



RUTH TRAIT
AUG 2006

Talk – "Discovering the Quins"

This talk is about Margaret and Michael Quin, the Pioneers of our Parish of Sacred Heart, but because some of you may have read my article about them published in our Parish magazine "Horizons" in 2002, I am going to speak mainly about how I discovered the Quins.

When I retired, some 18 years ago, one of the voluntary jobs I undertook was to work at the Melbourne Diocesan Historical Commission, often referred to now as "Catholic Archives". It used to be situated at 24 Brunswick Street Fitzroy in an old terrace house, but some years ago it moved to the Diocesan offices beside St. Patrick's Cathedral.

One day at "Catholic Archives", I was looking up something in "The Advocate". Some of you may not know "The Advocate", it was a Catholic weekly published in Melbourne from 1868 to 1990. It is a wonderful source of religious, historical and literary information as well as recording events in the Archdiocese of Melbourne and far beyond.

Information from "The Advocate" is readily available, because a very detailed summary with an index has been made by Fr. Kevin Hannan, who now lives in the care of the Little Sisters of the Poor in Northcote. He is 97 and still has a very sharp mind.

His Index to the summary of the Advocate is available for researchers at the State Library of Victoria. Initially you use the Microfiche of the Index to the summary to get your references and then you proceed to use the appropriate Microfilm reels to read the relevant issue and page

of the Advocate. (Unfortunately no-one has tackled the other Catholic Weekly, The Tribune, published in Melbourne 1900-1971).

Back to the day of my search! As I was searching the relevant page, my eye was caught by something I was not looking for – it was an item in The Advocate of 25.3.1926 headed "A Model Catholic Pair".

The Advocate – March 25, 1926

A Unique Compliment -Church Workers Honoured

A Model Catholic Pair

A compliment unique in every way was paid to two worthy Catholic people at Sandringham last Sunday, when his Grace the Archbishop visited the Sacred Heart Church. The main purpose of the visit of his Grace was to bless a number of stained-glass windows, particulars of which ceremony appear elsewhere.

In his remarks from the pulpit at the close of the ceremony, the parish priest, the Rev. Fr. Mangan, stated that one of the windows bore the inscription –

"In honour of Michael and Margaret Quinn, and their 20th year of devoted service to Sacred Heart Church".

It appears that at the very beginning of Church movements in Sandringham, Mr. and Mrs. Quinn were to the fore, and have been identified in a most active way with Sandringham Church ever since. The devotion and attention of both husband and wife to the Church work have been most remarkable. In the first years, when

the Sandringham Church was a chapel of ease to St. James', Garden Vale, the entire care of the church and grounds, of the financing of the parish, of the work of cleaning, of attention to the altar and sacristy, was undertaken as a labour of love by this worthy couple.

On the formation of the parish, the pastor, Fr. Mangan, states that their zeal and love and energy in the cause of Church work were in no way diminished, but have endured unflagging from year to year. "It was, therefore," said Father Mangan on Sunday, "taken as a unique opportunity to commemorate the services of this worthy couple to erect a window in their honour on the 20th anniversary of their faithful service."

THE ARCHBISHOP'S COMPLIMENTS

After the service the Rev. Fr. Mangan introduced Mr and Mrs Quinn to his Grace Dr. Mannix. His Grace congratulated them and complimented them on their worthy and lengthy service. His Grace remarked that it was usually after death that such services were commemorated, but he was delighted to see Mr. and Mrs. Quinn in such excellent health, and apparently fresh enough for further long service.

Names of donors of windows: - The late Mr. P.J. Hogan, Mr. and Mrs. Maguire, The Parishioners in Honour of the Late Archbishop Carr. Mr. Haslett, Mr. Meade, Mrs. Soffa, Friends of St. Malachy, Mrs. Meere, Mrs Holloway, Miss Ring, Mrs W. T. Toohey, Girls' Club, Parishioners in Honour of Mr. and Mrs. Quinn.

Now I have lived in Sandringham for 43 years on and off, and I had never heard of Mr Michael and Mrs Margaret Quin, nor had I ever noticed in our first church the stained glass window installed in their honour.

In fact that precious window and all the other stained glass windows have long gone, except for some pieces incorporated in our present church, and a window featuring St. Brigid which was acquired by former Curate here Fr. McLaughlin for St. Brigid's Greythorn, a parish established in 1961. The Quins' window, featuring I do not know what, is referred to as being in the Sacristy of our first church, in which case not many parishioners would have ever seen it.

No-one I inquired from knew of the Quins, so I had to rely on research for further information, as I was curious to know more about the lives of this remarkable couple who really seem to be the Founders of the Catholic church in Sandringham.

I searched The Advocate for other Quin references and when I found in the issue of 26.2.1942 mention of 'the late Mrs M.A. Quinn' (she was actually Margaret Elizabeth) "who died last week" that gave me the start I needed to fill in an Application to the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages for the Death Certificate. This Certificate provided more clues – that she had 2 adult children Helen and Cecil Aloysius and that her husband Michael predeceased her. It gave a clue as to the year she married so I was able to send for her Marriage Certificate also.

The Quins had married in St Frances' Church Melbourne on 24.1.1891; he was from Bendigo (Sandhurst then) and she from Ballarat. At the time of marriage he, aged 30, was living

in Brighton and she, aged 26, was living (probably staying temporarily for the wedding) in South Yarra, but her usual place of residence had been Sandringham and her occupation was "Cashier".

It would be interesting to know where.

I persevered with my Applications for birth, Marriage and Death Certificates of the Quin Family. I found that Margaret and Michael's son Cecil married Mary Elizabeth Burgess of Richmond on 3.4.1924 at St. Ignatius' Richmond. He was living at 9 Moor Street Sandringham at the time of his marriage. Cecil and Mary had a daughter Elsie who died and 2 sons, Ronald James Quin and Peter William Quin.

Cecil had joined the Commonwealth Public Service and worked in the Customs Department. He spent time in Sydney and Canberra. Cecil and his family returned to Melbourne (from Canberra) in 1954 and in 1956 or 1957 moved to 88 Sandringham Road Sandringham. After Cecil's death on 6.7.1968, his widow Mary and probably his son Peter William (known as "Bill") continued to live there. A Sands & McDougall Directory entry shows Mrs M. E. Quin still living there at 88 Sandringham Road in 1974. I have not checked any further, but Mrs Mary Quin died in 1986 aged 94.

Cecil's elder sister Helen, called "Elsie", was a teacher at Hampton High School. She didn't marry. Someone now living in Sandringham Road who was taught by Miss Quin, when recently asked what she recalled said "Miss Quin – she had grey hair"!

By now I was quite excited because I realized that there could be living descendants of Michael and Margaret Quin.

My next step was to go to the current Electoral Rolls at the State Library. These are on microfiche and are very easy to use, the names being arranged alphabetically within the States and Territories of the Commonwealth of Australia. I searched for the name Peter William Quin (grandson of Michael and Margaret Quin) – no sign of his name, so he was likely to be deceased. I searched for the name Ronald James Quin – and found it! He was living in Blampied via Ballarat. I was absolutely thrilled and could hardly wait to put pen to paper and write to him!

I had written an article called "The Two Pillars of Sacred Heart, Sandringham" based on the Quin research I had then done. That article was published in the June 2002 issue of our Parish magazine "Horizons". I posted a copy of this with a covering letter dated 12.7.2002 to the Quins' grandson Ronald Quin and impatiently waited for a response. Would there be any? He could have died recently, he could have lost his memory, he could be disinterested, or worse, he could have been displeased by my "investigations" One, two, nearly three weeks went by when, to my immense joy, I received a very long, treasured letter dated 30.7.2002 from "Ron Quin" (with one "N")!

I shall read you quite a few excerpts –

Dear Ruth, Throughout my life I had learned not to be surprised by anything, but I must say your letter with a copy of 'Horizons' June 2002 was a real exception. Those family members who have read it got quite excited.

I was told as a boy, that Michael Quin was the youngest survivor of 4 or 5 brothers the elder ones having died in Bendigo goldmines. His mother pleaded with him as the only son still alive, to leave the mines, hence his arrival in Melbourne to join Victoria Railways. The legend from my father (Cecil) was that he (Michael) drove the last train at night from Broadmeadows to Sandringham, left it at the station, then walked back along the line to 9 Moor Street where he went through a small picket gate, then through a trimmed gap in the Cypress hedge to the rear garden. We actually saw this set up for many years until he died, when the hedge was allowed to grow again.

Michael Quin was a tall reserved man, with a big frame, well preserved until his death. When dressed in his Sunday suit, Homburg hat and with his polished cane walking stick he was very elegant. We as children were proud of him. He always came swimming with us and our father when we went to Sandringham beach where we had a well kept bathing box.

Margaret Quin was a vivacious jolly lady with a ready smile. She was quite dynamic but you never heard from her, that she was busily involved in all the activities outside the family circle. She possessed a keen analytical brain but also a heart of gold and worked tirelessly during the Great Depression supplying food and money to families without any income. To her credit she always put the view that higher education brought opportunity. Hence she insisted that my brother and I should have access to University if we were so inclined.

As your article states, my mother's maiden name was Mary Elizabeth Burgess. Her father was a full blood Englishman from Lincolnshire, one of 15 or 16 children. Her 'migrated' to Australia

perhaps not intending to settle here as a young man in his late teens or early twenties. Four or five of his brothers back in U.K. had been ordained Anglican priests, although he was not a church goer when I knew him. He was a gentle, kind generous man and started his own produce and fuel business in Church St. Richmond just south of the Railway Viaduct. On many occasions I saw him take money out of the till to give to people, who called in to tell him of their hardships during the Depression. My brother and I spent a lot of time with him as we were his only grandchildren, his own son and daughter-in-law being childless.

I do not know when my father (that is, Cecil, son of Michael & Margaret) joined the Commonwealth Service, whether it was from school or after the 1st World War. He played football for Sandringham in the V.F.A. winning the 'best and fairest' medal in 1916. He then joined the A.I.F., served in France, driving an ammunition truck until the end of the war. During the 2nd World War he was chiefly in Sydney and Canberra in the Customs Dept. He was in Canberra about 7 years.

In February 1942, aged about 16, I awoke from a sleep on the beach at Sandringham to see out in the bay a spectacle or apparition quite unusual. After staring at it for a while I identified it as a long line of ships almost bow to stern, one after the other, steaming up the bay to Port Melbourne.

*I raced home to tell Elsie as my grandmother was not home at the time. *(she certainly was not at home; she died very recently - on 11.2.1942)*

We heard on the radio news that night about the arrival of this large convoy of ships loaded with U.S.A. soldiers under the command of General McArthur. Troops and supplies had been sent to

Melbourne as it was feared that the Japanese invasion of Northern Australia was only a matter of weeks away.

After Margaret Quin died on 11th February 1942, my father arranged for me to stay with Elsie for a week or so after the funeral. The detail came back to me as I reflected about the happenings at that time

My parents returned from Canberra to Melbourne in 1954 and eventually moved to 88 Sandringham Rd about '56/'57.

Sincerely

Ron Quin

The 1st Japanese air raid on Darwin was 19th Feb 1942; between then and March 1943 there were 64 Japanese Air raids on the N.T. This is a very unpublicized fact.

Isn't that a wonderful letter? You can imagine how delighted I was.

Later on Ron Quin phoned me and I tried to make notes as he spoke – for instance that Mrs Margaret Quin had plenty to say sprinkled with plenty of jokes, that her daughter "Elsie" was talkative too and that she ("Elsie" hiked a lot around Black Rock, Mentone, Beaumaris and Sandringham. "Elsie" got cancer, did not tell anyone and so died alone at home at 9 Moor Street in 1954 aged 62. She was buried on 14.7.1954 with her parents.

Ron Quin told me that when Cecil Quin and young family were living in Brunswick, they would come to Black Rock for 2 or 3 weeks at Christmas time and stay in the vicinity of Arkaringa Crescent. Each evening they would come to 9 Moor Street for tea with Michael and Margaret Quin.

He remembers his grandmother Margaret Quin as a smart dresser; he recalls her little lace up boots and smart hats – and that she was "mad on jam-making".

Back to my searches:

At the library of the Genealogical Society of Victoria I tried to search Railway material to follow in detail Michael Quin's railway career and the development of the railway line to Sandringham, but I wasn't particularly successful. I only extracted a few basic facts.

The Two Pillars of Sacred Heart, Sandringham

Michael Quin was born in Sandhurst in 1860, the son of Patrick Quin a Hotel keeper, and his wife Mary O'Loughlin. Margaret Elizabeth Quin's maiden name was Donegan. She was born in Ballarat in 1865, the daughter of Thomas Donegan, a Police Officer, and his wife Catherine Kenny.

Michael Quin joined the Railways on 10.10.1883 at the age of 23; his registration number was 6464. He worked in the Traffic Section and by 1902 had become a suburban guard.

He later transferred to the Transportation Section and was recorded as earning 8/- (shillings) a week by 1905. He was working on the Picnic Point Railway line which used to terminate at Brighton Beach, but from 1902 the trains ran through to Sandringham.

The Quin's elder child Helen, was born in 1892 in Brighton and the younger, Cecil Aloysius, was born in 1896 in Sandringham, which was the year the gatehouse and railway crossing at Georgiana Street were constructed.

Michael Quin was appointed the gatehouse keeper at the Georgiana Street Sandringham level crossing and the Quins then lived in the gatehouse until that railway crossing was abolished in 1925. About that time they moved to 9 Moor Street Sandringham.

Michael and Margaret Quin attended to the needs of the Catholic Church in Sandringham; they were really the managers and attended to everything themselves, excepting priestly functions. They were the pillars of the local church for years. The Quins continued living at 9 Moor Street.

Michael Quin died at Moira Private Hospital in Abbott Street on 3.11.1939. He was buried the next day in Brighton Cemetery. Part of this Obituary from the Parish publication "The Credo" describes him – "As a church collector, Mr Quin was best known to the young and old of the parish as Sunday by Sunday, year in and year out, he was faithful to that duty. Quiet, almost shy by nature, even to those who knew him best, he was at all times a light of good example and a model Christian man. He loved the Church and he loved the Mass and the

Sacraments. It was his humble boast that as an employee in the Victorian Railways, he had never been late for work.

He had a kind of holy regard for time and punctuality, and so it is not surprising that he cared for the church clock, was one of the first in the church on Sundays, and always the first for confession on Saturday nights."

Margaret Quin died at home at 9 Moor Street on Wednesday 11.2.1942. She had been, according to the Sandringham News of 13.2.1942, which I saw at the Sandringham & District Historical Societies' Rooms, "one of the most benevolent and public-spirited residents of the City of Sandringham" and had in fact attended a committee meeting of the Catholic Welfare Organization a day or so before she died. It was an unexpected death, so it is perhaps not surprising that the funeral on Thursday 12.2.1942 was private, but both Fr Hartnett (then Sacred Heart P.P.) and Fr Mangan (Sacred Heart's first P.P.) officiated at the burial in Brighton Cemetery. To estimate the worth of Margaret Elizabeth Quin one need only read this extract from The Advocate of 26.2.1942 –

(She) "was a Catholic leader of the truest type. The name of Catholic Action was unknown to many when over thirty years ago; she and her late husband fostered the infant parish of Sandringham, then attended from St James', Brighton. Even the grounds, the trees and shrubs, the exterior and interior tidiness of the church and altar, the financial needs, the comfort and convenience of the visiting, and later of the resident priests were her ever-increasing concern. All who knew the deceased lady will agree that she was a

worker of the greatest value. In the Sacred Heart Sodality, in the Altar Society, she was the leader and organiser. In civic affairs, the local city council placed charitable appeals and benevolent relief in her capable and trusted hands. She was a lady of the highest intelligence and character as well as the most profound faith and piety. In civic circles her influence was recognised as being for the good of the community and to the credit of the Church she represented...."

Margaret Quin was a public figure, engaged in many activities outside her home, including being the Secretary of the Sandringham Ladies Benevolent Society. President of the Women's Sacred Heart Sodality, a member of the Altar Society and a Probation Officer.

She could not have achieved all that she did without the quiet support of her husband. She must have been a very capable, astute woman.

Unfortunately there are no photos available of Michael or Margaret Quin. I did write again recently to Ron Quin specifically to ask if we could borrow photos to copy them for our archives, but there are none. I have not yet tried at the Sandringham & District Historical Society but I am not very hopeful.

Peter William Quin "Bill" brother of Ron Quin, died of lung cancer in 1988. At the time of their father Cecil's death in 1968, Bill Quin was living at 88 Sandringham Road with his parents, so it is very likely he stayed on with his widowed mother.

I've made several attempts to locate 88 Sandringham Road but because the street numbering is out of kilter and 88 is nowhere near the odd numbers of the 80's I've never quite got there – it is right up near Bluff Road. Whether today's 88 is the same No. 88 Sandringham Road that Cecil Quin and family lived in, I do not know, because at some stage the street numbering in Sandringham Road was changed. I have not investigated that yet.

Michael and Margaret Quin are buried in the Brighton Cemetery, Roman Catholic Section R 369. I have not yet tried to find the grave but I hope we might have a Parish Pilgrimage to their grave in November (this being our Centenary Year).

We would be delighted to receive information about more Catholic Pioneers of Sandringham. If your parents, aunts or uncles, grand-parents or great-grand-parents lived in Sandringham, try to recall what they said or wrote about Catholic life in early Sandringham – and provide our Archivist Mary O'Connor with the information and/or material.

Thank you

Ruth Trait

Talk given on Wed 9.8.2006 at
"Tea and Talk".