

## IRISH JESUIT SCHOOLING IN VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

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Although Austrian Jesuits were already operating in South Australia, Archbishop Goold of Melbourne, Victoria, in 1865, secured Jesuits from the Irish province to staff St Patrick's College. A second boys' college, Xavier, established in 1872, soon dominated St Patrick's though itself challenged by brothers' schools. By 1901, the Irish Jesuits had amalgamated with the original Austrian, while Xavier had achieved the status of public school at the expense of St Patrick's. Xavier went on to develop two preparatory schools, one situated close to the archiepiscopal palace of Dr Mannix. In 1950, the creation of the Australian Jesuit province meant the loss of the Irish province. Another loss lay ahead: the closure of St Patrick's in 1968. Now the Australian province of the Jesuits is squarely aligned with Asia rather than with Europe. Further, it is developing educational initiatives with new focuses.

In 1848, the revolutions in various European countries resulted in the expulsion of the Jesuits. Jesuits from the Austro-Hungarian Empire were among those exiled. Two young Jesuits, Fathers Kranewitter and Klinkowstroem - ordained only six weeks - joined a German group emigrating to the 12-year-old colony of South Australia. In 1852, Jesuits were given spiritual charge of the area of the colony north of a line drawn from Morgan to Spencer's Gulf. The area is roughly the size of France. In the following year, the first Jesuit church was built in South Australia and in 1856, the Jesuits opened their first college at Sevenhill, South Australia. This institution functioned as a boys' secondary boarding college, seminary, novitiate, and mission centre. St Aloysius' College still stands today in this region of South Australia, where the Jesuits continue to produce sacramental and high quality commercial wines.

Although initially located in the colony of South Australia, the Austrian Jesuits, whose numbers increased in the years following the arrival of Fathers Kranewitter and Klinkowstroem, came from time to time on the invitation of Archbishop Goold of Melbourne to conduct spiritual retreats and parish missions in the state of Victoria to the east.

## THE ARRIVAL OF IRISH JESUITS

As early as 1859, Goold had been negotiating with the provincial of the Irish Jesuits for the purpose of staffing St Patrick's College, East Melbourne, which stood virtually in the same grounds as the cathedral of the same name. Negotiations continued over a number of years to the point when, in 1865, the Jesuit general, after consultation with both Austrian and Irish representatives, took up Goold's request for staffing for the college. Agreement was also reached for the Irish Jesuits to undertake the Richmond mission in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

The approach made to the Irish province was undoubtedly based on a number of factors. John Joseph Therry had been the first Irish priest to labour in the very first of the early colonies in Australia, that of New South Wales. On his death in 1862, it was found that he had designated the Irish Jesuit province as main beneficiaries of his estate. Given Goold's desire to see the Jesuits established at St Patrick's College and having no certainty that they would receive any official acceptance into New South Wales, the Jesuits decided to take advantage of the terms of the Therry bequest and to establish themselves in Victoria.

Initially the Irish provincial sent to Melbourne two of his most experienced men. One was Joseph Lentaigne SJ, who had been the first Irish provincial from 1860 to 1863 (the Irish Jesuit mission itself had become a province only in 1860). Lentaigne had later been appointed rector and master of novices at Milltown Park, Dublin. His companion was William Kelly SJ, who had been expelled from Maynooth Seminary because of public support he offered the Young Ireland movement, then out of step with the Irish hierarchy. Despite this setback, he had later joined the Jesuits and became known as an outstanding classical scholar and scientist. Thus these two pioneer Irish Jesuits, with the help of two lay teachers, took over the instruction at St Patrick's and made it the first Jesuit school in Victoria. By December 1865, the roll stood at 30 pupils.

The coming to Victoria of the Irish Jesuits was an event of considerable social and educational importance in the history of Australia. Their arrival ensured that Irish traditions were to influence Australian catholicism in its early period of formation. Numbers in the school were soon to grow, but the activities of the Jesuits were not confined to school teaching alone; they undertook, as had the Austrians, many other pastoral duties (apart from the Richmond mission). These various activities saw the development of bonds between the Society and the general catholic community.

In September 1866, Fathers Lentaigne and Kelly were reinforced by the arrival of a second group of Jesuits from Ireland. These now included the superior

of the mission, Joseph Dalton SJ, who had been educated at Clongowes Wood and at Tullamore. He had taught in all the Irish Jesuit colleges, including Clongowes Wood and Tullamore. Over the 40 years following his arrival in Victoria, he was to play a critical role in establishing four Jesuit colleges: St Patrick's, Melbourne; Xavier College, Melbourne; St Ignatius, Sydney; and St Aloysius, Sydney.

#### EXPANSION IN EDUCATION

In 1866, St Patrick's had grown to an enrolment of 102 students. Because of lack of space, it was not suitable for boarding purposes and, throughout its history, it remained almost purely a day school, except for the occasional admission of extremely limited numbers of boarders. It was the need for extended boarding facilities that led, as early as 1871, to the establishment of the second Jesuit college in Victoria. The new establishment was Xavier College, situated in Kew, only four miles from St Patrick's, but in an area then seen as somewhat remote. Set on a site of 70 acres, Xavier began to take shape with the laying of the foundation stone on December 8, 1872. The sermon to mark the occasion was preached by William Kelly SJ who chose the then appropriate text 'What came ye out into the wilderness to see?' The Irishness of the occasion was revealed in the green sashes of the various Hibernian catholic benefit societies. The music they marched to included 'The Harp that Once,' 'The Minstrel Boy,' and 'Paddy's Wedding.' In his sermon, William Kelly spoke against the state education act and the secular education it promoted<sup>1</sup>. Here at Kew 'the youth of the comparatively wealthier classes would receive an education which would not endanger their morals.'

In his history of Xavier, Denning (1978) refers to the uneasy relationships that existed between St Patrick's and Xavier. Distinctions existed which kept them separate. Size, possession of boarding facilities, and families of different social status made the two schools more like stepbrothers, than brother schools.

The crowd present that day would have seen, stretching back towards Richmond, the fledgling church of St Ignatius, and to the south the Church of

<sup>1</sup> Between 1872 and 1893 all six colonies passed legislation which established government-controlled school systems under a minister of the Crown and withdrew financial aid to church schools. These statutes were popularly known as the 'free compulsory and secular' acts. See, for example, Jones (1974), p.20.

the Immaculate Conception, Hawthorn, both buildings with reminders that the work of the Jesuits extended beyond the two schools into the two young parishes.

Over five years passed from the laying of the Xavier foundation stone to the school's commencement under its first rector, Father Thomas Cahill SJ. Cahill had for a time studied at Maynooth for the secular priesthood, but had gone on to join the Jesuits in France. From 1874 to 1878 he had been rector of St Patrick's College. In 1878 he found himself rector of Xavier as well. His period as rector was brief, lasting only to 1879. Until 1952 the rectors of both St Patrick's and Xavier were Irish with the exceptions of William Lockington SJ, appointed to St Patrick's in 1916 and Jeremiah Sullivan SJ appointed to Xavier in the same year.<sup>2</sup>

Although Xavier did experience periods of decline in harmony with broad economic downturns, it was to become the leading catholic college in Victoria. During the depression years of the 1890s, enrolments at both schools were affected, though St Patrick's was the more severely hit. In the years leading up to the turn of the century, St Patrick's had to recover from the effects of this depression and also compete with other less expensive catholic schools, notably those of the Christian Brothers who came to Victoria in 1868 and those of the Marist Brothers who arrived in 1893 (Fogarty, 1959). By the end of the century, thought was being given to the possibility of the closure of St Patrick's. This was not to occur for another 70 odd years, however.

In 1901, the Austrian and the Irish missions amalgamated, under the latter. By that date, there were 80 Irish Jesuits. In the same year Xavier, after a period of sporting partnership with St Patrick's, took over the representation of the Jesuit colleges in the Victorian Public Schools' Association, manifestly a sporting organization, but latently a grouping of high-fee and high-status schools showing affinities with the English greater public schools<sup>3</sup>. The transfer of the

- 2 In 1952 the first Australian born rector, Father Philip Gleeson SJ, was appointed to the school. He was succeeded by three other Australian born rectors. From 1974, the title 'rector' was reserved for the spiritual superior of the Jesuit community, and the title 'headmaster' applied to the chief executive officer responsible for the running of the school's operations.
- 3 Dening (1978) writes 'From about the time Xavier became a public school till the depression (of the '30s) and the second world war, public school sport was a social and class phenomenon' (p.173). He describes in some detail the focus on public school sport among professional and middle-class groups.

title of public school to Xavier was a sign of its rise, and of the relative decline of St Patrick's.

By 1950, the Jesuits had established themselves to such a point in Australia that Australia became a province in its own right, sending in 1951 six Australian Jesuits to establish a mission in northern India. The remaining Irish priests were assimilated into the Australian province. Some survive to this day. However, in 1990 the last member of the Irish province who still had an association with the Victorian schools died. He was Father Patrick Stephenson SJ who was born on the eve of St Patrick's Day, 1896, in the county of Waterford, Ireland. Having been educated by the Jesuits at Clongowes Wood, he joined the Society of Jesus in 1914. After seven years of formation in Ireland, he came to Xavier in 1921, without doubt little realizing the extent of his future involvement with this particular school. In his first stay at Xavier as a scholastic, he taught for four years. On completion of this stage of his formation as a Jesuit, he returned to Europe to study theology in England and in France, being ordained in Lyons in 1928. He returned to Xavier in 1930 after which he taught humanities, mainly geography, to generations of school boys. He edited the college magazine for 50 years; he acted as spiritual father and confessor to countless boys, many of whom went on to continue their association with him as chaplain of the Old Xaverians' Association. His requiem was held at St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, on May 9th, 1990. The cathedral was filled to capacity (Sharpe, 1990).

Considering in the broadest sense possible such a long and remarkable career, it would be easy to omit much of significance. Nevertheless, certain events stand out. In 1913, Melbourne had witnessed the arrival of Daniel Mannix, a former president of Maynooth College. He was to succeed Archbishop Carr in 1917 as Melbourne's third archbishop (see Ebsworth, 1977). Throughout his long reign, Irish Jesuits were very close in many senses of the word to the archbishop whose palace *Raheen* was, like Xavier, also situated in the suburb and parish of Kew. When in 1920 Xavier was presented with Studley Hall, the Jesuits were established just across the road from *Raheen*<sup>4</sup>. Albert Power SJ and William Hackett SJ, the latter rector of Xavier from 1935 to 1939, were close friends and confidants of Mannix.

4 In 1923 the diocesan seminary at Werribee outside Melbourne was entrusted by Mannix to the Jesuits. So too in 1959 was the newly established Melbourne theologate of Glen Waverley. In both seminaries men of Irish origin were prominent. They included Henry Johnston, Albert Power, and Charles Mayne (see O'Farrell, 1974).



Studley Hall opened as a Xavier preparatory school in 1921, the year in which Patrick Stephenson came as a scholastic to the senior school. It became known as Burke Hall, after its donor, T.M. Burke, a prominent Victorian catholic layman. Dening (1978) notes in his history of Xavier that it was only with some reluctance that the general consented to this new preparatory school, holding concerns that the increase in numbers would lessen the Jesuit character of the education to be provided. Bygott (1980) asserts that primary education was not a particular forte of the Jesuits and that Burke Hall was essentially an institution where small boys marked time until they moved on to the senior school.

Despite such reservations, the success of *Burke Hall* led to a decision in 1935, when the senior school was again experiencing financial difficulties, to open up a second preparatory school, this time in Brighton. The purchase of property led to the establishment of *Kostka Hall*. Thus Patrick Stephenson had been part of the growth of Xavier across its three campuses. Concerns about the Xavier expansion had been considerable. Nonetheless, consolidation followed.

In 1968, *St Patrick's College* was closed down. The buildings, with the exception of a tower preserved after public outcry as a commemorative gesture, were demolished to provide space for expanded archdiocesan administration. When *St Patrick's* closed, Xavier, which had completed some new buildings about this time, took in any of the Patricians who wished to transfer and provided space for the display of *St Patrick's* honour boards.

#### CHANGING DIRECTIONS

For men such as Patrick Stephenson, the creation in 1950 of the Australian province had meant their detachment from the Irish province under whose auspices they had arrived in Australia. They had seen the growth of Xavier and the demise of *St Patrick's*. Another adjustment lay ahead. A major re-organization of the Society's administration aligned the Australian province very firmly with Asia rather than with Europe. The new regional centre for the East Asian Assistancy, centred in Manila, meant the termination of the former organizational arrangements which had seen first the Austrians and then the Irish in larger numbers come to Victoria. In the 1990s, the earlier connections with the Irish province now appear fairly remote.

The educational efforts of the Australian Jesuit schools had traditionally been directed towards the sons of the gentry, with a strong admixture of students drawn from the commercial life of the community. Schools such as Xavier have strongly directed their efforts towards professional entry and the attainment by their pupils of leadership positions in society.

However a new, additional trend is emerging. In the early 1980s, there was an experiment, under Jesuit direction, with a senior co-educational high school in the non-affluent outer western suburbs of Melbourne. Though unsuccessful in some ways, this has not prevented the establishment, under a Jesuit headmaster, of a co-educational high school in the outer western suburbs of Sydney (Rolfe, 1991). The earlier focus under the Irish which saw in Victoria the development of St Patrick's and then Xavier with its preparatory schools continues, though modified in the light of diminishing numbers of Jesuits, increased enrolments, and the changes brought about by Vatican II that have promoted a lessening of middle-class ties.

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