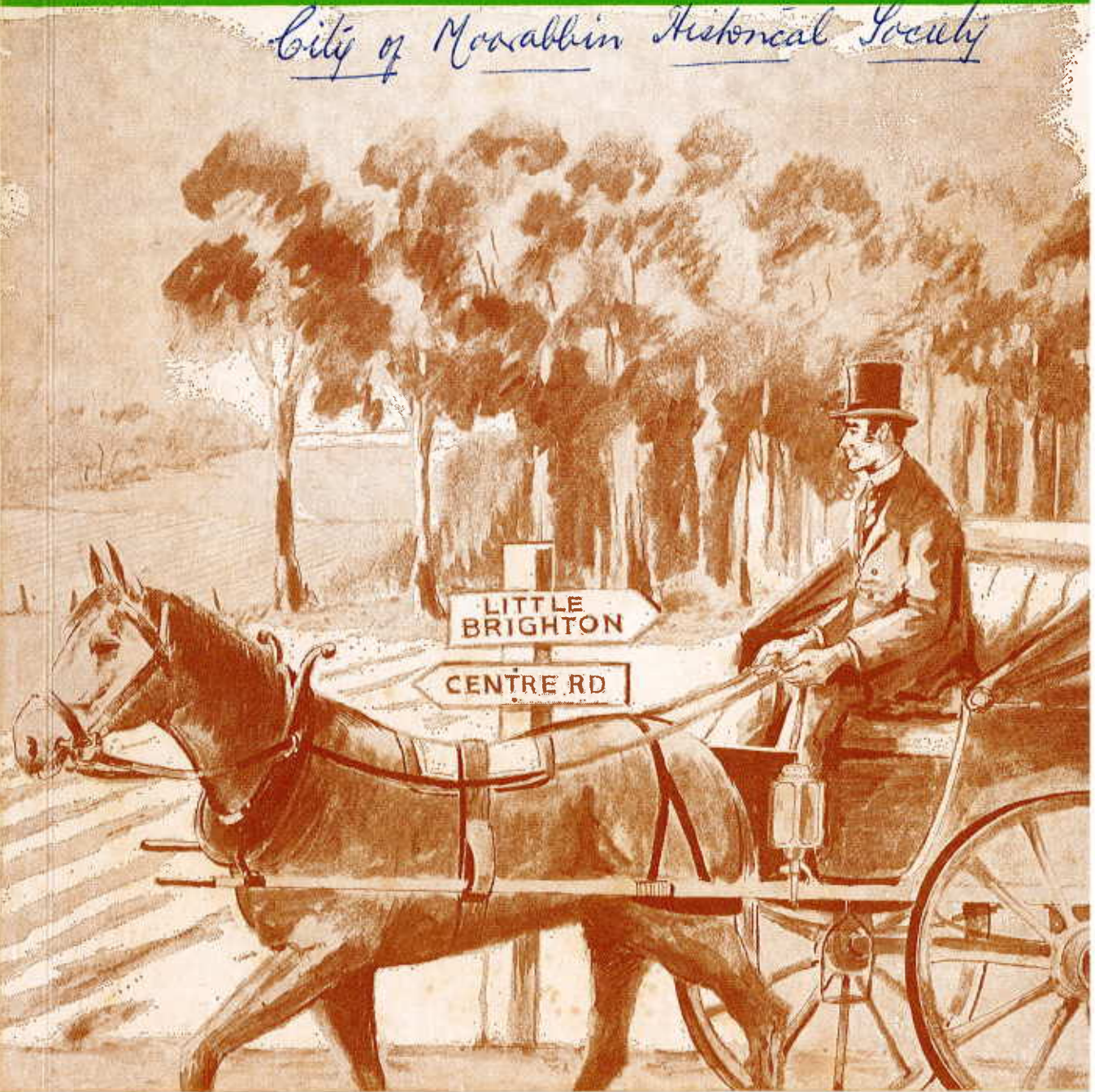


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# THE LIVING HARVEST

*A History of  
St. Peter's Parish, East Bentleigh*

*City of Moorabbin Historical Society*







From the early days of the pioneering families to today's living pioneers who have established the parish of St. Peter's and who are continuing the work of the Lord's Harvest, we owe a great debt of gratitude. Lest we forget the vision of all those people, clergy, sisters and laity, this brief history is dedicated.

M. B. Heriot, Parish Priest.

# THE LIVING HARVEST

A History

of

St. Peter's Parish

East Bentleigh

by

W. T. Dobson

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This brief history of the Catholic Parish of St. Peter's, East Benteigh has been made possible with the kind assistance of Rev. Father John Keane P.P. Chairman of the Diocesan Historical Commission, and Mr. Dan Minogue, Hon. Secretary of the Commission.

Extensive use has been made of the original research material of Mr. Tom Sheehy, the distinguished official historian of Moorabbin, and we are all indebted to the Council of the City of Moorabbin for their continuing efforts to collect and preserve the history of our early beginnings.

Mr. Weston Bate's comprehensive and excellent "History of Brighton" has also been used as a primary source of reference in the preparation of this work.

The kind co-operation of the descendants of the Catholic pioneer families of the district is gratefully acknowledged, as is the assistance afforded by many parishioners in the accumulation of material.

A companion volume to this history is planned to mark the 25th. anniversary of the establishment of the parish some years hence, and will record the more recent era of progress and people of the parish.

The originator of this historical project, mentor, guiding spirit and inspiration throughout, has been our Parish Priest, Rev. Father Maurice Heriot, who has so rapidly gained the respect and esteem of the parishioners of St. Peter's. May his continuing ministry in East Benteigh be for us all another bountiful chapter in the history of our parish.

W.T.D.



## Prayer for a New Church

We have built our homes, our school, and now we build our church where crops once flourished.

For over one hundred years the earth of our neighbourhood has been made rich and fertile by the pioneer market gardeners who brought to this new land their faith, and their hope for a new and better life. Their crops flourished and their prayers for good seasons and bountiful harvests were heard.

Now, in this community of our parish, the produce of the earth has given way to a new harvest.

The cycle of preparing the good earth, planting, and nourishing has been replaced with a new circle of birth, growth, renewal, re-birth and the ultimate season of eternal life — a living harvest.

We build this church on land cleared from the bush, made rich and fertile by those who have gone before. We fix the bricks and mortar upon the soil and raise the Cross toward heaven, in prayerful hope that the harvest that will come for ourselves, our children, and those who will follow, will be blessed and joyously bountiful.



This motif was designed and drawn by a Parishioner, Mr. John Guiney, and was chosen as the emblem to be used during the opening ceremonies of the new Parish Church 1974.

# THE IRISH EXODUS

It was the long summer of 1865 and the hot noon-tide sun beat down on the dusty, rough and narrow bush track.

A horse and buggy, with the black coated figure of a priest riding atop, moved slowly over the holes and uneven surface, sending up a lazy haze of dust, disturbing the hordes of buzzing bush flies.

Father Patrick Niall had harnessed the horse into the buggy soon after breakfast, and set out from his lean-to hut, which served as a presbytery at Little Brighton, to visit the little village of Oakleigh — a straggling collection of humble shacks, five miles away through the newly carved-out market gardens, which were now stretching through the bushland from east of his church-school at Brighton to the village at Oakleigh.

The priest had called on a few families who had recently arrived from Ireland, and as his horse clip-clopped along the rough dusty surface of the Centre Road he thought about the growing numbers of Irish families who had settled in the uncleared bush area east of Brighton, carving out selections and growing marketable crops of potatoes and vegetables.

Most of the families had been forced out of Ireland by the terrible famine of 1845-1849 when there were two partial and three complete failures of the Irish potato crop. The result was “total annihilation”, said the “London Times”, shocked out of its usual reserve by this, the most horrific disaster in the British Isles since the Black Death of 1349.

The young Irishmen and their families, who had come to settle in this part of the growing district of Port Phillip, arriving in the early and mid-1850's, had known hunger in the greatest tragedy experienced by the Irish people, millions of whom faced starvation in 1846, and again in 1847, 1848 and 1849. They died in the lanes, in doorways and in their homes, confronting horrified relief workers with visions reminiscent of an Apocalypse, with whole rooms of dead people. Mothers desperately combed the black, blighted fields even for rotting potatoes while their children cried from the agonies of hunger.



While the country lay prostrate from the "Great Famine", a new disaster struck. This time it was man-made. The Protestant landlords of Ireland, bankrupt because their destitute tenants could not pay the rent and anxious to turn their lands over to pasture, began a massive eviction campaign. An eviction was an ugly scene. At a signal from the sheriff, the "drivers" — police or troops — dragged the miserable peasants from their cabins. Then the "crowbar brigade" tore down the thatched roof and "tumbled" the mud walls to prevent the homeless from returning for shelter. Screaming women, half-naked children and tottering grandparents were turned out into all weathers and left to crouch in shallow holes roofed with sticks and turf in the countryside.

Weakened by famine, the Irish people were struck by disease. Typhus and relapsing fever, dysentery, scurvy and famine-dropsy ravaged the whole country, carrying off not only the peasants but also the middle and upper classes in the towns. From 1846 onwards, there was a near hysterical rush to escape the "doomed and starving island", and tens of thousands of panic-stricken refugees put to sea for the United States and Australia. By 1851, emigration had risen to a quarter of a million a year and remained very high for the rest of the century. It was a massive exodus. Everywhere the emigrants went they took with them a hatred of Britain and all things British.

Newly ordained in 1852 at Maynooth for the mission district of Port Phillip, Father Niall had arrived just over 12 years ago. He remembered well as a boy the terrible starvation of the land and the sickness and malnutrition of the students in the seminary.

He remembered also his parents telling him of the harsh and cruel Penal Laws which had prohibited the teaching of the Catholic faith, the administration of the sacraments, and the saying of Mass. Priests were made outlaws, and the practice of the faith had to be carried out in secret. These repressive laws had only been repealed 20 years before he was born.

The Penal laws in Ireland prohibited Catholics from the law, commerce and from every civic activity. No Catholic could vote, hold any office under the Crown, or purchase land. Catholics could not attend schools. The practice of their faith was proscribed, informing was encouraged as an "honourable service", and priest-baiting treated as a sport.

Ten years before the famine, the "Poor Enquiry" of 1835 stated that three-quarters of the labourers in Ireland existed without regular employment of any kind. Unless an Irish labourer could get hold of a patch of land and grow potatoes to feed himself and his children, the family starved. The possession of a piece of land was literally the difference between life and death.

Father Niall thought of all these things as the horse and buggy rolled along and he said a brief prayer of thanks that so many of his countrymen were blessed

here in this new land with hope for the future. He looked out on each side of the road at the rows of potatoes and the green lines of large cabbages, and the rough two-roomed dwellings of the gardeners in the shade of the peppercorn and gum trees reminded him of country homes in Ireland.

Today he would call and see Fred Quinn, a young Irishman who was cultivating vegetables three miles along Centre Road from Brighton. Quinn had promised to give land for the building of a schoolhouse. He had decided that as most of the children attending the Brighton Catholic school came daily, not from Brighton but from the market garden area to the east, the time was now ripe to build the schoolhouse on this site and transfer the Brighton school to this new location. And so began the Catholic life of what was later to become the parish of East Bentleigh.

## IN THE BEGINNING

The arrival of the first white settler in the Port Phillip district of the colony of New South Wales (John Batman in 1834) was the beginning of our later metropolis of Melbourne. Early settlement was at first slow, with some people coming from Sydney and a small number of immigrants from England. Amongst those early arrivals from London was a young Englishman of some substance, Henry Dendy, who landed in February, 1841 with an order which had been issued to him in London in payment of the sum of £5,120 for the grant of an area of 5,120 acres (eight square miles) at £1 per acre.

Although at first he desired to take up land much closer to Melbourne, Dendy was obliged to make his selection five miles beyond the town boundary. He chose a frontage to Port Phillip Bay, where the Government Surveyor, Hoddle, marked out a two-mile frontage to the bay, extending four miles inland to an eastern boundary (now known as East Boundary Road) and to the north by a line (now known as North Road) and to the south by a survey line (now known as South Road). On 8th June 1841, Dendy's Special Survey was gazetted.

Dendy appointed a young Englishman J. B. Were to be his agent and assistant in the development and sub-division of the land. Initially he sought to develop the seaside area of his property as a resort for the shop-keepers and merchants of the growing town of Melbourne. His first intention was to call the area "Waterville" but soon abandoned this name for "Brighton".

Another arrival in 1839 was John O'Shanassy, a tall thick-set Irishman from Tipperary who was destined to become the leading Catholic layman of Victoria and the second Premier of the State with an ultimate knighthood. Two years after his arrival, (at the time of Dendy's grant being made), he obtained a grazing lease from the Commissioner of Crown Lands for an area of 40,000 acres for the payment of £10 per year. O'Shanassy's "Windert" station covered an

area between North Road, Ormond, the "No Good Damper" (Old Dandenong) Road and the Dandenong and Mordialloc Creeks, taking in most of Moorabbin, Mordialloc and a large portion of Springvale. His homestead was located somewhere on North Road, and the entire area of what is now St. Peter's parish was contained in the lease.

The No Good Damper Road was the name first given to Old Dandenong Road when it was a nameless track in 1843. The title was first used to describe the "No Good Damper House" on the same road, near the present Drive-In Theatre. It was given as a name by the aborigines as a warning to others of the tribe not to accept the flour from the homestead. Early reports say that a number of natives arrived at the homestead in search of food, and finding the occupants away, looked in the usual storage place for the flour where they found a similar white substance which turned out to be lime. The report says the owner returned to find the aborigines in agony lying on the floor. No Good Damper was the first and only recorded naming in English by the natives of a Victorian locality.

The aboriginal tribe of the area, the Bunurong (sometimes spelt "Boonoorong") were a fine specimen of aboriginal manhood. Their hunting grounds lay throughout the whole of Moorabbin (they called it "Moorroobin") to the Yarra in one direction and the tip of the Mornington Peninsula in another, then eastwards to and including the Dandenongs and back into the nearest parts of West Gippsland. Aboriginal numbers were small even at the coming of the white man and in 1836 the two local tribes together numbered only 350, while in 1840 just before Brighton was settled the Wawoorong or Yarra tribe numbered 118 and the Bunurong or Westernport tribe only 62.

Natural springs that had been used by the aborigines in their regular "walkabout" course through the Moorabbin district, was one of the main reasons why Cheltenham shared with East Bentleigh the distinction of being the first areas established outside Dendy's Brighton Survey. One of the most reliable of these natural springs, used sometimes as a camping site by the aborigines, was located on the site of the tennis courts on the parish property near the corner of Bignell and Centre Roads. The soak surrounding this spring was used later by O'Shanassy's cattle, and explains why the actual corner of these two roads was never deemed suitable for later market garden cultivation.

The area was timbered with she oaks, red gum, wattle and honeysuckle, and two large swamp ponds were located on the western side of Warrigal Road, just south of South Road. Kangaroos were numerous as were emus, native cats and wild dogs, while a few koalas were among the less plentiful animals in the early days of settlement. The area also had a heavy snake population, with copperheads, brown and black snakes among the most numerous.

O'Shanassy's cattle venture was not a financial success and in July, 1846 he wrote to the Crown Lands Commissioner thus: "Sir — I take the liberty to request



that you will transfer the lease, which I have held for the past four years and upwards, of the station known as 'Windert' in the country of Bourke of Messrs. Richard and John King of Western Port." The original 40,000 acre grazing lease transferred from O'Shanassy had been greatly reduced for purposes of settlement by the Commissioner of Crown Lands to an area from South Road, bounded roughly by Warrigal Road on the eastern side extending south to the present highway centre of Cheltenham.

The King brothers, Richard and John, arrived in August 1844 and first settled at Western Port. Following misunderstandings between the aborigines and the Europeans in that area they decided to move to Moorabbin and became the first settlers in the district. They had also come from Ireland, and their sincere Protestant faith was early evident in the practical and truly Christian manner in which they helped their fellow countrymen, no matter what their religion. The Kings were also kindly and sympathetic to the aborigines; there was always food for them at the King estate.

The main force behind the settlement of East Moorabbin and Cheltenham was John King, the younger of the two brothers, and his wife Deborah. It was John King who had all the say and conducted all the arguments against the early English and Scottish residents of Brighton who did not want the tall, gentle Irishmen as neighbors on the eastern side of Arthur's Seat Road (now Point Nepean Highway). It was John who stood steadfast on the name of the area being called "Kingslands" when a surveyor named Foot tried to dub it with that of another Brighton in placing it on the map as "New Brighton". (Later it was to be known as Kingstown, until about 1880 when the then residents discovering that there was another Kingstown in Victoria, asked the postmistress and wife of the local schoolmaster, Mr. Peter Hotton, to select a new name. She decided upon "Heatherton" because a plant similar to Scotch Heather was common in the district).

It was John King also who began a sheep station on that part of his land which abuts the present Cheltenham business area. He brought in and employed southern Irishmen to form their own settlement which for a time was known as Irishtown. In 1852 Crown Land officials took that portion of his land from Keys Road to Centre Dandenong Road. Josiah Holloway purchased the area which had been taken from the Kings and divided it into two-acre lots and that area became known as Two-Acre Village until 1856 when the name Cheltenham was adopted.

George Keys, another northern Irishman from County Strabane, had arrived in October 1841 with his five young sons. After four years on a dairy farm at Preston he purchased 377 acres of land to the south of Kings' remaining 237 acres. The area of Keysborough is named after this family, who together with the Kings formed a strong Irish core (although both their families were Protestant) around which all the early Irish settlers were to gather. The eldest son of the

Keys family, Robert, then 29, established a small shanty hotel in 1847 known as Keys' Little Brighton Inn, which soon became the meeting place of the Irish. There was great animosity between Keys and his more fully-established rival at the Big Brighton Hotel near Brighton Beach, and in these hotels there met the men of each side — the English and Scots on one side of the district and the Irish on the other.

The differences that existed between the Kings and the Keys faction and the early Brighton settlers over to the west had multiplied with the population. More and more Irishmen had come to the east of Arthur's Seat Road and more Englishmen and Scots to the west. It was not that there was a bar against the people of any nationality coming to live on the one side of the main road or the other; it just happened that the Irish from both north and south of their country had moved into the eastern section of the district.

By 1858 the desire to break away from Brighton was hotly debated. Sympathetic towards the East Brighton people was John O'Shanassy, who had earlier pioneered the district with his cattle run and now, at the time of the heated arguments taking place in that year, was Premier of Victoria.

Brighton was declared a municipality in 1859 and Robert Keys, the hotel-keeper, was elected one of the first councillors. From the very day that the proclamation was read, there was no peace between the two factions until the two sections divided for all time on 16th May, 1862. On that memorable day the Moorabbin District Roads Board was proclaimed, giving independent local government to the areas east and south of Brighton which consisted of the present-day cities of Moorabbin, Sandringham and Mordialloc.

John O'Shanassy, recognised by all as a sincerely religious man of fine character, and lay leader of his compatriots and co-religionists, systematically adjured his followers to remember that they were now Australians, and that the importing of old-world agitations would do no good and cause much ill-feeling. The notorious exploits of the Irish bushrangers, Bradley and O'Connor, had not helped the settlers. Unlike the Kellys of the next generation, there was no false heroism by the public on behalf of these outlaws who terrorised the Moorabbin area and the Mornington Peninsula region during the first half of October, 1853.

These two Irish deportees, both of whom had committed murder in England, were sentenced independently after their convictions to be sent to Australia. One arrived in South Australia and the other in New South Wales some months prior to the discovery of the Victorian goldfields in 1852. Each one had again resorted to violence after arriving at their respective destinations, and they were both sent to Port Arthur in Tasmania, where they escaped, shooting a policeman on their way, to Hobart. Here they managed to board a ship and force the master and crew, at gunpoint, to sail them to Port Phillip. They headed for the

Mornington Peninsula and Westernport Bay where they were content at first to exist on stolen food taken from farm houses in the absence of their owners.

Armed with shotguns they decided to stage a "hold-up" at the Kings' home-  
stead, near the corner of South and Warrigal Roads. They entered the kitchen  
where Mrs. King was tending her young baby and demanded all the valuables  
of the household. Mrs. King agreed to show them everything so long as they  
did not harm anyone. Then, after gathering the jewels, watches, money and  
anything else valuable together, they tied Mrs. King and her child to a heavy  
kitchen table leg and left the house.

After leaving Mrs. King and the other members of the distraught household  
they came upon a ploughman driving two horses along South Road near the end  
of Bignell Road. When he refused to hand over his team they shot him dead on  
the spot. Not content with these two acts of violence, they headed in the direction  
of the present Chesterville Road where they came upon John King and his  
15-year-old son. They robbed King of what money and possessions he was  
carrying, then, tying father and son to a tree stump, Bradley and O'Connor made  
off in the direction of Caulfield. A local search was made for the bushrangers  
and when it failed, the residents pooled firearms so that no household was un-  
armed. Bradley and O'Connor moved northwards followed by troopers and  
after shooting dead another victim, they were finally captured near Kilmore.  
The public outcry against the two brigands was largely instrumental in the sub-  
sequent abolition of "Transportation", and they were later hanged at the old  
Melbourne Goal.

With the discovery of gold in Victoria in 1851, Melbourne's demand for food-  
stuffs grew rapidly, and so began the intensive agriculture of the area. Thus, as  
"East" Brighton and Moorabbin districts began to settle down, each section to  
the east and south developed its own particular produce, which in the main was  
at the dictates of the light sandy soil with the presence or absence of surface or  
underground water also playing a major part. What was later to become East  
Bentleigh and the area across to the eastern side of the Schnapper Point Road at  
Cheltenham and back to Keysborough, grew vegetables of the cabbage and cauli-  
flower varieties in the winter, but changed to tomatoes and pumpkins in the  
summer, and had root vegetables for most of the year round. Orchards saw the  
pioneers to the west of the highway occupied whilst Highett, still mostly un-  
developed, continued to serve as a cattle area, operated by William Highett.

Over towards the north (McKinnon and Ormond) where the water supply,  
because of the less frequent appearance of springs, was more dependent upon  
direct rain or barrelled rainwater, grew the less thirsty grapevines in the many  
acres of vineyards that covered the greater part of both areas. Heatherton  
(then called Kingstown) was a mixture of market gardens and dairying sites,  
and at East Bentleigh the land was divided into five-acre lots.



Across the original plan of the Dendy Special Survey runs a light pencil line, marking the track of Arthur's Seat Road (later Point Nepean Highway) cutting the area almost in two, running from North West (to Melbourne) across the survey to South East 9 to Arthur's Seat. This small track slowly began to be a busy road, dividing the locality in half, as only a main highway with its through stream of traffic can divide.

The names Big, or Great Brighton, Little Brighton and East Brighton suggest that there were three centres of local life, despite the widely scattered nature of the settlement. But what held the settlement to these centres? We have already seen the hotel position at Big Brighton. — At Little Brighton, in 1847 Robert Keys had taken a licence for an inn on the road to Arthur's Seat and in 1848 William Picket was granted a licence for the Bush Inn at East Brighton. There were very few early shops away from the Big Brighton area, and apart from the location of the first Anglican and Catholic churches, the mill was probably the next most important focal point of life. This was located near the corner of Hawthorn Road and was constructed about 1846. A large number of the first settlers considered themselves members of the Little Brighton community, because they took their grain to the mill, went to church near the Little Brighton village, patronised Mr. Keys' hotel on the Arthur's Seat Road and shared a common distrust of the men of the big sea-shore estate.

The village of Little Brighton located in the region of St. Finbar's Church, was officially named such in 1843, to distinguish it from the central township area of Great or Big Brighton. Henry Dendy, the original owner of the entire area in 1841, soon fell into financial difficulties and was declared bankrupt at the end of 1844. His astute agent and former employee, Jonathan Were, owned nearly half of the land within the Dendy Survey by 1845 and formed his own company to develop his investments. Many disliked Were — he was landlord, and landlords' agent, all in one.

Dendy was discharged from insolvency in 1846, but chose to sell the remaining small portion of land still in his name in Brighton and leave the district. He died at Walhalla in Gippsland in 1882 almost penniless. Jonathan B. Were on the other hand became the landlord of many of the early Irish settlers in the eastern part of the Survey area, and in 1847 gave two acres of his land at Little Brighton to the Catholic Bishop of Melbourne, Bishop Goold, for the construction of a church — and so began the Brighton Mission.

## THE BRIGHTON BEGINNINGS

Soon after Christmas 1847, construction began on a small weather-board church-school on the land donated by Mr. Were at the corner of Centre and Point Nepean Roads, (the present site of St. Finbar's). The building measuring 32ft. x 16ft. was all wood, foundations, walls and roof. The sides were shingled

slabs. The total cost £47. Construction was hurried along so that the first Mass could be celebrated there on St. Patrick's Day, 1848. The church, dedicated to St. Patrick, was blessed and declared open on 30th April by Father Nicholas Coffey, O.F.M., a Franciscan and one of the pioneer priests from St. Francis', Melbourne. A collection made at the opening gained £10/4/6. Shortly after in June, 1848, the Catholic school opened in the same building, with 35 children attending. With no priest resident in the district, Mass was said in the new church about once a month, and usually by a priest from St. Francis', the Mother Church of Victoria, or the then Cathedral.

"The Port Phillip Herald" of 3rd August, 1848, records: "There is a list of subscribers for the Brighton Catholic Church. The amounts total to £40. This sum was collected by Richard Martin, farmer, of Little Brighton, to whose exertions may be chiefly attributed the commencement and erection of the little church, and the consequent consolation is that the Catholics of the locality will have divine service now regularly celebrated amongst them".

The Little Brighton church was later to give up the name of St. Patrick so that the Cathedral church of the diocese could be named after the patron saint of Ireland, and the new name of St. Finbar was chosen to honour the Irish patron of Cork. The church was the third Catholic church in Melbourne, only St. Patrick's Cathedral and the Mother Church of Victoria, St. Francis', pre-date it.

For the first five years of its existence the little chapel was administered from the Mother Church of St. Francis. The "Melbourne Morning Herald" of 25th February, 1853, under the heading "Roman Catholic — Brighton" stated: "Services are performed every second Sunday in each month, commencing at 11 o'clock. A clergyman will soon be permanently located there".

The first resident priest, appointed in February 1853, was Father Patrick W. Niall, a young Irish priest of 23, who had been ordained for Melbourne, and arrived in September, 1852. His new mission known at first as "Brighton-St. Kilda" was huge by today's standards as he was responsible for all districts south of the Yarra from Emerald Hill (South Melbourne) to the tip of Mornington Peninsula (Portsea) and eastwards into Gippsland as far as Warragul and Korumburra. After his first twelve months in this area his responsibilities for South Melbourne were taken over by Father John O'Connell.

Father Niall lived for a brief time in a small house at St. Kilda and the following year moved to his first presbytery in Brighton, the location of which is not certain. In 1861 a new presbytery was built at Elsternwick (Gardenvale), the location being probably considered more appropriate, having regard to the then existing responsibility for St. Kilda and Prahran. However, in the following year (1862) these two areas were formed into a separate mission.

The young priest was a man of prodigious energy, and in 1858 he built, with the assistance of the laity, two new schools, — one at Oakleigh, (40ft. x 16ft.)

and the other at Eumemmering Creek, Dandenong (22ft. x 12ft.). Other schools followed at Berwick, Mornington and Bittern, and it is possible that all these small schools were used for Mass. It is of interest to note here that the first school and church at Oakleigh was not on the present site in Warrigal Road but located on the corner of Dandenong Road and Atkinson Street, opposite the present Oakleigh Court House, on what is now a service station.

The school at Little Brighton, built and opened in 1848, continued to grow steadily in numbers of children attending, the great majority of whom walked up to three miles from the market garden areas stretching to the east right up to the present parish of East Bentleigh.

We are fortunate to have left to us an interesting description of the school given in a report by School Inspector Childers who made an official inspection before the arrival of Father Niall, on 12th March, 1851. He describes the school then three years old, as being in very fair condition but not quite light enough. A two roomed "house" for the Shoolmaster was attached. These rooms measured 9ft. x 12ft. and 7ft. x 12ft. — "rather low". The playground was fenced with palings.

The general attendance was 58, with average attendance about 33. At the time of his visit there were 21 boys and 21 girls present. The pupil's fee was sixpence each (weekly, monthly or annually?) nine children were unable to pay any fees. The teacher, Thomas Sherry, received an annual stipend of £30 in addition to the school fees. This was his first teaching appointment, having previously been a printer, and although he had no formal training as a teacher the inspector's report stated that he was "a young man well suited to his work".

The school equipment consisted of a map of the world, a broken blackboard and "there is only one desk". The reading, writing and spelling of the pupils was "tolerable", but only two children knew any arithmetic. Under the heading PUNISHMENTS "The cane is seldom used" and under the heading PRIVIES "None". The average attendance at the school grew to 60 in 1855, but then had slowly declined to 29 in 1862.

Early in 1865 Father Niall decided that the Little Brighton school, now of little purpose, would be best closed, and a new school built on the land offered by Mr. Fred Quinn three miles along the Centre Road at what is now East Bentleigh. He had previously discussed the matter with the Denominational School Board and on 14th March, 1865, he wrote a letter advising that the Little Brighton school had been kept open with a view to the renewal of aid. He said "A new school is to be opened three miles distant, and I would request that aid be transferred to the new school". He forwarded a list of the children then attending the school.

So much had happened since Father Niall came to the colony a little over 12 years before. The discovery of gold just as he arrived had brought rapid



growth to Victoria. The separation of Victoria from the colony of New South Wales in 1851 had brought with it a growing sense of independence to the new State. The affair at Eureka Stockade in 1854 had furthered this feeling of the settlers to being Australians, and the priest's countrymen were playing their part in building the new land. In England Benjamin Disraeli was about to become Prime Minister, Queen Victoria had been monarch for 33 years and would reign for another 31 and in America the Civil War between the North and South had just ended, with the shocking news then just to hand of the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln.

Melbourne's population had grown rapidly from 23,000 in 1851 to 125,000 in 1861. The first church, dedicated to St. Francis, had been built only twenty years previously, in 1845. In 1851, Bishop Goold had only nine priests. In 1848 Victoria had only two churches, now there were 65. The gold rushes of twelve years back had trebled Victoria's population in four years. In 1846 Victoria had 9,000 Irish-born citizens, about a quarter of the population; twenty-five years later, there were to be 100,000 Irish-born among Victoria's 170,000 Catholics. The Brighton Mission (the term parish was to follow later) had also increased markedly in Catholic population. Father Niall's mission stretched from Brighton right down to the tip of Point Nepean, across to Western Port and Flinders and into Eastern Gippsland and in the area later to be known as East Bentleigh, the Catholic life of that community was about to begin.

So it was on that day in 1865 as the young priest's horse slowly clip-clopped its way along the Centre Road towards Fred Quinn's market garden where he decided to see as many of the local Catholics of the area as he could to invite their assistance in building the new school.

## THE MOORABBIN CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Many of the small market garden holdings in the area had originally been held under lease by the Irish migrants who arrived in the late 1840's and 1850's. Any land was too expensive for the new settlers with little or no capital. However with the improvement in prices for their produce many were able to buy land by instalments. Potatoes had risen in price from £7 per ton in 1849 to £23 per ton in 1854 and Melbourne grew so fast in the 1850's that it provided an excellent market for all sorts of grain crops, vegetables, fruit, meat, milk and animal fodder. The gold diggings were also constantly in need of supplies. In 1853 cauliflowers sold for 2½ pence each, eggs 5/- a dozen, milk 2/- a quart. This favourable market accelerated a change from subsistence farming to the cultivation of market crops.

Jonathan Were sold 602 acres at an average price of about £4 per acre from November, 1847 till February, 1849. There were 60 different purchasers who took up an average of ten acres apiece, the largest being two of thirty acres and

the smallest (fairly numerous) of three acres. Terms were made easy, a deposit of as little as 8 per cent was accepted in one case and the remainder of the purchase price was usually paid by three equal bills, at six, twelve and eighteen months, although twenty-four and thirty-six month bills were sometimes accepted.

In 1852 two wealthy land investors had obtained by Crown land sale all the area from East Boundary Road to Warrigal Road. A square mile of land bounded by Chesterville Road to Warrigal Road and Centre Road to South Road had been purchased by Mr. Hugh Glass, probably the biggest land-holder in all Victoria at that time. Exactly the same area of one square mile to the north of Centre Road, stretching to North Road and across to Warrigal Road, had been bought by a Catholic solicitor, Mr. Peter O'Farrell, who was the solicitor to the Bishop, Dr. Goold. These two areas of land had been sub-divided in much the same way as the land to the west of the Dendy Survey, and it was in the land of Glass and O'Farrell that our parish began.

Father Niall was much encouraged by the willing support given to the concept of a school in the area. Families by the names of Boland, Brady, Cahill, Carroll, Cullinane, Delaney, Gahan, Hanrahan, Kelly, Kennedy, Leary, McCormick, McGuinness, as well as Fred Quinn, had all promised help with the building, which, it had been decided, would commence immediately.

It was the decision of the Denominational School Board that the school would be known as the Moorabbin Catholic School, although the Catholics of the area decided amongst themselves that as far as they were concerned it would be named after a saint. Legend has it that the men of the district, after they had completed the labour of building the school, decided that it should be named after Peter Brady — hence St. Peter's. Later Brady Road was named after the same family.

## BENTLEIGH'S FIRST CATHOLICS

The first five Catholic families to settle in the Bentleigh and East Bentleigh district arrived probably sometime before or shortly after 1850. We are able to positively identify the first of the pioneers from the signatures on a petition which was taken up in April and early May of 1853. The petition to the then Lieutenant-Governor C. J. Latrobe requested the payment of an annual stipend to the newly-arrived priest of the Mission, Father Patrick Niall, who had been appointed as from 1st March, 1853. The stipend requested (and subsequently granted) was £200 per annum.

The petition read: "We, the undersigned adult inhabitants of the Parish of Brighton, in the Town of Brighton, do hereby declare that it is our desire and intention to attend Divine Service in the place of worship situate within the said Parish, and known as the Catholic Temporary Chapel, that we have not previously signed any other application of this kind for this or any other place of

worship". It is interesting to note that of the 111 men and women who signed the petition, 67 could not write and signed the document with a cross. A graphic illustration of the lack of schooling in Ireland resulting from the penal laws.

The five families from this area were Pierce and Johanna Hanrahan, Michael and Catherine Carroll, Denis and Ellen Shanahan, James and Catherine Gould, and George, John, Edward and Eliza Howes. The Howes family seems to have left the district some years later. The four other families were destined to play quite active parts in the future development of the church in the district.

Pierce Hanrahan, a native of Kilkenny, settled on land in Bignell Road. It seems that from his original small holding he acquired some additional acres stretching through to what is now Brady Road. Early rate books show that he built a cottage, and later he built a six-room dwelling nearer to Brady Road. Eventually his market garden grew to a total of 20 acres with the main frontage on to Brady Road.

Pierce and Johanna had seven children—Andrew (1850-1892), Ann (1851-1926) later to marry Francis McCormack, John Patrick (1854-1922), Patrick (1855-1880), John (1879, died at 16 months), Thomas (1859-1939), and Pierce Jnr. (1860-1904). The sons of the family followed in the steps of the father as market gardeners. John Patrick worked a 20-acre market garden in Brady Road and a further 20 acres in East Boundary Road in 1871. Andrew in 1871 had an 80-acre property in East Boundary Road as well as a further 20 acres in Brady Road. However by 1875 Andrew had disposed of the East Boundary property and was working 20 acres in Brady Road which was to remain his holding till his death. Patrick who died at the early age of 25 had married a Mary Quinn, who also died at the early age of 24. The only other record of descendants is that of Thomas and his wife Margaret whose children were Cecilia (Mrs. Murphy), Thomas (jnr), Catherine (Mrs. Hickey), Ellen (Mrs. Cherry), and Josephine (Mrs. Carey).

Close to Pierce Hanrahan's market garden in Bignell Road was that of Michael Carroll who with his wife had arrived from Tipperary at about the same time as the Hanrahans. They brought their three young sons, Michael born 1844, John born 1845, and Patrick born 1849. Two other children, Margaret born 1860 (and later to marry into the Shanahan family) and Thomas 1863, were born here. The Carroll market garden grew to 60 acres in the early 1860's, by which time the sons Patrick and William were assisting their father. By 1880 the property was consolidated as 50 acres with a four-room dwelling.

The third of the original families was the Shanahans,—Denis and his wife Ellen from Cork. They were the youngest of the early arrivals, being then only in their early twenties. The land they cleared for a market garden was in Tucker Road. The 1862 rate book shows that they were still living in the original slab cottage. In 1875 a two-room dwelling is shown and in 1880 a four-room cottage



on the 19½ acres of market garden. Their three sons Michael (1872-1952), Cornelius (1873-1936), and Denis (1877-1909) were later to be active in church affairs in the district, and to develop their own market gardens in Tucker Road, Manchester Road and East Boundary Road. The Moorabbin rate book of 1901 shows the three sons as owners of these garden properties.

James Gould and his wife Catherine were neighbours of the Hanrahans and Carrolls in Bignell Road. Here they worked their market garden which seemed to stretch towards Brady Road — an area of 10 acres is shown at the address in 1869. Later in 1871 an additional market garden of 21 acres in East Boundary Road was worked by James and his teen-aged sons — James (1850-1871), Thomas (1855-1903), Michael (1859-1932), and Stephen (1861-1912). Two daughters — Catherine, who was born in Ireland before the family came to Australia (1845-1914), and Elizabeth (1853-1934) were the other children.

The Howes family from Limerick had a small market garden in Jasper Road. John Howes and his wife Margaret signed the 1853 petition as did Eliza, George and Edward Howes who also are shown as living 1½ miles from the Catholic chapel. A Cornelius Howes joined the Hibernians at Brighton in 1884 and died the following year. His occupation is shown as a market gardener. Another young Irish migrant who arrived with his family in 1855, went to work for John Howes and stayed to found another pioneer family of the parish, was Michael Brady, of whom more anon.

These original five families of the early 1850's were soon to be joined by others who arrived around 1855 — the Kennedys, the Bolands, McCormicks, Bradys, and McGuinness's.

## *James Kennedy*

Probably no other family in the district has had such an enduring impact upon the Catholic development of our area and parish as the Kennedys. From a single young Irish immigrant, from Carrick-on-Suhr, Tipperary, has sprung a number of large families, many of whom have contributed significantly not only to the growth of the faith in this district but to the development of the community in a great variety of ways.

James Kennedy was about 28 years of age when he arrived in the colony sometime around 1855. It is likely that in order to obtain sufficient capital to purchase his own land, he at first worked for other property owners. It is known however that in later years he worked for John King on his property in South Road and in 1859 was able to purchase a 10-acre property in Bignell Road. It is likely that before he purchased this property he was already working the land. (It was also about this time that he married Margaret Norris then 25 years of

age). The 1862 Moorabbin rate book shows that the cottage on the Bignell Road property was made of palings. Later a 4-room dwelling was erected.

Three sons and five daughters were born to the marriage. The daughters all married into other local pioneer families. Kate (Mrs. Finnerty), Margaret (Mrs. James Cochrane), Minnie-May (Mrs. Michael Shanahan), Ellen (Mrs. John Prendegast), and Brigid (Mrs. John Boland). It is interesting to note that later Kennedy children (male and female) married into other local Catholic pioneer families, — McGuinness, Fitzgerald, Malane, Cormick.

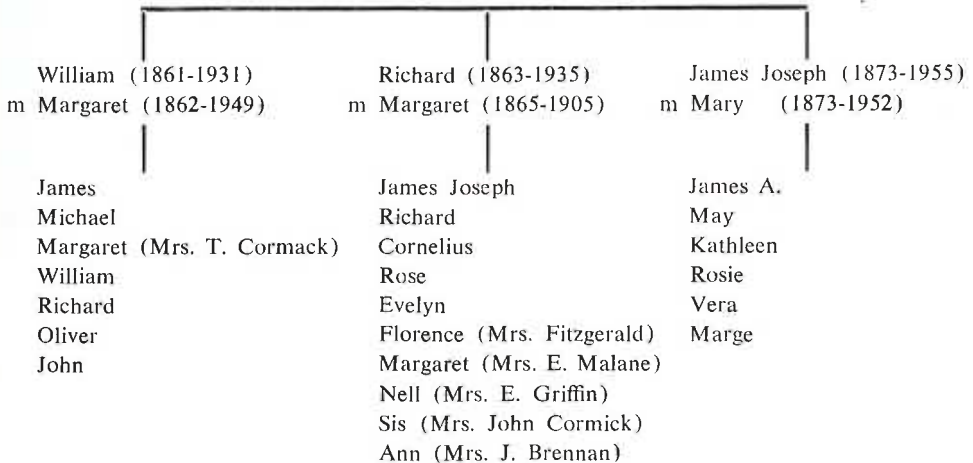
The three sons of James and Margaret Kennedy were William (born 1861), Richard (1863) and James Joseph (1873). The following “family tree” shows the families of these three sons:



**JAMES KENNEDY**

James Kennedy (1827-1890)  
Margaret (nee Norris) (1834-1914)

issue 3 sons & 5  
daughters — Kate,  
Margaret, Brigid,  
Ellen & Mary



In 1871 James Kennedy purchased a further 20 acres in Mackie Road. Later this market garden was reduced to 13 acres and became the property of his son

Richard till his death in 1935. William Kennedy acquired a 10-acre market garden in South Road and the original Kennedy property in Bignell Road was retained by the family and worked as a market garden until 1969 when the land was sold to the Church for the establishment of St. James Regional College.

James Kennedy and his three sons were early members of the St. Patrick's, Number 25 branch of the Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society, (The name St. Patrick's related to the original parish name of what is now St. Finbar's), and in the years to come would play an increasingly important part in local Catholic and district affairs.

## THE SEVEN BRADYS

The Brady family arrived from Ireland on the sailing ship "Hotspur" on 25th June, 1855, after a 108-day journey from Liverpool, from where they had departed on 9th March. Earlier they had crossed the Irish Sea to board the sailing ship for Australia. The ship carried 382 adults and 39 children, eight of whom died during the voyage and were buried at sea. All were Irish immigrants who were receiving assisted passages, and all had known the terrible times of the Great Famine.

The Brady family comprised three boys and three girls together with their mother. The yellowing pages of the handwritten passenger book, kept at the Immigrants' Depot in Melbourne, shows that they came from Galway. Michael, the eldest, was 24 at the time of arrival. His occupation was that of an agricultural laborer. He could read but not write. He left the Depot on 9th July, 1855, to work for Mr. John Howes of Brighton. Peter Brady, whom legend has it, our parish is named after in honour of St. Peter, was aged 20 and was also an agricultural laborer; he also could read but not write. William, then aged 14, also an agricultural laborer who could neither read nor write, went to work on 7th July for James Elliott of North Melbourne.



**PETER BRADY**

The eldest girl of the family, Anne, aged 22, was the only one of the family who could read and write. She stayed in the Depot till 10th September, when she obtained work as a domestic servant at Moonee Ponds. Honora, aged 18 who could read only, also went to work as a domestic servant. The youngest daughter, Eliza, aged 16, stayed nearly three months at the Immigrants' Depot before obtaining a position as a domestic servant at an annual salary of £15.



The mother of the family, Margaret Brady, shown as a domestic servant, went to her cousin Michael Boland who lived at the corner of King and Little Bourke Streets. Her age is shown on the ship's passenger list as 45, but if one is to believe the tombstone over her grave in Brighton Cemetery she was in fact 58 years of age at the time of her arrival. Maybe it was necessary to put back her age in order to obtain an assisted passage?

With Michael, the eldest son, already market gardening in the district, the three brothers pooled their small capital a few years later and first leased then later bought market garden land in what was eventually to be called Brady Road. Some years later, about 1875, William moved to another market garden property of 20 acres in Bignell Road. The 1871 rate book shows Michael Brady with 30 acres on Bignell and Brady Roads, Peter Brady with 20 acres on the same roads, and William with 20 acres again on the same roads.



**MICHAEL BRADY**



**WILLIAM BRADY**

By 1880 Michael's garden area had increased to 42½ acres with a 4-room cottage on Brady Road, Peter's acreage had increased to 35 acres with a 4-room cottage on Brady Road, and William retained his 20 acre garden with a 4-room cottage in Bignell Road until 1890 when he sold his holding and purchased a new property of 37 acres in East Boundary Road. Meanwhile their sisters Eliza and Honora came to live in the district, Eliza becoming Mrs. Michael Boland and Honora marrying Cornelius McCormick.

The three brothers all made noteworthy contributions towards the development of Catholic life in the area. All joined the Hibernians and helped build the original (1865) wooden school in Centre Road.

## *Michael Boland*



**MICHAEL AND ELIZA BOLAND**

Michael Boland was born in Ireland in 1825 and came to the infant colony of Victoria in the mid-1850's. Soon after clearing two areas of bushland, — one in Brady Road (10 acres) and the other in East Boundary Road (15 acres) he married Eliza Brady. Later he sold the market garden in Brady Road and with the proceeds enlarged his East Boundary Road property to 20 acres, now the site of the Moorabbin swimming pool.

Four sons and one daughter were born to Michael and Eliza. Peter (1868-1892), Michael Jnr. (1869-1950), William (1873-1905), Patrick Finbar (1878-1964) and Elizabeth who died as a small child of 3½ years in 1877.

## *The McCormick Brothers*

Cornelius and Francis McCormick, both bachelors, came out to Australia from County Clare and together developed a market garden in Bignell Road. Later the rate books show Francis with six acres in Bignell Road and 13 acres in Kingsland, near the corner of South and Warrigal Roads. Cornelius at this time was working 19 acres, also in Bignell Road.

Cornelius married Honora Brady, and Francis married Ann Hanrahan. The children of Francis and Ann were Pearce (1876), John (1875), Johanna (1877), Cornelius (1880), and May, Patrick, Anastasia, Catherine, Francis, and Anne.

## *Cochrane*

James Cochrane and his brother David (1828-1888) settled in the district during the 1850's. James originally worked land between Chesterville Road and East Boundary Road and moved to a market garden property of 107 acres in Cochrane Road in 1868, where he built a 5-room dwelling. In the same year

David occupied a small 6-acre property in Centre Dandenong Road and later, in 1900 he sold this property and bought 14 acres in McGuinness Road and an additional 10 acres in Bignell Road.

## *The McGuinness Family of Clare*

The McGuinness family from County Clare comprised seven brothers, four of whom migrated to Australia and three to the United States. Michael, the eldest (born in 1826) came to the colony of Victoria with three younger brothers — James, Cornelius and William, at the time of the gold rushes about 1852. Their father, Cornelius senior, and their mother came out at the same time. Arriving in Melbourne they were caught up in the gold fever and joined the rush to the rich fields at Mt. Alexander and Bendigo. They found gold in moderate amounts, and after a year or so at the diggings, returned to Melbourne and purchased land which they cleared and levelled for market gardening.

Within a few years Michael was working 27 acres in Centre Road, James had 40 acres in McGuinness Road, Thomas owned 27 acres in McGuinness Road, and William and Cornelius were working another 40 acres also in McGuinness Road. Thomas McGuinness married a Mary Hanrahan. Michael married a Margaret Carey, and a daughter of this marriage (Margaret) later became Mrs. William Kennedy (1862-1949).



**MARGARET MCGUINNESS**



**MICHAEL MCGUINNESS**



## *Cormick*

John Cormick (1834-1902) and his wife Ellen were among the first settlers in Mackie Road. Related to the McCormicks of the district, they had dropped the *Mc* before their name so as to avoid confusion. Their original market garden was 20 acres in area and was expanded to 25 acres in 1875. The three sons of John and Ellen were Richard (1869-1947), William (1861-1923), and Charles (born 1871).

Richard later owned a 13-acre garden on Centre Road, and William in the 1890's worked as a baker, with a shop and bakehouse in Centre Road. His son William Jnr. also followed his father as a baker (1904-1952). The other children of William Snr. and his wife Mary were John, Thomas, Charles, Mary, Teresa, Nellie and James. The children of Richard and Therese were Nellie, Richard and Tess.

## *Cahill*

The land upon which St. Peter's Church, School, Presbytery and Convent are now located was originally owned by the Cahill family. James Cahill (1842-1892) and his wife Catherine came from Cork in the late 1850's and at first settled in Bignell Road, moving to a 20-acre lot in Mackie Road where a 3-room cottage was built in 1869. Their three sons, John, James Jnr, and Patrick inherited the property. A grand-son, Matthew, later purchased land on Centre Road between Bignell and Brady Roads and owned this property between the years 1920 and 1940.

## *Quinn*

Probably the first benefactor of St. Peter's was Fredrick Quinn (1829-1921) who gave the land upon which the original St. Peter's School was built in Centre Road opposite the present building site of the Moorabbin Hospital. Fredrick and his wife Ann (1836-1899) had three children — Catherine (1858) Mary (1854-later Mrs. Hanrahan) and Ann (1860). Quinn's early market garden in Centre Road was 9 acres with a 4-room cottage, and by 1880 the property was enlarged to 13 acres with a futher 10 acres off Centre Road; all but one acre was sold by 1890. Later, in 1901, he was living on a 10-acre property in Elizabeth Street.

## *Prendegast*

John Patrick Prendegast (1850-1930), of Centre Road, followed the occupation of draper and operated a small shop. He and his wife Ellen (nee Kennedy) (1867-1954) were both very active in church affairs. Their children were William, Rita (Mrs. David Fitzgerald), James, Ellen, John, Bernard, and Agnes (Mrs. O'Rourke).

## *Naughton*

Dennis Naughton (1836-1910) was another of the early Irish settlers in Bignell Road. By 1870 he had moved from his first location and was living in Centre Road where he had a property of 25 acres. In addition he was growing vegetable crops on 17 acres in East Boundary Road, on 10 acres in North Road, and 10 acres on Brady Road. His children were William (1863-1935), Annie, Edmund, Bridget, Ellen, Margaret, Elizabeth, George and John.

## *Gahan*

Patrick Gahan (1818-1882) and his wife Margaret purchased a small property (5 acres) in Centre Road in 1871. Their eldest son John (1854-1891) worked 7 acres in Tucker Road. Three other children — Edward (1864-1916), Mary Ann (1859-1945), and William — later owned land and lived in Carlow Street.

## *Hallinan*

Thomas Hallinan (1813-1883) and his brother Michael (1821-1905) were early market gardeners in the area and were also members of the H.A.C.B.S.

## *Delaney*

John Delaney (1857-1924) and his wife Bridget were later arrivals in the area and operated a 10-acre market garden in Brady Road around 1900. Their children were Jack, Nell, Lou and Michael.

Other Catholic families who are mentioned in early records are Thomas Malane (1836-1915) from Country Clare, market gardener, and Patrick Malane a market gardener of Centre Road; Phillip Kidney and his wife Johanna (nee Shanahan) and their children Honora, Jack and James; the Ryan family of Old Dandenong Road, the only details of whom were recorded on the death of Mrs. Charlotte Ryan (1813-1902); Patrick Coleman (1828-1887) market gardener and his wife Ellen of Cochrane Road and their children—Johanna (born 1858), Ellen (1870), and Timothy (1871); John Cullinane, market gardener, corner of Centre Road and Mackie Road and his two sons, John and William; Phillip Lynch (1812-1897) market gardener and his wife Caroline, of North Road; and Patrick Lynch, of Mackie Road (1863.)

## Fitzgerald

Patrick Fitzgerald (1856-1939) was born in County Clare and emigrated to Australia in 1877. At first he worked on the construction of the Gippsland railway, later at a brewery and eventually became manager of the Young Australia Hotel in North Melbourne. In 1882 he married Ellen Walsh, a young colleen from County Waterford, in her parish church of SS. Peter and Paul, South Melbourne. For several years the couple lived in North Melbourne, and in 1888 they took up bush land on the eastern boundary of Warrigal Road. They found early that the edge of the rich sandy soil was along the side of Warrigal Road and that most of the land they cleared was clay. Finding the land too poor for farming, Partrick opened a "boiling down" business, and in spite of many reverses, including three fires, he eventually became successful and later turned the business into the company known as "P. Fitzgerald & Sons" which survived at that location until the mid 1960's, when it was relocated outside Dandenong.

The Fitzgeralds had eight children. David, the eldest, married Rita Prendegast of Bentleigh; and the second son, John, married Florence Kennedy, also from Bentleigh. A daughter (Florrie) is now Sister Mary Peter, Principal of the Presentation Convent, Windsor, and there are 236 descendents, including nine sisters of religion one priest and one brother.

### THE PIONEERS — SECOND GENERATION — 1904

**Front Row:** Michael Shannon, Catherine Fenaughty (nee Kennedy), John Prendegast, Mrs. James Kennedy Snr. (widow of the original James Kennedy) Richard Kennedy, Mary Kennedy (nee Shine) Margaret Kennedy (nee McGuinness).

**Back Row:** Mrs. Ellen Prendegast (nee Kennedy) Mrs. Margaret Cochrane (nee Kennedy) James Cochrane, James Kennedy, William Kennedy, Mrs. Mary Shannon (nee Kennedy), Mrs. Bridget Boland (nee Kennedy).







# THE LITTLE WOODEN SCHOOL HOUSE

Soon after Father Niall's visit to the Irish settlers in the "East Brighton" district on that memorable mid-summer day in February, 1865, the men-folk took time off from their labours in the fields and gathered on Fred Quinn's land in Centre Road to build the 30ft. by 15ft. school house. The rough hewn timber was cut into long lengths of heavy palings, somewhat like weather-boards. The school was erected some 50 yards from the road (farther in from the road than the second school made of brick, which was to be erected 36 years later in 1903).

Although the name St. Peter's was not to be officially recognised as the name of the school for many years to come, local legend has it that the men who had taken part in the construction rested after the completion of the building, and contemplating the result of their efforts, they decided there and then that such a venture should not begin its existence without bearing the name of a patron saint. It was decided that as a tribute to the efforts of Peter Brady, who had taken a leading part in the building operations, it should bear his name, in honour of the apostle Peter.

Soon after the completion of the building the first dance ever held in the Moorabbin - Bentleigh district was organised to celebrate what was in fact the first community effort in the area. Within a very short time the building was to be used not only as a school, but as a meeting hall and as a venue for nearly every function in the surrounding areas of "East Brighton" and Moorabbin. The Hibernian Society, a branch of which was to be established in the district in 1870, also used the building for some of its meetings, as well as the St. Finbar's old school building some three miles to the west.

St. Patrick's Day was probably the biggest annual occasion celebrated in the hall. The other big annual function was Lanigan's Ball, which was held there for the first time in 1867, and for every year following until the much larger East Bentleigh hall was built in 1894.

The orchestra which performed for St. Patrick's Day and Lanigan's Ball as well as for weddings and other celebrations comprised a piano, violin, jews'-harp and concertina. These instruments were played by William Cullen, Thomas Cahill, Mick Shannon and Michael McGuinness respectively. Step-dance performances of traditional and "modern" Irish jigs were always a feature of the evenings and loud would be the rich Irish brogues calling for Frank McCormick and Thomas Morgan to show their real artistry in the dance.

It is difficult today to realise that such a small "30 by 15" building could be the venue for a dance, much less a ball. But it takes little imagination to picture the gaiety of the scene, with the lively Irish jigs, the soft brogues of most of the counties of Ireland raised in song, the candlelight and the small wide-eyed faces



of the children looking in through the windows. Oh! the wonder of it all! The loud boisterous "Wild Colonial Boy", and the hush that would descend as a sole baritone voice drifted out onto the night air, across the planted paddocks with the sad "Danny Boy", and the tears that would come to many an eye as the "Rose of Tralee" reminded so many of the loved ones in Erin they would never see again — in this life.

Regular card evenings were held in the lamp-lit hall and were the occasion of much-enjoyed conversation that would go on into the "wee sma' hours". The game of "45 cards" was then the most popular game played.

As to a school starting in March, 1865 we have little accurate knowledge as to the identity of the first teacher. The earliest teacher recorded is a Mr. Hanrahan who could have been from the local pioneering family of that name. Mr. Hanrahan resigned from the school in October 1872. It is possible however that he may have been teacher of the school for a few years before, and even possibly the original teacher.

The teachers who followed were:

1873 Miss Rose Gillon.

1874 (August) till 1886, Mrs. Kate Sampson, who lived with her husband in a small lean-to structure at the side of the school.

1887 and 1888 Miss Horan.

1889 till 1895 Miss A. Richardson.

1896 till 1901 Miss Johanna Minogue, who boarded with the Quinn family next door to the school.

1902 Miss Marcella Smith who came daily by train from Burnley to the East Brighton (now Bentleigh) station. Her salary was £40 per annum.

1903 and 1904 Miss Johanna McCormick, a daughter of Francis McCormick who was born here in 1877 and in 1905 entered the religious life as a Sister of Mercy.



**MRS. KATE SAMPSON**

The "Advocate" of 19th April, 1873, records Moorabbin School (Brighton Mission) attendance as 56. Other early records indicate that in 1875 a total of 40 children were attending the school. The Australian Catholic Church directory of 1878 states "MISSION OF BRIGHTON — Moorabbin School 56 attending."



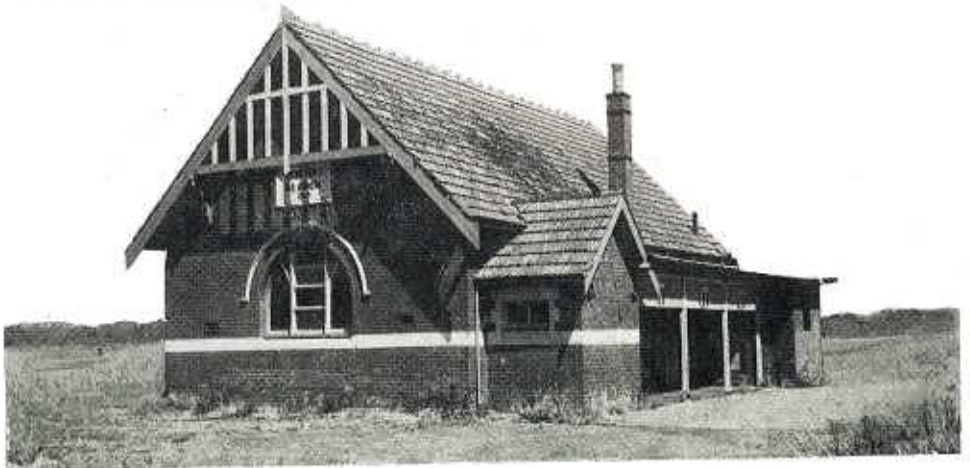
Although we have little real evidence, it is probable that Mass was celebrated and the sacraments administered from time to time in the original wooden building; however, as a community meeting place and hall, the small building was the focal point of local social life for just on 30 years.

By the early 1890's such long established social functions as St. Patrick's Day and Lanigan's Ball were forced outside the district to neighbouring "towns" where there were halls large enough to cater for all who wanted to attend.

In 1894 a local doctor, a real estate agent, a draper, a grocer and five market gardeners got together to plan the building of a larger local hall for the use of all local groups. The draper was John Prendergast and two of the gardeners were Francis McCormick and William Leary. The outcome was the formation of a company — the East Brighton Public Hall Company Ltd. It commenced with a nominal capital of £49. Construction began immediately and by the winter of the year 1894 it was ready for Lanigan's Ball. Shares were available for one pound each and by the 1920's the company had a registered capital of £600.

The East Brighton Public Hall is still standing — the name is now the East Benteigh Hall. The Moorabbin City Council later took over the hall and further enlarged and improved its facilities. The last Lanigan's Ball (the 89th) was held in this hall on Wednesday, 4th July, 1956. The organisers were Messrs. J. J. Kennedy and W. Pendlebury.

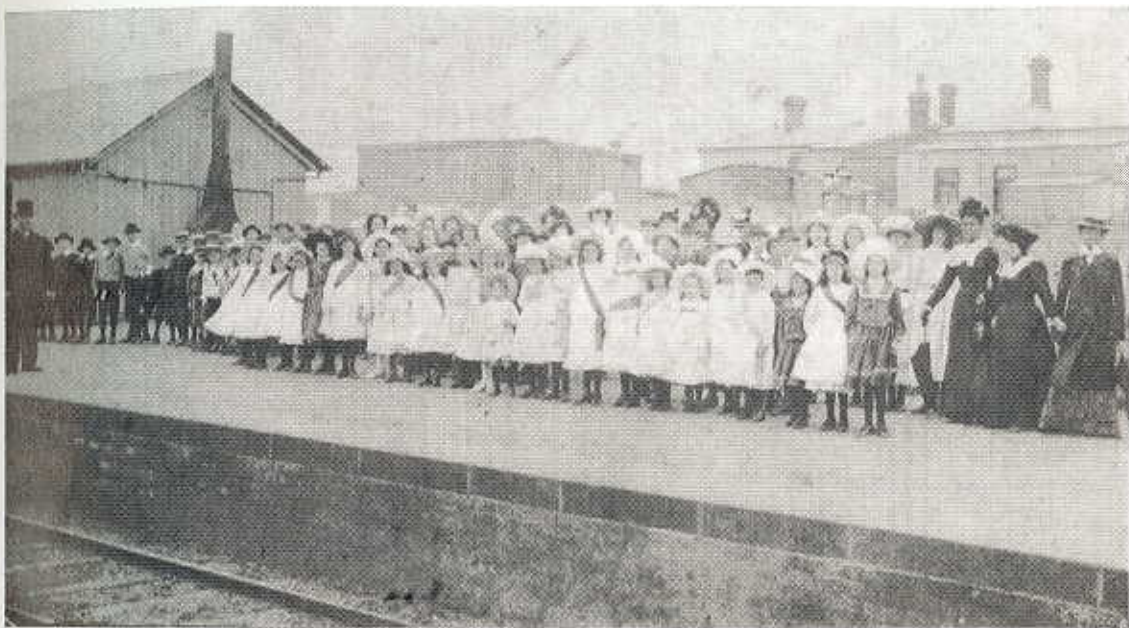
By the turn of the century it had become apparent that the 35-year-old wooden school house was inadequate, and that if a teaching order of nuns was to come to the school, a new and bigger building would be required. Again the Catholics of the district faced the challenge and in a short space of time £300 was collected for the construction of a fine and handsome brick building which cost the then frightening amount of £425. Messrs. Robert Dunn & Son were contracted to build the brick structure, the main room of which measured 45ft. x 25ft. with two cloak rooms, stage, etc.



**The second school building — Blessed and opened 1903**

A handsome new picket fence, tanks, fire extinguishing apparatus, etc., are amongst the accessories of the school which had replaced the old wooden buildings used as a school for a number of years past.

The day for the grand opening and blessing was Tuesday afternoon, 7th April, 1903. School children from St. Peter's as well as from St. James', North Road, Gardenvale, lined the railway platform of the now Bentleigh station to await the arrival of His Grace, Archbishop Carr. The "Advocate" devoted an entire page to the event — "The parishioners had assembled in their hundreds from North Road, Orrong Road, Brighton, East Brighton, Mentone, etc. Some sixty vehicles (horse-drawn of course) loaded with men and women were assembled in the vicinity of the station, whilst nearby was a large body of the officers and members of the H.A.C.B.S. (Hibernian Society) in regalia. The Bavarian Brass Band was in attendance and played some inspiring Irish national airs.



**Waiting for the Archbishop 1903 — Pupils of St. Peter's at Bentleigh railway station. On left, in top hat, Fr. Gough then Parish Priest Brighton district.**

"With the arrival of the Archbishop on the steam train from Melbourne, a procession was formed and proceeded in the following order along Centre Road to the new school — First came the 60 horse-drawn drays, gigs, traps and buggies containing visitors from all parts of the parish; the Bavarian Band; the school children wearing green rosettes; the beautiful large banner of the Hibernian Society mounted on a lorry and drawn by richly caparisoned horses; the members of the branches of the Hibernians; the clergy; and lastly the Archbishop, accompanied by Fr. Gough, the Parish Priest of the Brighton district. Four officers of the Hibernian Society, mounted on horses, acted as escort for the Archbishop's carriage".

In the words of "The Advocate" — "The country people flocked out to witness the pageant, the like of which they had not had the pleasure of witnessing before in that part of the country. It was, in fact, a miniature St. Patrick's Day procession. Green was to be seen on every side. It was displayed lavishly by men and children, and even the hundred and one horses' heads were gaily decorated with the Irish national colour. Arrived at the new, handsome and commodious school, some two miles distant from the East Brighton station, his Grace entered the grounds between files of the processionists, who reverently knelt to receive his blessing.

"A triumphal arch of greenery, on which was inscribed the greeting 'Welcome', had been erected over the entrance to the school grounds. A bright and cheery spectacle burst on the view of the visitor as he entered the new structure. Thanks to the deft hands of the ladies, the schoolroom had been transformed into a thing of beauty. Choice flowers, greenery, flags of all nations, including a banner, on which were emblazoned, 'Cead Mile Failthe', 'Erin Go Bragh' etc. Across the outside facade was the inscription 'St. Peter's School 1903'.

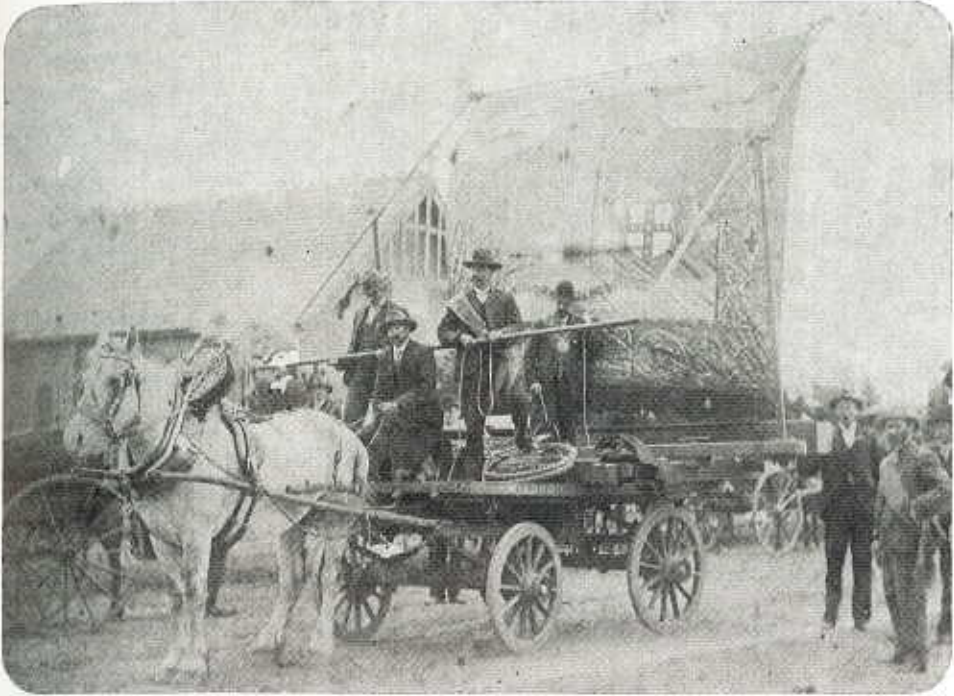
"The children sang a glad song of welcome. A large overflow assemblage, listened to an address of welcome given by Mr. W. Taylor, Past President of the Hibernian branch. The address was signed by J. Naughton, President, and John Brennan, Secretary of H.A.C.B.S., East Brighton.

"His Grace, on rising to reply, was greeted with cheers. He said that the address of the Hibernian Society and the Catholic people of East Brighton reminded him that as they came from the railway station, the onlookers must have imagined that they were proceeding to some marriage feast, or to some political meeting where speeches were to be made; or at least, to some religious ceremony at which a large church was about to be dedicated. They had not, however, come together for any of those purposes, but for one of the very highest importance — the blessing and opening of a new Catholic school (Applause). He was delighted to see them attach so much importance to the opening of the school. It showed that the Hibernian Society and the Catholic people generally of East Brighton were prepared to continue their sacrifices in the cause of religious education (Cheers). It was in the Catholic school that all the powers of children received their full and perfect development (Cheers). Hence it was that he (the Archbishop) attached so much importance to the opening of their beautiful school (Renewed cheers).

"Father Carey, the previous Parish Priest, replied to the Archbishop's address. He desired to congratulate the people of East Brighton on the erection of so fine a school, which was a practical proof of their determination to hand down to their children the faith which they had brought with them from the bright land of St. Patrick (Applause).

"Father Gough, the Parish Priest, read a list of subscriptions amounting to £100, which together with the £300 raised by the parishioners, virtually paid





**SCHOOL OPENING 1903 — The Hibernian Society banner and horse-drawn cart which escorted the Archbishop's carriage along Centre Road, from the Bentleigh railway station to the new school.**

**On cart L. to R.: Michael McGuinness, Frank McCormick (with reins) Peter Brady, in bowler hat (unknown).**

**Standing to right of cart: James and William Kennedy.**

for the school. He asked the Archbishop to plant an oak tree in front of the new school (Cheers) in commemoration of the important ceremony which His Grace had performed that day (Cheers).

“The Archbishop then proceeded to plant the oak amidst a scene of much enthusiasm, the band playing appropriate selections. At the invitation of Fr. Gough, three ringing cheers were given for the Archbishop”.

And so it was that the new school building, opened on that April day of 1903, was to become the centre of Catholic life in the district for the next 50 years.

The first Presentation sister to teach at the rebuilt school was Sister Mary Vincent, who came daily by horse and buggy from Star of the Sea Presentation Convent at Gardenvale. After some years Sister Vincent was transferred to another teaching appointment but returned for a second long period of teaching at St. Peter's towards the end of the First World War from about 1917 till the middle 1920's. The young boy who daily drove the horse and buggy for the nuns on the long journey over rough roads was John Charlston, who for many years has operated a bakery business in Centre Road. John boarded at the Convent and went to school at St. Peter's.

# THE CLERGY

The pioneer priest of the vast Brighton Mission, Fr. Patrick William Niall remained so for some 16 years until 1869, and Father John O'Dowd followed as priest of the Mission for about a year, and in November 1870 handed over to Father J. P. O'Sullivan. By this time the Brighton presbytery was rebuilt on the original site in North Road, Elsternwick (now Gardenvale) where St. James' is now located.

Father O'Sullivan was assisted by Father Lee, a Chinese priest, and an interesting letter in the archives of the Archdiocese from Fr. O'Sullivan to Bishop Goold gives us some insight into the problems of a parish of that size. "The mission is mostly market gardeners. Very few come to confession except on Sunday mornings. I have tried to carry out the arrangements of my predecessors, but I cannot be in Oakleigh or Brighton on Sundays except to hear confessions at Brighton on the first Sunday".

"Father Lee officiates at Brighton and Oakleigh every Sunday. It is impossible to make an Irish congregation care for his ministrations. The different places where Mass is said on Sundays are Dandenong, Cranbourne, Pakenham, Oakleigh and Brighton, besides giving stations on week days, in the towns at Snapper Point (Mornington) Dromana, Tootgarook, the Heads, Stoney Creek or Flinders, Balnarring, Hastings as also the Bass. Another priest is badly needed for Brighton".

In June 1876, Father Matthew Carey, who had come from Ireland the previous year, was put in charge at Brighton. Shortly after his arrival at Brighton he reopened the school at St. Finbar's, which had been closed at the time of the commencement of St. Peter's school in 1865. Later in 1878 he built the Church of St. Michael at Berwick, and completed the church previously started by Father O'Sullivan at Pakenham in 1871. Two other small churches were erected at Mornington and Shoreham. At the time of Father Carey's arrival two schools were in operation—St. Peter's (with 40 children) and Oakleigh (with 30 pupils). He established an additional school at North Brighton (Gardenvale) which very quickly had over 100 pupils enrolled.

Father Walter Ebsworth in his book "Pioneer Catholic Victoria", records that in 1882 Father Carey built the first wooden church alongside the presbytery in North Road, and when the new Parish of Dandenong was formed in the following year, embracing both the Western Port district and the Mornington Peninsula, the old mission of Brighton ceased to exist, and Father Carey's parish came to be known as Elsternwick. St. Finbar's, all during this period, remained a Chapel of ease, and it was not until a later time that a presbytery was built and St. Finbar's became a parish in its own right.

Perhaps the most memorable assistant Priest of the mission during Father Carey's 14 years in Brighton was Father W. Quilter, who was there from 1877 till 1880 and again later in 1894.

Dean Carey went to West Melbourne in 1901 and was succeeded by Father Gough who for the previous 25 years had been the pastor of Daylesford. He remained for 20 years and was followed by his curate Father Patrick Gibbons, who was elevated to Parish Priest. The five-year ministry of Father Gibbons as Parish Priest of Brighton from 1922 to 1927 was of great significance to the parishioners at the St. Peter's end of the parish. For the first time Mass was to be celebrated regularly at St. Peter's school as from 1922.



**FATHER MATTHEW CAREY**

For many years previous the Catholics of the area went to various other areas for Sunday Mass and the late Mr. J. J. Kennedy brought this problem of Sunday Mass to the attention of Archbishop Mannix in a letter he wrote to His Grace dated 27th May, 1919, which has been recently found in the archives of St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Mr. Kennedy said: "My subject deals with the district of Bentleigh, where we are very poorly attended to in the way of church services. As you are aware we are in the parish of Elsternwick and are situated between five to six miles from the presbytery. Now it would be of much greater advantage for the Bentleigh people to be connected with either Oakleigh or Glenhuntly, the priest then being within three miles of us.

"Our nearest church is Brighton, which is about three miles from us, and it is very awkward for us to go there to confession on a Saturday afternoon. Now we have a Catholic school right in the centre of us, where confessions could be heard and Mass said for us, if only the priest had not so far to come.

"At present our people are all spilt—some go to St. Finbar's Brighton, others to St. Anthony's, Glenhuntly, others to Oakleigh, others to Mentone, thus causing the people never to meet together. A motion was passed by our H.A.C.B. Society to form a deputation to you about this matter more than 12 months ago, but nothing has ever come of it.



“It may also be said that our Catholic people in this district comprise about one hundred to one hundred and fifty. They are mostly farmers, and are well able and quite willing to put in to build a new church if necessary. Trusting I have not offended in any way in writing this letter to you, Your Grace, I am yours most respectfully (Signed) J. Kennedy.”

James Joseph Kennedy heralded by his letter of 1919 the need for a church. A grandson of the original pioneer James Kennedy he was destined to play a leading role in the ultimate establishment of our own parish. Three of his daughters were to join the Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. He passed from this life in 1968, but he will be forever remembered as long as St. Peter’s parish exists.



**J. J. KENNEDY**

Years later at a meeting of the local Regional School Board, when the parish priests of district parishes were planning the establishment of a regional boys’ school, Father Timothy O’Sullivan parish priest of St. Paul’s Benteleigh, proposed that the regional School should be named after James Joseph Kennedy, in the name of the saint, James. It was doubly significant, for the college was to be built on the original Kennedy land in Bignell Road.

The first altar boy to assist Father Gibbons with Sunday Mass was James McGuinness. The original McGuinness home was built opposite the 1903 school in Centre Road.

From the late 1890’s through the turn of the century and right up to the 1920’s the entire East Brighton area (including Benteleigh and East Benteleigh) was part of St. James’ Parish, North Road, Elsternwick. During this time St. Finbar’s was administered as a chapel of ease from Elsternwick. In 1921 a new parish of St. Joan of Arc was established in Brighton, and from that time till 1928, St. Finbar’s and the entire Benteleigh area (including what was later to be named East Benteleigh) was administered as part of this new parish. St. Finbar’s as a separate parish was not destined to be re-established until 1940. St. Patrick’s at Mentone had been created a parish in 1904, and in 1928 two new parishes were created — St. Kevin’s, Ormond, and St. Paul’s, Benteleigh.

The first Parish Priest came to the new parish of Benteleigh in the person of Father Joseph Egan. He later introduced into the parish the Sisters of Our Lady

of the Sacred Heart, who in addition to establishing in Jasper Road, took over the running of St. Peter's School. Father Egan died on 14th November, 1933.

Six sisters from the order set up a temporary convent in Roberts Street, Bentleigh, in January, 1934, and at the opening of the school year a few weeks later took over from the Presentation nuns the primary schools at Bentleigh and East Bentleigh. Sisters Juliana McKenna and Margaret McGuigan were the first O.L.S.H. nuns to teach at St. Peter's, East Bentleigh, which then had 36 pupils.

From 1934 until 1941 Rev. Father John Durkin was Parish Priest of Bentleigh. He was followed by Father James O'Neill 1942-1949. In 1950 Father Timothy O'Sullivan became Parish Priest of St. Paul's and soon after the rapidly increasing sub-division of market garden land for housing brought many hundreds of Catholics into the district. The influx made the Municipality of Moorabbin the fastest growing area in Australia during the early 1950's.

## ST. PETER'S A PARISH

Soon after his appointment as Parish Priest of Bentleigh, Father O'Sullivan foresaw the development about to begin in the eastern side of his Bentleigh Parish. Although most parts of Bentleigh had been sub-divided for housing years before, in 1950 the present East Bentleigh was still largely market gardens. However, with the continuing expansion of the Melbourne metropolitan area, the first of the sub-divisions with new homes were just starting to change the face of the market garden country, which had altered little since the arrival of the Irish pioneers.

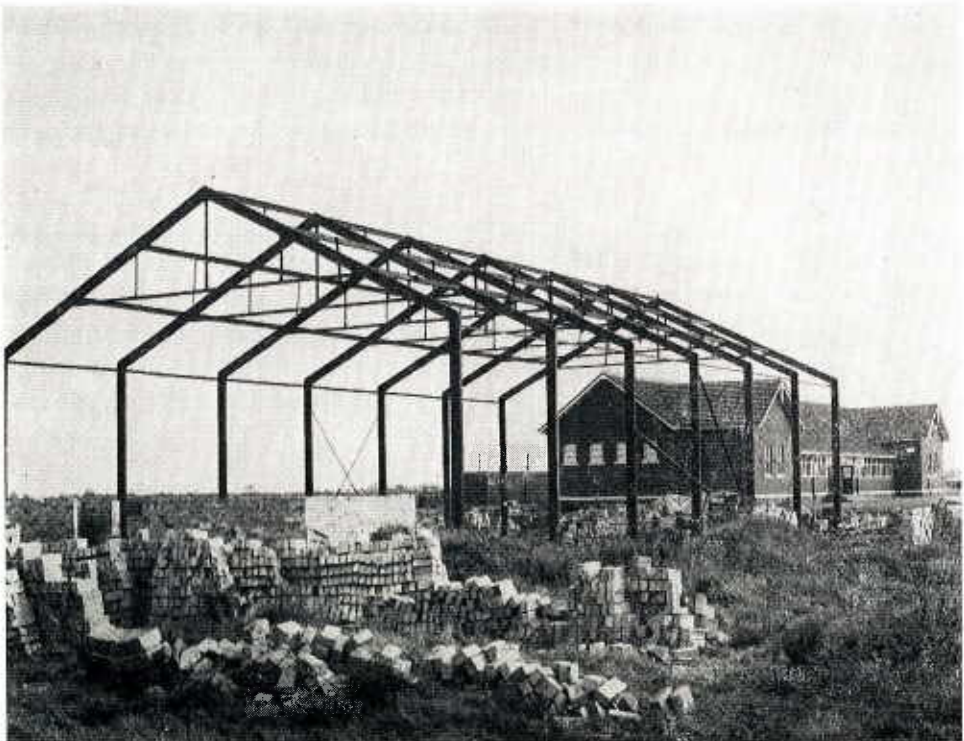
By 1951 and early 1952 the local demand for home-building land gathered pace, and the skeletons of building frames, and modern freshly painted finished homes dotted the landscape like mushrooms. The new homes were modern, but the potholed and unsealed roads were still little better than at the time of the pioneers. In 1953, Father O'Sullivan purchased the present school and church site and erected a school-church, which has now been incorporated into the main school complex.

Within a few months East Bentleigh became the most rapidly growing urban area in Australia, vying over the next few years with Bankstown in suburban Sydney for the title. Almost overnight, hundreds of acres of market gardens were auctioned, sub-divided and built on.

To Father Tim O'Sullivan, of Bentleigh, must go the honour and recognition of being the architect for the establishment of the East Bentleigh parish. He had the same vision as his countrymen — our early pioneers — to foresee the rapid



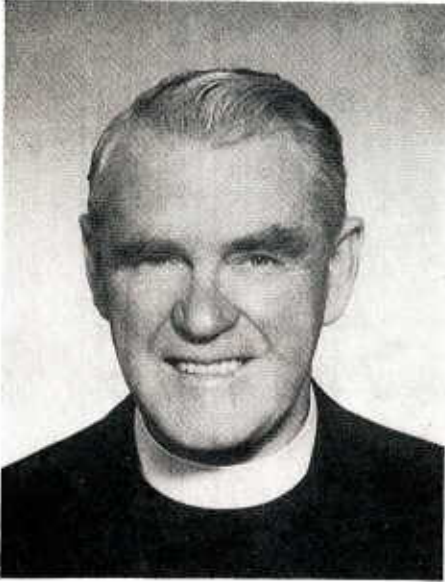
1940 and still surrounded by market gardens — the old brick school in Centre Road.



Foundations of Church Hall 1956 with first built section of the School Complex in the paddock beyond.



development that was to occur in the East Benteigh area of his parish, and the prudent judgement to provide for the future needs of many hundreds of young Catholic families who were to make their homes in East Benteigh.



**FATHER TIMOTHY O'SULLIVAN**

Father McKenna, as the new pastor, guided, co-ordinated and directed the sudden and accelerating influx of lay vigour and determination to build a parish. The stream of new settlers from overseas was becoming evident amongst the young families who had come to the district. By the late 1960's nearly 300 Italian families were living within the parish boundaries and the number of houses within the parish boundaries grew from 1,866 in 1954 to 6,112 in 1971 (a 3½ times growth development).

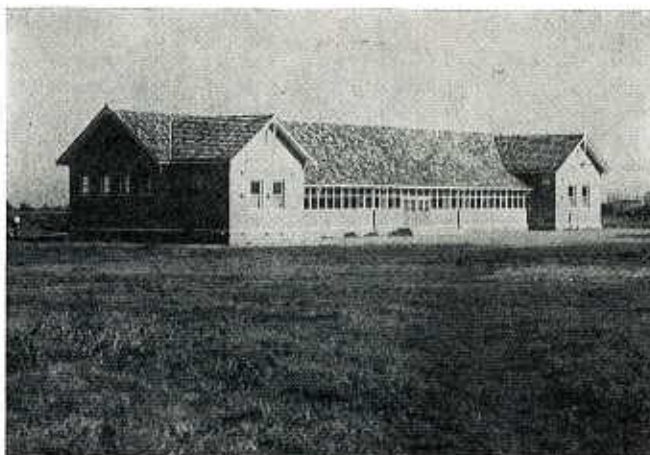
The number of children attending St. Peter's Primary School increased seven times over from 152 children in 1954 to 1,026 pupils in 1968, a far cry from the days of the first wooden school building, a little along Centre Road.

By August, 1956, the number attending the school doubled to nearly 300 from the 1954 figure, and Father McKenna realized that the bulk of the parish resources would have to be devoted to the expansion of the school. Also in 1956 construction began on the church-hall and presbytery. On 3rd March, 1957, the new church hall was blessed and opened by Bishop Fox. In June of that year 21 young parishioners banded together to form St. Peter's Credit Co-operative. Ten years later its membership had grown ten-fold. By this time the "personality" of the parish was beginning to emerge, and the sheer tempo of activity was becoming markedly evident.



Fr. McKenna — First Holy Communion  
for Parish School children 1955.





**Original school building on Bignell and Centre Road site, now incorporated into present school complex. Built 1953.**

The Holy Name Society, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Children of Mary and Legion of Mary were established and flourishing. In addition to a school Mothers' Club, several groupings of men were actively involved with sporting activities for the youth of the parish. During 1958 three additional classrooms and a shelter shed were added to the school.

The enormous physical demands of such a rapidly growing parish took its toll on Father McKenna, and after two years as our first parish priest, he passed to his eternal reward on 23rd May, 1958.



**Bishop Fox at opening of Church-Hall — March 1957**





**I WILL GO UNTO THE ALTAR OF GOD**

The sanctuary of St. Peter's, March 1957 — December 1974.



FATHER FRED McKENNA P.P.



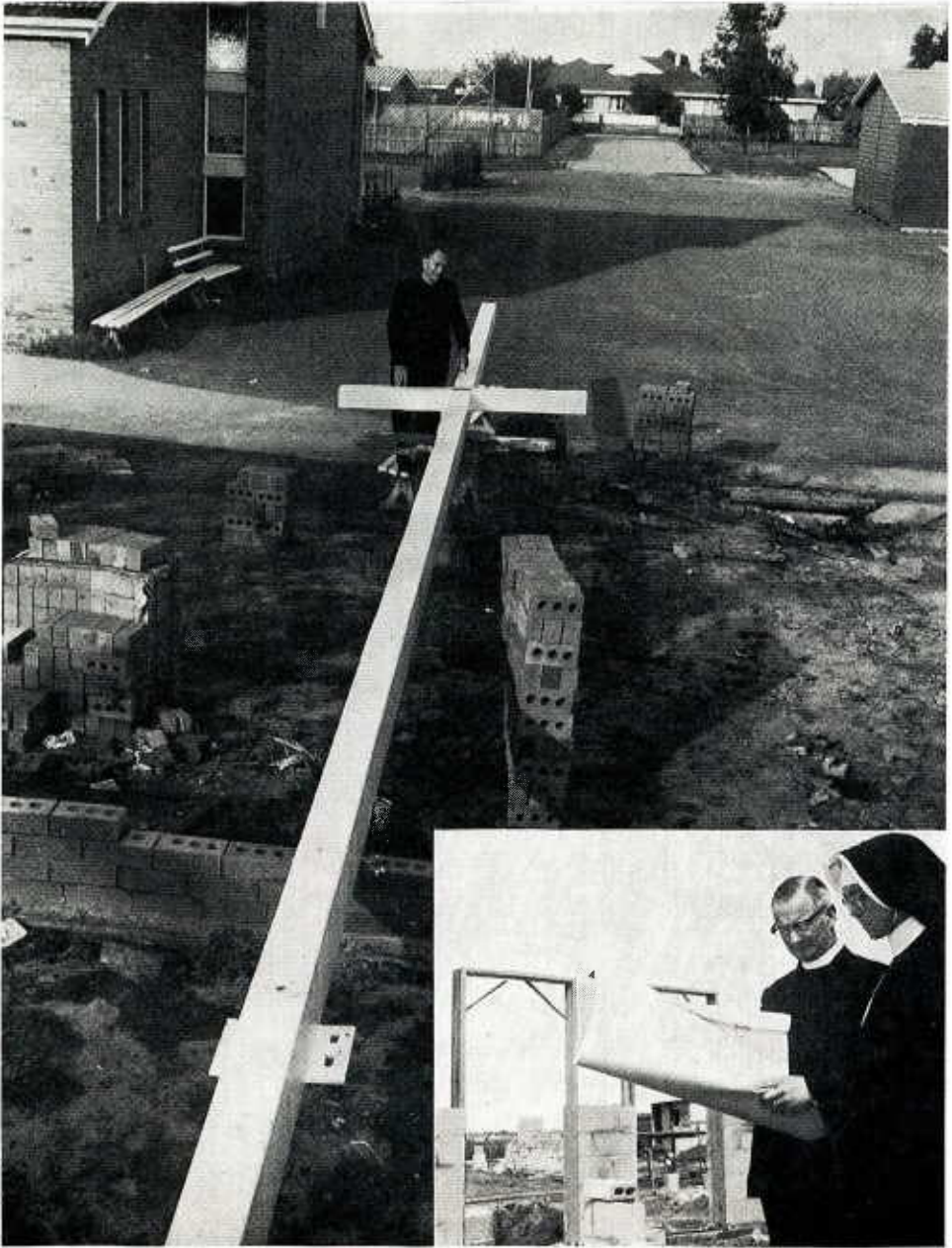
FATHER WILLIAM CASEY P.P.

## PASTORATE OF FR. WILLIAM CASEY

In October, 1958, Father William Casey, previously an Army chaplain, was appointed Parish Priest, and he continued to provide direction and impetus to the growth of the parish. The opening of the 1959 school year saw pupil numbers up 100 from the year before. During 1959, three more classrooms and a canteen were added to the school. Later in the year a young Irish priest, Father Joe Browne, was appointed Assistant Priest, and he was destined to stay with us for six accomplishment-filled years.

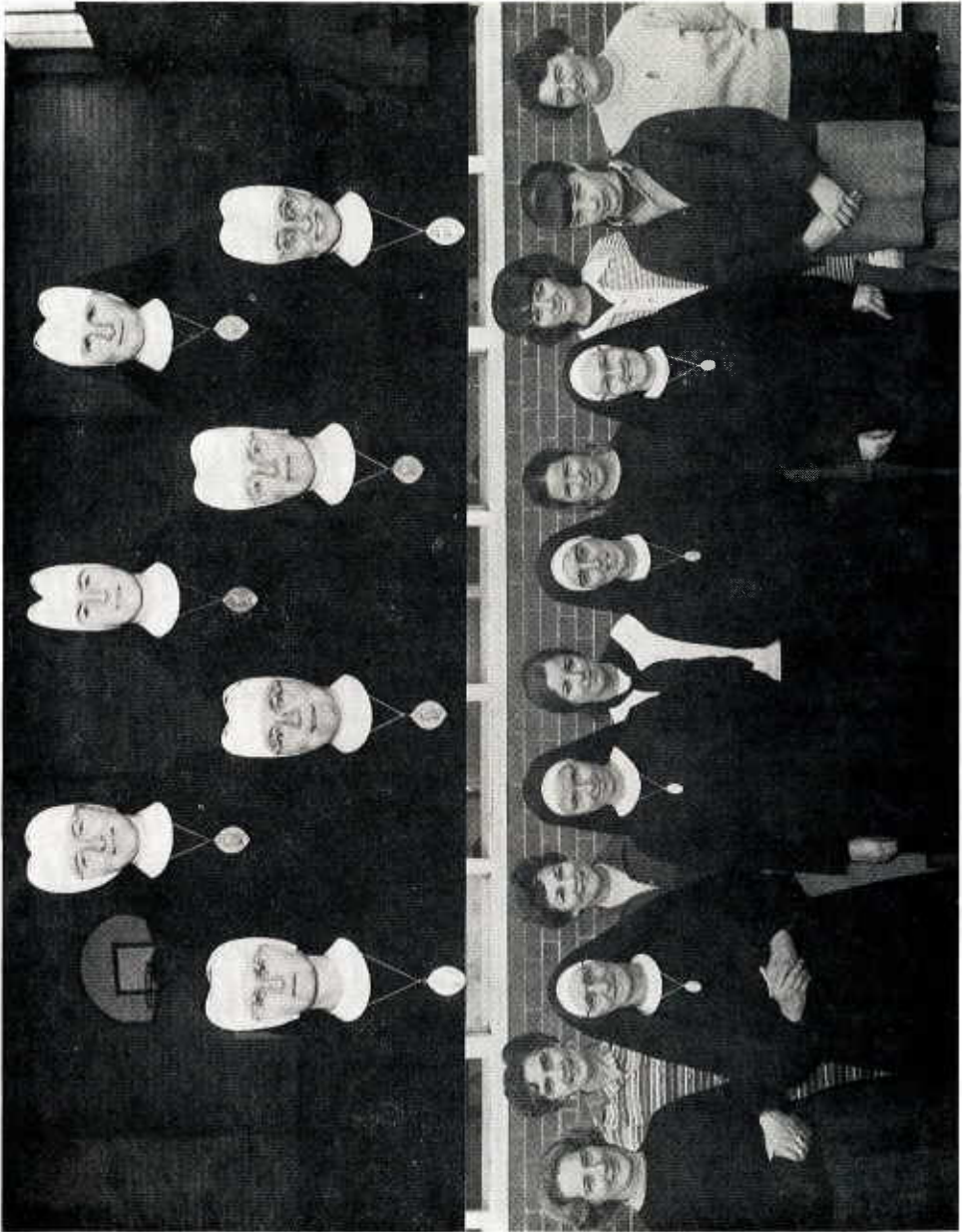
The year 1960 saw school numbers increase again by 100 from 505 the previous year to 606 and later in the year to 670 pupils. During that year, yet more classrooms (another four) were built, and the school assembly hall was finished, making a total of 14 classrooms. Fifteen full-time and two part-time teachers staffed the school. Father Casey's early declared policy was that no Catholic child would be turned away from a Catholic education at St. Peter's. The real years of "crisis" as far as the mounting pressure on our limited parish school resources were concerned, were as yet still some time away.

It was at this time that the deep dedication to the cause of Catholic education of our good nuns, the Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, was becoming very evident to the many hundreds of young parents in the parish who had enrolled their children at St. Peter's School. Coming each day from their Convent in Jasper Road, Bentleigh, the nuns brought to the young parish, and the young parents who made up the majority of the parishioners, a belief and a renewal of their conviction that a Catholic education was the firmest foundation for the faith



**Parish Priest Builders: Fr. Heriot with cross for the new church 1974. Insert  
Fr. Wm Casey discussing progress with St. Peter's Convent 1964.**





**TOP PICTURE: 1965** Front Row: Sister Amelia, Sister William, Sister Ignatia  
Sister Vincent.  
Back Row: Sister Rita Mary, Sister Jose, Sister Brigid.

**BOTTOM PICTURE: 1970** Front Row: Mrs. M. Thomas, Sister Tarcisius,  
Sister Margaret, Sister Rosemary, Sister Marilyn, Miss L. Reddie.  
Back Row: Mrs. J. Kennedy, Mrs. E. McLeod, Miss C. Collins Mrs. G. Lobortolo,  
Miss Smith, Mrs. G. Considine.

that they could hand down to their children. The single-minded commitment of these good women to the establishment of our parish community will always remain enshrined in our history.

Among our memories of the early 1960's will be the Sunday Mass of those years, still in Latin, and the presence of hundreds of infants in arms and toddlers, many contributing to a high sound level that seemed at times to drown out the first small amplifying system and at times the sermon.

By 1960 Father Casey was gaining valuable assistance and support from a group of parishioners who formed what became known as the Parish Finance Committee. Financing of parish growth by the old traditional envelope method was no longer adequate or appropriate.

The first Sacrificial Giving campaign was conducted in April, 1961, when a total of \$165,000 was pledged over the following three years. At this time our school had a staff of seven nuns and fifteen lay teachers, and at the same time the much loved Pope John had announced the Vatican Council. Two years later in June, 1963, this great Pontiff was to die and our own greatly revered Archbishop Daniel Mannix was called to his Maker a short time afterwards in November, 1963.

School enrolments had grown to 950 children by 1964, and the principal parish event of the year was the building and opening on 26th July of our Convent by the new Archbishop, Justin Simmonds. Father Casey at the time said "We have tried to provide for them a home which will be practical. It will, in addition, be a house of prayer and we feel that untold blessings will come to our parish from the sisters living here as part of the parish family".



**THE FIRST PARISH COMMITTEE** — This 1960 group of parishioners constituted the pioneer parish committee to assist the Parish Priest in development, planning and finance.

**Front Row:** Bob Holdsworth, Fr. W. Casey, Fr. J. Browne.

**Second Row:** Keith Little, Jim Williams, Barry Dedman, Reg Lucchinelli, Jim (J. J.) Kennedy, John Bray, Les Carpenter, Frank Domigan, Frank Madden.

**Back Row:** Digger George, Tom Gough, Allan Shea, Kevin Plummer, Ron Pearson.



**St. Peter's Boys Football Team 1963 — with coach Kevin McGuinness.**



**Sunday Mornings 1953-1957 Mass in the first built section of the School Complex.**



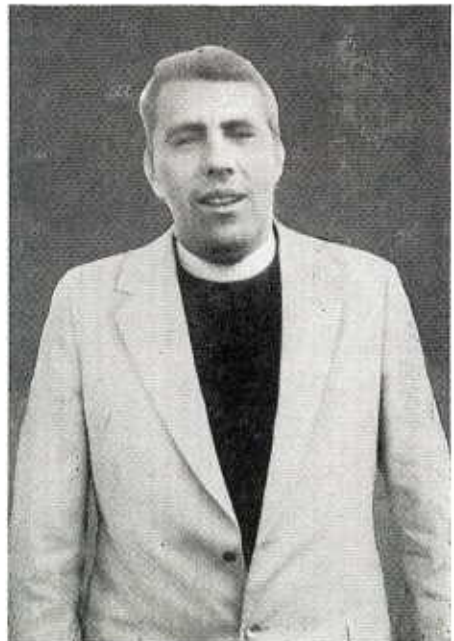
In mid-1964 we saw the first of many changes in the liturgy. More changes in the Mass were effected in July and August. In November the 12 noon Sunday Mass was changed to the present time of 5.30 p.m. Although the Mass in English now became the norm, a 7 a.m. Sunday Mass in Latin was still celebrated for the next three years. We realised that we were seeing many changes and in 1965, our assistant priest, Father Browne, was succeeded by Father Edward Fitzpatrick.

The following year, 1966, saw school enrolments pass the 1,000 mark to 1,015. At that time it was estimated that of the 1,200 families in the parish, 554 had children attending the parish primary school. In 1967, Father Crawford followed Father Fitzpatrick as Assistant Priest and in February, 1969, the eleven year pastorate of Father Casey closed with his appointment as Parish Priest of Alphington.

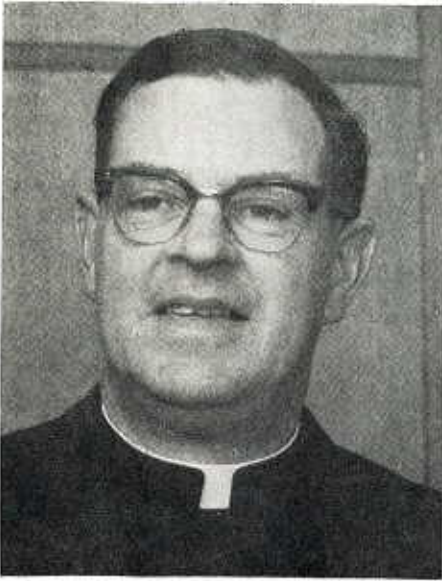
In 1968 a pioneer of the parish Mr. J. J. Kennedy passed to his eternal reward. Just 50 years before, "J. J." had written his historic letter to the Archbishop concerning the need for a church in East Bentleigh, and ever since that time he had worked with unfailing faith for the establishment of a parish. He will long be remembered for his great gentleness and generosity to the people and the church in East Bentleigh.



**FATHER JOSEPH BROWNE**



**FATHER MAL CRAWFORD**



**FATHER DANIEL COAKLEY**



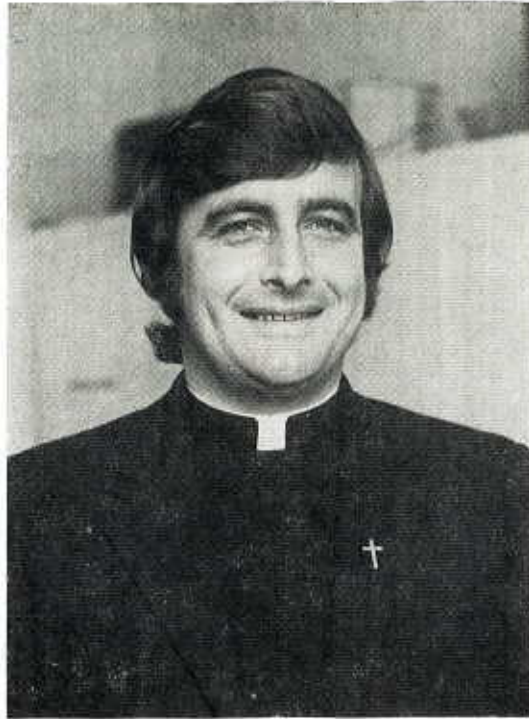
**FATHER KEVIN DILLON**

## **FATHERS D. COAKLEY and K. DILLON**

Father Daniel Coakley, previously Parish Priest of Beaumaris, was appointed Parish Priest in Feb. 1969, and a year later in Feb. 1970, Father K. Dillon took up his four-year appointment as Assistant Priest. A Parish Council was established and a constitution adopted in July, 1969. The first election for members of the Council was held in the following month. In June, 1970, the Sacrificial Giving Renewal campaign gave a good indication of the strength of the Parish when 1,047 families pledged a weekly amount of \$1,039.

The outstanding event of 1971 was the opening in July of St. James' Regional College in Bignell Road on land which had previously been the original market garden of the Kennedy family. This secondary school services the needs of the parishes of Bently, Ormond, East Moorabbin, Highett, Cheltenham, Mentone, as well as East Bently.

The following year, 1972, highlighted two important parish events. Since arriving in East Bently, Father Dillon had devoted a considerable amount of time and effort to youth activities and functions. His very considerable initiative and efforts culminated with the purchase in early 1972 of several Army disposal huts, which were erected on church ground. The Anchor Club opened in April, 1972, for the use of young parishioners aged between 14 and 18 and early proved a popular and important adjunct to parish activity. The second event of 1972 was the reception of the design of the new church. Considerable interest was shown, and a well-attended general meeting of parishioners voted on the design in September of that year.



**Fr. Ray Whitehouse Assistant Priest  
St. Peter's 1974.**



**ST. PETER'S UNDER 13 FOOTBALL TEAM — 1961.**

**MR. BILL RODRQUEZ, Coach,**

**BACK ROW — G. Pierce, J. McGuinness, R. Lucchinelli, J. Donald, M. Carlisle,  
J. Carlisle, R. Day, G. Heagney, P. Oliver.**

**CENTRE ROW — P. Reynolds, R. Mervcich, A. Siilo, R. O'Brien, M. Little (Captain),  
D. Morgan (Vice Captain), P. Kingston, L. Morrow, B. Towart.**

**FRONT ROW — R. Dusting, G. Powell, R. Perman, J. Andrews, M. Hubbard,  
L. Moore, R. Lynn, D. Neenan, B. Dwyer, A. McGuinness.**



The year 1973 witnessed two sad events. In March the Anchor Club was totally destroyed by fire. On 18th July, the parish was shocked and saddened by the sudden death of our pastor Father Daniel Coakley. The solemn Requiem Mass was presided over by His Eminence Cardinal Knox. It is interesting to note that this was not the first time that our church and parish had been visited by a Cardinal. Some months previously, during the Melbourne Eucharistic Congress, the church and presbytery had been visited by Cardinal Yu-Pin, of Taiwan.

Again due to the sheer energy and determination of our resourceful Father Dillon, the Anchor Club was rebuilt in an enlarged and modern style and was in full operation four months after the destruction of the original buildings. Some months later — in October, 1973 — the Parish Priest of South Melbourne, Rev. Father Maurice Bernard Heriot, was appointed to our parish as Pastor, and on his shoulders fell the task of commencing the building operations of the Parish Church. Four months later Father Dillon was appointed Director of Vocations for the Archdiocese of Melbourne and was succeeded by Fr. Ray Whitehouse.



**Sister Vincent Returns** — In early 1974 one of St. Peter's original teachers of 1904 revisited the parish. From left to right: Fr. Heriot P.P., Sister Mary Vincent, Mr. Michael Kennedy (hidden), Mrs. Michael Kennedy, Fr. Ray Whitehouse, Sister Michaelis and pupil Tony Cochrane, a descendant of the pioneer Cochrane family.

## YEAR OF GRACE 1974

This year will be engraved on the foundation stone of our new church and will doubtless be seen and historically noted by future parishioners and of generations as yet unborn.

With the ongoing and continuing growth of our pilgrim church in this community of East Bentleigh, the construction and opening of the first parish church may in future times be seen as a simple milestone, perhaps of some significance.

For us, in this year of 1974, the building of our church is a major event and a fitting culmination to many years of united effort, sacrifice and prayerful anticipation begun more than 100 years ago.

From the establishment of the parish a mere twenty years ago, the major part of our finances and other resources has been devoted to the continuing expansion of St. Peter's Primary School and our Regional Secondary School, and the resulting education of over 5,000 children. This important accent on priorities has, of course, delayed the building of our church.

Since that summer day of long ago when Father Patrick Niall drove his horse and buggy down the dusty Centre track to the market gardens of the Irish farming pioneers, to the rebuilding of St. Peter's School early in the century, the establishment of the parish at mid-century, the building of a large school, and convent — and with the bountiful efforts of our priests, nuns and brothers, in unity with our men, women and children — we have now in this year of grace 1974 a Parish Church of St. Peter's, built with love, hope and dedication to THE HONOUR AND GLORY OF GOD.



# By bush track to Bentleigh

THE ODYSSEY of Father Patrick Niall over a "dusty, rough and narrow bush track" on a day of high summer in 1865 makes a charming rural vignette.

Father Niall, first resident parish priest of the "Brighton-St. Kilda" Mission, which originally embraced all districts south of the Yarra from Emerald Hill (now South Melbourne) to Portsea and eastwards into Gippsland as far as Warragul and Korumburra, was on his way to visit "the little village of Oakleigh." There, five miles from the lean-to hut he called his presbytery at Little Brighton was a growing colony of market gardeners, most of them fled Ireland in the terrible famine years from 1845 to 1849.

The muster of their names has a rich, Hibernian ring — Hanrahan, Carroll, Shanahan, Gould and Howes, to list the five founding Catholic families in what is now Bentleigh. Their story is centrepiece of *The Living Harvest*, a brief, closely researched and entertaining history, published by the parish to celebrate the completion and opening this month of St. Peter's, first parish church of East Bentleigh.

St. Peter's became a parish on January 11, 1955, hiving off from the parent Bentleigh parish which had itself been part of the large St. James' parish, Elsternwick, until 1928. Parish growth through the century since first settlement had been slow, according to W. T. Dobson, author of *The Living Harvest*:

"From the 40 Irish pioneer families of Bentleigh and East Bentleigh of the early 1850s, the Catholic population had remained in the early 1920s at about a total of 150, with only slight increases until 1950."



Thereafter is a tale of "extraordinary growth ... almost without precedent". The market gardens gave way to urban subdivision although for some years the pot-holed, unsealed roads of the district resembled the bush tracks Father Niall had bounced along in his buggy. Moorabbin, of which East Bentleigh is part, became the most rapidly growing urban area in Australia. Between 1954 and 1971 houses in the East Bentleigh parish alone tripled from 1866 to 6112.

THE CHURCH that Mr. Dobson's short parish history celebrates was first suggested in 1919 in a letter to Archbishop Mannix by James Joseph Kennedy, grandson of James Kennedy, who settled the district about 1855 and purchased 10 acres in Bignell Road in 1859.

Education's priorities delayed building St. Peter's. A school of rough-hewn timber, erected by the market gardeners on Fred Quinn's land in 1868, gave way to a handsome brick establishment in 1903. In a splendid photograph from that year, the

pinafored girls of St. Peter's, their brother pupils in apple catchers and Father Gough, parish priest, in top hat, line the platform of Bentleigh station in welcome to Archbishop Carr, who opened and blessed the new school on Tuesday, April 7.

By Mr. Dobson's account, drawn from the *Advocate*, it was a rousing day. Parishioners in their hundreds gathered, from North Road, Orrong Road, Brighton, East Brighton, Mentone. Outside the station were assembled some 60 horse-drawn vehicles crowded with men and women. A large body of officers and men of the Hibernian Society were in attendance in regalia. The Bavarian Brass Band played "some inspiring Irish national airs". At the entrance to the "handsome and commodious" school, some two miles distant from the station, was a "triumphal arch of greenery, on which was inscribed the greeting, 'Welcome' ...".

In 1953, the site of St. Peter's Church was purchased in Centre Road, not far from the original school, and a new primary school-church was built to accommodate 152 pupils. The enrolment by 1968 was 1026. In July, 1971, St. James' Regional College was opened on the Bignell Road site of the original Kennedy market garden, joining St. Peter's primary school in an educational complex that Father Niall could only have dreamed about during those dusty buggy rides through his parish.

In the words of Father Herriot, St. Peter's parish priest since October, 1973, the completion and opening of the church that J. J. Kennedy first proposed to Archbishop Mannix more than 50 years ago "culminates the work of over a century".

This picture of the partly finished church illustrates the incompleteness of the *Living Harvest* — which is the season of our earthly life. God's work is never finished — but may we all find in our new church not only a place to worship and to pause and be refreshed, but the true focal point of our pilgrim journey to Eternal Life.

M. B. Herriot, Parish Priest.





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M. B. Heriot, Parish Priest.

...blown off, and at the age of 82  
was still winning golf trophies.  
Nothing will stop a golfer, I tell  
you.  
...planned down on  
the air like one vast greenhouse.  
...the island looks from  
lovingly than the tourists. When  
island courses are razed  
...sort of confrontation which the  
last Conservative Government  
...munity will be split by the very



