

History of St Joseph's Church Lexton

The first Mass was celebrated in Lexton in 1851 by a travelling priest. The residents received word that the priest would be in the town so they were able to get together for the sacraments of baptism, confession and Eucharist.

The Assembly Hall at the Lexton Hotel was used by the Lexton Catholic community for their meeting place. As time went by this building required renovation so the parishioners decided to raise money to build their own church.

The Victorian Government Gazette lists one acre as set aside for the Catholic Church at Lexton on the 13th October 1863, however the church was not built until 1894 on land facing the main road bounded by Skene and Clapperton Streets.

The official opening of Lexton's first Catholic Church, which was built by Mr Dave Gray took place on the 29th of July 1884. The Bishop of Ballarat Dr James Moore dedicated the building. Fr John Barrett of Clunes celebrated the first Mass, while the Bishop preached a sermon appropriate to the occasion. At the conclusion he referred to the generous help given by their non-catholic friends. The close co-operation between people of different faiths was evident in that amongst the invited guests were the Anglican Bishop of Ballarat, Bishop Thornton and members of the Robertson family of Mt Mitchell estate. Representatives of the following families were present at the dedication of the first church of St Joseph: Briody, Dromney, Howard, Keating, Kettle, Kelly, McCarthy, McDonald, Ransom and Salvana.

The first church served the parishioners until 1967, when due to the required maintenance a meeting of the congregation was held. The Parish Priest, Fr E O'Bryan presided and the decision was made to build a new church. Permission was obtained from the Bishop, however drought conditions set in for the ensuing twelve months and plans were held in abeyance.

By December 1972, Fr John Martin had become Parish Priest and a fund raising committee was formed led by Kevin Briody as the president of the St Joseph's congregation. The treasurer/secretary was Patricia Briody. Plans for the new church were drawn by Mr Tony Rieter of Sebastopol in 1974, which included a catechists or meeting room. Mr Rieter gave his time freely to many church projects in the Ballarat Diocese-this was greatly appreciated. The plans were placed on view for the parishioners and building commenced the following year 1975.

A feature of the new church is the thirty two concrete columns. As the concrete was poured on the site it was only possible to make one column per day. Permission was obtained to conduct a car raffle; the profit from this went towards the purchase of the bricks.

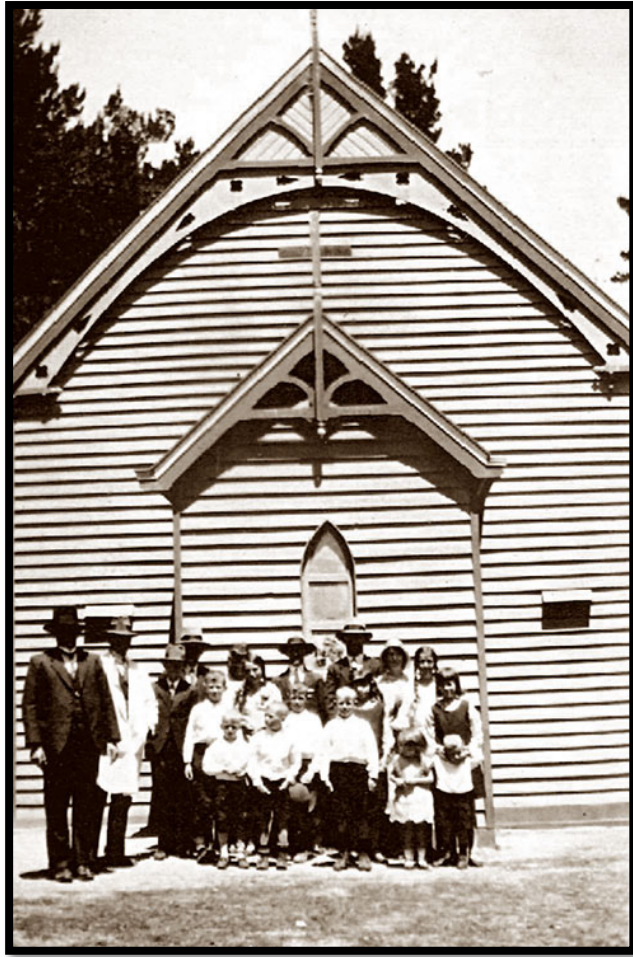
An annual Catholic Ball and golf day were also held. The church was built largely by voluntary labour. A team of men of the church – Frank, Jack, Jim, Phonse, Terrence, Phillip, Gerard, Christ, Simon, Dominic Briody, Lionel Smith, Chalie Grose and Bernie Cullinan led by Kevin spent many hours on the project. Locally grown and milled timber was used in the construction. This together with the generous donations by parishioners enabled the project to reach completion and was paid for in full by 1981. The beautiful red gum alter was crafted by a parishioner, Charlie Grose.

The opening of the second Church of St Joseph at Lexton took place at Sunday 9th October 1977. The Bishop of Ballarat blessed the new church before celebrating Mass at which seven young people were confirmed. The opening ceremony was attended by approximately five hundred people of whom many stood outside the new brick church. The Bishop was assisted by Frs S Dew and John Martin.

At the conclusion, all adjourned to the Lexton Public Hall for afternoon tea. The visitors and parishioners were given an official welcome by Lionel Smith after which Cr Bill Molloy spoke on behalf of the Lexton Shire Council. Mr Tom Austin, MLA also addressed the gathering and conclude his speech by congratulating the parishioners on their achievement of building a "build it yourself church".

In 1984 Kevin Briody passed away suddenly and fittingly his funeral was held from the new church. A tabernacle was dedicated to his memory for his leadership and effort in the completion of the new St Joseph. In recent times, Mass is celebrated on the Fifth Sunday of the month. The church is often the venue for funerals for local residents, even of other faiths, which is in keeping with the ecumenical spirit.







Kevin and Patricia Briody (around 1984)