

The Beginning of our Parish

The First Australians

Our Parish area, like other areas of Australia, has been populated by Aboriginal people for an amazingly long time. Aboriginal culture forms one of the world's oldest continuous surviving societies. There is clear archaeological evidence that humans have been present in Australia as far back as 40,000 years and there are scientific finds suggesting that people were using fire to clear land as long as 120,000 years ago.

Before the arrival of the Europeans local Aboriginal people lived in extended family groups, which formed part of larger communities of people who spoke the same language.

The Logan City area was at the intersection of two major language groups, the Yugambeh and the Jaggera. To the south and east of the Logan River were the people who spoke the Yugambeh language. There were eight family groups within the Yugambeh. Of these, the one which lived closest to our present-day parish was the Gugingin.

Descendants of the first Australians live in the area and members of the Williams and Graham families to name a few, have played a part in parish life by participating in our celebrations and providing training. The Yugambeh Museum Language and Heritage Research Centre is promoting the traditional knowledge of the region, especially the Yugambeh language. It is open to the public (Wed 10am-2pm) and is worth a visit for those who are interested in Aboriginal culture, present and past.



*Eileen Williams at St Patrick's on Aboriginal Sunday and Naidoc Week 2001
In the background quilt made during Children's Liturgy*



*Cover of Program for Aboriginal Sunday and NAIDOC Week 2001,
by Therese Flynn-Clarke*

Beenleigh

The junction of the Logan and Albert rivers, now the Beenleigh area was called 'Wobbumarjoo', or 'boggy clay' by the Gugingin people. The name 'Beenleigh' came from English migrants John Davy and his brother-in-law Francis Gooding who settled there in 1864 and named their property after the Gooding family property in Devonshire England.



Logan River



Albert River

Parish History

Queensland was initially administered by the Archdiocese of Sydney. During 1840's and 1850's Beenleigh was part of a very large parish called the 'Mission to the Logan' and was relying on occasional visits by itinerant priests. There were some priests based in Brisbane while others were travelling overland from Sydney or Northern New South Wales.

The separate Archdiocese of Brisbane was established in 1859, the same year Queensland was declared a state. James Quinn was the first Bishop of Brisbane and served the archdiocese until his death in 1881.

The first Parish Priests

In 1874 Fr Benedict Scortechini was appointed the first resident priest of the Logan Mission. He had been recruited in Italy by Bishop Quinn during the first Vatican Council and arrived in Queensland in 1875. He was based in Logan Village and rode to Cleveland, Boonah, the Tweed and other faraway places to visit Catholics for the next nine years.

In 1875 Fr Scortechini bought the Masonic Hall in Yatala and converted it into the first Catholic Church in the Yatala / Beenleigh District. St Patrick's church was opened with great ceremony by Bishop Quinn, assisted by Frs Fouhy and Scortechini. Mass was celebrated by Fr Fouhy, supported by a choir and instrumental performers from St Stephen's and St Patrick's churches in the city.

Fr James Enright replaced Fr Scortechini as resident priest in 1884 and the year after he moved residence to Beaudesert.

Fr Enright was parish priest during the large 1887 floods which inundated Yatala. The nearby hotel and railway bridge were swept away, but St Patrick's church, on higher grounds, was spared and became temporary refuge to people made homeless during the devastation.



Fr Benedict Scortechini, first Parish Priest of the Logan



The Old St Patrick's Church

New Parish boundaries

In 1892 the parish of Logan was divided into new parishes of Southport and Beaudesert. Fr Enright continued as parish priest of Beaudesert, whereas Beenleigh and Yatala became part of Southport, with Dr Michael Patterson as parish priest. Dr Patterson felt that with Beenleigh developing so fast it was important the church was moved from Yatala. He secured the Wharf Street site and in the late 1890's the church was moved to the new Beenleigh site.

In a 1925 redrawing of parish boundaries, Beenleigh became part of the parish of Yeronga, with Fr. Owen Steele as parish priest. Fr Steele enlisted in WW2 and served in North Africa where he became one of the "Rats of Tobruk", the name given to the soldiers who held the Libyan port of Tobruk against the Germans.

Fr Steele returned in 1943 and was appointed Parish Priest of Beaudesert and as it happened the parish boundaries had been redrawn and Beenleigh was part of the Parish of Beaudesert (1943-1954).

Beenleigh became its own parish first in 1955, with Fr Vince Kiley the first resident priest. Fr Kiley lived in a small room at the back of the church. In 1959 Fr Kiley purchased the property at the corner of Leville and Tobruk streets as a presbytery. Later the Leville Street house became the convent for the St Joseph sisters and the priests moved to the St Joseph's school brick building. The Leville Street house is now the St Patrick's Parish office.

In 1963 Fr Kiley had the church moved from Wharf Street to the end of Tobruk Street. It was blessed and officially opened by Archbishop Sir James Duhig in 1963.

In 1975 the parish celebrated the 100th anniversary of the opening of the church in Yatala. Archbishop Rush concelebrated with a number of priests who had been involved with the Beenleigh church over the years. There were also representatives of the choirs from St Stephens Cathedral and St Patrick's in The Valley just as there had been at the opening of the church 100 years previous.



Sister Kathleen with grade 1 class in front of the Old Church, 1975

In preparation for the official opening of the new St Patrick's church in 1980 the then Parish Priest, Bill O'Shea compiled a Souvenir Booklet about the history of the area and the church. A copy of it can be found in the Parish Library. The information above comes largely from Bill O'Shea's booklet as well as and from the Beenleigh Historical Museum, and Local Government and Catholic organization websites.