



The Rev. John Youl was appointed to Northern Tasmania in 1819 and resided at George Town. He had no church until Governor Arthur commissioned the building of St. John's in 1824. Clay for the bricks was obtained from a great hole which later was to become Princes Square; huon pine was brought from Macquarie Harbour. Arthur thought the plans too grandiose for Launceston and reduced the size by a third. Surveyor Wedge found the angle of St. John Street at variance with the lines of the church, so the street was altered. At this stage the building was outside the town. Rev. Youl contracted a chill from attending the execution of three prisoners on a wet morning and died of asthma in 1827. He was followed by Rev. J. Norman and a year later by Rev. W.H. Browne. In his diary, Browne tells how, shortly after service one Sunday, the whole ceiling collapsed. The tower with its clock was erected in 1830 and in 1866 a small chancel with three lights was added at the east end. Early in the present century Alexander North, the architect designed a large new building. The new transept, chancel and crossing were consecrated in 1911. Forty years ago the nave was completed, incorporating much of the early structure. Plans exist for the addition of a large central tower and two smaller ones flanking the entrance.

Thus the present building embodies structures erected in three widely separated periods, each remarkable in their own way. From the first building period, 1824-1830 we have the west tower and the spaces flanking it, constructed massively of red colonial brickwork covered with stucco. They were built in a colonial 'gothick' style which owed more to the designer's memory (of Tom Tower at Oxford?) than to any pattern-book. The naivety of the design is one of its charms, but if the unknown architect was an amateur, the builder was not. The side windows of this part of the building are identical with those of the original nave, which had three on each side in addition to these. Colonial Georgian church windows were of clear glass set in a tracery of wooden glazing bars. Between 1901 and 1911, North's chancel, transepts and crossing were erected in alternating bands of red brick and golden sandstone on heavy blue-stone foundations, and roofed with concrete vaults and dome. The style is a unique combination of Byzantine and Gothic Revival of North's own devising and is accordingly of great interest to architectural historians. Whatever its merits, it has fascinated such authorities as Sir John Betjeman, Professor J.M. Freeland, and Dr. Lloyd Rees, for here even in its unfinished condition, we see the work of an original mind.

J.F. Bentley's 1894 design for Westminster Roman Catholic Cathedral is the only imaginable ancestor for it. Finally, in 1938, the old nave was heightened and its walls encased in the new brickwork. Again the design is unique, being an Art Nouveau adaptation of the late Gothic Revival. Between tuck-pointed red brick piers, the pilasters of the arcades have capitals of carved cement, the work of that remarkable artist-craftsman, the late Gordon Cumming.