

**FRANK HILLS**  
**07.05.1931 – 09.03.008**

*20 April 2008*

*Dr Tom Boland*

Frank Hills was a foundation member of the Brisbane Catholic Historical Society. In the first rather confused meetings his clear, trained mind helped us to establish our goals and methods. He may have been disappointed that we did not at first decide on a constitution. He would later have found satisfaction in the insistence of bank officials that we adopt one.

As in all his other enterprises, he entered into the Society with great enthusiasm. He found the topics of the papers fascinating, and he loved to discuss them. He showed a passion for accuracy. He pursued me tenaciously about the spelling of the name of St Laurence's College. The name came from Bishop Quinn's Dublin school, St Lawrence O'Toole's. I used that spelling for the foundation of our college, and he never ceased to challenge it.

Frank was a public servant with a driving concern for professionalism and the public good. He brought these forces to the business of the Society. Quality, standards and exactitude were his contribution to our dealings.

His enthusiasm and his savouring of person and occasion brought him boundless joy in being a Catholic. He was of the glory days of the Christian Brothers Old Boys Association.

J.P. Kelly was one of his friends. The innocent days of the first Catholic Action groups he embraced with gusto and unquenchable optimism. Martin Haley's Catholic Writers and Readers he found inspiring.

He may not have been fully convinced of the benefits of the Second Vatican Council. Certainly, he was a trenchant critic of the wilder reactions to it. This did not disturb his deep Catholic commitment. Frank's Church was very much the Irish-Australian Church. He loved all things Irish and presumed they were Catholic. His Church was that of James Duhig and Daniel Mannix, and it was of the Duhig Church he most wanted to hear in the Society. He had the witty Irish appreciation of the foibles of the revered ecclesiastics, and his stories were human and humorous: but they never touched the reality beneath the surface.

The place you were likely to find Frank was the Irish Club. There his interests came together as he met with his friends: friends of his professional life, the Public Service and the Law. There he could relax with those of like mind who shared his love of the same literature.

Frank's love of Church, literature and history were manifest in the delight with which he read from and recited Hilaire Belloc. There were other Catholic writers who could elicit a smile and a nod of approval; but Belloc suited his temper. He and the late Doctor Oxenham quoted verses to each other with mutual delight. It may be – it is – a fact that Belloc's Catholicism was of an earlier age, pre-Vatican II, combative and not too ecumenical. Frank knew that.

When he declaimed:

*Heretics all, wheree'r you be  
At Tarbes or Nimes or o'er the sea,  
You never will hear a good word from me.  
Caritas non conturbat me.  
(Charity does not disturb me.)*

he knew it was not appropriate in these days. After all, the French references in Belloc were to long forgotten mediaeval heretics. Yet it was fun, and Frank was always fun.

Not only did he like Belloc, he loved books. He collected first editions of his favourite authors. He relished their compact beauty, the fresh, clean pages, the exciting scent of the unopened volume. It was a delight to handle his treasures, to admire their disciplined spines ranked on his shelves. His library was a shrine, and the gods worshipped there were books. Frank was a bibliophile.

There was another love he found both in books and on the field. He was a devout cricketer. He revelled in stories of the Bradman era and admired the skills of the contemporary greats. If envy found any place in Frank's generous soul, it was of the cricketing collection of his friend, Pat Mullins. He was outraged that the Gabba did not take up Pat's offer of his goldmine of cricketing lore. He looked on the Melbourne Cricket Ground as a sanctuary when it welcomed them.

To speak of his several loves is only to touch on the reality of love in his home. It was hard to imagine him without the wife who was the star his life followed. He could not have survived

without his large, loving, talented family. He communicated to them all his enthusiasm, but he appreciated them all for their individual, personal characters and charm. The Hills family were his greatest achievement, his inestimable gift to Church and State.

Frank Hills was a founder of the Brisbane Catholic Historical Society. We were blessed to have him.

*Tom Boland is a Brisbane priest. His doctoral thesis in Rome was on Bishop Quinn's migration ships.*

*He taught Church History at Banyo Seminary for twenty-five years.*