

# NEWSLETTER

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## VILLAGE OF ST ANNE'S, STRATHFIELD SOUTH

By Cathy Jones

*Historic St Ann's Catholic Church is located in St Anne's Square, the centre of the Village of St Anne's in Strathfield South. Located within this Square is Historic St Ann's Church, the present St Anne's Catholic Church and St Anne's Primary School.*

*Historic St Ann's Church was built between 1859 and 1864 within the Village of St Anne's. The Village was laid out by Father John Joseph Therry and the streets of the Village were named for prominent Catholic ecclesiastics of the time.*



Figure 1 Historic St Ann's Church 1964. Source: Cathy Jones

*The Village is located at the nine-mile peg out of Sydney and one day's journey by dray or bullock wagon'. It overlooked the first available crossing of the Cooks River (before bridges were built) for those heading to the Illawarra or Goulburn<sup>2</sup>. The current St Anne's Church was built in 1966 and the primary school in 1956.*

*The spelling St Ann's is used to describe the first Church as it is historically and frequently recorded with this spelling, according to the Friends of St Ann's Group. However, generally the Church, the Village and street name is spelt St Anne's.*

## Father John Joseph Therry and the Village of St Ann's grant

On March 20 1837, Catholic priest Father John Joseph Therry (1790-1864) received a land grant of 47 acres in an area called 'Bark Huts', in the Parish of Concord. The grant was made for personal use and profit under the seal of NSW Governor Sir Richard Bourke. The area of the grant was described as 'bounded on the north by the road from Sydney to Liverpool, 17 chains, commenced at Moore's Bridge' on the east by a line south 29 chains 20 links being part of the western boundary of James Wilshire's 500 acres; and on the south and west by Cook's River'<sup>3</sup>.

In today's terms, the locality of Bark Huts was situated around Liverpool Road near the crossing of the Cooks River at Strathfield South. Moore's Bridge joined the two sides of Liverpool Road across the Cooks River.

Father Therry originally called this district Maryborough or Marybury, which is a reference to Mary, mother of Jesus Christ<sup>4</sup>. Therry was a prominent and important figure in the establishment of the Catholic Church in Australia. As Eddy (1967) notes<sup>5</sup>, he was:

*"Simple and unselfish, a firm democrat and a zealous priest, Therry was a man of large notions and considerable achievement. He was an unsophisticated man with no clear ideas of social systems or political reform. Yet his energy and persistence proved a continual source of trouble to those who opposed his ideas of what was right or possible. Of the middle class, gentle, 'pious, zealous, and obstinate', he admired but lacked the education and ability of his more vivid contemporaries. But despite his peculiarities and limitations he undertook many obligations and responsibilities which would in the circumstances have crushed greater men. His enthusiasm and sincerity assure him of a firm place among the founders of the Catholic Church and in the history of civil liberties in Australia. He firmly believed in a distant future for which he built, often regardless of existing conditions".*

Father Therry planned to use the land grant to create a village at Bark Huts with the Catholic Church at its' centre. This plan was never fully implemented, as the land was subdivided and sold in stages to pay for the building of St Ann's Church. However, the village square layout conceived by Father Therry remains in evidence despite considerable changes to the built environment.

The construction of the original St Ann's Church was consistently delayed and was not built for close to 30 years after the land grant. Shortly after receiving the grant in June 1837. Therry offered 5 acres of land for sale for the benefit of neglected Aborigines<sup>6</sup>. In July 1841, the 'Australian Chronicle' announced that the foundation stone of St Anne's Church would be laid during that week. The first foundation stone was laid on 2 July 1841 by Dr Francis Murphy (Bishop Polding's Vicar-General in his absence). Therry chose the name Ann (the spelling he personally used and reference to this spelling is used in this article, though the church is more commonly spelt as St Anne's) for the new Church. St Anne was the mother of Mary, mother of Jesus Christ and therefore, the maternal grandmother of Jesus Christ. St Anne was the spouse of St Joachim. Ann was the name of Therry's sister and also one of his mother's names<sup>7</sup>.

In the following September, it was stated in the 'Australasian Chronicle' that Father Therry would make a 'free gift of half acre allotment to each of 20 persons who shall respectively subscribe £25 toward the erection of the church'<sup>8</sup>.

In March 1854 preliminary notice was given that the land would be sold by auction – the proceeds of 20 acres were to be devoted to the erection of St Anne's Church and the balance to be paid to the building fund for the construction of St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney<sup>9</sup>. Therry reputedly included timber from the local Cooks River Ironbark in the building of St Mary's Cathedral. Bethel wrote in 1931 "In his travels round about the bush lands surrounding Sydney in those early days Father Therry spied some enormous ironbark tares on the banks of Cook's River. He admired them, but not with a botanist's eye. "What fine pillars a few of those would make for the roof of St. Mary's," he said; and ...had the trees felled and shaped and made ready to act as columns of that church".

The subdivision of the land created 134 allotments with the streets of the subdivision named after dignitaries of the Catholic Church, which included Bede, Anselm, Therry, McEncroe, Gregory, Dean, Coffey, Grant and John Streets<sup>10</sup>. The auction sales of land at St Anne's held in May 1854 raised £3466<sup>11</sup>. Of this, Therry dedicated £2000 to the building of St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney. The foundation stone of St Anne's Church was relaid on July 26 1854<sup>12</sup>.

### Building of St Ann's

On 18 February 1859, Fr Therry finally accepted the seventh contract to build St Ann's<sup>13</sup> Construction, dependent on uncertain funds, proceeded between 1859 to 1864. It appears that Fr Therry financed the building of the Church, according to 'accounts among his papers' and letters written by John Cobb (the builder of St Ann's) in January 1859<sup>14</sup>. Cobb, after far from amicable dealings, finally agreed to erect all the mason's and bricklayer's work for £496<sup>15</sup>. The fourteen windows were set deep within the stonework and bricks were sourced locally from the clay of the Cooks River<sup>16</sup>. On 6 July 1859, another foundation stone was blessed by Bishop Polding. Though this stone is not visible today, stones were often built into the building at that time<sup>17</sup>.



Figure 2 Historic St Ann's altar 1964. Source: Cathy Jones

St Ann's Church was finally completed in 1864, the year of Therry's death. It was the last Church built by Therry. The first record of the Sacrament of Baptism at Bark Huts or St Ann's was on 29 June 1866. In the 1880's, the Church was frequently used as a school. In 1901, the Church acquired an altar from the Convent of the Good Samaritan, which had been demolished to make way for the railway at Central.

The State Heritage Register listing describes the Church as:

*"Located in the north east corner of the square (the centre being too clayey) it is typical of an Irish village church with additions, such as the vestry with fireplace. Built of solid brick (cement rendered in 1952) with sandstone footing course. Dressed sills and cappings to the buttresses. The brick interior is painted to the dado level. The sanctuary is plastered with interesting stencil work. The rest of the square is now occupied by the new church, primary school and car park".*

## Naming of St Ann's Village

The streets surrounding St Ann's Church are all named for dignitaries of the Catholic Church. An article in the Catholic Weekly in 1951 sheds some light on the origin of the street names in the St Ann's Village. Though Coffey and Grant streets were laid out, these streets no longer exist as the land on which the streets were located were later acquired by the Western Suburbs Brickworks. These streets were located approximately where Dean Reserve in Strathfield South is now located.

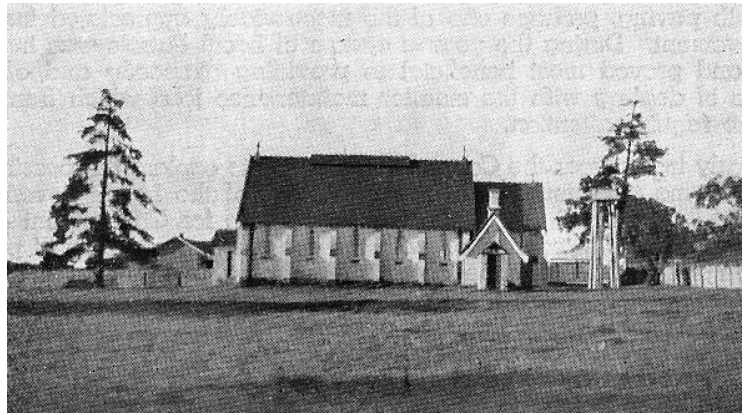


Figure 3 St Ann's Church Enfield featured in Enfield Council Annual Report 1936

St Anne's Square is named for St Anne, the mother of Mary, mother of Jesus Christ.

Anselm Street was named after St Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109). Anselm was a founder of modern philosophy and was one of the first scholastic writers.

John and Bede Streets were named after John Bede Polding (1794–1877), the first Archbishop of Sydney. Polding was born in Liverpool, England and was ordained a priest in 1819<sup>18</sup>. Until his departure for Australia was secretary to the President-General of the Benedictine Congregation. He was appointed Vicar-Apostolic of New Holland in 1834, and on Sunday September 13, 1835, with his little band entered Port Jackson. He visited Rome in 1847 and again in 1855, returning each time with recruits. After many appeals he obtained a Benedictine colleague, Roger Bede Vaughan, as co-adjudicator in 1873. Four years later Dr Polding died at Sacred Heart Presbytery Darlinghurst in 1877.

Therry Street was named for Father John Joseph Therry, pioneer priest of Australia. Therry was born in Cork, Ireland in 1790. He was ordained in 1815 and was later secretary to the Bishop of Cork, Dr Murphy<sup>19</sup>. In 1820, he and Father Phillip Connolly arrived in Sydney on the SS Janus as Government chaplains. Therry described his life in Australia for the next forty-four years as 'one of incessant labour very often accompanied by painful anxiety'<sup>20</sup>.



Figure 4 St Anne's Village 1947

Father Therry, built the first Saint Mary's Cathedral, and worked widely throughout New South Wales, Melbourne, Tasmania, and finally at Balmain where he died on May 25, 1864. He was buried in Devonshire Street cemetery but his remains now rest in the crypt at Saint Mary's Cathedral with those of Archdeacon McEncroe and Father Power. His funeral was 'certainly the most numerously attended' ever seen in Sydney to that date<sup>21</sup>. His remains are now in the crypt of St Mary's Cathedral, where the Lady Chapel was erected as his memorial<sup>22</sup>.

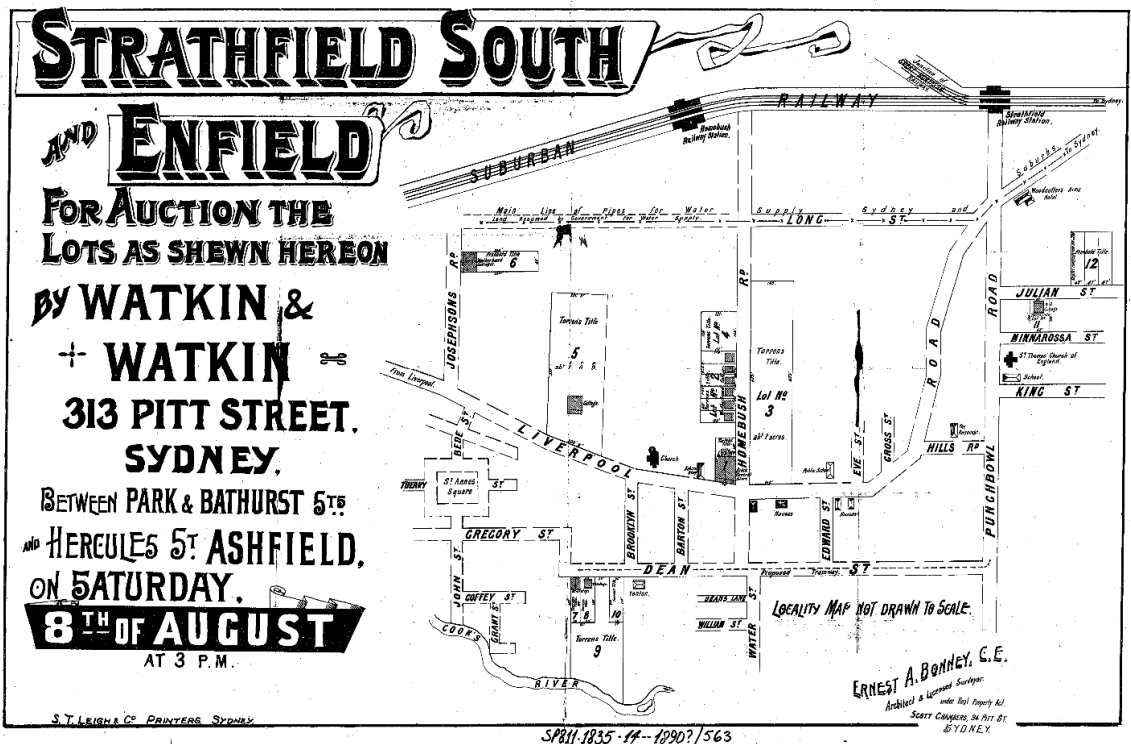


Figure 5 Subdivision map c1880 showing St Anne's Village and Coffey and Grant Streets



McEncroe Street is named after Archdeacon McEncroe (1794-1868). McEncroe took charge of St Mary's Cathedral when he arrived in Sydney on June 13, 1832. At that time there were only two other priests in the country Father Therry and Dowling; Father Connolly was in Tasmania. John McEncroe was born in Cashel on St Stephen's Day 1794 and was ordained in 1819. In November 1822 he went to America and was right-hand man to Dr John England, Bishop of Charleston for eight years. Repeated attacks of yellow fever and malaria undermined his health, so he returned to Ireland, where he made the acquaintance of John Hubert Plunkett who had been appointed Solicitor-General in New South Wales. On Plunkett's persuasion he accepted the post of chaplain in the young colony and both reached Sydney in June 1832. In 1838 Father McEncroe went to Norfolk Island for two years and in 1840, returned to Saint Mary's. Here he remained for 20 years and became the first parish priest of Saint Patrick's Church Hill. He died in 1868 and was buried in Devonshire Street cemetery in the same tomb as Father Terry, who had predecessor him by four years. The remains of these two Pioneer priests now rest in the crypt at Saint Mary's Cathedral.



Figure 6 St Anne's Village. 1943 Aerial. Six Maps

Gregory Street was named for Henry Gregory. When Bishop Polding left England in SS Oriental on March 27, 1835 one of the sub deacons who accompanied him was Henry Gregory Gregory (1813-1877). He was ordained on March 17, 1837, the second ordination in Australia. He was given temporary charge of Saint Mary Seminary but in October 1838, he was sent to Norfolk Island with Father McEncroe and remained there until the end of 1839. He left Sydney with Dr Polding in November 1840 and was made a Doctor of Divinity (DD), a holder of an advanced academic degree in divinity in Rome. On his return he acted as the Archbishop, and was made Vicar-General in 1845 when Father Francis Murphy became Bishop of Adelaide. He administered the Archdiocese during Dr Polding's absence in Europe in 1846-47.

Coffey Street was named for Dean Coffey (1801-1857). Coffey was an Irish Franciscan who with Father Geoghegan volunteered to accompany Dr Ullathorne to Australia. For some time he was at St Francis' Church in Melbourne with Father Geoghegan. He secured the grant of the Catholic Cemetery in Parramatta and built there the first mortuary chapel in Australia as a memorial to Father McCarthy who died in Parramatta in 1844. During Dean Coffey's regime the churches at Kissing Point (Ryde) and Concord were served from Parramatta. He was largely responsible for building St Charles's Church Ryde, where he died after celebrating Mass on November 13, 1857. Began in 1878 and completed in 1883, the tower of Saint Patrick's Parramatta was erected to his memory.

Grant Street was named for John Grant (1816-1864). In 1838, the ship Francis Spaight arrived in Port Jackson having on board the Vicar-General of Sydney, Dr Ullathorne accompanied by three priests, the pioneer five Sisters of Charity and three ecclesiastical students. One of the latter was John Grant, a native of Kilkenny, and he was employed as one of the teachers in St Mary's Seminary. In October 1843, he was ordained and sent to Appin, and soon afterwards

was appointed to the Bathurst mission, extending from the Blue Mountains to beyond Dubbo. At an early date he was appointed Dean and Doctor of Divinity and for nearly 20 years he laboured in this part of the Lord's vineyard.

### St Ann's Church and School

In 1917 St Joseph's Catholic Church opened on Liverpool Road Enfield and St Ann's as under the control of St Joseph's under Father Considine. However, St Ann's found it difficult to compete for parishioners from the new Church as well as St Martha's Church in Strathfield and experienced declining numbers of parishioners, a trend that continued in the 1920s and 1930s. However, increased building activity and expansion of population in and around Liverpool Road after World War II improved the viability of the St Ann's with increasing numbers of parishioners.

In 1953, St Ann's Church became a Parish. The Rev. Father Patrick Kennedy was established as the first Parish Priest and served at St Ann's until his death in 1971. From the time of his appointment, Kennedy set out to expand the buildings and presence of the Church. In 1953, Farther Kennedy lodged an application with Strathfield Council to build a new Presbytery of seven rooms, office and garage at estimated value of £7200, which was approved by Strathfield Council<sup>23</sup>. The builder was A. Condon, Wyatt Ave, Burwood. The presbytery and garage were built on the land formerly occupied by the old bell tower (which is featured in the 1936 photo of St Ann's). The new Presbytery was opened by His Eminence Cardinal Gilroy on November 22 1953<sup>24</sup> who said:

*"From the time of his appointment in charge of St Anne's, Fr Kennedy has shown commendable initiative. He has studied the needs of the parishioners and the resources of the parish and has made his plans accordingly. The church was here when he arrived. A presbytery has now been added to the plant, all other necessary units will follow".*

In April 1956, Father Kennedy lodged an application with Strathfield Council to build a new school at St Ann's. The application involved construction of two classrooms and toilets at an estimated value of £7000<sup>25</sup>. The builder was A Condon, Wyatt Ave, Burwood. Building of St Anne's Parish school commenced in 1956. The school was serviced by the Dominican Sisters from Santa Sabina. Extensions to the school were built in 1977 and 1980.

In 1965, Farther Kennedy successfully lodged an application with Strathfield Council to build a new Church at St Anne's Square at an estimated cost of £34,000<sup>26</sup>. The builder was G. C. McCabe & Co Pty Ltd, 51 Wollongong Rd, Arncliffe.

In March 1966, the new St Anne's Church was opened by His Eminence Cardinal Gilroy. The prayer 'St Anne, the Mother of the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, Pray for Us' surmounted the arch of the sanctuary of the old church and was translated to the plaque beneath the window at the northern end of the new Church.

The historic St Ann's Church was used as classrooms, a school library and on occasions, a meeting place for the Parish and community<sup>27</sup>.

Rev. Father. Paine was appointed the Parish Priest of St Anne's Church in 1973-1974. Following Father. Paine's death in 1981, Rev. Father. Dr George Joiner was appointed the Parish Priest.

In March 1983, the Historic St Ann's Church was partly demolished under instruction from the Parish Priest Father Dr George Joiner. In response to representations from a local community group, the Friends of Historic St Ann's, the Minister for Planning and Environment, Eric Bedford, issued a stop demolition order under the Heritage Act on 14 March 1993 (Heritage Order 1983), which involving calling the Police to enforce the order<sup>28</sup>.

The Friends of St Ann's was formed in 1983 from members of the local community concerned by the deterioration and looming threat of demolition of the historic church. The Friends<sup>29</sup> considered the key factors of importance supporting the restoration of historic St Ann's included:



Figure 7 Historic St Ann's 1986 pre-rennovation

1. The building is a key element in the landscape, contributing a sense of time, place and belonging.
2. The Therry church is an important element in the fabric of the municipality... arguably the oldest building in Strathfield .....helping to define and establish the environment which residents live.
3. St Ann's cannot be viewed as an isolated building but rather as a part of the pattern of settlement, socialisation and cultural expression through religious observation.
4. St Ann's has suffered from the twin problems of most heritage buildings ...1. finding funds for restoration; and 2. finding a viable use the building without compromising its structure.
5. It was designed and built as a church. It has now found a place of practical use in the modern parish and school of St Anne's as school library, senior classroom and, in the mezzanine overhead, a computer space/quiet study area/meeting room.

In 1996 the former Church was restored and the building is now used by the School. In 1996, the National Trust recognised the Friends of Historic St Ann's with a heritage award for the preservation of Historic St Ann's<sup>30</sup>.

Historic St Ann's is listed as an item on the State Heritage Register, as of historic importance to the State of NSW and listed for its significance to the local area on Strathfield Council's Local Environmental Plan (LEP).

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<sup>1</sup> Friends of St Ann's 2002

<sup>2</sup> Friends of St Ann's 2002

<sup>3</sup> Government Gazette 1837

<sup>4</sup> Catholic Weekly 1953, p5

<sup>5</sup> Eddy, 1967, John Joseph Therry, Dictionary of Biography

<sup>6</sup> Catholic Weekly 1951: 2

<sup>7</sup> National Trust 1983

<sup>8</sup> Australasian Chronicle' 1841 quoted in Friends of Historic St Ann's undated

<sup>9</sup> Catholic Weekly 1951 p2

<sup>10</sup> Catholic Weekly 1951 p2

<sup>11</sup> Catholic Weekly 1951 p2

<sup>12</sup> National Trust 1983

<sup>13</sup> O'Brien p356

<sup>14</sup> Catholic Weekly 1951, p2

<sup>15</sup> Stone 1993

<sup>16</sup> Stone 1993

<sup>17</sup> Stone 1993

<sup>18</sup> Nairn, 1987, John Bede Polding, Australian Dictionary of Biography

<sup>19</sup> Eddy 1967

<sup>20</sup> Eddy 1967

<sup>21</sup> Eddy 1967

<sup>22</sup> Eddy 1967

<sup>23</sup> Strathfield Council Building Application 145/53

<sup>24</sup> Catholic Weekly 1953: 5

<sup>25</sup> Strathfield Council Building Application 81/1956

<sup>26</sup> Strathfield Council Building Application 75/1965

<sup>27</sup> Friends of Historic St Ann's 1983

<sup>28</sup> Friends of Historic St Ann's 1996

<sup>29</sup> Friends of Historic St Ann's undated

<sup>30</sup> Friends of Historic St Ann's 2005