

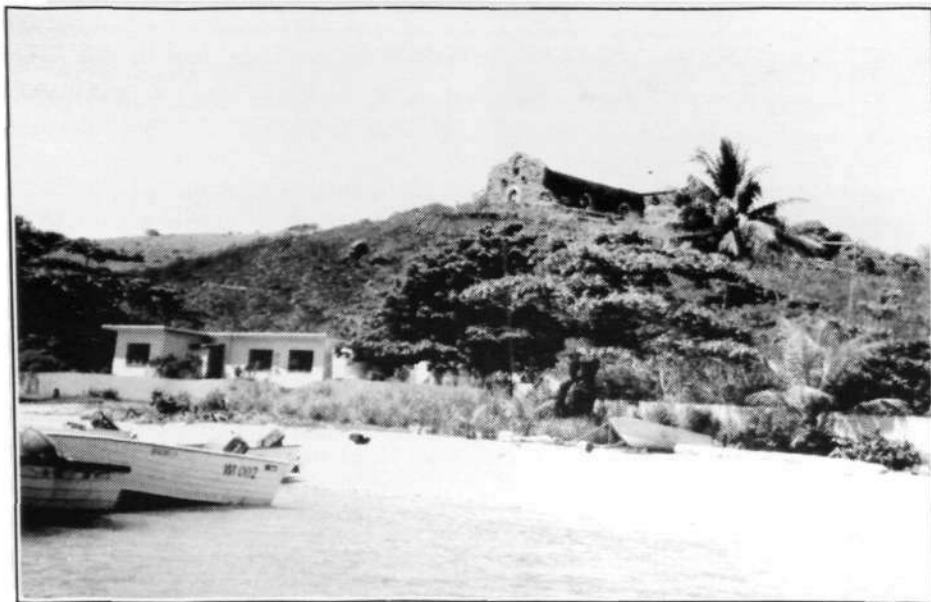
STONE ON STONE

Story of Hammond Island Mission

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compiled by

Tyrone C. Deere



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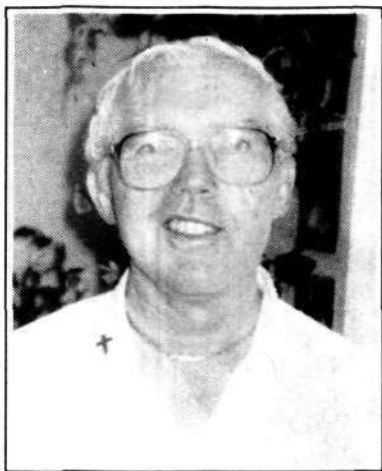
Cover: St. Joseph's Church Hammond Island.
Standing on top of the hill it can be seen from Thursday Island, and by those people travelling the waters of the Strait.

Deere, Tyrone Cornelius 01.01.1942
Stone on Stone

Building Stone Church - Hammond Is. Qld - History
Letters - Hammond Island Mission - General Interest

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INTRODUCTION



"Stone on Stone" began as the simple reprinting of the story of the building of St. Joseph's Church, Hammond Island as told by the builder Fr. Tom Dixon, and Fr. Paul Power an assistant priest, to the editor of "Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Annals" and printed there in 1953-1954.

In 1993 I applied to the Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs for a small grant to work on community and personal histories of the Catholic people of the Torres Strait Mission.

In the Sydney Archives of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart I found many of the letters that priests and brothers from here wrote to the Provincial Office in Sydney from 1927 to 1967.

I decided to extract parts of these letters about the Hammond Island Mission

Just as in the bonding of stones the Hammond Church grew, so too we can each see ourselves as one of these thousands of stones, each depending on each to hold and bond together as a living Church. Some people are like corner stones, some big boulders and some little chips holding each other together.

I dedicate this book to my father, Jack Deere who bonded with me and never ceased to encourage and inspire me with prayer when, from school days in the 1950's and 1960's I first told him of my desire to be a priest. He never lived to see his son a priest, but that dream led me to meet the people of the Torres Strait Mission first on July 19, 1977, and sign the visitors' book, and table mat of Fr Miah McSweeney.

In the last 20 months as I have taken "the Lord" weekly to the "first boy" of Hammond Island Mission, whom today I call the "Father of Hammond", Francis Dorante has never ceased to be an inspiration and encouragement to me. He is a true "corner stone"

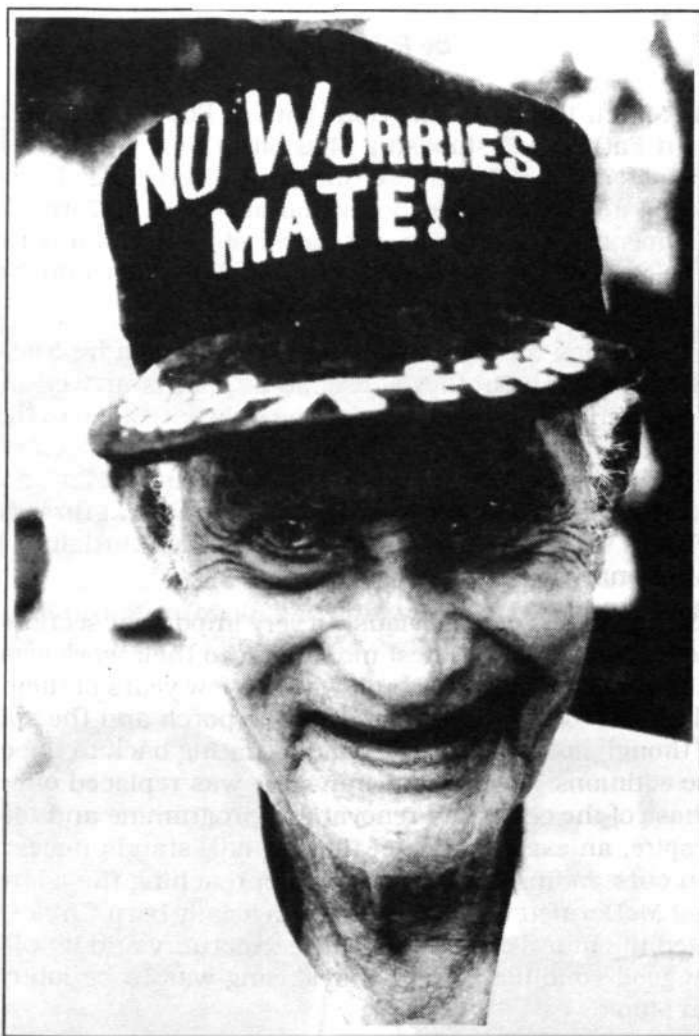
Thank you, and God bless you all.

Tyrone Deere





Fr Tom Dixon
"the builder"



***40 years later a proud Francis Dorante
celebrates the Anniversary of the
Hammond Island Church he helped to
build***

Sacred Heart Mission, Thursday Island, Our First One Hundred Years 1884 - 1984

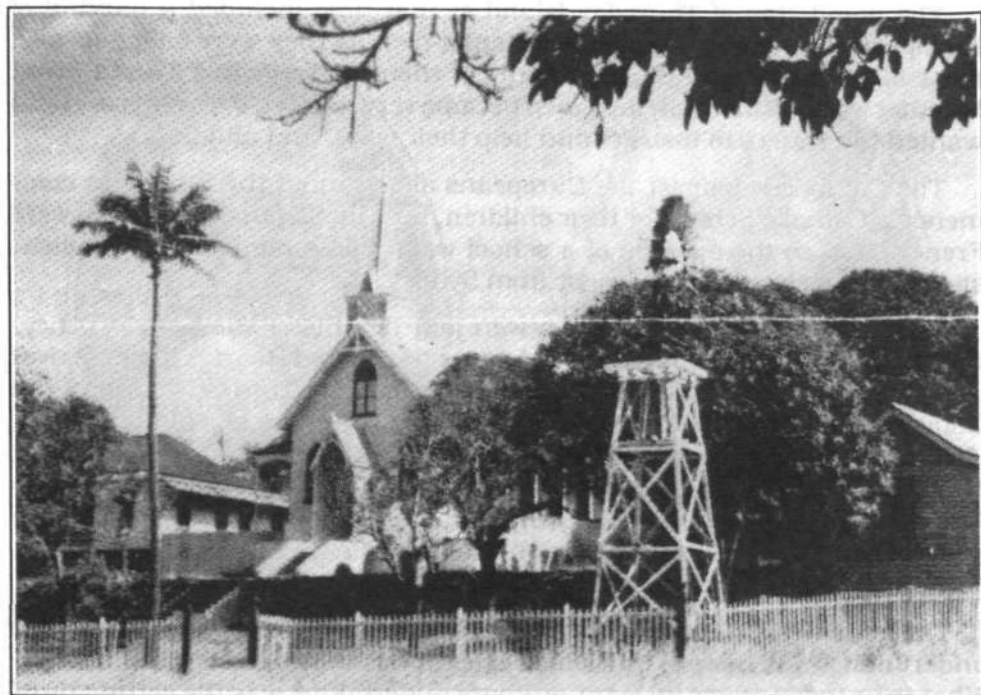
by Fr Tom Mullins

It was in March 1881, that the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII requested the Sacred Heart Fathers to establish a Mission in New Guinea. The Fathers themselves later decided that the setting up and servicing of such a Mission would be facilitated if a site were chosen and settled in the Torres Strait. Such an establishment would serve as a stopover station and a permanent link between the Societies Missions in Mainland Australia and New Guinea. Thursday Island was chosen for the purpose.

And so it was that on October 24th 1884 Father Andre Navarre, Father Ferdinand Hartzler and Brother Guiseppe de Santis arrived on Thursday Island to found the Mission which was to be duly entrusted to the Patronage of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. These three were later joined by Father Verius, Father Coupe and three young Italian Brothers Mariano Travaglini, Nicola Marconi and Salvatore Gasbarra. (Within the next three years Father Navarre, Father Verius and Father Coupe were to be ordained Bishops for different Missionary Dioceses.)

The M.S.C. Brothers were obviously a very important section of the early Mission Community. The greatest monument to their work was and is still the beautiful church which they built within a few years of their arrival and which still stands today. It appears that the porch and the spire are later additions, though not much later as photos dating back to the early 1900's show these additions. The old flat-iron spire was replaced only in 1983 as the first phase of the centenary renovations programme and today the new fibreglass spire, an exact replica of the original, stands majestically in its place as an outstanding landmark to all approaching the island. In 1935 while Father McDermott was Parish Priest, a locally born Chinese lad, David Sing, painted the mural on the wall of the sanctuary and it still remains in reasonably good condition today. David Sing was to be later ordained a Carthusian Monk.

On January 21st 1886, Father Navarre and Father Verius welcomed the first Sisters to the island. They were Sister Paul Perdrix, Sr. Madeleine Masselin and Sister Claire Dessailly of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, all of French origin. They were accompanied by Father Durin M.S.C. The Sisters first work on Thursday Island was to mend the tattered clothes of the Missionary brethren. The Sisters were housed in a three-bedroomed convent built by the Brothers.



Thursday Island Mission in the early 1900s. Convent to the left of the Church. The infants' School is on the right.



Archbishop Navarre



Bishop Verius

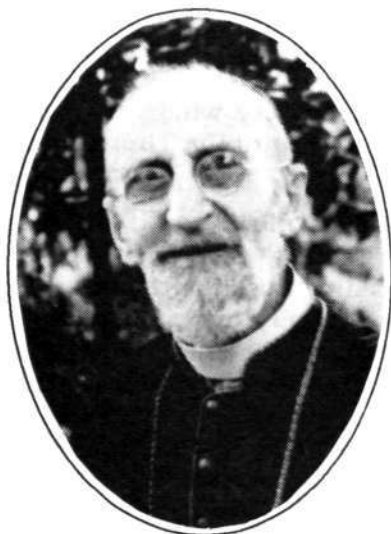
The population of Thursday Island at that time included a handful of Europeans and many Filipinos or Manila-men as they were called locally, most of whom were Catholics. Many of them had married Torres Strait Islander women. Many of these men became very devoted to the Mission and wanted the Sisters to instruct and help their wives and children.

The Catholics amongst the Europeans also wanted the Sisters to commence a Catholic School for their children, but the Sisters themselves were French, and so the opening of a school was impossible until an English-speaking Sister could be brought from Sydney.

And so on January 8th 1887 they were joined by Sister Margaret Sweeney, the first Australian Daughter of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. On her arrival the Sisters began a tiny Catholic School on the closed-in verandah of the Convent. The first school was built around 1900, on the site of the present Hall, a school which remained in use until 1962. It was complimented in 1932 by a building known as the Sargeant-Major's Office, bought from the Army Garrison on the hill for 20 pounds. It was erected by a Mr Jim Cadzow and opened by the Hon. Ted Hanlon, the then Premier of Queensland. It became the Infants School with Sister M. Urban as the first Sister-in-charge.

The Island Parish has always been noted for its diversity of projects and undertakings and this is a trait which extends back to its earliest beginnings. What to us today seems an extra-ordinary undertaking was the setting up of an orphanage or as it was known in those days - St. Henry's Roman Catholic Asylum. It too was built by the M.S.C. brothers about 1889 and its purpose was best summed up in its own constitution which reads: "St. Henry's Roman Catholic Asylum is a charitable institution where children of every race and denomination are received to be boarded and educated by the Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Children of both Vicariates of New Guinea and New Britain belonging to the Society of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart are entitled to be received into it ... Passed 18 years of age, boys and girls can be taken away by their parents or guardians; or a place of employment, or trade will be provided for them by the establishment if possible. Should parents or guardians for a good motive be unable to pay expenses, children are kept free." The Constitution is dated June 20th, 1889.

The Orphanage was in constant use until evacuation during World War II in 1942. It was reopened in 1948 for only a short time. Amongst other factors, child endowment gave parents the much needed assistance to care for their families and the need vanished. In 1961-1962 the orphanage was converted to a school and blessed as such by Bishop O'Loughlin in February of that year. History records that work on the play area was carried out with voluntary labour under the supervision of Mr. Pat Killoran, the later Under-Secretary of the Department of Community Service, without earth moving



Archbishop de Boismenu M.S.C.
Parish Priest T.I. 1898-1906



Bishop Coupe M.S.C.
T.I. 1888



Bishop Back M.S.C.
Parish Priest T.I. 1904-1927



Bishop Doyle M.S.C.
T.I. 1927-1938

machinery. In later years the building was reduced to one story and as such it remains today, serving now as a school room.

Very notable amongst the good works of the early Priests, Brothers and Sisters was the setting up and running of Thursday Island's first Hospital. It was situated on the block above the Presbytery where the teachers residence now stands. It remained in existence until the Thursday Island Hospital was established in 1893.

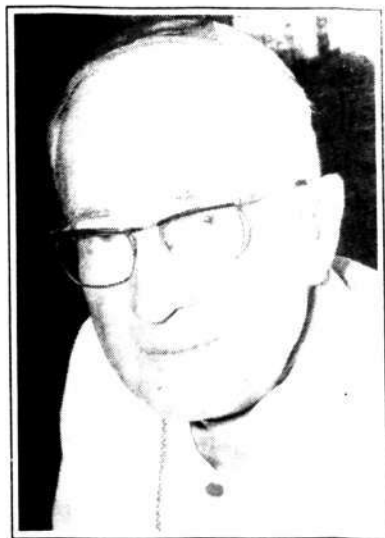
In 1927 Father J. Doyle was appointed Parish Priest, and realising the need of a settlement that would offer stability to the men engaged as pearl shell divers and to their families, he obtained permission from the Department of Native Affairs to establish a settlement on Hammond Island just at the back of Thursday Island, at that time without resident population. As a nucleus for a settlement he got together about a dozen boys and with Father McDermott M.S.C. in charge, the new Mission was officially opened in 1929. Families gradually set up homes there, and in 1932 the first marriage between a young man from Hammond Island and a girl from Thursday Island took place. Father McDermott also set up a school on Hammond Island which was staffed by the M.S.C. Brothers until the M.S.C. Sisters were installed on February 26th 1936. Sister Laurencia Enright and Dorothea Hunniford were the first resident Sisters on Hammond Island.

1938 was to be a year of tragedy for the Mission. Sister Marietta Roche who arrived on Hammond earlier that year was nine months later drowned when the small boat in which she was returning to Hammond Island with two other women and two men capsized after dark in rough seas. Together with two young French Sisters who died on Thursday Island, her remains lay buried on the hillside of Thursday Island which looks back to Hammond across the short stretch of water where she met her death.

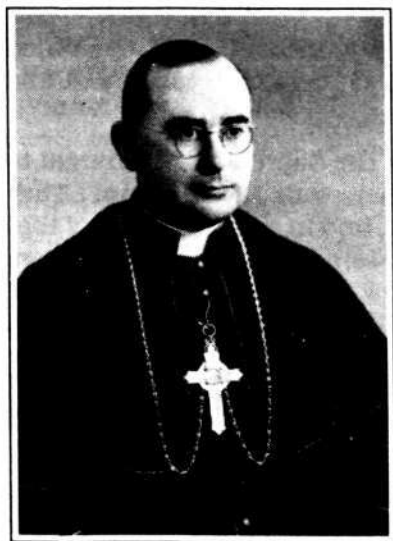
1938 was also to mark the transfer of Thursday Island and all the other islands of the Torres Strait, from the vicariate Apostolic of Papua to the Diocese of Darwin. The reason for this was that it was too remote from Papua, and on the other hand, on the shipping route to Darwin. Thus in 1938 Thursday Island became officially a Mission of the Australian Province. The Mission continued as part of the Darwin Diocese until 1967 when with Bishop O'Loughlin as Bishop of Darwin, it was transferred to the Diocese of Cairns with Bishop T.V. Cahill as Bishop. Notable in its last years under the Diocese of Darwin was the long and faithful service of Father Owen McDermott M.S.C. His 10 years at Hammond in the 1930's along with his 4 years in the 40's and a final 10 years ending in 1962 as Parish Priest at Thursday Island make him the second longest serving Priest in the Torres Strait. He, along with other Priests, Sisters and Brothers of the Sacred Heart era, is held near and dear to the hearts of those whom they have served.



Bishop Gsell M.S.C.
Bishop of Darwin 1938



Bishop O'Loughlin M.S.C.
Bishop of Darwin



Archbishop Cahill
1949 - 1967

**BISHOPS
OF
CAIRNS
DIOCESE**



Bishop Torpie
1967 - 1985

In 1967 Father Miah McSweeney, then serving as parish Priest of Gordonvale, was appointed by Bishop T.V. Cahill, as parish Priest of Thursday island, the first from the Diocese of Cairns. His term of office was to carry him through to the first days of 1982, when he was appointed Parish Priest of the newly formed Parish of Weipa. Both Weipa and Bamaga on Cape York Peninsula had been annexed to Thursday Island Mission shortly after Father McSweeney's coming to Thursday Island, though Bamaga had been served by Thursday Island for some years previous. During his fourteen years of service, his efforts for the different areas and communities of the Mission, namely Thursday Island, Hammond Island and Bamaga, and the hospitality which he offered to so many people at Sacred heart Presbytery and especially to the members of the Armed Services - the keen sense of humour which brightened so many conversations, established him as a true Torres Strait identity well known and remembered by those who live or have lived in the Torres Strait and those who have visited it from afar.

From 1967 to 1982, Father McSweeney was assisted in his work by a number of Priests well known and remembered by the present parishioners. Father L. Bibo served for 1 year 1967-68. Father J. B. McCarthy 6 months in 1968. Father H. Flynn for 5 years 1969 - 1973. Father J. J. Newman for 2 years 1974-1975 and Father J. McGrath for 5 years 1975 - 1980, Father T. J. Mullins 1981 to January 1993. During the time of Father McSweeney and his assistant Priests much was to be achieved. Soon after 1967 the orphanage was reduced to a one storied building destined for use as a school room. In July 1973 the new school was opened by the Premier Mr. Bjelke-Petersen. The new Hall was completed in the late 1970's and in 1980 the new teachers residence completed. Hammond Island Mission which celebrated its 50th birthday in 1979 has experienced a great deal of development and Bamaga now has its own Church very suited to its requirements.

Back in 1967 The Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart brought to a close their long association, 83 years in fact, with the Mission. They departed the Mission in the course of that year, and in the latter part of that same year Mother Oliver O'Halloran the then Mother General of the sisters of Mercy of Cairns, and Sister Mary Joan (now Sr. Mary Ormond) visited Thursday Island. In 1968 Sr. Mary Joan arrived back with Sr. Mary Consilia Wallwork and Sr. Mary Matthew (now Sister Margaret Rush) to take over the work of educating the children and they continue their good work today, labouring to lead the children by word and example, to serve Christ in and through his Church.

Most noteworthy of the achievements of recent years was the setting up and opening of the Star of the Sea Home, Waiben, a home to serve the aged people of the Torres Strait. The home was run by the Sisters of the Handmaids of Our Lord, a Papuan order of Sisters who have only one other



*Left: 1984
community of
Sisters of Mercy
on Thursday
Island - (L to R)Sr.
Cheryl Fulton, Sr.
M. Paul Harney,
Sr. M. Oliver
O'Halloran, Sr.
Rovena Duffy
(School Principal)
and Sr. Patricia
Butterfield*

*Right: The
Hammond
Island
community
gathering in
St. Joseph's
Church,
Hammond
Island, for
Confirmation*



*Left: A
happy group
of Hammond
Island
people
gathered on
the beach to
farewell
Bishop
Torpie after
the
Confirmation
Celebration*

THESE PRIESTS OF THE DIOCESE OF CAIRNS HAVE
SERVED ON THURSDAY ISLAND



Fr. M. McSweeney
1967-1982

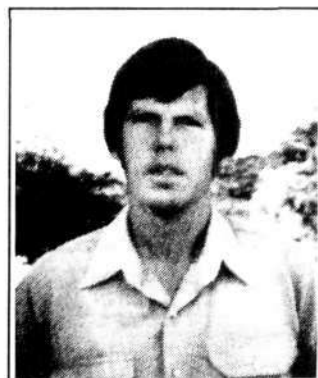


Fr. L. Bibo
1967-1968

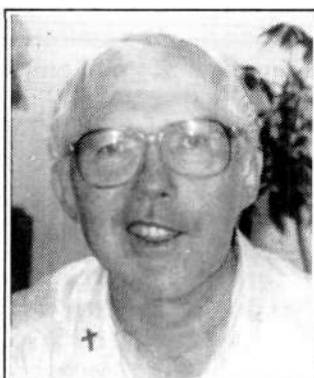


Fr. T. Mullins
1981-1993

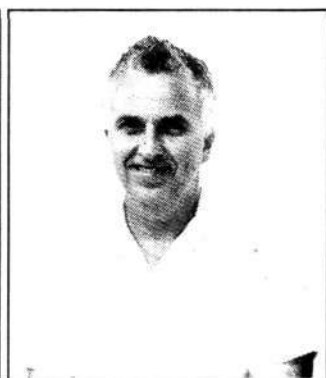
Fr. J. Newman
1974-1975



Fr. J. McGrath
1975-1980



Fr. T. Deere
1993-1994



Fr. H. Flynn
1969-1973

House in Australia and that is at Edmonton, also in the Diocese of Cairns. Four women of the Torres Strait are members of the order, namely Sister Laura Dorante, Sister Mary Garnier, Sister Marietta Garnier and Sister Clare Mairu. When Star of the Sea Home was opened by the Hon. Charles Porter on February 14th 1980 Sister Mary Garnier was appointed its first Sister-in-Charge. With her came Sr. Marina Magaiva and Sr. Flavla Kwaneumamataga. About a dozen Sisters and lay staff continued on with the Home for nearly 10 years when the need for major renovation forced its closure. A new Home is now being built with Government funding.

At the conclusion of its first 100 years, Sacred Heart Mission prays: Thanks be to God for the countless blessings He has bestowed upon it in those one hundred years. May He continue to bless abundantly its work: may it become more and more a channel of God's love, peace and salvation.

10 More Years - From Centenary Year 1984 - 1994

Father Tom Mullins who came as assistant priest to Fr Miah McSweeney in 1981 became Parish Priest in 1982 when Weipa was cut off the Thursday Island parish. Father Tom Mullins accomplished much with the parishioners in his twelve years as Parish Priest without the assistance and company of another priest. He could easily go for six months at a time without seeing another priest friend.

A truly remarkable feature of 1983 was the work accomplished by a voluntary task force assembled by Fr. John Lennon of Cairns when 38 men flew up from Cairns and gave generously of their time and effort to restore the Church, Convent and Presbytery which allowed \$100,000 donated by Mrs Muriel Rasey to the parish to be spent on materials for renovation. This task force was greatly assisted by the people of the parish, and friends of the parish, in their voluntary work for the upkeep of Church buildings.

In October Fr Mullins researched and wrote a centenary book "Our First One Hundred Years Sacred Heart Mission Thursday Island 1884 - 1984". Most of the above was printed in it.

There was a glorious week of Centenary celebrations held around October 24th 1984 when many past parishioners, Priests and Bishops, and Sisters and Brothers and lay-teachers joined with all the locals in pride of their accomplishments.

In the mid 1980's a big development in self responsibility for the people of Hammond Island was the transition from the priest having the day to day administration and maintenance of the buildings to the Hammond Island Council. No more does the priest have to write begging letters etc to the Government for grants to pay for this and that, and erect houses and employ people to work there, etc.

SISTERS WHO HAVE SERVED AT SACRED HEART MISSION



Sr. Elva Russell
1975-1980 & 1985-1994

Gwen Moloney

Sr. M. Paul Harney
1970, 1973-4, 1976-92

The Sisters of Mercy who have served at Sacred heart Mission (complete list)

BACK ROW L to R: *Sr Mary Columbiere, Sr Mary Anne, Sr Anne Maree*

MIDDLE ROW L to R: *Sr Mary Oliver, Sr Maureen Russell, Sr Margaret Rush, Sr Cheryl Fulton, Sr Joan Steele*

FRONT ROW L to R: *Sr Patricia Butterfield, Sr Mary Raphael, Sr Mary Ormond, Sr Monica Murray, Sr Rovena Duffy*

DECEASED: *Sister Mary Consilia*



Left: A 1982 photo at Star of the Sea.

L to R: Sr Mary Garnier, Mrs Nash, Sr M. Rose, Sr M. Flavia, Sr Marina, Mrs. Lorraine Walker

Also in the late 1980's the Sisters at Star of the Sea Old Peoples Home had to withdraw and for a while Fr Mullins was able to employ people to run the Home. When after a lot of worry and heartache the decision had to be made to close the Home, again Father was relieved of a lot of administration.

1987 was the last year that the Sisters of Mercy were Principals of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School. When Sister Elva Russell retired from teaching and from being Principal in 1975 to 1980, and again Principal from 1985 to the end of 1987 to become a full time Pastoral Assistant to the Parish, Miss Delia O'Donnell was appointed first Lay Principal. Delia helped bring an easy transition and is loved by the children. She applied for and received over a half million dollars in Government grants to refurbish the school over the last seven years. Sister Patricia Butterfield who first came in 1979 and who returned in 1984 is now the only Sister of Mercy teaching in the School. Many lay teachers have come and gone over the years and will be well remembered by their pupils, and the parents and friends they made while here.

In the late 1980's the interior of the Hammond Island Church was cemented and a new roof was placed on the Churches at Hammond and Thursday Islands.

A new Church was erected, and opened on 18 December 1988 on Horn Island, which again was greatly assisted by the Cairns Task Force assembled by Fr Lennon.

Over 300 people were baptised and four weekend Masses were offered in these years. By Christmas 1992 Fr Mullins was ready to return to a mainland parish after twelve years of labour in the Torres Strait and Fr Tyrone Deere became parish priest from January 19, 1993. He tried to continue the pastoral ministry of the Mission to the Torres Strait with great admiration for all those who have gone before him. It is different today, people want more and more self-determination in the daily life of the parish and he has tried to do that with encouragement in parish based parent-child preparation for Sacraments and the singing of their own language hymns, for example. On September 4 1994 he returned to Cairns as Administrator at St Monica's Cathedral. Fr Wojciech Beben S.V.D. from Poland, where he was taught and ordained by Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, who is now Pope John Paul II, is now Parish Priest. Fr Beben has been a missionary and anthropologist in Papua and New Guinea for the last 18 years.

Blue Granite Church of St Joseph's Hammond Island

Stone on stone rose the blue granite Church that the people of the Catholic Mission of Hammond Island built. Work began on 4th February 1952 and the last stone was placed by Eddie Mills at 10 am on Christmas Eve 1953, before the celebration of the First Mass there on Christmas Day 1953. Early the next year the Church was completed and furnished and officially opened on May 9th. By that time the priest who had inspired its building and laboured the hardest on it, had been transferred to another mission at Santa Teresa in Central Australia. Tom Dixon returned to see his Church in the mid '60s and again in October 1984, during the Centenary of the Sacred Heart Mission to Thursday Island and the Torres Strait.

In 1929 Fr John Doyle, later a Bishop, had founded a mission on Hammond Island for the coloured people of the Thursday Island Mission. This third Church was opened on the 25th anniversary of the First Mass on Hammond Island on Ascension Thursday 1929.

On May 8th 1994, Fr Tyrone Deere gathered a packed Church to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Church and the 65th anniversary of the founding of St Joseph's Mission.

This story is now printed in booklet form as the story was told by Fr Dixon and Fr Power and the Editor of "The Annals of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart", in 1953 and 1954. The Church stands as a tribute to the faith and hard toil of men and women, boys and girls of forty years ago. Some of those workers were present for the celebration of thanksgiving.

Let us trace Hammond Island history first.

Extracts from letters of Fr John Doyle to his Provincial superior in Sydney.

Thursday Island 26.4.1928

"There is surely good reason for me to hope that one of next year's new priests will be a companion for me. With the Protector of Aborigines I have inspected Hammond Island to chose a spot for a future settlement for half-castes of Thursday Island. The application for a grant of land has been sent to the Government with the hope that the Mission can be opened next year. This is the important work for which another priest is wanted.

I have enquired and found we can get a Government grant of land for this work. It would soon be more than a self-supporting concern with vegetables, poultry etc. which could be disposed of on Thursday Island.

On leaving the Orphanage (established 20 June 1889 on Thursday Island by the Sisters and the Priests of Sacred Heart Mission for children mainly sent

from the Outer islands) the boys could settle down on their own allotment on the Island and marry the girls from the existing orphanage here.

These are a couple of ideas I have in my head for the future work here. I wonder are they like many other ideas, which never become practical. However the Protector of Aborigines at Thursday Island is with me in the latter suggestion re the orphanage. We could build up a thoroughly Catholic Mission on an island to ourselves.

The Japanese work is rather brisk at present. The Japanese are engaged in the Pearl-shelling industry. From Christmas until some time in March all their boats are in for a spell and every afternoon and night we are engaged with English classes for the Japs. They are very genuine chaps and I enjoy their company very much. Last Saturday I baptised two of them and they made their First Holy Communion on Sunday morning. They make very earnest converts. The class consists of about twelve at present. I hope to pick up a bit of Japanese later on; they are now so keen on learning English that they will listen to nothing else. Of course we have an interpreter who comes regularly, a splendid Catholic and the apostle of the whole movement. (Many years later when visiting Yokohama in Japan, Fr Doyle met again many of these converts who remained faithful to their religion.)

I am very happy and settled here. We went out to Black Rock to see Fr Docherty on his way to Darwin.

I sent my kindest regards and also those of Fr. Lepaire to yourself."

John Doyle M.S.C.

Thursday Island 23.10.1928

"His Lordship Dr Bach has recently spent a fortnight with me in his old home. He still shows much attachment to Thursday Island. The people were very good to him while he was here on his trip and of course we had a welcome back ready for him when he arrived.

(Father Bach was parish Priest of Sacred Heart Mission Thursday Island from 1904 to 1927. He was the longest serving priest here. On the 29th May 1927, having been appointed Vicar Apostolic of the Gilbert Islands, he was consecrated Bishop.)

We are busy here now preparing for the bazaar to be held on the 29th and 30th of this month. The proceeds are in aid of the new Hammond Island Mission which I hope can begin next year.

Hammond Island is very close to Thursday Island and it has good ground and plenty of water. It is uninhabited and I have succeeded in obtaining a Government grant of the land for Mission purposes. We will begin by moving the boys (half-castes) over there and as well as their schooling we will train them to work the land, look after poultry etc. For these latter pursuits I have

obtained the services of a few old Manila men as teachers, who will also make their home on the island with their families. There are now several other families from here applying to me for an allotment on the new Mission reserve.

To begin the work of building etc will cost some hundreds of pounds but we hope the bazaar will cover a good part of it. A small launch (will cost about £120.) is also necessary at the beginning.

I was really going ahead with this work Father relying on the assistance of one of this year's newly ordained. If you can spare one I am sure there is the will on their side to come. But I can rely on you to help me if you can. Of course experience has taught it is not much use of sending one who is not too keen on these parts (Fr Hogan.) However the North has gripped me and I am contented in every way."

Thursday Island 27.12.1928

"Our bazaar, which was recently held for two nights, was very successful. We cleared £550 and everybody here was satisfied. It is for the purpose of beginning the Hammond Island Mission.

Already I have spent £200 of the funds in purchasing a small launch which was, of course, a first necessity. I am now endeavouring to have a building erected - no easy matter in these parts. I am hoping Father that you are going to let me have a helper and companion in the work. I admit that there is not such a terrible lot of work for two men either here or at Hammond. But one man could not satisfactorily run the two places as the boys would be left on Hammond practically by themselves which would not do. But apart from a helper, an Australian priest companion is every often longed for by me. For nearly two years I have been practically by myself with an occasional visit from a French Father - who though they may have good intentions are not the best companions. I am not saying this to detract from the French Fathers but the ones I refer to are priests sent from France to spend a few months here, learning English, before proceeding to Papua. Though it may not be for me to pass a judgement on this system Father, yet I am the one who must live through it. It is not a system which is for the best interests of the place here.

The New Guinea authorities would probably stop this system if I had an Australian priest companion here.

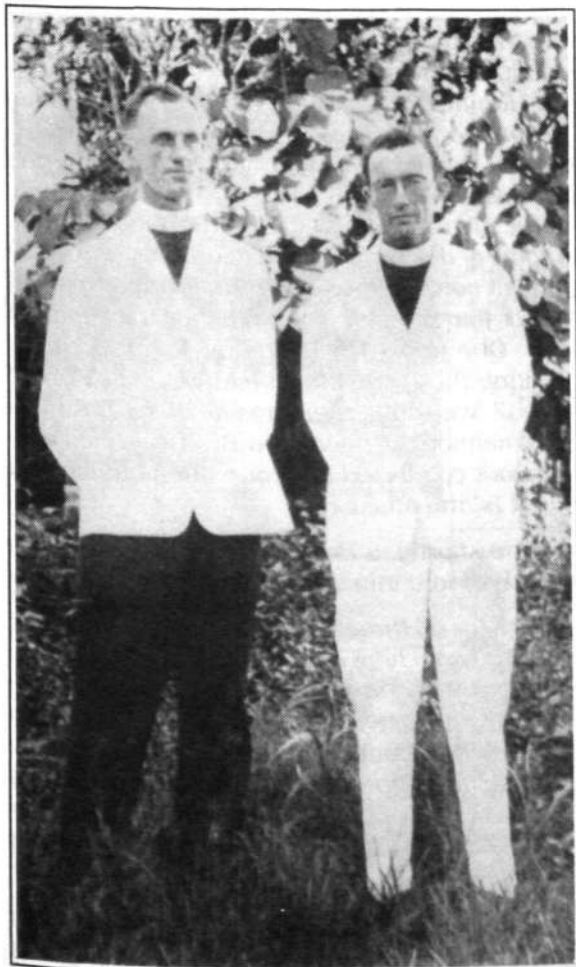
..... Maybe there is still an opportunity for me of working in Papua - and what's more on an Australian Mission. If so, I am sure my Thursday Island sojourn has been a good acclimatisation."

Thursday Island 19.4.1929

"Your last letter to me was an announcement of the arrival of Fr McDermott. Needless to say that was a very welcome letter and perhaps even more welcome was the arrival of Father himself.

I think he is now settled down to the climate, the people and the place. The

***Right: Sr Marietta Roche, drowned 16th
October 1938 near Hammond Island***



***Left: Fr. J. Doyle (left)
founder of Hammond
Island Mission with
Father O. McDermott, the
first resident priest of
Hammond Island***

weather was not of the best when he arrived but now we have the beautiful south easterly every day and not even the glorious climate of Sydney itself can rival the pleasant atmosphere of our island home.

Our little works are going ahead a little too slowly, but yet they are going ahead. I am busy trying to purchase poultry, cattle and the like for our Hammond Island scheme. Also to secure a suitable boat to visit the islands. To secure the boat is the problem."

Thursday Island 23.7.1929

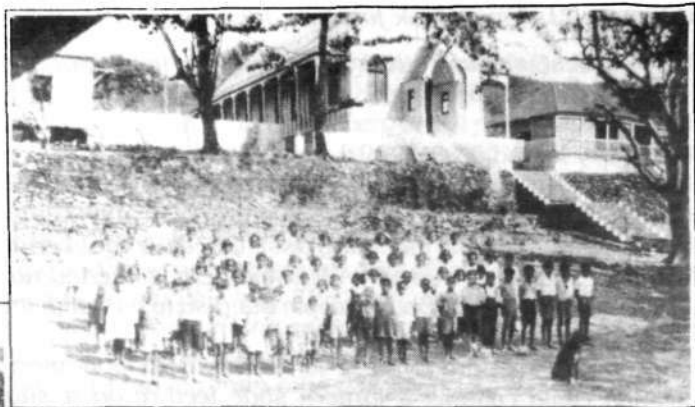
"Fr McDermott is very well and I think improving in health every day since coming to these parts. I appreciate very much his help and companionship. His coming has made Hammond Island a reality and last week the boys who had been at the presbytery were transferred across. Fr McDermott is staying there most of the time but we occasionally change places.

I celebrated the first Mass on Hammond Island on Ascension Thursday when the Sisters and the girls from the orphanage also some people from the town were present. We had a great day. Poultry rearing, agriculture and fishing are the principal pursuits which are now in operation there. Of course there is school too every day for the small boys. We hope that soon we can make it attractive enough to win some of the Torres Strait Islanders. I do wish you would hurry up and come to visit some of these Islands Father. In itself it is a big enough Mission for three or four priests. To commence it we want a fair size boat and another priest. One priest for Thursday Island, one for Hammond Island, and one for visiting the Torres Strait Islands. How about Brother J. Flynn after his ordination? We can fit him into one of the positions very well. Am I asking too much if I mention the need for a Brother. Even now we could well do with one for the work connected with our small launch and preparatory work on our Hammond Island Mission.

If we get a big boat, as we hope to shortly, a Brother is almost essential. I think a man like Bro Barker would fit right into this work.

It is quite true Father there is work for all three and for more than three up here. There are Islands all the way between here and New Guinea coast now visited by the Church of England. There are a few Catholics scattered on a few of these Islands. Saibai Island, one of the biggest, gave me a great reception when I visited there some time ago and they would be easy to land. They have called here several times since. I wish and hope you will soon spare the time to come and have a good look at some of these places. We can raise a boat for the occasion. But come before the North West winds time which commences about the end of November.

Prospects have been considerably brightened in these parts recently because of a new patch of pearl shell found by the Japanese divers. This patch is supposed to extend about 20 miles in length and will mean a little revival for



Above: Photo was taken in 1929. It shows the present convent and presbytery as they were at that time.



Left: A view of the orphanage taken from behind where the present convent stands.

Below: Fr. Doyle (L) and Fr. McDermott (R) with a visiting priest in 1930's



things in T.I. I must look for more Jap. converts!!

With best wishes Father and asking the help of your prayers for our work
John Doyle M.S.C."

Thursday Island 29.8.1929

"Would it be possible for you to let one of the Mission Fathers come, between now and November and conduct a mission for us? Though we would not be able to do much in the monetary assistance we could certainly defray at least half the expenses incurred. A Mission here is needed not only for the help of faith and fervour of our own people but also to assist in implanting the faith in many other lives.

If you could spare a priest, for example Fr. Goodman who as well as his mission could conduct a lantern slide lecture on a subject like Lourdes, I consider untold good would be done. Many people here have never travelled beyond the Island. It will greatly benefit the work Fr McDermott and myself are trying to do."

Thursday Island 13.12.1929

"Fr. McDermott is busy this week supervising the construction of a Church on Hammond Island. It will be something to have the Church.

You will be interested, as I was, to learn that three Islands are losing their teachers this year. They are Mr and Mrs Miller from Mabuiag, Mrs Zahl from Badu, you will remember the old white haired lady, and a Mrs Smallwood from Yorke Island. We did not visit the latter which is near Darnley and has a population of about 250. I suppose it is for the Queensland Education Department to supply teachers. if we cannot."

Thursday Island 28.2.1930

Because of lack of funds and of men, our mission work here often appears to me to be very confined and limited when one considers, as you know, the many islands and people close by who are untouched by Catholic influence. If we were starting or could start on these people, life here would be full of interest. But if in the future there appeared little or no hope of starting a mission amongst these islanders then, I think, any priest would leave here with but little sorrow. Truly the Japanese here are great fellows, but again they are in town only for a few months of the year. Thursday Island can scarcely be called a mission. The missions are all around Thursday Island which is itself merely a centre."

In 1930 Fr Doyle was sent to a new mission at Samarai. He was recalled to Thursday Island after a couple of months. In 1932 there was talk of sending Fr McDermott to Samarai. He remained on Hammond. In 1957 Fr John Doyle was ordained Bishop of Samarai.

Thursday Island 19.9.31

"I have spent one week away visiting some of the Torres Strait Islands. I went to Naghir Island where we have some Catholics - four women and five children and two men (Mills family). There is a very small population beyond these people on this island. Also I visited an island called Yam. Three old Manila men came to Mass on this island but their descendants together with some other Catholics have long since gone over to the Church of England as this Mission has been visiting these places for many years. Of course my trip was necessarily hurried as we have no shelters on any of these islands but the hospitality of the ground in a native's hut. The wind was good for sailing our boat, in fact a little too strong to make the sailing pleasant though it assured us of speed. The only way to make a success of the extra island work, if we are going to take it on, is to have a man who will spend all his time on and around these islands.

I am not free to be away from the Island for long and then while I am here there is not work for two of us but we are scratching to live on the few shillings that come in. Hammond Is. is growing and promises to be a good thing. Fr. McDermott is happy there and spends most of his time on that work."

J. Doyle M.S.C.

Extract from letter from Fr. McDermott

Thursday Island 7.1.1932

"His Lordship after his first visit to Hammond Is. Mission told me that I must stay on there because a good beginning has been made and Hammond has, in his eyes, great possibilities.

Hammond Is. Mission has had plenty of difficulties already and will have troubles and trials for years to come. The life on Hammond is not one of luxury and you will find very few priests who will be content with it. Thank God, we have now a respectable home for the priest but there is a great deal of building and hard work ahead - school, new church, convent and orphanage as well as a new boys' house to take the place of the present shanty which may collapse during this N.W. monsoon. The folk on the Mission are half-castes - a crowd that not everyone can understand and handle happily. The administration too requires a good knowledge of Government Aboriginal law and the man in charge must be one who is not easily intimidated by Govt. officials; one who knows his position and will stick to it. The efficient running of the Mission can only be brought about by experience. For these and other reasons changes do not work out for the good of the Mission. I may not be the ideal man for Hammond but I certainly know more about it than about Samarai.

I think, Father, that what I have written in confidence to you will be enough for you to determine the best use you can make of me. Briefly the position is: I am happy in my work here and content to remain but if my services are required elsewhere I will go willingly.

The three years of hard work and more or less hard living at Hammond Is. have left me rather tired and the Bishop has told me that I can go for a few

months' holiday after Easter by which time the school should be completed, the gardens planted and the young French priest sufficiently grounded in English to take my place during my absence. A short spell early this year will fit me, D.V. for many more years of work in these parts whereas if I wait for another year or two my constitution may be undermined so as to render me unfit for further use. His Lordship told me to ask your approval for the holiday and I trust that you will grant it. I am not a physical wreck so you may be able to make some use of me during my spell.

Father Doyle and Father Finch are both very well and Br Barrett is strong and happy in his work. He likes Hammond Is. very much and though not an ideal helper is still of great assistance. Just now Mother Albert is here indicating by her example the correct decorum nuns should observe. She has been much better in her attitude to Hammond Island than the most optimistic expected and we hope to have a convent at Hammond in the near future.

O. McDermott M.S.C."

Thursday Island 11.5.1932

"Father Finch will speak to you of what I consider with him an incomparably better proposition for a Mission field for the Australian Province. It is the Torres Straits which link right up with the Western side of Papua. This is an old proposition which I have put forward before but which I am afraid has never been considered seriously. There is an outlet here in the West of Papua and the Torres Straits which will take all the Australian Missionaries for a very long time. In the West of Papua there is only a very little Missionary opposition by native representatives of the London Mission Society. Many Torres Straits people want us, as well as a few scattered Catholics already in the district. A good centre for this work is already established around Thursday and Hammond Islands. A boat sufficient for the beginning, is already ours. No great funds would be required. If this Mission was put under the Australian Province sufficient money to begin can be obtained from the Australian Branch of the Propagation of the Faith. Four priests could be placed any day on the work and sufficient work awaits all those who will follow."

J. Doyle

Extract of letter to Fr Doyle from Provincial in Sydney - 23.6.1932

"Father McDermott is here and is gradually picking up. He is asking for a lay-brother to replace Br. Barrett and suggests Bro. Greenfield who is most enthusiastic about going to the Missions. Before making any change I should like to hear from yourself as Superior and must consult His Lordship Bishop de BoisMENU. The extension of Father McDermott's holiday is a good thing for he may not have a chance for a long time."

Extract from letter to Father Provincial from Fr. Doyle

Thursday Island 2.7.32

Thanks for yours of the 21st June. In regard to the Lay Brother I wish we could get one who could be of some help in the school at Hammond Is. It appears because of the shortage of funds and of helpers that Fr. McDermott and myself will be the only two priests here for some time. Yet there is a duty on us to make at least occasional visits to the other islands where we have some scattered Catholics and also across to Daru where there is quite a little congregation of our own people with a number of children. When these are visited somebody responsible must be left at Hammond Island. A Brother who could carry on a bit of school work and look after things in general. Unfortunately Brother Barrett is not the best for this kind of work though he is very willing at all times to do his best. He would be an excellent man in his right sphere but I don't think that this is the best place for him as things are just at present.

Bro. Greenfield, I imagine would be good for outdoor works. Would he also be a help for the school?

I certainly think that he would be much more suitable than Bro. Barrett.

I would like to add that I recently had a visit from a European, Mr. Beach, from Daru. He is a Catholic and is very disappointed that the Mission is not spreading out in his direction. There are splendid opportunities for much work to be done amongst some Catholics and many who are still Pagan. I do sincerely wish that the Province could do something to help us spread where we are being continually invited. Last week, a native came from Murray Island in the Torres Straits, a distance of about 90 miles to receive instruction and be baptised. There are many more waiting.

Jack Doyle, M.S.C."

Thursday Island 22.11.32

"At Hammond a new school is just about completed and a Church is being erected on Horn Island which is quite close to Thursday Island. There has been no church at Horn Island previously but as about thirty Catholics live there a Church is called for. Of course these schools and churches are not of the red-brick type as one sees South but they have the name of School and Church and serve the purpose well.

Jack Doyle M.S.C."

Thursday Island 24.2.1934

"Thanks for your letter notifying us of the acceptance of Bros Greenfield and Barrett for Renewal and Final Vows. Bro Greenfield is due for Renewal on the 26th and Bro Barrett for Finals on 19th March. They were very pleased to receive word that they were accepted and wish to thank you for your wishes and prayers for them.

I have recently made a visit to several of the Torres Strait Islands. It was

at the request of the people themselves, on these islands. I can only repeat what I have already said so often, that the big majority of Torres Strait people are crying out for us. It is a mystery to me why they are neglected for so long. I baptised 14 on Darnley Island during my ten days visit. If I could remain a short time and erect a Church there I know 100 who would soon be received into the Church and there would be soon many more following. That is on only one island. There are many more islands like that. Of course it means a third priest up here to take on this work. Also some grant to assist the continuance of the work. During Fr. McDermott's absence, if I am here alone, even our Catholic people on the islands will be deprived of a visit from a priest.

In my opinion this work should not be put off indefinitely. It has been put off too long and now we have got, not only those who wish to be baptised, but some already baptised on various islands. The Church of England Mission is working continuously throughout the Torres Strait.

I know that you have plenty of work for all the Fathers but wish also that something could be done for the work in Torres Strait, and a priest, during Fr. McDermott's absence would be very welcome.

Hoping Fr. McDermott will make a quick recovery and be able to return after a few months. The Brothers at Hammond Island keep very well.

With every best wish Father and asking for a remembrance in your Mass for the work here.

J. Doyle, M.S.C."

**Letter to Father Provincial and Reverend Fathers Consultors
from Fr. Doyle - 9.6.1935**

"Though I am sure you are all aware of the position of the Mission at Thursday Island I respectfully submit the few following particulars for your consideration.

Thursday Island with a total population of about 1600, composed mostly of coloured people representing Japanese, Malays, Filipinos, Chinese and a large number of half-breeds of these nations. The Catholic population at present numbers about 320 and consists almost wholly of representatives of the people mentioned. Attending the school are about 120 children including the orphan girls (about 30) cared for by the Sisters. The Government gives a subsidy to the Sisters for 25 orphan girls at the rate of 10/- per week per girl. This grant is paid by the Government to the Sisters direct. By means of this Government Grant £12/10/- per week, their sole income, the Sisters, seven in number, support themselves and over 30 orphan girls ranging from about 3 to 18 years of age. In consideration of this Government Grant and with the addition of the small sum of £5 per month paid by the resident priest at Thursday Island the Sisters supply his meals do his laundry as well as a good

deal of laundry and other support for the priest and two Brothers at Hammond Island. Also for the same funds and with no additional expense to the Mission the Sisters wish at once to build a Convent at Hammond Island and to keep two extra Sisters there for school work commencing next year. Considering all these good works carried on by the Sisters with their Government Grant I fail to see that the position would be at all improved by having the Government grant paid to any other than it is at present.

Income received direct by the priests consists of:

1. Church collections at Thursday Island about 25/- per week.
2. Fetes etc. about £200 per year (maximum)
3. Government Grant Hammond Island £100 per year
4. Mass stipends for two priests average £70 per year

No other grant from any source is received by us at Thursday Island. One can easily imagine there is little balance from our income when from this total sum there is deducted

1. Support of the priest and two Brothers at Hammond Island
2. Support of about 12 orphan boys at Hammond Is.
3. £5 per month to Sisters at Thursday Island.
4. Clothing for two priests and two Brothers and orphan boys
5. Altar requisites, building maintenance, launch expenses between Thursday and Hammond Islands and occasional longer boat trips to Torres Straits Islands.

In regard to these other Torres Straits islands quite a lot of Mission work is waiting and has been waiting since I first went to Thursday Island 8 years ago. Simply the lack of means and men have prevented the progress of the work. In spite of this lack a beginning has been made on three islands where natives have been received into the Church. Surely we are not going to go back on what we have already commenced. The natives made a sacrifice in becoming Catholics and remaining firm in spite of strong Anglican opposition. Even without extra men and means which are necessary for progress the work begun must be continued. Hammond Island is a growing and important work, for both Church and State. From the church point of view it is evident how important it is. From the State point of view I would refer to the Home Secretary for Queensland (Mr. Hanlon's) report published in Queensland papers after his visit to the island last year. Rev. Fr. McDermott has had the interest of the island at heart since its foundation and I am sure his interest is still there.

Thursday Island always needs a priest and at least one who can take an interest in a cosmopolitan race. It may not be what is called a very active work on Thursday Island since it is a small island and scope is limited. Yet the people are there in numbers above enumerated and I will refer again to the 120 Catholic children at the Convent School.



*Left: Convent Hammond Island
1937*

Below: Old School 1937



*Above: Presbytery Hammond,
started September 1931*



Above: Bro Barrett and friends



Above: New School 1956

Right: Old Church 1958



With these remarks Reverend Fathers you have a good idea of the work being done and awaiting accomplishment in the Torres Straits.

For my part I am pleased to remain even if no improvement was made since there are many interests which would appeal to any Missionary minded priest.

It is the only Catholic Mission north of Cooktown, the only one East of Bathurst Island.

The work awaits immediate development in the Torres Straits islands amongst a good class of native numbering nearly 5000. But before any marked progress can be made an extra priest and a subsidy is required.

If the Province took charge of the work there seems no reason why this district could not be developed, as Bathurst Island has been, by support from the Australian Branch of Propagation of the Faith. That support, without calling on the Province at all, would help much in development of the work.

As long as Thursday Island remains part of the Yule Island mission so does it remain outside the scope of the Australian Prop. de Fide and no help will be forthcoming.

Therefore I would ask that the transference of this Mission to the Australian Province be expedited and I am sure much progress will be made without any extra financial cost to the Province.

J. Doyle M.S.C."

Thursday Island 30.6.1936

"We still have Bro Greenfield who is helping to finish off a little work before returning South. He appreciates missing the cold winter which he would experience were he to go down at present. I will let you know when he is leaving; probably about the end of July, if you are agreeable to that. His Lordship the Bishop has written his consent for Bro Greenfield to go.

The Sisters are doing very well at Hammond Island and recently had a visit from Mother Josepha, from Kensington, who expressed her pleasure in her visitation.

Fr. McDermott, Bro Barrett and myself are very well and we unite in conveying our best wishes to you.

J. Doyle, M.S.C."

Thursday Island 28.12.1937

"I received your letter yesterday afternoon and am hurrying now to catch the mail going South today. The news conveyed to me by your letter was the greatest shock ever I have received. A real stunner."

Fr J Doyle was transferred to be Rector at Downlands College, Toowoomba.

War Years

In December 1941 when Japan entered the war and pushed towards Australia, Thursday Island, Hammond Island and Horn Island were evacuated. Horn Island was bombed 10 times and a Japanese plane was shot down over Hammond. An Allied plane also crashed into the water near Hammond. Two men died.

Fr. Doody wrote 6th February, 1942:

"All the sisters and children have gone down to Brisbane (Cooyar, near Toowoomba), from T.I., and all the women and children from Hammond have gone with them. As there were over ninety of them I thought it best to send Fr. Flynn along with them to help them when they get to Brisbane and to try to keep them together. Hammond Is has been practically closed up - there are still about a dozen boys (men) over there, but as they are nearly all working here in T.I. during the day I thought Fr. Flynn would be of much more use to the women and children of Hammond - there are nearly eighty of them gone south - than to the few boys left behind. I told Bill to see the Acting Director of Natives as soon as he got to Brisbane, and to let me know what arrangements were being made. The Sisters and girls are of course subsidized by the above mentioned Director or his department so they will be well cared for. The women and children all have income from one source or another, so that once they settle down under Government supervision I am hoping that they will be able to carry on just as they did at Hammond. With Fr. Flynn as Superintendent, they should be no trouble to the Government or to themselves.

I have kept Bro Carter back for the time being, hoping to be able to look after Hammond. As things settle down here, and news from Fr. Flynn becomes definite, I will probably send Bro down to join him if necessary or helpful, as there's not much he can do up here - except cook for me. and that is hardly a full time job. Besides it is three and a half years since he had a holiday, so if Fr. Flynn and the Sisters start a mission centre and school down south, he would be more useful down there than here, and could have the change from the tropics that everyone needs from time to time.

So for myself - of course I will stop here until the Japs or the military chase me out - if ever. It's hard to say what will happen here, so we just have to wait. As it is only the good that die young, as they say, I haven't much hope of an early and easy trip to Heaven, but at least I may be able to help others get there. Anyway I will do my best."

February 27th, 1942.

"Dear Father Kerrin,

I wrote to you three weeks ago but owing to rather an unusual mix up in the mails, I think you would have hardly received it until a few days ago. In the meantime things are changing up here.

It seems more than possible that all civilians will be evacuated from here

sooner or later. I do not know what I will do in that eventuality. There are of course some Catholic soldiers up here, and I would like to stay on for their sakes. However there are two Military Chaplains up here already, and another one might be less than welcome. In the meantime of course I cannot do much except wait."

**Extract from letter to Fr Doody from the Provincial Priest in Sydney
March 5th, 1942.**

"To come to the main point of your letter, I wholeheartedly agree with your decision to remain at Thursday Island, whilst the civilians are still there. This is surely your duty, difficult though it be, as you say. But then! What if the civilians are evacuated? You mention you would like to stay on with the Catholic soldiers, but you may not be welcome. I would suggest that in the event of the civilians being evacuated that you offer your services to the Military as a Chaplain, and then if a negative is given to your offer then make your way southwards. Later on another Military Chaplain may be required. I am not familiar with the situation there and so I am not in a position to give definite advice or instructions. I know you will do what you think is your duty and what is best."

After the War

Extract from letter from G. Abbott, M.S.C. 29.3.1946

"The Island is no longer under Military control and civilians are free to return. A few came back on the "Alagna" the other day, and about forty including a few women and children are expected on the "Wandana" about the middle of April. The question of Sisters returning here will arise next, and I leave the whole matter to you. A good deal of work will have to be done in an around the Convent, and under existing conditions, I don't know who is going to do it."

Extracts from letters from Fr. McDermott

Thursday Island 18th March, 1948

"Dear Father Provincial,

I have been expecting a reply to my letter of early Feb. re the possibility of getting another Brother for Hammond Is. either to work with Bro Barrett or to replace him. We urgently need a Brother capable of undertaking the primary school, with the assistance, if necessary of the Q'land Correspondence Courses which are supplied free to Missions. A second priest could fill the bill but he would have to be engaged on other jobs from time to time, which would not be 100% satisfactory for the school. I receive many enquiries re the Hammond school from the Government officials and from the coloured folk and the only answer that I can give is that I am waiting news from South.

Father Kerrins wrote to tell me that Father Dixon would probably come to T.I. He should be a very good man for this place; he has talents and is gifted with good health and plenty of energy. Also, he has developed into quite a handy man. an asset in these parts."

Thursday Island 12th February 1948

"Briefly the position is: If I am to go on to Darwin Thursday Is will need two priests, one experienced, and if we are to make anything of Hammond Is a lay brother capable of teaching primary school is required immediately. To ask one priest to carry on is practically to shelve the work and neglect the opportunities offering in Torres Strait. I am convinced that Hammond Is has a future - which admittedly is all before it - but a future that depends on its having a priest and a capable Brother. The Hammond Is. priest could visit the Catholics on Naghir, Nepean and other islands, the Brother meanwhile carrying on at the Mission. Had we a school at Hammond I could have a number of families there now but I do not think it fair to invite newcomers to the Mission until we can provide some stability, control and educational facilities. Thursday Island was the first M.S.C. Mission in Australia (1884) but in all its long history it does not appear to have enlisted much sympathy. The French were content to make it a port of call en route to Papua and our Province has not made the best of the opportunities for Mission work it offers.

Apart from the population of Thursday Island our district embraces 6000 islanders who, through force of circumstances, are 99% Anglicans. At present many of these 6000 are dissatisfied with their religious position and I think a wonderful opportunity for missionary effort is at hand. However one priest cannot get anywhere. T.I. is the centre of Torres Strait and a priest should always be at hand before of accidents, administration etc. We have two Catholic islands, apart from Hammond and T.I., but I have not been able to visit them since my arrival here. The only transport available would have meant a prolonged absence from home. I feel rather ashamed of my apparent neglect but can do nothing about it.

Hence I earnestly request you to give the question of staff for Torres Strait your serious consideration. Two priests and a Brother who could teach school under the Queensland Correspondence system are the immediate requirements if we are to take mission work in these parts seriously. One priest alone can do merely a holding job and he will be gradually losing his grip.

When I consented to return and endeavour to re-establish our mission it was with the understanding that another priest would arrive early this year to assist me. The non-arrival of the promised assistant together with my appointment as Superior has changed the complexion of things. Plans must remain in the box until the question of staff clears. I was rather disappointed at not being able to start school at Hammond at the commencement of the school year.



The first families at Hammond. The Kanaks and the Sabatinos. Joseph Kanak and his wife Raphaela are the two people in front row holding children. Nicholas Sabatino is in second row with hat on. His wife, Joanna, is at end of front row near Mrs. Kanak.



The Sebasios. Mr. Sebasio's wife Delasa, is seated on his right and her sister on his left.



Francis Dorante and his wife Mary. Francis was Fr. Doyle's first boy. Mary (now deceased) was a woman of great faith and an inspiration to all



*Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart who served in the 1920's and 1930's
BACK (L to R): Sr M. De Pazzi, Sr M. Editha, Sr M. Osmund, Sr M. Mark,
Sr M. Cyril, Sr M. Assumpta
FRONT (L to R): Sr M. Adrian, Rev M. M. Agatha, Rev. M. M. Albert,
Rev. M. M. Veronica*

Father Kerrins informed me that Fr. Dixon and Fr. Askew were aspirants to the job of parish priest of T.I. My recent letter to him gave my reasons for preferring Fr Dixon who, by the way, would be glad of a change. He has been six years at Palm Is. I do not mind waiting here till another priest arrives and becomes somewhat used to the work."

Thursday Island 24.3.1949

"Fr. Power blew in un-announced on the 10th, the day before Doody left and was in time for a parish welcome which co-incided with Gerry's send-off. The parishioners gave Gerry a few quid to help him on his way. We didn't present the usual wallet but poked the notes into a big envelope. I advised the collector not to waste cash on a wallet as Gerry already had one, which was not altogether correct. Gerry got away on the Elsanna which arrived in Brisbane yesterday, two days behind schedule. Power is shaping well and I feel he will be successful though the assignment is rather a tough one for a new chum. It is not quite the same as in Doyle's day because then there were overseas ships calling here and very often priests were among the passengers. Now no such boats call and the chances of a visiting priest are very meagre. Power is very keen on being all things to all men and this should stand to him in T.I.'s mixed community. He says he is fairly handy with tools; I hope to try him out next week if the rain gives us a chance to do some badly needed repairs to the presbytery. It has been raining since Power arrived and I have not been able to show him around as much as I would like, I hope to take him out to the islands before I go away.

Barrett was pleased to get your letter. He is very well as is also Howley. Sometimes when the fish refuse to bite or things are not so hot John remembers that he should have a retreat and says he is going to ask to go South. When the fish play the game again John forgets the south and everything is O.K. The fish are biting well at the moment.

Howley is doing good work in the school and by living in peace with John is atoning for past misdeeds and storing up treasures where there are no moths. John, of course, continues to think that his coming here was a mistake when there is such a capable bloke as Bob Howley on the horizon. "Bob is a very handy man; he can fix electric lights.

O. McDermott, M.S.C."

Hammond Island Church Built 1952 - 1954 by Father Dixon and Parishioners

Thursday Island, 21st June, 1954.

I arrived at Thursday Is last Friday after a pleasant trip from Sydney to find Fr Raymond and the Sisters well and all glad to welcome me. I am settling in quietly and tomorrow I will renew acquaintance with Hammond Is. Fr Raymond has done a good job looking after both islands since Fr Dixon left especially as Hammond has been without Sisters all this year and he has had

to look after the school there. We hope to have Sister Anastasia back from sick leave in Sydney shortly and then the Sisters will return to Hammond. Francis Dorante and his wife have been of the greatest assistance to Fr Raymond, helping him particularly in the school and in the church.

Con O'Leary has gone South with his family to be present at Kevin's Profession at Mittagong on July 2nd or 4th. Con was very opposed to Kevin's going to the Brothers but is now happy about the Profession and left here without leave because he said nobody was going to keep him away from Kevin on his Profession day. You may meet him somewhere in the south.

O. McDermott. M.S.C."

Thursday Island 20.1.1955

"Fr. Raymond is handicapped in not having any flair for outside work and cannot direct any big or complicated building or repair project. I had hopes of a new school for H.I. this year. Francis Dorante is a real treasure; he can turn his hand to anything but cannot get as much work out of the men as Fr. Dixon or I could."

O. McDermott M.S.C.

Thursday Island 28.2.1955

"Fr. Raymond leaves T.I. tomorrow. He intended leaving last Friday but the strike of plane pilots deprived us of our usual plane. Fr. Raymond has done a good job here and is popular with all, except some of the Sisters in whose eyes he can do nothing right. I do not think the Sisters have been altogether fair to Fr. Raymond. I went through what he has been experiencing 25 yrs ago here and later on in Port Moresby. "Curates are meant to be contradicted" seems a working axiom amongst too many O.L.S.H. I hope that Fr Raymond will get a better spin from the Sisters in Papua. Fr Raymond is not over-strong and recently has been troubled by pains in the chest; an old complaint, I understand, that baffled the medicos in Melbourne during his scholasticate. A good check up would be advisable before he leaves for E.P.

The T.I. Church has just been painted interiorly; the first time in 50 yrs for the walls which previously were covered with hessian, Sydney newspapers of 1901 vintage stencilled over very effectively. The seats have been polished and the whole church looks bright and clean. The work cost me a little over £200. Because someone thought that tie-beams spoil the appearance of the church and removed them I have quite a problem to solve. The walls are falling outwards at the wall-plates - just a matter of inches but enough to cause anxiety for the roof and the safety of the building. I have wire ropes and a 3/4" rod ready to install; gradual tightening of these will I hope restore the walls to original positions.

We are gradually adding the finishing touches - and they are many - to the H.I. church which has yet to be officially opened. A handy man would be a

great blessing here. There is over 6 months repair work at T.I. alone and I cannot afford wages of £2.10.0 to £3 a day. Wages alone for painting the Church amounted to £168.

O. McDermott, M.S.C."

Thursday Island, 16th January, 1956.

The years are beginning to take their toll of my energies and I have to limit my activities to my strength. I cannot now do the manual work, carpentry etc that filled so big a place in my earlier priestly years. The usual works of the ministry are easily within my reach, especially in a quiet place such as T.I. If I could get a Brother here for about 3 months I would be happy. Mr. O'Leary has obtained £2000 for a new school at Hammond but Fr Collins is not versed in the art of building and labour on the Mission is scarce because the able-bodied men must work full time in outside jobs to maintain their families. Francis Dorante is employed full time on the Mission and he has 100 and 1 calls on his abilities. I heard that Bro Carter is on holidays. He would be useful here for a few months if he can be spared from the Territory. He is getting up in years and has slowed down considerably but he would be handy in directing building operations and in doing the numerous odd jobs that require attention at T.I. and at Hammond. I might take this matter up with Fr Copas because I feel that if I take over the supervision of the new school building I may be putting too much of a strain on my health.

Today we received news that the two candidates presented by our convent school - Margaret O'Leary and Patricia Tracey - passed the Scholarship exam. Con O'Leary is out of hospital and convalescing in Brisbane but will not resume duties till May.

O. McDermott, M.S.C."

Thursday Island 20th March, 1956.

"Both Fr Collins and I are well and in good spirits. I was not the best towards the end of the Bishop's visit; the ulcer tended to be troublesome but calmed down shortly after his Lordship's departure. His visit didn't worry me though my sense of hospitality prompted me to disregard my diet routine. The Bishop suggested that I go South for a good holiday; I told him I appreciated the kindly gesture but didn't feel the need of a holiday at this stage. Moreover, I did not feel that I should be away at this period of the year when the Hammond Is men are home on holidays and matters can arise that I am in a better position to handle than is Fr Collins. Fortunately, the holiday season has been very quiet and we have been able to get a fair amount of work done by the boys. We are preparing to build a new school of two class-rooms at Hammond - cement walls and fibrolite roof with plenty of louvres. Mr O'Leary has obtained a grant of £2250 for the job.

O. Mc Dermott, M.S.C."

Thursday Island 12/11/56

"Would you please obtain for me an illuminated copy of the Pope's Blessing for Francis Dorante, Mary Dorante and their family. Francis and Mary will, D.V., celebrate the Silver Jubilee of their marriage on Feb. 3rd 1957, and would greatly appreciate the Papal Blessing for the occasion.

O. McDermott, M.S.C."

Thursday Island 1/12/1958

"Life goes along quietly in these parts and both Fr Collins and I are well. Father has settled down to life at Hammond after his holiday; I have given him a free hand there and he appears more content. Both of us find plenty to occupy us; when the ministry is slack there are plenty of repair and maintenance jobs to keep us busy. The Bishop has suggested sending us Bro Carter to help us catch up with the lag in maintenance and I have agreed to the suggestion even though Bro is no longer very active. Skilled labour is scarce and very costly; we have to depend on semi-skilled help which needs supervision. I have just received a bill for £117 for erecting fibro guttering around T.I. convent.

O. McDermott, M.S.C."

Thursday Island, 23.3.1959

"Fr Collins and I get on very well together and I will be sorry to see him go. Still, all things considered, I think a transfer will be in his best interests as a priest. Fr Docherty will be very welcome and I feel that his presence at Hammond will mean very much to that Mission and usher in an era of renewed spiritual and temporal advancement. He is a priest with many talents and varied interests who will soon win the respect and affection of the Hammond Is people and make himself at home with them.

O. McDermott, M.S.C."

Thursday Island, 10.8.1959

"Many would give me the honour of founding Hammond Is Mission and I carry with me happy memories of my ministry in Papua, Palm Is, Northern Territory and - Melbourne. "Man of 21" - Pioneers and Founders".

Fr. Collins departure and Fr Docherty's rheumatism have added much to my duties and I seem to be prospering on the extra activity. Fr Docherty spends practically all his time at Hammond, coming to town only for alternate Sundays. I do all the shopping and business for Hammond. Recently I had two trips to Naghir Is. I would have liked to send Fr Docherty but he is too clumsy now for boat work.

O. McDermott, M.S.C."

Thursday Island, 4.4.1960

"Father Docherty and I are both keeping well but beginning to feel our years and the toll that 30 years in the Tropics take of even the toughest. Fr Docherty

is very happy at Hammond Is but not enamoured of T.I. He will have the care of both places whilst I am on holidays and will be happy to have me home again. My absence will put a heavy burden on him, especially the travelling between Masses on Sundays, but he should manage it.

O. McDermott, M.S.C."

Thursday Island, 21.5.1962

"Since I last wrote to you Bishop O'Loughlin asked me if I would be willing to make way for Fr. Cosgrove at Thursday Is. and accept the care of Darwin's building activities during the Bishop's visit to Rome for the Council. The Bishop also suggested that he might ask me to act as V.G. during his absence. I told His Lordship that I was quite willing to meet his wishes but would like to remain here till the end of the financial year to make the Annual Reports concerning Hammond Island to the Director of Native Affairs, likewise the financial and statistical reports that the Bishop requires. This would give Fr Cosgrove a new year to start with and save him the concentrated efforts that annual reports demand.

I have spent nearly 20 years all told in this area and think that a change might be for my own good and for the betterment of the parish. The Bishop has not replied to my letter; there may be something in tonight's mail.

O. McDermott, M.S.C."

Extract from letter from J. Cosgrove M.S.C.

Thursday Island 22.2.1965

"Things have been a little difficult here of late. I did not think the effect of all the educational changes would reach Thursday Island as effectively as it has done.

With the departure of our local Sister for the south I tried to get help locally even offering to pay a lay teacher. However I was unsuccessful. So we were forced to bring the Sisters over from Hammond Island. This did not entirely solve the problem as the Sister from there quickly realised that she could not manage all the grades in her charge so we had no alternative but to send grade 7 to the state primary school. This went very much against the grain but had to be done. Now I have to put them on my list for catechism once each week. Keeping the faith is hard enough under the best of circumstances here so I hope the future does not turn out too badly.

Then poor Father Docherty had to face his problem. He showed much courage. He is keeping his school going. He is doing some teaching himself and has engaged the help of two of the island girls.

I was over at Hammond on Sunday. R.J.D. is living a pretty lonely life. In the presbytery by himself. I could not help but admire his brightness and

courage. Still I think he is feeling the strain a bit as may be judged from his letter to me last week; I am enclosing it.

So life goes on. One day I might learn to laugh. I hope you can in the midst of all your cares.

J. Cosgrove, M.S.C."

Transition from Missionaries of the Sacred Heart to Cairns Diocesan Priests

Thursday Island 30.5.67

Dear Father McMahon,

Father McDermott has sent me a very useful list of items to send to Darwin, and I am now combing through for more. Thanks for your letter and word to Bishop Cahill. He already knows what is here. Father McSweeney's mail has started to arrive. I am sweating on the bookkeeping and reports - quite a grim time.

I am grateful for your suggestion that I take a holiday. The uncertainty and embarrassment of the last two years has made for a lot of nervous strain. I need a holiday, and I would be grateful for a meaningful one. You did not refer to my proposal to work in the School of Pacific Studies. But since you previously favoured the idea, I have ventured to write to Dr Stanner on the chance of the offer being renewed. In the event that it is, I would like to take my holiday over on the Trobriands while they are less expensively distant, and there get edited about four hundred pages of single spaced typing. This would not take long as the subject matter is full of lively interest for them, and we could cover possibly up to fifty pages a day. But it would be rewarding, possibly beyond all expectations. I have written provisionally to Bishop Doyle soliciting his permission and hospitality.

Last week and this week school still goes on, but the nuns are in Brisbane seeing Mother General, and Sister Killian going on to Sydney. She reached Brisbane safely, so she should see it through to Sydney.

B. Baldwin M.S.C."

Thursday Island 27.6.67

The Director
Department of Aboriginal & Island Affairs
Brisbane.

Dear Sir,

The main effort during the past year has been the education of the Hammond Island children, forty four of whom cross to Thursday Island for schooling. Owing to sickness of two of the nuns and the inability of the Order to replace them, the fifth, sixth and seventh classes had to be directed to the

state school, only the first four primary grades being kept on.

The Hammond Islanders are themselves preparing to carry the responsibility of maintaining, paying off, and insuring the replacement of the school ferry. It has given perfect service, and is fostering a particularly good school attendance.

The well for the community water supply met bedrock at twelve feet. This is decomposing granite, and will have to be loosened with explosive along a lateral trench to free the water. The telephone waits on the Post Master General's Department. A lawn of two or more acres, mostly Townsville lucern was carefully cultivated during the growing season. An experiment with 100 day old chickens was carried successfully to the half grown stage only to succumb to hawks, goannas and dogs, against which security must be complete enclosure. Four new homes are being built, two nearing completion. Much greater quantities of sea food were marketed this year. There is full employment. A dance orchestra is developing and there is a dance or social every two weeks. The tone of the community is self reliant and vigorous.

The financial statement is enclosed.

Thanking you for your kindness and help with the ferry, the utility and the other things, and regretful that our association now terminates.

M. McSweeney"

**Extract from N.Q. Register 15/8/59
by Gerald Fetherstun**

"The Islanders on the islands off the northern tip of Queensland have a name for Father Thomas Dixon: "Father Tom - the church builder".

Father Dixon's eight brothers and sisters will tell you that he is a stubborn man.

They will tell you how, when he was nine, he discovered he had a vocation - a vocation to be a missionary.

He never wavered from that ambition and when he was 12 he entered the seminary of the Sacred Heart.

Twelve long years later Thomas Dixon was ordained, but his boyhood dream was still before him.

The young priest was sent to the loneliness of the steamy, jungle-clad islands of Torres Strait.

Church Builder

It was on Hammond Island three miles from Thursday Island, that the natives first dubbed Father Dixon the "church builder".

HOW DO YOU GET TO HAMMOND?

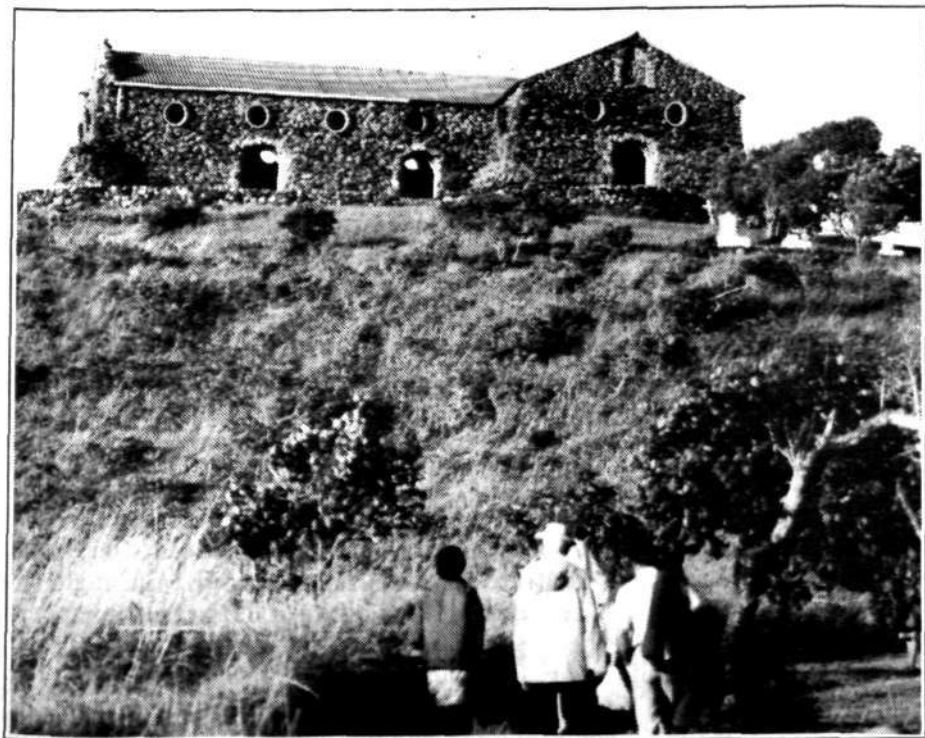
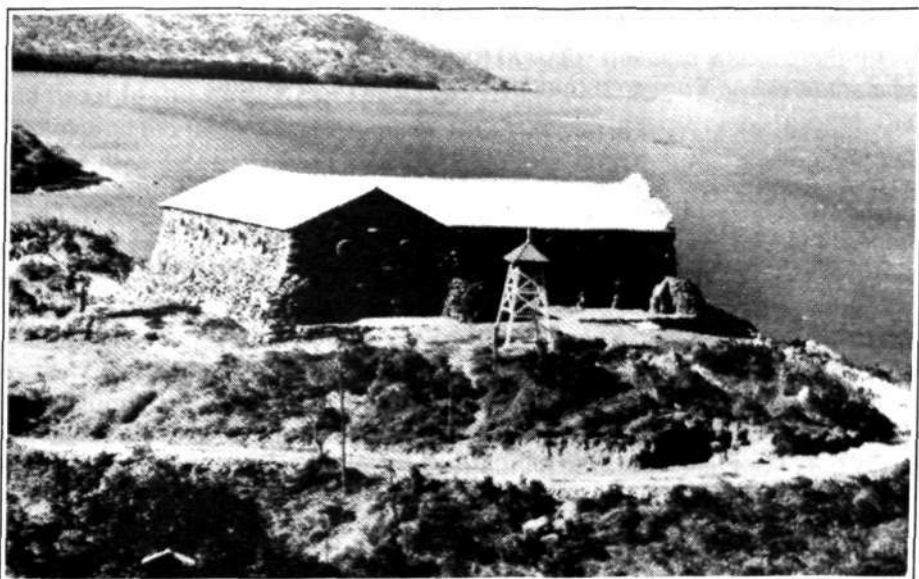


If you're a student you're able to take the barge to and from Hammond Island every day as the snap shows. These children are happy to be underway and homeward bound after the day's school.

The trip is only a short one and a very pleasant one when the weather is fine and the sea is calm, but if it's wet and rough and windy it's a different matter.

If you're an adult who lives on Hammond you possibly have a dinghy of your own - there are about thirty on the Island. If you haven't one, then someone is sure to give you a lift!





He chose the tallest hill on the island as the site for his church.

But there was a problem - 60,000 rocks weighing a total of 2000 tons had to be smashed and dragged hundreds of yards up that hill.

Father Dixon, his hands torn raw and his face burnt almost black, worked beside his small band of natives.

Once he showed his bleeding and callused hands to a visitor. "You would never know," he said, "that these were hands that held a bible."

For two years the priest and the Islanders toiled up the hill under their burden of stones.

Rock by rock the walls of the church mounted until they reached 14 ft.

Then came the windows. Glass was expensive and in short supply. But beer bottles left by picnic parties and gathered from Thursday island were not, and it was from these that the windows were made.

First cylindrical concrete pipes were cast. These were filled with bottles and sealed around with concrete.

To-day amber shafts of light spear the dimness of the Church of St. Joseph on that lofty hill."

HAMMOND ISLAND CHURCH by Rev. P. J. Power, M.S.C.

A new church is going up at Hammond Island in the Torres Strait. It is an enormous work for so small a place, and will be a landmark in the history of the island as a Mission.

It was the priest in charge, Father T. Dixon, M.S.C., who conceived the idea of building in stone with the frames of two Sidney Williamson huts for reinforcement. A new church building had become a necessity, and yet a wooden building or a concrete one was out of the question. The limited Mission funds simply could not measure up to the prohibitive prices of rough hardwood at 2/- to 3/- per super. foot nor of Japanese cement (alone available) at 40/- per bag. There are acres of stone on the island suitably sized for handling, so Father decided to gather these and raise the walls of his church.

Massive walls they are, too; four feet broad at the base, two feet thick at the top, and fourteen feet high. The ground plan is T-shaped, the down-stroke being 50 ft x 24 ft. That means about 260 ft. of wall 14 ft. high. Of course, the front facade will be higher still, another 10 ft to the gable peak. Blue granite is the main type of stone used. Its dark colour will contrast admirably with the white quartz surrounds for windows and doors. The Sidney Williamson hut frames commence in the wall four feet from the ground level. It is their angle-iron roof sections that will be the most useful

to span the 24ft between the walls and support the corrugated fibro roof.

Seven double doors, 7 ft by 5 ft., lead through the wall, five into the nave and two into the sacristies. These, when open, will give abundance of air in the hot climate, and light, though the main daylighting will come through the cylindrical concrete windows ranged round the building twelve feet from the ground. Night lighting will be provided by a 32-volt generating plant soon to be installed at the station, a gift from the Queensland Government.

But why the need for a new church?

The original one, built by Father O. McDermott, M.S.C., has completely disappeared; grass grows green on the site. It was a modest little chapel, for times were even harder in the early days of the Mission. It had a wooden floor, a frame of swamp-cut mangrove, a roof of galvanised iron, plaited coconut-leaf sides. The war came and the church went, not by bombs and bullets, but white ants, unchecked, picnicked in the floor and stumps, and the plaited coconut-leaf rotted through years of neglect after the population was moved to Cooyar, in Southern Queensland. When the soldiers moved further north in pursuit of the Japs, thieves removed the bell. Finally, at the beginning of 1948, a cyclone swept in for the kill.

Another building, originally erected as a boys' dormitory, was then pressed into service; a tiny porch was added to its 20 ft by 30 ft of floor space, and crosses to its gables. But this, also born when times were very hard, is nothing more than a tin shed. It has solid stumps of cement set in three kerosene tins and a solid floor of hardwood. The walls were of plaited coconut-leaf, but are now covered with sheets of flat and ripple iron. The frame is practically all rough, round mangrove, and the roof is covered with second, third and fourth-hand corrugated iron. The army provided a coat of paint for the exterior, that was possibly meant to be canary yellow, though the result would make one believe that the canary had been dead for some time. There are two glass windows in the front wall, amber-coloured glass apparently collected after mishaps in other places. Along both sides there is a row of windows, that is, when they are open, because the things called windows are sheets of flat-iron clouted to wooden frames.

During the rainy season, from late November till March, churchgoers have either to be most careful where they sit or provide themselves with an umbrella. But, as you know, umbrellas are not allowed in church, not up and open, anyway. Fortunately for the back-seaters, unanimous decision has so far favoured the former alternative.

A cyclone came in to kill this church, too, in January, 1952, but fortunately didn't succeed. It began to rage at half past ten in the morning, while Father was away at Thursday Island. By three o'clock in the afternoon

the whole roof on the epistle side began to flap and bang. The Sisters, fearing the worst, moved the statue of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart to the shelter of the Gospel side, and, when Father arrived from T.I. safe and sound in the launch, his first job was to climb up to the roof, hold the iron down, and nail it as best he could. Incidentally, he had to hang on in the high wind, too. At half past eight the roof on the Gospel side began to flap and bang. So up Father climbed in the dark, managed to hit his fingers only four times in the process of re-nailing.

By morning the wind had found and used another entry. A gable sheet above the altar had gone altogether, and the back-drop curtain swept out like a flag in the wind, dragging vases, candle-sticks and crucifix to the floor. Before the Sunday mass Father had to find the missing sheet and nail it back in its place. The "Boy-house" beside the church had lost half its roof altogether.

And how is the new church progressing?

Work began on February 4th, 1952. The ground was cleared of stones and trees, the deep foundation trenches were dug, all the menfolk of the island lending a willing hand, for that was the pearling fleet's lay-up season. The Mission blitz-buggy was put to work overtime carrying loads of stone until its poor tyres expired. Owing to the generosity of a lay-missionary at home in the South, four more were obtained for £100. In five months the walls had risen four feet all round and were ready for the steel frames to be mounted on them, a splendid effort for the few men employed. Double doors and frames were then on hand, but at a cost of £197/10/- landed at Thursday Island. Corrugated fibro roofing is on order for £300. No wonder Father is building in stone and doing a lot of the work himself!

The site chosen for the church is a remarkable one. A small hill stands at the edge of the sea, with higher ones on either side. It was crowned in early 1951 with an 18 ft tower for the Mission bell, which looks like a lighthouse from the sea. The church is going up beside it. So prominent is its position that passengers on any steamer passing through the Torres Strait can see it, and any ship from the south for T.I. must for a time sail towards it.

BLUE GRANITE CHURCH

Next to Thursday Island in the Torres Strait is Hammond Island. Its Catholic inhabitants are half-caste and full-blood natives. Many a church there had been the victim of the cyclones that periodically sweep the island, and the Pastor of Thursday and Hammond Islands, Rev. Father T. Dixon, M.S.C., looking up at the uncrowned hill in the centre of the Mission and at the hundreds of tons of blue granite that literally covered the island, decided on the bold scheme of building a church. He called in no tenders, but set to work himself with the

inhabitants of the Mission. There were no electric cranes to lift the stones, no electric drills to curve out obstinate ones. Picks and shovels and crowbars, long levers of hard wood and human energy, animated by faith and love, worked the impossible. The Editor was fortunate to read the detailed diary which Father Dixon kept, and the following story is taken from it.

The hill that marked the site already carried a handsome, newly-constructed belfry, and the church that was planned would barely cover the remaining space of its crest. This had to be levelled somewhat and built up some four feet at the corners, before ground level could be reached. The site is a most beautiful one, dominating half a circle of the lapis-lazuli sea and coloured reefs. Its whole beauty is a purely natural one, a lovely combination of sky, sea and mountain. In silhouette, the whole church would be visible from the sea route on some 200 degrees of the compass, appearing at night like a lighted ship because of its porthole-like windows. It would be a landmark for navigation on sea-maps.

FIRST BEGINNINGS

In the first week of February, 1952, the first sod was turned, or, rather, the first stone. It was six feet long, four feet high, and three feet wide. Later this was the first stone to be edged into the foundations. The site was combed for stones. They literally numbered thousands, were separated into their various sizes, and every one of them and thousands more were to go back into the building. Fortunately the volcanic soil was very wet and soft, allowing the boulders to be eased out relatively easily. The first foot was black topsoil, penetrated with small stones; then came red clay containing granite boulders, ranging from moderate to enormous, gouged out with five-foot crowbars and 4x3 hardwood levers. These granite boulders formed the basis of the concreted foundations. The work entailed in the very trying climatic conditions of heat and moisture cannot be imagined by those in more temperate climates.

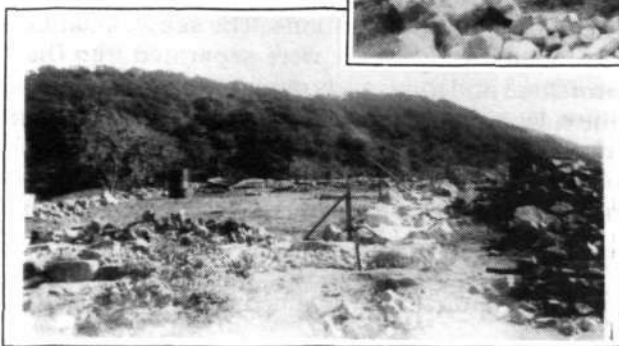
After combing the site and getting a rough level, we dug the foundation trench, four feet wide by two feet deep, following the contour of the hill to ensure solidity to the building. Then, in March, No. 1 boulder went into the foundation. "Get your bars under. She's rolling. Let her go!" After the first boulder we crowbarred the giant stones, filling the spaces with smaller stones, then pebbles, and finally the cement. It had been agreed that we work two days each week, Tuesdays and Thursdays. We had now only six workers and myself, as the others had "signed on" a pearling lugger and were not able to return to our aid till January, 1953. They began to grumble and lost heart

It was an adventure of faith and loyalty, a gigantic test which they were to pass eventually, but at times I felt that I might be left alone. However, Divine



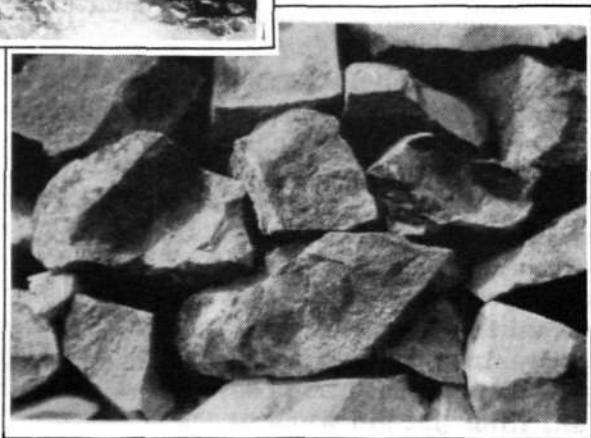
*Left: Beginnings:
digging the foundation
trench.*

*Right: The site was
combed for stones*



*Left: Foundations laid,
order appears on the
scene of operations*

*Right: The "bonding" of
the stones*



Providence never once deserted me and, with such encouragement, we won through. By the end of March a little order began to creep into the site, and in April the summer lost its sting. Two workers went, but were replaced by others.

We made sure that our building would be square. Also, we made certain that the first two feet of wall be constructed of very large and flat stones with larger stones at the corners. Smaller stones, referred to as "footballs, coconuts, and apples", according to their size, were used to fill all spaces and wedge the larger stones to prevent any movement. Two wheelbarrows were to do marathon work, carrying soil, gibbers and inoperable stones to all points of the buildings, till they wore through. We soon exhausted the ready supply of large, flat stones, and a widespread hunt with crowbars began. Most of the suitable stones were rolled by hand some twenty to fifty yards into position. On one such occasion the index finger of my left hand was crushed, necessitating three stitches.

Raising the hundred yards of 4 ft wall was tedious and difficult work, and my six workers were often very discouraged. I became more determined to see the venture through, coaxing, cajoling, threatening, painting vivid pictures of the happy conclusion of the work, which to them seemed too distant to be real. The arrival of the south-west wind and the consequent drop in temperature made climatic conditions more pleasant. Often I had to come over each Mission day and back again to T.I. at night, as I was the only priest.

MISSION DAYS

The mention of Mission day recalls a public meeting of men and youths in January. At it an enthusiastic motion was passed that on two days each week, to be known as Mission Days, all man-power resident on the Mission should give free labour to build the new stone church. So every week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the mission bell summoned the man-power to the hill. Work went on till 'two bells' that were a signal to the womenfolk to bring the "smoko" at 11 a.m. Under the shade of the ubiquitous buttercup tree we sat, until the billies of tea and biscuits arrived, enjoying the caresses of the sea breezes and the greenness of the surrounding hills and low valleys. These were memorable moments of mutual enjoyment that punctuated the many hours of toil, and busy hands and feet found rest and recuperation from the grind of the hours before lunch at 1 p.m. At 2.30 we recommenced and dug and carried and stacked stones till the happy afternoon tea break, when once more the ladies reappeared with tea and biscuits. As they returned with empty billies and tins to their children and their household chores, we returned to our crowbars and wheelbarrows for yet another hour and a half. Often I had to return to T.I., and invariably left my half-dozen



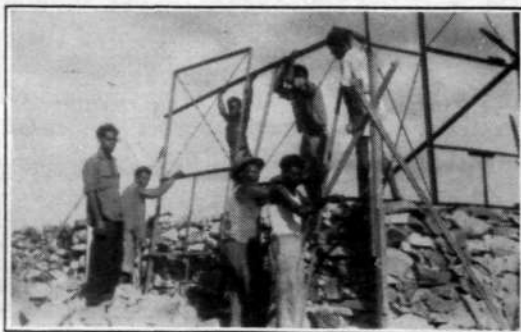
Left: No. 1 boulder goes into the foundations

Right: A view along the 68 feet of back wall



Left: Progress, as the walls rise higher. A view of the glorious setting of the new Church

Right: The steel frames being erected on the 4 ft. wall



companions sitting weary upon a heap of boulders to tie up the ends of their yarns or gaze abstractedly at the steady progress of the day or try to cope with the problem of a happy ending to all their sweating and straining. I would be returning by the "Little Flower" launch, looking back wistfully at the vision on the hill that was causing so many aches of body and mind. Francis Dorante would be driving the launch and entertaining his own tired reflections, venturing a phrase or two of hope and satisfaction, for he never doubted the ultimate success of our efforts, and constantly added his able quota of toil and ability. A smile was always on his face during work and "smoko", and he was in fact my very industrious and first "first mate". We all slaved well, but not all joyfully. I mention these things because they are factual and remain vividly conscious in my recent memory.

PROGRESS RAISES OUR SPIRITS

Meanwhile, Sister Francoise had drawn to scale the door frames and "Lear and Blumsen" of Townsville had constructed them and shipped them to T.I. at a total cost of £200. I decided to erect the hardwood frames immediately. Francis Dorante was capable of doing this sort of work, and checked the levels. We staggered the doors to break the strong S.E. trade wind which blows for almost nine months of the year. The sight of these seven door frames in position bolstered the courage of the workers and engendered a spark of enthusiasm, for the construction began to show shape after so many days of constant toil. Now the worry of several of my defeatist co-workers was: "How is he going to do the stones over the doors?" From the very beginning I had overcome many "prophecies" as to the impossibility of building the church by obtaining regular advice from building contractors such as Jim Cadzon and inviting over Government inspectors to see the job. In every case I was solidly supported and encouraged by their opinions. Also, I vanquished the laboured Jeremiah by toiling myself with consistent endeavour. Not a single worker became sick on the job at any time. In these matters, as always, I felt the overshadowing protection of Providence and the continual care of St. Joseph, who was my "clerk of works" and in whose hands I had placed the venture and to whom I had promised the dedication and the statue.

Whenever we wanted sand we had to truck it in the old "blitz" wagon from the beach. The construction of a road was essential and quickly effected by Wonnie Cowley, Steve Malley, Eddie Mills and myself. This road was too steep to be permanent, but it served us for twelve months, until it was replaced in 1953 by an excellently graded ascent. The first road enabled us to bring sand and rock to the site, and a long hose brought water from the reservoir which stood on an eminence some few feet above our level, a fact much questioned until we beheld the trickle from the hose. After the ninth load a broken clutch spring halted my intention of bringing stone up the hill. I decided to find the stone on the hill itself, and did until the end. The only exception was the



Left: The sight of the door frames in position bolstered our hopes

Right: The steel framework takes shape



Left: The interlacing of the stones with the steel work of the army huts

coloured quartz to edge the doors and windows. This came from a hillock about a quarter of a mile away, a geological anomaly, as it is the only outcrop in miles of granite. This quartz is said to contain five grains of gold to the ton.

OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES

The 68 feet of back wall dulled our efforts, since it was unrelieved by the two spaces, five feet wide by seven feet high, that broke the other walls and saved a considerable quantity of stone in a wall from 3 ft 6 in to 4 ft wide. The pattern of their positioning was actually a species of bonding, and not "crazy-wall", according to those who know. As I was not to cement the external walls, both for economic and artistic reasons, I made doubly sure that the initial eighteen feet of wall be built of sturdy, wide, and flat squarish stones. It was difficult to gain true lines on the outside of the wall, as it bevelled in from a four-foot base to two feet at the top of the wall of fourteen feet. To gain these true lines we constructed at each end, from 3x2 timber, a frame work, giving us the exact proportions, and between them stretched a fishing line. But the strong trade wind made this impracticable, and the same source soon blew the frame work down, forcing us in the long run to judge with the eye - a practice that the coloured people have long indulged in through necessity and so gained peerless efficiency.

All this time our task amounted to procuring stones of suitable size and shape and carrying them to the scene of operations. Now we had recourse to new methods. I acquired three spalding hammers, each 12 pounds weight, and a stock of sledge hammer handles and began to knap the larger boulders to make them manoeuvrable, and other stones to obtain that clear, blue surface that would give colour and beauty to the outer walls. A certain proficiency was soon obtained in breaking the stone according to the grain and so hitting and standing on the correct side to avoid the "granite shot" that flew off the surface of the steel-hard rock, and sometimes off the less hard hammer head, at bullet force and pace, inflicting multitudinous incisions from which, unobserved, a spray of blood would issue. One had barely to breast or brush the edge of a broken rock to invite a deep cut, barely noticed at first, but later giving serious trouble, hence I procured a pair of plastic sun glasses and did the knapping myself.

As we built up the wall we interlaced the stones, and the interplay of large, larger, small and smaller stones locked the wall to prevent movement. A straight line was preserved inside and outside stones of clear blue surface were built up with a gradual incline. Over to the left of the hill, upon which the church was being built, and running up from the beach, was a whole spur of granite boulders, from which every inch of topsoil had been denuded and on which a few deep-rooted trees held their own. There is no dearth of material there or elsewhere - only the mechanical means to transport it. As

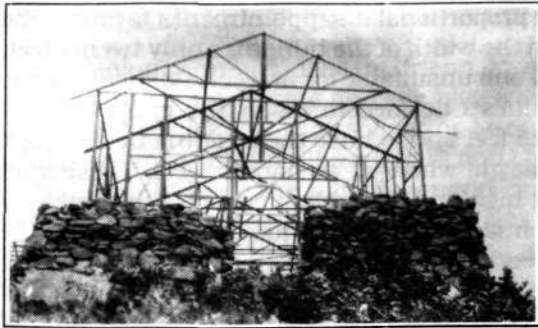
we worked we had only to raise our eyes to see the lovely stretch of bluest sea that extended right over to the mangrove foreshores of Horn Island. To the left were the foreshores of Hammond Island itself, and its most northerly promontory sliding into the sea, and beyond the sea route along which all ships must pass. The weather was by this time superbly mild and fine, permitting a constant pressure of toil. We had to carry the stones singly since the blitz truck had become unshod, when the aeroplane tyres were beyond even heavy-duty sleeving. In spite of this inconvenience and the considerable delay, the walls continued to rise and hopes with them. Muscles developed as the spalding hammers shattered hundreds of boulders and bars probed the soil for anything that was stone.

ECONOMIC SOLUTION

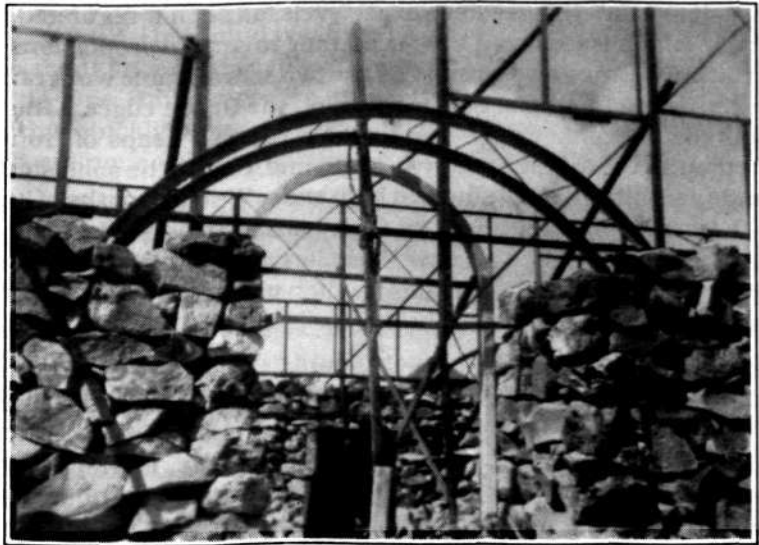
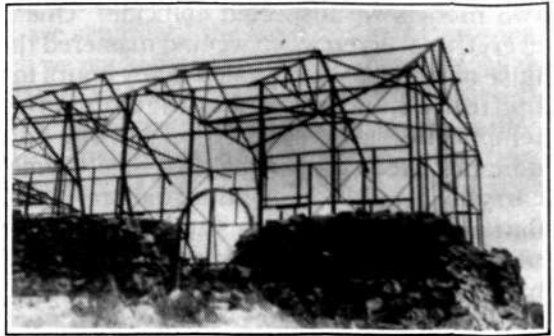
The Mission's economic position had been a deciding factor in a number of my plans, and it guided us to build such an edifice with our own hard labour, to employ tradesmen was well outside the ambit both of our dreams and pockets. However, I stretched the purse strings to tension and paid "those who stayed behind" one pound per day. Within six weeks the black faded into red, and one morning I explained the position and put a proposition that would help both sides. I would apply to the Government for a subsidy of £60 to obtain a super-large "flattie", made to transport firewood, which could be sold to Thursday Island Hospital for £8/10/- a cord, a measurement eight feet long, four feet high and four feet wide. I would carry the wood to our beach in the blitz and ferry the wood over in the "flattie" at 5/- per cord, a price barely covering the petrol for truck and launch. It was agreed. I got that Government "flattie", and it transported 27 cord of firewood for them, so that the men got their wages and I got assistance with the stone work. Later they declared the money O.K., but the effort too much! Laurence Lui, Wonnie Cowley, Lui Garnier, Stevie Malley and I brought in their wood, reloaded it and towed it to T.I. at all hours of the day and night. On one occasion - the only one - the "flattie" was overloaded and sank in a four-knot tide. Luckily the launch was made of soft wood and merely sank to the gunwales. Wonnie dived overboard and lashed the firewood inside the "flattie", but by this time we had drifted so far downstream that it took us an hour and a half to tow the sunken load back some three-quarters of a mile. We lost three pieces of firewood.

JIGSAW PUZZLE

By August we had raised the walls to four feet from the interior floor level without cementing. We had completed "Stage 2" of our plans. The next step was to have complications. I had designed the building for two Sidney-Williams steel frame Army huts, abutting to form a "T". The excellent structures were to serve both as a protection and as a facility in keeping the



*Views of the new church
rising on the hill in the
centre of Hammond Island
Mission. In the picture on
the right the frame is ready
to receive the fibro roofing*



*The "T" angle-iron arches erected over one of
the doorways*

building square. They had two proportional disappointments for me. The walls were only ten feet high and the width of the buildings only twenty feet, both measurements undignified and unsuitable for an ecclesiastical edifice. To overcome both these difficulties I decided to insert the extra five feet section to give me the width of 25 feet and to raise the building by resting it on top of the four-foot wall, the height where-at we had arrived. These huts are assembled in sections, 10 ft high and 6 ft wide, in much the same way that boys use meccano sets. Each section can be dis-assembled, likewise the rafters and roof structure. In theory nothing could sound more simple. But in practice it became a complete jigsaw puzzle, as we sat for a day and a half over our dismantled Army hut. There were no blueprints available, nor did two models we inspected coincide. One hole in a top plate would alter everything. Even when we had mastered the plan generally, we made many false assemblies and wasted many hours in trial and error experiments. We had to use hundreds of nuts and bolts of various sizes, both to assemble and temporarily stay the structure. Mr. Jim Cadzon, a kindly friend, generously donated the second Army hut steel frame which "The Trixen", a lugger carrying an all Hammond Island crew, and the "Little Flower", towing the flattie, ferried over from TI. The blitz blundered up the hill with all the sections intact. We had painted the frames with "Killrust" and "Redlead" to preserve them from the destroying sea air. It was a break from stone work and served for respite.

It was important that we keep exact levels, as such it regulated the pitch of the roof, which is fixed and built according to certain proportions of stress and strain. Eventually we assembled the two sets of frame work on the four-foot wall, resting them just some inches on the inside edges. The problem now was to anchor them. We searched old rubbish heaps of "round steel" gathered up all the old bedsteads we could find, cut up the solid steel lengths and made a small right angle bend at both ends. We laid lengths of linear steel along the middle of the walls, and then hooked the steel lengths over the bottom plate of the huts, and over these heavy steel lengths lying on top of the walls. Over these and the plates we then proceeded to place rather large stones.

According to plan, we continued to build the walls up and around the army-hut frames, before we attempted to erect the remainder of the steel. Stone was difficult to procure. The winter suns and the persistent trade winds had dried the soil and clay of their moisture, turning them into a hardness that rivalled the granite and made digging laboriously arduous. During the "wet" the boulders relinquished their grip on the clay rather readily, but from now till the next "wet" they clung to the baked clay with the tenacity of cub-bears to the mothers.

NEW ROAD

Joe Moloney, my consistent friend in every mechanical mishap, had repaired the clutch spring and the blitz was in constant use, carrying the broken stone. I knew that sooner or later I must construct a better and permanent road "up the Church hill", and I began it now from the top down, so that I could back the blitz down and carry any stone. This proved an excellent plan. A great amount of stone was now required to build the walls up another four feet to window height and also to give the framework some solidity before adding to it the great weight of the steel rafters and their accompanying interlacing. We began to work on the new road with picks, shovels and crowbars and planned the descent on a wide sweep round the perimeter of the hill. As we went, we separated the large and larger stones from the small and smallest, which we packed on the outside edge for a solid foundation. We had to cut deeply into one side, and here we encountered enormous, granite boulders which we knapped down to a size easy to handle. In this way truck after truck load was moved up to the building, until great bad luck with this worthy vehicle came our way.

Slowly, but always progressively, the stone walls crept up outside the steel frames, encasing it, giving it rigidity and the stones mutual support from the frames and themselves. As the height of the walls rose, three-eighth inch round steel was used to tie the framework to them. So desperate was the call for stone that I procured the services of a "powder-monkey", my friend Joe Moloney, who tried a few "mud plasters" on some of the more huge boulders. It was with scant success, because the only explosive I could obtain was the up-thrusting type. I had recourse to the further expedient of hand-drilling holes, but this quickly proved useless; the granite was harder than the steel and drills were not easily obtainable nor so easily sharpened.

I had initially intended to construct the arches over the doorways with the stonework peculiar to arches. But one day on T.I. I espied a heap of very strong "T" angle iron arches belonging to the Hospital Board. The arc was not the same dimensions as our doors, but, at a glance, I could see that the difference was at least adjustable. I tendered for them at 10/- a piece and procured fifteen, one more than I needed, two for each doorway. Later, we would rest the stones on these two angle iron arches and strengthen the whole with straight pieces of railway line resting on each side of the arch.

FINDING MISSING LINK

I have already spoken of the difficulties we experienced in the assembly of the framework, but actually our troubles had not started. Our first discouragement arose out of the late discovery that most of the shorter diagonal supports of the rafters had disappeared. This meant a general scouting under houses and amid rubbish dumps for angle iron. We gained a deal of it from the relics of a small army-hut belonging to Laurence Lui, one

of our inhabitants and workers. This we retrieved from the long grasses of T.I. and carried on the Presbytery V8 utility after dismantling the hut. In one of the Hammond Island army dumps I found a length of good railway line, admirably suited for one of my purposes. It would act as a spreader between the top plates of the sidewalls and as a plate itself for the walls of the sanctuary and sacristies upon which their rafters, which held the middle section of the roof, should stand. Normally, in these army huts the rafters rest on the top plate of the sections, but, just at this portion of the Church, such sections had to be omitted as the main body joined the sanctuary here. Actually, the plan was for one army hut of 12 five-foot sections to form the top of the "T" (sanctuary and sacristies) and another army hut of some ten, five-foot sections to form the body of the Church, or the stem of the "T". The two buildings would be linked by two valleys, which are not allowed for in the army huts but which we had yet to construct.

In connection with the placing of the railway line, I invited a T.I. blacksmith, Charlie Clarke, to come and inspect the job. After doing so, he suggested giving two bottles of "gas" and "acetylene", if his cousin, Bernie Clarke, would do the job and the valleys. Bernie was only too willing, and for the next couple of months Bernie's cheerfulness and tradesmanship were to be much in evidence, together with Kapoo-kaz, his dark offsider. Kapana Segigi was the latter's real name. Quite a few bottles of "gas" and "oxy" were to be emptied before the valleys were in. The "Mission Day" had to be changed from Thursday to Saturday and, through necessity, we worked on two Sundays, because Bernie came over outside his working hours. Regularly he and I came out to the back of T.I. to the Hammond Island landing in his "Blue Dodge", an ex-army reconnaissance vehicle, with his torch and spare cutters and yet another bottle of "gas" or "oxy". Together we discussed ways and means of overcoming the hundred and one difficulties that continually presented themselves.

We must first assemble the rafters. The loss of the diagonal supports compelled us to blow new pieces, blow new holes, in both the diagonal pieces and the rafters. All the half-inch bolts were rusted, but with heroic patience Eddie Mills sat before the vice and the stocks and dies and made them useable with a reasonable easiness. While Eddie rethreaded the nuts and bolts and Bernie "blew" the holes, we others worked on the assembly line and got each rafter frame ready to be hoisted up in one unit and bolted into place. Several times we had to take them down and shift them into various positions. In one day we erected only five. Erecting these rafter-frames into position was difficult and in some ways dangerous, because of their awkwardness and great weight. We lashed a long pole to the lower framework, and put a double pulley on its top. We chained the hook of the rope to the apex of the triangular rafter-frame and took another rope down to someone

on the ground pulling in the opposite direction to steady the frame, after the block and tackle had hoisted it to its balancing position. Once one frame was up we were able to use its apex for the block and tackle to hoist the next frame. We now encountered undue delay. The huts had been constructed to certain and definite measurements, but the years of tropical weather had buffeted them into losing just that shade of accuracy that made assembly reasonably easy. One man would have to use a sledge hammer; another would lend the force behind his feet, while the third slipped the bolt into the hole. We inverted the steel battens to form an "L" so that later we could bolt on the 3x2 wooden battens to which the fibro roof would be screwed. This entailed the "blowing" of innumerable holes in the steel and boring the same in the wood.

When pressure of work made his regular Saturdays impossible, Bernie taught Francis Dorante how to use the torch and the assembly could go on. Quite a few Mission Days went into this tedious and annoying work. While the criss-cross of the roof and ceiling went on, with the assistance of a visitor newly arrived to T.I. who was to give of his energies from now on, I put as many extra stays on the frames as we could lay our hands on, to give added strength and prevent the possibility of any stones falling inside. I do not know how many nuts and bolts went into this work.

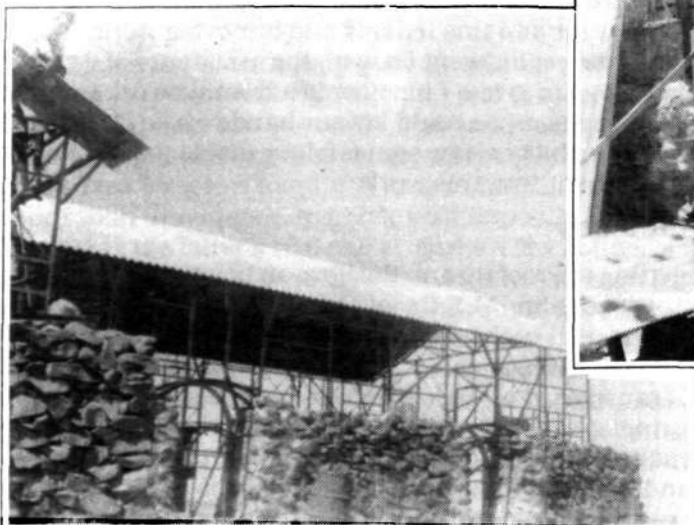
"MIRACLE OF MIRACLES"

I had anticipated getting the roof up and the fibro on before the visit of my Bishop (Most Rev. J. O'Loughlin, M.S.C., of Darwin) in early November. Constant emergencies lessened such hopes, and the breakdown of the "Blitz" put them into the realm of the impossible. This war-time vehicle had carried 27 cord of fire-wood, transported all the angle iron, tons of knapped stone, and was in the act of bringing up the first load of fibro when the fibrous timing cog was spoilt. The truck was to stay half way up the first hill for four months. The lugger "Trixen" under the captaincy of Francis Sabatino, had once more come to our water transport rescue. This time it carried the six tons of super-six Wunderlich's fibro and fittings. It had come on the September ship, "Elsanna", and "miracles of miracles", had been unloaded on the only day the wharfies had worked before "striking" and causing almost all cargo to be taken back to Cairns or Brisbane. They had pursued the usual procedure of unloading right down the hold to the bottom of one side, and our fibro was there at the bottom on that side, as it had been loaded at Brisbane. The five crates of fibro were hoisted by Joe Moloney's movable crane and lowered to the deck of the "Trixen". She delivered them to Hammond Island wharf at midnight, when the tide was propitiously high, and each sheet was manhandled to the wharf. Four months later we were to manhandle it again for fear a cyclonic wind should cause the waves at the spring tides to wash it off. Thus far we got with the fibro and no further - just yet.

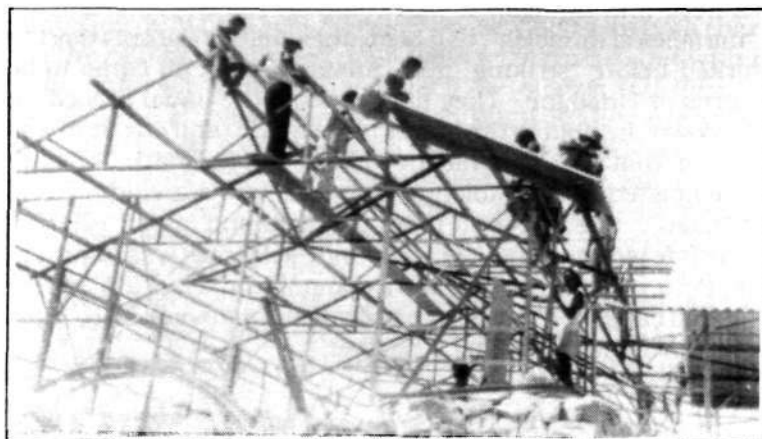


Above: Looking over the Convent roof to the new Church in its picturesque setting

Right: Mr. Edwin Clarke helps to erect the fibro roof



Left and below: Views of operations in the erection of the fibro roof



The constant efforts to get the truck on the road again is a long, interesting struggle between Providence and human prudence and craft. Little did I know that a rather violent cyclone was to come prematurely in late November. In short, I had strengthened all corners and interiors and doorways before I even had the fibro on the spot itself, to say nothing of its being in position. Joe Moloney came over at much inconvenience to himself on five occasions through the breakdown period, before the truck ran again. "Bad luck" to the pitch of a hoo-doo seemed to surround the blitz - what with breakages, misfits, mishaps! Twice the pistons seized, when we had to take the head off; once the oil line disintegrated. Regaining the timing was the main difficulty in the end.

I should have referred some time back to Des Carey, who was a friend to me, but in another capacity. Des has a 9.5 movie camera, and right from the start had journeyed to Hammond and taken a progress filming of the whole venture, and continues to do so. I mind very well the afternoon we tramped over one of the neighbouring hillsides taking distance shots, only to discover the magazine was empty.

In the meantime, without our transport, we had to carry on building up the walls outside the framework. The quest for stone became at times a frantic one. My aim was to reach window height, i.e., eight feet from the floor level, before the Bishop arrived. But with the usual misfortune attendant on all missions, and the "Annual Bazaar" coming on October 3rd, I found myself well behind schedule. The men were becoming more and more dissatisfied, and frequently showed signs of slacking and losing heart to the extend of murmuring. However, I doubled my efforts and worked alone or with Stevie Mallie on non-Mission Days, both getting stone and building up the walls. We climbed up on the 44-gallon drums and pulled the stones after us, and tossed them up into position, and slowly the walls rose.

I received the notification of the dates of my Bishop's (Most Rev. J. O'Loughlin, M.S.C., Bishop of Darwin) canonical visitation and decided to tie up some of the strings. Consequently, with Stevie as my companion, I plastered all the doorways up to the height of the wall. After two days my fingers were pitted with the cement and we had recourse to leather gloves, as we did earlier, when fingers were being cut and bruised by the sharp edges of the knapped granite and the weatherbeaten outer edges of the unknapped. In three days we packed and plastered the seven doorways and took away any suspicion of weakness that the uncemented look tended to present.

The Bishop arrived. He was met on the beach by all the inhabitants. With stripped, young coconut fronds and garlands of bougainvillea they had erected a very select "Welcome" approach. The men and youths were nearest the water and, as soon as the dinghy touched the sand, it was carried by

strong arms clear of the water and the Bishop stepped out on to the dry beach. After a formal address, he was treated to a Concert in the schoolroom. The Bishop had been encouraging from the beginning. Naturally he was interested in estimates and advised the usual caution but, once that had been discussed, he was always ready with friendly advice.

It will be recalled that I had altered the proportions of the army huts by introducing another five-foot section into the width. This extra section automatically raised the roof. Normally, the base of the triangle would rest on the top of the walls, but now it was some 18 inches above. However, an angle iron stay inside and a corresponding one outside up to the end of the rafter supported these points of strain. We kept bracing and staying where support was deemed necessary, advisable or useful. But still most of our energies went into the ceaseless search for stone, picking up conveniently squared stones and larger ones that underwent a pounding from the ageing spalding hammers. We went back to the wheel-barrows in lieu of the incapacitated "Blitz".

NEW WORKERS

The pearling season began to close. This was important for us, as it meant treble the quality and quantity of workers. Jackson Ahwang was one of the first. He was keen, strong, intelligent and hard working, and we made excellent progress. Soon the 295 feet of 3 foot wall was raised to the eight foot mark. Daniel Sebasio and Stephen Christian added their youthful energies to our untiring efforts to stabilise the walls before the fierce onslaught of the tropical wet. I began to entertain fears of the corners falling, especially after a minor collapse of one corner, because of too many careless feet on the loose outside edge. I fancied also that I could detect some movement in one of the back corners after several severe deluges. I decided to buttress all the corners to make sure that I should not regret it later on. Fortunately, we had a sudden influx of toilers from the lay-up of the pearling luggers, and with their new enthusiasm I effected the buttressing. The buttress was roundish like a bee hive, completely faced with knapped blue granite, rising some three to four feet high and eight feet wide. They added beauty to the outline of the building and gave all the corners superb strengthening. I furthermore cemented all the corners within the wall itself and decided to continue cementing them till completion.

By this time my friend, Joe Moloney, had the "blitz" back on the road after four months of misfortune and mishap. What a thrill to see it being piloted by Joe up the new road for the first time, bringing the first load of fibro. Pat O'Rourke and I had been battling with the new, wide-sweeping road, but with slow success. In one and a half days the men completed it, making a first-class job.

ON TO THE ROOF

The bulk of the fibro had been resting on the main jetty some four hundred yards down from our normal landing place. It had survived one severe cyclone which reached its intensity when the tide was out; it had resisted the approaches of the Christmas "Spring" tides, after we had taken the precautions of tying it down with its own casing to the jetty. I was loathe to risk the possibility of another "Blow", especially if it occurred during the February tides, which are the highest of the year, when the whole of the £200 worth would be swept off the jetty. I decided to take it from the "danger spot" and bring it as far as the "almond tree", our usual landing place. Once again the "Large Flattie" proved its strength and serviceability, when we transported the whole of the five tons in three trips, the "Little Flower" doing the towing.

As soon as the "blitz" was on the road, we trucked all the fibro up the hill and set it down in heaps in readiness for its final destination on the roof. Our radiator was leaking badly; there were no brakes, and the flat battery and the slightly advanced spark rendered some interesting "cranking" a frequent practice all that day. On all three occasions when our men handled the fibro, not one sheet was damaged in any way, although I could not say as much for our wharfies, who had dropped a crate or badly cradled it, causing us some major juggling when later we were putting up the sheets.

While we awaited that clear, calm, dry weather which would enable the fibro to be lifted up safely, we turned to "plaster" the interior of the walls we had erected. Sand was our problem. I reluctantly brought up a load of beach sand, but found it a good binder for the coarse gravel-sand we were obtaining from the adjacent sub-soil. The mixture was a dry one in the proportion of 4 to 1. In applying the "plaster", leather gloves were essential against both the cement and the stones. To ensure that the cement went in far enough, it had to be flung into the cracks and small stones were inserted into the larger cavities. It was a long and tedious job over a surface of more than two thousand square feet by hands that were new to the game and under summer skies. Meanwhile, some of us plastered and/or raised the doorways. It was a matter here of obtaining the right stones, long and flat so that good bonding could be effected. We cemented all these doorways right through to ensure that nothing would or could move. All this meant more mixing of cement, more sand getting and more water carrying.

At long last the awaited break in the weather came. Edwin Clarke, who had been connected with the erection of the presbytery many years before (1931-32), now came forward again, despite his own pressing plumbing business, and helped us to erect the fibro roofing. He brought his eldest son, Bernie, who had been so helpful when we were putting the iron frames together. One Saturday morning we began the task, all anxious to see the roof

on. The sheets were in sizes of 8 and 9 feet and had to be mitred at the corners. To get such a mitre needed close attention both from those on the roof, led by Bernie, and those on the ground, guided by Edwin Clarke himself. Getting the first sheet square was difficult but important. We commenced on the right-hand side of the building and moved quickly when the mitre cut was settled. It was really a thrill to see the roof going up. What a joy after so many knock-backs and anxieties. The men were happy, too, and worked splendidly, anxious to see this section of the job done before they signed off in two weeks' time. Some handed up the sheets, some caught them half-way, some waited on the top to grab them, while others stayed below and cut the mitres on the various corners. This was an arduous task, requiring a lot of saws frequently sharpened and much patient plying of the saw. "Super-six" fibro is rather thick and its long sojourn on the wharf had hardened it too much for our liking. Everybody seemed to be taking his turn with the saw, including my curate, Father Raymond, M.S.C., who was anxious to help but had been spending practically all his spare energies on re-leading the iron framework. The faster the ground men mitred, the faster the middle men handled, the faster the roof men screw-nailed the sheets into position.

At "smoko" we had one side of the 50-foot main building completed and in the fifty minutes before dinner the other side was completed. We had to leave the valley section for a time as it was still incomplete, so Bernie commenced the roof of the second building. But it was on this section that we ran into trouble which caused us to abandon the work until the morrow, and even on the morrow the difficulty persisted and forced us to devote the second week-end. Bernie noticed that the sheets were developing a slant, which became more pronounced as the job continued. There was nothing to do but remove the cause, which had been placed when we first erected the iron rafters and neglected to take all the bend out of them. Using long hardwood pieces, we raised the roof, straightened out the rafters and remedied the fault. Some were detailed to complete the screwing-down of the fibro, as Bernie only screwed enough to keep the sheets in place. One man bored the fibro, another the purlin, while a third screwed.

Our attention turned to the valleys. Jimmy Dorante and Hislo Sabatino put in the wooden noggings upon which the Muntz Metal valleys were to be nailed. Francis Dorante, Jimmy's father, did an excellent job of putting the Muntz metal together. It was tacked on to the noggings with copper tacks, to obviate all depreciation and further maintenance. The Muntz metal was cheap at 17/4 a sheet, and the valleys took eleven sheets. However, they showed quite a sag. So a steel hawser was obtained and some dog grips and two stay screws. The steel wire was fixed to the ridge of the main building, passed under the valley and fixed again to the ridge of the second building. The strain was taken with the stay screws and the valleys brought up to their

right positions. Fixing the fibro on the valleys was a long and tiresome business with mitres to be sawn practically the whole length of the sheet. We were very busy also looking for enough fibro and had to insert an extra ridge purlin to take the small pieces. The quantity worked out wonderfully and all that was left was a small heap of mitres and rubbish.

Then we turned to the ridge capping, which caused some trouble when so many breakages in transit were discovered. Mush head bolts were needed, together with the usual felt washer and Ormonoid filling

ON LEAVE

The day came for the "sign-on" of the pearlrs. This meant that we were only four left to go ahead with the work. Mr. Tom Houstin, the new Head Teacher from T.I. State School, brought over two of his junior staff, Maurie Kelly and Brian Roche, on Saturdays to supplement us, and with this noble band the walls rose a little higher. It meant spalling more stone, trucking it up the road, heaving it up the walls and placing it in position. We paid most of our attention to stoning the doorways, picking the cement and cementing it into position to ensure rigidity. Our cement supply was fast fading out and luckily I obtained a further ton, which enabled us to carry on until I should get the signal to take my holidays in Sydney. On March 28th I left the building behind to rest itself till my return in June.

During my absence in the south a little work was done by way of re-leading the steel frame-work. But much more work was done by another cyclone, out of season, that wrenched four sheets of fibro off the roof and tore away several pieces of ridge-capping, the flying debris making further holes in other sections of the roof. However, not one stone had moved, nor one inch of cement facing cracked, nor one single piece of steel work showed any defaulting before the fierce winds.

While I was away, Pat O'Rourke completed his promised task and left these shores for greener ones - those of his Irish ancestors. Pat was a government clerk whose real trade was stone-masonry. He had been helping with the stone and construction of the road until he decided to build a baptismal font out of the hard granite - a formidable undertaking, indeed, with a minimum of sharp tools and a maximum of hardness in the granite. His original intention was to build the font in two pieces. Having overcome the first difficulty of finding stones large enough with no "faults", I was to see Pat pounding away at this monolith, week-end after week-end, with his hammer and chisels, trying to make some impression on this granite, which a prospector-geologist told me was the basic stone of the earth's crust, "Next to Hell", and therefore as "hard as hell", I suppose. Procuring steel chisels was difficult enough; having them sharpened regularly was more difficult, but getting them to cut this granite was much more difficult still, so much

so that even the redoubtable Pat abandoned the "two-piece" plan. He finally constructed the font in crazy stone fashion (the experts assure me the more correct term is "Kentish Wrag"), much to our mutual disappointment. The very unique baptismal font stands in one corner of the main body of the church.

ON WITH THE JOB

I returned to Thursday Island on June 27th, 1953. On the following day I hastened over to Hammond to inspect the cyclone damage and to assess the possibilities of a quick completion. My coloured toilers were reduced to Francis, Eddie, Laurence and Daniel, besides the youthful Raymond Adams. On Saturdays I might count on a couple of "whites" from T.I. The future was not near when I might say "Finish!" A very opportune grant from the funds of the Propagation of the Faith decided me to solicit some daily labourers, for it allowed me to pay them wages enough to support their large families. Consequently, I employed, from Monday to Friday, Eddie Mills and Daniel Gutchen to work with me at collecting sufficient stone to keep the larger gang at work on Saturdays, when our meagre numbers were swelled by friends from T.I. The dried-out soil held the huge boulders in death-grips, which it relinquished only under pressure from the three crowbars, wielded simultaneously by our now much experienced hands. Though it was July and a stiff sou'-east blowing, it was a perspiration effort all day. Eddie is a muscular man of some fifteen stone, and Daniel a square-shouldered individual of twelve stone, and both are sincere toilers. Granite boulders, of seven feet length and five feet width and four feet height, were unearthed by their efforts, while it was my task to break them up with the ten-pound steel hammer that literally curled up at its edges as I pounded these monsters into slabs, some two feet long and ten inches wide, before they were trucked in the old "blitz" up to the site. The site was some fifty yards along the "new road", which we had improved constantly with the chips from the boulders, taking out the hollows and making the grade nigh perfect.

The old blitz performed splendidly, as it ground its way up the road with fourteen loads, in our first five days, of knapped blue granite in readiness for stacking on the Saturdays, when four white pen-pushers came over and bent their backs and hardened their hands for a great cause. Tom Houstin and Brian Roache, school-teachers, returned to help me. Tom French brought two Englishmen who, with Kevin Kuelkin - all Protestants - ably aided me. Each Saturday we stacked the stone around the walls and raised them to the ten-foot mark, which was window height. Some carried the stone inside; some up the wooden steps; one lifted them up on to the wall, and two set them in place, while the youthful Ray Adams gathered "blue chips" and "apples" to chock the larger stones and keep them rigid. Granite dust in our eyes seemed to be as great a problem as cuts from the blue metal. Nevertheless,



*Front view (above)
and side view (right) of
the new church,
showing windows in
position and the stone
work gradually
enclosing them*



*The new church in its setting of hill, mountain and sea.
Thursday Island is in background across the water*

we proudly watched the thick walls rise and give definition to the interior and happily let us foresee with perfect clarity the end coming into the realm of reality. How avidly we calculated the stoneless spaces the twenty-one cylindrical windows would occupy, and how relatively easy our stone task would be once these windows were in position! This was the usual topic of our pleasant smoko half-hours. There was a new spirit as we joyfully spoke of the completion of our hard work and dreams. "Kedeh" (enough" and "Minassi" (finish) were the jubilant shouts that ended every working spell, and now the final "minassi" seemed to be around one of the near corners.

ON TO THE WINDOWS

At length we made our first window - a concrete cylinder of three feet diameter, three inches thickness, and three feet in depth. The weight of such a mass of concrete was our problem. If we made it up on the wall, we were confronted by the difficulty of removing the moulds in the limited space under the roof. If we made it on the ground, we faced the problem of raising it on to the ten-foot wall with our limited tackle. We decided to make the cylinder on the wall itself. We mixed our concrete, poured it into the mould with hindrance, and allowed it three days to set. But in overturning it, we saw our laborious efforts come to naught, as the whole mass crumbled before our eyes and hurtled down to the ground. We resolved to try the second means of making it on the ground and raising it later when it had had time to harden and become much more manoeuvrable. We set one concrete cylinder each day in the moulds until we had fifteen. Then the blitz broke down once more as we were trucking sand from the fresh water creek. This time it was the bearing for the main gear shaft, a breakdown soon remedied.

I determined to employ yet another man during the week to help dig for stone. We dug for it because the underground stone was solid and a lovely blue. David Kelly a Torres Strait Islander despite his name, joined our ranks and the four of us set to digging and barring. Mine it was to whack the boulder with a spalling hammer, while they manoeuvred it, permitting me to get a surface that I could get my hammer-face on to, together with my fifteen stone. In this way we unearthed many and huge boulders that went down before the onslaught of the steel hammer. We tossed the split boulders on to the blitz, and load after load found its groaning way up the road to make an impressive pile for our Saturday friends - Tom, Kevin, Chas Lee and Ron Bettany.

UP THE PLANE

By this time our concrete cylinders were deemed hardened enough for handling. They looked strong, but rather massive for human hands. We built an incline plane of 4 x 3 hardwood, reaching from the ground to the window site. We set up two blocks and tackle on the top plate of the steel frame and passed the ropes round the cylinder and rolled it ever so carefully and



Left: Cecilia & Marcellina Sabatino bringing up "Smoko" to the workers on the church



Above: Pat O'Rourke, standing beside the baptismal font that he built after so much experiment and effort



Left: Lui Garnier and Francis Sabatino do a splendid job in cementing the Church floor

Right: Hislo Sabatino on the job of building the altar rails from North Queensland softwoods



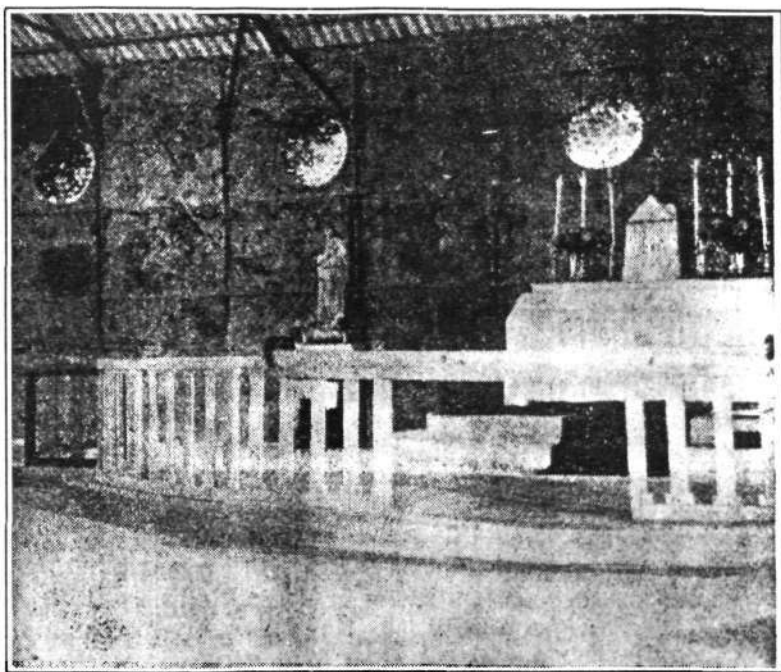
solicitously. Eddie and Laurence kept it on the "straight and narrow" of the incline plane; Francis directed operations from the top of the walls, while the bulk of us took hold of the ropes outside the building and pulled. The cylinder trundled slowly up the plane to its destined place on the wall, and big Eddie, wiry Francis and able-bodied Laurence manhandled it into position, giving it a tilt outwards to forestall any possibility of rain trickling inside. With the first ten we used an old mattress to cushion their movements on the wall, but when we had gained experience we disdained this precaution, and the twenty-one cylinders have gone up without mishap, not that we did not have our moments of trepidation and prayerful anxiety. On the first Saturday we hoisted two, each performance taking an hour. Next time we put up five, and later enlarged the record to seven.

As the cylinders arose the spaces between them were filled with stone, bringing the walls within a foot of the roof itself. The height of the walls and the limited space between them and the roof made stacking difficult. The corners always worried us, as they needed specially picked stones, with blue on two sides, squarish and broad-based. Some days stones would "run" - that is, they would come up in such sequence that they would pack well and quickly. On other days nothing seemed to fit, and progress was slow and tedious.

PRIDE IN ACCOMPLISHMENT

The weather, though windy and dust-raising, was cool and pleasant. Everybody was in fine fettle. The windows were a heartening sight in the brilliant tropical spring sunlight, and the silhouetted outlines of the whole edifice exhilarated us with feelings of pride in accomplishment and gave us constant cause to hark back with relief to the bad old days of discontent and drudgery. More and yet more stone was being swallowed up in the rising walls. Eddie and his two companions kept up the hunt for stone, especially when the blitz was motionless. I shattered their boulders, which we stacked on the edge of the road, ready for the repaired truck. More cylinders were built when the sand arrived, until the full quota of twenty-one was reached.

We kept a shepherd's eye for a stone long and flat enough to serve as a platform for the statue on the front wall. We found it underground, but later determined in favour of reinforced concrete. By September 22nd we had the twenty-first and last cylinder in position. How sturdy and fine they looked as they squatted side by side on all the walls! Captain John Mellor, off the "Melbidir", took a splendid series of snaps of the hoisting of the ninth cylinder, at which my Superior, Very Rev. Father O. McDermott, M.S.C., co-founder of the Hammond Island Mission, was present. During his month's stay with us he pointed out to me that next April marked the Silver Jubilee of the First Holy Mass on Hammond (Ascension Thursday, 1929). What an



An interior view of the new Church, looking across the sanctuary



The workers line up for a photograph against the massive walls of the Church. Note the "Blitz" through the open doors

appropriate date it would be for the opening of this new church, such that we might remember it as the Jubilee Church! Let us hope so.

The patient rolling up of these twenty-one windows was a triumph for us all. what was an anxiety for the first five became a game by the time we saw the last nestling in its place, marking the conclusion of "Stage Seven" in our venture and adventure. Seeking more stone became our daily preoccupation, until on Saturdays our gang of seven manhandled the trucked stone on to platforms and up to what we trust will be their final resting place. We searched on pre-war roads and made a new Mission road in the village in our effort for stone. We also rough-cast-cemented the interior of the raised walls to ensure greater solidity. How beautiful the windows looked with the cement around them, and the view from them all is something that might compensate for medieval leadlights!

GABLE ENDS

We began the final stage of the stone work - the building up the three gable ends. We commenced immediately on the facade, seeking long and flat stones from the sea front, so that they could be laid lengthwise and cover the full width of the wall. This seashore granite had a greyish tinge. With Laurence and Francis we began the last ascent. Scaffolding was our concern, as the wall was already fifteen feet high. The faithful petrol drums became our mainstay, and with our accustomed ingenuity we raised a series of platforms, looking like choir stalls in tri-platform style. With one man on each platform we juggled the stones until the topmost worker hoisted them above his head for the stone-pitcher himself, who, with a minimum of space to manoeuvre upon and a dizzy height to annoy his balance, placed them in position. I willingly relinquished this usual portfolio in favour of Francis, and Laurence, men of lighter frame and more agile ages. Steadily the triangular opening closed up. Slowly and progressively the facade became what we intended it to be, an imposing wall overlooking seas and sands.

The end of our constant endeavours and fondest yearnings loomed large before our minds and yet there remained much hard work. Every day saw some advance; every truck load of stone meant a cherished step forward; every foot of wall was marked with the realisation that soon we would be able to lay aside our spalling hammers for the trowel. Much rough-casting and grouting of the interior walls was effected, while fresh water sand was to hand in the dried creeks, although carting the water from the wells below was difficult. As soon as we completed a gable-end, we grouted it for neatness and safety.

The time also came to decide how many statues should adorn the exterior walls, as we had to construct the platforms as part of these walls. Saint Joseph, as patron of the Mission and Church and as "the clerk of works",

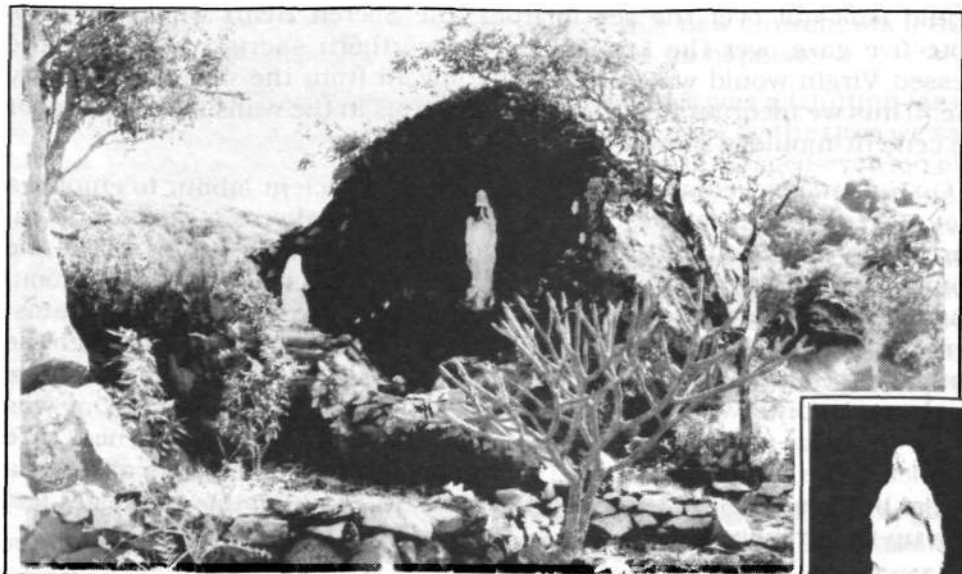
should look out over the sea in front; the Sacred Heart would cast His protective gaze over the Mission on the northern sacristy side; and the Blessed Virgin would watch over her Convent from the southern sacristy side. Thus we incorporated the three platforms in the walls in readiness for the cement-moulded statues.

On Saturdays we had five or six men, just sufficient labour to employ a relay system of passing the stones up and the empty kerosene drums down. During the week Eddie, Raymond and I procured enough stone out of the ground for the Saturday's work. As the gable ends closed and standing room ceased to exist, we devised a steel tray, again out of forty four gallon drums, combining it with a block and tackle, to raise the remaining stones which the nimble Eddie and Francis juggled into position, as they clambered round the rough steel work. We were making such progress that Christmas Day was set as the goal of our struggle as far as the walls were concerned. We completed the buttresses on all the remaining external corners and ran a special buttress the full length of the back wall, making this wall eight feet wide up the first six feet.

A singular triumph was the triple arch that topped the front wall. It was singular because of its peculiar difficulties. Apart from the difficulty of lifting the stones to that height and keeping a safe footing on the roof, we had to get an evenness in the curves of the arch. This was obtained from the gesticulations and vociferations of one of us, standing down on the beach, some 200 feet below, who was in an excellent position to see the silhouetted outline of the arches. The earlier return of the Trochus men, Lui Garnier and the Mills brothers, gave us extra energy and progress. John, Paul and Joseph did some smart work, grouting the interior of the back wall. Likewise, the temporary return of the "Pelican" lugger crew, a veritable physical force of youths and able-seamen, made our Christmas goal a feasible one. In fact the last stone went up and into the walls at 10 a.m. on Christmas Eve. Eddie Mills put up that last stone. We paused to toast our achievement and drank not without some emotion.

CHRISTMAS MASS - 1953

We spent the rest of the day cleaning up in preparation for the event our endeavours had long cherished - the First Holy Mass in the Church and on Christmas Day. Clean, white, beach sand made a splendid and cushion-like covering for the floor. The improvised altar looked majestic between two cabbage tree palms, gathered from the hillsides for the occasion. A semi-circular altar rail of inch water piping, covered with coloured crepe-paper, set off the sanctuary, while the interior generally was festooned with tousled coconut fronds and the profuse blooms of the Poinciana trees that flourish so well in these parts. These preparations were arduous, coming immedi-



The Lourdes Grotto at Hammond Island



Our Lady Altar





Fr Tom Mullins

ately upon the strenuous efforts of the past two months but they were justified as our hearts felt the warming of communal effort, when we knelt together for the first time within our own "creation" for the Christmas Mass.

It was so cool hearing confessions up there in the tropical, mid-summer night. Cella Sabatino, one of the two smoko-carriers, says she was the first to go to confession in the new "church-house". Bertie Dorante served the first Mass and, of course, was the first to receive Holy Communion. "Who will be the first married?" "Who will be the first baptised in the new Church?" These were constant topics for conversation and conjecture. The favourite Christmas hymns and carols floated through the windows and doors, together with the light, out over the silent waters, reminding one so much of a European village Church on a mountainside. The singing and speaking were clear but muted by the loose sand on the floor. Later, when the cement floor was laid, the resonance became more marked and the quality of the sounds bell-like.

Since the Church was not yet blessed, we prepared a large Christmas Tree for the children in one of the sacristies. In the old Blitz, decorated for the purpose, Father Christmas came up the road and made an ingenuous entrance through one of the cylindrical windows, much to the surprise and delight of the children.

CEMENTING

After Christmas week and its rest, we made a determined effort on the cementing of the floor, an area of 2,750 square feet. The advent of the usual "wet season" forced us to use beach-sand, which came up in innumerable loads, both for filling and the mixture. Stretches of twenty five by six feet were laid at a time, neatly set off in squares for the aisle and seating. Lui Garnier, having benefited by his days in the army, was adept at smoothing, while Francis Sabatino soon realised that he was equally proficient. Francis Dorante, an expert in all that concerns cement, was content to see other and new hands doing a splendid job. The youths carted sand and water, mixed the cement, poured it and mixed more; older men dragged the steel-angle iron for the rough levels or took the levels. As each Mission day passed, the floor looked as we had hoped it would be, a superb finish, a tradesmanlike job, even with a touch of the professional.

Cementing the semi-circular sanctuary, raised seven inches above the floor, was a difficult piece of work but an original and artistic one. Francis, fortunately, has the happy knack of making good improvisation. With two long pieces of dinghy-planking, he made a splendid curve, both for the sanctuary itself and the two altar steps. The interior began to look dignified and majestic with its high walls, its wide stretches of cemented floor and the raised sanctuary. All our joys were flooding in at once. A particular pride was now being taken in every detail and suggestions became the regular thing -

MAY 8th, 1994 - HAMMOND ISLAND
CHURCH 40th ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATIONS

Left: Mrs Zilla Garnier Below: Jeleko Pearson



*Anima
Pearson
&
Grand
child*



*John
Mills*

a pleasant reward for so much coaxing!

EXTRA INTO THE TASK

About this time I received word to take up another appointment that had been awaiting me for some months at Santa Teresa Mission in Central Australia. All I had to do in this last fortnight could only be done at a hammer and tongs pace, together with the fullest energies of the men. By agreement relays of them each day sacrificed their seasonal holidays and put that extra into the task which made the completion possible. It seemed incredible, but the end was in sight.

Hislo Sabatino, in his own ingenuous way, built from North Queensland soft woods the beautiful altar rails round the semi-circular sanctuary. The bending of the top-rail was a master stroke of ingenuity, which only one trained in shaping dinghies, could have accomplished. It is difficult to describe the grace and dignity that these rails give to the majesty of the sanctuary. One is reminded, in a sense, of a miniature basilica, as one looks at the tall walls, so solid and opaque, the wide sanctuary and the unlimited wings of the sacristies.

FINISHING TOUCHES

The finishing touches were anything but touches. The door frames, although they had been standing for two years, were the very last things to be hinged to the steel frames, anchored to the cement floor and stoned in. The hanging of the double-doors was a simple enough business, even if few people had heard of parliament hinges. When opened, they had a butterfly appearance; when closed they were very ecclesiastical. Finally the stone doorways were arched with a false arch of quartz, a piece of bonding that gave them an air of rustic abandon, aptly suited to the architectural ideal of the original plan. Neat, cement approaches of an arc design rounded off these doorways.

The wide sweep of the half-rounded platform, that we finally raised at the front door, was an inspired addition to the facade, enabling the worshipper to walk out the front door and, gazing over the scene, take in a beautiful experience. . . the ever-changing glories of that widest angle view that Wednesday Island, the two Tuesdays, Channel Island, Horn Island, Cape York and the seas present any time of the day or moonlit night.

Late one afternoon we dismantled the altar in the old Church and removed it, together with all the other sacred furnishings, including the battered harmonium that wheezes out all the accompaniments, to their new orientation in the new Church. You cannot put old wine into new bottles nor old furniture into new churches! Holy Mass was said and Benediction given regularly now. The lighted Church, with its porthole windows, looked just

like a passing steamer.

One defect became evident quickly. The back windows were throwing too much light into the eyes of the worshippers and in the cyclonic, north-west rains the water was beating on the inside of the cylinder and bouncing up for the winds to waft ever so finely into the Church. These problems were solved by six dozen amber soft-drink bottles in each of the back windows! Only for those who have seen the effect of the western sun pouring in through these "stain-glass" windows, can it be said that there is a distinct beauty in the varying angles of refraction. The effusions of the afternoon sun are shattered into a myriad combination of scintillating ambers and golds, while the gaps between the bottles let in the air. One thing now remained. The terracing of the grounds round the Church, the cleaning up of the past two years' work, and the spreading around of white beach sand. On the Tuesday at 5.30 pm it was finished.

Two days later I looked for the last time from the window of the DC3, that circled near it, as it lifted up off the Horn Island Drome, taking me to Cairns and so from there to Santa Teresa in Central Australia. The blessing and opening of the Church and its furnishing have yet to be done; of these the hardest will be the furnishing.



*Generous friends of Sacred Heart Mission at Cultural Festival, May 1993 -
Pat Jones, Paddy Rendell, Muriel Rasey*

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Bishop Bathersby and Fr Tom Mullins with Confirmation class - about 1990



Monsignor Walsh and Confirmation Class 1992

BISHOP FOLEY'S FIRST VISIT 1992



L to R: Clare McGrath, Sr Elva, Gwen Moloney, Barbara Ford, Pat Jones, Bishop James Foley, Maria Mills, Rhyma Toolis, Anne Raetzke, Cessa Mills, Marian Ball



1993: Sr Elva, Sr Patricia, Fr Charles (Anglican) and Fr Deere