

## Excerpts from the book "The First Hundred Years"



### **A History of St. Joseph's Catholic Parish Bulli 1886 - 1986**

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#### **OUR PARISH BEGINS**

Here was a parish, centred around St. Joseph's church on the Main Road, Bulli. The boundaries had been decided, and all that was required was a Parish Priest. The Cardinal Archbishop made a choice and Dean Michael Flanagan, formerly Parish Priest of Wollongong and as such, the moving force behind the building of the church and the school, became the pastoral authority, coming back to the area from Surry Hills where he had been since 1882. The parish he was to administer and develop was an area that included the entire coastal strip from south of Corrimal to the northern outskirts of Helensburgh, also known as Camp Creek. Population figures available at that time were not as specific as they might have been, but those recorded for the year 1881 showed a total of 2,013 persons in this area. The birth rate for the mining village of Bulli for the same year is recorded as 41.4 births per 1,000 of population and the total births shown as 67. The population figures were issued at ten year intervals and 1891 revealed an increase of 1,911 to a figure of 3,924.

The Baptismal Register, commenced on 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1886, recorded the first baptism, as taking place on that date at St. Patrick's church, Clifton, when Dean Flanagan baptised Ellen, daughter of Owen and Ellen Murphy. She was born on 29th May, 1886. Her father was a labourer and they resided at Clifton. The God-parents were John Murphy and Margaret MacMahon.

It was almost a month later that the first baptism took place in what was now the parish church. On the 15<sup>th</sup> August, the Rev. Dean baptised Michael Ernest Ryan, born 23rd May, 1886. His parents were William Ryan and Jane Ryan (nee Butler). They resided at Woonona and William Ryan was a miner. The God-parents were John Ryan and Annie Sweeney.

The extent of this new parish and the unbounded zeal of its founding pastor may be glimpsed in an analysis of the parish baptismal register. The four months remaining in that calendar year contained a total of 27 entries, of which seven were performed in the parish church and the balance spread throughout the districts as follows:

Woonona	2
Clifton	6
Otford	5
Helensburgh	6
26 Mile Camp	1

Of the five recorded baptised at Otford, three were performed on Otford Railway Station. Early records indicate that the 26 Mile Camp was some distance north of Helensburgh near the present Engadine. The considerable travelling, on horseback for the greater part, would have presented little difficulty for the Rev. Dean Flanagan, who had been ministering to the faithful, first at Kiama, and later in Wollongong since 1860, less than twelve months after he was ordained in Ireland in 1859.

Whilst so much of the early history of the parish has been preserved, in such places as the microfilms of the local newspapers kept in the Wollongong City Library and the copies of the "**Freeman's Journal**" and "**Catholic Press**" and other records held in the archives of the Archdiocese of Sydney, there is no information regarding the whereabouts or even the existence of a residence for the priest in those early days.

There was no local cemetery until 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 1889, when the Bulli General Cemetery was dedicated. There was a Catholic cemetery on the Main Road, Corrimal, and in fact still exists to-day opposite St. Columbkille's Church, and it was here that eight of the eighty-one miners who lost their lives when the Bulli Mine explosion occurred at 2:30 p.m. on March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1887, were interred. The headstone marking the grave of Thomas Harris, aged 44, and two of his sons, Thomas Henry, aged 18, and Francis Henry, aged 16, are still legible to-day.

### **Bulli Presbytery**

The Illawarra Mercury reported in its notes from Bulli in the issue of the 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1891, that the Roman Catholics are about to mark the erection of a Presbytery for their Parish Priest by a grand tea meeting.

The foundation stone of that now demolished building tells is that it was laid by Cardinal Moran on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1891.

**The Mercury** article mentioned above also reports *"that the Wesleyans were also getting one up (a tea party) to which they mean to invite all the local clergy."* The article comments *"How sweet it is to see Catholics, Wesleyans and the other denominations meeting in such unity"*.

Some two months later on October 17<sup>th</sup> in fact, we read in **The Freeman's Journal** that the Cardinal was in Bulli. The article deals with the opening of the new Presbytery and reports that His Eminence, accompanied by the Cathedral Administrator, Rev. Fr. J.J. Byrne, and Mr. J. B. Freehill, arrived at Bulli Railway Station where a large crowd was being entertained during their waiting by the Bulli Band, under the able conductorship of Mr. Phillpots, playing appropriate airs.

Also waiting at the Station to greet His Eminence was Father J. Prendergast and Fathers Ryan (Wollongong) and McDonald (Kiama). Mr. Dickson, of the Family Hotel, was also in attendance with his sociable with three horses harnessed ready to convey the distinguished visitors to the presbytery in Park Road.



*First Presbytery - Built 1891 - Replaced 1952*

When the train arrived at eleven thirty, a procession was quickly formed and led by the Bulli Band, moved off down the road. On arrival, His Eminence and party had a look through the building and expressed themselves as being highly pleased at the excellent structure, which reflects great

credit on Messrs. Knight and Keer, the contractors, who were local men. The building, which is of brick with iron roofing, and plastered throughout, is a fine roomy place, and will be quite an ornament to Bulli.

The opening and blessing took place at 12:30 p.m. and afterwards His Eminence addressed the large gathering from a platform erected on land adjoining the Presbytery which had been decorated with evergreens, as was an arch at the entrance. He and other speakers congratulated the people on the work of erecting such a fine and admirable building for their priest, a credit to them and an ornament to the beautiful little town of Bulli.

A collection was taken up and realised £110 (\$220) in a few minutes. Father Prendergast P.P. thanked His Eminence on behalf of his Parishioners for his attendance and encouraging remarks. The sociable of Mr. Dickson was again in use to convey the visitors to his Family Hotel, where dinner, which was got up in a first class style, awaited them. Later that afternoon, after a visit to the church and convent (on the Main Road Bulli), the party left on the 4 p.m. train to the strains of "**Auld Lang Syne**" from the Bulli Band, as the train moved out of the platform.

### **Land Acquired for New Church**

A ledger held in the Presbytery records that Mrs. P. Farraher of "**Holy Mount**" Woonona had given an amount of £50 into the custody of His Grace Bishop Higgins as a donation towards the purchase of land for the new church. The date of this gift is not known, but when His Grace handed this amount into parish funds, the accrued interest was £7.10.0.

This same ledger contains details of a total payment of £189 to a Mr. Glass over a period of twelve months, and again in 1899 there was a payment of £10 to a Mr. G. Croft for land believed to be for a right of way.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, there was great activity afoot. Arrangements were made throughout the land to celebrate the start of the Commonwealth of Australia, and in Bulli to greet Cardinal Patrick Francis Moran.

### **Foundation Stone for the New Church**

The Cardinal Archbishop travelled by train from Sydney to be in Bulli on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1900. He was to bless and lay the foundation stone of the new church in Park Road. That he was welcome was made abundantly clear from the decoration of the site adjoining the Presbytery. Bunting and other gaily arranged adornments bedecked a dais erected for the occasion. Calico signs declared "**Welcome to our Cardinal**".

A considerable crowd was in early attendance and included Mr. & Mrs. Farraher, Mrs. J. Kirton, Mr. J. Horan J.P. (Helensburgh), Mr. Bourke of Bulli Public School, Mrs. Geo Adams, Capt. Featherstone, Mr. Garlick, Mr. Shaples, and Mr. Shaw, the contractor.

At the appointed time, 3:00 p.m., the Cardinal, attired in the robes of his office and attended by the clergy present, ascended the dais and according to the ceremony for the occasion, blessed and laid the stone.

In introducing the Cardinal Archbishop, Father Dunne informed the gathering that since 1896 there had been an amount of £832 (\$1,664) collected, of which £700 (\$1,400) was used to clear the debt on the Presbytery, to purchase the land for the church site and to pay interest etc., leaving an amount of £132 (\$264) in hand. He considered this to be most generous as Bulli was not a wealthy district, being mostly a mining village.

Cardinal Moran, making his first visit to Bulli for eight years, congratulated Fr. Dunne on his stewardship and the people for their generosity, and demonstration of faith. His Eminence then reviewed some of the changes of the past one hundred years. He instanced such things as steam and electricity and the development of newspapers. He spoke of new nations that had emerged; nations such as America and Canada, of the engineering feats such as the Suez Canal and its effect on trade and navigation. He spoke of the pacification of Egypt and the current hostilities in Africa.

In Australia they had indeed come from darkness into light, and now after many years the separate states making up the colony were coming together at this time under a great constitution to form a grand Commonwealth to achieve great things. He said that all present must endeavour to promote religion, for by that came great enlightenment, and a spirit of sacrifice amongst citizens. There must be religion if the laws were to be respected and the rights of others acknowledged.

At the conclusion of Cardinal Moran's address a subscription list soon raised £350 (\$700) and the afternoon concluded with afternoon tea in the presbytery where the Cardinal and party were entertained by Mrs. George Adams and the Misses Ramsay.

The above information was extracted from **The Illawarra Mercury** of 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1900, and in which issue, in a column headed "**Man in the Street says**" reported as follows.

*"That Bulli beat Dapto at foundation subscription on New Year's Day. That Dapto, however, had the disadvantage of a wet day when the Cardinal was laying the cornerstone there recently, which meant much in hard cash either way".*

As the twentieth century began its journey into time, the work on the Park Road site progressed quite well, despite the untimely death of Mr. P. Hayes, the architect. The work was taken over by his son, and although some difficulty with the nature of the ground meant an additional 3 feet in depth on foundations and this, in turn, increased the number of bricks to 112,000, of which 40,000 were used in the foundations. The extra work cost approximately £120 (\$240).

**The Illawarra Mercury** of 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1900, reports that the church, Gothic in style, roofed with Welsh slate and surmounted by 5 marble Ionian crosses, the work of F. W. Rose of Wollongong, was complete and had been blessed.

It was the "**Catholic Press**" of 1/9/ 1900 that gave such a detailed and stirring coverage of the events of that Sunday that it would be most unfair to the memory of the unknown, but extremely enthusiastic journalist who submitted this account of it were not reprinted in full. He chose, as a sub-title "**A Grand Demonstration**", and wrote:

*"It would be difficult to find in any country a greater exhibition of Catholic faith and generosity than that which was witnessed last Sunday at Bulli. Those who have fears that, when the old Irish stock has passed away, their descendants will fall victim to the spirit Of materialism, which is dismembering the non-Catholic denominations, may make their minds easy. The people of Bulli are nearly all native born Australians and yet in no part of Ireland is there a more simple piety, more ardent devotion and a stronger bond of affection between priest and people.*

*Bulli is a small, old town famed for the beauty of her scenery. An hour after leaving Sydney the train brings you to the brow of the Pacific, and then for another hour you feel as if you are making a journey on the rainbow.*

*On your right are the towering wooded hills and valleys and on the left you lose sight of the ocean when the train disappears with you in mountain tunnels.*

*Bulli sits by the seashore in the midst of these hills, and if it were not for the daily incursion of sightseers, one could well believe that the slumber song of the ocean would lull the residents into an unending sleep. As it is they are a peaceful people. In the long business street, the architects have made no effort to compete with the natural beauties of the place. There are the usual halls, in humble settings the geniuses of the two newspapers, and there are one or two hotels as good as any outside Sydney.*

*Dairy farming is carried on to a limited extent. The principal industry of the place is coal mining. All the residents appear to be rich in health and contentment, if not in wealth.*



*Early on Sunday morning, the 26<sup>th</sup> August, while the dew was still on the grass, little girls robed in white, accompanied by their little brothers, were hastening from all quarters, some on foot, and some in buggies, towards the old whitewashed Catholic Church, which already had taken on a sorrowful and lonely aspect. After having known the joys and griefs of the people, almost since the birth of the town, been the scene of weddings and christenings, and the comforter of the afflicted, it was now about to be deserted, but loving memories must still cling to it while the people rejoice in the beautiful church the Rev. Fr. Dunne has had erected on a much finer site near his pretty presbytery in another part of Bulli.*

*It was the First Communion day of the children, the happiest day in all our lives and it seemed fitting that they should gather round the old mother church before going to the altar rails to receive their Saviour in the new edifice to be blessed that morning. It was no wonder, the sight being so beautiful, that later on the people assembled on their verandahs to see the children, in the charge of the Sisters of St. Joseph marching along the street amidst occasional raindrops to the new church. Mass was celebrated by Fr. Dunne. The Children received Holy Communion from the Rt. Rev. Mons. O'Brien, Rector of St. John's College who later addressed them. At the Mass the children's choir assisted by the Sisters and Mrs. Larkin sang. Afterwards the first communicants marched back to the convent, where they were entertained at breakfast by the Sisters.*

*The sky was cloudy, and there were great fears that rain would interfere with the opening ceremony. But about 10 o'clock the rain cleared away and the morning became radiant. The church grounds were decorated with flags, buggies rattled along the streets, drags crowded with visitors merrily saluting their Bulli friends, began to arrive from neighbouring towns, and then we knew that the heart of Fr. Dunne was glad.*

*Indeed, if there is any excuse for pride, Fr. Dunne had that excuse on Sunday. The church is one of the finest on the South Coast. There is said to be even a doubt now about the superiority of Fr. Byrne's church at Wollongong. When South Coast people talk of beautiful churches they always refer, despairingly it would seem, to Fr. Byrne's as a model.*

*Father Dunne and the Catholic people have erected a building that is an ornament to Bulli. The church is perfect in every particular; there is not an article of furniture lacking, and everything is new. The beautiful marble altar and other articles of furniture were the generous gifts of parishioners.*

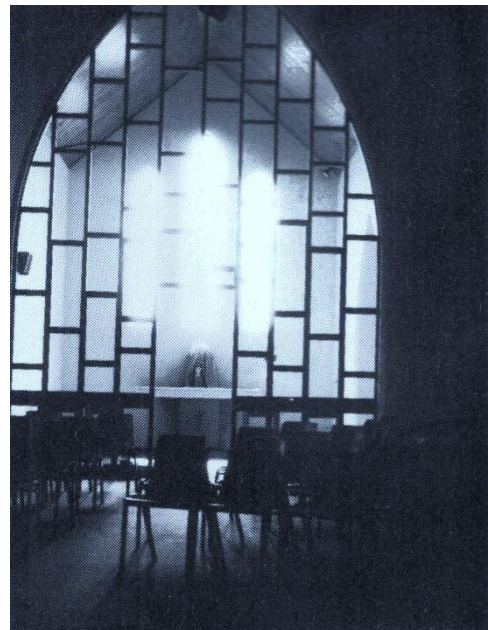


*Original interior of St. Joseph's Church - Bulli, 1900*

*The building is tuck pointed, the brick work stucco is what is technically known as cut jointed. Handsome lead lights fill the windows, whilst the fittings are of varnished Kaurie pine. There is a beautiful choir gallery and the church will accommodate 450 people.*

*Sister M. Malachi and her community of Sisters had decorated the three altars beautifully and their efforts to have everything in order for the opening were crowned with success.*

*Remodelled interior of St. Joseph's Church - Bulli, 1986*



*The Church was crowded in every part. In spite of the extra seating accommodation, many had to remain standing. All the leading non Catholics of the district were present. The church having been blessed by the Rt. Rev. Mons. O'Brien, Mass was sung by the Diocesan Inspector of Schools, Rev. Fr. Whyte. Mons. O'Brien and the Hon. T. M. Slattery, K. C. S. G., were seated in the Sanctuary. The Wollongong Choir sang the appropriate responses.*

*Taking for his text, a passage from Genesis Chapter 28 Verses 18-18 "**How terrible is this place. This is no other than the house of God and Gate of Heaven**", Mons. O'Brien preached an eloquent sermon, and congratulated the people of the parish on their devotion to their religion and their generosity. This generosity was evidenced by the £210 (\$440) that was quickly subscribed, making a total in hand of £834 (\$1,668) towards the cost of the church, which was to that time £1,488 (\$2,976).*

*Benediction later that evening attracted a large congregation and the brilliance of the acetylene lamps that had been installed made a fine picture indeed as the crowded church was bathed in their illuminating beams."*

### **First Baptism in New Church (1900)**

In the excitement of that grand day just described, there was another event that took place and recorded only in the parish register.

According to Father Dunne's "**Liber Baptizatorum**" he baptised the month old son of Stephen and Alice Kirton, naming him William Ray Patrick in the presence of his God parents Archibald and Frances Eagles and undoubtedly many relatives and friends.

### **First Wedding in New Church (1901)**

Approximately fourteen months were to elapse before the Parish Marriage Record discloses that on 16<sup>th</sup> October, 1901, Father Dunne officiated at the wedding of Alfred Burrows and Margaret Walsh. The witnesses were John James Henningson and Alice Larkin.

### **Cataract City**

In 1903, the sleepy little village of Sherbrooke and its surrounding orchards were resumed for the construction of Cataract Dam. Workmen travelled to the site via Bulli Pass, and a settlement established downstream from Sherbrooke. It had a road one chain wide, business offices, married and bachelor quarters, post office, three stores, seven boarding houses, billiard and assembly rooms, public school with 100 pupils, and Anglican and Catholic churches. All of these buildings, except the stone school building were removed on the completion of construction in 1907. It is understood that the Catholic Church at "**Cataract City**" was part of the Bulli Parish for just those four years.



Whilst there is no record to verify this, it is believed that the church mentioned above could be that same building that became St. Bridget's at Coledale, which it is known to have come from over the mountain.

The story of the progress of the parish, of building programs and hopes for the future continues on towards the present time and in the journey to the future, small seemingly unimportant events in to-days world, occurred that were without doubt to improve the lot of the parish priest.

September, 1902, accounts show an expenditure of £15 (\$30) for the erection of a boys room at the presbytery and future accounts listed payments of an average one shilling (10 cents) per week to the boy who was employed in cleaning up the church and presbytery yard and other tasks. The room was later rebuilt and a laundry added. A handy man was employed. A coach house for a sulky and horse was also provided.

In 1913, modern times came to the presbytery. Sewerage was connected and electricity arrived and the next year water was laid on to the presbytery and school and finally the telephone was installed. Another expenditure that year was for a new Baptismal Font that cost £25 (\$50).

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***Below are images of the church taken in 2018 by Michael Barnett.***

