

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 12th 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 24th 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 13th August 1933, the last Mass was celebrated in the century old church. As quoted in the Newcastle & Maitland Catholic Sentinel 1st 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 19th 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 22nd 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*

MAITLAND PARISH, ESTABLISHED 1841-

When Fr John Lynch set up a Mass centre in West Maitland in 1839 it was located in Plaistowe St, Horeshoe Bend. It was a slab hut with a bark roof and earthen floor. The foundation stone of **St John the Baptist Church** was laid by Bishop Polding at Campbell's Hill on Thursday 8th October 1840. The church was never built on the original site but some four years later was erected in Cathedral Street (then Charles St).

The question could be asked; why did Dean Lynch move from the Campbell's Hill site and come down on to the flood plain to eventually build St John the Baptist Church? The most that can be said is that he built where he did for the same reason that so many others did and are still doing. He came to where the people were.

The church was opened for use in 1846. When St John's was built it is said that it stood 300 yards (274 meters) from the river bank, but over time, with the incursion of the river, the distance would now be scarcely more than 100 yards (91 meters).

Before Fr Lynch left Maitland in 1862 he had enlarged the church and added the tower. When Bishop Murray arrived in Maitland in 1866, he took St John's Church as his Cathedral and on 1st November 1866 St John's became the Cathedral of the Maitland Diocese. The Cathedral served Bishop Murray for 43 years and then gave good service for Bishop Dwyer for 34 years. The Catholic Hall at Maitland, which was built in 1922, was remodeled and was opened as St John's Pro-Cathedral by Bishop Gleeson on 26th November 1933. The old St John's Cathedral underwent renovation and conversion and was blessed and opened as a primary school and Catholic Hall on 14th September 1952. The Pro-Cathedral continued to serve the Maitland Diocese until 1995. The earthquake of 1989 caused significant damage to St John's Pro-Cathedral and because of a change in direction of population movement, the then Bishop of Maitland Diocese, Bishop Leo Clarke took the opportunity to petition Rome for a change of name, and on the 16th July 1995, the "Diocese of Maitland" became the "Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle" and the Church of the Sacred Heart at Hamilton became the Cathedral. Recently the diocese has undertaken a major renovation of the original St John the Baptist church which has brought the church back to its former glory and is again in use as a chapel to serve the people of Maitland.

St Columba's Church at Paterson was opened on 21st December 1884 by Bishop Murray and was administered by the Parish Priest of Gresford. It was built by Mr Morris of East Maitland, who did the foundations and Mr Coleman who did the brickwork. The total cost of the work was about £400.

The *Maitland Mercury* on 11th September, 1884 reported on the progress of the building of St Columba's – "*The size of the edifice is to be 40ft by 20ft. The preparations for the foundation are now in process, and it is expected that the ceremony of laying the foundation stone or first brick will take place in a week or two.*" Building work progressed very well with another report published in the *Mercury* on Thursday, 13th November 1884 – "*This new edifice is making rapid progress. The brick work appears to be completed and good progress has been made with the roof, hence completion may be expected shortly. The prominent situation and ornate architecture of the structure will make it, when finished, quite an ornament to our town.*"

On 3rd January 1885, the Sydney paper '*The Express*' gave the following description of St Columba's – "*The new structure, which occupies a prominent position is of brick on cement foundation, 40 by 20 feet inside. It is of Gothic design with lancet windows and elaborately ornamented with embellishments in wood and cement outside. The internal arrangements are all that can be desired, and altogether the Church forms quite an ornament to the town.*"

Little is known of the early history of St Columba's but it is known that Fr Michael Kiernan (1911-1939) travelled to Paterson from Gresford in a horse and sulky before he acquired a one seater Dodge car.

The additions of a porch and sacristy area to the church were built in the early 1900's to provide overnight accommodation for the priest if needed.

Restoration work was carried out on the church to co-incident with its centenary celebrations in 1984. Four stained glass windows were put into the Sanctuary, the remaining windows in the body of the church were replaced and the extremely old pews of varying shapes and sizes were replaced with new pews.

Today, St Columba's is a part of Maitland Parish.

Holy Family Church at Largs – Shortly after the arrival of the first Bishop of Maitland. James Murray, a deputation from the Dunmore/Largs area, led by Jeremiah Maher, visited the bishop and asked permission to build a school which could be used as a Mass centre on a Sunday. Permission was granted and the school building was completed before the end of 1868. It was established on the "Voluntary Principle" which meant that the people paid for the building and the teacher's wage.

As more priests were appointed to the Maitland area, East Maitland parish was subdivided, but the Dunmore/Largs area remained part of East Maitland.

The Sisters of St Joseph's took charge of the Largs School in 1889. The school building continued to be used as a church.

In late 1909 a block of land, situated on the corner of John and Church Streets, was purchased at a cost of £50. This was the first step in the building of Holy Family Church. The foundation stone of the new church was laid on 11th April 1910, having been delayed from 3rd April, because of inclement weather.

The blessing and opening of the church was held on Sunday 4th September 1910. The *Maitland Mercury* reported on the opening giving the following description of the Church – "*The new church, which is one of the neatest in Largs, built of brick, on reinforced concrete foundations. The roof is tiled, and is carried by hammer beam principals, the ceilings, altar rails, etc., are of Kauri pine. The windows are of stained glass, three at the sanctuary end, being figured.....The walls are plastered inside, At the front of the building is a porch...The design is of the Gothic style, and has been effectively treated, the aspect of the exterior and interior being very pleasing.....*"

In 1957 Holy Family Church at Largs was transferred to Maitland Parish.

Sacred Heart Church at Campbell's Hill – The foundation stone of a new church to be erected in honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at Campbell's Hill was blessed and laid on 7th October 1917. The church adjoined the Bishop Murray Memorial Orphanage (Monte Pio).

In 1875, to cater for the need of higher education for Catholic boys, Bishop Murray established the Sacred Heart College at Campbell's Hill for both day pupils and boarders. It was established in what had been the residence of Bishop Murray. He had vacated his home so that the college could be established. He then rented a house in Elgin Street as his residence.

When Bishop Murray died in 1909, his successor, Bishop Dwyer decided that a home for orphans would be a fitting memorial for Bishop Murray. The Sacred Heart College had ceased to function in 1905 and the old buildings were still standing being used in the interim as accommodation for the workers who were constructing the North Coast railway line.

With the Sisters of Mercy in charge, the Bishop Murray Memorial Home for girls was blessed and opened by Bishop Dwyer on 23rd May 1910.

Bishop Dwyer also played a great part in the building of Sacred Heart Church and the later extensions. When the church was opened on 18th August 1918 it was seen as the completion of the Memorial for Bishop Murray.

*Resources used: Centenary-The Diocese of Maitland 1866-1966 by Rev Harold Campbell
Centenary of St Columba's Catholic Church Paterson 1884-1984
The Cedar Ground - A History of Largs Catholic Community by Helen Russell*

MORPETH PARISH, ESTABLISHED 1875

Historical records indicate that our pioneer priest, Fr John Joseph Therry, celebrated Mass at Morpeth as early as October 1833 and with the establishment of the parochial district of East Maitland in 1835, it can be assumed that Morpeth would be a regular stopover point for the priests from East Maitland as they visited the people in the outlying districts of the parish. A fortnightly Mass Station existed in Morpeth from at least 1854.

In March 1861 land was purchased at Morpeth from Edward Close and the foundation stone for **St Bede's Catholic Church** was blessed and laid on 7th November 1861 by Archbishop Polding of Sydney. The Bishop of Maitland, Dr J Murray, blessed and opened St Bede's Church on 13th November 1870 although the church was probably in regular use from 1862 when the building was completed.

Morpeth was still a part of East Maitland Parish but as more priests became available, East Maitland Parish was subdivided and in 1875 the parochial district of Morpeth was established with Fr Patrick Corcoran, who had been at East Maitland since 1871, in charge.

The first entry in the Morpeth Marriage Register was recorded on 12th August 1875 and in the Baptismal Register on 12th November 1875. Fr Corcoran remained in Morpeth until 1887 when he returned to his birthplace, Ireland.

In 1891 Bishop Murray wrote to Fr Corcoran and offered him the permanent position of parish priest at Morpeth. He returned and cared for his flock until his death on 21st February 1929.

Fr Corcoran began to build on Morpeth's foundations by erecting buildings to 'meet every parochial need', including a new church, school, presbytery and convent. St Bede's continued to be used as a school building until December 1969 when it was occasionally used as a church hall. It was sold in September 1994.

The foundation stone of the new church was laid on 13th June, 1897 and was opened and blessed by the Most Rev Dr Murray on 2nd October 1898, originally given the name of its predecessor, St Bede's.

The reason for the name change to the **Church of the Immaculate Conception** is not known but perhaps it had something to do with Fr Corcoran donating the stained glass window depicting Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception.

Morpeth Parish had eight resident parish priests, seven of whom were Irish - Fr Patrick Thomas Corcoran, Fr James Gleeson, Fr James Walsh, Fr William Hourigan, Fr James Morrissey, Fr Brian Walsh (Australian born), Fr Michael Hanrahan and Fr John Delaney. When Fr Delaney died in 1990 the parish priest of East Maitland also became the parish priest of Morpeth Parish.

Today Morpeth Parish is administered under the Chisholm Pastoral Region under a shared parish priest model.

*Resources used: Centenary-The Diocese of Maitland 1866-1966 by Rev Harold Campbell
Tomorrow Belongs To You by Kevin Pilgrim*

LOCHINVAR PARISH, ESTABLISHED 1905

In Australia's early history, the Catholics who had settled in the areas north of Sydney were first served by priests based in Sydney who travelled great distances on horseback to minister to their people. When Fr Dowling was assigned to East Maitland in 1836 his district extended from Newcastle to the Queensland border. It can therefore be assumed that the early Lochinvar district settlers would have occasionally been visited by Fr Dowling, the only resident priest north of Sydney, if not Fr Therry before him.

In 1838 the arrival in New South Wales of more Irish priests enabled more priests to be assigned to the Maitland area.

At Lochinvar the first church was built in 1841, the location of which is not known. In 1851 Thomas Winder donated land for four churches in Lochinvar – Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and Wesleyan.

In 1858 on the land donated by Thomas Winder (the present site of St Patrick's Church) a church was built. It was a wooden structure and was used as a church and a school; it was described as being "*neat in design*"..."*in the Gothic style*". Rev Dean Lynch blessed the church on Sunday 24th October 1858 and it was formally opened on Thursday 11th November. Many improvements to the original building were made over the years.

Terrible weather conditions in December 1865 proved too much for the buildings foundations and on 21st December, during a fierce wind storm, the building collapsed.

In January 1866, the Catholics of Lochinvar met "*to devise means to rebuild their chapel*". In an advertisement in the Maitland Mercury on 20th February 1866, Fr A. Phelan of West Maitland invited tenders for the construction of the new church at Lochinvar.

Bishop Murray blessed and opened the new church, dedicated to **St Patrick**, on Tuesday 27th November 1866, "*the first church he had the pleasure of assisting in the opening since his arrival in Australia*". The Church was in the Gothic style with foundations of stone and a brick superstructure with a slate roof adorned with a cross on the gable. Further improvements to the Church were undertaken in 1896.

Lochinvar was formally "*raised to the dignity of a parish*" on 16th July 1905. The same day the new presbytery at Lochinvar was blessed and opened and Fr P. C. McCormack, assistant priest at West Maitland, was named as Lochinvar's first parish priest. Unfortunately the presbytery was gutted by fire on 1 July, 1943 and the contents, including parish records, were destroyed.

In 1914 the parish embarked on a two-staged plan to build a new church that would cater for the needs of the parish into the future. The first stage of the project was the building of a new church at right angles to the existing 1866 church. A temporary structure connected the new portion and the old church so that they could be used together until the larger plan could be completed.

The Lochinvar parishioners, some of whose descendants still live in the area, contributed much to the building of the new church by means of donations and the organization of numerous fundraising events.

On the first Sunday of October in 1932, parishioners and clergy gathered for the laying of the foundation of the new portion of St. Patrick's church, completing the original plan for the church drawn up in 1914. The 1866 church was demolished in keeping with the plan. This was able to be undertaken because of a generous bequest from the late Robert Burgess.

The new church was blessed and opened on 12 February, 1933 by Most Rev. Dr. Gleeson, Bishop of Maitland. At the opening, Monsignor Roche, V.G., "*thanked Fr. McCormack, who devised the building, the architect (Mr. T.W. Silk), who planned the beautiful structure and set it in the ground, and the people who did the most difficult part, that of paying.*"

*Resources used: Centenary-The Diocese of Maitland 1866-1966 by Rev Harold Campbell
St Patrick's Parish Lochinvar 1905-2005 Commemorative Booklet compiled by Marie Hughes RSJ*

BERESFIELD PARISH, ESTABLISHED 1947

The original Our Lady of Lourdes church was built in Tarro. It was blessed and opened on 22nd July, 1923. The area was part of East Maitland Parish until the parish obtained its own status in October 1947 when the parochial district of Tarro was established. Fr M. Hanrahan was appointed as priest in charge and served the parish for 25 years.

The Sisters of Mercy, who were based at East Maitland, established a school at Tarro in September 1944 and taught the students in the Tarro Church. On 29th June, 1948 a new school for the Sisters of Mercy was opened and on 14th November, 1948 a new presbytery was blessed and opened by Bishop Toohey.

In 1946 a small timber church at Thornton was blessed and opened by Fr G. P. Youll. The church, dedicated to St Patrick was administered from East Maitland.

At Beresfield, on 3rd September 1961 Bishop John Toohey blessed and opened a building dedicated to St Jude to be used as a mass centre. The building was formerly a hospital hut that was built at the Greta military complex and used during the Second World War. It was transported from Greta and erected in the vicinity of the present Beresfield parish church.

A new presbytery was located in Beresfield, the first presbytery at Tarro being sold in 1973.

The new church of Our Lady of Lourdes at Beresfield was blessed and opened by Bishop Leo Clarke on 9th October, 1977. The Parish of Beresfield, which was formerly known as the parish of Tarro, embraced the parochial districts of Beresfield, Woodberry, Thornton and Tarro. St Judes was still standing at the time of the opening of the new church as it was where refreshments were served following the opening ceremony.

The original Our Lady of Lourdes church has been refurbished and is now used as the assembly hall and school mass centre for OLOL Primary school at Tarro. A number of the stained glass windows have been gifted by the students of OLOL.

The last resident parish priest of Beresfield was Fr Ron Picken who had a keen sense of humour and was well loved by his parishioners.

Today, Beresfield parish is a part of the Chisholm Pastoral Region with Fr Paul as shared parish priest.

*Resources used: Centenary-The Diocese of Maitland 1866-1966 by Rev Harold Campbell
Programme of the Opening of the New Beresfield Catholic Church*

RUTHERFORD PARISH, ESTABLISHED 1961

The establishment of Rutherford as a Parish could be described as unique. It can be said that the parish was born from the school.

In 1955, Fr Francis William Coffey was appointed as the first administrator of the parochial district of Campbell's Hill which embraced the Rutherford area. With the assistance of the Sisters of Mercy from the convent at Campbell's Hill, Fr Coffey established St Paul's Church School at Rutherford in a cottage that once stood on the site of the current school. The suburb of Rutherford was undergoing great expansion following the 1955 flood which had devastated the low lying parts of the Maitland area.

Sr Agnes Riley and Sr Moya Lantry travelled to the school each day from Monte Pio at Campbell's Hill. On 29th January 1957, 64 children were enrolled in the new school. In 1958 another 34 children were enrolled and Sr M Boniface was appointed the first principal.

Fr Coffey soon realized that the cottage would not be enough to house the growing enrolment. He purchased two more blocks of land adjacent to the cottage. It was probable about this time that St Paul's Hall, as we know it today, was relocated from Nelson's Bay to its present site and was used as a school room and Mass centre.

Fr Coffey instigated a campaign to raise funds to build a new and larger school. On 1st October 1961 the new school, comprising of three primary classrooms, an infant's section, basement, toilets, tuckshop, office and staffroom, was blessed and opened by Bishop Toohey. The building cost £29,000 and had an enrolment of 115 students. When the new school was opened the hall became St Paul's church.

In December 1961 the parochial district of Rutherford was established with Fr P. Flynn appointed as Parish Priest. The late Ian and Helen Mills, well known parishioners of Rutherford, were the first couple married in the parish. Fr Flynn remained as parish priest of Rutherford for 20 years during which time the school continued to expand and a new church and presbytery were built. The old church became the parish and school hall.

The new St Paul's church was built in 1972 and was blessed by Bishop John Toohey on 24th March 1974.

Over the years the original cottage was used as classrooms, presbytery and school office and in about 2007 it was demolished to make way for the further expansion of the school. The current enrolment of the school is about 420 students.

The church was beautifully refurbished in 1999. The parish hall was used regularly by the school and parish and was refurbished in 2001.

*Resources used: Centenary-The Diocese of Maitland 1866-1966 by Rev Harold Campbell
Newcastle and Maitland Catholic Sentinel Vol. XXXIV No. 10 (1July, 1966)
St Paul's Primary Website - School History*

EAST MAITLAND



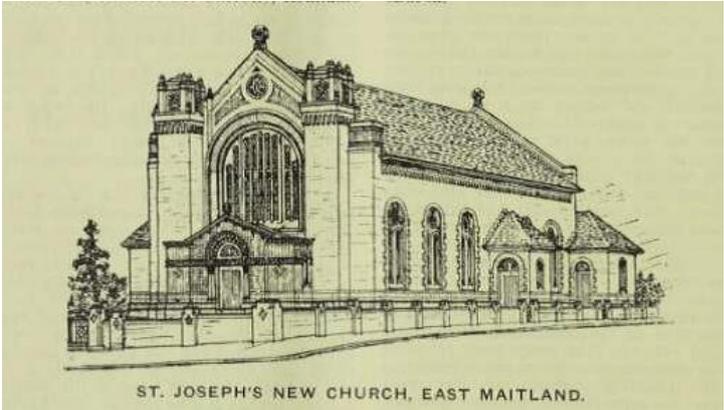
East Maitland parishioners with Fr. Morrissey at the closing of the old St. Joseph's, 13th August, 1933.



Four Parish Priests were solemnly buried at St. Joseph's East Maitland. Rev. Christopher Dowling, Rev. Edmund Mahony, Rev. Michael Barron and Rev. Patrick O'Leary.

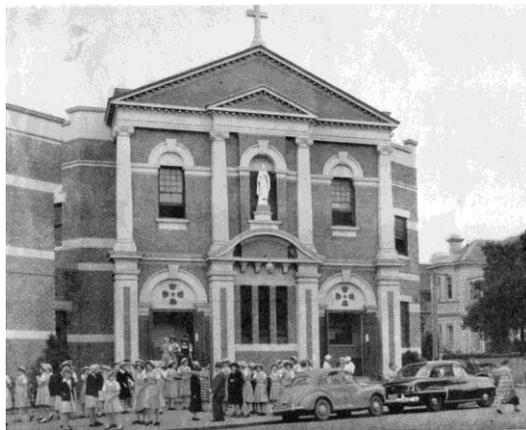


The last Mass in the church built by Fr. Therry.

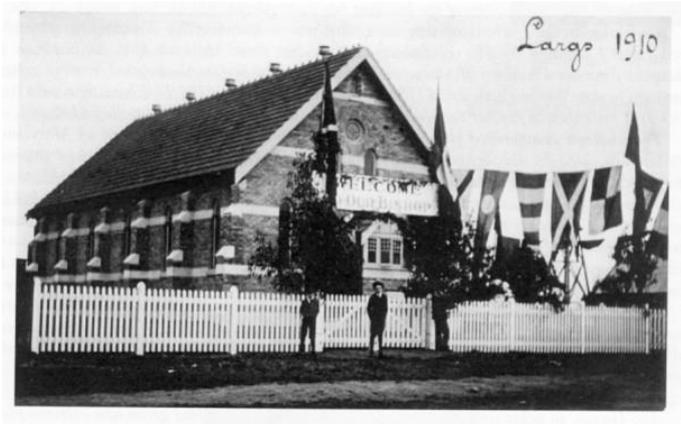


ST. JOSEPH'S NEW CHURCH, EAST MAITLAND.

MAITLAND



PATERSON



LARGS



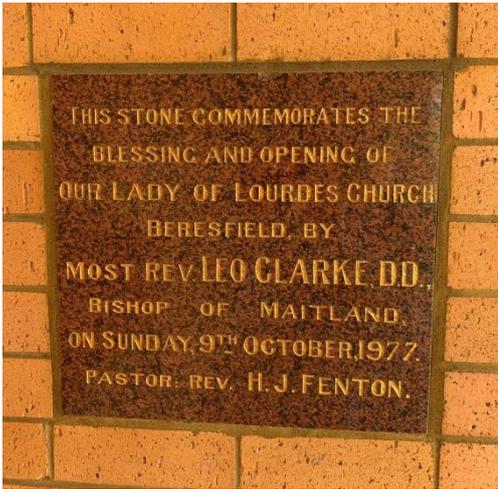
MORPETH



LOCHINVAR



BERESFIELD



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