



education begins at **Boys' Town**

In 2016 the Dominic College community celebrated 70 years of Salesian education at Boys' Town, Glenorchy.

Last year's Veritas magazine recalled the arrival of the first Salesians, Fr Brennan and Fr Drohan on 29 November 1946 and the first few months after taking over operation of Boys' Town.

From the start, Fr Ciantar, the leader of the Salesians in Australia, planned on establishing a school at Boys' Town, Glenorchy. He chose Fr John Brennan as Rector, one of the first Australian students to be professed in the Salesian order, and a gifted, natural educator.

Salesian historian, Fr Ted Cooper, said Fr Brennan could get the best out of even the slowest student.

'John used his natural flair for dreaming up ways and means for making his lessons attractive.'

John Brennan studied for two years at Sunbury, and was sent to England, to Cowley, Oxford, in 1934. Br John Brennan returned to Australia in 1937 and was ordained 1 December 1944. He undertook leadership at Glenorchy after just two years as a priest.

Fr Ciantar visited 'for a little taking-over ceremony' and celebrated the foundation on Sunday 8 December. As soon as Fr Ciantar departed, Fr Brennan got down to business! He wrote to Fr Bortolo Fedrigotti, at Rupertswood, to ask his advice on Federal Government issues, such as Sales Tax exemption, Child Endowment paperwork and Education Department support. With

Fr Fedrigotti's directions, Fr Brennan then wrote to the Tasmanian Director of Education, explaining he wanted to begin a school.

'As our influence and control over the boys is not sufficient when they go out to school every day, it is our intention to start teaching school here at Boys' Town at the start of the new school year.'

He asked for the approval of the Department and information about any formalities and official books to be kept.

Fr Brennan also asked for the same help the Victorian government gave to similar institutions in Melbourne – textbooks, readers and atlases for about 30 pupils.

Br Robert Downey and Br James Brophy arrived ready for lessons, and the first class was on Friday 7 February 1947.

There were 26 boys to start the school, the numbers fluctuating as boys arrived, and left. They slept in the dormitory hut attached to Grantleigh, and one of the brothers slept in the room with them. They had their new lessons on the ground floor of Grantleigh, in two classrooms: with younger students on the right hand side, and older ones on the left.

Fr Brennan applied for teacher registration for himself and Br Brophy straight away. Mr Ian Rennie, Registrar of the Teachers and Schools Registration Board supplied Fr Brennan with application forms to register Boys' Town as a primary school.

The subjects taught were: English, Arithmetic, History, Geography, Good Manners, Religion, Hygiene, Drawing, Science, and Nature Studies. The teachers named in the registration application were Frs Brennan and Drohan, and Brs Brophy and Downey. Br Brophy was listed as a trainee teacher.

Fr Ciantar arrived for a second visit 27 February, and wrote: 'This is a really good start!'

On 1 May Mr S L Hickman came to inspect the facilities for the government to complete registration and Fr Brennan reported he was favourably impressed. Official registration of the school (Number 316) was granted a few weeks later.

Mr Hickman, observing Br Brophy's classroom skills as a trainee complimented him, saying he had a 'goodly measure of success with lads not always easy to teach.'

Fr William Cole arrived 3 June to join the teaching team.

Students from Boys' Town did not sit for the Catholic Secondary Schools' Association examinations – there were no reports of students sitting the 1947 or 1948 examinations. But Fr Brennan reported that the studies of the boys were yielding good results and five of the boys did sit for first year exams in 1949. Four of them were successful, one gaining a credit in every subject: English Expression, English Literature, Social Studies, Latin and Geometry. One boy also sat for Arithmetic.

The four boys who passed are listed in The Standard: J Bumford, J Dransfield, K Jordan and B Walsh. J Dransfield received a credit in each subject, and went on to pass his second year examinations in 1950.

Just as important as their academic studies, music, dancing, theatre and gymnastics were taught at Boys' Town.

In the first 12 months the boys conducted over 20 concerts and entertainments at Glenorchy and other venues, for the entertainment of visiting dignitaries, religious visitors and Boys' Town parents and friends!

Archbishop Tweedy visiting on 2 April, was 'surprised and delighted, especially at the gymnastics.'

A concert for visiting young Tasmanian soprano, Auriel Garratt, on Sunday 1 June included Fr Brennan accompanying three pieces sung by the choir. The Standard's reporter warned 'St Virgil's College boys, beware; you have serious rivals at Boys' Town.'

The columnist praised student Ken Jordan's humorous recitation "Sitting on the fence" which they said 'amply demonstrated his ability to say a lot of words in a short space of time.'

The highlight of the evening was the gymnastic display, under the direction of Br Brophy.

'Some of the lads practically turned themselves inside out!'

On 29 June 1946, the students gave a concert at St Peter's Hall at the St Mary's Cathedral Fair which included eight items varying from choir, recitations, gymnastic displays on the horizontal bar, a magic display to a full-length performance of the farce 'The Crimson Coconut.'

Sport, too, was important at Boys' Town. Former student, Les McGuire recalls the excitement of weekend visits to the football games: 'Fr Brennan would take us in the old Ford ute; the people of Glenorchy would hear us coming as we left Boys' Town!'

In August 1947, the boys who had received good marks went to watch the carnival match when Western Australia defeated Victoria.

In the 21st century, we sometimes forget how popular boxing was in this period. In July 1946, the Sandy Bay Amateur Boxing Association visited, with the Tasmanian lightweight champion. In August, those boys who had good marks were taken to "The Boxing" on a Monday – the Tasmanian Amateur Boxing and Wrestling Association tournament.

On one Monday evening a Boys' Town student from the group, Jimmy Monks, was unexpectedly invited to box a lad from Launceston. Fr Brennan said he was defeated 'but fought so gamely that someone presented a trophy to him, as the first Boys' Town boy to fight in the City Hall.'

Archbishop Tweedy was listening to the boxing on the radio and rang Fr Brennan to thank him for a thrill of real pleasure.

'The whole hall was shouting for Boys' Town', the Archbishop related. 'We have some very good friends associated with the boxing.'

His Grace was still tickled later that week when he visited Boys' Town and preached a sermon. He told the boys how proud of them he felt while listening in on the radio. 'No one is fit to fight another until he has fought and beaten himself.' ■

Opposite: Fr Brennan and boys in front of the scaffolding of the Boys' Town building. Cricket on the first oval - the rear of Grantleigh is in the background.