



ST. JOHN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH  
TOORAK  
EST. 1859



# A Guide

# Welcome to St. John's Anglican Church, Toorak

This beautiful and historic church is open every day for all people to come and pray, rest, and reflect in one of Melbourne's most prominent places of worship.

This booklet has been prepared to assist the visitor in discovering some of the artistic, architectural, and aesthetic treasures of St. John's. We offer it as a guide and trust it will be found useful to you. Please replace the guide in the narthex (entrance porch) when you are finished with it, or, if you wish to keep it, please do leave a donation in the box affixed to the narthex wall for this purpose.

St. John's is a place of worship in the Anglican tradition, with a vibrant and active congregation stretching back 160 years. First time attenders and visitors are always welcome on Sundays.

Weekly service times are 8am and 10am each Sunday, 7pm on Wednesday evenings and as advertised on our website [www.saintjohnstoorak.org](http://www.saintjohnstoorak.org)

Again welcome – and God bless you.

The Revd. Dr. Peter A. French, Twelfth Vicar

**Statement of Significance: St John's Church & Organ, Toorak  
National Trust of Victoria**

A prominent bluestone church, designed by W. W. Wardell, built in various stages between 1860 and 1873, with the subsequent enlargement of the chancel in 1912 and the addition of the baptistry, vestries and chapel in 1920, 1935, and 1937, to the design of Walter Butler and Louis R. Williams. This was Wardell's first Anglican design, carried out on an honorary basis, and gave rise to suspicion that he was unfairly trying to develop an Anglican practice. The building comprises a lengthy nave, with aisles and a diminutive clerestory and chancel flanked by organ chamber, chapel and vestries. The exterior is dominated by an elegant tower, with stair turret and broach spire, placed at the west end. The interior is notable for the wood and stone carvings, organ by Hill & Son, London of 1912 (later rebuilt), and the excellent stained glass, especially the W. C. Cornish memorial window, which was the first major work of J. L. Lyon.



## 1. In the beginning...

The suburb of Toorak is named after the house and estate established by James Jackson from 1848-1851, and is believed to derive from an aboriginal word for 'pool of water'. In 1854 this property, Toorak House, became the residence for the Governor of Victoria. This, together with the economic and social boom generated by the Victorian gold rush of the 1850s, led to the Toorak locality beginning to acquire its reputation for large prestigious homes occupied by wealthy residents. One such resident was Mr. Alfred Ross, editor of *The Argus* newspaper, who was to offer about an acre of his property 'Orrong' for the purposes of a new church building in the fledgling suburb.

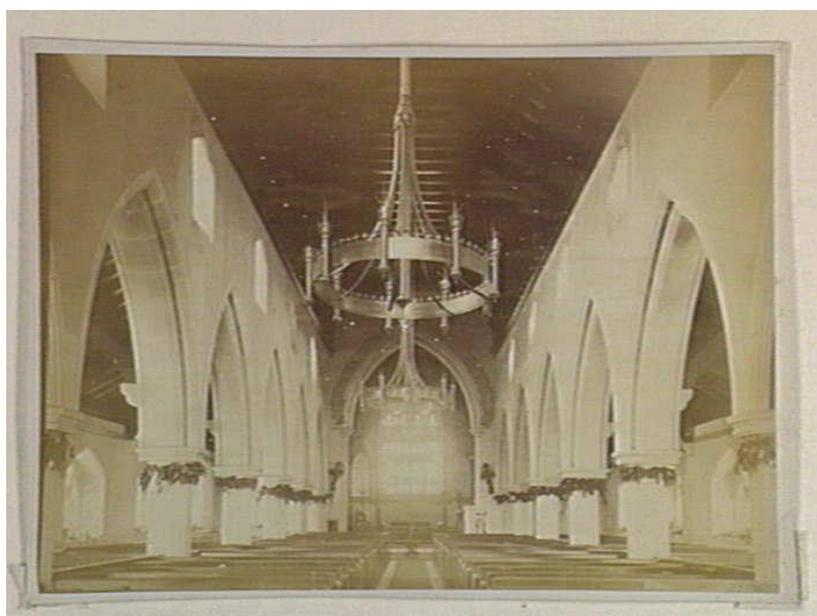


*Toorak in the late nineteenth century, looking from Government House towards St. John's.*

The first permanent Anglican Church to be erected in the area was, however, Christ Church, South Yarra, the land for which was allotted in 1854 on the present site on the corners of Punt Rd. and Toorak Rd. Residents of Toorak, including the Governor, initially travelled to Christ Church to attend church services, a distance of more than 2 kilometres for some. Towards the end of the 1850s it was felt by many that Toorak had grown sufficiently to warrant the building of a church of its own. To this end, a meeting of seventeen local residents was held on the evening of 21<sup>st</sup> November 1859, in the Heyington Place home of Mr. H. W. Dauglish. The building, called Sherren House, is now part of the St. Catherine's School. At the meeting, attended by several local dignitaries, a board of five trustees, together with an honorary secretary, were appointed to raise funds for the building of a church for the people of Toorak. In March 1860, Mr. Alfred Ross offered land for the proposed church on the corners of Toorak and Orrong Roads, and the site was promptly endorsed by the first Bishop of Melbourne, Charles Perry. The parish boundaries, which have not changed since inception, extended geographically from the Yarra River to occupy the area between Kooyong Road and Williams Road up until Malvern Road. The foundation stone was laid by the Governor, Sir Henry Barkly, and construction commenced in April 1860 under the supervision of architect William Wardell, with the first stage being substantially completed by October the same year. Upon Wardell's appointment as Inspector General for Public Works in the colony of Victoria, further works, including

the completion of the nave and the enlargement of the chancel, were completed under Nathaniel Billing during 1861.

The opening of the new church was, however, delayed for some twelve months by a controversy that developed with the 'parent' church, Christ Church South Yarra, whose trustees resisted the appointment of a vicar to St. John's, Toorak, which still lay within the parish boundaries of Christ Church. The trustees of Christ Church were greatly concerned that the loss of the eastern half of their parish would result in a dramatic decrease of income, largely from pew rentals, which was relied upon to service the debt incurred by the building of that church. At a meeting convened by Bishop Perry in June 1862, these concerns were finally allayed, with the Bishop himself guaranteeing £300 to offset the loss of income incurred by Christ Church. The now completed, but as yet unused, Church of St. John the Evangelist, Toorak, was finally opened for worship on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> July 1862. Sir Henry and Lady Barkly attended the opening service, which was led by the Revd Dr. Bromby, the first Headmaster of Melbourne Grammar School.



*Interior of St John's Toorak, ca. 1877 (State Library of Victoria)*

## **2. Architects**

Mr. Daughlish, in whose home the initial meeting that led to the founding of the parish had been held, invited his friend William Wilkinson Wardell to design and build the new church for the Anglican community of Toorak. Wardell was a pre-eminent colonial era architect, responsible for many public buildings in both Melbourne and Sydney, where he later moved. He had converted to Roman Catholicism in England prior to arriving in the colony of Victoria in 1858, and had designed some thirty Catholic churches in London. His first commission in Victoria was St. Patrick's Roman Catholic cathedral in East Melbourne. He also designed a new Government House in the Domain. St. John's Toorak was to be the only Anglican Church Wardell built. Under his influence and design, St. John's was built in the English Gothic revival style. Over the course of the next few decades a succession of other prominent architects of the time contributed to the building of St. John's and carried out further

works in keeping with Wardell's original design, including enlargements to the nave and the chancel, and the additions of the organ chamber, spire and baptistry. Among them are F. M. White (who designed the Toorak mansion Trawalla); A. L. Smith (Supreme Court of Victoria); A. E. Johnson (Melbourne General Post Office); and Charles D'Ebro (Stonnington Mansion and Prahran Town Hall). In subsequent years (especially between 1921 and 1961) Louis Williams, some time Diocesan architect, would have a large and important role at St. John's, designing many significant features of the interior, including the Baptistry and pews, together with the soldier's memorial and church hall.

### **3. The Exterior and Bells**

St. John's Church is constructed in basalt bluestone with Tasmanian sandstone dressings. The gabled roofs are of slate and are steeply pitched. The spire, based on the original plans drawn by William Wardell, was added in 1873. It was designed by Toorak resident A. E. Johnson and is capped by a weathercock some 150 feet (almost 46 metres) above ground level. A unique and somewhat unusual feature are the four stone gargoyles at each corner of the apex of the tower, and the fifty-two carved heads that decorate the corbels both inside and outside of the church. These are believed to have been carved by an unidentified Italian craftsman in the 1880s. Some of the heads have been identified as those of the first vicar the Revd Walter Fellows, his daughters May and Rose, his brother Judge Fellows, Canon Drought the second vicar of the parish, Queen Victoria, King George V, Cardinal Wolseley, Abbess Hilda of Whitby, and Bishop Moorhouse, the second Bishop of Melbourne. Most are, however, unidentified, and are thought to be representations of local identities and prominent citizens of the time.

Inside the spire is the belfry, which is accessed via a spiral staircase. Originally there was just a single bell, cast by W. G. Wilson of Glasgow in 1861. This bell was presented to Holy Trinity Hampton in 1921. There are now thirteen bells in the spire at St. John's (a full set of chimes), weighing over four tonnes in total. The largest bell, a Tenor F. Sharp called the 'Edward Latham', weighs over half a tonne. The first set of eight bells was given in 1921 by the Hon. & Mrs. W. L. Baillieu, in thanksgiving for those who returned safely from the Great War (including two of their own sons) and in memory of those who perished. A further set of five bells was given by the same Hon. Baillieu in memory of his wife, in 1927.

### **4. The Front Porch (Narthex) & North Porch**

The main entrance to the church is through the twin oak doors facing Orrong Rd., which lead into a small entrance area (the narthex), the interior doors of which provide a wind lobby. The doors were installed on the occasion of the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church in 1970. The north porch is a small entrance area with double oak doors that open out onto busy Toorak Road. Before the completion of the extensions to the nave carried out in 1878 this was the main entrance to the church. The porch is built entirely of stone, including its two white stone benches inside, and was fitted with oak paneling in 1927.

### **5. The Nave**

The main body of the church is called the nave, after the Latin *navis* meaning ship. The nave of St. John's consists of a long middle aisle, over 23 metres in length,

flanked by six bays of pews on either side. The interior is supported by stone arches, giving the nave a cathedral-like ambience.

**(i) Pews**

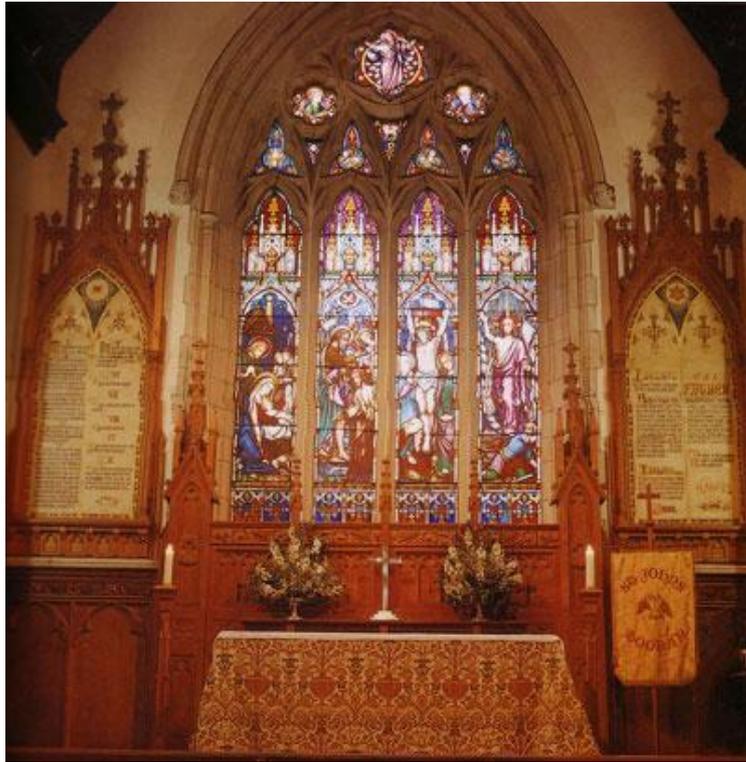
There are 23 rows of matching pews inside the nave. The pews are made of oak imported from Nana Island in Japan in a special consignment. They were designed by Louis Williams and carved by J. E. Lenegan. They were dedicated on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1934, by the Archbishop, with the old pews being distributed as gifts to five other parishes. The ends of each pew feature Australian fauna and flora, whilst those closest to the front of the church have ecclesiastical symbols. Originally pew rent was a major source of parish income for most churches in Melbourne. A booklet published in 1940 for the eightieth anniversary of St. John's says the pew rent was set in 1880 at £2 per pew and that this remained the case in 1940. The same pamphlet states that one sixth of the pews were free (as this was church law at the time) and that the nave could accommodate a maximum of 640 persons. Around 70 different people contributed some £2500 to the importation, design, and installation of the new pews. Most of the pews were donated as either thank offerings or memorials. A plaque attached to the base of each pew gives the details. Among the donors are:

- G. J. Coles
- Mrs. Sidney Myer
- St. Catherine's school
- Mr. M. H. Baillieu
- Mrs. H. Sargood
- Sir G. Turner (a former Premier of Victoria)
- A pew donated by 'all parish workers'

**(ii) Stained glass**

The interior of the nave is well lit by stained glass windows of a variety of design and colour. St. John's was the first parish church in the Diocese to be fully fitted with stained glass windows. Every window inside the church was filled between 1869 and 1938, and all are dedicated as memorials. Two windows in particular deserve special mention:

- The Lancet or East window, the oldest and largest window in the church, was designed and built by Melbourne firm Ferguson & Urie, and installed at the time of the construction of the church in 1862, in memory of William and Jane Cornish. Its four panels depict four important moments in the life of Christ, with a citation from one of each of the four Gospels underneath. Observant viewers, familiar with the Gospels, will note that the biblical references underneath two of the panels have been incorrectly transposed. This occurred many years after installation of the window, when the panels were removed for cleaning and repair.



- The other large window in the church is at the west end (over the entrance leading into the front porch and door). This window was installed in 1873 when the front porch was created and the spire added. It was given in memory of Mr. John Goodman (1826-1874), who had served as speaker of the Legislative Assembly, and was also one of the original trustees of the church. The west window features three panels illustrating three of the 'I am' sayings of Jesus ('I am... the way, the truth, and the life... the good shepherd... the light of the world) from St. John's Gospel.

Further windows of interest, inside the church are:

- The 'Missionary window' on the north wall, which features an indigenous Australian standing under the Southern Cross, the first known representation of an indigenous Australian in Victorian stained glass.
- The 'Healing window', also on the north wall of the church, illustrating a scene from St. John's Gospel Ch. 5 in which the sick and lame wait for a cure at the edge of the pool of Bethesda.
- The 'Children's window', which marks where the baptismal font originally stood, before it was moved to the Baptistry in 1920.
- The window nearest the chapel on the south side of the church is a memorial to the first vicar of the parish, the Revd Walter Fellows.
- The next window along the same wall, the 'Grice memorial window', commemorates two sons of the Grice family who gave their lives in 1901 (the Boer war) and 1916 (the First World War).
- Further windows along the south wall of the church depict important incidents in the New Testament, including the resurrection of Christ, his ascension into heaven, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

### **(iii) Memorials in Opus sectile**

Between the windows on both the north and south walls of the church are further memorials in stone and mosaic known as *opus sectile*, an ancient Roman technique. These memorials were conceived by the Vestry of the day in 1919. As almost all of the windows inside the church were already occupied, it was determined that the spaces in between the windows would be suitable for mosaic work. Each memorial consists of three panels in coloured stone with molded surrounds. The panels were installed from 1946.

The *opus sectile* on the north wall of the church each show scenes from the Old Testament. Beginning from the corner nearest the sanctuary and altar, these are:

- Abraham in the desert (Genesis 22.17)
- Moses presenting the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20)
- Samuel and the boy Eli in the temple (1 Samuel 3)
- David playing the harp to King Saul (1 Samuel 16.14-23)
- Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel (1 Kings 18.39)
- King Josiah finding the scrolls of the law in the temple (2 Kings 22)
- The prophet Ezekiel during the Babylonian exile (Ezekiel 14.1)

Those on the south wall of the church all depict scenes relating to the history of the Church of England and the arrival of the Anglican faith in Australia. Beginning from the corner nearest the Angel Chapel, these are:

- Joseph of Arimathea converting the Britons (legendary)
- St. Columba of Iona, Gaelic missionary monk, AD 521-597
- St. Augustine of Canterbury, the first Archbishop of Canterbury, arriving in Kent to meet King Ethelbert, AD 597
- William Caxton, demonstrating his printing press at Westminster, AD 1477
- Revd William Johnson conducting the first service in Australia at Port Jackson (Sydney) 3<sup>rd</sup> February AD 1788
- Samuel Marsden's first mission to New Zealand, AD 1814
- The first church in Melbourne, ca. AD 1836

### **(v) Other fabric and fixtures**

- The litany desk is usually kept on the south side of the cross aisle and is used on Sundays for the readings of the Prayers of the People or Intercessions. The desk was given by Mrs. A. McCallum in memory of her husband Archibald McCallum OBE, and features the McCallum family coat of arms together with the coats of arms for several other institutions to which St. John's owed allegiance at the time.
- The Lectern, at the front of the nave on the right, is brass and was given some time between 1900 and 1912, replacing an earlier lectern given by Alfred Ross who had donated the land on which the church was built.
- The Pulpit, at the front of the nave on the left, is carved from New Zealand limestone and rests on basalt pillars on a bluestone base. It was installed in 1881, replacing an earlier pulpit that was much larger and located where the lectern now stands.

## **6. The Baptistry**

The baptismal font was originally located at the front of the church until being moved to the usual position near the front door of the church in 1920. A new Baptistry was created by opening an arch in the west wall of the church. It was designed by Walter Butler, the architect responsible for the Mission to Seamen building in Flinders Street and the Wangaratta Cathedral, and dedicated in memory of Canon Drought, the second vicar of the parish. The first child to be baptised in the newly dedicated Baptistry (6<sup>th</sup> November 1938) was a great grandson of Canon Drought. The Baptistry dado (wood panel) carvings and font cover were designed by Louis Williams and carved by J. E. Lenegan (the same team which had designed and carved the pews). The baptismal font is of white stone, with an elaborately carved timber cover, showing scenes from John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

## **7. The Chancel**

The chancel was at first much smaller and was gradually expanded and enlarged to its present size during renovations undertaken in 1862 shortly after the building of the nave, and again in 1912 and 1936-1937, during which time the marble flooring was laid. The space occupied by the chancel is separated from the nave by a stone arch. At the front of the arch, on either side, is the stone pulpit (from which the sermon is given at services of worship) and the lectern, which as in most Anglican churches is carved into the figure of an eagle with wings spread (from which the Scripture readings are read at services of worship). On either side of the chancel are the choir stalls, organ console, and seats for the clergy. The choir stalls are made of oak and were installed in 1920 in thanksgiving for the end of the Great War. Before the building of the spire the choir were located in a loft at the back of the church which has long since been demolished.

## **8. The Sanctuary and Altar**

The altar is constructed from oak and dates from 1904. It was originally fixed to the east wall, but has been detached and brought forward, enabling the priest to stand behind it facing the congregation. The oak rails and gates were installed under the supervision of Louis Williams in 1921, replacing the original wrought iron rails. The carving in the altar frontal depicts the Last Supper of Christ (recalling Da Vinci) and is the work of J. E. Lenegan who also carved the pew ends. Rising over the altar is the magnificent East (or Lancet) window (referred to above). On either side of the window are a pair of ornate wooden panels painted in Gothic style by Mrs. Fellows, wife of the first vicar the Revd Walter Fellows, and given in memory of Mrs. Ethel Law, wife of the third vicar. The two panels contain illuminated manuscript: on the left are the Ten Commandments and on the right the Apostles' Creed and Lord's Prayer.



## **9. The Organ**

The first organ was installed in St. John's in 1873 and constructed by organ makers Merklin-Schutze of Brussels. This organ was commissioned by the first vicar, the Revd Walter Fellows, and was originally located in the choir loft at the west end of the church (near the front door and narthex). The organ and choir were moved to the sanctuary in 1878. A new organ was commissioned in 1912 when extensive renovations were undertaken to the front area of the church on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding. This organ, constructed by William Hill & Son of London, was installed in 1914. The instrument was tested in London prior to its transportation by the famous organist of Westminster Abbey, Sir Frederick Bridges. It was given by the Connibere family in memory of their father, a prominent member of the parish, who had died in 1911. To accommodate this new organ the chancel had to be enlarged and a small room built to house the organ blower. The organ was rebuilt and enlarged in 1961, and was restored back to its original condition in 1995, at which time the pipes visible in the chancel were painted and stenciled. The organ is the largest Hill organ in Australia. It has 48 speaking stops, three manuals, and over 2,000 pipes. Down to the present day, the organ has provided sacred music for worship services in St. John's, with the singing led by the parish choir.

## **10. The Chapel of St. Michael and All Angels**

Dedicated on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1937 and constructed with the substantial gift of an anonymous parishioner, the Chapel of St Michael and All Angels (known popularly as the Angel Chapel) was the last major structural addition to the church. It is separated from the chancel by a timber and glass screen and accessed through twin doors on the south side of the aisle, or through the separate porch and entry leading out on the south lawn (facing Clendon Road). The chapel is fitted with a small sanctuary and stone altar, and with wooden pews installed in 1971. Inside are three fragments of Medieval French stained glass, each collected from the ruins of cathedrals in France and Belgium during the First World War. The prayer desk is carved into the shape of the Angel of Gethsemane in the style of a Medieval Miserere seat. Carved underneath the seat is a priestly figure sweeping away 'filthy lucre'. The moveable lectern on the opposite side of the chapel is in the shape of a matching angel with stars and names of the seven angels of the seven churches of Asia (from the Book of Revelation Chs 2-3) carved in the pedestal base. The chapel was designed by Louis Williams and the extensive wood carvings, showing scenes of pioneering

life in Australia, and numerous depictions of angels, are the work of J. E. Lenegan. Of particular note are the six large angels in each corner of the roof, four of which are named as Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel. There are thought to be over thirty different representations of angels inside the small space occupied by the chapel. Counting them has occupied many schoolchildren over the years.

## **11. The Cloisters**

A door on the south side of the sanctuary, located in between the choir stalls and a small entrance to the Angel Chapel, leads to the cloisters, which were added in 1936. Along the narrow stone corridor are the clergy vestry, the library, the choir vestry, and the toilets. Along the corridor are chiseled important dates relating to the fabric and fittings of the church, and framed photographs of the clergy who have served St. John's as vicar.

## **12. The Grounds and Other Buildings**

The parish site occupies an irregular area bounded by Toorak Road and the intersections of Orrong Road and Clendon Road. Rising over the vicarage is the only remaining tree of a row of large trees which once lined the driveway to 'Orrong', the home of Mr. Alfred Ross who donated the land on which the church was built. The homestead was demolished in the 1930s and the original driveway leading to the mansion is now Clendon Road.

### **(i) *Soldiers' Memorial***

The soldiers' memorial was designed by Louis Williams and is located at the front of the church facing the prominent corners of Toorak Road and Orrong Road. The memorial is hexagonal in shape and is made of sandstone, with bronze panels depicting an Australian soldier at the point of death handing his sword to 'Victory'. The memorial was dedicated in 1923 and inscribed with the names of the 36 men of the parish killed during the First World War together with the 120 more who served, both men and women. In 2005 the memorial was updated in conjunction with the Toorak RSL and a bronze panel added commemorating those who served and died in subsequent conflicts.

### **(ii) *Buxton Hall***

The original parish hall was constructed in 1860 at the same time as the church, near the Toorak Road corner of Grange Road, now in the Toorak Village shopping precinct. This building was used as a Church of England school until the State Education act of 1872. Plans for the building of the current Buxton Hall on the church site were drawn up in the 1950s and a fundraising committee established under the supervision of department store head Sir George Coles. The new hall, named the Buxton Memorial Hall after Ms Winifred Buxton whose bequest financed a recent refurbishment of the building's interior, was designed by Louis Williams and dedicated in 1957 in memory of those lost in the Second World War. The hall complex includes several offices which occupy what was the stage, and also houses the Kindergarten.

### **(iii) Vicarage**

The first vicarage was built to house the new Incumbent at the same time as the church and completed in 1862. A new single storey vicarage was constructed on the same site in 1958, using many of the materials of the first building, in particular the bricks and tile slates.

### **(iv) Grounds & Garden of Remembrance**

The two substantial areas surrounding the church are that of the south lawn, along the Clendon Road frontage, and that of the Garden of Remembrance, on the north side of the church facing Toorak Road. The south lawn, the largest open space around the church, is widely used for photographs following the many marriage services that take place at St. John's. Baron Sir Ferdinand von Mueller, who planted much of the Botanic Gardens, is known to have presented some plants to St. John's and to have had a role in the design and planting of the lawns. The Garden of Remembrance was established in 1971 for the purposes of interring the ashes of past parishioners. The names of those interred, together with many others, are kept in the Book of Remembrance on a window sill inside the church. In 2108, a substantial gift was made by parishioner and eminent Australian, Tony Beddison AC (1948-2020), in memory of his mother, Sally Beddison. The gift was in the form of a beautiful reimagining of the gardens and world-renowned landscaper, Paul Bangay OAM, was commissioned to undertake this major project. Bangay's stunning landscaping sensitively includes heritage-listed trees, some of the oldest trees in Toorak.

## **13. Clergy**

Twelve priests have served St. John's Toorak as Incumbent (vicar) since the church was opened for worship in 1862. The first priest to conduct services at St. John's was, however, the first Headmaster of Melbourne Grammar School, the Revd John Bromby, a Yorkshireman born in Hull, who conducted services in the new church until the Revd Walter Fellows was able to take up the position as first vicar of the parish in October 1863. Fellows was an Oxford graduate who held the record for the longest known hit in a game of cricket during the Victorian era, being credited with driving a ball 173 yards at the Christ Church ground in Oxford. He remained until 1900, a period of 37 years, and during his long incumbency the church was substantially completed with the nave extended and the chancel and spire added. The second vicar, Canon Drought, was a graduate of Trinity College Cambridge with honours in mathematics as well as theology. He led the parish during the difficult days of the First World War and resigned during the conflict, suffering the tragic loss of one of his own sons on the Western Front (a memorial dedicated to his memory is located on a wall inside the Angel Chapel). Another of his sons also became a priest and gave the address on the occasions of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the church. The third vicar, Dr. Law, led the movement against the granting of liquor licenses in the Toorak area as Chairman of the Prohibition Union during the 1920's and 1930s. His resignation, after 27 years as vicar, warranted an article in *The Argus*.

### **Incumbents of St. John's Toorak**

The Revd Walter Fellows, 1863-1900  
The Revd Canon Charles E. Drought, 1900-1917  
The Revd Dr. Archibald Law, 1918-1945  
The Revd Canon H. M. Arrowsmith, 1945-1950  
The Venerable A. R. Mace, 1950-1955  
The Revd Thomas Gee, 1955-1968  
The Revd A. Victor Maddick, 1968-1978  
The Venerable Stan Moss 1978-1988  
The Venerable Philip Newman 1988-2004  
The Revd Michael Simpson, 2004-2008  
The Revd Dr. Bradly S. Billings, 2009-2015  
The Revd Dr. Peter A. French, 2016-

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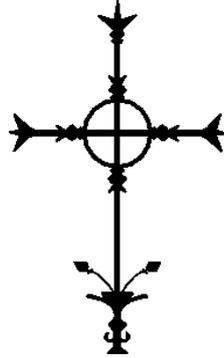
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*An early lithograph of St. John's church in the 19th century, from the archives at Whitehead's Printers, Clifton Hill.*



ST. JOHN'S  
ANGLICAN  
CHURCH  
TOORAK  
EST. 1859

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