

Rev. William Henry Browne (1800-1877)

Rector of St. John's Church 1828-1868

William Henry Browne was born on 20th August, 1800, at Mallow, *Co. Cork*, the second but eldest surviving son of Henry Browne, barrister at law, and Isabella Galwey. They lived at Ballinvoher, Castletown, *Co. Cork*. William Henry was educated at Charleville School and on 6th October 1817, he entered Trinity College, Dublin, intending to study medicine. However, he changed over to theology and took his B.A. in 1822. There is no record in Dublin of his LL.D., but he was always addressed and referred to and signed himself as 'Doctor' and the evidence for the genuineness of his doctorate is too strong to be dismissed.

Browne was ordained deacon in 1824, appointed curate of Whitechurch and priested in the same year; he served there for three years. He then sought a colonial chaplaincy. He arrived in Van Diemen's Land in October, and on 1st November 1828, was gazetted chaplain at St. John's Church. For some years he was the only clergyman in Northern Tasmania. His parish extended from the mouth of the Tamar to Campbell Town and across to the East Coast; it comprised some 3,800 square miles and about 4,500 souls. He had responsibility for the gaol, barracks for male prisoners and the female house of correction, as well as for the Church; he held six services a week in addition to travelling and general pastoral work. Much of his travelling was on horseback. There being no residence for the chaplain when he arrived, he built himself a house, since demolished, named 'Bifrons', on the High Street.

In addition to his spiritual work, the Reverend Doctor showed great interest in education and soon acquired a school, but was forced to relinquish it under pressure from Archdeacon Scott. He was a stalwart evangelical and took a leading part in the controversies over church ritual; he quarrelled with Bishop Nixon and for some years was at odds with him.

Browne took no small interest in public and community affairs, principally in establishing the Benevolent Society, the Launceston Church Grammar School, St. John's Hospital in what is now Morton House, the Mechanics' Institute and, with the Reverend John West, he played a leading part in the Anti Transportation campaign. As well, he worked hard to establish the post office savings bank system in Tasmania, but his outspoken and sometimes indiscreet comments on other institutions caused bad feelings between Browne and other leading citizens.

Dr Browne was twice married. First, on 3rd September 1829, to Caroline Johnson, second daughter of Richard Willis, of 'Wanstead' near Conara; Caroline died at George Town in February 1845 aged 37 years and is buried in the George Town cemetery. Secondly, on 25th June 1846, to Julia Augusta aged 37, youngest daughter of the Reverend John Gavan, rector of Wallstown, *Co. Cork*. She survived him by twenty-two years and is buried in London. There were four children of each marriage. At his home 'Bifrons' on the outskirts of Launceston, the Reverend Doctor and his family were twice attacked by bushrangers, the first time in 1833, the second time was some twelve years later in early 1846. During his incumbency Browne made a number of improvements to St. John's Church. In these forty years the church was completed and in 1866 enlarged by the addition of a chancel; the first clock was installed in 1830 and the second, still existing, clock with bell, in 1835. The first service of confirmation was held in 1833 by Archdeacon Broughton.

In 1868 Dr Browne resigned because of age and failing health, but when Thomas Reiby resigned in 1870, Bishop Bromby appointed Browne Archdeacon of Launceston, which office he filled until his

death on 20th June 1877. He was buried in the Cypress Street cemetery with the simplicity he had always advocated for funerals.

During the construction of the east end of St. John's Church, Mr Montague Browne, a direct descendant, caused to be erected a monument in the shape of the family arms, carved in sandstone and crafted by Mr Hugh Cunningham. The inscription reads:

THE VEN. W. H. BROWNE LL.D.

RECTOR 1828-1868

ARCHDEACON 1870-1877

Arms:

Sa. on a chev. three lions passant between two bendlets.

Crest:

An eagle displayed.

Motto:

Suivet raison."

(Extract from *Engraved in Memory* by J.S.Gill. 1988)