

Our History

The story of our church began over 200 years ago in Portsmouth.

St John the Evangelist Church (31 July 1789) **Prince George Street, Portsea**



Consecrated in 1789, "it was a proprietary chapel of evangelical persuasion where pews could be both bought and sold". This church was destroyed in an air raid on 12th August 1940.

Circus Church (7 June 1857) **Lions Gate Road, Portsea**



The Rev J Knapp, the incumbent at St John's, Portsea wanted to reach the working classes in the Royal Dockyard with the Gospel. In his search for a suitable building he found an old disused wooden building on the corner of Lions Gate Road and Fountain Street, (now Edinburgh Road), Portsea. The building previously housed 'Hengler's Grand Cirque Variete' and had been built for equestrian exhibitions, 5 years earlier. The Circus Church, as it became known, was an oddity in that it had no parish, and was never consecrated. It was privately owned by a Board of Trustees who appointed the incumbent without reference to the Bishop. 2000 people attended the first meeting on 7th June 1857. Later further benches and new galleries were added to accommodate 2,400 people. In 1863 the building became unsafe and a new building became a necessity.

Circus Church (28 December 1864) **Surrey Street, Portsea**

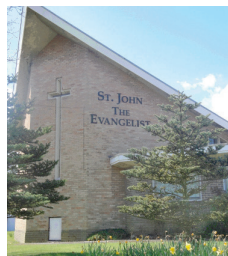


The Rev J C Martin funded the new, permanent church at a cost of £2,600 and in 1890 new buildings were built to house day schools. On the 10th January 1941 the Surrey Street Circus Church was wrecked in a severe air raid, during which the original Hengler's Circus Church was also damaged. Reconstruction began in 1949, with services and the Sunday School being held in the small hall and classrooms. The cost of restoring the whole building was to be £6,000 and in view of the shifting population of Portsmouth, it was considered advisable to sell the building and use the resulting assets to help provide a church in a new housing area, within the Portsmouth Diocese. This was done in the hope and belief that a Church would arise to carry on the tradition and spirit of the Circus Church, with a ministry resting squarely on the Word of God. The last service of the Circus Church was on 28th February 1951. The site was sold to the National Provincial Bank for £10,000 and became a car park. A plaque marks the site of the Circus Church.

St John the Evangelist Hall/ Church **(17 April 1956)** **Upper St Michael's Grove, Fareham**



Using the money from the sale of the Circus Church, the Hall Church was built on the present site in a developing area of Fareham, and the name of the original mother church, St John the Evangelist, was adopted. The foundation stone was laid on the 11th December 1954, and the first service was held in October 1955. The dedication took place on 17th April 1956 by the Bishop of Portsmouth. The hall continues to be used for church and community activities.



St John the Evangelist Church **(24 November 1963)**

Upper St Michael's Grove, Fareham

The present church was consecrated on the 24th November 1963, and in the tradition of the original 18th Century St John's Church, the new church continues to share the good news of Jesus Christ with men, women, boys and girls.



The Bell Tower

The 10 metre base is made from forced concrete faced with Gloucester and Purbeck stone. Mounted on the base is a 9 metre high spire clad in stainless steel. The four bells weigh between 76 and 140 kilograms.



Lobby/ Vestibule

The vestibule has four bas reliefs showing, the Diocese, St Paul's journeys and both eastern and western hemispheres. These are set around our Jesus' Command, 'Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel'. Mr M Bonner, the architect's assistant, drew the maps, Mr Arthur Perry worked on the plaster reliefs, Mr Folland painted them and Mr J D Lennox of Portsmouth College of Art produced the lettering.



Balcony

The balcony area contains seating and also the organ which was made by Degens & Rippin Ltd., London, in 1964. It is a traditional electric pipe organ.



Coffee Area

In 1993 a refreshment serving area was created under the balcony at the back of the church and is used for meetings, discussion groups, social gatherings and coffee after services.



Apse

Set in the Chancel east wall is a 5 metre high glass Cross. The arch of the apse is an isosceles triangle representing the Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The base of the Communion Table was designed for St John's, but the top was given by Holy Trinity, Gosport and originated from St Agatha's Church, Charlotte Street, Portsmouth, which was near the old Circus Church. The Bishop's Chair was given to the church by members of (the church's branch) of the Mothers Union.

Pulpit & Lectern

The pulpit is regularly used by Clergy and Readers for preaching. The lectern reflects the lines of the bell tower and it is from here that the bible is read during services.



Font & Leaded Etched Windows

The south facing windows lead out onto a terrace. The etching on the three central windows was designed by Mr W Wilson and shows the Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist accompanied by angels. In front of the windows is the font which is a ship's bell.

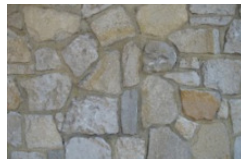


Nave

Inspired by the hull of a boat, the main body of the church is in the shape of an upturned boat, with cross aisles. The seating is a mixture of pews and chairs.

Lounge

A comfortable meeting room that is used for midweek communion services, meetings, and the crèche on a Sunday morning. The bells are rung from here.



Foundation Stone

The initials of the builder Mr A H Bailey can be found in the stonework, some feet to the right of the foundation stone.



Wall Plaques

Several stone plaques were rescued from the Circus Church in Surrey Street, two of which can be seen in the coffee area. One is in the memory of the Rev J C Martin who founded the Surrey Street Circus Church.



Banners Old & New

The Church has many beautiful banners, made by congregation members, past and present. The children's church banner was made by choir man Mr Hedges, aged 74, for the new church; containing 370,944 stitches and it took over 1,500 hours to complete.

With special thanks to Jeannette Poulter, who carefully researched our history.