

**PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF TASMANIA
BICENTENARY OF FIRST SERVICE PREACHED IN HOBART
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, THURSDAY 5 JANUARY 2023**

[Vice-Regal Salute is played]

Good evening and a warm welcome to this Government House reception to mark the Bicentenary of the first sermon in Australia by a Church of Scotland – Presbyterian – Minister.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community and recognise their continued connection to land, sea, and waters. I acknowledge the impacts of colonisation upon our First People and commit to a future that listens to and respects Aboriginal stories, culture and history.

May I acknowledge among us:

- Graeme Roberts, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Tasmania
- Reverend Alistair Bain, Senior Minister, St John's Presbyterian Church
- Reverend David Jones, who spoke at this morning's service
- Miss Ngaire McCrindle, Chair of the Presbyterian Trustees.

This morning at St John's Church, Don and I attended and enjoyed your Service celebrating the bicentenary of the first Presbyterian sermon by the Reverend Archibald Macarthur.

The story of the Reverend Macarthur's time here is most interesting. A centenary article in the *Mercury* in June 1922, written by the

Reverend G B Murphy, Moderator, and the Reverend J Heyer, clerk of the Tasmanian Assembly of the Presbyterian Church records, and I quote:

“Looking back to establish the date for the first Presbyterian services that were held in this State, some enthusiasts go so far as the advent in 1642 of Abel Tasman, who was a Presbyterian elder himself, and commanded a Presbyterian crew. Tasman and his party spent some time exploring our shores [at Blackman Bay], but whether he actually conducted worship on the island can only be conjectured.

“The year 1821 finds us on sure ground in the requisition of the Presbyterian settlers of ‘Hobart Town and the vicinity’ to the United Associate Presbytery of Edinburgh, on the 4th of December that year....

“... pursuant to this open ‘call’ the Reverend Archibald Macarthur was ordained and inducted to the charge of the Presbyterian congregation at Hobart Town by the Presbytery of Edinburgh in 1822, and reached our city in December of that year with the official warrant of the Colonial Secretary for Mr Macarthur: ‘to proceed as a free settler to the settlement of Van Diemen’s Land and ... you will make to him upon his arrival a grant of land in proportion to the means which he may possess of bringing the same into cultivation.’”¹

End of quote.

That land grant was not insignificant and consisted in some one thousand two hundred and fifty acres in the Bothwell district.²

So, Macarthur, the first ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church to reach Australia, aboard the vessel *Skelton*, began his ministry in Hobart on the second Sunday of January 1823.

During his ministry, the first Presbyterian Church in Tasmania was built on land granted to the congregation of St Andrew’s. Governor Sir William Sorell lent

¹ *Mercury*, Wednesday 21 June 1922, page 11.

² Mortyn, S. M., *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 2, 1967.

material assistance in the work of erecting the church, the foundations being laid by labour supplied by the Government.

Some five years later in May 1828, the Reverend Macarthur married Mary, née Geiss. They had three sons and a daughter, of whom there are records only of John, the third child.³

Under a cloud of controversy, Macarthur resigned in 1835 after charges of him taking liberties with a female member of his congregation were substantiated. Macarthur subsequently attempted to form a breakaway congregation but was unsuccessful. In 1836, he left for England never to return.⁴

Notwithstanding this controversy, Macarthur is recognised for working with others to lay the foundations for a faith that has continued for 200 years in Van Diemen's Land and then Tasmania.⁵

Interestingly, Caroline Denison, wife of Governor Sir William Denison, expressed concerns in a letter in 1848 that her husband to, quote "prevent our Church [of England] being over-ridden, as it has hitherto been, by the Presbyterians, etc , who, though a less numerous are a more active body than we are, and therefore have had it all their own way in the Government schools, and have not allowed our Catechism or anything of what they call sectarian instruction to be taught."⁶ Presbyterianism continues to prosper today. I recognise and congratulate you on 200 years in Tasmania.

I now invite you to enjoy the reception, and to look around the State Rooms.

Thank you.

³ Australian Dictionary of Biography. op. cit.

⁴ Notes attached to an email from Graeme Roberts dated 5 December 2022 to David Owen.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Denison, Sir William and Lady Caroline, *Varieties of Vice-Regal Life*, edited by Richard Davis and Stefan Petrow, Hobart, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 2004, page 88.