

ST JOHN'S  
ANGELICAN CHURCH  
LAUNCESTON  
TASMANIA



**ST JOHN'S** Launceston  
*an All Saints Network church*

# The Church of Saint John, Launceston ...since 1825

## ST JOHN'S TODAY

Welcome to St John's, Launceston, part of the All Saints Anglican Network, a network of Anglican parishes in greater Launceston and George Town.

St John's is the oldest church in northern Tasmania. Here for 200 years Launcestonians and visitors have worshipped God through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. May your heart be filled with peace and hope as you encounter this witness of many generations to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Church is located on the south-east corner of St John and Elizabeth Streets in the city and has a seating capacity for about 400 worshippers. It maintains a congregation of around 250 parishioners and holds two regular services on Sundays – a traditional service following *A Prayer Book for Australia* and a contemporary, family focused mid-morning service. For much of the present century, there has also been an informal 5 pm evening service – at the time of writing, this has taken the form of a monthly youth service. St John's from its earliest days has been evangelical in theology and ethos.

The church and rectory in St John Street, and the former Sunday School hall in Elizabeth Street are listed on the Tasmanian Heritage Register of places of historic cultural heritage significance.

The architecture of the church and the design of its original fittings were first conceived and planned in nineteenth century colonial Tasmania. The architecture comprises a mixture of Georgian, Gothic Revival, Byzantine and a local adaptation of the English Arts and Crafts styles. The building is characterised by three contrasting colours of Tasmanian quarried freestone used in the construction, namely pink, yellow and white.



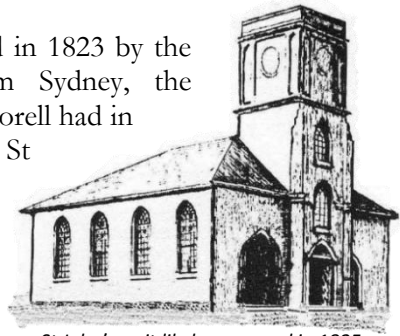
## ST JOHN'S IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The early history of the Church in Launceston is described more fully elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> St John's Parish grew from the Colonial Government's chaplaincy to the Port Dalrymple region, centred on George Town, Launceston and the Tamar River Valley hinterland.

Launceston was first settled in 1806. The parish's records date from 1811. From 1814 to 1835 it was part of the Diocese of Calcutta, India. Colonial government indecision as to where to locate the administrative centre in the Tamar Valley caused delay in the development of Launceston until 1824 when Launceston was firmly reinstated as the headquarters, contributing to the late start to the church building.

The first incumbent, the Reverend John Youl, took up his appointment in November 1819. Mr Youl held services in a building in Cameron Street which at different times was also used as a blacksmith's shop and a school. Colonial chaplains' visits having been infrequent till his appointment, he found it necessary to perform multiple baptisms and weddings. The need for a dedicated church building was obvious.

The church was built on land consecrated in 1823 by the Senior Colonial Chaplain visiting from Sydney, the Reverend Samuel Marsden. Lt Governor Sorell had in mind a plan similar to the now-demolished St David's Church in Hobart (built 1817-1824), but with a shorter nave – the subject of historical speculation – a spurious tale that Lt. Governor Arthur drew a red line across the plans, remarking that it would be sufficient, is unsupported



*St John's as it likely appeared in 1825*

by evidence. Arthur engaged Colonial Architect David Lambe to oversee the erection of the Georgian style church.<sup>2</sup> He laid the foundation stone of St John's Church on 28th December 1824. The first stage of the church was built by local builders in 1824-1830 using convict labour. Bricks were fashioned by the convicts from clay quarried from what is now Princes Square, opposite the church. The incomplete Church was opened for Divine Service on Friday 16th December 1825.

<sup>1</sup> P. C. Blake, *John Youl: the Forgotten Chaplain*, Philip Blake, Launceston, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> P. G. Webb, "The building of St John's Church, Launceston" in *Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Papers & Proceedings*, vol. 24 no. 4, 1977, pp. 141-150. See also E. Ratcliff, *A Far Microcosm*, vol. 4, Fullers, Hobart, 2015.

An organ with 568 pipes, built in 1826 by John Gray of London, was installed late in 1827. The building was consecrated on 6th March 1828. The first stage was completed in 1830 under Mr Lambe's successor John Lee Archer, who also oversaw the 1829 installation of a north-facing convict-made clock in the tower. In 1829-1830 Mr Lee Archer added to the tower an octagonal bell-turret with a Regency-style Huon pine cupola. In 1835, a bell was hung in the tower, cast in 1828 by T. Mears of London (Whitechapel Bell Foundry), and a two-faced 1828 Thwaites and Reed clock was installed. The parish added the third clock face in 1857.

Inside the church, the free congregation sat in box-pews that were arranged around two aisles. Regular attendees paid a pew rent of 5 to 15 shillings a year, depending on pew location. Until 1835, convicts in chains from the convict barracks at the lower end of George Street were brought to stand in a gallery accessed by stairs on either side of the main entrance. After 1835, services for convicts were held at the convict barracks, and the galleries were fitted with seats for a growing congregation.



*The 19<sup>th</sup> century nave, with the original galleries which were demolished in 1938*



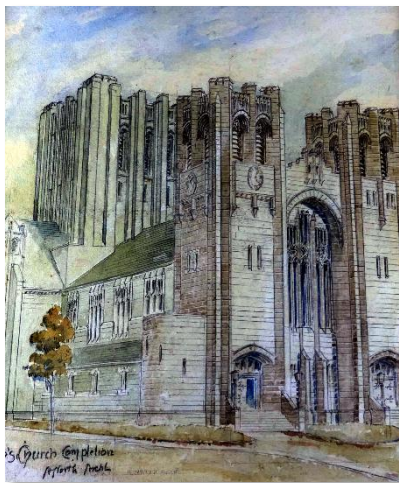
*The 1862 Brindley-Sharp Organ in the west gallery – much of it remains part of the present organ*

The Gray organ stood in the gallery at the west end with the choir on either side. The top panel of organ-front pipes displayed today on the wall above the west gallery is from the Gray organ. It remained in use until 1862 when it was replaced. The Gray organ is now in the former St John's Church, Franklin in southern Tasmania.

The next major change was in 1866 when a small chancel was constructed at the east end. This accommodated a communion table, the minister's stall, and the baptismal font. As part of this work, a three-light east window by Ferguson and Urie of Melbourne, donated by Mr John Cameron of Oakburn in Elphin Road, Launceston was added depicting the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in 1869 new cedar pews replaced the old ones.

## ST JOHN'S IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the visionary architect Alexander North was commissioned to design a new, much grander church; his plan was approved in 1892.



*North's final grand design for St. John's*

He planned a great building with a massive central bell tower that combined Gothic Revival and Arts and Crafts styles. As the building proceeded, so the plan developed. The proposed twin western towers of North's final stage (which was never started) would have replaced the now heritage listed convict-built clock tower.

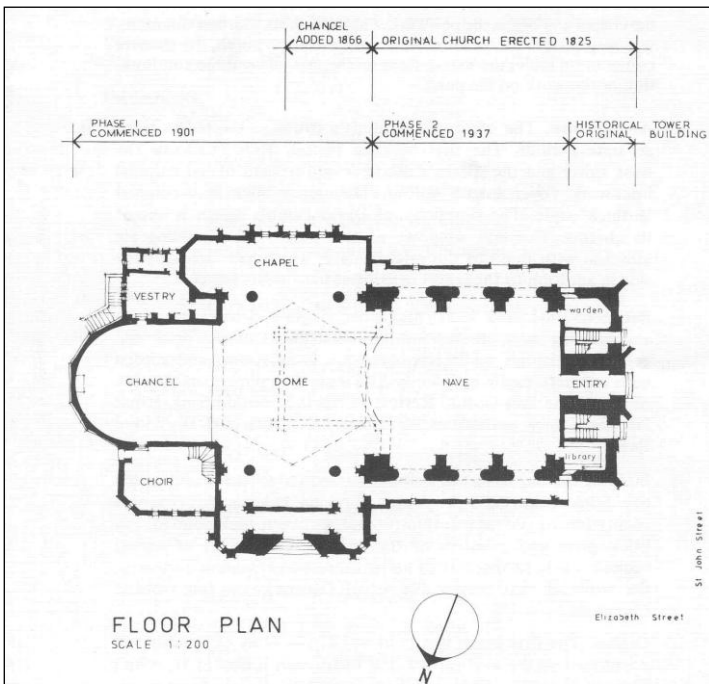
Building of Phase 1 (see the floor plan on the next page, and photograph on page 11) started in 1901, some distance east of the Church. The 1866 chancel was demolished and replaced by a large Byzantine-style domed crossing reaching to a majestic height of 70 feet (21.3 m). The dome, not in the original 1892 plan, was added to the plan by North in 1904. By 1911 a new sanctuary, chancel and nave had been joined to the existing Church.

The choir was accommodated in the new chancel in stalls carved around 1916 by Hugh Cunningham. Many other pieces of furniture were hand-crafted throughout the Church during this period.

The next stage, Phase 2, was completed in 1938, and was consecrated that year. The roof of the enlarged nave was raised to a height of 60 feet (18.3 m) and ambulatories were added on the north and south sides. Six windows, three on either side of the old church, were crafted into arches, and clerestories were placed above the archways. The 1866 chancel's east window depicting the Ascension was placed in the centre of the south clerestory. The central roundel of each of its three quatrefoil lights depicting respectively a Dove, Alpha, and Omega, are now separately housed in a display cabinet in the small museum adjoining the northern ambulatory (see page 7).



*Some of Cunningham's remarkable native fauna*



*Floor plan circa 1982, indicating the major stages of the church building's development*

Phase 2 of North's re-development of the Church was not entirely finished by the start of World War II. Part of the roof over the chapel and several other areas remained incomplete. In 1984 the roof over the dome and chapel was completed. The ceiling was repaired, new tiles were placed as necessary, and the tower was re-surfaced. In 1985 a new narthex and gallery were built at the west end, with pews from the back of the nave moved to the new gallery. Today, many carvings throughout the church remain unfinished, despite Alexander North suggesting their subjects in 1935.

In North's grand design, the west tower and remaining part of the early church building would also be demolished or incorporated into the new west towers seen on his drawings, along with a massive central tower. By the 1960s, there was a new appreciation of the significance of early colonial buildings as part of the state's heritage, so the west tower was preserved for posterity, which explains the curious hybrid appearance of the exterior of the building.

The tower clock was electrified in 1970, retaining the 1828 clockwork. For reasons of access and safety, today the clock is no longer in use. A Garden of Remembrance was created in 1975 on the Elizabeth Street, northern side for the interment of ashes of past parishioners. In 2021, following the closure of St. David's Church, Riverside, a columbarium wall was erected opposite the garden, partly to accommodate ashes relocated from St. David's.

## ST JOHN'S IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

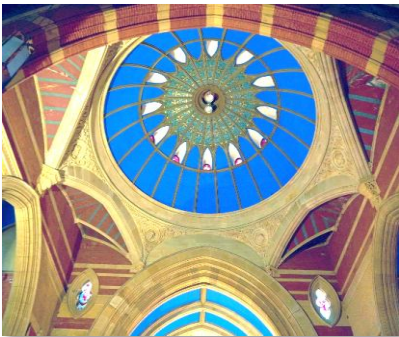
From 2002, the mid-morning Sunday service adopted a more contemporary style, in both liturgy and music. The robed choir was replaced with a more informal singing group. In 2003 the front few rows of pews were moved from the nave to the western gallery, and a platform extending across the width of the chancel steps was constructed in the crossing creating a versatile space for liturgical, dramatic, choral, orchestral and other musical presentations.

In 2023, a much larger redevelopment of the interior of the building began, including the removal of pews from the nave, modern moveable seating, contemporary lighting adjustable for various events and purposes, and a larger dais allowing external users to stage public events such as orchestral concerts. Delays and material shortages meant that the building was not reopened until August 2024.

2025 was the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the building and first service of St. John's. Celebrations began on 28<sup>th</sup> December 2024 with a service to celebrate 200 years since the laying of the foundation stone. Events during the year included the launch of *St. John's – Launceston's First Church – 1825-2025* by well-known local historian Julian Burgess, followed by a mid-year celebratory parish dinner, a lecture by visiting academic, Professor Stuart Piggin, and a series of lunchtime concerts covering the development of church music during the 200 years. The year culminated with a dinner for present and past clergy and parish officers ahead of the bicentenary service on 16<sup>th</sup> December.

Today, as part of the wider All Saints Network, St. John's ministries include programs for children and youth, small groups for adults young and old, community service, prayer ministry and particular needs' ministries.

## SOME SPECIAL FEATURES IN THE CHURCH



### THE DOME

The unique architectural feature of the dome is that the walls supporting the dome form a rectangle. Additional vaulting, unparalleled in style, was required to carry the circular base. The blue and gold mosaic, designed by Alexander North, is incomplete; it was planned to face the entire dome, but contemporary architectural lighting now adds to its beauty.

## THE NORTH TRANSEPT

Dominated by the great rose window, donated by the Perrin family for the consecration of the great "extension" of St. John's Church in 1911. The Westminster Gallery below is no longer accessible to the public due to more stringent safety requirements. The gallery in turn is above the north entrance, rarely used since it was built in 1911, and the baptistery area which holds several significant memorial plaques, the stone font having been relocated to the gardens in 2024 because of changed baptism practices.

## THE SIDE CHAPEL

The chapel south of the transept was added around 1910. The Launceston Church Grammar School used the Church for its regular school chapel services from 1846-1923 while Grammar operated from neighbouring sites. Most of the chapel's memorials and fittings were donated by members of the Grammar School community to honour that close association. Notice the double-facing pulpit with its two entrances.

## EARLIEST MEMORIALS<sup>3</sup>

The oldest mural monument is in the south ambulatory to Mrs Charlotte Balfour, wife of the Commandant of Port Dalrymple in 1825-1826, Lt-Colonel William Balfour who died in August 1825 and was buried in a bricked vault just inside the east wall of the Church during its construction. Uncovered during building work in 1938 and again in 2024, the vault remains beneath the nave floor, its position indicated by a small plaque on her memorial.

The earliest memorial window was donated by the rector, Dr Browne, in 1837. It is by John Pike Hedgeland of London and depicts the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was dedicated to Archdeacon William Hutchins. This vesical window is high above the organ console, under the dome.

## NORTH AMBULATORY AND MUSEUM

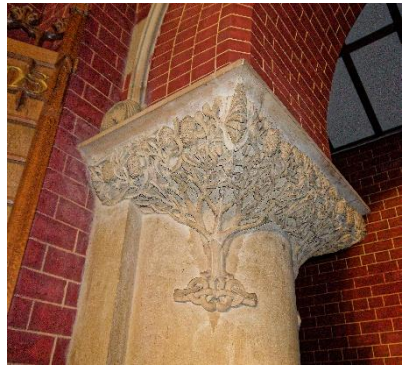
A carillon stands next to the entrance to the Westminster Gallery staircase. This tall but modest box of tubular bells was made by Boosey and Hawkes of London and installed in November 1946 as a thank-offering for peace following the end of World War II. Speakers in the west tower broadcast the bells over the city. The gravestone of the first chaplain, Revd John Youl, is nearby, relocated first from the former Cypress Street Burial Ground, and then from Youl's Symmons Plains property when it was sold in 2012. At the western end of the ambulatory, a small museum houses a number of interesting artefacts, including the workings of the first clock assembled by a convict worker and installed in the tower in 1829 but replaced in 1835 by the present multi-faced clock.

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<sup>3</sup> See E. Ratcliff, *op.cit.*, vol. 1. For notes on other memorials in the Church, see also J. Gill, *Engraved in Memory*, Jenny Gill, Launceston, 1988.

## THE CARVINGS<sup>4</sup>

Two master craftsmen were responsible for the Church's carvings, following North's designs in the Arts and Crafts style. Hugh Cunningham worked on the Church up to his retirement around 1920. He was assisted and followed by his student, Mr W. Gordon Cumming who worked during the later years up to 1945. The beautiful workmanship depicts Tasmanian flora and fauna. Mr Cumming's foliated cement column capitals in the archways of the nave were modelled in situ, 1934-1937. Each of the carved pews was different, and the best examples are preserved upstairs in the west gallery.

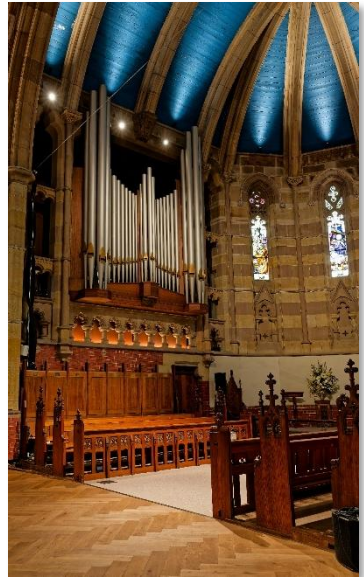


## THE ORGAN

The current organ, installed in 1862, was designed by St John's Church Organist Thomas Sharp in 1861 and built by Charles Brindley of Sheffield, England. With subsequent alterations as listed below, the Sharp-Brindley organ's quality as an English Romantic instrument has given it a national reputation. Two panels of original organ-front pipes from this organ are displayed on the wall above the west gallery. These are the rebuilds and major additions to it:

- 1912 - rebuild and relocation by J. E. Dodd of Melbourne;
- 1915-1929 - rebuild by St John's Church Organist G. F. Hopkins;
- 1934 - new console and front row of metal pipes added by George Fincham and Sons of Melbourne;
- 1959-1960 - rebuild by J. W. Walker and Sons of England, including the current console;
- 1974 - additions by Laurie Pipe Organs of Melbourne;
- 2007 - Simon Pierce, of Pierce Pipe Organs, Brisbane and son of former St John's Church Organist William Pierce, completed Mr Hopkins' original design for the organ's Great and Swell divisions with added flue work. This brought the total number of organ pipes to 3125 pipes in 49 ranks.

For further information about the organ, please refer to the separate brochure on the pipe organs of our Church.



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<sup>4</sup> See C. Miley, *Beautiful & Useful: the Arts and Crafts Movement in Tasmania*, QVMAG, Launceston, 1987.

## THE RECTORY

The rector's house lies to the south of the Church. Built in 1878, it was first occupied by Canon Brownrigg in 1879. Built under Henry (Harry) Conway's architectural oversight reputedly to Canon Brownrigg's design, it is typical of English rectories of the day, but with a verandah. It contains some beautiful Huon pine fittings. The servants' bells were removed in 1980 and the servants' stairs in 2015. In 2005 the upper floor was made into a self-contained flat for the rector, but is nowadays used as office and storage space. The rooms on the ground floor are currently used for meetings and offices for church staff.

## THE PARISH CENTRE

The first building used by the Sunday School was built in 1841 and is now leased to the neighbouring motel. An extension was built in 1890 adding a function hall and kitchen, and then a smaller hall was added in the early 1900s. All the extensions were removed in the 1970s and a new Parish Centre was erected in 1975 on the south side of the Church. This building was largely funded through a generous bequest of Laurence Denham.

## FURTHER READING

The early parochial records of births, marriages and deaths are held in the State Archives Office in Hobart, and on microfilm at Libraries Tasmania's Launceston branch.

Blake, Philip C., *John Youl: the Forgotten Chaplain*, Philip Blake, Launceston, 1999.

Browne, William H., edited by Gill Morris, *His record is on high: the journal of Reverend William Henry Browne, LL.D., of St John's Church, Launceston, Van Diemen's Land, 23 May 1830 - 19 February 1845*, Gill Morris, Launceston, 2013.

Burgess, Julian, *St. John's – Launceston's First Church – 1825-2025*, Launceston, 2025.

Gill, Jenny, *Engraved in Memory*, Jenny Gill, Launceston, 1988.

Miley, Caroline, *Beautiful & Useful: the Arts and Crafts Movement in Tasmania*, Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery, Launceston, 1987.

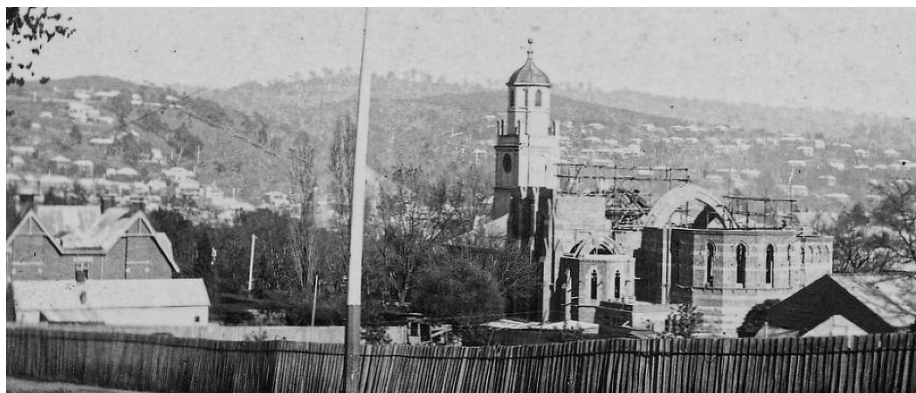
Ratcliff, Eric, *A Far Microcosm: Building and Architecture in Van Diemen's Land and Tasmania 1803-1914*, (4 vols.), Fullers, Hobart, 2015.

Webb, Peter G., "The building of St John's Church, Launceston" in *Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Papers & Proceedings*, vol. 24 no. 4, 1977, pp. 141-150.

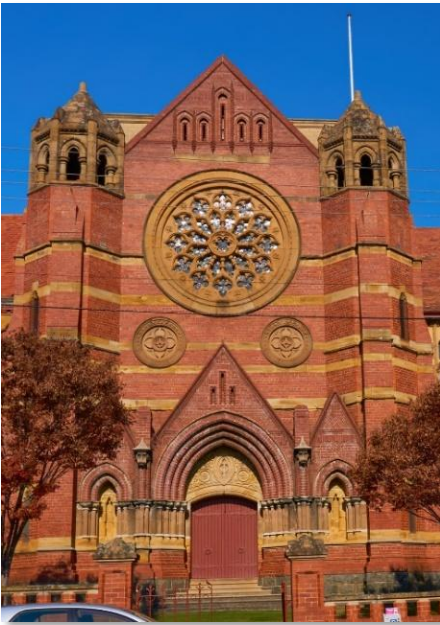
# RECTORS OF ST JOHN'S CHURCH

1819 - 1827	The Reverend John Youl
1827 - 1828	The Reverend James Norman
1828 - 1868	The Reverend William H. Browne, LL.D.
1868 - 1887	The Reverend Canon Marcus Blake Brownrigg, M.A.
1887 - 1890	The Reverend Elias C. Champion, M.A.
1891 - 1896	The Reverend Canon R. C. Nugent Kelly, M.A.
1897 - 1908	The Venerable A. Richard Beresford
1908 - 1913	The Reverend John S. Bryers, M.A.
1913 - 1919	The Reverend Herbert N. Baker, M.A.
1919 - 1921	The Reverend F. E. Cassion Crotty, Th.L B.D., M.A.
1921 - 1933	The Reverend D. Ross Hewton
1933 - 1949	The Reverend Canon William Greenwood
1949 - 1961	The Reverend Leonard N. Sutton, B.A.( <i>Syd</i> ), Th.L., M.A.( <i>Oxf</i> )
1961 - 1970	The Venerable Henry A. Jerrim, O.B.E.*, E.D., Th.L.
1970 - 1974	The Reverend H. Hugh Girvan, Th.L., Dip.C.C.A.C.
1974 - 1981	The Venerable Ian E. A. Booth, Th.L.
1981 - 1986	The Reverend Ernest E. Horth, R.F.D., B.A., Th.L.
1987 - 1993	The Reverend John A. Brook, B.A., Th.L.
1993 - 2004	The Venerable Gregory K. Clifton, Th.L.
2005 - 2016	The Right Reverend Ross J. Nicholson, Dip.A., B.Com., M.A.(Theology)
2017 - 2025	The Reverend James Hornby, B.FSC, M.Div.
2025 -	The Reverend Dr Cameron Munro B.AppSc., B.Div (Hons), Dip.Min, M.A. (Theology), D.Min.

*\* awarded 1 January 1984 "for service to the Anglican Church and the community of Tasmania"*



*Major additions to St John's under construction circa 1909.*



Architect Alexander North's Elizabeth Street entrance to St John's. It shows the Great Rose Window donated by Mr and Mrs W. Perrin. The window depicts symbols of the person and offices of our Lord Jesus Christ:

**THE CROSS, THE LILY, THE ROSE, THE GRAPE, THE CORN, THE FISH, THE LION, THE LAMB, THE LAMP, THE SUN, THE KEY, AND THE SCEPTRE. IN THE CENTRE ARE THE GREEK LETTERS ALPHA AND OMEGA, REFERRING TO OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE BEGINNING AND THE END.**



The former Sunday School building in Elizabeth Street, built in 1841 and probably designed by James Blackburn, is now leased to the neighbouring motel.



The reredos on the east wall and communion table. The reredos is a mosaic interpretation of Leonardo da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper and is a memorial to the fallen of World War I.

## All Saints Anglican Network

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