

CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND FAITH

A HISTORY OF ST PATRICK'S MORTLAKE TO MARK THE CHURCH'S 110TH ANNIVERSARY

Researched/

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Introduction

Today, on the 110th anniversary of St Patrick's Church, Mortlake, we recall the sacrifices and the faith of the clergy, religious orders, and successive generations of migrants from many cultures who settled in Mortlake and have contributed in so many ways to this local, vibrant, Christian community.

We especially honour the Irish pioneers who began to settle at Mortlake from the mid 1880s - many from Counties Tipperary, Limerick, Cork and Kerry.

Parish Founder

We may consider Dean Callaghan McCarthy (1822-1894) as the founder of St Patrick's Parish. Born in Ireland he migrated to Australia and was ordained by Archbishop John Bede Polding. For more than 20 years Fr McCarthy ministered in the expansive parish of Mudgee, before being appointed as the first parish priest of St Mary's Concord in 1870.¹ Described as '...a direct, determined and energetic Irishman...' Dean McCarthy identified the needs of the growing number of Catholics living in the villages of Mortlake, Riverview and Beaconsfield from the mid 1880s. Dean

McCarthy appreciated that distance and transport restricted many Cabaritra and Mortlake families from attending St Mary's Concord and he encouraged the Archdiocese of Sydney to purchase land at Mortlake on 17 July 1889.²

Through his interest in the welfare of Mortlake's Irish, the Dean eased the family dislocation that many migrants experienced in their new homeland. During the early 1890s he made plans for a church at Mortlake. A couple of months before the laying of a foundation stone the Dean was involved in a train accident while journeying to the city to attend a gathering at St Mary's Cathedral. Although badly injured Dean McCarthy called a cab and calmly proceeded to St Vincent's Hospital Darlinghurst, before dying a few hours later.³

Cardinal Moran

In December 1894 Cardinal Patrick Moran, the Archbishop of Sydney, visited the fledgling Catholic community at Mortlake and laid the foundations stone for St Patrick's Church and parish

¹ *The Irish Australian* 31 October 1894

² Property files, St Patrick's Parish Mortlake Archives (SPPM)

³ *Irish Australian* 31 October 1894

community.⁴ At that time the Mortlake community comprised about 200 Catholics.

The Cardinal acknowledged the contribution of Dean McCarthy:

*Their late venerated pastor had looked forward with joy in anticipation of the laying of the foundation stone. No other purpose was dearer to his heart for many years.*⁵

The cardinal took the opportunity of appealing to the large assembly, including the Mayor of Burwood, about the importance of religious education:

*I recently saw a report from France (which) found that from the Communistic schools all religious instruction had been banished, and that 70 per cent of the children educated in them had turned out professed atheists.*⁶

Completed in 1895 St Patrick's was a small brick building with an iron roof, located closest to the main street. Its

construction during a period of economic and social hardship had significance for several reasons. Firstly, the name, St Patrick's, signified the many Irish migrants and first generation Australian of Irish heritage who had settled in the district. Despite Sydney's Catholic community being predominantly Irish, Mortlake represented only the third church named after Ireland's patron saint in the 19th century.⁷

Secondly, this church, unlike most in the colony commenced without debt, due to the combined generosity of the late Dean McCarthy who bequeathed £300 for the erection of the church; and the men and women of Mortlake who between 1893 and 1895 raised £230, an enormous sum given the district's general poverty in the 1890s, which had been exacerbated by unemployment. Apart from Dean McCarthy the 'chief contributors' to funding St Patrick's included the Callaghan, McNeeve, Moloney, O'Connor McCarthy and Toohey families. Timothy O'Connor McCarthy held the important position of secretary of the church building committee.⁸

⁴ *Freeman's Journal* 5 January 1895

⁵ *loc. cit.*,

⁶ *loc. cit.*,

⁷ St Patrick's Church Hill and St Patrick's Kogarah were the other two parishes

⁸ *Freeman's Journal* 5 January 1895

Finally, St Patrick's Mortlake has the distinction of being the only Catholic Church built in the metropolitan area in the 1890s, a decade of high unemployment caused by the colony's worst economic recession in 120 years.

District History

The *Wangal* tribe were the original inhabitants of district now called Mortlake. Some recognition of Aboriginal settlement is reflected in Wangal Reserve at the end of Hilly Street. After European settlement – some historians prefer the term 'invasion' – the district was named Breakfast Point, following an expedition by Captain (later Governor) John Hunter and Lieutenant William Bradley up the Parramatta River in February 1788. Hunter and his crew reportedly had breakfast with some members of the Wangal tribe.⁹

In the early 19th century Mortlake was named variously Batchelor's Point and Bottle Point.¹⁰ Mortlake, an English name, dates from about the 1880s. Like Putney on the other side of the Parramatta River, they appear to have

⁹ S. Coupe, *Concord: A Centenary History* (Concord, 1983)

¹⁰ B Millin, 'Origins of Names in Port

been named after towns along the Thames River, London.¹¹

Other nearby suburbs such as Burwood and Enfield also reflected the intent of the colonial authorities and the English settlers of these districts.¹²

Beginning of Christian Worship

The Congregationalists were the first Christian denomination to worship in Mortlake. In 1879 the Congregational Church established a Mission and Sunday School on the Yaralla Estate.¹³ In the mid 1880s this Mission moved to Tennyson Road, Mortlake, then the centre of a small village. Congregationalists from Burwood provided the funds to build a church in 1887¹⁴; the remnants of which are

Jackson', *Royal Australian Historical Society* Vol 31 Part 5, 1945

¹¹ F. Pollon *The Book of Sydney Suburbs* (Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1988) p 180

¹² Myth suggests that Irish Catholics dominated the Mortlake landscape in the last 15 years of the nineteenth century. Irish culture may have dominated other districts, such as Balmain and Darlinghurst, but English migrants were relatively numerous in Burwood, Strathfield, Concord and Mortlake in the later parts of the 19th century.

¹³ G.M. Shaw, *Concord Jubilee, 1883-1933* (Sydney, Canberra Press, 1933)

¹⁴ G. Nicholls, *Burwood Congregational Heritage, Year Book Congregational Union of NSW 1977 Special Edition*, p 93

clearly visible today at 119 Tennyson Road.

Adjacent to their church the Congregationalists built a hall. This hall – no longer standing – may have played an important role in the religious education of Mortlake Catholics before the St Patrick's Church. In the late 1880s the Sisters of Charity of Concord realised the '...sad conditions of the Catholics of Mortlake...' many of whom, reportedly, did not attend Sunday Mass and had not received the sacraments. The Sisters trained two young women who began catechist classes in a local 'hall', attracting more than 70 children and a number of adults.¹⁵ There were no other halls in Mortlake at that time, giving rise to the view that Catholic instruction took place in the Congregational Hall.

Australian Gas & Light Company (AGL)

An important historical question is why build a Catholic Church in the 'outlying suburb of Mortlake' when a strong parish existed at Concord, and when several other nearby areas with larger populations, such as Strathfield and

Burwood, did not have churches until 1904 and 1916 respectively.¹⁶

It is true that up until the later decades of the 19th century the greater Concord area had not been densely inhabited. At the incorporation of Concord in 1883 the population stood at 400.¹⁷ A decision in the same year by the Australian Gas and Light Company (AGL) – first established in Sydney in 1837 – would have a profound impact on the development of Mortlake and Concord.

In the early 1880s AGL sought to increase the production of gas to meet growing demand.¹⁸ In 1883 AGL purchased 42 acres of land at Mortlake and began to shift operations from several other inner-west localities such as Darling Harbour, Balmain and Five Dock to Mortlake. The availability of land at Mortlake led AGL to purchase more land, bringing the total site to 120 acres.

¹⁵ Parish of Concord, *Annals of the Irish Sisters of Charity in Australia 1882-1938*

¹⁶ St Martha's recently celebrated its centenary: See G. Vella, 'A brief history of the original St Martha's Church, Strathfield', pamph. November 2004. See also J.A. McGlade, 'The Parish of St Martha's Strathfield: Its Story' in *St Martha's Strathfield, 1916-1991*, pham, ca 1991

¹⁷ Concord Council *Annual Report, 1918*. (SLNSW)

¹⁸ *150 Years of Gas*, Annual Report, Australian Gas and Light Company, 1987

The commencement of gas production at Mortlake in 1886 attracted migrant labourers and earlier migrant families. The Mortlake site quickly produced more gas than the other three sites combined. In September 1886 labourers at the Gas Works petitioned colonial authorities with the names of 60 predominantly Anglican and Wesleyan school age children. Several Catholic families also signed the petition, which the Government approved on 5 November 1886. AGL provided £2,000 towards the construction of Mortlake Public School.¹⁹ Many of the school's parents supported the establishment of St Mary's Anglican Church (originally called Concord North) Mortlake in 1887.

At about the same time the 'grand' Palace Hotel and Ashton's Baths at the end of Tennyson Road opened.

Immigrants

The first Catholics working at AGL lodged with families in Burwood or Concord or at local pubs. Michael Moloney, a native of Killaneana, Co Clare, moved to the district soon after immigrating and lived 'at Kings'. James Rourke from Co Kildare boarded 'at

Jones' and Michael Baggot, a Limerick man, settled 'at Levery's'.²⁰

Irish migrants such as John Hutch and Julia Carey who married at St Patrick's Church Hill in April 1871, brought their family to Mortlake.²¹ Their eldest son, James, married Sarah Knowles of Mortlake in June 1894.

First Marriage

The first recorded Catholic marriage in the Mortlake district occurred on 21 September 1889, when James Rourke, aged 27, married Annie Giles, 18, a domestic servant and native of Orange, NSW. The Rourkes had the following children: Bridget M, James A, Genevieve, John Thomas, and Margaret.

Despite their local church many Mortlake couples were married at St Mary's Concord, nearly two kilometres south-west, because marriages could only occur at St Patrick's on a Sunday. The first couple married at St Patrick's

²⁰ *NSW Electoral Roll, 1887-88*. In this source the spelling is Molloney.

²¹ John Hutch of Chair, Co Tipperary, was the son of John Hutch and Johanna Judiannus; Julia Carey of Co Cork was the daughter of Michael Carey and Margaret Howran.

¹⁹ *Mortlake Public School, 1887-1987*, p. 3

Church were Mary Josephine Lynch and Patrick Joseph Higgins in 1906.²²

First Baptism

Employment opportunities also attracted James McFadden and Julia King to Mortlake and their eldest child Julia Catherine (28 December 1886) has the distinction of being the first Mortlake baby baptised by Dean McCarthy at St Mary's Church on 16 January 1887.²³

Some other Mortlake marriages in the late 1880s included:

- Michael Baggot (Co Limerick) and Abyna Leahy (Co Cork)²⁴
- John Ryan (Co Kerry) and Sarah McGaughey (Co Derry)²⁵

Moloney²⁶ family

Members of the Moloney family have lived continuously in the parish since the early 1890s. Soon after his marriage

at St Patrick's Church Hill in 1891, Michael Maloney²⁷, aged 31, and his 27 year old wife Mary Hogan²⁸ from Co Limerick moved to Mortlake where Michael gained employment as a fireman at the Gas Works; Mary worked as a servant at Burwood.²⁹

Their 10 children were born in a workers' cottage at no 42 Mortlake Street.³⁰ We are very pleased that Joe and Iris Moloney are present today. Born in 1912, Joe started school at St Patrick's aged five years and ten months on 28 January 1918, and has lived in the same street all his life.³¹

The Moloneys typified the close connections between AGL, the church and Mortlake. The combined service to the Gas Works by Michael Moloney and four of his sons – James, John Daniel

²² Extracted from Marriage Registers, St Mary's Concord.

²³ *Baptismal Register*, St Mary's Concord. St Mary's Concord Parish Archives (SMCPA)

²⁴ Children: Patrick, 1890; James, 1892; Catherine, 1892-95; Nellie, 1894. Their mother's name also spelt Abinia.

²⁵ Children: Eliza, 1890; John, 1893; Kathleen, 1895; Sarah, 1898.

²⁶ Also spelt Maloney in some church records and Molloney in some state records.

²⁷ Michael Moloney arrived Sydney per *Port Victor 1*, 8 July 1886. He was the son of James (or Michael) Moloney and Honorah Walsh.

²⁸ Daughter of John Hogan and Margaret Sheehan

²⁹ Marriage Register, St Patrick's Church Hill, 1891 (ML)

³⁰ James Patrick; Margaret; Maria; Michael; Julia, Catherine; Daniel, Anne, Joseph

³¹ *Register of Admissions as used in Catholic*

and Joe – was 219 years. Joe retired in 1979 having completed 50 years service.³²

Other early families

During the 1890s Economic Depression, men 'fortunate' to gain work at Mortlake often uprooted their families from other areas of Sydney to live closer to employment. The registers at Concord parish list other families living in Mortlake included:

- Brien
- Brophy
- Clancy
- Corcoran
- Dowling
- Flynn
- Higgins
- Hird
- Lanfran
- McCall
- McManus
- O'Callaghan
- O'Donoghue
- Powell
- St George

Schools St Patrick's Mortlake January 1917-May 1963 (no records from April 1924 to February 1954)

³² Michael Moloney: 40 years; Joe, 50 years, 31-01-1927-1977; Daniel, 49 years; John

- Willis
- Woods³³
-

The first district census confirmed the presence of a Catholic community at Mortlake.³⁴ Many Irish families lived in small semi-detached cottages in Lake, Herbert, or Mortlake Streets.³⁵ AGL as part of its expansion later purchased Lake Street, which was situated near the main gates of AGL.

St Patrick's School

Dean McCarthy encouraged the Sisters of Charity – the first religious order of women in the colony – to open a school in the new church building in 1896. Ninety six children attended the school in its first year.³⁶ During the week a curtain was placed across the altar and the pews where you sit today were re-arranged to form a classroom. Later on kindergarten, first and second classes

44 years and James 36 years. Interview with Joe Moloney, 24 September 2000.

³³ Extracted from a study of *Baptismal Register, St Mary's Concord (SMCPA)*

³⁴ *NSW Electoral Roll 1894-95, Burwood (Concord Division)*.

³⁵ Extracted from a study of *Baptismal Register, St Mary's Concord. (SMCPA)*. Joe Moloney also confirmed that these streets, especially Lake Street, were home to many 'Irish families'

³⁶ Inspector's Report, 17 December 1896

were held in the church, with more senior classes were held in the old Fire Station.³⁷

From its origins the school had difficulties, including insufficient funding and staffing. The first official inspection by the Diocesan Inspector of Schools, included some critical remarks:

*There are boys ten and even twelve years of age who do not know how many persons in God. There should be special attention paid to these boys.*³⁸

In relation to the quality of work, the inspector recorded:

*Home work is rather slovenly done and the books are not neat.*³⁹

A year later the concern focused on the lay teacher:

It is quite impossible for one teacher to conduct a school containing so

*many boys of different degrees of intelligence and attainments.*⁴⁰

In 1899 James Whyte reported that St Patrick's School '...laboured under many disadvantages, one of these being the want of books.'⁴¹

St Patrick's Mortlake School operated until about 1909. It is unclear why the school closed in that year, but it 're-opened' in 1917 providing an important service to families with the dual pressures of husbands being away at the war and wives working in local factories.

The school roll, which commenced in 1917, provides an insight into the occupations and religions of families who sent their children to St Patrick's. The fathers of most of the children held labouring positions at the Gas Works, such as the children of Michael and Mary Moloney. One of the few Catholics not employed at the Gas Works was Mark Pryke, the proprietor of the Palace Hotel.

Additionally, St Patrick's School attracted the sons and daughters of tradesmen, many Church of England

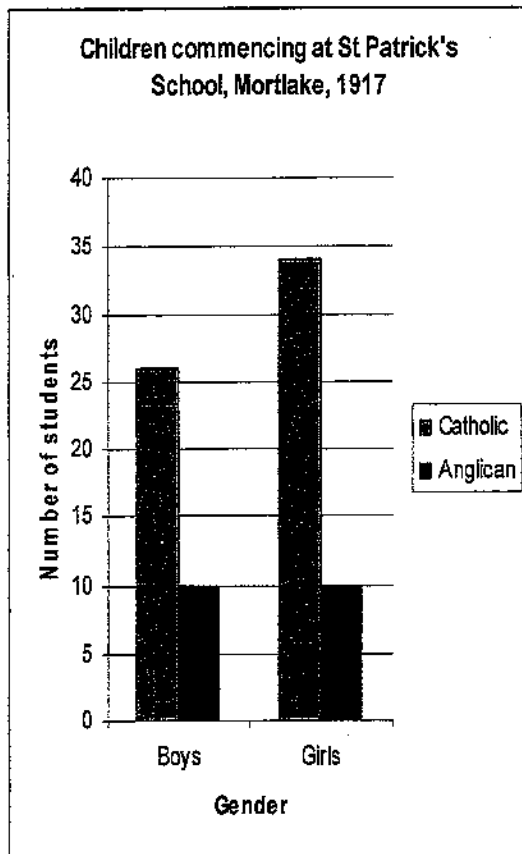
³⁷ F. Morgan, Address delivered at Centenary Reunion Mass, St Patrick's Mortlake, 13 November 1994

³⁸ Inspector's Report, 4 December 1896

³⁹ *loc. cit.*,

⁴⁰ Inspector's Report, 14 December 1897

adherents, including several Solomon families; Claude Beechey, a fireman's son; and the children of Arthur Sly', a dairy manager of 'Brais' Road.⁴²



From the 1920s to the 1950s the school had mixed fortunes. It received good support from families, but insufficient

funding, internal conflict, and less than adequate facilities hampered its development.

The school used the single brick building adjacent to the Presbytery for its Kindergarten. A much-needed boost for the school occurred in 1928 when the parish purchased a wooden Fire Station and Chief Fireman's Cottage (now the presbytery) and also employed a skilled lay teacher. The former Fire Station provided two extra classrooms.⁴³ An inspector in 1930 reported 118 students on the roll and concluded that an 'additional teacher in this school is an urgent necessity.'⁴⁴

In the mid 1930s – at the height of the Great Depression – St Patrick's catered for 125 students. The effect of delayed marriage (and declining fertility) led to just 72 students by 1939. The figure edged up to average 85 by the end of the 1940s, but the combined impact of the Depression and mortality from both Wars put (what the British historian Rev Thomas Malthus described as) a check on population growth.

⁴¹ Inspector's Report, 18 September 1899

⁴² *Register of Admissions as used in Catholic Schools St Patrick's Mortlake January 1917-May 1963*

⁴³ Interview with Joe Moloney, 25 September 2000

⁴⁴ Inspector's Report, September 1930

Local women provided hot meals for the religious teachers, who came from Concord. Without these meals, the Sisters would not have received a main daily meal.⁴⁵

Alongside the fireman's cottage was a tennis court. Mrs Iris Walker (nee Dowling) recalled playing competition tennis on a Saturday, while social tennis on a Sunday was interrupted by Benediction at 3.00 p.m.⁴⁶

Annual bazaars held at Solomon's Hall, near the Punt, raised important funds - £500 in one year. Unfortunately, the funds went to Concord parish, something that disappointed many locals.⁴⁷

Throughout the 1940s and early 1950s disagreement between the Sisters and clergy over financial allocations and payment of a lay teacher did little to enhance the school's reputation, which, at the time, was considerably lower than neighbouring St Mary's Concord.⁴⁸ We

read, for example, concerns about the 'lack of discipline' at St Patrick's. In 1949, the Mortlake third class children were described as:

*Restless... (they) do not remain seated and fiddle with objects on the desk, continually.*⁴⁹

Another characteristic of the Mortlake school was that many children started Kindergarten at an age that the politically correct would frown upon today. In April 1949, for example, the average age of the 16 children in 'Transition and Kindergarten' was 4.10 years. But in the local context of women working and the absence of official day care, the School was catering for the needs of its community.

The addition of two new classrooms - the building parallel with the Adams Lane - in 1952 was a stimulus. Mons Slowey described the children as being more 'responsive' and ranked St Patrick's as

⁴⁵ Interview with Irish Moloney, 24 September 2000

⁴⁶ Interview with Mrs Walker, ca 1994, SPMP Archives

⁴⁷ Interview with Jack Coulson, 2002

⁴⁸ Comparison of the annual reports and

commentaries by School Inspectors for both St Patrick's and St Mary's during this period reflects this divergence.

⁴⁹ St Patrick's Mortlake School Report Register

'satisfactory' against other Diocesan schools.⁵⁰

But a lay teacher could not survive without a regular salary. In May 1953 the Diocesan Inspector, Fr O'Grady, reported that a religious knowledge examination 'showed all classes below standard, some far below'. In that year the school's oldest class was Year 4. As the 1950s progressed the school continued to receive reports that highlighted religion and discipline as major problems.

In 1959 a Catholic inspector warned of the school's imminent closure 'because of falling enrolments'. The myth that Concord Parish swallowed up St Patrick's in 1960 is not correct. Several factors influenced the closure of St Patrick's School, including the internal issues mentioned above and the desire by Catholic Education office to close the school. Moreover, after St Patrick's finally closed in 1963 the overwhelming number of students moved to Mortlake Public School. St Mary's received

⁵⁰ This conclusion is based on an analysis of the Inspectors' Reports of other nearby Catholic schools.

initially, at least, only a handful of students.⁵¹

1939 Renovations

In 1938, Monsignor Bond of Concord enthusiastically sought permission from the Archdiocese to increase the church to accommodate 60 more people, to add a mural confession and to build a priest's sacristy. The effect would be to double the size of St Patrick's Church.⁵² He advised Archbishop Gilroy that 'he expected no mental anguish from this undertaking.'⁵³ On 26 March 1939 Cardinal Gilroy blessed and officially opened the renovations.

Further renovations in 1979 involved the addition of a *porte-cochere* at the church entrance and replacement of the original windows.⁵⁴ A conservation report in the 1990s described the church as being of 'Spanish Mission style' and 'the church's historical significance being undermined by (an) inappropriate front addition' (the porch).⁵⁵

⁵¹ St Mary's Concord *School Report Register*

⁵² Monsignor Bond to Cardinal Gilroy, 17 May 1938, Concord Parish File, SAA

⁵³ Monsignor Bond to Cardinal Gilroy, March 1938, SAA

⁵⁴ S. Coupe, *op. cit.*, p 216

⁵⁵ Concord Council, Heritage Report, 30 January 1986

Fr Maurice McCarthy – First Parish Priest

St Patrick's community gained independence i.e. became a parish in its own right with the appointment of Fr Maurice McCarthy as the first parish priest on 11 December 1943. He initially lived at Concord until the Presbytery was ready.⁵⁶

The parish's first marriage register reflects some of the demographics of the 1940s and 1950s. In the 40s the average age at first marriage for brides was 22 years and 25 years for grooms.

Post-World War Two Migration

Large scale re-settlement and migration after World War Two resulted in many non-British skilled tradesmen coming to Australia. Some of them chose Mortlake as their new home. From the early 1950s work opportunities at the Gas Works and nearby factories attracted newly arrived migrants from Poland, Egypt, Malta, Yugoslavia, and, increasingly Italy.

In 1955 Fr Frost became parish administrator following a serious heart attack by Fr Maurice McCarthy, which

⁵⁶ Interview Fr John Usher PP, AM,

required several months recovery in Lewisham Hospital and further rest in his native Ireland.⁵⁷

The rich culture brought by the Italian community to the parish began in the late 1950s and 1960s. In 1958 the first Italian marriage occurred: the bride was a first generation Australian born at Annandale; the groom Italian-born. Their marriage signified a trend of migrant and first generation Italian-Australians marrying and settling in Mortlake; in 1966 the marriage of two Italian born migrants occurred - it would be the first of many. By the early 1980s the Italian presence in the parish was second only to the Australian-Irish influence.

'Special dangers... gambling, communism and reading'

In 1957 Fr Michael Coffey, a native of Co Waterford, Ireland, succeeded Fr Maurice McCarthy, who took over the Parish of Belmore, following the death of his brother, Fr John McCarthy.⁵⁸

In 1962 and 1965 Fr Coffey expressed to his Bishop three 'special dangers to the

September 2004

⁵⁷ E. Morgan, 'My impressions of St Patrick's Mortlake during my forty-eight years as a Parishioner, man, ca 1972

⁵⁸ F. Morgan *op. cit.*,

faith and morals of Mortlake Catholics -
Gambling, Communism and Reading.⁵⁹

How legitimate were his concerns? After World War Two, Communism posed a major threat within the labour movement, and at major industrial sites such as the Gas Works. However many Mortlake parishioners who worked at the Gas Works did not support Communist ideas.

Housie - a relatively innocent form of gambling - had been conducted on a small level within the parish (and many other parishes) during Fr McCarthy's time. A longstanding parishioner, Mrs Ellie Morgan, recalled:

*A Silver Circle Club was organised and quite a large amount of money was accrued...the Parish went ahead by leaps and bounds.*⁶⁰

The prizes remained small as the parish sought to raise vital funds for the school.

In respect to 'reading' perhaps some long time parishioners can remember what you were reading in 1962?

⁵⁹ *Report of Episcopal Visitation, Parish of Mortlake*, 14 August 1962

⁶⁰ E. Morgan, *ibid.*, pp 1-2

Fr Patrick McManus' changes

The arrival of Fr Patrick McManus in 1967 as Parish Priest was seen as an opportunity to regenerate the parish. Parish stalwart, the late Roy Peacock, wrote to parishioners seeking their support for a social event to welcome Fr McManus.

*As you are probably aware, our numbers have fallen off considerably in recent years. There is every indication that our parishioners are coming back to St Patrick's.*⁶¹

During his five-year stay Fr McManus expressed concern at the absence of a Catholic school.⁶² But the strength of other Catholic schools, coupled with an unsympathetic Catholic Education bureaucracy, dampened his vision.

Fr McManus focused on improvements to the church. He replaced the altar, and also the Stations of the Cross, which had originally come from St Mary's Concord Parish. Fr McManus addressed the issue of bright morning sunlight on congregations by engaging an artist, Mrs Toni Byrce, of Narraweena, to create the

⁶¹ R. Peacock, letter to parishioners ca 1967, SPPM

⁶² *Ibid.*, June 1970

beautiful mosaics that now hang on the sanctuary wall. The *Catholic Weekly* reported that the mosaics 'add a devotional aspect to the sanctuary and highlight the Tabernacle during the hours when the church is open for private dedication.'⁶³

Fr McManus also demolished the old Fire Station, which stood adjacent to the presbytery. The McNeeve family, generous supporters of St Patrick's since the 1890s, bequeathed their family home, which stood adjacent to the overflow carpark.

Fr Eris Tierney - the 'Bishop' of Mortlake

In 1972 the much-loved Fr Eris Tierney, was appointed the parish's fourth parish priest. He laid the impetus for the further development and more active lay participation in many aspects of the parish. In his 1973 Report to the Bishops, Fr Tierney said he was 'unaware of any dangers to the faith and morals.'⁶⁴

Fr Tierney warmly encouraged lay participation in parish affairs and in

response to the 'large increase in migrants, he established a weekly Italian Mass.'⁶⁵ He inaugurated the first Acolytes' program in the Archdiocese of Sydney. Thirteen Mortlake parishioners were commissioned in the first group.

In 1975 Fr Tierney sponsored a Steering Committee that paved the way for the beginning of a Parish Pastoral Council in 1976, with Terry Paul as the first Chairman and Paul Gallagher as Deputy Chairman.

1975 was also another important year as it marked the start of the 250 Club, a most successful fundraising initiative that lasted 25 years, beyond anyone's expectations.

Fr Tierney also established a Liturgical Committee, with (the late) Ces Sweetman as its Secretary; a caring Committee; Maintenance Committee; and Finance and Social Committee.⁶⁶

Perhaps the only regret during Fr Tierney's tenure was his inability to convince the Archdiocese of the opportunities that would arise after the cessation of operations at the Gas

⁶³ *Catholic Weekly*, 12 January 1994

⁶⁴ *Report of Episcopal Visitation*, 2 May 1973

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p 29

Works. Time proved Fr Tierney correct in his predictions of the redevelopments of Cabarita and Mortlake.

Fr (Bishop) Barry Collins

By the time Fr Tierney retired in 1986 he had built a sturdy lay parish that could sustain and work co-operatively with the arrival of two part-time pastors, Frs John Usher and Barry Collins, who were given the novel title, by Catholic standards, of Moderators.

About a year later Sr Helen Nugent joined the parish team. In 1993 Fr Collins became Parish Priest, and on 3 June 1994 he was installed as Bishop of Wilcannia-Forbes, one of Australia's largest geographical Dioceses.

In 1993, the Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Clancy, gave permission for the Parish to borrow \$35,000 from the Archdiocesan Development Fund to refurbish the church's sanctuary and other essential renovations and repairs.⁶⁷ These renovations occurred on the eve of the Church's centenary celebrations, which included a special

reunion Mass on 13 November 1994, led by the administrator, Fr Grove Johnson. Fr Johnson organised the very successful St Patrick's Day annual celebrations and provided a vision to landscape the parish grounds. He provided special care to the Italian community of the parish.

Fr Peter Morrissey

In 1997 Fr Peter Morrissey was appointed the fifth Parish Priest – like his predecessors, Fr Peter displayed a deep interest in parishioners, especially the sick and the elderly. He ministered to the Mortlake community with the same sincerity and pastoral interest that have been the hallmark of his priestly life.⁶⁸ He continued the fine tradition of St Patrick's Day events.

Fr Morrissey oversaw the Year 2000 religious and social celebrations. Unfortunately a week after the final event, Bishop Barry Collins, died unexpectedly.

⁶⁶ St Patrick's Parish Archives, 1976-77

⁶⁷ Cardinal Edward Clancy to Fr Barry Collins, Parish Priest, 7 June 1993, SPPM

⁶⁸ I am personally grateful to Fr Morrissey for his kindness to my late grandparents, Thomas Gleeson and Gladys O'Brien.

Fr John Usher

The parish has also been fortunate to have retained the services of Fr John Usher, during his long tenure (1983-2004) as Director of Centacare Sydney, the largest Catholic diocesan social welfare agency in Australia.⁶⁹

In 2000 Fr John became the longest serving priest in our parish's history. In 2003, following the retirement of Fr Peter Morrissey, Fr Usher was appointed as the sixth Parish Priest of St Patrick's Mortlake.

In the same year the Federal Government awarded Fr Usher an Order of Australia Medal (AM) for his distinguished services to community and social welfare. His extensive contributions to church and government policy have been widely recognised and he has been mooted as a future bishop.⁷⁰ We thank God for Fr Usher and his predecessors, who have guided and nurtured so many people on their Christian journey

⁶⁹ Cardinal Clancy to Clancy to Fr Usher, 16 June 1983, Catholic Welfare Bureau Correspondence, 1981-1983, B2735, SAA

⁷⁰ P. Fray, 'Don't call us, we'll call you: the search for two bishops' *Sydney Morning Herald* 25 November 1995 p 31

Community Outreach

St Patrick's Parish has a long tradition of assisting the disadvantaged and the poor. Following the devastating Tsunami in the Indian Ocean on Boxing Day 2004, parishioners contributed at least \$8,000 to a special parish appeal for Caritas Australia, and many other parishioners donated directly to a range of charities.

Locally, the priests and people have outstretched themselves to assist the poor, including the work of the St Vincent de Paul Society Conference. During Australia's major economic depression of the 1930s, for example, St Patrick's Conference opened a depot at the rear of W.J. Solomon's shop in Mortlake Street for:

*the daily distribution of hot soup and bread, to those in distressed circumstance.*⁷¹

Within a short period the SVdP depot daily provided food to 200 people:

*... thus giving evidence of the unfortunate plight of a larger number of families in the district.*⁷²

⁷¹ H G Taylor, President, St Patrick's Conference to the General Manager and Secretary, AGL 25 June 1931

Epilogue

Today, 110 years after its completion, St Patrick's Church remains home to many parishioners from divergent cultures. Generations of Catholic migrants have settled in Mortlake and steadfastly supported this parish.

Mortlake has a rich history of faith-filled people who have worshipped at St Patrick's Catholic Church. In the last decade the parish has expanded with the creation of new suburbs such as Breakfast Point, Cape Cabarita and Edgware, and new parishioners have flowed from these residential developments.

While there have been significant changes in the district and parish over the last 100 years, the character and homeliness of St Patrick's remains as strong today, evidenced, in part by the generosity of so many parishioners - 'new' and 'old' who have joined together to organise and partake in today's 110th celebrations.

Archives

ML Mitchell Library, State Library of
New South Wales
SAA Sydney Archdiocesan Archives
SMCP St Mary's Concord
SPPM St Patrick's Parish Mortlake

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Any errors remain mine

D J Gleeson

⁷² *loc. cit.*,