

Fr Joseph Lentaigne SJ, brought the triptych, depicting the 'Passion of Christ, from Ireland to Melbourne, Victoria, when he and Fr William Kelly SJ, arrived in 1865 as the first Irish Jesuits to come to Australia. Their arrival marked the beginning of the Irish Australian Mission and followed the arrival in South Australia of the Austrian Jesuits 23 years earlier.



In 1866, the Society of Jesus took over the Richmond parish and it is believed that the triptych has been here, in several locations, ever since. It was placed in St Stanislaus' Chapel in South Richmond, built in the 1920s, and it remained there until the closure of the chapel in the 1980s. It was then moved to the St Ignatius' Presbytery, Richmond.

In 1997, the Fine Arts Department at Melbourne University was asked to view the painting and make a preliminary assessment of its origins. Following their report, several experts from both Melbourne University and the National Gallery of Victoria collaborated to make a detailed assessment. Initial opinion suggested that the work was made in Italy in the 17th century, using, retrospectively, Flemish models. The style made the triptych appear older than in fact it is, and the handling of stylistic characteristics indicated that it is a workshop piece, not the work of any master painter.

In 1998, a further expert confirmed this opinion and subsequent research and discussion regarding the painting and frame are all in agreement. In 2000, restoration was completed by the Australian National Gallery, Canberra, ACT.

Interesting Lentaigne family history was provided by a daughter (an RSCJ nun) of Fr Lentaigne's younger brother Henry, who had settled in Australia:

Joseph Lentaigne was born in Dublin on July 27, 1805. His father was a Frenchman belonging to an ancient family from Normandy, who in 1793, after his two elder brothers has been guillotined as adherents of the “tyrant” Louis Capet, had fled to Flanders and then to England, where he applied himself to the study of medicine, finally settling in Dublin in 1799. Exactly how the family acquired the painting and how it was passed on to Fr Lentaigne, and subsequently arrived in Australia, is not fully known.

Whenever this triptych was painted, its value surely lies in that it is a part of the early fabric and history of the Society of Jesus in Australia.

*Information courtesy of Robyn Treseder*