

An Enduring Legacy



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Founder of the
St Vincent de Paul Society
in Australia

KEVIN SLATTERY



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St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria Inc.

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Priests Urgently Needed

When Melbourne's first bishop, the Augustinian Dr James Alipius Goold arrived in the city in late September 1848 he was confronted by a rapidly expanding population of immigrant Catholics and a critical shortage of priests. He later described the situation as follows:



Fr Patrick Geoghegan OFM

“When I arrived in Melbourne the diocese had only three clergymen, two churches, one in Melbourne, the other at Geelong – and a commodious little chapel at Portland. In Melbourne, close to the church, a small presbytery ... a spacious hall, which is used for a boys’ and girls’ school, a small schoolhouse.”¹

Dr Goold quickly formed what he called the ‘Catholic Association’ with the aim of raising funds to recruit urgently needed clergy. At the first meeting of the Association on January 28, 1849, 60 pounds was subscribed. This amount grew to 400 pounds during the remainder of 1849.

The recruiting drive began on March 17, 1849, when Fr Patrick Geoghegan, Melbourne’s pioneer priest and appointed by Dr Goold as Vicar-General of the diocese, sailed for Europe. As a result of that mission, over the following two years, four priests and five seminarians arrived in the colony to supplement the few

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Fr Ward arrived with Fr Patrick Dunne and 42 other passengers on the 787-ton *Digby* on September 7, 1850. In his diary Bishop Goold wrote that ‘they seem to be pious and zealous priests.’ Ward

had been ordained at St Cuthbert's, Ushaw, in Durham in the north of England on December 21, 1839. Parish work followed with periods in Blackburn (1841), in Runcorn in Chester, first as assistant (1842-1843) then alone from 1844 to 1849. He was at Mulberry St, Manchester, prior to his departure for the Melbourne Mission.



Little is known of Ward's parish work in England. However his appointment to Runcorn occurred shortly after the establishment of the parish there. Mass in that area was said in a variety of places, including a hayloft, until Ward built a chapel in 1846-47, which stood until replaced in 1888.² In difficult, anti-Catholic times, it was a considerable achievement to found the first church at Runcorn.

Arrival in Melbourne

When he stepped off the *Digby* at Hobson's Bay Fr Ward was confronted by a city very much in the making. Its progress since John Batman had recognised the spot as 'the place for a village' and negotiated an illegal exchange of 600,000 hectares of land with the eight Aboriginal 'chiefs', had been rather remarkable. What



Hobson's Bay, 1854

had previously been an area of much beauty, where 'billabongs and swamps were sprinkled around the bay, teeming with broilgas, magpie-geese, Cape Barren geese, swans, ducks, eels and frogs'³ had been transformed in 1837 by the assistant surveyor-general of New South Wales, Robert Hoddle, into a settlement of 10-acre squares, with streets 99 feet wide. On the corner of Elizabeth and Lonsdale Streets – one of the major intersections on this city grid – stood St Francis' Church. It was to here that Fr Ward was initially posted.

The census taken around this time revealed Melbourne's population to be 23,143, of whom 5,631 were Catholics. Sadly the num-

ber of the original inhabitants and owners of the land had fallen away to less than 100 and these were already ‘reduced to the unhappy role of cadger and hanger-on in a white man’s town.’⁴

Fr Ward was described as a short, stout man, and in many ways he would seem to have been an unlikely type to have been attracted to missionary work in Australia. Aged 45, he was older than the average missionary. He was also of delicate health which was to be severely taxed as he undertook various ministries in Victoria.



St Francis' Church in 1857

Fr Ward's Knowledge of the Society

The St Vincent de Paul Society, founded in Paris in 1833, had become established in England in 1844.⁵ By the end of that year there were five conferences in London. By 1849, the number in England and Wales totalled fourteen, with 274 brothers. Although there is little evidence that Fr Ward had any contact or involvement with the Society, there cannot be much doubt that he would have been aware of its activities. Much of the Society's work in England involved providing relief and assistance for Irish immigrants who had crossed the Irish Sea to escape the famine conditions in their own country, settling in the worst of London's slums. Their plight and the work of the London conferences in helping to relieve their distress was highlighted by Frederic Ozanam, principal founder of the Society, when he visited London in 1851 for the Great Exhibition. One might assume that Ward, with his Irish background and a natural sympathy for all things Irish, would have been particularly impressed with the Society's work in this area.

So he brought with him from England a great concern and compassion for people in need, a great love for the apostle of the poor, St Vincent de Paul, and an awareness of the work of the Society.

Fr Ward's appointment to St Francis' was for a brief period only. During this time he was 'in charge of the temporal affairs of the churches of St Francis and St Patrick, and of the presbytery and seminary attached to St Francis.' Mass had first been celebrated at St

Francis' in May 1842, and the church was given a final blessing in October 1845. At the time, most buildings in Melbourne were plain frame structures, but the church stood out 'as a little gem of which the infant colony could be justly proud.'⁶

The foundation stone of St Patrick's Church had been laid by Bishop Goold on April 9, 1850, on the site of the present cathedral. This church was to be built to serve the working populations of Collingwood and Richmond. However, by the time of Fr Ward's arrival five months later, only a small wooden chapel, twenty feet by fifteen, had been erected for Sunday mass. Fr Dunne said mass there on September 8, the day after their arrival in Melbourne. He noted that the building was furnished with a few forms and a very temporary altar. The congregation totalled around twenty-five, mostly women.⁷



Fr Gerald Ward

Bishop Goold realised that the future of the Church in the colony could not depend solely on missionaries from Europe. During 1849 he converted what had been a schoolroom next to St Francis' into a seminary. Four seminarians were in residence by the time of Ward's arrival.

The Creation of a New Colony

As he began his pastoral duties in this frontier town Fr Ward would have been aware of an impending celebration. A huge bonfire of 100 tons of firewood and rubbish had been prepared in the Flagstaff Gardens. Throughout 1850 Melburnians had impa-

tiently awaited news of separation of the District of Port Phillip from the colony of New South Wales. On October 10 the *Lysander* arrived from London carrying letters of royal approval for the creation of the new colony of Victoria. The excitement was intense. Bonfires lit up the city. Beacons on hill-tops flashed the ‘glorious news’ to all parts of Victoria. A week of festivities and partying followed. However, it was not until July 1 in the following year that writs were issued for elections to the first parliament of the new colony.

Also at this time, following Edward Hargraves’ discovery of gold near Bathurst in New South Wales in February, persistent rumours of gold discoveries in Victoria circulated throughout the colony.

Adjusting to his new responsibilities on the Melbourne Mission was one thing; acclimatising to Melbourne’s weather was another. Fr Ward had the misfortune to experience a torrid first summer, including a drought which culminated in the devastating Black Thursday bushfires on February 6. The fire was so intense that some settlers thought it heralded the end of the world. Thoughts turned to home when the heat was so overpowering. Writing in her diary about Black Thursday, the thoughts of Frances Perry, wife of the first Anglican bishop of Melbourne, turned to England: ‘This weather takes a great deal out of one; and I should not wonder if we have to return home in a few years to be braced up.’⁸ It would not surprise if Fr Ward had need to be ‘braced up’ at the end of his first Australian summer.

On Palm Sunday, April 15, 1851, Fr Ward was no doubt delighted when one of the seminarians, Maurice Stack, was ordained a priest by the bishop. It was the first ordination in the colony.

Adjusting to his new responsibilities on the Melbourne Mission was one thing; acclimatising to Melbourne’s weather was another.



Garryowen's hastily-prepared poster which brought the first definite news to Melbourne in November 1850 that separation from New South Wales had been achieved

Caring for Those in Distress

At the time of Ward's arrival, the many cases of poverty and distress in Melbourne were attended to by private charities, mostly church based, which had sprung up in the city during the 1840s. The New South Wales Government took little responsibility for the dispensing of welfare in Port Phillip, claiming it was hamstrung by a lack of income. Fr Ward could refer calls for assistance to members of the Friendly Brothers, an offshoot of the Friendly Brothers of St Patrick, then operating in Ireland. Fr Geoghegan had established this society of Catholic laymen in Melbourne in 1845 following an incident outside St Francis' when he was shocked to find one of his parishioners dumped there after suffering what appeared to be a stroke. Its principal aim, as laid down by its founder, was to afford 'relief to every deserving object of suffering humanity who might seek its aid or refuge, irrespective of any claim on the score of religion or country'.⁹ The Annual Report of the Brothers for 1849 reveals that 663 males and 240 females were given assistance during the year. Expenditure of 290 pounds included the purchase of a hearse, and ten burials of Catholic paupers.¹⁰

Transfer to Geelong. The Discovery of Gold

Dr Goold sailed for Europe at the end of April 1851. Before he left he appointed Fr Ward to replace Fr Dunne as pastor at Geelong. Patrick Dunne, with whom Fr Ward had travelled from England the previous year, was transferred to the newly formed parish of Coburg. Fr E. McSweeney was Ward's assistant, later joined by Fr John Bleasdale.

In the 1851 census the Catholic population in Geelong numbered 1,565. The parish was extensive, including Colac, the Upper and Lower Leigh, Ararat, Steiglitz, Little River and all the country between Geelong and Queenscliff. Hardly had Fr Ward unpacked his bags at the 'clergy house' adjoining the temporary church of 'St Mary of the Angels', than news of the first strike of payable gold resounded throughout the colony. Following his discovery of a few ounces near Clunes at the end of June, 'Lucky' Jim Esmond showed his find to the *Geelong Advertiser* which heralded the news with the headline, 'The long sought treasure is at length found'.¹¹ This trig-

gered a rush to Clunes from Geelong and Melbourne. Shortly after, a bigger strike in the Buninyong Ranges near Ballarat was also announced in the *Geelong Advertiser*. This started a rush to the goldfields, initially from Melbourne and Geelong, and then, towards the end of the year, from overseas, as a flood of immigrants poured into the new colony.

In a dispatch to Bishop Goold towards the end of October, Fr Geoghegan wrote of the serious social and financial repercussions of the mass exodus from the cities: 'The gold mania has upset everything. The city of Melbourne, Geelong, in fact all the settlements present a most deserted appearance – scarcely a working man to be seen – all to Ballarat, Buninyong. A great deal of distress begins to prevail in consequence among the wives and children left behind. Our collections are all paralysed. St Patrick's nearly stopped – work stopped – and St Francis' very much down, nor are we to expect any improvement till about Christmas.'¹²

According to the 1851 census Victoria's population was 77,345. In 1852 there were 94,644 new arrivals. In three years the population increased fourfold. The effect on Geelong was dramatic. For a few months there was an exodus of the town's male population to the goldfields but soon it was reversed. The quickest and easiest path to Ballarat for the overseas fortune hunters was by steamer to Geelong from Melbourne and then by road. Many of those on arrival at Geelong decided to stay in the town to set up small businesses to serve the itinerant gold seekers. Others returned to the town to settle after trying their luck on the goldfields. As a result Geelong's population soared from 8,291 in 1851 to 20,106 by 1854.

Ian Wynd in his history of St Mary's parish says that Fr Ward and his assistants 'bore the brunt of the effect of the first years of the gold rushes on Geelong when the population increased rapidly and with it the number of Catholics.' Apart from serving this Catholic

'The gold mania has upset everything. The city of Melbourne, Geelong, in fact all the settlements present a most deserted appearance – scarcely a working man to be seen – all to Ballarat, Buninyong. A great deal of distress begins to prevail in consequence among the wives and children left behind.'

community, it was all Fr Ward could do to keep open, and continue to find teachers for, the six schools in and around Geelong.¹³ In a letter to the National Schools Board in January 1852, he apologises for the late delay in his returns ‘caused mainly by there having been but one priest in Geelong for some months, till very lately, and to the unusual press of duties during the Christmas season.’¹⁴

Recollections of a Pioneer Priest

The life of a priest living outside Melbourne in the 1840s and 1850s was a tough one. Fr Dunne in his reminiscences published in the *Advocate* in May and June of 1894 recalled those days as follows:

‘They had to get through rough and laborious work, of which the priests at the present time can form but little idea. There were no railroads of any sort outside the few towns and villages; no buggies as they would have been useless in traversing the thick bush and boggy creeks. The priests, when they went on their rounds of stations, for a month or more, had to carry the vestments before them in the saddle, and if they could not reach a homestead station before night, they would consider themselves fortunate in dropping into a shepherd’s hut, and would gladly accept his hospitality of black tea, damper and mutton.’

Fr Ward’s difficulties in serving a rapidly growing Catholic community was compounded by the fact that he would not ride a horse.

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Fr Dunne was a marvellous story teller. He relates that “Fr Ward was an exceedingly nervous man and never was on the back of a horse but once. It is related that, while on the mission at Geelong, a very pressing sick call came from the bush, and, as Fr Bleasdale was absent, there was no alternative but to go to attend to the dying person, and there was no buggy; so Fr Ward had to get into the saddle for the first and last time in his life, and the man led the horse by the bridle for some time, till Fr Ward got used to the saddle. He got, however, slowly but safely along, attended the sick call, and the man, on his return journey, got

another horse for himself to see Fr Ward safely home. When they got a little way on the return journey the man said, ‘It is getting late; we ought to get on a little faster in order to get in before night’, and at the same time put his horse into a canter over the level plain. The horse which Fr Ward was riding followed the other horse at a canter, when Fr Ward let go the reins and, holding on by the front of the saddle, cried out at the top of his voice, ‘Oh, stop the horse! Stop the horse! Take me down! Take me down!’ The man pulled up and took Fr Ward down. He walked home and vowed he would never mount a horse again during his life.”



On a horse but once

Transfer to Williamstown

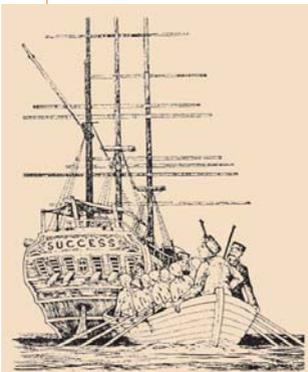
Bishop Goold returned to Melbourne in February, 1853, after nearly two years’ absence in Europe. With him he brought four additional priests. This made possible several changes, one of which was the transfer of Fr Ward to take charge of the new mission of Williamstown, considered at the time ‘the poorest district in the colony.’¹⁵

This was a time of frenetic activity on Hobson’s Bay. An American visitor arriving in May 1853 observed that the bay was full of shipping from Williamstown to Sandridge (Port Melbourne). He estimated that there were between six and seven hundred ships crowding each other for more room. Whilst many were waiting to offload cargo, others had been deserted by officers and crew who had set off to try their luck on the diggings.¹⁶ Also jostling for room in the bay were five prison hulks, moored off Gellibrand Point Lighthouse, which were used by the government to house hardened criminals. As a result of the wild life on the diggings and the upsurge in population, the few prisons in the colony were filled to overflowing. It was said these hulks contained the greatest gang of desperadoes ever

assembled, with men from Norfolk Island, the Tasman Peninsula, Macquarie Harbour, Cockatoo Island and other penal settlements. From their first day on board these floating prisons, the men were treated worse than caged animals. Each convict was stripped naked and marched to the after deck. His foot was placed on an anvil so that the warder could select a set of irons. With both legs in irons, the convict had then to march to the other end of the ship, the skin peeling off his ankles as he went. After some time he was taken below deck, placed in a cell probably too small for him and fed a gruel made out of maize. One of Ward's main tasks in Williamstown involved visiting the hulks and attending to the spiritual needs of the convicts. It was challenging and draining work.

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In addition to the penal hulks, there was lock-up accommodation on shore at the Marine Stockade in Nelson Place. *The Blue Book* for 1853, under the section 'Roman Catholic', states that Divine Service was held every Sunday at the Williamstown Stockade on the verandah, or in the mess-room. *The Blue Book* also indicates that the hulks *Deborah* and *Success* were visited occasionally, when Divine Service would be held on deck.¹⁷



The penal hulk *Success* off Williamstown

Fr Ward never took up residence in Williamstown. In an appeal for a residence for the new priest, the *Melbourne Catholic Chronicle* in July stated that Fr Ward, 'in visiting his flock during the inclement season of the year, has to wade through what is literally a land sea of mud and slop.'¹⁸

With the population in the area growing rapidly, Ward found it necessary to enlarge the school. Rising costs were a problem which he indicated in a letter in June 1853:

'I found it necessary to enlarge the school, but it had to be done with a regard to economy. The expenses at the present are enor-

mous. It could be done cheaper, but times have made costs so high. By right there should be a new school altogether.’ Cost of the building work was 66 pounds.¹⁹

Return to St Francis’

A tension which had been simmering for some time between the Bishop and his vicar-general – whom Dr Goold was convinced still harboured disappointment over not obtaining the Melbourne bishopric²⁰ – resulted in Fr Geoghegan being transferred, at his wish, from St Francis’. He and Fr Ward exchanged places in October.

The tedium of commuting the 10 miles from St Francis’ to Williamstown either by horse and buggy or by sea on the small paddle tug *Firefly*, and the taxing responsibility of ministering to convicts, had led to a deterioration in Ward’s health and he would have been relieved to be transferred back to the Melbourne Mission. The building of the presbytery and the laying of the foundation stone for the new school at Williamstown were to be left to his successor.

A City Transformed

Melbourne was now the capital of a colony in which the economy was dominated by gold mining rather than wool. The city which had coped reasonably well with a population of 20,000 prior to the gold rush was now expected to adequately service the needs of 100,000.

Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe, after a brief period of popularity following separation, was the butt of criticism on all sides as he and an inexperienced Legislative Council grappled with the huge problems which confronted them. Those in the cities were critical of the lack of services; the diggers were critical of the goldfields administration, and the squatters were critical of La Trobe’s lack of support for their control of the land.

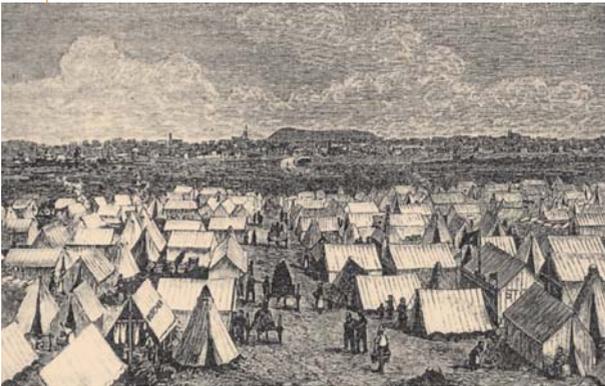


Elizabeth Street, Melbourne

Melbourne's state of chaos may best be gauged from the colourful report of the *Sydney Morning Herald* correspondent on November 4, 1852:

'... that a worse regulated, worse governed, worse drained, worse lighted, worse watered town of note is not on the face of the globe; and that a population more thoroughly disposed, in every grade to cheating and robbery, open and covert, does not exist; that in no other place does immorality stalk abroad so unblushingly and so unchecked; that in no other place does mammon rule so triumphant; that in no other place is the public money so wantonly squandered without giving the slightest protection to life or property; that in no other place are the administrative functions of government so inefficiently managed; that in a word, nowhere in the southern hemisphere does chaos reign so triumphant as in Melbourne.'²¹

The unusual mixture of labour shortage and surging population in the city saw wages and prices soar during late 1852 into 1853. Rents multiplied by five and ten, basic food items more than trebled. The city was considered to be perhaps the most expensive in the



Canvas Town looking towards Princes Bridge, circa 1853

world in which to live.²² This was bad enough. As well, Melbourne became filthy. Streets deteriorated under heavy traffic. The town's water supply was totally inadequate and carters had to travel further and further up a polluted Yarra for fresh supplies.

Foul smells were the result of poor sanitation and lack of sewerage. Flies and fleas tormented the population.

In an attempt to relieve the critical shortage in accommodation, several short term measures were introduced. In the most important of these, a canvas city of tents and huts was hastily erected in November 1852 on Emerald Hill, on the south bank of the Yarra,

in an area where the Victorian Arts Centre now stands. Up to 7,000 homeless, destitute immigrants, often mothers and their children who were left by fathers trying their luck on the goldfields, were housed here in the most basic of temporary accommodation. Too poor to rent rooms at grossly inflated prices in the city, here they paid five shillings per week.

At the end of 1852, a beleaguered La Trobe sought permission from London to resign. No action was immediately taken. The *Argus* began a daily advertisement from early in 1853, 'Wanted – a Governor: Apply to the People of Victoria.'

During 1853 as miners, mostly wiser but poorer, began to drift back to the city in large numbers and immigrants continued to flow in, it was only the skilled worker who was able to command a wage now five to six times higher than in 1851. La Trobe gradually began to sort things out. During the year, with the availability of more labour, thousands of new buildings were constructed throughout Melbourne and the newly created suburbs of Richmond, Brighton, Prahran and St Kilda. He closed down the canvas city and ordered residents there to rent elsewhere. Decisions were made which were to form the basis of a modern transportation system. Private companies were authorised to build railways. The coaching firm of Cobb and Co was founded. Crippling cartage costs were reduced. Massive imports of goods from Britain, which had previously been unavailable, resulted in an excess and lower prices. Late in 1853, La Trobe turned the first sod of land for Melbourne's first reservoir at Yan Yean.

The wealth generated by gold and the interests of many of the immigrants led to a stimulation of Victoria's cultural life.²³ Theatres sprang up in the major cities. In February, a bill to establish Melbourne University became law. The Melbourne Philharmonic Orchestra gave its first performance on December 24. As well, Dr F.J. von Mueller was appointed Government Botanist.

1854 ushered in a period of prosperity for the city. In February, Australia's first telegraph line was opened between Melbourne and Williamstown. In July, the foundation stones for Melbourne University and the Melbourne Public Library were laid. Melbourne was growing into a commercial city, providing the miners with the goods they needed, through imports and its infant industries. Clothing, tools, household goods and conveyances were manufac-

tured. The first railway line in Australia, between Flinders Street and Sandridge, was opened in September. In October, the first issue of what was to become a Melbourne institution, *The Age* newspaper, was published.

Homeless and deserted children roamed the streets in packs. Abandoned children were a chronic problem in a society where prostitution, short term relationships and illegitimacy flourished.

Yet while many prospered others found life extremely difficult. Swindlers, lawless characters, runaway convicts and murderers abounded. 'In broad daylight', wrote the *Argus*, 'men are knocked down and robbed.' One issue of the paper devoted twelve columns to details of stolen horses. Homeless and deserted children roamed the streets in

packs. Abandoned children were a chronic problem in a society where prostitution, short term relationships and illegitimacy flourished.

Founding of the First Conference

It would appear likely that Fr Ward had contemplated for some time the establishment of a St Vincent de Paul conference. He may even have discussed the possibility with Fr Geoghegan when he agreed to join the Melbourne Mission. After the demanding ministries at Geelong and Williamstown, the transfer back to St Francis' offered him some welcome stability. There were now seven priests at St Francis' in what was becoming an over-crowded presbytery. The interesting question is why he considered it necessary to found a conference of the Society which could be seen to duplicate the charitable activities of the Friendly Brothers. He had observed at first hand the Friendly Brothers providing relief to the people in need both in Geelong and from St Francis'. Whether he considered this group of Catholic laymen incapable of meeting an explosion in demand at this time, or whether the philosophy of the Brothers lacked the spirituality which St Vincent de Paul fostered, is difficult to determine. It may have been that, having witnessed the remarkably rapid spread of the Society – by then active in twenty-eight countries with over 1500 conferences²⁴ – he considered it was part of a natural progression for it to come to Australia.

No doubt these were contributing factors. Ward himself was later to suggest the main reason why the conference was formed was ‘for the protection of male and female orphans.’²⁵

The problem of orphans in Melbourne dates back to the early years of Port Phillip. Often both parents were lost on the disease-ridden ships which brought settlers out on the long voyage to the colony. Workplace accidents claimed many colonists. Health facilities were primitive and denied to many of the poor. Newspapers in Melbourne highlighted the need for an orphan asylum from 1841 onwards. Petitions to the New South Wales Government however were ignored. In 1845 the founding of four church charities, including the Friendly Brothers, eased the situation a little. An important component of the Brothers’ work was to place unprotected children into board and lodging.²⁶ The Anglican St James’ Dorcas Society regularly met at the St James’ parsonage to assist orphaned or abandoned children. By 1851 it had succeeded in building a weatherboard cottage for orphans on the corner of Bourke and King Streets.

The gold rush had greatly exacerbated an already serious situation. A review of the period in the *Advocate* commented as follows:

‘The breaking out of the gold-fields in this colony in 1851, brought to these shores, from most parts of the world, men with their wives and families, who by accidents incidental to the perilous pursuit in which they engaged, or (through their own recklessness of life) shortened days, bequeathed to the care of their fellow-colonists their unprovided-for and helpless children.’

It was on March 5, 1854, less than six months after the death of

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It was on March 5, 1854, less than six months after the death of the principal founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society, and just twenty-one years after its establishment in Paris, that Fr Ward presided over the first meeting of an Australian conference, the Conference of Melbourne, at St Francis’.

the principal founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society, and just twenty-one years after its establishment in Paris, that Fr Ward presided over the first meeting of an Australian conference, the Conference of Melbourne, at St Francis’.

On May 2, a report appeared in the *Melbourne Morning Herald* of an inauguration ceremony held at St Francis’ on the preceding Sunday, April 30, as follows:

‘ST. FRANCIS ON SUNDAY.— A most impressive spectacle was witnessed in this place of worship on Sunday last, in consequence of the inauguration of St Vincent de Paul. At 11 o’clock a pontifical high mass was commenced by the Right Rev Dr Goold, as celebrant, assisted by Dr Fitzpatrick, Dean Slattery and Rev Mr Stack, officiating as deacon and sub-deacon, and Rev Mr Ward as master of ceremonies. The Rev Dr Shiel preached the panegyric of the saint, and his discourse was an elaborate and eloquent specimen of pulpit eloquence. After the last gospel, fifteen candidates for admission approached the altar, and kneeling before the bishop were duly received into the order and obtained His Lordship’s benediction. The church was densely crowded, and many were obliged to leave, unable to obtain admittance.’

Its objects ... comprise sundry works of charity, but more especially the relief of the destitute, in a manner, as much as possible, permanently beneficial and the visitation of poor families.’

A submission from the ‘Brotherhood of St Vincent de Paul’ to the Victorian Government the following February for a share of poundage fees to enable the Society to continue its charitable work reveals the identity of only two of those members:

Gerald A. Ward as president and M. Keogh as treasurer. Although the names of the others were submitted to the Council-General in Paris as part of the aggregation process, the records have unfortunately disappeared.²⁷

This same submission by Fr Ward provides a succinct summary of the objects of the conference and one assumes the work undertaken by its members:

‘Its objects ... comprise sundry works of charity, but more especially the relief of the destitute, in a manner, as much as possible, permanently beneficial and the visitation of poor families. Every

opportunity is seized of bearing consolation and instruction to the sick and prisoners, to children indigent, abandoned or imprisoned, and of procuring religious ministration to those who stand in need of them at the hour of death.²⁸

The number of cases relieved in the first year was 179, at a cost of 314 pounds.

The Original Inhabitants

It is quite possible that some of those cases would have involved assisting the few Aborigines who loitered around the city. Their maltreatment in the few short years of European settlement was graphically outlined in an editorial addressed to Aborigines by the editor of the *Argus*, Edward Wilson, in 1854:

‘There comes Christian England, who, if you were strong enough to demand a price for your land, would buy it from you, but who, as you are few and weak, and timorous, generously condescends to steal it! There comes Christian England, to absorb your hunting grounds, destroy your game, inoculate you with her vices, and show her Christian spirit by dooming you to ‘extirpation’! There comes Christian England, who carried off many tons of your gold without setting apart one ounce for you; who hands you over to be contaminated by the worst and lowest of her own people, to be taught their crimes, to be impregnated with their diseases.’²⁹

A tragically poignant illustration of their plight was offered by Magistrate Hull when appearing before a Select Committee on Aborigines in 1858. He recounted a meeting with the once proud chief of the Yarra tribe, Derrimut, opposite the Bank of Victoria in Melbourne. Derrimut was famous for having intervened to prevent the certain massacre of



In the 1850s Aborigines were often to be seen in the streets of Melbourne

early Melbourne settlers, including John Pascoe Fawkner, by ‘up-country Aborigines’ in 1835.

“He stopped me and said, ‘You give me shilling Mr. Hull.’ ‘No’, I said, ‘I will not give you a shilling – I will go and give you some bread’.

He held out his hand to me and said, ‘me plenty sulky you long time ago, you plenty sulky me; no sulky now, Derrimut soon die’. And then he pointed with a plaintive manner which they can affect, to the Bank of Victoria, and said:

‘You see, Mr. Hull, Bank of Victoria, all this mine, all along here Derrimut’s once; no matter now, me soon tumble down’.

I said, ‘have you no children?’ and he flew into a passion immediately. ‘Why me have lubra? Why me have piccaninny? You have all this place, no good have children, no good have lubra, me tumble down and die very soon now’.”³⁰

Aggregation of the First Conference

It is a tribute to the efficiency of the first conference and in particular, its president, that it was aggregated by the Society’s Council-General in Paris on October 2, 1854. Even if the application had been forwarded on one of the new barque-rigged mail steamers, the trip often took three months in those days. Departures from Australia were irregular and ships were often held up at that time due to the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854.

A few days after the inauguration mass, on May 6, Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe finally left for home on the steamship *Golden Age*, after fourteen and a half years in the colony. Despite all the criticism and opposition he had constantly to endure as he steered Victoria on the path to self-government, and still mourning the recent death of his wife Sophie, his diary entry as the ship moved



Copy of Aggregation Certificate for the Conference of Melbourne (aggregated October 2, 1854)

through the Heads for the last time was from Psalm 115, ‘What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me?’³¹

The Sad Case of the Sherry Family

It was on the next day, however, that an incident occurred ‘somewhere in the recesses of Collingwood Flat’³² which was to have a significant impact on the direction the conference would take and on its place in Victorian history. William Sherry and his wife Margaret both succumbed on the same day to ‘congestion of the brain produced by constant intoxication.’³³

It was a sad case. At the inquest into the death, witnesses had testified that both had been drinking to excess for at least eight months, even whilst confined to bed over the last six weeks of their lives. Five children, three boys and two girls, were orphaned as a result, the eldest aged eleven, the youngest only two. At the time of death, property and land owned by the Sherrys in Collingwood was to the value of seven pounds per week. As the parents died intestate, the eldest son, William, inherited the property. Their only relative in Australia, James Power, also of Collingwood, a cousin of Margaret Sherry, was a widower with five children himself and unwilling to apply for guardianship of the children.

A Presbyterian minister, the Reverend Robert Hamilton, living in the neighbourhood, on hearing of their plight applied to the Supreme Court for custody of the children. This was granted, for the boys, William, John and Larry, at a hearing on June 29. The girls, however, Ellen and Jane, aged five and two, were taken under the wing of a Mrs Maria Chidley, wife of a toy warehouse proprietor living in nearby Brunswick St, who, on her own evidence, had attempted to clothe and feed the children in their state of abject neglect as their parents continued on to the last stages of their path to self-destruction. Having lost her own child, Mrs Chidley formed a strong attachment to the girls which evidently was returned in large measure.³⁴ It is difficult to imagine this environment, surrounded by love, ‘Dutch dolls and rocking horses’, which contrasted so starkly with what they had previously known.

Soon after the court ruling it came to Fr Ward’s attention that the Sherry children had been baptised Catholics. As it was accepted

practice at the time that children in such circumstances should be placed with families of the same faith, Fr Ward applied to the court to have the previous ruling overturned. This was done on July 27, 1854. Mrs Chidley then approached Ward and begged him not to take the girls from her. Ward relented, out of consideration for her feelings, allowing her to retain them for three months on condition she brought them to him once a week at 10am each Saturday.³⁵

The First ‘Special Work’

Fr Ward was now confronted with the task of placing the Sherry boys in care. In August a cottage was rented in Prahran (then a socially disadvantaged suburb) for this purpose and to care for others who had been brought to the attention of the conference. Over time two other houses were added to form a little orphanage, with a garden attached. From here thirteen orphans, including five girls, were entirely provided for. The children received a proper formal education, and moral and physical training at the local Catholic Denominational School. The demand was such that there was insufficient room to accommodate all homeless children referred to the Brothers. These were ‘entrusted to persons in whom the brotherhood place confidence’.³⁶ The orphanage itself was under the superintendence of a matron, Mrs Clarke, aged about fifty, and she was assisted by two female servants.³⁷ Perusal of the 1856 rate books for Prahran, the earliest available, has revealed that the two-roomed rented cottage with skillion was located at no.16 John St. (later changed to St John St.) It was by this time owned by G. A. Ward and the occupier was Patrick Hayes who, with his wife, cared for the orphans.³⁸ Perhaps Mrs

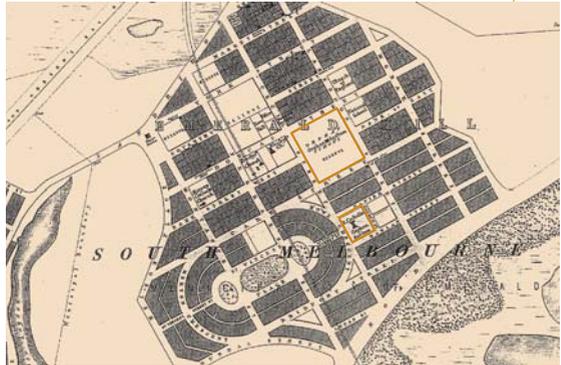
This then was the first special work of the Society in Australia, established mainly from Fr Ward’s own resources.

Mrs Clarke had moved on. Today the site is occupied by a block of flats. This then was the first special work of the Society in Australia, established mainly from Fr Ward’s own resources.³⁹ He had recognised a need that could not ‘be satisfied within the normal scope of conference activity’⁴⁰ and had undertaken to do something about it.

Founding the St Vincent de Paul Orphanage

Provision of social welfare became the responsibility of the new government in 1851. A few days after separation, a site for a government orphan asylum on Emerald Hill was approved. With the onset of the gold rush and the myriad of problems it brought in its wake, the orphanage was placed on the backburner until late in 1853 when John Hodgson moved in the Legislative Council that an amount of 10,000 pounds be set aside in the estimates for such a purpose. Events continued to delay serious consideration on the building of any orphanage, preference being given to providing ad hoc financial aid to voluntary charitable organisations to do what they could.

A solution was presented to the government when in November 1854, the Anglican Bishop of Melbourne, Bishop Perry, formally applied to it for the ten-acre site set aside for an orphanage on Emerald Hill to house ‘at least a hundred children’⁷⁴¹ plus a grant to enable its construction. At this time the St James’ cottage had developed into a site in Bourke St West where it was attempting to house 35 children in cramped conditions. In a period of



Map of South Melbourne in 1855 showing the sites of the both the Protestant Orphanage and the St Vincent de Paul Orphanage

increasing unrest on the goldfields and on the eve of the Eureka uprising, the government, under the new Governor, Sir Charles Hotham, was very happy to pass responsibility for the building of the orphanage to the Anglican community.

Fr Ward had established the small orphanage at Prahran out of a natural concern and compassion for children and a concern that the unprotected Catholic children could be placed with Protestant families, or institutions, and so lose their faith. The news that the Government had approved the building of the Protestant asylum heightened these concerns. In January 1855, the Vicar-General

wrote to the Colonial-Secretary seeking permission to select land for a Catholic orphanage in the city. This was granted. The two acre piece of land selected, on the corner of Cecil and Raglan Streets in Emerald Hill, was only a few streets away from the Protestant site.

On July 10, an advertisement placed in the *Argus* over the name of Gerald Ward, appealed for funds for the building of the orphanage, stating that the children would be given ‘the undivided attention of an approved superintendent and matron ... towards fitting

On July 10, an advertisement placed in the Argus over the name of Gerald Ward, appealed for funds for the building of the orphanage, stating that the children would be given ‘the undivided attention of an approved superintendent and matron ... towards fitting them, by religious, educational and industrial training, for the pursuits best adapted to them...’

them, by religious, educational and industrial training, for the pursuits best adapted to them. It is believed that an institution such as this will receive the cordial support and encouragement of all whose hearts can feel for the unguided, helpless and unprotected orphan; and it is not easy to believe that any will be found so callous as to refuse aid, according to their ability, towards an institution so admirable in its objects, and so much needed as this confessedly is.’

At that point 360 pounds had been raised for the Building Fund.⁴²

Part of the inspiration for the building of the orphanage had come from Paris. Ward indicated that an orphanage in Paris dedicated to St Vincent de Paul had existed for one hundred and fifty years and had been under the supervision of the Brotherhood since the found-

ing of the Society in 1833. Many hundreds of male and female orphans were at that time supported in the Paris orphanage. Ward indicated that the orphanage at Emerald Hill was ‘proposed to be carried on under the same system as that at Paris.’⁴³

Ward was still greatly upset that the Sherry girls remained in the care of Mr and Mrs Chidley. Again it was his firm conviction that the girls, being Catholics, should be brought up by those of the same faith. In another application for custody, this time in the Supreme Court, he sought to have the girls removed from the care of the

Chidleys. Addressing a meeting of the Catholic Association whilst the court was sitting in September, Fr Ward took leave to provide those present with the background to the case. In so doing, he revealed something of the sectarian passions of the day. He described the Presbyterian Minister Hamilton as a ‘sanctimonious parson’, inferring that he sought custody of the boys only in the belief that there was money in it for him. Mrs Chidley was labelled similarly as a ‘sanctimonious lady’, being virtually accused of kidnapping the girls and twisting their minds whilst plying them with gifts. He claimed that she had completely reneged on the agreement made with her over twelve months before. Indeed he had not seen her since then. So sacred to him was the principle that children had the right to be raised in the faith of their parents that he was prepared to go as far as Westminster to have it confirmed. His speech was reported in the *Melbourne Morning Herald*.⁴⁴

Fr Ward’s injudicious language would have done nothing to improve the fragile relations existing at the time between the churches. The *Herald* report was brought to the attention of Mrs Chidley who some days later, in a letter to the paper, very capably refuted the charges laid against her by the ‘reverend gentleman’. She convincingly portrayed herself as a concerned citizen who had ‘adopted’ the girls out of a natural compassion for their plight. She and her husband had been rearing them for the past seventeen months as loving parents. She denied ever having made any arrangement with Fr Ward regarding the temporary care of the girls.⁴⁵

In an editorial in the paper on the same day as Mrs Chidley’s letter, the *Herald* decried the sectarian remarks directed at the Reverend Hamilton, describing Fr Ward as ‘simply a gentleman, in this instance, of bad taste, bad temper, bad judgement, and bad manners.’⁴⁶

Laying the Foundation Stone

One week later, on Sunday October 7, whilst the case was still proceeding in the Supreme Court, Bishop Goold laid the foundation stone of the St Vincent de Paul Orphanage, before a large congregation. Only a few weeks before, a similar ceremony had been held for the Protestant orphanage, three hundred metres away. A

large marquee had been erected as a temporary chapel but it was able to accommodate barely half those in attendance on a typical Melbourne October day on which it either rained or threatened to do so. The occasional homily during High Mass was delivered in typically eloquent fashion by Dr Geoghegan. Following mass, the bishop blessed the temporary walls surrounding the site during a procession in which he was accompanied by the attending clergy, including Fr Ward, as well as ‘the members of the Brotherhood of St Vincent de Paul’.⁴⁷

The architects appointed were Messrs George and Schneider of Victoria Parade, and the latter then presented the bishop with a handsome silver trowel on which was engraved a sketch of the orphanage as proposed. The

bishop then used the trowel to lay the foundation stone, on which was the following inscription, translated from the Latin:

‘This building was raised by the pious labours of the Society of St Vincent de Paul under the guidance of a Cathedral Priest of St Francis’ – the Rev Gerald A.

Ward. May this aforesaid building be a refuge for orphans, a product of the folly of man and the fearful happenings and dangers of a perverse world.’⁴⁸

Among those in attendance was the prominent Catholic layman, parliamentarian John O’Shanassy. O’Shanassy, later to be three times Premier of Victoria, was a foundation member of the Friendly Brothers. He contributed generously to orphanage appeals and served as a member of the Committee of Management. Also noticed in the crowd was the legendary philanthropist Caroline Chisholm for whom, no doubt, the orphanage would have been a welcome initiative. Mrs Chisholm was universally known for her pioneering work in assisting poor women immigrants and had herself established an immigrants’ home for unemployed girls in Sydney in 1841, followed by sixteen branch homes throughout the countryside.⁴⁹ She had



St Vincent de Paul Orphanage, Emerald Hill.

come to Victoria to arrange for shelter sheds to be built at intervals along the roads to Ballarat and Bendigo to house the travellers as they made their way to the goldfields. Her name is listed as a donor of clothing for the orphanage.

The plans for the building were ambitious. It was to be in the 'Italian style' facing the bay, with a tower in the middle flanked by two schoolrooms, one for girls, one for boys. An observatory was planned to sit on the tower. Separate dormitories were planned for the boys and girls, two refectories, two school rooms, two bathrooms, store rooms, board room, detached kitchen and laundry plus several out-houses where those of a suitable age would be taught various trades to prepare them for employment. According to Ward, female orphans were to be under the charge of a matron and subject to visits by the Sisters of Charity and the bishop. On the matter of the sisters, it was to be the Sisters of Mercy, who did not arrive in Melbourne until March 1857, who were to provide the visitation. Total cost was to exceed 3,000 pounds. Ward had sufficient money on hand, at the laying of the foundation stone, to get 'to the roofing'.⁴⁰ Builder John Aspland of Emerald Hill was given the task of completing the job. The urgency of the task was impressed on him so that the orphans at Prahran, those placed with families and the many waiting to be placed could be accommodated in their new surroundings as quickly as possible.

A Vision for the Orphanage

Ward's vision for the orphanage was an enlightened one. He contemplated 'a select library of juvenile works, and, if possible, a museum, so that, combining amusement with instruction, the minds of the children can be led up from Nature to Nature's God.'⁵¹ The



Sir John O'Shanassy, three times Premier of Victoria during the 1850s and 60s



Caroline Chisholm, heroine to thousands of immigrant women.

grounds were laid out by an experienced gardener, affording ‘an opportunity for imparting practical agricultural information to the male children at certain portions of the day.’⁵²

Ward’s expectation that the orphanage ‘will be ready for occupation within eight months’⁵³ was over optimistic. By mid-November the architects were again advertising for tenders to build the orphanage.

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As the year drew to a close, the Supreme Court rescinded its earlier decision of July 27, 1854, to grant custody of the Sherry girls to Fr Ward and ruled that they be ‘remitted to the custody’ of John and Maria Chidley.

Through 1856, progress in the building of the orphanage was hampered by the difficulty in hiring skilled contractors.⁵⁴ This was no surprise, as construction in the city and suburbs continued at a remarkable pace. The Melbourne to which the Sisters of Mercy, who were to

play such a significant role in the future of the orphanage, were introduced when they arrived from Perth in March 1857, was a city of style with grand and extravagant public buildings and banks. It was acknowledged as ‘the capital of Britain’s most celebrated colony’.⁵⁵ Yet on the outskirts of the city the suburbs of Collingwood, Fitzroy, Carlton, Prahran and South and North Melbourne already had taken on an appearance of slums. Many of the residents had been driven from the temporary accommodation in the city and were living in small, mean dwellings. As diggers continued to drift back to the city, unemployment grew and employers were able to force down wages. There was no lack of work for members of the Conference of Melbourne.

The six men appointed trustees of the orphanage, included three clergymen – Bishop Goold, Fr Ward, and Fr John Fitzpatrick – and three influential Catholic laymen – John O’Shanassy, William Archer, a convert and barrister who was prominent in Victorian public affairs and John O’Brien, later to be a member of the Legislative Council. The Medical Officer was another convert to Catholicism, Dr A. C.

Brownless, who was later to become Vice-Chancellor and then Chancellor of Melbourne University. Ward, however, bore much of the responsibility for its operation, including its ongoing construction, admission of orphans and supervision of staff. Much of his time was taken up raising the necessary funds to enable building work to continue. He had taken on much of the financial burden himself.



Dr A. C. Brownless

Support gradually came from fellow clergy and a committee of leading Catholic citizens, headed by John O'Shanassy. As a fundraiser, wives of the committeemen organised a Grand Fancy Bazaar in January 1857 lasting three days and climaxing with a grand ball. It was attended by the new Governor, Sir Henry Barkly. The five hundred pounds raised was to be shared with St Patrick's Cathedral which was under construction at the time.⁵⁶

By March 1857 the building was considered advanced enough to be able to accept seven boys from Prahran (including the Sherrys), plus seven others from the Melbourne Benevolent Asylum. During 1857 the average number of the children in the orphanage was twenty-seven. This number had increased to sixty early in 1858. Whilst applications for admittance increased daily, sources of revenue again slowed. The orphanage was capable of comfortably accommodating one hundred.

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Transferred to Heidelberg

Soon after the orphanage began taking in the children Ward was transferred to Heidelberg. This would seem to have been a strange move by the bishop. If his intention was to ease Ward out of

the day-to-day administration of the orphanage, it was not successful. Ward continued to oversee its operation. How he continued to do this and to adequately service the vast St John's Mission at Heidelberg, which extended down to Westernport Bay in the south and north to Healesville and beyond, is a mystery. Despite failing health, however, he is reported to have laboured 'zealously' at Heidelberg where he was 'much esteemed and respected'.⁵⁷ His Sunday routine there was mass at 11 o'clock, then catechetical instructions, followed later by vespers and benediction. During the week he managed to visit the outlying areas of the parish. At the home of Mr and Mrs Nelson on the banks of the Plenty River, he celebrated the first mass in the YanYean area. He organised a circulating library for the use of schools and congregation.⁵⁸ Towards the end of the year, his condition deteriorated rapidly. He died on January 14, 1858, aged 52.

The Death and Burial of Fr Ward

Solemn Requiem Mass was celebrated by Bishop Goold on Saturday, January 16 at St Francis', assisted by most of the clergy from Melbourne and nearby countryside. Goold, not one to show emotion, was visibly affected during the service. The large cortege then moved in procession along Elizabeth Street to the Melbourne General Cemetery, led by the children of the orphanage, two abreast. The *Herald* correspondent provided the following detail:

'... the hearse drawn by four horses bearing white plumes; chief mourning coach containing the bishop; then followed other mourning coaches, containing clergymen according to dignity, after which citizens two abreast, and then came a long line of carriages and equestrians. The procession moved along Elizabeth Street to the New Cemetery, on arriving at the gates of which it halted and the clergymen being vested in surplices and cassocks, walked two and two, followed by Bishop Goold, wearing his rochet, pectoral and purple biretta. The coffin was borne by citizens. Having arrived at the resting place of this truly benevolent ecclesiastic, a circle was formed by the bishop and clergy, and the last solemn rites, according to the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church were performed by his lordship, who during the ceremony manifested strong symptoms of sin-

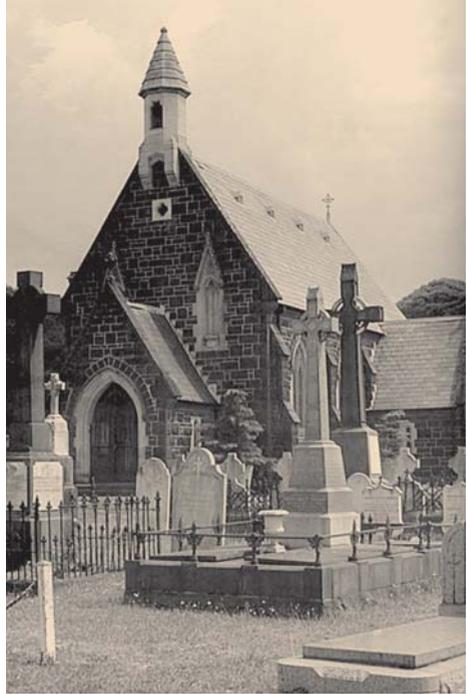
cere sorrow for the loss of so valuable a priest ... It was heart-rending to see the poor orphans weeping over the grave of their late benefactor.⁷⁵⁹

Burial took place in grave 384B, 'H' Section. However, in September 1871, following the building of the mortuary chapel for priests at the cemetery, Fr Ward's remains were disinterred, placed in a new wood and lead coffin and removed to the chapel.

Papers of the day which had taken issue with Ward over the custody cases, praised his 'untiring exertions on behalf of the orphan and destitute', remarking that he was one in whom 'many a widow and orphan had found a good friend.'⁶⁰

No doubt Fr Ward had his faults. Resolutely defensive of the Catholic faith, at times he reacted in an intemperate manner when he believed the faith was under threat. Yet those commenting on his life and work invariably refer to him as 'saintly' and as one of the 'greats' among Melbourne's pioneer priests. The *Freeman's Journal* paid him this tribute shortly after his death:

'This pious, zealous and unostentatious priest was noted for his most active benevolence and practice of charity, numerous, unassuming, and it may be said, universal. He was endeared to all who knew him, by the kindly simplicity of his generous heart, and geniality of his disposition, and the fervid anxiety he evinced for the poor of the mission. He suffered from a protracted illness that impeded him in his work for the orphan and the helpless. He was a great follower of St Vincent de Paul.'⁶¹



The mortuary chapel for Catholic priests – built in 1871 – at the Melbourne General Cemetery

An Enduring Legacy

Gerald Ward's enduring legacy was the protection he gave to deserted and homeless children – those most at risk and vulnerable in early Melbourne – through the founding of the St Vincent de Paul Orphanage. Inspired as he was by the great apostle of charity, St Vincent de Paul, and by the Society which took his name, Ward endeavoured to give the least fortunate in the community, through education and training, the opportunity to become useful and productive members of society. This was the first major initiative in the field of Catholic child welfare in Victoria, one he achieved at a great personal cost to himself and to his health. The pity is that he did not live to see the fruits of his labour.⁶²

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Although the first conference lapsed with the death of its founder, references to the work of St Vincent de Paul during the 1860s and 1870s in Melbourne, and in Portland in

1869, provide evidence that Catholics in Victoria had not forgotten the Society. The seed sown by Gerald Ward had a life in it. The first ladies conference was founded in Geelong in 1874, before the establishment of a conference at St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne in 1885 signalled the birth of a new era of continuous growth which extends to this day.

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2. Personal Communication, Canon John Marmion, Shrewsbury Diocesan Archivist, England, December, 2003
3. Flannery, T. (ed.) *The Birth of Melbourne*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2002, p. 7
4. Newnham, W.H. *Melbourne: Biography of a City*, (Revised) Hill of Content, Melbourne, 1985, p. 22
5. How that happened is worth recording. In a personal communication Austin Fagan, the archivist for the Society in England, provided the following background information: 'When Frederic Ozanam returned to Paris from Lyon in 1840 to take up his position as Professor of Foreign Literature at the Sorbonne, he became president of the conference of St. Etienne-du-Mont, close by the University. One of the members of that conference was George Wigley, an Englishman. Prior to returning home Wigley asked Ozanam how the Society could be established in England. He was advised to approach influential people in public life. One of those was the editor of *The Tablet* who published a series of articles on 'French Charity'. One of the writers was Fr Ignatius Spencer, an ancestor of the Princess of Wales, the late Lady Diana Spencer, who had become interested in the Society following a meeting with Alphonse Baudon, later to become the third President-General of the Society. The articles created much interest leading to the formation of the first conference on 12th February 1844.'
6. Tough, J. *A Short History of St. Francis Church 1839-1979*, 1979, p. 10
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8. Robin, A. (ed.) *Australian Sketches - The Journals and Letters of Frances Perry*, Queensberry Hill Press, Carlton, Vic., 1984, p. 147
9. McAuliffe, M. *Victoria's Pioneer Priest. Fr. Patrick Bonaventure O.F.M., A.C.T.S.* Melbourne, 1939, p. 24
10. Reproduced in Cannon, M. *Old Melbourne Town Before the Gold Rush*, Loch Haven Books, Main Ridge, Vic., 1991, p. 253
11. see Wynd, I., *Geelong - the Pivot*, Cypress Books, Melbourne, 1971, p. 23
12. cited in O'Kane, F. *A Path is Set - The Catholic Church in the Port Phillip District and Victoria, 1839-1862*, Melbourne University Press, 1976, p. 76
13. Wynd, I. *St. Mary of the Angels*, (2nd ed.) Geelong Historical Society, Geelong, 1979, p. 20
14. cited in Ebsworth, W. *Pioneer Catholic Victoria*, The Polding Press, Melbourne, 1973, p. 35
15. *ibid*, p. 304
16. Bourke, D.F. *A History of the Catholic Church in Victoria*, Catholic Bishops of Victoria, Melbourne, p. 31
17. cited in Ebsworth. W. *op. cit.* p. 305
18. cited in Bond, E. *Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Victoria*, The Society, Victoria, 1980, p. 12

19. cited in Ebsworth. W. op. cit. p. 304
20. O’Kane, F. op. cit. p. 78
21. cited in Serle, G. *The Golden Age – History of the Colony of Victoria 1851-1861* M.U.P., Carlton, 1968 p. 67
22. Serle, G. op. cit. p. 119
23. One of the many notable arrivals during 1853 was Alfred Felton from East Anglia, a twenty-two year old who set himself up as a merchant and pharmaceuticals manufacturer, accumulating a vast fortune. He died in 1904 bequeathing three hundred and eighty-three thousand pounds to the National Gallery of Victoria. The Felton Bequest underpinned the Gallery’s acquisition policy throughout the twentieth century.
24. Baunard, Monsignor, *Ozanam in his Correspondence*, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Dublin, 1925, p. 412
25. *Statement of Facts* submitted by Ward to the Supreme Court of Victoria in the Chidley custody case, September 1855
26. Bignell, S. *Orphans and Destitute Children in Victoria up to 1864*, Victorian Historical Magazine, v.44, Nos 1/2, 1973, p. 10
(Bignell cites newspaper reports of the time which revealed that Michael Lynch, treasurer of the Brothers was in constant attendance at the Police Office to ensure that protection was provided for children brought before the bench or for those whose parents were sent to prison.)
27. As indicated by Elizabeth Bond, (op. cit. p. 13) it is quite possible that conference members were part of the St. Vincent de Paul Orphanage Committee of Management. However the name of M. Keogh, treasurer of the conference when an application to the government for funds from poundage fees was made in 1855, is not there. The members of the committee listed in the first annual report of the orphanage (1858) were Hon. John O’Shanassy, Hon. Daniel Tierney, Michael Curtain, Patrick O’Brien, John O’Grady, Richard Harney, S. Donovan, Very Rev L. Shiel, James Mayne, Richard Feehan, Nicholas O’Connor, Rev Dr. Barry, Edward Higgins, Thomas Dollard, Charles Chissell, Laurence Taylor, D. Doolan, John McHugh, Patrick Moriarty, F.J. McCann, Edward Gallagher
28. see Bond, E. op.cit pp. 14-17
The full text of the submission is the key primary source on the founding of the first Conference. It is quoted below.
‘The first Conference in Australia of the above Brotherhood was established in Melbourne on the 5th March 1854.
It’s objects, like those of the original Brotherhood established in Paris in 1833 – and to which the Melbourne Conference has been aggregated since the 2nd October ult. – comprise sundry works of Charity, but more especially the relief of the destitute, in a manner as much as possible, permanently beneficial, and the visitation of poor families. Every opportunity is seized of bearing consolation and instructions to the sick and to prisoners – to children indigent, abandoned or imprisoned – and of procuring religious ministrations to those who stand in need of them at the hour of death.
When in any town several young men are members of the Society, they assemble in order to encourage each other in the practice of virtue – the meeting is called a

Conference – they are connected together by a particular Council called after the name of the City where it is established.

All the branches of the Society are connected by a Council General.

Up to this time the Melbourne Conference has had ample opportunity of knowing that it's usefulness has been felt – and they have abundant reason to anticipate that their services in works of an enlightened charity will obtain sooner or later a wider appreciation than they even now enjoy.

The Government having kindly invited all Charitable Institutions to apply, according to certain forms for a pro-rata share of a large sum of money at its disposal for beneficent purposes, the Brotherhood of St Vincent de Paul respectfully submits the following summary of their affairs in the hope that they like others may have their claims responded to and their services rendered still more generally beneficial to the poor.

The Brotherhood beg to express regret that their Rules have not as yet issued from the Press – but with their respectful compliments to His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor, they send with this paper a French copy of the Manual that his Excellency may be fully apprized of their objects. They will feel obliged by its being returned when fully perused.⁷

29. cited in Garden, D. *Victoria – a History*, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1984, p. 78
30. Wiencke, S. *When the Wattles Bloom: The Life and Times of William Barak, Last Chief of the Yarra Yarra Tribe*, S. Wiencke, Woori Yallock, 1984, p. 44
31. Gross, A. *Charles Joseph La Trobe*, Melbourne University Press, 1956, p. 125
32. *Melbourne Morning Herald*, September 28, 1855
33. Coroner's verdict at the Inquest into the death of William Sherry, held at La Trobe Inn, Collingwood, May 8, 1854
34. *Melbourne Morning Herald*, September 28, 1855
35. 'Statement of Facts' submitted by Ward to the Supreme Court of Victoria in the Chidley custody case, September 1855
36. *The Argus*, July 10, 1855 (Advertisement over Ward's name, appealing for funds for the orphanage)
37. Sworn Statement by Ward provided to his Counsel at the Chidley custody case, October 1855
38. F. D. Minogue, *Footprints v. 5*, no. 9, Nov 1985, p. 11
39. *Catholic Directory*, 1858, pp.29-30
40. *The Rule of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Aust.*, 14th ed., 1991, p. 49
41. Bignell, S. op. cit. p. 14
42. *The Argus*, July 10th, 1855 (Advertisement over Ward's name, appealing for funds for the orphanage)
43. Part of sworn statement by Ward, Sherry Custody case, Supreme Court, October 6, 1855
44. *Melbourne Morning Herald*, September 17, 1855
45. *ibid* September 28, 1855
46. *ibid* September 28, 1855
47. *The Argus*, October 8, 1855
48. *The Age*, October 8, 1855.

49. *Australian Encyclopedia*, Grolier Society of Australia Pty Ltd, 4th ed., 1983, CHI 200
50. Part of sworn statement by Ward, Sherry Custody case, Supreme Court, October 6, 1855
51. p. 29 in Catholic Directory for 1858, M.T. Gason, Melbourne cited in Mackle, F. *Footprints of our Catholic Pioneers* p. 138-139
52. *ibid.* p. 30
53. Part of sworn statement by Ward, Sherry Custody case, Supreme Court, October 6, 1855
54. Twigg, K., *Shelter for the Children – A History of St. Vincent de Paul Child and Family Service 1854-1997* Sisters of Mercy, Melbourne, 2000, p. 5. (See this excellent history for a comprehensive account of the early days of the orphanage)
55. Allen, M. G., *The Labourers Friends – Sisters of Mercy in Victoria and Tasmania*, Hargreen Publishing Co., North Melbourne, 1989, p. 34
56. *ibid.* p.45
57. Kenyon, A.S. *Heidelberg: the City of Streams. 1834-1934 Centenary* p. 113
58. Vaughan, E. *St. John's on the Hill – A History of St. John's Heidelberg*, 1982, p. 19
59. *Melbourne Morning Herald*, January 18, 1858, p. 5
60. *The Argus*, January 18, 1858
61. cited in Ebsworth, W. *Pioneer Catholic Victoria*, The Polding Press, Melbourne, 1973, p. 155
62. Jenny Glare, Manager, Heritage and Information Services, MacKillop Family Services, has kindly provided the following brief history of the orphanage since 1858.

‘Following Father Ward’s death in 1858, a committee was established to manage the Orphanage.

In 1861, the Sisters of Mercy at the request of Archbishop Goold became responsible for the management of the Orphanage and for the care of the children. By 1864, separate accommodation for girls had been developed on the corner of Napier Street and Clarendon Streets, South Melbourne. The Sisters were able to move between the two sets of buildings via a narrow laneway known as Church Street. In 1874, the Christian Brothers assumed management of the Boys’ Orphanage and thereafter the two Orphanages operated autonomously, each under the management and control of their respective religious orders. The girls’ orphanage known as St Vincent de Paul Girls’ Orphanage remained at this site until 1966, when the Sisters relocated the work to Black Rock and established a new system of residential care for children, under the name of St Vincent de Paul Child and Family Service.

Residential care for boys as well as a specialist educational facility continued at the Cecil Street site until 1999 and 2001 respectively. On 1 July 1997, a new organisation, MacKillop Family Services, was formed to take forward the work of St Vincent’s Boys’ Home, St Vincent de Paul Child and Family Services and five other Catholic Child Welfare agencies. In 2002, the South Melbourne school was transferred to Maidstone bearing the name St Vincent’s School, thus maintaining a connection with the work originally begun by the St Vincent de Paul Society in 1854. Between 1857 and 1997 more than 6120 children resided at St Vincent’s Boys’ Home. Between 1864 and 1966 more than 5317 children resided at St Vincent de Paul Girls’ Orphanage.’



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