



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC
(UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF SYDNEY)

NEWSLETTER

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NOTICE OF THE 2020 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE ACHS
1.30 PM ON SUNDAY, 15 March, 2020.

Crypt Hall of St Patrick's at Church Hill [Grosvenor Street], The Rocks.

The Agenda:

- Minutes of 2019 Annual General Meeting
 - President's Report
 - Treasurer's Report
 - Election of Office Bearers for 2020
 - Items of business and motions of which due notice had been given.
- Agenda items must reach the Secretary by 23 February 2020.

NOMINATIONS REQUESTED FOR COUNCILLORS FOR 2020

All positions on the Council are declared vacant at the AGM. Positions: President, Vice Presidents (2), Secretary, Treasurer, Councillors (up to 7). Nominations must be in writing, signed by the nominee, nominator and seconder who must be financial members of the ACHS and received by the secretary prior to the meeting.

REMINDER - MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Payment of fees for Membership of ACHS for 2020 will be due on 1st April 2020 and must be paid by 1 May 2020. Application/Renewal forms are included in the envelopes with this Newsletter. A form will also be available on the ACHS website. NB Fees remain the same as last year.

Australian Catholic Historical Society Inc. Program for 2020

This information is correct as at 20 January 2020, but changes can occur.

Sydney Meetings.

| DATE | TOPIC | SPEAKER |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| 16 February | <i>Catholic rural virtue: ideal and reality</i> | Professor James Franklin. UNSW. ACHS Vice President and Journal Editor. |
| 15 March *1:30 pm start. | *1:30pm Annual General Meeting 2:00pm Presentation: <i>Les Murray's sacramental poetics.</i> | Dr Stephen McInerney Poet and Executive Officer The Ramsay Centre. |
| 19 April | <i>"Answering the call": Sydney's Irish Catholic doctors in the Great War.</i> | Honorary Assoc. Professor Paul Lancaster Menzies Centre for Health Policy, University of Sydney. |
| 17 May | <i>The Quiet Man: a new film about Fr John Neill.</i> | Fr John Neill OP OAM Formerly: Councillor, University of Notre Dame Mr Tim Perkins Director <i>The Quiet Man.</i> |
| 21 June | <i>The Catholic clergy – prisoners of history.</i> | Fr John Crothers Formerly PP Penhurst and Peakhurst and author of <i>The Clergy Club.</i> |
| 19 July | <i>Pastor aeternus: 150 years since the promulgation of "On the infallible teaching authority of the Roman</i> | Dr Paul Collins. Author and broadcaster, Emeritus Professor Edmund Campion. Author, formerly: Catholic Institute of Sydney. |

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| | Pontiff” -the binding dogma of “Papal Infallibility”. | Emeritus Professor Robert Gascoigne. Theologian, formerly: Australian Catholic University. |
| 16 August | <i>David Coffey: Theologian of Spirit.</i> | Emeritus Professor Paul Crittenden. Formerly: Professor of Philosophy <i>and</i> Dean of Arts, University of Sydney. |
| 20 September. | <i>The "Spanish Flu" and its impacts on Catholic Church activities.</i> | Dr Janice Garaty. ACHS Councillor and historian. (Author of <i>Providence Provides: Brigidine Sisters in the New South Wales Province</i>). |
| 18 October | <i>Under the skin? The contested history of the Bible in Australia.</i> | Dr Meredith Lake. ABC Radio National (Religion Department). Winner: NSW Premier’s Australian History Prize (2019) for The Bible in Australia: a cultural history. |
| 15 November | <i>Writing Australian Catholic history: A case study – Riverview.</i> | Mr Gerard Windsor. Novelist, reviewer and essayist (Author of <i>The Tempest-tossed Church</i>). |
| 12 December | Annual Mass and Christmas Lunch. | Details to be advised. |

Location, time and contact: Sunday afternoons at 2.00pm (unless otherwise stated) in the Crypt of St Patrick's at Church Hill [Grosvenor Street], The Rocks. Admission is free and does not require membership of ACHS, but a donation is welcome. **Enquiries to: Dr John Carmody,** President ACHS: john.carmody@sydney.edu.au

Melbourne Chapter Meetings for 2020

Monday 2 March. Janette Elliott will speak on the topic: "*True knowing vs. unknowing of love in Julian of Norwich's interpretation of our marvelous medley both of weal and woe*".

Dates for other meetings in 2020: 1 June, 7 September and 9 November. Speakers and topics TBA

Location: Yarra Theological Union Study Centre, Classroom 1. 29 Albion Street Box Hill.

Information: Matthew Beckmann, OFM. Email address: mbeckmann@franciscans.org.au

Message from the President John Carmody

In a review of a recent book I read this sentence: “[This book] suggests how taking religion seriously can breathe new life into the craft of international history”. That is precisely what ACHS attempts to do and, as we seek to sustain our spirits during this dreadful beginning of the New Year it is worth keeping that aspiration in mind.

It reminded me of the “Brexit” shambles which has been fixating and paralysing Britain and – since I was there for the “Referendum” in 2016 and a few politically significant subsequent occasions – of my attempts to understand the powerful forces which underlie that dispute.

I suspect that the reasons go back to the Reformation: when Henry VIII broke with Rome (a political as much as a religious act) he also broke with Europe. Furthermore, unlike every other reformer, he established a state-based church with the monarch as its head (and since the Papacy also entertained comparable delusions, there was a potential for serious political rivalry). That continues to mean, I think, that even

irreligious English people see the Church of England as, somehow, an expression of their political selves. A consequence, I suspect, is that – “informed” by those warm parts of “The Continent” where the English have their holidays – they think of Europe as *Catholic*. As an Australian friend (who has lived in London for 40 years) once put it to me, “Not many of the English go to northern Germany or Scandinavia (the *Protestant* parts) for their holidays.”

Hence, apart from their insular geography (and the sense, therefore, that winds and tides separate and protect them), the English consider that – emotionally, no less than in other ways – they are distinct from (indeed, superior to) Europeans. The solution to the powerful conundrum *must* be an emotional one and it should remind us that we historians need to ask such nettlesome questions. In his fascinating book, *The English and their History* (2014), Robert Tombs pushes such issues even farther back in time.

Happy New Year to everyone!

(John Carmody President)

ACHS Melbourne Chapter meeting: Monday 11 November 2019

The Melbourne Chapter meeting planned for 11 November 2019 was cancelled.

Sydney meeting: Sunday 17 November 2019.

Topic: *Disentangling the McGirrs of Colonial NSW*

Presenter: Rev Dr Colin Fowler OP Formerly Parish-priest and historian: St Bede's, Pyrmont. NSW.

Fr. Fowler explained that the researching of his paper had been driven by the challenge to disentangle the careers of three priests ministering in colonial NSW between 1855 and 1874. Each bore the surname McGirr; one was John, two were James. Ecclesiastical documents and contemporary newspapers conflated the details of their lives and secondary sources compounded the confusion.

The author's interest in this matter arose from curiosity about a conversation that took place on a voyage to Australia in 1855-1856. The Irish-born and English-educated Myles Athy, aspirant to a monastic vocation at Sydney's Benedictine monastery, kept a diary during this voyage. Well into the journey he recorded a conversation with one of the three Irish secular priests on board, in which the 'Paddy' clergyman expressed his support for the Russians in the Crimean.

Downside-educated Myles was appalled at such disloyalty to the Empire. Such opposition to the British Empire was a not an unfamiliar Irish nationalist attitude – 'England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity'. Athy, to whom a Paddy might have applied the derogatory term 'West Briton', did not name the priest. Initial research suggested that the most likely Russian supporter was Rev. J. McGirr, who was a native of County Mayo within the Archdiocese of Tuam, over which the combative patriot archbishop, John McHale, 'the Lion of the West', presided from 1834 to 1881.

All three J. McGirrs were schooled at St Jarlath's College in Tuam, where Archbishop McHale's keen interest in Irish history and language fostered the beginnings of a strong tradition of Irish nationalism.

Fr Fowler proceeded to unfold the careers of these three clergymen, beginning with John, who had been ordained in 1843 for the diocese of Bengal and in 1855 recruited by Archbishop Polding to head Lyndhurst College in Sydney, where priests for the diocese were to be formed. His rather troubled career in the antipodes led him to ministry in rural Victoria and in New Zealand. He died in England in 1869.

James McGirr, a cousin of John, also went to India as a missionary in 1846. After several years back in Ireland from 1852, he sailed to Australia in 1860 for health reasons. He joined his brother Michael, a former Maynooth seminarian, who took up a teaching position in Bathurst in 1857 and later became editor (then owner) of the Catholic newspaper, the *Freeman's Journal*, dying in 1890. James was back in Ireland in 1866 and became involved in nationalist politics. He died in 1881.

A younger cousin, James Joseph McGirr, came to Australia as a seminarian in 1864 and was the first priest ordained for the newly established Bathurst diocese, where he was appointed president of St Stanislaus College. Then followed an appointment to the mission of Parkes, from where he encouraged two nephews to migrate. These nephews, James and John, ventured initially into goldmining and then into agriculture. They both produced large families, resulting in numerous McGirr descendants.

Having untangled the colonial McGirrs, Fr Fowler concluded his talk with the return visit of Jim McGirr, Premier of NSW, to the family village in County Mayo in 1948.

(Based on summary provided by Fr Fowler)

ACHS Annual Mass and Christmas Lunch: Saturday 14 December 2019

The ACHS Annual Christmas Mass and lunch was held at Mary MacKillop Centre North Sydney. The Mass was celebrated by Fr Brian Lucas and Fr Michael McLean, both ACHS members. During the homily Fr Lucas mentioned aspects of the life and works of St John of the Cross whose feast day it was. He also mentioned that Fr McLean and he had entered St Columba's Seminary at Springwood on the same day.

After the Mass we moved to the Schoolroom for lunch. This was a different venue to the one we had used previously as it could accommodate the larger group

that attended this year. After an excellent lunch the President Dr Carmody thanked members for their continued support of the Society in 2019. He particularly thanked those who had contributed to the Society achieving another successful year and those who had organised the Mass and lunch. He then introduced the speaker, Monsignor Tony Doherty who had been Dean of St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney during which time the Spires were erected and Pope John Paul II visited Australia. Monsignor Doherty was later Parish Priest of Rose Bay.

Monsignor Doherty thanked Dr Carmody for the invitation and apologised for being slightly late as he had conducted a funeral that morning. He began by stating that we are the keepers of the story and that was an important commitment. He proceeded to mention the stories of three people. The first was Jean Finnane whose requiem Mass he had just celebrated. The second was his mother and the third was Jorge Bergoglio - Pope Francis.

Jean Finnane was born in December 1918, married 78 years ago and had seven sons and one daughter. She had been an active and cherished Rose Bay parishioner since 1927 and carried the history of the Rose Bay's Catholic Community. She was devoid of ego, but was a complete person who radiated the fullness of life. – *"I have come that you might have life. Life in its fullness"*. (John 10:10)

Monsignor Doherty then told a number of stories about his mother who liked to have the occasional whisky and who lived into her 99th year. One was a conversation between his mother and Pope John Paul II at an informal dinner gathering when she was trying to explain to the Pope that she was 94.

He then moved onto Pope Francis who is under intense pressure and facing unprecedented criticism by some

prominent people. He told the story of the Pope interacting with some Argentinean Pilgrims and sharing a traditional Argentinean drink the pilgrims had offered him. After the incident the security team told him not to consume any food or drink offered to him as it may contain poison. He is reported to have responded that it was not a problem as they were pilgrims not cardinals.

Monsignor Doherty briefly acknowledged the recent canonisation of St John Henry Newman and drew attention to the words of one of his hymns *"Lead Kindly Light, amidst th'encircling gloom"*. He suggested that we remember this message and the qualities of these three people as *"Amidst the elephantine vanity and greed, we do not have to travel far to find the campfires of gentle people"* (Quote from Garrison Keillor)

When the dinner and formalities were concluded there was a great opportunity to socialise with those present. In an email to Councillors after the Mass and lunch Dr Carmody mentioned that *"the conviviality was almost tangible. I thought that the new venue worked extremely well and I'm very pleased that we decided to move there and not place any limit on the numbers attending"*. (Geoff Hogan Editor and Councillor).

Bicentennial of the establishment of an official Catholic presence and of Catholic schools in NSW

Before 1820 there had been some priests in NSW: Fr Dixon, a convict, two other convict priests and Fr O'Flynn. Fr Philip Conolly and Fr John Therry were Australia's first officially appointed Catholic priests and arrived in Sydney on 3 May 1820. Fr Conolly went to Tasmania in 1821. Fr Therry obtained a land grant on which to build a church. It is now the site of St Mary's Cathedral.

In 1820 Fr Therry established a Catholic school in Parramatta and appointed George Morley as principal. Morley had been an accountant in County Meath, Ireland, was convicted of a petty crime and sent to Australia in 1813. The school was located in Hunter Street, Parramatta. In 1837 it moved to the site of the current St Patrick's Cathedral Parramatta and evolved into what became Parramatta Marist High School, the Marist Brothers having been appointed to the school in

1875. It is now located in Westmead. A list of Headmasters from the time of Mr Morley to the present time is situated in the school's administration building.

There are some sources that mention the provision of education for Catholic children in NSW prior to 1820, but these were not "Catholic schools" as there was no recognised "official" Catholic presence until the arrival of Fr Conolly and Fr Therry. The arrangements lacked the structure and official recognition associated with being a Catholic school.

A connection of Parramatta Marist High School with the ACHS is that a past president and life member of the Society, Br John Luttrell, is a former student of the school.

(Geoff Hogan Editor and Councillor)

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