

* Napier Erfenis/Heritage *

JUNE 2026
EDITION 10

A MESSAGE FROM THE NHCB CHAIRPERSON

I cannot believe it is June already, and nearly half the year has disappeared.

We had a very successful AGM on 21st May at the Bowling Club. Our guest speaker, Dr Odette Scott-Curtis, was a hit and gave us a lot of information on the Renosterveld and her pet project, “the Black Harrier”.

We also welcomed three new members on the night, and are proud that membership has reached 49. However, many members are not active but supportive.

This month, the newspaper is ecclesiastical in tone, as we are relating the histories and other details of three of our local churches. One is a Heritage building in Volhou Street; the other is St Saviours Anglican Church in West Street; and Ina Georgala has written a very informative article on the history and workings of the church clock at the main church in Napier.

We are having an important workshop on June 25th on Fire Management, with speakers from the Greater Overberg Fire Protection, Cape Nature, and Enviro Wildfire Services. Considering the number of fires that raged in the Overberg region at the beginning of the year, this is an important topic. Please attend, as it promises to be an interesting morning on a life-and-death topic.

And keep warm!
Marina Richards



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Black Harrier in flight. Pic from the Odette Curtis presentation at our AGM



HERITAGE BUILDING FEATURE



THE CHURCH IN VOLHOU STREET *INSIDE A SURPRISE AWAITS*

T

This month, we turn the focus onto the Western end of Napier above Sarel Cilliers Street. The only listed building on Napier's Heritage Inventory is the Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk (VGK) in Volhou Street.

Long before Napier was founded, the Moravian Church established a powerful presence in the Overberg. They founded Genadendal (1737) near Caledon and Elim (1824) just 30km from what would become Napier. Elim became a sanctuary for freed slaves and the indigenous Khoikhoi people and the Moravians provided communal land, education, and trades to marginalised communities.



Research shows that the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) established a mission church in South Africa to compete with the Moravian mission stations and reach labourers in rural areas.

Due to the segregation policies, separate branches were formed: the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk (NGSK) and the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika (NGKA). In 1994, these churches merged to become the Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk (VGK).

Today on Volhou Street, Napier's past and present stand side by side.

Although the original historic NGSK mission building is listed on Napier's Heritage Inventory, it has sadly fallen into disrepair, and there appear to be no funds to maintain it. This is a pity as it must once have been beautiful, particularly inside. It is used as a hall for functions.

The new church, built right next door, is a face-brick building that holds an incredible architectural secret inside: the imposing pulpit pictured on the left.



INSIDE A SURPRISE AWAITS



The face-brick church houses a magnificent pulpit that was donated by the local NG mother church because it no longer fit into their own building (the original church, not the landmark building in Sarel Cilliers Street).

The sheer scale of the podium completely dwarfs its surroundings.

The pulpit is made of intricately designed Kiaat wood. We couldn't find any records of who commissioned or crafted it.

The upper canopy is crowned with repeated:

- Pointed arches (the hallmark of Gothic architecture)
- Trefoils (the small clover-like openings along the canopy rails).
- Vertical pinnacles pointing upward.

The panels of the pulpit itself repeat the same pointed-arch motif, creating a unified design.

To preach, the Dominee enters through a small door at the back and climbs the stairs to appear high above the congregation.

The congregation must raise their heads and eyes to look at him towering above them.



The pulpit combines Gothic Revival forms whose main symbolic themes are the Trinity (through the trefoils), the upward direction of worship (through the pointed arches and pinnacles), and the centrality of God's Word through the elevated pulpit and its crowning canopy.

**DO YOU KNOW WHO BUILT THE KIAAT PULPIT?
IF YOU HAVE OLD FAMILY JOURNALS OR CHURCH
RECORDS MENTIONING THE PULPIT, PLEASE LET US
KNOW!**



**These are the front and back views of the original Verenegende Gereformeerde Kerk (VGK) in Volhou Street.
The building features on the Napier Heritage Inventory.**



ST SAVIOUR'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN WEST STREET : FROM A SCHOOL TO A CHURCH



C

Continuing on their ecclesiastical journey, Marina Richards and Ora Laubscher next visited St Saviour's Church in West Street, where they were welcomed by the Pastor, Yasmille Smythe, and her friends, Joana Willemse and Caroline October.

Yasmille explained that before it became a church, the building was a school.

She and her two friends were classmates in this very building long before it became a church. Their friendship has stood the test of time. They fondly recalled where each classroom was, where they used to play, and where the teachers' offices had been.

“When I entered the church, I was reminded of a talk given by Albert Geldenhuys, grandson of the architect Wynand Louw, to members of the NHCB and Napier residents last year”, Marina says.

He spoke about his journey across South Africa researching and documenting the churches designed by his grandfather. During his presentation, he explained that Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) churches are generally designed around the pulpit, which serves as the focal point of the interior.

“As a baptised Catholic, I felt immediately at home and remarked to Yasmille that the interior felt more like a Catholic church than a typical Dutch Reformed church”.

The St Saviours Anglican Church Mothers Union (Moedersbond) Banner



At the entrance to St Saviour's Church in West Street are, from the left: Pastor Yasmille Smythe, The NHCB's Marina Richards, with Joana Willemse and Caroline October.



Yasmille, Joana and Caroline were classmates in this very building when it was still a school, long before it became a church.

Their friendship has stood the test of time. They fondly recall where each classroom was, where they used to play, and where the teachers' offices had been.

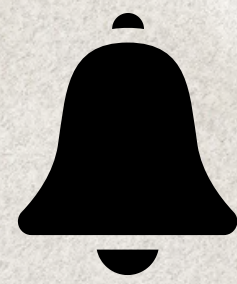
FROM A SCHOOL TO A CHURCH

Most of the furniture in St Saviour's were saved from the Original Anglican Church that stood on the corner of Church and High Streets, opposite the original NG Church. The building's roof and walls collapsed during a flood in 1957, and all that remains is vacant land and the original boundary walls.



The original Anglican church suffered irreparable damage from the cloudburst in 1957.





THE MYSTERIES OF NAPIER'S CHURCH BELLS

A

Anyone driving into Napier on the R316 spots it immediately: the Dutch Reformed Church, with its clock tower, stands proud, tall, and brilliantly white against the sky. The sudden silence that echoed through the village when the clock was overhauled in May sparked consternation and prompted NHCB member Ina Georgala to investigate Napier's church bells.



When the iconic church was first built, it did not have a clock tower. The bell was located in various structures next to the church.

Completed in 1928, this grand 1,000-seater church and its landmark clock tower, facing all four cardinal directions, is the heartbeat of village life.

With its melodious chimes marking the hour and half-hour, the clock has kept generations of Napier residents on time for school, work, weddings, and funerals, and helped visitors find their way.

At the time, the clock mechanism cost the congregation a whopping £502.10s, roughly R879,000 in today's money. It proved to be a spectacular investment. The stoic clock celebrates its centenary in two years' time and has required only periodic maintenance, including a May overhaul to replace a few corroded parts.

Visitors are always astonished to learn that this clock is seldom more than 1 minute and 30 seconds out. Keeping it that accurate is no small feat. The church Sexton and his assistant must wind it manually every week. This requires climbing over 52 rickety ladder steps and tackling four steep ladders, often battling gale-force winds howling through the tower!

Mystery #1: The Anonymous Masterpiece

Yet, for all its prominence, the clock's origin remains unknown. On a sunny day in April, Sexton Bill Koen and I ventured up those ladders to investigate. Despite searching every nook and cranny of the workings, we found no trademark or serial number.

The shape and form of the clock mechanism strongly suggest that JF Weule manufactured it in Bockenem, Germany. Famous worldwide for precision, Weule clocks traditionally bear a distinctive owl (Eule) trademark. Sadly, the factory closed in 1966, leaving us with a cold trail.





THE THREE MYSTERIES



If it is a Weule clock, how did it get here? One clue lies in the church's architect, Wynand H Louw. He apprenticed under Berlin-trained Cape Town architect JCE Seeliger and frequently recommended top-tier German clocks and organs for his churches.

Another possibility points to Emil Burmester, a prominent German merchant in Cape Town who imported and serviced timepieces in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Burmester often placed his own company stamp over the manufacturer's mark. However, because our clock is completely bare, the mystery remains.

Mystery #2: The Travelling Bell of Hoog Street



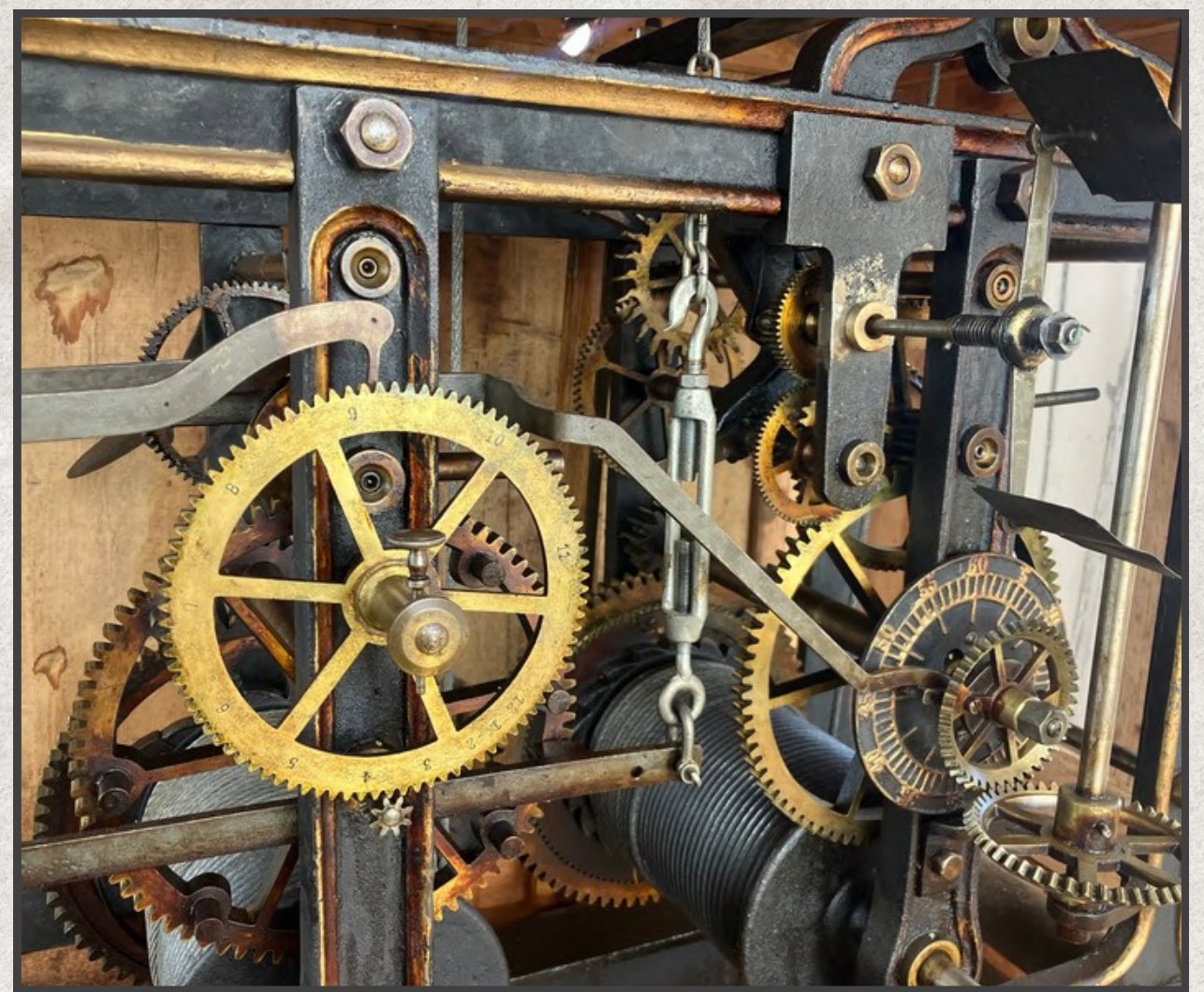
Moving down the road to the Dutch Reformed Church Hall in Hoog Street, we find a cast-iron bell in a small bell tower bearing the mark of the Barwell Foundry of Birmingham.

It currently hangs without a clapper. The missing clapper is safely under lock and key after local youths attempted to steal it a few years ago.

The real puzzle is why this bell has moved at least three times in its career. Photos from around 1905 show it dangling from a wooden-and-cast-iron structure at the corner of Hoog and Church Streets.

A few years later, it was moved directly adjacent to the hall, and today, it resides in the bell tower next to the old Post Office.

Why the musical chairs? No one seems to know.



Mystery #3: The Lost Nautical Bell of St. Saviour's

Our final mystery belongs to St. Saviour's Aican Church, whose original bell had a fascinating maritime past. Cast at Chantiers d'Agde in France and bearing a French inscription, the brass bell belonged to the Marie-Elise, a French barque that ran ashore at Ryspunt between Arniston and Skipskop in November 1877. How a salvaged ship's bell wound up in a Napier church bell tower is a secret lost to time.

Tragically, its uniqueness made it a target. On the night of September 15, 2020, thieves stole the historic bell, and it hasn't been seen since. Today, the faithful are called to service by a modern electronic bell, and the dulcet, historic tones of the Marie-Elise are gone.

FOR YOUR DIARY

You are invited to an interactive workshop on wildfires

FIRES ARE HERE TO STAY
BUT, CAN WE DO BETTER AT MANAGING THEM?

WHEN: 25 JUNE 2026
WHERE: MUDDY WATERS, Jubileum Street
TIME: 10H00 - 13H00
FEE: NHCB MEMBERS R50, NON-MEMBERS R100

SPEAKERS & TOPICS

- Fire is part of the fynbos ecosystem, but what makes it more dangerous these days? *Dr Andrew Turner (Restoration Ecologist, Cape Nature).*
- Which organisations are involved and what do they do? What is the public's role? *Pieter Rossouw, Greater Overberg Fire Protection Association (GOFPA).*
- How does one prepare? Are short memories getting in the way of the long-term view? *Kim Da Ribeira, Enviro Wildfire Services.*

HOSTED BY THE NAPIER HERITAGE & CONSERVATION BODY (NHCB) & THE NAPIER RATEPAYERS ASSOCIATION (NRA)

FIRES ARE HERE TO STAY
BUT, CAN WE DO BETTER AT MANAGING THEM?

PAYMENT
You may pay in cash to an NHCB Committee member or
EFT (Your name+FIRE)
Napier Heritage and Conservation Body
Standard Bank
Branch code 051001
Account no 10166921643

RSVP
Send POP and the number of people attending to
napierheritageconservationbody@gmail.com
BY Friday, 19 June 2026

Refreshments will be served during
tea break and homemade
soup for lunch



HOSTED BY THE NAPIER HERITAGE & CONSERVATION BODY (NHCB) & THE NAPIER RATEPAYERS ASSOCIATION (NRA)

FOR THE PUZZLERS

In the spirit of bells, we’ve come up with a **Spot the Difference** puzzle based on the world’s biggest and most famous bell- the Tsar Bell in Moscow.
Spot 5 differences below. Answers in the next issue.



Image 1



Image 2