

## CHURCHES OF THE CHISHOLM

### REGION EAST MAITLAND PARISH, ESTABLISHED 1835 –

St Joseph's Church, East Maitland is located on the site of the first church built north of Sydney. Evidence

given by Fr Frederick Crew recorded his first impressions on arriving in Maitland from Newcastle in November 1830 – "As I came over the hill from One Mile Creek, two things struck me. I saw on my left, on Stockade Hill, a gallows, and on the right hand side, the unfinished walls of the Roman Catholic Chapel which was not roofed over." There is also historical record of the fact that on the morning of November

30, 1830, five men had been hanged on Stockade Hill and we know that pioneer priest Fr John Joseph Therry was present at the execution. In the original plan of the town of Maitland (East Maitland) drawn up in 1829 by the Surveyor-General, Sir Thomas Mitchell, the corner of King Street, East Maitland and the present Newcastle Road is marked for the Roman Catholic Church. The site was opposite the gallows and as tradition states was the place that Fr Therry camped and waited for the condemned man to arrive. The land became known as the priest's paddock.

(East) Maitland was an outstation of Sydney and whatever baptisms or marriages that were conducted in the years prior to the arrival of the first resident priest, Fr James Watkins, were recorded in the registers of St Mary's Church on Fr Therry's return to Sydney.

The foundation stone of the old St Joseph's Church was laid on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1834 by Fr Therry. Funds for the building of the church came from Government grants and private subscription and both Fr Therry and Fr Ullathorne had input into the design. Stone from the nearby Glebe quarry was used in its construction.

When Fr Watkins arrived in 1835 the church was described as having „a roof of sorts and an earthen floor, excepting the Sanctuary, where it was of wood". Fr Watkins remained at East Maitland for nine months, leaving the area to travel to Hobart shortly after the arrival of Fr Christopher Dowling in August 1836. Fr Dowling was then the only resident priest north of Sydney.

"The chaplain stationed at Maitland has to extend the sphere of his duties to Newcastle, across the Hunter, up to the whole of the Williams River, and over to Paterson's Plains on the one side, and on the other, to the distant parts of the Upper Hunter, the Patrick's and Liverpool Plains."

The official census in 1836 showed that the Catholic population of NSW was 21,898. The ordinary attendance at Mass at St Joseph's East Maitland was 250. Quoted from "History of Catholic Church in Australia" by Cardinal Moran.

Fr Ullathorne, saw the necessity of bringing Irish priests to Australia to minister to the Catholics here who were predominantly Irish. In 1838 a team of young Irish priests came to Australia and a general re- organisation took place. Fr Edmund Mahony and Fr John Thomas Lynch came to Maitland and Fr Dowling was transferred to Newcastle. This heralded the real beginning of Catholicity in the Hunter Valley.

In the beginning of their ministry, the two priests, Fr Mahony and Fr Lynch, lived together at East Maitland. In early 1839 Fr Lynch, although he continued to reside at East Maitland, set up a base in West Maitland. Fr Lynch moved to West Maitland in 1841 when other living quarters were set up.

Fr Mahony died on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1845, aged 33 years and was buried in the churchyard beside St Joseph's Church. Over time three more parish priests, Fr Christopher Dowling, Fr Michael Barron and Fr Patrick O'Leary, were laid to rest in the churchyard.

It is a matter of record that East Maitland Parish is the birthplace of the Maitland Newcastle Catholic Diocese. Upon his arrival in October 1866, the first resident bishop of the Maitland Diocese, Bishop Murray, said his first Mass in St Joseph's Church and it was from St Joseph's Presbytery that Bishop Murray administered the fledgling Maitland Diocese for five years before he moved to Victoria Street, Maitland in 1871.

In 1933 St Joseph's church was the oldest Catholic Church still in use in Australia. In that year it was proposed that the old church be demolished and replaced by "a grand brick structure to cope with the increasing population". Donations to support the building of the new church were sought from past and present parishioners.

On 13<sup>th</sup> August 1933, the last Mass was celebrated in the century old church. As quoted in the Newcastle & Maitland Catholic Sentinel 1<sup>st</sup> August 1933, "The passing of St Joseph's will close an interesting chapter in the history of the Catholic Church in the Hunter Valley."

On 19<sup>th</sup> November 1933 parishioners gathered to witness Maitland's Bishop Edmund Gleeson lay the foundation stone of the new church. They stood on the spot where, more than a hundred years earlier Fr Therry had laid the foundation stone of the original church. The opening ceremony of the new St Joseph's Church was held on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1934.

A feature of the new church is the rose window behind the altar. This window is a link with the old church as the stained glass of St Joseph and the glass around it came from the first church. Also from the old church are the Stations of the Cross fitted with new surrounds. Another link with the past is housed in the western turret of St Joseph's. The church bell once hung in a wooden belfry alongside the old church. It now hangs above the marble plaques commemorating the former parish priests of East Maitland and continues to summon all to prayer.

*Resources used: Centenary-The Diocese of Maitland 1866-1966 by Rev Harold Campbell  
St Joseph's Parish East Maitland 150 years 1835-1985  
St Joseph's Church East Maitland 50 Years of Celebration 1933-1983  
The Newcastle & Maitland Catholic Sentinel - August 1, 1933*



*The last Mass in the church built by Fr. Therry.*

