

**BUILDING THE FIRST
ST JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH AT ENOGERA**

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Foreword

I was born and raised in St John the Baptist parish and, except for 6 years teaching elsewhere, have lived there all my life. My mother who was brought to the district by her parents in 1919, when she was only 3 months old, also lived within the boundaries of the same parish all her life. While researching this presentation I found the names of my great-grandparents in the lists of attendees at planning meetings for the building of the church and their donations are listed in a report of the opening ceremony in *The Age* dated August 15 1908. St John the Baptist church and its parish are in my blood.

My talk this evening relates to the events leading to the building of the church. I offer it in tribute to all the pioneers of the past 100 years who contributed to the building of the parish and to the pioneers of today who, like their forebears, step forward into the unknown future with faith in God and hope that he will be with them in every enterprise.

As a child several things intrigued me about my parish and school:

- the church was built on one site in the suburb of Alderley, whilst the presbytery, school and convent were about half-a-mile up South Pine Road in the suburb of Enoggera
- The church/parish and school had different names, unique, in my then limited experience of surrounding parishes and schools.
- The church was opened in 1908 and the school in 1919 while many other churches and schools were opened at the same time, often sharing the same building.

Many years later I was in the ‘old’ church one Saturday afternoon preparing for a function when a visitor came to the door and asked if she could look inside. She commented that the land on which the church was built was not the usual position for Catholic churches in Brisbane, being low-lying land on the edge of the Kedron Brook/Sandy Creek floodplain.

The simple answer to this was that the land had been donated and the church was built before James Duhig, who was renowned for buying hilltops in Brisbane for churches and schools, became archbishop. The final question for me in this yet-to-be-solved puzzle came from a ‘History of St John the Baptist Parish’ written as an assignment by a seminarian. The author did not reflect much on the events that led to a church being built but, again, I was intrigued by a line that said, ‘The land was donated by Mr Clugston who was not then a Catholic.’

What was his reason? I surmised that there was probably a Catholic wife in the background who was behind this donation. During my childhood my own non-Catholic father had been volunteered by my mother for working bees at the church and school. It turns out that I was not far from the truth.

I wondered, but never asked questions. Finally, the impending centenary of the opening of the 'old' church became the catalyst for seeking answers. This talk is a result of that search.

The Church in Brisbane – Early Years

The penal colony of Moreton Bay was opened for free settlement in 1842. In that same year (one source says in the next year) Fr James Hanley was appointed as the first parish priest of Brisbane. Work commenced on the first Catholic church in Brisbane - St Stephen's in Elizabeth Street - in 1848 and the opening took place in 1850. With the separation of the colony of Queensland from New South Wales in 1859, James Quinn was named the first Bishop of Brisbane. He subsequently arrived here in 1861. This little church then became the cathedral. The foundation stone for the new cathedral was laid in 1863 and it was opened in 1874.

In 1861 a Catholic church, St Patrick's, was built in Fortitude Valley, in Wickham Street, opposite Duncan Street. Later in the sixties many Irish Catholic settlers were brought to Brisbane through Bishop Quinn's Queensland Immigration Society. They settled mainly in the Spring Hill/Fortitude Valley/Newstead area and, to accommodate the growing congregation, the foundation stone of a new St Patrick's

Church was laid in Morgan Street in 1880. It was opened in 1882. Before Bishop Quinn died in 1881 the parish of Sandgate had been established and a church, Sacred Heart, opened. A new church which was opened in 1892 also replaced this. Sandgate parish was vast, extending from Albion in the south to Redcliffe and Humpybong in the north, and west to include Burpengary and Strathpine.

Between 1881 and 1907 several churches were built and parishes established in suburbs close to the city. These included St Brigid's, Red Hill – 1882 (not the present building), Holy Cross, Woolloowin – 1888, St Mary's, South Brisbane – 1893 and Sacred Heart, Rosalie – 1907. Meanwhile the suburbs of Enoggera and Alderley were growing and the seeds were being sown for the building of a church and the establishment of the Enoggera parish.

The Growth of Alderley/Enoggera

As mentioned previously, the Moreton Bay settlement was opened to free settlers in 1842. Three years later, in 1845 John Brennan purchased 6 hectares of land in Enoggera and paved the way for more settlers to come and establish farms in the area. In 1851 Thomas Hayes purchased 13 hectares of land. This block extended from the western end of what is now Raymont Road (opposite the church) to Kedron Brook.

Other early settlers included Timothy Corbett, described as a prominent Irish Catholic patriot and businessman, who purchased a total of 26 hectares of Crown land along Kedron Brook. (This area was later subdivided and sold as the Derby estate). Corbett's land along with blocks on either side owned

by T Gollaher and Patrick Mooney, 'The Derby', bordered by two arms of South Pine Road and Kedron Brook, occupies the area between the church and school in Enoggera Parish. Corbett probably farmed the area and in the 1860s built a house, *Killarney*. It is heritage registered, having been built of hand-made bricks and being a rare surviving example of early 19th century brick construction. In my lifetime it was owned by another Catholic family, the Farry's.

The early settlers were engaged mainly in mixed farming including orchards and vineyards, drawing on the plentiful supply of water from Kedron Brook. The vineyards were mainly established in the area west of where the school now stands, off Hurdcotte Street and Pickering Street and further out in Gaythorne and Mitchelton. The discovery of gold at Gympie in the 1860s resulted in further development of the Enoggera district. The main route from Brisbane to Gympie was along the Great Northern Road (now Enoggera Road) and South Pine Road. Travellers to and from the goldfields passed through the area.

In 1888 the Enoggera Divisional Board was separated from the Ithaca divisional Board and became the local government authority for the area. By 1900 the railway line had been extended to Enoggera; there was a General Store (Raymont's) at the intersection of Enoggera Road, South Pine Road and Samford Road, the *Alderley Arms* hotel opposite, a blacksmith/wheelwright shop, a saleyard near Newmarket railway station and a sawmill in Pickering Street. Cattle and sheep were driven through Enoggera to the saleyards and the hotel was a popular place with the drovers. Alongside this development we have the contrast

of cultures with aborigines still camped along Kedron Brook and at Alderley close to where James Trackson had built his home, *Sedgley Grange*, in the 1890s. Raymont's Store was the agent for the Government, supplying rations and blankets to the aborigines.

St John the Baptist Church Enoggera

Thus we arrive at 1901 and the beginning of the story of St John the Baptist Church. Whilst the followers of other Christian faiths could attend Sunday services in the district, with a Baptist church (1872), a Church of England (c1899) and a Methodist church (1901) already built, Catholic settlers in the Enoggera district were still travelling to St Stephen's Cathedral in the city or to St Patrick's in the Valley for Sunday Mass, and later (1893 on) to St Brigid's Red Hill. Many of them would have walked. In 1901 the parents of the Catholic children of the Enoggera district began to discuss the need for religious teaching to be held in the district as the Sunday School at Red Hill was too far distant for young children to attend. It was decided that Mrs Alex Clugston (nee Ellen Mott) should approach the Mother Superior at All Hallows Convent.

As a result the first Sunday school class was held on 7 February 1901 in a cottage that belonged to the O'Connor family. Two sisters travelled from All Hallows each Sunday afternoon and 28 children attended on the first day along with about a dozen parents (mothers) and 'sympathisers'. Parents of the children contributed to the cost of the rent of the house and the traveling expenses of the sisters. The Sunday school classes continued to be held until 1919 when Our Lady of the Assumption school opened. I remember

that cottage in South Pine Road Alderley where the Bi-Lo shopping complex now stands. It must have been crowded even on that first day.

Mrs Clugston also called on Archbishop Dunne to tell him what had taken place. He expressed his approval and added that he had a piece of land in the area on which he would be happy for a building to be erected if it was suitable. The land was inspected by the men of the community who decided it was too small to accommodate a church and school. The Archbishop agreed, and then offered the land to be sold with the proceeds going towards a building fund when a suitable site was acquired. After another site was inspected and found unsuitable Mrs Clugston donated an acre of land. (A map of the district shows a block of land in the name of E Mott). It was considered to be too small for future development so Archbishop Dunne purchased two adjoining acres. The timeline for the above is uncertain as two sources seem to conflict. It appears that the new land was acquired soon after the commencement of the Sunday school, but the land offered by the Archbishop was not disposed of until later.

In the meantime Sunday school classes continued to be held in the cottage. However, by 1906 when there were more than 50 children regularly attending, it was obvious that other arrangements had to be made. Discussions centered around setting up a building fund to erect a building on the land. A meeting of the ladies of the district, chaired by Fr Hegarty, was held in July 1906 to discuss ways and means. Following this meeting subscriptions were canvassed and Mrs Trackson hosted a euchre party and dance at her home. A total of 50 pounds was raised. In November 1906 a meeting was held at the home of Mr James Trackson with the purpose of forming

a Building Committee. Fr Hegarty became Chairman, Mr Trackson himself was appointed Honorary Secretary and the committee members were Messrs A Clugston, J Hurley, J Twomey, P Gaffney, T Gorman and J Molloy. Mr Trackson offered a block of land to be disposed of 'on the art union principle'. Progress was held up owing to Mr Trackson's business interests taking him out of Brisbane often. In March 1907 Mr Trackson relinquished the position of secretary of the committee and Mr H. Crawley was asked by Mrs Clugston and Mrs Hurley to arrange an entertainment to raise funds. At a subsequent 'meeting of gentlemen' Mr Crawley was elected secretary and further fundraising was planned. (It was at this meeting that my great grandfather was listed as an attendee.) During 1907 two concerts raised 36 pounds, the art union raised 39 pounds and 6 shillings and a sale of work raised 102 pounds. The piece of land donated by the Archbishop was disposed of at auction by Isles, Love and Co, realizing more than the reserve price of 40 pounds.

With more than 200 pounds in hand the committee decided that it was time to lay the foundation stone of the building. This ceremony was duly performed by Archbishop Dunne on March 15 1908. The prayers recited were the same as those used by King Solomon at the dedication of the Temple of Jerusalem 3000 years previously. On the day a further 68 pounds was collected. An announcement of, and invitation to the intended ceremony, included an appeal for donations with the direction to forward same to Mr H Crawley, Chief Engineers Office, Railway Department. (Obviously the Catholic Church in Brisbane already had connections with the railways.) A train departed Central Station at 3pm for Alderley to take people from other areas to the ceremony.

Immediately after the foundation stone was laid tenders were called and the dream was finally about to become a reality. The committee further decided that they would buy the materials themselves and have the building erected by labour only. Apparently this saved a considerable amount of money. The architect was Mr C Voller. Contracts were let to C Crowther (brickworks and cement), T Marshall (carpentry), J Campbell and Sons (joinery), Lewis and Wiles (painting) and Campbell Bros (plumbing). I have been told that the bricks for the building were handmade on the site. None of the documents that I have seen confirm this; however, two nearby brick cottages belonging to William Clugston had been built with bricks handmade from clay dug on site, as was the aforementioned house, *Killarney*. Two brickworks in the Enoggera district, including one in Pickering Street, near the church, did not commence operations until 1912 and 1913. There was a plentiful supply of clay in the area, so it is possible.

Finally the building was completed and the Blessing and Opening ceremony took place on the morning of Sunday August 9, having been delayed by one week due to inclement weather. The ceremony commenced at 10.30 with Archbishop Dunne blessing the building inside and out. He then addressed the congregation from the steps of the high altar congratulating them on the building that he said, represented an act of faith and religion that was an example for the people of other localities to follow. He complimented the parents on the regularity with which they had sent their children to Sunday school and hoped they would send them as regularly to church. In his brief homily during Mass celebrated by Father Baldwin after the opening ceremony,

the Archbishop announced that he would endeavour later on to arrange for a weekly service at the church. He pointed out that there was, at that time, a scarcity of priests due to a number of deaths among the clergy of the archdiocese during the previous 12 months. The archbishop was also hopeful of being able to provide a day school for the children in the early future. It would be several years before these dreams were realized.

By the opening day 390 pounds had been raised which left a sum of 160 pounds to clear the debt. The Archbishop and Mr Crawley went among the congregation for subscriptions and a sum of 63 pounds 16 shillings and sixpence was collected. As was the practice of the time a 'subscription list' of names and amount given was published in a report of the opening in *The Age*. (I am proud to say that the Rudkins family (My great-grandparents and great-aunt) gave a total of 1 pound 16 shillings.) An interesting name on the list was Mrs K M Smith after whom the funeral directors are named.

Some of the pioneering Catholic families of Enoggera are the Clugston, Reed, O'Connor, Trackson, Twomey, Crowe, Mooney, Pluck, Crawley, Quigley, Fitzgerald, Gaffney, Gibney, Fitzgibbon, Samuel, Johnson, Brazil, Collins, Page, Rudkin, and Hurley families.

Description of the Church.

The following description was included in the report of the opening ceremony in *The Age*.

The building, which is one of the very few brick churches on the outskirts of the city, occupies a splendid and prominent position on the South Pine Road close to Alderley railway station. The building is designed in the Gothic style, and is very substantially constructed of brick and cement with cement dressings and dark brick base, both exterior and interior effects being extremely good. The walls are rendered hard internally, with a cement coating, coloured a cool and pleasing light green. The front and side entrance steps and porch are of concrete finished in cement. The church is well lighted by Gothic headed windows on side and front, all made to open. Over the porch is a stained glass rose window and over the altar a stained glass triple window of fine effect. The ceilings are of wood, and neatly finished into panels, with ventilators in white and gold. The dimensions are 50 feet by 30 feet, with a sanctuary 13 feet by 10 feet and a room each side (of the altar) 10 feet by 8 feet 6 inches. The seating accommodation provides for about two hundred, and the building is designed to be adapted for future enlargement when required. A neat and substantial sawn fence and gates have been erected on the front of the spacious site, giving the whole an appearance of completeness.

There is no mention here of a choir loft that existed in my memory of the church. I recall this loft being packed with members of the congregation at Easter and Christmas services. There is a story that Archbishop Duhig was, on one occasion, so concerned that the choir loft would collapse that he advised the parish priest he would not come to celebrate Mass there again.

This little church served the community of Enoggera for 53 years until 1961 when the 'new' church was blessed and opened. The only alteration made during this time was the removal of the two side rooms to make more room for pews, the addition of a wooden porch to the side entrance and a wooden extension to the back of the church to replace the sacristies.

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