

John Cameron (1806 - 1866)

John was baptised on 2nd March 1806 at St Botolph's, Aldgate, son of Alexander and Elizabeth Cameron.

He arrived in Hobart Town on 25 April 1823 accompanying his sister and brother-in-law, Mary Cameron and John Swan. He was 17. They were among the earliest of settlers coming to Van Diemen's Land by choice. After a trip to England in 1827, John returned and moved to Launceston in 1829 to set up his drapery business.

John returned to England again in 1836, and married Eliza Milburn Snell in London on 25th February 1837. They were back in Launceston by October. Following their marriage the Camerons joined the congregation at St John's (John was involved with establishing a Presbyterian kirk in Launceston in 1831).



With the new Church Act of 1837, churchwardens became responsible for management of local church funds. The first meeting of the pew holders of St John's, under the new Act was held on 28th December 1837 shortly after John's return from England. Three wardens were elected (Sams, Flexman and Hill) and they, along with the Rector, Dr. Browne, had to work out what they needed to do to run the Church and comply with the provisions of the Act.

John was a churchwarden for the years 1839 and 1840, and became seriously involved in the life of the church. In April that year, John was present at a meeting of members and friends of the Church of England to form a District Committee of the Societies for the Propagation of the Gospel and for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. By August John was stocking SPCK publications for sale in his shop, *Mr. Cameron's*, and receiving applications for membership. In October 1840, his efforts in Launceston were noted and compared with a lesser performance in recruitment in Hobart (*Courier (Hobart)*, 20 Oct 1840, p.2-3).

The growth of the church establishment was acknowledged by the appointment of Rev William Hutchins as Archdeacon for Van Diemen's Land in March 1836. Following Hutchin's untimely death in 1841, Rev Francis Russell Nixon was consecrated Bishop of Tasmania on 24th August 1842 in London.

The powers of the bishop and the legal status of the church remained a problem for some years in the colonies in the Australasian region. A conference of Bishops was held in Sydney in October 1850 in an endeavour to resolve the issues of church governance. The bishops proposed a structure with the overriding authority of the bishops and clergy. This was hotly contested over the following four years, along with differing views on church doctrine and finances.

On his return from an absence of four years (1853-56), John picked up the threads of his previous interests and the parishioners of St John's elected him as their lay representative to first meeting of Synod to be held on 29th September 1857 (*Courier (Hobart)* 14 Sept 1857, p.3). John remained a lay representative for St John's for the subsequent meetings in 1858 and 1859.

By the end of the first meeting, John had been appointed to several committees: the Church Patronage committee; a committee to raise the funds to pay for the direct costs of the Synod meeting (expenses of the members to be met by their parishes); a committee dealing with fees for Church services payable to

the Diocese, especially Marriage Licences; and a committee investigating the funding and management of Christ's College (in recession at the time) as well as the Launceston Church of England Grammar School and the Hutchins School (*Courier*, 7 Oct 1857, p.2).

Back in Launceston John was elected to a Board of Patronage to fill a vacancy at St John's, and also for Christ's Church, Longford (*Examiner*, 9 Sept 1858)

In March 1859, the Bishop called a meeting in Launceston in which he presented the history of the administration of the Church in the colony, and the onus on the church community to provide the necessary funds (*Hobart Town Advertiser*, 21 May 1859, p.2). John was again tasked with raising funds from the laity (*Courier*, 18 Mar 1859, p 2). As a lay representative of his parish for the third meeting of Synod, John was automatically a member of the subcommittee for the Launceston Archdeaconry, including the finance committee (*Courier*, 18 May 1859, p. 2).

In July John was on a Board of Patronage for Holy Trinity (*Cornwall Chronicle*, 20 July 1859).

The Camerons left for London again in February 1860, returning on 26th January 1863. John resumed his busy life, but suffered a stroke in June 1865 (*Mercury*, 9 June 1865)

The *Cornwall Chronicle* reported on 15 March 1865, that St John's Church needed to be enlarged. Plans included an extension and a chancel. JC promised a 'magnificent window' for the chancel. Debate continued over the extensions as there were insufficient funds for the building as planned (Peter Mills, architect) as well as disputes with the contractor over what he had contracted to do (1866). The window arrived on the *Black Swan* from Melbourne on 16 August 1866, and was installed in the completed chancel which was consecrated by the Bishop in September. On 3rd April 1931, The Examiner included an article on St John's saying that there were two beautiful windows of stained glass, a gift of John Cameron, that recall his memory.

Major extensions were undertaken in 1911, but John Cameron's window appears to have been removed. At some point his daughter, Kate, discovered that the window had been removed and not reinstalled. She may have attended St John's centenary celebration in 1925. *



As a young man, John established himself as a retail and wholesale merchant in Launceston and had a number of business interests. He had significant holding in real estate and is credited with establishing Brisbane Street as the principal shopping precinct in Launceston. He was a shareholder in various local enterprises, a founding director of the Launceston Gas Company, a trustee of the Devon Road District and of the Tasmanian Permanent Building and Investment Society. He was appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1845, but declined to seek public office in the local council or government.

Anne Cameron Batt - 2025

* Research by the Heritage and History team at St. John's has located a letter from the Diocese of Tasmania to St. John's Church in 1922 requesting that the window in question, if not required by St. John's, should be given to the church at Kingston. This evidently stimulated the church to temporarily install the window in one of the existing northern openings of St. John's in 1925, where it remained until stage 2 of the building project went ahead in 1938, after which the window was installed in the south clerestory, where it remains to this day.