

The Irish Down The River

The Irish played an important role in the development and character of the new settlement in Australia. There were fun-loving and generous folk, often transported for their part in the Irish uprisings of 1798 and 1801.

One such Irishman was Andrew Doyle, transported in the 'Rolla' with Patrick Hand, James Fitzgerald and Patrick Byrne. The Doyles became connected with the Protestant faiths, in particular Wesleyan and the Church of England.

Although three Irish priests had come to the colony, there are no records of marriages or baptisms occurring 'down the river'. Even when Father Therry arrived in 1830, ministering to Windsor from time to time, there is no mention of him travelling out of the town.

The Catholics on the river must have felt neglected at times. Kitty Carman (Catherine Collins?) was an early Irish transportee, convicted in Dublin in 1796 and sent out on the 'Britannia', under the rule of Captain Thomas Dennott. The convicts under his charge were starved and denied adequate water. They were heavily ironed and brutally flogged - some receiving 400 lashes a day and many dying on the voyage. Women were beaten, placed in neck-yokes and had their heads shaven. Kitty, her husband and the other Irish transportees who had suffered so cruelly, soon found their hatred of the British disappear once they reached the colony.

An Irish settler who lived along the Colo, near its mouth, ancestress of the Cavanough family, was Margaret Darnell (Dowling?), and it was her nephew, Father C.V. Dowling who arrived in Windsor in 1831. Another was Jeremiah Sullivan, who had once been in the seminary and worked hard to establish a church and school in the area.

In 1835, Father Corcoran visited the Macdonald River and Sullivan formed a committee for the erection of a Catholic school. He later approached Father Brady in 1838. It is not known if this school was built - it may have been the schoolhouse come church opened by Bishop Bede Polding on St Rose's day, August 30, 1840 (the chapel of St Rose, said to be near the Upper Branch or Colo River).

From October, 1840, Father Slattery ministered to the area from the Macdonald River to the Brisbane Water, and a Macdonald register commenced. Well-known Catholic families were the Morans from the Colo, Hugh Doughertys from Wiseman's Ferry area, the Byrnes, Toomeys and the Jurds.

St Joseph's on the Macdonald River was commenced in 1839, but not finished until 1853. It is now in ruins. Ten miles north, at Upper Macdonald, was Our Lady of Loreto, in use from 1842.

Great floods in the 1850's and 60's saw the decline of Catholic families in the area, and after the hardships of the 1891 flood, many Catholics adopted the Wesleyan faith, which was very strong in the area.

St Kaituma's