

Interview with Fred Jones – Warden Emeritus of St. John's Church

Interviewed by Dennis Hodgkinson – May 1969

DH: That lovely hymn tune you heard played was played on the pipe organ of St. John's Church, Launceston. *Abide with Me* is well suited to St. John's because the word abide suggests staying a long time. And not only has St. John's stayed a long time as the first and oldest church in Launceston, where it was built in 1825, but notable men have given long, loyal, and loving service to it, for example, Dr. W.H. Browne, who was rector for 40 years from 1828 to 1868, and laymen in our own time, such as Mr. Fred Jones. Mr. Jones was born on the 7th of May, 1875, and is still going strong. Last week he celebrated his 94th birthday anniversary, and tonight he is here in St. John's to tell us of the church he has known and loved for so long and which he remembers so well.

DH: How long have you been connected with St. John's, Mr. Jones?

FJ: 80 years altogether.

DH: As long as that. Well, that means that you were here then when it was the old church for which Governor Arthur set the foundation stone.

FJ: Yes.

DH: That's interesting. Could you tell us what it was like as you knew it in the old days.

FJ: What - the church?

DH: Yes.

FJ: Well it was just the... there was no tower, just the ordinary bell, proper bell, just the ordinary church.

DH: It was rather smaller than it is now wasn't it?

FJ: Oh yes.

DH: And what did it look like inside here when the old church oh well when the old church was here?

FJ: The gallery was upstairs and the organs up in the back up there, you see?

DH: Oh yes. Where was the gallery?

FJ: Around on these... on this side - on three sides.

DH: Was it? And can you remember what they used the gallery for besides the organ?

FJ: Well I've been told it was for the prisoners that came to church on a Sunday morning.

DH: Oh yes. And the officers would bring them in.

FJ: Oh yes. I've been told.

DH: I understand that later on they had to move the prisoners for some reason.

FJ: Yes, I think so. Yes, well, I think the, as the days went on, you see, they had services, I think, at the prison, I think.

DH: I heard a story that the noise of their chains rather aggravated the other members of the congregation.

FJ: Yes.

DH: That was the reason they moved?

FJ: Yes.

DH: This organ they had in those days how did they supply it with wind?

FJ: Well they used to have a young boy used to just blow with a hand blower.

DH: Really! And you were here then. Who was the rector in those days?

FJ: Well, the first rector when I come to St. John's was Canon Brownrigg.

DH: Oh, yes. Can you remember anything about him?

FJ: Oh, I just remember as a man, I used to go and speak to him occasionally.

DH: Yes. I suppose when you first came here in 1886, you went to Sunday school, did you?

FJ: Yes.

DH: Could you tell us something about that?

FJ: Yes, well, the Sunday school was over in the old hall and we used to go to the Sunday school and I used to go there with about six of us in the Bible class.

DH: Yes.

FJ: And a lady used to teach us in the Sunday school.

DH: Oh, yes. Were there any other members of your family who went to the Sunday school with you?

FJ: Yes, there was my four sisters and myself.

DH: Really?

FJ: Yes.

DH: Well, that's very interesting. And I suppose later on you were confirmed, were you, in St. John's?

FJ: Yes, the late Mr. (*Bishop*) Montgomery, he confirmed me.

DH: Was he the father of Field Marshal Lord Montgomery?

FJ: Yes.

DH: I suppose he must have been a young boy at that time.

FJ: Yes, I was. I was about 12 years of age when I was... (*confirmed*)

DH: Oh, yes. And were you married in St. John's as well?

FJ: No, I wasn't married.

DH: Now, another thing that's very significant and beautiful about St. John's are the stained glass windows. Are these all the original ones that were in the old church?

FJ: No, there was only one original one, that was that one on the left, based on the (*Ascension*).

DH: I see, on the south side. And do you know anything about the ones on the other side, who they were in memory of?

FJ: Yes, the Lakin family.

DH: Mr. Lakin.

FJ: Yes.

DH: I believe they were donated by his family, weren't they?

FJ: Yes, by the family.

DH: And what was his connection with St. John?

FJ: Mr. Lakin. He was here about the same time, not a long time before I was.

DH: I see. I believe he had something to do with the building of the rectory, is that right?

FJ: Mr. Lakin?

FJ: Yes, well, I think he suggested that we have a rectory made for the rectory.

DH: I believe he headed the committee that got it built.

FJ: Yes.

DH: And it was only £2,000 in those days.

FJ: Yes, so I've been told.

DH: Did they have any difficulty in getting the finance?

FJ: Oh, well, we had some very good people used to donate things and donate so much money.

DH: I believe your own family had a hand in providing the finance, could you tell us about that?

FJ: Yes, well my father - Mr. Lakin, come down to see my father and he wanted to know if we... he wanted to just finish the rectory and there was about a thousand pounds owing on it at the time and father, he donated the money.

DH: Oh, very good. And you were here when the old church for which Governor Arthur lay the foundation stone was being extended. You can remember that I presume?

DH: Well, the only foundation stone was the one of the end of the church.

DH: Yes, and who was the rector then? It was Canon Beresford, I believe in his time they did the extensions.

FJ: Yes, I think it was Canon Beresford.

DH: Oh yes. Mr. Jones, in the old days how did they heat the church?

FJ: Well I used to have just the, from memory, I used to just have the heaters, you know, the...?

DH: The gas heaters, weren't they?

FJ: Not the gas heaters, it was just the heaters... they... used to have the heaters. I can't say from memory about the heaters.

DH: I understand that in the old days they started off with oil lamps and then about 1860 they got gas lighting in Launceston. Did they have gas lighting in the church? Could you tell us something about that?

FJ: Yes, gas lighting, yes.

DH: Could you tell us how it came to be brought into the church, the gas lighting?

FJ: Well, I think Mr. Arthur Green at the gas company. He was a secretary of the gas company, and he gave so much towards it, and then the other people gave so much donations to it.

DH: How much did he give, do you remember? Well, I've been told he gave

FJ: I think about a thousand pounds.

DH: My word. That would be worth quite a lot of money in those days.

FJ: Yes.

DH: And then in about the turn of the century, they started getting electric lighting in Launceston.

FJ: Yes.

DH: Did they... Was there any difficulty in introducing that into the church?

FJ: Oh, well, some people thought it wasn't advisable. They thought that they'd had the gas so many years, and Mr. Green was always, used to be, come to church and attend to the church. Very liberal and that's why they...

DH: I see. He was actually the secretary of the gas company, wasn't he?

FJ: Yes.

DH: Oh, yes. In the old days, before they had motor cars and railways, they used to use carriages a lot. Did people come to church in carriages to St. John's?

FJ: Well, not to my memory, they used to walk, they used to be, I used to just walk the church.

DH: Oh, yes.

FJ: They didn't have any transport at all.

DH: Did they have very far to come?

FJ: Well, not very many of them. Mr. Green, I think, used to live in High Street, where they used to just walk down.

DH: Oh, I see. There were quite a lot of people living in the city in those days, residential.

FJ: Yes.

DH: And what do you think of the new organ or the present organ that we've got here? Do you remember that being introduced into the church?

FJ: Yes, oh yes. They wanted to bring the organ down from the gallery and place it down here.

DH: Oh yes.

FJ: Some parts of it and other parts added to it. The late Mr. Hopkins, he was the organist at that time, and he used to, he was a, he was a very talented, you know, able to direct what kind of organ he wanted, and he was, he used to play the organ.

DH: Oh, yes. Was he a local man?

FJ: No, I believe he came from the old country, I think, ...overseas.

DH: Oh, yes. Mr. Jones, if you look around the church here and see all the various furnishings, could you tell us a word or two about them? I think you had something to say about the wonderful pews they had here in the original church.

FJ: Yes, well, I used to go in with the cedar chairs, cedar seats.

DH: Cedar seats.

FJ: Yes.

DH: They're all cedar, were they?

FJ: Yes, all cedar.

DH: Did these have carvings on them?

FJ: No, I don't think so.

FJ: I see. And I understand that altar rail there, that was a gift to the church.

FJ: Yes.

DH: Did you tell us something about that?

FJ: I knew that Mr. Barnes, he donated all the rails.

DH: Oh, yes.

FJ: Yes.

DH: They lived locally, did they?

FJ: Yes. His wife and family used to come to St. John's. And I think she asked, they asked whether they could get these altar rails, but Mr. Barnes, he presented them.

DH: Was he the gentleman who donated the land for the gardens in Cataract Gorge?

FJ: Yes.

DH: That was the same one, was it? I believe the original William Barnes, he was the first brewer in Launceston.

FJ: Oh.

DH: Probably one of his descendants donated this altar rail. And when they were putting the extensions on the church, what did they do for services? Did they have to, were they able to conduct them somewhere else, or what happened?

FJ: Oh, no, they had them here, and they used to, while this was being built. They had just a kind of a sheeting down.

DH: Oh yes.

FJ: And the pulpit was over on that side there.

DH: Oh yes. Now what about the rectors? How long, how many rectors would you have been while you were here that you have known?

FJ: Well, about, I think it's in the book there, about 13.

DH: About 13.

FJ: 13 Rectors.

DH: That's a long, long time. Mr. Jones, I've got a list of the Rectors here and I'm just wondering if I sort of ran through it, whether you could tell us about some of their personal characteristics. The first one that you were with when you first came to St. John's was Canon Brownrigg.

FJ: Yes.

DH: Do you remember what he was like?

FJ: Yes, well, he was a middle-aged man when I came here. I was thinking about 50, I think.

FJ: Oh, yes.

FJ: And he had a family, Mr. Brownrigg, that was, I think, Mark Brownrigg and Harold Brownrigg. He had about 7 in the family, I think.

FJ: Oh, yes.

FJ: It used to be Mark Brownrigg and Canon, Norman Brownrigg and Mr. Brownrigg.

DH: What were his interests? I mean, did he have any hobbies?

FJ: Oh, Mr. Brownrigg?

DH: Yes.

FJ: Yes, well, he used to go down, he was a great fisherman, he used to go out fishing, and sometimes he'd holiday, he'd go down to fishing down at Low Head.

DH: Oh, yes. And then we have the Reverend Champion.

FJ: Yes. Well, he wasn't there very long, the Reverend Champion.

DH: And what about Canon Kelly? He was the one who followed Mr. Champion.

FJ: Yes. Well, he was here and he used to do very good minister and go around visiting the sick, Canon Kelly.

DH: Oh, yes. Was the hospital built there then? The general hospital?

FJ: Yes.

DH: What were the sermons like in those days? We hear stories of them having very long sermons in the old days.

FJ: Yes, well, from my memory, it used to be about a quarter of an hour, 20 minutes.

DH: Oh yes.

FJ: Nothing any longer.

DH: About the same length as today. And then there was Archdeacon Beresford.

FJ: Yes. He was a very nice man. He was very popular and then he would go round and visit the sick, go round different people, you know, along to come to church.

DH: Oh yes. There is a Beresford house, isn't there, in Trevallyn?

FJ: Yes.

DH: It's named after him I believe. And then the Reverend Bryers came along after him.

FJ: Yes, well he came out from England many years ago. He wasn't here very long and he went back home, as far as I know.

DH: Oh, yes. - And then there's Canon Baker.

FJ: Yes. Yes, well, he was here for quite a good while. And he had a call over to Sydney and he went over to Sydney and he went over there.

DH: Did he visit St. John's after he'd left? Do you remember him visiting St. John's when he'd gone over to the mainland?

FJ: No, he went over to Sydney and he retired from there.

DH: Oh, yes. And then Canon Crotty.

FJ: Yes, well, he was here for some time, but he wasn't here very long.

FJ: And then he had another call somewhere else, and I think the bishop transferred him somewhere else.

DH: I see. And then after Canon Crotty, there was the Reverend Ross Hewton.

FJ: Yes.

DH: I see. He was here from 1921 to 1933.

FJ: Yes. Well, he was a very good man. He was a very good minister. He and his wife, they used to visit the sick and go around to different hospitals.

DH: I understand you've been connected with the General Hospital for quite a long time.

FJ: Oh, yes. I suppose I have been about, what, about 37 years.

DH: Have you really?

FJ: Yes. I used to go around, go to visit the sick and go around with different people.

DH: Oh, yes. This is the central auxiliary, isn't it, of the General Hospital?

FJ: Yes.

DH: And you're the president at the present time?

FJ: Yes.

DH: Oh, wonderful. After Reverend Ross Hewton as Canon Greenwood from 1933 to 1949.

FJ: Well, he was quite a good while...

DH: He'd be here during the war, I think, at the beginning of the war.

FJ: Yes, yes, he would be.

DH: And then Archdeacon Sutton came along.

FJ: Well, Archdeacon Sutton, he was, he came from Sydney to here.

DH: Did he?

FJ: And he came here and he was, he was here for some time.

DH: I understand that you've been connected with the vestry for a long time.

FJ: Yes.

DH: Could you tell us how you came to be appointed or join the vestry?

FJ: Oh, well, they just nominated different ones in the vestry. They wanted a vestry. There was three church wardens, you see, and Mr. Whitfield was getting up in years, and Mr. Perrin, he was, he was getting up in years, and then Mr. Whittaker, and there's only the three wardens, and then they, they made it into (???) you see, the vestry.

DH: I see. And you have meetings how often?

FJ: Hmm?

DH: How often do you meet?

FJ: In the vestry?

DH: Yes.

FJ: Once a month.

DH: And you still go along attending these meetings?

FJ: Yes, I'm going over to the rectory tonight.

DH: Are you? Oh, yes. Mr. Jones, I understand that you were here, you were connected with St. John's, and you used to come to church here at the time of Queen Victoria's death. Could you tell us something about that? Do you remember the service?

FJ: Yes, I remember the service when the service was taken.

DH: You don't remember any details of it?

FJ: I don't know. Now I was only young, you see, and I knew that they were having more, and I came with my parents.

DH: Oh, yes. Mr. Jones, just to wind off this interview that you've been so kind to give to us, perhaps you'd like to say what St. John's means to you and why you're so interested in it.

FJ: Yes, well, I've been coming to St. John's for just about 80 years or more, and I've always helped to welcome the people coming to church and help them to see they are seated properly.

DH: And you've been coming along every Sunday for all that time, have you?

FJ: Yes. That's when I was here. Perhaps if I was away somewhere... I'd always be here when I was on duty. I'd be here.

DH: Oh, yes. I guess when you were away, you'd still be thinking of them back at St. John's?

FJ: Oh, sometimes I'd go away, perhaps for a week's holiday, something like that, or, and, well, I knew the others have to take my place, so I used to go away for a holiday.

DH: And just to finish off this very interesting interview with Mr. Jones, we've asked Archdeacon Jerrim, who's an old friend of his, to say a few words.

Archdeacon Henry Jerrim:

Thank you, Mr. Hodgkinson, for this opportunity of saying a few words at the end of this recording.

Initially, I'd like to put on record this congregation's appreciation of the loyal and devoted service which Mr. Fred Jones has rendered to this church over a period of almost 90 years. I'm sure that there are many who have visited St. John's and remember the warm welcome they received from Mr. Jones. You who listen to this recording will realise that St. John's has held a vital place in the life of this devoted servant of the church. Mr. Jones has always been willing to help the church in any way within which it was possible for him to do so. He followed the example of his father who financially assisted in the building of the rectory, in that Fred Jones has made it financially possible for many jobs around the church to be done.

In recognition of his long and valued service to St. John's Church, the bishop approved to the appointment of Mr. Jones as church warden emeritus. This means that Mr. Jones continues to have the standing of church warden for the remainder of his life without election. This is a unique honour which has been bestowed upon a worthy recipient. May Mr. Jones be able to spend the evening of his life in continued association with the church which he loves. May his life be inspiration and example to many of the present generation and the generations to come.