

A GUIDE TO THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE DIVINE, OBAN



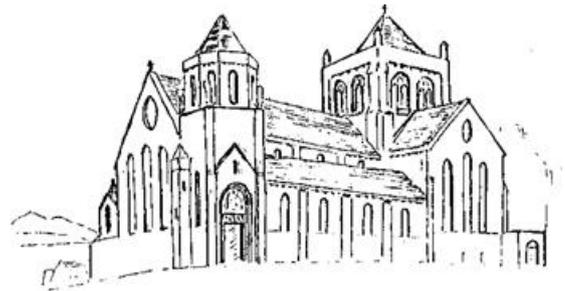
Welcome to St John's Cathedral, Oban; the Mother Church of the historic United Diocese of Argyll and The Isles, within the Scottish Episcopal Church.

The Cathedral building in which you are standing is only a small, unfinished part of the intended structure, the result of over a hundred years of noble plans and aspirations that have met with much disappointment and frustration - and not a little bad luck.

The Episcopal Church has a long and momentous history in the West Highlands, tracing its history back to the Celtic Church. The congregation of St John's first gathered in 1846, when Oban was but a village, and the present site open fields. Two local lairds, MacDougall of Dunollie and Campbell of Dunstaffnage, were crucial to the project of starting a building, and both the families are still connected with the congregation.

The original St John's Church was completed in 1864, the dotted line on the centre plan delineates the extent of the original building. In 1882 a south aisle, which is now the Narthex, was added this also enabled a new door to be opened onto George Street, which had now become the principal street of the town.

Each Bishop tried to further the concept of a more worthy building in Oban, and Bishop Chinnery-Haldane (elected 1883) commissioned plans for a grand structure. When a neighbouring piece of ground became available and following the Bishop's premature death in 1906 the congregation was encouraged, under Dean Pressley-Smith, to make the new church his memorial. Plans were drawn up by James Chalmers of Glasgow, something of a maverick architect, for a large new Church, of Cathedral proportions to be built on the existing site.



Work finished when funds were exhausted in August 1910, by then only the Sanctuary, Chancel, one Transept and one bay of the Nave were completed. The floor of the new construction was twelve feet higher and oriented at 90o to the original building, the remarkable riveted buttresses support the incomplete end of the high Nave with the shores going deep into the earth far below the undercroft.



The building has remained largely unchanged ever since, despite two major campaigns to rebuild or complete it. In 1920, the Church became the Cathedral of the Diocese of Argyll and the Isles.

During the 1960's work was undertaken to raise the floor of the nave to its' intended level, and it is clear that at that time there were still aspirations towards a more grand design; this artist's impression dates from 1966.

Some stabilization work was undertaken in 1988 and remnants of the array of monitoring equipment installed in the cathedral to record the effects of Concorde's trial flights can still be spotted in the form of glass "tell-tales" on some of the walls.

Please feel free to explore our place of worship, to pray and to enjoy its peace.

Points of Interest

1 The Narthex was built in 1882, as a side aisle to the original church, and is now both a baptistery for the onyx and marble font given by the MacDougalls of Dunollie, and a meeting place for the congregation.



2 The sliding glass doors, given in memory of a parishioner, Lady Helen Kerr, daughter of the 9th Marquess of Lothian, are built on the site of a series of stone arches, or arcade, which had to be demolished when the floor was raised by some feet in 1968.



3 In various parts of the building you will notice the Diocesan Coat of Arms, with crossed Crosiers for Argyll and St Columba in a coracle for the Isles. The Argyll Arms were those borne by the Bishop of Argyll at a time when the Church of Scotland was Episcopal, and were confirmed by the Lyon Court as the Diocesan Arms in 1962, thus legally confirming our continuity from the old Church. They are now used for the United Diocese, rather appropriately as they contain the two crosiers in one shield.

4 The west wall of the original church contains two windows with modern paintings by Sarah Campbell of Dunstaffnage. The left-hand window depicts the dream of Jacob at Bethel, linking earth and heaven. His stone pillow is traditionally supposed to be the Coronation Stone formerly in Westminster Abbey, now in Edinburgh Castle, and which was once housed at Dunstaffnage Castle. The right-hand window is the vision of St John the Divine [after whom the building is dedicated], in which the elders cast their crowns on a sea of glass.



5 The life belt is from H.M.S. Jason, which was hit by a mine near Coll, during the First World War, 25 lives were lost. The crew, before their last fateful tour of duty had worshipped at St John's, which was much used by the Forces during both World Wars.

6 The pulpit is of St Bee's Sandstone, with various marble and Mexican onyx embellishments; the carvings are of Bishop's heads and other faces, along with the sign of rippling water. The emblems of the four Evangelists, St Columba, St Mungo [with the tree, the bird and the bell], and the Hand of God are in the lower row.



7 The Lectern was part of the furnishings of the old church and takes the traditional form of the eagle. It was given by M.R. MacDonald, in memory of her husband Neil MacLeod MacDonald of Dunach who died in 1884. It has been suggested that it may have been intended to go on the marble plinth alongside it, in the design of the present building.

8 The Chancel steps are of Iona Marble. The skylights above this area are where

the great Lantern Tower was to have been built. It was to have had a viewing platform, from which all of Oban could have been seen. The partially prepared-for site of the circular staircase can be seen outside at the back of the Cathedral, next to the blocked Transept Arch.

9 The tall Choir Stall ends are intended to represent the tall round-headed carved stones in a Celtic graveyard. The carvings on the right hand side include the sign of St Mungo, the Diocesan Arms [with a Blessing issuing from God's hand], and Christ in Majesty; and all the designs have rather formal 'roots' going down the panel.

10 The twelve canons' stalls in the back row on either side are dedicated to Celtic Saints, these details are recorded on brass plaques on each stall. Most of the stalls have tip up seats, such as are found in medieval churches. The Bishop's special stall has a raised canopy with the Diocesan Arms behind it while the Provost's stall is surrounded with carved thistles.

11 The blocked transept arch contains a massive metal eagle, the sign of St John the Evangelist, whose theology is supposed to soar over the rest of the Bible. The bronzed metal sculpture is by George Wyllie, of Gourrock.



12 The Sanctuary steps are all Iona Marble. Notice the small cross towards the foot of the left hand pillar, which is the 'foundation stone', but could not be laid until Bishop Chinnery-Haldane's grandson was old enough to do it.

13 Here also, is the Bishop's Cathedra or throne, unusually within the Sanctuary itself. It has the Diocesan Arms cut in stone above it, and opposite there is a three seated sedilia for the clergy at the Eucharist, and above the credence is a chalice cut in stone and set with glass.

14 The Reredos behind the altar is over 12m high, with a canopy including gilded thistles in a decorative style contrasting with the plain Norman style of the stonework, and was designed by the architect, James Chalmers, himself.



The oil paintings, by the Glasgow artist Norman MacDougall, are a synopsis of the life of Jesus Christ; the Annunciation to Mary [the outer two paintings]; the Pieta; and above it the Ascension, set in the West Highlands, with the faces of the apostles being the faces of some of the congregation of 1910.

Above the altar and the inset panels of Greek and Italian marble, there are faces of angels, the three in the centre representing heaven and the two on either side representing earth, symbolising perfection and the uniting in worship of the whole church.



The Reredos is in memory of Bishop Chinnery-Haldane, who is depicted as St Columba in the right-hand statue.

The left-hand statue is St John, who is supposed to have drunk from a poisoned chalice and survived; note the chalice that he holds, with a little dragon peeping out.





15 The altar in the Lady Chapel, in the South Transept, is of Sienna Marble, in memory of Dean Charles Pressley-Smith, the first Provost, whose Rectory [now the King's Knoll Hotel] was called the Deanery, and hence the nearby road called 'Deanery Brae'.

Above the Credence Table, to the right of the altar, hangs a panel depiction of Our Lady, in the style of Della Robbia.



16 The organ, by J Wood and Sons LW, was installed in 1994.



17 Various memorials, including one to a young man drowned in the first Submarine accident, and one to Bertie MacKay, verger of the Cathedral for 45 years. The two stained glass windows depict a kneeling dark-cloaked Christ in the woods of Gethsemane, where he prayed before the Crucifixion, and Christ the Good Shepherd.



18 The large three light window, by Wailes of Newcastle, given in 1864 by Sir Donald Campbell of Dunstaffnage, in memory of his brother Sir Angus, it depicts three episodes in the life of St John, the centre one showing the old 'Apostle of Patinas' and it is the East Window of the original Church, under which the first altar was placed. To the right, at the corner, are the remains of the original Chancel arch.

19 The stained glass window depicts St Columba landing on Iona and is signed "W & JJ Keir, 1878". W & JJ Keir were brothers, one of whom did the stain glass work, and the other the lead work. They were based in

Glasgow. This was gifted to St John's by the church opposite (now the Hydro Electric) when it was decommissioned.



We hope that you have enjoyed visiting the Cathedral, and that you have said a prayer for yourself, for the life, work and witness of the Cathedral, and for the Diocese of Argyll and The Isles.

Please sign the Visitors' Book before you leave and return this guide to the table. There are paper copies available to take away if you would like to.

May the road rise up to meet you.
 May the wind be always at your back.
 May the sun shine warm upon your face;
 the rains fall soft upon your fields
 and until we meet again,
 May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

Traditional Gaelic blessing