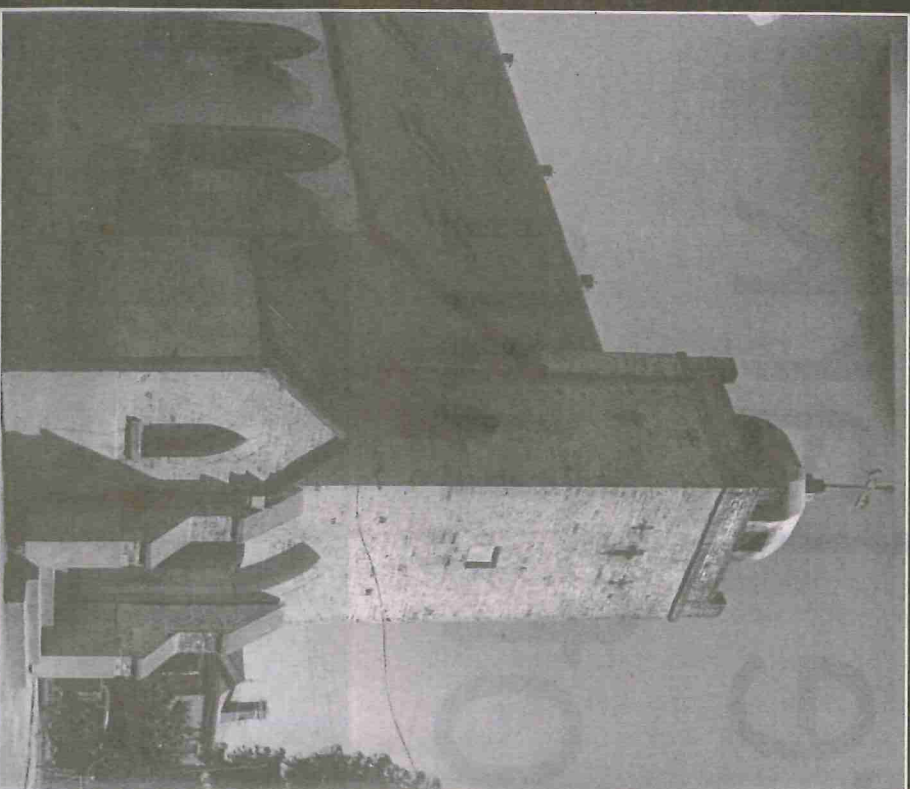


What you should know

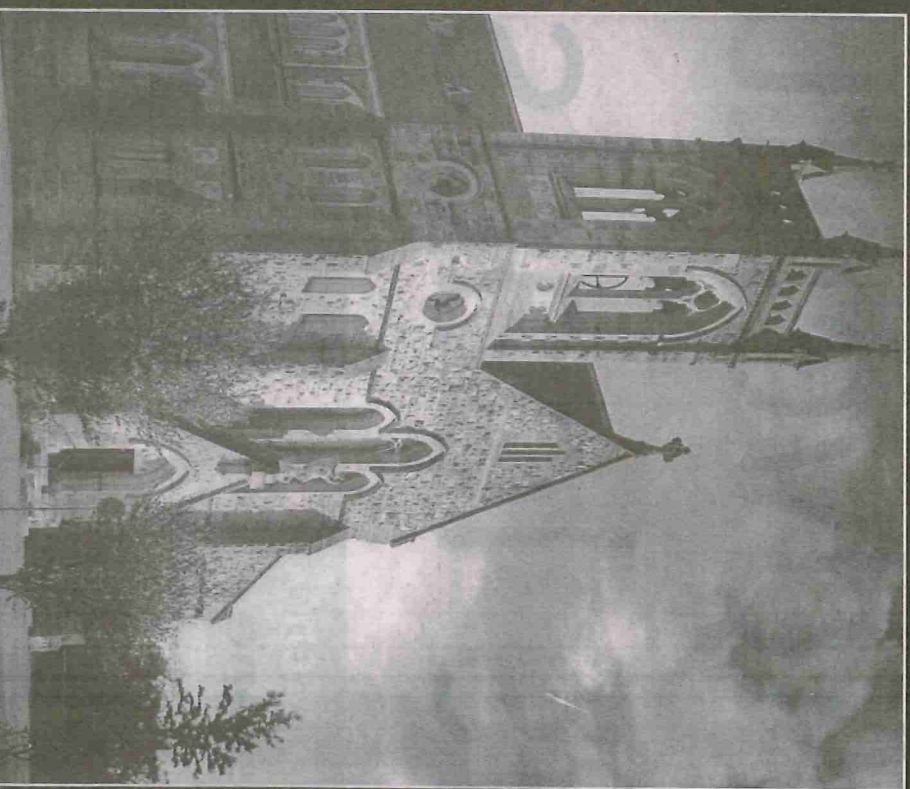
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The old church.



The new church.

When churches came to Wagga



at the archives
Wayne Doubleday

Churches began to appear in Wagga in the mid-19th century.

Between 1859 and 1869, three churches had been built on Church Hill, catering for the different religious denominations.

Church was built in Church Street in the late 1850s.

The foundation stone was laid on September 27, 1858 by Reverend McAlroy of the Diocese, attended by Reverend Birmingham.

The church was built in the Gothic style and was opened on December 4, 1859.

As there was no resident priest in Wagga until the 1870s, Reverends McAlroy and Birmingham continued to travel to Wagga at regular intervals to conduct religious services.

These two men had an influence on the Roman Catholic population of Wagga for some 20 years.

St Joseph's School was built in Johnson Street to cater for the growing number of children, whose parents wished them to receive a Catholic education.

The school opened in January 1886 around the corner from St Michael's Church. March 1885 saw a decision to build a new St Michael's Church, on the the corner of Johnson and Church Streets.

The Reverend Father Dunne saw that the original church had become too small for the growing Catholic congregation, and looked to building a larger church.

Once the idea had been conceived, it was not

to be lost.

The plans for the new church, which would accommodate up to 1000 people, were designed by Messrs. Tuppin, Gilbert, and Demmhey, architects of Melbourne.

Mr Gibbs was accepted to complete the stonework, and Charles Hardy was to complete the carpentry.

The *Wagga Wagga Advertiser* reported in great detail all the aspects of the church that contributed to its "grand and commanding appearance". The stained-glass windows were all presented to the church by the "kindness and liberality of wealthy members of the congregation".

On April 26, 1885, when building commenced on the new church, there were some 500 spectators gathered to watch the ceremony of the blessing of the foundation stone. A Latin inscription on parchment, placed in a bottle, was buried under the foundation stone. The translation of the inscription read:

For the greater glory of God, This cornerstone of a new church at Wagga Wagga, dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel, was properly blessed and laid by the Right Rev. William Lanigan, D.D., and Bishop of Goulburn, assisted by the Very Rev. P. Dunne, pastor of the district and Vicar-General of the Diocese, the Rev D.T. Walsh, the Rev. M. Buckley, and a large concourse of the faithful, on the 26th day of April, the year of Grace one thousand eight hundred and eighty-five, during the pontificate of Pope Leo XIII, in the reign of Queen Victoria, under the Viceroyalty of Lord Augustus Loftus, K.C.M.G., happily governing this colony of New South Wales. The Very Rev. J. Butler, Prior, O.C.C., preached a learned and eloquent sermon suitable to the occasion.

The new St Michael's Church was officially opened over the weekend of October 1 and 2, 1887. In attendance were five bishops, and various priests from the region. The Saturday saw the official reception with a procession by the children of St Mary's and other schools,

followed by several addresses given inside the church.

The Right Rev Dr Murray, Bishop of Maitland said, "This church expresses the great, the enormous power of the Catholic Church, because it is only amongst Catholic people, blessed in their poverty, that such a noble church could be erected; and therefore the Catholic people of Wagga will have a claim - a very strong claim to the especial protection of St Michael."

On Sunday, October 2, 1887 the consecration ceremony took place. Early mass was held from 6am until 9am, with the ceremony of blessing and the opening of the new church commencing at 10.30am. The vast interior was crowded with people from around the region. The ceremony began with a procession of clergy followed by a Litany and then the Solemn High Mass at 11am. A Hallelujah Chorus closed the proceedings.

A luncheon followed the official ceremony where each of the visiting Bishops and Priests gave a speech.

Mayor Fitzhardinge stated it had given 'great satisfaction and pleasure' to be invited to the ceremony despite being members of the Protestant Church.

Upon the opening of the new St Michael's Church in 1887, the original church became St Michael's School, which was eventually demolished in 1965.

The construction of such buildings was a mark of progress for the citizens of Wagga. St Michael's Cathedral still stands proud on the corner of Church and Johnson Streets, next door to St Joseph's Primary School.

Compiled by Claire Stewart

References:

Wagga Wagga Advertiser - 04/10/1887; McCarron, P, Ryan, C., & Kennedy, G., *A History of the Christian Brothers School Wagga Wagga, 1914-1989*; Morris, S., (1999), *Wagga Wagga, A History*; Swan, K. (1970), *A History of Wagga.*