

The old St James' Church on the corner of Bridge Road and Coppin Street, Richmond was demolished when St Ignatius' Church was built, but the foundation stone was preserved to become part of the second, present church...

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In 1850 a 2-acre Government grant was obtained for a [Roman Catholic Church in Bridge Road, Richmond](#) and in August 1853 Fr Madden called tenders for a brick church-school to be erected there. This block on Bridge Road was bound by Griffiths, Palmer and Coppin Streets. The trustees appointed later were Bishop Goold, Rev J J Madden, Joseph L'Estrange and William Henry Archer.

*The Herald* newspaper of 26 September 1853 recorded the laying of the foundation stone:

The foundation stone of the new Roman Catholic chapel was laid at Richmond yesterday (Sunday) by the Right Rev Bishop Goold in the presence of a large concourse of people. The sight is a very picturesque one and the edifice will be dedicated to Saint James. A considerable sum was laid on the stone to forward the good work.

The church was probably named St James', because this saint was the patron saint of the first Catholic Bishop of Melbourne, James Goold and also of the first parish priest of Richmond, Rev James Madden.

*The Catholic Directory* of 1855 stated that:



The small but handsome chapel-school at Richmond was solemnly opened and dedicated to God in honour of St James on the Feast of St Agatha, February 05, 1854.

*The Herald* of that same week described how the blessing was followed by the Pontifical High Mass, Rev Dr L B Shiel preached an impressive sermon and Rev W Cunningham directed the choir. Richard Fitzgerald was named the builder of this Ancient Gothic building. The total cost of the church-school and furniture was given as £2,667.3.9, of which £900 was subscribed by the people.



In March 1853 Bishop Goold had appointed Fr James Joseph Madden to care for the growing congregation of Richmond Hill. As there was no church in the area, Mass was celebrated for a time in the home of Mr Joseph L'Estrange at 'Erindale', a fine bluestone building near the corner of Highett Street and Bromham Place. Fr Madden's first presbytery was a house in Charlotte Street.

James Plunkett was a parishioner and conductor of the choir at St James' in the 1850s. His sister, Mary Jane, married Michael Keogh, a brother to Mrs Joseph L'Estrange. In Plunkett's diaries of the 1850s, there are several references to St James' Church and Fr Madden. (Note that 'M J' is Mary Jane Keogh, and 'M' is Michael Keogh.)

- Thursday 27th December 1855 *Estranges, Mr and Mrs Archer, Dr and Mrs Stewart, Fr Madden, Geary*
- Tuesday 8th January 1856 *M J, Mother, Mr and Mrs Forbes, Mr and Mrs L'Estrange, Fr Madden and L*
- Tuesday 10th March 1856 *J to Mrs L'Estrange's Miss Chapman, new governess there. Fr Madden also*
- Sunday 28th February 1858 *choir for Richmond.*
- Monday 2nd August 1858 *at Fr Madden's concerning organ for Richmond.*
- Monday 2nd September 1858 *baptised by Fr Madden.*

In 1859, Richard Fitzgerald constructed a two-storeyed brick presbytery on the corner of Bridge Road and Coppin Street, alongside the church. In the glass pane above the door were the words *St James' House*. The building cost £2300.

Fr P Smyth succeeded Fr Madden as parish priest in June 1864. He was assisted for a short time by Fr I J O'Callaghan. In 1865 Fr E McCarthy became the Richmond pastor for a few months. Other priests remembered at the old St James' were Frs F O'Donnell, J O'Donnell and Francis McCarthy. In April 1866 the Jesuit Fathers took over the Richmond Mission. Frs Dalton and M'Kiniry lived in St James' House.

With the increase in population over the years it became evident that a larger church was necessary on a more suitable site. Although attempts were made to set the project in motion, no movement was successful until the Jesuit Fathers arrived. Land was purchased in Church Street on the very top of the hill. The foundation stone for the new church of St Ignatius' was laid on 04 August 1867.

In 1876 the old St James' church-school was demolished, however the presbytery remained and was demolished as late as August 1958.

The foundation stone was preserved to be included in the new church of St James' in Kent Street which opened on December 16, 1900.

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The foundation stone of the first St James' Church was used as the foundation stone of the new St James' at the corner of Kent and Davison Streets, Richmond, laid by Archbishop Carr on August 26th 1900. His Grace blessed and opened this church on December 16th 1900.

There was to be one Mass each Sunday, the priest coming from St Ignatius'.

In 1920 the Jesuit Provincial asked Sr Patricia Campbell for the Sisters of St Joseph to teach at the North Richmond school of St James', in Davison Street. As a result of this request, five sisters came to teach at St James' school and its offshoot - St Louis', in Burnley.

The first convent was a substantial house with a tower at 94 Burnley Street. Edward Rowland Priestly had built this house in 1871. Priestly was a hide and leather merchant and a member of the Richmond Council in 1877 and 1878. The house had twelve rooms, including a forge, billiard room, a bathroom and a cellar.

One of the nuns who lived there in the 1930s, Sr Jeanne has described how the sisters used the house:

The tower was three storeys high, and had a reputation for being haunted. Two nuns slept in each storey. The houses over the river in Kew could be seen above the shops on the opposite side of Burnley Street. Inside the Convent was a Chapel, a Community Room, a Music Room and a Classroom. The Classroom held about 30 to 35 grade 3 children. There was a sleep-out near the front of the building which was wooden boards up to about a height of three feet, and then above the boards was wire netting. There was a garden in front with steps leading down to the iron gate opening to Burnley Street.



In 1922 St James' was made into a separate parish with Fr Cuffe SJ as Parish Priest. The new parish recorded the first baptisms of local babies Margaret Mary Trainor and Alexander James Tropp and the first marriage - Mary Towers to John Heffler.

In March 1924 St James' School and Hall were blessed and opened. The first parish ball was held in this year. In 1931 the Jesuits handed over the parish to the diocesan clergy in

the persons of Frs John Donovan and John Carr.

St James' Mothers Club started in 1947 with Mrs Watson as first President.

Between 1948 and 1954 a new floor and seats were put into the church. The confessionals were added and a window with the symbols of St James' was placed over the porch - the initials S J for Saint James, the sword for his martyrdom, the crozier for his episcopacy, and the Bible for his preaching.

In 1956 the new convent for the Sisters of St Joseph was opened and blessed by Archbishop Mannix. This convent had been built in Davison Street, next to St James' School. It was a two-storeyed cream brick building.

Between 1970 and 1972 the church and parish buildings were renovated and the old presbytery demolished and a new presbytery blessed.

Since then the Sanctuary has been completely renovated, and a beautiful carved wooden crucifix donated by the builder, Mr Fred Dixon, was placed over the altar.

In 1997 the Convent was declared unsafe for habitation and demolished, and in August 1998 St James' once again became the responsibility of the Jesuit Community in Richmond.

Source: *The History of the Second St James' Church Richmond* by Sr Philomena McGuigan.