



"THE SCHOOL IN THE CARDINAL'S BACKYARD"

– by Brother Frank Cruice, delivered 27th July 2008 to
The Australian Catholic Historical Society

The best hidden secret in Australia is St Paul's College. And it is apt that the Society is drawing attention to St Paul's in this the Year of St Paul.

North Head: The site is significant being the area where Governor Phillip's men kidnapped three aborigines in 1789. In return Phillip was speared at Manly Cove which event can be seen as a turning point in future relationships between the indigenous people and the colony. Other celebrities have been associated with the site: Film maker Baz Luhrmann (*Moulin Rouge*, *Strictly Ballroom*) went here in Years 9 and 10; Nola Fletcher (nee Manning) one of the 2GB original Quiz Kids taught here for over thirty years.

History does not commence, it continues and thus St Paul's grew out of the parish school in Raglan Street Manly, near the Catholic Church. In 1929, just when Manly Catholic Boys felt it was safe to go back in the water, they discovered to their horror that a school - Primary to Leaving Certificate - had been opened for them. It came to be staffed by Christian Brothers. No scandalous squeezing by the 1960s made it imperative to search for a site on which to build a separate secondary school. But where to put it? Extend the Raglan Street school? The Council refused the application on the valid grounds that then the area would come too cluttered. Combine with the girl's school, Stella Maris? Oh, co-ed was then a definite no-no. Build at Palm Beach? St Augustine's at Brookvale already drew boys from there. Balgowlah? Mgr Macdonald PP of Manly though wanted the school in his parish! But then the Man of The Hour, Cardinal Gilroy smilingly, graciously, stepped in. He offered 2.2 acres in his backyard, the land you see! The Sydney Archdiocese jumped at the offer: money would not have to be spent on purchasing a site: although isolated there was peace and quiet; magnificent views of Middle Harbour would calm future occupants (and they did); there was proximity to the seminary; and the Brothers' residence in Raglan Street was not that far distant.

On Sunday August 8th 1965 at 2.30pm the College was opened by Cardinal Gilroy. It became known popularly as "Christian Brothers" although the Brothers did not own it and simply Headmastered and with lay teachers staffed it. It was under the general supervision of the Sydney Catholic Education Office (the CEO). "We are next door neighbours" beamed the Cardinal at the boys during the occasional stroll. The next door neighbours came from the parish regions of Manly, Balgowlah, Harbord, Narrabeena, Narrabeen, Manly Vale, Dee Why. Enrolled were 280 and it was expected that 700 would be on the roll by 1970 but that has never happened yet. Constructed by Civil and Civic it's a remarkable edifice for only \$125,000. Well, at first sight. To service and repay the loan the Sydney Archdiocesan authorities levied the parishes concerned. Built quickly, in 24 weeks and finished in four months ahead of schedule so that classes began in the third term of 1965 and not in the first term 1966 as envisaged. The school became what was then classified as a Regional School.

For this first 17 years 1965 to 1982 St Paul's was headmastered by four Christian Brothers; Brothers Simmons, Taylor, Lennox, Garretty. Soon discovered were several flaws and it became evident that it had been created by those who knew little about school buildings. Weekend vandals could climb to the lower verandah and did force their way into the building through the fragile doors at either end; the ladies' toilet opened on to the stairway used by the boys; no Art and Craft rooms and so on. The Christian Brothers Provincial Council shown the plans only the day before the contract was signed! It was clearly too late for the Brothers to effect any transformation but they did insist on immediate alteration to the dimensions of the two science rooms so they would conform to Canberra's requirements and so qualify for a Commonwealth Science Grant. This action saved the Archdiocesan authorities much money of course.

A problem for Brother Taylor. The Wyndham Scheme required an extra Year - Year 12. There was doubt as to whether St Paul's could cater for it but His Eminence had expressed a wish that it be provided and this communication was of great assistance to the Principal in outfitting a newish school now providing full secondary education from Year 7 to Year 12. So, in 1967, the first year of the HSC there were 27 in Year 12 and 29 in Year 11. But many graduates from the Raglan Street primary school clamoured to be enrolled. Wonderful, but where was the space? Extensions? Out of the question for the powerful Building and Finance

Commission had suspended all building due to lack of funds. Combine our small Year 11 and 12 classes with those of St Augustine's? The Augustines feared that a sudden influx would upset their school. Again, magnanimous Cardinal Gilroy came to the rescue! He permitted in 1970 for some 40 seniors to have classes here, in the Dining Room of the Palace. More room then for the incoming Raglan Streeters. Unfortunately the clerical residents were accustomed to a monastic quiet; boys will be boys' some damage to venetian blinds and the upshot saw the class return to the school building where demountables by this time had been added. It must be said that His Eminence took in good spirit any humour at his expense. One Breakup Day in an open car was a Year 12 lad robed as the Cardinal blessing the crowds in the Corso when all of a sudden and to the astonishment of all the "Cardinal" disappeared into the saloon bar of the Steyne Hotel!!!

Yes, a friendly spirit pervaded the school and certainly Manly boys didn't begrudge discipline. Jus as well for succeeding Brother Taylor was Brother Lennox, a Principal who carpentered boys - very successfully - with the chisel of instruction and the mallet of discipline. The school thrived. But as gas been pointed out there was no Art room, no Woodwork room, and classes housed in demountables and also no Library. And no money for cleaning so each weekend Brother Lennox himself undertook to clean out the school! When the Whitlam Federal Government handed out money for capital projects St Paul's received the biggest amount for any school in Australia, some \$250,000. However the Building and Finance Commission (today defunct) did nothing to make up the rest needed to pay for the aforementioned shortcomings so Brother, sensing an injustice to the boys - er - uses the State Government's per capita grants instead of handing that money to the Building and Finance Commission which strictly he was supposed to do, and for this was reprimanded, but the additions by this time were up and thus paid for by him. Any anyhow all's fair in love and war, isn't it? Enrolment now 530 with 100 in Years 11 and 12 combined. These 1976 extensions were at the rear and comprised six classrooms, laboratories, Art room, Woodwork room. Actually the final cost was \$428,000. Money came from Science Grants, and the Brothers, and the Schools Commission and the local Parishes. For the Library, Fr Ryan, now Manly PP mustered \$100,000 much to the astonishment of The Powers That Be.

The pupils were enjoying all these improvements and GPS facilities for CEO fees: recreation now for seniors in the beautiful Seminary grounds

across the road; liturgies in the historic Cerretti Chapel etc. Relations with the Palace remained cordial apart from a few minor Thises and That's, the most significant being a dispute over where the rear boundary ended. Cardinal Gilroy had given extra land as playing space so the P&F had hove to, cleared scrub, and put in a basketball court down there. A cleric objected complaining that we were overreaching ourselves by an inch or two but Bishop Muldoon came on our side..... . Interestingly about this time the Mother Prioress of the enclosed Tyburn nuns wanted to build a convent in the far corner of the site. She had made a special trip from England to inspect the grounds. The Council rejected the idea saying that it would involve cutting down too many trees. So the nuns moved from their Manly convent in Wood Street to Riverstone.

Because of a decline in recruits the Christian Brothers had, very regrettably, at the end of 1982 to withdraw from St Paul's (a few remained working for a few years in the Raglan Street Primary School).

St Paul's was now wholly, no longer partially, staffed by Lay Teachers - and still under the eye of the increasingly bureaucratic Sydney CEO. The Christian Brothers' seventeen years at St Paul's had seen 26 Brothers teach there and by 1982 a total of 140 Brothers had taught in Raglan Street and St Paul's combined. The boys seemed more disturbed by the departure. One touch surfie asked sorrowfully "Does that mean them crosses will be taken down?" Parents understood the situation so no angry outburst. This was the first Brother initiated withdrawal from a school in many years.

Post 1982: St Paul's - for long thought it had been popularly referred to as "Christian Brothers". That's all. In a way, then, a Christian Brother descendant / its star still in the ascendant / its dramatis persona remaining resplendent.... . Four successful Lay Principals to follow: Mr Mayne, Mr Doyle, Mr Martin, Mr Comerford. In 1987 the school passed into the Diocese of Broken Bay and hence under its Catholic Schools Office. Known more commonly now at St Paul's, with the initials CBRHS (Christian Brothers Regional High School) removed from the red and black badge. The 75th anniversary of the Raglan Street school was celebrated beautifully by St Paul's, the Principal rightly considering the school as an offshoot. There would seem to have bee four concerns of the school over recent decades:

1. Discovering the point of entry into adolescent male spirituality. Perhaps they are onto something by entering that world over the years through the doors of Social Justice, Relationships, and The Environment, and their newly stated desire "to turn Manly boys into manly men".
2. The uncomfortable trend to become a school catering for the middle class only, instead of both working class and middle class. This has been noted by long stayers on the staff. The point is that to embrace the new technology the CEO needs money...fees go up...and lower incomers are priced out of a Catholic School. A trend observable in other CEO schools too.
3. Provision of a broad-based curriculum catering for the needs of a range of pupils in this still small-to-medium populated secondary school. Current enrolment is 571 with 64 in Year 12 and 74 in Year 11. Mr Martin sensibly addressed this problem by introducing courses in Life Skills, Hospitality, Cooking, Food Technology etc proving now that St Paul's is not just a Universe but a Multiverse.
4. Solving the perennial accommodation problem. For a time demountables housed staff. But such an arrangement could be only temporary. Accommodation problems again, and finally arrangements were made to lease the Palace (the Seminary and its staff had long gone) on behalf of St Paul's and not this time just the Dining Room to be used! Restoration began late 2004, completed mid 2005. One of the numerous challenges facing the builder and architects, St Paul's was told, was the installation of state-of-the-art technology without detracting from the antiquity of the building. They have succeeded.

Staffs certainly remain conscious of the deeper aim of their work with the tender-tough, tender-tranquil boys here: to conscientize their manhood and to concretize their Christhood... And oh yes, other things remain the same too: the sulphur crested cockatoos still shriek among the Norfolk pines; magpies and currawongs and crows still magpie and currawong and crow; and possums in the springtime can still be seen with their babies in the coral trees. And I'll bet your bottom dollar that some Year 12 lads still disappear at lunchtime - to Collins Beach below for an illegal swim!

