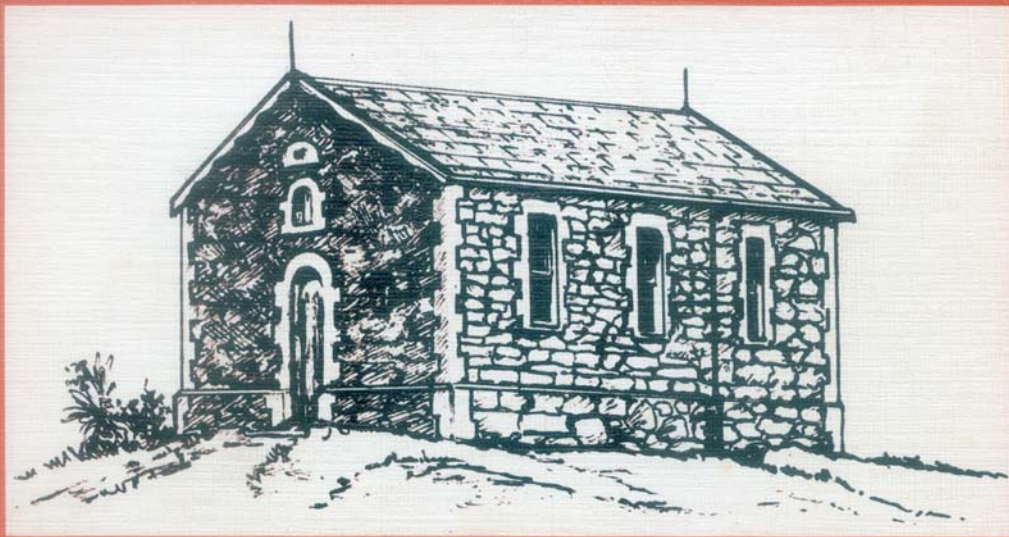


St. Joseph's Old School Willunga



1868 – 1882
RESTORED 1985



THE HISTORY OF
St. Joseph's Old School
Willunga



by Kel Jackson

1868 – 1882



The idea for this book originated from a casual remark made by a parishioner who thought it would be good to collect as much material as was available on the history of the old school and put it into book form. The book, together with the re-opening and blessing of the restored School, is the Willunga parish's contribution to the South Australian 150 Jubilee Celebration.

It is hoped that this book will help to keep the faith of our ancestors alive, and that it may be of some inspiration to future generations to keep building on the solid foundations of faith and example so generously left by our forbears.

KEL JACKSON.

Acknowledgements

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In particular we are grateful to:

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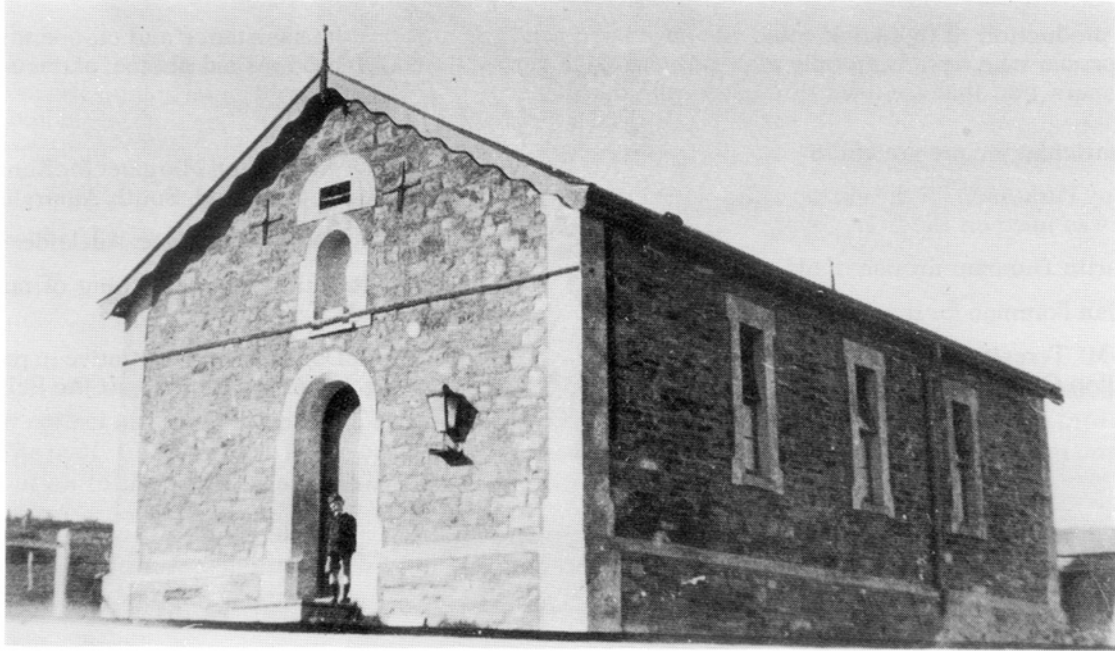
Sisters Callista, Neagle and Margaret McKenna, St. Joseph's Convent, Norwood, South Australia.

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St. Joseph's School, Willunga



The School was built exactly to the plan of St. Joseph's Bowden (Boys' School), but built of sandstone with cut freestone facings. It was 45 feet long by 22 feet wide and built to accommodate 150 children.

The School was renovated and re-opened after

being closed for years at the turn of the century by Fr. Cosgrove.

During the restoration of the building in 1985 it was discovered that the floor was made of Baltic Pine, the beams were Oregon and the trusses were made of Cedar.

Foreword

The work of restoration of St. Joseph's School at Willunga to provide a usable parish hall was undertaken in 1985 on the initiative of parishioners whose vision was directed not only to the needs of the future but also to the preservation of the past.

As this work progressed, and the State's sesquicentennial year approached, the historic significance of St. Joseph's School became more apparent. It had been one of the earliest schools conducted by the Sisters of St. Joseph — newly founded by Mary MaKillop. Later, it had been the hub of the social life of the Catholic community at Willunga.

The re-opening of the restored building seems an appropriate occasion for recapturing a sense of the history in which St. Joseph's School has featured. This little booklet is an attempt to do so. Compiling it from various records and memories has been a formidable task, and I commend the dedication of those who have undertaken it.

St. Joseph's School at Willunga stands as a historic witness to the faith of the Catholic people of the past. In its restored condition it witnesses to the on-going faith of the people of the present.

by Father Michael Rodger.

Mary MacKillop

Mary MacKillop, a first-generation Australian, daughter of Alexander and Flora MacKillop, was born in Melbourne on January 14, 1842. In 1866 she was teaching in a Catholic school in Penola. Midway through 1867 Mary with one companion came to Adelaide to don Religious Habits as Sisters of St. Joseph. Almost at once, other young women came to join them and thus under the direction of Father Julian E. Tenison Woods, this new Australian Congregation set out on its mission.

It was the need of education for poor children that was its first aim but on arrival in Adelaide Mary found at once that there were other crying needs, so that within a very short time the social works of the Congregation were born — care of orphans, young girls, women and children, later aged women, together with meals for destitute men and visitation of the gaol, hospital, the indigent poor.

Schools were opened at St. Francis Xavier's Hall, in the Suburbs, at Yankalilla, Willunga, Pt. Elliot, Robe and an ever-spreading pattern north from Adelaide to Blinman. Mary and her sisters of these years

were all young women either new settlers or first-generation Australians growing up with the new land. Life was raw for the poor and most Catholics were incredibly so. The Sisters' standard of living was that of the people among whom they laboured, too many of whom died young. Poor and scanty food, absence of doctors with few remedies available — all took their toll of the early population.

Gradually the Sisters of St. Joseph spread to all states except Tasmania and to New Zealand. Today, they are also to be found in Peru and one house in Ireland.

Mary MacKillop had a vision of Australia far ahead of her time with the ability to locate problems and to meet their challenge. Politically she was powerless — it was near the end of the century before women in South Australia won the right to vote. Financially, there was always the spectre of debt at her shoulder as this colony faced drought after weary drought, massive unemployment, increasing alcoholism and the apathy of the illiterate as their standard of living deteriorated.

Who was this woman of vision and tenacity? Mary was a woman of deep faith and compassion who had grasped the concept of the law of love: love God —love your neighbour — and hold to it. A woman who listened and heard the cry of the poor but, above all, a woman who loved. Who she was shaped what she did. Always prone to ill-health, yet she travelled tens of thousands of miles by coach and steamer as Superior-General, visiting and encouraging her Sisters and establishing foundations. She even went to Rome to gain approval for the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph. At last, aged 67 years, she died in Sydney on August 8, 1909.

This School of St. Joseph's at Willunga was an early outpost of a faith and growth experience in the young South Australia — young when the state was young, planting with its priests a faith that has endured.

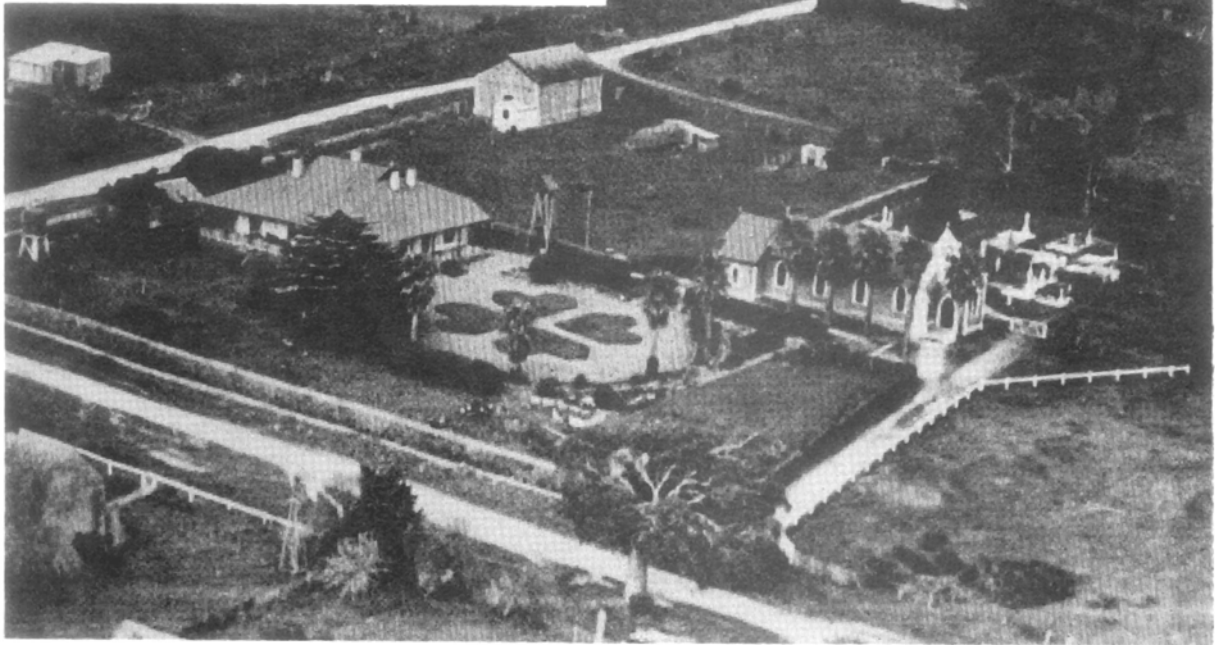
By Sister Margaret McKenna, RSJ.



Mother Mary MacKillop

Willunga Parish Centre

St. Joseph's School, Willunga was opened in 1868 and closed in 1882, during this time the School was run by the St. Joseph Sisters who were founded in Adelaide during mid 1867 by Mother Mary MacKillop. The School was built to accommodate 150 although the daily attendance rarely exceeded 40 children.



The Beginning of Willunga Parish

First references to a Catholic Church in Willunga is to be found in the journal of Bishop Murphy, first Catholic Bishop of Adelaide, in 1845. On the 31st March he went to the home of the Martin family and the following day celebrated mass.

On Bishop Murphy's return from his official visit to Rome in 1847, he repeated his 1845 visit; stayed at Mr. Martin's and celebrated Mass there and held another meeting of the Catholic residents and it was decided to build a church. A collection was taken for this purpose and £72/10/- was realised.

By February of the following year not only had the Bishop got the plans for the proposed building but also an estimate of cost, £350. This was for the bare shell only, plastering and flagging with local slate would be added later. The £350 included a tower, communion rail and altar. The dimensions of the church were 48' by 28' with a height of 12' from the base course.

The foundation stone was laid on the 16th March, 1848 by bishop Murphy.

Fr. M. O'Brien, nominally Willunga's first Priest, never actually resided there, but lived with Fr. Snell

at Morphett Vale. When Fr. O'Brien made visits to Willunga he stayed with some farmers (Martin perhaps).

It was Fr. O'Brien, however, who started the erection of the Willunga St. Joseph's Church.

The first Priest actually resident at Willunga was the English Benedictine, Fr. Thomas Caldwell, who arrived in early May, 1850.

In the years 1867 to 1869 a marvellous change came over the quality and the quantity of the religious instruction in the Willunga parish schools.

The second Bishop of Adelaide, Geoghegan, in the early sixties travelled Europe, starting with Ireland, in search of Priests.

It was only in Holland (where he had gone on the advice of Cardinal Wiseman) that Dr. Geoghegan succeeded in securing two Priests to Volunteer for South Australia, Frs. Bongaerts and Van der Heyden, whose only motive in venturing into the unknown and far distant land was the love of God and zeal for souls. The Fathers arrived in Adelaide in 1863.

Faith Without Courage

For some time the two Dutch Priests remained at the Bishop's House, West Terrace, their main occupation being the learning of English, tutored mostly by Fr. J. Smyth.

In 1866 Fr. Bongaerts was transferred to Willunga, to take charge there. By that time, he

could tell people in plain English what he thought of them, and after a while he told the Willunga people that, though they had Catholic faith, many of them had not the courage that should go with it, because of shyness, timidity, or sheer cowardice. Though very gentle and lovable, Fr. Bongaerts had still the Dutch honesty and outrightness.

Sisters of St. Joseph Come to Willunga

The Sisters of St. Joseph had been founded in South Australia in the August of 1867. By the November of the same year Fr. Bongaerts had them teaching at Yankalilla, and also had begun to build a school for them, which was opened by the Sisters at Willunga in the September of 1868, with 40 children attending school.

The Sisters were not long in the parish before there was a strong evidence abundant of the strengthening of Catholic faith and courage.

The Willunga parish Catholics had certainly the gift of the faith; yet more was to be added to it, and

under God, the Sisters of St. Joseph were to be the agents through whom this added grace was to come. Cardinal Newman described the English Catholics at one period of their history as a "Gens Lucifuga" — which in a free translation could mean "A people shunning the light of day" in fear of public derision or worse.

Fr. Bongaerts had found that Willunga possessed a certain number of aggressive bigots — so aggressive that some "peace at any price Catholics" made their gentle pastor a little impatient by their spineless acceptance of such impudent and unprovoked attacks.

The Sisters' Crusade

From the pulpit Fr. Bongaerts had asked the people to pray for the gift of strong faith. And he especially urged the Sisters in the schools to ask the children's prayers for this intention.

Soon the children were not only praying, as asked, but were little missionaries in their own homes. Parents or relatives in the homes were being asked to hear their prayers, their catechism, or explain some point of Catholic faith. The Sisters had turned their charges into young crusaders. This, coupled with the good Sisters' and the children's prayers, brought grace into the homes. Sinners knelt in humble prayer and contrite hearts were cleansed.

The Sisters' next mode of attack was the introduction of religious processions. School children and Sisters marched through Willunga's streets singing hymns and carrying banners.

The bigots were amazed, but speechless. Weak Catholics became so prominent in these processions that the very bigots stopped them later in the streets to congratulate them upon having the courage of their convictions. There were few indignant protests — but the processions continued and became such an attraction in the Willunga parish that Catholics from all the

surrounding districts flocked to Willunga to join in them.

Before the coming of the Sisters of St. Joseph, there had been schools and schoolteachers of a kind. Many of the teachers were of the itinerant kind, who in those days went from place to place, teaching in private homes or anywhere they got a job. They did not remain long in any place.

Only an occasional one of them had any systematic method of teaching or idea of school discipline.

The schoolbooks were usually a mixed collection. Most of them were castoffs or a cheap lot picked up in secondhand bookstalls.

The whole school life was "doice far niente" kind of business. It was "go as you please" with teacher and pupils, as far as a school system was concerned. Both teacher and pupil arrived and went early or late, just as the mood moved them, and playtime was any old time the scholars felt like a romp or the teacher felt like a draw on his pipe.

But, oh, what a difference when the Sisters came. Pupils could not understand it for a while. They thought the Sisters were the sternest ladies they ever knew. Why couldn't a girl talk to the girl beside

her if she felt like a talk? Why couldn't a fellow go and have a look at a bird's nest he was keen about?

In those early days, the Central Council of Catholic Education set up in Adelaide by Bishop

Shiel, had drawn up a definite curriculum and timetable for the schools, to which the Sisters strictly adhered, much to the disgust of scholars, who had grown used to the old slipshod methods and discipline.



Successful Experiment

Fr. Woods and the Central Council of Catholic Education in Adelaide in 1867, regarded the despatch of Sisters of St. Joseph to a district where there was no resident Priest at that time and where the Sisters would not have daily Mass and the frequent grace of the Sacraments as a great experiment.

Much depended on its success or failure. It was

an unusual experiment. Religious Sisters as a rule only make foundations where they have daily Mass.

With great pleasure, Fr. Woods, Director of Education in South Australia, reported that success had attended the experiment.

Fr. Woods told the Council or Board that the generosity and co-operation of the Catholics was beyond all praise.



Father J.E.T. Woods

Extracts from reports of Fr. J.E. Tennison Woods, Director General of Catholic Education.

4th July, 1867

St. Joseph's School, Willunga has been granted a Third Class Licence.

20th November, 1867

I called at Willunga on my way home from the opening of the Yankalilla School which enabled me to visit Willunga where operations have already commenced for the new school building there.

19th February, 1868

I have the honor to report, since last meeting, that I have visited Willunga, Gawler, Port Adelaide, Glen Osmond and town Schools, but have merely inspected them, with the exception of the Glen Osmond School, which was examined, and passed very satisfactorily for a Second Class Licence.

The Willunga Schoolroom has been opened for the use of the children but, as it has not been reported to me as quite finished, I have not been able to report upon it.

24th May, 1869

St. Joseph's School, Willunga visited by His Lordship Dr. Sheil.

14th July, 1878

I wish to report that Bishop Christopher Reynolds recently visited the Willunga Parish and confirmed 67. He established the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart and also that of our lady of Mt. Carmel. He also directed the flock to repair the Presbytery and church grounds and fences — the Cemetary was also inspected and he promised to come again shortly and consecrate it.



The Sisters' Accommodation

Two rooms were built behind the School for the Sisters to live in — later a house was bought for them. A photo of this house as it stands today is shown below.



Fund Raising for the School House

1868 was a busy year for fund raising for the school — there were concerts and sales throughout the year. The following extracts from the *Southern Cross* gives a good description of the happenings.

CONCERT IN AID OF WILLUNGA SCHOOL —

On Wednesday evening, January 29th, an entertainment was given at Willunga, consisting of a concert and a lecture, in aid of the new Catholic schoolhouse at that place. The large Town Hall was chosen for the occasion, and we are happy to say it was well filled, both in the reserved and other seats. The programme of the concert comprised some of the choice glees by the Adelaide Catholic Glee Class, as well as solos by Miss Bishop and Messrs. O'Brien, Donovan, and Gillespie, according to the published advertisement. The whole was admirably conducted, and the glee "All among the barley," "Come where my love lies dreaming," and "The Wreath," were given in a manner which would have done credit to more aspiring musicians than our Adelaide amateurs.

The lecture by Fr. Woods was divided into two parts, on "Life in the Bush". It treated of the varieties of Australian life to be met within the remote districts, and was illustrated by many anecdotes derived from his own ten years' experience as a missionary. It was attentively listened to throughout, and being on a subject which most of the auditors could appreciate, was apparently successful in its object, of giving

amusement and instruction at the same time. The whole entertainment kept the audience most agreeably engaged for about two hours and a half, at the end of which, the proceedings were terminated with the National Anthem. Mr. E.J. Peake, S.M., occupied the chair. The school for which the entertainment was given is now completed, and reflects the greatest credit on the congregation and their zealous pastor. Of course there is a debt upon it, and Fr. Theodore will undoubtedly be glad to hear from anyone willing to aid him in reducing this. It is a remarkable fact that our first schools are all in the missions dedicated to that glorious Spouse of Our Lady. There are now three — St. Joseph's, Penola; St. Joseph's, Willunga; and St. Joseph's, Bowden.

ST. JOSEPH'S, WILLUNGA —1868. A Fancy Sale and Concert will be held at the end of July, towards the liquidation of the debt on the new schoolroom.

Articles or subscriptions for the same will be thankfully received by the Rev. T. Bongaerts, Willunga, or W.W. Hewett, Catholic Book Depot, Currie Street, Adelaide.

ST. JOSEPH'S SCHOOL, WILLUNGA. A Fancy Sale will be held on Monday and Tuesday, August 10th and 11th, 1868.

On Tuesday evening, a lecture and concert will be given.