

St Patrick's Day 2013

Friends of the College, well may we ask –

Why did the Brothers open St Patrick's College, what did they achieve and what have they left?

Thankfully, recently published researched historical works of considered scholars inform us well on Edmund Rice, Br Patrick Ambrose Treacy and on the founding of SPC.

Edmund Rice founded his first school in 1802 in Waterford. His school was purposeful but welcoming to all, humane, and ecumenical in outlook and in the support given it. But from those who succeeded him came an emphasis that was more of Irish nationalism, sectarian, rigid single approach, and isolationist.

Br Treacy translated Christian Brother education to the seven colonies of Australasia. But he was none of the above. He so quickly understood his new context in the *Great Southern Land* and adapted superbly. His biographer records that "He had a single-track mind, in the sense that he had no thought but the Kingdom of God and the Brothers' part in establishing it." (Hickey) "The school is open to all who wish to avail themselves of it without distinction of creed, colour or nation".

Treacy had been sent to educate the poor in Australia. However there were no poor as in Ireland. This was a land of opportunity for all. Rather, he saw the need to educate so as to support the Faith. This was the era of *Free, Secular & Compulsory* education, as expounded by Henry Parkes in NSW and his counterparts in the others colonies.

The fee issue in Ireland had been lost by Edmund and his supporters. The policy of Edmund's successor as leader of the Christian Brothers, Br Paul Riordan, prevailed - fees could not be charged. Within two years of his arrival, Treacy had not only realised that this policy had no application here, but he had made such clear representation to the leadership in Ireland that the policy for Australasia was changed and a rescript from Rome obtained to support this.

He saw good schools conducted by other denominations that took their students to matriculation and thus university. Government schools were only to the 8th Grade. In Ireland the Christian Brothers' schools were similar; secondary was reserved for schools conducted by priests. Treacy succeeded in taking the Christian Brothers' schools in Australasia to matriculation level despite some opposition, especially from Archbishop Carr of Melbourne.

Treacy saw first hand the geographic isolation in this wide brown land and responded with the first boarding schools in the world conducted by Christian Brothers at CBC Adelaide and then at St Joseph's Gregory Terrace in Brisbane.

And so when Bishop Moore of Ballarat requested Treacy to take over Holy Ghost College, which had closed after only three years of operation (1889-1891), he was more than ready. He had developed a clarity of purpose based on the needs of this colony and its people. Bishop Moore had a vast diocese and wanted a boarding school to support its young men. He already had one for girls with the Loreto Sisters at Mary's Mount. Treacy and his Education Committee were enthusiastic when offered Holy Ghost College. Treacy insisted that the property, just over one hectare (but now 11 hectares), be transferred to the Brothers and that the full administration remain with them. Bishop Moore agreed and became a great supporter of the new College.

But Treacy had no staff for a college. Thankfully, headquarters in Ireland were able to be generous this time and sent some Brothers of special ability. He appointed as the first headmaster, Br John Ryan an Irishman who had joined the Brothers in Australia, who had experience with boarding at Gregory Terrace and who was then leading the Skipton St School and so was known to the Bishop and the people.

On January 24, 1893 St Patrick's College began with classes for its first students. There followed a remarkable first 20 years. Very high standards of scholarship, sport, music and oratory were set from the beginning. The great leader of this early period was Br William Mark McCarthy - *the Builder of SPC*. Over a number of appointments to the College he had acquired most of the property by 1905, had built classrooms and science rooms by 1910 and the dormitory building in 1919.

The teaching of Br McCarthy, physics and mathematics, and Br John Kenny, chemistry, was first class. I grew up with stories from my father of these great men. Br Stephen Turpin was Headmaster when my father arrived from his Echuca school. He often told of how Br Turpin took him to one side during maths classes and led him gently but surely through an understanding of the first 15 theorems in geometry.

They engaged the best – Herr Brun for violin and orchestra and Mr W Paine for elocution. And three who between them gave 50 years expert teaching - Mr Hatfield M Sc, in science, Mr Jack Morrissey who also began the football tradition, and Mr Jock Stanley ex-British army for gymnastics.

The tradition for educating Saints and Scholars was set. From the young gentlemen of these early years came Sir Hugh Devine – world famous surgeon, Sir Bernard Heinze – hailed as the most influential figure in Australian music, and as you see as you walk by in the corridors, a gallery of generals and leaders in their fields. Religious spirit was strong. Those thinking of entering the seminary made no secret of it. Vocations were held in high honour and priests came in large numbers.

The pervading influence of the 1930s was Br David Gabriel Purton, the educator par excellence, who was also a kindly man. He set high standards as Headmaster. It was the period of the Great Depression and many could pay no fees. When parents contacted him to withdraw their sons, he would hear none of it and they stayed. A group from those days who are well into their 80s joke that then only the publicans paid fees. The leader of this luncheon group is Laurie Larmer whose parents had the Lake View Hotel.

It was then that the great Br O'Malley legend began. This teacher/sportsmaster/football coach/communicator cast his spell for good over so many young men.

Br John Dominic Healy took the College into the 1950s and gave to it our magnificent chapel which stands not only as a most worthy place of prayer and worship, but as a statement for all to see of our purpose and belief. Br Justin Linus Kelty, the leader of the 1960s, gave us the extensive teaching facilities of the O'Malley wing. The previous teaching facility was added in 1910!

Br Paul Nangle initiated the next phase of renewal in the 1970s. Through this period Br Herb Breach, who we buried from the chapel two weeks ago, was the model of encouraging young men as a teacher and a coach. He taught so many to use gifts that they had never recognised. He typified so many who laboured here.

Of course, these are only some of the outstanding names of those who gave so much to the noble educational enterprise that has been SPC. There are many others over the decades without whose dedication and generosity there would have been no SPC, and certainly no opportunities for those from the bush. The Old Collegians have established its list of *Legends* and also *Facere & Docere* awards for service to the College. Amongst the recipients of the latter are Peter Farley, Frank Rice and John Cosgriff and more to come. Powerful support has come to the College through its Parent Associations and more recently the Board. In these important organisations great men and women have served the College well.

But a school is essentially about its students. Throughout its 120 years St Patrick's College has been an inclusive place. *Saints and Scholars* may paraphrase Treacy's aim but these include the *ordinary*, the thousands of fine Christian men, husbands, fathers, citizens, pillars of and contributors to their communities. But we also rightly celebrate our bishops, archbishops and cardinal, the 326 priests, those who dedicated their lives in religious orders, the contributors in many professions, the 84 who gave their lives in World Wars I and II and Iraq, the State Premiers, the Olympians, the Test Cricketers, the Brownlow Medalists and the countless AFL players.

Amongst the highlights of the last decade has been the outreach of SPC Old Boys to Africa and beyond. At Newman College an SPC boy recently inspired a record involvement of students in community service. Our boys continue to be held in high repute at Newman; the current programme for Indigenous students is exemplary; the social justice programme and contributions of students to good causes are in the spirit of the Gospel.

The baton has been changing gradually for some decades. Our present Headmaster has carried the mantle of McCarthy and Kelty in renewing the fabric of the College in an outstanding manner and further developing the reach and tradition of this great school. Dr Peter Casey's outreach to past students and to the wider community has been magnanimous as has been his hospitality today. We hand the College to very worthy leaders – and rejoice that this is so.

Brothers Rice, Treacy, McCarthy, Purton and Kelty would be very happy that their contributions have been built upon so well and that the College has flourished in continuing to offer the best to its young men today.

Let us toast -

St Patrick's College – what has been, what is and what is to come.

Bill Wilding cfc
17 March 2013