

JOHN LEE ARCHER:
Architect, Engineer and Magistrate



Parliament House, Hobart 1870

John Archer, of Cooliney, County Tipperary was the Resident Engineer to the Commission of His Majesty's Revenue in Ireland. He married Charlotte Lee of Kent and their only son John Lee was born on 26 April 1791. After professional training and work in London and Ireland, John Lee Archer reached Hobart Town on 2 August 1827. Almost immediately Lieutenant-Governor Arthur decided to 'merge the Office of Architect into that of Civil Engineer'. The other duties of Inspector of Roads continued to be performed by Major Turton.

Thereafter, Archer served as Civil Engineer and Colonial Architect for eleven years. During this time he was, for example, responsible for Ross Bridge and several churches (including St Luke's, Richmond). Naturally, Archer designed official buildings, including those of a convict and military nature, such as parts of Richmond Gaol. More specifically, he began designing a new Custom House ([see reverse](#)) in 1830 and formal construction work began on 3 January 1835. The basement level was finished in March 1836 and the second storey was ready for its roof by 1838. Customs Department staff opened for business on 1 September 1840 and importantly within a year the Legislative Council commenced usage of the 'Long Room' on 19 June 1841. The House of Assembly was established in 1856 and likewise used the 'Long Room'. In 1904 the bicameral Parliament of Tasmania became the sole occupant of Archer's fine Georgian style sandstone building.



Archer underwent a career change in 1838 — two years after Royal Engineers arrived in Tasmania — when Lieutenant-Governor Franklin reassigned the duties of Colonial Architect to the military as an economy measure. Archer was appointed as a Police Magistrate for the Circular Head District and lived there for fourteen years. During that time he helped design the township at Stanley in 1842-1843 before dying there on 4 December 1852 aged 62. His grave is to be found in the Church of England section of the little cemetery at the foot of 'The Nut'. Buried in the same grave are his wife Sophia (nee Mattinson), who died in 1863 (aged 54), and their daughter Charlotte Lee Gibson, who died at Stanley in 1911 in her seventy-seventh year. Descendents of Archer continue to live in Tasmania.