

134 Macquarie Street (GPO Box 618)
Hobart Tasmania 7001
Phone: 1300 850 332 (local call cost)
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Name: St Thomas' Anglican Church
Status: Provisionally Registered
Tier: State

THR ID Number: 12016
Municipality: Northern Midlands Council

Location Addresses

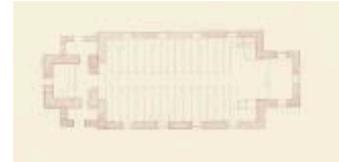
9 FALMOUTH ST, AVOCA 7213 TAS

Title References

204075/1

Property Id

6418563



St Thomas' Church,
Avoca
DPIPWE, 2016

Interior of St Thomas'
Private collection,
2019

Plans for St Thomas'
Church, 1839
TAHO

St Thomas' Church
floorplan
TAHO



Boxed pews, St
Thomas'
Private collection,
2019

Altar, St Thomas'
Private collection,
2019

Interior, including
boxed pews
Private collection,
2019

Plans for St Thomas'
Church, 1839
TAHO

Setting: St Thomas' Anglican Church is situated in the north eastern Tasmanian village of Avoca, on Falmouth Street, the main thoroughfare through the town. It is located on a rise at the western entrance to Avoca, and overlooks the St Paul's River. The church sits prominently on a hill on the corner of Blenheim and Falmouth Streets. Both the eastern and western boundaries are marked by historic plantings. The northern portion of the title abuts a railway line and is predominantly scrub.

Description: Built from local dressed sandstone with Romanesque stylistic elements, St Thomas' Anglican Church is a highly intact example of a colonial-era church. The building exhibits a continuous parapet and cornice, and nave of four bays. The windows are of timber construction with narrow, rounded arched heads comprising 32 panes. A substantial memorial window in three parts commemorating the O'Connor family is a prominent feature of the eastern elevation. The opposite end of the building comprises a two-level square tower with bellcote a c.1939 cast iron memorial clock. The entrance foyer below is lined with flagstones; the room contains two doorways opposite each other: one reputed to have been used by local settlers and the other by convicts. The nave retains a high degree of integrity and is largely original apart from a lined ceiling. The room includes plastered walls, recessed arched windows, Tasmanian Oak floors and a c.1920s unpainted Tasmanian Oak-lined ceiling. A small timber staircase leads to the raised timber pulpit. Intact timber box pews, uncommon in a state context, flank the central aisle. One rear pew is slightly larger than the others and was said to have been adapted for a larger member of the congregation. Some hand painted local names have survived on the pews. A robing room near the entrance is largely original and panelled in cedar.

Associated items: A number of items provenanced to the church building are considered of heritage significance, providing an understanding of the evolution of worship in a rural community, and the meaning of such places to the region. This registration includes the following elements:

- (i) carved wooden altar, donated in memory of RC Foster c.1937;
- (ii) carved wooden Bishop's chair;
- (iii) wooden hymn board and numbers;
- (iv) J. Estey & Co. pedal organ, c.1900;
- (v) original cedar pulpit with staircase;
- (vi) box style pews, considered uncommon in Tasmania;
- (vii) sandstone baptismal font, c.1848;
- (viii) finial from the roof spire; and
- (ix) cast iron safe.

Landscape setting: The parkland/garden setting of the church is of heritage significance for their historic and aesthetic values, and as a contributing element to an important landmark on a major Tasmanian thoroughfare. Both the eastern and western boundaries are marked by historic plantings. Memorial trees were planted in 1918 to commemorate fallen soldiers (*Daily Telegraph*, 29 August 1918 p.8), although the species and exact location are unclear (*Austral Tasmania*, 2015 p.54).

Comparative analysis, boxed pews: Fixed box pews are uncommon in a Tasmanian context and likely at a national level. Designed to create an enclosed draught-free family space, in the mid-19th century they were replaced with often-utilitarian bench seating, providing more space for the congregation. In the Tasmania, examples of box pew seating survive in St Andrew's Presbyterian, Evandale (THR #5019); Campbell Memorial Church, Oatlands (THR #5519); St George's, Battery Point (THR #1688); St John's Presbyterian, Macquarie St (THR#79); St Paul's Methodist Church, New Norfolk (THR#1222) and the Wesleyan Uniting Church, Melville St (THR#2504). In other early Tasmanian churches such as c.1825 St John's Church, Launceston (THR#4612) and c.1841 St Joseph's Church, Hobart (THR#107), the box pews were removed in the 19th century (*Examiner*, 4 February 1902 p.7 and *Tasmanian News*, 24 December 1891 p.2).

The former St Thomas' Rectory (THR#4879) and Sunday School (THR#5998) Avoca, are separately entered in the Tasmanian Heritage Register.

History:

St Thomas' Anglican Church, Avoca is situated on land traversed by the Oyster Bay, Northern Midlands, Ben Lomond and North Eastern Aboriginal tribes; only possible due to a system of reciprocal rights and social obligation, which had existed for centuries (Scripps, 1999 p.5). Prior to European occupation, the region had been managed by the Tasmanian Aborigines using traditional land management practices, including low density burning. Europeans in the early colonial era viewed the resulting landscapes as well suited to stock raising and cropping.

European settlers arrived in the Avoca area in the 1820s, with a convict station established in the following decade. The designation of Avoca as a police sub-district and the associated increase of safety and services, likely stimulated the growth of the township (Scripps, 1999 p.36). Like many growing towns, the residents of Avoca wanted a place of worship. A committee was formed in November 1838 to raise funds for an Anglican church and residence for a minister (*Hobart Town Courier*, 26 October 1838 p.2). Lieutenant Governor John Franklin laid the foundation stone in the autumn of 1839 (*Austral-Asiatic Review*, 9 April 1839 p.4).

Executed by the Public Works Department, the design of St Thomas' church is attributed to colonial architect and convict, James Blackburn (1803-1854) who was transported for forgery. Original drawings for St Thomas' dated 1839 include the layout of boxed pews (TAHO, PWD266/1/1126). Unusually for a convict, Blackburn was given substantial responsibility, his work demonstrating his technical proficiency, resourcefulness and creativity as a designer (Preston, 1966). Progress on the church was slow: it took three years for the structure to be completed. The Church opened in May 1842 to a congregation of 120 in a building 'substantial as well as ornamental' (*Launceston Examiner*, 28 May 1842 p.4). Like many buildings of the period, it is likely the church, named after St Thomas, was erected using convict labour. It appears the grounds were used for annual prisoner Ticket of Leave musters, held so the authorities could monitor the movement of conditional pardon prisoners (*Launceston Examiner*, 26 February 1845 p.3).

Despite immediate use after its construction, it took almost four decades for St Thomas' to be consecrated. It finally took place in 1886 (*Daily Telegraph*, 14 August 1886 p.3).

In concert with the growth of the township, the building and contents of St Thomas' evolved. One local newspaper correspondent noted 'improvements have been made in St Thomas' Church lately; the windows have been renovated, new altar rails, the gift of Mrs Charles Parker, have been erected, and the local ladies have worked the cushions and altar cloth' (*Tasmanian*, 10 May 1884 p.29). At the end of World War One memorial plantings were made in the grounds (*Examiner*, 31 August 1918 p.8) and afterwards the entrance gates replaced (*Examiner*, 18 February 1930 p.5). In 1936 a memorial window with three panels commemorating members of the O'Connor family of Connorville (THR#5056) was unveiled. Descendants came from across the state for the commemoration (*Examiner*, 20 March 1936 p.5). A year later an altar table and brass altar cross was dedicated by the Bishop (*Mercury*, 16 November 1937 p.5). A clock in the bell tower was installed in 1939 to commemorate those who died in World War One (*Examiner*, 12 July 1939 p.4).

In the 1960s the architectural value of St Thomas' and other churches of the period were recognised by the National Trust. Due to declining numbers, the last service was held at St Thomas' Church in June 2019. The

building, ecclesiastical collection and plantings remain a reminder of the historical importance of the Christian faith in Tasmania, and a visual marker on the main ingress/egress to the east coast of the state.

References:

www.abs.gov.au

Austral Tasmania, 2015 *St Pauls River Bridge, Avoca: Historic Heritage Assessment: Final Report prepared for Transport Infrastructure Services*, Department of State Growth.

Austral-Asiatic Review, 9 April 1839.

Daily Telegraph, 14 August 1886, 29 August 1918.

Examiner, 4 February 1902, 31 August 1918, 18 February 1930, 20 March 1936.

Hobart Town Courier, 26 October 1838.

Launceston Examiner, 28 May 1842, 26 February 1845.

Mercury, 16 November 1937.

Scripps, L. 1999 *The Fingal Valley: Historical Study*. Foot & Playsted, Launceston.

Tasmanian, 10 May 1884.

Tasmanian News, 24 December 1891.

Statement of Significance: (non-statutory summary)

St Thomas' Anglican Church and associated items is of historic cultural heritage significance as it demonstrates the pattern of settlement in the Fingal Valley, and the role of established religion in developing social and spiritual hubs across Tasmania. The c.1840s church is demonstrative of a rural Romanesque sandstone building, harking back to the use of stone as a building material in the early European development of the Fingal Valley. The suite of collection material contained within St Thomas', including boxed wooden pews, raised pulpit and stone font are representative of ecclesiastical furniture contained within rural Tasmanian churches. The main church building has a special association with architect James Blackburn (1803-1854) to whom the church design is attributed, and who had a significant impact on the colonial architecture of the state.

Significance:

The Heritage Council may enter a place in the Heritage Register if it meets one or more of the following criteria from the Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995:

a) The place is important to the course or pattern of Tasmania's history.

St Thomas' Anglican Church, Avoca is an important element in demonstrating the evolutionary pattern of the Fingal Valley. It reflects the role of worship and in particular, the role of established religion in developing social and spiritual hubs in regional settlements across Tasmania. Erected in the 1840s, the Church is an historical record of Avoca's religious life, demonstrating aspects of the community's development and growth.

b) The place possesses uncommon or rare aspects of Tasmania's history.

St Thomas' Anglican Church, Avoca, contains timber box pews, many of which across Tasmania were replaced from the mid-19th century and therefore makes the Avoca example uncommon.

c) The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Tasmania's history.

No Data Recorded

d) The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of place in Tasmania's history.

St Thomas' Anglican Church, Avoca is a fine, highly intact example of a colonial-era sandstone church. The church has a highly intact exterior with Romanesque stylistic elements, continuous parapet, narrow rounded arched windows, and square tower with bellcote and memorial clock. St Thomas' is a fine example of the tradition of siting ecclesiastical buildings in prominent, often elevated positions. The church interior is highly intact and notable due to the retention of many of its early and original furnishings including wooden box pews, raised pulpit, stone font, tri-partite stain-glass memorial window and its elegant, spare and unassuming aesthetic.

e) The place is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement.

No Data Recorded

f) The place has a strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social or spiritual reasons.

No Data Recorded

g) The place has a special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Tasmania's history.

St Thomas' Anglican Church, Avoca has a special association with convict and colonial architect, James Blackburn (1803-1854) to whom the design of the church is attributed as well as many notable colonial-era buildings throughout Tasmania.

h) The place is important in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

St Thomas' Anglican Church, Avoca, overlooking the Esk Highway, the main thoroughfare to the east coast of Tasmania, is considered a landmark in the area, perched on a prominent hill at the entrance to the town. The church is also a prominent element from elevated positions across the Fingal Valley .

PLEASE NOTE This data sheet is intended to provide sufficient information and justification for listing the place on the Heritage Register. Under the legislation, only one of the criteria needs to be met. The data sheet is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory of the heritage values of the place, there may be other heritage values of interest to the Heritage Council not currently acknowledged.

Note

1. Lot 1 represents the registered boundary for 'St Thomas' Anglican Church', #12016 on the Tasmanian Heritage Register.
2. Lot 1 is the whole parcel of FR 204075/1, the boundary of which is marked by a heavy black line and described below.
3. All boundaries are parcel boundaries, details of individual land parcel boundaries may be accessed through the Land Information System Tasmania (LIST).

Fingal (rail) Line

Blenheim Street

Lot 1²
~9470m²

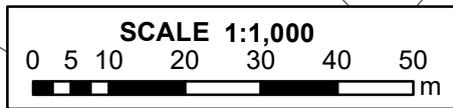
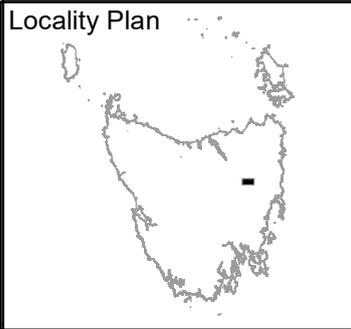
PID 6417923

FR 204075/1

PID 6418539

FR 212209/1

Falmouth Street



TASMAP: HANLETH - 5437 **GRID:** MGA94 / ZONE 55 **DATUM:** AHD **CONTOUR INTERVAL:** N/A

No.	PRODUCTION / AMENDMENT	AUTHORITY	REFERENCE	DRAWN	APPROVED	DATE
1	Production	THC	12016	AW	DRAFT	DRAFT



St Thomas' Anglican Church
9 Falmouth Street,
Avoca

CENTRAL PLAN REGISTER

 p.p. Surveyor General: _____
Date Registered: _____ XX-XXX-20

**CPR
DRAFT**