

Welcome Learning: A Brief History of Goodna’s Catholic School

6 October 2015

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Before time

The broad river snaked its way through the bush as always since the Dreamtime, nourishing the people and animals who came to its banks. The rhythm of life and the movement of people accompanied the unfolding pattern of the seasons. Women and children spent their days gathering plants and small creatures while the men hunted larger animals, birds and fish. The dreaming stories were celebrated in dance, song, art and word in the camp along the creek where neighbouring clans gathered and the Yaggera people met with the Turrbal in corroboree. Tools and blades were fashioned from stone and traded. The males of many clans gathered at the Bora Ring to teach the boys how to become warriors, and the elders guided them through the secrets steps to manhood. Ceremonies marked the passage from child to adult, and the mysteries of initiation passed down from the ancestors were shared.

Europeans arrive

In December 1823, the incursion began. Two rowboats came up the river crewed by alien men from another continent. John Oxley and Allan Cunningham with an officer and their boat crews began their exploration. On 3 December 1823, Oxley landed at Prior's Pocket on the northern bank of the river and, leaving his men to rest, he crossed the river, climbing a low hill and then walking to Dingo Hill from where he could see much of the surrounding landscape. Others followed, and in 1827 a small party of convicts and their guards passed by on their way to a spot upstream, beyond where two rivers joined together, where a deposit of white limestone had been recognised. Here, at the future site of Ipswich, limestone could be hewn and burnt to make cement.

When the ghostly strangers arrived, they were terrifying in their violation of the land and its creatures, and of each other. They brought with them their alien animals and in their cruelty and savagery they broke all the laws that had existed since time immemorial, bending the country to their will and somehow escaping the fate of those who transgress against the spirit of the land. Against their violence and their diseases the original people had little defence. The convicts left from 1839 and free settlement was allowed. The Aboriginal people were driven to the margins as the white men took over the land, careless of their gathering places and sacred sites, and excluding them from their hunting grounds. The men of Woogaroo Station and their horses drove their sheep across the land, crushing underfoot a way of life that had existed for thousands of years.

Woogaroo

The river became a highway for the steam boats of the white man and the dusty track beside it became a pathway for bullock drays and carts. At this spot, a village known as Woogaroo grew up on the river flats as a landing developed and innkeepers set up hostelries for thirsty workers and travellers by land and by water. A store was established in 1857. By 1859, a thousand bales of Darling Downs wool made their way down the river to Brisbane each month. Settlers tried growing sugar and cotton with early success. Bullock teams heaved prized logs of hoop pine and red cedar to the wharf for use in Brisbane. Coal was discovered and primitive mines were developed as men imagined the fortunes they could make selling the valuable fuel for use in steam ships, foundries and workshops.

Situated between the two most important towns in the Moreton Bay district, the growing settlement welcomed the establishment of the new Colony of Queensland in 1859, the same year that O'Possum Creek cattle station was established and a cemetery was opened. As a self-respecting part of the British Empire, Queensland needed all the latest facilities. This included an 'asylum' where the unfortunates of society could be housed away from the public eye. In those days, such a place was not only for the mentally ill but also for many of those with disabilities. The Woogaroo Lunatic Asylum received its first inmates in 1865 when seven warders (two of them female) and ten police constables escorted 57 male and two female lunatics from Brisbane Gaol to the new Asylum. The place has changed its name many times, to

the Goodna Asylum, the Goodna Hospital for the Insane, the Brisbane Mental Hospital, the Brisbane Special Hospital, Wolston Park Hospital and now simply 'The Park'. As the number of inmates increased, so did the number of warders living nearby. So too did the number of farmers as the government divided the land up into farms and the number of mouths to feed steadily grew.

The establishment of the new Colony meant that a Government House and Parliament building were required. The sandstone for these buildings came from a quarry established at Woogaroo near what is now Stuart Street. The stone was quarried and dressed and taken by cart down to the river for transport by barge to Brisbane. The construction of Government House at Gardens Point in Brisbane began in 1860 and Parliament House nearby in 1865.

Another requirement of the new Colony was a railway. River transport sufficed from Brisbane to Ipswich but beyond, a line to the rich Darling Downs with its grazing properties was needed. All the rails, workshops equipment, locomotives, carriages and wagons needed for the pioneer line came up the river on barges hauled by steam boat to North Ipswich from where the line commenced in 1865.

Woogaroo becomes Goodna

In 1865, the settlement's name was changed from Woogaroo to Goodna. By now it had a mail run and a post office, and a Congregational church. The Royal Mail Hotel had opened by 1866. The rich entrepreneur,

Robert Towns opened up a coal mine, with production starting in 1867, providing more jobs. The loaded coal wagons, about 7000 tons a year, were hauled by horses down to the river wharf on a narrow gauge tramway using timber rails. A police station was established and in 1870 a blacksmith set up shop. 1870 also saw the opening of a State School. As Brisbane and Ipswich grew, farming activities moved to maize (for animal feed) and root vegetables with a strong local market for such produce.

The first Catholic school

The Redbank Plains area had more farming land available and cotton was being grown. Most of the labourers in the cotton fields were Catholics, and it was here that that the locality's first Catholic school was set up, in 1868, at the corner of Redbank Plains Road and School Road. At this point in time, government financial assistance was available to support the setting up of schools by voluntary bodies and the teacher was a layperson, Richard Doran. When the Goodna State School was opened in 1870, the Catholic school lost its funding and, facing unemployment, the teacher understandably moved to the new school. In 1874, when a State School opened in Redbank Plains, Andrew Horan, the Ipswich Parish Priest, invited Mary MacKillop's Sisters of St Joseph to revive the Catholic school. The sisters followed Mary's example in living in very harsh conditions to provide a very basic education to the children. With only eight children at the school in 1877, and the sisters barely surviving, Mary MacKillop withdrew her sisters for

more pressing duties elsewhere. The school struggled on for a short time but was soon forced to close. The school building became a dwelling and was moved to Goodna in 1916 where it can be seen today at 31 Church Street. It was refurbished in the 1990s.

Development of transport and industry

By the early 1870s, passenger transport options between Goodna and Brisbane and Ipswich were two steamboat services a day in each direction and three horse coach services each way, two of them run by Cobb and Co. The steamboat called at Oxley and Goodna while the intermediate coach stops were at Rocklea, Oxley and Goodna. The Brisbane Road of that time corresponds to the Brisbane Terrace of today.

When it was decided to extend the railway from Ipswich to Brisbane, the first sod turning took place at Goodna on 30 January 1873. Two thousand people travelled from Brisbane and Ipswich, most by river, to see the Governor, the Marquis of Normanby, perform the ceremony using a silver spade and wheelbarrow. The Ipswich Volunteer Artillery fired off two cannons as a salute. It took more than three years to complete the line, making Goodna an important station for travellers from Brisbane to Toowoomba, Dalby and Warwick. From Goodna, travel to Ipswich by train was only about half an hour and to Brisbane about an hour: the river steamers and coaches plied their trade no more.

The coming of the railway line encouraged further development. For example, a sawmill had opened by

1884, allowing sawn timber to be taken as building supplies not only to Brisbane but as far west as Roma. Dairying, butchery, market gardening and even honey production grew as a result of the improved transport links, while a chemical factory was established close to the river, and a brickworks was opened. By 1888 the population of Goodna was 500.

The open country in the area was used for a variety of purposes. For example in 1886, the Queensland Defence Force's volunteer soldiers used the area for training their horses to haul artillery guns in preparation for any foreign attack upon the colony. A few years later, the Goodna area was a favourite gathering place for the Brisbane Hunt Club, which perpetuated the British traditions associated with fox hunting. The riders brought their horses from Brisbane by special train and the pack of hounds came on foot from their kennels at Rocklea. Following lunch at a local hostelry or private residence, the 'hunt' would take place with the hounds followed not a fox but a pre-laid scent trail across country, and there was much jumping of fences and other obstacles on the part of the riders.

A church is built

Many of the local people in and around Goodna were of Irish Catholic origin and the area was part of the extensive and important parish of Ipswich. Its parish priest from 1875 to 1917 was Andrew Horan, an Irishman who was a noted builder in the St Mary's precinct in Ipswich and beyond. He purchased 2.4

hectares of land at Goodna and engaged the services of Italian architect Andrea Stombuco to design the new church he intended to have built there. Stombuco had designed the presbytery at Ipswich and went on to design many homes, churches and commercial buildings in south-east Queensland and elsewhere. In August 1880, Bishop James Quinn, Queensland's first Catholic Bishop, travelled to Goodna to lay the foundation stone for the new church, with a crowd of 500 in attendance. The new church was opened on 1 May 1881 by the Bishop. He died later than year and his death was registered in the name of O'Quinn, a name he had assumed as an expression of Irish nationalist fervour some years before.

The church was dedicated to St Patrick and was said to have cost a total of £1141. It was approximately 22.5 metres long and 9.4 metres wide. It was of a simple but elegant stone design with an iron roof. The stone came from the quarry in Stuart Street, and the parishioners carted the stone to the building site. Cedar used in the construction came from the Mt Mistake sawmill and the ceiling was of Rosewood pine.

In 1883, the church grounds were the venue for a major event, when John Redmond, an Irish MP from the Irish Nationalist Party, held a public meeting there. It was attended by many sympathisers of the Irish cause who were nevertheless very anxious to demonstrate their loyalty to Queen Victoria. It was claimed that no less than 3 tons of food prepared by the Catholic ladies of Ipswich were conveyed to Goodna by train for the event.

Hopes of educating the children

At the church foundation stone laying in 1880, John Larkin, a Goodna resident, expressed the wish that a convent school might soon be provided for the children to attend. This was a natural development following the recent closure of the Catholic school at Redbank Plains.

Fundraising for a Catholic school must have started because in March 1881 ‘a musical and literary entertainment’ was held at the Ipswich School of Arts in aid of the Goodna Catholic school building fund, featuring adult entertainers as well as students from the St Mary’s Ipswich convent school. It was reported that the hall was crowded and over a hundred people were turned away.

In spite of the artistic and financial success of such fundraising efforts, it is likely that Father Horan was not enamoured of the idea of a Catholic school in Goodna. His parish school was St Mary’s and until a separate parish was established at Goodna, the hopes of the parishioners there were likely to fall upon deaf ears, particularly as Archbishop Dunne was not a strong advocate for the establishment of new Catholic schools. One wonders what happened to the funds that were raised.

In the meantime, John Larkin was the first signatory of a letter from parishioners written to Bishop Quinn in June 1881 asking his permission for two Sisters of Mercy to travel from Ipswich each Sunday to provide catechism instruction to the Catholic children of Goodna. It appears that this request may not have been successful for

Archbishop Dunne passed on a similar request from Father Horan to the Sisters of Mercy a few years later.

The 1893 flood

The flooding of the Brisbane River was a frequent problem at Goodna, and a rowboat was kept handy to allow the staff of the Mental Hospital to get to and from work. The 1890 flood did much damage, with many people driven out of their homes and given shelter in the Catholic church. In 1893, the greatest ever recorded flood of the river occurred. At Goodna, the water level rose to 22 metres (5 metres higher than in 1974 and 6 metres higher than in 2011), flooding the Catholic church. The flood destroyed many more of the buildings in the old settlement north of the railway line. Even the Railway Station building was partially swept away. Although some buildings were rebuilt on the river flats along the old Brisbane Road, development turned to the higher ground above the railway line. There were seven hills in the area: Hospital Hill, Dingo Hill, Holmes Hill, Brickfield Hill, Meaney's Hill, School Hill, and Bradley's Hill. 'School Hill', 'Brickfield Hill' and 'Holmes Hill' were all common Goodna addresses in the 1930s.

Goodna Catholic parish and its convent school

The new parish of Goodna was separated from Ipswich in 1892 and Father Thomas Hayes was appointed Parish Priest. It had been decreed by the Australian bishops in 1885 that every parish should have a primary school.

Father Hayes knew that the work of every parish priest was to build a presbytery, convent and school. Indeed at this time, many churches were designed to serve as a school during the week. However, hard economic times and a lack of enthusiasm on the part of Archbishop Dunne meant that very few new parish schools opened in the Archdiocese of Brisbane until Bishop Duhig's arrival in Brisbane from Rockhampton as coadjutor in 1912.

Goodna was an exception with the opening of the school in 1910. The impetus came from the local branch of the Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society, formed to provide social insurance benefits before the advent of the welfare state. A local committee was appointed under the patronage of Father Hayes and once it been decided to go ahead, the site was prepared and bush logs were brought in to be placed as stumps. The 'stump capping' ceremony was held on 9 January. This, and many other functions and activities were calculated to raise money as the government provided no financial assistance whatever for Catholic schools, and all the funds had to be raised by the parishioners. At the stump capping ceremony, £81 was raised and another £300 was collected before the school's opening. The builder was Mr J Carrick of Brisbane and the total cost was in the vicinity of £650.

The official blessing occurred on 3 July 1910, with an attendance of about 250. It was to have been performed by Archbishop Dunne, but he was indisposed. Instead the veteran Father Andrew Horan from Ipswich fulfilled the role, accompanied by Father Hayes and three visiting priests. Well practised in fundraising, Father Horan

announced his donation of £5 and then proceeded to ask each person individually for their contribution, which he announced publicly to enable the secretaries to record the amounts. It was reported that donations ranged from £8 to 5 shillings, with £135 being collected on the spot.

The school building was elevated 2.7m above ground level. It consisted of a single large room, 17m by 8m, with a full width stage at the eastern end, provided with the expectation that it would be 'of considerable use in the provision of entertainment'. On the west end, facing Church Street, was a porch with twin sets of steps while there were also steps at the eastern end of each veranda. The possibility of enclosing underneath the school to make more classroom space was forecast. The building framing was of hardwood while the remainder was pine, with the verandahs made from crow's ash. There were eight large swinging windows down each side of the main schoolroom.

In his speech that followed the fundraising luncheon served in the new building, Father Hayes assured those present that the children would receive an education second to none. They would also receive religious instruction, which would enable them to live good lives and to save their souls. As adults, they would be mixing with non-Catholics and unless well equipped with religious knowledge, they would probably come to grief. With appropriate support given to the school by their parents, they could become faithful servants of God and loyal citizens of Australia.

Convent of Mercy

St Patrick's convent school commenced the next day under the direction of the Sisters of Mercy. The first principal was Sister Mary Scholastica McNamee, and the other teachers were Sr Mary Anselm Murphy, Sr Mary Evaristus Hannigan and Sr Mary Fabian Knapp. These ladies travelled by train from the Ipswich convent daily until a convent was built in Goodna. The Sisters of Mercy engaged prominent architect RS Dods to design this structure. He had designed many buildings for them including the Mater Hospital in Brisbane. The convent was built in Church Street right opposite the school building and was blessed and opened on March 11 1911, shortly after the death of Father Hayes. The sisters lived there until the end of 1985 when it became a refugee youth centre catering for Vietnamese migrants. It is now part of Mercy Family Services.

The debt on the school was paid off by a garden fete held in May 1912 which raised £70 and was attended by the newly arrived coadjutor Archbishop Duhig. The opening of the school was said to have led to the growth of the parish, so much so that the church had to be extended in 1915. A brick extension was added to the east end, to accommodate a new sanctuary. A sacristy was built on each side of the sanctuary. New side doors were added to the church and at the western end a brick porch was added, rendered to look like stonework. New water tanks were connected to horse troughs. Father Stapleton, the Parish Priest, was responsible for this work, as well as for the construction of a new church at Corinda, which was then within the Goodna parish. Father Thomas

Keating became Parish Priest in 1924. Father Keating changed the name of the church and parish to 'St Francis Xavier's', often simply referred to as 'St Saviour's'. In spite of this, it appears that the school continued to be known as St Patrick's for many years to come.

In this era, with the appointment from 1921 of an Archdiocesan Religious Inspector and Examiner, Archbishop Duhig made it clear that he took responsibility for the quality of religious instruction in Catholic schools. The Archdiocesan Inspector, usually a parish priest, was expected to visit schools and set examinations, with the top students receiving prizes and their names and schools being published. The State Inspector also visited the school each year and wrote a report on the organisation and educational attainments of the school.

Sacramental preparation was an important part of school life. The importance of the First Communion class was such that some children travelled long distances to attend the Catholic school just for this year. The culmination was the First Communion mass early on a Sunday morning (strict fasting rules were then in force). The children, the girls dressed in white and the boys in white shirts, processed into the church under Sister's watchful eye, and with a large contingent of relatives in attendance. A First Communion breakfast in the school building followed. The Sacrament of Confirmation was administered by the Archbishop every few years. Immediately before it occurred the examination at which the Archbishop would question the candidates to ensure

they had sufficient knowledge of the faith to receive the sacrament.

In common with many others, Goodna Convent School would have been significantly affected by the influenza pandemic of mid-1919 and the mass unemployment of the Great Depression in the early 1930s, but details await the efforts of future historians.

Fundraising for the school was a necessary and continual task, with euchre nights, fetes, concerts and dances held regularly. These occasions were also a significant focus for the local community. About 1934, a three metre extension was built on the western end of the school building for use as a long narrow infants classroom, and the double steps were moved from there to the northern side.

School sports were a feature of the Christmas breakup held on the last day of school each year. In 1933, there were races for girls as well as bowling at the wicket, apple eating and a three legged (or Siamese) race. Boys enjoyed their additional events of the egg and spoon race, sack race, potato race, high jump, pole vault, and hop, step and jump.

War in the Pacific

The coming of war against Germany in September 1939 did not have much immediate effect on the school, but following the Japanese attack on the American base at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii in December 1941, panic spread that northern Australia was wide open to invasion. Schools in Queensland did not reopen in

January 1942. The fall of Singapore in February, soon after followed by air attacks on Darwin, did little to reassure the population. The government ordered that slit trenches should be dug at every Queensland school to serve as air raid shelters, and it was not until March, with these precautions completed, that students were allowed to return. Each child had to bring a bottle of water so they would have something to drink if there was an air raid, but children living close to the school were given special permission to run home, which proved handy on the two occasions when the air raid siren sounded, thankfully both times a false alarm.

The whole community became involved in the war effort. Children took money to school to buy War Savings Stamps to increase government funds. A major area for military activity developed between Brisbane and Ipswich, with staging and training camps developed for Australian, Dutch East Indies and American troops. Local properties were used as firing ranges for military training. Australia became a huge base for the US military. By mid-1943, nearly 100,000 US troops were stationed in camps around Brisbane. A major American base was Camp Columbia at Wacol, where up to 5000 troops were stationed at any one time. When the camp was vacated by the Americans in 1944, it was handed over to the Dutch and became the headquarters for the colonial government-in-exile of the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia).

The war saw an increase in Archdiocesan involvement in Catholic schools. In 1944, the position of Director of Catholic Education was established. It was held by a

priest, and the position was at first separate to the position of Inspector of Religious Education. In 1948, the two posts would be combined in one man, Father Barney O'Shea. He presided over huge changes in Catholic Education until his retirement as Director in 1982.

A tragic event

Eight children started 1943 in Year 7, the Scholarship class, two girls and six boys. Most were 12 years of age. As six of them had been at school together in Year 1, they were a close-knit group. Clair McErlean was a daughter of a local policeman and Kath McGrath's father was a local store keeper. The fathers of all six boys worked as attendants at the Mental Hospital. Three boys had been at school together continuously, John Watson, Andy McCarthy, and Joe Coogan. Jim Guley was a child prodigy, an outstanding pianist with a promising future, who had played at the Brisbane City Hall at the age of 6. He had left the convent school at the end of Year 3 but returned in Year 6. There were also two older boys in the class. Vince Mangin, who had just turned 14, had returned to school to the Scholarship class after a break of two years. He had left school at the end of Year 5 but had now come back to have a go at the Scholarship Examination in order to try to improve his prospects. The other new boy in the class was Roy Thompson, 13 years of age and apparently not a Catholic, who started at the convent school on 22 February 1943, only the day before the event that was to change his life forever.

In those carefree days when children were allowed to wander far and wide, the military activity in the neighbourhood was naturally a magnet for local schoolboys. On Sunday 21 February, John Watson, together with three younger boys from the convent school, 10 year old Eddie Trott and his brothers Tom (8) and Allan (6), walked the seven kilometres to Martens' farm at Redbank Plains. They were possibly attracted by prospects of recovering a horse and two dogs they had been told were left behind when the farm had been requisitioned by the Australian Army a few days before. The farm had been declared a Prohibited Area for use as a range for firing weapons. When the boys arrived at the farm, they saw about ten US soldiers, who had arrived in a truck, set up to do some weapons test firing using a piece of corrugated iron leaning against a dead tree as a target. The boys did not realise it, but the American soldiers were demonstrating, to a US Army Major and several other officers, a new secret weapon, an anti-tank rocket, which they fired at the target from a rocket launcher. The demonstration was not a complete success. Five rockets were fired but only two exploded, partly because the ground was soft. The unexploded ones were marked with the cardboard cases they had come in so that they could be destroyed by US troops over the next few days.

After the Americans left, the boys had a closer look to see if they could find any unexploded rockets to take home. They found two and placed them inside their packaging. These 'duds' were about 450mm long and because they had tail fins the boys thought they were bombs. Eddie Trott took one home. His father was away

in the army but his uncle said it might be dangerous and told him to put it outside. John Watson took the other one home and put it on the kitchen table. His father threw it out into the yard.

The next day, John Watson took his bomb to school to show to his fellow members of the scholarship class. He also showed his teacher, Sister Mary Cleophas, who showed the weapon to the other children in the school. At lunchtime John and Vince Mangin unscrewed the weapon into its three parts and noted a hard yellow substance inside its nose section. They then reassembled it. The bomb was left at the school overnight and the next day John and some of the other boys played with it at lunchtime by seeing who could throw it the hardest and furthest.

That afternoon the scholarship class stayed back at school as usual after all the other pupils had gone home for the extra work they needed in preparation for the scholarship examination. Sister Mary Cleophas dismissed them at about 4.30pm and they went downstairs to pack up. John Watson said he would be taking the bomb home, and Andy McCarthy threw it down from the top of the building's steps. Then Jimmy Guley and Vince Mangin threw it. Finally, John took it under the building and threw it, nose down, onto the asphalt. The rocket exploded with a deafening noise and a flash of blinding light. Hot jagged metal fragments of shrapnel flew in every direction, becoming embedded in the timberwork of the building and puncturing the water tank in several places. A crater about 150mm deep and 300mm wide was blown in the asphalt.

John Watson was very seriously wounded. All the other class members were struck down by flying shrapnel, with only Kath McGrath not seriously injured. Some suffered broken legs and feet and others severe internal injuries. Sergeant McErlean, Clair's father, on duty at the police station next door, rushed to the scene. Doctors and nurses were called from the Mental Hospital to assist and ambulances were summoned. The children were taken to the Ipswich General Hospital. Unfortunately, John Watson died from his injuries later that night.

Kath McGrath spent a few days in hospital but Jimmy Guley was there for a month and Andrew McCarthy for more than five weeks. Clair McErlean, Vince Mangin and Joe Coogan were in hospital for two months, and Roy Thompson for three months. The children all carried the scars and the ongoing ill-effects for the rest of their lives. The American Army held an inquiry into what had happened, but its findings were kept secret. An inquest was held into John Watson's death. The coroner's finding was accidental death. No one was sued for negligence and no compensation was ever paid.

Students and parents

A school admissions register exists, commencing with all the children who were in attendance at the school in 1936, so we can only base calculations on the numbers enrolled from 1936 onwards. The school remained relatively small with an enrolment of 100 not being reached until the early 1950s. The number of students

enrolled in March of each school year between 1936 and 1945 is shown below:

Year	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940
Enrolment	75	86	76	76	63

Year	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
Enrolment	63	67	75	73	76

The total number of new enrolments during the years from 1936 to 1945 was about 175. The data shows how important the mental hospital was to the Goodna community. More than 25% of the children enrolled during those years were the children of male nursing staff, described as ‘warders’ or ‘attendants’ (the title changed from time to time). In 1939, the number of residents at the hospital was 1773, and there were around 500 nursing staff employed there. Given this number, it is perhaps surprising that the warders with children attending the Convent School during this ten year period did not number greater than 40.

The vast majority of other fathers were labourers, railway employees or people working in the manufacturing and construction industries, hospitality, retailing and personal services. For the whole period of the war, only eight were members of the armed forces at the time their children were enrolled. There were only four clerks and four farmers, and for short periods, two graziers and a doctor from the mental hospital. Ten fathers of children enrolled during the period were

deceased, and another five enrolling parents were female. 16% of children were not Catholic.

Very few children who were enrolled for the start of their schooling remained at the school long enough to complete Year 7, in fact only 15% of new enrollees from 1936 to 1945. 19% did not even remain for a full year. Children could enter the Preparatory Grade from about age 5 and they would stay there until they had learned enough to be promoted to Year 1. Most children spent two years in Prep. Others stayed there longer and some children made very slow progress through the school, repeating a number of year levels and finishing school at age 12 or 13 when still in Year 5 or Year 6.

After the war

Shortly after the end of the war, the parish obtained a large army hut and it was brought onto the site to serve as a parish hall. It was placed running north-south behind the school building. A school tuck shop run by the Ladies Auxiliary operated from it. It was used for parish concerts, dances and other social events, as well as for school assemblies. The parish was very much the social centre for the Catholic community of which the school was a vital part, so the hall was a focus for many activities.

After the war, many migrants came to Queensland from Great Britain, Ireland, and the European mainland. A huge migrant holding centre was established at Wacol on the site of Camp Columbia to receive the immigrants and prepare them for resettlement. Large numbers of

refugees from European nations began arriving in Australia. Many came from eastern European countries like Latvia, Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia. Others came from Holland, Germany and Austria. There were also Dutch refugees from Indonesia and many migrants from the United Kingdom. At Christmas 1949, additional Sisters of Mercy were based at Goodna convent to assist people at the Migrant Centre with a plan to offer Catholic children enrolments free of charge in Catholic boarding schools. It is not clear how successful this idea was, but the sisters took very seriously the need to assist newly-arrived migrants with education, especially those whose first language was not English.

On 8 May 1950, eleven children aged between 8 and 14 from the Wacol Centre, who had come from eastern European backgrounds were enrolled at the Goodna convent school. On 11 July, 21 more aged between 5 and 9 were enrolled. As more and more arrived over the following years, hundreds of these newly-arrived children would receive their first introduction to Australian education at the school. Most stayed at the school only a few weeks or months before finding more permanent settlement elsewhere but the welcome of the Sisters and of the local Catholic community to these new Australians was a significant contribution to their future lives in Australia. Over the years, numbers of migrant families settled locally and the convent school enrolled many of their children.

The figures showing the enrolments in March each year indicate that the immigration of the early 1950s brought

a dramatic rise in numbers. They do not show the very large number of children that were cycled through the school, often only for a short time, during this period.

Year	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950
Enrolment	74	60	77	89	99

Year	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955
Enrolment	148	128	131	124	140

The convent school at Darra had been started by the Daughters of the Sacred Heart in 1937. In 1954, they handed the school over to the Sisters of Mercy and until a new convent opened at Darra in 1956, the sisters teaching at Darra lived in the Goodna convent. With the increase in population and in traffic, the Brisbane-Ipswich Highway was moved south of the railway line in the mid 1950s.

The 1950s brought huge population growth to Australia. From 1952, Year 8 was added onto Primary schools in Queensland with the intention that students would have another year of schooling. Most children just skipped a primary grade at the end of 1951 but in the following years few stayed on to complete Year 8. In 1953, two boys stayed back for an additional year after Year 7 to have a second try at the Scholarship exam, which they passed. Six students had passed the Scholarship in 1951 but only three in 1949, and none in 1950 and 1952. From 1954, the Preparatory Grade was abolished in State Schools although it did not completely disappear from

the Goodna Convent School until the end of 1955. The last Queensland scholarship exam was at the end of 1962 and by then most children were staying on for Year 8. From 1964 Grade 8 became a part of secondary education, with all students expected to go to High School.

At Goodna, four classes had traditionally been accommodated in the original school building, with the infants at the western end and the scholarship class on the stage. The Principal's office was the small room on the church side of the stage. It also accommodated the scanty library. The corresponding room on the police station side was the sports store. During the early 1950s there were many children from migrant backgrounds at the school, particularly from Poland, and Ann Everett remembered that the older children often assisted teachers in the infants grade with students who had little or no English. With no government financial assistance available, any improvements had to be carried out with finance raised at parish level. A further concern was that the number of sisters available to teach was not keeping up with the ever increasing growth in numbers of children, and the costs of training teachers was increasing as standards became more exacting.

From the mid 1950s, lay teachers began to be employed on a limited basis. They were poorly paid and a number came from the ranks of married women at a time when female primary teachers in State Education lost their jobs once married. Others were simply untrained. The Sunday collection was the major source of the funds that had to be raised for the upkeep of the sisters, who were in effect

voluntary workers, and the lay staff. School fees were generally very low.

By 1960, the numbers of children in Catholic Primary schools in Queensland were expanding rapidly and appeared likely to outstrip capacity in a short time. Not only were new buildings needed but many existing buildings were old and in need of replacement. There was still no government financial assistance available to Catholic (or any non-government) schools. However, at Goodna, a peak had been reached in 1961 and numbers declined for a while after this, probably as a result of the slowdown in immigration and also as a result of the transfer of Grade 8 to secondary school. The years from 1966 to 1970 saw steady growth back to the level of 1960.

Year	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962
Enrolment	147	144	165	187	190	201	181

Year	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
Enrolment	180	154	148	160	174	179	187

To enable class sizes to be reduced, an extension was built on the eastern end of the school building during the 1960s. This provided two additional rooms each approximately 7 metres square.

As the numbers of children in Catholic schools grew, so did the number of lay teachers, but this put a heavy strain on parish communities which had to raise the entire funds required. Wealthier parishes were able to afford lay teachers while poorer ones had difficulty in doing so.

Class sizes often increased to impossible numbers. Priests in new suburbs began to despair of ever being able to open a parish school. This led to a gradual consensus that primary school funding should be on an Archdiocesan rather than individual parish level. The idea was that by pooling funds and pooling debts, more could be done. Fairness in the provision of staffing, fairness in the setting of maximum class sizes (recommended as 45 in 1968) and fairness in the payment of lay teachers (who only received 66% of the State Award for trained teachers from 1968) could be achieved, as well as the possibility of new schools being provided in the growing suburbs. The scheme was initiated under the leadership of Director of Catholic Education, Father Barney O'Shea in 1968, with the support of Archbishop O'Donnell, but it was not universally welcomed by the clergy.

The potential of the new scheme was unlocked when, after a long campaign by parents and church leaders, State Government funding for non-government schools commenced in 1969, with a grant of \$25 per student. This was more than doubled the following year with the announcement of a Federal Government grant of \$35. This funding, which gradually increased in the following years, at least ensured the survival of many parish schools which otherwise would have been forced to close.

The 1970s

The name of the school was changed from St Patrick's to St Francis Xavier in 1970, according to the admissions register. The 1971 school photos say simply 'Sisters of Mercy'.

Enrolment numbers up to 1970 saw a steady growth back to the level of 1960. After 1970, numbers began to explode. To create more space for classes, the original side verandahs of the old school building were closed in. An enrolment of just over 200 in 1970 rose to more than 500 in 1980.

Year	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974
Enrolment	206	220	243	285	294

Year	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
Enrolment	341	366	424	456	487*

* estimate

Parish newsletters from early 1973 remind us that the fundraising culture of former times was still alive. Bingo was held every Wednesday night at 7.30pm while the Annual St Patrick's Concert was held on Sunday night 18 March at the Wolston Park Hospital Recreation Hall. Admission charges were 50c for adults, 20c for children not appearing in the concert and \$1 for a family ticket. Tickets in a raffle to win a spray and steam iron were sold for 10c each. Half the proceeds of the concert were

given to the parish for the church renovation fund. Tuckshop at the school operated with five mothers on the roster each week. The Ladies Auxiliary of the P&F operated keep fit classes at a cost of 20c per class on Tuesday evenings and Wednesday mornings but the Wednesday morning classes had to be cancelled from April 1973 because of a lack of numbers.

The proceeds of the 1972 school fete amounted to \$1042. From this, the P&F had to find money for building repairs and painting, school stationery, cleaning materials, telephone bills and school books. Following the 1972 P&F Annual General Meeting, it was decided that the P&F would join the Queensland Federation of Parents & Friends Associations, and it was announced that for 1973 only, no school ball would be held. 80 families had agreed to pay 20c per month to finance school cleaning, but this was only about half the number of families.

One of the fathers of two children at the school, Brian Watson, was tragically killed in the Whiskey Au Go Go nightclub firebombing in Brisbane on 8 March 1973. In January 1974, the flooded Brisbane River did not rise as high as in 1893 but it still created enormous disruption and damage to the parts of Goodna that were lower than the school grounds.

The provision of government grants to assist with running costs from 1969 allowed schools to begin considering the new buildings they needed to accommodate their growing numbers. At Goodna, Father Charles Tommasi, Parish Priest from 1972, was very keen to see the school develop and was behind the

decision to build on the northern side of the site, close to the church and well away from the old school building. A new classroom block that later bore his name, was built in 1972.

With the election of the Whitlam government in 1972, the promise of capital grants from the Federal Government to assist school communities in the provision of new buildings became a possibility. Thus it was that a grant was applied for, and on 2 July 1973, the Principal, Sister Mary Paulina Ward, received a letter from the Federal Minister of Education, Kim Beazley (Senior) offering \$144,000 for the construction of eight classrooms, an administration area and library, staff room, storeroom, toilets and covered ways. It was expected that the work would be completed by 30 June 1974.

The building was opened by Archbishop Francis Rush on 4 May 1975, with the Federal Minister for Social Security, Bill Hayden (a future Governor-General) in attendance. Archbishop Rush expressed the hope that the school would be seen as a centre of influence for the whole community it served. The Archbishop wished above all for the students to absorb the values of courage and integrity, and he spoke warmly of the many migrants that contributed so much to the parish. Four of the original pupils of 1910 were present.

The total cost of the building was \$180,500, and the Commonwealth contribution was the second highest Federal grant for a school in Queensland up to that date. Open area classrooms were fashionable, so three open area rooms were provided to accommodate six classes

with each carpeted and tiled. Twin soundproofed withdrawal rooms were also provided and the multi-coloured roof featured stepped skylights. The toilet block had a stepped pitched roof and skylights. Unfortunately, this building, later known as the Clarke Wing, did not prove to be a great success. It was unduly hot and difficult to ventilate and the open area classrooms were not very practical. A variety of efforts to improve its usefulness were not wholly successful and it was demolished in 2008.

Inside the building was placed a memorial plaque to Charlie Harnell, 1896-1975. Charlie had lived in the house in Church Street that had once been the Sisters of St Joseph school at Redbank Plains from shortly after his marriage in 1926. Although not a Catholic, when Charlie retired at 65 years of age he devoted himself to the Goodna convent school. He worked voluntarily as a groundsman and carpenter for ten years.

The library in the 1974 building was soon needed as a classroom and on 24 April 1977, a new Library building that also contained the school office was opened by Auxiliary Bishop John Gerry at the same time as a combined new presbytery and parish centre. The local member, Mr Bill Hayden, was again in attendance.

Shortages of available sisters led to a decision to move to a lay Principalship. Sister Mary O'Brien was the last Sister of Mercy Principal. The first lay Principal was Jim Toohey, who took up his duties in 1979. This was a difficult period of transition for any school community for people had become used to a religious Principal who lived on site and whose presence was integral to the life

of the parish. However, sisters still served at the school, and lived at the convent until the end of 1985.

The 1980s

The 1980s began with the electrification of the railway line from Darra to Ipswich. At the school, the trend of rapidly growing numbers continued until 1982, the year in which Brisbane was put on the world map with holding of the Commonwealth Games. Many people remember seeing Raelene Boyle win the 400m at the QE2 Stadium and Rob de Castella heading down Coronation Drive to win the marathon. Six years later, World Expo 88 was held at South Bank in Brisbane.

Year	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Enrolment	512*	549*	581	552	439

Year	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Enrolment	443	487	465	475	479

* estimate

With enrolment numbers skyrocketing, in about 1981 a block of four demountable classrooms had to be brought in to accommodate more classes, and the school office was moved to the 1974 building. At about the same time the parish hall was demolished as it had become unsafe.

Following the end of the war in Vietnam, many refugees arrived from Indo-China. They were followed by people from Latin America, including El Salvador, Nicaragua

and Chile, and later from the former Yugoslavia. In addition, many people from the Pacific Islands, particularly Samoa, have found a welcome at the school. By 2000, 27% of the children were non-European in origin.

In 1984, enrolment numbers dropped back sharply to the mid 400s, where they have remained until very recently. Although this drop coincided with the economic recession of the early 1980s, the likely explanation is that it was largely due to a serious division that occurred in the school community in 1983. During the year, the first after the retirement of the long-standing Director of Catholic Education, Father Barney O'Shea, a popular male teacher was dismissed, leading to unfavourable media coverage and the case going to the Industrial Commission. With the community polarised, many families took the decision that their children would not return the following year. It is believed that this incident led to the establishment of an Industrial Relations section within the Brisbane Catholic Education Office.

Jim Toohey left at the end of 1983 and was replaced by Paul McCann. As he was unable to commence duties immediately, the Acting Principal in Term 1 1984 was Tom Doolan. In the following years, a shortage of teachers made it very difficult to staff the school, with the number of new staff each year sometimes reaching double figures.

Paul McCann saw it as his responsibility to rebuild the confidence of the community in the school, and to promote the confidence of the local community generally. He valued the support he received in this from

Bill Hayden, the local Federal Member for Oxley and the then recently deposed Leader of the Opposition. Hayden was Minister for Foreign Affairs under Prime Minister Hawke and then Governor-General from 1989 to 1996. Following a visit to the school as Governor-General, Hayden invited the Year 7 children to share afternoon tea with him at his official Canberra residence, Yarralumla, and provided financial assistance for them to do so. McCann credits this incident as leading directly to the Commonwealth Government financial assistance that is available to schoolchildren from throughout Australia to visit the national capital.

On 17 April 1988, Archbishop Rush blessed and opened another new building, a block of six new classrooms, with a remedial/resource room and pastoral care room that had been completed the year before. It was named the Hayes Wing after the first Parish Priest of Goodna. A Commonwealth Grant of \$518,500 had been received to assist with the construction of this building. At the same time the 1972 building was refurbished with the inclusion of a new staffroom and staff facilities, freeing up space in the 1977 Library building. Also opened at this time was a new covered assembly area, named after Father Ron Illidge, Parish Priest from 1962 to 1974. Two Commonwealth Employment Program (CEP) grants had assisted with general landscaping and upgrading. The construction of the new building meant that the original school building of 1910 was no longer required, and it was demolished.

1988 also saw a very unfortunate incident when on 16 January, a sixteen year old boy was fatally stabbed in the

school grounds in what was alleged to be a gang fight. A seventeen year old was brought to trial but was found not guilty.

The 1990s

During the 1990s, enrolments remained steady, and in 1994 Denise Ryan replaced Paul McCann as Principal.

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Enrolment	487	486	465	468	473

Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Enrolment	460	450	464	460	468

One incident that attracted the attention of the media was on the afternoon of 12 November 1996. Children from the school were aboard a local school bus when the driver objected to several young passengers talking and singing loudly. The driver stopped the bus and the children were apparently detained on board for a period of time in hot temperatures.

On May 21 1997, refurbishments to the 1974 building were blessed and opened. This project involved the refurbishment of five classrooms, the administration office, and provision of a first aid room. The toilet block was rebuilt and three demountable classrooms were refurbished. The total cost was \$454,955. A Federal Capital Grant of \$120,441 had been received, along with State Government grants of \$260,129. A time capsule

was buried, to be opened at the school centenary celebrations.

The 21st century

The Year 2000 saw the Olympic Games held in Sydney and an Olympic Torch relay crisscrossed the country. On 13 June 2000, the school was an exchange point for the torch relay.

In 2004, Lynn Albury replaced Denise Ryan as Principal and led the school in a period of rapid change.

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Enrolment	464	463	490	468	441

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Enrolment	468	475	434	450	441

In 2002 preschool had been introduced on a half-time basis and from 2005, full-time preschool was offered. In 2007 the preparatory grade replaced it. Only a half cohort of students entered Prep in the year of its introduction as part of a process to raise the age of students exiting compulsory schooling in Queensland, causing a reduction in total enrolments. On 9 August 2002, a new Preschool building was opened at the same time as refurbishments to the 1977 Library building, by now known as the Mercy Resource Centre. The Library refurbishment was a \$217,621 project that attracted a State Government grant of \$158,860, while the

Preschool cost \$291,105 of which \$280,388 came from the State Government.

The opening of St Augustine's College at Springfield in 2003 was associated with a small reduction in enrolments at St Francis Xavier's, but numbers soon recovered to the mid 450s.

With the anticipated introduction of the Preparatory Year in 2007, space would need to be provided for two full-time preparatory classes. An extension to the 2002 Preschool building was constructed in 2005, thanks to a grant of \$208,613 from the State government. It was officially opened on 3 April 2007. Small Capital Grants made available by the Federal and State governments in 2006 and 2007 made possible the upgrading of the upper school eating courtyard at a cost of \$70,000 and the refurbishment of the tuckshop at a cost of \$40,000.

It was recognised by the school community, and by the grant allocating body, the Queensland Catholic Education Commission, that the 1974 building, known as the Clarke Wing, needed to be replaced. Approval was given in 2007 for a project worth \$1,917,699 to replace this building with a new one that would incorporate a new administration area and staff room at ground level with four classrooms on the first floor. This project received a grant contribution of \$700,000 from the Commonwealth Government and \$867,345 from the State Government. It was completed in 2009.

In 2008, approval was given for two more capital projects. One was for the construction of a new building to replace the demountable classroom block. This

consisted of three classrooms upstairs and a new Preparatory classroom downstairs, with undercroft space provided for future conversion to classrooms. The second element to be approved was the conversion of the old staffroom and staff toilets in the 1972 building back to classroom space. The total cost approved was \$1,489,668 with a grant contribution of \$439,815 from the Commonwealth Government and \$924,853 from the State Government. One of the demountable classrooms had been used for Out of School Hours care, but this was moved to a new building provided by the parish in 2007 and named the Ron Illidge Centre.

Additional Commonwealth government funding for capital works in schools was announced in 2009 under the banner of ‘Building the Education Revolution’. The National School Pride element, amounting to \$200,000, was used to carry out minor refurbishments to classrooms in the 1972 block and to construct a new covered link between the new classroom block and the adjacent buildings, allowing the demolition of the remnant of the 1974 building. The P21 element funding of \$3,000,000, completed in 2011, provided a magnificent new multipurpose centre, McAuley Hall.

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Enrolment	472	469	490	516	536

Veronica Lawson was appointed principal in 2011. In 2012, Centacare opened the government-funded St Francis Xavier Kindergarten on the site. This facility offers local children the opportunity to enrol in an

approved early learning program. This initiative, together with local population growth, saw a growth in enrolments at the school. At the end of 2013, Sr Veronica Ekerick, the last full-time Sister of Mercy staff member, left the school where she had been working as a Pastoral Care Worker for some years. 2015 has seen a further change in the school with Year 7 moving to secondary schooling and a consequent reduction in numbers.

Conclusion

Australia's Catholic Education system today is generally regarded as a jewel in the crown of the church's achievement in Australia. The Goodna example illustrates some of the main themes in its evolution: the role of the parochial system in establishing and stubbornly maintaining Catholic schools over many years; the heroic sacrifice of the religious sisters in staffing those schools on scant resources; the response to the Gospel call in response to human need that has made a great contribution to making Australia a welcoming and inclusive multicultural nation; the move to a more corporate approach to the organisation of Catholic Education, progressing hand in hand with the granting and extension of government assistance; the establishment of a vibrant lay ministry in Catholic schools with a broad vision of service to the community; and a recognition by all governments that money is well spent on Catholic Education, bringing dividends in costs, inclusivity and community support.

This is a revised and updated version of the material first published for the school's centenary in 2010.

Thanks are due to: Lynn Albury, State Library of Queensland, Brisbane Sisters of Mercy Archives, Ipswich City Council Library, the late Vince Hanley, the late Ann Everett, Paul McCann, Dennis O'Sullivan, Mark Allen and Father Roger Burns.