# CHRIST CHURCH SOUTH YARRA

A Short History and Guide



## Introduction

#### Dear Visitor,

Christ Church, South Yarra, is both an impressive revival gothic church, used for worship every day, and a wonderful miniature gallery of works of art. While several items are from the United Kingdom, the majority are the work of artists and crafts people — stained glass artists, embroiderers, metal workers, cabinet makers and wood carvers — working in Melbourne between the 1880s and World War Two. The church is particularly rich in work showing the influence of the mid-nineteenth century Arts and Crafts movement, which rebelled against the effects of industrialisation and mass production and stressed integrity in materials and design, as well as quality in craftsmanship.

This guide is intended to help you enjoy and understand many of the things you will see here, but it doesn't aim to tell you about every single window, or provide a comprehensive history of the parish. You can find this in David Cuthbert's *Christ Church South Yarra*, *A Social History 1850–1990*. However, this guide invites you to look carefully at some things that you might otherwise have missed, and might even encourage you to look at this and some other church buildings in a new way. At several points, it asks you to make comparison with works in some other Melbourne churches.

As tourists, many Australians — from committed members of churches to those of other great religious traditions, and those with no formal religious convictions — visit churches and cathedrals overseas because they appreciate their historic value as well as their religious significance. However, many churches in Australia are also buildings that are important examples of architecture, as well as homes of interesting and often underestimated works of art in different mediums. Finally, through a knowledge of the people who contributed and still contribute to this building and its life, we see a part of our own regional and national history.

#### Your Guide

## The Building

#### Architects, Stone, Mortar and Spires

Even though it presents a unified whole when viewed from outside, like many European churches, Christ Church, South Yarra, was built in stages. A grant of land was made in 1850, but it took almost a decade before the first part of the building was completed. In 1854, South Yarra Anglicans had shown

a distinct lack of interest when Bishop Perry (Anglican bishop of Melbourne 1847–76) suggested that they should purchase an ironframe prefabricated church to seat one thousand people. Such buildings were being manufactured in England for export to its colonies — an example can still be seen at Gisborne. Instead, the first trustees entered into unsuccessful



Early building

conversations with Charles Vickers, who had already designed Christ Church, Hawthorn, and Holy Trinity, Coburg. When, in December 1855, his fees turned out to be too costly, they accepted a design by Taylor and Webb — Charles Webb having already designed St Andrew's Brighton. So, for the moment, they worshipped in a nearby Free Presbyterian school room.

In 1859, the first stage was completed at a cost of £9177. The architects used the clearly cross-shaped floor-plan common in many Gothic and Gothic revival churches with a nave (the vertical part of the cross), transepts (the arms of the cross), a chancel with its distinctive central lantern (the area of the ceiling that admits light) at the crossing and a tower base. There were also plans for a spire. The sanctuary of this first part of the building may also have been intended as a temporary one, pending the availability of further funding.

The building was extended in the 1880s, a decade of boom fuelled by a rising population and a real estate market which overheated before collapsing. The year 1881 saw the building of the east end sanctuary, a chamber to house the organ's pipes, and vestries. The most spectacular addition was the spire and the southern aisle in 1885. As architects, the parish contracted Reed Henderson and Smart. Their head was the successful and fashionable Joseph

Reed, who had used a variety of styles in major Melbourne buildings, including the Town Hall, the Collins Street Independent Church (now St Michael's), and the Exhibition Building, its dome partly modelled on Brunelleschi's dome for the cathedral in Florence. Webb's earlier designs had envisaged a spire, never actually built. Reed designed one, 176 feet high, modelled on that of Salisbury cathedral. The original tower, insufficient to bear its weight, was pulled down and reconstructed; it was completed by June 1886. Three years later, the extensions were completed with the addition of a northern aisle.



Joseph Reed's spire design

#### The Intentions of the Founding Builders

This ambitious programme of building work reflected not only the optimism of the decade but the energy and drive of Horace Tucker, vicar from 1880 until 1908. What did the builders of the church want? There are several answers. Being reminded of England was a strong motive, as the model for Reed's spire shows. When a major plan for embellishing the interior was on

hand, English cathedrals were referred to as a model. Whereas in the past they had seen 'Deformation' as well as Reformation, the interior of Christ Church was now 'returning to the earlier and better traditions'.

Parish magazines described the style of the building as 'early English' And Tucker wrote nostalgically that a peal of bells would 'recall more than anything else the peaceful fields or ancient streets of dear old England', as 'music of the old hallowed land'. The builders also wanted to create something permanent, again like the European tradition. One of the major new furnishings of the church — the rood screen — was described in 1890 as 'substantial enough and worthy to stand for centuries . . .'

In 1876, the *Argus* investigative journalist 'Vagabond' was unimpressed with Christ Church's interior, describing it as dull, ugly and tasteless. The stained glass was ordinary; a brass plaque was the sole ornament. But a conscious ambition to be a leader, or have the best, fuelled the transformation of the 1880s. By 1893 Tucker claimed from statistics of worshippers that Christ Church was Melbourne's leading church, a flagship for 'all the churches of Australasia'. In 1891 the newly installed marble portrait bust of Lieutenant Anderson was described as 'a real work of art, and it is said that there is nothing to equal it in the colonies' — in many ways an accurate claim. It remains one of the few works in an Australian Anglican church created by a nineteenth century American artist. Other claims like this could sometimes be more a matter of local pride.

The previous year, when the rood screen was installed, Tucker described it as 'without doubt the finest erection of its kind that adorns an Australian church'. Then it was certainly the only comparable example in Melbourne, but soon Robert Prenzell would create the screen for St Paul's cathedral with its native flora and fauna; St David's cathedral in Hobart would install the most elaborate revival gothic screen in the whole country during World War One, and fine but very different cast metal screens appeared in St John's Albany and St George's cathedral, Perth. And despite the exaggerated claims of local pride, there was more than just aesthetics behind the building and its beautiful fittings. There were reminders from time to time that the heart

and core was a spiritual conviction and fervour, without which there would be a rapid descent into an empty aesthetic.



The rood screen 1956

# Inside the Building

#### The High Altar and Sanctuary

Today, the devotional centre of the church is the freestanding altar, located in the crossing under the lantern. This dates from 1980 and was installed so that modern liturgical texts could be used in a setting in which priest and people face one another. Before then, as many photographs show, the immediate interior focus was the high altar, which remains in its original position in the east end. Choir stalls flank the approach to it, and the visual impact of the area was heightened when it was marked off from the rest of

the church in 1890 by the installation of an elaborate rood screen (a screen surmounted by a cross, and often other additional carved work, from the Anglo-Saxon rood, meaning cross) and matching pulpit.

The different styles of decoration that have been current at particular periods of time are clear in changes in this area of the church. The freestanding altar and its sanctuary reflect the contemporary preference for simplicity and broad treatment of surfaces. However, photographs of the high altar and its sanctuary at the end of the nineteenth century display the use of profuse and detailed decoration to highlight the sanctuary and its fittings, particularly through stencilling on walls, including panels featuring symbols and painted texts over arches. Such



Interior pre 1890, showing stencilling

stencilling was a common feature in churches as much as in domestic homes and public buildings, and was subsequently obliterated when the style became unfashionable. A well-restored example of such work in a Melbourne Anglican church may be seen in Christ Church, St Kilda.

#### The Chapels

The north transept is the location for the Lady Chapel, its title referring to the Blessed Virgin Mary, using a term for her familiar from the Middle Ages onwards (Our Lady). Like all chapels, it is a miniature church, complete with its own altar and sanctuary and space for a congregation. It is used for the celebration of the eucharist on weekdays. A recent woodcarving of

the Blessed Virgin and Child from Moçambique acts as a reminder of its dedication. This area was first furnished as a chapel in 1940, and three years later, the new carpets that had been installed as part of this development were stolen!

The first chapel in Christ Church was created in 1901, when a second altar was installed close to the organ chamber; Tucker introduced a daily eucharist in Advent that year. The currently freestanding altar located in the crossing was originally designed for the south transept by North and Williams in 1918. The south transept continued to be used daily for many years after World War Two as a chapel for Christ Church Grammar School.

#### The Baptistery

In Christ Church, the baptistery (the location of the font, where baptisms take place) is not marked off from the rest of the building in the manner of an enclosed chapel, as in some other churches.

The font, the work of Irish stonemasons, was one of the exhibits in the Great Exhibition of 1880. Its purchase does not seem to have been immediate — it was presented to Christ Church in 1886 by William Cain (1831–1914), a mayor of Melbourne, businessman and pastoralist. It was not the only item acquired from that exhibition for a church — the Last Supper mosaic, now the altarpiece in St Peter's, Eastern Hill, was in the Italian section.

## **Beautiful Works for Practical Ends**

#### From the Practical to the Custom Made: Altar Vessels

As in many other early Melbourne churches, some of the first vessels and furnishings used in Christ Church were among the better household items of early European settlers. An eighteenth century chair, presumably a family heirloom even to its nineteenth century owners, is one such example,

probably used as a chair in the first sanctuary. St Paul's cathedral was the recipient at much the same time of a pair of seventeenth century chairs.

In 1858, S. B. Vaughan, a Christ Church trustee, gave an eighteenth century silver flagon from his family's best domestic silver for use in the eucharist

as an altar vessel. In 1890, a Miss Vernon gave a silver mounted cut glass cruet, formerly used by her father, who had spent much of his life as a parish priest at Denham, in rural Buckinghamshire. Later altar vessels were all custom made and locally produced, with a minimum of ornamentation. Christ Church preferred to buy from Drummonds, rather than Gaunts, the other major Melbourne silversmiths who regularly executed church plate. An important exception is the church's largest set of vessels, an elaborate gothic revival chalice and paten created in London as a memorial to John Hornsey.



Hornsey memorial chalice

#### Stained Glass

Clayton and Bell, a major English glass company that received commissions from churches across the British empire in the nineteenth century created the Life of Joseph series (three windows in the north transept), with their sophisticated imitation of medieval miniature style, installed in 1868. The south transept windows (The Good Samaritan, Solomon's Temple, Christ and the Samaritan Woman) are also probably their work.

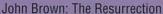
Generally speaking, however, like several other large Melbourne churches from the same period, Christ Church is a treasury of stained glass produced in Melbourne in several studios. By the end of the nineteenth century, more glass artists were located in Melbourne than in any other Australian city. British-born and trained, they had a ready market in the city's many parish churches — their best work was of a high quality, lessening the attraction of importing glass, though this often continued to be done by cathedrals, or donors with deep pockets.

Ferguson and Urie, Melbourne's first stained glass makers, who were advertising in the diocesan paper in 1866, created the three windows in the sanctuary above the high altar in 1881 as one of their last church commissions — a major artist of theirs died the following year. Similar Ferguson and Urie windows appear in several other buildings, including St John's, Toorak, and the former chapel of Trinity College. Large and impressive examples from this studio include the Prince Albert memorial windows in Holy Trinity Kew, and the west windows in Scots Church, Melbourne. When the Clayton and Bell windows were installed, a contemporary Melbourne viewer thought that the strong colouring in Ferguson and Urie glass was a better solution to the more intense Australian light, which 'drowned out' the less brilliant colours in the English ones.

Brooks Robinson and Co., who created the Resurrection window (west wall of nave) in 1892, appear to have commenced producing stained glass in 1882, and eventually became Melbourne's longest-serving stained glass producers. The Christ Church parish paper commented on their success in attracting British glass artists of considerable ability. Though the paper did not name him, this was then true of one particular individual, John W. Brown, and the remarkable treatment of the angels' wings in the Resurrection window reflect his connection with the celebrated William Morris and Co. of London.

Commissions on his return to England (such as his windows in the choir and east end of Liverpool cathedral) show how competent he was even in the highly competitive British market. At a more mundane level, the tabernacling — the elaborate frame bordering the figurative work, modelled on wood carving — was a characteristic of Brooks Robinson windows in many churches, almost a signature. The principal of Mathieson Stained Glass (later Mathieson and Gibson), the artists who created the window of the







John Hughes: Sacrific of Isaac

Blessed Virgin (south nave wall) probably trained with Brooks Robinson, but their glass work also shows German stylistic influences.

The studio of Hughes and Rogers produced The Sacrifice of Isaac (south wall of nave), installed in 1892. The remarkable tinting of the flesh (Isaac is treated as a classical nude) indicates that the glass artist was John Hughes, who had worked for Clayton and Bell, and who had come to Melbourne to supervise the installation of that firm's windows commissioned for St Paul's Cathedral. He worked briefly for Brooks Robinson, where Brown replaced him, but quickly received other commissions, including the Last Supper windows in the north gallery of Joseph Reed's Independent Church.

William Montgomery (1850–1927), who had worked in London for Clayton and Bell and migrated to Melbourne in 1887, was responsible for the Tucker memorial window in the baptistery, and the St Michael, St Paul,

and Ascension and Baptism of Jesus windows. Until his death, his studio was the main Melbourne rival to Brooks Robinson. Edward Newbigin, who commemorated his son in the St Michael window, originally proposed in 1905 that he would eventually fund windows in the baptistery area if the space were reserved. Only a month later, when the Christ Church vestry ambitiously — or impatiently — indicated that they wanted the space filled immediately, he accepted, and they were installed by May 1906 as part of the parish jubilee! Montgomery was the glass artist preferred by the architect Alexander North, who advised on the baptistery, and no doubt this is why he was then commissioned for the 1918 Tucker memorial.

#### Woodcarving — from the International to Restrained Nationalism

In 1892, as many of Tucker's plans for Christ Church had already come to fruition and others were underway, South Yarra residents could look at

tropical ferns, Sturt's desert pea, lizards, snakes, marsupials and birds on the façade of Alexander James Macdonald's newly opened Post and Telegraph Office in Toorak Road. Across Bass Strait, native fauna and flora were starting to appear in the woodcarving of Anglican church furnishings.

The cabinet work and woodcarving in Christ Church were created by local craftsmen, but they did not yet reflect



Gumnut finial

these nationalist touches. The kauri pine rood screen and pulpit of 1890 were from the workshops of R. J. Moore in Collins Street, to a design by G. A. Badger, an ecclesiastical architect. Its style was international — it could as easily have been designed for and installed in a church in England.

A quarter of a century later, the Prussian-born master carver Robert Prenzell (1866–1941) introduced Australian flora and fauna into the furnishings

of Trinity College chapel, which was designed by the Launceston-based architect, Alexander North (1858–1945), an enthusiastic advocate for both native timbers and symbols. The combined new school and parish hall at St Peter's Eastern Hill (1913) was another major Melbourne commission of North's, and that same year, he was also being consulted at Christ Church in the planning of a memorial for Horace Tucker. North and his much younger Melbourne partner, Louis Williams, designed new choir stalls in 1915. Their finials feature a restrained gumnut motif. The work was contracted out through a vestry member, and not to the distinguished (and probably more expensive) Prenzell, whose studio was only a few doors down the street from the church at 11 Toorak Road.

In 1937, North's former partner, Louis Williams, now the diocesan architect, approved a design for a new high altar by Hadwen and Houghton. The old high altar was given to the parish of Bungaree two years later.

## The Builders

When the first stage of the church was built, St Kilda and East Melbourne were suburbs that housed more of Melbourne's old gentry. South Yarra was a mixture of old gentility and new wealth. By the time Tucker completed the church, the suburb was home to many who were prominent in the social life of the 1880s boom, including those who lost substantially through speculation.

Something of the range of the builders of Christ Church can be seen from the following, a handful from among the many commemorated through memorials in the church. William Clarke Haines (1810–66) surgeon and first premier of Victoria, contributed substantially to early building costs. His memorial is the Life of Joseph windows (north transept). His family intermarried with the Graham family. James Graham (1819–98) and his wife, Port Philip pioneers and squatters, are memorialised in the south transept. Grandchildren of theirs (the Martins of Banyule) were donors of Brooks Robinson windows at St John's Heidelberg. The Grahams had strong

links with St Paul's cathedral, as also did George Porter, who gave sets of candlesticks and crosses for the altar in 1881 as well as embroidered stoles (vestments). He was a major donor of the cathedral's high altar mosaics.



A group of fashionably dressed women c.1890

The lawyer Thomas Budds Payne (1819–97) gave £2000 towards the spire as memorial to a daughter who died just before her twenty-first birthday; he also gave £500 towards the north aisle. Edmund Gerald Fitzgibbon (1825–1905), town clerk of Melbourne, a trustee and parochial nominator has no memorial in the church, but faces Melbourne traffic from his full-length statue in St Kilda Road. Horace Tucker's role as a catalyst has already been made clear.

Women feature prominently as builders of the church. In 1876, 'Vagabond' commented 'it is needless to state that the ladies were all well-dressed and handsome' and late nineteenth century photographs bear this out. The rood screen and pulpit were presented by Raynes Waite Dickson (b. 1845) the president of the Law Institute of Victoria, as a memorial to his wife

(Dickson was one of those whose speculations went awry in the post-boom depression). The new high altar, reredos and sedilia (clergy seats) of 1893 were commissioned by Alice Moubray, the widow of Thomas Moubray (1825–91), a trustee — a fitting memorial, given that he was the senior partner in a firm of furniture importers and makers who had won awards at the Centennial exhibition of 1889. Her niece, Eva Brunton (nee Moubray), presented the Sacrifice of Isaac window.





Detail of embroidery work

In one particular art medium their contribution was outstanding, systematic and exclusive — embroidered fittings for the altars, and a range of vestments. Between 1881 and 1882, a range of such works had been given to the church, but early in 1890, several women formed a group to systematically create entire new sets of altar frontals and accompanying items, and sets of stoles in all the seasonal colours of the church year; they also made many simpler items, including surplices and cassocks. The project was complete by 1905.

The sophisticated standard of their best work was partly due to instruction given by an (unidentified) embroiderer who had been trained at South Kensington School of Needlework. As well as creating works for Christ



Church, the group accepted paid commissions from elsewhere as a way of fundraising. One of their members, Edith Pincott, a member of a Geelong gentry family, subsequently created remarkable altar frontals and banners that have survived at All Saints, Newtown. Another member of the group, a Miss Drummond, entered a white superfrontal (which she subsequently presented to the church) in the 1907 Melbourne Exhibition of Women's Work. Of its kind, this display of arts and crafts was unprecedented for scale in Europe

at the time. The style of the memorial in the church to the feminist Annette Bear Crawford (d. 1899) — a bronze tablet — was consistent with that of much of the metal work in that exhibition, and contrasts with that of other tablets in the building.



Bear Crawford memorial plaque



Moubray memorial plaque

#### The Church as a Portrait Gallery

The church contains several disguised portraits, as well as an obvious one—the alabaster bust of Lieutenant Alexander Gordon Anderson (1867–89). But the artist who created it was far more celebrated than Anderson. William

Wetmore Story (1819–95), a well connected American lawyer, literary and art critic, friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Robert Lowell, settled in Rome in 1856. Another friend was the poet Robert Browning, whose

psychological theories influenced his portrait sculpture. Story was also the subject of a two-volume biography by novelist Henry James. British art critics praised his work (more often large statuary), but well-to-do Australians in Italy also had contacts in the kind of British and American society that Story frequented, a society that features in Martin Boyd's novel The Cardboard Crown. Another overt portrait is the 1961 window depicting the first vicar, William N. Guinness, a late work of Napier Waller (1893-1972).



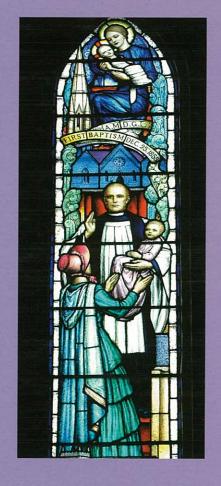
The Anderson bust

Stained glass windows sometimes contained contemporary portraits, thinly disguised. Story obviously used a photograph as the basis for his bust. Montgomery likewise used a photograph of Horace Finn Tucker when he included Tucker as a benign religious figure in the memorial window to him in the baptistery.

It is very likely that an oral tradition is correct in identifying the young woman in the north transept window showing the raising by Jesus of the daughter of Jairus, as Alice Wilkinson, to whom the window is a memorial. The fine portrait is reminiscent of much pre-Raphaelite painting of the period. Lieutenant Edward Newbigin, a young army officer, is commemorated by a window of the warrior archangel, St Michael. Contemporary sources refer to the design being submitted to the parish by his father, and it also may be a portrait.

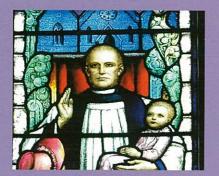


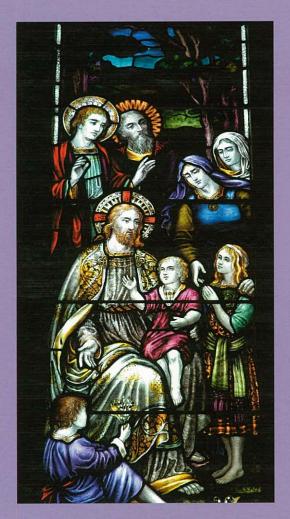
Above and below Details of window clearly showing Saint Michael with the face of Lieut. Newbigin



Above and below
Details of Guiness memorial







Above and below Tucker (the older male) in details of 1918 Montgomery window





Above Raising of Jarius's daughter (detail)
Below St Patrick (detail)



## Modern touches

While Victorian gothic and Arts and Crafts style fittings dominate the building, there are modern touches as well by major contemporary glass

artists. As well as the Waller window of Guinness, Glenn Mack (b.1943) created a very different treatment of the nude from Hughes' Sacrifice of Isaac in his St Patrick window (south-east corner).

Different again in technique as well as style are the two 1990 miniatures by David Wright (b.1948) in the porch. In the Lady Chapel, the aumbry door and lamp designed by Roy Simpson should be noted, as well as the Madonna.



Aumbry door

# **Organ and Music**

The first stage of the building featured a gallery at the west end, the location for a mixed choir and a harmonium, replaced in 1871 by a Hill Norman and Beard organ. Guinness restricted music to the simplest and most minimal level, frustrating Charles Edward Horsley (1822–76), a distinguished English performer and protégé of Mendelssohn, who left after six months — he was only allowed four anthems per year! There were stirrings among the parishioners, but Guinness prevented any overt defiance of Bishop Perry's injunctions on music, such as occurred in some other parishes.

Tucker encouraged musical standards that reflected those of his congregation, emphasising its importance by the relocation of the organ and choir and the eventual installation of the rood screen, and even justifying the latter with an exaggerated claim concerning its possible acoustical properties:

Waves of sound seem to dash themselves in clashing echoes against unbroken wall spaces, while the presence of Gothic aisles, pillars and screens imparts a clearness and soaring sweetness and fullness to musical sounds that no bare rectangular hall could ever shape.

The first sung eucharist was celebrated in 1884. The choir became all male. The school was envisaged as a choir school in 1898. Scholarships had been offered by 1890; by the end of World War One, male soloists (including an alto) were being paid. Extensions to the organ in 1916 and the creation of new choir stalls indicated the continuing appreciation of the part played by music in the liturgy.

Christ Church organist during World War Two, the Revd Howard Hollis (1941–7), subsequently joined the staff of Westminster Abbey as a priest



Organ with Fullard at console

and musician. In 1949, James Schofield, whose daughter Margaret became a distinguished Melbourne pianist, appointed Leonard Fullard as music director and organist. His establishment of an annual Bach festival at Christ Church commencing in 1950 set new standards in the performance of that composer's church music in Melbourne — cantatas, many receiving the first Melbourne performances, were given in liturgical settings, as well as his complete organ works. Through the founding of the Dorian singers and the Oriana madrigal choir, Fullard contributed to the awareness of early vocal music, both sacred and secular. Further additions were made to the organ, inspired by Fullard's initiatives.

Today, worshippers hear the choir in a remarkably wide repertoire of music, ranging from sixteenth century unaccompanied English and continental works, to the contemporary Estonian Arvo Pärt, balanced by an equally comprehensive range of organ works. The latter are performed on a completely new organ built in 1998 by Kenneth Jones and Associates, who had recently completed a major commission for Trinity College Chapel.

# Chronology

1850 Land grant

December 1855 First Anglican service

April 1856 Laying of foundation stone

September 1859 Completion of first stage: nave, transept, chancel, tower base (Taylor and Webb)

October 1881 Opening service following completion of new

sanctuary and organ chamber, relocation of organ

June 1886 Completion of spire, new tower, south aisle

September 1889 North aisle completed 1952 Restoration of top of spire 1957 Restoration to stonework

1991 Completion of spire restoration

1998 Installation of new organ



#### Festal altar frontal and superfrontal

Silk brocade, velvet, gold and coloured silk threads, c 1908.

Manuscript notes by a former vicar of Christ Church, Sydney Ball, refer to the dedication of a superfrontal by a Miss Drummond on Christmas Eve of 1907. The choice of a non-ecclesiastical brocade for the ground was probably dictated by the unavailability of such fabrics in Melbourne at the time.

This frontal is being restored by Marget Stefanovic as part of the church's 150th anniversary celebrations

#### Acknowledgements

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