

= St John 's , Ashfield =

St John the Baptist Anglican Church is an active Anglican church located between Alt and Bland Streets , Ashfield , a suburb of Sydney , Australia . Founded in 1840 , on land donated by Elizabeth Underwood , the church building is the oldest authenticated surviving building in Ashfield , having been built at the time when subdivision increased the population density sufficiently to turn Ashfield into a town . It was also the first church built along the Parramatta Road which linked the early colonial towns of Sydney and Parramatta . The earliest remaining parts of the building are one of the first Sydney designs by the colonial architect Edmund Blacket , who later became renowned for his ecclesiastical architecture .

The expansive church grounds contain a cemetery dating back to 1845 that contains the remains of many notable Ashfield residents . Australia 's only memorial to Australian Air Force Cadets occupies a prominent position near the entrance to the church . The St John 's site has been listed on the Local Environment Plan Heritage Schedule , and the Register of the National Trust of Australia .

St John 's is one of three churches , along with St Albans , Five Dock , and St Oswald 's , Haberfield , which make up Christ Church Inner West , operating within the parish of Ashfield , Five Dock , and Haberfield , as part of the South Sydney Region of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney . The church has had 18 rectors , including William George Hilliard who later became the Bishop of Nelson . Andrew Katay has been rector since early 2005 .

= = History = =

St John 's was the first church to be established along Parramatta Road between the colonial towns of Sydney and Parramatta ( then known as Rose Hill ) , during a time of rapid church building when many of the oldest churches in Sydney were erected . Since 1810 the Parish of Ashfield had extended from Balmain to Strathfield , and from Enfield to the Parramatta River , and in 1840 this was formalized into an ecclesiastical district .

= = = Early contributors = = =

The first portion of grounds , an area of 1 acre , 2 roods , and 36 perches ( a total of 0 @. @ 698 ha ) , was provided as a gift by the local landowner Elizabeth Underwood who was subdividing " Ashfield Park " . The Bishop of Australia , William Grant Broughton added urgency by expressing his " intention of having a Place of Worship erected immediately , on the allotment of land appropriated for that purpose " . Another benefactor was William Bland , a doctor and politician who had been sent to the colony having been convicted of manslaughter after pistol duel which left his opponent mortally wounded , and after whom Bland street is named . He gave a donation of £ 200 and land . Fellow local medical practitioner , James Bowman , contributed a " similarly munificent donation " . By mid @-@ 1839 the funds received were thought to be sufficient to commence building . The exact location was determined in February 1840 , and appeals continued to fund a building of sufficient size for the surrounding population .

= = = Church building = = =

The church was founded on 9 September 1840 . The service on that day was read by the first rector , Joseph Kidd Walpole , who had come to the district from Christ Church , Kelso , and had begun to plan the church building . W. G. Broughton made an address at the ceremony . The anniversary sermon was preached by Robert Allwood .

This Foundation Stone of a church dedicated to the honor and worship of Almighty God ! and to be denominated ' The Church of St. John the Baptist ' was laid the 9th day of September , 1840 . By the Right Reverend Father in God William Lord Bishop of Australia In the Fourth Year of the reign of Queen Victoria . Sir George Gipps , Knight . Governor . Rev. Joseph Kidd Walpole , Minister . Among those that are born of women there is not a greater Prophet than John the Baptist ; but he

that is last in the Kingdom of God is greater than he . Luke vii , 28 .

Building work on the church began in 1841 , but construction came to a standstill due to construction problems and insufficient subscriptions . The following year the colonial architect Edmund Blacket , as one of his first assignments after arriving in Sydney , was requested to inspect the church 's walls , then still under construction . As a result of his report , the walls were demolished and re @-@ erected , although continued funding problems , and the transfer of J. K. Walpole to Windsor caused further delays . The church was licensed for operation on 1 October 1843 . Much of the interior woodwork was carved by the third rector , Frederick Wilkinson . The roof was strengthened in around 1845 by the installation of timber support columns . On 16 August 1845 , at a cost of £ 100 the church purchased an additional 2 @.@ 5 acres ( 1 @.@ 0 ha ) of land from Elizabeth Underwood ( who remained a parishioner until her death , and is buried in a prominent grave within the church cemetery ) . The church was eventually consecrated on 19 August 1845 .

After 29 years , as the Bishop of Sydney Frederic Barker put it " the population of Sydney had invaded these sylvan shades " , so an expansion was required . Blacket designed the current stone transept and chancel , to transform the church into a cruciform plan . These were built during the period 1874 ? 1875 at a cost of around £ 150 ? raised without the help of grants from the government or the English societies . The foundation stone of the addition was laid by Barker on 24 October 1874 , and included a copy of Australian Churchman and the Sydney Morning Herald . At the time this addition accommodated an extra 250 seats , bringing the total capacity to 446 .

Construction of the choir vestry and a wooden porch outside the western door were completed in 1885 , and dedicated by Bishop Alfred Barry . This work was overseen by the Blacket brothers , who had followed the trade of their late father .

Arthur Blacket then designed the west tower . The eight @-@ bell peal was ordered from England after a generous bequest by one of the " Melanesian boys " , David Marguay , and subsequent fundraising . The tower was then quickly constructed at a cost of around £ 250 in memory of the recently deceased rector James Christian Corlette , and dedicated as The Corlette Memorial Tower on 1 November 1901 . The memorial bells proved depressing amongst the local populace , and were rearranged in 1904 , with louvres added to the previously open arches . This was apparently ineffective , as the bells were removed within a few years .

= = = Music = = =

Prior to the installation of a pipe organ , a seraphine and then an harmonium were used for musical accompaniment . The first organ was installed above the gallery at the western end of the church by William Davidson at the request of the rector J. C. Corlette , and was transferred to the south transept in about 1879 , where it remained until 1882 when it was sold to St Bartholomew 's , Pyrmont , and later St Luke 's , Northmead .

The 1883 Hill and Son organ , including 844 pipes , costing a total of £ 550 , was installed in 1884 , and located in the north @-@ east corner of the transept . It is still in use , with original pipework , making it faithful to the original tones . The organ was refurbished and rebuilt in 1950 , 1975 , and 2008 .

The 1950 change from mechanical to electrical action was motivated by removing the increasingly noisy pedals and trackers . This refurbishment also included detachment of the console ( to the other side of the transept ) , and replacement of the bellows with a " pressure equaliser " . The façade pipes were sprayed to a dull gold colour , covering over the original diapering , described disparagingly at the time as " all over the pipes without much rhyme or reason ; fleurs @-@ de @-@ lys in profusion , dots , bands , triangles in all the colours of the rainbow rioted in confusion " . This work was carried out by R. A. and D. A. Wiltshire .

By 1975 the organ had become unplayable , and a reconversion to mechanical action was undertaken . The console was moved back to the organ side of the transept , with the action going backward under the floor into the organ . This necessitated removal of floor joists and foundation piers , but the unsupported floor caused further problems long term , and during the 2008 rebuild it was re @-@ electrified .

Between 2006 ? 2008 Sydney firm " John W Parker ? Pipe Organ Builders " refurbished the organ , returning the soundboard action to electric , providing a new roll @-@ top ' detached ' console , and an entirely new wind supply and bellows . The swell box which had been discarded in the 1975 rebuild was reinstated , and the pedal Bourdon 16 ' stop was extended to 8 ' pitch . Octave couplers were provided in Sub and Octave pitches on the Swell also . All manual pipework was washed , cleaned and regulated to original Hill standards and tonality .

The church had a significant choral history , with significant events often celebrated with a full choir , sometimes accompanied by an orchestra . In the late 19th century the St John 's choir participated in regional choir festivals .

= = = Site development = = =

A small hall for Sunday school was erected in 1865 by the generosity of L. H. Smythe . By 1895 the hall had fallen into disrepair , and the needs of the children had outgrown it . The current Parish Hall was planned to replace it . The memorial stone for the replacement building was laid by the Primate of Australia , William Saumarez Smith in inclement weather on 2 February 1895 . The architect was E. A. Scott , and his building design was of a " domestic style ... with a highly decorated front " . It cost £ 625 10s , was complete within three months , and seated up to 400 . However , by 1903 , the Sunday school had once again outgrown the space available , and an additional infants classroom was built nearby . This is now called the Small Hall , and is used as a classroom for the St John 's Preschool .

A rectory was first provided for the rector J. C. Corlette and his large family in 1879 . A block of land , located on what is now the corner of Rectory Avenue and Alt Street , was purchased for £ 444 , and the foundation stone was laid by Bishop Barker in 1880 . This original rectory was sold in 1922 for £ 1800 . The current rectory , on the main grounds of the church , was founded by Archbishop John Charles Wright in the same year , during the rectorship of William George Hilliard , and built at a cost of £ 2500 .

Gravel pathways lined with Phoenix canariensis palms , the lawn in front of the church , and the stone churchyard fence were also constructed in the 1920s . The Alt Street wall was erected in 1922 , and dedicated to the previous rector Alfred Yarnold . The Bland Street wall was dedicated in 1927 by Archdeacon Davies , and commemorates one of the key contributors , R. A. Forsaith .

The cemetery , which had been in existence since soon after the foundation of the church ( the first interment was Frederick Underwood , Elizabeth 's 11 @-@ month @-@ old grandson , on 1 May 1845 ) , was consecrated by the Archbishop of Sydney , Howard West Kilvinton Mowll , on 8 September 1934 . By this stage it reportedly already contained the remains of 1 @,@ 396 people . He was asked by the rector of the time to " set apart the area , containing 4 acres and 4 perches ( 1 @.@ 63 ha ) , as a burial @-@ place for the bodies of Christian people living in and about Ashfield " .

Australia 's only memorial to Australian Air Force Cadets occupies a prominent position on the grounds , and a memorial service attended by the Cadets has been held annually since it was opened by the State Governor Lieutenant General John Northcott in 1946 . It was built by Squadron Leader Arthur Whitehurst who had commanded a squadron at Ashfield during the period 1941 ? 1946 , and whose son Douglas Arthur Whitehurst had died in action in World War II .

A children 's playground was installed near the Alt St boundary in 2011 , and opened by Ashfield Municipal Council Mayor Ted Cassidy and Strathfield MP Charles Casuscelli .

= = = Regional influence = = =

A number of local street names were derived from the presence of St John 's . Church Street , which ends directly opposite the church entrance , was originally the track used by Burwood residents to reach the church , using a conveniently located fallen tree across Iron Cove Creek .

As the population of Sydney 's Inner West grew , many of the Anglican churches in the area were established by the congregation of St John 's ( including four during the final thirty years of the

nineteenth century ) . These include Balmain , Burwood , Five Dock , St Thomas ' Enfield ( declared a separate parish in 1868 ) , and St Oswald 's Haberfield ( 1908 ) . Because of this involvement , St John 's was later referred to as the " Mother Church of Western Suburbs " .

= = = Rectors = = =

St. John 's has had eighteen rectors to date .

Joseph Kidd Walpole was the first rector , during the period 1840 ? 1842 . He was originally from England , and went on mission to Madras in 1836 , but his health gave way , and he was transferred to New South Wales . He was ordained as a Deacon in 1936 , and as a Priest in 1937 . After disappointing progress on the building , he was transferred to Richmond after two years .

William Stone , B.A. was the rector during the period 1842 ? 1843 . He grew up in a clerical family in Ireland , married his first cousin , and had nine children , seven of whom joined their parents on the journey to Australia in 1841 . When appointed at St John 's , he set aside a room in their family home , deemed by the Bishop as temporarily licensed as a place of worship since the church was not yet complete . At the time he was also the minister of the Parish of Concord , and earned a government stipend of £ 150 . He was transferred to Sutton Forest in 1843 .

Frederick Wilkinson , M.A. , was the rector during the period 1843 ? 1854 . He personally carved much of the woodwork in St Johns . During his rectorship , he also organized for St Mary 's church to be built in Balmain , and then St Thomas ' Enfield . Once St Mary 's was built , he presided alternately in Ashfield and Balmain . During his time at Ashfield , the Wilkinsons lived in a " picturesque , many @-@ gabled wooden house called The Meads in Enfield " ( near Burwood road ) , where he had a large workshop for his wood @-@ carving . He also established a private school at The Meads , which enjoyed a " high reputation as the best collegiate school in the colony " . Apart from a return trip to England ( serving as the ship 's chaplain during the journeys ) , he continued his leadership of St John 's until June 1854 when he accepted ' a special commission for the cure ' at Holy Trinity at Millers Point .

Thomas Hatham / Hattam Wilkinson was the rector during the period 1854 ? 1860 . He had originally come to the colonies in the company of his father 's brother , Frederick . Since then he had been curate @-@ in @-@ charge at Balmain under his uncle , got married to Julia Sarah Underwood ( Elizabeth 's daughter ) at St John 's , served a short period as chaplain to Darlinghurst Gaol and three years as the assistant minister of St John the Baptist , Canberra . After his uncle left St John 's , he became the rector . After leaving St John 's , he moved to Enfield , and later Appin , finally returning for burial in the St John 's cemetery after his death in 1876 .

William Lumsdaine was the newly ordained rector during the period 1860 ? 1865 . He had come to Australia with his two brothers and a sister in 1836 in the charge of Bishop Broughton . When he became rector , he rented Ashfield Park House , Elizabeth Underwood 's original house as his family residence . Along with Ashfield , he simultaneously held the incumbency for the parishes of Burwood , Enfield , and Five Dock . During his time at St John 's , two of his children died of diphtheria on the same day . After finishing at St John 's , he continued to serve at Five Dock and Burwood . He died in 1902 aged 78 and is buried in the St John 's cemetery .

William Cecil Cave @-@ Browne @-@ Cave was the rector during the period 1865 ? 1867 . He was a grandson of the ninth Cave @-@ Browne @-@ Cave Baronet . He was recently married when he arrived at St John 's . Later in his career he held the rectorship at St Thomas ' North Sydney .

Canon James Christian Corlette , D.D. , was the rector during the period 1867 ? 1900 . His previous appointment had been in Jamberoo . He was married to Frances Edith Manning , a daughter of the politician Sir William Montagu Manning . In 1877 she was elected to the committee of the newly formed Infant 's Home , as an indication of Anglican support . The home cared for abandoned babies , and was the subject of a storm of protest , with the Roman Catholic Cardinal Patrick Francis Moran accusing it of a " vindication of promiscuous practices " . The Corlettes ' eight children were all born during his time at St John 's . Perhaps not surprisingly , during this period St John 's first began to provide a residence for the rector . Corlette encouraged Ashfield 's Melanesian population

to worship at St John 's , and many later returned to the islands as missionaries . He provided more frequent and regular services than his predecessor , and emphasized Saint 's Days , Communion and music . During the period 1868 ? 1884 he concurrently held the precentorship at St Andrew 's Cathedral , and in 1897 again served there as canon . In 1893 he was chaplain to the Bishop of Sydney , and became rural dean of Petersham in 1895 . Along with many of his family , he is buried in the St John 's cemetery .

Alfred Yarnold was the rector during the period 1901 ? 1916 , which were the final fifteen years of his career . Immediately previously he had spent nineteen years as the rector of Christ Church , Lavender Bay . Overlapping with his time at St John 's , he was also the chaplain to the Archbishop of Sydney , and the rural dean of Petersham . One of Yarnold 's curates was the Rev. Charles Clark , who would later father the Australian historian Manning Clark . Clark 's mother was a teacher in the St John 's Sunday School

William George Hilliard , M.A. , was the rector during the period 1916 ? 1926 . He was recently ordained when he joined St John 's , having completed only a four @-@ year curacy at Dulwich Hill . His first wife died during his time at St John 's . When he completed his time at St John 's , he became the Headmaster of a local private school , Trinity Grammar School . In 1934 he became the Bishop of Nelson . He was described as " one of the most popular evangelicals in the Church life of Australia , and a forceful preacher " .

Ainslie Arthur Yeates , M.A. , was the rector during the period 1927 ? 1928 . He came to Ashfield from St John 's Woolwich . Soon after he arrived he suffered a breakdown in his health , was very sick throughout his time at Ashfield , and died after a four @-@ year incumbency .

Herbert Stanley Cocks , B.A. Th.L. , was the rector during the period 1931 ? 1939 . He brought with him a wide experience of church work . Having been ordained just before World War I he had been a chaplain for the A.I.F. , and after demobilization a missionary , school principal , and chaplain in India . Most recently he had been rector of Holy Trinity , Erskineville .

Leonard Neville Sutton , M.A. , was the rector during the period 1939 ? 1949 . He was a keen teacher , having previously been principal at St Andrew 's Cathedral School , chaplain at The King 's School , and vice @-@ principal at Brighton Grammar School . He was very interested in the welfare of young people . This enthusiasm led him to start the St John 's Preschool . The Sunday School also had 350 pupils at the time .

Frederick Allen Seymour Shaw , B.A. Th.L. , was the rector during the period 1949 ? 1966 . He had already served as an assistant clergyman at St John 's during 1930 ? 1931 . During that time , he was ordained . Eighteen years later he returned to St John 's as the rector .

John R. Seddon , Th.L. Dip.R.E. , was the rector from 1966 until he transferred to St Luke 's Mosman in 1973 .

Percy William " Bill " George Twine , Th.L. L.T.C.L. , was the rector during the period 1973 ? 1980 . He had long been an organ player , and inclined toward high church style . He died suddenly whilst still the rector .

Stanford Ronald Colefax , R.F.D. Dip.Th. , was the rector during the period 1980 ? 1990 .

Dennis P. Robinson , Th.L. was the rector during the period 1990 ? 2003 .

Andrew Katay , B.D. M.Th. , became the rector in early 2005 . He was previously a Senior Associate Minister at St. Barnabas , Broadway , and Anglican chaplain at The University of Sydney , while leading the staff team of the Sydney University Evangelical Union . His arrival at the church marked a change from two traditional communion services to congregations with a variety of styles .

= = = Acting rectors = = =

From time to time , an acting rector or locum tenens has taken on temporary leadership , or filled a gap between rectors .

Septimus Hungerford was acting rector in 1879 . He had previously been the rector of St Peter 's Cathedral , Armidale . Later he became the incumbent at St Thomas ' Enfield .

William Hough took temporary leadership in 1889 whilst J. C. Corlette undertook the precentorship of Goulburn Cathedral .

Arthur Christian Corlette stood in temporarily for his older brother J. C. Corlette in 1898 .

Robert William Phayre Montgomery filled in at St John 's after the death of J. C. Corlette , during the period 1900 ? 1901 . He was an Irishman who came to Australia as a missionary chaplain in 1891 . After leaving St John 's he took up a position as vicar of Cressy

Arthur Killworth M.A. LL.B. , acted as rector during the period 1928 ? 1931 .

Archdeacon William Apedaile Charlton led St John 's for four months in 1939 after the departure of H. S. Cocks . He had already served in Sydney churches for 55 years .

James R. Le Huray , Th.L. was the acting rector during the period 2004 ? 2005 .

= = = Education = = =

In the mid @-@ 1850s St John 's established a Church of England Denominational Day School in a small , plain white stone building near the corner of Charlotte and Bland St , which was reported as being in good repair with 28 pupils in 1867 . However , when the Ashfield public school expanded in 1875 , the church school proved unable to compete , and by 1880 it was closed . The building was sold to the newly begun Ashfield Boy 's College in 1882 , but was demolished in 1885 .

Catholic education in the area flourished , and seeing this , J. C. Corlette wrote to England to Miss Ellen Clarke , suggesting that she start a school for young ladies in Ashfield . This went ahead , the school known as Normanhurst School began in a cottage in Bland Street . Although it was officially non @-@ denominational , Normanhurst maintained strong links with St John 's . The school grew , and moved premises to Orpington Street , but eventually closed down in 1941 .

= = Land and buildings = =

= = = Church = = =

Having evolved over a long period , the church building displays elements of a range of styles including Colonial Gothick Picturesque , Victorian and Federation Free Gothic . The transepts and chancel are constructed from Sydney sandstone , whereas the nave and tower are rendered brick . The roofs are all slate .

The interior has been described as " architecturally much more satisfying than its exterior " . It has a hammerbeam ceiling with a curved rafter roof with colonettes , plaster walls , and stained glass in every window from a range of periods . The reredos and pulpit are distinctive cedar carvings by the early rector F. Wilkinson .

= = = Cemetery = = =

The cemetery is geographically aligned with the church , and takes up a large portion of the land area . The oldest graves are on the eastern side of the path , and typically face west . Newer graves on the western side of the path generally face east .

A number of notable former Ashfield residents are buried at St John 's . First Fleet convict , John Limeburner / Linburner , had been transported for stealing clothing to the value of about one pound , eventually died in 1847 aged 104 . His headstone was defaced by vandals in 1965 . Several members of the Wilkinson and Underwood families were significant in the early European settlement of the Ashfield district . Louise Taplin ( 1855 ? 1901 ) was matron of The Infants Home in Ashfield for 15 years until her death , and led the home through the 1890s depression , despite a shortage of salaried staff . Henry Halloran ( 1811 ? 1893 ) was a poet and resident of Ashfield , and was married to Elizabeth Underwood 's daughter Elizabeth . Thomas Walker , a banker and philanthropist who owned and developed Yaralla Estate , is in a family grave with his wife Jane , and daughter Eadith 's ashes . Samuel Henry Terry , a wealthy landowner and politician is also buried at St Johns , having spent the last part of his life in an Ashfield residence named The Lilacs . Randolph John Want was a solicitor and member of the New South Wales Legislative Council . Edward Thomas Jones Wrench

was one of the founding partners of real estate agents Richardson and Wrench . Amy Schauer was a cookery instructor and author . The graveyard also contains members of the Taverner , Uhr and Rodd families , after whom the localities Taverner 's Hill , Uhr 's Point , and Rodd Point are named . There are also graves of three former rectors : T. H. Wilkinson , W. Lumsdaine , and J. C. Corlette , and members of their families , together with a pioneer clergyman , E. Rogers .

Beside these prominent figures , many of the St John 's graves contain children . Typhoid and whooping cough epidemics took heavy tolls in the Victorian period . Although Ashfield was known as a healthy area , many families lost two or even three children .

Burial rates at St John 's declined rapidly around the turn of the 20th century . The rector 's notes from the time indicate that many funeral services conducted at the church now preceded burial at Rookwood Cemetery . Although the cemetery has never officially been closed , no burial plots have been sold for some years . A memorial garden for the interment of ashes was opened in the time of J. R. Seddon , providing a popular resting place for the Ashfield community .

Since the late 1970s day @-@ release prisoners have assisted with maintenance of the cemetery grounds . In Australia 's bicentennial year , 1988 , a \$ 16 @,@ 000 grant was awarded for restoration work in the cemetery , at which time some broken gravestones were cemented together , and some illegible ones were ' cut back ' and the letters repainted .

= = Ministry = =

Andrew Katay became the 18th rector in early 2005 . In 2008 the church was part of an amalgamation with the parish of Five Dock and Haberfield , forming Christ Church Inner West Anglican Community ( CCIW ) with Andrew Katay continuing as the rector of the new parish . There are currently three Sunday services at Ashfield , and two at Five Dock .

Since July 2006 it has run a mothers and children group , which discusses Christian parenting issues , and teaches English to those for whom it is not their native language .

In 2010 the church began an outdoor film festival showing ghost and horror movies in the historic cemetery .