

# Early Parish Priests

Although the early priests, Frs Dixon (1803 - 4), Therry & Power (1820's) visited Windsor, Father Christopher Vincent Dowling, an Irish Dominican based at Parramatta, was the first to hold regular services at Windsor (1831).

On his transfer to Newcastle in 1835, a resident priest was appointed. This was Father James Vincent Corcoran, another Dominican who had come to Australia with Bishop Polding. Writing to his confrere and cousin, Rev Thomas Heptonstall, O.S.B., Bishop Polding speaks of the religious revolution effected by Fr Corcoran in Windsor.

One hundred and forty had attended their Easter duty, only half a dozen of whom had been to Confession for many years.

There was still much to be done, as the 1836 census showed over 800 Catholics in the Windsor area. Fr Corcoran had seen the foundation stone of St Matthew's laid, but he did not see the church completed: while driving to Sydney on 4th August, 1837, he was thrown from his gig and killed.

The next priest was the Rev John Brady, later Bishop of Perth, who saw the completion of the church. In addition to Windsor, each month he visited six stations, each having a small chapel and situated at distances of 12 to 35 miles from Windsor.

In 1840, Father Thomas Slattery was assigned to assist Father Brady and, when Brady was transferred to Western Australia in 1843, he took charge of Windsor until the arrival of the Rev W.J. Dunne later that year.

In 1845, Fr Dunne was succeeded by the Rev John Kenny and, later the same year, Rev M. McGrath.

Although his stay was short, Father Kenny must have had pleasant memories of Windsor, for when he died in 1886, his Will included a bequest of one hundred pounds to the Parish.

In 1847, Rev John Joseph Therry, the pioneer priest of Australia, took up residence in Windsor for about nine months. He was followed in 1848 by Rev John Grant, who remained until 1851. Fr Grant obviously had the gift of making friends, for, when in 1851, he planned to leave Windsor quietly to board the "Blackwell" for a health trip to Europe, friends at Windsor gathered a testimonial of one hundred pounds and sent a parishioner riding to Sydney to deliver it before the ship sailed.

While in Rome, Pope Pius IX conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. On his return in 1853, he was stationed at Bathurst until his early death in 1864, and in his fund raising effort there, his Windsor friends joined the many who supported him.

St Matthew's

Father Grant's place at Windsor was taken by Fr Nicholas J. Coffey, a Franciscan. The following year saw Father Patrick Hallinan become parish priest, and, unlike his predecessors, his stay was not a short one. Parish priest for twenty-two years, he was highly esteemed by all classes of the community. During his time, he worked hard to have the church of St Monica built at Richmond. He shared in the tragedy of the 1867 flood, taking shelter with the many people who found refuge at the two St Matthew's churches.

When Dean Hallinan departed over four hundred assembled to see the presentation of a purse of one hundred and fifteen pounds and listen to an address on behalf of many well-wishers.

In 1874 he was followed by the Rev Samuel John Austin Sheehy, a Benedictine. As Polding's Vicar-General, he had been nominated for a bishopric, but in the English-Irish friction of 1860's, this did not eventuate. It was he who brought the sisters to Windsor, establishing a convent south of Fitzgerald St in George St.

In 1886, Fr Austin was succeeded by Rev John Hayes, from Wollongong. Fr Hayes was in charge of the now smaller, but still large Windsor parish for the next twelve years. He suffered from ill-health until his death in 1898. He was buried in the local cemetery after a funeral service attended by 50 priests.

Rev B. McDonnell became parish priest and remained until 1924. He was well-liked by all denominations, and the silver jubilee of his ordination (1911) was marked by many celebrations at Windsor and Riverstone, where speakers included non-Catholic clergy as well as his brother priests.

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## Assistant Priests

(Priests other than those listed as Parish Priests)

- Father Thomas Slattery (c1840)
- Father Maurus O.S.B. (mentioned by sisters 1878)
- Father Sheridan (c1895 - M. Brown's notes)
- Father Lynch (c1898 - M. Brown's notes)
- Father Whelan (c1920)

(Names below have been supplied by Rita Taylor - order uncertain)

- Father Stack
- Father Sheils
- Father McCulloch
- Father Leo Purcell
- Father Richard Cattell
- Father Brian Egan
- Father Chris de Souza
- Father Peter Lamont

St Matthew's

NOTES: No curates in Father Coffey's or Father Murhpy's time (Sister M. Stanley) but M. Brown says Father Costello in Father Murphy's time. A cutting from the "Windsor and Richmond Gazette" May 29, 1909, mentions a Father Ryan and Father Jerome Keating O.S.B. - Hatigan in "Men of '38" mentions Father Jerome several times, but at Bathurst and the gold fields at Sofala and Turon. There were several Ryans listed in index.

*St Mathew's*