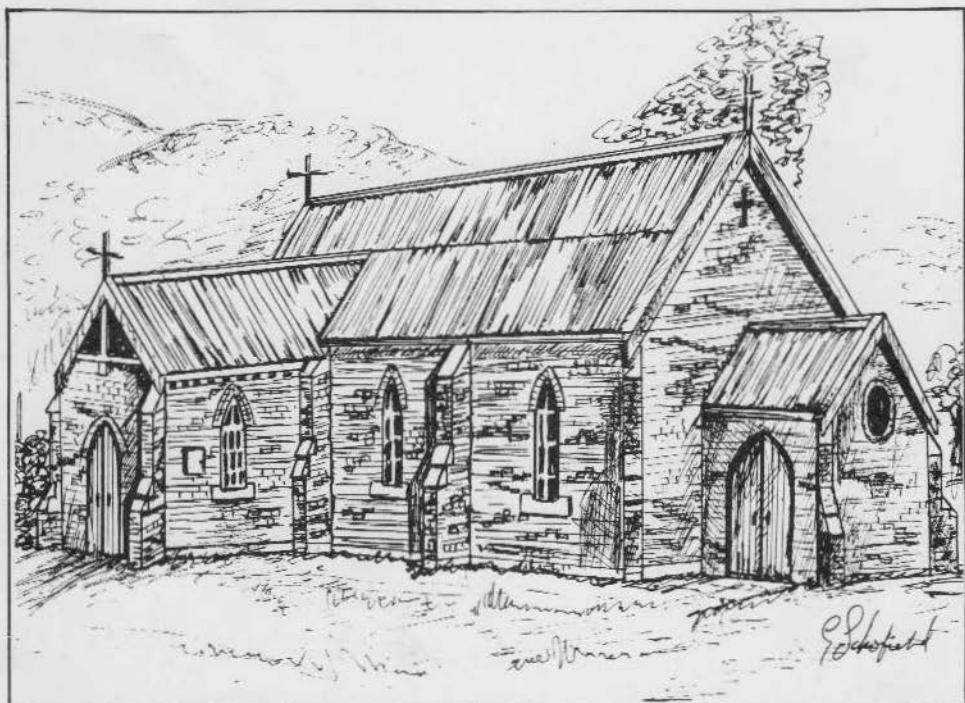


Centenary of St. Columba's Catholic Church Paterson



1884-1984



Artist's impression of original church, 1884.

Foreword

In March of this Centenary year it was decided that some sort of historical record of St. Columba's Church, Paterson should be attempted. At that time I'm sure that no-one realised what a mammoth task this would involve. Joan Clode began the work of sifting through the old Maitland Mercurys and then Audrey Bruno took up the work and brought it to its conclusion.

Considerable difficulty was encountered in unearthing the history of St. Columba's but what has been discovered has fired us all with the desire to pursue the subject at greater depth. Eventually it is hoped that a more complete history of the whole Parish of Gresford can be undertaken. There is a very rich field awaiting us.

I'm sure that this work will be of very great assistance to future historians. The whole parish is very grateful that this work has been written to help us know more of our history and to help us celebrate this first one hundred years. It will help us to appreciate more deeply the spirit of those who preserved and passed on the faith in this area.

My prayer is that this Church will be the centre of a loving Christian Community where people will draw strength from Christ and from each other in order to then go out and spread the love of God everywhere.

Father Vincent Ryan
Parish Priest

My appreciation and thanks are extended to the following people, who have contributed information and have assisted in compiling this booklet:-

Mrs. Joan Clode, who had the initial task of searching through the old newspapers in an attempt to find information regarding Gresford Parish and in particular St. Columba's.

I appreciate the help and information supplied by Mrs. Edith Hallinan, the daughters of Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Jordan, Miss Monica Gibbs and Mr. Charles O'Connor (Jnr.).

Mr. Geoffrey Schofield for the excellent sketches of our present St. Columba's and also an impression of the original church before the extensions.

Books and Editorials used for reference were:-

"The Diocese of Maitland" by Reverend Harold Campbell.

"Golden Jubilee" by the Dominican Nuns.

Marist Brothers "Commemorative Booklet" compiled by Mr. A. O'Hearn, Mr. S. Parkes, Mr. H. Boyle.

"A New History of Maitland" by Maitland City Council.

"Hunter River" by Cecily Joan Mitchell.

"Historic Towns & Buildings of N.S.W. — Hunter Region" by Tony Crago.

Maitland Mercury.

Newcastle & Maitland Catholic Sentinel.

The Sydney Express.

I hope you have found our past history as interesting as I did, when doing the research for this booklet. My feeling was that in understanding and reflecting on our early heritage, we could perhaps appreciate a little more fully just how fortunate we are that our ancestors persevered in their faith under enormous difficulties, and thus handed down through the generations this precious gift that we now have. Let us hope that in 100 or 200 years from now, our descendants will still have a deep commitment to the Catholic faith.

Audrey Bruno

The Early Catholic Church in Australia

In the early days of settlement in Australia attendance at Anglican religious service was compulsory for all convicts, whatever their religion, under penalty of reduced rations, the stocks, or the lash. For Catholics, this violation of conscience and religious rights lasted 32 years, save for two short periods of toleration.

When the flood tide of Irish rebel transportation began to ebb, the Irish formed a quarter of the population. Among them were three priests, convicted for alleged complicity in the '98 Rebellion. They were Fathers Peter O'Neill, James Dixon and James Harold. They eventually returned to Ireland.

Father Dixon alone left his mark on the religious history of the colony. He was officially emancipated and authorized to exercise his priestly ministry. Father Dixon offered the first public Mass in the settlement on May 15th, 1803. There was no altar, an Irish convict made a small chalice of tin, and some old damask curtains served as vestments. These Masses lasted less than 12 months. When a foolhardy insurrection of some 400 United Irishmen took place outside Sydney in April, 1804, Governor Philip King concluded that the Irish leaders had used the Mass gatherings to stir up the revolt and held Dixon personally responsible. His permission to celebrate Mass and his salary were withdrawn. He remained another 4 years in Sydney, ministering privately to Catholics, with several Protestants contributing to his support.

During the following decade, the Catholics were without the services of a priest, and they were virtually forgotten by the English vicars apostolic and the Irish bishops. The period has been called the "catacomb era" of the Church in Australia. The faith was kept alive by laymen alone.

In August, 1816, a petition to the Vatican on behalf of the Catholics of New South Wales, pleaded for a priest. Within a month, Father Jeremiah O'Flynn, a former Cistercian monk who had become a secular priest, was appointed Prefect Apostolic. Although neither the Colonial Office nor the Vicar Apostolic of London would endorse his appointment, O'Flynn paid his own passage out, hoping that authorization would eventually follow. When he arrived in Sydney in November, 1817, Governor Lachlan Macquarie would not let him work in the colony. He also prohibited him from saying Mass in public, but allowed him to remain temporarily, since O'Flynn claimed that his credentials were on the way. When they failed to arrive, a warrant for his deportation was served. Father O'Flynn managed to evade authorities for six months, meanwhile carrying on a busy underground apostolate. Eventually he was arrested, and put aboard a ship for London in May, 1818.

O'Flynn's apostolic escapade had an unexpected sequel. The matter of his deportation from Sydney was raised in the House of Commons, and a newspaper campaign aroused public opinion against the intolerant treatment of Catholics in Australia. The most forthright and

effective writing came from the pen of Father John England, parish priest of Bandon (who was destined to become one of the foremost bishops in the U.S.). When chaplain to Cork jail, he had volunteered for New South Wales and had helped Father O'Flynn before his departure to Sydney. Father England published a vigorous appeal to the authorities in the form of an open letter (5th January, 1819) to the Vicars Apostolic and Government of England, demanding legal status for the Catholic Church in Australia. As a result, almost 10 years before Catholic emancipation in England, freedom of conscience was allowed, and a Catholic mission was established and subsidized in Australia.

The Church was officially founded in Australia when Dom Edward Slater, OSB, was appointed Vicar Apostolic of the Cape of Good Hope with jurisdiction over Madagascar, Mauritius and New Holland with the adjacent islands, and two volunteer Irish priests, John Joseph Therry and Philip Conolly, landed in Sydney in May, 1820. Despite their official status, their presence was resented. Anglicanism was regarded by Governor Macquarie as the established religion. The priests were given official instructions forbidding them to receive converts, to perform mixed marriages, or to attend Catholic children in state institutions. After two years in Sydney, Father Conolly went to Tasmania to minister to the convicts, while Father Therry carried on a tireless apostolate on the mainland.

The coming of Catholic Emancipation in Britain in 1829 was soon felt in the antipodes. An 1828 census gave a total population of 36,600, of whom 24,250 were Protestants and 11,230 Catholics. In 1833 a remarkable young English Benedictine, William Ullathorne, arrived in Sydney as Vicar General. Although only 27 years of age, he provided vigorous leadership for the struggling Catholics, closely studied the social effects of the convict system, and during a visit to England campaigned brilliantly for its suppression. Ullathorne recommended to the Holy See that the Australian Mission be separated from Mauritius. In May, 1834, New Holland became a vicariate in its own right and in September, 1835, Ullathorne's friend and teacher at Downside Abbey, John Bede Polding arrived as Australia's first bishop. Meanwhile a new policy resulted in the passing of a Church Act (1836) which placed all religious groups in the colony on an equal footing. In 1841, when convict transportation to Eastern Australia officially ended, the total population was 211,000, of whom 40,000 were Catholics.

When the colonies federated as the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901, Catholics numbered 856,000 in a total population of 3,782,000. During the second half of the 19th century, the present ecclesiastical provinces and most of the archdioceses and their suffragan sees were established.

The 20th century has witnessed a remarkable numerical increase in the Catholic population. By the variety and activity of its charitable works, organizations and missions to the aborigines, the Church has proved energetically apostolic.

The Early Years of Maitland Diocese

The first Church built north of Sydney was St. Joseph's Church, East Maitland. When exactly it was built and by whom, has been something of a puzzle to historians. The truth seems to be that it was built over a period of years with more than one of the pioneer priests having a hand in it. It is believed that the foundation stone was laid by Father John Joseph Therry in 1830 or earlier. The position of the Church was facing Stockade Hill, the place of execution. The condemned man would often make his way to this spot to be blessed by Father Therry before the gallows did their ghastly work. Many of these early visits by Father Therry were rushed and hurried. The co-called modern grapevine was working then, perhaps even better than it is today; the word would come through that the priest was needed here or needed there, that an execution was scheduled to take place; a soul was about to meet its Maker.

When the first resident priest, Father James Watkins, arrived in East Maitland in 1835, St. Joseph's Church had a roof of sorts and an earthen floor, excepting in the Sanctuary, where it was of wood. This historic old Church was demolished in 1933, to make way for the present St Joseph's Church, which has been built on the same spot as the original church.

Father Christopher Vincent Dowling was the second priest to take up residence at East Maitland in 1835 and when he did so, was the only priest north of Sydney. During the three years Father Dowling remained in Maitland he confined his activities to the Lower Hunter, Maitland, Singleton and Newcastle area. He was chaplain to the military and was frequently in Newcastle.

The early ministers of all denominations worked hard and long for their flocks, covering distances on horseback that would appall a modern man with his powered vehicle. The greatest hindrance to travel was the creeks and streams that crossed the roads from Maitland. Even in a small fresh in the Hunter River, the Falls Road at Oakhampton, which was the only way to the Paterson and the North Coast, was impassable. Even in townships, conditions were crude and the priest received very little help or encouragement. All ministers of religion had to face the same conditions in a land where the convict system was breeding criminals of the worst class, where morality was almost a negative quantity.

The real growth of Catholicism in the Hunter Valley began in 1838, with the arrival in Australia of the band of Irish priests who had been awaited for so long. Two of these priests, Father Edmund Mahoney and Father John Lynch were appointed by Bishop Polding to the Hunter River. Their coming to the Hunter, coupled with Father Dowling's work at Newcastle was the real foundation of what was to become the Diocese of Maitland.

Fathers Lynch and Mahoney came as a pair. It was the endeavour of Bishop Polding to send out his priests, two by two, as did Our Lord when

he sent out the Disciples, and always to have his priests at least as near as a day's ride to one another. Father Mahoney remained at the home base and Father Lynch, being the much stronger physically, went off to the more distant parts. In the beginning of their ministry the two priests lived together at East Maitland, but early in 1839, although he continued to reside at East Maitland until 1841, Father Lynch went to West Maitland and set up the base which was to become the centre of the Diocese later on. This church was built in Plaistowe Street, Horseshoe Bend. It was a slab construction and roofed in bark.

In 1840 Reverend Dean Lynch invited Bishop Polding to Maitland to lay the foundation stone of St. John's Church. Originally sited at Campbell's Hill, on the site of the present Maitland Hospital, the Church was moved to the town centre and opened in 1846, where it later served as the Cathedral for the Maitland Diocese. For 87 years this edifice served the purpose for which it was built until, in 1933, Bishop Gleeson took over the Catholic Hall as a Pro-Cathedral. The old stone-built Church in the plain Gothic style still serves as a riverside landmark. In later years it was renovated and made into a school and hall for use by the Marist Brothers.

The early priests to service our own beautiful area had to travel out from Maitland. The usual period for visits was every six weeks, but no doubt if a call was urgent enough, the priest would visit earlier. Father John Lynch was the visiting priest until 1862, then Father Patrick Phelan, Father Joseph Byrne, Father Patrick Dwyer (later Bishop) from 1884-1887 and then Father Peter Roche from 1887-1892. Our first resident priest in the Gresford Parish was Father Hugh O'Neill. His name first appears in the Baptismal register on 16 August, 1891, but Father Peter Roche then appears occasionally up until 9 February, 1892. We may assume from this that Father O'Neill still resided in Maitland until 1882 and then moved to Gresford. Father Patrick Flanagan came from 1896-1898, Father Patrick Cullen 1898-1911, Father Michael Kiernan 1911-1939, Father Thomas Quiggley 1939-1957. More recently Father William Peters was the Parish Priest from 1957-1984. Father Peters was respected by Catholics and non-Catholics alike and the fact that he was originally a "country lad" himself, gave him an understanding and affinity with the country people. Father Vincent Ryan came to the Parish at the beginning of 1984 and already there have been quite a few changes, which mark a new wave of enthusiasm and commitment in our community.

The Bishops who have directed the Diocese since those early years began with:- Bishop Charles Henry Davis OSB 1884-1854: Bishop Davis was appointed to the Maitland Diocese but never actually came here to live. Bishop James Murray from 1865-1909 was the first resident Bishop. Bishop Patrick Vincent Dwyer was appointed Co-adjutor Bishop in 1897 and then succeeded Bishop Murray in 1909-1931. Bishop Edmund Gleeson CSSR came from 1931-1956, Bishop John Toohey 1956-1975 and our present Bishop Leo Morris Clarke, who has a difficult task in our fast changing world.

In the early days of settlement, the education of children depended mainly on the Church organizations. In 1841 Father Mahony was made responsible for Morpeth and established a Denominational School there with John Dwyer as master-in-charge. When government support was withdrawn, it was closed but reopened as a Church School by the Sisters of Mercy in 1881. It is only in recent years that the Sisters have ceased teaching at Morpeth.

In 1865, the See of Maitland was first established and The Right Reverend James Murray was appointed its Bishop. Born in Wicklow, he was the grandnephew of Dr. Daniel Murray, the Archbishop of Dublin. Before leaving for Australia, Bishop Murray visited Kingstown and secured a promise from the Dominican nuns that they would send Sisters to Maitland as soon as he needed them. It was a promise of far-reaching importance for on arrival in Australia, the new Bishop found the Catholic community in a bitter struggle. The Government of New South Wales had just tabled a Bill, later to be known as the Public Schools Act 1866, which would deprive the Church of the right to educate her children in Catholic Schools. Bishop Polding was abroad when the crisis developed and the newly arrived Bishops of Maitland and Bathurst were called upon to meet the attack.

The matter of Catholic education was, therefore, the vital issue that confronted Bishop Murray on his arrival in Australia. But in his own diocese of Maitland he found an immediate and pressing need. The Faith there was in jeopardy through lack of priests and religious teachers. Within three weeks of Bishop Murray's arrival in the diocese, he wrote to a friend: "There is plenty of work for three priests more than I have. I will be obliged to send Father Doyle to the district of the Namoi River, 250 miles away, and will have to attend myself to East Maitland and Morpeth and to a gaol besides." With the education crisis and the immediate needs of his diocese weighing heavily upon him, Bishop Murray turned his thoughts to Ireland and to the help he had been promised by the Irish Dominicans. On 11 January, 1867, a letter of momentous importance reached Kingstown. It was from Bishop Murray informing the nuns that the time had come for the fulfillment of their promise.

There were nuns residing in the Maitland area at this time but the schools conducted by them were for the poorer class of people, and because of this professed object, the children of the rich were debarred from attending their schools and hence they went to Protestant schools. These were the Good Shepherd Nuns, founded in 1857 by Bishop Polding. In 1867, their name was changed to Sisters of the Good Samaritan. These Sisters were in Maitland when it belonged to Sydney but returned to Sydney when Maitland was made a Diocese.

The dominican nuns arrived in Maitland on 10 September, 1867, and five days later commenced teaching at St. John's Denominational School in Victoria Street, which for some time previously had been conducted by the Misses Healy. This school is now St. John's Dominican Primary School. In their first year they had established a

high school for girls, which was the only one of its kind between Sydney and the Queensland border. The boarding school was opened on 1 February, 1868, and from the very beginning was a high class school and soon ranked as one of the leading boarding schools in N.S.W. A few details of the school uniform and customs are interesting: the boarders wore Shepherd's plaid, a black and white check material, in their frocks. Old fashioned bonnets, stiffened with cardboard, were the custom. For Sunday best they wore a short black silk jacket, white sailor hat with white ribbon band, black cotton gloves and white stockings with black shoes. This was the 1868 "new look"! When called to the parlour to see visitors, even parents, the children observed the French custom of wearing gloves. Conversational French was spoken freely and, for the perfection of pronunciation, all permissions had to be asked in French.

Within five years of the Dominican nuns arrival they had erected the long building extending from Albert to Victoria Streets, the Convent itself and the Church. By 1883, they had acquired the extensive gardens and paddocks now part of St. Mary's, and had built the boarding school section.

Meanwhile, besides the routine duties of teaching in the schools, the nuns had associated themselves with other missionary activities. Owing to the lack of priests and the extensive parishes, there were many people who knew practically nothing about Christian Doctrine: these the nuns endeavoured to instruct. Once every month, from all over the district, particularly from Raymond Terrace, men and women collected at the Convent for hours of simple teaching in the essential doctrines of the Church. For the people of Maitland itself, the nuns instituted a weekly Christian Doctrine class, which terminated with Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

St. Mary's School is no longer a boarding school but the day school for girls is one of which the Dominican nuns can still be proud.

Bishop Murray was concerned that there was no place of higher learning for boys. There was need, especially, to educate students for the priesthood and St. Patrick's College, Manly, was still something of the future. It was with this in mind that Bishop Murray established the Sacred Heart College at Campbell's Hill as a boy's college, receiving both day pupils and boarders. The college was established in 1875, in what had been the residence of Bishop Murray, who vacated the residence in order to establish the college. He took a rented house in Elgin Street. There were a number of Rectors in the early years of the College and then it was handed over to the Patrician Brothers in 1881. The Patricians remained for eight years and then departed. In 1889, Father Patrick Vincent Dwyer became Rector and the college entered on its only period of real prosperity. Father Dwyer (later to become Bishop Dwyer), had been the Diocesan Director of Schools and Bishop's Secretary before taking over the college.

With the elevation of Father Dwyer to the Episcopate, the Marist

Brothers joined the Diocese and took over the College in 1897. They continued there until 1905 when the College finally closed down. When Bishop Murray died, a few years after the College had closed, the place was turned into the Bishop Murray Memorial Orphanage. The Orphanage was closed in 1973 and the building is now used as a Conference Centre.

When the Marist Brothers first came to Maitland in 1898, an agreement was drawn up between the Brothers and the Bishop of Maitland. In this agreement the Marist Brothers agreed to manage the Sacred Heart College at Campbell's Hill and to keep up a standard of studies that would enable students to prepare successfully for the Junior Public Examination and the Matriculation for the University of Sydney. Five of the Brothers taught at the College and three others travelled down to St. John's Primary School in Free Church Street, in a four-wheeled buggy.

As far as can be ascertained, the old St. John's Primary School in Free Church Street was built about 1874. The Marist Brothers were fortunate in taking over from the last lay headmaster, Mr. H. O'Connor, who had run a well organised school. St. John's became a High School in 1917 under the directorship of Brother William. This was in the building now used as the Woodwork Room. The school was registered later in 1917 as a full secondary school, which meant that it was allowed to advertise that pupils were permitted to travel free on railways from any distance. St. John's then became known as Marist Brothers' High School. By 1935 classroom conditions were atrocious, due to the fact that there were more pupils than there was space. The St. John's Boys' School buildings were demolished and the first stage of the school as it is today, was built. The primary classes were phased out in 1970. Since those early years Marist Brothers has expanded rapidly and it is with regret that, after 87 years, the Brothers are leaving the school at the end of this year. Due to shortage of numbers, the Brothers are needed more elsewhere. Marist Brothers High School will be renamed St. Peter's High School.

The Sisters of Mercy came to the Maitland Diocese in 1875 and moved into their new convent at Singleton after Bishop Murray had decided to enlist the co-operation of the Sisters in the work of Catholic education in his diocese. At that time the people of New South Wales, were following the lead of their Bishops and were resisting the attempt on the part of the State to secularise education, and to withdraw State aid from denominational schools. For some years prior to the passing of the Public Instruction Act of 1879, the Bishops foresaw the need of providing for Catholic children, schools in which religion should be the dominating and all-pervading subject.

The Sisters' first undertaking was a school for girls at Singleton, and, then, in quick succession in the "eighties", many other schools were opened up around the country.

The Sisters of St. Joseph came to Lochinvar in 1883 and an old hotel served as their first home. Within twenty five years, eighteen branch convents were opened. As the years progressed so also did the buildings at Lochinvar. In March, 1962, Pope John XXIII granted "Definitive Approbation" of the Holy See to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Lochinvar, setting the seal on the wonderful work that had been achieved during their eighty years in the Diocese of Maitland. At the beginning of 1964, the Sisters of St. Joseph took on a new work in the Diocese when a new convent was opened in the parish of Gresford. From this convent as a centre the Sisters travelled around each of the public schools in this rural parish to instruct the children in Christian Doctrine. For many years Gresford was the one parish in the Diocese of Maitland without any Catholic institution except a presbytery and four churches. This work was continued for almost twenty years but, with the growing decline of girls entering the religious orders, the services of the St. Joseph nuns is needed more elsewhere. The convent is now used as a Health Centre for the Gresford district.

In the sixteen years between 1867 and 1883 three religious institutions of women were set up in the Diocese of Maitland. That was a time of crisis, and these nuns answered the call for help. It was another fifty years before any more religious orders came to the Diocese:- These were the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent De Paul, forty-six acres of land was purchased at Mayfield for £9,000 in 1933 and a boys orphanage was built for the Sisters to run.

Early Settlement of our Paterson Area

The two tributaries of the Hunter River were discovered in 1801 by Lieutenant Colonel William Paterson, who had been sent by the Governor to explore the upper reaches of the waterway. One of these was called the "Cedar Arm" as it was the main link to the cedar forests. This was later changed to the Paterson and the other tributary was named the Williams River.

About 1817, Captain Wallis, the commandant of the small convict settlement at Newcastle sent cutting gangs to work the flourishing cedar forests on the banks of the river. By the year 1820, there were twelve farms established, a few by free men and the remainder by convicts. It was not until 1821 that the first land grant went to Captain William Dun.

In 1820 Lieutenant William Gordon Ward, his wife and six children arrived in Sydney to take up the 1,000 acres he had been granted. Soon after their arrival, the lieutenant died but Mrs. Ward was allowed to assume her late husband's entitlement, of which she took a portion at Castle Hill in 1822. In 1823, six hundred acres was added to the original grant, and this she took up on the western bank of the Paterson River. The balance of the grant was taken up on the eastern bank of the river. Mrs. Ward's grant was at the head of the navigable river, and the local settlers petitioned the Government for a wharf to be built at this point. To enable this, Mrs. Ward surrendered ninety acres of her six hundred acre grant and the town of Paterson grew around the wharf.

Paterson prospered. The land was fertile, seasons were good and convict labour was cheap. The river flats grew a great variety of crops — wheat, maize, tobacco, cotton, hops, oranges and grapes, which were used to make fine wines. Of course, timber was one of the main exports — hardwood timber was used for shipbuilding, cedar and rosewood to make furniture and the softer wood for candle and soap boxes. Many fine homes were built in the area and some of them still remain — a constant reminder of our heritage. Many of these homes were replicas of grand houses left behind in England.

The town became a trading post for the small coastal boats plying up the Hunter from Newcastle and Morpeth, carrying produce and timber and servicing the small industries that once thrived there. It was also the centre of a coaching service that travelled as far as Dungog, Muswellbrook and Cassilis.

The years of the early 40's were dry, bad years for Paterson. In 1843, the Paterson River ceased to run and there was a general depression throughout the country. However, after 1843, things slowly improved until the gold discoveries of the fifties brought prosperity back to the country.

In 1833 Paterson was surveyed and laid out, with such street names as King, Queen, Marquis, Count, Church and Prince. Many veterans of the Peninsular War requested and received grants in the area. Land was also provided for each of the Churches. The land for the Catholic

Church was situated in Church Street but St. Columba's Catholic Church was not built until 1884. A year later, in 1885, Paterson was declared a town.

Paterson once boasted of having at least 5 hotels. The business section of the town consisted of 4 blacksmith shops, 4 stores, 3 boot-makers, a tannery, 2 butchers, a bakery and 2 tailors. There were two steam flour mills, and across the river was a shipyard. There were water mills further up the river, and down river, at Dunmore Bridge there was a big steam flour mill — Mitchell's Mill.

The bridges that link Paterson with Maitland, the "Belmore" and the "Dunmore" were not built until the 1860's. Before that, the river had to be forded at the Old Falls at Oakhampton.

The old road through to Gresford and Dungog has been re-routed. Once the busiest part of the town was by the river and the road which skirted it was called Commercial Road. This was the scene of much activity with heavily laden bullock drays, waggon-carts and carriages rumbling over it. Wages for a day's work around the 1870's were 4/6d. to 5/- for which they worked long hours and until 3 p.m. on Saturdays. The coach ran from East Maitland to Paterson daily and the trip took 1½ hours.

Paterson since those early days has altered. It has not grown; in fact it has regressed, although it is still considered by many to be the prettiest village in the Hunter Valley. During the week it slumbers quietly, the North Coast trains and the Brisbane Limited thunder through and local trains stop at the Station. Timber and milk trucks and dozens of cars pass by. At intervals the village is invaded by various groups:- artists, members of Historical Societies, National Trust members or architectural students. On Sundays and holidays, Tucker Park is crowded with visitors enjoying the tranquil setting beside the river and roaming through our town, inspecting the many old buildings and browsing in the craft shops.

The three Churches in the town were all built in the nineteenth century and have stood the test of time. St. Anne's Presbyterian Church was the first to be built, in 1840. St. Paul's Church of England was completed in 1845 and is in the process of being renovated and restored. Our own St. Columba's Church was consecrated on 21 December, 1884, and so of course this is a very special time for our mellow old Church as it celebrates its Centenary in this year of 1984. With all the activity seen at the Church in recent months, after years of neglect, the whole of the Paterson community must realise that this is an important year for the Catholic Church at Paterson.

Gresford Parish

We have been unable as yet, to obtain a great deal of history regarding the early years of Gresford Parish, but we are hopeful that in the years to come a more detailed account may be researched and written.

The Parochial District of Gresford has four churches:- The first Sacred Heart Church at Summer Hill was built of timber and was opened before 1841. It was then rebuilt in brick and opened in 1913. St. Helen's Church at Gresford was opened in 1867, St. Paul's Church at Glendonbrook in 1889 and St. Columba's Church at Paterson was opened in 1884.

In the first directory of the Australian Church, published in 1841 by the famous W.A. Duncan, foundation editor of the first Catholic newspaper, "The Australasian Chronicle", we find the following report:- "At Paterson there is also a wooden chapel, roofed, and a very excellent building, cost £150. Mr. Keily and Mr. Clarke gave three acres of land to this church, which contains nearly 300 persons." The number of Catholics at Paterson at that time, was reported to be 120 with 10 Communicants. This report would refer to the first Sacred Heart Church at Summer Hill.

St. Helen's Church at Gresford was opened on 5 October, 1867, and the occasion was given full coverage by the Maitland Mercury of the day. Bishop James Murray was present for the High Mass and blessing of the Church. Reverend M. Doyle was celebrant with Reverend P. Phelan and Reverend W. Stone acting as deacon and sub-deacon. The choir from St. John's Cathedral, Maitland, were present and under the "guidance of Mr. J. Broderick, executed the music in their accustomed finished style. After the first gospel, the Venerable Archdeacon McEnroe, from Sydney, preached an appropriate and instructive sermon. The Bishop then gave the usual indulgences of forty days. A collection was made by Father Phelan and Mr. Doyle, which we believe was satisfactory. At the end of the mass a brief financial statement was made by Father Phelan, showing in a rough way the receipts and expenditure in connection with the church. He passed a high eulogium on Mr. MacCormack for presenting the site and £100 as a donation, and on Mr. Doyle, his son-in-law, for his donation of £50, and for his untiring exertions about this new Church.

After the religious ceremonies had concluded, his Lordship, the clergy and the majority of the congregation adjourned to a magnificent luncheon, prepared for them by Mrs. Doyle and some lady friends. We have seldom seen a repast of this kind equalled for profusion and elegance; the wines, produced in the district by Mr. Glenny, were particularly commented on. The guests, numbering some hundreds, appeared determined to do ample justice to the delicacies prepared for them, and when we add that many of them came some ten or twenty miles, this desire on their part was perfectly natural.

The Chairman brought the proceedings to a close by giving the toast to 'The Choir of St. John's, West Maitland', the members of which had always shown their willingness to give their services on occasions of this kind, and had that day given substantial proof of it, by coming twenty-eight miles, though unaccustomed to rough it through the bush. In connection with this toast he begged to mention the name of Mr. Thomas Hyndes, a member of the choir, and also contractor for their new church. He said Mr. Hyndes had given great satisfaction about the building of the new church. He also spoke highly and humorously of the versatility of Mr. Hyndes' talents, whether on the cricket ground, or on the river, whether at the head of the fire brigade, or driving a precious cargo along a hard bush road, whether erecting the material building of a church, or chanting the music of Mozart. About this stage of the proceedings a splendid thunderstorm broke over the scene, and whilst tending to drown the eloquence of the speakers, also cooled the atmosphere, and made the evening an agreeable one for the return home."

A sequel to the St. John's Choir visit to Gresford was reported in the "Newcastle and Maitland Catholic Sentinel":-

"A storm was gathering when they left Gresford, and the parish priest did his best to prevail on them to delay their departure till it had passed." The Choir members ignored this and set out for home. They were caught in the storm and the members, drenched to the skin, had to seek shelter as best they could. "They would never be taken for the joyous party that only a few short hours before had awakened the echoes by their singing as they sped along towards Gresford." This visit was sadly remembered by the Choir, as one of the members, Miss Helen Broderick developed pneumonia, and died as a result, a month later.

St. Columba's Church at Paterson was opened on 21 December, 1884. It was built by Mr. Morris of East Maitland, the contractor for the foundations and Mr. Coleman who did the brickwork. The total cost of the work was to be about £400.

On 11th September, 1884, the Maitland Mercury reported:-
"The size of the edifice is to be 40ft by 20ft. The preparations for the foundation are now in process, and it is expected that the ceremony of laying the foundation stone or first brick will take place, in a week or so. It is not definitely announced that such a ceremony will take place, but it is thought that such an opportunity of making a collection will be made."

The building apparently progressed quite well and the Mercury was able to report on Thursday, 13 November, 1884:-

"This new edifice is making rapid progress. The brick work appears to be completed, and good progress has been made with the roof, hence completion may be expected shortly. The prominent situation and ornate architecture of the structure will make it, when finished, quite an ornament to our town. We shall endeavour to furnish some particu-

lars when we report the opening, &c. A ball in aid of the building fund, is to take place tomorrow night in the School of Arts."

On 13 December, 1884, an announcement in the Mercury indicated that the Consecration of the new Church would take place:-

"His Lordship the Bishop of Maitland will Solemnly Bless and Open the New Catholic Church at Paterson at Eleven O'Clock Mass Sunday, December 21st. The choir of St. John's Cathedral, West Maitland, will attend."

On 3 January, 1885, a report was in the Sydney paper "The Express" regarding the opening and consecration of the new Church:-

"The ceremony of solemnly blessing and opening the new Church of St. Columba at the Paterson, was performed by his Lordship the Right Reverend Dr. Murray on Sunday week. There was a large number of the Catholics of the district present to witness the proceedings, which were of an interesting and imposing nature. The Bishop was assisted in the performance of his duties by the Very Reverend P. Hand, V.G., and the Reverend Fathers Dwyer and Darcy. The new structure, which occupies a prominent position is of brick on cement foundation, 40 by 20 feet inside. It is of Gothic design with lancet windows, and elaborately ornamented with embellishments in wood and cement outside. The internal arrangements are all that can be desired, and altogether the Church forms quite an ornament to the town. The singing on the occasion was of a first-class character, the local choir having been strengthened by several members of St. John's Cathedral Choir, Maitland. The sum subscribed in aid of the new building amounted to over £70."

At this stage we know very little regarding the history of those early days. We do know that Father Michael Kiernan (1911-1939) used to travel down from Gresford in a horse and sulky initially and then acquired a one seater Dodge car towards the end of his stay at Gresford. The Church had the porch and sacristy area built on around the early 1900's to provide overnight accommodation for the priest, if necessary.

Mr. Charles O'Connor was the local schoolteacher in both Father Kiernan and Father Quiggle's time and both these priests would visit these good people after Mass to have refreshments before their return trip to Gresford. Mr. O'Connor was a good man and prepared the children for their First Holy Communion, trained the altar boys and taught them the necessary Latin and also played the organ for the Church choir. There was an excellent choir in those days.

Mass was held on three Sundays of the month — two 10 a.m. Masses and one 8.30 a.m. Mass. This 8.30 a.m. Mass was the only Communion Mass during the month, owing to the difficulty of the Priest having to fast for so long and the distance necessary for him to travel.

A well known family in those early days were Thomas Edward and Maude Florence Jordan. Maude came to Paterson around 1900, where she was employed as a nursemaid to the children of the local Police Sergeant, Sergeant Cunningham and his wife. She met Tom, who had taken up a selection of land at Glenbourne, Paterson, and they were married by Father Patrick Cullen at St. Columba's in 1904. Their first home was at Glenbourne, where Tom carried on a cream dairy, which meant in those early days that the cans of cream were transported by horse and slide to the river, three miles distant, where it was collected by boat, which in turn conveyed it to the Creamery at Morpeth.

To attend Sunday Mass it was necessary to travel by horse and buggy, sometimes the long way around to the township, on other occasions to the river, cross the river by boat and proceed on foot to the Church. During the Missions conducted by the Redemptorist Fathers, this procedure was followed morning and night for one week. On many occasions, the family was joined by Maude's sister, Lydia, and her husband, Jim, who was Tom's brother. These people lived at Dunn's Creek at the time. In 1918 Tom purchased "Sussex Farm" from Mr. Stewart Corner, and the family took up residence in the fine two-story home built in 1836 and originally known as "Longhouse Green" (which was demolished in 1960 to allow for road alteration). In 1924, on completion of their new home "Sussex House", Tom and Maude relinquished their former home to Doctor Kem Yee, who conducted the building as a hospital known as "Cintra", staffed by Matron Locke and others.

In 1908 their first son, Stanley Thomas, died from shock after receiving a small burn on his arm. He was two years old. In 1924 their thirteen year old daughter, Ellen, was burnt to death when a gas jet ignited, setting her clothing alight. In an attempt to extinguish the flames, which completely covered her, her father's hands and arms were terribly burnt.

During the following years more healthy children were born to this exemplary couple, numbering fourteen in all. Tom, with the assistance of his sons carried on farming pursuits, and was noted statewide for his tomatoes — he was known as "the Tomato King". A son of the soil, his knowledge of the land and the seasons was boundless. He was a particularly kind and generous man, especially to those less fortunate than himself. During the Great Depression in 1929, when the number of men seeking work was ever on the increase, they always received something to eat at "Sussex House" and were allowed to sleep in the hay shed before proceeding on their way. Apparently, it was usual for them to jump the train to stations north of Sydney in pursuit of odd jobs in rural areas. Some had walked many miles and were barefooted, having worn out their boots or shoes. Maude frequently helped out with footwear and articles of clothing for the unfortunate travellers. She was a gracious, gentle lady, noted for her kind and charitable disposition. Her main interests were her family, her home and her beautiful garden. Blooms from her garden frequently graced the altar at St. Columba's.

Miss Ida Gibbs, who lived at Priestley's corner, collected the flowers each Saturday, when she walked to the Church to decorate for Sunday Mass.

Thirteen of the fourteen Jordan children were baptised at the little church. It was also the venue for the First Communions, the Sacraments of Confirmation and later on many marriages. For the fee of ten shillings, paid annually, families were entitled to their own pew, suitably identified by a brass plaque bearing the family name.

Tom died in 1961 at the age of eighty-three years and on 10 September, 1983, at the age of ninety-nine years Maude passed away.

This pioneer couple leave behind 152 living descendants, comprising 12 children, 39 grandchildren, 98 great grandchildren and 3 great great grandchildren. Two of Maude's brothers still live locally, Cec Collison of Paterson and Sydney Collison of Gresford, and many of the descendants still live in the Gresford Parish.



Thomas and Maude Jordan married St. Columba's Church, 1904

The years have dealt kindly with our Church but in this Centenary year, it is badly in need of repairs and a general facelift. Because of this need, a committee was formed at the beginning of the year to organise the repairs and to direct celebrations for the Centenary year. The committee eventually decided to restore the Church as far as possible so that the general character of St. Columba's would not be spoilt. Some of the decisions that have been made have taken a lot of discussion and thought, but because of the time and care taken in reaching decisions, we feel quite sure that the Church is something that the parishioners and the people of Paterson may be proud of. The main work of restoration has been completed by 2 December, the date of the Centenary celebrations. It was considered that 21 December was too close to Christmas to hold the celebrations.

The plaster work inside the Church has been repaired by Mr. Sylvio Bizzotto at no cost to us, and he has also repaired the cement render and pointing outside. The interior of the Church, including the ceiling, has been painted. Four stained glass windows have been put into the Sanctuary and the remaining windows in the main body of the church are new. New pews have replaced the extremely old ones of varying shapes and sizes. Carpet has been laid for the first time. New lighting has been installed and fans have been put in the ceiling.

The gutterings and plumbing have been renewed as have been the crosses on top of the Church. It is our intention to landscape and beautify the grounds. The paint that existed on some of the outside bricks was sandblasted off and they are in their natural state. Restoration work has cost about \$32,000.

A sign has also been erected in the Church grounds giving the times for Masses etc. These Mass times can be most confusing to new and not so new parishioners. I wonder how many of us have rushed down to Church on Saturday evening and found it deserted, and have realised it is the 8.30 a.m. or 10 a.m. Mass that week.

Our Centenary Ball on 7 September was a wonderful success, both socially and financially. There were 340 people present from throughout the Diocese and the profit for the Ball was \$1,500. We are most grateful to everyone for their support and the very small band of workers who worked for its success.

Bishop Leo Clarke, Fathers Vincent Ryan and Michael Timbs will concelebrate the Centenary Mass. It is our intention to have a luncheon in the local School of Arts after the Mass.

This Centenary year has resulted in some exciting and welcome changes in our Parish. Various committees have been formed to aid in the running of our Parish and aiming at parishioner involvement in what is our Church and our responsibility.

The Gresford Parish Council was formed just in time to recommend approval of the money required to do the refurbishing of St. Columba's. We have formed a Social Committee and the various social functions have been most enjoyable and has resulted in a feeling of unity and friendship within the Parish.

The world of today is changing and progressing so rapidly that it is sometimes beneficial to take stock of ourselves and our faith, to help us define what this gift of the Catholic religion means to us in the modern world, and how best we can pass this precious knowledge on to our children and to others. It is important to remember that no matter who we are or what we do, we are all basically children of God and therefore equal in his eyes. It is how we measure up to his standard that is important. As we unite and grow in our faith let us hope that this year will be a landmark in the history of Gresford Parish — a year when we all come closer to God through acknowledgement of our need of Him and through loving and helping one another. The beautiful prayer of St. Francis of Assisi could well be our guide:-

Lord make me an instrument of Thy peace
where there is hatred, let me sow love:
Where there is injury, pardon:
where there is despair, hope:
and where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console:
to be understood as to understand:
to be loved, as to love:
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

