

The pages under the category of Parish History, give a brief insight into the founding of Forestville and Davidson Parishes.

We are indebted to Mr Jack Fox, whose booklet "The Evolution and History of Forestville Catholic Church" was used as the basis for the material on Forestville, and to Mr Bruce Walsh for the material on Davidson.

Thank you both.

Since July 2006 the two parishes have been joined together and are now known as The Catholic Parish of Frenchs Forest.

Our first Parish Priest Father Clem Gailey

Forestville starts off as part of MANLY Parish

Initially Manly Parish covered the whole of the Manly Peninsula and all of the French's Forest -Belrose area.

Regular Mass was not celebrated in the district during those early years. There were however, some Masses celebrated in private homes on an irregular basis starting about 1918.

These Masses were celebrated by Father McDonald who needed to travel on horse-back to reach distant parts of his far flung parish.

Now part of BALGOWLAH Parish

In 1929, following other redistributions of Manly Parish to the north, Balgowlah Parish was formed from within Manly Parish, and as the districts of French's Forest and Belrose were placed within the changed boundaries, they became part of the Parish of Balgowlah.

The first Parish Priest of Balgowlah Parish, was Rev. Father Bond who remained so until 1932, when he was replaced as Parish Priest by Rev. Father Whelan. The next change of Parish Priests took place in 1936, when Rev. Father Wall became Parish Priest. Without assistant priests to help, Fathers Bond, Whelan and Wall were unable to celebrate regular Masses within the distant and sparsely populated districts of French's Forest and Belrose. Whenever possible however, Mass was offered in the Soldier's Memorial Hall at the corner of Starkey St and Warringah Rd Forestville, but never more frequently than once a month and always on Saturday morning.

In those days parishioners like Jack Fox were sent far afield to alert the few Catholic families of a forthcoming Mass. Private phones were unheard of in those days, and there were only about four public phones in the entire district. Home visits were also difficult for priests to carry out on a regular basis, but were done whenever possible. After the opening of French's Forest cemetery in 1943, it was not unusual for Father Wall to make home visits after a burial service. Father Wall remained as Parish Priest until 1952, when he returned to his much loved native Ireland prior to his death.

Now we move to MANLY VALE Parish

Shortly after the departure of Father Wall, another division was made in the Parish of Manly. On this occasion, Manly Vale Parish was formed from part of Manly Parish and included the French's Forest and Belrose districts from Balgowlah Parish. St. Kieran's Church, having been built by Manly Parish as a church of ease, became the Parish Church of Manly Vale. Father Ormonde O.S.A. was appointed P.P. of this new parish, with Father Fitzsimons O.S.A. as his assistant. Very shortly after Manly Vale Parish was formed, these two priests started a regular Sunday Mass preceded by Confessions, in The Soldier's Memorial Hall Forestville.

After a few years, a change was made in the staffing of Manly Vale Parish and Father O'Byrne O.S.A. became P.P, with Father Stokes O.S.A. as his assistant. A further change was made later when Father O'Shea O.S.A. replaced Father Stokes as assistant priest. Father O'Byrne wasted no time in carrying out a very extensive census of the French's Forest and Belrose districts. Extensive to the extent that he personally visited every house in that part of his parish. He also formed a local

community fund raising committee, started an out-door monthly collection and encouraged that the second Mass collection be a florin (2 shillings - about 20 cents) collection. All monies raised in the district were banked in a special account to be used for future local purposes

Our first landholdings

Land in excess of two acres, situated at the corner of Warringah Rd and Arthur St Forestville, had previously been bequeathed to The Church by the Howard Family. Due to the location of this property, it was considered an unsuitable place to form a parish centre and was sold.. A more central replacement property was bought at Warringah Rd. Forestville. Regrettably, this was later shown to be equally unsuitable due to other reasons.

Our first Church

The results of Father O'Byrne's census revealed that need existed for a separate Church in the Forest area so he made representations to Cardinal Gilroy regarding the building of such a church. On receipt of an approval from Cardinal Gilroy, Father O'Byrne had Kevin Curtin and associates prepare plans for a church at Warringah Rd. Work was started on the proposed church early in 1958, and on 9th Dec. 1958 The Church of 'Our Lady of Good Counsel' was Blessed and opened, having cost in excess of 12000 pounds. (This first Forestville church is now the Montessori School on the corner of Warringah Rd and Brown Street)With Mass being celebrated for the first time in a Consecrated Church, a great blessing had been bestowed on the little community. With alternate Priests from Manly Vale each Sunday, the congregation was well supplied in those early days. From 1956 onwards, after the opening of St Augustine's College at Brookvale, the teaching Augustinian Fathers from the college, namely Father Brimson O.S.A. and Father Moran O.S.A. would also regularly offer Forestville's Sunday Mass celebration.

Now we have our own parish of Forestville

In December 1959 a separate Parish of Forestville was formed with Rev. Father Clement Gailey being appointed Parish Priest and the district said sad farewell to the tireless Father James O'Byrne O.S.A. The boundaries of the newly formed Parish of Forestville were as they are today, with the area of the present Davidson Parish included. As the newly formed parish did not have a priest's residence, Father Gailey was obliged to live in the Priory at Manly Vale. As this arrangement did not permit him to easily acquaint himself with his new parish or meet his parishioners, Father Gailey very early on, purchased and took up residence in a caravan at the rear of the church. The Blessed Sacrament was from then on reserved in the Parish of Forestville. Early in 1960 when a new cottage in Woodside Grove, having a common boundary with the Church Property, was available for sale, it was bought by Father Gailey and became the first Presbytery of Forestville

Our first school

Within six months of arrival, Father Gailey knew most of the streets in the built up areas of the district, and armed with Father O'Byrne's census of the late 50s., soon made himself known to his parishioners. Seeing the existing need, his energies were quickly extended to provide a Parish School. With the population expanding at an alarming rate, to finance what seemed an impossible dream, he introduced a planned giving program.

As the Warringah Rd property did not lend itself to the large school complex that seemed would ultimately be required, Father with limited resources, was faced with a search for suitable land. As luck would have it, or was it Heavenly Intervention, the land upon which stands our present Parish School became available. This site was purchased at what now must seem like a gift of around 30,000 pounds. The sale took place just days prior to a dedication to council of a proposed road joining Landscape Ave and Currie Rd. Father with a church debt, a presbytery debt, and having need to borrow to pay for the school site, could well have thought that the task of building a school to be an impossibility.

The volunteer labour approach

The period of the early sixties, was one of greatly increasing enrolments in catholic schools in the Sydney Archdiocese. The Archdiocese also had many growing parishes who had the same type of financial problems as the young Parish of Forestville was experiencing. Quite a number of these parishes had undertaken school building programs using voluntary labour. Some men of the Forestville Parish made suggestions to Father Gailey about this type of undertaking, but Father Gailey was aware that many of these schemes had fallen by the wayside bearing very little fruit. Seeing the absolute necessity of building a school, he examined many of methods that had been used. Jack Fox and Stan Stumbles went with Fr Gailey, one Saturday morning in 1960, as far afield as Bass Hill to investigate one such school project.

One scheme recommended as being successful, was a team system at North Ryde Parish. A steering committee established to enquire into North Ryde and a few other projects reported that the North Ryde method should work at Forestville, where many qualified building tradesmen were among the newly arrived parishioners. In the light of this report, Father called a meeting in the Soldier's Memorial Hall, of all interested parishioners where all the projects could be outlined. The 170 men attending that meeting unanimously endorsed the North Ryde system and the teams method was adopted by Forestville. The meeting also resulted in a register of all building trades workers being made.

Starting the School

At Forestville, each voluntary project involved about 200 men, mostly fathers of prospective pupils, but also included men of goodwill other than those of the Catholic Faith. Men were divided into 8 separate teams, with one team working either Saturday or Sunday on a rotating basis throughout each project. Each team had a qualified carpenter as its leader, and the first project had as foreman—overseer, either Ron Cook or Bill O'Brien, one of whom attended each day work was in progress. The workers only remuneration was a well earned rest and a chat over a bottle of beer at the end of each day's work.

A building—works committee was formed that initially consisted of Ron Cook, Bill O'Brien, Tom Birrell (chairman) and Miss Betty Tomlin a long serving house-keeper for Father Gailey (secretary). This committee that met weekly was changed and expanded as time passed, and together with the oncoming team leaders arranged such things as organizational matters, reviewing progress, ordering materials and mailing reminder notices. There were other members of the parish equally willing and able to undertake these weekly duties, but it was thought that small groups work more efficiently.

Qualified tradesmen other than carpenters were grouped as per trade, and each group under-took to do that part of the work applicable to their trade as and when required. To attempt to name all these people, would at this late stage be a difficult task and at the risk of forgetting some it has not been done. A qualified Architect—Parishioner, one Richard Mainwaring, volunteered his services to design and supervise the work. The services of Mr. George Holland, a local structural engineer were given voluntarily to design roof trusses etc. It was appreciated very early in the planning, that a good job depends on the quality of the paintwork, so to ensure that the paintwork was up to scratch, the services of Mr. Ken Armitage, a qualified house painter were solicited. Ken attended, on a voluntary basis, whenever painting was being done. He mixed all paint and issued it with a brush wherever required and offered qualified practical advice as the work progressed. At tea and meal breaks he went around the job cleaning pots and brushes and had everything ship shape when the workers returned. Neither George or Ken are members of the Catholic Faith. This was also the case with quite a number of other volunteers.

The opening of the school - with Brigidine Sisters

In July 1961 a start was made on the school block facing Currie Rd containing four class-rooms, office and ablution block. With everything finished for the start of school year 1962, Our Lady of Good Counsel Primary School opened with a Kindergarten and classes one to three. A further class was added at the start of each of the three following years. The eastern block of the same size and with another ablution block were built in 1963, and the western block with tuckshop, library and ablution block were built in 1965. All were built in the same manner taking the same time and were ready for the following school years.

The Brigidine Sisters, having accepted an invitation from Father Gailey to staff O.L.G.C school, took control in 1962. From their St.Ives convent, Sister Timothy Keady (Principal) together with one other Sister, travelled by car in company with other Brigidines who were teaching at Narraweena. With many changes in Sisters over the years, this method of transport continued until 1975, when dwindling numbers gave need for them to withdraw.

Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Primary School now caters for children from Kindergarten to Year 6.

The cost of the work

Whilst these three projects were built by using voluntary labour saving the parish many thousand dollars, they still came at a price and when complete at the end of 1965, the parish had an accumulated debt of \$137,000 with expected expenditure for 1966 reaching \$31,000 and an expected income for the same period being well short at \$11,800. Regrettably, this situation did not improve during the following years. With this heavy burden upon his shoulders, Father Gailey who was always reticent to speak of money matters from the Altar, had need to write in the Parish News of May 1966, some facts and figures regarding income and expenditure and the following is quoted from that bulletin :-

"Our weekly income averages \$486 and our weekly expenditure averages \$600. These figures indicate we spend \$114 more than our income each week. Frankly, we have never been able to meet our liabilities since 1962. This has been overcome by help from the Parish Savings Bank and by not making payments to the Catholic Trust. Income was greatly lifted last October, but so have our commitments been increased this year, by reason of having built the third wing of the school and the increased wages of lay teachers. It should be realized from these facts and figures that the financial situation is far from solved.

There is in this parish, a policy of not talking money, but to depend on the good will of the parishioners. This method is very successful and the people very generous. The present system of raising funds depends on the parishioners themselves spreading good will and understanding the needs of the parish. The parish depends on these parishioners to build up this unity and mutual understanding. If there has been little activity and little mention of material problems lately, **PLEASE** do not let your interest lag. The burden of facing these financial problems is on your priests. And the burden is heavy."

The parish Grows up Quickly

To give some indication of the growth of the parish, it is interesting to note that the church in Warringah Rd, having been opened in 1958 with seating for approx. 300, and with one Mass each Sunday, had by October 1966 need to increase seating by the use of stack-a-bye chairs wherever they would fit and the weekly Sunday Masses had increased to six. The Parish School, that had opened in 1962 with 172 pupils, had an enrolment of 529 for the start of 1967 and the average number of baptisms in the parish were in excess often a month from 1964 onwards.

The opening of the school in Currie Rd., created a separation of the parish buildings that was undesirable, and many years elapsed before the parish was brought together on adjoining properties.

The first move towards this end, came from Mr. and Mrs. Boileau, the owners of land alongside the school., namely No. 9 Currie Rd. upon which this new church stands. With the opening of the school, these generous people, seeing the difficulty the separation would cause the school pupils in attending the Church, and knowing land was not available to redress the situation, and themselves feeling hemmed in, made a very generous offer to sell to the church, As part payment they under took the exchange of a piece of Church owned land fronting Coolabah Cres, part of the recently purchased school block that was quite unsuitable for playground purposes. This arrangement was accepted by Father Gailey and he moved residence into the house on No. 9 Currie Rd. during 1962. From then on, Father Gailey, the school pupils and staff were no longer inconvenienced by the separation of the buildings.

Our Second Church

The rapid increase in the parish population as shown by the above figures, was such, that by late 1966, serious consideration had need to be given to building a larger church, and more school classrooms. After much consideration, consultation and many sleepless nights by Father Gailey, Richard Mainwaring was again called upon to design a dual purpose building to be built at Currie Rd, to the east of the original school. This building was to be used as a second Mass centre at weekends and convertible to school rooms during the week. When the plans of this building were drawn up they were readily adopted by the Parish Committee and the Building Committee set about finding way and means of building it with voluntary labour and a cost limit of about \$30,000. Plans were then submitted to Cardinal Gilroy for approval, who consented, but raised serious doubts or objections to a compromise building to serve both church and school. The new thinking stimulated by His Eminence, was that the new building should be a church (which in later years could become a hall) and the Warringah Rd. Church become an infants school.

This concept was adopted, and work commenced on this Church-Hall Building on 22nd. July 1967. The same type of voluntary effort was employed and having now seen the need for maintenance free buildings, this new building was constructed of face brick inside and out and was roofed with tiles. Shortage of time and bricklayers, gave need for the brickwork to be about the only paid labour in the entire job.

Opening the Second Church

The ceremony of Blessing this Church began at 2.30 pm on Saturday 9th. December 1967 with His Lordship Bishop Muldoon standing before the front doors of the church accompanied by a number of priests and a line of altar boys. After blessing the outside of the Church, he proceeded inside to bless the altar. After the blessing, Bishop Muldoon said the first Mass at the altar he had donated. This ceremony had taken place nine years to the day from the opening of the first Catholic Church in Forestville

When Currie Rd became the parish Mass centre, a large portion of the Warringah Rd property west of the church, was not needed. Angel Place was then formed and its entrance from Brown St was made by using a block of church owned land originally purchased as rear access to the church. The blocks on either side of Angel Place were then sold leaving only the old church building and land facing Warringah Rd. as church property. With the shift of the Mass centre to the church at Currie Rd, Father Gailey was relieved of walking to Warringah Rd. around midnight each night to lock the church. Something he had been doing since moving his presbytery in 1962. The shifting of the infant's school to Warringah Rd however, still left a situation regarding inconvenience. This unfortunate situation was endured by the pupils and staff of the infants school until around 1972 when the church building and remaining church land in Warringah Rd. was sold to "Montessori" for school purposes.

The Community Room

With the sale of the church property at Warringah Rd., parish finances were more rosy, but prior to that sale, another voluntary Building Project was under taken in 1971. This project was the construction of the Community Room. Started in June of that year this building was finished by the end of the year. The same principle of voluntary work was used and again a maintenance free brick

construction was chosen. When complete, this room became a much needed meeting room for the youth of the parish who had been early enrolments at The Parish School.

Formation of Davidson Parish

Another milestone in building and evolution of Forestville Parish were the formation of Davidson Parish from within the boundaries of Forestville in 1975 with Father Patrick (Paddy) Gillic as Parish Priest. Father Gillic was at the time of his new appointment, assistant to Father Gailey at Forestville.

The last building work undertaken by Father Gailey, was the construction of the two brick classroom blocks on the eastern side of the school property built by contract labour. The first in 1978 and the second built and joined to the first in 1980.

Our newly completed Church, stands as a legacy of Father Gailey's foresight and generosity, as in the late sixties, when the parish was strapped for cash, he purchased, using his own finances, a large parcel of land at the northern end of Forestville Park. He had visions of one day building a high school on that land and had the title of it made in favour of the Parish of Forestville.

During the twenty seven years Father Gailey was Parish Priest of Forestville, he laboured long, hard and tirelessly for the spiritual well being of his flock. He had assistant priests some of the time, but spent many years on his own. Some of his assistant priests were, Father John Walter, Father Basil Rosen, Father Peter Bain, Father John Williams, who left to become an army Chaplain in Vietnam and Father Paddy Gillic. Father Gailey left the parish at Easter 1986 leaving behind a legacy of much hard work and many sleepless nights.

Now part of Broken Bay Diocese

Rev. Father Eris Tierney succeeded Father Gailey as Parish priest of Forestville in May 1986 as the parish also moved to be part of the new Diocese of Broken Bay under the initial guidance of Bishop Patrick Murphy.

The New Presbytery

This building was completed in 1992 and is a very functional building, eventually providing accommodation for the assistant Priest, and offices for the joint operations of the two parishes - now joined under one Parish Priest. Prior to the building of the new presbytery, the priests of the parish were obliged to live in the original homestead of the Boileau family. Jack Fox had worked on the construction of that building early in 1950 and was most familiar with its shortcomings. Being built in the immediate post war period of material shortages and size limits, it contained one bathroom and one bedroom. (It did have a small attic room and a hotch-potch room on the upper floor.) It was certainly not a fit place for two priests and a housekeeper to live. When asked his thoughts regarding its demolition, Jack replied, "I would rather see it demolished before the brick bus shed at Jamieson Square, that I had worked on at the same time, as the bus shed had more architectural merit."

Fr Tierney became a much loved Parish Priest and was very visible in the church and school. His energy and enthusiasm enabled the parish to move into their third parish church. When Fr Tierney retired through ill health the responsibility for pastoral care of both Forestville and Davidson parishes was given to Fr David Taylor, who was then the Parish Priest of Davidson.

The two worshipping communities of Forestville and Davidson continued as separate parishes, operating under Parish Priest Fr David Taylor, and Assistant Priest Fr Clem Hill. They blended together many lay ministries and shared the pastoral support through one Parish Pastoral Council. In July 2006 we have seen history come full circle, with the Parish of Forestville and the Parish of Davidson being formally dissolved and one new Parish being formed, called Frenchs Forest Catholic Parish. This covers the same boundary as the original Parish of Forestville established in December 1959.

Davidson, Church and School

The first building and original church was blessed and opened on 1 June 1975 with Cardinal James Freeman as the Officiating Bishop.

This building now serves as the Parish Hall and is known as the "Fr Paddy Gillic Memorial Hall" in honour of the first Parish Priest of Davidson, Fr Paddy Gillic who was appointed in December 1975.

In 1976 the "School of Religion" was opened in 1976, and this now serves as the foyer for the present church. Before the presbytery was built in 1980 Fr Gillic used this building as living quarters, with part of the building being used today as the Blessed Sacrament Chapel.

The school opened for the beginning of Term 1 in 1980 with Sister Marcia, a Brigidine Sister, as first Principal. The present church was built by Fr John Hill our second Parish Priest in 1990 and blessed and consecrated by Bishop Patrick Murphy, Bishop of Broken Bay.

Extensions to the school were blessed and opened in March 2005 by Bishop David Walker, the current Bishop of Broken Bay.

St Martin de Porres Catholic Primary School caters for children in Year Kindergarten to Year 6.