

READING YOUR LOCAL CHURCH

Uncovering the signs
and symbols of

ST SALVADOR'S

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Look, there's the spire!

The first glimpse of St Salvador's is the tower with its spire rising above the roof tops of the surrounding houses.

A tower with or without a spire has been a traditional part of a church building for hundreds of years. Pointing up to the heavens (the traditional dwelling place of God) but with its base set firmly in the heart of the local community, a church tower lets us know that it is a kind of bridge between God and the people. It joins the things of heaven and the things of earth.



In the old days, a church tower also had some practical purposes. It served as :-

- A land mark and a sign to travellers that here is a sacred building. It would be visible from far away even on misty days.
- A source of information. The church bell would be rung before the services or for special events. There was often a clock that chimed the hours and sometimes a weather vane on top of the spire.
- A place of safety (a sanctuary) if the community were in danger or under attack.



St Monans
Church

St Salvador's was built in the late 1930s. The architect was Sir William Auchterlony who based his design on the ancient medieval church of St Monan's which is situated in the East Neuk of Fife.

Although it is a traditional church design, the materials used (e.g. concrete blocks) were very much of the time and the same as those used in the construction of

the surrounding houses – thus reinforcing the link between church and community..

There is a bell in the tower (not a very loud one) which used to be rung before the start of services.

During the 2nd World War, a room in the tower played an important role as a lookout post – providing vital information and helping to keep the local community safe from attack by enemy aircraft.

So, in one way or another, St Salvador's has continued to uphold the practical and spiritual purposes and traditions of a church building.



A sign dating back to the time of the 2nd World War.

So what in a name?

The name of a church often tells us something about the history of the place or what was important to the people who founded it. For example, the main church in the centre of Edinburgh's Old Town was founded in the 11th century by the sons of Queen (Saint) Margaret of Scotland in honour of her charitable work among the poor. As a tribute to her, they chose to dedicate it to St Giles, the patron saint of the wounded and those outcast through leprosy and other skin diseases. They also decreed that money given to St Giles should be donated to a Lazzarite hospital, caring for lepers and the poor, which was situated outside the city boundary.

St Salvador is another name for Jesus. He is the Saviour Saint, who through his death on the cross gives his life to save the world and brings freedom and forgiveness to all people. So, by dedicating the building to Saint Salvador, the founders and congregation are stating that this act of self sacrifice by Jesus is central to their life and faith. And to reinforce this, the cross, the symbol of Jesus' work of salvation, can be found in many places inside and outside the church.



Now we are inside

The entrance to the church (the porch) takes its name from the latin word 'portus' meaning harbour or refuge. To go through the church door is therefore to come out of the storms of life and into a safe place. The porch is a place of welcome and preparation before going into the main body of the building. A symbol of this is the bowl of holy water set in a niche beside the inner door. Traditionally worshippers would use the water to make the sign of the cross on their foreheads as a token of self cleansing before entering.

The main part of the church is called the nave, from the latin word 'navis' meaning ship – a reminder of the story of Noah who gathered his family and all the animals into the ark to keep them safe during the time of flood. It is in the nave that the main 'work' takes place. Here people listen to the readings and to the sermon; they follow the 'liturgy', join in the prayers and sing hymns.

On one side is the lectern, where the readings from the Bible are given. Traditionally, visual images such as statues, pictures and stained glass windows played a role in teaching and helping people to deepen their faith. A few such images can be found in St Salvador's, including a series of plaques, known as the Stations of the Cross which surround the walls of the nave. These tell the story of Jesus' crucifixion, beginning with his trial and ending with his burial in the tomb.



On the other side of the nave is the font – the word has the same origin as 'fountain'. This is used for the simple ceremony of Baptism when water is poured over a child or adult to mark their entrance into the Christian faith. This action recalls the Baptism that Jesus received from John the Baptist in the river Jordan before the start of his ministry. It is also a reminder of the preciousness of water as the source of all life and its essential role in our everyday lives. The font in St Salvador's came from the chapel of Saughton Hall, a large mansion, now demolished, which once stood next to Saughton Park.

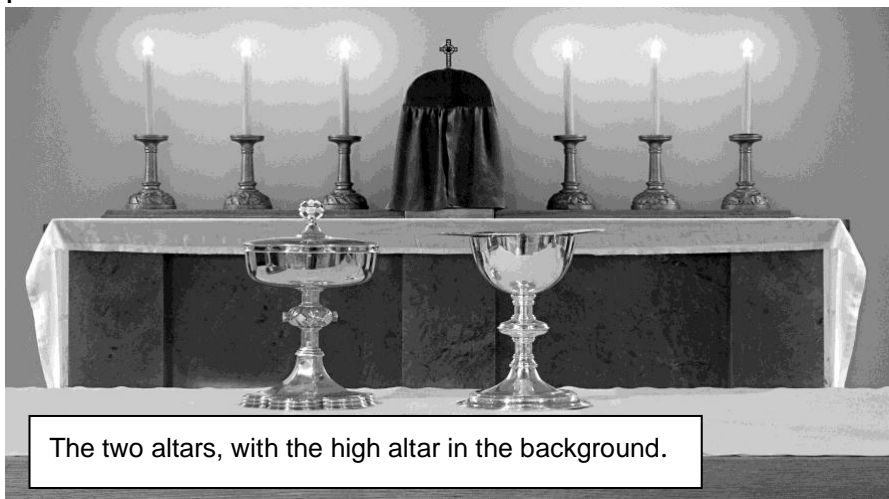
The nave of a church building traditionally faces east, towards sunrise. It is generally believed that this is to mirror the dawn of creation and to remind us of Jesus who is often called 'the Light of the World'.



The journey up the chancel steps from the nave to the Sanctuary, was traditionally seen as the transition from the earthly place to the heavenly place. Chancel is an ancient word meaning a 'see through' gate and in the past there was often a screen that separated these two halves of the church. The idea was that the people stayed in the nave and were only allowed to peep through into this holy part of the building. St Salvador's has a screen but we like to keep it folded back as a sign to everyone that every part of the church is open to them.

The word Sanctuary means 'safe place' - a place of welcome, acceptance and peace. Central to the Sanctuary is the altar. In early church traditions, the altar was usually made of stone and represented the place of Jesus' sacrifice. In more recent times, the altar is the Communion or dining table and recalls the Last Supper which Jesus shared with his closest friends (the disciples) on the night before his crucifixion. It was through this meal (the bread and wine) that Jesus indicated the full significance of his sacrifice on the

cross and commanded them to:- 'Do this in remembrance of me.' Every Sunday, people at St Salvador's continue to remember this event and, as a central part of their worship, share a token meal of bread and wine.



The two altars, with the high altar in the background.

The cross above the high altar shows Jesus surrounded by 12 shields each representing one of his closest followers (Apostles). Jesus is wearing a crown as a way of showing that he has conquered death through his resurrection. He is 'Christ the King'.

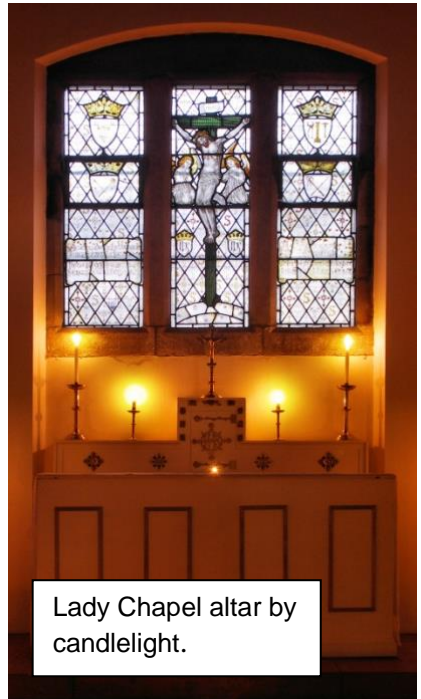


KEY TO SOME OF THE SHIELDS

- Andrew - white diagonal cross on blue background
- Peter – keys
- Matthew - 3 balls
- Paul - axe
- Bartholomew - 3 knives
- James - scallop shell

One more place to go

Beside the Sanctuary is the Lady Chapel, dedicated to Mary the mother of Jesus. A chapel dedicated to Mary is often found in church buildings and is generally loved by worshippers for being a more informal and 'motherly' place. Mary is known for her faithfulness both as mother to the baby Jesus and for remaining by her son's side even at the crucifixion. As a way of emphasising Mary's constancy (her way of being alongside Jesus) the Lady Chapel in St Salvador's is set beside the Sanctuary and the central cross. The stained glass windows which face the altar in the chapel show the figures of Mary (centre) with Columba and Queen Margaret, two important Saints in Scotland's religious history.



Lady Chapel altar by candlelight.

St Salvador's is a modern church – not yet 100 years old - but its building and internal features continue to tell the story at the heart of the Christian faith and to express something of its mystery. If you would like to know more about the church or what goes on, please get in touch.

Rev'd Nicola Moll – November 2012

