

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ST JAMES' PARISH COORPAROO FROM 1913 TO 1925

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For those whose interest in Catholic history of Brisbane centres on areas other than Coorparoo, I offer this description of the Coorparoo parish development as essentially the typical pattern by which suburban Brisbane parish expansion occurred in the earlier decades of Archbishop Duhig's episcopacy.

And let me add that, in giving a developmental history of St James' Parish, Coorparoo, to the year 1925, one is examining the parish that built the first church not only at Coorparoo but also at Annerley, Mount Gravatt and Camp Hill, and one that as well established Mass centres at homes at Kuraby, Eight Mile Plains and Mount Cotton. In my estimation, the area covered by the Coorparoo parish in the early days has since yielded territory to approximately twenty parishes.

The main thoroughfare in the present St James' Parish is Old Cleveland Road, which the present St James' Church fronts. This roadway was first mapped as a track to Cleveland in 1828, and then officially surveyed in 1850. Coorparoo land on the eastern and western sides of Old Cleveland Road was surveyed and auctioned as farm lots in 1856 and 1857 respectively, and habitation of the suburb began.

To make a very quick overview of local economic history: in 1876 the Coorparoo Public School opened, in 1880 a Post Office was established at the school under the charge of the headmaster, in 1885 horse-drawn trams were introduced from South Brisbane to Buranda, and in 1888 the Bulimba Divisional Board handed its authority in the Coorparoo locality to a newly-established Coorparoo Shire Council.

The year 1893 saw the worst of Australia's severest nineteenth-century economic depressions, which caused land prices to drop. This decline in Coorparoo was exacerbated by the Brisbane flood of that year, in which Norman Creek inundated the low-lying parts of Coorparoo. The district gained an unenviable reputation - which was generally inaccurate - of being flood-prone.

The effect of these factors on local land prices was quite dramatic. In 1891 the total value of rateable land in the Coorparoo Shire was 399,000 pounds, but by 1906 had dropped by 60% to only 164,000 pounds. In fact, it took till 1923 to again reach the 300,000 pound mark that had been the case thirty-three years previously. This decrease in Coorparoo land prices was to work in Archbishop Duhig's favour when he purchased land for the Coorparoo church and convent in 1913 and 1916 respectively.

In 1899 an electric tram service reached Stones Corner, meaning that Coorparoo was still beyond the terminus of public transportation. The tramline was extended to both Coorparoo Junction and to Upper Cornwall Street, Greenslopes in 1915.

In 1906 a public telephone was installed at Stones Corner; in 1908 there were only two private telephones in Stones Corner. In 1910 a public phone was placed at Coorparoo Junction.

Taking the year 1910, who were the Catholics in the Coorparoo vicinity, and where did they live? A few known by name are: Michael "Gil" O'Gorman, a dairy farmer near the Coorparoo railway station; William Keating, who conducted a bakery at Stones Corner; the descendants at Buranda of the late James Toohey, who had been a substantial landowner there and in Tarragindi and Nathan; V.H.Duffy, a carting contractor of Old Cleveland Road, Coorparoo, and in Norman Park, Judge Patrick Real of the Queensland Supreme Court.

Photographs of Coorparoo of the day show small wooden houses that were called "working man's cottages" dotting the landscape. Enough of these occupants were Catholic such that when the Coorparoo convent opened in 1916, two hundred Catholic children attended on its first day.

In 1910 all the people referred to above were part of the Kangaroo Point Parish. The only two parishes in southern Brisbane at that time were South Brisbane and Kangaroo Point, both of which were founded in 1892.

Sunday School

Around 1910, the Sisters of Mercy at Kangaroo Point began regular visits to Coorparoo on Sunday afternoons to give catechetical instruction to the local Catholic children, some of whom attended Kangaroo Point convent school, while others were enrolled at Coorparoo State School.

Of the eight Sisters in the Kangaroo Point community, at least six were regularly engaged in catechetical instructions, teaching Sunday School at Annerley, Greenslopes and Coorparoo. Sister Emilian, who was always accompanied by another Sister, usually Sister Charles, taught at Coorparoo in a four-roomed cottage that was

not otherwise used during these years. It stood well back on a large allotment near the corner of Clarence Street and lower Cavendish Road, opposite the Coorparoo Railway Station.

The dwelling is universally acknowledged as being in the charge of Mr Michael "Gil" O'Gorman Jnr, third son of an Irish pioneer who had purchased much land in that vicinity in 1882. The Sunday classes in the cottage continued from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., with usually about twenty children present.

At the age of 40, the Most Rev. James Duhig, Bishop of Rockhampton, was named Coadjutor Archbishop of Brisbane on 26 February, 1912. He knew Brisbane well. He had lived and been educated there, had worked there as a youth and was ordained a priest of the Archdiocese. Even as Bishop of Rockhampton he had made return visits to the Brisbane Archdiocese to assist the ailing Archbishop Dunne with the administration of Confirmation and in other ways.

During his 35th year as Brisbane's second bishop, Archbishop Robert Dunne died on 13 January, 1917 at the age of 86 years. Even though the first rapid steps in the foundation of the Coorparoo parish took place before then it was Archbishop Duhig who actively participated in the entire series of meetings, transactions and ceremonies that led to its foundation.

Perusal of the accompanying chronology shows the quick succession of steps that brought the Church very visibly to the Catholics of the Ipswich Road and Coorparoo areas. It also shows the rate at which the parish developed during the years when the First World War was taking its toll of Australian life and resources.

Saint James' Distinction

St James' has the distinction of being the first suburban parish that Archbishop Duhig helped to found. It also contained the first church land that the young Archbishop purchased in Brisbane.

In November 1912, Archbishop Duhig bought land on the corner of Ipswich Road and Ferndale Street, where the church of Mary Immaculate, Annerley, now stands. On the advice of three local Catholic laymen - Messrs W. de Lange, W. Freney and L. Mellish - the archbishop obtained this three-acre site for the sum of 814 pounds several weeks after his formal installation into the Archdiocese.

At all Masses at St Stephen's Cathedral on Sunday, 5 January 1913, it was announced there would be a meeting to consider the building of a church at Stones Corner. This meeting was arranged for 3.30 p.m. on Sunday, 12 January, in the schoolroom of St Joseph's, Kangaroo Point.

Clergy present were Fathers J.Breen P.P. and Gowen, of Kangaroo Point; J.Byrne V.G., Administrator of the St Stephen's Cathedral; Jeremiah O'Leary; and about a hundred parishioners. People from the Coorparoo area recorded as taking part in the ensuing debate were Mr W. Keating, owner of a Stones Corner bakery; Miss Toohey, one of the three daughters of a prominent Buranda Catholic family; and Mr Michael "Gil" O'Gorman mentioned earlier.

The Catholic Church had owned land in the Buranda area for over 25 years. In the will of James Toohey, dated 20 November, 1883, the three trustees of his estate were directed to select and sign over to the Catholic Church one acre of Portion 174, County of Stanley, Parish of South Brisbane. The trustees had chosen an acre that was designated as subdivision five; it was transferred to the Archdiocese by a deed issued on 1 February, 1887. Today, this land is bounded on two edges by the north side of Bank Lane and the east side of Church Avenue, Buranda, and is equidistant from Logan and Ipswich Roads.

Stones Corner became the terminus for the electric tram in 1899 and it was a foregone conclusion that service would soon extend at least to Greenslopes and to Coorparoo Junction. Thus, whereas some people at the meeting were happy to build on the Toohey bequest land, most felt that further development demanded a site nearer the anticipated termini of the trams.

Because the meeting could reach no consensus, Archbishop Duhig suggested that the decision be deferred. He proposed that one of the two halls at the Stones Corner tram terminus be hired at 9.30a.m. on the first Sunday of the following month. He promised to celebrate Mass and to convene another general meeting afterwards.

Stones Corner Mass

The first public Mass at Stones Corner was thus celebrated by Archbishop Duhig on 2 February, 1913, the congregation being too numerous for Foresters' Hall that had been hired for the ceremony. This hall, built in the last century and now long demolished, faced Logan Road, Stones Corner.

After Mass, the Archbishop announced that he had placed a fifty pound deposit on the present St James' parish land. He then gave details of the purchase and revealed an agreed price of 1,250 pounds for the three acres. He mentioned the property had cost 2,000 pounds in 1892. This apparent anomaly is indicative of the extent to which memories of the 1893 flood depressed Coorparoo land prices. Each year from 1906 to 1910 the total value of rateable land in the Coorparoo Shire had actually decreased.

At the meeting a committee was formed to build a church/school on the site as soon as possible. Those present also resolved to erect on the site at a later date a modern brick

church that would be neatly designed and commodious.

Father O'Leary Appointed

A 9.30 a.m. Sunday Mass was again celebrated by the Archbishop at Stones Corner on 16 March, 1913. In the presence of Fathers J. Byrne and J. O'Leary, he convoked the third general meeting and announced that Father O'Leary had been appointed the first Parish Priest of the districts served by Old Cleveland Road, Logan and Ipswich Roads.

A foundation stone for the Coorparoo church/school was soon ready to be ceremonially placed. A thousand people gathered to witness the event. On arrival at the Old Cleveland Road property on Sunday afternoon, 6 April, 1913, Archbishop Duhig was accompanied by Fathers J.P. Byrne (Cathedral) and J. McCarthy P.P. (Red Hill). He was met by a group of Hibernians, Children of Mary and schoolchildren, and escorted to a platform prepared at the scene of the ceremony.

The Archbishop explained that the new parish was dedicated to St James. He said this was fitting, because it was from the parish of Father James Breen at Kangaroo Point that the Coorparoo parish had come, and because of a generous bequest of land to the Church by the late James Toohey. Possibly, it did not escape his audience that by happy coincidence Archbishop Duhig also bore the same Christian name. The sale of the Toohey bequest land at Buranda earned 600 pounds for the parish.

Coorparoo Church/School Opened

On Sunday morning 10 August, 1913, streamers stretching across Old Cleveland Road drew attention to the ceremony of the blessing and opening of the first church building in the new parish.

A weather conscious reporter at the opening wrote that 'the weather was a happy blending of mellow sunshine and exhilarating zephyr. It was indeed in full accord with the spirit of the day's proceedings.'

The spirit of the proceedings no doubt pleased the Pastor who, at the conclusion of the ceremony announced that in its sixteen weeks of existence, the parish had undertaken a total debt of 2,650 pounds of which only 450 pounds were outstanding. At the conclusion of his speech 300 pounds were raised and the Kangaroo Point Hibernians gave 100 pounds. He thus opened the church with a mere 50 pounds left to pay.

Father O'Leary then proceeded to celebrate the first Mass in the new building.

Annerley Development

In themselves these proceedings at Coorparoo during the first sixteen weeks of St James' parish would be impressive enough, but a similar development at the Ipswich Road end of the same parish must not be neglected. Father O'Leary soon built a church on the Ferndale Street property that had been Archbishop Duhig's first Brisbane land purchase.

The Ipswich Road church/school was opened by Archbishop Duhig on 14 June, 1914, at a total cost of 814 pounds for the site and 1,193 pounds for the building. This entire debt was cleared before Father Gallagher transferred his domicile from Coorparoo to Ipswich Road as resident priest in 1916.

Even after St James' church was opened, Father O'Leary had to live at the Kangaroo Point presbytery, for he had no residence of his own. He set about remedying this situation. At a meeting held at St James' towards the end of March 1914, parishioners decided to build a brick, two-storey presbytery in the parish.

Archbishop Duhig presided at Father O'Leary's 9.30 a.m. Mass on 19 April 1914. The parish choir, only eight months old, drew favourable press comment for its presentation of the music of a Mass by J.L. Battman and of *Regina Coeli* at the Offertory. The conductor of the choir was Mr F. Wright and Miss E. Halligan played the organ.

Immediately after the Mass the ceremony of laying the presbytery foundation stone began. Special trams had come from North Quay for the convenience of those who wished to attend the ceremony.

Having half the required 2,400 pounds collected while the building was little more than a foundation stone might have pleased many a pastor. However, Father O'Leary, who had opened his Coorparoo church almost free of debt eight months earlier and who would have Mary Immaculate church, Ipswich Road, ready for dedication eight weeks hence, thought the proceeds of a garden fete might boost the coffers.

Garden Fete

The Jeremiah O'Leary expression "garden fete", was an innocuous synonym for extractive industry that could proceed on five successive week-nights and culminate in a full day's business on Saturday. His garden fete after the foundation stone ceremony of the presbytery netted 400 pounds, a sixth of the anticipated cost of the building.

During one such marathon fete, when radio was still in its infancy, a radio tent proved as lucrative as it was innovative. Undaunted by the fact that Brisbane had no radio station, the promoters set up a radio receiver and a bank of earphones. An amateur radio enthusiast at Greenslopes was prevailed upon to transmit a programme nightly for the duration of the fete!

Those for whom radio was an unexperienced novelty willingly paid threepence for three minutes' listening and many patrons were so enthralled that they were prepared to part with another coin rather than with the earphones. In an effort to satisfy the popular demand, the radio tent continued on the Sunday, the day after the fete ended. Even so the operators could not cater adequately for the large numbers, until after Sunday Benediction a loudspeaker replaced the bank of earphones. The technological leap forward from earphones to loudspeaker was accomplished without any increase in the threepenny tariff.

A personal fund-raising effort by Father O'Leary to meet the presbytery construction costs was the publication of his 208 page booklet, *Catholic Miscellany*. In 1913, the 2/6d. charge would have been a sacrificial offering for many of those parishioners who purchased a copy.

On Sunday afternoon, 16 August, 1914, the completed building was opened by Archbishop Duhig in the presence of Bishop Patrick O'Connor, third bishop of Armidale, N.S.W.

In the first sixteen months of the St James' parish of Coorparoo-Ipswich Road, expenditure for the two pieces of land and the three buildings that stood on them was 7,220 pounds, of which all but 1,220 pounds had been paid. Father O'Leary himself indicated that the condition of the balance sheet was exceedingly gratifying, especially seeing that very few of his parishioners could be called wealthy.

Agreeing with Father O'Leary's observation, one old parishioner since deceased is quoted as saying that the parishioners of St James' always gave "according to their means and not to their meanness".

From the opening of the church/school building in 1913 until the end of 1915, the only school in the edifice was the Sunday School, which the Sisters of Mercy transferred from the previous site near Coorparoo Railway Station.

Good Samaritan Sisters

The next major development at Coorparoo was the arrival of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan from Sydney to begin a convent school at St James'. Improvements

were made underneath the building, so that the infant classes could take place there. On opening day, 31 January, 1916, almost 200 children began classes.

The Sisters initially lived in a now demolished house that stood at 67 Kirkland Avenue. A young lady who was present at the wharf to welcome the Sisters and who is now Sister Mary Scholastica Cullen of the same religious congregation, explained that recourse was had to a rented dwelling because her uncle, Archbishop Duhig, hoped to purchase *Langlands* for their convent.

Thomas William Connah, the owner of *Langlands*, had died on 21 November, 1915, eight weeks before the Sisters reached Brisbane, and his widow decided to sell the property. The transaction was officially completed on 16 April, 1916, the house and nine acres costing 4,600 pounds.

To recover the purchase money Archbishop Duhig extended Fifth Avenue through the property and sold the housing allotments that faced it. Within two years he recouped what he had paid for the house and nine acres by selling six acres.

On Sunday 20 August, 1916, Archbishop Duhig blessed and dedicated the 1884 house to St Scholastica and celebrated Mass in the chapel that had been added to it. The chapel and other improvements cost 2,000 pounds. The architects of the chapel were Messrs Coutts and Beresford.

For the third time in Coorparoo church history, the builder was Mr Edward Duhig. In the following year Mr Duhig purchased *Knowsley*, an 1880 home since demolished, that stood in the vicinity of the street of the same name in Stones Corner. He thus became a member of the St James' parish in which he had built the first church, presbytery and convent chapel.

Mount Gravatt Property

During Father O'Leary's sojourn in his native County Cork, Mr Peter Hartley, a parishioner resident in the Mount Gravatt district, offered Archbishop Duhig thirty-two acres of land near the present junction of Logan and Nursery Roads for 650 pounds. The sale was completed on 23 February, 1921. Because at that time a Soldier Settlement Scheme had brought families to the vicinity, Archbishop lost no time in having plans drawn up for the original St Agnes' Church. Architect of the wooden church was Mr Cavanagh, and construction was entrusted to Messrs Stewart and Crowe.

The building, which is now resited at the back of the property as a parish hall, was opened on Sunday, 3 July, 1921. Having a morning engagement in the Ipswich district, Archbishop Duhig had allowed himself time to travel the 40 miles to Mount

Gravatt by car.

Construction of the church had cost 1,000 pounds, exclusive of furnishings. Already an amount of 357 pounds was in hand, which included donations of 50 pounds each from the Archbishop and Mr Peter Hartley. In reading out the financial statement, the Archbishop mentioned a young child who had given 23 shillings, the entire contents of a money box.

Within months of the opening of St Agnes' Church at Mount Gravatt, as part of St James' Parish, Coorparoo, Father O'Leary was given a curate in the person of Father John McCarthy, whose presence in the parish allowed further expansion to be undertaken. Development had also quickened along the other main thoroughfare in the parish, Old Cleveland Road. The tramline had been extended from Stones Corner to Coorparoo Junction early in 1915 and was to reach Camp Hill in April, 1925. Father McCarthy was directed to canvass the Catholics of what was then called East Coorparoo and Coorparoo Heights, regarding the erection of a chapel to serve the residents of Camp Hill and beyond.

Camp Hill Church

Early in 1923 such a church was constructed on land at Camp Hill that was formerly portion of the Byrne's estate. The building was dedicated to St Thomas in memory of the late Hon. Thomas J. Byrnes, who had been Premier of Queensland from April, 1898 until he died in office five months later.

The wooden church was 60 feet long and 30 feet wide, had cost 820 pounds, of which 300 pounds had been bequeathed by a sister of the late Premier. The solemn blessing was deferred until Sunday, 11 February, 1923, by which time Archbishop Duhig had returned from an overseas visit to Europe and the United States.

He explained that before 1913 there was a church and school at South Brisbane, a church/school and convent at Kangaroo Point and a church at Bulimba. These six buildings together occupied a little over five acres. At the time of his 1923 speech there were nine churches, seven schools, six convents and four presbyteries in the same area, standing on about 100 acres of land. The Archbishop continued:

It is the spirit and zeal of the priests which enabled me to put up such a record. When I came here from Rockhampton a little over ten years ago, there were twelve priests in the Brisbane area - now there are forty!

When, by 1923 the needs of the outer edges of the parish had been satisfied by chapels at Mount Gravatt and Camp Hill, attention was directed to the construction of the long-promised brick church at Coorparoo. Although there were already signs of the

onset of the great world depression - a difficult time to pay for a 9,000 pounds church - it was nevertheless deemed opportune to undertake its construction. One of the men who took up the collection at the 7.00 a.m. Mass in those days has recalled there was usually no more than a solitary one shilling coin in the collection. This fact stands out clearly in his mind because of a practice the 7.00 a.m. collectors developed. The collector who encountered the lone shilling had to shout his fellows a soft drink at the corner-store opposite the church after Mass!

New Brick Church for Coorparoo

The foundation stone of the church was laid by Archbishop Duhig on 25 January, 1925. In his address he spoke of the great opportunity given the Catholic Church to present good examples of architecture to the city. He praised the State and civic authorities for the pleasingly designed buildings that had recently been undertaken.

The day St James' Church was blessed, 29 November, 1925, was a very active one for the Archbishop. His handwriting in his copy of the *Ordo Recitandi Officii* reveals his itinerary for the day. It is interesting to note that Laidley, Coorparoo and Bulimba - the three parishes where Archbishop Duhig performed ceremonies that day - all came to possess identical brick churches designed by the same architect.

Present Church Blessed

By 3.30 p.m. on Sunday, 29 November, 1925, thirty priests and several thousand people had gathered at St James' for the ceremony. His Grace read the dedicatory service at the western door of the new brick church and then proceeded to the nave, accompanied by Monsignor J. Byrne V.G. and the altar-servers.

Yet again the parish priest performed the task of acquainting those present with the state of the parish balance sheet. Father O'Leary explained that the building had cost 9,200 pounds and furnishings an additional 1,400 pounds. At the foundation stone ceremony earlier in the year, 814 pounds were subscribed and during the intervening period the 2,000 pounds mark had been reached. After the collection that afternoon, 3,040 pounds were in hand.

No contemporary newspaper report mentions the actual time or the celebrant of the first Mass in the new church, possibly because it would go without saying that such would have been Father O'Leary's honour.

Dean O'Leary remained as parish priest of St James' Coorparoo for a total of forty years. In 1953, when his health was less than robust, the parish was transferred into the care of the Order of St Augustine. Dean O'Leary remained living in the

Coorparoo presbytery for the remaining couple of years of his life. A separate study could well be done on the person, talents and influence of Dean O'Leary within the Archdiocese of Brisbane. Many incidents of his humour, learning and zeal still remain in the memories of many Brisbane Catholics. Who will undertake this task, I wonder?

CHRONOLOGY

- 26 February, 1912: James Duhig, Bishop of Rockhampton, appointed Coadjutor Archbishop of Brisbane.
- 5 November, 1912: Mary Immaculate church site, Ipswich Rd purchased.
- 12 January, 1913: First Meeting regarding a church for Coorparoo area held at Kangaroo Point: Archbishop Duhig chairman.
- 2 February, 1913: Second Meeting held after Mass celebrated by Archbishop Duhig in Foresters' Hall, Stones Corner.
- 6 February, 1913: With approval of second meeting, purchase of Old Cleveland Road site successfully completed.
- 16 March, 1913: Third meeting, once again after Stones Corner Mass celebrated by Archbishop Duhig. Father O'Leary announced as parish priest of the new Coorparoo parish.
- 6 April, 1913: Archbishop Duhig lays foundation stone for wooden church/school at Old Cleveland Road.
- 10 August, 1913: St James' Church/school opened, virtually free of debt.
- 19 April, 1914: Foundation stone laid for Coorparoo presbytery.
- 14 June, 1914: Mary Immaculate Church, Ipswich Road, blessed and opened.
- 16 August, 1914: Coorparoo presbytery blessed and opened by Archbishop Duhig.
- 3 July, 1921: St Agnes' Church, Mount Gravatt, blessed and opened.
- 25 January, 1925: Foundations stone laid for present st James' Church.
- 29 November, 1925: St James' Church blessed and opened.

Fr Michael Endicott OSA, as a member of the Australian Province of the Augustinians, has been researching and writing the Province history for many years. Among his many writings, his most outstanding book to date is *The Augustinians in Far North Queensland 1883-1941*, published in 1988.