

Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the opening of St Bernard's Catholic Church, Berowra Heights (1970—2020)

KU-RING-GAI CHASE CATHOLIC PARISH

Diocese of Broken Bay ~ 22nd November 2020 ~ Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe
'Seek God, Find God, Embrace God in Jesus'

The History of St Bernard's Parish, Berowra Heights

Early Days

The Catholic community from Berowra to Asquith originally belonged to the parish of Waitara, which was itself part of the Archdiocese of Sydney. Land for a church at Asquith had been purchased as early as 1927 by Fr T. Barry, parish priest at Chatswood. The land was later transferred to Waitara parish and in 1938 the first Catholic church was built in Asquith, on the site currently occupied by St Patrick's Primary School, at a cost of \$3,300.

It was a building 63ft by 30ft which held up to 270 people, and like many parish buildings in those days, it served as a school during the week and also hosted Saturday evening dances, after which parishioners would have to prepare the church for the two Sunday morning Masses.

Parishioners from Mt Colah, Mt Kuring-gai and Berowra travelled to worship at the new church in Asquith every Sunday. Families from Berowra had to be at the crossroads by 6.30am to catch a bus, driven by Mr Corrigan, to be in time for 7am Mass.

To save the long, arduous trip to Asquith every Sunday, a house on the expressway, owned by Mr Edward Kelly, was hired and the Catholic community at Berowra attended Mass there. When that arrangement ended, Mass was celebrated in the community hall in Crowley Road, Berowra.

Over the next twelve years the Catholic population increased six-fold and in 1951, Asquith became a parish in its own right, covering Asquith, Mt Colah, Mt Kuring-gai and Berowra. The new parish was inaugurated by His Eminence Cardinal Norman Gilroy, Archbishop of Sydney, on 1st February 1951. Its first parish priest was Fr Christopher Smithwick, but when he drowned tragically in an accident off Bradley's Head in January 1952, the parish came under the pastoral care of Fr Vincent Folkes, known as a gentle and generous man. Fr Folkes continued as parish priest for the next twenty years. His assistant priest was the young 'builder' priest, Fr Laurie Cruikshank, whose tireless energy and determination led to the building of the church hall at Berowra and the new church at Asquith.

Building a Church, Building a Community

The first attempt to build a church at Berowra, using a re-purposed army hut from Holsworthy, came to an untimely end when the frame which had been assembled on a site on Berowra Waters Rd blew down in a storm. At this sign from above, the site was abandoned, and parishioners instead bought the land in Warrina St for a future church. After many delays, construction began in 1969.

First on the building agenda was a parish hall at Berowra Heights. There were plans to build a new church later, on the corner, but when it became apparent that funds for a church wouldn't be forthcoming, the building under construction was adapted and became the new church.

The stone for the building, a grey trachyte, came from the site of the former stock saleyards in Flemington where it had formed the paving. The stone is believed to have been quarried in the Bowral area and transported to Flemington by rail, although other reports say it came to Sydney as ballast in British ships which returned to Britain loaded with wool or timber and was transported to Flemington by bullock teams. When the saleyards were closed, the paving stones were sold off very cheaply to anyone willing to come and collect them.

Ron Curtis, Berowra parishioner, below, amid the masonry at The Wall, built with granite said to have been brought from overseas in ships as ballast.



Fr Laurie Cruikshank had an idea that the blocks would be good for paving for the proposed new parish buildings, so he got some men together and bought a load of blocks and had them stored in the front yard of Bernie and Frances Gleeson's home in Mt Kuring-gai.

Closer inspection showed that the blocks, when cleaned of years of animal detritus, would be perfect building material and so parishioners were mobilised to collect the blocks

All set up for Sunday Mass, complete with stackable chairs and beautiful parquet flooring



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from the saleyards in borrowed trucks and trailers, and deliver them for storage to any available land owned by the wider Church family, all over Sydney. Over 200, 000 blocks were purchased, more than enough to build churches at both Berowra and Asquith.

The building work was led by Mr Neville Brown, a parishioner who lived at Mt Colah, who coordinated labourers and tradesmen, assisted by Jim Onslow, carpenter, and Ron Curtis, block-layer with Warwick Smith as site surveyor. A roster of volunteers, men and youth of the parish, worked up to sixteen hours a day every weekend, as well as occasional four-hour shifts during the week, while the women and children provided food for the workers. Due to the work of the volunteers, the estimated cost of \$58,000 for the building was slashed to \$33,000, and the building was finished in eight months.

The new church hall in Warrina St was blessed and opened by Cardinal Norman Gilroy on 26th April 1970 just a year before his retirement. Following the success of this building project, St Patrick's church at Asquith was built using the same system of volunteer labour, again under the supervision of Neville Brown.

Fr Folkes remained parish priest of the combined parish until his retirement due to ill health in 1971, shortly after the new church at Asquith was completed. He was succeeded by Fr Patrick McMaugh in February 1972.

The Parish of St Bernard's

Finally, in 1973, St Bernard's, Berowra, became an independent parish, with Fr James Boberg as parish priest. Fr Boberg lived at St Catherine's in Brooklyn until a presbytery was built on the current site in Berowra Heights.

When Fr Boberg retired in 1988, he was succeeded by Fr John Doran. Fr Doran continued as parish priest until he left to study in Canada in August 1991.

Fr Bob Crawford was appointed to succeed him.

Fr Denis Callahan was parish priest from 1997 until 2002, and the new parish hall has since been named in his honour.

A New Parish

Both parishes gradually came to share their resources and grew in cooperation, until finally on 25th June 2006, both parishes were combined as the newly created Ku-ring-gai Chase parish. The new parish, extending from Bridge Road, Hornsby, to the northern side of the Hawkesbury at Mooney Mooney, was inaugurated by Bishop David Walker in a ceremony held at Hunt Reserve, Mt Colah, halfway between Berowra and Asquith.

In 2007 a new parish Pastoral Centre was built at Berowra Heights on the grounds of St Bernard's church, in the geographical heart of the parish. It was blessed and opened by Bishop David Walker on 30th September.

1973 *Fr Boberg's appointment letter as Parish Priest.*



*St Mary's Cathedral,
Sydney, N.S.W. 2000.*

14th November, 1973.

Dear Father Boberg,

With this letter I have pleasure in appointing you to the new Parish of BEROWRA as from Saturday, 1st DECEMBER, 1973.

I would be grateful if you would arrange the new boundaries with Father P. McMaugh, Asquith.

I know you will discharge this new appointment with your customary energy and zeal.

Please forward to me the name of the Parish Accounts, the name of the Branch and of the Bank where these Accounts are kept so that the requisite Bank letters may be issued to you.

Would you also please advise the Registrar General's Department of your change of address.

Begging God's Blessing on you,

I remain,

Yours sincerely in Our Lord,

+James Freeman
ARCHBISHOP OF SYDNEY.

Rev. J. Boberg, P.P.,
Catholic Presbytery,
Heathcote Road,
HOLSWORTHY. 2173.



1975

*Rev. Pat McMaugh
PP Asquith*

*Rev James Boberg
PP Berowra Heights*

Cardinal Freeman

1975

Mr Ernie French

Rev. Pat McMaugh

Cardinal Freeman

Rev James Boberg

*Mr Roger Newton
(at microphone)*



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'ROLLING STONES' FIND A NEW HOME



Granite blocks hewn more than a century ago in Scotland have found a permanent home in Berowra.

The blocks, used as ballast in sailing ships, and later as flagstones in the Flemington stock yards, have been used to build a new Catholic church hall in Warrina Street.

His Eminence Cardinal Gilroy officially opened the building, St. Bernard's Memorial Church Hall, on Sunday afternoon.

The church represents a new era in the Asquith-Berowra parish, and a mark of achievement for parishioners.

Most of the work on the church hall was carried out by voluntary labour.

Most of the parishioners were unskilled and many had little or no idea of building procedures.

However, under the patient guidance of foreman and supervisor, Neville Brown, of Mt. Colah, the building was completed in eight months.

Parish curate, Father Cruickshank, bought the granite blocks used for the walls.

They were purchased from the Meat Board from the now deserted Flemington stock yards.

Apparently, thousands of the blocks are left over, and the parish already has plans for their future use.

Architects estimated \$58,000 for the cost of the project, but the voluntary labour cut the price to \$33,000.

Parish priest, Father Fawkes, has been using the new church hall for services in recent weeks.

Previously, Catholic services were held in Berowra community hall once each Sunday.

PICTURED LEFT: The impressive frontage of the new St. Bernard's War Memorial Church Hall at Berowra.

'ROLLING STONES' FIND A NEW HOME. - Parishioners build their own church (article date unknown)

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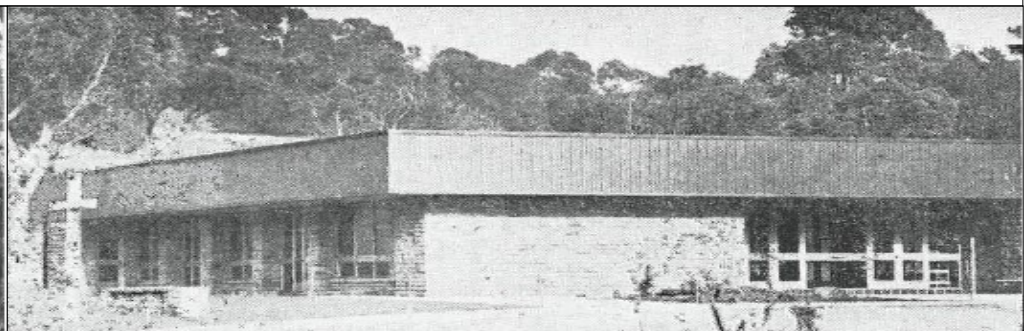
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PICTURED ...: The impressive frontage of the new St. Bernard's War Memorial Church Hall at Berowra.



Neville Brown, far left above, and some of the volunteer work force wiring up the steel rods for the foundations of the new church hall at Berowra.



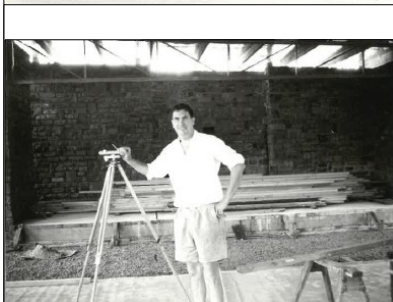
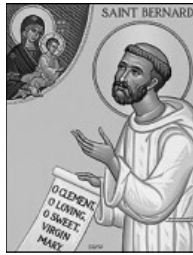
Materials and design combine to make the new War Memorial Church Hall at Berowra typically Australian. Its stonework is reminiscent of earlier days. The use of modern steel and timbers, including reinforced concrete foundations, has produced a harmonious structure pleasing to the eye, and a serviceable nucleus for future expansion as additional buildings become necessary on the site.



1995

Students of St Bernard's Catholic Primary School with Fr Bob Crawford celebrate the 25th Anniversary of St Bernard's Catholic Church at Berowra Heights

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Timeline ~ St Bernard's Church, Berowra Heights

- 1968** Construction of St Bernard's Church commences
- 1970** St Bernard's Church blessed and opened by Cardinal Gilroy on 26th April.
Fr Folkes is appointed Parish Priest
- 1973** St Bernard's Berowra Heights became an independent parish,
Fr James Boberg is appointed Parish Priest
- 1988** Fr John Doran is appointed Parish Priest
- 1991** Fr Bob Crawford is appointed Parish Priest
- 1997** Fr Dennis Callahan is appointed Parish Priest
- 2002** Fr John Hannon is appointed Parish Priest
- 2003** Fr Robert Borg is appointed Parish Priest
- 2011** Fr Biju Joseph appointed as Coordinator of Parish
- 2014** Fr Jinto Joseph is appointed Administrator
- 2016** Fr Shaju John is appointed Administrator
- 2017** Fr Shaju John appointed as Parish Priest (incumbent)

*We acknowledge
past and present
assistant priests and deacons,
who served in the parish ~*

*Fr Laurie Cruikshank
Fr Robert McNeill
Fr Carmelo Sciberras
Fr Stephen Hamilton
Dn David Huntley
Fr John Mutuku
Dn Kevin Hale
Fr Thomas VC
Fr Leonse Kurian
Fr Shiju Simon
Fr Joy Thomas*

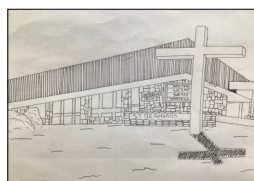


**We take this opportunity to acknowledge the wonderful relationship our
Parish shares with our**

Primary School Staff and Students alike ~ *from the first School Principal
(1971) Sr Mary of the Cross (later known as Sr Janet Quade) to our current Principal,
Mrs Gill Austin, we have enjoyed and valued a very warm and welcoming relationship.*



- St Bernard's School began in 1971.
- The first class was held at the back of the church until some classrooms were built.
- Sr Mary of the Cross was the first teacher.



- Mercy nuns from Waitara came to teach the children.
- This first class had nineteen children in it.
- At first there was only Kindergarten and each year a new class was added.