

A HISTORY OF ST PETER'S COLLEGE, GORE

Compiled by past pupil Donna Richardson and Father Aidan Cunningham, Holy Thursday 1999

Saint Peter's College opened on February 4 1969 with 171 pupils in Forms One to Three, of whom 72 were girls. There were 34 boy boarders that first year. The staff of eight religious teachers were the Rosminians: Fr Lance Hurdidge (Headmaster), Fr Larry Hogan, Br John Tedesco, Br Eric Willett, Br John Wallace, and the Sisters of Mercy: Sr David (Pauline Gallagher- who was Senior Mistress), Sr Fidelis (Zita Kean), Sr Stephenia (Stephanie Glen). And all, staff and pupils, were well and truly controlled and supervised by Fr John Buckner, the Bursar, a crucial figure in those early years.

The College had been officially opened and blessed a week earlier by the late Bishop John Kavanagh of Dunedin, as the first Catholic co-educational day school and a boarding school for boys in New Zealand. Since that time the College has grown and diversified in many ways to meet the needs of the community it serves. The current roll has over 350 students, though the maximum numbers of 576 were reached in 1979. The first proud buildings are now merely the shell of a brand new modern facility. As the College celebrates its thirtieth anniversary this article will look at the tradition and innovation over the history of an exceptional school, highlighting something of its special character and outstanding episodes and the people who helped to create it.

The Property Purchases

Following the sudden death of the Gore Parish Priest, Fr Thomas Kavanagh, in July 1947, Fr Frank Finlay was appointed to the parish. Because he was at that time "on loan" to the Christchurch Diocese the appointment did not become effective until some months later. But soon after his arrival in Gore he saw the need for a Catholic Boys Secondary School and for the whole period he was stationed in Gore, some 25 years, he gave unsparingly of himself in time and energy - leading his lay committees through hardships and many disappointments until his dreams were fulfilled and his constant prayers answered with that official opening of St Peter's College in January 1969.

"Mons" (Monsignor, as he later became) Finlay is indeed responsible for the establishment of the College. The first move was made in 1949. During some discussions between Monsignor Hussey, then the Director of Catholic Education for the Diocese of Dunedin, and Fr Finlay, the latter was encouraged to make preliminary enquiries within the parish. Little thought, at that stage, was given to the size and type of school and the areas from which the pupils would ultimately be drawn. The initial thinking was probably centred around a School, Forms One upwards, for Catholic boys in Gore, Matura and the surrounding areas.

About mid-1950 a 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ acre property was offered for sale in West Gore. This was on the eastern side of Lower Frank Street (later renamed Kakapo Street). The property was owned by a Mr D. McGill who also owned additional property on the western side of the street, as well as extensive farm lands in the vicinity of Gore. It was at a time just prior to an upsurge in subdivision in that part of West Gore. There was a substantial area surrounding the 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ acres, not yet subdivided, which appeared to be an ideal possibility for a school site. That first purchase was successfully negotiated by Fr Finlay at \$1 000 (the currency at that time was of course pounds, but these are the dollar equivalents).

Having taken this initial step, it became evident that two properties to the North would need to be acquired to have sufficient land on which to build a school and provide the grounds for development, for sports and

recreation. One was of ten acres - it was L-shaped. It adjoined the newly acquired property and extended to the corner of Coutts Road and Robertson Street on which an old, rented house stood. This was owned by an Invercargill woman, a Mrs Coutts, no doubt a descendant of the people after whom Coutts Road was named. The second property was of about five acres on the corner of Coutts Road and Frank Street South, adjoining the north and west boundaries of the Coutts land. This area had been used by the Perks brothers as a market garden and nursery and was owned by a Miss A Wyber, the proprietor of the Carrington Hotel in Ashton Street. She also owned a Private Hotel in Balclutha.

It was known that neither lady was really interested in selling. After preliminary, unsuccessful efforts Father Finlay resorted more and more to prayer for this project. He also continued to appeal to more and more people to pray for his particular intentions. He acquired a habit of going for a walk and stopping beside the land and throwing medals over the fence. When he was asked years later what medals were used, Monsignor Finlay replied that they were Miraculous, St Theresa of the Child Jesus, the Sacred Heart, and others too! Mrs Coutts soon agreed to sell and, although there was much difficulty with her local agent, the Boys School Committee finally signed up at a purchase price of \$6 000.

At this stage it seemed that the Southland Catholic Boys School Committee (as it became) was virtually committed to the area for the School, and it was imperative that it acquired the Wyber property, thus giving one block of $18 \frac{3}{4}$ acres. For some considerable time there was no wish by Miss Wyber to sell and it was not until a further four years had passed and many, many further prayers and medals that the final breakthrough was made. The purchase price of \$6 000 seemed high at the time but the Committee decided unanimously to settle at that.

Meantime, in an effort to acquire some access from Robertson Street, the Committee had purchased a half acre section extending from Robertson Street to the property acquired from Mrs Coutts. This was owned by a Mr Probyn and the purchase price was \$400. Upon hearing of this purchase Mr Joe Howard Snr, a great friend and supporter of the Church in Gore, decided to buy an adjoining half acre and donate it to the new School project. (These sections later became the site for the Tractor Shed, and then the Fair Sheds, and close to the boundary of the main sports paddocks a bore well and pump were installed to water the cricket wicket area).

In 1960, the Laird Brothers, who at that time lived on the corner of Coutts Road and Frank Street (North), approached the Committee with an offer to sell seven acres adjacent to the property purchased from Mr McGill. Although the two properties were separated by a 22 yard roadline owned by the Borough Council, the Committee became interested in this proposition and eventually signed up at a purchase price close to \$9 000. Following this, negotiations were entered into with the Council to have the roadline moved to the south of the new acquisition. The Council had had long-term plans to run Kitchener Street more or less straight through to Kakapo Street as an arterial route and the Committee's request necessitated a major change in this planning.

However, the change was successfully negotiated and the roadline was shifted to the southern boundary. It was then gradually formed and eventually opened up as Pukaki Street in 1971. The seven acre Laird property subsequently became the approximate area on which all the College buildings have been located.

Mr Jack Crowley, a member of "Mons" Finlay's Committee, recalls going with Mr Maurice Adair, the Chairman, to the Laird Brothers' home, one cold evening, to discuss the purchase of this land which the Lairds had for sale.

The Committee had delegated to Maurice and Jack the power to discuss, propose and purchase the property, if all was right. Maurice went with some trepidation. Jack also, but he did know the brothers. Discussions began. Jack and Maurice made an offer. The brothers were not enthused. Jack suggested Maurice and himself leave for a while so the brothers could discuss the deal by themselves and the Committee men would return in ten

minutes. Both wandered around outside in the dark, getting colder. Returning, there was more discussion. The brothers were still not happy about the price and were most reluctant to sell. Jack and Maurice put forward another offer and again left. They wandered about again, getting even colder, praying that the result this time would be more favourable. Both men walked around the streets, hoping no one noticed them or supposed they were up to anything suspicious and perhaps notified the police. This time on their return the offer was accepted. Jack then produced a bottle of whisky he had been carrying around in case of a happy ending. All four men got down to another good discussion and all warmed up. Maurice was not really a whisky man at all maintained Jack. Their return to their own homes was undertaken with some difficulty, but very happily indeed.

About the same time as the purchase of the Laird property was being negotiated, Mr George McLeod, owner of 5 acres with a large wooden dwelling on the west side of Kakapo St, decided to sell out. After a good deal of deliberation, with plenty of arguments for and against, the purchase of this property was approved and accomplished. Purchase price was \$14 000. This was the land and the senior boarders' dormitory building that came to be called St Paul's (Without, or Outside the Walls), and has since been sold to the Southland Polytech for their Gore Campus. The rest, playing fields, has been subdivided.

The land purchases up to the time of the School Opening end there. But other purchases were subsequently made and some of those sections have been sold too. Just prior to the Official School Opening it was decided that some access from Robertson Street, adjacent to the classrooms, was necessary.

Arrangements were made to lease from Mr Bob McQuillam a strip of about 12 feet of land, on the north side of his property. This was fenced off, gravelled, and came to provide an adequate right of way. In later years judder bars were laid to encourage the traffic to move through slowly, as this became the major entry way to the College site. After the death of Mr McQuillam the whole of his property was then purchased and it now forms the College frontage on Robertson Street.

While it is generally, perhaps unanimously, agreed that the site of the School has been the right one - as West Gore has expanded to become a prime residential area with the West Gore Primary School, Gore High School and St Peter's College all within a small compass - it is also interesting to record that some other sites had been considered and suggested by individuals and the members of the Committee in those early years.

These sites included an area over the Waikaka River in East Gore, on the Gore-Mataura Back Road, before the junction with Mountain Road, adjacent to Mr Dave Nicholson's property. This area was however liable to flooding and would have been inundated in the floods of later years, especially in 1978.

The Nicholson children themselves were some who were prevented on occasion from attending their classes in West Gore by the floodwaters over the Back Road. It would not have made a good site for a school, and it was on a far more isolated side of Gore. Another site considered was on the Mandeville Road, half a mile or so north of the Borough boundary. A further property examined was on the Waimumu Road, about the area where the DSIR/Grasslands was to be established. Another proposal which was put forward, but not proceeded with, was that some land in the Waimumu Road area should be purchased for growing the school's own vegetables and essential grains.

It is hard now to imagine the incredible effort that took place, acquiring and clearing and levelling suitable land, planting the trees and putting up the initial buildings. What is not difficult to appreciate is that it all cost money, and this money came first from the generosity of the Catholics of Southland, and then from those in the parishes of Central Otago. \$410 633 had been raised when the College opened in 1969, but there was still a debt of \$341 096, and more than \$100 000 was required for the Hall which still had to be built.

The Fund Raising

From the outset it was obvious that substantial sums of money would be required. Over the years as the size of the proposed School grew and more plans were formulated, and as inflationary tendencies were beginning to appear, various estimates were mentioned as being the target sums. The first recorded figure was \$20 000, then \$40 000, \$60 000, \$100 000, \$400 000, and finally an almost limitless figure seemed to be accepted. But this was Southland, and the fundraising was at its innovative best.

Simultaneously with his initial search for property Fr Finlay called some of his parishioner-workers together and acquainted them with his plans and aspirations. As a result of this meeting a letter was sent out to all the Gore parishioners appealing for donations by way of quarterly envelopes. Obviously the people accepted the idea of a Boys' School as the scheme was most successful for a period. Whilst no complete records are held it is known that up to \$1 000 per month was collected.

Later it became apparent that the envelope scheme was losing its impact and a decision was made to have the Committee men call on all parishioners monthly to collect a donation. This method also lasted for a time, after which it became difficult to have enough collectors on a more or less permanent basis. The half-crown collection was then instituted. This simply involved men standing outside the church after every Sunday Mass, holding collection boxes. All wage earners were expected to contribute half-a-crown (25 cents) in this way. This method continued for about four years, bringing in approximately \$4 000 annually.

One of the early fund raising events was a weekly Saturday night dance, held in St Mary's Hall (earlier known as the Princess Theatre) in Mersey Street. This was started under the supervision of Fr Reg O'Brien, the parish curate in the early 1950's. The late Bruce Ferguson, who was regarded as the Caretaker of St Mary's Hall, did a great job, week after week, in running and controlling these dances and he received good support from various members of the Committee from time to time. The dances were an enjoyable occasion (in the days before the appearance of licensed sports clubs, television and dining out) and they continued for several years and raised about \$80 weekly.

For some years a form of fund raising, which involved the Saturday race meetings throughout the country, was regularly practised. It was the "Tiny Tatts", a type of betting that was considered legal at the time. It was run in conjunction with Fr McCarthy in Invercargill. The system was not complicated, but it did consist in being exact: collecting the betting forms from the midday Invercargill bus, distributing them among a selected number of retail shops in Gore and Mataura, collecting the completed forms on Saturday morning and returning them to Invercargill on Saturday, midday, and, of course, retaining the commission from the funds collected. The late Tom Ambrose and the Monsignor, himself, were involved in this distribution and collection process. Although the commissions from this source were not great they were indeed regular, usually about \$10 per week.

In the early 1950's the game of "Housie" was introduced to Gore. This was before it was actually legalised. The game was started in St Joseph's rooms (next to the old Blessed Sacrament Church; both buildings have since been demolished). The game involved quite a good deal of work, by half a dozen stalwarts, and included a light supper for the participants. "Housie" did not really become popular in those days and \$6 a week was about the average netted from this source. Much effort, seemingly little reward.

After some weeks St Joseph's was considered an unsuitable venue and the game was tried in the supper room of St Mary's Hall. However this move was not successful and "Housie" returned to St Joseph's. A few years later of course "Housie" in licensed premises was legalised and for a number of years the Committee joined with other local organisations in profitably raising funds by this method for the "The Catholic Boys' School".

The Chairman of the Central Committee, the late Maurice Adair, who was to be honoured with a papal medal for his work over so many years, recalled that at one time a suggestion was made that the Committee endeavour to hire a hall and conduct a Race Meeting of its own. A race course was to be marked out on the floor; six wooden horses were to be used, the horses to be advanced according to the throwing of dice. A win and doubles totalizer was to operate. The enthusiastic Committee decided that an approach should be made to Sergeant Wilkes, in charge of the local police, for permission to run such an evening because gambling and betting were tightly controlled, but it was all going to be for a very good, and Catholic, cause, and would all be for fun. Sergeant Wilkes asked "How well do you know Police Chief Taylor in Invercargill?" He suggested Maurice should make the request to this gentleman. Undaunted, Maurice arranged to be introduced to the Chief by a well known Invercargill Catholic businessman. In due course he made the formal request and, not unexpectedly, received a very, very, emphatic NO!

Nevertheless, some very interesting evenings were held in the old Croydon Bush Hall (later to be demolished). Many of Gore's best known punters of the time were there and it appeared that a very good time was had by all. Recollections from those who took part in these "clandestine" activities in the country, away from the surveillance of the local constabulary, call to mind the type of story associated with the Hokonui Hills and the production of "hooch" during even more distant times. Apparently the wily locals outwitted the police on most occasions, and the "Mons" was most happy to bank the proceeds on a Monday, and did not ask too many questions!

For many years a variety of other forms of local fund raising were used: cake stalls; the sale of recipe books (the names of the contributors give a strong indication of those stalwart families - the mums, and dads - who always seemed to be in the forefront of support for the as-yet-to-be-realised Boys' School); small raffles; regular raffles; Sales of Work; Bazaars; house parties; dances of all types; sheep schemes; grain schemes; cattle schemes. They all contributed in their own way to the overall result.

The stories of the two biggest fund raising efforts in the Gore Parish deserve a very special mention. Maurice Adair reiterated that, in retrospect, it was a great pleasure and privilege to work alongside all those people involved in these two great projects: the week-long Bazaar in 1955, followed almost immediately by a nationwide Monster Raffle.

Having made the decision to go ahead with the Monster Bazaar in St Mary's Hall, the Committee embarked upon a most ambitious and a highly successful preliminary campaign of preparation. House parties were arranged to obtain early funds and floats; approaches were made to very many people to commence sewing and knitting and such like endeavours; promises were asked for all types of produce and baking, sweet-making and so on. Various preliminary raffles were organised, and, in general, it seemed that almost the total parish was involved one way or another in some facet of the preparation.

Mr Joe Farry, who operated an importing business and was a Gore resident at the time, made available a large variety of goods at very favourable prices. Side shows, games and other forms of entertainment were organised to ensure there was sufficient variety to bring the crowds along for a whole week. One of the biggest attractions was a tug-of-war for all local rugby teams. This was well publicised and well organised and was largely responsible for attracting a big crowd on the final night. The "Kubala Boys" (Cyril, Ray, Brian, Dereck, Pat and their Uncle Tony as Captain) had their own team and they won the final amid great excitement, and donated their hard earned prize money to the Fund. Thus the Monster week-long Bazaar took place.

It is probably quite safe to say that Gore had never before seen such a week of this type of function, which enthusiastically involved so many people. Day after day the stalls were replenished and at all times were full enough to attract more customers. When one considers the amount of baking, cooking, making, etc., that goes into a Sale of Work or similar activity, maybe

lasting for a mere couple of hours' selling time these days, one can gauge the enormity of the task of restocking for a whole week. When it was all over and the Balance Sheet was prepared the Committee found that the nett proceeds reached almost \$8 000 - an incredible figure for that time. It was a response which indeed boosted the morale of the fund-raisers.

Perhaps filled with the flush of success, the Committee almost immediately set about its second "Think Big" project. This was a Monster Raffle, with various prizes totalling \$1 000 in value, for which a license was obtained from the Internal Affairs Department to sell tickets throughout Southland. However, there appeared to be an opportunity to extend a great deal further than Southland. The national telephone directories were carefully perused to obtain names and addresses of likely looking "clients" throughout the country.

A sophisticated filing system was introduced and the Committee and its helpers finished up with about 8 000 names. Large teams of local typists gave their time, night after night, addressing envelopes - four for each customer - a total of 32 000 envelopes! And so it was that the raffle books were dispatched. The Committee more than anxiously awaited the returns. The percentage of returns was most satisfactory and the final result was about \$5 500 added to the coffers.

The Committee was smiling in more ways than one. Some interesting letters came back with the returns. Maurice Adair recalled one from a Mrs Forde in Oamaru - 'We are not Catholics but we do wish you luck in your undertaking and we enclose our \$2 for the tickets.' Another, from a Southland resident read - 'How dare you send these tickets to my husband! The money would be much better spent on the Bluff Harbour Board project.' (Fund raising for the new Bluff Harbour was under way at about the same time).

For several years more the half crown church door collection ensured that regular amounts were added to the Building Fund. A few small Bazaars, some more dances, a Fancy Dress Ball, raffles and so on, also assisted, until, in the early 1960's Parish Planned Giving was introduced. This changed entirely the method of raising funds. Sadly, perhaps, there would be no more of that involvement - the committed supporters and the contributors to the Bazaars and the Raffles. (No one at this juncture had heard of Brother Ted and Tombola).

Collecting in Country Parishes

During the years 1954 and 1955 it became evident that a School for boys in the Gore district alone was not the answer and the decision was made, with Bishop Kavanagh's blessing, to embrace the country areas of Southland and ultimately to provide a Boarding School for all Southland Catholic Boys. The plan was to send two Gore Committee men to each country parish, to speak to the parishioners and, with the help of local men, to canvass the various areas for funds and perhaps set up local committees to continue the work.

Messrs. Maurice Adair and Frank Kerr were "appointed" to the Wrey's Bush-Nightcaps Parish. A visit was made on the Saturday night to the Parish Priest, so that the scheme could be explained to him. No doubt he would have been advised of their approach. He listened intently to the plan put forward by the two men, and to the request to canvass the area. His exact words in reply were: "Well, you can have a go, but you haven't got a bloody show!"

The following morning they arrived at Wrey's Bush for early Mass. In his verbal notices the P.P. duly advised his flock that Mr Adair and Mr Kerr would be speaking to them - outside the Church, after the Mass. There was no soap box nor a platform handy, so Maurice Adair was required to stand on a sawn-off tree trunk and from there expound the plan to all present. A similar event took place after the Mass at Nightcaps Church, after which Frank Kerr was taken to the Wairio area by a Mr Mick O'Brien, whilst Maurice "operated" in Wreys Bush and environs, in the care of a fine old gentleman, Mr John (Jack) Boyle. He contributed a most generous donation and it is known that a much more substantial sum came from his Estate.

"Our first call was to another fine old Catholic," remembered Maurice Adair. "He appeared to believe that we were seeking funds for a school for Gore boys only and therefore declined our request." The collectors were confronted with quite a number of such misunderstandings and refusals.

Sometimes varied blandishments and good-natured cajolery did produce a satisfactory result. Equally, prospective donors vanished from their homes when collectors called on their properties. "For at another place, we found a utility type vehicle was sitting at the gate, and several dogs were lying around, untethered. The lady of the house told us that her husband was down at the 'Bush', which we could see a mile or so away down the paddocks!" Despite these setbacks the Committee men were generally very well received and were given a goodly number of generous donations, including \$200 each from two brothers.

Following that initial approach to the Country Parishes it was fully determined to set up further Committees in the respective areas. This was duly carried out. Thus the "Central" Committee was formed, with delegates from all parishes in attendance. Fairly regular meetings took place, usually quarterly, at Winton, and the various schemes to raise funds in the Country areas emanated from those meetings. Apart from transacting the business of the day, usually on a Sunday, it was a fine opportunity to get to know the collectors and fellow Catholics from other areas and generally a very happy social hour was held after the meetings.

The personnel of the early Committee changed over the years, as was to be expected. But many of those Gore parishioners and the men of the Central Committee went on to have connections with St Peter's that lasted for the following decades: the Chamberlain, Corcoran, Ferris, Finn, Forde, Hishon, Kean, Kubala, McMullen, Monaghan, O'Brien, Nicholson and Roughan families are some that come to mind. Martin Thyne was a member of that early Gore Committee. He was later to return to St Peter's as the Deputy Principal and teach full time for over fifteen years. His inventive methods of discipline will always be remembered by the many students who spent their lunchtimes sanding desks!

Capuchins and a Collapse

The first Central Committee meeting, as such, was held in Gore, in June 1955.

The parishes undertook their own methods of raising funds. Catholic families were visited each year. Donations were gratefully accepted, as were offerings of stock and produce. As the years passed the Committee men asked Bishop Kavanagh for a priest to accompany them or to assist them on their rounds. Frs Vince O'Brien, Chris Gaffey and John Mullin were seconded at different times and so played a great part in encouraging the fund raising and keeping up morale in the country districts as the opening of a school seemed to be no nearer. Fr Gaffey went to the trouble of having a model of the proposed school buildings so as to show the people where their money was being spent.

All the early collectors for the school were hampered by the fact that no teaching order had been appointed. None could answer the queries about the nature of this new school: who would staff it? Would it be a day school? A boarding school? A combination?

In September 1960 the Capuchin Friars agreed to staff the school and two of their priests, Frs Agathe Angelus and Eustace, came south to assist with the campaign. They were very well received. As the first collectors to visit Otautau and the Western districts with beards and bare feet, they also caused some consternation. One of those guiding the Capuchins around was asked: "What did you have in your car the other day?"

The school would open in 1964. Architects and plans were produced. The first buildings, the Staff House and one dormitory block, were begun. But then came the shock and the setback: the Capuchins reported in 1963 that they were unable to provide the staff after all. "The Mons" was to write: "No great work of God is ever

accomplished easily; it demands effort and trial and often heroism. This we have had, and it is also a guarantee that God is with us and the work will prosper under His hands." An opening in 1964 was impossible, but still faithful people continued their offerings. The only bright spot was that two of the school buildings were under way.

In April 1965 Bishop Kavanagh was able to announce that the Rosminians had agreed to staff the school which was to open in 1968 (but later put back to 1969). This was the breakthrough.

Rosminians Arrive

The Priests and Brothers of the Institute of Charity, more commonly known as the Rosminians, after their saintly founder Antonio Rosmini-Serbati (1797-1855), had opened a school, Rosmini College, on Auckland's North Shore in 1961. The first Rosminian to put new heart into the Central Committee did not however come from Auckland. He was Fr Tom Lenane, a Parish Priest, not a teacher; a visitor from Wales who came to Southland in April 1965. In the August school holidays Br John Tedesco flew down from Auckland "to fly the flag" and he began the first of many visits by the brethren from Rosmini College to the parishes of Southland. When Fr Lance Hurdidge, another Welshman, was appointed as Headmaster he was able to persuade the Bishop to make the school co-educational, and the Sisters of Mercy agreed to provide staff too. The Sisters of Mercy had over the past century already run schools in Southland, at Winton, Wreys Bush, Riverton, Nightcaps, Otautau and of course in Gore at St Mary's. One can say that the joint commitment of the two religious congregations was an inspired move! Many former pupils of St Peter's will vividly remember such names as Br Tedesco, Fr Willett, Fr Hill, Sr Mary Fidelis, Sr Kevin (Josephine Mary), Sr Stephen (Josie Dolan) and of course Fr Cunningham.

The name, St Peter's, was specifically chosen by Fr Hurdidge. At the Silver Jubilee in 1994, he was to write: "It was at St Peter's, Cardiff, that I was baptised, received first Holy Communion and was confirmed - taking the name of Peter. So I have a great devotion to him, the rock on which we stand. Brethren in Auckland at the time would have tried to get the school named Rosmini - but that is not NZ. With Antonio Rosmini's devotion to the see of Peter, I think he would have approved."

The Years Since

When the College opened there was no hall. Assemblies, Masses, games, wet weather programmes were all held in the still-empty ground floor of the dormitory block. Construction of the hall began in the spring of 1969 and by mid 1970 another very useful gathering place was available to all Gore folk. In December the first school dance took place and the hall stood up well to the pounding it received from the third and fourth formers. This was to become an annual event. That first Ball was opened by the representatives of the School Council, Martin Black and Ann Ferris.

Other early firsts which have become annual events include the Eisteddfod, the Fair, the Careers Evening, and the drama productions (excerpts from *The Winslow Boy* and *Pygmalion* produced by Fr Bill Harwood). The St Peter's Fair now is one of the biggest per capita in the country, and many of the traditional attractions are still popular. One which will be remembered by many is Br Tedesco's Tombola and the work undertaken by a dedicated team of helpers led by Kath and Jim Mortimer, whose home was all too often inundated with the "prizes". On the occasion of the first Careers Evening, the Gore Rotary Club organised eleven speakers on a variety of occupations. Now the combined St Peter's/Gore High School Careers Evening attracts more than fifty representatives from occupational and tertiary institutions all over New Zealand.

The early musical and dramatic productions at St Peter's were extremely popular. The first ones mentioned above were simply form productions, but were so well received that they were then readily performed for the

parents and the general public. But the first major musical had to wait till April 1977 when Mr Peter Owens produced Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat, with Tony Piggot, Damian Mulvena and Tessie Daukes in lead roles.

Altogether some 150 staff, students and parents took an active part. Since then the musicals have become part of tradition, and Joseph and Godspell have been performed twice. These productions have always been not only a showcase for talent but also a remarkable example of the long hours of extra-curricular work put in by staff and students alike. Equally the long and patient efforts of parents in the wardrobe department should be noted: Mesdames Finn, Lynch, Mortimer and Walsh were involved for many a year.

Many will recall the determination of people such as Sr David, Sr Stephanie, Fr Harwood, Mr Peter Owens, Mrs Valda Tattersfield, Mrs Yvonne Hickey, particularly with her choreography, and more recently Ms Lindy Cavanagh and Mr John Boyce, among others, in consistently producing shows of which the school community can be justifiably proud.

Fr Cunningham first became associated with St Peter's back in August 1966, when as Br Cunningham, he was sent to Gore to help collect for the proposed school. He returned at the beginning of 1970 before departing for Rome in September 1971 to complete his training for the priesthood. He reappeared as Fr Cunningham several years later in 1976 and remained until the Silver Jubilee year of 1994. Beginning as teacher of history and social studies, coach and Eastern Junior Selector for rugby, he then moved on as teacher of History of Art and Religious Studies and Head of the English Department for many years. In the school productions he was never content just to produce and direct either. He appeared as God in the 1977 performance of Joseph and again as Potiphar in the 1993 production of the same musical, and as the Pope in his own San Francesco in 1983 when Stephen MacDonell, whose part it was, became ill, and there were other roles besides!

In the same vein, another long standing tradition is the College Eisteddfod held every year. It gives St Peter's students practical experience in public speaking, in singing, in dance and in music. It develops invaluable confidence along the way. The winners' and the House shields which line the corridor of the Specialist Block contain quite a history recording all the names over the generations, and they show the way the competition has developed and expanded.

1970 was the year in which the numbers of religious teachers reached their maximum. There were thirteen, and they comprised the total staff. But in 1971 Mrs Loyola Williams, the first lay person, joined them full time and now, as Assistant Principal, she is the longest serving member of staff.

"Mons" Finlay retired as Parish Priest of Gore in 1972. One of the four school houses is, naturally enough, named after him and a grand tribute appeared in the third term Rock that year. The name for the school magazine comes from the biblical quotation "You are Peter and it is upon this rock that I shall build my church". The format for the original magazine, produced on a Gestetner, was devised by Br Tedesco. The photo pages were printed at The Ensign, but all else in every one of the early issues of the magazine was printed and produced in the College. It was a mammoth task and no mean feat considering three issues were put out every year - one appeared, madly, in the last week of each term and tended to disrupt most of the junior classes, whose task it was to collate and staple and bind the pages. The Chronicle was the section most read by the students. They loved to see their names in print. Written up each week by Br Tedesco, and then by Fr Cunningham, it detailed the life of day pupils and boarders and the staff and tried to include as many student names as possible in the activities, incidents, - amusing, sad, glorious or banal - which characterise life in any school.

In 1972 for the first time St Peter's won the Bishops' Shield, an annual cultural challenge between the Catholic secondary schools of the diocese of Dunedin, and the College is once more pleased to be the current holder.

The school also began to participate in exchange programmes when Nancy Junta, an American AFS student arrived. In recent years the College has benefited from more and more exchangees, particularly from international students making their presence felt, but also from St Peter's students studying abroad.

Educational and sports tours have long been a part of the school history. In the 1970's, Br Ted, with the help of families like the Mortimers and the Kubalas, regularly made summer tours around the North Island, and even to Fiji. Since 1980 tours have also been made to Australia. Fr Syd Marriott and Fr John Bland were also responsible for organising and taking tours and trips beyond the Mainland. Until the times of rapid rises in the price of petrol there were inter-school exchanges and tours between the "sister school", Rosmini College in Auckland and St Peter's. All of these are another example of a time where the whole school community works together for the massive efforts in fundraising and in the organisation required to make such trips a reality.

Enterprising hostel boarders made the best of the great floods in October 1978 by kayaking around the school grounds and across to Pukaki Street, and then trying to paddle down the fast flowing creek to Charlton Road. Many parts of the school and hostel were affected. The drains backed up. The boarders had to be "evacuated". The newly opened Home Economics block was inundated. The Hall was saved by a whisker, prayers and many towels rolled up against the doors. Fr Buckner rescued all the boilerhouse pumps from total immersion. However, floodwaters filled all the heating ducts and saturated the lagging; as it dried out, interesting smells persisted throughout the ground floor for days.

There was much to celebrate in the following year when the dramatic new Chapel building was completed. Fr Michael Hill had launched another appeal to the Catholic community of Southland early in 1977, with an original estimate of \$60 000. The final total was closer to \$100 000, due to inflation and interest rates as well as alterations to the original plan. The award-winning new building comprised a central Chapel - sufficient for the boarding community, and class groups, rather than the whole school - a sacristy, and areas to be used for the teaching of Religious Studies. All the Parishes in the region, once again, as well as former pupils and members of the wider public, were canvassed for donations, many giving very generously indeed. Families in the farming community gave not only money but also wool or stock to be sold.

And once again the Rosminians, and the Sisters of Mercy, took off at weekends and in holiday times to visit the Parishes and speak to the appeal. An interest free loan was also provided by the Sisters of Mercy and the Institute of Charity, working together again for the benefit of St Peter's. The School motto is "Charity Fulfils the Law", and within a year of opening, the Chapel was debt free, a monument to the donations raised by the hard work of the Chapel Committee. It is all the more outstanding given that these were many of the same people who had already contributed generously in the previous years when the school was first proposed and finally built.

Changing Times

Along with the students, the St Peter's uniforms have changed with the times. When the school opened the uniform was grey and red. Br Ted then delighted in displaying his expertise with colour changes on the Gestetner by placing a neat red netball skirt ("red, pleated sailcloth") on the figure drawn on page seven of the first number of the Rock. Boys wore grey socks with red tops, grey shorts, grey shirt and a pullover with a red v neck; girls wore white socks, grey wrap-around skirts, white blouses, ties and a red cardigan. All thought they looked very smart, though the girls' skirts tended to unwrap when they sat on the high stools in the laboratories! There was a red parka to be worn in wet and cooler weather. Since 1969 several changes came and went, before the present-day royal blue blazer was introduced in 1981 and the woollen kilt the following year.

Greater changes than uniform were also taking place. Catholic schools had been operating as privately run Church schools for almost one hundred years when the Kirk Labour Government held an historic conference in 1973. The eventual outcome was that the Crown assumed responsibility for funding and the payment of teachers, while the Bishop of the Dunedin Diocese, as the proprietor of the school, retained some rights. These were in relation to the special features of the education St Peter's provides as a Catholic school: the "special character" which distinguishes it from any state school. St Peter's officially became a private school integrated into the State System on the first day of Term 1 1982, after the conclusion of lengthy negotiations which had begun before the College was among the first group of various schools submitted by the Bishops for integration in 1978. However, as a Form One to Seven school in an urban area, there were many objections, some locally, some nationally, before an equitable solution to the integration process was reached. Fr Eric Willett, as Headmaster, was thus able to say "it will be an event of the greatest significance in time to come, because the school could not continue to operate in its present form without placing an impossible financial burden on its parents."

In 1984 another momentous change took place when the first lay Principal, Kerry Henderson, was appointed. He took over from Martin Thyne, who had been Acting Principal in the first term of the year. But 1984 was also the year when the school community and the townsfolk of Gore were saddened tremendously by the sudden death of Br John Tedesco, who had dedicated much of his life to building up St Peter's and St Paul's as a pioneer founder of the school. He had also involved himself fully in the local community, serving two terms on the Gore Borough Council.

A new church was erected in Gore in 1987, on the same site as the former one. It is a magnificent building, excellent for liturgies, although many visitors still comment on the resemblance to a hydroslide complex. Many former pupils got to go back to school over an eighteen month period. While the new church was being built St Peter's hall was put to good use each weekend for the Parish Masses, and some of the former pupils had the privilege of having their marriages celebrated in the beauty of the Chapel.

Also in 1987, after eighteen years, the first St Peter's second-generation students were enrolled in the first forms: Michael Vettters (son of Judith Hoffman, 1969-72); Joshua Heke (son of Lyann Bastiaansen, 1969-73); Daniel Fletcher (son of Mary-Ann Larking, 1970-74); Michael Bastiaansen (son of Tony, 1972-73).

The Last Decade

A decade ago in 1989 the 20th anniversary of the College was celebrated. In 1991 John Boyce succeeded Kerry Henderson as Principal. Four years later he led the College in celebrating its Silver Jubilee, over the long Easter Weekend. Many of those involved with St Peter's, from its beginning, to current students and staff, were able to take part in the class reunions, the photos, the liturgies and the Masses in the Parish Church, the Dance, the Banquet, the lolly scramble and other events. Twelve chairs were donated by the former and present Board members to be used for special occasions in the Hall and a scroll was presented with the names of all deceased former pupils.

St Peter's had always been connected with the community, from the earliest times when the IHC undertook the staffing of the laundry, to those occasions each year when numbers of students give their time to collect for a worthwhile charity or get themselves involved in Work Day. The Fair Days and Eisteddfods, Swimming and Sports Days, field trips and camps are renowned for the amount of parental support they receive. Whether it be in donating things to be sold at the Fair, providing transport or clocking the finishing times on a race, the parents have been there year after year. While a large annual Rock is still published, there have been some new ways with which St Peter's has kept the community up to date: a weekly half hour radio show was begun in 1992; bi-weekly columns in the local Ensign newspaper; a new-look newsletter, which goes home with the students.

One of the first steps for St Peter's in attracting fee-paying overseas students occurred in 1994 when a group of Japanese girls arrived with their teacher for a two week visit. The girls stayed with local host families and were able to enjoy many aspects of life at St Peter's, even a ski trip and the School Ball. There is now a sister school relationship with Hikarigaoka Girls High School in Okazaki, Japan. The success of that visit, and work undertaken in 1995 by former deputy principal John Hogue in Hong Kong, paved the way for many more overseas students who have studied here since then. St Peter's has taken an initiative in an increasingly different economic and competitive environment, providing overseas students with a caring place in which to gain a New Zealand education, and our own students with a greater opportunity for cultural experience.

To achieve continuing academic success in such a competitive environment, a school must ensure that its students have access to new opportunities and new technology. 1995 saw the first Scholarship passes in fifteen years, as well as several new ways of teaching. Lessons were delivered over the Internet and learning new languages was undertaken through Sky Television.

Countless projects such as the refurbishment of the science labs, the new Robertson Street entrance, the new art room and the technical block and music suites took place between 1994 and 1997, when the final stage of the new building programme was started. Completed late in 1998, St Peter's is now a thoroughly modern complex with the resources to ensure that its students and staff are able to achieve their best, in fine surroundings that facilitate teaching and learning.

Over the thirty year history of the school, and throughout the tenure of six principals, one thing that seems to stand out is character and involvement.

Participation levels for sports teams and science fairs are always high, and students get really involved in events like Quiz Day or the House folk song competition at the Eisteddfod. Those with experiences of other schools often comment on the support and enthusiasm our school community has, not only for innovative fundraisers such as the tugs-of-war held in the 1950's or the Brides of the Past show in 1993, but also for the events which occur every year. For while occasions such as the MUNA conference, biology fieldtrips and sports exchanges are new for each year's students, many of the same parents and teachers have repeatedly given of their time and energy.

St Peter's is a dynamic and changing place. Both the founding religious orders have diminished and left the College, and just one religious staff member, Sr Sian Owen RSJ, Deputy Principal, remains amongst the thirty strong staff led by Principal Martin Chamberlain.

With the departure of Sr Sue France from St Peter's in 1990 a 115 year period of teaching from the Sisters of Mercy in Gore came to an end. At the Mercy Day Assembly shortly before she left, Sr Sue gave a reason for the decline of the teaching Sisters of Mercy when she said: "The Sisters came to New Zealand to do work that others were not able to do at the time. It seems only right, now that there are able and committed teachers to carry on Catholic education, that the Sisters are moving into other areas of work, such as tertiary chaplaincy, counselling, parish work, and the care of the sick and handicapped, as well as being involved in education, but not necessarily teaching in schools." This reason would seem to equally apply to other orders.

St Peter's has already faced a great many challenges in its relatively short history, and it has had its fair share of misfortune and upset. On this occasion of our anniversary, we think of these times too. The same character and charity that we have always displayed in our many achievements has helped us to face adversity as well.

After thirty years St Peter's has proved itself more than able to still accomplish the high standards set before the students on opening day in 1969.

The school spirit that began working for St Peter's twenty years before it actually opened, in the collecting of the funds, clearing blocks of land, finding the staff, then raising money for a Chapel and cleaning up after floods, later saw the inception of Integration and Tomorrow's Schools, the Internet and the latest building programme. We can be confident that the same school spirit will see St Peter's College well into the future, whatever it may hold.

Compiled by past pupil Donna Richardson and Father Aidan Cunningham, Holy Thursday 1999