

Except for its scattered coconut palms, frangipani and eucalyptus trees, during the greater part of the year it was windswept, barren and dusty. Here and there a few houses with galvanised roofs indicated the direction of an unpaved street or two. Beauty there was, however, in the seascape in front of the mission with the pearlluggers coming and going or riding at anchor, Horn and Prince of Wales Islands rising from the sea in the near distance and, on a clear day, the faintest outline of Australia's northernmost point, Cape York.

A description of Thursday Island in the early days, an excerpt from the history recorded by the sisters



OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART PRIMARY SCHOOL

From its humble beginnings on the verandah of the convent, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School has been serving the people of the Torres Strait for well over a century. The current school, the buildings of which served as an orphanage until the 1960s, has since developed into a modern, vibrant and multicultural focal point of family life on the islands, with both the original campus and a campus on Hammond Island which serves younger students in that area. It currently has an enrolment of around 150 students.



OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART CATHOLIC CHURCH

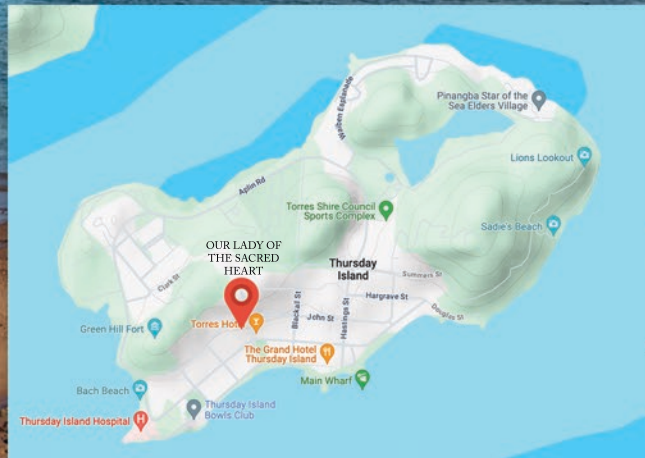
120 Douglas Street, Thursday Island

School website:
olsh.qld.edu.au

Further information:



*We hope you've enjoyed
visiting our historic church!
Please enjoy your stay on
Thursday island and support
our many wonderful local
businesses. We hope to see
you again one day.*



OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART CATHOLIC CHURCH

- THURSDAY ISLAND -

140 Years of History



THE EARLY YEARS

The Catholic Church's presence in the Torres Strait began when Pope Leo XIII requested that the Sacred Heart Fathers establish a Mission in New Guinea. It was decided among the Fathers that such a mission would be best serviced by a site in the Torres Strait. Such a site would serve as a stopover station and a permanent link between Australia's mainland and New Guinea. Thursday Island was selected.

On October 24th 1884, Father Andrew Navarre, Father Ferdinand Hartzler and Brother Guiseppe de Santis arrived on Thursday Island to establish the Sacred Heart Mission. The historic church, which is now heritage listed, was built only a few years after their arrival. The M.S.C brothers ran the Mission until January 21st 1886, when the first Sisters were welcomed to the island. They were the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, all of whom had french origins.

The Sacred Heart Mission had also begun a tiny Catholic School on the closed-in verandah of the Convent. Sister Margaret Sweeny, the first Australian daughter of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, taught the children - a handful of European, Filipino and Manila students. The Parish has always been noted for its diversity of parishioners, which can be traced back to its earliest beginnings. The M.S.C Brothers had also built an orphanage on church grounds.

The orphanage continued to be in use until evacuation procedures was in place during World War II in 1942, but was re-opened for a short period of time in 1948. However, as child endowment payments began, parents were given the much needed assistance to care for their families and the need for an orphanage soon vanished. From 1961-1962, the orphanage was converted into a school by volunteer labourers from the local community. Bishop O'Loughlin blessed and opened the school in February 1962.

THE CHURCH

Construction on Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church by French and Italian priests of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart began in 1885, making it the oldest building on Thursday Island. It was improved on over the next few decades, reaching its currently recognisable form by 1905.

In 1935, David Sing, a prominent painter of religious works in Catholic Churches who was born on Thursday Island, painted the trompe l'oeil murals on the rear wall of the sanctuary, and on the front of the altar.

In 1938 the Sacred Heart Mission in the Torres Strait was transferred from the Vicariate Apostolic of Papua (formerly British New Guinea) to the Diocese of Darwin, becoming a Mission of the Australian Province. It remained within the Diocese of Darwin until transferred to the Diocese of Cairns in 1967, after which the parish was no longer staffed by Sacred Heart priests but by Cairns Diocesan clergy.

In 1983 the flat-iron spire of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church on Thursday Island was replaced with a fibreglass copy as the first phase of a centenary renovations programme. The roof was reclad in 1992. The building remains substantially intact and is a good example of a late 19th century timber church with decorative Gothic elements and side verandahs. It retains many early fittings and fixtures, including the choir loft, pews, altar, decorative fretwork, the 1930s murals, and statuary.

The church was added to the Queensland Heritage Register on 7 December 1998.

