

**ARCHDEACON LEO HAYES**  
**Priest, Anthropologist And Book Collector**

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*This paper and the following one by Mark Cryle were written to honour the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the acquisition of the Hayes Collection by the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland.*

‘In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit’.

With these words J. R. R. Tolkien began his book, *The Hobbit*: a tale of the adventures of his hero, Bilbo Baggins. The more I thought about Archdeacon Edward Leo Hayes, the more associations I found I was making with the character of fiction. So, in order to set the scene, I have taken the liberty to refer to some of these.

There is the physical description of the man. Photographs reveal what one biographer, Shirley Bell, has described as a ‘gnome in a clerical collar’. His white hair gave him a somewhat scholarly appearance, which was reinforced by his rather intense brows. Often his frock coat was fastened by only one button as a concession to social propriety, while his shoelaces were always undone.

Then there is the figure of Bilbo's encounter with Gollum and the quest for 'the precious'. Archdeacon Hayes never lost his childhood curiosity for collecting things. He picked up his first stone axe at age five, and his first book at age seven. These small beginnings expanded over the years in a way not unlike the 'hoard' that Bilbo Baggins was to take from Smaug the dragon.

Hayes was a bit of a bowerbird, and as a result, his collection was quite eclectic. I can remember as an undergraduate consulting works on the activity of French naval explorers along the Australian coastline. Others would examine his back issues of *Women's Weekly* or any of a myriad of other subjects.

Ultimately his collection included 25 000 books (of which 19 000 were on Australiana) and 30 000 manuscripts; plus an assortment of legal documents, press cuttings, book plates, stamps, notes and coins, postcards and photographs, maps, ferns, guns and pistols, cattle bells and Aboriginal artefacts. It is the sheer variety of the items that is both revealing and a cause for further investigation. Did he really know what he had, or was the thrill to be found in their acquisition?

Edward Leo Hayes was born on 23 November 1889, at Frederickton on the Macleay River in northern New South Wales. He was the second of the eight children of Edward Martin Hayes and Brigid Mary Flannery. His father was headmaster at the local State School and, as a young lad, many hours were spent fossicking and collecting objects such as birds' eggs on river banks or retrieving items of indigenous manufacture which had been left in the scrub.

At age twelve, he left school and commenced office work with Bacon and Co., a firm of auctioneers and valuers in Gunnedah; before moving, in 1908, to Toowoomba and a position with the Darling Downs Co-operative Association.

In Toowoomba, he fell under the influence of the formidable Monsignor Denis Fouhy, and received the Sacrament of Confirmation there. At the time it was suggested that he might have a vocation to the priesthood; but his father would not hear of it, and so Leo had to wait until his twenty-first birthday before taking this step.

At the seminary, he won the prize for Rhetoric three times, as well as the Cardinal Ceretti medal for Dogmatic Theology. He also looked after the books of the seminary's library. Legend has it that he told the then Rector of the seminary that one day he would have more books than were held there.

Whatever of this, he was ordained priest on 30 November 1918, for the Brisbane archdiocese, in St Mary's Cathedral Sydney by the then Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Cattaneo. When Toowoomba became a separate diocese in 1929, he elected to join the new diocese. His priestly ministry was spent in the following places: Ipswich (1918-1922), Kilcoy-Woodford (1922-1924), Taroom (1924-1927), Chinchilla (1928-1930), Crows Nest (1931-1950), Oakey (1951-1967).

Several features serve to illustrate the character of the man. The first was his love of children. In his ongoing curiosity, he was a little like a child himself in some ways. His pockets were always full of lollies and the children followed him

about like a modern Pied Piper. He knew every child in the local school by name and often had prizes for them. Whenever any of them recorded some achievement, such as success in their public exams, he would write to them, congratulating them and wishing them well.

He was an enthusiastic supporter of the movies. This was the time before television became a part of everyday life. Often he used to take children with him, seeing the same movie several times a week. Legend has it that he was once heard to say to the ticket attendant: 'I didn't like it last night; maybe tonight I'll like it better'.

His mailbag reveals his many friends; some of them notable in their own right: such as Dame Mary Gilmore, Dorothy Cotterill, and John French, V.C. Throughout his life he received many letters and cards. It is doubtful if any of these were ever destroyed, except by accident. He kept them all – letters from children, letters from friends who wrote constantly to him through the years; all testimonials of his ability to maintain sincere friendships. A sample of these is to be gained in those he received at Christmas 1966, the year before his death. On that occasion he received some 600 cards and letters.

During his time at Woodford-Kilcoy and Taroom during the 1920s he amassed a large collection of stone axes, sharpening stones, woomeras, boomerangs shields, etc. Many of these came from the Bunya Mountains. He was also interested in Aboriginal languages, and collaborated with Mr E. M. Watson in the production of a handbook of these languages for the Royal Geographical Society. Interests in indigenous

culture such as these, led to Father Hayes becoming a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society himself; and to his participation, as an ethnologist and entomologist, in its three expeditions to the Carnarvon Ranges, in 1937, 1938 and 1940.

The leaders of the expedition were the then Secretary of the Society, Mr Dan O'Brien, and Mr Theodore Culman, an engineer who had discovered the site when prospecting for oil and mineral deposits. Fr Hayes enjoyed himself immensely on these expeditions, which made a number of discoveries, including a rich coal seam, a kerosene deposit, caves containing examples of rock art, and a dazzling variety of native fauna and flora. For his contributions to the expedition's work, the Royal Geographical Society presented him with its Thompson Medal.

During World War II, General Douglas MacArthur consulted Hayes' collection of maps of the South Pacific. He offered payment for the privilege; but, when Hayes declined, the general presented him with a bottle of whiskey and a fountain pen. The present whereabouts of the whiskey are unknown; but the pen was used to write the stories Hayes had learned from the local Aborigines.

At one time, he numbered a live snake among his collection. This used to sleep on the telephone, until one night the local doctor, desiring to make a call, lifted the snake instead of the receiver – with the results that might be expected from such an event.

On 26 April 1967, the University of Queensland recognised his work with an honorary Master of Arts degree. On 26 October of the same year his collection was handed over to the University, and a series of removal vans began the trip down the Toowoomba range.

Archdeacon Hayes died in St Vincent's Hospital, Toowoomba, on 17 November 1967, five days before his 78<sup>th</sup> birthday. The celebrant of his Funeral Mass was Fr R. J. Flynn and Bishop Brennan of Toowoomba preached the panegyric. Staff from the University also were in attendance. The 'man of God' had gone to meet his Maker.

The image I want to leave you with, however, is the image with which I started out; that of the 'hobbit' seated in the midst of his 'hoard' after a lifetime of collecting.

Scholarship in general, and Queensland scholarship in particular, is indebted to Archdeacon Edward Leo Hayes in many ways. I leave it to others to take up the story of the Hayes Collection after it came to The University of Queensland

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