



# THE ARRIVAL OF THE SALESIANS AT BOYS' TOWN, GLENORCHY

*Fr Brennan, front row, second from left and Fr Ciantar, second from right. Photo taken during visit of Cardinal Gilroy in 1947.*

Last year's Veritas magazine looked at the foundation of Boys' Town in Glenorchy, and the attempts of Archbishop Tweedy to obtain an order to look after the orphans. It will be 70 years in November this year since the arrival of the first Salesians in Glenorchy to take over Boys' Town.

Tasmania's Archbishop Tweedy approached the leader of the Salesians in Australia, Fr Ciantar, in May 1946, asking him again to take over Boys' Town. Fr Ciantar was the Provincial Delegate and he reported to his Provincial in the USA, Fr Tozzi, writing:

The Archbishop of Hobart has again asked for us. He must have some society at once to look after his orphans. It will be another Adelaide! He does not want to pass over us, but if we cannot accept he may have to do so... I urged the acceptance on the Superiors. I am due to go over and see the place and what he intends to give us and under what conditions. Meanwhile, we shall await an answer from Turin... It is imperative I go to plead our cause.

Fr Ciantar flew to Hobart to see Boys' Town with Archbishop Tweedy, and the Rupertswood Chronicle said he returned:

full of optimism for further Salesian expansion. Dr Tweedy is prepared to alter proposed building plans to meet Salesian requirements. The Archbishop has the sympathy of the civil authorities who are levelling (grading) and draining a football oval. There is a sum of

£15000 on hand to make an immediate start on a new school building. Dr Tweedy would also welcome the Salesian Sisters.

The Archbishop offered independence of control excepting that his public promises must be kept – the setting up of a technical school, and the acceptance of 'non-catholic boys to the Home if admission is sought'.

Archbishop Tweedy explained to Fr Ciantar that several large donations had come from non-Catholics, but there had been some public sectarianism over orphanage financing.

'I look to Boys' Town as one of the means of breaking down this opposition,' he wrote, 'and of creating a very creditable impression on the whole community.'

Fr Ciantar flew from Sydney 10 August 1946 to Europe where he would meet the Salesian Superiors 24 August and account for his unauthorised actions during the isolated war years, the development of the Salesian houses and the spirit of the work. While the Rector Major congratulated Fr Ciantar, and the Superiors were anxious to help within austere post-war limits, he reminded Fr Ciantar 'of the need to move along slowly... and to put down firm foundations.'

The Salesian Superior Council in Italy discussed Boys' Town 26 August 1946 and later wrote to Fr Ciantar that they favoured the project but would need to approve the plans, after the Provincial (in the USA) had approved

them first. Fr Ciantar was instructed to 'follow the usual channels'.

*The Standard* in Hobart had already published a front page story on the arrival 'in the near future' of the Salesians to take over at Boys' Town. Fr Ciantar was never accused of moving too slowly!

In September 1946, the three German missionaries at Boys' Town applied for naturalisation. Frs John Brand, Paul Gustav Diedrichs and Bernard Berlemann were to be allowed to return to New Guinea. Archbishop Tweedy needed the Salesians to take over as soon as possible.

Fr Ciantar reported the deadline to the American Provincial, Fr Tozzi:

The Archbishop of Hobart would like us by the 1 December, as the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Superior wants his three confreres back in the Islands by that time. There is no choice. I know that you will ratify what I have done. The Superiors in their turn have approved as I told you in my last letter. Of course they told me that all the signing of documents etc, will have to go through ordinary channels, namely through you, the Provincial. What a pity the Provincial is so far away. I hope the Superiors will make a change one day. It is most unsatisfactory...

The Catholic Women's League organised a farewell for the three Germans at Boys' Town on Friday 21 November and provided an artistic concert arranged by Mr P Fazackerly, attended by 200 guests.

Fr John Brennan the newly appointed Rector at Boys' Town, began the written 'Chronicle' of the Salesians in Glenorchy, November 29 1946:

Father Brennan and Father Drohan flew from Melbourne – the former to assume the charge of "Boys' Town," Glenorchy, Tasmania, the latter to put in a couple of months hard work here while awaiting the arrival of the permanent staff – who will free him for his own appointed destination of Oakleigh. They were met by Fr Paul who drove them to the Calvary Hospital to meet His Grace – a patient there. Then they were taken to "Boys' Town" and thus began our new sphere of action.



Fr Brennan recorded Fr Paul Diedrichs left the next day, Saturday 30 November, and Br John on Sunday 1 December.

Fr Brennan's companion, Fr Frank Drohan was born in 1919 in Clonmel, Ireland, joined the Salesians at 14 and was sent as a missionary to Japan at 17. He remained in Japan till advised to leave, quickly, a month before Pearl Harbour in 1942. He was then ordained in Melbourne and worked on aboriginal missions in the north-west. As a carpenter, Fr Drohan was always in demand, but was keen to return to Japan as soon as he could.

In 1997, Fr Drohan wrote of the first days of the Salesians at Boys' Town, 50 years before:

When we arrived the Priest in charge gave John the key of the Tabernacle, the key of the safe, and the key of the light truck, and bade us goodbye. It was a Friday and another Priest and a Lay brother cook remained until the Monday so we could get a complete "run-in"! The building consisted of what looked like a Swiss chalet, a quonset hut, a garage and some farm buildings.

On Wednesday 4 December, Fr Brennan wrote:

Bro Thomas Supple and Bro Peter Swain arrived safely to-day. Bro Tom to be our cook, and Bro Peter – like Fr Drohan – to keep the ship afloat until the permanents are free to reach us.

Fr Ted Cooper, Salesian historian, explained Fr Drohan and Br Swain were seconded to help establish the facilities, and Fr William Cole, Br Robert Downey and Br James Brophy, to arrive just before the new school year in 1947 'would be the backbone of the teaching staff.'





Br Tom Supple was the cook. Fr Drohan recalled:

Br Tom Supple arrived a short time later, and relieved John and myself of the kitchen job. I remember saying Mass early and attending the community Mass, hearing Confessions

and dodging out from time to time to keep an eye on the milk warming on the stove.

Although always in need of repairs and improvements, the structure at Grantleigh was in fine shape and passageways had been constructed

between the residence and the army huts to create a larger complex. An army hut, 60 feet x 16 feet, had been attached to Grantleigh and a passage cut into the back room. Another hut, the same size, was a few meters away, used as a dormitory, with a lavatory block affixed.

The new Salesian Boys' Town decided not to look after the youngest children, however – a new home had to be found for those orphans under 8 or 9 years of age. Fr Ciantar sought placement for four children with St Joseph's Home Surrey Hills, Victoria, through the Catholic Social Services Bureau.

Fr Riese, Director of the Catholic Social Services Bureau, reluctantly agreed to accept the children, if the Archdiocese of Hobart contributed 10/- per week and the boys return at the age of nine.

Three children, Leslie James McGuire, Gary John Douglas, Ronald Vincent Keogh, were sent to Victoria in December.

In the first month of the Salesian arrival, the Glenorchy community consisted of Frs Brennan and Drohan and Brs Supple and Swain.

Fr Ciantar visited 6 December 1946 'for a little taking-over ceremony' scheduled for Sunday 8 December, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and the celebration

of the foundation of Don Bosco's Oratory in Turin. Fr Brennan wrote:

Eight of our boys made their first Holy Communion to-day, along with the children of the Moonah parish in their Church. We had a little concert in the afternoon to mark the taking over & after that Father Ciantar gave the first Benediction Boys' Town has had. When we came the front room (left hand as you come in) was the Chapel and the present Chapel was a recreation room... Father Ciantar stayed till Tuesday morning.

We asked the architect to call out today and we discussed the plans of the new building. He has every hope that a commencement can be made early in the new year. Mr Harry Hope is his name – may he not belie it.

In the lead up to Christmas, the boys finished at school in St Therese's, Moonah or St Peter's, Hobart, and some then went home for holidays. Supporters dropped in to bring treats for the boys, including the Ladies Social Guild, and Mr George Castrisios, proprietor of The Spot Milk Bar.

A variety of community organisations had been financial supporters of Boys' Town since it was established by the Archbishop. Fundraising before the arrival of the Salesians in 1946 included a state-wide art union, won by Mr A Midson, wool-packer, of Launceston. Racing and trotting clubs held benefit meetings. Bookmakers raised significant amounts: a cheque for £648 was presented to Dr Gaha in February 1946. The pupils of St Joseph's Orphanage presented a music and drama night at the Theatre Royal in aid of Boys' Town, including the operetta, 'Pearl the Fishermid.'

Christmas was a happy occasion and Fr Brennan noted 'Father Christmas paid a visit during the night leaving plenty of good things for all.'

Br Celestine arrived for a holiday New Year's Eve and the Boys' Town community had a big bonfire that night. On Thursday 2 January 1947, the whole community at Boys' Town went up Mt Wellington in the Boys' Town truck and enjoyed a picnic.

Br Brophy arrived on 18 January 1947 and Br Peter Swain left. Br Downey arrived on Regatta Day, 4 February

On Friday 7 February 1947 Fr Brennan wrote: 'We had school here for the first time to-day.' ■