

## **PAPER VII**

### ***THE HIBERNIAN SOCIETY IN QUEENSLAND.***

The full title of the Society that we know affectionately as 'the Hibernians', that is the Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society, is worth some consideration in itself, as it encompasses the principal features, functions, and organizational character of Queensland's oldest surviving Catholic, and Irish, society.

From Hibernian we know that it was Irish at least in orientation. It was, in fact, substantially, but not exclusively, Irish in membership, either by birth or by descent.<sup>1</sup> It was Australasian in that groups of the Ballarat Hibernian Society, one of the amalgamating bodies that formed the HACBS, were operating in some of the gold mining centres in New Zealand by the time of the amalgamation in 1871,<sup>2</sup> and the newly-formed society spanned all the Australian colonies by 1877.<sup>3</sup> According to the Constitution, new members were required to state that they were 'practical Catholics, and intend to remain so while members',<sup>4</sup> and the first set of rules was returned by Bishop Goold, so that the condition of the Easter precept be written in, to define what 'practical Catholics' were.<sup>5</sup>

Hibernian, Australasian and Catholic place the Society clearly within the field of Australian Church history, while Benefit indicates that it was committed to providing welfare payments to members, and takes it to the wider area of the friendly society movement. This too warrants some consideration.

Friendly societies were simply that: groups of friends with common interests, who joined together and put aside a few pence weekly to help cover the cost of the emergencies that might befall any of them, principally sickness and death.

They are first recorded in Scotland in the shipping industry in the sixteenth century, possibly because of the local application of the Poor Law,<sup>6</sup> but their growth, and development to the peak of their organizational form in what became known as the Affiliated Orders, was in the nineteenth century, in the industrial centres of

northern England.<sup>7</sup> This was the result of population concentration there, following the Industrial Revolution, and the accompanying process of urbanisation.

There was also a movement in France, developing a little later than it had in England, as the urbanisation process there was more gradual. The French societies, notably the St. Joseph's Society, and the St. Francis Xavier Society, were Church organisations, and were part of the Catholic response to the new living conditions inherent in urbanisation. The political instability that characterised nineteenth century France, however, militated against any long term development of a friendly society movement. Because of the weakened position of Catholicism in England after the Reformation, there was no such organized response from the Church there, the only Catholic voice promoting social justice being that of Cardinal Manning.<sup>8</sup>

The English societies belong to the second phase of health care for the masses in British welfare history. The first was the outgrowth of the hierarchic structure, whereby the poor rate was supplemented by voluntary charitable organisations. The second, a nineteenth century development, was the concept of self-help and mutual aid,<sup>9</sup> and saw the rise not only of friendly societies, but of building societies, co-operatives, savings banks, and trade unions,<sup>10</sup> and the third phase was the state responsibility of the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

There was a significant development in friendly society life in Manchester in 1810, when the Abercrombie Oddfellows there called together all the groups of the city named Oddfellows for discussion and interchange of ideas.<sup>12</sup> They were, in fact, called Oddfellows Lodges, and there is a distinct connection between them and the local Masonic groups between 1814 and 1828.<sup>13</sup> The connection was again evident in Victoria in the foundation days of the societies,<sup>14</sup> and again in Brisbane in the 1880s.<sup>15</sup> This affinity between Freemasonry and the Affiliated Orders eventually precluded Catholics from becoming members of these societies.<sup>16</sup>

By 1814 the deliberations of the Manchester Oddfellows had produced a triple tiered organisational structure. At the base was the local lodge which dealt with the member at local level, taking his contributions, and making payments to him. Above that was a District, which was broadly a group of lodges in a particular area, which were affiliated with the District, hence the term Affiliated Orders, and above that a controlling body which determined policy. This was the Unity. From that came the great Manchester Unity, the model that all major friendly societies were to follow.<sup>17</sup>

Groups all carried a name drawn from their cultural tradition, and they were all numbered. Abercrombie was Lodge No. 1 of Manchester Unity. This has been interpreted as an acknowledgment of its position of leadership, and becomes significant later in the Hibernian story.

Other groups followed Manchester, including the Foresters and Druids, and some, while still within the ambit of self-help and mutual aid, had a more specific philosophy, such as the Rechabites, who were devoted to temperance. There was, too, a group of Catholic Brothers, small in membership, and in the number of lodges. They were dedicated to Our Lady, with a commitment by members and their families to say the **Angelus** every day.<sup>18</sup> Hibernian Society ritual included the **Angelus** in the closing prayers of its meetings,<sup>19</sup> and as **Angelus** times did not correspond with meeting times, this suggests that some of the founding fathers in Victoria could have been members of this group in England, or at least familiar with it. They were probably mostly Irishmen, and this would have been their first experience of institutional life on the English model. There was no significant friendly society movement in Ireland, as conditions there simply did not admit of one,<sup>20</sup> although there were some groups in Dublin and in Belfast.<sup>21</sup>

Australian health care repeated the English pattern, but with one major legal difference, in that there was no Poor Law.<sup>22</sup> Descriptions of the various benevolent institutions, however, indicate that there was probably little practical difference between them and the Poorhouse.<sup>23</sup> As English political structures had travelled with colonial officialdom, and on the top deck, so too did the solutions to the inequities of the system come in the cultural baggage of those at the bottom. Friendly Societies had been a protection against poverty at home, and the organizational method was invoked in the new environment.

The first groups appear in Sydney in the early 1830s, but their growth and development in Australia began with the population explosions of the Golden Decade 1851-1861, at first on the goldfields, and then in the developing provincial centres and cities. Thirteen societies in 1865 expanded to 34 in 1879. Most of these were the English groups, but two of the largest, modelled on the affiliated orders, and incorporating religious principles were the Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society, or the HACBS, and the Protestant Alliance Friendly Society, or PAFS. They were thus essentially Australian creations, as was the Australian Natives' Association, or ANA, which had a sharply national focus.<sup>24</sup>

On 7 April, 1865, the Catholic Young Men's Society attached to St. Francis Church, Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, formed a Catholic Benefit Society.<sup>25</sup> Provincial centres followed, and some of these groups affiliated with the St. Francis

Society.<sup>26</sup> In 1868 a Hibernian Society was formed in Ballarat,<sup>27</sup> and in 1870 the St. Francis Benefit Society changed its name to the Irish Australian Catholic Benefit Society.<sup>28</sup> As in Manchester, discussions between these and a number of other groups followed, and their deliberations resulted in the formation of the Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society on 28 April, 1871.<sup>29</sup>

There has been an element of doubt as to the root society, with some recent historians giving credit to Ballarat,<sup>30</sup> and the Hibernians themselves celebrated their Centenary in 1968.<sup>31</sup> Primary documentary evidence, however, decrees otherwise. St. Francis Branch was Branch No. 1 of the Hibernians,<sup>32</sup> just as Abercrombie was of Manchester Unity. More convincing is an address of congratulation to Pope Leo XIII on the occasion of his Episcopal Golden Jubilee in 1893, which outlines the formation, history, financial position and aims of the Society. It reads:

*In this important city in the year 1865, thirteen Irishmen [some accounts say twelve] proposed to themselves to deliver their fellow citizens from the danger of joining any of those societies condemned by the Church.<sup>33</sup>*

The signatories to this document were the Executives of all existing Districts, including Ballarat, and the senior branches of the two colonies, Western Australia and Tasmania, where Districts had not been formed. Brisbane District signatories were F.T.F. Keogh, J.W. Massie and Thomas Lawless of St. Stephen's branch, and John Healy of Warwick.<sup>34</sup> More convincing again that 1868 carries no weight is that the Hibernians celebrated their Golden Jubilee in 1921,<sup>35</sup> fifty years after the amalgamation, which is clearly correct, and while a case could have been made for 1865-1965, there is no case for an 1868 origin. The Ballarat Hibernians were simply one of the amalgamating societies.

The address to Pope Leo XIII is a revealing and informative document, and is only one of a number of such documents demonstrating a strong sense of acknowledgment of the hierarchic structure of the Church. The sentence that sets the date of formation also indicates the lay initiative evident in the Society's origins, and it is a formal rejection of Freemasonry. Freemasonry had been the subject of a number of Encyclicals, the first in 1738, but closer to the time and conditions of the Hibernian foundation there were four issued by Pio Nono and five by Leo XIII.<sup>36</sup> The date of formation of the St. Francis Benefit Society is highly significant, in that it follows closely the release of the Encyclical **Quanta Cura**, on 8 December, 1864. To this was attached the Syllabus of Errors, which included 'clandestine societies, biblical societies and clerico-liberal societies'.<sup>37</sup>

The identifying mark of a Secret Society, according to the Hibernians, was the use of a Password.<sup>38</sup> This opinion was based on the advice of Church authorities,<sup>39</sup> and also appears to correspond with Freemasonry's own regulation regarding identification, ranging across the centuries. In the fifteenth century, St. Mary's Chapel Lodge, near Edinburgh, required that all members use the 'secret word' so that they would be recognized by members all over the world,<sup>40</sup> and a recent analysis of Australian Freemasonry maintains that the only matters intended to be kept secret are the traditional modes of recognition.<sup>41</sup>

Hibernian regalia, a subject in itself, was drawn from the colours of the ancient Irish flag, emerald green and gold,<sup>42</sup> which were to rise again in the banners of the Home Rule movement of the 1880s. The emblem consists of Irish and Australian motifs. Dominant is a Celtic Cross, super-imposed on a harp, round tower, wolfhound, and oak tree, and to the side a quartered shield showing a ship, sheep, crossed pick and shovel, and a sheaf of wheat. The supports of the shield are a kangaroo and emu, all surrounded by a rising sun. The shield is quartered by a cross of five stars,<sup>43</sup> which, like the Angelus, raises the question as to the possible involvement of some of the founding fathers in Eureka. Encircling all motifs is the sunburst of the ancient flag, and at the base, a cluster of shamrocks.<sup>44</sup>

By regulation, there were to be no changes or additions to regalia.<sup>45</sup> There was, however, a change to the emblem itself. The Hibernian panel, an entry in a Sydney design competition in 1903, consists of a rectangular border, patterned on the Book of Kells, with additional, and relevant, motifs. The emblem was set at the top, and the shamrock base was extended to form a border in trefoil shape, similar to a Membership Certificate. The Australian motifs were also changed, with the quartered shield giving way to six rectangles, containing the crests of each of the Australian states.<sup>46</sup> This, according to the records, does not appear in Queensland until the Annual Report of 1944,<sup>47</sup> and a photograph of a St. Patrick's Day Procession in Maitland in the 1930s shows a Hibernian banner, still with the quartered shield.<sup>48</sup>

Sample regalia had been ordered from Paris by the Ballarat Hibernians, even before the Societies amalgamated, but the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War cut off all communication.<sup>49</sup> Initially regalia for all colonies was supplied by a Melbourne firm,<sup>50</sup> but from very early in the history of the Brisbane District, it was made by the Sisters of Mercy at St. Ann's in Fortitude Valley, and the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration at Villa Maria in Spring Hill.<sup>51</sup> Annual District Meetings in Brisbane always set aside time for a visit to the Sisters, so that country branch delegates could see the work in progress<sup>52</sup> - a strengthening of the bond between religious and laity in Queensland.

There was a variation in Queensland regalia which could hardly be called a rule-breaking addition; perhaps an interesting addendum might be more accurate. This was the blackthorn of T.J. Byrnes. The stick had been given to Byrnes by the people of Ireland, and reached the Hibernian Society by a circuitous route, and on a second thought. Mr. Frederick Peak, the owner at the time of the donation, had decided to give it to the Queensland Museum, but later considered that it would be more appropriate to place it in the keeping of the senior Irish organization in Queensland. From 1914, the stick was handed from President to President on election.<sup>53</sup>

Originally, the branches of the Irish Australian Catholic Benefit Society were called Lodges,<sup>54</sup> but on the amalgamation all groups were simply called branches,<sup>55</sup> possibly to offset the Masonic inference in 'Lodges'. All took the name of a saint, or some religious concept, but not necessarily that of the Church in the area where the branch was situated. In Queensland, all Brisbane branches took the name of the local Church, but not all of the country branches did. St. Colomba's Branch, Gympie, for example was situated in the parish of St. Patrick, and St. Patrick's Branch, Ipswich was in St. Mary's parish.<sup>56</sup>

The first Queensland branch was not Brisbane, as might reasonably be expected, but Rockhampton, in 1874.<sup>57</sup> There is no evidence of any lay initiative there. The letter to the executive Directory enquiring about branch formation was sent by Dean Murlay,<sup>58</sup> a French pioneer priest of central Queensland, to whom the initiation papers were sent.<sup>59</sup> No early records have survived in Rockhampton.

The next branch was Toowoomba in 1878, with detailed records held in the Toowoomba Diocesan Archives. This group was originally a St. Patrick's Society, formed in 1870 when a Toowoomba layman, P. Murray, answered an advertisement in the *Advocate* for information on the Society. In 1878 the group decided to convert to a Hibernian branch, and most of the names of 1870 appear again in 1878.<sup>60</sup>

In 1871 another Hibernian Society had been formed in Queensland which was later to provide a research hazard for the uninitiated. This was the Queensland Hibernian Society, founded by Dr. Kevin Izod O'Doherty, and two Irish Protestant friends, Robert Atkin and Henry King.<sup>61</sup> It was, thus, non-sectarian, as were most of the early Irish societies in Australia - except, of course, Orange Lodges.

In the tradition of the United Irishmen, these societies were intended to protect the rights of all Irishmen, regardless of creed.<sup>62</sup> In Australia, however, where the religious ratio of the population was directly the reverse of what it was in Ireland, and where the Irish question was not a national priority, members who

were not Catholics usually found that they had more in common with the 75% Protestant section of the population, than they had with the 25% Catholic. These societies, then, while they remained constitutionally non-sectarian, in practice became largely Catholic in membership.

They were thus the direct opposite of the HACBS. Constitutionally Catholic, regardless of place of origin, this was a Catholic Society, which happened to have mostly Irish members. The others were constitutionally Irish, regardless of religion, and were thus Irish societies, which happened to have a goodly number of Catholics as members.

In 1899 the Queensland Hibernians were absorbed by the HACBS. By then, nature had taken its course, and all forty remaining members were Catholics. Thirty-nine joined the HACBS, and formed the South Brisbane branch, with Peter Gaffney as Secretary.<sup>63</sup> This was the last of the metropolitan branches within the five mile radius that was the core of the old Brisbane church.

The first of the city formations was St. Stephen's in 1879, its initiators Francis Keogh, and Thomas Lawless, both members of the St. Patrick's Church community in the Valley.<sup>64</sup> Soon after, in 1879 or 80, Charters Towers formed, followed by Townsville in 1880, and Gympie and Ipswich in 1881.<sup>65</sup> Ipswich had also been a St. Patrick's Society.<sup>66</sup> Late in 1880 the Brisbane District was established.<sup>67</sup> Districts to that time were: No.1 Melbourne, 2 Ballarat, 3 New Zealand, 4 Sydney and 5 Brisbane.<sup>68</sup> Only Charters Towers, Gympie and Ipswich joined the District, with Townsville, Rockhampton and Toowoomba, at that stage, remaining affiliated with the Executive Directory in Melbourne. Warwick, Bundaberg and Maryborough were formed in 1882-83, and all affiliated with the Brisbane District.<sup>69</sup> Thus by 1883 of ten branches in Queensland, only one was in the metropolitan area.

This is a strong reflection of Queensland's history. A vast expanse of territory with the capital on the southern extremity forced the development of strong provincial centres, particularly strong northern ports. This gave rise to the 'branch house' mentality in relation to Brisbane. Business and commercial interests in the north bypassed the capital, to deal directly with head offices in Sydney and Melbourne.<sup>70</sup> This happened with the Rockhampton Hibernians. Heady with their status as a Diocese from 1882,<sup>71</sup> in 1886, without any reference to Brisbane, Rockhampton approached the Executive Directory for District status, and suggested as well that Districts should coincide with Diocesan boundaries.<sup>72</sup> This certainly did not accord with Brisbane's plans - nor did it all happen.<sup>73</sup> District status was granted, to District No. 7, but the issue of diocesan boundaries was never taken up, although it was frequently raised by Rockhampton.<sup>74</sup>

Because of its vast territory, and late foundation, intensive migration programmes were directed to Queensland from 1880.<sup>75</sup> From 1881 to 1891 there was a population increase of 85%.<sup>76</sup> By 1886, almost 20 000 Irish had arrived, most of them Catholics.<sup>77</sup> Some still disembarked at ports along the coastline, but the tide of urbanisation was running high, resulting in an unprecedented expansion within the city of Brisbane. particularly within the five mile radius that was the nineteenth century census area.<sup>78</sup> By 1880 there were five strong Catholic communities, with churches and schools, or church/schools, within that radius, at St. Stephen's, the Valley, South Brisbane, Kangaroo Point and Red Hill.<sup>79</sup> In 1886, still within the core area, a Church was built at Wooloowin, then called the Lutwyche Church, - to again become the Lutwyche parish in its Centenary year, 1986.<sup>80</sup>

Hibernian expansion, as it usually did, coincided with the surrounding conditions, and in 1885, the second city branch was formed, at St. Patrick's in the Valley, with forty members. Kangaroo Point and Red Hill followed in 1886 and Wooloowin in 1888.<sup>81</sup> Wooloowin broke the pattern of city parish development, which to that point had been church, school, and then the Hibernians, the first organization of the laity. In Wooloowin, it was Church, lay institute, and then the school, which did not begin until 1890 the year after the Holy Cross Home opened with resident nuns.<sup>82</sup>

The next city formation was an even greater departure from the pattern than was Wooloowin. In 1889 the Annual District Report stated that 'on 25 November 1889, a branch was formed at Coorparoo, called St. James'.<sup>83</sup> The key to this branch appears to lie in the estate of James Toohey. Toohey had lived in Kangaroo Point, near the present Church complex, and acquired land from there to Mt. Gravatt. At the time of his death in 1887 the family was living in the Coorparoo/Mt. Gravatt area. Under the terms of his will, land was left for a Church and Convent at Kangaroo Point, and a church and cemetery at what is now the north east corner of Toohey Forest Park.<sup>84</sup> The church administration did not want that land, no doubt regarding it as too remote, and when the present Coorparoo Church was built it was in Old Cleveland Road, much closer to the city, and twenty-five years later.<sup>85</sup>

The Coorparoo branch lasted for three years, and only three members names are listed, as District Meeting delegates: J. Murray, J. McCann, and Peter Toohey,<sup>86</sup> James Toohey's elder son. From a body of evidence, including Ronald Lawson's zonal analysis of Brisbane in the 1890s, which places Coorparoo in Zone 5, that of the affluent,<sup>87</sup> and the fact that the branch was the only one in Brisbane where single men exceeded married in membership,<sup>88</sup> it appears that this was a group of



young men, who were in comfortable circumstances, not in need of health cover, and who formed the branch in enthusiastic anticipation of a parish church. When the church did not eventuate, interest probably dropped, and more importantly, the practical realities of branch life were just not there, such as the central meeting place that church buildings provide and the parish community as a field of recruitment.

In the same year as the Coorparoo foundation, letters were sent to a number of church communities in both city and country, inviting branch formation. Positive responses were received from all, with South Brisbane reporting that a preliminary meeting had already been held. The Board minutes of the time report that 'branches will be functioning in all centres before we next meet'.<sup>89</sup> That would have been in six months time. The storm clouds were gathering, however, and even before the formation of Coorparoo, one report referred to 'the great depression throughout the colony, the cause, we believe of many members leaving'.<sup>90</sup>

There was no further metropolitan expansion until the upturn of the second half of the next decade, when Sandgate was formed in 1896.<sup>91</sup> In spite of the depression, a number of church building programmes were completed in Brisbane in the early nineties, including the present South Brisbane church, the second St. Stephen's school,<sup>92</sup> and a whole complex either built or replaced at Sandgate.<sup>93</sup> These projects no doubt absorbed the funds and energies of the Catholic community. There were, too, in these years of the depression, two country formations, at Eidsvold in 1892 and Bowen in 1893,<sup>94</sup> while Emu Vale, Geraldton, (later Innisfail), Pittsworth, Childers, Allora and Goodna, were all part of the resurgence of the second half of the decade.<sup>95</sup>

In 1897 the first women's branches were formed. These had been suggested by the Adelaide District at an Annual Meeting of the Directory as early as 1890. The first Brisbane branch was at Kangaroo Point, initiated by Edmund Butler, with Miss Lily Butler as the first female branch secretary.<sup>96</sup> Women's branches were always small, not only in the Hibernian Society, but throughout the whole friendly society movement.<sup>97</sup> In 1921 Jerry Riordan, of the Woolloowin branch, moved that women should be admitted to male branches,<sup>98</sup> and the first mixed branches appear in the records of 1925.<sup>99</sup>

In 1899 the long awaited South Brisbane branch eventuated. The question here must be why did the second church of Brisbane, indeed of Queensland, take so long to form a Hibernian branch. There were probably a number of reasons. South Brisbane was badly affected by the Depression, becoming a shire in 1887, just as the economic decline gathered momentum.<sup>100</sup> It was also devastated by the

floods of 1893. Just as likely a reason as these, however, could be termed 'the reverse of the tyranny of distance'. The distance from St. Mary's Church to the Cathedral was, after all, only half the distance that the nuns walked every day from All Hallows' to the school at South Brisbane, from the 1880s until 1915 when the convent was built.<sup>101</sup> As well, many South Brisbane residents worked in the city proper, and the first St. Mary's meetings were held in the old St. Stephen's Schoolroom.<sup>102</sup>

Space does not permit further detailed treatment of branch expansion, which continued until the second half of the twentieth century. A table of 1958, shows the last metropolitan branch as Indooroopilly.<sup>103</sup> One more city branch, however, warrants attention. This is Wynnum, formed in 1902. There was no church there at the time, although there was one at Cleveland, called 'Star of the Sea',<sup>104</sup> which was the name of the Hibernian branch.<sup>105</sup> The branch experienced the usual difficulties in the circumstances, and closed in 1911, to reform in 1921, as Coorparoo had in 1918.<sup>106</sup>

The significance of Wynnum is that with Sandgate, it extended the Brisbane radius of the society at both the northern and southern ends of Moreton Bay, to tip the ten mile limit that was to become the metropolitan area of the city of Brisbane in 1924.<sup>107</sup> These eight branches, in all the principal centres of settlement within that radius, would enable the Brisbane Hibernians to claim that they were the ancestors of the institutional life of the laity, at parish level at least, which was the coalface.

1902 also marked the breakaway and formation of the Northern District. There was little of the acrimony evident in the Rockhampton District's formation, although there was considerable debate as to the apportioning of funds.<sup>108</sup> The Hibernians then, as is the case with so many Queensland organisations, such as the Railways, broke into three divisions, Northern, Central and Southern.

Having established where the Hibernians were, it now needs to be established who they were. In Queensland, as in all colonies, they were, initially, mostly Irishmen. This was the result of British and colonial government policy which strongly preferred British migrants.

Ireland was at that time, unhappily, British, and most of the Irish were Catholics. Just as there were Irish Protestants, however, so too there were non-Irish Catholics from Britain. Probably the best known of these now is the Highland Scots colony in Victoria which produced Mary MacKillop.<sup>109</sup>

There were too, in all colonies, particularly after the gold rushes, small representations from most Continental countries, and some from the Middle East. Many of these had a strong Catholic component. In Queensland the largest group was German,<sup>110</sup> and German and Lebanese names dot the local Hibernian records.

After twenty years of colonial and church life in Queensland, however, before a Hibernian Society was formed, another highly significant force was beginning to emerge. This was the native born children of all migrants. Intermarriages between the migrant groups themselves, and more so by their children, added another dimension to the ethnicity of the Hibernian Society. While statistical and intergenerational studies may in the future throw further light on this, the title, regalia, ritual, and most of all, the community interests of the Society establish its strong Irish orientation, and in this it was a microcosm of the Church of which it was part, that is substantially Irish in membership, but by no means exclusively.

As in England, Australian friendly society members were not drawn from the marginalised.<sup>111</sup> They had at least to have the income and the budgetary skills to set aside their weekly, or fortnightly, contribution. Neither would they claim to be affluent. Few would have had confidence that their capital would have maintained their families should anything happen to them, the breadwinners, even in the short term. Most friendly societies could cite cases of members who were financially secure on joining the society, and many who reached a degree of affluence within their term of membership. The Hibernians can furnish their examples of such members. Dr Kevin O'Doherty, (a member of the HACBS as well as of the Queensland Hibernians), and Francis Keogh, were both qualified professionals on their arrival in the colony.<sup>112</sup> Peter Scott and James Carroll, on the other hand, both occupied lowly positions in their early days in the country, but Peter Scott became Deputy Registrar of Friendly Societies,<sup>113</sup> and James Carroll a leading figure in the construction industry.<sup>114</sup> Frank McDonnell began life in Brisbane as a shop assistant, and T.C. Beirne in a small drapery in South Brisbane, both eventually to become giants in the Brisbane retail world, and members of the Queensland Parliament.<sup>115</sup>

Occupation, rightly or wrongly, is regarded as the best single indicator of status.<sup>116</sup> In 1887 and 1888, the Brisbane District Executive, and executives of the five existing city branches revealed twenty-eight members whose occupations could be traced. This showed a sharebroker, surveyor, shire clerk, photographer, asphalt contractor, building contractor, publican, draper, van proprietor, furniture dealer, general smith, clerk, Chief Sorter in the Post Office, letter carrier, sawyer, baker, carrier, carter, two grocers, a grocer's assistant, a storeman and six labourers.<sup>117</sup>

The sample is small, but it was the public face of the society at street level. These were the Hibernians that called at the bank, the post office, and the stationers, and compared with two occupational tables of the period, one of Ronald Lawson, and another of Paul Crook, the group was not markedly different from the rest of Brisbane. A look at the unskilled is interesting. Lawson's unskilled shows 29.3%, the Hibernians 32.1% <sup>118</sup> Crook's unskilled 27%, the Hibernians 31%. <sup>119</sup>

They were thus slightly over-represented in the unskilled. Bearing in mind, however, that even in the happiest Irish migrant experience, which probably was in Queensland, the Irish migrant was at a disadvantage, if for no other reason than that he was different. His speech was identifiably different, even in a migrant colony, his cultural orientation was different, and most of all his Church, which was central to that culture, was different.

A photograph of the foundation group of the Tully Hibernians in 1927 shows occupation beside the names of members. Forty years on, and in a small rural community, without putting a statistical slide rule on the sample, the picture is much the same as the Brisbane table. <sup>120</sup> The society was thus, not only a microcosm of the Church of the time, but of Australian society, that is that it leaned towards the lower end of the socio-economic continuum, but not exclusively so.

The primary function and legal basis of all friendly societies was the provision of welfare benefits, particularly in cases of sickness and death. As all societies were bound by the same legislation, chiefly the Friendly Societies' Acts of each of the colonies, there were no major differences in contributions and payments between societies. In the first three Quinquennial Valuations of the Registrar of Friendly Societies, the Brisbane Hibernians were at the top of the valuation scale. In the first report of 1887, which should have been 1886, but was delayed by the condition of some of the returns, this was the only Society of the ten listed which showed a value of 20/- in the pound - actually 20/ 4d. <sup>121</sup>

A chink in the financial armour appeared in 1899, because the Hibernians were the last society to convert to the sliding scale used by Insurance Companies. The battle between Registrar and Society, and progressives and conservatives within the society, waged for six years, and after the death of Tom Lawless in 1904, and the advent of Peter Scott as Secretary, in 1905 the sliding scale was implemented. <sup>122</sup>

The event made news in the friendly society world. A telegram of congratulations was received from the Registrar, and much more significant in the field of community relations, an offer from PAFS of their books to use as a model for the new accounting system. <sup>123</sup>

All friendly societies moved beyond their original boundaries, and took their place in the various efforts of the wider community.<sup>124</sup> This was particularly so in the case of the Hibernians, because of the place of the Church in their cultural tradition, and because they were demographically a minority group. Approaching one of the many cross-roads of the post war period, Jerry Riordan recalled in 1958:

*Its members throughout the early history of the Church in Australia have worked hand in hand with their priests to bring about the magnificent growth of Churches and schools to serve the needs of themselves and their descendants.*<sup>125</sup>

Support in the parishes took a number of forms, including donations, functions, loans to parish institutions, and the professional advice of individual members.<sup>126</sup> Support of the Church also extended to diocesan and national level, with some Hibernian contributions still able to be seen. The marble tablet which was on the left side wall of St. Stephen's Cathedral, before the restoration in 1989 was a memorial to Pope Leo XIII, and was funded by a lecture on the life of the Pope given by Father Duhig in 1904.<sup>127</sup> The statue of Cardinal Moran outside St. Mary's Cathedral in Sydney was a national project, with all Districts levied.<sup>128</sup> In 1943, £2000 was given to Archbishop Duhig towards the main altar in the proposed Holy Name Cathedral.<sup>129</sup>

The Hibernians were responsible for St. Patrick's Day celebrations in all Queensland centres, and in 1912 were entrusted with the arrangements for the first Corpus Christi Procession held in Brisbane.<sup>130</sup> Even when responsibility passed to the later and larger Holy Name Society, the Hibernians still marched as the last of the lay groups, a tribute to their seniority in Brisbane Catholic institutional life.

Two projects which absorbed energies while they remained as issues were Catholic education and Irish nationalism. In 1887, in an address to Archbishop Dunne on his reception of the Pallium, the inequities of the education system were referred to as 'the disability most keenly felt by us in the land of freedom.'<sup>131</sup> In 1896, James Hegerty, on behalf of the Valley branch, launched a scholarship scheme to send one or two children of members, to Catholic Secondary schools. It failed, not for lack of support of the idea, but for lack of money.<sup>132</sup> With the high priority Hibernians placed on Catholic secondary education, and what government scholarships there were, not able to be taken out at Catholic schools, it is likely that many were already committed financially within their own families, and were stretching household budgets to cover Gregory Terrace, St. James' and All Hallows' fees. The Hegerty scheme was revived in 1911,<sup>133</sup> and continued in various forms

until the 1950s. By then it was in the nature of bonus assistance, as the legislation initiated by St. Stephen's branch member, and MLA for the Valley, Frank McDonnell, in 1901, and completed in 1914, opened Catholic Secondary schools to all able students by the State Scholarship examination.<sup>134</sup>

Clerical education was also a commitment of the Society, beginning in 1923.<sup>135</sup> At this time, students were of necessity studying in the south, but on the opening of Banyo Seminary in 1941, burses were immediately made available to the sons of members there, and continued at least until the 1960s.<sup>136</sup>

The Hibernian stance on Irish nationalism was put, respectfully, but clearly, before Leo XIII in the address of 1893, six years after the Papal Rescript on the national movement. The relevant paragraph begins with the concessional 'although our Society is non-political', and makes reference to the bloodshed of centuries, and to the inalienable linkage between Catholicism and Irish culture.<sup>137</sup> These addresses, which were, no doubt, primarily acknowledgments of, and loyalty to, the office, also gave this national body of organized, and recognized, Catholic laymen, the opportunity to raise issues that were of concern to them as Catholic laymen, such as education to their Archbishop in 1887, and the Irish question to no less than the Pope himself.

Usually support for the Irish cause took the form of funding, reception of the Home Rule delegations, and acknowledgment of high points in the national struggle. Arrangements for funding and receptions were usually in the hands of a central committee. 1906 appears to be the only time a special Irish Parliamentary Fund was launched by the Hibernians themselves.<sup>138</sup> It was also the first time that the Society planned to host its own function for the visiting representatives, Devlin and Donovan, but the reception in the other colonies was so enthusiastic, that the delegates pleaded exhaustion, and asked that the Brisbane Hibernian celebration be cancelled.<sup>139</sup> There is no reference in the records to the visit of the Redmond brothers in 1883, but at that time this was an infant society with only about 130 members in Brisbane.<sup>140</sup> On John Dillon's visit in 1889, the Brisbane address hoped that 'at no distant date there would be an Irish Parliament in College Green with Charles Stuart Parnell as Prime Minister'.<sup>141</sup> The Hibernians were thus avowed Home Rulers at this time. There is also no reference in the records to the visit of Michael Davitt in 1895. Davitt, however, was on a private visit, which Archbishop Dunne believed was sponsored by the Australian Labour Party, and at official level the visit was low-key in Brisbane.<sup>142</sup> On his death in 1905, however, the Society's address referred to Davitt as 'the noblest Roman of them all'.<sup>143</sup>

In 1914 Frank McDonnell was chosen to represent the Society at the opening

of the Irish Parliament, expected to take place in 1915. In a moving and beautiful letter from his home in Eagle Junction, McDonnell expressed his delight at being present 'as the old doors opened wide on a free and unfettered Parliament of a great and gallant people'.<sup>144</sup> The opening did not take place because of the outbreak of war, followed by the Uprising 1916. This was referred to three years later by the National Directory, then sitting in Brisbane, as 'that lamentable but so meritorious event'.<sup>145</sup> An endorsement of de Valera's claim for self-determination and international recognition is recorded in 1919,<sup>146</sup> a cablegram of support to Archbishop Mannix in England on his arrest in 1920,<sup>147</sup> and soon after a cablegram of sympathy to Deputy Mayor O'Callaghan of Cork on the death of Terence MacSwiney.<sup>148</sup> Irish world-wide disquiet on the terms of the Treaty of 1921 was expressed simply and soberly in the statement 'the situation is not acceptable to all sections of the Irish people'.<sup>149</sup> A reference to the death of Kevin O'Higgins in 1927 is one of the last references to Ireland.<sup>150</sup> 'Romantic Ireland' was indeed dead and gone.<sup>151</sup> There was nothing that could be done politically at home, and still less abroad, except as the second part of the Brisbane statement on the treaty recommended, which was to pray.<sup>152</sup>

This period, too, from 1928, until 1932, marks an extraordinary number of deaths of high profile members, and those from the ranks: Frank McDonnell, James Carroll, James Hegerty, and the list could go on.<sup>153</sup> These findings correspond with Rosa MacGinley's major thesis that 1930 marks the end of the migrant Church in Queensland,<sup>154</sup> a somewhat chastening finding for those of us born before 1930 - we ourselves were born into a migrant Church.

Hibernian branches existed in all major centres of settlement in Brisbane from 1902. They did not exist in isolation, but formed a network across the city of members and their families. They were linked to country areas by District Meetings, and to other Districts and States by Annual Meetings of the Directory. Reciprocal courtesies existed between them and the Ancient Order of Hibernians in America, links maintained with the Irish National movement by delegations, and always and ever, with the Apostolic See.

The Hibernian sphere of influence extended not only to Church and other Societies, but well beyond, and while the links may not have been formal, they were, nonetheless, direct. Hibernians were well represented in the Irish Volunteers, formed in 1887,<sup>155</sup> and a number were instrumental in establishing the Queensland Irish Association in 1898.<sup>156</sup> From 1894, when the Friendly Societies Medical Institute was established, all societies sat together in Conference<sup>157</sup> - men of all faiths, and none.

Individuals, too, were making their mark on the community in the Trade Union movement, eventually moving into the Parliament itself, taking with them their heritage values, paramount of which was their faith, and their inherent, - or perhaps because of their history, their finely-honed - passion for justice. Of this there is no better example than Frank McDonnell. Becoming Secretary of the Shop Assistants' Union in 1888, he became Labor member for the Valley in 1896, and was responsible not only for the legislation that opened wide the doors of Catholic Secondary education, but spearheaded the Factories and Shops' Acts of 1896 and 1901.<sup>158</sup> These latter pre-empted the day when sick pay would no longer be a friendly society function. Closely linked to friendly society sick pay were compensation provisions. Compensation became a State responsibility in 1916, with the passing of the Workers' Compensation Act, in conjunction with the establishment of the State Government Insurance Office by the Ryan Government. The engineer of this Act was John Arthur Fihelly.<sup>159</sup>

To Fihelly's impressive **Curriculum Vitae** of the time can be added membership of the Red Hill Hibernians from 1912.<sup>160</sup> Others to enter the State Parliament were Mick Kerwin, also of Red Hill, and Peter McLachlan of the Valley. These were all Labor members.<sup>161</sup>

One of the Society's undertakings to Bishop Goold was that it be non-political,<sup>162</sup> and this was honoured. The nuances between the lines of the records, however, point to where the allegiance of many lay, such as **ad hoc** meetings held in the Trades Hall, the unqualified support for Frank McDonnell, and the reservations expressed by some for T.J. Byrnes,<sup>163</sup> no doubt because of his part in the passing of the Peace Preservation Act during the 1894 strike.<sup>164</sup> Again, like the national origins and social status of the Hibernians, this affiliation was by no means monolithic. William Cassidy of Red Hill was a strong supporter of the Liberal cause.<sup>165</sup> Some members expressed a high personal regard for T.J. Byrnes<sup>166</sup> which could have translated to the political, and F.T.F. Keogh, a co-founder of the society in Brisbane contested the 1896 election as an Independent for the Valley against Frank McDonnell.<sup>167</sup>

As far as it is possible to assess the politics of a constitutionally non-political body, it can be said that as the Hibernians considered themselves to be working class,<sup>168</sup> albeit across a wide spectrum, they followed working class politics, and from the late colonial period to the 1950s would have been regarded as part of 'the Catholic vote'.

The establishment of other Catholic societies meant that the 'big frog of the colonial pool' became more and more just an ordinary sized frog in the ever



widening pool of a growing church, in a growing state, in a growing nation, being drawn ever onwards to a global, and indeed a cosmic world.

Two of these societies, because of their Hibernian connections, deserve attention. In 1894 the St. Vincent de Paul Society was founded in Red Hill. By 1906 branches had formed in all the parishes in the old core area, running parallel with the Hibernians, thus further consolidating institutional life in the parish communities. A number of Hibernians were involved in these formations, including William Cassidy in Red Hill, Edmund Butler in Kangaroo Point, and Ned Duhig and J.T. Fahy in Wooloowin.<sup>169</sup> The appearance of J.T. Fahy as a Hibernian branch secretary in 1906, and more significant, of John Levander a few years earlier as District Auditor, signals the native born moving into executive positions. John Fahy was of Irish-Irish parents,<sup>170</sup> and John Levander of Irish-Swedish.<sup>171</sup>

The other association with a strong Hibernian connection was the Christian Brothers' Old Boys Association. In 1924 Frank McDonnell handed over the presidency of this group to Jack Kelly, the driving force that brought a committed and involved laity to the stage where it well merited the term 'Lay Apostolate'. Another of this group was A.S. Hegerty.<sup>172</sup> Stan Hegerty was the son of James Hegerty, stalwart of the Valley branch, and later of the District Executive of the Hibernians. With assemblies of up to 2000 of Christian Brothers Old Boys,<sup>173</sup> and the hard evidence of Hibernian support for this system of education, it is highly likely that the Hegertys were more prominent representatives of many hundreds more— of fathers whose core values included a Catholic Secondary Education system, and the sons, through that system, able to take their place in the Catholic intellectual revival of the thirties, emanating from England and from France. This connection could well develop the claim that the Hibernians were the ancestors of the institutional life of the laity, from its lateral position of the 1890s, and trace it vertically to the thirties.

The thirties, however, foreshadowed the future direction of friendly society life. In 1929, a National Insurance Act was proposed. but was aborted by the Depression.<sup>174</sup> Another proposed Act in 1939 was halted by vested interests, which were saved by the outbreak of War.<sup>175</sup> Then the six year cataclysm changed the face of life in most countries of the world, including Australia. Perhaps the most significant post-war change in Australian life was that the dominant Anglo-Celtic communities became just a part of a multicultural society embracing a multicultural Church. In the 1950s Australia provided its own cataclysm with a political split that impinged heavily on the unity of Catholic Australia. The 1960s brought an Ecumenical Council which changed many of the practices, though not the doctrines,

of Catholic life. Sodalties and the older type institutions gave way to the Post-Conciliar teams. These were designed to facilitate the living out of the sense of mission inherent in Baptism,<sup>176</sup> articulated anew for the laity. There appeared to be as many of these as there were needs, and interests - and sometimes ambitions.

For friendly societies the major change was the intervention of the Commonwealth Government in health care, with frequent pieces of legislation, beginning in 1946,<sup>177</sup> which eroded their functions, and which were all designed to the ultimate goal, which was National Insurance. This was achieved in 1975, with the creation of Medibank. Major societies realized along the way that if they were to survive, a new direction was needed.

Many of the post-war initiatives of the societies were in the field of aged care, again not for the marginalised, but for those who had tried, at least, to provide for themselves. These included friendly society bonds exempt from social security and taxation, Manchester Unity Holiday apartments at Caloundra, residential units of the Independent order of Oddfellows at Keperra, and a retirement complex of the Rechabites at Victoria Point.

Before the Hibernians made this decision they were to face their own cataclysm, when the hospital and medical funds ceased operations in 1979, with claims unpaid.<sup>178</sup> This was the blackest day in the Society's history in Queensland, and a black day for the Catholic community. A number of reasons have been cited from the records, and from influential members of the time, including the inability by law to transfer State to Federal funds, a Telecom strike, difficulties encountered with computers, and a heavily weighted end of terminally ill patients in Mt. Olivet. The sale of the Queen Street building, the Society's second building, was perceived to be an attempt to retrieve the situation, but it was sold because rental returns fell short of estimates.<sup>179</sup>

A home for aged Hibernians had been suggested as early as 1961,<sup>180</sup> and a still solvent society had to decide its future. Deliberations resulted in the buying of land from the de la Salle Brothers at Scarborough in 1980, with the intention of building a retirement village. The ambition was realized, and in 1984 the first residential units of the complex were occupied.<sup>181</sup>

Caloundra, Keperra, and Victoria Point all still contribute to Queensland community life, and are monuments to what was a once vibrant force in Queensland society. Just a few miles from another monument that marks the birth of Queensland, is the Catholic community's contribution, with a name drawn from its ancient past, BallyCara, or the Village of Friends.

'Romantic Ireland' is dead and gone. The colours and symbols of an ancient civilization that once emblazoned Australian streets are now the province of the museum, and medical claims are made at the nearest major shopping centre.

The Scarborough complex is the outward and visible sign of that earlier Catholic force. It will not accommodate all the descendants of Queensland's Hibernians in their old age, nor will it absorb whatever energies they may have left for Catholic institutional life. More difficult to evaluate, and certainly more enduring than a building, however, are the intangibles that buildings represent. Foremost among these in the Hibernian story are a value system and a network which were harnessed in the 1880s, and which played no small part in carrying a colonial culture, and at grass roots level, a colonial Church, across the threshold of a century to nationhood.

Today, seasoned with one hundred and twenty years of successes and failures, of triumphs and tragedies, individually and collectively, the present shareholders in that value system and that network can reasonably expect to be tided across the threshold of another century, to the unknown, which will be the third millennium.

**Denise Sweeney - 5.12.1995**

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