google Image Search, Wikipedia, various images from online sources found in research

AI was used in generating some of the images on the loading page for the look-and-feel of the website where I wanted an older classic look to the castle.