

A Diocese is Born

by Berenice Kerr rsm

Historical journals hold accounts of the formation of Ballarat Diocese, and the issues which provided the background to this event have been explored in other publications by students of Church History.¹ A continuous, detailed narrative is, however, difficult to come by. Hence this attempt to provide an outline of the process by which the vast territory of the diocese of Melbourne was divided into three separate dioceses in 1874, noting that subsequently a fourth diocese, Sale, was created in 1887.

One hundred and fifty years have passed since Rome issued the decree which stated:

*We [Pope Pius IX] by Our Apostolic Authority ... erect and constitute ... two new dioceses, one in the City of Sandhurst and one in the City of Ballarat ...*²

As the anniversary approaches, it is opportune to revisit the story ... our story, and in doing so certain questions spring to mind. Why was the diocese formed? Who made the decision? How was it arrived at? and possibly, the most fundamental question: What is a diocese, anyway?

A Diocese

Of the four, the simplest to answer is the last. What is a diocese?

If we take a diocese as being an administrative area, the answer is arrived at through a simple exercise in geography. Those of us who live in the Ballarat diocese are familiar with the 'Murray to the sea' concept and know that there are certain boundaries which define territory administered by Ballarat and that similar boundaries define Sandhurst or Melbourne. Canon Law, however, widens the definition of diocese to 'a portion of the people of God which is entrusted to a bishop for him to shepherd',³ giving it a pastoral connotation which leads directly to the reason why the diocese of Ballarat was founded.

Obviously, our exploration applies to the post-colonial period of Australian history. Nevertheless, we are aware that people have inhabited the land now known as Australia for millennia prior to James Cook's 1770 voyage along the East Coast, an event which prompted the establishment of the penal colony of New South Wales.⁴ The history of the dispossession of the First Peoples, the seizure of their lands and the massacre of their people, together with the denial of their culture and spirituality, is not the substance of this paper. It is appropriate, however, to acknowledge that the land of the First Peoples was seized without any recompense.



Warrenheip Hills near Ballarat. 1854. Eugene von Guérard
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1 The Ballarat Diocesan historical journal, *Light*, carried a series of articles written by T.J. Linnane, entitled 'Advent of a Diocese' beginning November 1968. The Melbourne Archdiocesan equivalent, *Footprints*, featured several articles under the heading, 'Setting up Diocesan Boundaries in Victoria', the first of which appeared in October 1973. J. N. Molony and C. Dowd both provide valuable contextual information in their respective theses for the Australian National University. These were enhanced by their authors' access to original documents from the Vatican archives which shed extensive light on events of the period. See below for details.

2 Ballarat Diocesan Archives and Melbourne Diocesan Historical Commission, a translation of the original.

3 Canon 369. https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib2-cann368-430_en.html Downloaded 12/07/23.

4 Before Governor Macquarie's official 1817 recommendation to the Colonial Office that Australia be so named, the continent had been known variously as 'New Holland', 'New South Wales', or even more vaguely as 'The Unknown South Land'. See <https://www.nla.gov.au/faq/how-was-australia-named>

The Australian Mission

The beginnings of the 'Catholic' story in Australia can be traced to Catholics among the convicts condemned to serve their sentence in the British colony. To begin with there was no priest, no means of receiving the sacraments. The first priests were Irish convicts, and it took almost forty years of struggles with officialdom before a priest was appointed to minister to the growing number of Catholics, who, by 1820, were dispersed over a wide expanse of territory in NSW and Tasmania.⁵

Governance of what was known as 'The Australian Mission', that is, the entire continent, was an ad hoc business. Priests came and went, sometimes authorised by the colonial authorities, sometimes not. The English Benedictines were instructed by Rome to include Australia in their purview, with the result that by 1819 responsibility for 'New Holland' was in the hands of the Bishop of Mauritius. In 1833 Dr William Ullathorne OSB was appointed to Sydney as his Vicar General. No sooner had the latter arrived in Australia than he began to take steps to impose some order on the prevailing mayhem.⁶

The body in Rome which managed the affairs of foreign missions was the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, often referred to by a shortening of its Latin title to Propaganda. For the group of Cardinal administrators, reliant as they were solely on reports from visitors to Rome, the daily affairs of the church in Australia lay in the realm of mystery.⁷ Ullathorne aimed to put an end to that and prevailed on Pope Gregory XVI to appoint John Bede Polding, an English Benedictine, to the position of Bishop of Sydney. Polding's diocese extended over the entire Australian mainland - one of his first actions having been to appoint Robert Willson Bishop of Hobart.⁸ The 26,000 Catholics in Polding's care made up a quarter of the total European population; he had six priests and a few Catholic schools.⁹



John Bede Polding
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In April 1842 Pope Gregory established more formal church structures: Sydney was made an archdiocese; Hobart and Adelaide sub-ordinate dioceses.¹⁰ The newly established Church Province of Sydney covered the whole mission. Polding was named Archbishop of Sydney with Robert Willson and Francis Murphy the Bishops of Hobart and Adelaide respectively.¹¹

The Port Philip Settlement

Closer to home, the area identified as the Port Philip Settlement, subsequently to be known as Victoria, was settled during the 1830s. Lands along the south west coast of Bass Strait had long provided a temporary haven to whalers and sealers as they engaged in their trade, while pastoralists had gathered in communities inland, grateful for the benefits provided by what one explorer termed 'Australia Felix'. Portland, the first permanent European settlement in Victoria, was founded by the Henty family in 1834.¹²

'Missions', later to become parishes, some ultimately dioceses, frequently were set up in response to pleas by representatives of the community for the services of a pastor. Such is the story of Melbourne, where, following a quest

5 Tasmania was known as Van Dieman's Land until 1856.

6 For the situation of the church in 1833, see P. Wilkinson, 'Historical Series: Particular Councils in Australia, First Provincial Council, 10-12 September 1844', originally published in *The Swag*. https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Article_Peter-Wilkinson-The-Swag-1844-First-Australian-Provincial-Council-formatted.pdf Downloaded 12/07/2023.

7 'The men who worked at the Congregation knew that Australia was far away and very big - remotissimo and vastissimo were their favourite adjectives to describe the southern continent - but they seem not to have appreciated just how far or how big'. Though written in relation to a later period, this nevertheless seems accurately to summarise one of the chief problems with Propaganda and the Australian Church. See C. P. Dowd in 'Papal Policy Towards Conflict in The Australian Catholic Missions: The Relationship Between John Bede Polding, O.S.B., Archbishop of Sydney, and The Sacred Congregation De Propaganda Fide, 1842 - 1874', thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University, Canberra, July 1994, p.80.

8 Van Dieman's Land was a separate colony from NSW but was under the administration of the diocese of Sydney.

9 See Wilkinson, *op.cit.*

10 The official term for an archdiocese is 'metropolitan see', the subordinate dioceses being termed 'suffragan sees'.

11 See Wilkinson, *op.cit.*

12 See W. Ebsworth, 'Early History of the Church in Victoria - No. 19, Portland, Oldest Town in Victoria,' *Advocate*, December 18, 1946, p.11. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/172232956?searchTerm=Early%20History%20Church%20Victoria%20Early%20History>

from Jeremiah and Catherine Coffey in 1837, Patrick Bonaventure Geohegan was appointed as pastor.¹³ A similar story is behind Polding's visit to the Western District in 1844. Groups of Catholics from these communities had begun asking the Sydney authorities for a priest. It is said that on April 25 of the previous year,

*... the Jemima left for Sydney with a petition from the Roman Catholics of Portland and vicinity requesting Archbishop Polding to appoint a clergyman to the place. [T]he document bore 166 signatures, but many more names could have been obtained had people in the country been given an opportunity of attaching their names.*¹⁴

Twelve months later, having installed Robert Willson as Bishop of Hobart, Polding, with two companions, stopped over in Melbourne and set out on horseback from Geelong to visit the people of Port Fairy and Portland. The three said Masses, administered the Sacraments, registered marriages and, in all, brought the comforts of religion to these people living so far away from the centre of church administration. Polding's sensitivity to their plight and his first-hand awareness of the perilous journey required to reach them contributed, no doubt, to his decision to establish a diocese in the Port Philip district, with a pastor who was geographically closer to his people and thus more able to visit them.¹⁵

First Bishop of Melbourne: James Alipius Goold



Great Lonsdale Street East (1864) St Francis Church on left side
More details below.

Accordingly, in 1848, James Alipius Goold was appointed first Bishop of Melbourne. Goold arrived in Melbourne in October of that year to his 'cathedral church', St Francis Lonsdale Street.¹⁶ His area for shepherding was extensive and resources were meagre. His diary tells us the following:

I left Sydney on the 3rd Sept to proceed overland to my diocese, the extreme boundary of which, at the River Murray near Albury, was crossed by me on the morning of 28th September ...

*I arrived in Melbourne on the 4th of October ... When I arrived ... the diocese had only three Clergymen, two churches - one in Melbourne, and the other at Geelong - and a commodious little chapel at Portland; in Melbourne, close to the church a small presbytery ... a spacious Hall, which is used for a boys' and girls' school [and] a small school house ...*¹⁷

By 1851 Victoria had been made a separate colony from NSW. At that time the population was 77,000. Within fifteen years, due in the main to the discovery of gold, the number of inhabitants had grown to almost 400,000 – an increase bordering on 400%. Records show that Goold did his best to meet the needs of his people, recruiting priests, organising schools and establishing parishes.

In the ensuing two decades eleven parishes or missions were established in the territory which would eventually become the diocese of Ballarat, while across the state of Victoria many more were added.

Who Made the Decision?

With the infrastructure safely in place it is now time to consider who was involved: that is, the actors in the drama.

Early in Polding's administration of the Province of Sydney, the dioceses of Adelaide, Hobart and Perth had been established. By 1869, in addition to Melbourne, there were five other dioceses with resident bishops. Maitland, established in 1847, Brisbane in 1859, Armidale 1862, Bathurst 1865 and Goulburn 1867.¹⁸

Image: State Library of Victoria record: Title: Great Lonsdale Street East (1864.) [picture] Author/Creator: Francois Cogne 1829-1883. lithographer. Contributor(s): Charles Troedel 1836-1906 Copyright status: This work is out of copyright

13 T. J. Linnane, 'Names in the Eureka Story', *Light*, September 1975, p.20.

14 Ebsworth, *loc.cit.*

15 T. J. Linnane, 'The Planting of a Vineyard', *Light*, December 1964, p.20. Polding wrote of 'miles and miles of bogs and marshes amid snow and sleet, rain and wind, such as I had never before experienced'.

16 Work on St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne began in 1851.

17 Diary of James Alipius Goold, <https://melbournecatholic.org/uploads/documents/GooldDiary1848-1886Complete.pdf>. Downloaded 12/07/23. Hereafter referred to as 'Goold, Diary'.

18 The first Bishop of Maitland was also the auxiliary bishop of Sydney and, until 1865, Maitland had no resident bishop.

There exists in the National Portrait Gallery a print consisting of a collage of several individual photographs of the men who constituted the Catholic hierarchy of Australia in 1869. At the centre is the print of Polding, Archbishop of Sydney. Surrounding it are smaller prints of James Murray (Maitland); William Lanigan (Goulburn); Mathew Quinn (Bathurst); James Alipius Goold (Melbourne); Lawrence Bonaventure Sheil OSF (Adelaide); Daniel Murphy (Hobart); James Quinn (Brisbane).¹⁹ Despite the semblance of unity among the men surrounding Polding it is safe to say that the majority of them had a view of the Australian church substantially different from that of Polding and little trust in his capacity for administration.²⁰ This group of bishops, to a greater or lesser degree, played leading roles in the eventual establishment of the diocese of Ballarat.

A word about the cultural background of these bishops: the majority of them were Irish, appointed to minister to the predominantly Irish Catholic population of Australia. A key figure in the appointment of many of them had been the Irish Cardinal Paul Cullen. By 1869 Cullen was Cardinal Archbishop of Dublin, but he had previously been rector of the Irish College in Rome and his opinions held sway with the authorities at Propaganda.²¹ To contemporary Australians it may seem odd that the affairs of the Church in this continent were influenced by someone so far removed from the scene. That was, however, the case and it annoyed Archbishop Polding.²² It is said 'that there was scarcely an episcopal appointment, a crisis or a question about which ... [Propaganda] did not consult Cullen before making a decision.'²³ Cullen and the bishops to whom he was a mentor were fiercely loyal to Rome and Roman ways.²⁴ Then, of course, they were Irish and while Catholics in Australia were in the main of Irish extraction, there were, as Polding was later to point out, other nationalities represented in the Australian church.²⁵ To them this was of no consequence. 'Men formed by Cullen assumed the guidance of the Catholic Church here. Most of them were Irish by background ...[but] before all else they were Romans.'²⁶ Collisions between them and the English Benedictine Archbishop were inevitable. They saw Polding as an outsider, to be out-manoeuvred if necessary, in order to gain their ends.²⁷



The Catholic Hierarchy of Australia 1869 by Archibald McDonald and Henry Samuel Sadd (engraver)
National Portrait Gallery of Australia

Another factor which cannot be ignored, having as it did a significant impact on the behaviour of several key personnel, is the education question and the consequent upheaval it engendered in the Australian church. In 1872 the Education Act Victoria foreshadowed similar legislation in all Australian colonies to establish a public school system which was 'free, secular and compulsory'.²⁸ In the years preceding the passing of the Act, debate was not only bitter but the

19 <https://www.portrait.gov.au/portraits/2010.49/the-catholic-hierarchy-of-australia>. John Brady, Bishop of Perth, was not in Australia at the time the print was made.

20 See P. Wilkinson, 'Second Australian Provincial Council, 18-25 April 1869', *The Swag*, Vol. 26, No. 1, Autumn 2018, pp. 7-13.

21 This issue is examined in depth by C. P. Dowd, *op.cit.* See, in particular, pp.17, 69-76, 168.

22 Polding complained, 'I do not know why ... Cullen should interfere so much in our affairs.' J.N. Molony, 'The Roman Mould of The Australian Catholic Church 1846-1878', Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Australian National University December 1967. p. 46. See also T. J. Linnane 'The Priest who borrowed a Tent – Patrick Dunne', *Light*, June 1967, p.15.

23 Dowd, *op.cit.*, p.76. This is corroborated by Molony *op.cit.*, p.43, who points out that none of Polding's nominations for Bishops was appointed to the newly-established dioceses in NSW while all of Cullen's were.

24 The 'Romanisation' of the Australian clergy is treated by Molony, *op.cit.*

25 *Footprints*, Vol. 2, No.1, January 1974, p.20.

26 Molony, *op.cit.*, p.69.

27 Dowd, *op.cit.*, pp.69-76. Molony, loc.cit.

28 See <https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/scan-sid-786.html>

principles on which the system was based threatened the livelihood of the church. Cullen had been a champion of Catholic education in Ireland. The Australian prelates he had trained and promoted were equally zealous and robustly defended the rights of the church to maintain its own system.²⁹ By 1867 the Education debate had taken a decidedly sectarian turn, with those in favour of the proposed Bill using the appointment of Irish bishops to flaunt divisive 'No Popery' slogans.³⁰

Second Australian Provincial Council of the Catholic Church, April 1869

1869 is a significant date in our narrative. That year, on April 18, the Second Australian Provincial Council of the Catholic Church opened at St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne.³¹ The council members, exclusively clerics, were under the leadership of the group of men whose portraits are referred to previously.³² The business of the Council included, of course, Catholic education, but also on the agenda were marriage, support for the clergy, administration of temporal goods, the formation of priests, and evangelization of the Australian Aborigines.³³ Without warning, however, Pope Pius IX suddenly announced plans for the 1st Vatican Council to begin the following December, meaning that the Bishops were required to make their way to Rome at once. Before dispersing, the assembled bishops discussed two matters relevant to our story. One was the elevation of Melbourne to Archdiocesan status; the second the establishment in Victoria of two new dioceses.³⁴

That the Catholic population of Victoria merited a division into smaller administrative and pastoral units cannot be denied.³⁵ Common sense dictated it and, as Bishop Goold was later to point out, it was 'necessary for the benefit of Religion'. While this may have been so, the size of the population and the vastness of the diocese had not prevented Goold from effectively carrying out his pastoral duties.³⁶

The Council having concluded its business, Archbishop Polding forwarded the Acts to the Holy See in June. Shortly after, most of the bishops began making their way to Rome.

Rome 1870



Image: Vatican I Assembly
Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Political events in Rome in 1870 were far from conducive to staging a Church Council. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, a series of events, inspired by the Risorgimento movement, culminated in 1861 with the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy, a union of the various states and kingdoms of the Italian peninsula. The Papal States and Rome, however, were not part of the Kingdom. Vatican I was in session when, in September 1870, Rome was invaded, and the papal lands were seized. The deliberations of the council were suspended indefinitely – though not before the doctrine of Papal Infallibility was proclaimed – while the Pope took refuge in the Vatican from which he never again ventured forth, declaring himself 'a prisoner'.³⁷

In June that year, Bishop Goold had called a meeting of the Australian bishops present in Rome. They composed a petition to the Holy See requesting that Melbourne be made an Ecclesiastical Province and that new dioceses be established in Sandhurst and Ballarat.³⁸ The petition was accompanied by a letter from Goold giving details pertinent

29 See Molony, *op.cit.*, pp.7, 35, 49.

30 Molony, *op.cit.*, pp.48-49.

31 The first such Council was held 10-12 September 1844.

32 See Wilkinson, *op.cit.*, pp. 7-13.

33 *ibid.*

34 *ibid.*

35 By the late 1860s the colony of Victoria, with only one diocese (Melbourne), contained a larger Catholic population than New South Wales which had five (Sydney, Maitland, Goulburn, Armidale and Bathurst). Clearly, the populous and wealthy Diocese of Melbourne was ripe for subdivision. Dowd, *op.cit.*, p.347.

36 'Setting Diocesan Boundaries in Victoria (1874)', *Footprints*, Vol. 2, No. 1, January 1974, pp.19, 20. By 1870 the population of Victoria was almost 730,000. [https://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/free.nsf/0/B757509AA0D92F0CCA257F730012F0BC/\\$File/20_Stats_Victoria_1870_Part_II_Population.pdf](https://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/free.nsf/0/B757509AA0D92F0CCA257F730012F0BC/$File/20_Stats_Victoria_1870_Part_II_Population.pdf)

37 The impact of these events on the Australian Church is explored in depth by Molony, *op.cit.*, p.263. The Council was prorogued on 20 October 1870, 'sine die', and was not officially closed until Vatican II met.

38 J. Keaney, 'Setting Diocesan Boundaries in Victoria (1874)', *Footprints*, Vol. 2, No. 2, April 1974, p.17.



Bishop Goold, Public domain, via Wikimedia Common

to the case but requesting that the dioceses not be erected until the boundaries were decided – to be done at a subsequent meeting of the Bishops.

The Official Declaration

At this point the ‘how’ question comes to the fore. Unlikely as it may seem, this part of the story is beset by intrigue, backroom deals and machinations, the likes of which could, without difficulty, be found in the pages of a good crime novel.

Following the suspension of the proceedings of Vatican I, the bishops went home, with the decrees of the Australian Provincial Council (1869) still unratified. Officials at Propaganda had intended to leave approval until the conclusion of the Council but that had become uncertain.³⁹ Finally, eighteen months later, most of the decrees were ratified, with the exception of the request for additional dioceses in Victoria. The authorities had a problem: the request did not contain sufficient detail.⁴⁰

Bishop Goold was quite clear as to what and who was required. Earlier in 1872, he had sent to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda a map with the proposed diocesan boundaries clearly marked and had proposed names of suitable candidates for the office of bishop.⁴¹ He had assured the Cardinals that financial and domestic matters were well in hand and had pointed out that the boundaries he had marked ‘are the limits chosen for the newly-proposed Protestant bishoprics’.⁴²

Rome, however, was not convinced. Maybe the Cardinals were waiting on information from the proposed meeting of the Australian Bishops previously mentioned by Goold. Maybe they were listening to the opinions of James Murray, Bishop of Maitland who, while in Rome in February 1872, was campaigning for three or four additional dioceses in Victoria, not merely two.⁴³ For whatever reason, the Cardinals requested more detail, more background information.⁴⁴

Two Additional Dioceses? Or Four? Or Six?

Months passed. At last, responding to a directive from Rome, in September 1873 Archbishop Polding called a meeting of the Australian Bishops to ‘discuss the erection of two new dioceses in Victoria, now the single diocese of Melbourne’.⁴⁵ Goold did not attend this meeting, giving heavy work commitments as his excuse. Others, Griver of Perth, Reynolds of Adelaide and Murphy of Hobart were not present. Five bishops present at the meeting - J. Quinn of Brisbane, M. Quinn of Bathurst, Murray of Maitland, Lanigan of Goulburn, and O’Mahoney of Armidale - Irishmen all and proteges of Cardinal Cullen,⁴⁶ took a literal interpretation of the instruction from Propaganda, that they were required to recommend ‘the erection of **new sees** in Victoria and fit persons to fill them’.⁴⁷ And that is exactly what they did. They divided Victoria into five dioceses, proposed their own nominees as bishops, and produced a new map showing their recommendations for boundaries.⁴⁸

39 It was formally closed by Pope John XXIII in 1960, prior to the opening of Vatican II.

40 *Footprints* Vol. 2, No. 2, April 1974, pp.17-18.

N.B. The footers on some pages of this volume are incorrectly labelled ‘Volume 2, No 1’ and throughout the volume the date is incorrectly given as ‘January 1974’. Correct details are found on the cover.

41 *Footprints*, Vol. 2, No.1, January 1974, p.19. I had the honour of sending you Your Eminence in the last mail, a geographical map of this Colony in which are traced the limits of the three dioceses of Melbourne, Sandhurst and Ballarat which, after diligent investigation and conforming to the wishes of prudent Priests I judged to be the most suitable.

42 *Footprints*, Vol.2, No.1, January 1974, p.19.

43 *Footprints* Vol.2, No.2, April 1974, p.18.

44 *ibid.*, pp.17-18.

45 The minutes of this meeting are reproduced in *Footprints*, Vol. 1, No.12, October 1973, pp.13-17. See also Vol. 2, No.1, January 1974, p.19.

46 Murray was a cousin to the Quinns and all three were related to Cullen. Hence the term ‘family bloc’ used by Polding’s secretary to describe them. Dowd, *op.cit.*, p.140.

47 See Keaney, J., ‘Victorian Bishops and Research in Roman Archives’, *Footprints*, Vol. 3, No. 6, October 1978, pp.23ff. Emphasis mine.

48 Dowd, *op.cit.*, p.135. The two additional dioceses proposed at this stage were Warrnambool and Sale though later Geelong and Kyneton were also proposed. Goold had already put forward nominees as bishops for the two new sees. The list from the Sydney meeting differed substantially from his and, in fact, contained two names of whom he explicitly disapproved. See *Footprints*, Vol. 2, No.1, p. 22.

Polding had been soundly ambushed. Not wanting to cause trouble or 'to flare up any party spirit', he signed the minutes of the meeting and tried to salvage some respectability by accompanying their dispatch with a covering letter explaining that 'what has happened was beyond my control ... [T]hey proposed the candidates and they enlarged the number of dioceses, both for which there was no need of my consent'.⁴⁹ Polding's letter expresses strong support for Goold, 'who more than anyone else, is fully aware of the state of his diocese and whether or not it is necessary to set up more dioceses apart from the two decided upon and who knows best of all which candidates are more suited to the positions'.⁵⁰ Goold, blind-sided by events and affronted that they 'started to split up my territory into five bishoprics giving each borders but hiding other important circumstances', wrote a letter of complaint to the Cardinal Prefect noting, among other matters, lack of due process.⁵¹ His main point was that had the bishops, as courtesy and fairness would demand, informed him of or even consulted him about their decisions, he could have 'proven the impracticability and futility of such villages as Sale and Warrnambool as bishoprics'. His proof lay in the fact that neither of these 'villages' had a sufficiently wealthy Catholic population to support a bishop and hence a diocese – the Catholic population of each consisting 'mainly of servants, household staff, small farmers and land tenants who live from hand to mouth.' His trump card in all this was to claim that were Propaganda to set up these dioceses, they would not be self-sustaining and would have to be funded from Rome. Furthermore, he was 'not happy with the majority of the candidates proposed to the Holy See by the conference prelates ... [and] that choosing them as bishops would be dangerous and would not in any way help the Catholic cause in this area'.⁵²

The group of five Irish bishops,⁵³ resolute that their views would prevail over those of Polding and Goold, now launched into campaign mode. Each member of the group sent a separate letter to the Prefect of Propaganda giving his version of events, arguing his case and in more than one instance nominating bishops other than those proposed at the Sydney meeting.⁵⁴ Murray, Bishop of Maitland, added weight to his argument by referring to the implementation of the Education Act, citing the need for 'new Bishops with deep religious knowledge and zeal' on account of the 'bad education system recently introduced in [Victoria], and outlined in detail how his candidates would 'benefit [the] church and ... promote the interests of the true religion and Catholic education in Australia'.⁵⁵

Matthew Quinn revealed himself as the master of intrigue. As well as sending the information to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda and expounding reasons to support the position taken by the coalition, he enlisted the aid of Monsignor Tobias Kirby. Kirby was the successor to Cullen as Rector of the Irish College and an ally as well as influential in Roman circles. It is probably no flight of fancy to suggest Kirby and Cullen, by having their nominees appointed bishops, had exercised excessive influence on the Australian Church.⁵⁶ Quinn fed information to Kirby suggesting that he 'may make use of it ... should anything turn up which would make it advisable or necessary'.⁵⁷

Goold in Rome

Furious with the New South Wales - Queensland coalition of bishops but unaware of the extent of their plotting, Goold decided that the written word was insufficient to win this particular battle.⁵⁸ He needed to be on the spot in Rome. On October 10 he and his chaplain Dean Moore left Melbourne on board the 'China'.⁵⁹ Quinn, on finding out he had been outwitted, wrote in haste to



Railway Pier Melbourne
Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

49 *ibid.*, p.21.

50 *ibid.* Goold had refused to accept one of the 'Sydney' candidates whom the meeting had urged him to endorse. *Footprints*, Vol.2, No.2, April 1974, p.20.

51 Handwritten documents held in Ballarat Diocesan Archives containing translations of letters relevant to this matter. Letter No XIII is from Bishop Goold to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda, dated October 9, 1873.

I have to make the holy Eminence aware that the division of a diocese must be done according to the necessary recommendations made by the 'Ordinary' whose knowledge and local experience of the spiritual needs of the soul and of the financial means looked for so as to cover the costs of such needs are favoured and not the propositions of bishops who finish up by saying big blunders as their knowledge and local experience is not enough.

52 *ibid.*

53 The Quinn-Murray faction.

54 *Footprints*, Vol. 2, No. 2, April 1974, p.20.

55 *ibid.* See also handwritten documents held in Ballarat Diocesan Archives containing translations of letters relevant to this matter, document entitled Summary, Letters No 9, No 10. See also a second document which contains 'Letter from the Bishop of Bathurst to the Distinguished Prefect of Propaganda' (No. 11).

56 Dowd, *op.cit.*, p.69. In 1867 the 'Cullenite' bishops of Australia had asked Kirby to act as their official representative in Rome.

57 'It is probable that you may have to make use of it in the proper quarter'. See Keaney, J., 'Victorian Bishops and Research in Roman Archives'. *Footprints*, Vol. 3, No. 6, October 1978, pp.23ff.

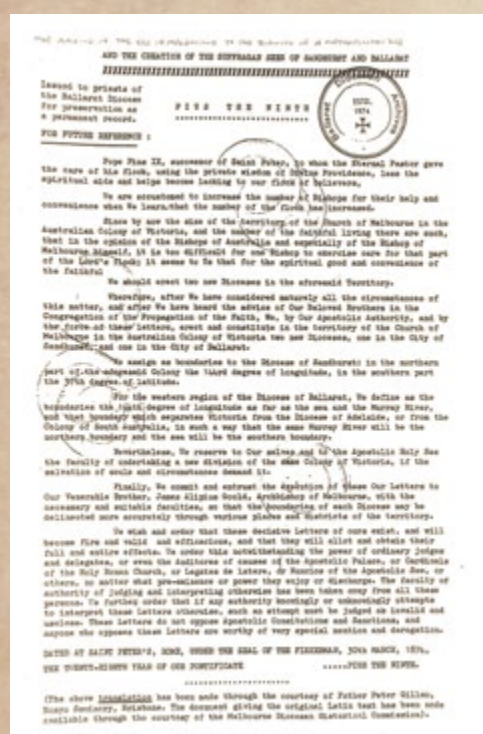
58 He made sure that they knew they were not welcome to call on him in Melbourne en route to or from the episcopal ordination of Christopher Reynolds as Bishop of Adelaide. *ibid.*

59 Goold notes: November 21st. At Brindisi. November 30th. *Took up my quarters at Santa Maria in Posterula*. Goold, Diary <https://melbournecatholic.org/uploads/documents/GooldDiary1848-1886Complete.pdf> p.435.

Kirby, warning him that Goold was on his way 'to upset what we have done'.⁶⁰ While the term 'conspiracy' may be too extreme, it is certain that there was a united front against Goold and Polding, consisting of the five Bishops of NSW and Queensland, supported by Cullen in Dublin and Kirby in Rome. Quinn provided Kirby with sufficient ammunition to counter any claims Goold might make and promised to provide more if necessary. Aware of Goold's nominees for the two sees, with surgical skill he denigrated their characters declaring them 'unfit for Episcopal dignity'. His choicest criticisms were reserved for Dr James Moore, Goold's chaplain and a nominee for Ballarat. He was, according to Quinn, hot tempered, with too great a fondness for alcohol.⁶¹ Lest this attempt at character assassination miss the mark, he resorted to innuendo: 'For many other reasons his promotion would be disastrous for the church in Australia' adding that Bishop Reynolds of Adelaide had told him that 'some of [Moore's] closer relatives are not respected for their way of living'.⁶² Then came the plea to Kirby, '[A]sk him [the Cardinal Prefect] for God's sake, to pause before Dean Moore is appointed Bishop'.⁶³

Against such an onslaught Moore's chances of being named bishop fell to zero, a fact of which Goold was unaware until he arrived in Rome and was given access to the Australian correspondence.⁶⁴ Then and there, he could reply to the assertions of the Quinn-Murray alliance, refuting their arguments, declaring their opinions 'erroneous and exaggerated' and the bishops themselves 'insufficiently informed'. In the proposed dioceses 'it was not the rich who supported religion but rather the business people, the small shopkeepers, and the poor working classes'; a division according to population numbers simply would not work.⁶⁵

Goold was not without allies in Rome. In February he was informed that the meeting to determine the matter of the Victorian sees was to be held on the 16th March. Immediately he began lobbying, spending two weeks visiting the cardinals who would attend the meeting and briefing them in full.⁶⁶



Two New Dioceses in Victoria

His efforts were rewarded. Prior to the March meeting the assembled cardinals were told of the difficulties under which Polding and Goold had been labouring on account of the goings-on of the Murray-Quinn group.⁶⁷ At the meeting two new dioceses were created in Victoria, Ballarat and Sandhurst. The boundaries were those proposed by Goold in his 1872 letter to Rome. The bishop named for Ballarat was an Irishman, Rev. Michael O'Connor, parish priest of Rathfarnham, whom Goold had recommended when he had made the original submission in 1872, though he later seems to have set his preference on James Moore.⁶⁸ This choice seems to have been a 'win-win', as O'Connor was favoured by Cullen and ostensibly would be acceptable to the Irish members of Australian hierarchy. The official document creating the two new sees was issued on March 30, 1874. On the following day Melbourne was elevated to the status of a metropolitan see (an archdiocese). Goold was invested as Archbishop, on 10th May 1874.

One important outcome of this meeting was 'the cessation of the monopoly of authority of Sydney over the Australian Church'. The Holy See erected a second province, based on Melbourne. The Dioceses of Hobart, Adelaide, Perth, Port Victoria, Ballarat and Sandhurst became suffragan dioceses of Melbourne while Sydney retained Maitland, Brisbane, Goulburn, Armidale and Bathurst'.⁶⁹

60 Keaney, *op.cit.*, p.24.

61 *ibid.*

62 *Footprints*, Vol.2, No.2, April 1974, p.20. See also Ballarat Diocesan Archives, a second collection of copies of letters, No XIV. Goold's response to these charges can be found in *Footprints*, Vol.2, No.1., January 1974.

63 Keaney, *loc.cit.*

64 *Footprints*, Vol.2, No.2, April 1974, p.20. See also Goold, Diary p.435: December 3rd. *Received two large packages of correspondence of the Bishops of Australia on the proposed erection of new Diocese in Melbourne besides those proposed by me.*

65 *Footprints*, Vol. 2, No.2, April 1974, pp. 20-21.

66 Goold, Diary, p.437. February 28th. *Had a visit from Canon Rinaldini, who informs me that my business will be settled in the Consistory to be held on the 16th. He gave me a list of the Cardinals to be visited before then.*

67 Dowd, *op.cit.*, p.348.

68 On the appointment of O'Connor as the first bishop of Ballarat, T.J. Linnane, writing in the diocesan magazine, *Light*, in 1968 makes the following observation. *One could speculate as to the part played ... by O'Connor's Archbishop in Dublin, Cardinal Paul Cullen. Certain it is that the Cardinal's residence was a kind of second Propaganda exercising a deep influence on the destinies of the promising Australian Church by having a say-so in the appointment of its new bishops.* T J Linnane, 'Advent of a Diocese', *Light*, November 1968, p.21.

69 Dowd, *op.cit.*, p.356.

The Quinn-Murray group was ultimately unsuccessful in its attempts at control; 'it would seem that the the Holy See was guided principally, if not solely, by Archbishop Goold, in the matter of dividing Victoria into several dioceses. The attempt of an episcopal faction to influence the affairs of Bishop Goold's diocese failed'.⁷⁰ Interestingly, Goold noted in his diary that on March 19th he had 'received a visit from Cardinal Martinelli, who called to say that the Holy Father told him that he was doubtful as to the admissibility of one of those ... proposed for one of the new Sees; his name was not mentioned'.⁷¹ Perhaps the unmentioned was James Moore. Perhaps the Quinn-Murray faction on that score at least was successful.

Ultimately Moore was vindicated. On the death of Michael O'Connor in 1884, he became second Bishop of Ballarat – the first to be consecrated in St Patrick's Cathedral. He served as Bishop until 1904 and is buried in the cathedral crypt.

An account of the eventual appointment of Martin Crane OSA to the see of Sandhurst is not given here. Suffice it to say that the first two appointees declined the position, one on account of ill-health, the other for reasons unknown. Goold's diary simply records: 'August 22nd. Received a letter from Rome informing me of the appointment to the see of Sandhurst of Dr Crane'.⁷²

Michael O'Connor, First Bishop of Ballarat

On May 17, 1874, Michael O'Connor was consecrated Bishop of Ballarat at Propaganda College, Rome, by Cardinal Franchi, assisted by Archbishop Goold.⁷³ On December 18, he arrived in Ballarat, to be greeted by a crowd estimated at 3000. Bells, sacred and civic, accompanied his journey to St Patrick's Cathedral (the church had been given that status) where he was solemnly welcomed.⁷⁴ On the following Sunday he was officially installed by Archbishop Goold as Ballarat's first bishop.⁷⁵

O'Connor's episcopacy was characterised by the building of schools and the establishment of parishes. He 'insisted in season and out of season on our Catholic right to build schools and on the strict duty of Catholic parents to send their children to those in existence'.⁷⁶ In any appreciation of our current strong diocesan school system, some thanks must go to this man, 'stout in mind, frail in body'. At his ad Limina visit shortly before his death, he reported that his diocese could boast forty new churches, several schools, and three religious orders operating in Ballarat city, another in Warrnambool.⁷⁷



Bishop Michael O'Connor

O'Connor from the day of arrival was a creature of bodily frailty constantly afflicted with colds, and finally succumbing to the TB germ. ... His brief term of office ended when he died on February 14, 1883, only a few weeks after his overseas return.⁷⁸

70 T. J. Linnane, 'Advent of a Diocese', *Light*, November 1968, p.21.

71 Goold, Diary, p.438.

72 *ibid.*, p.438. See W. Ebsworth 'Early History of the Church in Victoria—No. 32, Bishop Crane, O.S.A comes to Sandhurst, 1875', *The Advocate*, 19 March 1947, p.16.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/172486398?searchTerm=Early%20History%20Church%20Victoria%20Early%20History>

73 Goold, Diary, p.439. May 17th. *Assisted at the consecration ceremony of the Bishop of Ballarat.*

74 For an account of the building and consecration of the Ballarat Cathedral, see W. Ebsworth, 'Early History of the Church in Victoria, No. 39, The Building of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat', *The Advocate*, May 7, 1947, p.16. and *id.*, 'Early History of the Church in Victoria, No 45, First Cathedral consecrated in Victoria', *The Advocate*, June 19, 1947. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/172487547?searchTerm=Early%20History%20Church%20Victoria%20Early%20History>

75 Goold, Diary, p.443.

76 Linnane, *Light*, March 1969 and subsequent volumes for a calendar of O'Connor's activities.

77 Linnane, *Light*, September 1970, p.25.

78 *ibid.*

With the death of Bishop O'Connor, the 'infancy' phase of the Diocese of Ballarat ended. He left it firmly established and well-equipped to begin the next stage of its existence. The story of the ensuing years is told elsewhere and so it is fitting to end this piece with an extract from Cardinal Moran's History of the Catholic Church in Australia, where he describes the first Bishop of Ballarat thus:

*As a Bishop he treated both priests and laity as a loving, tender father . . . His humility and personal sanctity were a source of constant edification to all with whom he came in contact.*⁷⁹

The mortal remains of Michael O'Connor were laid to rest in the transept of St Patrick's Cathedral Ballarat.



Top: St Patrick's Cathedral Ballarat (1863-65), the wooden building on left is St Patrick's school. Left: St Patrick's Cathedral Interior. Right top: Bishop James Moore (Second Bishop of Ballarat); Bottom right: St Alipius tent school, by Eugene Von Guerard (Ballarat Historical Society Collection.)

⁷⁹ W Ebsworth, 'Early History of the Church in Victoria—No. 43, A Bishop's Residence is Built, *Advocate*, 4th June 1947 p.16. Incidentally, Moran, too, was a protégé of Cullen and Kirby – in fact he was Cullen's nephew. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/172488305?searchTerm=Early%20History%20Church%20Victoria%20Early%20History>