

ST Nicholas Church

PARISH LIFE TAMWORTH 1853-1953

INTRODUCTION

by Gerard Hoban

The decision to make an attempt to list chronologically some of the most significant events in the first one hundred years of our parish life, has been made necessary by the fact that there are very few original documents in existence which relate to that period. Many details of parish life in earlier years are in danger of being forgotten with the passing of time. Whilst there is much that has been brought to remembrance in the list which follows, there are - of necessity - many omissions.

Events that go on for years do not lend themselves to single line entries, and they could only be trivialised by attempting to do so. There is no mention of either World War, for example; nor of the severe economic depression

of the 1890's and the 1930's. Probably the whole chronology should be headed by noting the essential fact, that whatever material advances have been made in the provision of buildings and facilities of all kinds, the one most important aspect of our parish life has been the enduring and ongoing practice of our Faith, which has been marked by continuing practical expressions of Charity, and a sturdy continuance of confidence in Divine Providence.

Through war and peace, through boom and bust, through good seasons and bad, the practice of the Faith has flourished at St Nicholas. As we reflect on the past, we should humbly pray that this may continue into the future.

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THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS

1838 Rev John Thomas Lynch (1816-1884) arrived in Australia and was appointed to East Maitland to be joint pastor, with Rev Edmund Mahoney, of the only Catholic Church north of Sydney. He was the first priest to appear in New England and rode as far afield as Armidale.

1844 Dean James Hanly, first priest at Moreton Bay, riding from Moreton Bay to Sydney, baptised Jude Layden - born 1844 - in Tamworth, and probably celebrated the first Mass.

1848 Dean John Rigney (1814-1903) appointed to Singleton; Dean John Lynch appointed to Armidale. Both visited Tamworth at irregular intervals. Dean Rigney celebrated the first recorded Mass in Tamworth in June 1848, at the Robert Peel Inn, Ebsworth St, West Tamworth.

1848 The Town of Tamworth - i.e. East Tamworth - first surveyed; nineteen streets laid out and named by Surveyor-General Thomas Mitchell

1849 17 December- A double width grant of land made to the Catholic Church by the Colonial Government of New South Wales, running the full length of the northern side of White St, from Marius St to Peel St.

1853 Rev Timothy McCarthy (1829 - 1879) appointed resident priest at Armidale to serve northern NSW. His district ran from Murrurundi to the Queensland border, and from Wee Waa to the coast. He was the first Pastor of Tamworth.

1855 Rev John Dunne appointed to Armidale as assistant to Father Timothy

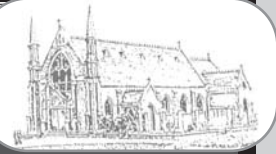
McCarthy.

1858 9 February - The foundation stone for the first substantial church building in Tamworth laid by Father Tim McCarthy, assisted by Mr. P.J.Coghlan. and Mr Daniel Regan. The church was to be built of brick and was to replace a temporary timber structure previously used for church purposes on another portion of the site. The new St Nicholas Church was built parallel to White St, on an east west axis, about sixty metres west of the present church.

1859 30 January - The new St Nicholas Church was blessed and opened by Dean John Lynch. The contractor was Mr. Grace, the total cost was £575 and £232 was subscribed on the day of the opening.

1860 3 June - A Public Meeting was held in Tamworth at the Harp of Erin Hotel to discuss the need for a resident priest. The Meeting guaranteed to find £200 to help maintain a clergyman.

1861 16 November - Archbishop J.B.Polding OSB, accompanied by Rev Mellitus Corish OSB and escorted by Father Tim McCarthy made the first Episcopal visitation of the northern area of his archdiocese. He administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to twenty candidates in St Nicholas Church on 17 November, and received forty seven children to their first Communion. He celebrated his sixty sixth birthday on 18 November in Tamworth. A delegation of local Catholics waited on the Archbishop and asked for the appointment of a resident priest for Tamworth.



1862 March - Rev John Killeen Handy (1834 - 1874) arrived in Tamworth, appointed by Archbishop Polding to be Pastor of the Liverpool Plains and first resident priest at St Nicholas.

1862 Rev J.K.Handy established a school in St Nicholas Church 'along American lines'. School Mistress Isobel Kendall of Maitland

1862 November - Rev J.K.Handy left Tamworth for Sydney.

1862 November - Clergy changes announced in Sydney: Rev Tim McCarthy from Armidale to Carcoar; Dean John Lynch from Maitland to Armidale; Rev B.H.Power O.P. (1827 - 1869) from Deniliquin to Tamworth.

1864 Rev James Garvey (b.1840) appointed to Tamworth.

1864 Tamworth proclaimed a Parish; Fr.Garvey the first Parish Priest.

1865 The See of Maitland established, and Dr James Murray consecrated in Dublin to be the first Bishop. He took possession of his Diocese in 1866, and in that year Tamworth ceased to be part of the Archdiocese of Sydney and was included in the new Diocese of Maitland.

1870 Rev Michael Gough appointed by Bishop Murray to be Parish Priest of St Nicholas. Father Gough built the first presbytery in White St, on a site adjacent to the present church. It was a small brick building of five rooms with a detached timber kitchen and laundry.

1874 Bishop Murray obtained government agreement to the sale of the Peel St frontage of the land granted to the Church in 1849. He subsequently purchased 'three half sections' of land in Marius St adjoining the present church, intending it to be the site of the future Dominican Convent.

1875 September - Rev Patrick Dwyer Ryan (1848 - 1899) appointed by Bishop Murray to Tamworth. He was to continue as Parish Priest for twenty four years until his death in 1899, and was largely responsible for the consolidation of the Church in Tamworth.

1876 12 January - The arrival of the first Dominican Nuns in Tamworth. Four nuns, Mother M. Regis Dowley, Sister M. Francis Hayden, Novice Gertrude O'Loughlin and Lay Sister Aloysius Lynch were escorted by Bishop Murray and Father Foran of Maitland. They travelled by train to Murrurundi - the end of the line - and then by coach to Tamworth, after an overnight stop with the Lane family at Ardglen. They were accommodated in the presbytery on their arrival, Fr Ryan moving to P.J.Coghlan's residence 'The Pines' - in Hill St.

1876 16 January - The Dominicans began teaching in Tamworth, in St Nicholas Church. The first day enrolments were ninety pupils in the Primary School and ten pupils in the secondary School.

1877 10 March - The Foundation Stone for a new St Nicholas Church - the present church - laid by Bishop Murray. Fr Ryan celebrated Mass in the existing church, with five to six hundred people in attendance.

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1878 The Railway reaches West Tamworth, and school enrolments double.

1879 1 March - New St Nicholas Church blessed and opened by Bishop Murray, after two years in the building.

The contractor was William Dowell of Tamworth - who had assisted Mr. Grace in the building of the old church in 1858/9. The cost was in excess of £3000. From this time on the old church was used entirely for educational purposes.

1880 21 June - Contract signed for the erection of a new three storey convent for the Dominican Nuns, on the site purchased by Bishop Murray in 1874. The contract price was £2353.

1882 January - The completed Convent was blessed and opened by Dean Thomas English, Vicar General of the Diocese of Maitland.

1885 Erection of a new two storey brick Presbytery, on the site of the first Presbytery in White St.

1887 Transfer of Tamworth from the Diocese of Maitland (Bp. James Murray) to the Diocese of Armidale (Bp Elzear Torreggiani OSFC). After a Dinner at the Dominican Convent, the transfer was made personally by Bp Murray to Bp Torreggiani. The two Maitland priests who were acting as locum tenens for Father Ryan - who was holidaying in Ireland - returned to the Maitland Diocese. Priests from Armidale took their place until Fr Ryan's return, and he remained as Parish Priest.

1894 27 September - First Catholic Ball held in Tamworth at the Alhambra Hall. Mrs. Percy Smith and Mrs. A.J. Crowe were the Honorary Secretaries ; Mrs. Charles Regan, Honorary Treasurer.

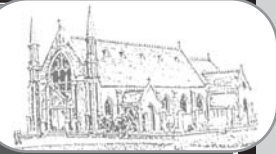
1899 September - Death of Father P.D. Ryan, after twenty four years as Parish Priest. Both Bp Murray and Bp Torreggiani attended his funeral, and the parishioners subscribed for an elaborate headstone. Father James O'Neill - Curate at St Nicholas - was appointed Administrator pro tem. The appointment was later confirmed as Tamworth became a Mensal Parish of the Bishop of Armidale.

1899 September - First Meeting of a special Parish Committee formed to find the means to pay off the outstanding debt on St Nicholas Church, which stood at £2000. President Charles Regan; Treasurer H. McVeagh and Secretary C.J. Shannon.

1901 Rev James O'Neill inducted as Dean of Tamworth by Bp Torreggiani.

1901 January - Celebrations to mark the Silver Jubilee of the arrival of the Dominican Nuns in Tamworth. Dr Murray came from Maitland to be President of the proceedings. He later laid the Foundation Stone for the new Chapel at St Dominic's.

1903 3 May - Consecration of Monsignor Patrick Joseph O'Connor as Co-adjutor Bishop of Armidale, with right of succession.



1903 December - Final payment on the outstanding debt of £2000 on St Nicholas Church. Testimonial presented to the Secretary of the Special Committee, C. J. Shannon.

1904 28 January - Death of Bp.Elzear Torreggiani OSFC Bishop of Armidale from 1879, and succession of Bp P.J.O'Connor.

1904 Completion of the Chapel at St Dominic's, and the blessing and opening by Bp P.J.O'Connor. Cost £1500.

1905 19 March - A new brick church at Attunga- - 'Dean O'Neill's church - dedicated to St Patrick, blessed and opened by Bp P.J.O'Connor.

1909 October - Completion of St Nicholas Parish Hall - the White St Hall - incorporating two extra class rooms.

1910 Additions to the former church, now used as a Primary School, in the form of an extra room at each end of the building.

1913 27 October - The laying of the Foundation Stone by Bp O'Connor, for major extensions to St Nicholas Church, to increase the capacity by approximately fifty percent, enlarging the church to its present dimensions. Projected cost £3000, of which £1516. was collected at the laying of the stone.

1914 Completion of the extensions to St Nicholas Church. Dean O'Neill moved to Inverell as Parish Priest. Rev William Augustine Mullins appointed Administrator.

1915 12 December - The laying of the Foundation Stone for St Michael's Church, Dungowan by Bp O'Connor.

1919 The building of St Joseph's Church-School at West Tamworth, and the arrival of the Sisters of St Joseph to teach there.

1922 Death of Fr W.A.Mullins. Fr John R Collender appointed Administrator.

1923 Building of a new class-room block at the Dominican Convent for the Secondary School.

1924 Purchase of "Carthona" - a two storey residence with extensive grounds in Carthage St - as a site for the future Christian Brothers College. Cost £1200.

1925 26 January - The arrival of the first Christian Brothers in Tamworth. Brothers Whiting, O'Connor, Lathey and Newman began teaching in the parochial Primary School in White St, which was given over to them until the new College was built. The enrolment on the first day was 120 boys. The Brothers were housed at "Carthona"

1928 Fr John Collender moved to Manilla as Parish Priest. Rev Dr Patrick J Dunne appointed Administrator. The area west of the Peel River was separated from St Nicholas Parish, to become the new parish of West Tamworth, Fr Dave Carroll appointed first Parish Priest.

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1929 8 September - Dr J.A.Coleman consecrated Co-adjutor Bishop of Armidale with right of succession.

1929 Commencement of the new Christian Brothers College in Carthage St, following a very successful Parish Bazaar at which the sum of £3000 was netted. The purchase of a single storey residence - "Coolinda" at the corner of Carthage and White Streets as a residence for the Brothers, "Carthona" having been demolished to make way for the new building.

1930 Completion and Official Opening of the Christian Brothers College, dedicated to Our Lady of Mt Carmel. Total cost £6830.

1930 Completion of a new school and Convent at Dungowan, for the Sisters of St Joseph.

1932 15 July - Death of Bp Patrick Joseph O'Connor, Bishop of Armidale from 1904, and the succession of Bp John Aloysius Coleman as fourth Bishop of Armidale.

1932 A new timber church built at Kootingal dedicated to St Marie Therese, replacing an earlier church destroyed by fire.

1938 Work commences on the building of a new church and school at North Tamworth on land donated by the Maguire family. The bricks for the church were donated by Albert Shepherd and the contractor was Frank Lane of Tamworth. The commencement was preceded by a long period of fund raising in the parish at large.

1938 The erection of St Peter's Church Nundle

1939 21 May - The completed church at North Tamworth, dedicated to Our Lady of Victories, was blessed and opened by Bp.J.A.Coleman.

1947 Purchase of the former Military Hospital at Woolomol - now Oxley Vale - as a site for a future Nazareth House.

1947 22 December - Death of Bp.John Aloysius Coleman, Bishop of Armidale from 1932.

1948 22 April - Consecration of Dr E.J.Doody in Brisbane, to be fifth Bishop of Armidale.

1948 Demolition of the second presbytery (1885?) and erection of a new cream brick building of two storeys on the same site in White St, adjacent to the church. Contractor W.S.(Bill) Young of Tamworth.

1948 The arrival of the Poor Sisters of Nazareth to staff the new facility in the former Military Hospital at Oxley Vale, renamed "Nazareth House.

1952 Rev Dr.P.J.Dunne (now Monsignor Dunne) moved to West Tamworth as Parish Priest, after twenty four years as Administrator of St Nicholas.

1953 Rev John M.O'Connor appointed administrator, one hundred years having elapsed since the arrival of Rev Tim McCarthy.



			1997 to present Rev Richard Gleeson
1853 - 1862	Rev Timothy McCarthy (1829-1879)	Pastor of New England, resident of Armidale	1996-1997 Rev Richard Gleeson
1862	Rev John Killeen Handy (1834-1874)	Pastor of the Liverpool Plains. First Resident Priest.	1993-1996 Rev Gerard Hanna
1863 - 1864	Rev Bartholomew Hyacinth Power O.P. (1827-1869)	Appointed, but no record of his administration	1983-1993 Rev Gerard Hanna
1864 - 1870	Rev James Garvey (b.1840)	First Parish Priest	1971-1983 Rev John M Carey
1870 - 1875	Rev Michael Gough	Parish Priest	1968-1971 Rev C.A. Fisher
1875 - 1899	Rev Patrick Dwyer Ryan (1848 - 1899)	Parish Priest	1959-1967 Rev Cletus J Leis
1899 - 1914	Rev James O'Neill	First Administrator	1953-1959 Rev John M. O'Connor
1914 - 1922	Rev William Augustine Mullins	Administrator	1928-1952 Rev Patrick J Dunne
1922 - 1928	Rev John R Collender	Administrator	1922-1928 Rev John R Collender
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1993 - 1996	Rev Gerard Hanna	Parish Priest	1862 Rev John Killeen Handy (1834-1874)
1996 -	Rev Richard Gleeson	Temporary Administrator	1853-1862 Rev Timothy McCathy
1997	Rev Richard Gleeson	Parish Priest	

EPISCOPAL ADMINISTRATION

The Parish of St Nicholas has been part of three diocese since it was established. From first contact (1830's) to 1866 it was part of the Archdiocese of Sydney. From 1866 to 1887 it was part of the Diocese of Maitland. From 1887 to the present time, it has been part of the Diocese of Armidale.



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