

Guerrini’s Stations of the Cross, Port Douglas (1883-1911): First in the North?

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Many Roman Catholics think Catholic churches must include Stations of the Cross.¹ This is not so; they are absent from Cistercian monastic churches and from many old basilicas and churches in Europe. A decorative set of mass-produced Stations ordered from a catalogue is often placed in a new church without ceremony, and they often are rarely used for any form of the devotional Way of the Cross they evolved to facilitate, except perhaps on Good Friday. When I was researching the history of the building and destruction of Port Douglas’ first St Mary’s Church (1881-1911)² the mention of Guerrini acquiring a set of the Stations of the Cross in 1883-1884 was viewed as interesting but of no great significance. However, on reflection it indicated that contrary to the current general expectation the Stations were not in the church from its opening (March 1881). It was only later that the history of the evolution of the devotional Way of the Cross and the use of pictorial Stations came to my attention, and it cast new light on the event and timing of events in Port Douglas.

Stations of the Cross in history

The origin of the Stations of the Cross is complex since it fuses earlier devotional practices. Contrary to what is often claimed, they were not started by St Francis of Assisi, but the development of the 14 ‘traditional’ Stations seems to have been Franciscan, and their entry into churches is the result of Franciscan piety. The Franciscans, who had custody of shrines in the Holy Land, also began erecting in Europe outdoor shrines (of no set number) corresponding to stations on Jerusalem’s *Via Dolorosa*. It is reported that the 14 Station set was introduced to Italy from Spain by the Franciscan priest Salvatore Vitali (or da Cagliari) who on 14 September 1628 erected 14 wooden crosses of Florence’s Via Crucis on the steps ascending to the church of San Salvatore al Monte (near San Miniato al Monte).³ Their presence gave rise the name of Monte alle Croci. In 1686 Innocent XI (1676-1689) granted the Franciscans’ petition to install Stations of the Cross in their churches,⁴ these therefore becoming authorized pilgrimage sites for Franciscans (including third order) who alone were granted indulgences for visiting them.

Forty years later, in 1726, Benedict XIII (1724-1730) extended these indulgences to all the faithful, and only five years later, in 1731, the Florentine native Clement XII (1730-1740) extended the permission to install Stations of the Cross in any church, on condition it be done by a Franciscan with the permission of the diocesan bishop; he also fixed the number at the 14 in what later came to be thought of as the “traditional” series.⁵ Benedict XIV (1740-1758) early in his pontificate

encouraged pastors to have Stations erected in every parish church (note, not every church in a parish). Thus in the first half of the Eighteenth Century, before British settlement of Australia began, this devotion spread rapidly, moving from a few particular sites to most parish and Franciscan churches, in the process changing from an exclusively Franciscan practice to a general one. One Franciscan priest was pivotal to this evolution.

Paolo Girolamo (Paul Jerome) Casanova was born at Port Maurizio (Port Maurice, now Imperia) on the Italian Riviera,⁶ in the first year of Innocent XI's pontificate and was baptized on 20 December 1676 in the church of San Maurizio. He went to Rome to study, but joined the *Riformella* branch of the Franciscans in 1697, taking the name Leonardo. He was ordained a priest on 17 August 1702, but in 1704 illness led to his return to Porto Maurizio to stay in a monastery of Franciscan Observants (now Friars Minor; OFM). On regaining full health after four years (1708) he began preaching missions there. In 1709 the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo III de Medici (ruled 1670-1723), gave the *Riformella* friars the Florentine monastery by San Salvatore al Monte (near San Miniato)⁷ on Monte alle Croci with its famous hillside Via Crucis. From there, Leonardo preached missions throughout Tuscany, energetically promoting the Way of the Cross, turning it into a communal devotion like that published in his *Via Sacra spianata ed illuminata*.⁸ He also ardently urged defining the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

In 1730, the year of Clement XII's election, Leonardo was invited to Rome and environs where he gave missions with much success. Thereafter he was much in demand in Rome, and in the following year the permission for Stations of the Cross to be installed in all churches was extended and their number was fixed in the form that Leonardo was promoting.

Leonardo continued to conduct missions throughout the Papal States, the Republic of Genoa (including Corsica), and the Kingdom of Naples, as well as in Tuscany as before. It was during this work that the papal encouragement for pastors to have the Stations installed in each parish church occurred. Leonardo died in Rome on 26 November 1751, having conducted missions for 43 years throughout Italy, and is reputed to have installed 572 sets of the Stations; the last was in the Colosseum in December 1750.⁹ He was beatified in 1796, and was canonized on 29 June 1867 by the Pius IX (1846-1878) who had defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854. It seems this devotion had continued to spread, and in 1857 Pius IX granted permission to the English bishops to install Stations when no Franciscan was available. In 1862 this was extended to all diocesan bishops, thus ending Franciscan 'monopoly' in erecting them.

We should also note that the necessary feature of the indulgenced Stations of the Cross is a cross; depiction of the station's event is entirely optional. However, since a visually stimulating presentation is useful, pictorial forms of the Stations became normative. In fact, it would have to be said that they became the only piece of programmatic art in Latin rite Catholic Churches, but it is important to remember that at first there were no true mass-production processes, so each pictorial set was unique, each embodying an artist's work, be they painted or carved. The latter could be reproduced by cast moulds, thus beginning mass production.

In Australia

The timing of the above mentioned dates is of significance in our history since the final step in broadening the permission to install the Stations post-dates the beginning of British settlement in Australia,

and is in effect contemporary with the establishment of the Diocese of Brisbane. Franciscan history in Australian does date from 1788, but it is rather accidental: the French *La Pérouse* expedition had two priests on board serving as chaplains, the younger being a Franciscan, Claude-François Joseph Louis (Laurent) Receveur who was also one of the seventeen scientists on board. He died at Botany Bay in 1788, becoming the first Catholic priest and the first scientist to die and be buried in this land; his was the first Catholic funeral Mass. A Franciscan priest surnamed Platt was later reported to be in Parramatta in 1840,¹⁰ but it was 1879 before the Irish Franciscans were established in Sydney, coincidentally the same year that the Capuchin Elzear Torreggiani arrived as bishop of Armidale.¹¹ But the Catholic Church in Melbourne had a Franciscan foundation in Fr Patrick Bonaventure Geoghegan who arrived there in 1839 and was responsible for building Victoria's first Catholic Church which he named in honour of his own patron, St Francis of Assisi. He also baptized Mary Mackillop there in 1850. He became the second Bishop of Adelaide (1859-1864) and was succeeded by another Franciscan, Laurence Sheil (1866-1872) who had also served in Melbourne from 1853 and Ballarat from 1859.

It is within the realm of possibility that Geoghegan and Sheil erected Stations in the various churches they cared for, and in particular in St Francis's Church, Melbourne. However, Trove's earliest Australian result on searching for 'Stations of the Cross' is of Fr Julian Tenison Woods preaching on the Stations in the Adelaide Cathedral on Good Friday morning in 1867.¹² Trove's second result is also connected to Geoghegan; while he was still a priest in Melbourne he returned to Ireland to recruit clergy, returning in 1851 with his cousin Horatio

Geoghegan, a deacon whom one source only claims was a Franciscan.¹³ Horatio completed his studies at St Francis' Seminary and was ordained a priest in 1852. Obituaries state that he ministered at St Francis' Church, Melbourne, then in Geelong, and in 1856 he went to Kyneton where he remained until his death in July 1895. He began the building of Kyneton's St Mary's Church in 1857, which was blessed in 1861 though incomplete, and he was reported as erecting the Stations in it in February 1868.¹⁴ Of note is that *he* conducted the service, not a bishop, and this may be evidence of his being a Franciscan.

In Queensland

Franciscans were not established in Brisbane until 1929 at Kedron, so unless one visited for the purpose of installing them, the Stations in Queensland should date only from 1862, soon after the arrival of its first bishop, James Quinn. The earliest clear reference to the *Stations of the Cross* in Queensland that I have been able to find via Trove's digitized newspapers is at St Mary's Church, Ipswich. The laying of the foundation stone was reported in 1858, and Mass was celebrated there for the first time on 04 November 1860 by Fr William McGinty, with the formal opening to wait until Bishop Quinn's arrival.¹⁵ Nearly ten years later, in April 1870 we find this report:

At St Mary's Church, Ipswich, ... yesterday, Good Friday, the offices of reading the passion and mass of the pre-sanctified took place at 9 a.m. The stations of the cross were commenced at 2 p.m., and terminated at 3, in commemoration of the hour at which the Saviour expired. In the evening a sermon on the passion of our Lord was preached by Dean Brun.¹⁶

This suggests that the Stations had been installed, but we lack a reference to this in the ten year period from the opening. An indication of the widespread uptake of the devotion is also found in St James' Chapel, Purga Creek, about 14 kilometres from Ipswich and within that parish, where they were installed in August 1871:

The first anniversary of the opening of St. James's Chapel at Purga Creek was celebrated on Sunday last. ... In the afternoon the stations of the cross were erected; these stations consist of fourteen pictures, representing the principal stages of the passion of our Lord. There was a large attendance of persons from the neighbourhood, and several visitors from Ipswich.¹⁷

There are various references to them further west too, but one of the clearest is from Roma in November 1884 when Bishop Quinn visited. Its church, All Saints, having been erected in 1873 (replaced by the larger Sacred Heart Church in 1893, and then another All Saints in 1962):

STATIONS OF THE CROSS. Last night there was a good congregation in the church, when the Bishop performed the ceremony of placing within the church the paintings illustrative of the Stations of the Cross, which had not previously been hung within the building. The ceremony, which was of an impressive nature, was followed by an excellent sermon.¹⁸

That actually post-dates the Stations being placed in Port Douglas, to which we are yet to turn. Brisbane seems to have lagged behind these areas. When St Stephen's Church (now the Pugin Chapel) opened on 12 May 1850 there was no one authorized to erect them. Installation of the Stations may have been intended for the new St Stephen's Cathedral when Quinn laid its foundation stone on 26 December 1863, but there was

no mention of them in the reports of its consecration on 17 May 1874. The first mention, and that of a decisive kind, appears only on 22 November 1886:

The Rev. D Fouhy, Roman Catholic administrator, announced the following list of recent benefactions to St. Stephen's Cathedral to the congregation at the 11 o'clock mass in that church yesterday:- ... Mesdames Quinlan and Grey, "Stations of the Cross," in terracotta, value £180; ...¹⁹

The new St Patrick's Church in Fortitude Valley was opened on 31 December 1882, but it did not have Stations installed until sometime between 1884 and 1889 if the following report of its priests' relocation is accurate:

... Father Corrigan has become very popular in Fortitude Valley, and various things are pointed to in proof of the energy with which he has conducted church affairs in his parish. Since his appointment, on the completion of the new church, stained-glass windows have been added to the building, the belfry and pulpit have been erected, and new stations of the cross provided...²⁰

This pattern may have been repeated in other major towns in Queensland too, but as yet we lack reference to them. This general pattern indicates that it was usually sometime after the opening a church before Stations of the Cross would be installed, the building being understandably the primary concern with optional extras having to wait. Their installation in St Mary's Church, Port Douglas, fits this pattern, but is of interest for who did it.

Joachim Guerrini (OSF/OFM)

Joachim Guerrini was born about 1835 in Montefegatesi in the province of Lucca, Tuscany,²¹ and thus came from the heartland of the *Via crucis* devotion and the work of Leonard of Port Maurice. Guerrini joined the Franciscans in the Roman Province of St Michael, and in 1859 he was sent as a deacon to the USA to serve in the Custody of the Immaculate Conception in North America, headquartered in Allegany, State of New York. The St Bonaventure College and Seminary (now St Bonaventure University) had recently been established there, and Guerrini was to be a faculty member, and was the first to be ordained a priest there, on Sunday, 21 October 1860. He was the College's first librarian, a position held until 1866. He went on to serve in various places in the province, and was naturalised on 16 October 1867 in New York City,²² serving around that time at St Anthony of Padua, the first and now oldest Italian parish in the USA. He went to Boston in 1873 as pastor to the establishing Italian parish, the second such in the USA. He arranged the erection of its church, described as a small wooden church at its opening on 23 February 1876; it was dedicated to St Leonard of Port Maurice who had been canonized in 1867, making it among the first churches to have him as patron.²³

The bishop was concerned that the Italians could not sufficiently fund the parish, so he authorised the Franciscan priests to minister to English-speakers too, especially directing that they were to hear confessions in English. Guerrini instituted weekly devotions to St Anthony of Padua,

and though no mention has been found yet, there would be no surprise if there was not also regular use of the Stations. The devotions and confessions were indeed successful, but with so many non-Italians attending the Italians began to feel it was no longer sufficiently their parish and stopped attending, and stopped donating. The end result was that creditors obtained a warrant for Guerrini's arrest for non-payment of bills. At least one source I found some years ago (now lost) suggested that his return to Italy, believed to be in 1879, was to escape the creditors.

To return to the matter of books. While he was librarian at St Bonaventure's he began to acquire rare books for it, and continued to do so throughout his life; he is now acknowledged there as the main contributor to its rare books collection, some estimates postulating that he is responsible for perhaps two-thirds of the collection of some 10,000 books. Each book he acquired is identified by a bookplate (or the earliest, by an inscription to the same effect) stating: *Ex libris ad usum Frater Joachim Guerrini O.S.F. concessis,*" [From the books granted for the use of Brother Joachim Guerrini O.F.M.]. In fact, not all his acquisitions are there, for internet searches reveal several now to be in other major USA collections.²⁴

Of Guerrini's time back in Italy we have no sure knowledge. It has been said that in the wake of Italian 'reunification' secularization had seen the suppression of the province to which he had belonged. Later letters reveal that he was personally known to one Quintilio Benini, the founder and editor of the periodical *Palestra del Clero* in Rome in 1878, who in turn was known to the Pro-Vicar of the Vicariate Apostolic of Cooktown, Monsignor Paul Fortini. Fortini was, inexplicably, appointed by *Propaganda Fidei* in February 1882 and he proved to be not only singularly inexperienced for such an appointment but rather bombastic with delusions

of grandeur. On arrival in June 1882 he so offended his three existing priests that they left within a few weeks. One of these was the famous Peter Bucas, founder of the Mackay's church and orphanage (later relocated to Rockhampton and named Neerkol), and the builder of Port Douglas' first St Mary's Church. With the priests gone, Fortini remained alone for a year, but advertising for priests via the *Palestra del Clero* attracted Guerrini to Australia.

Guerrini's Stations of the Cross in Port Douglas

Guerrini disembarked in Sydney in September 1883, and departed the next day for Cooktown. To our good fortune, he kept a diary which somehow came to be in the Diocesan archives.²⁵ He included transcriptions of letters he sent, giving much information that would otherwise be beyond our reach. He reports spending two days and one night in Port Douglas while *en route* to Cooktown, and then on receiving his appointment to Port Douglas he returned there on 29 November.

An acerbic side of his character is revealed in his diaries where he is scathing to the point of being libellous about other priests. It seems he appreciated little of the work of Peter Bucas, whom we have no reason to believe he ever met. Guerrini was shocked at how little cared for he believed the flock to be, and how poor was the practice of so many Catholics. This is nothing new to us as it became a feature of the church in this land. On the positive side, Guerrini was imbued with an Italianate sense of culture, manifested already in his book acquisitions and here it would be revealed in art. In a letter dated 08 December 1883 he wrote to his Roman friend Quintilio Benini of the *Palestra del Clero*, and he included money donated by parishioners 'Keating and Mary

O'Dea', requesting Benini to buy and send back fourteen oil paintings of the Stations of the Cross 'as large and as beautiful as you can find in the Eternal City', and four other paintings: the Resurrection, the Immaculate Conception, St Francis of Assisi, and St Anthony of Padua. He included the instruction 'Try to find large and beautiful ones.' Guerrini hoped that these could be received before Lent was too far progressed – for which we may presume that he intended to introduce the devotion as promptly as possible. The cost of this is not known; for while mention was made of £8 sterling, another detail unclear in the transcriptions may actually have read £200.

We do not know when the art works arrived; Fortini was dismissed in January 1884, to take effect when the new appointees, the Irish Augustinians, arrived. There are no dated entries in Guerrini's diary after 07 January 1884, but there much about his inopportune dismissal by the Augustinians when they arrived in May 1884. We do know that the Stations had arrived and been installed by 01 June 1884 owing to the following report in Brisbane's Catholic paper *The Australian*:

Great credit is due to the Rev. Father Guerrini for the piety and zeal with which he entered into the work of advancing the church here during the short time he has been with us. The improvement made by him in removing and enlarging the presbytery is surprising whilst the church has been nicely decorated. Stations of the cross have been erected, which I believe, have no equal in Queensland. There are two Masses on Sundays and Holidays of obligation, catechism in the afternoons, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in the evening. During the month of May, the Devotions of Mary were well attended, and the faithful had every opportunity afforded them of

attending to their religious duties as well as all the other beautiful practices of our holy religion.

We can only imagine how exceptional this church would have appeared during such pioneering times when the temporary wooden churches were largely bare, all decoration being that which formed the fabric of the building itself, its altar and sanctuary, and the manner of painting them. The presence of eighteen oil paintings in Port Douglas appears to be exceptional, though we will never know the sizes nor their artistic merit beyond the claim they had no equal in the Colony. This was in part due to the fact that they were still not normative in churches in this land. As indicated above, there are only two other examples known, those in the much more established area of Ipswich. Even Brisbane's two churches, St Stephen's Cathedral and St Patrick's in Fortitude Valley, lacked them at this point.

Guerrini's replacement priest arrived in May 1885, but Guerrini did not depart until sometime in 1886 following the protracted dispute over his dismissal and the terms of his departure. He then went to Armidale, having been accepted by fellow Italian and Franciscan Elzear Torreggiani. By the time of his death in Bundarra on 07 November 1918, aged 82, Guerrini was Australia's senior-most priest, and by all reports he was well respected and much loved.

He out-lived the art works he had acquired for Port Douglas; St Mary's Church, along with almost every other building in Port Douglas, was completely destroyed by cyclone on 16 March 1911. No photos of the inside of that first church are known, so there is no view of any of the Stations or the other works; the earliest interior photos of any of our churches were taken by the then parish priest Patrick Grotty in November 1914 soon after the opening of the new St Mary's in August 1914. No mention of Stations was made in the reports of its opening, nor is there sign of any in the photos. The new

church was bare, all the decoration being in the altar and reredos, as with the earlier pioneer churches. Later photos show that plaster statues of the Sacred Heart and of Our Lady of Lourdes were added some time later. The Stations in the second church, whenever they were added, were mass-produced prints indistinguishable from those in so many other churches.

¹ Throughout, *Stations (of the Cross)* refers to the physical fixtures indicating the stopping points on the *Way (of the Cross)* which is the devotional following of Christ's Passion.

² The full story is in Barry M Craig, *St Mary's of Port Douglas: As it Came to Pass*, (Port Douglas, 2012) 30-31.

³ The two churches, convent and monastery are close together, leading some to various confusions of them.

⁴ "Way of the Cross", in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol.15 (New York, 1912).

⁵ That did not inhibit the adoption of an entirely Scriptural 11 station *Way of the Cross* in the Diocese of Vienne in 1799.

⁶ An Italian site ([www.sanleonardodapm.altervista.org/Via% 20 crucis. html](http://www.sanleonardodapm.altervista.org/Via%20crucis.html)) claims that Porto Maurizio was the first place to have 14 niche/shrines of this series, whence St Leonard of Port Maurice became familiar with it.

⁷ The two churches, convent and monastery are close together, leading some to various confusions of them.

⁸ This work was eventually eclipsed by that of his younger contemporary, St Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787) who was himself an admirer of Leonardo.

⁹ Michael Bihl, "St. Leonard of Port Maurice", *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol.9, (New York, 1910); Dominic Devas, *Life of St. Leonard of Port-Maurice, O.F.M. (1676-1751)*, (London, 1920), 95.

¹⁰ One was reported in Parramatta in May 1840, a priest surnamed Platt: *The Colonist* (Sydney, 1835-1840), Saturday 2 May 1840, p.3.

¹¹ Died 1904, he was the last Franciscan bishop appointed in Australia.

¹² Reported on Saturday 20 April 1867 in the *Adelaide Observer*, Supplement p.2, and the *South Australian Register*, p.2. The earliest

result is in 1854, to an incident in China, then come many references in England and elsewhere in Europe.

¹³ <http://www.portphillippioneersgroup.org.au/pppg5bm.htm>

¹⁴ *The Argus* (Melbourne, 1848-1957), Monday 10 February 1868, p.5: "A series of religious pictures, entitled the 'Stations of the Cross,' were dedicated with some ceremony in St. Mary's Church (Catholic), Kyneton, on Sunday week, by the Rev. Mr. Geoghegan."

¹⁵ *Freeman's Journal*, Wednesday 21 November 1860, p.2.

¹⁶ *Queensland Times, Ipswich Herald and General Advertiser*, Saturday 16 April 1870, p.2.

¹⁷ *Queensland Times, Ipswich Herald and General Advertiser*, Saturday 02 September 1871, p.6.

¹⁸ *Western Star and Roma Advertiser*, Saturday 15 November 1884, p.2.

¹⁹ *The Brisbane Courier* (1864-1933), Monday 22 November 1886, p.4.

²⁰ *The Brisbane Courier*, Tuesday 12 March 1889, p.4.

²¹ The USA Census on 28 January 1870 lists him as 34, making it more likely that he was born in 1835 than 1836, the year usually suggested. He was enumerated twice, the second being later (13 July) at a different address in New York.

²² The record does not state date of birth.

²³ Another of the same name was built in Silksworth, Sunderland, England, also founded in 1873.

²⁴ E.g., a manuscript in the Free Library of Philadelphia has hand written on it "*Ad usum Fratris Joachim Guerrini de Montefegatesio O.S.F.[.] Winstediae mens Februarii A.D. 1873.*" [*For use of Brother Joachim Guerrini from Montefegatesi OSF, at Winsted, month of February AD 1873.*] Winsted, in the State of Connecticut, is between Boston and New York cities.

²⁵ Its description was noted there, but unfortunately, it is no longer there; fortunately there is a typed transcription and two translations.