



SANDPIPER

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A New Roman Catholic Church for Benalla (Euroa Advertiser 1908)

St Joseph's Church Benalla has the epithet as the 'jewel' of the Sandhurst Diocese, built on the "unswerving faith" of its Irish ancestors.

Over one thousand people attended its opening which was celebrated with great fanfare – without the Bishop of Sandhurst, who was ill, or the Archdeacon responsible for building the Church – who was dead. A testament to the Benalla spirit!

Euroa Advertiser [Friday 12 June 1908 page 3]

On Sunday, the formal opening and dedicating of the newly erected Roman Catholic Church at Benalla was carried out in the presence of fully 1000 persons. The congregation included representatives from all denominations, while visitors from Wangaratta and other district towns were present.

The foundation of the new Church was laid on 15 July 1907, by his Grace Archbishop Carr. It was intended that the dedication ceremony should have been performed on Sunday last by His Lordship, Dr Reville of Bendigo but, owing to having contracted a severe cold, he was unable to do so.

His Lordship was confined to his bed at the Benalla presbytery. Under the circumstances, the Rev. Father Mahoney PP of Myrtleford preached the opening sermon in the morning and the Rev. Father Kennedy of Wangaratta preached the vespers in the evening.

The erection of the new church was entirely due to the zeal of the late Venerable Archdeacon Davey PP of Benalla, and it was he who not only conceived the idea of constructing it but actually undertook to raise subscriptions among the people with which to carry out the work.

Archdeacon Davey himself contributed £500 to the fund and gave £1000 towards procuring a solid and most beautiful marble altar. Up to last Sunday, exclusive of that day's collection, the sum of £3400 had been contributed but, as the late Archdeacon Davey left by his will the sum of £2999(?) for church purposes, and the cost of the Church is about £10,000, only £3600 was required to

liquidate the debt. The task of raising this amount now falls to the lot of Father O'Reilly, PP of Benalla but, judging from the previous examples of generosity on the part of Roman Catholics, he should have no difficulty in obtaining the amount within the next few years.

At 11 o'clock on Sunday the church was packed, numbers having to stand. The Mass which took the form of *Missa Cantata* was celebrated by Rev. Father Armstrong with Rev. Fr O'Reilly as Master of Ceremonies, after which the Rev. Mather Mahoney preached a sermon. A collection was made at the close of the address and £800 (?) was realised. A feature of the service was the singing and rendition of the Farmers by a choir of about 40 voices. The solo was taken by Miss Lilian Reid (soprano from St Patrick's College, Melbourne); Mr J. Wade (leading tenor from St Francis Choir, Melbourne); and Mrs J.C. Bedford contralto, Wangaratta, and Mr C. Cannon bass, Benalla.

The offertory solo was sung by Miss Reid and during the collection Mrs Bedford sang 'O Loving Father' by Dal Regin. The Solo 'O s?' was rendered by Mr J. Wade and the quartet ... was sung by Miss Reid, Mrs Bedford and Messrs Wade and Cannon. Mr Cannon conducted the choir and Mrs Rahilly ?? as organist. The effect of the singing was added to by the instrumental obligatos.

Rev. Fr Mahoney preached from the text 'The work is great, for a house is prepared not for a man but for God' and gave a most eloquent and fitting sermon. The preacher referred to the assemblage that took place on 18th July, when the foundation stone of that magnificent church was laid by His Grace Archbishop Carr. And now they were assembled there full of joy that morning to witness its dedication.

In erecting that church they made a splendid profession of their faith and, not content with expressing their faith by means of their heart, they had put it in brick and mortar and made it lasting. That would serve to show their children and their children's children what their love for the Catholic Church was. Nothing was too good for God, but they required to be reminded of His mercy and goodness, hence it was necessary that a place worthy of Him should be erected in which to adore Him with gorgeous ritual and sweet music.

In concluding his sermon, the Rev. Father Mahoney reminded the congregation that the collection would be taken up in aid of the church building fund. The church, for beauty of design, and chase finish, stood unequalled in the land and was a credit to the architect who designed it and to the people who made it possible to erect. If they were that day, to put the finishing touch to the work they had begun, and he asked them to be generous with their donations. There was one other whom they all would wish to have seen amongst them that day, one who was a friend of the parish and who was loved by his fellow creatures, and that was the late Venerable Archdeacon Davey. He had set the grand example for the erecting of that church. It was to have been his greatest work, but now it was his memorial. It was to his great generosity that they owed that church. There was no one who could refuse to give something to the memorial of the late Archdeacon, and the preacher did not think that there was one that did not desire to have his name associated with that of their late beloved Archdeacon.

The children of the primary Catholic School had contributed £8 and the children from the Convent School £6 out of their scanty pocket money. If the children could do that, then those who had abundance should follow their example and give freely. He exhorted them to be generous in honour of the late Archdeacon Davey.

Rev. Fr Kennedy of Wangaratta preached at night, taking for his text 'Lord, I love the tabernacle, or Thy house and the place where Thy glory dwelleth.' The sermon was appropriate to the occasion, and was of a high order.

"The Catholics of Benalla have now erected a church valued at £10,000, convent £8,000, primary school £2000 and presbytery £2000 which, with other appointments brings the total up to £35,000. The old brick church is still standing, and the Rev. Fr O'Reilly is undecided as to what use he will put to it.