

**THE HISTORY OF LORETO, COORPAROO –
THROUGH THE BUILDINGS**

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Note:

*All the schools belonging to the Institute of the
Blessed Virgin Mary are known as Loreto Schools.*

The order was founded in the early 17th century by an English woman born in Yorkshire, Mary Ward. I won't go into great detail now but it was a very difficult beginning. Mary had to leave England as the climate of the time there was not favourable to Catholicism. Neither was the Church ready for such an order as Mary envisaged. She wanted women to be governed by women, no enclosure, no habit and no chanting of the Divine Office. Mary was at one stage imprisoned as a heretic. The order was totally (and brutally) suppressed in 1631. Over a period of time the I.B.V.M. was permitted to function but on no account was Mary Ward to be called its foundress. Permission for this was eventually granted in 1909 and in 2009 Mary was declared 'venerable'. So recognition has come slowly.

In 2009 we celebrated 400 years as an order! Mary initially founded the order for 'the education of girls or the needs of the times' which has allowed us to branch out into other fields as needed. In 1875 a small band of nuns, led by Mother Gonzaga Barry, came out from Ireland and began a school in Ballarat, Victoria, and from there schools were founded in Portland (Vic), Melbourne, Perth, Sydney, Adelaide and, in 1928, Brisbane.

This last foundation was in response to an approach by Archbishop Duhig for the Loreto nuns to start a school in Queensland. The Archbishop had bought a property, *Kemendine*, from Edward Deshon. (I know at least one of his children attended Loreto and certainly several of his grandchildren.) It was this property on Cavendish Road in Coorparoo that the Loreto nuns purchased from the Archbishop to begin their school. I will endeavour to give a brief history of the school through the buildings – past and present.

When I first came on board at Loreto in 1951 there were the original house, *Kemendine*, a brick three-storey building called the *Casket* building, two wooden army huts and a wooden house which had been converted into classrooms for Junior School use. On the block there were four private homes – today there is one!

Kemendine was built in 1889. It was a two-storeyed timber and tin building with verandahs on three sides; iron lace balustrades; lots of cedar doors, staircase and skirting boards; marble fire surrounds and double sash French windows. There was a long drive lined with palm trees leading up to the house and a circular garden bed at the top. A white picket fence in front was lined with camphor laurels. *Kemendine* was demolished in 1977 for safety reasons but items of interest were incorporated into another building which I will mention later.

The *Casket* building was so named because of a Casket win of £5000, the ticket being a gift from a past pupil of Loreto, Adelaide. The first two storeys were erected in 1930 with the ground floor providing kitchen, dining rooms and music area. The second storey contained five class rooms, two at one end being on a raised level. All inside walls were able to be folded back, thus providing a concert hall and stage. The

third storey was added in 1933 with a spacious dormitory and bathroom area. Walkways, top and bottom, linked the *Casket* building with the original *Kemendine* house. Over the years the *Casket* building has undergone changes and refurbishment, now providing classrooms, language laboratory, staff offices and a small archival area for the storage of student records.

I mentioned two army huts. In 1942, because of the threat of Japanese invasion, all coastal schools were ordered to close. Loreto evacuated to Glen Innes in N.S.W. and the army took over the Loreto site until the end of 1943. The two huts the army had built were purchased by Loreto, one being used for music, choral work and drama until it was demolished in 1977. The other served as a Junior Dormitory for many years. After boarders were phased out (1979 being the last years for boarders) it had many uses – as a room for sewing, art and other subjects. Finally it was demolished in 1997.

The house that became the Junior School was near the front gates on the right hand side of the original drive. Archbishop Duhig had purchased it to be used as a Mass centre by Father Bucas (a French priest) for the local Catholic community. A couple of rooms were converted into a chapel and the rest formed a residence for the priest and his housekeeper.

Loreto bought this property in 1940 and it served as the Junior School until the end of 1976 when the Junior School was phased out. Loreto had boys as well as girls in the Junior School so quite a few men can be claimed as past pupils as well! As the Junior School had grown over the years, a private property was bought from the Goring family in 1961 and a demountable acquired in 1967. In 1990 *Gorings* was demolished and the demountable relocated to another school. The swimming pool, constructed in 1985, is located on what was part of the Junior School playground area.

In 1963 another private house was purchased from the Grant family and another home owned by one of the Deshon families was acquired soon afterwards. Loreto now owns the whole block except one privately owned building facing Dale Street.

When I was at school the main administration building was erected in 1954. It originally contained classrooms, library, offices, priest's flat and parlours on the ground floor and a beautiful dormitory and ablution block upstairs. This building too had a walkway connecting with *Kemendine*. Over the years there have been changes and refurbishment; downstairs now has administration offices and a staff dining area while upstairs contains staff study rooms and classrooms.

In 1964 Stage One of the main classroom block was built with Stage Two being added soon afterwards and Stage Three in 1997. Stages One and Two have undergone alterations and updating over the years.

The building known as *Babylon*, so named because of a grey besser brick wall being decorated with hanging pot plants - hence 'the Hanging Gardens of Babylon', was added in the early seventies. It was completely rebuilt in 2000. There is now undercover car parking for staff with science rooms above, powered by solar panelling.

The *Mother Gonzaga* building and chapel were erected in 1977. The architect for this building was John Deshon, a descendant of the original owner, Edward Deshon. The iron lace from the verandahs of *Kemendine* was used on the top verandah and the chapel incorporated many features from the *Kemendine* house. Cedar and glass doors, the original front door from *Kemendine*, have pride of place as the front door of the chapel. The cedar skirting boards were also used. *Kemendine* had a sweeping cedar staircase and through the craftsmanship of a German woodcarving artist, Arno Schilling, it was transformed into beautiful furniture for the chapel.

The *Mary Ward Centre*, constructed in 1991 on the site of the old Junior School, is a multi-purpose hall with classrooms and music area as well as a stage fully equipped for performances. It has an indoor court which can be used for netball, basketball and volley ball as well as athletic and gymnastic activities. The entrance doors depict two of the series of fifty 17th century European paintings which tell the story of Mary Ward.

The original circular drive underwent several changes over the years but was eventually absorbed into the area now known as Deshon's Oval, constructed in 1994. This recreation area is supplemented by three multi-purpose courts on the southern side of the school complex and the multi-purpose court in the *Mary Ward Centre*.

Where the original *Kemendine* building stood a rotunda was erected in 2002. There are many shady areas for the girls to relax or work on projects requiring more conversation than one would wish in a classroom. The grounds are picturesque, shady and restful – even with 750 students present.

The 'new' convent built on the corner of Lade and Dale Streets in 1972 was split level – five levels in all. About eight years ago with occupants growing older, knees objecting to stairs and one member of community being diagnosed with MND, it was decided to relocate. This happened in 2004 with a move to a Holland Park house which had been built for total wheelchair accessibility. The 'new' convent then became the 'old' convent and was demolished in 2008 to make room for a three storey school block with a small car park and storage area underneath. The building is very user and environmentally-friendly as well as versatile with a magnificent view from the top floor.

Helen Salter is a member of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (I.B.V.M., more commonly known as the Loreto Sisters) and is the present Community Leader in Queensland.

Her association with Loreto, Coorparoo, began as a boarder from 1951 to the end of 1956. She has had two periods teaching there: 1969 to the end of 1976 as Principal of the Junior School and 1989 to mid-1995 in the Senior School.

She returned to Coorparoo in 2005 and since then has been working in the school archives with Mrs. Moya Hickey.