

The Roman Catholic Church

Rod Gowans and Marie Sykes

The challenge faced by the original Roman Catholic group in Tarooma was to convince the Cathedral administration that there were enough of them to warrant the weekly celebration of Sunday Mass. This achieved, the next step was to find a temporary venue for the Mass and ultimately to find a suitable site for a church.

Among the Roman Catholic families resident in Tarooma prior to 1944 were the Johnsons of Hinsby Road who came in 1937. Alice (Chris) Cook moved into the area in 1944. By this time there were others who had to travel either to Sandy Bay or to the city in order to attend Sunday Mass. This was not easy as very few owned cars and petrol was rationed.

It was Chris Cook who first realised that there was a need in Tarooma for a regular Sunday Mass. She made representations to the Cathedral Parish for a priest to be made available.

Once the Cathedral agreed to supply a priest every Sunday the next task was to find a venue. The Old Public Hall was used by other Christian denominations. Therefore Chris Cook arranged for it to be used and the first Mass was celebrated there in 1949. Only four people were present! Mavis Kornacki, nee Johnson, remembers that she was ill that day and unable to attend but her mother Mabel Johnson was there.

Land was first purchased by the Church in Jenkins Street, behind the hotel, but the parishioners of the day were not happy. They were anxious to obtain a site on the upper side of the Channel Highway. Eventually Chris Cook found the present site of the church. This was adjacent to the State Schools and the then Rotary Camp. The Cathedral felt that this was "too far out" of Tarooma, but the residents won the day.

A news item in the *Mercury* of the 20th April 1955 explains the area purchased and the price paid:

"Land Granted to Order.

A small area of the land purchased at Tarooma for a school had been granted to the trustees of the Sisters of Charity, the Premier (Mr. Cosgrove) stated in the House of Assembly last

night. The Premier told Mr. Pearsall (Lib) that the Education Department had purchased more than 14 Acres of land from Mr. H. (sic) [G.] Dixon, of Tarooma for £7,980. A parcel, a 23rd of the total area, had been granted to the trustees of the Sisters of Charity, and the price already paid, £500 plus the cost of survey, was a 16th of the total cost".

It was however about eight years before the church was finally built. During those years Mass was said weekly in the Hall, which Mavis Kornacki and her mother, Mabel Johnson, always prepared.

Among the many priests who ministered to the people in those days were Father Bernard Rogers (later Monsignor), B. Hanratty, A. Benneworth, P. Hansen, R. Donohoe, J. Wallis, Archbishop Tweedy himself, and later Archbishop Young.

In 1953 Archbishop Tweedy established the parish of Lower Sandy Bay-Tarooma and appointed Father J. Halpin as parish priest. Initially the boundaries of this parish extended from Waimea Avenue in Sandy Bay to Bonnet Hill.

Residents of the Lower Sandy Bay end of the parish were able to use the Chapel at Mt. St. Canice, the Convent of the Good Shepherd, but money had to be found for a church in Tarooma.

Tarooma was growing in this period and many more Roman Catholics took up residence. A few of the families were Worsleys, Coxes, Gowans, Noars, Cloughers, Dawsons, Nicholsons, Noonans, de Bavays, Wrens, Middletons, Rileys, Hemingways, Hogans, Garths, Cummins and Fitzgeralds. The first eight families are still represented here today. These people enthusiastically supported the fund raising and by 1956 plans were made for the building of a church.

In 1956 Father Halpin was transferred to Beaconsfield and Father Denis Quinn, who also worked as the Archbishop's secretary, was appointed parish priest.

Faced with the need for additional security for the loan which would enable construction of the church to go ahead, Father Quinn took out an insurance policy on his life, the premiums being met by the parish.

St. Pius X Church, designed by Esmond Dorney and built by Frank Ingram, was blessed and opened on the 26th October 1957. At the opening ceremony Archbishop Guilford



The opening of ST. Pius X Church on the 26th October 1957. PHOTO "THE MERCURY".

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Young described the building as being "healthily modern," with its "floor to ceiling windows giving a panoramic view of the Derwent". The building is basically unchanged, but there is no longer a panoramic view to distract worshippers. The trees have grown considerably and the church now nestles in its bush setting.

The beautiful Crucifix in the church was carved by Alan Gelston, a Tasmanian artist of note who tragically died when he was only thirty five years old.

Some minor changes have been made to the building over the thirty years since it was opened. Firstly, the raised sanctuary area was extended to fill the width of the church and soon afterwards a Sacristy-cum-Confessional was partitioned off in what had been the choir nook of the church. Peter Kornacki, a parishioner, undertook this latter task.

In the early 1960s the river frontage part of the church land was exchanged for a piece of land on the Channel Highway, between the church property and the Tarooma State Primary School. This land had belonged to the Education Department and the exchange was effected to facilitate access by the Tarooma State High School students to playing fields on the old Rotary Camp site, previously purchased by the Education Department.

The church immediately became a centre of activity and the first group formed was a choir. One of the parishioners, Chris Hemingway, a Manchurian, had a great love for church music and experience as a choir master. Weekly practices were enthusiastically attended. At one of these practices two ladies sitting next to each other were singing away with great enthusiasm when the conductor stopped the music and very diplomatically suggested that they separate as they appeared to be "putting each other off".

In the early years of the church the time of Sunday Mass alternated, being at 8a.m. one Sunday and 9a.m. the next. The congregation did not find this too difficult but sometimes poor Father Quinn, who had so many different duties, did get a little confused. If by 8.15a.m. Father Quinn had not appeared, Chris Hemingway would organise a choir practice and many new hymns were learned.

One morning when the choir was in full song Father Quinn burst in breathless at 8.30 a.m. As he bustled down the aisle he declared,

"You won't believe this but I really couldn't find one of my shoes!"

During this time a member of the Jesuit order would sometimes say Mass in Tarooma. The Jesuits had come to Tasmania to act as Chaplains to the University and prior to taking up residence in St. John Fisher College, which was opened in 1965, they lived in a cottage in the grounds of Mt. St. Canice. Fathers Lalor, Green, Muirhead and O'Sullivan regularly visited Tarooma those days, Father Muirhead most often on a motor cycle.

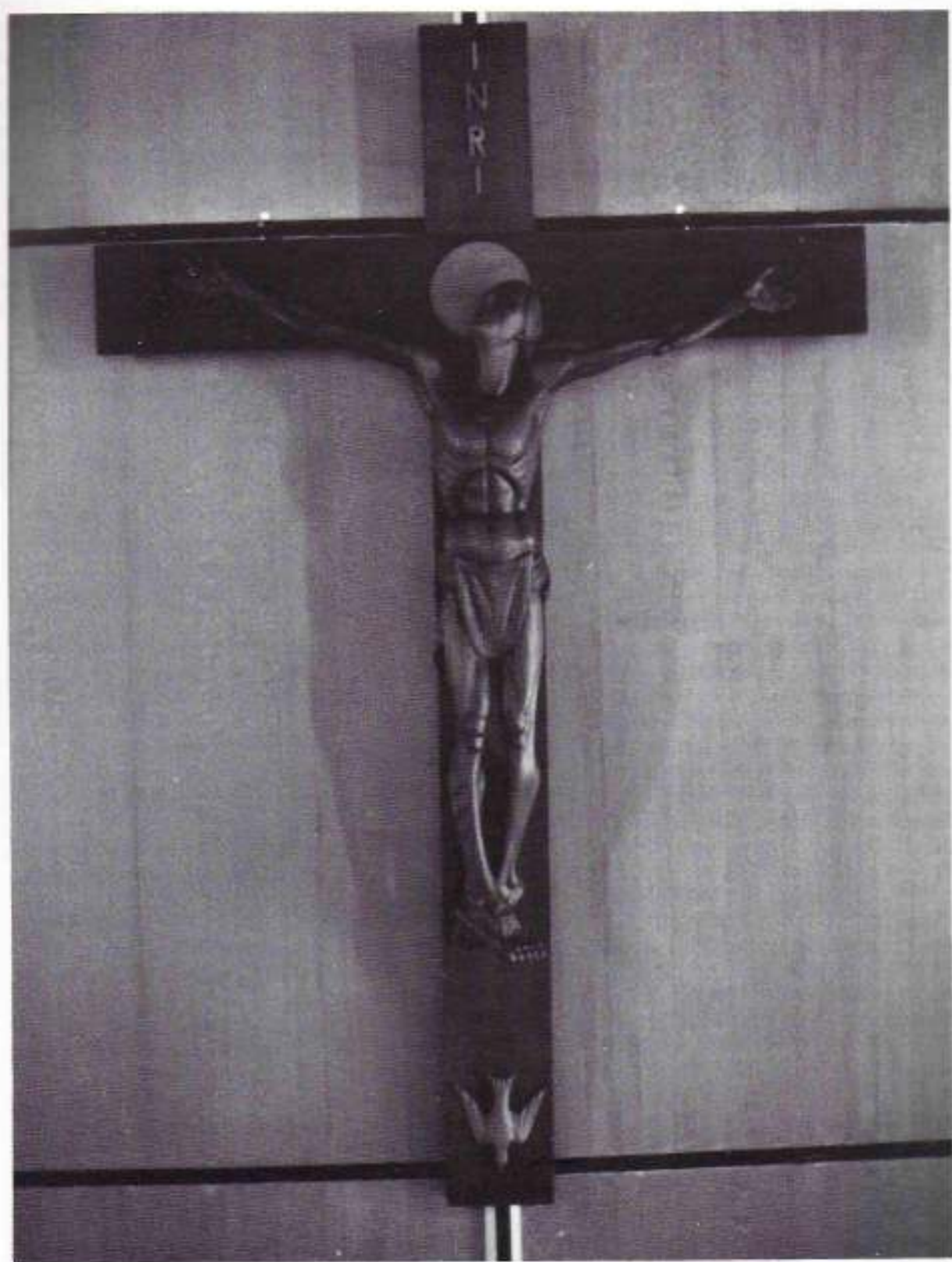
In February 1960 a Conference (i.e. the name given to a parish branch) of the St. Vincent de Paul Society was established in Tarooma. Ian Wishart-Smith, Chris Hemingway and Myles Sykes were the nucleus at the first meeting. They were soon joined by Terry Riley, Peter Kennedy, Peter Kornacki and Harold Middleton. This Conference was a very active one. The average attendance at weekly meetings was seven to eight and the membership ten to twelve. At one time there were sixteen members.

At all times the work of this group extended well beyond the boundaries of Tarooma. Two members, Ian Wishart-Smith and Tony Holland, held the position of Tasmanian President of the Society and Danny Reardon has been both Secretary and President of the Southern Regional Council.

The work of the society is financed largely by its salvage operation and the Tarooma Group organised Salvage Drives. Nowadays, Salvage Bins have replaced the Salvage Drives and there is a Bin on the Channel Highway near the entrance to the Church.

A new departure for the St. Vincent de Paul Society was the admission of women as full members in the mid-seventies. Tarooma was the first Conference to do this in Tasmania. Margaret Clougher, Rina Vandenburg, Margaret Reardon, Ann Mainsbridge and Lynn Rieussett were welcomed to the Society in February 1974. Very soon after Audrey Worsley (nee Cook), Eva Dunn and Geraldine Byrne joined them.

In the mid to late seventies the Tarooma Conference undertook to establish Conferences at Kingston and Geeveston. In the first year of operation of the Kingston Conference all visitation was done in pairs, one person from Tarooma and the other from Kingston. At this time also groundwork was done with the



The Crucifix carved in 1957 by the late Alan Gelston, in St. Pius X Church.

PHOTO DAVID LAING.

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Huonville and Kingston Conferences that led to the establishment in both of these centres of St. Vincent de Paul stores.

By 1979 Tarooma had largely lost its area of operation and, as the parish had been amalgamated with Sandy Bay in 1976, it was felt that an amalgamation of the St. Vincent de Paul Conferences was a logical step.

It should be noted that Ian Wishart-Smith, now resident in Sandy Bay, was one of the foundation members of the Tarooma Conference, and is the longest serving member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Tasmania. He has forty years of continuous service. Michael Reddington is the longest serving member of the Tarooma Conference still resident in Tarooma.

On the 24th May 1960 a group of twenty women from Lower Sandy Bay and Tarooma met at the home of Jack and Marie Garnham in Sandy Bay to discuss the possible foundation of a branch of the Catholic Women's League in the area. It was agreed that the branch would be formed and Marie Bourke became the first president. Members of this branch have contributed greatly to the wider Hobart community through their association with the League.

Members of the C.W.L. have taken part in many debates on the wider community issues of pornography, violence in television, realistic classification of films, underage drinking, pollution of the environment, etc. They also forged strong links with other women's groups within Tarooma, thus strengthening the already thriving ecumenism of the community.

Particular mention must be made of Ella Gowans, Marj Lowe and Mary Cox. Through the League, Ella became involved in the Good Neighbour Council and personally welcomed many newcomers to Hobart from the early sixties through to the end of the Vietnamese migration in the late seventies. Ella's contribution to the community was recognised by the Federal Government in 1977 when she was awarded a Medal in commemoration of Her Majesty's Silver Jubilee. Ella also taught Religious Education at Tarooma State Primary School for almost twenty years.

She took over this task from Marj Lowe. Marj had a wonderful capacity to care for and help people, and if anyone in the area had a need with which Marj could help, she was

there giving herself unstintingly. Mary Cox was also very active in both the early days of the Parish and the C.W.L.

In May 1973, when the church organ, originally acquired from Southport, refused to function any more, the Catholic Women's League donated the present Yamaha Organ to the Parish.

In the early sixties two groups of the Christian Family Movement met monthly in Tarooma for Scripture Study and relevant discussion. As times and people changed these groups became difficult to maintain and by 1970 no longer functioned in Tarooma.

During the sixties Father Quinn moved into the cottage at Mt. St. Canice. He was soon joined by Father Terry Southerwood. Father Southerwood stayed in the Parish for about four years, and for some of this time acted as Parish Priest while Father Quinn pursued studies in Germany and then Rome.

Early in 1967 Father Paul Connolly spent six months in the parish and after he moved Father Cullen came and stayed for about a year.

In 1969 Father Quinn was appointed Parish Priest to Lutana and Father John Wallis became Tarooma's Parish Priest. Father Wallis had been one of the priests who had celebrated Mass in Tarooma in the early fifties.

In 1971 Father Wallis was joined in the Mt. St. Canice cottage by Father John Wall. When Father Wallis moved to Tarooma, Father Wall stayed in the cottage and his parochial duties are largely focused on the Lower Sandy Bay area.

The Parish Centre, which consists of a Presbytery with a small hall underneath, was opened on the 13th October 1973. The hall has been in constant use for small parish celebrations and weekly Christian Doctrine classes. It has also been used by the Tarooma Playgroup Association.

In 1976 Father Wallis moved to Lindisfarne and his place in the Tarooma Presbytery was taken by Father Ralph Mitchell. Father Mitchell never became Parish priest because a review of parish boundaries at this time saw Tarooma lose its identity and become part of an expanded parish of Sandy Bay-Lower Sandy Bay - Tarooma, with Father Adrian Doyle as the Parish Priest.

Father Mitchell, a man of many talents and

varied experience, was already in his late sixties when he came to Tarooma. He had only been ordained about seven years previously, and is one of a very small number of married men to be ordained to the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church in Australia. Another was Father Peter Rushton who said one of his first Masses in Tasmania in St. Pius X Church, Tarooma, in November 1969.

As a former engineer Father Mitchell saw the dangers in the single exit from the Church to the Channel Highway, and so he landscaped the grounds to allow for more parking and a second, much safer outlet to the Highway. He also looked forward to the day when Tarooma might have a larger and more permanent structure for a Church. He therefore arranged for hundreds of yards of filling to be tipped near the second exit; this being the most suitable site for a new Church.

When Father Vincent Allen, the resident Chaplain of Mary's Grange for many years, died in February 1981, Father Mitchell was appointed resident Chaplain there. Sadly Father Mitchell returned to Queensland later that year for family reasons.

Father McCormack was the next resident of the Presbytery. He was known as "Smiley" and his stay was all too short. In January 1982 he was moved to St. Marys in the North East.

Unfortunately Father Liam Floyd, who replaced Father McCormack, stayed for only a few weeks before he was unexpectedly called back to Ireland. The Presbytery was empty until mid 1984 when Father Paul Connolly returned for six months. Father Connolly was working for Centacare at this time, but was available for Sunday Mass and always gave the congregation an opportunity to speak by asking after every sermon, "Any questions?"

Since April 1985 Father Michael Delaney has been living in the Presbytery and ministering to the Tarooma end of the parish in many ways. He belongs to two Ecumenical Religious Education Groups, one in Princes Street State School and the other in Tarooma State Primary School.

Over the years there have been two nuns working as parish Sisters in Tarooma. The first was Sister Therese Healy who spent two and sometimes three days a week in the Parish while Father Wallis was the parish priest. The other was Sister Joan, a Missionary Sister of the Sacred Heart, who had been working at

Mary's Grange. She worked full time in the parish from August 1976 to early 1980. Each of these sisters was greatly missed when they moved on.

A Parish Council was formed during Father Wallis' term as Parish Priest. Ian Wishart-Smith was elected as the first president in August 1970. He was succeeded by Bill Gaskell in 1971. Bill was largely responsible for the preliminary work, planning and oversighting of the Parish centre.

After the amalgamation of the Parish with Sandy Bay in 1976, the separate Tarooma - Lower Sandy Bay Council ceased to exist and eventually in the late seventies the Council went into recess.

The parish is now in its thirty sixth year. In the years since the first Mass was celebrated in the Old Public Hall in 1949 much has happened to meet the needs of the Roman Catholic people of Tarooma and to provide the opportunity for them to minister to others in a variety of ways.

Acknowledgements

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References

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