



THE ORGAN OF ST JOHN'S



ST JOHN'S Launceston
an All Saints Network church

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INTRODUCTION



St. John's Church, Launceston, was one of the earliest churches in Australia to have a pipe organ and remarkably, the history of both the first and second instruments can be traced in detail from the time of their being built to the present day.

The following account proves to be both interesting and informative.

"The present instrument offers a quality and range of sounds which make it one of the finest parish church organs in the Southern Hemisphere.

As a recital instrument, it has a versatility for the presentation of all schools of organ composition, especially those works written in the Romantic and post-Romantic tradition of the past one hundred years as well as for many modern compositions. Helped by the acoustic reverberation of the building, the organ, whether heard with an individual stop drawn or in full chorus, soft or loud, smooth-toned or fiery, produces a sound which is always warm and always majestic."

William Pierce, St John's Church Organist, May 1983

'Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord.' Psalm 150

1826

The first organ was built in 1826 by John Gray of London at a cost of £300, with shipping costs. It arrived in Launceston in September 1827 and was installed before May 1828 by Mr Evans (of Evans & Gribble) and a Mr Beckford. It had 568 pipes and 8 stops (or registers) with a single keyboard and compass of 4 octaves. In the lowest octave, the note A flat was left out because of the system of tuning then in vogue which, we are told, made it impossible to play in any key exceeding 3 sharps or 3 flats. This organ was positioned on the former west gallery, where the choir assembled for services, on each side of the console. The earliest available details of appointing an organist have been found in a letter from the Reverend James Norman to the Colonial Secretary's Office in May 1828 requesting payment of a salary to 'one Cuncliffe, a clerk in the Police Force for his services as organist'. It is not recorded whether he was actually appointed.

Changes to the organ took place sometime later, probably in about 1850, when an enclosed chest was added, (perhaps by Gray and Davidson), carrying an 8 ft Treble Clarabella and a 4 ft Flute - full compass.



The 1828 pipes in their original location before the major rebuilding phase of the 1930s

1862

In 1862, the organ was sold to St Andrew's Kirk, Launceston for £290, after which it was moved to St George's Church, Invermay under loan from the Launceston Grammar School who purchased the instrument for £190 in 1922. The organ was then transferred to the Launceston Grammar School in 1933 when the Chapel was completed. Hill, Norman & Beard of Melbourne was commissioned to alter the bass compass from GGG to CC and to add a pedal board with a Bourdon 16 ft and a Bass Flute 8 ft. An electric blower was provided for the new section. In 1965, the organ was purchased by St John's Church, Franklin in southern Tasmania for £750. Throughout this time, the organ had been moved around without its original front which has been retained at St John's and is displayed high on the west wall of the nave.

1862 – THE BRINDLEY-SHARP ORGAN

'The opening of the new organ recently erected in St John's Church, took place on Sunday last, the event being celebrated by the performance of two full choral services. The Venerable Mr Reibey preached in the morning and the Reverend Dr. Browne, in the evening. Mr Thomas Sharp, organist of the church, presided at the instrument and was well supported by an efficient choir stationed on either side of the organ.'

'Launceston Examiner' Tuesday, 26th August, 1862



The 1862 Brindley-Sharp Organ in the west gallery

The organ was planned by St John's Church organist, Mr Thomas Sharp, and was built in 1861 by Charles Brindley of Sheffield, England. It was installed in the old west gallery. Its price in England was about £350, but the freight, cost of installation and other necessary expenses brought the total cost to nearly £500.

The new instrument consisted of 'Great', 'Swell' and 'Pedal' organs; two rows of keys, and two and a half octaves of pedals. The compass of the Great organ is from CC to G in alt., the Swell from tenor C to G in alt. and the Pedals from CCC to F. The case was painted in imitation of oak, and the front pipes, now displayed in two panels on the west wall of the nave, were finished in blue and gold. The organ was powered by a hand-operated bellows.

The story goes that at the time of construction, the pipes were not all new. One rank of flutes of rare tonal beauty are said to have been made by Renatus Harris of England in the early 1660s.

1912 – A NEW LOCATION

In 1912, after the 1901-1911 building extensions, Mr J. E. Dodd, an organ builder from Adelaide, was instructed to remove the organ to a large well-designed organ loft to the left of the chancel. The roof of this chamber is dome-shaped, and deflects the sound out into the building which has a reverberation period of about 3 seconds when empty. Mr Dodd also added two new stops, a Clarabella (clear toned flute) and a quiet string toned stop named Viol d'Orchestre.

The architect of this building, Mr Alexander North, seemed to have been one of the very few of his profession who demonstrated a sound awareness of the needs of organs and choirs.



In 1912, the Brindley organ was completely moved, still in its previous format, into Alexander North's well designed loft.

The panelling had not yet been installed behind the choir stalls.

In 1912, G. F. Hopkins arrived from England to become the organist and choirmaster at St John's. He had been an organ builder with the firm of Hopkins & Rimbault, and the nephew of Dr E. J. Hopkins, organist of the Temple Church, London. In 1915, G. F. Hopkins began to rebuild and enlarge the Brindley organ on English cathedral lines. The project was not quite complete when he left Launceston in 1929 after some years of difficult relations with the wardens of the day, who were constantly reminding him not to spend money on the organ building without their authorisation. By now, the organ was a superb instrument incorporating all the old pipework, new slider sound boards, ranks of pipes imported from the best English sources and wooden pipes made from fine local timbers. In 1929, the organ consisted of 3 manuals, 2 connected, 31 stops and 1900 pipes. It is interesting to note that G. F. Hopkins had planned 4 manuals, 90 stops and 4,700 pipes.

The next stage in the development of the organ occurred in 1934 when George Fincham & Sons, organ builders of Melbourne, installed a front row of metal pipes and a new detached 3-manual console in the chancel. Only 2 manuals were connected to pipes at this stage. The tubular pneumatic action created problems as the console was about 40 ft below the instrument itself. There was a marked delay between the pressing of the keys and the sounding of the pipes, often embarrassingly. The pedals were even slower.



The Brindley Organ console in 1928



Two sets of earlier organ front pipes are on display above the west gallery – from the 1826 Gray organ and the 1862 Brindley organ.

1954

The situation remained unchanged until 1954 when a Claribel Flute, which is a pleasant solo stop, was added as a tribute to Mr Arthur Gee for his long and faithful service to the church as organist and choirmaster.

In 1955, the state of the organ was assessed by Mr Keith Davis, who confirmed the extent of the deterioration which had taken place over time. During that year all the pipes were cleaned and urgent repairs made. The report concluded that a complete rebuild would be necessary within the next few years.

Lindsay O'Neill, organist and choirmaster, was responsible for the comprehensive rebuild of the instrument by Messrs J. W. Walker & Sons Ltd. of England. The project was commissioned in February 1959 and was financed from generous bequests from the late Miss Ada Harrap, Mr Leslie Harold Lakin, Mrs Hilda May Lakin, and Mr Herman Rupp Lakin.

1960 – NEW CONSOLE

Early in 1960 many pipes were sent to England for revoicing. Work in the church began in August, with the arrival of Walker's representative, Arthur Jones, taking 6 months to complete the project. At this time of rebuilding, the opportunity was taken to install the extra pipes for the third keyboard. A new blowing apparatus was installed, and the pneumatic action was replaced with a modern electronic action to overcome the delayed response. The new console, for its time, was a wonderful piece of electronic craftsmanship and is also a beautifully carved piece of furniture.

The music-desk and frame of the console are constructed of fumed oak, the stop panels are of polished ebony, and the key-checks of French-polished mahogany. The keys, draw-knobs (which are fitted with toggle action) and thumb pistons are of solid ivory. The electro-pneumatic action is, of course, perfect. The electric swell shutter control gives the pleasant illusion of being mechanical in operation. The console, placed at the north side of the chancel steps, is well-located to hear the organ in proper perspective, and from here everything sounds in correct balance even when the Tuba, which speaks out into the north transept and Westminster Gallery, is employed.

All pipes were retained and nearly 600 new ones added, many of them for the third manual, and making up the 'choir' organ of quiet-toned stops, along with two new solo stops, the Tuba and a Clarinet. The last was purchased with money from the Memorial Fund for the late Harold Brownrigg, son of a distinguished former rector and member of the choir for many years.

1974

Laurie Pipe Organs of Melbourne made further alterations in 1974 when the Tuba was taken out and repositioned 'en chamade' (horizontal) above the choir vestry door, creating a most magnificent solo trumpet. A 32 ft Bombarde was also added to the pedal organ as an extension downwards of the 16 ft Trombone. These additions were made possible by the generous bequest of the late Mr Laurence Denham, and the gift of the Reverend David E. C. Lewis, a descendant of the first Chaplain, the Reverend John Youl, and an Assistant Curate of St John's 1972- 1974. The organ now had 3 manuals, 74 stops and 2,541 pipes, with 37 separate ranks of pipes.

2007

The long-held goal to complete the original concept of the organ as designed by G. F. Hopkins but not added to in the 1960 rebuild was realised in 2007 when Simon Pierce of Pierce Pipe Organs in Brisbane, and son of former St John's organist William Pierce, added a new IV rank Sharp Mixture to the Great in memory of Lindsay O'Neill, organist; a new Full Mixture to the Swell in memory of William Pierce, organist, and the Swell Mixture reconstituted as a Sesquialtera in memory of Archdeacon Leonard Sutton. This work completed the Swell and Great organ according to the Hopkins design. A total of 584 additional pipes were added to the Mixtures.

The dedication of the new stops took place on 2nd December 2007 with Gaylene Cohen, organist, demonstrating how the mixtures blend very nicely without being too sharp into the chorus and giving the whole organ a satisfying lift. In addition to the new Mixtures, a Laukhuff capture system was installed, as well as 75 drawer stops replaced with a modern Kimber Allen type.

The total cost came to \$43,310, and was funded by generous donations from the O'Neill, Pierce and Sutton families, as well as the congregation, community, and the many friends of the St John's organ.



Some of the new pipes added in 2007 – these tiny pipes represent a minuscule part of the 3125 pipes that make up this splendid organ.

CARILLON OF TUBULAR BELLS

The tubular bell system produces the same effect as a carillon of bells and is operated from a console housed in the north ambulatory of the church. Amplifier equipment is installed in the tower. The chimes can be heard over a distance of several kilometres; however the volume can be manually controlled.

The chimes were made by Boosey and Hawkes Ltd, London, the amplifying apparatus supplied by Amalgamated Wireless of Australia and installed by Findlays Pty Ltd'.

Examiner, 25 October 1946

The chimes were donated by the congregation as a peace thanksgiving at a cost of £450 and were first heard on 17 November 1946 being operated by the organist, Mr Arthur Gee. The chimes have signalled the call to worship, and the joy of newly-weds for decades, and important announcements such as the birth of a baby to Princess Elizabeth.

National Library of Australia



HARMONIUM

In 1964, a harmonium was provided to the chapel from a bequest from the late Mary M. Gee. The harmonium was a single manual German built 15-stop, 2 pedal Hörügel. It had fallen out of use in recent years, and when the chapel was configured in 2024, it was sold after consultation with the Gee family.



ORGANISTS AND CHOIRMASTERS

1827-1828	John Kay Cunliffe	1949-1974	Lindsay A. O'Neill
1828-1844	Mrs. K. Nairne	1956-1958	Arthur Wills (Acting)
1845-1852	T. L. Beckford	1963-1965	Miss Dorothy Glover (Acting)
1846	Thomas Rolfe (Acting)	1965-1971	Rodney Ford (Assist.)
1848-1849	D. A. Turner (Choirmaster)	1971	Lindsay Hutchinson (Acting)
1853-1854	W. Snelling	1975-1981	Chris J. Ryland
1855-1875	Thomas Sharp	1982-1994	William Pierce
1856	Miss Henry (Acting)	1983- 1994	Miss Gaylene Cohen (Assist.)
1876-1878	F. Ferguson	1994-2011	Miss Gaylene Cohen
1879	Carl Schmitt	1996-1999	Mrs Lorraine Macknight (Choir Director)
1879-1883	Henry King	<p>From 2012 onwards, there was no longer a stipendiary organist or choir director. The organ is still used for one of our Sunday services and for special events and recitals. It is usually played by honorary organists, with an occasional visit by organists of some renown. Honorary organists have included Glenn Clark, Alexander Kendall, Lynda Jessup, Kerry Holloway, Nigel McKinlay, Dr. Peter Renshaw, Craig Stenton, Ray Woods and Frederick Rainbird.</p>	
1883-1889	W. W. Thornthwaite		
1889-1890	J. Bryan		
1890-1897	Henry L. Smith		
1898	Miss Mabel Evershed (Acting)		
1898-1905	J. H. Fray		
1905-1911	Miss Mabel Evershed		
1906-1912	A. S. Wells (Choirmaster)		
1912-1928	George F. Hopkins		
1928-1948	Arthur R. Gee		

SPECIFICATION OF THE ORGAN

Compass of manuals, CC to C, 61 notes
 Compass of pedals, CCC to G, 32 notes
 The organ is arranged in four major divisions: Great, Swell, Choir and Pedal.

GREAT ORGAN

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Double Open Diapason
16 ft 61 pipes 2. Open Diapason No.1 8 ft 61 pipes 3. Open Diapason No.2
8 ft 61 pipes 4. Open Diapason No.3 8 ft 61 pipes 5. Stopped Flute 8 ft 61 pipes 6. Claribel Flute 8 ft 61 pipes 7. Principal 4 ft 61 pipes 8. Stopped Flute 4 ft 61 pipes | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Twelfth 2 and 2/3 ft 61 pipes 10. Fifteenth 2 ft 61 pipes 11. Mixture 3 ranks 183 pipes 12. Sharp Mixture 4 ranks 244 pipes 13. Contra Tromba T.C.
(fr. No. 13 Great) 16 ft 49 pipes 14. Tromba 8 ft 85 pipes 15. Clarion (fr. No. 13 Great)
4 ft 61 pipes |
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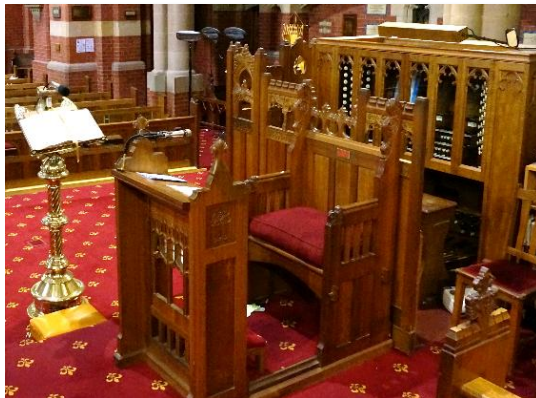
SWELL ORGAN

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lieblich Bourdon 16 ft 61 pipes 2. Open Diapason 8 ft 61 pipes 3. Flute D'Amour 8 ft 61 pipes 4. Clarabelle 8 ft 61 pipes 5. Viole d'Orchcstre 8 ft 61 pipes 6. Voix Celeste T.C. 8 ft 49 pipes 7. Salicional 8 ft 61 pipes 8. Principal 4 ft 61 pipes 9. Stopped Flute 4 ft 61 pipes | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Harmonic Piccolo 2 ft 61 pipes 11. Sesquialtera ranks 18 pipes 12. Full Mixture 3-4 ranked 232 pipes 13. Double Trumpet 16 ft 61 pipes 14. Cornopean 8 ft 61 pipes 15. Hautboy 8 ft 61 pipes 16. Harmonic Clarion Tremulant
4 ft 61 pipes 17. Tremulant 4 ft 1 pipe. |
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CHOIR ORGAN

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lieblich Bourdon 16 ft 97 pipes 2. Double Dulciana 16 ft 85 pipes 3. Violin Diapason 8 ft 73 pipes 4. Lieblich Gedeckt (fr no.1 Choir)
8 ft 61 notes 5. Dulciana (fr no, 2 Choir)
8 ft 61 notes 6. Prestant (fr no.3 Choir) pipes
4 ft 61 notes 7. Lieblich Flute (fr no. 1 Choir)
4 ft 61 notes 8. Dulcet (fr no. 2 Choir) 4 ft 61 notes 9. Nazard (fr no.1 Choir)
2 and 2/3 ft 61 notes 10. Flautino (fr no. 1 Choir)
2 ft 61 notes | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Tierce 1 and 3/5 ft 31 pipes 12. Dulciana Mixture (fr no. 2 Choir)
2 ranks 61 notes 13. Double Clarinet 16 fr 73 pipes 14. Clarinet (fr no. 13 Choir)
8 ft 61 notes 15. Contra Tromba (fr no. 12 Great)
16 ft 49 notes 16. Tromba (fr no. 13 Great)
8 ft 61 notes 17. Clarion (fr no. 14 Great)
4 ft 61 notes 18. Tuba 'en chamade' 8 ft 61 pipes
36 pipes placed horizontally 19. Tremulant |
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The organ console, with organ screen, in the 2020s, prior to the renovation of the church building.



PEDAL ORGAN

1. **Contra Bourdon** 32 ft 44 pipes
2. **Open Wood** 16 ft 44 pipes
3. **Open Diapason** (fr no.1 Great)
16 ft 32 notes
4. **Bourdon** (fr no. 1 Pedal)
16 ft 32 notes
5. **Leiblich Bourdon** (fr no. 1 Choir)
16 ft 32 notes
6. **Dulciana** (fr no. 2 Choir)
16 ft 32 notes
7. **Octave Wood** (fr no. 2 Pedal)
8 ft 32 notes
8. **Principal** 8 ft 44 pipes
9. **Bass Flute** 8 ft 44 pipes
10. **Fifteenth** (fr no. 8 Pedal)
4 ft 32 notes
11. **Bombarde** (fr no. 12 Great)
16 ft 32 pipes
12. **Trombone** (fr no. 12 Great)
16 ft 32 pipes
13. **Trumpet** (fr no. 13 Great)
8 ft 32 pipes
14. **Tuba** (fr no. 18 Choir)
8 ft 32 pipes

COUPLERS

1. Choir to Pedal
2. Great to Pedal
3. Swell to Pedal
4. Swell to Great
5. Choir to Great
6. Swell to Choir
7. Swell Octave
8. Swell Sub-octave
9. Swell Unison off
10. Great and Pedal Combinations
Coupled
11. Manual Doubles off

ACCESSORIES

- 25 Thumb Pistons
- 17 Toe Pistons
- Balanced Swell Pedal
- Balanced Choir Pedal



*The startlingly splendid tuba 'en chamade'
above the choir doorway*

TOTAL: 3125 pipes in 49 ranks

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This pamphlet last revised March 2026.