

The Chancel

The 'Three Kings' window

The most striking feature of the Chancel is the large stained-glass window. It dates to 1876. An inscription along the bottom states that the window is gifted in memory of Ewen Wallace Cameron by his widow. The window depicts the 'three Kings'; being: King David (carrying a lyre), King Solomon (carrying a scroll symbolising wisdom) and Jesus Christ (the Good Shepherd). Sophia Cameron gifted the decorative glass in the Chancel's side windows at the same time.

Altar

The altar table was handmade by a parishioner (Mr Thompson) in 1922 using old church seating. The symbols on the front of the altar represent the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet (Alpha and Omega). They symbolise the all-encompassing nature of God's power.

Eagle lectern and Church Bible

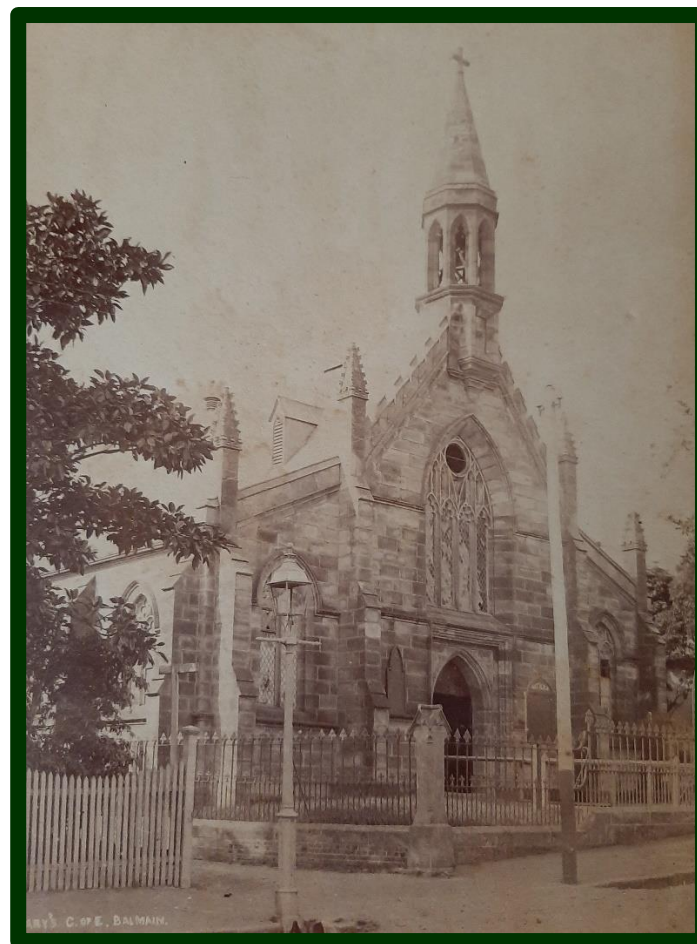
The eagle lectern was donated in 1890. The lectern is not used as the St Mary's Bible is too large to rest on the lectern without causing damage to the Bible's spine. The St Mary's Bible was published at Oxford University by the Clarendon Press and dates to 1827. It was presented to the Reverend Wilkinson (the first Minister of St Mary's) in July 1845. The Bible's cover is not original.

Baptism and Marriage Registers

St Mary's holds original Baptism and Marriage registers dating from 1846 to the present day. They are stored in the Vestry in a safe purchased in 1880. They are available for viewing on request.

Find out more:

Contact: office@stmarysbalmain.church or www.stmarysbalmain.church



A short guide

ST MARY'S
ANGLICAN CHURCH BALMAIN



THE CHURCH IN THE VILLAGE SINCE 1846

How old is St Mary's church?

The building you are in is the second church built on this spot. The first smaller church, designed by Colonial Architect Edmund Blacket, stood from 1846 to 1858. In 1856 a new chancel and vestry were added, and both were retained when the rest of the church was demolished to enable construction of the current building. The builders reused the stone and the bellcote from the original church. Voluntary subscriptions financed the entire rebuilding. Prominent local businessman Ewen Wallace Cameron contributed £500. The current church opened on Christmas Day 1859.

Who built it?

William Weaver and Edmund Kemp designed and built St Mary's. Weaver was a British engineer who trained under Isambard Brunel. He was Blacket's 2nd Clerk of Works before succeeding him as Colonial Architect in 1854 at the age of just 25. His partnership with Kemp lasted to 1863 when Weaver emigrated to New Zealand to pursue his engineering career. He died at age 40 only ten years after completing St Mary's. Weaver and Kemp's work includes Moore College (Liverpool campus now demolished) the Sailor's Home at Circular Quay and churches at Braidwood, Mudgee and possibly St Bede's RC Pymont.

Where did the bellcote go?

The bellcote, housing a bell donated by Weaver's benefactor Didier Joubert, was removed in 1942 as it was leaning. The bell was moved and re-hung to the rear of the church. It is no longer in use. Although unknown in 1942, the whole southern wall had sunk and was twisting outwards. The wall was stabilised, and badly corroded coping stones and window tracery replaced during restoration work in 2016. After a large stone fell from the front façade in 1987, the decorative carved sandstone finials were deemed unsafe due to severe weathering and were removed.

Under the floor ...

During excavations in 2021, we found a pair of handmade shoes under the floorboards beneath the organ. Concealing a pair of shoes within a new building is an old (primarily British) superstition. The shoes are intended to ward off evil spirits. We put them back!

Background image: Weaver & Kemp architectural drawing of St Mary's Church. Original held by the State Library of NSW

Cover image: St Mary's Balmain late 19th century. Copy held in the archive of St Mary's Balmain

The Nave

The Nave (the central part of the church) is 80 feet (24.3m) long and 47 feet (14.3m) wide. The roof is supported by hardwood pillars with Australian red cedar columns attached. The narrow-clustered columns are unusual and give St Mary's a sense of openness. The pews with a distinctive *fleur de lis* end decoration are original to the 1859 church and are made of red cedar. First lit by candles, gas lighting was introduced to St Mary's in the 1860s and electric light in 1905.

Memorial windows and Honour Roll

The windows on either side of the Nave contain memorials to local families (Rowntree, Bracegirdle, Franki) and to World War One soldiers. Dedicated in 1917, the Honour Roll is a very early example of a WW1 memorial. It commemorates 110 parishioners who served, 29 of whom did not return. Mr and Mrs James Franki purchased and donated the board in memory of their son.

Choir and organ loft

Built for the original 'compact' pipe organ and up to 50 choristers the balcony was extended to a design by Blacket in 1872 to accommodate a new and larger instrument. However, by 1884 complaints of 'serious discomfort' through 'want of proper accommodation' in the choir loft led to both organ and choir relocating to the front of the church.

The pipe organ

The pipe organ dates to 1871 and is a product of one of the great makers, the firm of Hill & Sons Ltd. The organ is rare in that it remains primarily in its original state. Over the years it has been subject to attack by white ants, water leaks and coal dust. Originally powered by a paid 'blower' working the bellows (see his graffiti on the side panel), an electric motor was installed in 1936. For many years the organ was positioned at a right angle to the congregation and rotated to its current position @ 30 years' ago. Below the organ, the floor joists are supported by sandstone rubble.

Pulpit, reading desk and font

Both the pulpit and the reading desk date to 1876. They are the gift of Sophia, widow of Ewen Cameron, and of Theodore Jacques respectively. Both are designed by Edmund Blacket. Blacket also designed the font. Originally positioned at the rear of the church, the font was relocated in 1966.