

We said our Mass in canvas tents, and neath the gnarled trees
 Of red-gum slabs and sheets of bark we built our sanctuaries
 Our axes rang on timbered slopes above the mining flat
 And church and school and convent mark the path of Father Pat¹



¹ Vale Father Pat, John O'Brien, aka Monsignor Patrick Joseph Hartigan

In 1815, the map of white settlement in New South Wales was hardly more than a patch, consisting only of Sydney and Parramatta. By 1825 this had changed. There were specks on the coast north of Sydney-Newcastle, Port Macquarie, Moreton Bay-scattered along a thousand miles of coastline and tenuously linked by ships.²

Lismore, the see of the Northern Rivers Roman Catholic Diocese, sits on the banks of the Wilsons River in the Richmond Valley. This valley is dominated by the mighty Richmond and Wilsons Rivers which emanate from the NSW/Queensland border ranges and meet at Coraki.

Europeans first ventured into 'The Big Scrub' in 1828 when Henry Rous sailed 20 miles up the Richmond River and botanist Allan Cunningham reached it by land from the modern Queensland side of the border ranges. This inhospitable land of mosquito, sandfly and snake infested swamps, rich and almost impenetrable subtropical rainforest, torrential rains, destructive winds, floods and fire attracted pioneers and settlers. They were seeking to establish new lives by raising sheep, cattle and crops and felling timber, especially the prized Australian red cedar. Some sailed up the Richmond from the Pacific Ocean at Ballina and others walked or rode overland from Grafton and the Northern Tablelands, including the Italian settlers who marched from Sydney and created New Italy after a perilous voyage from their homeland across the world.

² The Fatal Shore, Robert Hughes, Collins Harvill, Great Britain 1987

Coraki District and Catholicism

Coraki was founded in 1849 by William Yabsley, who from humble local beginnings as a timber feller, over time established lucrative ship building, trading, and cattle enterprises. At that time, Lismore was a small cattle station and Casino had only one store and a hotel. Coraki quickly grew to become the major port on the Richmond River. Barges, river boats, sailing ships and steamships plied their trade along the river and Coraki-built ocean-going barques carried cedar and later butter to Sydney and Melbourne.

The story of Catholicism in the Richmond Valley is one of indomitable struggle against the elements of nature to promote and preserve the faith for future generations. The first settlers had no churches, schools or resident priest. Infrequently, priestly visits from the big smoke of Sydney (1849 Fr Powell) Newcastle (1850 Fr Dowling) Ipswich (1851-53 Fr McGinty) and Armidale (1850's Fr Tim McCarthy) would bring the Mass to local homesteads. Occasionally, an itinerant priest, most prominently Fr Abbe Felix Schurr from 1872 until his death in Casino in 1900, would arrive by boat to celebrate Holy Communion and administer the other sacraments. Education in the faith and secular subjects was the responsibility of parents and almost solely the province of the family mother. After some time had passed, crude churches were built of local materials and adorned with hand-made accoutrements. If fire, flood or winds destroyed or damaged these houses of God, or

the need arose to rebuild or relocate, anything useful was salvaged and reused.

A Selective History of Coraki Parish Churches

The first catholic church and school in the area were established in 1871 at Swan Bay, just upstream from Woodburn. Shortly later, a convent for the Sisters of Saint Joseph (the order founded by Saint Mary MacKillop) was constructed there in 1883. Fr Abbe Schurr attempted to bring the sacraments to Swan Bay at six weekly intervals but the weather played havoc with his schedule and at times several months elapsed between visits.

The church and school at Coraki were established in 1874 and 1880 respectively and located in a complex on and behind Richmond Terrace on the Richmond River. Only after 2 churches were constructed was the Roman Catholic Parish of Coraki officially instituted in 1889 and incorporated an area of some 1000 square kilometers from Tatham near Lismore to Evans Head.

In 1896, the Presentation Sisters took up residence in the first convent in Coraki and began educating with a firm hand the local children in their schooling, music and the faith. A fire in 1904 destroyed the church and convent but the church/school and convent were rebuilt on the higher ground in 1905 in Adams St.

In 1922, the clergy, Fr Patrick Kiely and Bishop Carroll, and the faithful of Coraki parish embarked on an

ambitious project to build the current church of St Joseph's. Their vision was to build a church to take them forward as a centre of faith and community for years to come. Astonishingly, it took only some 6 months from the laying of the foundation stone to the opening in 1923. This grand church was built partially by sourcing materials from beyond Lismore and boating them down the Richmond. Parishioners donated both significant sums of money and labour to achieve their dream. St Joseph's was subsequently listed by the National Trust on 12 November 1989.

The old church now forms part of St Joseph's primary school. Although the Presentation Sisters departed in 1986, they left an enduring legacy and the old convent remains in the care of the parish.

In 1904, construction of the first All Saint's Church at Woodburn was oversighted by Fr John W Durney. It was situated in Duke Street behind the old bank and served as both a church and school. A convent and new school proximate to the church followed in 1914 and the Sisters of St Joseph returned to continue their education mission. In 1925, the church, school and convent were relocated to a site on the western side of Rocky Mouth Creek. Today the current church, school and retired convent is located there.

In April 1945, a fearsome cyclone destroyed much of Woodburn, including the All Saint's church and school. Fortunately, the church's holy statues and stations of the cross survived, however it took until 1953 with the

support of Fr Thomas O'Regan Jnr to open a new church. The excitement of the reopening was somewhat dampened by the record flood of February 1954 which submerged most of Woodburn. The interim school contained materials from the old Swan Bay church and convent buildings. In 1976, the Sisters of St Joseph left Woodburn, however, a new school was opened in 1988.

The Italian settlers arrived in New Italy in 1883 after a hazardous sea voyage and many trials and tribulations. They had intended to settle in New Ireland in the Pacific Ocean but were stranded in Noumea after their boat was impounded by the French for being unseaworthy. The British rescued them and took them to Sydney where they swore allegiance to the King. The first church at New Italy (circa 1887) was built from local timber with the skill of many hands.

The construction of a new St Peter's Church in 1907 was oversighted by Fr Cornelius Callanan. The church was a small building that formed the religious and social hub of the community. It was destroyed in the 1945 cyclone that also levelled the All Saints Church at Woodburn. Fortunately, the church bell was salvaged and now resides at the Woodburn primary school and the crucifix hangs behind the altar at St John's Church in Evans Head. A replacement church was not erected but many descendants of the original settlers still reside in parts of St Joseph's Parish.

Evans Head gained a church, St John's, in 1941, mainly because of the establishment of a Royal Australian Air

Force base there. The existing congregation of 18 permanent Catholics was swollen by military staff and Fr Thomas O'Regan Jnr and Bishop Carroll determined to build a church for the current need and the envisaged future growth of the seaside town. The church's fittings came from many sources, including donations from the Carmelite Monastery in Lismore and St Peter's at New Italy. A convent was erected in 1992 for the order of Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and its sisters ministered to the spiritual and practical well-being of the Coraki Parish.

Significance

Although there are marked differences in architectural style between St Joseph's and the similarly styled St John's and All Saints' churches, the surviving operational churches of the Coraki Parish share many similarities. Each is an historic building rich in local history, built by the sacrifices of parishioners and containing treasures inherited through local Catholicism. They permanently house the physical presence of God in the form of the Eucharist and are the oldest functioning places of religious services in their respective towns.

Each is cared for by the faithful and, most importantly, regularly hosts Mass where the Body and Blood of Christ is consecrated in the Sacred Mysteries. They are joyful community gathering places of prayers and hymns and where the sacraments are administered at baptisms, first communions, weddings and funerals. They are the heart of the parish community and nurture education

and social benefits to parishioners and beyond into the broader community of the region.

Our way of life in Australia today has evolved markedly in 170 years and many aspects of life differ beyond recognition from those enjoyed by the original settlers but the core values of the faith have endured and are alive today. The recent virus may have hampered the official physical practices of the faith but, like many aspects of Australian society, Catholicism has found new ways to operate effectively using technology to reach people in isolation when nature and the law restricted human contact and the faithful could not celebrate Mass together nor receive the Eucharist either in community or at home. Broader charitable activities, such as operating St Vincent de Paul shops for the benefit of society's disadvantaged, have also been affected but physical solutions have been created.

The temporary easing of restrictions has pleasingly stimulated a resurgence in Mass attendances and the public practice of the faith. Once again, the clergy and laity have reached out inclusively to people, parishioners and the broader community, for the benefit of all society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**A Short History of St Joseph's Parish Coraki
In and around the Mid-Richmond with George Hunt
All Saints Woodburn Primary School 75th Anniversary
Booklet
The New Italy Museum
The Coraki Museum and volunteers
Abbe Felix Schurr: By Foot-Pack-Oar-Saddle (not yet
published by Graham Smith)
Wikipedia
Yvonne and Dalice Ryan
Maree and Graham Smith
Fr Michael Recent Administrator Coraki**

NATIONAL TRUST REGISTER LISTING REPORT

NATIONAL TRUST REGISTER LISTING REPORT

CITY/SUBURB/TOWN TOWN	NAME OR IDENTIFICATION XXX	ADDRESS OR LOCATION 111 xxxxxx Road
---------------------------------	--------------------------------------	--

LGA:	XXX Council	ABORIGINAL NATION:	The xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
POSTCODE:	2xxx	PROPERTY INFORMATION	Lot x DP xxxxx
COMMITTEE:	xxx Conservation Committee	GRID:	Lat: -xx.xxxxx Long: xxx.xxxxx
AUTHOR:		LISTING DATE:	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The xxx at 111 xxxxx Road, Town is significant

DESCRIPTION:

The xxx

HISTORY:

The xxx

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

xxxxx, xxxxx, Month, Year

LOCATION OF LISTING:

PHOTOGRAPHS: