

*James Dempsey  
and John Butler:  
Pioneers of  
Australian Catholicism  
1802-1838*



*Paul Chandler, O.Carm.*

*Cover Image: stained glass window of St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney. It depicts the first public Mass known to have been celebrated in the Colony on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1803, by Fr. James Dixon, in a house in Sydney. He was an Irish political prisoner transported to the colony in 1800, was given a conditional pardon and for a short time permitted to perform his clerical functions. Fr. Dixon is shown wearing makeshift sacred vestments that had been run up from domestic curtain. Fr. Dixon's permission to function publicly was later withdrawn by the Governor, and he left Sydney in 1808.*

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On 30 October 1802,† after a five-month voyage from Cork, the *Atlas* sailed into Sydney Cove carrying 174 Irish prisoners, the majority of whom had been tried by courts martial in the aftermath of the Irish Rebellion of 1798. All but nine were serving sentences of transportation for life.<sup>1</sup> On board were two lay Carmelites, James Dempsey and John Butler, who thus became the first Carmelites in Australia. Dempsey, in particular, was to play a highly significant role in the early days of Australian Catholicism: he would be the spiritual leader of the Catholic community during its priestless years and the builder of the first Saint Mary's Cathedral in Sydney. The history of Australian Catholicism begins with the fidelity and spiritual leadership of men such as these.

At the time of the official foundation of the Carmelites in Australia at Gawler, near Adelaide, in 1881, the presence of these two lay members of the Order in the early days was still remembered, and much was made of it in the press statement marking the arrival of the Carmelites in the country.<sup>2</sup> As retold in 1881, the tradition about Dempsey and Butler was basically sound, but contained a number of factual errors and much pious embellishment, and, more seriously, had lost the name of John Butler. Thereafter the Carmelite thread to their story appears to have been largely forgotten, until research in 1963 brought the 1881 tradition once more to light.<sup>3</sup> Butler's name was only recovered in 1980 with the discovery of his gravestone in Botany Cemetery.

James Dempsey was a Wexford man and 33 or 34 years old when he arrived in Australia, having been born in 1768 or '69.<sup>4</sup> He left behind him in Ireland a wife and four children.<sup>5</sup> Although there is no contemporary reference to his being a lay Carmelite, there is little doubt that he was, for the

fact is independently attested in both Carmelite<sup>6</sup> and Dempsey family<sup>7</sup> tradition.

John Butler was a native of Carrick-on-Suir in County Tipperary. He was born in 1773 according to his Certificate of Pardon, but in 1778 or '79, if his gravestone inscription is accurate, and so was perhaps a young man of 23 or 24 when he arrived in Botany Bay.<sup>8</sup> His Certificate of Pardon records that he was 5' 6½" tall, with a dark pale complexion, brown hair and hazel eyes with a cast in the right. The 1881 tradition associates him with Father Peter O'Neil, transported on trumped-up charges of sedition in 1801, and with the town of Youghal, but there is no suggestion elsewhere of either connection. The same tradition suggests that he had a reputation for piety and that he "was commonly known as the Carmelite". This is a detail that rings true: Butler must have been proud of his status as a Carmelite, for he or his friends also had the fact inscribed on his gravestone. It reads, beneath a depiction of the Order's scapular:

Sacred to the Memory of  
JOHN BUTLER\*

who departed this life April the 4th  
1836 aged 57 years.

He was a lay Carmelite Brother and one  
of the members of the Confraternity of St. Joseph.  
May the Lord have mercy on his soul. Amen.<sup>9</sup>

It is difficult to know exactly what "lay Carmelite Brother" means in this context: Dempsey and Butler may have been tertiaries in the strict sense of the term (professed members of the "Third Order" of the Carmelites). Like the other religious orders of thirteenth-century foundation, the

Carmelites were divided into three “Orders”, the first being of friars, the second of nuns, and the third of laypeople. Although there is little evidence of the Carmelite Third Order in Ireland in their time, it seems to have existed there from 1750 onwards. Alternatively, they may have been members of the Scapular Confraternity, which then required of its members a commitment somewhat similar to that required of tertiaries today.<sup>10</sup> The eighteenth-century Irish friars, both Carmelites and Discalced Carmelites, devoted a good part of their efforts to building up the Scapular Confraternity, which spread rapidly throughout the country after about 1728 and had a large and fervent membership.<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note, too, that a number of Carmelite priests took part in the 1798 Rebellion in Mayo and Wexford, and that the Brown Scapular of the Carmelites was regarded with esteem by the rebels, who were enrolled in it in great numbers, wearing it for spiritual reasons and perhaps also as a mark of identification. At least in some Protestant minds the Confraternity itself was associated with fomenting rebellion.<sup>12</sup>

Whether Tertiaries or Confraternity members Dempsey and Butler valued their association with the Order. Indeed, the description of Butler as a “lay Carmelite Brother” on his gravestone, and the fact that he was known in Sydney as “the Carmelite”, raises the question of whether he was not perhaps a professed member of the First Order (laybrother or cleric). This must be considered unlikely, but is not entirely impossible, given that there is no indication that he ever married. Therefore, the term “lay Carmelite”, which commends itself for its vagueness, is used in this paper.

## *The Irish Rebellion of 1798*

To understand the story of these two men it is necessary to recall the condition of Ireland at that time. Ireland had long been in a state of incipient warfare, Irish against English, Catholic against Protestant, landlord against tenant. The majority of Catholics lived in poverty, in the country in virtual serfdom, in the cities in degradation and squalor, ruled in their own land by an alien church, grasping landlords and an unrepresentative Parliament. The wealthy lived in fear of violent peasant protest movements led by a long series of secret societies. The most prominent of these at the end of the eighteenth century was the society of the Defenders, which championed the interests of Catholic farmers and small-holders and dealt out rough justice to tithe-proctors, Protestant landholders, and anyone else considered an enemy of the poor.

The news of the French Revolution in 1789 had a profound effect in Ireland. In the cities it radicalized the moderate, mainly Protestant, middle-class reformers; their organization, the Society of United Irishmen, by then a revolutionary group, was declared illegal in 1794. In the countryside the news helped to fuel a great stirring of protest among the Defenders, who began gathering in armed bands of a thousand or more.

In 1796 the United Irishmen attempted to form a popular front with the Defenders and, with the aid of a French armada which tried unsuccessfully to put ashore in Bantry Bay in December of that year, to bring about a republican revolution in Ireland. The abortive invasion was followed by savage repression: almost the whole of Ireland was put under martial law, administered by an undisciplined army and a corrupt magistracy. Largely as a result of this repression—which, in the south, had peasants sleeping out in



the fields at night for fear—rebellion erupted in May 1798. It was a haphazard and desperate affair. Its leaders were arrested or killed almost before it had begun, and the undisciplined rebel forces, in some places led by local priests, were defeated within weeks.

In the confusion and fear that followed the suppression of the Rebellion, many thousands were tried by courts martial or assizes and sentenced to death, prison, or transportation.<sup>13</sup> It was said by a contemporary historian that in view of the many summary executions some accused chose transportation rather than take the risk of appearing before the courts.<sup>14</sup> In many cases records of trial and even of sentence were not kept, to the great frustration of New South Wales governors, who did not know which prisoners were fit to pardon.<sup>15</sup>

Records were made, however, of the trials of Dempsey and Butler and survive among the Rebellion Papers in Dublin. John Butler was tried by court martial in Carlow on 3 September 1799. He was charged with larceny of carbines from yeomen in furtherance of the Rebellion, pleaded guilty, and was sentenced to death. The penalty was later commuted to transportation for life.<sup>16</sup>

A James Dempsey [*sic*] was tried by court martial in Wicklow on 5 and 6 December 1799 with five other defendants; between them they were accused of seven murders and a robbery. They appear, in the circumstances to have received a careful trial: the proceedings lasted two days, and there were twenty-four witnesses, nineteen of whom were called by the prisoners in their defense; the court record covers fourteen pages. Dempsey, with Richard Carr, Nicholas Delany and John Kavanagh, was accused of the murders of John Hope and John Brady, yeomen, and Dempsey alone with the murders of two unknown dragoons of the Antient Britons

Regiment. The murders of the yeomen were supposed to have taken place near Carnew in County Wexford about the time of the battle of Vinegar Hill, and those of the dragoons after the battle of Ballyellis.

The battle of Vinegar Hill, on 21 June 1798, was the final stroke against the Rebellion in Wexford: the lightly armed rebel troops were scattered by British artillery. Many insurgents, however, remained in arms and Dempsy was apparently part of the force under Edward Fitzgerald and Edward Roche which retreated into the mountains of Wicklow, where it joined up with the Wicklow rebels on the morning of 25 June, but were repulsed after taking many casualties in a conflict of nine hours. Some of the remainder then marched south to the Wexford frontier, with the hope of surprising the garrison of Carnew. They were intercepted on the Carnew road by a force of cavalry which included a detachment of the detested Antient Britons, who were held responsible for many atrocities. On them the rebels took a bloody revenge at Ballyellis, where the cavalry was lured into an ambush and all but annihilated.<sup>17</sup>

At his trial Dempsy called a number of witnesses, including his mother Catherine. They testified first of all that he had not been involved in the murder of the yeomen, and secondly that he was not present at Ballyellis, having been severely wounded in the left arm at the battle of Hacketstown. At the time the murder of the dragoons was alleged to have taken place he lay near death at the Scotts' house at Humphreystown, his wife and brother with him.

Dempsy and Carr were acquitted of the murders but found guilty of being rebels and were sentenced to serve His Majesty abroad during life. The other four defendants were sentenced to death. However, another judge in reviewing the case observed that the evidence was most complicated and

the chief prosecution witness, Bridget Nolan, unreliable; he recommended, therefore, that three of the four death sentences be commuted.<sup>18</sup>

It is not certain that the Dempsey tried at Wicklow can be identified with the Dempsey of the *Atlas*, whose place of trial is given as Clannel in the record of his pardon in 1811.<sup>19</sup> However, this is the only James Dempsey or Dempsey of whom a trial is recorded in the Rebellion Papers, and Australian records are often inaccurate. Moreover, there are links between the Wicklow court account and the tradition about Dempsey known to the Carmelites in 1881. This tradition maintained that Dempsey was convicted for his “pretended connection with the good Father Dixon at Vinegar Hill”,<sup>20</sup> in the area, as we have seen, in which the rebel Dempsey was active in June 1798. Certainly the Dempsey of the *Atlas* was sympathetic to the rebels, for he used to tell the young Columbus Fitzpatrick, whom we will meet again later, that “nothing on earth gave him so much pleasure as to have it in his power to oblige a Catholic, more especially if that Catholic should happen to be a United Irishman”.

### *Sydney in 1802*

The arrival of the *Atlas* in Sydney in October 1802 was the occasion of some official anxiety, for three months earlier another convict ship of the same name had arrived from Ireland after a seven-month voyage which the avarice and cruelty of its master, Richard Brooks, had turned into one of the worst in the history of transportation. Governor King was obliged to report to London that this first *Atlas* had arrived “in a situation shocking to Humanity”: 65 of its 179 convicts had died on the voyage, four more died shortly after arrival, and the survivors were landed in “a dreadfully dying and

emaciated state.”<sup>22</sup> Butler and Dempsey and their companions on the second *Atlas* fared much better, however. King was able to report with relief to the Transport Commissioners that the vessel had “lost no convicts on the passage, and the whole were in perfect health and fit for immediate labour”.<sup>23</sup>

Sydney in 1802 was just fourteen years old and still little more than a prison in the wilderness. George Suttor in 1800 had described it as having “more the appearance of a camp than a town, mixed with stumps and dead trees”.<sup>24</sup> However, the food situation in 1802 was less precarious than it had been a few years before; there were now 10,000 acres under cultivation and three windmills for grinding wheat and corn. Many soldiers had built houses and moved out of barracks, and there were already the beginnings of independent trade. The population was about 6,000: of these about 700 were civil and military personnel and their families, about 400 were free settlers, and the remainder had come as convicts to the colony.<sup>25</sup> There were settlements at Parramatta, Toongabbie, Prospect, and Castle Hill, but in Sydney a few houses at the Brickfields (present-day Goulburn Street), where the gallows stood, marked the limits of the small settlement.<sup>26</sup>

Convicts arriving in the colony were assigned either to Government work or to private employers. Most *Atlas* prisoners appear to have gone into Government employ in Parramatta or Castle Hill.<sup>27</sup> They worked for nine hours on weekdays and a half day on Saturdays.<sup>28</sup> Dempsey and Butler were both stone masons, a highly valued trade in the infant colony, and were soon at work on Government projects: at the time of the 1806 census both were employed in the construction of the Dawes Point Battery.<sup>29</sup> Butler had earlier worked at the Castle Hill quarry and by 1806 was overseer

of Government stone-quarrying.<sup>30</sup> Dempsey was appointed overseer of stone masons in 1806<sup>31</sup> and after the grant of his pardon, worked on the Tank Stream bridge in 1811<sup>32</sup> and as overseer of masons at the General Hospital (the famous “Rum Hospital”) from 1812 to 1815.

### *The Church in Botany Bay*

Three priests were transported to Australia for alleged involvement in the '98 Rebellion: Fathers Peter O'Neil, James Harold and James Dixon. Father O'Neil arrived in February 1801 on the *Ann*, which brought more than a hundred United Irishmen and other rebels to Sydney.<sup>34</sup> Governor King was quick to condemn him as “a priest of the most notorious, seditious and rebellious principles”,<sup>35</sup> and transferred him to Norfolk Island. Father O'Neil, however, who had been flogged and transported without trial, was manifestly innocent of the charges against him; the order for his release arrived on the *Atlas*, and he returned to Ireland in January 1803.<sup>36</sup>

Father Harold had arrived a year earlier, in January 1800 on the *Minerva*, another rebel ship, and fared little better with the Governor. Within weeks of his arrival he had fallen under suspicion of complicity in a planned uprising of Irish convicts. He, too, was exiled to Norfolk Island. He later spent a year in Tasmania in 1807-1808 and then an unimpressive eighteen months in Sydney before he left the colony in 1810.<sup>37</sup>

So it was that Dempsey and Butler found only one priest in New South Wales when they arrived. Father James Dixon had come on the *Friendship* in February 1800 but unlike his fellow priests had managed to create a favourable impression with the Governor, who granted him in April

1803 conditional emancipation, a salary of £60 per annum, and permission to celebrate Mass publicly each Sunday.

The first officially sanctioned Mass in the colony was celebrated on 15 May 1803.<sup>38</sup> The little evidence that survives of Father Dixon's ministry suggest that it also included baptisms, marriages, and accompanying the condemned to the scaffold.<sup>39</sup> In the meantime, Rome had become aware of the spiritual deprivation of Catholics in Australia. When Father Dixon wrote for missionary faculties, Propaganda Fide replied with a sweeping administrative stroke, erecting the Prefecture Apostolic of New Holland and appointing Dixon its first Prefect Apostolic.<sup>40</sup>

However, his public ministry was short-lived: a rebellion of convicts at Castle Hill in March 1804 confirmed the colony's worst fears about the "depraved turbulent dispositions" of the Irish and the seditious use to which they would put the privilege of religious toleration, and in the ensuing panic Father Dixon's official status was revoked. He returned to Ireland in 1808. Then, apart from Father Harold in 1809-1810 and Father O'Flynn's brief and colourful ministry in the summer of 1817-1818, the Catholics of the colony were without a priest until 1820.

Most of them probably did not care, for in what was virtually a whole society of criminals the standards of morality and religion were dismally low. The romantic view persists that Irish convicts were largely innocent victims of injustice who treasured their faith as a priceless possession, but the truth is that, apart from a small proportion of rebels and political offenders, many of whom were men of high principle, the great majority of Irish convicts consisted of habitual criminals distinguished from their English fellows only by a greater tendency to violence.<sup>41</sup> Life in the penal

colony often brutalised them further: exiles in a strange, wild country, they lived among scourges and fetters in an unnatural society, where prostitution and illegitimacy were the norm, and drunkenness the almost universal refuge. Their spiritual wretchedness shocked the early missionaries; “a people”, Father Ullathorne would write, “such as, since the deluge, has not been”,<sup>42</sup> victims, said Bishop Polding, of a system whereby a man “loses the heart of a man and gets the heart of a beast”.<sup>43</sup> Father Harold begged the Governor to exile him to South America, so little hope did he have for a people “devoted only to the gratification of their passions”, who obliged him “to spend [his] time in places of riot and intoxication”.<sup>44</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that there are few indications of Catholic life in the colony: in 1792 five Catholics petitioned Governor Phillip for the appointment of a priest and there was a similar petition in 1796; a small school for Catholic children was established sometime between 1803 and 1806; and Michael Hayes, whose brother was a Franciscan in Rome, wrote pleadingly about the need for priests in the colony.<sup>45</sup>

It was mainly among the '98 men, who were political offenders rather than habitual criminals, that most interest in the faith was to be found. As they were emancipated over the years, many of them became prosperous and well-regarded: James Meehan was deputy surveyor-general, Michael Dwyer chief constable, Hugh Byrne a prosperous farmer, Michael Hayes a wine and spirit merchant, William Davis a wealthy blacksmith and property owner, Edward Redmond a prominent inn-keeper and businessman.<sup>46</sup> Yet even among these men, says James Waldersee, “there was little evidence of any sustained efforts to further the cause of their professed religion, or to remedy the state of spiritual deprivation they

shared with their fellow Catholics in this remote corner of the world”. James Dempsey, he continues, “was virtually the only man, even among the heroes of ’98, who appeared to take an active and continued interest in serving his faith through positive action”.<sup>47</sup> This is perhaps too harsh a judgement, but it is true that in the absence of a priest most Catholics had lapsed into apathy, while Dempsey, on the contrary, distinguished himself for his commitment to the faith and to the spiritual well-being of his fellows.

He accompanied the condemned with prayers to the scaffold, and as executions were usually attended by large crowds, thereby took on a very public ministry, no doubt inviting the scorn that the ungodly reserved for the pious, and the ridicule and obstruction that even the official clergy had to support in the course of their duties.<sup>48</sup> We know of this ministry from a deposition of Elizabeth McKeon which states that she saw Dempsey reading prayers “for one Hugh McLear and one Collins” as they were led up Pitt Row to execution, with a multitude of people looking on.<sup>49</sup> Thomas Collins and Hugh McLair were executed for highway robbery on 1 November 1816,<sup>50</sup> and it seems reasonable to think that Dempsey had been performing this ministry throughout the years when Catholics were without a priest, or at least since the departure of Father Harold in 1810.

By the time of Father O’Flynn’s arrival in 1817 Dempsey must be considered in some respects the centre of the Catholic community. His house in Kent Street was a prayer and communications centre for the Irish and the base for a pious confraternity which he established. But before we consider these things in more detail it is worth tracing the fortunes of Dempsey and Butler after their arrival in the colony.



### *Prosperity in New South Wales*

There is comparatively little documentation of John Butler's life in New South Wales. He was granted a free pardon in December 1809 by Colonel Paterson,<sup>51</sup> one of the military governors who ruled the colony in 1808-1809 after the Rum Rebellion and the expulsion of Governor Bligh. However, all such pardons were declared void by the new Governor, Lachlan Macquarie, on his arrival at the end of 1809. Butler petitioned Macquarie for a new pardon, noting that in his eight years in New South Wales he had spent two years at the Government quarry at Castle Hill and the remaining six as overseer of Government stone-quarrying.<sup>52</sup> He had to wait until January 1814 for Macquarie to grant a conditional pardon, and until 1827 for his absolute pardon.<sup>53</sup> He remained in Government employ at least until 1820, when he was still quarry overseer, and seems to have held 30 acres in the District of Sydney.<sup>54</sup>

For James Dempsey, on the other hand, the bitter bread of exile soon turned into a feast. Like Butler, he had obtained an absolute pardon under Colonel Paterson, but was successful in having it confirmed by Governor Macquarie. He gained his free pardon on 11 March 1811, only the fourth of the *Atlas* prisoners to do so,<sup>55</sup> which is probably an indication both of good character and of considerable ability as a stone mason.

In January 1810 Dempsey made the first of the many ventures in real estate and building that were to make him a wealthy man. On this occasion he purchased land in the Rocks area in partnership with John Ahearne, the Assistant Engineer and Superintendent of the New Store and a fellow *Atlas* exile, a business partnership which lasted some years.<sup>56</sup> Between 1814 and 1821 Dempsey advertised in the Sydney Gazette at least eight houses for sale or rent,<sup>57</sup> some of them

prestigious stone dwellings, of which there were very few in Sydney at the time.<sup>58</sup>

During 1816 he tried his hand as a spirit merchant, importing rum from Mauritius, which he retailed for ten shillings a gallon, and offering to accept spirits for half the purchase price of a two-storey house in Cumberland Street.<sup>59</sup> In 1820 he advertised for sale a farm of thirty acres, all cleared, at Wilberforce.<sup>60</sup> In the same year he applied to the Governor for an additional grant of land, telling Macquarie that he had now resolved to make his permanent home in the colony. He was granted 60 acres.<sup>61</sup> The following year he was assigned two convict servants, paying the Colonial Secretary £3/19/0.<sup>62</sup>

He also continued to work as a mason. The Macquarie years (1810-21) were years of great expansion in the colony and of much private and public building. Skilled tradesmen were few, and wages in the building trade were high. Dempsey earned £37 for work on the house of Ellis Bent, the Judge Advocate,<sup>63</sup> £24 for work on the Tank Stream Bridge,<sup>64</sup> and £20 for an inscription stone for the new barracks.<sup>65</sup> He also worked from 1812 to 1815 as superintendent of masons at the General Hospital, where among his other duties, he was responsible for employment of staff and for wages.<sup>66</sup>

Dempsey had purchased or built for himself a house in Kent Street (formerly Back Soldiers' Row) sometime before August 1814.<sup>67</sup> Kent Street was then the westernmost street in Sydney, overlooking the waters of Cockle Bay (later Darling Harbour). In later years it would become a somewhat prestigious location; Judge Dowling lived there after 1828 in an elegant stone house which survives among Kent Street's offices and warehouses today. But in 1814 Kent Street had not yet attained such heights of glamour, and most of the

houses were humble wooden structures, though some were more substantial. Thomas Glover, also a stonemason, lived there, and Dempsey's neighbour was Thomas Day, a boatbuilder; they were all reasonably prosperous men.<sup>68</sup>

Dempsey's Kent Street home would come to play a large part in the history of Australian Catholicism. It was "a good substantial dwelling house with two good front rooms, a fire place in each; a good large kitchen, two bed-rooms in the rear; together with a large Allotment of Garden Ground in cultivation and a capital Well always supplied with good Water"; it is variously described as "behind the Barracks" or "by the water side in Cockle Bay".<sup>69</sup> According to Ambrose Fitzpatrick it stood "on the western side of Kent Street, midway between Margaret Place and Erskine Street".<sup>70</sup> From Kent Street in those days one looked out on "one of the most romantic prospects the eye can behold"—the waters of Cockle Bay and the thickly wooded, undulating country on its western shore,<sup>71</sup> a scene that can scarcely be imagined as one looks across Darling Harbour today.

Sydney in 1814 was changing in many ways: the population had grown to 13,000;<sup>72</sup> the discovery of a path across the Blue Mountains had finally opened the western plains to settlement; a steady trickle of free settlers and the emancipation or completion of sentence of many convicts was bringing a new character to the colony, now no longer merely a gaol; and Macquarie, in pursuit of a great vision, was building roads, schools and churches, and legislating for the moral improvement of the citizens. Some things, however, remained the same: there were still kangaroos and emus in the Domain; there were still masters who treated their assigned servants like beasts; men were still flogged and hanged as a public spectacle; Aborigines still occasionally attacked travellers on the Parramatta road; men

and women in alarming numbers still spent their days in drunkenness and dissipation; and still the Catholics were without a priest who could minister to their spiritual needs. In 1817, according to Michael Hayes, there were 1,100 children of Catholic parents not baptised, some ten years of age, and many people desirous of marriage forced to live in concubinage.<sup>73</sup>

Some found consolation at Dempsey's in Kent Street. The rosary was recited there each day, and at some time (perhaps at Father Dixon's suggestion)<sup>74</sup> a confraternity was formed, consisting at first of five or six men but gradually increasing to twenty-five, with Dempsey at the head.<sup>75</sup> They gathered each day at Kent Street for the rosary, and were joined by other Catholics on Sundays and holy days. There is a suggestion that Dempsey had some confraternity members residing with him in Kent Street; if so, this must have been Australia's first Christian community.<sup>76</sup>

Almost the only surviving eyewitness accounts of Catholic life in those years are contained in the recollections of Columbus and Ambrose Fitzpatrick. Bernard Fitzpatrick, their father, a convict and something of a ne'er-do-well, was transported to Sydney in 1810; his wife Catherine and the children followed him as free settlers. After living at Windsor on the Hawkesbury, Catherine and the children moved to Sydney in 1817 and settled in Sussex Street, not far from Dempsey's.<sup>77</sup> Catherine Fitzpatrick joined the Kent Street prayer group and, in company with a Mr McGuire, used to gather the children of both sexes there to teach them the catechism; thus they learned to adore the God of glory in three Persons, to treasure their faith as a divine gift and a heavenly light, to refute the calumnies of the Protestants, and to give thanks to God that in his holy Church they had a good mother against whom all her enemies would never prevail.<sup>78</sup>

Mrs Fitzpatrick also founded a small choir that used to sing Vespers at Dempsey's on Sunday evening. When Father Therry arrived in 1820 he was astonished to find this "lay church", with a choir which could sing the liturgical services and, in the Fitzpatrick boys, some ready-trained altar servers.<sup>79</sup>

Whatever other activities were taking place in those years we will never know in detail because of the fragmentary nature of the evidence. Dempsey's work with the condemned, for example, we know of only through the chance survival of a reference to it in another context. Columbus Fitzpatrick says that Dempsey devoted "the better part of his time to works of charity and religious exercises".<sup>80</sup> He was the kind of man to whom people turn for help in trouble, and we know of a few such cases which give us a glimpse of his charitableness and of the respect in which he was held in the Catholic community. In 1823, for example, he had a letter from Dennis McHugh, who had recently been transferred from Newcastle to Port Macquarie on the north coast. McHugh had expected his wife to follow but she, to his "great Surprise and Asttonishment" went to Sydney, after selling all their goats and fowls and taking the £15 they had received for the house at Newcastle. McHugh wrote to Dempsey:

....I have no other friend on this side of the Globe to address my Greivence to but you in this my distress and uneasy state. I am going to mention the full sentiments of my brest, not knowing but this might be my last letter to you... Grief and distress of mind has very much impaired my helth; at the present time I am hardly able to write or sit up in my bed, if the almighty doesn't grant me some relief I doubt it

will put a period to my life. I solmly declare since I heard my wife went to Sydney that I am not able to find language to explain my tortures.<sup>81</sup>

McHugh asks Dempsey to find his wife and direct her to come to Port Macquarie, and if she will not, he says, “from this sickly bed I strictly notice you, and that in the name of God, not to give her one Shilling on my Acct, until the day of her Death”. He thinks that she took from Newcastle more than she ever merited, but if she comes back and he had ten thousand pounds, she would have all. If he dies, he wants Dempsey to handle his estate.<sup>82</sup>

*Father O’Flynn and the Leaving of the Blessed Sacrament*

On 9 November 1817, unexpectedly, a priest arrived in the colony. He was Father Jeremiah O’Flynn, a former Cistercian and sometime missionary in the French West Indies, who had been appointed Prefect Apostolic of New Holland through the good offices in Rome of Father Richard Hayes, OFM. In London, however, the Colonial Office refused him permission to proceed to the colony, for Father O’Flynn, semi-literate (he was an Irish speaker) and lacking the manners of a gentleman, had failed to impress there. He sailed without authorisation nonetheless.<sup>83</sup>

In Sydney Governor Macquarie was also unimpressed with the priest, who was, indeed, less than honest with the Governor, assuring him that his credentials would arrive on the next vessel. Macquarie allowed him to remain until the situation was clarified on condition that he did not engage in any public ministry. No credentials arrived, however, and O’Flynn in the meantime was busy performing baptisms and

marriages and celebrating Masses at which Catholics assembled without leave of their overseers, which Macquarie viewed as a threat to Government regulation.<sup>84</sup> Among other things O’Flynn confirmed young Columbus Fitzpatrick, then about seven, at the Parramatta home of John Lacy in 1817.<sup>85</sup>

When Macquarie gave orders for the priest’s deportation, he was at first hidden by the Catholics “in some skulking place in the country”, to use the Governor’s phrase, but was eventually arrested, held in custody, and deported on the *David Shaw* on 20 May 1818. There were petitions of protest from the Catholic soldiers of the 48th Regiment, of which a large proportion was Irish, and from 400 Catholic and Protestant settlers, but they were to no avail.

Father O’Flynn took with him to England a “remonstrance and petition” to Earl Bathurst, Secretary of State for the Colonies, from the Catholics of New South Wales. It was a protest about the treatment of their priest and a moving Celtic lament for the spiritual deprivation they suffered, “long toiling in this land, grey through vicissitudes, approaching towards the Grave, disconsolate and wo-worn with perplexities” and now once again bereft of a priest’s “Spiritual aid for our Comfort and reconciliation in our last days”.<sup>86</sup> It was signed on behalf of the Catholic community by twelve of its most respected members, James Dempsey among them.<sup>87</sup>

Either by accident or design Father O’Flynn left the Blessed Sacrament behind him when he was deported in May 1818. This would normally have been contrary to canon law, but it seems that in penal-law Ireland it was customary to entrust the Blessed Sacrament to lay care in an emergency, and for laypeople to take Communion to condemned prisoners. Whether the Sacrament was left in James Dempsey’s house in Kent Street or William Davis’ in

Charlotte Place has been the subject of a long-lasting controversy, with both families continuing to assert their ancestral traditions and to guard artefacts associated with them.<sup>88</sup>

Davis, a blacksmith turned pikemaker, had been transported in 1800 for his part in the Irish Rebellion and was, until his death in 1843, one of the most prominent and wealthy Catholics in Sydney. The site for Saint Patrick's, Church Hill, commenced in 1840, was donated by him and has long been associated with the Blessed Sacrament incident.<sup>89</sup> There is no space here to deal at length with this controversy. It will have to be sufficient to note that the rediscovery of the Fitzpatrick Letters in 1965 seemed to cast grave doubt on the credibility of the Davis tradition, which is attested only by people who arrived in New South Wales years after the event. The only eyewitness accounts are those of the Fitzpatrick brothers, who maintain unequivocally that it was at Dempsey's house that the Blessed Sacrament was preserved and venerated. Subsequent historians tended to side with the Dempsey/Fitzpatrick account, but Fr John Hosie has since argued plausibly that both traditions are likely to be true: that the Blessed Sacrament was venerated in both houses and moved clandestinely between them to avoid attracting the attention of the authorities to the gatherings of Catholics for prayer.<sup>90</sup>

According to the Fitzpatricks, Dempsey organised a group of men to keep perpetual watch over the Blessed Sacrament, and converted a room of his house into a little chapel. Catholics came there, even from the distant settlements, for a Sunday paraliturgy based on the prayers of the Mass, for Sunday Vespers, and for the weekday rosary, already a tradition in Kent Street. It is difficult to discover who were the men who kept watch over the Blessed



Sacrament. The same 1881 article which records what was then known about the lay Carmelites in Botany Bay also states that John Butler was one of the “guardsmen”, though its author did not know that he was the anonymous second Carmelite.<sup>91</sup> Father N. McNally stated in a paper given in 1941 that the “Council of Protection” of the Blessed Sacrament comprised James Dempsey, Michael Hayes, John Lacy, Hugh Byrne, Francis Kenny, Martin Burke and Michael Dwyer.<sup>92</sup>

If apathy had prevailed among the Catholics of the colony before 1817, Father O’Flynn’s truncated stay did something to rouse them, for after his departure the Catholic community formed regional committees centered around the houses of some of the more prominent and well-established ‘98 men, such as Lacy at Parramatta, Dwyer at Liverpool, Byrne at Campbelltown and Kenny at Appin. In Columbus Fitzpatrick’s words, there was thus “a union in prayer and an intercourse of intelligence amongst all classes of Catholics in the country, all emanating from or culminating to the great centre in Kent Street”.<sup>93</sup> These were men of considerable prestige in the Catholic community: Michael Dwyer, for example, the “Wicklow Chieftain”, was one of the heroes of the Rebellion, having surrendered only in 1803 after holding out in the Wicklow Mountains against all efforts of the British to capture him. He and Hugh Byrne were among the five State prisoners who arrived in New South Wales in 1806 with the status of free settlers.

The Blessed Sacrament remained for about eighteen months, until it was removed by the Abbé Florence Louis de Quellen de Villégée, chaplain of the *Uranie*, a French ship which visited Sydney between 18 November and 26 December 1819.<sup>94</sup> The Abbé may well have recorded the surprise he must have felt at finding the Blessed Sacrament

in a country without a priest, but his records perished when the *Uranie* was lost on the Falkland Islands on its journey home.

When Doctor Ullathorne arrived in Sydney in 1833 he heard the story, and recorded it, with some understandable romantic colouration, a few years later:

It is mournfully beautiful to contemplate these men of sorrow gathered around the bread of life—bowed down before the Crucified—no voice but the silent one of faith—not a priest within six thousand miles to extend to them that pledge of pardon to repentance, whose near presence they see and feel.<sup>95</sup>

However, the best account of the incident, though written many years later, is undoubtedly that of Columbus Fitzpatrick. It is worth quoting at length from his reminiscences, published in the Goulburn *Argus* in 1865:

I am further induced to write on this subject [the progress of Catholicity in this country] from the fact that there are now persons in Sydney publishing garbled accounts of these matters, of which they know nothing personally and of which they are ill-informed... I am led to this train of thought by reading a little work, published in Sydney, bearing the title of “St Mary’s”, the writer of which not only makes several mistakes, but he does what is infinitely worse—he entirely ignores the heroic conduct of men who, by their virtuous lives and their unconquerable fidelity to religion, served as a beacon to the wavering of their own creed and gained the esteem and friendship of their

separated brethren. In speaking of Father O'Flynn, the writer of "St. Mary's" calls him the Very Rev. W. Flinn. Now his name was the Very Rev. Jeremiah O'Flynn, and a very finelooking man he was. He confirmed me, and I quite well remember him.

Again the writer says that Father O'Flynn left the Blessed Sacrament in the house of a devoted Catholic near the present site of St. Patrick's church. This is another mistake. Father O'Flynn left the Blessed Sacrament, in a pix, at the house of the late Mr James Dempsey of Kent Street, near to Erskine Street, and next door to the residence of Mr. Thomas Day, the boat builder, which is not near St Patrick's church. When Father O'Flynn came to this country he found, amongst other good and zealous Catholics, the late Mr. James Dempsey, a stonemason by trade, and who, having neither wife nor children in this country, was enabled to devote the better part of his time to works of charity and religious exercises, thus fitting himself for the post he was so soon and unexpectedly called upon to fill: for when Father O'Flynn found that he would not be permitted to remain with his flock, he, in humble imitation of his Divine Master, determined on leaving them the last pledge of his love:<sup>96</sup> and he did so, for he left the Blessed Sacrament in a pix with Mr. Dempsey, who consecrated the best room in his house for the safe-keeping of what he prized more than any earthly treasure.

Father O'Flynn made a good selection when he chose Mr. Dempsey to be custodian of that sacred treasure he was about leaving [*sic*] to his bereaved flock, and well did Mr. Dempsey perform the duty of safe-keeping of the Blessed Sacrament. Mr. Dempsey secured the assistance of five or

six other religious old men, whose whole duty and pleasure was to watch and pray in that room, in which an altar had been erected and a tabernacle placed to receive the holy pix. The room was converted into a little chapel, and it was no unusual thing on a Sunday, when Catholics could assemble to join in the prayers at Mass being read in that room, to see many of them kneeling under the verandah, aye even in the street, much to the amusement of the scoffers, who said we ought to be sun-struck; but despite all their scoffs the real Catholics continued to meet at Mr. Dempsey's until the arrival of Father Connolly and Father Therry [in May 1820]; in fact, it was no unusual thing to see Catholics from the most distant part of the colony assembled there.

After the departure of Father O'Flynn, the Catholics in the different parts of the country formed themselves into committees, having in their centres Mr Lacy, of Parramatta; Mr Dwyer, of Liverpool; Mr Byrne, of Campbelltown; Mr. Kenny, of Appin, &c; so that there was a union in prayer and an intercourse of intelligence amongst all classes of Catholics in the country, all emanating from or culminating to the great centre in Kent Street. In those days, when there was no railroad, no coaches, and very few horses, it was not counted a wonder to see a man walk from Campbelltown to Sydney, or from Windsor to Sydney, on purpose to hear from some of the late arrivals something about that home they loved so dearly. To these men Mr. Dempsey's house was more than St. Mary's was to us three months ago,<sup>97</sup> seeing that they could not pray before the altar they loved so much in their early days, but they could get there information on all those subjects nearest and dearest to them. Among the many who came from distant parts in

those days, there was one who I particularly remember, on account of his being not only a very fine man but also a very fine singer: we used to sing all the vespers in those days as they did in St. Mary's lately; his name was Francis Kenny, and he was afterwards a very wealthy man in this district, and was the father of the present Kennys, of Kennys Point. With him there used to come an old French gentleman we used to call Louis, but I forget his name now,<sup>98</sup> but he was of good service to the Catholics. When a French frigate came into Sydney having on board a priest, who was not only surprised but delighted to find so many good and zealous Catholics in such a remote corner of the globe, where he expected to find nothing but sin and iniquity, Louis used to act as interpreter for the priest, who could not understand or speak English.

There could be nothing in the course of events more fortunate for the Catholics than the arrival of this French priest at that time, as his communion with the Catholics showed our separated brethren one of the advantages of our religion, and raised the Catholics in the eyes of the Governor and the public, who were astonished to find that the enlightened gallant officers of the *Urianna* [i.e. *Uranie*] worshipped God at the same altar and in the same manner as did their poor despised Catholic fellow-townsmen. That these officers, who were so polite and were on visiting terms at Government House, should kneel down with those poor Irish—for there were no rich Catholics in those days—in that small room, in that obscure house, was to the Protestants a source of astonishment, but it was a fact and they could not get over it.

When Father O'Flynn came to this country Mr. Dempsey was a master-builder, and had gained by this industry and intelligence the goodwill of all classes from the Governor down, besides having made a competency for himself; and as he had no family, he was esteemed a well-to-do man. But when the dispute arose between the Governor and Father O'Flynn, and it was found that Mr. Dempsey sided with the priest against the Governor, he at once lost caste, and with it many of his influential friends. But after Father O'Flynn was sent out of the country, and it was proved that Mr. Dempsey not only refused to go to church, but that he kept an open house, wherein Popish rites (as they termed our devotions) were celebrated, and that publicly, he became at once an object of their aversion, if not their hatred, and he was put on the list of incorrigibles, as the professing Catholics were often called by persons in authority. Nor was this to be wondered at, if we take a dispassionate view of society as it then stood in this country....

All I want is to show the Catholics of the present day that they owe a great deal to the old Catholics of the country, and that standing out prominently before them all is James Dempsey's name, which ought to be inscribed in St. Mary's in letters of gold; seeing that all I have written about him was only an introduction of him as his actual services did not begin until the building was commenced. He then it was who carried up those good old walls under every disadvantage a man could labour under, and yet the Catholics of today and their favourite writers quite ignore him and others something like him. Poor James Dempsey, may you rest in peace!<sup>99</sup>

Columbus' younger brother Ambrose also witnessed these events, though he was at the time only four or five years old.<sup>100</sup> In later years he corroborated his brother's account in a letter to Cardinal Moran and in an interview in the *Freeman's Journal*, in which he declared to the interviewer that he remembered going

to Dempsey's house with his mother scores of times. The Blessed Sacrament... was kept in a special room which was regarded as a "holy of holies", no one (save James Dempsey, who occasionally put it in order) entering it, the door being kept open while the faithful few reverently knelt outside and prayed. With respect to the "perpetual watch" which was kept by men taking turns day and night as watchers, Mr. Fitzpatrick mentioned the names of half-a-dozen persons who performed this pious office. Mr. Fitzpatrick positively declares that no such gathering ever took place at any other house... He remembers the French priest and though not positive on this point, believes that when the priest found the Blessed Sacrament under such peculiar circumstances he expressed his great astonishment and removed it, leaving the sacred vessel in its place.

Perhaps the Kent Street Confraternity and the "guardsmen" of the Blessed Sacrament of 1818-1819 can be identified with the Confraternity of Saint Joseph, of which John Butler was a member and which is mentioned on his gravestone, though I have been unable to find any evidence to link the groups securely. Nevertheless, it can be said on the basis of the available evidence that the spiritual and community life which was based on Dempsey's house was

much more significant in the Catholic life of early Sydney than has been generally acknowledged, and that the history of Catholicism in Australia begins, not with the arrival of the clergy, but with what we would call today a basic Christian community and with the efforts of lay people to keep the Faith alive in conditions of great spiritual deprivation.

### *The Building of Saint Mary's Chapel*

The deportation of Father O'Flynn, which created a minor sensation in England and Ireland, had the effect of focussing attention on the plight of Australian Catholics.<sup>102</sup> Consequently salaries were provided for the first official chaplains, who sailed from Cork in December 1819 and arrived in Sydney on 3 May 1820. They were Fathers John Joseph Therry and Philip Connolly.<sup>103</sup> In the meantime a deputation of Catholics had petitioned Commissioner Bigge, then conducting his exhaustive enquiry into the state of the colony, asking for his aid in securing the services of three priests. Dempsey, as would become usual now, was among the prominent members of the Catholic Community chosen to sign.<sup>104</sup>

On their arrival the two priests stayed at William Davis' house and celebrated Mass at the Reddingtons' Harp-without-the-Crown Hotel in Pitt Row.<sup>105</sup> Therry's diary records on a later occasion "Heard confessions at Dempsey's".<sup>106</sup>

It was Father Therry who would become the dominant figure, for the two priests soon quarrelled, and Father Conolly, though the senior, moved to Van Diemen's Land in 1821. Therry was then about thirty, not well-educated and something of a contradictory personality, but, says O'Farrell, a "dynamo of apostolic energy and destined to become the hero of his flock". A "pious, zealous obstinate man", Bishop



Polding would later remark, “who... kept the embers of religion alive when a few more capable persons would not have done half so well.”<sup>107</sup>

One of the priests’ first priorities was the erection of a chapel. Within two months of their arrival a public meeting was convened to consider the matter. It was held in the Court House on 30 June 1820 and was attended by “all the respectable Roman Catholics of the Colony, and also some Protestant gentlemen of sentiments friendly to the design”. A committee, consisting of the two priests and seven laymen, was formed to raise funds for the project. Once again Dempsey found himself in company with some of the most prosperous and respected members of the Catholic community: William Davis, its wealthiest member; James Meehan, deputy surveyor-general, its most important public figure; Michael Hayes, whose literary exertions had been at least partly responsible for the arrival of Father O’Flynn; Edward Redmond and Martin Short, both prominent innkeepers and men of property; and Patrick Moore, a landholder in the Campbelltown area. All were ’98 men.<sup>108</sup>

So with this strong committee, the goodwill of the Governor, and the moral and financial support of many Protestant merchants and officials, the chapel project was off to a good start. Governor Macquarie granted a two-acre site on the outskirts of town, near Hyde Park. It was an unfashionable part of Sydney and, among Catholics, a controversial site, for its proximity to the convict barracks reminded many of them of things they would rather forget. But the choice of site, made apparently at the instigation of James Meehan, which gives Saint Mary’s the park-like setting it enjoys today, has long since been vindicated.<sup>109</sup>

Macquarie laid the foundation stone on 29 October 1820 in one of the splendid ceremonies that Father Therry

loved. Columbus Fitzpatrick was altar boy and held the trowel.<sup>110</sup> Money came in at an encouraging rate, so that by December 1821 the building fund amounted to £638/12/6.<sup>111</sup> The largest donations were from William and Catherine Davis, who gave £50 each; the next largest from James Dempsey and James Meehan, who each gave £30; the Governor gave £21, and John Butler, still working as quarry overseer, gave £2.<sup>112</sup>

But even at the beginning of the project there were omens of trouble to come. Father Therry wanted his church to be a grand edifice that would proclaim to anyone who thought the Irish an inferior race the glory and splendour of their Faith. More practical minds were dismayed at his ambitions, and Francis Greenway, the colony's foremost architect, withdrew from the project in opposition to what he regarded as the extravagance of the plans.<sup>113</sup> Recalls Columbus Fitzpatrick:

The Catholics were badly off for a church, but Father Therry, who was a far-seeing man, would not be satisfied with a small one. This led to dissension among the Catholics, many of whom could not enter into his views or see the necessity for so large a church as he intended to build. Among these was Mr. Greenaway [*sic*] the architect, employed to make the plans. He said, what was true, that Father Therry was but a young man and did not know what such a building would cost, that any one must be mad who would suppose that the Catholics of Sydney would require such a large building for the next hundred years at least. Many such arguments were used by well disposed persons, but Father Therry was firm, and at last his plan was adopted by the Catholic committee.<sup>114</sup>

In fact, Saint Mary's was conceived in haste and begun before proper plans were drawn up or estimates of the cost made. It continued to lack proper plans over the years, to the great frustration of all who had to work with Father Therry on the undertaking.

Foremost among those workers was James Dempsey. He was a member of the original fund-raising committee and a generous donor to the project (giving well over £200 in the first three or four years). From the beginning he was superintendent of construction, and, to judge from the technical suggestions contained in one of his letters to Therry, must have functioned also as *ad hoc* architect of the project.<sup>115</sup> It was Dempsey who carried the building forward in the face of the almost insurmountable obstacles posed by Therry's chaotic approach to finance, for the priest's lifelong habit was simply to plunge ever more deeply into debt, constantly expecting "a merciful interposition of Divine Providence" in his favour.<sup>116</sup>

Unlike Therry, Dempsey was careful with money. Some of the pay sheets he made up meticulously every week survive in the Therry Papers, showing the wages paid to the twenty or thirty labourers and masons who were employed on the building in 1823. Labourers were paid 2/6 per day; skilled labourers, mostly masons, £2 a week and more; Patrick Maher with his horse and cart cost 8/- a day; and Dempsey paid himself £2/2/0 a week as overseer.<sup>117</sup> A later tradition maintains that John Butler also worked on Saint Mary's, though his name is not on the surviving pay sheets.<sup>118</sup>

Dempsey resigned from the project at least twice. An angry resignation letter survives from 1822: he claims that Father Therry owes him £100 and is particularly injured at

having been accused of financial mismanagement. “No longer is it in my power to give satisfaction to you”, he writes, “being continually abraded [=upbraided] whenever I send in my accounts... ’Tho I had the misfortune of being a convict I never once thought of being a thife”. Dempsey’s replacement, whom he describes as “an efishent man and a good scoller not like me”, did not last long, however, and Dempsey was soon back as superintendent.<sup>119</sup>

Friction continued between the two men throughout the following year. Dempsey argued that the rate of building should be limited according to the finance available, but Therry would recognise no limitations on his dreams. By the end of 1823 funds had run out, and Dempsey wrote to Therry insisting that work be stopped until more money could be raised. He had been obliged to spend his own money to pay the workmen to keep the project going but could meet the growing expenses no longer. As James Waldersee remarks, Dempsey’s “efforts to meet the just debts incurred in the building, and his desire to see that the wages of the workmen were paid, even at his own risk, does him tremendous credit... In fact, the more we learn of Dempsey’s role in building the first St. Mary’s, the more we must wonder if ever it could have been completed without him.”<sup>120</sup>

Dempsey’s letter reveals his commitment to the Saint Mary’s project despite the immense difficulties under which he laboured, his concern for the tradesmen employed on it, his strength and directness of character, and something of his robust and unaffected piety. Not a well-educated man, he generally had his letters written by another, but here has added a blunt confidential postscript in his own hand. The original spelling is retained:

Sydney December the 31st 1823

Rev'd Sir,

It is with reluctance that I am obliged to inform you that I can no longer continue to carry on the work of St. Mary's Church, as my means is completely exhausted, for along with expending my own money, I have trespassed on that of others entrusted to my charge. I was unwilling that anything disrespectful should be said of that building, or that the men should have any cause to complain of bad payment. I also relied on your word and promise, when it appeared you were not satisfied to stop the works. This last fortnight I have been called upon by two persons of whose money I had sums in charge and were I call'd on by every person whose money I am entrusted with I assure you, I should be obliged to sell either my houses or cattle to meet the demands, and I should think it were hard should such be made if I could not discharge them without those resources. It is wholly impossible for me to carry on the building any longer on my own accounts for the great expense which is likely to be incurred now, with sawyers, masons, carpenters and laborers, will require a great deal of money to be commenced upon. The mason work on the main building will require 14 to 16 men between the quarry and the building. Carriage of stone will not be less than 10 or 15 shillings per day. Two pounds ten shillings per week will hardly defray the expense of time. Watchmen, blacksmiths etc. will add to the expenditure.

The sum now advanced by me on account of the building is very little less than three hundred pounds, and this I hope you will see settled and acknowledged, as I

expect to be paid by some means. My subscription to the Chapel I consider has been fair and liberal according to my means (which are not indeed so great as may be imagined), for on examination it may be found that between me and my son, it amounted to not less than ninety pounds. Respecting the men you had on the store belonging to the Chapel, if it meet your approval, I shall endeavor to keep them employed myself for some time, or until means shall have been produced for the carrying on of the work again, and I shall give the Chapel funds credit for them, equal to the charge to it of Government for their service.

*[In Dempsey's hand:]*

Reverent Sir, this is known only between you and me. I wish to remind you that some time back you promised me that you would settel with me and pay me with some of them nots of hand you hold belonging to the Capel fonds. You ware pleast to say also that you would Draw money from government before would have the work stopt. I have told you frequently that I should stop the work but it appears to me you seeme to take but very litel notice of what I says of leat. You seemd very much offended when your own money was payd out on the Chapel and told me you never was so much offended since you came to the Coleny as you ware by me. But I return thanks to the Almighty God for having it in my power to make it good out of my own. But its no use for me to be offended for being out of my money ever since the Chapel commenct as I have. Even when there was plenty of money in the Bank I was generally Advanct from £20 to £100 pounds. But I hope in God that my simpel

generasidy wont be the mains of any Coolness between you and me. The Builden has being carred on to this without any complaints respecting the payments and I hope in God that nothing will take place that will ever bring Disgrace on that building or on the Minnester of Christ whome God will be pleased to intrust with its inspection.

I remain Sir yours truly

\*JAMES DEMPSEY

I hope you will excues the indifrent maner this Last part is Dun as I Did not wish to let any other person see or know it.<sup>121</sup>

Dempsey's son Cornelius, who is mentioned in this letter, had arrived on the *Minerva* on 15 December 1821:<sup>122</sup> his father had not seen him or any of his family since he left Ireland in chains. Cornelius lived at first with his father in Kent Street and was also a generous donor to the Chapel fund.<sup>123</sup> On 16 August 1824 Cornelius married Jane McGuigan, an Australian-born girl. Later they settled in the Braidwood area and, over the next twenty years, had eight children. There are still Dempsey descendants there.<sup>124</sup>

By September 1824 only the walls of the chapel were up. Governor Brisbane, though exasperated by the ambitious nature of the building for "the tinsel and show" of Roman Catholic worship, advised London that financial support should be provided for the roofing and flooring of the chapel, which then still required over £3,000 to complete it. Therry, realising that his ambition of building a grand church had overreached the capacity of the Catholic community to pay for it, attempted to persuade the Government to assume full responsibility for its completion, but to no avail.<sup>125</sup>

Dempsey continued as superintendent of construction as well as administering the Chapel Fund.<sup>126</sup> He had learned to deal firmly with Father Therry. Events behind the scenes may be guessed at from a letter the priest wrote to Winifred Redmond, who served as his unofficial banker, towards the end of 1824:

Dear Madam, the public funds being exhausted, I am obliged on account of the Chapel Funds and through fear of Mr Dempsey's tongue, to infringe this evening on my resources for the sum of fifty dollars.<sup>127</sup>

Nevertheless, Dempsey was still having to buy materials from his own pocket to enable building to continue at all. These purchases represented substantial donations—£100 in June 1824 and £72 for lumber in October 1825—and he made Father Therry acknowledge them through advertisements in the *Gazette*.<sup>128</sup>

Towards the end of 1825 it was decided to send Dempsey to India to solicit funds for the chapel, presumably from soldiers formerly garrisoned in New South Wales. He rented out his house in Kent Street<sup>129</sup> and managed to extract from Father Therry a promise that on his return he would be repaid £116 owing to him, which he had advanced to pay workmen and to purchase materials. (He was still owed the money in 1828).<sup>130</sup> Therry, in the meantime, was shopping around to provide his principal financier with the cheapest possible passage to India, such as would be taken by men “who being in rather humble circumstances would be satisfied with ordinary accomodation and a steerage passage”.<sup>131</sup>

Finally Dempsey and a man named Mangan sailed for India on the *Norfolk* on 7 October 1825.<sup>132</sup> It was a



disappointing trip, as Dempsey reported from Calcutta four months later. He was at a great disadvantage not being able to speak Portuguese and when he did manage to make himself understood in Madras the local clergy, he complains, “entirely disapproved of my mission and said that it was a most foolish attempt as the Catholicks there were poor”. When he visited the local bishop, His Lordship declined to come downstairs to see him but gave a donation of ten rupees, “which I had a good mind to send back again”, wrote Dempsey, “but [for] being unwilling to give offence or to deprive the funds of even one Rupee”.<sup>133</sup> He returned from India on the *Prince Regent*, which reached Sydney on 12 May 1826.<sup>134</sup> Meticulous as always, he submitted a detailed account of his trip, which had sustained a considerable loss, costing £53/8/6 and raising only £35/7/3 in donations.<sup>135</sup>

While Dempsey was away, work on the chapel had virtually ground to a halt. It still lacked a roof and flooring, and the Catholics were obliged to hold Mass in the Court House or in the schoolroom in Castlereagh Street, while the chapel stood desolate and open to the weather.<sup>136</sup> But even in their borrowed accommodation the Catholics were able to outdo in liturgical splendour the Anglicans in their fine Greenway church nearby. In Holy Week of 1828 Father Therry’s solemn celebration of the Easter rites and his down-to-earth, scriptural preaching reduced even a staunch Calvinist reporter to tears along with the rest of the congregation.<sup>137</sup> Therry loved a grand ceremony and with his finely developed persuasive powers was able to secure the services of Mr Cavanagh, band-master of the 3rd Buffs, and Mr Richenberg, bandmaster of the 40th Regiment, who were both Catholics. Forty years later Columbus Fitzpatrick’s heart still thrilled to the memory of Mass in the Castlereagh Street schoolroom in 1825, when “it was a common thing to

have five or six clarionets, two bassoons, a serpent, two French horns, two flutes, a violincello, a first and tenor violin, and any amount of well-trained singers, all bursting forth in perfect harmony the beautiful music of our Church”, and, on a big feast, disturbing the puny choir of Saint James’s with the strength of their choruses.<sup>138</sup>

Even in its unfinished state Saint Mary’s created a striking impression, for it was Sydney’s most expensive and ambitious building. Dr Roger Oldfield left this description of it in 1828:

The Gothic edifice, though a plain structure without the usual architraves, fretwork, moulding and sculpture, is a surprising piece of work, standing where it does... The building... is in the form of a cross, having at each corner octagonal buttresses rising above the roof with high-pointed caps, ornamented with turrets... The whole has a fine effect, and by moonlight, but that the stone is fresh, you might fancy it is some stone abbey.<sup>139</sup>

In 1848 Fowles wrote:

It is a vast and lofty pile, in the pointed Gothic style of architecture, extremely plain, and devoid of ornament, yet imposing from its situation and magnitude.<sup>140</sup>

*John Butler*

While Dempsey was associated with Father Therry’s efforts to build the church, John Butler assisted with another aspect of the priest’s ministry. As Patrick O’Farrell describes it, “Therry’s was a ministry full of sickbed, suffering, death

and burial.... In Sydney, the gaol dominated his life... Elsewhere, his pastoral world was one of alarms and excursions, constant travelling, long rides on horseback through heat and flood...”<sup>141</sup> It appears that Butler performed a secretarial function for the priest, opening his mail while he was absent and passing on the more urgent messages. A glimpse of this involvement in Therry’s work survives in a letter of 17 August 1825:

Revd Sir,

The Sheriff has send a Letter this Evening to the House for to let you know that your Reverence was wanted on Friday next to the Gaol for that man is to suffer.

Sir, I remain  
your humbl Sirvant

John Butler<sup>142</sup>

It is quite plausible, as the 1881 tradition suggests, that Butler was part of the Catholic circle based at Dempsey’s house in Kent Street and that, as a stone mason, he was involved at some time in the construction of Saint Mary’s. In the Muster of 1814 his name is recorded immediately after Dempsey’s; possibly they shared the Kent Street house, where Dempsey is known to have had other devout lodgers. Butler was associated with Dempsey’s son, Cornelius, as co-executor of the will of William Dumigan, who had arrived in New South Wales with the 46th Regiment of Foot in 1805 and died in 1826. Butler was a close family friend of the Dumigans; he was godfather to their daughter, Eleanor, and after William’s death his wife, also named Eleanor, provided that Butler should see that the children were brought up and

educated as Catholics. When Mrs Dumigan died, it was Butler who erected her gravestone.<sup>143</sup>

In 1826 another Irish Carmelite passed briefly through Sydney: this was the turbulent Father Samuel Coote, who had arrived in Hobart in May 1824 and had soon clashed with the equally turbulent Father Connolly, the small Catholic community of Van Diemen's Land dividing between the two irascible priests. By the end of 1825 the Lieutenant-Governor was showing him the door. Coote was only the fourth priest to come free to the Australian mission. His presence is well-documented in *Historical Records of Australia* and elsewhere and was known to early church historians such as Cardinal Moran. Strangely, however, he has been largely written out of the historical record by more recent historians. Columbus Fitzpatrick mentions meeting him in both Hobart and Sydney, but unfortunately we have no evidence of any contact he might have had there with the two lay Carmelites.<sup>144</sup>

Apart from these few details we know very little of John Butler's activities, except that they were such that he became known as "the Carmelite" and that they gained him a reputation for piety which was remembered even some forty years after his death when his name had been forgotten. This is clear from the newspaper account of 1881, which, although conventionally hagiographical in character, is nevertheless witness to the preservation of an oral tradition about Butler in the Catholic community, anonymously as "the Carmelite", and by name as a guardsmen of the Blessed Sacrament and one of the principal workers in the construction of the first Saint Mary's:

One whose name has been forgotten by men, but not by the recording angels of God, was commonly known as the

Carmelite—he was a tertiary and supposed to be from Youghal, and suffered much, with Father Peter O’Neill, of that town... He was transported to one of the Island depots in Sydney Harbour where he consoled his fellow captives not only by his advice, but also by the most powerful of all admonitions, the example of his holy, patient life. He kept the faith among them by the recitation of the holy Rosary which brought before their minds the life, sufferings and death of our Blessed Redeemer. From his cell at mid-night when the gaoler had gone to rest, the sweet murmur of prayer arose from his dungeon and was re-echoed by the suffering band... James Dempsey, with another of the guardsmen, John Butler, were the principal builders of old Saint Mary’s.<sup>145</sup>

### *A Journey Home*

In 1828 Dempsey made what proved to be a lengthy visit home to Ireland. He wrote back to Therry enthusiastic accounts of the churches he had seen in San Salvador and London and of the boasts he was everywhere making about Saint Mary’s, along with suggestions for the resolution of various technical problems in its construction. Dempsey argued that the church should be lit by high clerestory windows, but it was one of Therry’s singularities to put as many windows in a building as the walls would bear, without regard for the summer heat. Ullathorne would later criticise him for the seventy windows of Saint Mary’s and for making the Campbelltown church “like a cage”.<sup>146</sup> An optimist, apparently, Dempsey looked forward to hearing the news about the first Mass to be celebrated in Saint Mary’s, which he anticipated would take place at Christmas that year,

though in fact he would return to Sydney in time to be present at the first Mass in the church five years later.

There was some sadness involved in this trip, for its purpose was “not to seek riches or pleasure but to seek to relieve the distress”. Moreover, he was now estranged from his son and daughter-in-law over some financial matter. He reflected rather somberly in a letter to Therry from London: “...the ingratitude I received from my son cannot leave my mind, but he is like many others I met with in that land that considered themselves better entitled to what I work hard for than I was myself. I am well accustomed to receive ingratitude for my kindness and liberality.” But he has a spiritual interpretation for his unhappiness, which he hopes the Lord will count as part of the punishment due for his many sins.

As usual, Father Therry owed him money. With a characteristic combination of caution and generosity, Dempsey asked that it be put into a trust fund to be administered by C.W. Chambers for the education of his grandson and namesake, James Nicholas Dempsey,

as I consider him the same as an orphan from having a bad Father and a Dilatory Mother... As to his Father if he don't alter his way of life he followed in my time I would sooner never hear from him for he has set me entirely against him. I pray that God may mend him and give him grace to do better for Soul and Body.<sup>147</sup>

Work on the chapel had again come to a standstill in 1827, for now, in addition to the chronic mismanagement, there were the economic effects of the depression of that year.<sup>148</sup> And in the meantime there was dissension in the

Catholic community. A second and much needed priest, Father Daniel Power, had arrived in December 1826, but Therry chose to regard him as an intruder in his domain and acted to undermine Power's ministry.<sup>149</sup> So bitter did their conflict become that Therry struck Power in public when they were both in attendance at an execution. Soon the Catholic community was split into rival congregations. Father Power, the official chaplain, said Mass in the Court House. Father Therry, suspended by Governor Darling in 1825 for supposedly disparaging the Anglican clergy, diverted £1,100 from the Chapel fund to build Saint Joseph's Chapel next to the unfinished Saint Mary's as a base from which he could defy Father Power and the Governor. It was the only church he ever finished. As well as Saint Mary's, churches at Campbelltown and Parramatta stood roofless until they were finished by other hands. (Ullathorne would remark mordantly of Therry: "Except Mass and the Rosary he never finished anything else. He never finished a church, and unless a person were dying he never finished a confession"; and Bishop Polding would later record having to say Mass in an upper room of the Parramatta gaol "to the music of chains and ribaldrous conversation in the apartment below").<sup>140</sup>

Dempsey heard in Ireland of these scandals and in July 1830 wrote a long letter to Therry in his own laborious hand, as he generally did when he had confidences to impart. In Dempsey's character humility and formidable directness were combined, and he did not shrink from telling the priest that it was his rashness and unwillingness to accept advice that were largely responsible for the unfinished state of the churches so sorely needed by the growing Catholic community.

It was a complex friendship between the two men. Dempsey was respectful towards Therry without being deferential or sacrificing his forthrightness. Therry was the one friend in whom he felt he could confide, and yet there is something fatherly in the way he advises the priest, who was twenty years his junior and whose impulsiveness he had often had to temper. In Dempsey's unlearned syntax and spelling his voice can still be heard:

... I am happy to hear you are still going on with St. Mary's Church tho slowly. But yet I hope your perseverance will be crownd with suckcess. Providence I hope will reward your unwearied Expectience and long look for complation... If a little more aconomy had being blended with your grate ability or if you would have taken the advice of som Lay Persons of exsparence, not maining Me, there might have been three Churches instid of one and all finished. But you have rely trid the people and I feair St. Marys will remain long unfinished. Your Reverence first to gratefy a few indivls at the Hoksbury [=Hawkesbury River] gained the illwill of [cockies?] who had the country under their command and could do as they liked. This you would not believe. These individels had their own interest in view which the never acomplished.

By this the people of Hoksbury have being without Chapel since and I feair will be longer; the inhabitins of Paramatta are also without a Chapel altho you undervaled this buildin when it beginning altho' you expended their money on the Sydney Church. In Cambel town you made the peapel add a 2d story to their buildin which if they had stopt at one the might have finished this. I feair the are all



without even one onely depending on govmt to toss them out when they pleais. In what you have expended on small building at High park [Saint Joseph's Chapel, Hyde Park] would have made a fin one in any of these places. But of these failings none of your parsh[oners] dare tell you. And those you found well inclind you did not spare nor would you be contented for all the could do in point of subscription.

I fear there is a coolness also between you and Reverent Mr. Power as Mr Higgens informs me you both have mass at the one time in Sydney, one for the government peapel and the other for the inhabatens. This I feair is from som unChristanable feelings. Shurely if Mr. Paor be a litel warm in Temper you are able to master yourself and sho no bad Exampel by any coolness of temper nor to lave one part of the country without mass. If government falls out with ye I hope in God ye will not fall out with one another or sho any coolness that would give scandal. If any coolness take place he that would humbel himself the most would be the gratest.

I ask your Reverences pardon for what I take the liberty of saying. I am well awair that you wants no directions from my ignorance but I find myself still intrested for and would wish to recommend what was for the best for the Country at large. I am well aware it is hard to exsell you in the administration of your functions but you were astray in the expence that would atend so large a building. Your Reverence onely look at the sise you wish for not at the Expence or where it com from. This I believe, you don all for the grater glory of God, who knows your intintion and

will reward you according to your intention whether you finish or no.

This letter is the most revealing of the five Dempsey letters that survive. In it is evident the faith and kindness of a self-made man who was yet accustomed to suffering and resignation. He was still estranged from Cornelius, who added to his father's sense of grievance by not replying to his letters, but to whom he continued to write. There were other sadnesses for him in Ireland, though their nature is obscure. Whatever his misfortunes were—apparently the result of some foolishness on his part—they had served to alienate him from his friends. In Athy he did not feel at home (there is no mention of the wife and children he had last seen thirty years before) and he longed to be back in Australia. His health was poor and his fortune gone, and he had commenced a building in the hope of earning enough money to return to Sydney. He wrote mournfully to Therry:

I have to inform you and my friends that I consider my self lonesom here in a strange town 30 miles from my one place and more lonesom that I have being these 36 years for during that period I have being always known. My misfortunes has being grate you have seen before now I suppose in one of Mr. Chambers Letters. This has caused a grate coolness between my friends and me that I should act so foolish for which it is no wonder after all I seen.

It is not known when Dempsey returned to Sydney though he was there by 4 December 1833.<sup>152</sup> In the meantime, something of a new ecclesiastical era had opened with the arrival of Father Ullathorne, the Vicar General;

youthful but of boundless confidence, he immediately asserted his authority over the redoubtable Father Therry. He found Saint Mary's "on a very large scale, with transepts raised to a great height, with walls of massive solidity and with large crypts beneath", but still unusable and the Catholic community in a state of agitation over Therry's failure to finish it. Ullathorne managed to secure harmony, vested the property (formerly held in Therry's own name) in a committee of trustees, and had the church closed in from the weather and ready for use by the end of the year. Thus Dempsey must have had the great satisfaction of witnessing the first Mass celebrated in Saint Mary's on Christmas Day, 1833.<sup>153</sup> He sold his Kent Street house and took up residence in Clarence Street.<sup>154</sup>

The next we hear of him is in February 1834 when, still an inveterate committee man, he appears on the Committee of Saint Mary's Church, now presided over by Father Ullathorne, which began a campaign to raise the funds required for the completion of the interior of the church. Things had changed in New South Wales in Dempsey's absence, both in the Church and in society generally, and though he found a few familiar faces on the committee—old '98 men such as William Davis, Edward Redmond and Martin Short—most of its members were of the new generation of settlers. Catholic Emancipation had come in 1829, and so the most prominent of them were the colony's two Catholic Government officers, J.H.Plunkett, the Solicitor General, and Roger Therry, Commissioner of the Court of Requests.<sup>155</sup> Mrs Therry's bonnet had caused a minor sensation at Mass in 1829, for it was the first to be seen in a congregation accustomed to consider itself a stranger to such possibilities of refinement.

In September 1835 the first Catholic bishop arrived, John Bede Polding, and Dempsey was no doubt present to see Saint Mary's become a cathedral at a grand High Mass on the feast of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, at which the bishop was astonished "to hear Mozart's Mass sung in Botany Bay, and well sung too".<sup>156</sup> Next month, when there were rumours that the bishop intended to transfer Father Therry from Sydney, Dempsey was one of fourteen signatories to a petition that the priest be allowed to remain.<sup>157</sup>

In 1838 Cornelius Dempsey was granted 1,030 acres at Emu Flat on the Shoalhaven River near Braidwood.<sup>158</sup> By then, apparently, father and son had made peace, but if James had forgiven his son's misdemeanors, he had not forgotten them. On 5 January that year he made his last will and testament: Cornelius was the principal executor and heir, but the co-executors, Andrew Higgins and Timothy Maher, were enjoined to prevent him from giving way to a prodigal or extravagant life; there were also explicit instructions for the care and education of the grandchildren.<sup>159</sup> In all, the estate was worth about £500, not a large fortune in comparison with some of the other prosperous '98 men.<sup>160</sup>

James Dempsey died just a month later, on 10 February 1838.<sup>161</sup> On 12 February he was buried from Saint Mary's Cathedral, to the construction of which he had devoted so much. He was laid to rest near his fellow lay Carmelite, John Butler, who had died two years before, on 4 April 1836, in the Sandhills Cemetery, which was where Central Railway now stands. A contemporary, Alexander Harris, found the Sandhills a place of unutterable woe, "full of wanderers far from home and kin."<sup>162</sup> But Dempsey and Butler, who had found a freedom no chains could bind and a home where no one is a wanderer, lay in the Sandhills in peace.

In 1901, when Central Railway was built, the monuments and remains from the old cemetery were removed to Botany Cemetery. In 1973 about 800 of the best preserved stones were established in a Pioneer Park and the remainder destroyed. Dempsey's, an altar-type stone in poor condition, was among those disposed of, but Butler's stone, though unfortunately in a deteriorating state,<sup>163</sup> can still be seen there, a reminder of two lay Carmelite stone masons who, in what must have seemed a great darkness, followed in the footsteps of their Master and made of themselves the living stones of which the Church is built.

## APPENDIX DOCUMENTS

JAMES DEMPSEY TO FATHER THERRY 1822<sup>164</sup>

*Therry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/3, 120-121. This letter is water damaged and only legible in part. In Dempsey's hand.*

...No longer is it in my power to give satisfaction to you being continually abraded whenever I send in my accounts... when I find money myself you wish to have the work finished... but when the bill comes...

I wish you [would show?] me that paper where you say I have charged you nine pounds over what was rite. You perswade me on last Monday that the week before was only 23 pounds and would put no more in your order tho the expense was 27-1-3. If so much be deficient in one week its no wonder of £12.19.3 being due to me on the accounts since last May as there were many weeks I got none. I received last week in labour and cash 17s. I am always willing to give you an account of what I did when called upon.

... your hand and word as a gentleman and Clergman that I should be payd the remainder of my balance which was to be in five months [...] which was the twelfth of may [...] my hundred pounds... You have now got an efishent man and a good scoller not like me. And I hope the Capel wont be at so much loss by him as you consider it is by me. As to my accounts I will give you any satisfaction that is in my power any time, and tho' I had the misfortune of being a convict I never once thought of being a thife nor even knew of anyone belong to me on either sides to be schuch. Believe me to be sincere this time for I will not be abraded any longer in this matter for nothing. I remain Rd Sir, Yours

JAMES DEMPSEY

JAMES DEMPSEY TO FATHER THERRY 20 February 1826  
*Therry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/6, 37-39*

Dear Reverend Sir,

I at last embrace this favourable opportunity of conveying my sentiments to you hoping they may find your Reverence in good health as they leave me and Mr Mangan as we have both enjoyed since we left Sydney, thanks be to the Almighty God for all his Mercies and blessings to us. We had a long and weary passage occasioned by contrary winds and some calms. It was on the 29th December we cast Anchor in the Heads of Madras. Mr Clinton landed there and all the Troops except some Company officers that were bound for Calcutta. Mr Mangan and I landed on the 30th and agreeable to Mr Clintons directions I went in search of the Roman Clergyman as he considered that most advisable to have their advice. I found none of them that could understand or speak English excepting one Dark Gentleman a native of that place, and he spoke it but very poorly. But however with Gods help I was able to go to Confession to him and received from him on New Years day being fully confident that God makes no distinction with his faithful servants on account of Colour or Country. On the following morning I visited him respecting my business to that Country which I was hard set to make him understand; he brought me to the Vicar or Superior of the Church and tried to explain my business to him which was not in his power; they advised me to have my letters translated into the Portugese Language and then they might discover their meaning, which I complied with, and brought them to them again. They entirely disapproved of my mission and saided that it was a most foolish attempt as the Catholicks there were poor. I told them I did not intend to confine myself

to Catholicks alone nor if we did in N.S. Wales we could not have done as much as we did, they did not offer to pay even as much as I paid for the Translation, tho' I believe he was a Roman Catholick that wrote it. Next day I took a Horse and Chaise and Guide to visit the Bishop. It was about 5 miles distance from Madras at St. Thomas Town, near St. Thomas's Mount. I hoped to have the pleasure of seeing his Lordship which I had not. As I could not speak French Latin or Portugese he would not come down stairs to see me. I sent him my Portugese Transla<sup>n</sup> which he sent down again knowing what I wanted him to do, as well as I could make the messenger understand that I wanted his approval, he wrote Acting B with ten rupees marked paid which I had a good mind to send back again, but being unwilling to give offence or to deprive the funds even of one Rupee. On the following day I memorialled the Governor, inclosing the Memorial with my letters of Recommendation, delivered them to his Adecamp at Fort St. George and attended the next day at the Garden house to receive my answer. I also visited Major Bell of the 40th and Captain McDoogal. Lieut. Roberts was the only Gentleman who gave five rupees. I am sure Mr Roberts would have given much more if any of the Superior Officers had set down their names before him as he encouraged me to go to them first. He seemed very kind and friendly to me and particularly inquired for you and so did Mr Wilson and Mr. Broker and many more of the officers. I found a very particular friend in a son of Mrs Lacy, he treated me very Civily and gave me for his subscription in Money and other things that were wanting to me and Mr. M. fifty rupees. I also received fifty from his Father, my Stay there was but short or I might have got something more. I make no doubt but I shall go there again as I have very little hopes of getting anything here as the first Subscription for that Church



has taken place here by the exertions of Mr. V. Jacob who deserves great applause for he opened lists in three or four very respectable [...] but it is now closed and I hope you have the money before this as it was sent from here last June by the ship Candy in care of Mr. James Redall, the exact sum I can't say until I hear from Mr. Jacob. Our living comes much dearer than what you expected. It cannot in the nicest manner be much less than Ten or Twelve rupees each per week. Sir please to give my best respects to Mr. and Mrs. Redmond, to Mr. and Mrs. Marshal, to Mr. & Mrs. Byrn, Mr. Davis and Mrs. Davis if arrived to your Congregation in full not forgetting Mrs. Dillon. I hope, Dear Sir, you will remember me at the altar of God. I remain Revd Sir & etc.

JAMES DEMPSEY

JAMES DEMPSEY TO FATHER TERRY 24 October 1828

*Terry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/8, 161-163*

Swan Inn Whitechapel

24 Oct. 1828

Revd. Sir,

I send you these few lines in hopes they will find you in good health. I wrote to your Reverence once before since I arrived the 20th which I put in the post office, but for fear of any miscarriage or delay I think well of sending this—in my last letter I did not say as much as I wished as the person who wrote it was very little better than myself. I hope you have received it as it will give you good account of St. Salvador and the great number of fine churches it contains. My delay is much longer in this Town than I expected. I have wrote home but required no answer as I thought to be off long

before this. I have seen the honourable Mrs McQuire who received me very kindly, and kept me a long time inquiring after all the old neighbours. She was purely in health with a severe cold. Dr Redfern attends on her, he had been there that day before I came. I would be obliged to you when you go to Parramatta next to call in on Mr. M. Moore and let him & his wife know that I call'd and that Mr. & Mrs. McQuire were very happy to hear from them. I also met Major Goulburn who knew me and asked if the chapel was finished. On this morning I went to the residence of the Revd. Gentleman of Moorefields Chapel who was highly pleased with my account so that he made me take breakfast with him. The Revd Mr. Devereux has gone to France 7 months ago. He enquired after the size of our Chapel. I told him it was much larger than his. Then he asked the size and when told he said not for his was 120 feet in length and 48 in breadth. I then thought of the two turn ends which proved me right. It is very well inside but only a brick building well stuccoed. In the centre Isle there is upwards of 60 pews all paid for on Sundays, some at 1/- per seat and none less than 6d. The two side Isles have seats about half way up from the altar. There is but one Altar and in St Salvador most have 9, the least I saw 7 and all most grandly furnished.

Revd. Sir, I hope by Christmas Day you will be able to celebrate Mass in the Church of St. Mary's, that I would be very happy to hear. The troubles so much spoken of give me some concern but I hope there is no disturbance in the part I am going to. I should think it hard in this time of life if any such thing should happen but God, I hope, will protect me as he knows my intentions are not to seek riches or pleasure but to seek to relieve the distress. Revd. Sir, the ingratitude I received from my son cannot leave my mind, he is like many others I met with in that land that considered themselves

better entitled to what I work hard for than what I was myself. I am well accustomed to receive ingratitude for my kindness and liberality. I hope the Lord will accept of the ingratitude on many occasions as a part of the punishment due to my numerous sins. That debt that remains due to me by you, as you did not think well of paying it to me for I know not what reason, I hope you will pay or cause it to be paid to Cha. H. Chambers Esq. for the use and benefit of my Grandson James Nicholas Dempsey as I consider him the same as an orphan from having a bad Father and a Dilatory Mother that I intend Mr. Chambers to apply in giving him education and a good Trade. As to his Father if he don't alter his way of life he followed in my time I would sooner never hear from him for he has set me entirely against him. I pray that God may mend him and give him grace to do better for Soul and Body. As for being any comfort and assistance to me was I in want of it I never expected. I hope you will be kind enough to give my respects to all my friends they are too numerous to mention all their names.

I remain

Your Humble Servt

JAMES DEMPSEY

JAMES DEMPSEY TO FATHER TERRY 18 July 1830

*Terry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/10,131-134. In Dempsey's hand*

*Some illegible words are indicated [...?]*

Athy July the 18th 1830

Dear Reverent Sir,

I take this opportunity of sending you these few lines hoping they may find your Reverence in good health as they leave me at present, thanks be to God for all his Blessings to us. I am happy to see in Mr Higgins Letter that you enjoy a good state of health and also your Brother Laborer the Reverent Mr. Power. I am happy to hear you are still going on with St. Mary's Church though slowly. But yet I hope your perseverance will be crowned with success. Providence I hope will reward your unwearied Expectation and long look for completion. This gentle man has undertaken the voyage to the East Indies I hope will have good success this time. I hope you have taken a little more pains with him than you took with me for my authority from you was a very weak one. But had it been ever so strong it would be of no effect on account of the subscription carried on so lately by Mr. Tait. It were my wishes and expectation it would prove successful but he is better hopes this time and a mass of better information, but I dare say not much better inclination. But a losing man or horse is never praised let him act ever so well. If a little more economy had been blended with your granteability or if you would have taken the advice of some Lay Persons of experience, not minding Me, there might have been three Churches instead of one and all finished. But you have relied on the people and I fear St. Mary's will remain long unfinished. Your Reverence first to gratify a few individuals at the Hobsbuij gained the illwill of [cockies?] who had the country under their command and could do as they liked. This you would not believe. These individuals had their own interest in view which they never accomplished.

By this means the people of Hsburry have been without Chapel since and I fear will be longer; the inhabitants of Paramatta are also without a Chapel although you undervalued

this buildin when it beginning altho' you expended their money on the Sydney Church. In Cambel town you made the peapel add a 2nd story to their building which if they had stopt at one they might have finished this. I feair the are all without even one onely depending on govmt to toss them out when the pleais. In what you have expsended on small building at High park would have made a fin one in any of thes places. But of these failings none of you parsh[oners] dare tell you. And those you found well inclind you did not spare nor would you be contented for all the could do in point of subscription.

I feair there is a coolness also between you and the Reverent Mr. Power as Mr. Higgens informs me you both have mass at the one time in Sydney, one for the government peapel and the other for the inhanbatens. This I feair is from some unChristanable feelings. Shurely if Mr. Paor be a little warm in Temper you are able to master yourself and sho no bad Exampel by any coolness of temper not to lave one part of the country without mass. If government falls out with ye I hope in God ye will not fall out with one another or sho any coolness that would give scandal. If any coolness take place he that would humbel himself the most would be the gratest.

I ask your Reverence pardon for what I take the liberty of saying. I am well awair that you wants no directions from my ignorance but I find myself still intrested for and would wish to recommend what was best for the Country at large. I am well aware it is hard to excel you in the administration of your functions but you were astray in the expense that would attend so large a building. Your Reverence onely look at the sise you wish for not at the Exspence or where it com from. This I believe, you don all for the grater glory of God, who knows your intintion and will reward you acording to your intintion whether y finish or no. I hope in God that the

subscription this gentel man will bring from Est will incurage the inhabatans to [...] and with that I hope you will be able to put a kind of finish on it, and I would lay out more on small Buildings for that is disharting the peapel.

It will be out of your power I feair to atempt the ceilings at this time. If you can glase and plaster it will be a grate thing. There is one thing I would recommend if my advice would have any efect in the glasing, that is if you have not the sashes made before you get this letter, that is to have all the low windows built up with brick or stone and to leave 4 inches of Ainsset on the out sid, that is from the inside of the [...] which I believe is 6" and also inside whatever may be spared after a thin wall. The outside to be plasterd well and colerd as glass with sashes. This will save a daile of exspence in wood, glass and workmanship and the can well be spard, for all the fine Churches I have being in has being lited from above. Under the side galerry the opset window will give lite the same as in Moorefeil London and in St. Salvadore where each Curch has 9 alters, at the last I seen 7. And when you are going to seel I would advise an alicptticel arch from one colum to the other or a transom of wood to receive the one end of the jice and not to have [...] opset to every window. This would save a daile of exspence and onely lave the sinter in this form. The colms can go high enough so as not to intercept the lite which will make your sinter [...] the less. The Baton of the top windows inside will require to have a grate slant toards the floor. This trows the lite Downwards.

Dear Reverent Sir, I am hapy to hear of the rapid increace of your stock which I have seen in Charles Richards letter. I hope my old acquaintens Mrs Dwyer enjoys good helth and that she is hapy in her family and that all her Sones and Daughters are well and doing well—this would be my

wishes. I mostly seise her Brother-in-law and his wife when I go to town. Their two children is no more. Her mother-in-law is well. One of her brothers-in-law is dead. I hope that Mrs Badsen and his wife is doing well. I hope that Mr. & Mrs. Davis are well and Mr. & Mrs. Redmond and family and all both your friends and mine. Dear Sir, this is the 3rd letter I have sent to you but yet I expect no answers I know you are better employed. I am at this time writing to my son though I ought not for he has, I believe received 2 from me and does not think it worth his while to send me one. I am also sending one to my old friend Mr. Lacy. I hope, Dear Sir, you will give my Dutyfull respects to Rev. Mr. Power. I know not but I might be in that Country again. It will much depend on the will of providence. I should never forget my dutyfull and kind respects to the worthy Mr. & Mrs. Chambers. I hope them and their children are well. My respects also to John [...?] if alive.

Dear Sir, I should said more respecting the people only I wish to write this letter my self not wishing to let others see what I would take the liberty of saying to you. I have said a deal more in Mr. Lacys letter as being wrote by another. I have to inform you and my friends that I consider my self lonesome here in a strange town 30 miles from my one place more lonesome than I have being these 36 years for during that period I have being always known. My misfortunes has being grate you have seen before now I suppose in one of Mr. Chambers Letters. This has caused a grate coolness between my friends and me that I should act so foolish for which it is no wonder after all I seen. Along with that misfortune I commenced a building here. With other expences that has most sunk what I have remaining so I am likely to be very poor shortly if I do not get this money from Doctor Du[...?], but however if I live and get my health I will

save as much as will take me out there for in that country I would be more at home than hear.

Dear Sir, I believe Mrs Casidy is going out there. I would wish all my friends to treat her well for in my opinion she is a very deserving woman and always shown me respect. I hope that he and she will do well. I remain, Dr. Reverent Sir, with many respects, your truly obedient and humble servant,

JAMES DEMPSEY

\*



## ENDNOTES

† This article was first published in Carmelus [Rome] 32 (1985): 107-149 under the title “Lay Carmelites in Botany Bay, 1802-1838”. It was reprinted with minor alterations on the occasion of the bicentenary in October 2002 of the arrival of Dempsey and Butler and the joint celebrations by the Dempsey Family and the Australian Lay Carmelites, 25-27 October 2002. It is reproduced here with kind permission of the author.

<sup>1</sup> The local courts of trial were all in Rebellion areas; cf. T.J. Kiernan, *Transportation from Ireland to Australia 1791-1816*, Canberra, 1954, 129-134. George Rudé, however, reckons that only 60 of the *Atlas* prisoners were rebels; “Early Irish Rebels in Australia”, *Historical Studies* 16 (1974): 17-35.

<sup>2</sup> “The Carmelites and South Australia”, *The Advocate* [Melbourne] 9 April 1881, 14.

<sup>3</sup> [Brian Pitman], “Early Carmelite Tertiaries in Australia”, *Nubecula* 19:2 (1963): 14-15.

<sup>4</sup> His gravestone inscription read: “James Dempsey, native of Wexford County, Ireland, died 7th February, 1838, aged 69 years”; M.R. Sainty and K.R. Johnson, *Gravestone Inscriptions NSW*, Sydney, 1973, 67, no. 1210.

<sup>5</sup> Petitions for Mitigation of Sentence, 1810, 66; Archives Office of New South Wales (hereafter AONSW).

<sup>6</sup> *Advocate* 9 April 1881, 14.

<sup>7</sup> V.M. Walker, *The Story of James Dempsey*, Bega, 1971, 11; cf. G.M. Cashman, “A Catholic Who’s Who from 1788 to Polding”, *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* (hereafter JACHS) 5:3 (1977): 29.

<sup>8</sup> Certificate of Absolute Pardon, 13 June 1827; AONSW 2/1907.1, no. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Personal visit to Botany Cemetery. The inscription is recorded with some small errors in Sainty and Johnson, 77, no. 1389.

<sup>10</sup> I am grateful to the late Fr Peter O'Dwyer, O.Carm., for this information; cf. his "The Irish Carmelites and the Rising of 1789", *Nubecula* 33 (1982): 19-22. The author (O'Dwyer?) of *Irish Carmelite Fathers: Seventh Centenary Souvenir 1271-1971*, [Dublin, 1971] states that "membership of the Third Order [is] evidenced in documents from 1750 onwards", 34. Elsewhere, however, O'Dwyer states: "The first reference which I have found to the Third Order in Ireland dates from August 17, 1846...", *The Irish Carmelites of the Ancient Observance*, Dublin: Carmelite Publications, 1988, 217. There was a group, now extinct, called Carmelite Brothers of Ireland, engaged in education of poor children, which was officially aggregated to the Discalced Carmelites in 1817; *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, 2:587-588. This group apparently had its origin in the mid-eighteenth-century Archconfraternity of the Brown Scapular based at the Discalced Friars' Church in Stephen's Street, Dublin; cf. James P. Rushe, *Carmel in Ireland: A Narrative of the Irish Province of Teresian or Discalced Carmelites, A.D. 1625-1896*, Dublin, 1903, 149-150. Much of this history is ill-researched and for lack of documentation is likely to remain obscure.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. P.R. McCaffrey, *The Whitefriars*, Dublin, 1926, 438-440; P. O'Dwyer, *Mary: A History of Devotion in Ireland*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1988.

<sup>12</sup> O'Dwyer, "Irish Carmelites and the Rising", 20-21.

<sup>13</sup> Of the immense literature on the Rebellion see, for example, T. Pakenham, *Year of Liberty*, London 1969; and on its significance for Australia, G. Rudé, *Protest and Punishment: The Story of the Social and Political Protesters Transported to Australia 1788-1868*, Oxford, 1978.

<sup>14</sup> E. Hay, *History of the Insurrection of the County of Wexford*, Dublin, 1803, quoted in Kiernan, *Transportation*, 81. For a summary of trial and sentencing procedures see A.G.L. Shaw, *Convicts and the Colonies*, London, 1966, 166-183.

<sup>15</sup> Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to Lord Pelham, 29 Aug. 1802, *Historical Records of Australia* (hereafter HRA), I.iii.569.

<sup>16</sup> Rebellion Papers, State Paper Office, Dublin, SPO/620/5/58/6.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. P. Harword, *History of the Irish Rebellion of 1798*, London, 1848, 192-201.

<sup>18</sup> Rebellion Papers, SPO/620/17/30/41.

<sup>19</sup> AONSW, Register of Pardons and Tickets of Leave, 1:132-133.

<sup>20</sup> *Advocate*, 9 April 1881, 14.

<sup>21</sup> C.J. Duffy, (ed.), "Catholic Religious and Social Life in the Macquarie Era as Portrayed in the Fitzpatrick Letters", *JACHS* 2:1 (1966) 24; hereafter "Fitzpatrick Letters".

<sup>22</sup> King to Hobart, 23 July 1802; HRA I.iii.531-532. Cf. Charles Bateson, *Convict Ships 1787-1888*, Glasgow, 1959, 46-47, 163-166.

<sup>23</sup> King to Transport Commissioners, 9 Nov. 1802; HRA I.iii.720.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Max Kelly and Ruth Crocker, *Sydney Takes Shape*, Sydney, 1978, 9-10.

<sup>25</sup> King to Hobart, 9 Nov. 1802; HRA I.iii.610.

<sup>26</sup> Kelly and Crocker, 9-10.

<sup>27</sup> Rudé, *Protest and Punishment*, 187.

<sup>28</sup> General Order, 28 Oct. 1802, HRA I.iv.326.

<sup>29</sup> 1806 Muster, Mitchell Library, Sydney (hereafter ML), HO.10/37.

<sup>30</sup> AONSW, Petitions for Mitigation of Sentence, 1810, 39.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>32</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 19 Jan. 1811, 1.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 May 1812; Wentworth Papers, ML A761, 96, 104.

<sup>34</sup> Rudé, “Early Irish Rebels”, 20.

<sup>35</sup> King to Portland, 10 March 1801; HRA I.iii.9.

<sup>36</sup> P.F. Moran, *History of the Catholic Church in Australasia*, Sydney, 1896, 42; cf. HRA I.iii.759, I.iv.82-83.

<sup>37</sup> Harold Perkins, “Father Harold: The Story of a Convict Priest”, JACHS 3:3 (1971): 1-14; James Waldersee, *Catholic Society in New South Wales 1788-1860*, Sydney, 1974. Michael Hayes thought Harold “a learned man and a great orator” but “avericisious [*sic*] and petulant”; Letter of 25 Nov. 1812 in Cataldus Giblin, (ed.), “The Hayes Letters”, *Footprints* 2:11 (1976): 18.

<sup>38</sup> King to Hobart, 17 Sept. 1803; HRA I.iv.396.

<sup>39</sup> James Waldersee, “Father James Dixon and the 1798 Wexford Rising”, *Journal of Religious History* 6 (1970): 29-30.

<sup>40</sup> R.M. Wiltgen, *The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church in Oceania from 1825 to 1850*, Canberra, 1979, 182-184.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Waldersee, *Catholic Society*, 42-70; Shaw, *Convicts and the Colonies*; L.L. Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia*, London, 1965.

<sup>42</sup> *The Catholic Mission in Australasia* [1837]; repr. Adelaide, 1963, iv-v.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in A.M. Grocott, *Convicts, Clergymen and Churches*, Sydney, 1980, 140.

<sup>44</sup> Harold to Hunter, 23 April 1800, HRA I.ii.503. Perkins, “Father Harold”, 7. On the indifference of many Catholic convicts

to their religion see Waldersee, *Catholic Society*, 188-195; but cf. the more cautious conclusions in Grocott, 267-279.

<sup>45</sup> Historical Records of New South Wales (hereafter HRNSW) 11.484; Ronald Fogarty, *Catholic Education in Australia 1806-1950*, Melbourne, 1950, 1.16-20; “Hayes Letters”, *Footprints* 11 (1976) *et seqq.*

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Cashman, “Catholic Who’s Who”, 23-41.

<sup>47</sup> *Catholic Society*, 254-255; cf. Patrick O’Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community in Australia: A History*, Melbourne, 1977, 9-11.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Grocott, *passim*.

<sup>49</sup> Deposition of Elizabeth McKeon, 4 August 1826, Therry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/65, 163.

<sup>50</sup> Governor Macquaries’ Diary, ML, A773, 59.

<sup>51</sup> AONSW, Register of Pardons and Tickets of Leave, 1.132-133.

<sup>52</sup> AONSW, Petitions for Mitigation of Sentence, 1810, 39.

<sup>53</sup> AONSW, Register of Pardons and Tickets of Leave, 1.704; Certificate of Absolute Pardon, 2/1907.1, no. 4. Conditional pardons were conditional on the recipient remaining in the colony.

<sup>54</sup> Evidence of J. Tipton before the Commission of Enquiry 1820; ML, Bigge Report Evidence, 4277, BT Box 11; and Bigge Report Appendix, 5160d, BT Box 24.

<sup>55</sup> See pardon list in Kiernan, *Transportation*, 131.

<sup>56</sup> Colonial Secretary’s Office, In-Letters 1810, 247B; cf. Walker, *James Dempsey*, 18.

<sup>57</sup> Dempsey advertised in the *Gazette* on 13 Aug., 12 Nov. 1814; 25 March, 16 Sept. 1815; 19 Oct. 1816; 19 April, 28 Aug. 1817; 21 March 1818; 7 Aug. 1819; 15 Jan., 3 June 1820; 28 April, 21 July, 11 Aug., 22 Dec. 1821; 15 Nov. 1822; 22 Sept. 1825.

<sup>58</sup> 59 of 1,053 private dwellings; *Report... on the State of Agriculture and Trade in the Colony of New South Wales*, Sydney, 1823, 42-43.

<sup>59</sup> *Gazette*, 27 July, 19 Oct. 1816.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 Jan. 1820.

<sup>61</sup> AONSW, Colonial Secretary's Office, Memorials re Land 1820, 3 July 1820; "60 acres" is a marginal note on the petition. Cf. *Gazette* 28 April 1821.

<sup>62</sup> Wentworth Papers, ML, DI, 246.

<sup>63</sup> Walker, *James Dempsey*, 9.

<sup>64</sup> *Gazette*, 19 Jan. 1811.

<sup>65</sup> Wentworth Papers, ML, A 763, 134; DI, 126.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, A761, 96,104,116; *Gazette*, 2 May 1812.

<sup>67</sup> This address is first given in the *Gazette* on 13 August 1814.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Frank Clune, *The Saga of Sydney*, 2nd ed., Sydney, 1962, 181-182; Isadore Brodsky, *The Streets of Sydney*, Sydney, 1962, 139-143.

<sup>69</sup> *Gazette*, 21 March 1818; 25 Sept. 1825.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Ambrose Fitzpatrick, *Freeman's Journal*, 21 Jan. 1888.

<sup>71</sup> James Macle hose, *Picture of Sydney and Strangers' Guide in New South Wales for 1839*, Sydney, 1839, 63.

<sup>72</sup> Macquarie to Bathurst, HRA I.iii.599-600.

<sup>73</sup> "Hayes Letters", *Footprints* 3:2 (1977) 20.

<sup>74</sup> J.P.McGuanne, *Old St. Mary's, Sydney*, [1913?], 4-5. According to McGuanne, the confraternity also met for prayers at John Reddington's in Pitt Row.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Moran, *Catholic Church*, 66.

<sup>76</sup> Ambrose Fitzpatrick says that there were confraternity members living with Dempsey in Kent Street; "Fitzpatrick

Letters”, 43. Veronica Walker, the Dempsey family historian, suggests that one of them may have been Elias Aitchison, Colour Sergeant of the 3rd Regiment of Foot, who was living at Dempsey’s when he died suddenly, aged 47, on 4 January 1827. However, Aitchison may not have been a Catholic, for he was buried in the Church of England section of the cemetery, and may have been simply a boarder. Walker, *James Dempsey; Gazette*, 6 Jan. 1827; Sainty and Johnson, 52, no. 941.

<sup>77</sup> E.J.L. Scarlett, “The Fitzpatrick Family”, *JACHS* 2:1 (1966) 46-66; C.J. Duffy, “Who Was Columbus Fitzpatrick?”, *Australasian Catholic Record* 45 (1968): 257-262.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. A. Donlevy, *Catechism, or, Christian Doctrine by Way of Question and Answer, Drawn Chiefly from the Express Word of God and Other Pure Sources* [in English and Irish, Paris, 1742], 3rd ed., Dublin, 1848.

<sup>79</sup> “Fitzpatrick Letters”, 20-21, 25.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>81</sup> Denis McHugh to James Dempsey, 21 Oct. 1823; Therry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/3, 239-241.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Memorandum of Dr Porter in Moran, *Catholic Church*, 56-58.

<sup>84</sup> O’Farrell, *Catholic Community*, 12-16. Macquarie’s view is expressed in HRA I.ix.804. A rather coloured view of the affair is the subject of Eris O’Brien’s *The Dawn of Catholicism in Australia*, 2 vols., Sydney, 1928. There is also an historical novel featuring Dempsey but following the tradition of the Davis family by Tom Luscombe, *The Priest and the Governor*, Melbourne, 1970.

<sup>85</sup> “Fitzpatrick Letters”, 34.

<sup>86</sup> ML, Bonwick Transcript 11215, quoted in O'Brien, *Dawn of Catholicism*, 2.105.

<sup>87</sup> The others were John Connell, William Davis, Gabriel Lewis Marie Huon de Kerlieu, Joseph Morley, William Hayes, William Flaney, Daniel Bready, Michael Dwyer, Daniel McCallam, Michael Hayes, Patrick Moore; *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> After Columbus Fitzpatrick's letters of 1865, the controversy was taken up again in the *Freeman's Journal*, 21 Jan. 1888, 4-8, 17. It 1965 it featured for several months in the *Sydney Catholic Weekly*: 23 Sept.; 7, 14, 28 Oct.; 4, 11 Nov. (articles); 7, 14, 21, 28 Oct.; 11, 18 Nov.; 30 Dec. (letters). In 1990 Fr John Hosie returned to the subject: "Davis, Dempsey and the Leaving of the Blessed Sacrament: The Controversy and a Possible Solution", *Australasian Catholic Record* 67 (1990): 81-86.

<sup>89</sup> On Davis see, e.g., Cashman, "Catholic Who's Who", 27.

<sup>90</sup> Waldersee, Catholic Society, 225; O'Farrell, *Catholic Community*, 15-16. The sources of the Davis and Dempsey traditions were treated by C.J. Duffy, "The Leaving of the Consecrated Host by Father Jeremiah O'Flynn", *JACHS* 2:2 (1967) 1-20. K.S. Inglis was sceptical about the entire incident: "Catholic Historiography in Australia", *Historical Studies* 8 (1958): 223-253; cf. the critical comments of R. Wynne, "Pioneering on the Illawarra", *Australasian Catholic Record* 45 (1966) 119-120. Hosie makes a compelling critique of Duffy, see note 88.

<sup>91</sup> *Advocate*, 9 April 1881, 14. It is difficult to date the various events at Dempsey's and to determine the relationships, if any, between the confraternity which recited the rosary there, the "guardsmen" of the Blessed Sacrament, and the Confraternity of St Joseph mentioned on Butler's gravestone. If the confraternity was indeed founded at Fr Dixon's suggestion (cf. n. 74 above), and



therefore prior to 1808, it predated Dempsey's pardon and his residence in Kent Street, and indicates the importance of his role in the Catholic community from very early days. Columbus Fitzpatrick, on the other hand, associates the beginning of the confraternity with Fr O'Flynn's departure and the leaving of the Blessed Sacrament in 1818. He is not entirely clear, however, and given his age at the time and the fact that he arrived in Sydney in 1817, his testimony to earlier events is not necessarily reliable. Certainly Dempsey was carrying on his ministry to the condemned before O'Flynn's arrival, and there seems no compelling reason why these other religious activities (the weekday rosary, Sunday Vespers, perhaps the confraternity) should not also be allowed an early date.

<sup>92</sup> Published as "The Men of '98" in JACHS 3:1 (1969): 39. Unfortunately no sources are cited, and there is no indication whether or not the term "Council of Protection" was a contemporary one.

<sup>93</sup> "Fitzpatrick Letters", 20.

<sup>94</sup> *Catholic Weekly*, 11 Nov. 1965, 16, 22; cf. letter of Ambrose Fitzpatrick to Cardinal Moran, "Fitzpatrick Letters", 43.

<sup>95</sup> W. Ullathorne, *The Catholic Mission in Australia*, London, 1837, 8-9. Ullathorne records another incident concerning a member of the Scapular Confraternity which is of interest, not least for its picture of a lay contemplative: "There were several soldiers who went to their weekly Communion, in the 17th Regiment, and at least twenty who went once a fortnight. One young man I particularly remember. He was quite a contemplative. He had received the Carmelite Scapular before he entered the Army from the Reverend Father Pope at Congelton and had persevered in a habit of prayer and fasting. He spent the sentry watches in prayer. He had to stand sentry at the gaol by the gibbet

one night after two men had been hung upon it, and such was his terror through the working of his imagination, in that ghastly spot, with the shade of night around him, that as he afterwards told me with a sense of gratitude, nothing but the earnestness with which he said his prayers, and so conquered his imagination, saved him from throwing down his musket and jumping over the parapet to run away. The incidents of a barrack-room, and the rigours of military discipline, served him as subjects of self-mortification. And he certainly had both a tender conscience and an habitual sense of the presence of God. He kept several of his comrades steady to their religious duties, and from time to time brought others to the Sacraments. I have often wondered what ultimately became of that young soldier, who had then gone on well and holily for several years.” *From Cabin-Boy to Archbishop: The Autobiography of Archbishop Ullathorne*, London, 1941, 109-110.

<sup>96</sup> Ambrose’s account agrees with his brother’s in every detail but this: Ambrose thinks that the Blessed Sacrament was left behind by accident at the time of Fr O’Flynn’s arrest; *Freeman’s Journal*, 21 Jan. 1888, 5.

<sup>97</sup> Columbus’ reminiscences were occasioned by the destruction of St Mary’s Cathedral by fire in June 1865.

<sup>98</sup> Gabriel Louis Huon de Kerrilau, who had come as a private with the New South Wales Corps in 1794 and later settled in the Campbelltown area; Cashman, “Catholic Who’s Who”, 33-34.

<sup>99</sup> “Fitzpatrick Letters”, 19-21. Columbus (1810-1877) was a boy of seven or eight at the time of these events. Later his mother, eager for him to have a Catholic education, “apprenticed” him as servant, altar boy and student to Fr Connolly, whom he accompanied on trips to Newcastle and Port Macquarie and with whom he spent eighteen months in Tasmania during 1824-25, thus meeting most of the Catholics of note in the colony, cf. note 77.

<sup>100</sup> He was born at Windsor in 1814 and died in 1904; cf. Scarlett, "Fitzpatrick Family", 65.

<sup>101</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 21 Jan. 1888, 5. At the time of this interview Ambrose was 74, but still active as an officer of the Colonial Architect's Department. The letter to Cardinal Moran, dated 30 Nov. 1884, is in "Fitzpatrick Letters", 43-44.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. O'Brien, *Dawn of Catholicism*, 11.112 ff.

<sup>103</sup> Eris O'Brien, *The Foundation of Catholicism in Australia: Life and Letters of Archpriest John Joseph Therry*, 2 vols., Sydney, 1922, is a somewhat triumphalist but invaluable study, reproducing many documents; but cf. the more balanced judgements in O'Farrell, *Catholic Community*, chs. 1 and 2.

<sup>104</sup> Petition dated 12 Feb. 1820; Bigge Report Appendix, ML, BT Box 21. The other signatories were Michael Hayes, William Chalker, Michael Dwyer, P. Purcell, William Davis, John Lacy, Pat Moore, William Fallon, John Curtis, Andrew Byrne, Jos. Morley Snr., S. Macguigan, Michael Reddington, Patrick Parrigan.

<sup>105</sup> O'Brien, *Archpriest Therry*, 1.23-24.

<sup>106</sup> 7 July 1827; ML.MSS 1810/72.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in T.L. Suttor, *Hierarchy and Democracy in Australia 1788-1870*, Melbourne, 1965; cf. O'Farrell, *Catholic Community*, 23-24.

<sup>108</sup> *Gazette*, 1 July 1820.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. James Waldersee, "Old St. Mary's: Sydney's Debt to Father Therry", *JACHS* 2:2 (1968): 39-59; R.W. Harden, "Old St. Mary's 1821-1865", *St. Marys Cathedral Sydney 1921-1971*, Sydney, 1971, 1-19.

<sup>110</sup> "Fitzpatrick Letters", 17-18.

<sup>111</sup> *Gazette*, 1 Dec 1821.

<sup>112</sup> Waldersee, “Old St. Mary’s”, 41.

<sup>113</sup> F. Greenway to J.J. Therry, 11 Nov. 1823, Therry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/3.

<sup>114</sup> “Fitzpatrick Letters”, 16.

<sup>115</sup> James Dempsey to J.J. Therry, 18 July 1830, Therry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/10, 131-134 (reproduced in the Appendix). For Dempsey’s acknowledged donations see *Gazette*, 11 Oct. 1822; 9 Jan. 1823; 19 Feb., 10 June 1824; 3 Oct. 1825.

<sup>116</sup> J.J. Therry to John O’Sullivan, 18 April 1846, quoted in Waldersee, “Old St. Mary’s”, 59.

<sup>117</sup> Waldersee, *ibid.*, 44; cf. Therry Papers, Chapel Accounts, ML.MSS 1810/6.

<sup>118</sup> *Advocate*, 9 April 1881, 14; Walker, *James Dempsey*, 31.

<sup>119</sup> James Dempsey to J.J. Therry, n.d. [1822], Therry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/3, 120-121 (reproduced in the Appendix).

<sup>120</sup> “Old St. Mary’s”, 45.

<sup>121</sup> James Dempsey to J.J. Therry, 31 Dec. 1823; ML.MSS 1810/3, 267-269.

<sup>122</sup> *Gazette*, 15 Dec 1821.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 May, 11 Oct. 1822; 9 Jan. 1823.

<sup>124</sup> Walker, *James Dempsey*, 27-30.

<sup>125</sup> Governor to Earl Bathurst, 28 Oct. 1824; HRA I.xi.382-383; Harden, *St. Mary’s*, 4.

<sup>126</sup> Statement of the R.C. Chapel Fund with James Dempsey, Therry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/79, 187-192.

<sup>127</sup> J.J. Therry to Mrs Redmond, 18 Sept. 1824, quoted in Waldersee, “Old St. Mary’s”, 4.

<sup>128</sup> 8 June 1824; 3 Oct. 1825.

<sup>129</sup> *Australian*, 22 Sept. 1825.

<sup>130</sup> Mutual Engagement between Revd J.J. Therry and Mr James Dempsey, 29 Sept. 1825, Therry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/65, 137; James Dempsey to J.J. Therry, 24 Oct. 1828, *ibid.*, 1810/8, 161-163 (reproduced in the Appendix).

<sup>131</sup> J.J. Therry to Captain Fotherley, *ibid.*, ML.MSS 1810/5,127.

<sup>132</sup> *Australian*, 13 Oct. 1825.

<sup>133</sup> James Dempsey to J.J. Therry, 20 Feb. 1826, Therry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/6, 37-39.

<sup>134</sup> *Australian*, 13 May 1826.

<sup>135</sup> Expenses of Mr Dempseys Voyage to Calcutta, Therry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/79, 183.

<sup>136</sup> Harden, *St. Mary's*, 6.

<sup>137</sup> Quoted in P. O'Farrell, (ed.), *Documents in Australian Catholic History*, 2 vols., London, 1969,1.34.

<sup>138</sup> "Fitzpatrick Letters", 25-27.

<sup>139</sup> Quoted in Harden, *St. Mary's*, 6.

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 13. When finally completed St Mary's was capable of holding a congregation of 2,000; cf. Polding's return to Government in 1836, in H.N. Birt, *Benedictine Pioneers in Australia*, 2 vols., London, 1911, 1.301.

<sup>141</sup> *Catholic Community*, 21-24.

<sup>142</sup> Therry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/5,137. The man's name was Webb; he was hanged on 9 August; *ibid.*, 139. Therry employed another John Butler as a stockman on his country property, from whom there are also letters in Therry's papers.

<sup>143</sup> Sainty and Johnson, 96, nos. 1759, 1760; Deposition of Eleanor Dumigan, Therry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/65,195.

<sup>144</sup> Moran's reference is in *Catholic Church*, 244-246; Fitzpatrick's in "Fitzpatrick Letters", 30; HRA III.iv.233-236, III.v.13, 135-136, 374. O'Farrell does not mention Coote. Cf. Paul

Chandler, "Carmelite in Van Diemen's Land: A Collection of Documents", *Nubecula* 31 (1980): 32-55; Paul Collins, "Mystery Priest and Maverick", *Footprints* 5:12 (1986): 21-28; W.T. Southerwood, *Planting a Faith in Hobart*, Hobart, n.d., 10.

<sup>145</sup> *Advocate*, 9 April 1881, 14.

<sup>146</sup> *Autobiography*, London, 1891, 11.

<sup>147</sup> James Dempsey to J.J. Therry, 24 Oct. 1828, Therry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/8, 161-163 (reproduced in the Appendix). Some of this money was released to Cornelius in 1830, when the crop failures of the previous seasons left him in financial difficulties; cf. C.W. Chambers to J.J. Therry, 5 Feb. 1830, *ibid.*, 1810/10, 49-50.

<sup>148</sup> O'Farrell, *Catholic Community*, 27; Waldersee, "Old St. Mary's", 49; Governor Darling to Under-Secretary Hay, 13 Aug. 1827, HRA I.xii.503-504.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. O'Farrell, *ibid.*, 28-31. Eris O'Brien gives a rather prejudiced account of Power in *Archpriest Therry*, 1.105-131; it should be read with Waldersee's defence of him, "Father Daniel Power", JACHS 2:2 (1967): 21-48. Cf. also Birt, *Benedictine Pioneers*, 1.121 ff.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Duffy, "Growth of Catholic Sydney", 22-23; *From Cabin-Boy to Archbishop*, 62; Birt, 1.286.

<sup>151</sup> James Dempsey to J.J. Therry, 18 July 1830, Therry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/10, 131-134 (reproduced in the Appendix).

<sup>152</sup> When he witnessed a document related to the estate of Charles Pickever, Therry Papers, ML.MSS 1810/67, 63.

<sup>153</sup> Ullathorne, *From Cabin-Boy to Archbishop*, 70; Moran, *Catholic Church*, 150.

<sup>154</sup> *New South Wales Calendar and General Post Office Directory*, 1836, 1837.

<sup>155</sup> W.W. Burton, *The State of Religion and Education in New South Wales*, London, 1840, quoted in Patrick O'Farrell, (ed.), *Documents in Australian Catholic History*, 2 vols., Melbourne, 1969, 1.39-41.

<sup>156</sup> "Fitzpatrick Letters", 26.

<sup>157</sup> O'Farrell, *Documents*, 106-108; *Australian*, 7 Feb. 1834. The other signatories were Adam Wilson, Roger Murphy, Andrew Byrne, Thomas Higgins, John Leary, William Reynolds, Andrew Higgins, M. Burke, John O'Sullivan, Edward Redmond; J.H. Plunkett and Thomas Connolly signed a codicil.

<sup>158</sup> Walker, *James Dempsey*, 40-41.

<sup>159</sup> Will of James Dempsey, Supreme Court of NSW Probate Division, no. 901/1.

<sup>160</sup> Walker, *James Dempsey*, 40-41.

<sup>161</sup> According to Sainty and Johnson his gravestone inscription said 7 February (no. 1210), but the burial was on 12 Feb. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 Feb. 1838) and such a long delay is unlikely. Probate records give 10 Feb. as the date of death.

<sup>162</sup> An Emigrant Mechanic [Alexander Harris], *Settlers and Convicts*, [London, 1841], repr. Melbourne, 1869, 54-55.

<sup>163</sup> An attempt in 1980 to acquire it from the Botany Cemetery Trust for safekeeping was unsuccessful.

<sup>164</sup> The permission of the Provincial of the Society of Jesus in Australia to quote the following letters from the Therry Papers in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, is gratefully acknowledged.

