

**A Rose among the Shamrocks: The Story of
Sister Mary Catherine Morgan
4.12.1820 – 23.12.1874**

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Of all the foundation Sisters of Mercy of the Brisbane Congregation, the one who perhaps has the most interesting story is Sister Catherine Morgan. During her religious life, she was a member of three ‘official’ Mercy Congregations, Liverpool, Brisbane and North Sydney, and for a short time was a member of her own ‘semi-official’ Mercy group in Bathurst where she lived from June 1864 to October 1868.

She was born to Edward and Anne Morgan of Parr Hall near the village of Coughton in Warwickshire on 4 December 1820 and was educated by the Benedictine Sisters at the famous Stanbrook Abbey, a school where many well-to-do Catholic families of that time sent their daughters. She entered the Sisters of Mercy in Liverpool on 23 July 1844 and was professed there on 14 April 1847. As the Liverpool convent had only been founded in 1843, SM Catherine was among the early members there. Three of her sisters, Mary, Agnes and Frances also joined the Sisters of Mercy in Liverpool. They had

at least one brother, Edward, who seems to have died not long before Catherine. Despite searching on Ancestry and Google, I have been unable to find out anything more about the Morgan family. A search for their residence, Parr Hall, also proved fruitless, but recently I was reading the life of Katherine Parr, the sixth wife of Henry 8th, and discovered that her family had property in this area of Warwickshire. Were they the original owners of Parr Hall? Unfortunately it would be too difficult to make any connection after all these years. So that is all I am able to tell you about Catherine Morgan's family, but given that she attended Stanbrook Abbey as a boarding student, it is reasonable to assume that they were fairly well off.

Mother Vincent Whitty and her four Irish companions left Dublin for Liverpool en route to Brisbane on 5 December 1860. While waiting to board their ship, the *Donald Mackay*, the group stayed with the Sisters of Mercy in Liverpool, and here Mother Vincent would have met the forty year old SM Catherine, and heard of her interest in the foreign missions. Bishop Quinn, the leader of the Brisbane group, had recruited several French priests to join the mission, and had also found a French sister willing to go to Brisbane. However, when Mother Vincent boarded the *Donald Mackay* and met the French sister, she discovered that she was not interested in joining the Sisters of Mercy, but wanted to stay a member of her own order, and, presumably, make her own foundation. Mother Vincent decided that this would never work, and the poor French sister was offloaded and sent back to France. As her passage was paid, M Vincent was anxious to find a replacement for her.

Naturally she thought of SM Catherine, so she hurried back to the Liverpool Convent to see if she would be able to come with them. M Ligouri Gibson, the Superior in Liverpool, recounted the story in a letter to another sister:

She knew Sister Mary Catherine [Morgan] had a love for foreign missions and she implored us to give her. Sister Mary Catherine was willing either to go or stay, whichever we thought God wished – it was eleven o'clock, the vessel sailed at two!! It seemed the work of prayer, and that God wished us to grant dear Mother Vincent's petition. Dear Sister Mary Catherine! She made the sacrifice generously. We miss her very much, but she is well bestowed, and I am sure she will be happy...¹

As the rest of the group were young and inexperienced, Mother Vincent would have been delighted when SM Catherine was released to join the little group. The day the *Donald Mackay* left, M Vincent wrote back to Baggot Street:

Sr. M Catherine is quite at home at her duty as Sacristan and is also quite at home with each of us. She has not a single regret, but on the contrary rejoices that God called her *so quickly* and at length satisfied her desire to go on a Foreign Mission.²

So it seems that the English rose was settling in well among the shamrocks! SM Catherine was an excellent seamstress and very creative in 'making do' with whatever was to hand. Her talents were soon put to good use. It was discovered that the Bishop's mitre was packed in the ship's hold, so with just the few materials she had with her and three diamond studs provided by a

non-Catholic lady on board, she was able to make a new mitre – it remained Bishop Quinn’s favourite one for many years. When the supply of hosts ran out when the ship was in quarantine outside Geelong, the Bishop ordered some to be made ‘somehow and at once’. SM Catherine ingeniously made a supply using two flat irons. The Bishop had no cope for the first liturgical ceremony in Brisbane, and SM Catherine was able to produce one in the matter of hours.

Despite her talents with the needle, SM Catherine soon proved that she was unsuited to the raw living conditions the Sisters met in Brisbane. Their first home was a cramped cottage near the Cathedral which offered the Sisters no privacy, so the peace and ordered tranquillity of convent life which she had known in Liverpool (and perhaps grew accustomed to during her days at Stanbrook as a girl) were, in her view, sadly lacking, and she became ill and unable to carry out any schoolroom duties. In September 1862, after only fifteen months in Brisbane, she sought permission to return to Liverpool which Bishop Quinn allowed her to do. SM Catherine obviously thought that Mother Vincent was responsible for the failure of the foundation to live up to her expectations – in a letter to Cardinal Cullen of Dublin dated 7 October 1868, she wrote *there was but little religious discipline* under Mother Vincent. Bishop Quinn also blamed Mother Vincent for the state of affairs which led to SM Catherine’s departure, and this was the beginning of a chain of events which culminated in his deposition of Mother Vincent as Reverend Mother. But that’s a whole other story!

While awaiting approval from Liverpool for her return, SM Catherine stayed with the Benedictine Sisters at Subiaco in Sydney. The Superior there had taught SM Catherine during her days at Stanbrook, and on one occasion while at Stanbrook, she had also met Archbishop Polding of Sydney. Her cousin was a Benedictine priest in Sydney. She obviously felt at home in the Benedictine milieu and worked for some time in the Sisters' school. However, the school was forced to close for financial reasons in September 1863.

Whether SM Catherine ever received approval to return to Liverpool and where she spent the next few months are unclear. What she did next, though, may have been influenced by the fact that a Sydney Benedictine, Father Michael Corrish, was appointed as parish priest of Bathurst in February 1864. In June that year, with the encouragement of her cousin, Fr Bede Sumner, and the approval of Archbishop Polding, SM Catherine and two companions arrived in Bathurst, apparently with the idea of founding a Mercy convent there. It seems that the previous parish priest had left a large sum of money to establish the Sisters of Mercy in Bathurst. Sadly, their first ministry in Bathurst was to nurse Father Corrish, who died a few days after their arrival.

Conditions in Bathurst seemed to suit Catherine and she is recorded as having been in charge of a Girls' School, a ministry she seems to have discharged very competently. She and her companions were held in high regard by the Catholic people of Bathurst. Archbishop Polding appealed to Liverpool for extra Sisters for Bathurst, and in 1865, the Bishop of Liverpool agreed to send some

Sisters to Bathurst, provided that the Superior of the group he was sending (SM Ignatius McQuoin) would become the Bathurst Superior, with SM Catherine Morgan as her assistant. Catherine was agreeable to this and eagerly awaited the reinforcements.

However, events took an unexpected turn a few months later, with the appointment of Matthew Quinn (brother of Bishop Quinn of Brisbane) to the newly created see of Bathurst. Before he knew that Polding had invited the Sisters from Liverpool to Bathurst, Matthew Quinn had negotiated with the Mercy Convent in Charleville in County Cork for a group of Sisters to accompany him to Bathurst. When he found out about the Liverpool group, Matthew Quinn tried to prevent them from sailing to Australia, but he was too late – they were already on the high seas. Archbishop Polding, faced with a potentially embarrassing situation, invited the Liverpool Sisters to make a foundation in Sydney instead. SM Catherine Morgan remained in Bathurst until Matthew Quinn and the Charleville Sisters arrived on 31 October 1866. She then joined Mother Ignatius at the Mercy foundation in Sydney, and was appointed the Assistant Superior there.

However, she soon became dissatisfied with what she regarded as lax discipline and practices in the Sydney community. She complained to Archbishop Polding but felt he did not take her complaints seriously. Eventually, M Ignatius realised that she and SM Catherine were totally incompatible and she offered to pay Catherine's passage back to Liverpool.

Although Catherine knew she was no longer welcome in the Sydney Congregation, and the Liverpool Superior

was willing to have her back, she did not seem all that anxious to return to Liverpool. Perhaps her decision was helped by the fact that her passage back to Liverpool was booked on a cargo ship where she and another returning Sister would have been the only passengers! Another factor may have been the death of her last remaining sister in the Liverpool congregation around this time. So Catherine then decided she would return to Brisbane. Although Bishop Quinn wrote that she returned to Brisbane without notifying either him or the Brisbane Superior of her intentions, SM Catherine must have assumed that, as she left Brisbane with the blessing of the Bishop, she would be welcome to come back at any time:

I left with the full permission of Bishop Quinn, but it was upon such good terms that I was at liberty to return, – this together with an assurance from His Lordship at a later period that I should be welcome back, enabled me to come to Brisbane³

It may seem surprising that she would want to return, given the circumstances of her leaving in 1862. However, Catherine was now convinced that the problems she had encountered earlier in Brisbane

are now happily through the vigilance of Bishop Quinn, [and] the appointment of another Superior, perfectly corrected, and good order, fervour and discipline established.⁴

There is no record of what the Brisbane Sisters thought of her return or of how she was received back into the community after six years away. Soon after her arrival, and almost certainly with the approval of Bishop Quinn,

she wrote to Cardinal Barnabo in Rome, a long account of her time in Sydney , and for good measure, sent a copy to Cardinal Cullen in Dublin. Cullen's copy of this document is housed in the Dublin Archdiocesan archives. It makes very interesting reading and does not put M Ignatius McQuoin in a very good light. However, Catherine Morgan was undoubtedly biased against her, so this document needs to be read with caution.

Catherine's return to Brisbane, probably in September 1868, was fortuitous in at least one respect. St Ann's Industrial School had opened in 1867, with the aim of providing skills training to girls graduating from Nudgee Orphanage. You are probably familiar with the St Ann's building facing Ann Street beside the All Hallows' entrance gate. This was not the St Ann's that Catherine Morgan would have known however. It dates only from 1894, and by then SM Catherine was long dead. For many years the name: *St Ann's Industrial School* could be seen in the gable at the top of the building, which became part of All Hallows' School in 1963. Some years later, someone decided to erase history and sand-blasted *Industrial School* from the name!

The St Ann's that SM Catherine knew was the old Caledonian Hotel building, situated on the far side of Ann Street near the present day junction of Ann and Boundary Streets. Today there is a restaurant and a grocery store there! It was only ever meant to be a temporary home for St Ann's, but Catherine readily found a niche there teaching the skills of dressmaking, needlework and lacemaking for which she had so much talent. So good was the work produced at St Ann's that

orders came in from Finney Isles (a leading department store). A magnificent Limerick lace gown designed by SM Catherine to raise funds for a bazaar was brought by the husband of a Mrs Harris for the (then) fabulous sum of £50. Mr and Mrs Harris were the grandparents of Lord Casey, who was Governor-General of Australia in the 1960's. More importantly, the St. Ann's girls were so thoroughly taught that they had no trouble finding jobs as dressmakers etc. later on. In 1879, an Industrial Fair was held in Brisbane and articles from St Ann's received so many prizes that it was decided to enter work in an International Fair in Sydney that same year. St Ann's received two medals from this prestigious exhibition, and those same medals are still in the possession of the Brisbane Sisters of Mercy. SM Catherine had started a tradition of excellence in various branches of needlework at St Ann's which continued for almost 100 years.

Catherine Morgan was also very artistic, and painted the wooden altar in St Ann's chapel to resemble Portland stone. Even the Bishop was fooled by it – until he rapped the surface with his knuckles! She is also credited with having painted the beautiful religious signs still to be seen above some of the doorways in the All Hallows' Convent building. One could say that the English rose, having survived transplants to Sydney and Bathurst, was finally flourishing in the soil of Brisbane.

SM Catherine was not to remain long at St Ann's. She died there, aged 53, of an intestinal obstruction on 23 December 1874 and was buried by James Quinn in the little cemetery behind All Hallows' Convent on the same

day. In 1882, her mortal remains, together with those of the five sisters who had died before her, were transferred to Nudgee cemetery where she rests to this day.

I am indebted to many sources, particularly an unpublished account of SM Catherine's life written by Mary Ryan rsm of Bathurst and Maureen McGuirk's life of M Ignatius McQuoin⁵. Sr Barbara Jeffrey rsm, Mercy archivist at Birmingham, provided some of the details about Catherine's early life.

¹ MM Ligouri Gibson to MM Juliana Hardman, 24 January, 1861.

² MM Vincent Whitty to MM of Mercy Norris, 8 December 1860.

³ SM Catherine Morgan to Cardinal Barnabo, 7 October 1868.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Maureen McGuirk rsm *Singing to the End of the Service*, Playright Publishers, Sydney, 2007.

**St Clements Melkite Rite Church,
South Brisbane**

5 April 2016

Mr Simon Haddad

[This is a summary of the talk given by Mr Haddad as no text of the actual talk was available.]

Mr Simon Haddad, Secretary of St Clement's Parish Council gave an interesting history of the church and of the Melkite community generally. He began with the ninetieth anniversary celebrations which were attended by Archbishop Robert Rabbat, the Melkite Catholic Eparch of Australia and New Zealand and Archbishop Amel Nona, the Chaldean Catholic Archbishop, as well as our own Archbishop Mark Coleridge. As part of these celebrations, Simon presented a history of St Clements, which is essentially the talk given to our Society in April.

The story of St Clements really dates back to the 1880s when large numbers of predominantly Christian migrants from Lebanon began arriving in Australia. Lebanon was then part of Syria, and in the 1891 New South Wales census, 116 Syrian born people were recorded as living in the colony. By 1921, that number had risen to 850. These early settlers mostly belonged to one of three Christian traditions – Melkite, Maronite and Orthodox.

The first Melkite priest from Lebanon arrived in Sydney in 1891. He was Archimandrite Sylvanos Mansour, and at first he ministered to all three communities. The first Melkite rite church in Sydney was completed in 1895. Rev Mansour died in Brisbane in November 1929 while visiting St Clements.

The Lebanese migrants spread rapidly throughout the rest of eastern Australia, and in 1929 a second Melkite rite church was established in South Brisbane. The foundation stone of St Clements was blessed on 7 March 1929 by Archbishop Duhig and laid by His Lordship Archbishop Clement Malouf from Lebanon. The latter had come to Australia to attend the 29th International Eucharistic Congress in Sydney, and Archbishop Duhig made sure that Brisbane was on his Australian itinerary. The first parish priest of St Clements was Archimandrite Sophronus Khoury. He had migrated from Lebanon to Sydney in 1908 and in 1928 arrived in Brisbane where he gained permission to build a Melkite Rite Church. Until it was completed, he offered Mass for Syrian Catholics in St Marys, South Brisbane. The Church was dedicated to St Clement, the third successor of St Peter, who according to tradition, was imprisoned by the Emperor Trajan, and was martyred by being tied to an anchor and thrown into the sea.

St Clements was blessed and opened by Archbishop Duhig and Archbishop Clement Malouf on 29 March 1936. It was described in the *Daily Standard* as a handsome brick structure, 70 feet long with an approach of double steps. The interior of the Church is more Latin than Byzantine in style, something that the local

parishioners were probably more familiar with. The architects were Hennessy and Hennessy, and the builder Mr. L Machin. The total cost of the land, church and presbytery was £3305. Although the community was small and its members not wealthy, a fund-raising committee was formed and eventually the debt was paid off. Rev Khoury ministered to the Lebanese community in Brisbane until his death in 1952. He was succeeded by Rev Alexis Malouf, who had come to Brisbane in 1951 as Rev Khoury's assistant. Rev Malouf ministered to all three sections of the Lebanese community – Melkite, Maronite and Orthodox, even receiving permission from the Vatican to officiate at Orthodox weddings. He was much loved by the Lebanese community, ministering at St Clements until his death in 1990. He was succeeded by Rev Lawrence Ayoub, whose 90th birthday was celebrated as part of the Church anniversary.

Although the parishioners of St Clements continue to be largely of Lebanese descent, the church and its parishioners have played a significant role in the wider society. Several parishioners lost their lives in the world wars, and the church recently held an exhibition commemorating St Clements connection to the ANZACS. The St Clement Catholic Association continues to provide volunteers to St Vincents Aged Care and assists in finding employment opportunities for young people. Several prominent former parishioners were listed by Simon as having contributed significantly to life in Australia and abroad.