

St. John the Evangelist Church, Colaba.

The Church of St. John the Evangelist is also called the "Afghan Church" since it was built spiritual memorial to the gallantry of those officers and men who laid down their lives in the first and second Afghan wars. This church was chosen because it was intended to combine the original purpose with an object of the highest spiritual life.

As early as 1820, Archdeacon Barnes had written a letter to the government urging them of a need to build a church at Colaba, on the site of the old burial ground, where the officers of the navy and military were buried. It was intended to be a spiritual home for the Bombay army. In January 1824, the Government sanctioned the proposals to build a Chapel for the 'Protestant Inhabitants at a cost of Rs. 28,157. But the plan supplied by the Chief Engineer, accompanied a staggering estimate amounting to Rs. 74,012 and hence the work was held up.

In 1843, once again the idea was taken up by Rev. George Piggott who canvassed his proposal with the zeal of a missionary, within four years he was able to collect sufficient funds so that Sir George Russell, the Governor of Bombay could lay the foundation stone on December 4, 1877. But unfortunately the Reverend left none to supervise the work, Fortunately Rev. Anderson, his successor continued the work, with equal fervor and the Church was ready, Rt. Rev. John Hardinges second Bishop of Bombay, consecrated it on January 7, 1838.

Architecturally, St. John's was not outstanding, but historically it was the first Church, erected in India along the lines laid down by the Ecclesiological society embodying the new principles of Gothic Architecture. In 1858, it was a novel architectural experiment in India but it paved the way for the high Victorian buildings both secular and ecclesiastical that were to become the hallmark of the British architecture, in India.

Gothic in style, the walls are of rubble faced with coursed kurla stone. The piers, arches, consignees and dressings are of Probunder Stone. The roof is an open one of varnished teak-wood with a pitch of 50 the height is 60 feet and the chancel arch is 50 feet.

At the base of this arch on the south side, stands the stone pulpit with a big reading desk on the other corresponding side. The floor of the chancel is of encaustic tiles imported from England. The windows have stained glass imported from England.

The Choir stall are suitable and solid, with high backs pierced with open squares containing flowery rod iron designs. The alter rails are of brass supported by brass standards at suitable intervals. The chancel floor was completed only, in 1903 to match the sanctuary floor that had been put down in 1882. The fine marble lectein arrived on May 2, 1865 and the base was added in 1890. The metal screen near the front was done by Mr. Higgins, one of the most eminent metal workers in England who had come to Bombay to superintend this work.

The Church bells were unique being the only ones in use in West India. They were donated by Sir Charles Cayzer of Gertomore Pertshire, a former resident of Colaba. They were donated to commemorate his wedding and costed him Rs. 8,000 they were made by John Taylor.

St. John's Church was an important addition to the Churches in Bombay, since its tall towers when spotted by the Sailors coming into Bombay by sea, gave them a sense of home coming as it represented the architecture that they had left behind at home. The calmness and serenity around St. John's Church created a spiritual haven for them.

Along with the construction of St. John Church a Chaplain's residence was also built at Colaba. In the Church there is a huge commemorative plaque with the following words, "This Church was built in memory of the officers whose names are written on the wall of the Chancel and the noncommissioned officers and private soldiers, too many to be recorded, who fell mindful of their duty, by sickness or by the sword in the campaign of the Sind and Afghanistan, A.D. 1837-1843." By 1865, fifty memorial tablet commemorating officers and members of the British army who died in the Afghan war (1879-87) were added over the main entrance of the Church. Besides these there are a few more commemorative plaques in the church.

Sir George Lloyd, who was the Governor of Bombay by the infantry of Lord Napier of magdela and carried through Afghanistan and deposited in the Church in 1892.

Rev. Philip Anderson the Chaplain of Colaba for seven years who died on the 13th of December 1857 is remembered by his congregation. The Chaplain was also well known as a historian of Bombay.

Louville Warne ford of Bombay's Political department is also remembered. He was murdered on the 3rd of March 1904 by an Arab at Amriga.

Pierre Louis Napoleon Cavaguari political officer with the British troops in Afghanistan and an envoy at the court of Kabul is remembered along with the members of his escort who fell while gallantly defending the Residency a Kabul.

George Henry Woolven of the 1st Battalion, Lancashire, who died on the 16th of January.