

UNCOVERING THE STORY OF ST MARY'S, SOUTH BRISBANE

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Introduction

St Mary's South Brisbane: what image comes to your mind when you hear these words? Whatever it is, I hope that this paper will bring many more - and different - images of St Mary's to you. I want to place St Mary's firmly within the history of Brisbane as I share with you the story of St Mary's; from its beginnings as the first Catholic church in the southern portion of the diocese of Brisbane, through to its place today.

First, some background to this paper. I am not a professional historian and have no qualifications in that regard, but I do have a great interest in history and enjoy visiting museums, old towns and buildings, and cemeteries. In 1984, I moved to South Brisbane to live in a house I had bought from my Uncle Joe. The house, in Norfolk Road, was already well known to me – it was where my grandparents and their family had moved to in the 1920s - and it was just a few streets away from St Mary's of which I knew something. I had attended there only occasionally over the years but these occasions were for some of the major events of life - funerals and weddings – and I was glad to be now in a place where I felt very much at home and - through my family's long involvement with it - part of the history of the church.

In 1990, I became more involved in St Mary's, being employed by the community there to assist the Administrator, Fr Peter Kennedy, in administrative and pastoral tasks. As the community worker, I was involved in organising the celebration of the church's centenary that was in July of 1993 and it was thought that a booklet should be produced for the occasion. It was not considered this would be too difficult a task because, after all, South Brisbane was one of the

oldest parishes in the diocese and so would have a lot of history that surely would be written down somewhere.

Well, that ‘somewhere’ is still being discovered today -fifteen years later. Many things have been written about St Mary’s over the years, but not many of them in one place; so the task of finding the information and putting the story together has been long and time-consuming.

In 1991, at the John Oxley Library, I was told there was nothing on their index about St Mary’s South Brisbane. At the Catholic Archives I found a manila folder on St Mary’s with about ten small newspaper clippings. I had assumed that just one visit to these two venues would supply us with most of the material that we could use in our booklet. So the searching began.

Eventually we found just three sources of historical data about St Mary’s with a body of information like dates and names and references, that would start us on our way. These were: a page in the 1914 book *A Catholic Miscellany* by Fr O’Leary, a section in the Mercy story *Beyond Our Dreams* by Sr Mary Xaverius O’Donoghue, and a paper on St Mary’s by a former seminarian.¹ After that, it was down to searching newspapers and books that might have a link to St Mary’s. The realities of historical research hit hard, but even after long hours spent poring over newspapers at the State Library, and the frustration of days when nothing was found, the exhilaration and excitement when something **was** found was like a drug. I was hooked and wanted to find out more – well and truly bitten by the history bug!

We did put out a small booklet for the centenary. It focussed on the current church and its years 1893–1993, but St Mary’s history didn’t start in 1893, and I had just snippets of information about the earlier years. I wished I could do more, but time and circumstances during the 1990s just didn’t allow it.

In 2001, I saw an article about Local History Grants offered by the Brisbane City Council, and the time was right. I could devote twelve months to gathering more material and have it displayed in the

church. Just what I could gather and how to present it depended on what I could find and I especially wanted to know more about those earlier years. So, come with me and share the uncovering of the story of St Mary's of South Brisbane.

In the beginning . . .

Every story should have a beginning, so when and how St Mary's came about was a logical place to start. From the information gathered for the centenary celebration, we had little knowledge of what went on before 1893, but we did know that the present St Mary's was not the first St Mary's of South Brisbane.

There is a particular photo in the centenary booklet, which can also be seen at the front door of the church as part of the framed history.² It is the architect's drawing for the new St Mary's - dated 1890. It is a beautiful drawing, and what I really like about it, is that it shows the two St Mary's: the old and the new.

In the accompanying article to the photograph, in *The Queenslander* of July 8, 1893, there is this sentence:

The new church replaces a small wooden chapel which dates back to the early days of South Brisbane, it having been opened by the late Bishop Quinn on Sunday 2nd July 1865, when the present prelate, then Father Dunne, said the first mass in it.

The same sentence was in *The Brisbane Courier* of July 1, 1893; both papers were reporting on the opening of the new St Mary's. I remember the thrill of reading that sentence, because I had already seen the year of 1865 used in regard to the first church. But here was a specific date, the beginning of St Mary's of South Brisbane, and I went immediately to the 1865 newspapers expecting to read a report about the church opening. But there was nothing in the papers of January to December 1865, about a South Brisbane church being built or opened; and there wasn't the time then, in 1992, to investigate further. In the centenary booklet, we put just a short section on the early years, and included that sentence, believing it to be a correct statement.

Since 1993, I have looked through all the available newspapers of Brisbane and also the Sydney paper *The Freeman's Journal* (from 1858 to 1866) and found no item or mention of a Catholic church being planned, built, opened or blessed - at South Brisbane. During 1865, other Catholic churches were being written about and, in that year, the Warwick,³ Redbank,⁴ and Pine Mountain⁵ churches were built and blessed by Bishop Quinn. Why was there nothing about South Brisbane? There were many frustrating days at the State Library. I did seek assistance from the Catholic Archives to confirm the 2 July date with writings of Bishop Quinn and Archbishop Dunne but I was told the condition of the writings was such, that verification could not be made. I do hope that it can be confirmed one day.

We had no information then about what happened prior to the opening of the church, like when it was planned for, or when it was built. Just before the history project began, Fr Denis Martin told me that there was no information in church records about how the land at South Brisbane was acquired. There were land grants available for churches and schools during the early years of settlement, but it was not known how many of the early Queensland Catholic churches had received them. Perhaps South Brisbane had. Was a grant applied for and if so, who applied for it?

To go right back to the beginning of St Mary's, was a good starting point for the history project. I began eagerly - little knowing that it would take three of the project's twelve months to get some information on just those two questions and additional time, after the project finished, to finally get some answers.

A St Mary's friend worked in the Titles Office, and he offered to see what could be found there in regard to St Mary's. He obtained for me, copies of all the documents he did find and these included Deeds of Grant and various street maps. The Deeds of Grant were for the church site on the corner of Peel and Merivale Streets, and for the school site on the corner of Peel and Cordelia Streets. The school deeds - dated 1884 and 1885 - showed there were four blocks making up this site; these being purchased by Archbishop Robert Dunne. A new school was built here in 1908. As for the church site -

to my surprise and puzzlement - that deed was dated 1896. How could this be? The current church was built in 1892/3 - and there was after all an earlier church. The street maps sent to me were of 1864 and 1865 and showed there was a building on the corner of Peel and Merivale Streets, marked on one map as 'Roman Catholic Church' and on the other as 'Church of Rome'.

There was another paper amongst the deeds and maps sent to me and this turned out to be the most useful of all. It was the oldest document with regard to date and had many notations on it that would, I later learned, provide many clues to follow. It was an application plan bearing a stamp of the Surveyor General's Office of New South Wales and showed three Allotments: for a church, a school and a dwelling on the corner of Peel and Merivale Streets in the Town of Brisbane. The application was for Roman Catholic Church purposes, drawn by Surveyor Mr H C Rawnsley for the Survey Office Brisbane, and transmitted to Sydney on 2 May 1859. Here I had an application plan of 1859 and an 1896 Deed for the same land. What happened between those years?

The name of Mr Bill Kitson had been mentioned to me by a few people, as someone who knew a great deal about land in Brisbane. I met up with him at the State Archives and he was most helpful. He understood the notations on the plan and plied me with books and bundles of papers to look at and, after many hours, we had some information and more questions.

From the records of the Brisbane Lands Office, we found that the surveyor Mr Rawnsley was asked on 28 October 1858 to '...measure and mark out 2 acres at the intersection of Merivale & Peel Streets South Brisbane for R.C. Church purposes.'

Some months later, on 16 April 1859, the Survey Office of Brisbane wrote again to Mr Rawnsley to revise and alter the plan for Roman Catholic Church purposes in South Brisbane. This probably is the revised plan - received on 26 April 1859 by the Brisbane Survey Office and transmitted to Sydney on 2 May - that we have a copy of now. This was exciting information to find, but didn't give any clues

as to who had applied to the Lands Office for the land, or of what happened to the plan in Sydney.

Mr Kitson then followed up later notations on the Application Plan, and this led us to the letter that authorised the issue of the Deed of Grant in 1896. There was apparently discussion in the Queensland Parliament during 1894 that led to an amendment of the Crown Land Act.⁶ Under Section 30 of The Crown Land Act of 1894, Executive Authority could be obtained to prepare deeds for land promised to religious bodies by the Government of New South Wales prior to the separation of the Colony of Queensland. It was another year before the letter was sent (from the Department of Public Lands to the Surveyor General), stating that Executive Authority had been obtained. A request was then made for Deeds of Grant to be prepared for Roman Catholic Church lands in North Brisbane, South Brisbane, Dalby, Drayton, Gayndah, Ipswich and Toowoomba.

The letter from the Department of Public Lands contained a notation that all attached papers were to be returned to the Department. These papers **probably** provided the necessary proof that the lands had been ‘promised to religious bodies’. We **don’t know** because those papers were not found at the State Archives and, due to the time constraints of the history project, I had to make do with the information we did have.

About a year later - on a day trip to Sydney, I spent some hours at St Mary’s Cathedral Archives and, with the help of the archivist Pauline Garland, I found two letters which proved to be more pieces of the puzzle.

One letter dated 6 September 1858 from Abbot Gregory, the Vicar-General of Sydney, to The Secretary for Lands & Works reads:

Sir,

I have the honour to request that the site indicated in the enclosed tracing at the intersection of Merivale and Peel Streets in the town of South Brisbane may be granted for Roman Catholic Church purposes.

It was just some weeks later, on 28 October, that the Brisbane Lands Office requested a surveyor to mark and measure the said land in South Brisbane; and it was in May 1859, that the application plan was sent to Sydney.

The second letter I found in Sydney, was written to Abbot Gregory from the Department of Land & Public Works, and dated 30 September 1859. It reads:

Right Reverend Sir,

With reference to my letter of the 7th instant, I am now directed to inform you, that the plan and description of the Land applied for by you, in the Town of South Brisbane have been received, and that there will be no objection to the appropriation of the same to Roman Catholic Church purposes, as required, to which effect the Surveyor General has been apprised.

At last, the answers: a grant of land in South Brisbane was applied for by Abbot Gregory of Sydney, and he was notified that there was no objection to its appropriation for Roman Catholic Church purposes. These letters (which may have been among those papers attached to the letter authorising the drawing up of deeds all those years later, in 1896) prove that the land was promised in 1859 by the Government of New South Wales.

I believe that the progress of procedure, following the granting of land, was interrupted by the major historical event of Queensland becoming a separate colony from New South Wales. Separation Day was proclaimed on 10 December 1859 to celebrate that event. Probably all but necessary Government business from Sydney was suspended until a new Queensland Government was formed, but whatever the reason, no deed was issued for the land at South Brisbane around that time.

Although we now know that Abbot Gregory made the application for the land at South Brisbane; it is likely that someone from Brisbane made the recommendation for the land to him. I would like to investigate whether it might have been Dean John Rigney who made the recommendation. He was at that time, with Fr William McGinty,

managing the Church in Queensland until the arrival of Bishop Quinn in Brisbane in May 1861. More searching to do!

The Early Years

We still don't know much about the early years of St Mary's. The question of when the church was actually built still remains. It is there in street maps of 1864 and 1865, and possibly or probably was blessed and opened on 2 July 1865.

In my searches of the newspapers, when I did not find any reference to the church being built, I did on two occasions see mention of a Catholic Chapel at South Brisbane. These were in items regarding land sales at South Brisbane, one in 1864⁷ and one in 1865.⁸ So these, along with the street maps, lead me to be quite confident that the building was there in 1864. Was it built in that year, or even earlier?

We can assume that the news of the granting of the land was sent to Brisbane, (to Dean Rigney?) by Abbot Gregory in 1859. Were plans for the building of the church made while waiting for a new Queensland Government to ratify the decision made in Sydney? Did the people of South Brisbane get tired of waiting for that to happen, and just build the church? Did Bishop Quinn find the building in place when he arrived in 1861; or was it he who arranged for the church to be built; and then – perhaps - with still no deed issued, decide to proceed, without publicity, to bless and open it on 2 July 1865? Is that why there is no mention in the newspapers of that year, of the church's opening? I do hope we can, one day, know the answers to those questions.

However, there was a Catholic chapel on the corner of Peel and Merivale Streets, and we do know that, in 1866, it was a school as well as a church. As far back as 1850 there was a hope for a Catholic school at South Brisbane. This is mentioned in Fr Martin's book *The Foundation of the Catholic Church in Queensland* where we can read of a letter published on 17 October 1850, in the *Freeman's Journal*, (a Sydney publication). The Letter to the Editor was from their Moreton Bay correspondent, giving a summary of church and school development in the colony of Brisbane, then still part of New

South Wales. In the letter, the correspondent writes of the beautiful St Stephen's Church and of the two Catholic schools attached to this church. The writer goes on to say:

The establishment of a Catholic school at South Brisbane is earnestly solicited by the Catholic parents of that part of the town . . . It is to be hoped the Inspector of Catholic schools will respect their humble appeal and use his influence with the Central Board, to establish a school for their convenience and those of Kangaroo Point.⁹

It was a long wait - from 1850 until 1866 - for that to become a reality...

The Sisters of Mercy arrived in Brisbane, with Bishop Quinn, in 1861; and from the time of their arrival, the demand for their services was great. South Brisbane people were probably still earnestly soliciting a Catholic school in their area. In Sr Mary Xaverius's book *Beyond our Dreams*, we can read what eventually happened in 1866.

The task of opening up a school in South Brisbane where no Sisters were available, was taken up by one of the young women who had come to assist the Sisters by teaching in their schools. The young woman, Mary Teresa O'Meara, walked to South Brisbane each day from All Hallows'. The new school was a combined school and church and she had the 'toilsome task' on Monday morning, of pushing pews into a corner, getting out the children's desks, and, at the end of the week, of getting the pews back into place for Mass.¹⁰ I will mention that young woman, Mary Teresa O'Meara, again later.

For some time, I had just the year of 1866 as a date for the opening of the school at South Brisbane. Then, some years ago, I received a paper from a relative of mine (a Sister of Mercy living in Athy in Ireland). It was dated 1885 and contained a list of schools in Queensland where the Sisters of Mercy were teaching, and St Mary's School, South Brisbane is listed as opening on 2 April, 1866. I tried to confirm that date with any local press reporting, but there was none; so for now, we can accept that date from the Mercy Sisters as the starting of the school in the church building.

My searching of the Brisbane papers of the 1860s did eventually yield something. In *The Brisbane Courier* of 1 January 1868 there was a letter to the Editor headed ‘The Services of the Catholic Church at South Brisbane’. The letter reads

Sir,

I wish to call attention to the manner in which the church services of the Roman Catholics of South Brisbane are neglected. Why are we the most neglected part of the Roman Catholic Church of Brisbane? What more sins have we committed than the favoured children of St Stephen’s parish? If such is the case, then the more needs for confessions and masses. Last Sunday the key of the vestment case was lost, and sooner than use violence (so the reverend gentleman said) by breaking the hinges, the priest walked home, and we were left without mass – that is short and hurried as it is in general – no sermons or vespers for us. Yes we can pay our dues as well as any one, only we require to have our money spent here, and a priest for our sick.

It is signed ‘A poor Catholic’.

That is all the information I have about those first years of St Mary’s in the 1860s, but from 1870, we know more. From 1870 to 1879 are the years of the presence of the Sisters of St Joseph at South Brisbane.

The Sisters of St Joseph Years

These Sisters of St Joseph years at South Brisbane are a part of the St Mary’s story that did have available written material, and I didn’t have to do much searching out of information. The Sisters, through Sr Margaret McKenna, gave me what information they had about the South Brisbane part of those first ten years of their being in Brisbane. Not only were there the many letters written by Mother Mary to her Sisters, but there were also newspaper items about the Sisters and their schools.

Sr Mary MacKillop and her small group of Sisters arrived in Brisbane on 31 December 1869. They stayed with the Sisters of Mercy at All Hallows for three weeks and then, accepting the offer to take over the school at St Mary’s, they moved to South Brisbane, into a small cottage at Tribune St.

Bishop Quinn had asked for the Sisters of St Joseph to come to Queensland as soon as possible, and when visiting Adelaide on his way to Rome, said he had a school ready for them in Brisbane. The school wasn't named, but it is likely to have been St Mary's. I would imagine that the distance to St Mary's from All Hallows, and the crossing of the Brisbane River, would have been additional reasons for the Sisters of Mercy not taking on the school earlier. It must have been a great trial too for St Mary's first teacher: Mary Teresa O'Meara.

There were ferries that crossed the river and a temporary wooden bridge opened in 1865. This lasted just a few years, and the first Victoria Bridge was finally completed in 1874. It would surely be preferable to have another order of Sisters based on the south side of the river.

The Sisters did not stay long in the cottage in Tribune Street; it was soon too small for them **and** the homeless children gathered together by Sr Mary. In March of 1870, they moved into a former hotel in Montague Road at South Brisbane, and this became their St Joseph's Convent for the remainder of their time in Brisbane.

Within a few months, the Sisters were not only teaching at St Mary's, but had opened two new schools; one (called St John Baptist's) on the other side of the river at Petrie Terrace; and the other (St Joseph's) about one and a half miles from the convent at the Swamp. An article in *The Brisbane Courier* of 9 July 1870, just six months after their arrival in Brisbane, tells us:

The children under the care of the Srs of St Joseph, to the number nearly 300 from their schools at Petrie (Terrace), St Mary's and One-Mile Swamp met together on June 13th in the paddock adjoining St Mary's where they regaled themselves with tea, cake, sandwiches, fruit etc...

Sr Mary MacKillop stayed fifteen months in Brisbane during 1870 and 1871; and, throughout the years until the end of 1879, returned about five times to visit and encourage the Sisters in their work throughout Queensland. There are published books that tell a great deal of these years, so I won't go into them here.

I did do searches of the newspapers of those years, and have put cuttings of items that I found, into an archival album. These include the many letters and articles, during November and December of 1879, about the departure of the Sisters from South Brisbane. That period is also well documented, and I have nothing further to add to that.

But I would like to say that the people of South Brisbane were fiercely supportive of the Sisters, wanted them to stay, and very publicly expressed their feelings about the Sisters leaving. This public demonstration incurred the wrath of many other Catholics, including a 'North Brisbane Catholic' who in a letter to the Catholic paper *The Australian*, stated his disapproval of a petition by South Brisbane people, and of their acting without proper authority. The letter ended with a stated preference for Irish nuns who would never write letters to a newspaper or encourage their friends to 'get up raffles or concerts without speaking to the priests about it first'.

This part of the St Mary's story - the Sisters of St Joseph years - was, like the first wooden church, little known by many people in Brisbane, up to about ten years ago. Many of the people I met during the centenary celebrations, who had attended St Mary's during the 1930s, 40s and 50s, were very surprised to hear of the Sisters of St Joseph connection as they had no idea it was there. Some knew there had been an earlier wooden church, but for most people, the story of St Mary's was all about the current church and the school and convent of the Mercy Sisters. So I am very pleased that the history walk around the church is able to give information about those early years of St Mary's.

Not everyone was ignorant of those early years however, and I did meet people who had family stories of a connection to the Josephite Sisters. One such story was about the now Blessed Mary MacKillop, from a lady who currently attends St Mary's. Her name is Maureen, and her grandmother Maria Cecelia Cruise was born in 1863 and lived all her life in Carlton St, Highgate Hill - at that time, part of South Brisbane. Maria Cruise had a lifelong devotion to Mary MacKillop and had a picture of her hanging on a wall of her house

along with other devotional pictures. Maureen remembers asking her grandmother what saint was this one, and was told, 'Ah – that's Mary MacKillop. She is not a saint yet, but she will be.' Maureen told me that her grandmother had taught with Sr Mary at St Mary's school. However, when I sat down with her to get details of her grandmother's life, we found that she would have been seven years old in 1870, and therefore likely to have been **taught by** Sr Mary, rather than been **teaching with her**. She did become a teacher later on, so may have started as a pupil teacher with the St Joseph Sisters.

Remember that other pupil teacher – Mary Teresa O'Meara - who had started the school at St Mary's, under the guidance of the Mercy Sisters? She left St Mary's when the Sisters of St Joseph arrived and did further teaching for the Sisters of Mercy at Warwick. In 1874, she left Warwick - to join the Sisters of St Joseph.

The Sisters of Mercy Years

Now we turn to 1880 when the Sisters of Mercy years really do begin and they teach at the St Mary's school. Just when in that year the Sisters start their teaching, is not recorded; but there was a report in the Catholic paper *The Australian* in December of 1880 that tells of an 'entertainment' at St Mary's which gives great credit to the children and to the Sisters (of Mercy) who have charge of the school.

The small wooden building was still operating as St Mary's church/school in 1880. It did have some extensions over the years – to the sides and the rear, but just when these were done is not certain. We do know that there were meetings to plan and finance a new church in 1889, and the new St Mary's church was opened in July of 1893. This meant that the first church now became the school, to the great relief, I'm sure, of those who were still shifting pews and desks every week of the school terms.

Just briefly about the new church: the design by architects Simkin and Ibler was accepted by Archbishop Dunne, and the foundation stone was laid in an impressive ceremony on 25 September 1892. Cardinal Moran was visiting Brisbane at the time, and was accompanied on the day by several archbishops and bishops. The church was blessed and opened by Archbishop Dunne on 2 July

1893, even though the building was only partially completed. The 1890s were difficult years for Brisbane, following the boom years of the 1880s. There were industrial strikes, bank collapses, and severe weather conditions during those years. The major flood of 1893 swept away half of the Victoria Bridge and severely damaged areas of South Brisbane. The new church was never completed to its original design.

The Sanctuary of the church, as it is today, was added in 1929. Until then, the altar was flush with the rear wall of the church. I have read that this altar was formerly in St Stephen's Cathedral and was modified for St Mary's.¹¹ In 1929, Mr Joseph Steele, who lived opposite the church, made a miniature model of the altar to be first prize in a raffle. It was won by a Mrs K Carton, who donated the model to St Mary's in 1993.

Back to the school and the Sisters of Mercy. They continued to travel daily to St Mary's from All Hallows – for thirty-five years - by foot, by ferry, by bus, by tram. A convent at South Brisbane was at last blessed and opened by Archbishop Duhig in January of 1915. The Sisters had purchased a one-storey brick building and added another storey. The Archbishop praised them for their provision of the Convent, and paid great tribute to them for the faithful discharge of their service to the people of South Brisbane.¹²

The Convent was on a triangle of land bordered by Boundary, Peel and Cordelia Streets, and was diagonally opposite to the St Mary's Convent School which had been built in 1908, ready for the school year of 1909. The old church/school then became the Infants school, and this is how some of the people I have met remember it. They remembered it as the Infants School, and that it was demolished around the time the Sanctuary was built in 1929, when additions were made also to the school. Most of those people did not know that the Infant's School was once a church.

Sisters at the Mercy Archives have been helpful in giving me what information they had on the involvement of their Order at St Mary's; especially Srs Germaine and Helen-Mary in 2001 and 2002, and Sr Kay just recently. There has not been a great deal of it, however, as

they do not have records of all years at all schools. They were able to give me a few photographs of the convent.

I have been able to compile a list of some of the Sisters and lay teachers who have taught at St Mary's from 1880 to 1964, most of these were names given by people who wrote down their memories and family stories for me. I also looked in books about the Mercy Sisters and about Catholic education, for names to add to the list.

That list, being part of the framed history display around the walls of the church, led me to meet a woman who was attending a family baptism in the church about a year ago. Someone had told her that her maiden name, Macgroarty, was somewhere in one of the history displays on the walls of the church. I noticed her closely inspecting the displays and went over to talk with her. The name of her aunt - Margaret Macgroarty - was among the pupil teachers, and I was able to tell her that her aunt had been teaching at St Mary's in 1892. She, in turn, was able to give me some family history and two great photographs; one of her aunt Margaret taken in the 1880s, and the other of her own parents' wedding at St Mary's in 1929.

I have had many chance meetings like that one. People often visit St Mary's because of a family connection, and just call in to see this place that was remembered and spoken of so fondly. I try to get their family stories and any photographs they may have of their involvement with St Mary's. One special photograph we do have is of the church, the school and its pupils, taken in 1922; donated by the sister of Mary Maloney who was a pupil teacher at the school at that time.

I have now put together some archival albums - as people have shared their stories, memories and photographs with me. There are school class photographs; some of which include lay teachers - but no Sisters of Mercy. There is a collection of family stories, memories of the church and school, and newspaper reports of school concerts and parish activities. These are, however, relatively few in number; considering the thousands of people who have been associated with St Mary's over so many years. To date, I have gone through only a

small number of newspapers - from 1880 to 1964 – so, in time, the collection will grow larger - I'm sure.

The years of 1915 to 1925 were about the peak time for St Mary's in regard to numbers. In the 'twenties', industry was increasing along the river and the railway line and outer suburbs were opening up and becoming more desirable areas to live. Residential areas around St Mary's began to decrease as families moved away.

The school closed in 1964, quietly, with no public announcement or event to mark the occasion. The area around the school and convent was quite industrialised by 1964, and families with long connections to the parish were still moving away. The convent continued to be used for some years but was demolished in 1974 and the school was removed or demolished some time in the late 1970s.

In all those years of a Catholic school at South Brisbane, 1866 – 1964, there does not appear to have been a booklet written about it, or an anniversary celebrated. It is great to see that in more recent years, anniversaries are celebrated, with written and photographic records being made. The work of an historian may be just a little easier in future.

The Parish - the Priests

The early churches in Brisbane, including St Mary's, were ministered to by St Stephens, the first and main Catholic church of Brisbane. Church services and visits from priests to South Brisbane seem to have been quite irregular in the years up to the early 1870s - as indicated in the letter from 'A poor Catholic' that I mentioned earlier, and also in some of the letters written by Sr Mary MacKillop. I'm sure that one reason for this was having to cross the river.

In 1871, St Killian's College was established in South Brisbane and Fr Phillip Corrigan was appointed there. Around that time too, a German priest, Fr Francis Kaercher, was stationed at South Brisbane while ministering to the German communities of Queensland. It is likely that these priests would minister also to St Mary's and the people of South Brisbane.

There were priests appointed to the South Brisbane 'mission' as it was referred to in the late 1870s and 1880s, although I don't know whether they resided in the area or had to travel from the north side of the river. These included Fr John Ahern, Fr James Breen, and Fr Phillip Brady. Some of the information about the South Brisbane priests was given to me by Fr Chris Roberts at the time of the centenary preparation.

It was in 1892 that the first parish priest was appointed to South Brisbane. This was Fr Francis Dorrigan, and he was to oversee the building of the new church. The presbytery was built in that year also, on the land in Merivale Street behind the church. There have been only six other parish priests appointed to St Mary's after Fr Dorrigan: Fr Henry Fitzgerald, Fr Michael Masterson, Dean William Cashman, Fr Richard Thompson, Fr Vincent Kiley, and Fr Gerard Nichol. Most of the priests had quite lengthy periods at St Mary's. Fr Dorrigan was 27 years as parish priest and had also spent four years before that at St Mary's, during the 1880s. There is a beautiful Pieta statue in the church that is a memorial to him. Fr Thompson was there for 21 years and Fr Nichol for 15 years.

In 1980, Fr Peter Kennedy was appointed Administrator of St Mary's and also Prison Chaplain of south-east Queensland. He was Prison Chaplain for six years, and is still at St Mary's, as Administrator - twenty-five years later.

The people of St Mary's seem to have been active and involved in parish activities from its very beginnings and were probably no different from those in other churches of an earlier Brisbane. They supported their school, its teachers - and the convent when it was finally built there. They joined the societies and groups of the time: the Hibernian Society, the St Vincent de Paul Society, Holy Name Society, Sacred Heart Association. There was a Debating Society, a Catholic Young Men's Society; also tennis and cricket clubs and the famous dances at St Mary's. I have spoken to many people about the strong ties and relationships that were forged at St Mary's.

I mentioned that the peak time for St Mary's was probably the 1920s, and once the character of South Brisbane changed around that time,

then so did St Mary's. Residential housing disappeared as light and heavy industry moved into the areas along the river and the railway line. When the West End church and school were opened in the late 1920s, the geographical area of the parish and the number of families was greatly reduced.

The mix of people changed after World War Two, with an influx of migrants moving into the area, and St Mary's embraced that change; becoming for some time, the Mass centre for several communities: Polish, Dutch, Lithuanian and Slovenian. There was a display recently in the Queensland Museum about the Lithuanian community in Brisbane and it included a section on St Mary's and its part in their story.

But the decline continued; the school and the convent closed and were demolished. There remained almost no residential community around the church and St Mary's eventually was deemed to be a parish no longer.

Today, however, St Mary's continues as an active community with its members coming from many parts of Brisbane. The three weekend liturgies are well attended; the church is used regularly for musical events and the former presbytery is the base for many active social justice groups. What will be the future of St Mary's community – who can foretell its future and the future of St Mary's church?

Well, I hope its future is assured. St Mary's, like St Patrick's in the Valley and St Stephen's Cathedral, has touched the lives of thousands of people who, as the city grew, moved out from these churches and spread throughout the land. These inner city churches - which are unlike the usual parish with a strong local community - should now be claimed and honoured by the whole Brisbane community because of their history and cultural significance. Through them, there is a thread - a link - from the early settlers of Brisbane, over the years to the people of today. Let us claim and honour these churches for the future.

Maggie Boyle has been a member of the St Mary's Community of South Brisbane since 1984 and has combined an interest in history with a commitment to seeking out and recording the full story of St Mary's.

ENDNOTES:

- 1 Tim Reddel: *History of St Mary's Parish*, Banyo Seminary.
- 2 *St Mary's, South Brisbane 1893-1993* (Centenary Booklet).
- 3 *Queensland Daily Guardian*, 17 August 1865.
- 4 *The Brisbane Courier*, 31 July 1865.
- 5 *The Brisbane Courier*, 17 March 1865.
- 6 *Queensland Government Gazette*, December 1894, p.1331.
- 7 *The Brisbane Courier*, 23 November 1864.
- 8 *The Brisbane Courier*, 9 August 1865.
- 9 Denis W. Martin: *The Foundation of the Catholic Church in Queensland* (Toowoomba: Church Archivists' Press, 1988), 99.
- 10 Sr Mary Xaverius O'Donoghue: *Beyond Our Dreams: A Century of the World of Mercy in Queensland*, (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1961), 36.
- 11 *The Telegraph*, 1 July 1893.
- 12 *The Catholic Advocate*, 4 February 1915.