

LOOKING BACK AGAIN J.M.H

It hardly seems possible that twenty-one years have passed since we celebrated our diocesan centenary, 10th May 1987.

Some time earlier, Fr Michael O'Meeghan SM, had been commissioned to write a history of the Diocese. He had already done considerable research into the history of the Order to which he belonged, and it was felt this would be a base on which to start building a diocesan history.

In his prologue to 'Held Firm by Faith' Fr O'Meeghan says: '..... it is still premature to attempt a definitive history of the Christchurch Diocese. Some archives have yet to be thoroughly winnowed and catalogued. A little has been achieved already, but many more theses, monographs and review articles still remain to be written to provide a base for a readable general history'

A case in point is the family background of John Joseph Grimes, S.M., pioneer Bishop of Christchurch. Strangely, when he died in Sydney in 1915 he took with him all details of his family history. I say 'strangely' because Bishop Grimes was meticulous in keeping things. He literally 'lives' in the Diocesan archives housed in the eastern tower of the Cathedral. There can be seen his diaries, his pastoral letters, his illuminated addresses, sermons given over the years, notes for his popular magic lantern shows, carbon copies of his typewritten letters, records, and receipts for this, that and the other thing, even bus tickets. But of his family history there is no record.

And so, sadly, 'Held Firm by Faith' makes no mention of the Grimes family, other than to inform the reader that John Joseph was born at Bromley by Bow in the Diocese of Westminster on 11th February 1842, and after completing his secondary education at Marist College, Bar-le-Duc, France, he went on to seminary studies with the Marists at Dundalk, Ireland. Ordained on 22nd May 1869 at the church of Dublin University, he returned to the staff of St Mary's College, Dundalk, for six years. Then in 1874 he went to teach at Jefferson College, Louisiana, and later became its President. While helping in the New Orleans yellow fever epidemic in 1878 he caught the disease which left him with permanent after-effects. He was eventually transferred back to England in 1882, and there was appointed to the Marist Novitiate a Paignton, where he became Superior and Novice Master in 1885. It was this appointment which probably helped to mark him as a likely Marist candidate for the soon to be erected Diocese of Christchurch, NZ. After he was preconised as its first bishop on 13th May 1887, he was consecrated at St Anne's Church in the East End of London on 26th July 1887, and enthroned in the Pro-Cathedral, at Christchurch, 1st February 1888. He would be Bishop of Christchurch for twenty-seven years. The Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, in which he is buried, is an enduring memorial to the courage and fortitude of the man who spearheaded the project and saw it through to its completion.

Significantly, it was the centenary of the Cathedral which eventually prompted research into the Grimes' family history. Michael Hanrahan had been commissioned to write a history of the Cathedral to mark the 100th anniversary of its dedication, 12th February 2005. His fine history, entitled 'A Suitable Temple', contains details of the Grimes family for the first time. This was largely made possible by the computer age, and the detective work of two computer sleuths – Michael Hanrahan himself, and Jean Clifton his researcher. Printed below is the first communiqué I received from the pair as a result of their sleuthing.

March 5, 1845. A 29 year-old labourer breathed his last in a riverside hotel on the margin of a marshy wasteland known as The Isle of Dogs, a short distance from London town. Richard Grimes had been taken to Orchard House, near the confluence of the River Lea with the Thames, following the explosion of a steam boiler.



The logo designed by the writer to mark the centenary of the Diocese 10th May 1987.

Whether it was on a ship or in one of the factories that were starting to spring up to service shipping in the area isn't known. What is known is that three weeks later Limehouse coroner W. Baker found one George Low guilty of manslaughter for the incident.

Richard's death left a young family alone and virtually destitute. Eight years earlier, on September 5, 1837 the 21 year-old mariner had married Elizabeth Calding, a daughter of Morris and Elizabeth Calding. The sea and the river were in his blood – his father, also Richard, and father-in-law were mariners.

Richard and Elizabeth's daughter, Catherine, was born in 1840 and two years later, on February 11, 1842 their only son, John was born. The family lived with Elizabeth's mother in a tenement known as Man's Rents in Prospect Place in a former rural village, by then fast becoming industrialised, Bromley by Bow. Across the street was the workhouse, a place that must have seemed a real threat following Richard's death. The two women eked out a living, the younger one by taking in washing and her mother by going on the streets to sell apples.

As a nine year-old in 1851 young John was described as a scholar, something quite unusual in the tenement where even much older boys, if they had any occupation at all, were doing well to be errand boys. Where John went to school at that age is not known, but in an age before free education it was unlikely to have been any neighbourhood school, if one existed.

His grandmother, Elizabeth, was from Roscommon in Ireland, and very likely Catholic. Richard had married Elizabeth in the Church of England parish church in Stepney, but that may be little indication of religious affiliation, as Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act that required all except Jews and Quakers to marry in the local parish church was repealed only about a year before their wedding. Old habits died hard, and in any case Catholic churches were few and far between in the London of 1837.

The likelihood is, then, that the family were Catholic. London in the early Victorian era was a difficult place to be Catholic. John was born only 13 years after the Roman Catholic Relief Act that restored civil rights lost by Catholics in the post-Reformation period. It would be a further eight years before the English hierarchy was restored, enabling dioceses and parishes to be created.

It is known John was educated by the Marist Brothers in nearby Spitalfields, where the Marist Brothers came from France to found St Anne's primary school early in 1853. A secondary school was opened in 1857, the first post-reformation Catholic day secondary school for boys in Britain. However, the foundation date of both these schools postdates the 1851 description of John as a scholar.

The Marist Fathers had established themselves among "the poorest of the poor" in Spitalfields in 1850, their first foundation in England. Could the Fathers have recognised scholastic qualities in the young John and taught him informally for the period before the Brothers school was established?

We will likely never know. We do know a little of the social conditions of the area. Urbanisation and industrialisation were creeping eastwards like a tide from the metropolis to engulf the once pretty rural village of Bromley by Bow. The tide on the way engulfed first Spitalfields which the Marist Sisters, when they began their first foundation outside France there in 1858, described as "socially and spiritually deprived". With the little income Elizabeth and her mother would have earned, it is probable John had no options but to walk to his school, wherever it was. He was at home on census night, March 30, 1851, so it seems likely his trek to education was on a daily basis. Whatever his early education, it was furthered in north-east France, at St Joseph's College, Bar-le-Duc, before he began his training for the priesthood at St Mary's College, Dundalk, Ireland. He was professed a Marist in 1867 and ordained priest in the church of the Catholic University of Ireland in 1869.

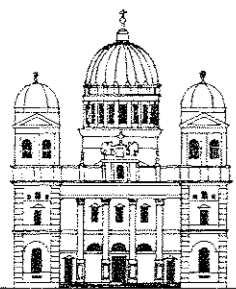


A photograph of the young Bishop Grimes taken by Mannering and Co. Colombo St. Christchurch, c. 1880.

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Subsequently, I did some sleuthing of my own. On a visit to London I explored the vicinity of Bromley by Bow, now largely industrialised, and succeeded in finding its old presbytery and the underground church in which Catherine Grimes was married. The parish priest made me very welcome and seemed pleased to hear something of the Grimes family who had been one time parishioners. I also found my way to the parish of Whitechapel, and saw St Anne's Church where Bishop Grimes was consecrated. The Marist Fathers, too, made me welcome, and were able to show me relics dating back to the 1880's, one of which was a note written by a young Father Grimes, recording his presence on the wharf when Fr Chevier SM left London for the New Zealand Mission. Fr Chevier would, of course, go on to become one of the 'Apostles of Canterbury'.

Today, the Most Rev. John Joseph Grimes, SM, DD, lies at rest in our Cathedral, awaiting the coming of the Great Lord as his tombstone tells us. And he continues to 'live on' in the archives in the Eastern tower of the Cathedral. But happily now, his only sister Catherine is also remembered in the Diocese of Christchurch. A parcel of land at Rolleston, bequeathed to Bishop Grimes in his day, has recently been designated 'Catherine fields'. It is being offered for sale in what is a fast growing satellite town of Christchurch. The priests and people of the Pastoral Area in which it lies are hopeful that sections will be reserved for the future expansion of the Church in that place. Who knows, in time a church and school may be built there and named for St Catherine of Siena or St Catherine Labore. Moreover, the parish priest of the time will be able to tell the assembled crowd the story of how 'Catherine fields' came by its name.



*'ECCE TABERNACULUM
DEI CUM HOMINIBUS'*

The Bishop and members of the Cathedral Trust are most grateful to the 'Friends' for their loyalty and generosity. Since September, \$2,405.00 has been received by way of subscriptions/donations, and gifts towards the Chapel of Reconciliation from both clergy and 'Friends' now totals \$14,220.00. Receipts for subscriptions may be found within, and a letter of thanks has been sent to all who have given towards the Chapel of Reconciliation.

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NEWSLETTER

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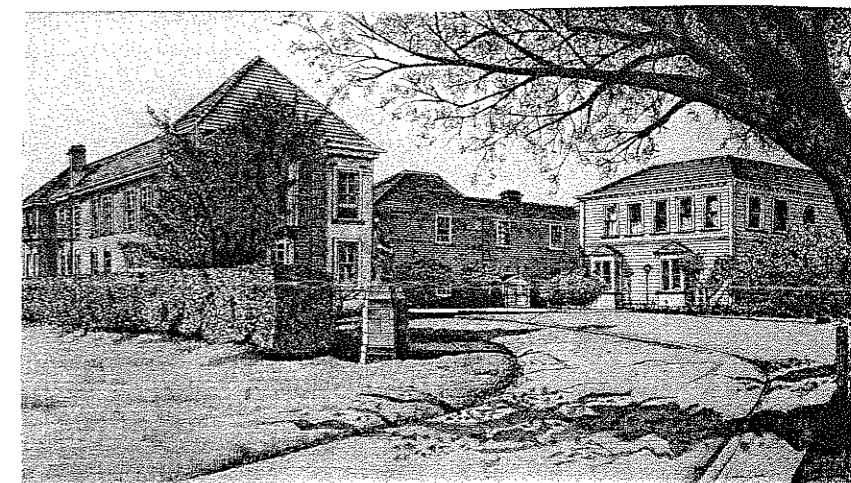
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LOOKING BACK

On my bedroom wall in the Ashburton presbytery hangs a framed black and white photograph taken at Holy Cross College, Mosgiel, in 1953. It was taken outside the historic Burns home purchased by Bishop Verdon of Dunedin, prior to the opening of Holy Cross College in May 1900.

The photo shows 105 students in soutane and Roman collar grouped about seven Vincentian priests who were our teachers and mentors. Surprisingly, two of these priests are still alive at an advanced age, living in retirement in Sydney. Of the students, nineteen are dead, three who are living became bishops, and eleven would be named Monsignors.

Of the students in my year, ordained in 1957, seven were from Auckland, seven from Christchurch, four from Wellington, and two from Dunedin. It was a vintage year. By contrast, there are now only seven students in Holy Cross Seminary in Auckland, none of them are for the Diocese of Christchurch, in fact, none are for the South Island!



Holy Cross College, Mosgiel, as generations of students knew it. The drawing depicts the original homestead purchased by Bishop Verdon in 1900, and the second wing added in 1932.

Whatever has happened? Clearly, the world has changed, and so too has the attitude of young men to the call to priesthood. There can be no doubting that God is still calling men to be priests. There can be no doubting that there are still men out there who are as generous as men ever were. One had only to read two stories in a recent 'NZ Catholic' to see that.

Fr Ernie Milne IC, who died recently, worked as a projectionist in a local cinema, before deciding to emigrate from Aberdeen to New Zealand. Here he spent two years working for the Post and Telegraph Department, doing the telephone wiring for the Queen's visit in 1953. He later trained to become a teacher, and during his teaching years decided to become a Catholic. In the 1970's he became involved in Charismatic Renewal; and in 1974 he joined the Rosminian Fathers. He was ordained ten years later, and served the Church in various areas, including a period of teaching at Holy Cross College, Mosgiel.

Fr Robert Steel, recently ordained for the Auckland Diocese, was also a convert to the Church. He entered Holy Name Seminary, Christchurch in 1972, and Holy Cross College, Mosgiel in 1974. However, he left in 1978 planning to get some experience of the world, before returning. He walked into the Travelodge Hotel in Melbourne and asked for a job. His hospitality career eventually included training people in the industry. In 1997 he was invited to join the Auckland University of Technology, where he taught until last year. But God never gave up on him. The final step in his move back to the priesthood came when he moved to Te Atatu in West Auckland. There he found a welcoming community, and it was there that he re-discovered his call to the priesthood. God's ways are not our ways!



A BLESSED CHRISTMAS
TO ALL THE 'FRIENDS'

For the Cathedral Trustees

Ann Harrington
Monsignor J.M. Harrington