

Knights of the Southern Cross: A New Story from the Old Days. Queensland 1921-2015

December 2015

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Organisations with traditions and significant rituals should know when, where and how they began, who was involved with that initiation, and why the organisation continues. A new history of the Knights of the Southern Cross (Queensland) has been published with the title of *A Quest for a Fair Go*. It is a second history book in the life of the state chapter of the Order. In 1984 the long-serving State Secretary and very beloved Brother, Jack Woodward, wrote *The Queensland Story*. The publication was a very useful resource for the Knights; however, it was compiled rather than developed as a history. Woodward structured his book into chapters examining the six decades of the Queensland Order as it had developed at that time. In early 2013 the State Council had decided to commission a new history. The national organisation had advised the state councils to write historical accounts of the organisation within each relevant state. A retired journalist, Cliff Baxter, had written an account of the New South Wales Order, *Reach for the Stars*. Wisely the Queensland State Council was looking for something special in a new

history. If the Knights were to be taken serious in the twentieth century, the Order ought to turn to the scholarly discipline of history. In the end, journalistic fluff and polemics does not impress many non-fiction book readers, and such books end up in the remainder bin very quickly. Brothers David Jefferies and Michael Gregg, both recent State Chairmen, were given the job of managing the project. To assist, Maureen Baillie in the State Office was brought on board, and a History Committee met regularly. The diocesan historian, academic historian at the Australia Catholic University, and Convenor of the Brisbane Catholic Historical Society, Dr Chris Hanlon, was approached to find a historian to research and write a project manuscript. It was hoped that a postgraduate candidate might be prepared to turn a thesis in the direction of the Queensland Knights. No one stepped forward as the months of 2013 moved on.

Local historian Beryl Roberts had an accountant, Steve Kelly, who was a Knight, and Mrs Roberts was asked if she was interested in authoring for the project. Mrs Roberts worked with Dr Neville Buch, a local and Queensland historian, and an authority on the social history of Protestant organisations in Queensland. He was also a friend and a former colleague of Dr Hanlon at the University of Queensland. With the provision of being able to co-opt the Rev. Dr Hanlon for the project, as a kind of project supervisor, Buch and Roberts agreed to undertake creating the manuscript. In the later stages of the project, Dr Hanlon served in the role of an editorial manager, and it was clear that his work much saved the day during the difficult challenges in the final

stages of the writing. Mention should be made of another friend and colleague of Buch and Hanlon, Dr Sue Keays. Dr Keays had been commissioned early to produce a manuscript for Southern Cross Care Inc. Her superb work was very valuable for the Knight's project.

On Wednesday 4 September 2013, the first full project meeting occurred at the State Office. The extended target date for the completion of a manuscript was August 2015. The deadline was overrun by eight months and the manuscript was delivered in May 2016. The planning for the project had originally set a completion date within twelve months. One of the valuable lessons for the historians is that a manuscript of this nature requires three full years. An important limiting factor was the attention which could be devoted to the project, and the time on the project was divided 70% from Dr Buch and 30% from Mrs Roberts. Both professional historians had other projects on their schedule. The delay in the work was also a positive indication. Both historians were overwhelmed with massive and well-managed Queensland Knights' archives held at the State Office. It took five months at the start of the project just to compile a sufficient bibliographical database which comprehensively covered the material necessary for the project. Unlike many organisations, the Knights had been very successful in archiving a full range of minute documents, and across a number of Committees and Working Parties. There was also a large collection of different journals and periodicals which the state Order had produced at one time or another. From the large pool of primary source material, 40 historical themes were apparent in the organisational life of Queensland

Knights. It was also helpful that the contributions of the Knights, during turbulent times of the 1920s to the end of the 1960s, had not escaped the attention of a few academic historians.

Unfortunately, most references were located as events in New South Wales and Victoria. There were nevertheless clues in a number of secondary sources for events in Queensland. Unsurprisingly, these were references to political dramas, particularly around the ALP splits of the late 1950s and the sectarian fall-out which followed. Although from the Knights' perspective these aspects were less important for the overall narrative, these events did need to be examined closely as part of a larger history. Patrick O'Farrell was a significant source on the subject of Protestant-Catholic sectarianism, and his work was very helpful in contextualising Woodward's *Queensland Story*. It became clear that a major division in the history was the pre-Vatican II sectarian battles and the post-Vatican reforms. It was interesting to discover that the Queensland and national Knights were already on a journey for organisational reform from 1960 and had set their sails to the 'winds of change' in the lead-up to Vatican II. This factor tells us the benefit of the new history. Woodward was a member of the pre-Vatican II generation and a few of the arguments in the old *Queensland Story* reflected a backward view, focusing on the sectarian battles of an era which was well past in 1984. The sad twist in the Catholic historiography was that Woodward and the other Queensland Knights were the reformers in the days of their youth. They were the leaders pushing for the place of the Lay Apostolate, a central theme of Vatican II. The achievements of the

Order needed to be understood and valued. Old men and women needed to re-discover their original vision (and I write this as one over the age of 50 years, so there is no ageism intended). One of big achievements of the Queensland Order, among many, was the support for Catholic Education, and the formation of the Parents and Friends Association. The difficult creation of the diocesan system would not have been possible had not the Knights, largely, provided the mechanism for parents and the community of faith to participate in educational reforms.

Three main views of the Knights of the Southern Cross (Queensland) come through the new history:

- Knights as an economic body;
- Knights as a social body; and
- Knights as a Christian Way of Life.

The Knights had their first meeting on Saturday, 29 October 1921, with 24 candidates for the new Queensland branch, at St Stephens School beside the Cathedral. They were organised by the New South Wales Order through the Brisbane optometrist, John Sidney Guilfooy. The organisation was primarily established as an economic body to look after the employment of Catholic men and for the economic strength of the Church. Less than eight years after the formation of the Queensland Order, the Knights became Archbishop Duhig's main collectors of public donations for the Holy Name Cathedral Project. At the Laying of the Foundation Stone at the Holy Name Cathedral site in September 1928 the amount raised was £42,409 – which is very large amount on today's currency. According to

the pre-decimal inflation calculator on the RBA site, the amount is roughly equivalent to \$84,818.00. However, its value as a cost in goods and services today would be \$ 3,214,808.78.

The fact that the Knights today have extensive archives is no doubt due to this role of existing as an economic body. The Knights have taken a very business-like approach to all aspects of their work. It has meant for us, the historians, that they have been extremely well organized in document management and project management, in such things as retrieving particular references, scanning documents, sorting out photographs, and in scheduling meetings to discuss research findings and draft chapters. It is, of course, not all about the numbers. The Knights are also a social body. At the heart of the organization are the gatherings: the branch meetings, the regional conferences, the annual state conference, and the meetings of State Council, and State Quota. The Knights are rightly proud of the many years working together, as a society of Catholic men. History is never an easy story to tell; more so, for an organization which was semi-secret before 1962. It is another important theme in the new history, and unlike the old, there is a view that secrecy may have not been the best strategy. Secrecy has often a habit of harsh comeback upon the silenced and loyal adherents (rather than the outside world). The codes of secrecy were, in fact, points of tension among the Knights as they very slowly moved into becoming an open and more inclusive society.

The days of secrets are gone and today historians find the Knights to be very sociable. The Knights themselves participated in the research and writing of the new history and this is particularly important as even the most experienced historians have to negotiate challenging tasks in composition when faced with new stories. There was research where much needed information was hard to locate. More importantly, the drafting of the manuscript needed be continuously revised through discussions with the members of Knights' history committee. It is always a learning process to be able to articulate fairly and accurately a balanced perspective of the history. It has not been stress-free for the historians and the Knights to consider controversial matters of politics and ethics. The events of 1957 in Queensland put an uncomfortable spotlight on several pages of history which the Knights, understandably, would rather forget. However, it can't be forgotten, for it was a significant catalyst for the national organization reforming itself from 1960 to 1962.

One of the most difficult chapters to compose was Chapter Six on the Christian Way of Life, and yet it was ultimately the most rewarding to read. Southern Cross Care, in providing twelve residential care facilities spread across South East Queensland, six retirement villages spread from Noosa to the Gold Coast and across to Ipswich and Toowoomba, and Community Services offering in-home care, has to be the largest investment in the Knight's history. The early beginnings go back to 1970s, and were, perhaps, the last great legacy of that older generation of Queensland Knights, since passed on.

In the process of the project the historians have been very aware of the work of others who have contributed to the construction of this history. First, there are the historical players themselves who lived the history and whose memories made it possible to flesh-out various points in the narrative. A few of these players resided at Southern Cross Care facilities. Secondly, there are today's Knights who have been important guides in the journey of the research and writing. They have inherited the legacy of what is revealed in the history being constructed, and ultimately it is their judgements on the work which matters. Thirdly, there are the other historians whose work we have built upon. We have been greatly aided by the works of Patrick O'Farrell, Michael Hogan, and Jack Woodward. There are also contemporary historians who have assisted, such as Sue Keays, who produced an earlier work on Southern Cross Care. Father Chris Hanlon has been invaluable facilitator in keeping the project on-track.

In concluding, the new history is not only an institutional history, it is a community history of faith; everybody involved in the project has learnt a lot. In terms of the Knight's history, we have learnt that:

- it was important for Catholic men in the post-world war I era to stand up against sectarian discrimination and work for mutual benefit;
- secret organizations were a common feature of that earlier period, but by the late 1940s it was becoming, to the wider community, something of a Cold War farce, play-acting in spy games;

- the Knights had become very successful in their objectives to improve the position of the Catholic man and woman (we should note that although the majority of activities were for men, considerable amount of the Knights' charity work was directed to benefit of religious sisters, widows and mothers in care of children);
- there is such a thing as being too successful when you 're a semi-secret organization. The rise of Catholic political-power in Queensland during the 1950s was the source of its decline. In the general population – made up of Protestants and Catholics, and various others – people expected and demanded greater transparency in employment and governance.
- and the greatest lesson we have learnt is that of the great capacity for the Knights to re-organize themselves, particularly in the light of the reforms of Vatican II. The rewards in being able to take new directions in the early 1960s, are the later successes in its work for the benefit for the wider Catholic community. Southern Cross Care stands as a stunning achievement.

As a historian of ideas, one enjoyed the pleasure of exploring honestly and fairly the ideas which are not my own. It is very important to understand as fully as one can, each human person and their value in the wider community. When this happens we breakdown the sectarian hatred but sectarianism is still unfortunately with us today as we witness unjust responses to Australian Muslims. Many thanks go to the Queensland Knights for deciding to allow us to research and write

their significant Queensland history. The new history is a tribute to their graciousness and dedication to supporting the wider Catholic community.