**[Parish History](http://www.pambulacatholicparish.org.au/index.php/parish-history/11-parish-history)**

History of Pambula Parish [ written by John Liston]

The first ministers of religion were searching out and ministering to their flocks at the very start of settlement. Throughout the 1840's these 'Apostles on horseback' forged tracks throughout the rugged Australian bush to bring instruction and sacraments to the pioneers. The Catholic priests were generally young, newly ordained Irishmen, who proved excellent horsemen and bushmen. Their congregations were normally poor, Irish Catholics, who were encouraged by Governor Burke to emigrate and settle the new land.

There were no villages or towns between Yass and Melbourne, but Fathers Brennan and Fitzpatrick were given a district centred at Yass - Goulburn and encompassed by the Great Divide to the sea as far as Bass Strait.  In 1841 young Father Michael McGrath visited Twofold Bay to administer sacraments. By 1843 a new Queanbeyan Mission was formed with Father Michael Kavanagh, the first resident priest of the Monaro district, including the coast. He rode 4 000 miles each year for 10 years to tend his flock of souls. In 1844 he baptised Patrick Whelan at Kiah, Twofold Bay. He visited Pambula in 1849 as part of his parish. By 1850 Father Henry Garnett from Broulee (Moruya) had a parish that extended down to the Victorian border. He built Pambula's first Catholic church of slab construction, near the Pambula bridge. Unfortunately huge floods of the early 1850's destroyed the church, along with other buildings like the Governor Fitzroy hotel and school.

The Government surveyors had incorrectly planned their new town on river flats. It was reported that a Father Johnson made a pastoral sojourn and succeeded in collecting 180 pounds for a 'chapel fund.' Sacraments were received in Pambula homes until another timber church was built opposite the Pambula Court House.  Unfortunately this St Peters Church was destroyed by the 1862 town fires. In 1860 Fr Patrick Birch said mass in Eden for 50 people at George Keon's house. In 1865, the young 29 year old Fr Patrick Slattery was appointed the first permanent Parish Priest of the Parish of Twofold Bay. He lived in Eden for it was the port town where immigrants disembarked and his hard work can be seen from the first Sacramental registers, where 382 baptisms and 41 marriages were recorded in 10 years.

In the 1861 census there were 694 Catholics in the Pambula district. By 1866 there were 60 parishioners in Eden, 25 in Kiah, 80 in Pambula, 15 in Merimbula and 120 in Bega. Fr Slattery built the first tiny St Patrick’s Church, Bega, in 1865, the Star of the Sea Church at Eden in 1863 (replacing Fr Birch's damaged small church of 1860), Pambula's 3rd St Peters Church in 1867, St Columkills Church Bemboka in 1872, St Josephs Church Candelo in 1875 and the Bega Presbytery in 1870.

Father Slattery kept a saddle-back diary, (still in existence) documenting his apostolic work and he would be accompanied on his visitations by a pet kangaroo. His parish was extensive and extended from Cobargo in the north to the Victorian border. Father Slattery wrote in his diary “How poor, how ignorant are these creatures at Pambula, yet they are full of Faith”. This undaunted faith had been tested by floods and bush fires and yet these parishioners built their 3rd Church, this time of local stone on the ashes of the last.

For the small Catholic community it was an ambitious project to build another permanent place of worship for they were a relatively poor community. The Bega Gazette congratulated them on their pluck and perseverance, for the little town of Pambula was silently and surely advancing in social and moral welfare and as far as places of worship were concerned, it certainly had outstripped its more pretentious neighbours. It was also noted that Mr William Shea had erected a temporary chapel for ten pounds while the permanent chapel was being built. Fr Slattery engaged Patrick O'Connor, an architect who had emigrated from Ireland in 1841, who had designed the Sea Horse Inn at Boyd Town and who had built the Governor Fitzroy Hotel in Pambula, to design and build the present St Peter’s Church at Pambula.

Mr Severs from Broadwater Lake supplied the lime for seven pounds, seventeen shillings and the 40 pieces of scantling for an extra three pounds. The foundations were only 600mm deep and were supported on damp gravelly clay or pure plastic clay. (Accounting for the rising damp, and the surface cracking as walls adjust to weather conditions.) The body of the church had stone walls, timber flooring and a timber framed roof, which was initially clad with shingles then later corrugated iron.  Mr Jago was contracted to supply the masonry of the church for 150 pounds. Mr W Thompson was paid 107 pound to supply flooring, roofing, doors, communion rails, altar, painting and repairing windows. Mr McCaffery bought the bell for eight pound, while Mr Shipway glazed the windows.

His Grace the Archbishop donated fifty pounds and Fr Slattery five pound towards the new church. St Peter’s also stands testimony as one of the first projects in the colony that successfully managed to bypass Catholic / Anglican animosity in the Pambula township. The donated money came from local people of different denominations like J H Bennett, J P, Captain John Lloyd R N, William Hibberd Esq, the Dowlings, Severs Burtons, Harts, Mannings and more. Most Catholic family names like Behl, Sheehy, Daly, Clancy, Schuback, Bickelmire, Frawley, Greely, Lovell, Bray, McPhee, Kinnane, Casey, Brown, Langan and Ryans collected money for the glazing of individual church windows. Others like the McCabes, Kauters, Dohertys, Bucketts, Cornells, O'Briens,
Gahans, Tiers and countless others made subscriptions without stipulating how it should be spent. The original panel fittings and pews were made from Australian cedar wood.

The vestry / sacristy was added later in the same style. With the growth of the congregation the church was extended in 1893 by Joe Koerber, the town builder. He added a side porch entrance and a choir gallery supported by timber columns decorated as imitation marble. Not long after, the rock wall exterior was concrete rendered to look like big sandstone blocks. During the restoration work of the 1990's, the original front wall foundations were found under the interior floor.

Archbishop Polding officially opened St Peters in July 1869. In 1886 the Catholic parish priest moved his base from Eden to Pambula as the Parish of Bega was formed by separating it from the Parish of Twofold Bay. The southern end was renamed the Parish of Pambula. On the 11th of April 1886, Father James Grace became the first priest to live in Pambula. Having no presbytery there, he boarded with Mr John Behl, who lived in the main Street in a residence known as the 'Retreat',(Covingtons).

In December 1887 Fr O'Reilly was thrown from his horse in Eden. Early in 1888 a buggy and harness were bought for the priest to do his pastoral rounds. In early 1889 a presbytery was purchased just behind the Pambula church. The fund raising for the presbytery included a concert featuring Miss  Josephine O'Reilly, a famous Sydney singer.

The Pambula presbytery was sold by Father Clinton around 1977 and he built a new parish home next to the Merimbula church. With no Catholic school in Pambula a regular Sunday school was organised with regular picnics.  On the 31st of December 1901 Eva Mylott (Mel Gibson's grandmother) who was a
world renowned contralto singer, sang Gounod's 'Ave Maria' during the 11 o'clock Sunday Mass at St Peters. In the same year Mother Mary MacKillop visited the Church to discuss with Fr Condon the building of a new convent for her St Joseph's Sisters in Eden. In September 1919 the bishop, Dr Gallagher was given an amazing welcome by the parishioners of Pambula.

St Peters Catholic Church holds great heritage value among religious institutions for it remains the oldest used Catholic church in the region. Pambula lost its Methodist, Presbyterian & Wesleyan churches, then the historic Anglican Christ Church, when it was demolished in 1956, so Pambula now has St Peters as their only historic church.

Sacraments were first administered in the Parish at Kiah in 1843 when it was part of the Monaro Mission and the first churches were built in Pambula in 1850 (St Peters) and Eden (Star of the Sea) in 1860. Kiah has a restored church named Our Lady of the Princes Highway. It was rebuilt after bushfires in 1929.

St Joseph's Church Wyndham was built in the late 1890’s and All Saints Church Wolumla was built in 1899. The first permanent Parish Priest was Father Patrick Slattery who lived and worked here from 1865. Bega was part of this parish up until 1886 when it separated to form a new parish of Saint Patrick's.

It was in 1886 that the Lyee-Moon steamer was shipwrecked south of Eden. On board was Mary MacKillop's mother, Flora, who drowned along with 70 others. This brought the services of Australia's first Saint - Mary MacKillop and her teaching Sisters to work in the parish where they established St Joseph's School in 1891. They opened other schools at neighbouring Candelo, Bombala, Nimmitabel, Bega and Cobargo. Two Josephite Sisters still live and work from the Eden Convent which is next to Mary MacKillop Hall, an official pilgrimage site and popular tourist attraction.

There are two active St Vincent de Paul Conferences in Eden and Merimbula, with a Vinnies shop in Merimbula. In Eden, there is Joeys Jumbles Op Shop.
Being a popular tourist destination, our churches are built to accommodate the influx of visitors in holiday times.

The Sapphire Coast is a popular retirement destination, so numerous Nursing Homes and Retirement Villages now exist. These facilities require visitation and ministry.