

**CHRISTIAN BROTHERS EDUCATION IN QUEENSLAND
1875-1925**

Fr Tom Boland

On 6 March 1875 the *Brisbane Courier* announced that ‘the Christian Brothers, a Religious Order of the Roman Catholic Church, devoted principally to the education of youth of the middle and humbler classes, will, we are informed, be represented in this colony before many months elapse

Within four months the Christian Brothers were represented in the colony. In fact, one of them had been here in the previous year, Brother Joseph Barrett. He had been sent from Melbourne to investigate an opening in Maryborough for Father Tissot. On the way he was hijacked by Bishop James Quinn, who persuaded him that the need in Brisbane was greater.

Quinn had promised a suitable building in the city. It turned out to be old St. Stephen’s and there, on 5 July 1875, Brother Barrett and two companions opened what grew to be St. Joseph’s, Gregory Terrace, and eventually St Francis Xavier’s Province. There were twenty six boys of a great variety of ages.

Brother Barrett wrote to Ireland to say that they needed more Brothers urgently, because the necessity was great in the colonies.¹ In Queensland their arrival coincided with the passing of the 1875 Education Act, which cut off funding from the denominational schools. The Brothers, in fact, did not intend to accept funding that went with control. There was, however, a Catholic alternative: St James’ School run by Mr Jeremiah Long, an unusually efficient headmaster. Until 1880 his school would still receive public funds. Why should parents send their sons to a new venture, where they would have to pay full fees? Dr Kevin Izod O’Doherty put it pithily: the Christian Brothers would find it difficult to compete with the Long Brothers.

Much of the Christian Brothers' programme was set in their first years of struggle to establish Gregory Terrace. The first thing was to formulate what kind of education they offered. The Irish experience and the contrasting conditions of the colony decided the future.

Blessed Edmund Rice set the standard. In his 1832 Constitutions he said 'their principal care [was] to teach children, particularly the poor, the things necessary for a virtuous and Christian life; ...'. Seamus Heaney spoke in Australia in 1976 saying that those people speaking in clichés about Christian Brothers' schools missed the essential. 'What has not been said enough is that there is a sense of a radiant universe in which you are kind of important. There is a kind of shimmer factor in the back of your mind.'² Home Ruler, Tim Healy, told the House of Commons in a burst of that shimmer factor that he did not care if his son learned his tables, so long as he learned the truths of his faith.

Brother Barrett might not have approved this fulsome oratory. The Christian Brothers certainly put the faith first but they were not willing to let the boys forget their tables. Their aim was to open to Catholic boys, particularly the poor, of whom there were plenty in Queensland 1875, the opportunities the colony offered within an atmosphere of Catholic faith and devotion. They were offering a channel of upward mobility in the ambience of traditional religion.

One problem they faced immediately: were they offering primary or secondary education? This was a problem still not finally solved in Ireland. From the first collection of strays in Waterford the Brothers grew with the increasing spirit of education in Ireland since the Stanley Act of 1831. Rightly or wrongly, the National Schools were believed by many to be proselytising. Bishops and priests wanted local schools as alternatives.

The need was for primary education to prepare boys for employment in trades or clerical positions that would help them out of the pool of unskilled labour. The Brothers then were primary specialists and, Tim Healy assured the House, skilled specialists. However, secondary education, too, was expanding. Here was danger of proselytism more serious. Bishops expended much money and energy in establishing secondary (intermediate) schools for their dioceses, run sometimes by religious, sometimes by their own priests. An important part of their aim was to provide a system where candidates for the priesthood could be prepared for the seminary.

In time the demand was more than these colleges could meet. The Christian Brothers were pressured by parishes and communities to move into this field. The Brothers themselves were divided on the move. Some argued that they were founded for the poorer classes who would not go into intermediate. 'College' was a word that sat uneasily in their vocabulary. On the other hand, the bishops were not pleased. They saw the trained educators of the Brothers as a threat to the existence of their own colleges in which they had invested so much for the diocese under their control. Herein lay the beginnings of the distrust between the Brothers and the dioceses, which migrated to Australia.

In Queensland the worst of the mistrust was avoided by the friendship between Bishop Quinn and Brother Barrett. This (3) dated back to the association of Barrett with Quinn's University School in Dublin. Quinn put himself out to assist Barrett with a generosity not often recognised by his many critics.

This did not answer the question: primary or secondary in Queensland? A compromise was forced on the Brothers by the needs of the colony and the composition of the first group of foundation boys. There were a number of professional or comparatively affluent Catholics in Brisbane.

They needed secondary education. The obvious, almost the only, place to go for it was the Grammar School. With a remarkable fluidity of age groups they there received a classical education at secondary level, or preparation for it. There were nearly thirty Catholic boys. Most of them transferred to St Stephen's in 1875. Despite his remarks about the Long Brothers, Dr O'Doherty moved his two sons.

The Brothers were faced with a mixed bag. There were teenagers who were almost illiterate and boys as young as ten already on the classical course. They sorted them out. Brother Barrett took the latter, his companions, Brothers Nunan and Nugent, the purely primary classes - all in old St Stephens and a rough annexe. Brother Barrett taught four divisions of Latin, several of French, Algebra and Drawing for all. There were giants in the land in those days.

It was the time when schools were changing curricula in the United Kingdom. The classical tradition was being challenged by science. Brother Barrett appreciated that colonial boys had a different future from that of Irish lads. The colony was at an early development stage. He introduced simple courses in geology and allied sciences to open up entry into mining, a major source of employment. By 1895 Physics was added, in 1896 Chemistry. Laboratory facilities were primitive, but so were all others at the time.

The Brothers realised that most of the early pupils were destined for urban employment, business or Civil Service, when they could get in. Clerical work needed special skills. In 1895 Brother Mullen introduced a course in shorthand, 1896 Typing and Bookkeeping. The commercial courses were an alternative till close to World War II.

The Civil Service assumed major importance. The 1880's were a time of great government departmental expansion. They were looking for more and more candidates. Most 4. appointments were made by openly acknowledged patronage, and rarely was a Catholic selected.

In 1889 the Civil Service Act made appointment by competitive examination. This was a new opening for Catholics and the Brothers seized it. Their colleges had special Civil Service classes that prepared for the Civil Service examinations. They achieved such success that soon complaints of undue influence were being made. So strong was the appeal to parents that by the Twenties James Duhig was urging them to remember that there were other, more attractive opportunities. It was only in the Sixties that Civil Service ceased to be the major destination of Brothers' boys.

On opening day 5 July 1875 Bishop Quinn spoke to his audience of about fifty people, mainly boys, of his grand vision of the Brothers' system leading to a university entrance. He told them that during his time in Europe for the First Vatican Council he had arranged with the University of London and the Colonial Office for students in Brisbane to matriculate by correspondence.³.

English Grammar and Composition

History

Geography

Arithmetic

Bookkeeping

Mensuration

Algebra

Euclid

Drawing

Singing

Instrumental Music

Natural Philosophy (Science)

Greek

Latin

French

There was no university in Queensland till 1909. Students were prepared for matriculation at the University of Sydney and later of Melbourne. These provided two stages of preparation by examinations, known as Junior and Senior University Examinations, a system continued by the University of Queensland. A brochure for Gregory Terrace in the Nineties lists a Brothers' curriculum:

Those preparing for Mercantile Pursuits give more prominence to English Composition, Arithmetic and Bookkeeping.⁴ Culture was not neglected. Dating from about 1890 there is a photograph of Herr Rosenstengel, Music Teacher, who taught at Gregory Terrace for fourteen years.⁵ The school boasted an orchestra which played at annual Speech Days. Items included choir and solo singing and recitation, sometimes in French. The style was patriotic and notably macho. From the start, there were displays of gymnastics with dumbbells, Indian clubs and parallel bars.⁶

The one element of recent curricula missing from the early days was Manual Arts. Even in the Twenties, when back in Ireland, the Brothers were giving a lead in the field, Manual Arts were not introduced. Facilities were expensive and the Brothers' financing was on a shoestring; more exactly, on a knife edge.

One feature of Brothers' schools slow to develop was sport. Irish schools, with few elite exceptions, were not sports oriented. The Brothers had little experience of school games. Parents did not push for it. They paid their money for boys to learn useful things, not to play games. Terrace, the founding school, had the problem of lack of space. Even after school hours boys were required to be home for chores. The Grammar Schools reported the same situation.⁷ The St Joseph's boys played cricket in the street. Even Victoria Park was too wild for games.⁸

When Nudgee was established, with lots of space, the Terrace boys had to face them with only the street for practice. Not surprisingly, they did not often win. The most memorable thing about the days was the singing in the horse bus along Sandgate Road.

Change came with the arrival of young Brothers in the late Nineties. Handball made its appearance, even though played against the school walls. Scotch football (Soccer) was introduced and the young Brothers played with the boys. Brother Furlong, Headmaster (Director) 1905, believed that 'healthy and vigorous sport was necessary to draw out and foster some of the most valuable qualities of a boy's character.....promoting the physical and moral well-being of the pupils.'⁹

With it all the overriding element of the curriculum was the Faith. Brother Barrett was a man of deep spirituality, and it was catching. We know more of Brother Furlong. He was a meticulous teacher, but in Religious Instruction he developed the characteristic approach for the entire period under consideration. He sought religious conviction, not simply emotional attachment, but based on informed intellect.

'His instructions profoundly impressed his pupils and they imbibed his own content of faith and piety.....'. The pupils rose to his high levels. He fostered the Christian Brothers' devotion to Mary, taking care, through the Sodality of Mary, to encourage what was, for the times, frequent Communion.¹⁰

What academic results did all this achieve? In 1880 a letter appeared in the *Brisbane Courier* attacking results of Terrace students in the Junior and Senior University examination. It was intended as an attack on Bishop Quinn's education policies, but it homed in on Terrace.

There was some substance in the charge; compared with Grammar's results, they were unimpressive; but there were reasons for this that endured for a long time. The Grammar Schools themselves suffered from them, though not to the same extent.

As early as 1879 Brother Barrett urged parents to leave boys longer at school. He advised them not to push their sons to cover too much ground before they were old enough for it. In particular, his boys were too young generally for the University examinations. That year there were 75 boys at St. Joseph's, then the secondary establishment, and 107 still at St. Stephen's. The average age of 36 boys in the top classes was 14.¹¹ At Brisbane Grammar they were two or three years older.

Many parents sent boys to school for very brief periods. They could not afford any more. On a page of the register of Terrace chosen at random in the 1898 entry, twenty seven names are recorded. The ages at which they commenced were listed:

2 aged 6	2 aged 12
2 aged 7	2 aged 13
3 aged 8	4 aged 14
4 aged 9	2 aged 15
5 aged 10	1 aged 16.
4 aged 11	

Primary classes ran from 2 to 5. There were two levels after, Subjunior and Junior. Senior candidates, who were few, were given special tuition. Of the boys listed on this page only three sat for Junior and passed. Only one went through from Class 2 to Junior. None is recorded as trying Senior. The other two who passed Junior entered (aged 13 and 14) at Class 5. Of the older age group (13-16) five out of eight started in Class 5, 2 in Class 4. The sixteen year old started in Class 4 and left in 5. The departure of the six year old is not recorded. The seven year olds left one in Class 3 and the other in Class 4.

A sample of the reasons for leaving:

to business	6
to trades	3
to Civil Service	1
to Gatton Ag. College	1
entered Novitiate	1
moved	1
not promoted	1
confirmed truant	1
always rude	1
to State	2
One, my favourite, 'peculiar boy.'	

One can understand the frustration of the Brothers, while seeing the beginning of the upward mobility they offered.

Despite the attacks in the *Brisbane Courier*, things improved. From 1875 to 1900 78% of Senior passes in Queensland went to Grammar Schools. By 1900 Brothers' Junior passes were up to half Grammar numbers and they were making a respectable showing in Senior.¹² From 1886 to 1896 St. Joseph's, Gregory Terrace, obtained 33 Senior passes and 178 Junior; St. Joseph's, Nudgee, 20 Senior passes out of 20. Nudgee took secondary first in 1892. Best passes were in Mathematics and French. (Many Brothers were fluent in French.) English and Latin were not remarkable. English History was not taught, only Ancient. After Brother Mullen's time (1892 - 1896) Greek enters the list of examination subjects, Geometrical Drawing, Free Drawing, Mechanics and Geology - altogether a typical Brothers' mix.

All this time the Brothers, at Archbishop Dunne's instigation, were agitating for access to Scholarships and Exhibitions for University. From 1896 the latter were open to students from non-Government schools. Only a few were offered; so it did not bring much advantage to Brothers' boys. A much greater problem was the granting of Scholarships for secondary education. Till this obstacle was overcome there would be few able to matriculate, or even qualify for desirable positions.

These were the **Irish** Christian Brothers. How did they adapt themselves to Australian schools? Not always well at first. Australian independent attitudes, especially in Bush boys, seemed uncivilised to some Brothers, like Brother Hughes at Nudgee in the Nineties. He could not wait to get back to Irish youth. In his view Australians were still possessed by Original Sin. Even Brother Barrett's concern for them seems like trying to save them from themselves. When they showed faith like the Irish, he seemed to see it as real, but miraculous. For similar reasons the Order faltered for a time in recruiting local vocations. When this began to change towards the end of the nineteenth century, a new, closer rapport developed. Most of the new Brothers from Ireland were young and more adaptable. They played sport with the boys and came to appreciate Australian character. In fact, till well into the twentieth century the boys, too, were adaptable. They were Irish-Australian but became Australian of Irish extraction.

James Duhig attended Gregory Terrace twice, briefly in 1885 and then in 1890-1891, when he returned to prepare to enter a seminary. He recalled that in his first period most boys had Irish fathers; in the second very few. When he went to Irish College in Rome, he discovered that he was no longer simply Irish. His fellow students thought he was Australian.¹³

Thanks to Brother Barrett and the regional director, Brother Patrick Ambrose Treacy, the Congregation made a major change in the Brothers' methods. They recognised and endeavoured to master the tyranny of distance. Queensland was a vast colony with a small population scattered over most of its area. Bishop Quinn wanted to care for all his people, but he could not provide schools for the remote areas, even for places merely distant from the main centres. From the start he wanted boarding schools, like the Grammar Schools and Brother Barrett shared his view.

There was a fundamental problem. The Brothers did not run boarding schools. In Ireland they were for the rich. Blessed Edmund had recognised that pay schools could finance free schools for the poor. Barrett could accept that, but boarding schools were 'colleges'. However, a little experience of the colony persuaded him that what Queensland needed was a 'middle class boarding school'. In 1875 the Vicar General, John Cani, agreed to take boys to live in his house in Leichhardt Street and attend Gregory Terrace for classes. Father Breen, a teacher before ordination, took over both boarding and teaching; but by 1878 the experiment had failed. In 1881, under pressure from the bishop, a small number of boys from South East Queensland were accommodated in the Brothers' house. Numbers increased beyond the elastic capacity of the building. At the end of 1883 the boys were told not to return.

The new bishop, Robert Dunne, was even more insistent than his predecessor. He did not like to see Queensland boys going to Sydney to school. In 1886 the Brothers agreed to try again, and numbers multiplied, this time from the far North and West. It became obvious that the accommodation could not cope with the expansion. Brother Barrett thought that the city was not the place for boarders for whom he was in loco parentis. In 1891 Brother Treacy moved the boarders from Terrace to a new site on the Sandgate Road, the second St. Joseph's, Nudgee.

The boarders created their own problems. They were of even more assorted ages than the boys of Terrace. Their educational background was restricted. Far from schools, they had only their parents or an occasional station tutor to coach them and station and farm life provided conflicting attractions. In addition, when the older boys moved from Terrace in 1892, many city boys moved with them. Nudgee had to cope with the full range of qualifications and Terrace lost its senior strength. However, the Brothers' outreach covered the whole colony, if only thinly.¹⁴ As boarding convents spread through the North and West, more boys became qualified to seek secondary education in Nudgee.

From that base the network spread. In 1885 the First Plenary Council praised the existing secondary schools and called for more of them.¹⁵ Subsequent Councils repeated the call in 1895 and 1905. Already over-extended, the Brothers responded. In Queensland they opened:

Maryborough	1888	Gympie	1904
Ipswich	1892	Townsville	1911
St James (taken over)	1893	Warwick	1912
Rockhampton (St Joseph's)	1894	St Laurence's	1915
Toowoomba (St Mary's)	1899	Bundaberg	1919
Charters Towers (boarding)	1902		

Although sparse settlement covered most of the colony/state, most of the inhabitants lived in the coastal strip, with some more closely settled areas of mining and farming in the hinterland. It was to reach the Catholic boys of these areas that the Queensland Christian Brothers' network spread. Maryborough had a claim on the first to be established outside Brisbane. It was the site of a Grammar School, which Father O'Reilly wanted to challenge for Catholic patronage. Maryborough had another claim on Robert Dunne's interest. It was a base for railway expansion. He was always

concerned with the Irish navvies on the line. He wanted to encourage them to settle in communities and raise Catholic families. A Christian Brothers' School would serve his purpose. Ipswich was another railway town, still a competitor with Brisbane, and it was the centre for a number of settled farm districts. It was a base for wider outreach for the Brothers.

St James' in the Valley, along with St Killian's in South Brisbane, and a few others in the country centres, were the dwindling and no longer efficient survivors of the old lay Catholic system. They were destroyed by the 1875 Act. St James' which had been the principal Catholic boys' school, had fallen on particularly hard times.

Now Long Brothers were in the shadow of the Christian Brothers at Gregory Terrace. Some years of hard negotiation between Dunne and Brother Treacy resulted in the Brothers taking over the decrepit building and foundering school. This became the only example of a 'pay' school subsidising a 'free' school in Queensland. Neither quite suited the descriptions; but it was the way the Brothers, and a subsidy from St Stephen's, allowed the old principle of educating those who could not afford to pay fees. Many of the St James' boys were the sons of trades people and labourers in the Valley and district. It was a drain on Terrace in finance and personnel for many years.

Rockhampton had a struggling lay school still barely functioning. The city was a port and a rail terminus. Bishop Cani, too, had a pastoral concern for the families associated with the wharves and the line west. His unhappy experience with the boarding school in Brisbane made him call on the Brothers.

When Dunne was Parish Priest of Toowoomba, he may not have favoured the introduction of the Brothers. Now the great Denis Fouhy, with the episcopal approval, wanted them to come and educate in the faith the sons of the many Irish settlers Dunne had helped to make homes in Toowoomba and in the nearby towns.

Charters Towers was an ambitious foundation. It was a thriving boom town. It was also on the route to the West. So the Towers became the next boarding school, a major outreach to the North and North West. Gympie, too, had a failing lay school. It was a busy mining town and the centre of a dairying and timber district. Townsville, another port and rail terminus, like Rockhampton, was a base for a wide outreach.

Warwick was at the centre of close Irish settlement, the result of James Quinn's migration policy. A few years after 1912 it was the almost predestined location of Billy Hughes' egg. Till recently the bishop had to be selective in sending priests there because a curate had to lead the St Patrick's Day procession on horseback.

St Laurence's, named for Quinn and Dunne's school in Dublin, rose from the ashes of St Killian's. It was the start of the long co-operation between James Duhig and the Brothers that filled so many blank spaces on the education map in more and more distant places.

Bundaberg was the last opening in this period. It was jealous of its neighbour, Maryborough, and was the prosperous base for the sugar industry and a farming hinterland.

The expansion was finally fuelled by the Scholarship system. The system was introduced to benefit the Grammar Schools. In 1882 regulations laid down that Scholarships could be won only from government schools. A further cause for Catholic discontent was that Scholarships for secondary education gave a virtual monopoly on Exhibitions to Sydney University to Grammar Schools. In 1887 the colonial government introduced funded exhibitions, open only to students at Grammar Schools. Even the mild-mannered Archbishop Dunne was outraged and he encouraged the Brothers to campaign to change the system.

In 1898 T.J. Byrne was able to extend the exhibitions to Catholic secondary schools; but he could not move the House on the Scholarship monopoly. It was the energetic and astute politicking of F.J. McDonnell that put through the Parliament an amendment to open the Scholarships to pupils of non-government schools, to be taken out at any approved school. Public and political outcry was such that the assent of the Governor-in-Council was not given till mid-1900.

The next move was to have the Catholic schools approved by the Department of Public Instruction. In 1900, Terrace, Nudgee, Maryborough and Ipswich were approved; in 1901 Rockhampton; in 1905 Towoomba and Charters Towers; in 1908 Gympie; in 1913 Townsville and Warwick. St James' was not listed, as it was then solely a primary school. ¹⁶

The immediate effect was not startling. The examination was competitive with only a limited number of Scholarships awarded. In 1914 it became qualifying, open to all who obtained a 50% pass. A successful pupil was entitled to sixteen pounds per annum for two years. This was the time required to reach Junior standard. An extra two to three years was possible for the student who passed the Queensland University Junior examination.

The practical possibility of attending University was established by the foundation of the University of Queensland in 1909. This encouraged parents to leave boys at school to Senior standard. In effect Queensland had crashed the State Aid barrier. The sixteen pounds per annum was paid directly to the school chosen by the holder. The extent of the financial aid can be seen from comparative figures for Scholarship holders:

1915	Grammar boys	432	Christian Brothers' boys	108
1920	“	“	“	“
		714		514

In 1915 holders at Christian Brothers' schools were exactly one quarter of the number at Grammar schools. Five years later the ratio was closer to 2:3. In 1920 Brothers' schools received 8224 pounds. This was over ten schools; but it was the difference between stagnation and expansion.

Almost from the start, many educators objected to the public examination system. It limited the curriculum and offered encouragement to rote teachings. The examining authorities - Department of Public Instruction and the University of Queensland - controlled a rigid and narrow curriculum. It was a system under which Brothers' schools flourished and reached a dominant position in the community, especially as the State system lagged so shamefully behind. Whatever the theoretical disadvantages, the Queensland Christian Brothers' schools were up and running well.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ J. Barrett to Superior General 17.7.1875. Copy in *C.B. Archives*, Parkville, Melbourne.
- ² Interview *The Australian*, 22.6.1996.
- ³ *Brisbane Courier*, 6.7.1875.
- ⁴ Gregory Terrace Archives (after shorthand began in 1896).
- ⁵ *The Terracian*, Series III, vol 4 No. 2, June 1997, p.5.
- ⁶ Newspaper clipping (*Brisbane Courier?*) 1898?. G.T.A.
- ⁷ Rupert Goodman, *Secondary Education in Queensland, 1860-1960*, ANU Press 1968, p. 51.
- ⁸ T.P. Boland, *Gentlemen of Terrace*, Boolarong, 2000, p. 8.
- ⁹ P.F. Connole, *The Christian Brothers in Secondary Education in Queensland 1875-1965*, Treacy Press 1965, pp.180-181.
- ¹⁰ Connole, pp.179-180.
- ¹¹ Connole, pp. 91-92.
- ¹² Goodman, p. 25.
- ¹³ Reminiscences of Archbishop Duhig, *Terrace Magazine* 1929.
- ¹⁴ T.P. Boland, T.P. *Nudgee 1891-1991*, Boolarong, p. 9.,
- ¹⁵ *Concilium Penarium Sydney ense A.D. 1885* (Sydney 1887), C. 246, p.78.
- ¹⁶ Goodman, Table IV, p.107. (The table ends at 1913, so St. Laurence's and Bundaberg do not appear)