

Chapter Eight  
Structures of Faith:  
The Confraternities — Guilds and Sodalities.

The Redemptorists were fundamental in establishing the more pervasive discipline which characterised the latter part of Murray's episcopacy. They were not, however, the only means which Murray used to foster and maintain religious discipline. Throughout his episcopacy he had encouraged the formation of various Catholic confraternities. As the name implies these were brotherhoods, associations of Catholic men, although by the middle of the nineteenth century they included women, gathering for, and united in, a common purpose. In the Diocese of Maitland, as in other dioceses, the confraternities were divided into two distinct groups, the guilds and the sodalities. The guilds were primarily Catholic benefit societies, but with a religious overlay, while the sodalities were religious organizations designed to support the regular religious observance of specific groups within the Catholic community.

In 1907 when the Catholic population (23,000) was the highest of Murray's episcopacy, the diocese could boast of nine different confraternities, namely two guilds (1,371 members) and seven sodalities (7,565 members) within its parochial districts.<sup>1</sup> These were not large numbers, the guilds comprising only 6 per cent and the sodalities 33 per cent of the Catholic population. But confraternity members rallied for important church functions and noteworthy religious ceremonies and thereby represented, in a very obvious way, the Catholic population as a whole. In August 1886, for example, three confraternities, the Australasian Holy Catholic Guild, the Hibernian Australian Catholic Benefit Society and the Confraternity of the Holy Family (a sodality) in all 310 members, were part of a gathering of over a thousand people at the laying of the foundation stone of the Catholic Church at Stockton. Dressed in their regalia of red, blue, green and gold, they not only added colour to ceremonies but respectability. But their role extended beyond that of

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<sup>1</sup> *Almanac of the Diocese of Maitland and Family Home Annual for 1907*, Maitland, 1907, p. 37.

providing a dignified note to a special occasion. With their distinctive badges and banners, these guild and sodality members manifested their own religious commitment and their prominent place within the Catholic community.<sup>2</sup>

In Part Three of this thesis I am mainly concerned with the period from the 1880s. But the guilds began much earlier than that. Archbishop Polding had established the Australasian Holy Catholic Guild of St Mary and St Joseph (A.H.C. Guild) in Sydney in 1845. Following strict business principles, members strove to improve their standing in the community and to increase their influence generally. They were to be leaders within the Catholic community and beyond. The guild was, in effect, 'an insurance company on a miniature scale'. Members paid a weekly subscription and in return the family received subsidised medical attention. At the death of a member the guild supported the widow and children. By 1866, the time of Murray's arrival in his diocese, the A.H.C. Guild had a branch at Newcastle with 57 members and another at West Maitland with 68 members.<sup>3</sup>

The other guild, the Hibernian Australian Catholic Benefit Society, had originated in Melbourne in 1871 when the Ballarat Hibernian Society, the Irish Australian Catholic Benefit Society and the Albury Catholic Benefit Society had amalgamated. Initially called the Irish Australasian Catholic Benefit Society, the group was afterwards re-named the Hibernians.<sup>4</sup> The society operated as a centrally controlled body with uniform laws covering the Australian colonies and New Zealand. The Melbourne group formed two original branches in New South Wales, one at St Patrick's, Haymarket, and the other at St Patrick's, Newcastle, in the 1870s. A New South Wales District of the Hibernians was established in

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<sup>2</sup> A.H.C. Guild members (a benefit society) numbered 60, the Holy Family Confraternity (a sodality) 200 and the Hibernians (a benefit society) 50. A Collection of Newspaper Clippings, 'The Churches of Newcastle', Local Studies Centre, Newcastle Region Library.

<sup>3</sup> 'The Catholic Guild, An Address given by a Member at the First Australasian Catholic Congress, St Mary's Cathedral, 10 September 1900', *Proceedings of the First Australasian Catholic Congress*, Sydney, 1900, pp. 300-302.

<sup>4</sup> H.A.C.B.S., An Address given by a Member at the First Australasian Catholic Congress, St Mary's Cathedral, 10 September 1900, in *ibid.*, pp. 305-307.

1880. Formed at a time when Catholics were also moving towards creating their own system of schools, the Hibernians signalled the coming not only of Catholic mutual aid societies but also of Catholic hospitals.<sup>5</sup>

The Confraternity of the Holy Family, which had gathered for the opening of Stockton Church in 1886, was representative of the many sodalities — religious devotional associations — established in the Maitland Diocese.<sup>6</sup> Originating in France in the 1840s, the Confraternity of the Holy Family was a working-man's association, although later in the century it accommodated women's groups as well. Seeking to promote the family values of patience, forbearance, industry, temperance and self-control, the Confraternity encouraged members to pray daily, frequent the Mass and the sacraments and attend meetings regularly.<sup>7</sup> This Confraternity and the many other sodalities like it, including the League of the Sacred Heart, the Children of Mary and the Confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament and Mount Carmel, were established in each parish of the Maitland Diocese to oversee and support Catholics in their religious practice.

Both the guilds and sodalities had their distinctive place in the formal religious practice and development of the diocese.<sup>8</sup> The sodalities had a strong devotional focus but the A.H.C. Guild and Hibernians also had their religious obligations, including an optional monthly communion and a compulsory quarterly communion.<sup>9</sup> Members were to pray for the sick and to support Masses for the dead, such acts of charity being intended to strengthen the ties among them. Moreover the guilds and sodalities provided the bishop with a way of overseeing the piety of the faithful. On Sodality Sunday members processed into church, taking

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<sup>5</sup> P. O'Connor, *The Hibernian Society of New South Wales, 1880-1980*, Lewisham, 1980, pp. 14-15.

<sup>6</sup> A list of these various sodalities is included in Chapter One.

<sup>7</sup> N. Byrne, *Robert Dunne 1830-1917: Archbishop of Brisbane*, St Lucia, 1991, p. 156-7.

<sup>8</sup> Here the term 'guilds' refers to the A.H.C. Guild and the Hibernians and will be used when discussing these societies in general. However, they were separate and distinct from one another. When referring to the former, in particular the initials, A.H.C. will be used and the word, Hibernian, will be used for the other.

<sup>9</sup> Minute Book of St Bede's Guild, Morpeth, 13 November 1870 to May 1885, MDA.

their place in the front pews for all to see. It soon became obvious if someone was missing. The bishop or priest, from his elevated position in the sanctuary, could look down on the ordered pews in front of him and know who was there. Lists of absent guild members were sent to the bishop with comments such as 'bad attendant' and 'continually absent' beside the name of certain members.<sup>10</sup> In some ways the ritualised order of the sodalities and the guilds reflected the religiously diverse nineteenth-century developments in religious communities. They thus extended the regular observance and discipline of such communities to the people at large. This was possible because the new religious communities themselves were less arcane and isolated in their observance than earlier foundations had been.

The confraternities, both guilds and sodalities, were crucial in ordering religious discipline within the diocese. But they fulfilled other roles as well, giving Catholics benefits beyond those received from performing their religious duties. The sodalities and guilds attended to the emotional and spiritual needs of men and women in varied and appealing ways. As we shall see, the sodalities, though they included men and children, catered most successfully for Catholic women. The benefit societies included female members, but the advantages offered by the guilds were largely directed towards Catholic men. Designed to provide leadership within the Catholic community, the A.H.C. Guild and the Hibernians also gave Catholic men opportunities to engage in the wider community. Ironically, while bishops, such as Murray were emphasizing separation rather than co-operation, particularly from the late 1870s, the guilds were creating links with non-Catholics.<sup>11</sup>

Men set great store on being able to care for their families especially in times of need. By paying the prescribed contributions the guilds

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<sup>10</sup> P. Ferry, Warden of the St Joseph's Branch of the Guild at East Maitland, wrote to Murray listing those members of the guild present at the Sunday communion and those who had been absent. P. Ferry to James Murray, 27 December 1901, Murray Papers, Miscellaneous Box 2, MDA.

<sup>11</sup> P. O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community in Australia: A History*, West Melbourne, 1977, pp. 152-153.



enabled men to provide a material safety net for their wives and children. Payments to the fund varied, beginning at 1s. 1d. for those aged fourteen and under twenty years, to 1s. 4d. for those 35 and under 40 years. The benefits included 21s. per week for 26 weeks for sickness, and lump sums of £20 on the death of a member with an extra £10 included for a wife or widow. Medical attendance and medication were available to a member and his family and hospital benefits of 15s. per week were paid for the admission of a member to hospital.<sup>12</sup> The *Diocesan Almanacs* advertised the benefits of both the A.H.C. Guild and Hibernians and actively promoted membership.

The A.H.C. Guild and the Hibernians were meant to exemplify not only religious virtues but also respectable middle-class mores. Failure to uphold these values was severely dealt with by guild members. Those found drunk and disorderly were summoned before a special meeting of fellow guild members, admonished by them and fined for their misdemeanours.<sup>13</sup> In the 1890s membership of the Hibernians was extended to include boys aged between seven and sixteen. Although boys received no financial benefits they were permitted to wear the Hibernian regalia at church gatherings and funerals. The formation of juvenile branches encouraged 'rising young men' to develop 'habits of religious regularity and thrifty saving', habits which would assure perseverance and fidelity in the 'succeeding years of matured age'.<sup>14</sup> These were obvious reasons for establishing junior branches but, most importantly, the juniors also provided a ready source of recruitment for the society. Increased membership offered a better financial base and numbers added to the prestige of the group.

In many respects the establishment of the guilds mirrored developments within society in general. The guilds provided Catholic men with opportunities similar to those afforded by the mutual benefit or friendly societies which had been established in England and later brought

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<sup>12</sup> 'Regarding Benefit Societies', *Almanac of the Diocese of Maitland and Family Home Journal*, for 1901, Maitland, 1901, p. 40.

<sup>13</sup> Minute Book of St Bede's Guild, Morpeth, 13 November 1870 to May 1885, MDA.

<sup>14</sup> O'Connor, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

to the colony. These secular friendly societies, like those associated with the Catholic Church, served as co-operative insurance funds and provided opportunities for social gatherings as well as for business. But the secular friendly societies were also schools of morality, with rules encouraging contemporary notions of respectability.<sup>15</sup> By 1867 there were, for example, 38 branches of the Manchester Unity Independent Order of Odd Fellows, the largest of the friendly societies, established throughout the colony with a total membership of approximately 1,900. Friendly societies continued to attract membership and by 1883 they totalled 35,000. Include family members and they totalled 175,000 people. The population of New South Wales in 1881 was slightly over 750,000, so that nearly one person in every four was associated with a friendly society.<sup>16</sup>

The fragmentary nature of records for Maitland's secular friendly societies makes it impossible to establish accurate membership numbers in the Hunter.<sup>17</sup> However studies of other areas, including Victoria, are useful guides. They suggest, and Patricia Curthoys in her study of Maitland between 1841 and 1871 concurs, that friendly societies were a major presence in every Australian town and that a high proportion of adult males were members. In Maitland, as elsewhere, members were involved in trade and commerce and included storekeepers and publicans and men with skilled trades such as bootmakers, saddlers, fellmongers, wheelwrights, stonemasons and carpenters.<sup>18</sup> These were men intent upon improving themselves and providing security for their families. The Catholic Guilds gave Catholic men the same means of security and opportunities for improvement.

While there were similarities between the Catholic guilds and the secular friendly societies, dissimilarities existed between the two Catholic guilds themselves. The guilds (that is, the A.H.C. Guild and the

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15 P. Curthoys, 'Securing Against Risk In Mid-Nineteenth Century New South Wales: Maitland, 1846 to 1871', PhD., University of New South Wales, 1995, p. 147.

16 I. Matheson, 'In Search of Respectability, Secular and Religious Influences in Society in South-East New South Wales, 1863-1900', PhD., Australian National University, Canberra, 1973, p. 266.

17 Curthoys, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-154.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 151-152

Hibernians) emphasised equally the fraternal, commercial and spiritual nature of their respective groups. But they attracted different kinds of membership. The A.H.C. Guild, having been founded by Polding, was exclusive to New South Wales. It was established in the larger towns of most dioceses and it tended to attract men from a variety of national backgrounds, including English, Irish and German. By the late 1860s the A.H.C. Guild had a membership of 3,000.<sup>19</sup> The Hibernians, on the other hand, were a national and international society with links to New Zealand, England and Ireland, but their membership was still largely Irish. Moreover, the growth of the Hibernians throughout Australia and New Zealand gave them, unlike the A.H.C. Guild, a broad, stable financial base. In 1875 there were 38 Hibernian branches in New South Wales, including five ladies' branches and one juvenile, with 2,428 members and funds totalling £13,130. Throughout Australia and New Zealand 78 branches with 5,000 members had funds of more than £100,000.<sup>20</sup> Although the Hibernians were not established in the Maitland Diocese until the late 1870s, a good ten years after the A.H.C. Guild, they soon attracted significant local membership.<sup>21</sup>

The A.H.C. Guild and the Hibernians were established for the same ends, but tension developed between them. The Hibernians had not found favour with Polding, who saw them as a form of Fenianism or even worse, freemasonry.<sup>22</sup> Secular friendly societies such as the Order of Oddfellows had originally been instituted on Masonic principles and so it was with some justification that Polding feared those groups which were not under his direct control.<sup>23</sup> Although the Hibernians paralleled the aims and objectives of Polding's own foundation, he firmly believed that the Irishness of the society would (as O'Farrell puts it) 'create tension and division in the mixed society of the New South Wales colony'.<sup>24</sup> But

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>20</sup> H.A.C.B. S., An Address given by a member at First Australasian Catholic Congress, St Mary's Cathedral, 10 September, 1900, in *Proceedings of the First Australasian Catholic Congress*, pp. 305-307.

<sup>21</sup> Archives of the H. A. C. B.S., The Hibernian Centre, Ashfield.

<sup>22</sup> O'Farrell, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>23</sup> P. H. J. H. Gosden, *The Friendly Societies in England, 1815-1875*, Manchester, 1961, pp. 127-128.

<sup>24</sup> O'Farrell, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

while the Hibernians acknowledged their Irish identity and called for loyalty to the old country, they also emphasized commitment to the new. Accordingly the society did not technically require members to be Irish. To be a practising Catholic was sufficient for membership.

Given the strong Irish membership of the Hibernians, Polding's concerns about them had some foundation but, ironically, it was the Australasian Holy Catholic Guild of St Mary and St Joseph, founded by Polding himself, which did more to exacerbate tensions within the Maitland community. In May 1868 the guild chaplain, Father Andrew Phelan, came to the defence of the guild after Captain Bourn Russell, a local member of the Legislative Council, had insinuated that the society was a danger to the community. Phelan, in a speech published at his request in the *Maitland Mercury*, took Russell to task over his allegations. Phelan claimed that neither the Attorney-General (the Catholic, J.H. Plunkett) nor the Bishop of Maitland, both of whom had approved the society and its rules, could be accused of 'conniving at Fenianism'. He added that the Irishmen of the district were 'content and happy' under the constitution of the colony. Phelan supported his argument by referring to the Warden of the Guild, who worked for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'where he would not be kept for an instant if he had the smallest sympathy with Fenianism'. Moreover, claimed Phelan, the guild's members came from all the main nationalities in the colony and even admitted Protestants as 'honorary' members. Phelan refuted the notion that the guild was a secret society, quoting a statement from its rules that it was 'a society working in the light of day, with no oaths of secrecy, with no secret laws, no secret objects, [and] no secret leaders'.<sup>25</sup>

Phelan's angry reaction to the suggestion that the guild was associated with Fenianism is understandable. News of Fenian terrorism in England had filled Australian newspapers from November 1867 until January 1868. Rumours of Fenian activity were rife in Sydney and any

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<sup>25</sup> Introduction to the Rules of the Australasian Holy Catholic Guild quoted by A. Phelan, *Maitland Mercury*, 28 May 1868.



gathering of the Irish, even in local pubs, was suspect.<sup>26</sup> In March 1868 an Irishman, the poor, deluded Henry James O'Farrell, aggravated an already tense situation when he attempted to assassinate the Duke of Edinburgh at Clontarf.<sup>27</sup> As we have seen in Chapter Four, Irish loyalty was more suspect than ever, although Catholics organised rallies to express publicly their horror and outrage and their loyalty to the Crown. These efforts reflected, to some extent, the insecurity of Catholics in relation to their place in the broader community in the late 1860s.

Catholic benefit societies welcomed non-Catholics as honorary members, but Catholics were discouraged from joining societies which were not Catholic, although many of these had a Christian focus. The Oddfellows, for example, used the same motto as the Hibernians: 'Faith, Hope and Charity'.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the Catholic bishops, gathered for the Synodical Conference held in Sydney in January 1888, proclaimed:

The Oddfellows, Foresters, Druids, Good Templars, Rechabites and all kindred societies have not the approval of the church and all Catholics who after this date, shall join such societies, disregarding the instructions of their clergy, shall be deprived of the benefit of the presence and services of the priest at their funeral.<sup>29</sup>

The bishops' reaction indicates that Catholics were indeed joining other societies. Since full membership of Catholic guilds was limited to Catholics, any leakage away from them threatened their viability in a time when all Catholic resources had to be harnessed to the cause of Catholic church building and schools. However, the penalty imposed by the bishops seems harsh. Because it was a threat which denied them entry into heaven, it could not be ignored. Nor was it an idle threat. In 1880, for example, Richard Kenna of Bathurst resisted pressure from Bishop Matthew Quinn to remove his son from Sydney Grammar School. When

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<sup>26</sup> P. O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, Kensington, 1987, pp. 209-210.

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed discussion, see M. Lyons, 'Aspects of Sectarianism in New South Wales Circa 1865 to 1880', PhD., Australian National University, Canberra, 1972, pp. 89-176.

<sup>28</sup> Gosden, *op. cit.*, p. 129

<sup>29</sup> 'Regarding Benefit Societies', *Almanac of the Diocese of Maitland and Family Home Journal*, for 1901, Maitland, 1901, p. 40.

he died soon afterwards, he was refused Catholic burial. It was a matter which became a *cause célèbre*.<sup>30</sup>

Catholics intent upon bridging life and death by the best possible means complied with the bishops' demands. The funeral of a guild member was a very special occasion, providing extra consolation for the family concerned. When a member died, a funeral notice placed in the local newspaper requested other members to attend.<sup>31</sup> The funeral of Robert Dilley, of Church Street, Maitland, demonstrates the general esteem in which this particular guild member was held. Father Peters, administrator of Maitland, conducted an 'impressive ceremony' at St John's Cathedral while Father Hourigan officiated at the graveside. Members of the St John's Guild headed the cortege, forming a guard of honour at the residence of the deceased and at the Cathedral. At a meeting of the guild the day before the funeral, members paid tribute to Dilley, recalling his long membership and his position as warden for several terms. One eulogy emphasized that 'Brother Dilley had always taken a great interest in guild and church matters generally and was well versed in the rules of the society'.<sup>32</sup>

Murray encouraged every head of a family to join a Catholic Benefit Society, but only those who could afford it could comply. In a town like Newcastle, where a large percentage of the Catholic population worked in the mines men needed little urging. These men had steady, well-paid jobs but their work was also very dangerous, with a high risk of injury or death.<sup>33</sup> Membership of the guilds was almost a necessity for them. Newcastle membership amounted to only ten per cent of the Catholic population, but this proportion was the highest in the diocese. By 1909 diocesan membership of the Australasian Holy Catholic Guild was 557

<sup>30</sup> B. Bridges, 'The Passing of the New South Wales Public Instruction Act, 1880', Litt. B., University of New England, Armidale, 1972, pp. 44-45.

<sup>31</sup> *Maitland Mercury*, 7 June 1924.

<sup>32</sup> *Maitland Mercury*, 9 June 1924.

<sup>33</sup> P. M. Smith, 'The Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society of New South Wales: A Study of Social Organisation Within the Irish Working Class During 1870-1900', BA (hons), University of New South Wales, 1980, p. 46. See also E. McEwan, *The Newcastle Coalmining District of New South Wales, 1860-1900*, PhD., University of Sydney, 1979, pp. 178-179.

while the Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society numbered 540, 33 of whom were women. The A.H.C. Guild was confined mainly to Newcastle and the lower Hunter River, and to the Maitland parishes of West and East Maitland, Morpeth and Largs (245). Small groups were located in the mining areas of Cessnock (20) and Kurri Kurri (25). The Hibernians were represented in the same districts but they had extended their membership to the upper Hunter and the Manning area as well.<sup>34</sup> For all Murray's encouragement, these numbers represented just five per cent of the total Catholic population, a percentage which brings home the exclusivity of the group.

A.H.C. Guild members and the Hibernians were thus a small minority in the Maitland Diocese. The bishop had encouraged membership of the A.H.C. Guild and the Hibernians and both benefit societies were effective in gathering membership. However, it appears that many Catholics did not join and perhaps not always because they were poor. The church was able to conscript certain members of the élite, so as to make effective shock troops, but many others were not so ductile. The failure of some prominent Catholics to join the Guild and the Hibernians could represent some resistance. That the bishops took such drastic measures in dealing with Catholics who were joining non-Catholic benefit societies indicates substantial dissent within a section, at least, of the Catholic community.

Many Catholics chose not to, or could not, belong to the benefit societies because of financial reasons, but this was not the case for the population generally. Curthoys and others suggest that the secular friendly societies attracted as much as a quarter of the population. On the other hand, savings banks and life assurance societies, the newer financial institutions of the mid-nineteenth century, were marginal to most people of New South Wales and to the people of Maitland in particular. Such saving was beyond most people. They simply could not afford the

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<sup>34</sup> *Almanac of the Diocese of Maitland and Family Home Journal for 1909*, Maitland, 1909, pp. 57-58.

premiums required.<sup>35</sup> Membership of the guilds was limited for similar reasons. Members were required to pay fees which were impossible for people whose work was irregular or whose incomes did not allow for money to be put aside. Most working-class Catholics were unable to provide themselves with such security.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the very poor were excluded from taking an active part in guild proceedings because membership required active literacy. The guilds clearly identified the haves and the have-nots, building in class distinction in much the same way as the various religious congregations of women did within the Catholic community.

Like the members of the friendly societies, guild members came from the more economically secure sections of the Catholic community. Men such as the officers of the Catholic Guild of St John the Baptist in Maitland in 1868 included small-businessmen, skilled artisans and farmers. Richard Ewens was a clerk and Patrick Monaghan and his brother, Hugh, ran one of the most flourishing butchering businesses in High Street, Maitland. James Bussell was a cabinet maker, who with his brothers was well established in the district. Joseph Bull was a bricklayer, while the brothers, James and Thomas Moylan, were both farmers as were John O'Neill, John Halfner and J. McMahan. In 1868 the Maitland guild had to its credit £402.7s. 7p. and that year had paid £80 in allowances to the sick.<sup>37</sup> Guild members were usually lower-middle class men of modest means who saw the value of judicious saving and earned enough to make it possible.

The guilds, overtly secular in their orientation and practice, offered members a number of personal and business advantages. They were not unlike literary societies and schools of arts.<sup>38</sup> They gave young men, keen on self-improvement, the opportunity for social exchange, for reading and debate. Guild members gained experience in organization and

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<sup>35</sup> Curthoys, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>36</sup> For further discussion, see *ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>37</sup> *Maitland Mercury*, 9 January 1868.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of the advantages of these societies in south-east New South Wales, see Matheson, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-73.



administration and enjoyed the support of an influential business network, not only within their own town but throughout the Hunter. The variety of guild membership could not but be of benefit to, and provide advantages for, those involved. When the Maitland A.H.C. Guild met in 1868 for the purpose of electing its local committee, the six chosen were, three Irishmen, two Englishmen and one German. The Warden, Richard Ewens (already mentioned), an Englishman by birth and a clerk by occupation, 'held a place of trust in by far the largest commercial firm in the town'.<sup>39</sup> Ewens had become a Catholic soon after his marriage to Mary Halleran, a lady's companion, at Maitland in March 1856.<sup>40</sup> Another councillor elected on that same occasion was Joseph Bull. He, too, was a convert and English. He had married Ann Carroll, from Kilkenny, at Maitland in February 1857. Bull became a Catholic in May 1861, soon after the birth and baptism of his son, Edward.<sup>41</sup> One of the cross-bearers of the guild, James Bussell, the cabinet maker, also had become a Catholic after his marriage.<sup>42</sup> For converts in particular, the guilds offered the extra advantages of acceptance and service in a way that was familiar to them. Most importantly the guilds gave insurance for the present life.

Public service was important to guild members for establishing links beyond the Catholic community. Robert Allsop, described at the time of his death as a 'prominent citizen', was one of the foundation members of the St John's Branch of the A.H.C. Guild and also of the Holy Family Confraternity, one of Maitland's sodalities. The records of the guild show Allsop's almost unbroken attendance during 40 years, an inspiring commitment to family and church. Allsop was involved in all church matters open to a layman, particularly the St Patrick's Day sports committee.<sup>43</sup> Born in the Williams River district in 1851, he spent his whole life in the Maitland area and took a keen interest 'in all things

<sup>39</sup> Speech by Andrew Phelan to Guild Members, *Maitland Mercury*, 28 May 1868.

<sup>40</sup> Marriage Register, St John the Baptist, West Maitland, 24 March 1856, Parish Archives, West Maitland.

<sup>41</sup> Marriage Register, St John the Baptist, West Maitland, 2 February 1857 and Baptismal Register, St John the Baptist, West Maitland, 5 August 1860 and 18 May 1861, Parish Archives, West Maitland.

<sup>42</sup> Baptismal Register, St John the Baptist, West Maitland, 15 June 1861, Parish Archives, West Maitland.

<sup>43</sup> Funeral Notice, *Maitland Mercury*, 8 December 1925.

promoted for the good of the town'. He married Jean McEntyre of Sydney at St John the Baptist Church, Maitland, in 1876 and they had eight children, four boys and four girls.<sup>44</sup> Having served his apprenticeship as a cabinet maker with Robert Hyndes of Maitland, another prominent Catholic, he worked in the Hyndes business until it closed in 1892. Allsop then worked for the Maitland Brewing Company and later for Tooth and Company. A keen sportsman, he was associated with the old Fourth Infantry Company of volunteers and was considered one of the best rifle shots in the district.<sup>45</sup>

The school teacher John M. Canty epitomized the community involvement of a guild member. At the time of his death in 1876, aged only 31, he was a teacher, secretary of the St John's Guild, Maitland, secretary of the Maitland School of Arts and a member of the Volunteer Rifles. His funeral was one of the largest in Maitland. A solemn Mass, attended by James Murray, was celebrated in St John's Cathedral with eleven priests of the district officiating. The funeral procession, including the bishop's carriage, was made up of members of the guild, the bands and other members of the East and West Maitland Volunteers, cadets of the West Maitland Public School, pupils of St John's School, pupils of the Sacred Heart College and friends from Maitland, Newcastle and Singleton. Father Hand read the burial service at the graveside attended by many of Canty's friends and ex-pupils. Three volleys were fired over the grave by the riflemen. As a Catholic, a guild member and a member of the wider community, Canty had earned the respect and admiration of many in the Hunter Valley.<sup>46</sup> In many ways he embodied Murray's hopes for the laymen of the diocese, and the bishop publicly demonstrated his respect by his attendance at the obsequies.

The established position of the guilds in the church community and in the community at large could be an advantage for both individual members, their church and the general community. The situation of the

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<sup>44</sup> Marriage Register, St John the Baptist, West Maitland.

<sup>45</sup> Funeral Notice, *Maitland Mercury*, 8 December, 1925.

<sup>46</sup> Funeral Notice, *Maitland Mercury*, 10 August 1876 and 12 August 1876, *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 1 and 12 August, 1876.

A.H.C. Guild and the Hibernians in most towns of the diocese gave each Catholic parochial district an easily identifiable and elite body of Catholic men to call upon for church and civic functions. The guilds provided lay leaders within the Catholic community. The sacramental form of worship which characterized the Catholic Church limited lay leadership, a disadvantage compared with other Christian denominations, such as the Baptists, which had lay preachers, and the Salvation Army, in which both men and women could engage in preaching and teaching. The guilds went some way to giving Catholic laymen prominence within their church. For its part the general community welcomed the various benefit societies, both Catholic and non-Catholic, since they comprised men of social and financial standing with interests in the whole community.

The A.H.C. Guild and the Hibernians were secular societies yet in some ways it is surprising, given the nature of the Catholic Church, that they were run by laymen. While the organization came under the jurisdiction of the bishop, who approved the rules and appointed clerical chaplains, members controlled their own affairs through their lay committees. In fact the guilds could pose a dilemma for local parish priests. They had been formed for the precise purpose of providing financial support to individual members and their families, so that their main activity was beyond clerical control. Moreover the realities of business and financial involvement posed certain tensions and contradictions, particularly when allied with Christian values. The basis of capitalism is competition, even exploitation, and the principle of 'laying up treasure on earth' was, in some respects, contrary to the message of the Gospel. Nevertheless local parish priests used the business acumen and expertise of guild members to their advantage. The A.H.C. Guild and the Hibernians raised money for scholarships to send children to Catholic schools and they were often called upon to give donations to parish projects.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-68.

A.H.C. Guild members and the Hibernians became parish fund raisers and fund collectors as well as church wardens. Fund raising was always associated with fun, usually taking the form of a social event or entertainment. Late in 1871 St John's Guild organized a Grand Steam Excursion to Newcastle on New Year's Day. The Volunteer Band provided entertainment and donations from the day were to go towards the buying of books for St John's Circulating Library.<sup>48</sup> Not to be outdone, in the same month the St Joseph's branch of the A.H.C. Guild at East Maitland, in co-operation with St Bede's branch at Morpeth, organized a Grand Steam Excursion from Morpeth to Newcastle by the *Collaroy*. On this occasion the Lambton Brass Band, with its sixteen 'superior musicians', accompanied the group. Proceeds from the day went to the building of a school house at Morpeth and towards repairs of the church at East Maitland.<sup>49</sup> In May 1873 the guilds of the Hunter River district, taking advantage of the Queen's Birthday, organized a Quadrille Party, Luncheon and Athletic Sports.<sup>50</sup> At a time when there were no annual holidays for the ordinary working man, such gatherings were welcomed. Moreover the guild's sponsoring of respectable activities was a means of exercising social influence, affording organisers both prestige and public recognition.

Men dominated guild membership but women were not excluded. In the 1890s membership of the Hibernians was extended to women aged between 16 and 40. Girls over 18 were not covered by their father's membership and could be a financial burden if they fell ill or needed hospitalization. Moreover, working women were as much in need of financial support in times of ill-health as working men. The inclusion of women in the Hibernians acknowledged the growing independence of women, yet their membership did not offer all the benefits afforded to men. Women were covered for sickness benefits but not for funeral expenses. It was assumed that a woman would marry a member of the

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<sup>48</sup> *Maitland Mercury*, 19 December 1871.

<sup>49</sup> *Maitland Mercury*, 20 January 1872.

<sup>50</sup> *Maitland Mercury*, 17 May 1873.



society and benefit from her husband's membership at the time of death.<sup>51</sup> Addressing an annual meeting in 1902, Father McAuliffe of Branxton claimed 'a girl could ask for no better guarantee that a young man would make a good husband than that he was an active member of a Catholic friendly society'.<sup>52</sup>

A surviving list of nominations for membership of the Hibernians at St Brigid's, Raymond Terrace, from late 1901, does read like a list of eligible bachelors. Each prospective member had to be nominated by two existing members; they had to present the required medical certificate of health and prove themselves financially secure, well respected in the community and practising Catholics. In September 1901 William Henry, a blacksmith, single and aged 16, was admitted as a full member of the society.<sup>53</sup> The majority of nominees, however, while single, tended to be older. Joseph Daley, a labourer, was 20; Thomas Lynch and Michael Gallen were farmers and both 21; Peter McDonnell an engine driver was 24; Thomas Daley, Michael Considine and Andrew Markham were all farmers, aged 27, 32 and 40. Two married men were also admitted to the society, Police Constable Mahoney, aged 41, and Joseph Hanlon, a saddler, aged 29.<sup>54</sup> For single, older members of the society, membership could be a means of demonstrating that they were financially secure and that they could support a wife and family. The more subtle benefits provided by the guilds would not have escaped some women.

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<sup>51</sup> Cornelius McAuliffe was ordained at All Hallows College, Dublin, in 1882. Arriving in Maitland that same year he was appointed to Gunnedah and worked in a number of parishes throughout the diocese. He was a professor at the Sacred Heart College from 1891 to 1898 and parish priest of Branxton from 1902 to 1906. At the time of his death in 1937 he was a Diocesan Consultant. H. Campbell, *Centenary: The Diocese of Maitland, 1866-1966*, Maitland, 1966, p. 202.

<sup>52</sup> S.D.B Annual Reports, 1902. For a discussion of female branches and of the benefits women received, see Smith, *op. cit.* pp. 31-33.

<sup>53</sup> Minute Book, St Brigid's, Raymond Terrace, H.A.C.B.S., 29 September 1901, Hibernian Friendly Society Archives, Ashfield.

<sup>54</sup> Minute Book, St Brigid's, Raymond Terrace, H.A.C.B, 10 November 1901, 24 November, 1901, St Brigid's, Raymond Terrace, Minute Book 1901-1905, Hibernian Friendly Society Archives, Ashfield.

The guilds provided ready-made social groups and inculcated a strong sense of belonging to an identifiable and respectable society.<sup>55</sup> The ritual surrounding the meetings, particularly the investiture ceremony, did much to strengthen this identity. The new Hibernian, for example, was presented with a scarf or collar which displayed the centrepiece of the society's banner. Made of plush green velvet and fringed with gold, the scarf, worn at meetings and special church gatherings, was striking evidence of membership. Each symbol on the scarf was identified and explained; the Cross was an emblem of man's redemption, the Harp of Erin denoted the member's love for the Island of Saints, the sunburst, round tower, oak tree and wolf dog were all Celtic, while the Australian coat of arms represented more local loyalties. The ceremony also underlined right values and virtues. The newly received brother or sister was called on to be 'charitable in judgement, forbearing in temper and lenient in condemnation, to be obedient to the laws of the Church, upright in his or her dealings and willing to help the needy'. This ceremony, led and witnessed by laymen, exhorted its members to practice Christian virtues, and to be loyal to Australia while maintaining their Irish heritage.<sup>56</sup> It was a ceremony designed to encourage the enthusiasm and loyalty of members and it embraced both the sacred and secular aspects of members' lives.

The ceremony, regalia and emblems associated with the guilds and Hibernians were a measure of their determination to be accepted. This particular iconography obviated the need for words. It defined who these Catholics were and where they were and it proclaimed their sensitivities and their allegiances. The Hibernian banner, which hung in the local meeting room or when the occasion demanded, was carried in church processions, proclaimed the society's many loyalties. It was almost overwhelming in its ornamentation. Catholic, Celtic and Australian symbols combined to proclaim the faith and patriotism of the society. Early twentieth-century banners included the coats of arms of the

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<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of the importance of friendly societies in the lives of working men, see Gosden, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-127.

<sup>56</sup> O'Connor, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-159.

Australian states and New Zealand with representations of native plants. Celtic images linked members to their Celtic past and a globe wreathed in shamrocks reminded members of their countrymen settled throughout the world. The figures of St Peter and St Patrick in the side panels had been included at the suggestion of Cardinal Moran and were to symbolize the unbroken fidelity of the Irish race to the See of Peter. The margins of the banner had interlaced decorations from the Book of Kells. The society's links with the ancient order of Hibernians of Ireland, Great Britain and the United States were depicted in the respective coats of arms at the top of the banner. A ribbon scroll draped across the centrepiece contained the society's motto, the universally accepted virtues of 'Faith, Hope and Charity'.<sup>57</sup>

Catholic laymen were provided with further opportunities for expressing their Catholicity in more practical ways when the St Vincent de Paul Society was established in the diocese. Formed in Paris in 1833 by a young Catholic layman, Frederick Ozanam, the society was a lay Catholic movement designed to alleviate the hardship caused by poverty. Ozanam encouraged and challenged the laity to take responsibility for needy members of the community.<sup>58</sup> In a nineteenth-century context the St Vincent de Paul Society was most appropriate in a country like France, where the Catholic Church was supreme and in a position to attend to the poor and even to members of other faiths. Even from 1880 this was not true of Australia. The society had been organized in Ireland in 1845,<sup>59</sup> but not formally introduced to New South Wales until 1881 when it was established by Archbishop Vaughan at St Patrick's Church, Sydney.<sup>60</sup> The society opened branches in the Maitland Diocese at St Mary's, Newcastle in 1906 and then at the Sacred Heart Parish, Hamilton, and St John's, West Maitland, in 1907.<sup>61</sup>

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57 *Loc. cit.*

58 I. Murphy, *The Diocese of Killaloe, 1800-1850*, Dublin, 1992, p. 226.

59 P. Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience: A Historical Survey*, Dublin, 1985, p. 170

60 C. Foley, *Charles Gordon O'Neill, Engineer and Apostle, Founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia and New Zealand*, Petersham, n.d., p.13.

61 Minutes of the first meeting held at St Mary's Parish Newcastle, 27 May 1906, quoted by S. F. Egan, *The Society of St Vincent de Paul in Australia 1854-1954: The First Hundred Years*, Vincent de Paul Society, New South Wales State Council,

Catholic laymen organized the society but, unlike the guilds, the benefits were entirely for the poor of the community. The first source of income for the St Vincent de Paul Society was the society itself, with members contributing whatever they could to a secret collection at each of their meetings. The minutes of the first meeting held at St Mary's, Newcastle, in 1906, recorded a collection of £4.5s.<sup>62</sup> The local community was also called upon to give assistance through the society's special appeals. Advertisements with phrases such as 'Help us make the lives of the poor a little brighter' and 'Donations of money, clothing and books gracefully accepted' were intended to stir the generosity not only of Catholics but the whole community. The society stressed that its efforts were directed to all who were poor and that the 'party or sect' of individuals in need was not to be considered.<sup>63</sup> By 1911 the St John's Conference, West Maitland, could claim that in the previous year 150 poor families had been helped and £300 expended on their needs.

It can be argued that the guilds represented only a minority group within the Catholic community, but they did attract membership in all areas of the diocese. The St Vincent de Paul Society, on the other hand, grew very slowly not only in Maitland but throughout Australia.<sup>64</sup> Similar to the guilds, in some respects, the St Vincent de Paul Society placed distinctive demands upon Catholics. Members themselves did not benefit directly from the society but were required to alleviate the poverty of others and, in particular, to visit them in their homes. The society had a strong religious base but it went beyond the personal prayer of individuals, demanding that members provide spiritual guidance and support for those they served. Both society and guilds had their priest director but members of the society had to give unquestioning obedience to the local parish priest: 'Nothing was ever done against his advice'.<sup>65</sup>

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Archives, Lewisham, n.d., p. 89, and *Almanac of the Diocese of Maitland and Family Home Journal for 1911*, Maitland, 1911, p. 74

<sup>62</sup> Egan, *op. cit.*, p. 89

<sup>63</sup> *Almanac of the Diocese of Maitland and Family Home Journal*, 1911, p. 74.

<sup>64</sup> O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community in Australia*, pp. 245-248.

<sup>65</sup> L. F. Heydon, 'Society of St Vincent de Paul', *Australasian Catholic Record*, January 1907, pp. 52-53.



Colonial Catholics' reluctance to be involved in the St Vincent de Paul Society may have sprung from apathy.<sup>66</sup> It is more likely, however, that they felt uncomfortable or embarrassed about visiting the poor in their homes, an activity which may have reminded them of the poverty they themselves had left behind. It is even more likely that Catholics felt awkward about proselytizing in a country where, however bold and obvious they might be in some respects, they were still a minority. Moreover, the service of the St Vincent de Paul Society was private, almost anonymous, and therefore very different from that which so obviously attracted the public spirited and ambitious men of the guilds.

As we have seen, women were not neglected in the development of societies and guilds. However, women were found more frequently in those societies formed solely for the spiritual benefit of members. One of the most popular of these, the Sacred Heart Sodality, with both male and female membership, had been established in each of the parochial districts of the diocese.<sup>67</sup> The society promoted devotions such as the Holy Hour and the First Fridays. These two practices, the first requiring an hour's prayer in church and the second attendance at Mass on the first Friday of nine consecutive months, provided occasions for prayer and reflection. As a mixed sodality it offered opportunities for socializing with members of the opposite sex, though the sodality was mainly popular with women. The *Diocesan Almanac* for 1900 gives the total number of members of the sodality, male and female combined, for each area. The figures for the districts of West Maitland and Newcastle reveal the overwhelming predominance of women. In West Maitland there were 250 men in the League and 734 women, while in Newcastle there were 140 men and 250 women. The sodalities allowed the same proclamation of faith and represented a similar sort of order and organization as that provided by the guilds. But whereas the guilds promoted the public and secular virtues prized among men the more private piety of the sodalities seems to have appealed especially to women.

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<sup>66</sup> O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community in Australia*, p. 247.

<sup>67</sup> *Almanac of the Diocese of Maitland and Family Home Journal for 1900*, pp. 21-31.

The benefits of the sodalities were seen largely in spiritual terms but there were other blessings to be had. The sodalities gave women some freedom of movement, providing wives and mothers with opportunities to socialize as women. Societies such as the Apostleship of Prayer and the Living Rosary allowed such gatherings. Although members assembled for prayer, they also spent time raising funds for the beautification of their local church or chapel. In 1883, the Singleton members of the Apostleship of Prayer and of the Living Rosary were acknowledged for their donation to St Patrick's Church of an altar in honour of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. The Society of the Living Rosary also contributed to the cost of the stained glass windows, the carpet, altar, candlesticks and other church furniture at St Patrick's.<sup>68</sup> Here women were engaged in familiar domestic activities, but they were also having some say in the appropriate adornment of their local church. Their choices would have been informed by the local parish priest, in this case, the Redemptorists, but the women themselves were also initiators. Women brought their home-making skills to bear and received public acknowledgment for them. These more feminine expressions of Catholicity, the decoration of churches, of altars and statues, paralleled the masculine expressions of Catholicity offered by the guilds.

Just as young men were encouraged to join benefit societies as a means of fostering appropriate religious practice and values, young women were expected to join the Sodality of the Children of Mary. This sodality, like those founded for older women, had a clear pious focus. Membership usually required a probationary period during which the young aspirant became familiar with the rules and expectations of the sodality. Full membership occurred at a special ceremony of consecration which was not unlike the reception ceremony of a novice into religious life. The aspirant, dressed in a white veil, a symbol of virginity, and blue cloak, denoting Mary's protection, was given a sodality medal and a book of prayers. The sodality demanded daily and weekly prayers and devotions, monthly meetings and communion and participation in parish

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<sup>68</sup> Manuscript prepared by Father Shearmann, CSSR, 1907, Archives, Redemptorist Monastery, Kogarah.

and diocesan celebrations. Monthly sodality meetings, run by the sisters, enabled both school leavers and teachers to keep in touch. The sisters continued to educate their young charges in the spiritual life by the prayers they encouraged and the literature they provided. Children of Mary had no doubts about the power of God or of the importance of the Blessed Virgin in interceding for humanity.

The Children of Mary Sodality had a strong moral imperative. The religious women instructed the girls in appropriate dress and decorum and encouraged them in the practice of the Marian virtues. The ideal Child of Mary preferred the 'ineffable sweets of contemplation' to the frivolities of everyday girlhood.<sup>69</sup> Any failures on the part of the girls were gently admonished. Maxims such as 'a Child of Mary would not act in this way' or 'How would Mary herself do this?' became the guide for a true Child of Mary and the future wife and mother or religious woman. Many a Child of Mary wore her blue cloak on her wedding day, when 'spotless as the virgin snow' she presented herself to her husband.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, while the virtues preached were taken seriously, young women of the Maitland Diocese, as elsewhere, were well able to distinguish between the appropriate and the prurient in the advice they were given. They continued to dance, sing and read romances with no fear of jeopardizing their virtue or their future.

The various sodalities available to young Catholics, including the Children of Mary, the Holy Angels for younger girls, and the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, which catered for both boys and girls, gave young Catholics an opportunity to proclaim their proud adherence to Catholic culture. Obviously the Catholic Church realized the importance of providing for children in a special way outside of school. These young men and women were the future of the Diocese of Maitland and they needed to be kept within the fold. Secular and attractive youth clubs such

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<sup>69</sup> The phrase is used by Patrick O'Farrell in a discussion of Children of Mary in *Vanished Kingdoms, Irish in Australia and New Zealand: A Personal Excursion*, Kensington, 1990, pp. 87-88.

<sup>70</sup> J. O'Brien, 'The Church Upon the Hill', *Around the Boree Log and Other Verses*, London, 1921.

as the scouts and girl guides were forbidden to young Catholics but the church was ready with alternatives. It was the age, too, of the 'invention' of juvenile delinquency and there was an urgent perception that youth needed monitoring.<sup>71</sup> At the same time membership of these sodalities and confraternities was not unlike the girl guide and boy scout movements of the secular world. The former nourished allegiance to the Catholic Church, the latter to the Empire.

The A.H.C. Guild and the Hibernians gave a small group within the Catholic Church a safety net for themselves and their families in times of illness and death. They enabled men to exhibit a masculine form of Catholicity which saw them marching in processions, acting as wardens and raising funds for worthy church causes. Representing an intertwining of the sacred and the secular, the guilds provided business networks and experiences for men of some means to improve their prospects. While the guilds maintained a Catholic subculture within the total framework of society they also involved members in the wider community.<sup>72</sup> Seen as respectable and dependable citizens, guild members were found in the many organizations and interest groups of the local community. Most significantly guild members were leaders within every Catholic parochial district of the diocese. It was through the guilds that Catholic men, loyal to their church, were able to exercise a deal of choice and initiative in religious and secular matters. The sodalities were more distinctly focused on religious observance, but they gave men and women of all classes an experience of structured community and public recognition.<sup>73</sup>

At the time of Murray's death in 1909 the Catholic benefit societies constituted just five per cent of the Catholic population and the sodalities 26.5 per cent. As an élite group they could have been a divisive force within the community. That the majority of Catholics chose not to join

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<sup>71</sup> S. Margarey, 'The Invention of Juvenile Delinquency in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Labour History*, No. 34, May 1978, pp. 11-17.

<sup>72</sup> N. Turner, *Catholics in Australia: A Social History*, 2 vols., North Blackburn, 1992, Vol. 1., p. 193.

<sup>73</sup> V. J. Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors, and The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, London, 1974, p. 163, London, 1969, p. 203.



the confraternities may be seen as an act of dissent or at least of some form of resistance. However, the church, even in its earliest days, was not meant to be an egalitarian institution, either within the religious hierarchy or outside it. Its values included obedience, deference and long-suffering, so that the establishment and maintenance of a lay élite was wholly consistent with its larger purpose and not likely to be resented by anyone valuing membership of the church. Any tension which may have developed between the élite group of Catholics who could afford insurance and the less fortunate majority seems to have been muted, if it existed at all. The overall benefit of the A.H.C. Guild, the Hibernians and the sodalities to the Catholic community generally, the establishment of a solid, dependable group of practising and loyal Catholics, seems to have out-weighed all other considerations.

## Schooling

Even the poor, by giving a little, could claim a share in the splendour of the Church.



(xiii) Krambach in the early 1900s

## A More Elaborate Display



(xiv) Hamilton in the 1890s, with the Sacred Heart central but with earthly pleasures as well.