

**THE MINISTRY OF FR. FULGENTIUS  
HODEBOURG ON THE DARLING DOWNS IN  
THE 1860'S**

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Fr. Fulgentius Hodebourg arrived in Melbourne aboard the *Donald Mackay* on 12 March 1861. He was a member of Bishop Quinn's party together with four other priests and several Sisters of Mercy.<sup>1</sup> A case of smallpox on board had detained them in Victoria.<sup>2</sup> Fathers Hodebourg, Tissot and Renehan arrived in Brisbane aboard the steamer *Telegraph* on 19 April 1861.<sup>3</sup>

In the Government Gazette Notices - NSW Police Gazette, Sydney dated 11 April 1861 - there is a report which reads as follows:

**STOLEN** from the Rev. F. Hodebourg, recently arrived by the *Donald McKay*, on the way from the Quarantine Station by steamer to Sandridge, a box about 5 feet by 2½, with wooden handles, containing theological and philosophical books, a list of which cannot at present be furnished. – 10th April 1861.<sup>4</sup>

There are a few historical facts about Fr. Hodebourg, which need to be clarified. Anyone doing research will

firstly find his name spelt in various ways, namely, Fulgentius / Fulgence Hodenbourg; Hodebourg or Hodeburg. However, Ipswich records show the name Fr. Hodebourg in his own handwriting.

After much research, the previous archivist in Toowoomba found that he was not a member of the Augustinians of the Assumption. A letter dated 11 February 1995 from Fr. Paul J O'Connor at the Assumptionist Centre, Augustinians of the Assumption in Massachusetts, explains:

I am unable to find any information about him. To the best of my knowledge three priests (of the Assumptionists' order) were sent to Australia: Fathers Henri Brun, Paul Tissot and Rene Cusse.<sup>5</sup>

Fr. Paul O'Connor then refers to Fr. Austin Treamer's writings as well as to Bishop James Foley's writings in 1992. Both of these religious scholars were writing on the Augustinians of the Assumption. We do know that Fr. Hodebourg was French. However, nothing of his early life, his date and place of birth or date of Ordination is known. We do know he was in Ireland around 1860 as he was mentioned in the *Freeman's Journal*.<sup>6</sup>

So where did he go when he arrived in Australia in April 1861? Fr. Hodebourg was in Brisbane and no doubt would have worked with Bishop James Quinn upon his later arrival.

In July 1861, he accompanied Bishop Quinn on his first diocesan visitation in Queensland. Bishop Quinn, accompanied by Fathers Renehan, Hodebourg and Tissot, went by boat from Brisbane to Maryborough. They then rode on horseback to Gayndah and through the Burnett and Condamine areas returning to Brisbane via Dalby, Toowoomba and Ipswich.

In 1862, Fr. Hodebourg went to Ipswich to assist Fr. McGinty. As part of his mission at Ipswich, Fr. Hodebourg visited the Darling Downs in June of that year. At Drayton, he officiated at two marriages. An extract from the *Darling Downs Gazette* states:

Marriage - On Wednesday, 25 June 1862, Rosie Emma Mehan, daughter of Patrick Mehan, Londenderry, Ireland to William third son of David Gibson, Esq Perthshire, Scotland. (Just one year later “Rosanna” Gibson died.)<sup>7</sup>

In the Local and District news in the *Queensland Times*, Friday, 5 September 1862, appears the following:

The rev. Father Houdebourg – We learn with regret that this gentleman who has gained the respect and esteem of all who have come in contact with him during his residence in Ipswich, is about to leave Queensland. We understand that it is the rev. gentleman’s intention to proceed at once to Europe.<sup>8</sup>

This information was incorrect as three months later Fr. Hodebourg was appointed to officiate in Toowoomba and Drayton. An extract from the *Darling Downs Gazette* dated 25 September 1862 shows:

Rev F Hodenbourgh, the Roman Catholic priest appointed to officiate in Toowoomba and Drayton arrived yesterday (24th September) and we believe purports taking up residence here. The Council has allowed the use of the Town Hall next Sunday for Worship.<sup>9</sup>

Fr. Hodebourg built the first Catholic building on the Darling Downs in Toowoomba at the corner of James Street and Neil Street and by November 1863 it was almost completed. It was called the “Roman Catholic School” and was to be used as a chapel and school until a church could be built. While Fr. Hodebourg was in charge, the church–school served its dual purpose. Today, St Patrick’s Cathedral stands on this site.

In 1863 Fr. William Larkin was appointed resident priest at Drayton and joined Fr. Hodebourg in the Drayton/Toowoomba Mission. Both priests spent much time travelling throughout the Western Downs, as their mission extended to beyond Roma. Fr. Hodebourg also visited shepherd’s huts at Eton Vale and Pilton and surrounding stations. Mass was said wherever a few people could gather. Mr and Mrs Patrick O’Shea worked at Pilton station from 1860 to 1866 and occasionally

welcomed Fr. Hodebourg to their humble home. The O'Shea's were relatives of Hanorah Frawley's family. Hanorah has written extensively on the early history of the Church on the Darling Downs.<sup>10</sup> There is a story of funds being raised to build a church at Drayton and then, that money being used to build the church in Toowoomba.

In 1864 because of the large number of Irish Catholics settling in the Toowoomba District, a public dinner was advertised to be held on 17 March 1864 in St Patrick's Church-School. The Chairman was Fr. Hodebourg and Vice- Chairman Fr. William Larkin.<sup>11</sup>

At the 1865 St Patrick's Day celebrations, Fr. Hodebourg was present and responded to a toast by the Chairman "To Honour St Patrick". In the course of a scholarly address, he said it was fitting a Frenchman should honour St Patrick.<sup>12</sup>

An extract obtained from the *Darling Downs Gazette* dated 11 January 1865 records Fr. Hodebourg in his role as marriage celebrant:

Marriage:- 7th January at Toowoomba by Rev. W. Larkin assisted by Rev. F. Hodebourg, Thomas P. Haaslam Esq. Town Clerk, Drayton, to Mary, eldest sister of William Murphy, Governor of the jail, at Toowoomba

and again,

Marriage - 5th September 1865, Fr. Hodebourg officiated at the marriage of James Barry, Drayton and Alice Murphy, sister of Mary and William Murphy Toowoomba.<sup>13</sup>

It was Fr. Hodebourg who revived interest in building the Drayton Church. Meetings were held in June and July 1865 for that purpose. Fr. Hodebourg was Chairman, and he started the first subscription list with a donation of £5.<sup>14</sup>

Fr. Hodebourg took an active part in civic affairs. He was a member of the Hospital Committee and made frequent visits to the hospital and the jail. There are reports of Fr. Hodebourg being active on various other Civil Committees.

He appears in Pugh's Almanac in 1866 as being resident in Toowoomba with Father John McGahan. In July 1866 a new Catholic Church was opened at Dalby. Fr. Hodebourg said Mass in the new church and preached to a large congregation, "many of whom were rejoiced to see again one who on many former occasions had extended his pastoral solicitude to the town". From Dalby, Fr. Hodebourg went on to visit Roma.

In September 1866, the church at Drayton was opened. Neither Fr. Hodebourg nor Fr. Larkin was present. Fr. Larkin had left Queensland earlier in that year and had gone to New Zealand.

When he visited Roma in 1866, Fr. Hodebourg, following Mass, appealed for funds to build a residence for a priest in that town, to which £40 was contributed.<sup>15</sup> As it turned out shortly afterwards, Fr. Hodebourg resigned from the Toowoomba Hospital Board in February 1867 as he was transferred to Roma as Priest-in-Charge of that mission.<sup>16</sup> The Roma Mission was not an easy one given the distances that had to be covered on horseback.

While in charge of the Roma Mission, Fr. Hodebourg was considering returning to Europe, as reported in news from Surat published in the *Dalby Press*:

The Rev Father Hodeburg paid us another visit and after spending a few days, left en route for St George. The Rev gentleman is going to Europe, and it is a source of great regret that so useful and amiable a gentleman should be leaving this important district.<sup>17</sup>

In a lengthy article titled “ROMA AND THE ROMANS” in the *Queenslander* dated 8 February 1868,<sup>18</sup> it was stated:

The religious wants of the district are abundantly supplied. Some time ago the Catholic body were avored with the presence and services of a most accomplished and hard-working clergyman, and Father Hodebourg’s name and his kindness, gentleness, and charity to all denominations, will

never be forgotten in Roma. He is at present, we believe, in Surat; but we expect him here soon.

The *Queensland Times* dated 23 September 1869<sup>19</sup> gives an account of the farewell sermon preached by Fr. Hodebourg at St Patrick's Church in Toowoomba. The account was repeated in the *Brisbane Courier* of 25 September 1869:

The term of Fr. Hodebourg's mission had expired and he was leaving Queensland from Roma with Bishop Quinn who was going to attend Vatican I Conference. Fr. Hodebourg, who had been appointed "Dean" of St Stephen's Cathedral, was one of the priests who assisted at a High Mass in St Stephen's Cathedral in Brisbane at 8.30am on the day of their departure, 22nd September 1869.

The *Queensland Times* commented:

Dean Hodebourg had been very successful in his ministry in Toowoomba and Roma. A large crowd had assembled at the Toowoomba Railway Station when he left there on Monday a.m. to testify their respect and wish him God speed.<sup>20</sup>

Early in 1868, following the rebellion of Fathers Renehan, McGahan and others against Bishop Quinn and their leaving the colony, Fr. Robert Dunne the Vicar-General of the diocese was appointed as Priest-in-Charge of the Toowoomba Mission.<sup>21</sup>

Fr. Hodebourg was still in the colony in 1869 when he was present at the laying of the foundation stone at Fr. Tissot's new church in Maryborough by Bishop Quinn on 24 July.<sup>22</sup>

On 24 August 1870, Bishop James Quinn wrote to Fr. Hodebourg whilst in Rome for the Vatican 1 Conference. He addresses Dean Hodebourg in the following way:

My Dear Dean Hodebourg, I have just now received two letters from you – of same date 20 inst. and same contents by which you ask permission to return to your native diocese & inform me that your Bishop is ready to confer a parish on you, as soon as you will have my consent. I hereby authorize you to act as your own judgment and conscience will direct...Having said so much as your Bishop, allow me now to request you, as a friend, to take a year from the date of your letter – Feast of St Joseph – to consider the course you should adopt. Act in meantime as you think fit, but don't say, except to your Bishop, or to a particular friend, that you doubt about returning.

As there is no record of Fr. Hodebourg returning to Australia, it appears that he stayed in France. After Fr. Hodebourg's departure in 1869, the town of Roma had no resident priest until Fr. Dunham was appointed in 1873.<sup>23</sup>

What do we make of Fr. Fulgentius Hodebourg? From all reports, he was popular and hard-working. He was an intelligent man and therefore much sought after on local committees. Travelling in outback Queensland on horseback in those early days was not easy as these pioneer priests would have carried some type of Mass kit as well as their personal belongings, maybe even a swag.

There is no record of where Fr. Hodebourg went or what he did after he left Australia in 1869. There is still much to be learned of this well-respected pioneer priest of Queensland.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, D.W., *The Foundation of the Catholic Church in Queensland*, 1988 edition, p.150.

<sup>2</sup> McLay, Y.M., *James Quinn*, 1979, p.41.

<sup>3</sup> Martin, *Foundation of the Catholic Church*.

<sup>4</sup> Government Gazette Notices, NSW Police Gazette, Sydney, 11 April 1861.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Mrs Annie Carrett Diocesan Archivist, Toowoomba from Fr. Paul J O'Connor at the Assumptionist Center, Augustinians of the Assumption, Provincial Office Brighton, Massachusetts, 11 February 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Long, D.M., *Pioneer and Early Priests Archdiocese of Brisbane Deceased or retired by 1929*, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Hanorah Frawley writing on Father Fulgence Hodebourg - date unknown – document held in Toowoomba Diocesan Archives.

<sup>8</sup> *Queensland Times*, 5 September 1862, p.3.

<sup>9</sup> *Darling Downs Gazette*, 25 September 1862.

<sup>10</sup> Hanorah Frawley writing on Father Fulgence Hodebourg - date unknown – document held in Toowoomba Diocesan Archives.

<sup>11</sup> *Darling Downs Gazette*, 24 March 1864.

<sup>12</sup> *Toowoomba Chronicle and Queensland Advertiser*, 23 March 1865.

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- <sup>13</sup> *Darling Downs Gazette*, 9 September 1865, p.3.
- <sup>14</sup> Hanorah Frawley writing on Father Fulgence Hodebourg - date unknown – document held in Toowoomba Diocesan Archives.
- <sup>15</sup> Long, *Pioneer and Early Priests*.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid; *Qld Times, Ipswich Herald and General Advertiser*, 19 July 1866, p.5; *Dalby Herald*, 12 July 1866, p.2.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> At p.9.
- <sup>19</sup> At p.3.
- <sup>20</sup> Hanorah Frawley writing on Father Fulgence Hodebourg - date unknown – document held in Toowoomba Diocesan Archives.
- <sup>21</sup> Long, *Pioneer and Early Priests*.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> This lack of information has prompted Dr Patrick O’Neill to undertake further research in French Church Archives. This material will be presented on a further occasion.