

THE STORY WE SHARE
CELEBRATING 70 YEARS OF MINISTRY 1930 - 2000
ST MARY'S CATHOLIC CHURCH WOODFORD

Carol O'Brien

I wish I could tell you that this story is my own but that is not so; all the same it is too good not to share. A religious education teacher was speaking to her class of eight and nine year olds:

‘What would you do,’ she asked, ‘if there was a knock on the door and, when you went to answer it, there was Jesus on the doorstep?’

There was total silence for a few minutes and then a little boy answered: 'I would run upstairs and get the big Bible from Mum and Dad's bedroom and hand it to Jesus and say, "This is your life, Jesus. Thank you for coming".'

And that is what I want to present to you this evening: the documented story of Jesus' coming to Woodford and district with the First European settlement.

In September, 1841, the Archer brothers, David, John and Tom (then only 19 years old), arrived at Durundur, Aboriginal for Moreton Bay Ash, a station of 35 000 hectares, on a ridge on the northern bank of the Stanley River. Earlier that same year the Balfours had settled at Colinton and the McKenzies at Kilcoy.

The history of this arrival of Europeans is well documented in the many letters the Archer brothers (Charles arrived in 1842) wrote home to Norway and in the book Tom wrote in later life. Entitled *Reminiscences of a Rambling Life*, it details the struggle to establish a home in country that was too wet for sheep and isolated from family and friends.

In 1842, Tom was at the Neurum out-station with the sheep when he welcomed an unexpected visitor. On page 124 he tells the story:

One evening while I was eating my solitary supper, just brought to me by the hut-keeper, I was surprised to see a gentleman on horseback talking to the men at their camp. In a few minutes he came towards me and I recognised him as a Roman Catholic Priest whom I had met several times, and always found a very pleasant, kind and jovial man. I was glad therefore when he proposed to camp with me for the night.

After spreading his blankets and making himself comfortable on the other side of the big log which made the backing of my cheerful fire, and partaking of the frugal meal I could offer him, he informed me that he was on a tour through the district to visit his co-religionists and attend to their spiritual wants.

We then had a pleasant chat while reclining on our blankets and he told me a great deal of news about men, things and events that had occurred in Brisbane and throughout the districts during my long absence from civilisation.

There was at that time a good deal of excitement about affairs in Ireland, where Dan O'Connell was carrying on his agitation for 'regale', and our conversation soon branched off into the question of Irish politics - on which we differed considerably - though the discussion was carried on with perfect good-humour on both sides of the log.

I expressed my detestation of certain outrages that had been committed, and said that I hoped they would be put down and severely punished. The Rev. Father differed from me and contended that agrarian outrages should not be treated as crimes, being perfectly justified by the objectionable manner in which land laws were administered in Ireland.

From that day to this I have ceased to be surprised at any Irish outrages. Next morning one of the men saddled up the Reverend Father's horse, and his tall and handsome figure disappeared forever from my sight.

(The Moreton Bay Courier reported in 1844 that Fr Hanley was the only Catholic Priest in Brisbane. It is possible that this was the identity of Tom Archer's visitor.)

For five years, Hanley was to toil alone in Moreton Bay. He was joined by Fr Eugene Luckie in 1848. Assisting Fr Hanley he also found time to work with the Aboriginal people from whom he gained so much respect that they wished to make him king.

In 1852, Fr Hanley's parish of Queensland was changed by dividing the territory into two parts. One continued to have Fr Hanley as Parish Priest, while the other, Ipswich, was placed under the care of Fr William McGinty, a man whose own mission to Australia had been inspired by the 'convict' Priests, Fr Harold, 1800-1804, and Fr Dixon, 1801-1804. The expansion of the Catholic Church in Queensland had begun.

Father Duncan McNab

The first Priest to live at Durundur was Fr Duncan McNab. A cousin of Mary MacKillop, he was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1820, and trained as a missionary. Because of the shortage of Priests in Scotland, he was not released to work in the Australian missionary field until he was forty-seven years of age. By this time his parents were too old to leave behind and the debt he incurred by bringing them with him obliged him work as a Parish Priest in Portland, Victoria, until 1871.

When he came to Queensland in 1875, he was fifty-one. He was keen to work with Aboriginal people and in 1877 established 'Binambi', 'Resting place' in the Dungidau dialect, a 3 000 acre reserve on Durundur Station on the northern bank of Monkey Bong Creek. This site was just opposite what is now the Woodford Correctional Centre.

Fr McNab lived among them, learning their language and expressing deep concern when Sergeant Wheeler and his Native Police arrived to investigate any complaint. The 'dispersal of blacks' caused him to object strongly.

Father Duncan McNab tells his own story:

I landed in Brisbane on Thursday 23rd of September, 1875. Two days thereafter I called on the Right Rev. Dr J O'Quinn, Bishop of Brisbane. He received me kindly... I told him I had come to Queensland for the purpose of labouring for the civilisation and conversion of the Aborigines; that if I were not allowed to devote myself exclusively to the Blacks I should return whence I came, but when not engaged for their benefit I should be glad to do what I could for Whites, by assisting the local clergy; but would not be bound by it.

He cordially approved of my design, granted my requests on the terms proposed and gave me letters commending myself and my mission to the clergy and laity of the diocese of Brisbane.

But Government and Church Administrators were not always able, or willing, to grant his request.

In the beginning of the year 1877, I proceeded along to Mooroochie about seventy miles from Brisbane and commenced giving instructions to some Aborigines whom I found there. For some nights they listened to me attentively and appeared interested in the subjects. They believed what I told them of God, of the creation and of the fall of man. But when I came to the Trinity, the Incarnation, or other matters of mystery, they replied in broken English, 'Bel me see it' i.e. 'I don't understand it', and would proceed no further. They, however, anxiously enquired when I should come again.

After parting with them, I reflected that possibly I was myself to blame for their not believing more, since I had neglected to tell them that even I did not comprehend such mysteries; so I resolved to avoid such an error for the future. From Mooroochie I directed my course to Durundur. There I had got a reserve of 2,300 acres for the Blacks belonging to the Station, or rather to that part of the country. I camped along with them because I have never heard of a people converted where the Priest did not live with them so that they might observe the whole tenor of his life as well as hear his doctrine.

They came every day to morning prayers, and before a great fire, attended catechetical instructions at night. By day I divided them into hunting, fishing and working parties, and inspected and directed the operations of the workmen engaged in collecting materials, or in the construction of their houses. They had no houses before; they sheltered at night only by the boughs of trees or a few sheets of bark rudely put together. I availed myself of the services of the younger who understood English best, to instruct the old.

They listened to me for six weeks before they expressed any opinion on what I had taught them. Then they said they wanted to go UP, and not DOWN, that they received the religion as true and good, and would remain on the reserve, Binambi, and make it their home. At the end of two months, I baptised twenty-seven of them and married nine couples.

Fr McNab's problems increased as he sought finance and support from authorities. He became a member of the Aboriginal Commission which administered to Aboriginal welfare and education in tribal territories.

A big man sitting astride his horse and wearing a wide brimmed cabbage tree hat, he was a familiar figure on Durundur. All went reasonably well until the Government rations ceased; the novelty wore off and only the Durundur Aborigines remained.

Then Fr McNab faced another problem. He continues:

After some of the Durundur Blacks became Christians the bigots attacked the Minister of Lands in Parliament and the neighbouring selections petitioned against the Reserve and complained that the good land had been assigned to the Aborigines, whom they wished to confine to the mountains and the scrubs. After this I could not get the Minister of Lands to act at my suggestion any longer with the power given him for the benefit of the Blacks by the Legislative Assembly as he said he did not want to bring a nest of hornets about his ears. The Minister soon became Colonial Secretary and Premier.

Fr McNab's high hopes plummeted. Receiving little but opposition from the Church, State Parliament, or from his fellow Commissioners, Fr McNab left Queensland in 1879 with the comment that his resignation from the Aboriginal Commission and from Binambi, was a direct result of his associates 'nibbling at, or rather, trifling with, the question of Aboriginal Civilisation'.

All that remains of Binambi today is a waterhole, and a sign naming the property, *Black Flat*.

The settlement closed on 15th February, 1905 and the Aborigines moved from Binambi, Woodford, to Cherbourg. Some walked overland; others travelled by train from Caboolture to Wondai and then walked to Barambah.

The Parish of Caboolture

The discovery of gold at Gympie in 1867 influenced the development of Durundur and district. Men on the way to the gold diggings passed through Durundur and Conondale and a new road north was made in 1868.

An Act for closer settlement came into force in that same year. The total area to be held by one person was 10 880 acres. The agricultural land had to be cultivated and enclosed by a fence and it was compulsory for the owner to reside on his selection for two years.

By the 1870s the Doyles, McCarthys and McCauleys had settled at Neurum; the Ryans, Hennesseys, Kellehers, Aherns, Cashes, Traceys and Carmichaels at Delaney's Creek and D'Aguilar.

In 1888, a pertinent notice appeared in the Brisbane Age:

Our readers of the Northern road are invited to inspect the Mission and Station list of the Rev. Clergy of Brisbane. The Rev. M Gallagher will visit them on a pastoral tour tomorrow. The reverend gentleman will go to Caboolture and hear Confessions and celebrate Mass on Monday morning at Mr Hall's in that township. Father Gallagher's next station will be at the hospitable mansion of P Cash, Esq., Waraba, on 26th. Wednesday 27th, he will be guest of M McCarthy, Esq., JP, the Catholic pioneer of the Woodford district; closing his tour by a mission at the house of that strong and good Christian, James Ahern, Esq., of Woodford on Thursday 28th.

Father Kiernan was the first Administrator and at the time the main church was St Peter's at Woodford. Built in 1890, on land donated by the Brotherton family, it still stands today as a private residence.

It was not until 1894 that the Parish of Caboolture commenced on a permanent basis. It extended from Kedron Brook to Nambour in the north and included Redcliffe and Strathpine. Father Baldwin was appointed Parish Priest in 1911. He travelled by train (the railway line from Caboolture to Woodford was completed in 1909) and said Mass at St Peter's at Woodford, at Doyle's at Neurum and at Ahern's at Delaney's Creek.

In 1918 Fr J O'Reilly replaced Fr Baldwin and in 1920, Woodford was still the main church of the parish when Fr A.E. Wright took over. In 1922 Caboolture Church was renamed St Peter's and Woodford's St Peter's became St Mary's.

In 1923 Nambour became a separate parish and Fr Leo Hayes became Parish Priest of Caboolture - and thus unfolds a very interesting story - one that may have influenced the decision to build a new church, convent and school at Woodford. St Mary's Convent opened at the beginning of the school year in 1930.

In the early days after 1909 when the railway line reached Woodford, Fr Leo Hayes came by train once a month to say Mass in the church. Father slept in the side sacristy.

One old timer was sceptical. ‘You won’t sleep there for long,’ he said. ‘The church is haunted.’ On that first night, Fr Hayes heard footsteps coming up the centre aisle. Undaunted, he turned over and went back to sleep. Every Saturday night that he slept there, he heard the same measured footsteps approaching the altar from the back of the church. After twelve months he decided to ‘front’ the ghost.

Fr Hayes borrowed the Station Master’s watch as he did not own one. He checked the time that he heard the footsteps. It was always midnight. A practical man, Fr Hayes called a local carpenter to make sure that the building was secure and structurally sound. The report stated that no fault could be found in the stumps, the walls, or the roof. On the next Saturday night, Fr Hayes was prepared. At the sound of the footsteps, he walked out into the sanctuary – and there he saw clearly a man’s face.

The Priest fell to his knees and prayed. The next day he said Mass for the repose of the soul of the man he had seen. The footsteps were never heard again.

Not long after, Fr Hayes was visiting a house ‘below the range’, D’Aguilar or Bellthorpe, he would not say, when his attention was drawn to a photograph on the wall. ‘Who is that man?’ he asked. He was told it was a relative who had died. Fr Hayes recognised the face he had seen in the Woodford Church at midnight but he refused to reveal the identity of the ghost.

Early History of Woodford Parish

The Woodford Provisional School opened on 23rd October, 1881, and the township was proclaimed in 1885. Robert Lindsay, an 18 year old youth, had been the first person buried in the new town cemetery that same year.

The steady growth of the timber and dairying industries had resulted in a population expansion and with many Irish settlers in the district especially at D'Aguilar and Delaney's Creek (there were Ryans, Traceys, Carmichaels, Caseys, Kellehers, Cashes, Aherns, Hennesseys, Sheehans and Powers), a Catholic Church was much needed.

Mr & Mrs Brotherton donated a suitable site and St Peter's Church opened in 1890. Mrs Brotherton donated one stained glass window and Mrs Mag O'Brien, wife of the licensee of the Yatesville Hotel, donated the other.

When the population outgrew the original church and a larger building and a convent school were needed, the present church site was purchased from George Armstrong Johnstone and Archbishop James Duhig consecrated and opened the new church in March, 1930.

The two stained glass windows are the only part of the original 1890 building to be incorporated into the present church. These windows were rededicated during the concelebrated Mass on Sunday, 4th June, 2000 – during the 70th anniversary celebrations of St Mary's Catholic Church at Woodford.

St Joseph's Convent School

The Sisters of St Joseph came to Woodford in 1929. The information in the archives states that the convent and church were opened on 9 March, 1930. The delay in the official opening can be attributed to the floods that had caused a postponement of the original date. Stella Simpson was baptised at the opening Mass by Archbishop Duhig.

Mother Lawrence was the Superior General of the Order and gave permission for the Sisters to open a convent and school in Woodford. The Queensland provincial was Sister de Lellis and the first community consisted of Sisters Bernadine Joyce, Aquinas Heagney, and Avellino Daley.

Motor Mission

When St Joseph's School closed in 1965, the Sisters continued the religious education of the Catholic children in the district by means of a Motor Mission. They lived in the Woodford Convent and travelled by car to give weekly Religious Instruction lessons in State primary and secondary schools. For example, the schools they visited in the early 1970s were Woodford, Maleny, Caloundra, Landsborough, Bribie Island, Esk, Beerwah, Somerset Dam and other small places; with sometimes only one or two children for instruction.

The Motor Mission continued until the end of 1983 during which time the Sisters had moved to Caloundra where they also had a school. To continue the Religious Education of children in the Woodford/Kilcoy Parish, two Sisters returned to live in Woodford. In 1984 the annual summer school was held for the first time in Woodford instead of Kilcoy. The activities lasted for a week and children came into Woodford from Mt Kilcoy, Delaney's Creek, Mt Mee, Kilcoy, and Woodford. The Sisters of St Joseph finally left Woodford in 1986.

Catholic Daughters of Australia

In February, 1959, a branch of the CDA was founded in Woodford. The first official meeting was chaired by Mrs A J Quinn, the State President, and attended by Fr Scanlan, visiting members from Brisbane and Kilcoy and ten local members.

The Minutes of Meetings of the Woodford CDA reveal what an active and supportive group it was in the parish. The ladies were responsible for the organisation and carrying out of the work in connection with many annual and special events in the parish. Significant occasions in which the members played an important role were the Debutante Ball, Fr Scanlan's Silver Jubilee and the parish supper after Fr Dermott Casey's first Mass which was celebrated in St Mary's Church, at 7pm, 30th June, 1960.

In 1973, on 13th March, the Woodford Branch of the CDA reluctantly decided to disband as the small number of members made it impossible to carry on.

Father George Ainslie (1942-1945)

This tribute to Fr Ainslie was written by his nephew, Barry Ainslie.

Fr George Ainslie thoroughly enjoyed his time with the parishioners of the Woodford area. Before serving in this area he had already been stationed in five parishes in his three years as a diocesan Priest. Woodford gave him the chance to settle into regular priestly work and to get to know people for a lengthy period of time. He was a great athlete. He loved to run. One of his favourite stories was when the soldiers at the army camp surrounding the convent challenged him to race them through the bush with a full army kit on his back. He well and truly won that race and in the process earned the respect of the soldiers. Fr Ainslie also played football for one of the local teams and wasn't too proud to join a game of Red Rover with the local Catholic school children.....In the last few years of Fr Ainslie's life (he passed away peacefully in October 1999 at the age of 87) he loved to talk about his Woodford days. He could clearly remember many of the parishioners by name. Woodford was certainly a special place and a special time in his priestly life and in his heart.

Memories of Father George Ainslie

(by Carol O'Brien)

It seems incredible to see all these years later that Father Ainslie was with us for four or five years; he was such an important part of our lives that he seemed to be a part of our parish for much longer.

Also in hindsight, I wonder how he survived. He lived in one small room on the western end of the church building, now the vestry. Of course there were school toilets – but how did he manage for a shower when the only water was the tank and one low tap under the school building? What about laundry – and food, and all the other small comforts of life?

I suspect that Father's needs were very few. He was slightly built and an athlete who played on the wing of the local football team and joined us at lunchtime at school for Rounders, Red Rover and whatever else we were playing.

When he needed to leave his room during a school day, it was necessary for him to walk through our classroom. We jumped to our feet at the sight of our hero. 'Good morning, Father. God bless you, Father,' or 'Good afternoon, Father. God bless you, Father,' we would chorus. We would repeat the procedure on his return.

To avoid this continual disruption to our classes, he obtained a tall ladder – from where I don't know – leaned it against the open window and entered and left his room via the ladder for years.

Father drove a small Vauxhall car with a dickie seat at the back and every morning we would wait under the camphor laurel tree in front of Mag O'Brien's house – once a part of the old Yatesville Hotel – and Father would be there as regular as clockwork to give us a lift to school. There would be kids packed in the front and in the dickie seat if you were lucky to get there first, and off we would go.

He was such a quiet, unassuming man – but what a lifelong influence and impression he made on us. Young as we were, we recognised him for the saintly man he was.

Towards Unity

The present Parish Priest, Fr Brian Taylor, reports on the signing of a Covenant by the local churches in the year 2 000.

We can be proud of the ecumenical efforts being made in our own local area under the auspices of our Ecumenical Pastoral Council, which consists of representatives of the pastoral councils of the Anglicans, Uniting, Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches.

It has come to a point when it seemed appropriate that we make a more solemn commitment to unity by signing a Covenant. This very significant event took place on June 1 in a wonderful ceremony in St Mary's Church, Woodford. We were privileged to have with us Bishop John Gerry (Roman Catholic), Bishop Richard Appleby (Anglican), Rev. Tim Jaensch (Lutheran) and Rev. Bob Warwick (Uniting Church) as well as local and visiting clergy, civil dignitaries and members of the various local churches. Truly we can thank God's Holy Spirit for leading us to this moment. Thanks to all who helped in any way with the organisation of this event. It was very appropriate it be celebrated during the Week of Christian Unity.

We are now committed to do together everything except where we still have serious theological differences. Where these occur we are challenged to patiently seek a way through them by prayer, study and sharing under guidance of the Holy Spirit and our Church's Teaching Authority. Let us have the courage to take up this great work!

In all these endeavours we are mindful of our pioneer Catholics whose hard-work, dedication and vision laid the foundation of our community. May we prove worthy of them.

Down the Years

- 1878 Fr Duncan McNab – Binambi Parish
Fr Michael J MacKiernan
- 1890 Original Woodford Church (St Peter's)
- 1896 Fr John Ryan (1st Queensland born Priest)
- 1907 Fr Byrne baptised Jack Jenkinson at Woodford
- 1922 Name changed to St Mary's
- 1923 Fr Leo Hayes
- 1924 Fr Michael Hayes
- 1928 Monthly Mass only (Maleny, Caboolture, Woodford, Kilcoy)
- 1930 Present Church and St Joseph's Convent and School opened by
Archbishop Duhig
- 1941- 45 Fr George Ainslie
- 1946 Parish of Woodford and Kilcoy established
P.P. - Fr Vincent Landener
- 1950 Fr Tom Guy
- 1952 Fr Francis Scanlan
- 1955 New presbytery and bell blessed by Archbishop Duhig, Aug 7:
Latin Mass – Gregorian Chant
- 1958 Branch of the Catholic Daughters of Australia founded
- 1960 Silver Jubilee (Dinner and Ball). High Mass celebrated by
Archbishop O'Donnell.
- 1963 Fr Basil Nolan
- 1965 School closed due to lack of Sisters
- 1966 Motor Mission started
- 1972 Fr Gerard Casey
- 1981 Fr Rollo Enright
- 1984 Fr Rollo's Silver Jubilee
- 1985 Fr Frank Scanlan – Golden Jubilee
Fr Dermott Casey – Silver Jubilee
- 1986 End of Motor Mission.
Fr Kevin Carey
- 1990 Fr Denis Scanlan
- 1998 Fr Brian Taylor
- 2000 St Mary's 70th birthday celebrations