

## **NON-STATUTORY BACKGROUND INFORMATION For SACRED HEART CHURCH, CALWELL**

**As of 14 July 2008**

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### **IDENTIFICATION OF THE PLACE**

- Sacred Heart Church, Casey Crescent, Blocks 15 and 16 (part), Section 796, Suburb of Calwell, ACT
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### **HISTORY OF THE PLACE**

European history in the Tuggeranong Valley area of the ACT began when Charles Throsby reached the Murrumbidgee River near where Tharwa now stands, in 1821. In 1823 Captain Mark Currie, RN, led an excursion to the Monaro, crossing the Limestone Plains and Isabella Plains, which they named after the Governor's daughter, Isabella Brisbane (Gillespie, 1991:8). The Valley was gradually settled and came to be centred on the large grazing stations of Lanyon and Tuggeranong (also known as Wanniasa). None of the early land holders were Catholic, but a significant community of Catholics soon grew from the assigned convict workers, ticket-of-leave women and men and tenant farmers. After the Land Acts were passed in 1861, the number of Catholics grew with the arrival of the land selectors. The community included the families Pike, Brennan, Sheedy, Fitzgerald, Gallagher, Morrison, Sullivan, Ryan, Smith and Wallace.

With no church in the area for many years to come, the homes of Michael Gallagher, Martin Pike and John Brennan were used to hold regular "Station Masses" for the Catholic families. By 1900 the Tuggeranong community had strengthened and saw the need for its own church. The Pastor of Queanbeyan, Father Richard Cullender, approached James Cunningham, owner of Tuggeranong Station, to request a small piece of land for the church. Many local Catholics doubted that Cunningham would be sympathetic but Father Cullender's approach was successful. Cunningham offered two acres of Tuggeranong Station for a nominal rent of a shilling a year, if requested.

There was, however, some disquiet over the best location for the church. The Tharwa families of Sheedy, Flint, White, Tong and Woods wanted the church built at Tharwa, while those living east of the Murrumbidgee wanted it at Tuggeranong. A vote among the community was taken and the Tuggeranong land offered by James Cunningham was accepted. Some of the Tharwa group boycotted the small church for some time after its opening but eventually accepted it. The two acre site chosen on Cunningham's property was in the "Big Hill" paddock close to the Cooma Road.

The small timber church was erected by voluntary labour in 1902, with funds for the materials contributed by the local Catholic families. The construction was supervised by Thomas Jordan and Jack Purcell of Queanbeyan. The church was dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and formally opened on 29 June 1902 (Maher 1991:28). The sermon was preached by Father James O'Gorman from Michelago. Later the same year Archbishop Kelly visited Sacred Heart Church for a confirmation ceremony.

Sacred Heart Church was the second Catholic church built in the ACT. The first was St. Francis' Church at Ginninderra, built in 1872. It functioned as a church until 1910 when a new stone church, St Francis Xavier's Catholic Church, was built at Hall. The Church at Ginninderra is now used for commercial purposes.

The small Sacred Heart Church was the centre of social and religious life for the Catholic families of Tuggeranong and the surrounding district. The families would meet there for baptisms, marriages, burials and especially Mass on Sundays, often travelling long distances from east and west of the Murrumbidgee. They came by horseback or sulky, which were hitched to the fences within the grounds of the Church. Because some families had been fasting from midnight in order to receive Communion, breakfasts were shared after Mass in picnic style, cooked on an outside stove and eaten under the pine trees by the side of the Church. Some matchmaking also occurred on these occasions; for example Joseph Keefe met his future bride, Gertie Climpson, on holiday from Sydney, at the Church (National Trust Files).

The first wedding celebrated in the church was on 29 July 1903, and the first baptism was that of the daughter of John Morrison of Trahlee Station in the same year. Another important occasion was when four men of the district returned to the little church for their Mass after graduation as priests. They were Laurence and Brian Gallagher, sons of Patrick and Catherine Gallagher of Erindale Station and John and Vivien Morrison, sons of John and Elizabeth Morrison of Trahlee Station.

In July 1927 a large crowd attended celebrations to mark the Silver Jubilee of the Church. The "Missa Cantata" was celebrated by Rev. D. Griffin, after which a procession passed through the grounds in the shadow of the tall pines planted 25 years earlier.

During the development phase of the Tuggeranong Valley suburbs from 1974, the Church had to be temporarily closed. It was closed from 1974 until 1985 and, during this time, the structure suffered some vandalism in the form of bullet holes and was infested with rats and rabbits (Guest 1985). The damage to the Church was repaired and religious services were re-established in 1985, continuing to the present. In 1988 during the urban development of Calwell, administrative decisions involving road realignments and drainage required the building to be re-sited and realigned. Its new location was approximately 50m to the north of its original site.

Although the moving and re-alignment of the church building separated it from its original site and from the bordering pine trees, it still maintained its physical and visual link to Catholicism in the Tuggeranong Valley. The Church now faces onto Casey Crescent and is incorporated as a centre-piece into the new Parish Centre of St Francis of Assisi. The St Francis of Assisi parish school office and hall were built on the original site of the church.

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## DESCRIPTION OF THE PLACE

Sacred Heart Church is a Federation Carpenter Gothic style church with extended nave, a sanctuary, a vestry and a porch. It was built in 1902 for the Catholic Parish of Queanbeyan, using voluntary labour. It was originally located near the junction of the road linking Queanbeyan to Cooma (now Monaro Highway) and Brennan's Bridle Track (Sheedy pers. comm.) leading off to Tharwa (now the realigned Casey Crescent).

The walls are weatherboard; some of the boards are becoming cracked and require painting. The roof is steeply pitched and is of corrugated, galvanised iron. There are decorative fretwork bargeboards on the four gables formed at the ends of the main building, the porch and the sanctuary. Finials in the shape of a cross adorn the apex of each of the four gables. There are seven arched windows on each side of the original building, one smaller window on the southern side of the sanctuary and two the same size as the sanctuary window on either side of the porch.

In 1988 when the Church was relocated from its earlier site, the building was set on concrete blocks and timber posts now support the original foundation posts. New concrete paving was laid and a low stone wall erected at the entrance to the Church.

Inside, the timber ceiling is painted and five decorative wooden squares are affixed at the centre, including one above the sanctuary. Electric ceiling fans have been installed where the squares are placed above the aisle. The floor is timber and is covered with carpet.

In 1912 the nave was extended by two bays and the porch was added. The aisle is at the centre of the nave. There are a number of well-worn wooden pews at the front of the nave on either side of the aisle, on which there are small metal plates engraved with the names of some of the families who established the Church. They are: Brennan, Sheedy, Fitzgerald, Gallagher, Morrison, Sullivan, Ryan, McDonald, Tiernan, Oldfield, McGee, Grady and Curley. The remainder of the nave is filled with rows of modern style plastic-covered chairs.

The Stations of the Cross are represented in fourteen pictures on the walls, given by the Morrison family of "Tralee" in memory of their father and mother, John and Elizabeth Morrison. The altar was replaced in 1988 when the Church was moved.

When it was relocated, the Church was turned almost at right angles so it could be sited on the centre line of the new St Francis of Assisi Parish Centre and entered from Casey Crescent. It is now the focal point of the complex and the new buildings form an arc around it. The immediate surrounds of the Church are gravel paved and grassed areas with adjacent car parks (see Figure 2).

A small area of bare ground behind the Church is all that remains of three pine trees which were planted in 1903 within the original church yard, together with other pines, to commemorate each of the Catholic families of the Tuggeranong Valley who established the Church. The trees were removed in 1998 as they had reached a stage of senescence where they were becoming dangerous. The area has been recently planted with eucalypts. The remaining pine trees that were planted by parishioners are no longer in the immediate vicinity of the Church.

There are four mature red gums (*Eucalyptus blakelyi*), two on each side of the Church.

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