

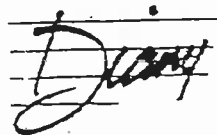
Father Tresallet must have been well thought of by Bishop Viard. Upon leaving Hokitika in mid-1868 he went with him on his ad limina visit to Europe, a visit prolonged by the calling of the First Vatican Council.

On returning to New Zealand in 1872 Father Tresallet went to Wanganui where he remained until 1875. From there he retired to Villa Maria, Sydney, where he was chaplain for some time to St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill. There he would have known a boy whose parents were married on the West Coast in the hey day of the goldrush; his name was Matthew Brodie. It may well have been the College Chaplain who directed his thoughts from law to the priesthood; he entered the newly established Manly Seminary in 1891 to become in time its first old boy Bishop.

Father Tresallet died in Sydney, 14th July 1894, and was buried in the cemetery at Ryde. With him are buried three of his confreres who were fellow missionaries in New Zealand.

POSTSCRIPT - Circumstantial evidence is that which is not positive or direct, but which is gathered inferentially from the circumstances of the case. Based on the evidence available, I believe the first Mass on the West Coast was offered not by Father Stephen Hallum but by Father J.M. Tresallet, S.M., and that the year was not 1864 but 1865.

JMH



*'Friends of the Cathedral'
Annual Gathering and Luncheon,
Sunday 28th October - 10.30-12.30.*

NEWSLETTER

FRIENDS OF THE CATHEDRAL



No. 71 : SEPTEMBER 2007

EVEN FURTHER AFIELD

I never cease to be amazed at how historical material appeals to the 'Friends of the Cathedral.' All I know about the Cathedral and its history has long since featured in these newsletters, and I have found myself exploring other areas of Diocesan history to write about, e.g., the intriguing story of the first Mass celebrated on the West Coast. You would be surprised at how many have written to say how they are enjoying the series. Regrettably, it ends with this edition.

The time has now come to go further afield – and given that celebrations are being held this month to commemorate the 50th anniversary of New Zealanders in the Antarctic, perhaps that should be the subject of this editorial.

In November 1969, I went to Antarctica as chaplain to the American forces at McMurdo Sound. In those days priests simply went to the American base at Harewood, were fitted out in the appropriate gear, and boarded the plane as weather permitted. Nowadays, those going to the ice have to have a medical check, a dental check, and sign their lives away to the President of the United States of America.

I was Parish Priest of Cheviot in 1969, and I found myself driving up and down Highway One awaiting takeoff. A severe storm was affecting the Antarctic and the temperature was 50 degrees below. Eventually we took off in a Globemaster for the eight hour trip. I have slides taken from the small windows of the aircraft, showing massive ice flows as we neared the frozen continent. The pilot warned us of the extreme cold on landing, and told us not to hold a camera to our faces when taking photographs!

In those times, things were fairly primitive at McMurdo Sound – basic Quonset huts to sleep in, twenty-four hour daylight to contend with, and world news came to us by way of a typed sheet. Surprisingly, the Americans' biggest problem was the constant breakdown of the ice cream machine!

As requested I made myself available for morning Mass in the Chapel of the Snows, and for anyone who wished to see me afterwards. Given the loneliness of the men on the base it was a rewarding time just chatting to them. And then came the women! Six of them, all scientists, and all of them far from welcome in this all male preserve. The fact that the navy personnel had painted their accommodation purple says it all. So, too, the welcome to the Officers' bar after the edict had gone out to clean up the 'Playboy centrefolds' on the walls. Only the leader of the group came the first night, but at least she broke the ice, and thereafter the others came as well. As always, time was a great healer.

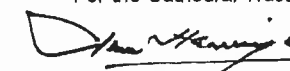
As recently as last week a boy from our school asked me how cold it was when I was in the Antarctic. Their class was doing a project. I said how do you know I've been to the Antarctic? He said you told us once at a school Mass. It seems children are still listening and learning, even at Mass, so maybe all is not lost!

IN THIS ISSUE: Invitation to the 'Annual Gathering of the Friends': Sunday October 28th and a Subscription Renewal (2008)



In the footsteps of Amundsen, Scott and Hillary – Geographic South Pole (1969). Elevation 9186ft; Ice thickness c 9000ft. Av. Temperature: minus 57 degrees (F).

For the Cathedral Trust


Monsignor J.M. Harrington

'Friends of the Cathedral' Newsletter: Cathedral House, PO Box 4544, Christchurch.

'WHAT IS TRUTH?' (Jn 18:38) Part 3

As the age-old dictum has it: justice must not only be done; it must be seen to be done. If the first Mass on the Coast was not offered in 1864 by Father Stephen Hallum "in a store belonging to the Kennedy Brothers", who was the priest sent to the goldfields "before any protestant was among the multitude"? In all probability the honour of the first Mass belongs to him. And so in closing this trilogy, we must look at the case of the alternative claimant.

The New Year of 1865 saw Dame Fortune smile broadly on sunny Nelson. As yet there was no road between Westland and Canterbury, and people and goods bound for Hokitika were already passing through Nelson's port. Accommodation houses were full, shipping offices were crowded, and there was talk of digger's trekking north from as far away as Queenstown.

It was not only Nelson town that began to prosper; so too did the local Catholic Mission. The Rector was the Apostle of Nelson, Father Antoine Marie Garin, S.M. He had been appointed there in 1850 and was to die there almost 40 years later. In a short history of St Mary's Station published in 1876 he recalled the following:

"..... when gold diggers were rushing in great numbers to Nelson from the Wakamarina diggings, our church proved to be too small; but because gold was then abundant not only at Wakamarina but also at the West Coast, we lost no time: we had every Sunday a collection at Nelson, and the other priest, my companion, went to collect amongst the diggers at Wakamarina and Hokitika"

Who was Father Garin's companion at the time? When did he set foot in Hokitika? Is it likely that he celebrated Mass there? Those are the vital questions.

The man's family name was Tresallet; his initials were J.M., standing for Jacques Marie, but to his confreres he came to be known as Maurice Tresallet. Born in France in 1828 and professed as a Marist in 1853, he arrived in Wellington with two companions on the 15th March 1859. Doubtless he came to work among the Maori, but like those who would follow him he found himself ministering mostly to pakeha. His posting to Taranaki in 1860 co-incided with the outbreak of the Land Wars, when the Catholic settlers of New Plymouth found their numbers increased almost overnight by a thousand Irish soldiers. It was the military who taught Father Tresallet to speak English, and it was largely their donations that enabled him to build his first church.

His coming to the South Island in May 1863 was occasioned by the indifferent health of Father Garin, whose station embraced the whole of the province of Nelson and Marlborough, the former extending to the Grey River west of the alps. Over the next four years, as the Nelson parish registers show, Father Tresallet was to be in journeys often: to Kaikoura, Picton, Queen Charlotte Sound, Wairau, Collingwood and elsewhere. The same registers confirm his absence from Nelson on visits to the goldfields, as noted in the writings of Father Garin.

No doubt solicitous for the spiritual well-being of the diggers, but with an eye to his building fund as well, Father Garin dispatched his assistant to nearby Wakamarina in November-December 1864. Since the visit proved to be a profitable one, Father Tresallet was asked to book a passage for the diggings on the Coast in the New Year of 1865, and over a period he visited 'Buller, Grey and Hoki'. Of these three embryo townships, Hokitika was by far the largest in January-February 1865. If he offered Mass anywhere on the Coast it would surely have been at Hokitika. Unlike the Buller and the Grey –

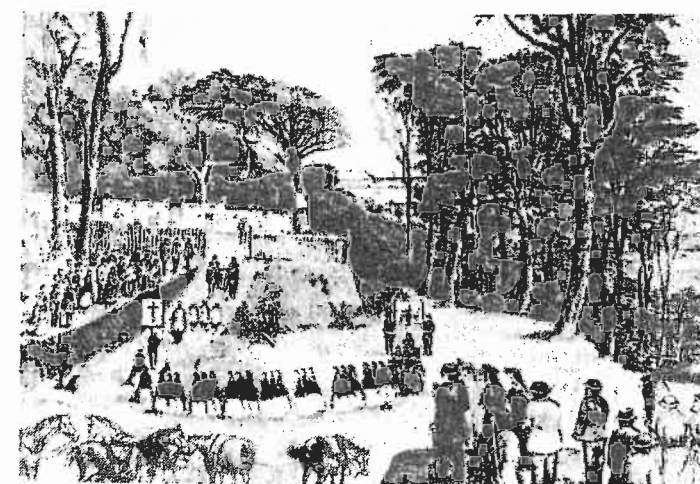


Fr J.M. Tresallet S.M. (Marist Archives NZ)

"..... there in the heart of dense and almost untrodden bush, a street had arisen as if created by the magic wand of an enchanter. Swift as the walls of Aladdin's palace, stores, shanties, public houses, butchers, bakers, and doctor's shops were to be found on every side"

Father Tresallet, presumably carrying a Mass kit, was to pay a second visit to Hokitika that same year. With the official proclamation of the Coast goldfields, 5th March 1865, the rush had begun in earnest. Father Chataigner of Christchurch, whose station included the goldfields of 'West Canterbury', wrote to Father Garin asking if he could make his assistant available a second time so that the diggers might have an opportunity to make their Easter duty. So on May 22nd Father Tresallet found himself on the steamship 'Bruce', bound once more for Hokitika. What he did not know was that Bishop Viard had himself dispatched a priest for the same destination only two days before. A Father Michael Driscoll from Melbourne had offered himself to the Bishop to work among the miners and collect for his Cathedral. He left Wellington on the 'City of Dunedin', 20th May 1865, but was never seen again; the ship was wrecked in Cook Strait with the loss of all on board. It was this tragedy that prompted Father Emmanuel Royer to offer his services for the same mission, thus becoming the first of the secular priests who would live and work in Westland.

By March 1867 there were 6 secular priests on the Coast, five of them Irish – a factor that would bring Father Tresallet to Hokitika for his last and longest stay. By April of that year Father Garin found himself reporting to the Bishop that the Coast clergy were at loggerheads. The Irish 'Troubles' had come to the Coast. On the principle of divide and rule the Bishop separated the troublemakers in a reshuffle. But this did not solve the problem. Even before the shifts took effect the pastor of Hokitika was brought to court on a charge of bodily assault, and as a result was asked to leave the Diocese. His replacement in Hokitika was to be Father Tresallet, who took up the appointment in December 1867.



The mimed Fenian funeral at Hokitika cemetery. The original by Patrick Lysaght was lithographed for the 'Hokitika Star' not long after the event in 1868.

The Irish 'Troubles' brought to Hokitika the most bizarre episode in its history. It began 12,000 miles away with the conviction and hanging of three Irish Fenians – the Manchester martyrs. When the news reached the Coast in 1868 a meeting was called in the Hokitika church to arrange a demonstration. The outcome was the mock funeral which led to the so called 'Fenian Uprising'. On Sunday, March 8th, a procession of several hundred diggers carrying an empty coffin made its way to the local cemetery in defiance of the authorities; it was led by Father William Larkin in soutane and surplice. On arrival the locked gates were lifted from their hinges, a service was conducted for the 'martyred brave', and a celtic cross erected to their memory. The authorities who saw the issue as one of law and order had their hand strengthened a few days later when news reached Hokitika that an Irishman had made an attempt on the life of Prince Alfred who was visiting Sydney en route to New Zealand. Local feeling against Fenianism grew apace and a number of stealthy arrests were made; among them was Father Larkin who was known to be a Fenian sympathiser. With others he was brought to trial and eventually convicted of riot and seditious libel. Meanwhile the town readied itself for a state of siege. Civilian military units were formed, special constables were sworn in, and arms and ammunition were ordered from Wellington for the uprising that never eventuated.

Father Tresallet's role as the relieving pastor during these events can scarcely have been easy. His predecessor, although long since dismissed from the Diocese, was still in Hokitika, living privately. The former curate, Father Larkin, who had also been given his exeat was now serving sentence in the local lock-up. But Father Tresallet, while showing sympathy and interest in Irish grievances, chose to keep the expression of these within an acceptable constitutional framework. In presiding over a service to give thanks for the escape of the Duke of Edinburgh he made it clear that the occasion was not a party political one, but purely an act of religion. In Wellington his Bishop was endeavouring to steer the same course.

(over)