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# Not in front of the altar - Mixed marriages and sectarian tensions between Catholics and Protestants in pre-multicultural Australia

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## NOT IN FRONT OF THE ALTAR

### MIXED MARRIAGES AND SECTARIAN TENSIONS BETWEEN CATHOLICS AND PROTESTANTS IN PRE-MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA

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Birth, death and marriage traditionally evoke our most powerful expressions of intimacy and sentiment. Yet for numerous Australian families up to the 1970s, those occasions triggered the opposite sentiments: estrangement, conflict and hostility, which sometimes endured beyond the grave. The cause: 'mixed marriage' between Catholics and Protestants in a pre-multicultural Australia, where religion was still code for a social and political identity that reflected English–Irish tensions derived from colonial days. This article is based on 48 oral histories recorded by Siobhan McHugh for a forthcoming doctoral thesis at the University of Wollongong. The marriages, which range from 1924 to 1983, are recalled by spouses, children and clergy. This article has been peer-reviewed.

I first heard of an Irish Catholic underclass in Australia at a conference in Kilkenny, Ireland, in 1983: 'Australia and Ireland 1788–1988'. Its purpose was 'to ensure that, when the Australian bicentenary is celebrated in 1988, the Irish contribution to nation-building in Australia would not be overlooked' (Kiernan 1986: Preface). I was there because I had been suspended as producer of a breakfast show with the national broadcaster, RTE, for inviting a guest to speak about contraception at a time when Ireland was facing a bitter referendum on whether to liberalise laws on abortion. By lunchtime I had been reassigned to a late night country music show, and with my new-found leisure had accepted the position of honorary secretary at the Kilkenny conference.

It was opened with panache by Senator Susan Ryan, then Minister for Education in the Hawke government. We did not have vivacious women heading government portfolios in Ireland then; the country was (so it seemed to me as a 26-year-old) run by men and the Catholic Church (sometimes one and the same thing). So when Dinny O'Hearn from the University of Melbourne addressed the gathering about feeling oppressed as a Catholic lad in Melbourne in the 1950s, I was not inclined to be impressed. But his 'hatred of bigotry and its bully-brother injustice' resonated with me; Irish Catholics in Australia were struggling against 'institutional forms of repression and cultural stifling' he told us (O'Hearn 1986: 25). In Australia, the oppressor was the overweening Anglo-Protestant Establishment. In Ireland, the Catholic Church *was* the Establishment, women the oppressed. Somehow out of this shared sense of grievance, as I sat around the piano late at night singing Irish songs with O'Hearn and the poet Vincent Buckley, the notion was born that I would go to Australia.

While Australia was clearly a nation of immense diversity when I arrived in the 1980s, a combative British–Irish dynamic that had been present from its origins still underlay parts of Australian society. ‘In Australian history, Catholics were the first ethnics’, Edmund Campion tells us (Campion 1982: 3). And as the country’s first ethnic minority, Irish Catholics felt beleaguered and even persecuted (Hughes 1987: 183; Hogan 1984: 83–91). Historians Patrick O’Farrell and Jeff Kildea describe how their struggle to maintain their religious and cultural heritage persisted over generations, creating a vibrant and distinctive subculture in Australia, of which ‘Irish’ and ‘Catholic’ were the virtually interchangeable identifiers of what colonial society generally deemed an ‘obnoxious dangerous inferior’ (O’Farrell 1977: 54; Kildea 2005). At around a quarter of the population, they were a minority too significant to be ignored (MacDonagh 1986: 128–130). From the earliest days of the colony until multiculturalism officially arrived in the 1970s, the critical dynamic in Australian society, O’Farrell observes, was British vs Irish, Protestant vs Catholic (O’Farrell 1987: 10).

Yet there was a third way – a Catholic–Protestant hybrid born of ‘mixed marriages’. Between 1891 and 1961, roughly 21 per cent of marriages in Australia can be classed as mixed. Analysing the census data, sociologist Hans Mol concluded that ‘religious affiliation is a formidable factor’ in determining a marriage partner, and Catholic women tend to marry ‘out’ more than any other group (Mol 1970: 293–300). From the 1961 data, for instance, he points out that if marriage partners were selected at random, you would expect around 22 per cent of people to marry someone of their own religion. The actual figure is a whopping 78.92 per cent. (Interestingly, Anglicans, at 80 per cent, had the highest rate of ‘in-marriage’; in spite of the Catholic Church’s vociferous opposition to what it called ‘the impediment of mixed marriage’, the Catholic rate was 77 per cent.)

Having arrived as a self-declared refugee from the Catholic Church in Ireland, I tried to ignore it in Australia. But it was like trying to ignore the Irishness that was everywhere, woven into every strand of Australian history. In Sydney, Irish-Australian writers and journalists I met sang ‘Faith of our Fathers’ with Irish-Australian politicians and lawyers at long, garrulous lunches. In Melbourne, memories of the toxic Labor Party split were laced with gleeful stories about Daniel Mannix – my favourite from a denizen of Stewarts Hotel in Carlton, who told me how, on his daily walk from Raheen, the archbishop had given a coin to him. ‘And don’t spend it in the next hotel!’ Mannix admonished. ‘No, Your Grace,’ replied the recipient. ‘Which hotel would Your Grace recommend?’ Even a cantankerous atheist like the columnist Padraic Pearse McGuinness (named after the leader of the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin and himself the product of a mixed marriage) delighted in telling me how his Jesuit education had taught him subversive thinking. Irishness lurked under impeccably English surnames – and why not, when you consider the impact of the relatively high rate of emigration to Australia by single Irish women throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

For instance, of some 4000 mostly Catholic ‘orphan girls’ sent here from Ireland after the famine, around half married Scottish or English Protestants.<sup>2</sup> Names like Rafferty, Keane and Kenny that trumpeted Irishness became subsumed under bland English monikers like Edwards, Digby and Green – but the Irishness, I was to discover, lived on.<sup>3</sup> I became intrigued by these mixed marriages and what they could tell us about the enmeshed postcolonial and religious tensions that had so bedevilled Irish and, by extension, Australian history. Although at odds

with much Catholic Church dogma, over twenty years I gradually reclaimed a Catholic identity based on spirituality and social justice. I even sent my children to a Jesuit school.

Three years ago I embarked on a doctoral thesis that would explore Catholic–Protestant marriages in Australia in living memory, and the cultural, political and religious conflicts or reconciliation they might reveal. I chose oral history as my methodology because it is particularly suited to the gathering of intimate personal stories such as these, as well as of general data. As American academic Michael Frisch puts it: ‘what happens to experience on the way to becoming memory? What happens to experience on the way to becoming history? As an era of intense collective experience recedes into the past, what is the relationship of memory to historical generalisation? These ... are the sort of questions that oral history is peculiarly, perhaps uniquely, able to penetrate’ (Frisch 1979: 75).

Oral history is also traditionally a means by which the voices of less powerful members of society can be heard. While Catholics are no longer a discriminated-against minority in Australia, many of my older informants grew up in an era when Catholics were notably under-represented in the Establishment and excluded from applying for certain jobs. Pioneering English oral historian Paul Thompson suggests that ‘oral history ... makes a much fairer trial possible: witnesses can now be called from the underclasses, the unprivileged and the defeated’ (Thompson 1988: 7). The celebrated Italian historian Alessandro Portelli reinforced Thompson’s statement almost thirty years later at the International Oral History Conference in Sydney in 2006, when he declared that ‘oral history is contestative, against the grain. It is speaking truth to power’ (Portelli 2006a). But what is ‘truth’? Traditional historians have often criticised oral history on the grounds that memory is fallible. ‘The basic problem with oral testimony about the past is that its truth (when it is true) is not primarily about what happened or how things were, but about how the past has been recollected ... [W]e move straight away into the world of image, selective memory, later overlays and utter subjectivity’, argues O’Farrell (1979: 5). But oral historians are actively interested in the ‘emotional truth’ of what happened, the meaning it holds for the person who experienced it, the way he or she has selectively remembered certain details and not others (See McHugh 2007: 153–4). ‘Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did’, says Portelli (2006b: 36). His colleague Luisa Passerini goes further: ‘All autobiographical memory is true; it is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, [and] for which purpose’ (Passerini 1989: 197).

The non-random selection of interviewees is considered a weakness by some critics, but prominent American oral historian Ronald Grele defends the practice. ‘Interviewees are selected, not because they present some abstract statistical norm, but because they typify historical processes ... The real issues are historiographical, not statistical’ (Grele 1996: 3). I advertised for interviewees in general newspapers and targeted publications and solicited others through word of mouth.<sup>4</sup> I tried to recruit as broad a spectrum of experiences and backgrounds as I could, within my logistical limit of around 50 interviewees. Had I for instance favoured Catholics on the grounds of being a less powerful set within the group, I could be accused of what Passerini decries as ‘replacing the essential tenets of scholarship with facile democratisation, and an open mind with demagogy. Such an approach runs the risk of constructing oral history as merely an alternative ghetto, where at last the oppressed may be allowed to speak’ (Passerini 1979: 84). My selection is, however, inherently skewed towards people who are more willing to communicate – the others

will simply decline to respond or participate. Other inhibiting factors include the topic, which might be distressing, or breach family secrets. As it turned out, more Catholics than Protestants responded, possibly because of a cultural identification with my Irish Catholic background (evident from my name).

The conscious or unconscious orientation of the interviewer and the dynamic between respondent and questioner – what Portelli calls ‘the exchange of gazes’ (Portelli 2006a) – will inevitably inform the interview. Should I declare my own views on Catholicism or English/Irish history – ‘discuss how my questions affected remembering and what was difficult to say to *me*’ – as Alistair Thomson decided he should do when interviewing ANZAC veterans? (Thomson 2006: 246). The result of his explicit introduction of his attitudes into the interviews usually seemed to facilitate discussion and provoked dissent as much as agreement, although Thomson notes that it may also have meant that interviewees told him stories they thought he would approve of. Portelli, when approaching former Fascists from the Second World War, was open about his left-wing affiliations. Far from reducing his prospects of being granted an interview, he believes it enhanced them, as they were eager to be heard by someone from an opposing viewpoint (Portelli 2006a).

During the interviews, I tried not to intrude my beliefs or opinions, but did elaborate if asked. I became conscious of my own subconscious stereotyping: I was surprised when one informant described a teetotal Catholic father and a Protestant mother who smoked and drank (and did yoga!), which subverted the image of the hard-drinking Irish and the wowser/ascetic Protestant. (Such stereotypes were constantly undermined: I discovered large, poor Protestant families, wealthy Catholic ones, a hilarious Methodist, a dour Catholic. The strangest combination was a man descended from Cromwell, whose Protestant father was in the British Army and whose Catholic mother had received a medal from the IRA for active service in the Irish War of Independence.) I have no way of knowing if Protestant informants refrained from telling me things because of their conscious or unconscious sense of ‘difference’, or whether Catholics were more open because of a perceived alignment. I suspect the latter, at least, is true. I was also conscious of my own ignorance, around Protestant denominational differences, and of buried prejudice – when one man revealed that he was a Mason, I had to quell an urge to bolt. To ‘us’ (Irish Catholics), Masons were the feared enemy, a milder version of the Ku Klux Klan.

Another issue for oral historians is how to convey the nuances of the spoken word on the printed page. Some practitioners have devised complex ways of rendering speech like poetry, to simulate the phonetic impact of the voice.<sup>5</sup> The process of editing the narrative is itself a form of selection, while the interpretation of that narrative also needs to be examined. I attempt below to convey the emotion of one informant, Susan Timmins, by describing something of her character and how she is affected by what she says, rather than just providing the bald quotes. I also provide audio clips for comparison.

I collected 48 interviews over two years, in Sydney, Melbourne, Newcastle, Canberra and their rural surrounds. Twenty-six informants were Catholic, 16 were Protestant (Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist) and six had converted (two from Catholic to Anglican, four the other way). The group included 34 spouses in a mixed marriage (14 Protestant, 20 Catholic including the six converts), 18 children who grew up in a mixed marriage (15 raised Catholic and two Protestant), two Catholic priests and three Protestant ministers. As statistics, they mean very

little. But their life stories together weave a compelling tapestry of bigotry and grievance nurtured for generations and all but forgotten, or at least glossed over, today. The stories also reveal moments of tolerance and magnanimity, as individuals re-evaluate priorities and set aside prejudices.

What will these oral histories achieve? Thompson notes that oral history ‘makes for contact – and thence understanding – between social classes, and between generations ... History should not merely comfort; it should provide a challenge, and understanding which helps towards change’ (Thompson 1988: 22–3). Several of my informants drew parallels between the marginalisation and oppression of Catholics of their generation and the victimisation of other groups in contemporary Australia – namely Muslims post 9/11 and young Lebanese after the 2005 riots at Cronulla. As Portelli observes, the role of oral history ‘is precisely to connect life to times’ and to link ‘individual experience and the transformations of society’ (Portelli 1997: 6).

## THE COUPLES

In 1988, Gay Wilson of Greenwich, New South Wales, received a sympathy card on the death of her mother. It read: ‘Dear Gay, there’s one thing I remember about your mother – she married a Catholic.’ The card came from Gay’s uncle, who, like her mother, had been raised a strict Methodist. Two things about it shocked Gay: its viciousness, at a time of bereavement, and the length of time her uncle had harboured his bitterness. Her parents had married in 1941. ‘I thought, I’ll never speak to you again,’ she recalls. ‘I ripped up the card; I thought, how dare he say that to me in my grief.’<sup>6</sup> [AUDIO 1]<sup>7</sup>

Gay Wilson was born in 1942 in Numeralla, New South Wales, where her Catholic father was a bush school teacher. Her mother’s family was ‘absolutely horrified to think that she was marrying a Catholic,’ says Gay, ‘because of people’s perception of Catholicism in those days’. John Haynes, a retired engineer who grew up in an Anglican family in Sydney’s eastern suburbs in the 1940s, elaborates: ‘There was a division,’ he begins.<sup>8</sup> Sitting opposite Helen, his wife of 46 years, he picks his words carefully. ‘You were more likely in Australian society to prosper as a Protestant than as a Catholic ... They were thought to be different ... not quite one of us.’ John Haynes only realised how deeply the difference was felt when, in 1962, he told his family of his intention to marry Helen, a Catholic. His father’s response came as a complete surprise: ‘If I married Helen, I would be disinherited.’ The couple proceeded with the wedding, choosing to marry in Dubbo (near where they worked) rather than Sydney, to mask the absence of John’s side of the family. ‘None of my family attended the wedding,’ he recalls. ‘Not my brothers, my sisters, my parents, uncles, aunts, grandfather.’

The antipathy could run both ways, as Julia O’Brien, from a prominent Catholic family in Maitland, New South Wales, discovered in the late 1920s. The O’Briens came out from Ireland as post-famine migrants in 1856, but by 1928, they owned a large general store and one of the few motor cars in the town. Julia, the eldest of twelve children, was about 25 when she fell in love with the chauffeur her father hired, a 20-year-old Protestant called Errol White. Their daughter, Susan Timmins, takes up the story:

When they did decide they wanted to be together, there was no way the O’Brien family would countenance it. My father’s family ... didn’t have a problem with it ... So what they ended up doing was, they eloped.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 42.1** John and Helen Haynes on their wedding day in 1962. John, a Protestant, was cut out of three family wills for marrying Helen, a Catholic  
Source: John and Helen Haynes

Unusually for the times, Errol and Julia lived together in Sydney for some years before they married – hoping, Susan believes, for a reconciliation with Julia’s family. When she heard that her father was dying, Julia returned to the family home in Maitland. Errol White gave Susan this account of what happened:

She’d been totally cut off from her family; her father never wanted to speak to her or see her or even hear her name again. The other children were forbidden to speak of her. My grandmother would not let her in the house, as she thought it would be too terrible for my grandfather to see. She never saw her father again ... She did see her mother, because she went there pleading to see her father, but was not allowed into the house. [AUDIO 2]

Following the death of her father, Julia married Errol in a registry office. ‘My father had become so anti-religion that he blamed almost every problem in the world on religion,’ Susan explains. Susan, born in 1942, was not baptised. Two years later, Julia died giving birth to Susan’s brother. Susan’s aunt, a staunch Presbyterian, looked after the children for a short time, but the atmosphere was not congenial. ‘They were bigoted from the other side,’ Susan recalls. ‘They thought Catholics were “bog Irish”. Whenever I did anything wrong, it was the bog Irish coming out in me.’ With no support from either side of the family, Errol White found himself forced to place the children in an orphanage.



**Figure 42.2** Julia O'Brien and Errol White in Sydney in the 1930s. They left Maitland to escape the antagonism of the O'Brien family  
Source: Susan Timmins

## THE DIVIDE

To understand where such bigotry originates, it is necessary to go back hundreds of years, as Patrick O'Farrell reminds us:

Australian sectarianism derived from the legacy of 16<sup>th</sup> century events, that is, the English variant of the Protestant Reformation, and the English conquest of Ireland ... English propaganda sought to morally vindicate this invasion with an ideology of justifiable colonial subjection. So the Irish became, forever after, seditious Catholic barbarians, sub-human anthropoids, violent, dirty, ignorant, on whom it was a necessary duty to impose English rule, civilization and religion. For their own good: their resistance proved their inferiority and primitive savagery (O'Farrell 2005: 9).

In 2007–08, when I gathered these oral histories, such sentiments clearly lingered. Catholic informants consistently linked 'Catholic' with 'Irish' and the tribal identity described was that of an underclass fighting for survival, while 'Protestant' was code for 'English' and the enemy: the oppressor and/or powermonger. Protestant informants commonly depicted Catholics as an unknown Other, who inhabited a parallel world ruled by beliefs and practices that were at best



odd (bells for prayers going off at strange hours in the schoolyard, bebies of saints and arcane rituals, priests running raffles and drinking beer), and at worst cause for distrust and repudiation (superstitious, baby-mongers, criminal, disloyal, inferior).

Take Pamela Cunningham's Catholic family, who acquired land around Goulburn, New South Wales, in the mid-nineteenth century, where they thrived.

We were always told we came from Ireland – that was our background – and the reason we came was because of the English and persecution.<sup>10</sup>

The family was well-established in the area by the time of the Great War: 'It was a huge clan ... the cricket team and the [Catholic] Church was the Cunningham family!' Pamela's paternal great-grandmother ruled over a typically Irish homestead, complete with pictures of the Sacred Heart and recitals of the Rosary. Being Catholic was not enough, as one son found when he went to war and returned with a French Catholic bride, incurring his mother's displeasure. Her real wrath, however, was reserved for her eldest son, who also went to the war – and married the Presbyterian nurse who tended his injuries. Hitherto in line for the family farm, Pamela's grandfather was disinherited and disowned. Although he raised his children as Catholics, his family was not appeased.

There was a lot of money involved and some of the stuff on Dad's side of the family ran really, really deep – thirty years later it was still bitter. People weren't talking to each other. Sometimes we would go to church in Goulburn because we would have holidays there and some of Dad's family wouldn't even talk to him.

Michael Flynn, a lawyer from Canberra, comes from two generations of mixed marriages, his Catholic forebears having twice married Anglicans called Gladys. The oppositional Irish/English characteristics of these unions were pronounced. Grandfather William Augustus Flynn, a court official, was born in Roscommon, Ireland, one of 13 children. He was brought up in a strong Catholic tradition: two sisters were nuns, and two brothers priests – one, Fr Michael Flynn, worked for Archbishop Mannix of Melbourne. William married Gladys Stilwell, an Anglican, in 1902.

The Stilwells were well established and had quite a lot of money and I think grandfather had very little other than his public service salary. So there was a bit of class distinction from that point of view.<sup>11</sup>

The couple married in a Presbyterian church, perhaps as a compromise between the two traditions, and raised their children Catholic. In 1934 Michael's father, a barrister, married Gladys Chapman, a 'very strong Anglican', whose family traced their ancestry back to William the Conqueror. But despite two generations of English blood, Bob Flynn grew up avowedly Irish.

Dad was born in Bathurst and he saw himself as Irish although he never went to Ireland. There was a sense of being Irish Catholic ... the iconography, there was the statue of St Patrick, we sang Faith of our Fathers and all that stuff so

there was a lot of Irish hymns and tunes, St Patrick's Day sports. The Irishness of the Church was very explicit.

Nowhere was this more so than in Melbourne under the long reign (1917–1963) of Archbishop Daniel Mannix, the outspoken Irish nationalist and provocateur 'uniquely revered by Melbourne Catholics as a spiritual and political chieftain'.<sup>12</sup> Meg Clancy, born in Carlton in 1950, grew up in a Melbourne where 'being Irish and being Catholic was part and parcel of the same thing. The school I went to was a Brigidine convent, with Irish nuns, and Mannix was a big man in our lives'.<sup>13</sup>

In 1920, the first Saint Patrick's Day parade after the Great War was a public relations coup, as Mannix famously squashed insistent (and untrue) mutterings about Catholic disloyalty to the cause by having 14 Victoria Cross winners on white horses, ten of them Catholic, lead the proceedings (see Kildea 2007: 85).<sup>14</sup> In later years, squadrons of Catholic schoolchildren occupied the imposing Bourke street boulevard in an ostentatious display of Catholic strength which a young Meg Clancy found thrilling.

You felt very tribal, very proud! You'd have your green ribbon on and your school uniform ... surrounded by other Catholics – it was stirring.

While Catholic identity was embellished by 'bells and smells', for many Australian Protestants Anglicanism was linked more to a sense of Englishness, Empire and Establishment than to explicit or strongly-held religious beliefs. Born in Sydney in 1938, John Haynes grew up in such a family:

My parents were as close as you could imagine to good citizens with religious moral attitudes, but didn't practise or attend anything that was religious that I was aware of. My grandfather came from England in the late 1890s and I think in those days there was a very strongly held view that all the best things came out of England and that if England's formal national religion was Church of England then that had to be the high point ... My father was very much an Empire man. Robert Menzies was the epitome of an Empire man and everything that came out of Great Britain, including I presume the Church of England, was to be admired and followed and was to be preserved. [AUDIO 3]

Even a well-educated Catholic like Michael Flynn did not differentiate between the Protestant denominations and cultures. 'When I was growing up, we thought all Aborigines were the same and all Protestants were the same.' The flourishing Masonic movement contributed to this image of monolithic Protestantism. It was 'Grippers versus the Kneelers. Grippers are the Masons, Kneelers are the Catholics,' explains Colin Chandler, who was born in Arncliffe in 1929 into a Catholic family of English/Irish background.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps his English-sounding name helped secure him a job in 1950 as an apprentice fitter at the Colonial Sugar Refinery: 'it was well known [that] to hold a position of importance there you had to be other than a Catholic.' Colin's brother, Kevin, was denied promotion to technical officer at Bunnerong power station around the same time because, an engineer flatly told him, he was not of the right ilk. 'The engineer, who was a Mason, said, "Well you know where we are going tonight, Kevin – and you are just not in it."'

Catholics viewed Masons with alarm, as an organisation virulent in its anti-Catholicism. While this was particularly true of Masons linked with the Orange Lodge, many Protestant Australians signed up for more pragmatic reasons. Harry Griffiths' father, a musician, joined the Freemasons in Sydney during the Great Depression of the 1930s:

I said 'why'd you do that?' He said 'well I found out, Masons get preference when you're going for work.' He was a practical man!<sup>16</sup>

Harry's mother, a strong Irish Catholic called Florence Duffy, was equally practical and in hard times, religion came second to food. The couple bantered about their differences:

My mother used to say to my father: 'give me the Masonic Grip! And she'd put her hand out, try and work out what it was. 'I can't feel anything,' she'd say.

'Well you're not supposed to. You're a Catholic ... you wouldn't know what to look for.'

'Well tell me!'

'No – you're a Catholic. It's a Masonic secret. I can't be telling you what the Masonic Grip is!'

She died still not knowing – because I don't think he ever gave it to her! [AUDIO 4]

In 1919, Catholics formed their own men's organisation, the Knights of the Southern Cross, which operated as a counter-network. And so the divisions extended through the workplace. Until the 1950s, job vacancy advertisements specified 'RC Need Not Apply', while unofficially each side knew which company or government authority favoured which side.<sup>17</sup> The Catholic-Protestant separation at times was tantamount to a self-imposed social apartheid. In Queensland, Protestants wary of encountering Catholic butchers or drapers must have been greatly reassured by a 1930s brochure, 'The Protestant's Guide to Shopping in Rockhampton'.<sup>18</sup>

Schools were an instant giveaway. In the 1960s, Gay Wilson was the butt of anti-Catholic jibes by her in-laws, Ulster Presbyterian immigrants. Her mother-in-law used devious means to discover how her grandchild would be educated:

In those days you were either 'Public' or a Catholic ... and the Catholic kids wore brown shoes to school and the Publics wore black. And she asked my son, who was just five, 'has Mummy bought your school shoes yet?' I knew what she meant. 'Did Mummy buy you black or brown shoes?' Not saying, 'what school are you going to?' I thought it was horrific to ask a five-year-old that. [AUDIO 5]

Although in urban areas, Protestants and Catholics often socialised separately, in the bush there weren't enough young people to sustain such distance. Thus it was that Heather Shepherd, a Presbyterian, met her husband, Cliff at the Agricultural Bureau of which both were members. She knew 'right from the start' that Cliff was a Catholic.

We were straight up with each other ... he has a wonderful family and I fitted into the family well. We got on well together and I was very happy with that – but of course my family wasn't.<sup>19</sup>

Heather's father, though not an avid church-goer, was a Mason. Although he liked Cliff, he told Heather she would be disinherited if she married him. He attended the wedding, in St Patrick's Catholic Church, Marulan, in 1962, but declined to give her away. As they left the church, the couple discovered how deep the animosity ran.

Somebody took the nuts off one of the wheels on the ute that we were going on our honeymoon in and the wheel came off. We weren't hurt, but we still don't know who that was. [AUDIO 6]

In other country towns, the divide was more benign, as Cordelia Hull recalls. She grew up in an Anglican vicarage in Beechworth in the 1960s.

You knew which families were Catholic. There was a bit of intrigue ... what goes on in the Catholic Church, what do they actually do, what do they believe in? My father would see all the cars outside there on a Sunday morning, everyone going to Mass, and he'd have about two and a half cars outside his, no one in the pews, so he was very envious!<sup>20</sup>

Catholics were equally curious about what went on in Protestant churches – a mystique heightened by the ban on Catholics entering a Protestant place of worship. Ten-year-old Kimberly O'Sullivan Steward, who grew up in a mixed marriage in Hurstville in the 1960s, defied the edict:



**Figure 42.3** Kimberly O'Sullivan Steward on her First Communion day  
Source: Kimberly O'Sullivan Steward

The nuns had told us that Protestants worshipped the Queen and thought that the Queen was God, and that's why if you went into a Protestant church you'd see there are no pictures of God. This somehow got mixed into the fact that my father was a real fervent Irish Republican, and so the British Royal Family and English people were bad, and the Protestants worshipped the Queen and thought she was God. I remember sneaking my head in – I was terrified, my heart was racing – looking inside the Baptist Church at the end of my street. And there was a big picture of the Queen on the wall, so I knew it was true.<sup>21</sup>

The rule caused further bitterness, as those Protestants who had managed to reach out across the social divide found their Catholic friends and relatives unable to take part in their weddings, christenings and funerals. After the death of her mother, Meg Clancy received a letter from a Protestant woman lamenting still how Meg's mother had been unable to be her bridesmaid, decades earlier – the Bishop of Sale had refused her request to be allowed to enter the Gippsland church.

Prior to the ecumenical thaw around the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), the Catholic Church was uncompromising in its attitude to mixed marriage. Catholics who chose to marry in a Protestant church were excommunicated forthwith. Those who repented could 'legitimise' their marriage with a second ceremony, but only after making a declaration naming the 'heretical minister' before whom the first marriage had taken place and whether it had been done 'out of ignorance or malice'.<sup>22</sup>

'Mary', a Catholic, met 'John', a Protestant serviceman, at a farewell party for young men going off to the Second World War. With Mary's family insisting on a Catholic ceremony, and John refusing, the marriage was called off, to general consternation:

I'd already bought a wedding frock and my younger sister was going to be flower girl. My father had bought a new suit for the wedding too.<sup>23</sup>

John and Mary reconciled and married in secret at St Philip's Anglican Church in Sydney in 1948, before just two friends, celebrating with their witnesses' cooking sherry. When they heard, Mary's mother cried and urged her to leave John, while her father lamented the waste of his new suit. Things settled down and the couple sent their second child to a convent school, where the time came for her to make her First Communion. When a nun heard the parents had married 'outside the church', she took Mary's husband aside. 'She talked him into getting married in the Catholic Church', says Mary. John was not too keen at first:

Possibly because he felt he was married anyway. One night my brother-in-law and the priest came down. I was in my dressing gown, and he said, 'well we're getting married next Saturday', and that's what happened.

Their second wedding took place on 25 July 1964: Mary has kept a champagne cork with the date inscribed. It was an equally modest affair. They left the children with babysitters, and had Mary's sister and brother-in-law as witnesses. Though her father never got to wear his new suit, her sister at last got to be flower girl, sixteen years on.

## THE ALTAR

Until the rules changed in 1966, most mixed marriages conducted in a Catholic Church took place in a cheerless ceremony behind the altar, on a side altar, in the sacristy or even the presbytery – anywhere but in the full splendour of the main altar and in full view of their guests. More than anything else the Church might do – more than hectoring priests and sniffy nuns, more to some even than excommunication – this relegation to an inferior setting rankled hugely.<sup>24</sup>

Nora Kennedy, a Catholic, married Tom Dunne, a Presbyterian, in Newcastle in 1942. It was a long and very happy marriage, but 65 years on, Nora still bristles at the thought of the ‘dirty old presbytery’ where she and Tom exchanged their vows, while their parents waited in the adjacent Catholic church.<sup>25</sup> She was even more aggrieved to find that two girls who were married with full regalia at the time were pregnant!

In 1941, ‘Gwen’ met Phil, an injured airman, at the opening of Concord Repatriation Hospital in Sydney. Gwen, a Methodist, taught Sunday School; Phil, a former altar boy, was starting to question his Catholic faith, but when they decided to get married in 1947, he wanted a Catholic ceremony to please his mother. He was outraged when the priest told him it would have to take place behind the altar. ‘He said, “If she’s not good enough to be married in front of the altar then forget it”’, recalls Gwen.<sup>26</sup> The couple got married in a Methodist church, Phil’s parents and sister conspicuously absent. A brother and a cousin went as far as the top of the steps and listened through the window. Their wives had told them that if they entered the church they need not come home.

The ‘not in front of the altar’ rule offended Catholics and non-Catholics alike because of its deliberate implication that a mixed marriage was second-rate. Even some Catholic clergy found it an obnoxious imposition. In Dulwich Hill in Sydney, the parish priest, Fr Pat Tuomey, refused to comply.<sup>27</sup> Fr John McSweeney, a curate at Dulwich Hill in the 1950s, explains:

He decided that that wasn’t a good rule, that we needn’t obey it. So we conducted all marriages the same way; they were all in front of the altar and we didn’t discriminate in any way between mixed marriages and Catholic marriages.<sup>28</sup>

[AUDIO 7]

Fr McSweeney does not recall anyone being disciplined for this breach. ‘Probably the bishop knew about it, but he was wise enough not to say anything about it.’ Other priests resorted to creative means to get around the issue. When Michael Flynn’s parents married in 1934, in the Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Blackheath, they asked a Vincentian priest with a theatrical bent to preside.

Dr John McMahon ... used to put on plays ... he took the Blessed Sacrament out of the altar so it then became simply a hall ... He turned the seats around and there was this beautiful arch at the back. So he set up an altar there, that wasn’t in liturgical terms an altar, and they were married in front of the altar that he constructed, with their back to the one that was now no longer an altar ... so they subverted the whole intention of the bishops!

To ensure they could marry on the main altar, or have the full Nuptial Mass, the non-Catholic party sometimes converted to Catholicism – but not as commonly as Protestants feared. A 1966 survey of 2606 adults showed that only 4 per cent had converted as a result of marriage, with wives who had done so outnumbering husbands 6:4. Of those who converted, 35 per cent became Anglicans, 32 per cent switched to Methodist or Presbyterian and only 24 per cent turned Catholic (Mol 1970: 296).

Tony Davis not only abandoned Catholicism, he became a Mason – a singular shift.<sup>29</sup> Tony's parents had no qualms about his marrying Elaine, an Anglican, but his Catholic extended family set about trying to convert her. When she resisted, his relatives disparaged him, one uncle declaring him 'a turncoat'. They married in 1961 in an Anglican church and after accompanying Elaine to Anglican services for a time, Tony was officially reconfirmed an Anglican. 'Dad was a little upset, but Elaine and I played it down ... to save his feelings.'<sup>30</sup> A teacher, Tony discovered that several of his high school colleagues, 'all very nice blokes', were Masons. Eventually, he was asked to join the Lodge. 'I didn't tell my father, because my Dad believed that Catholics and Masons should keep as far away as they can from each other.' Ten years later, Tony went to see his father as he was dying.

He said to me, 'I want you to really promise me something and that is that you will never – from this moment on in your life, you will never join the Masonic Lodge and become a Mason'. I said, 'I will never do that, from this moment on'. But there was no point in me telling him because he would have got very upset. [AUDIO 8]

## THE CHILDREN

As soon as you walked in, on the piano there were photos of all the family and their weddings and there was a photo of our parents' wedding – but our mother was cut out of it. Just sort of shredded out of it. That set the tone for us. We didn't feel very welcome. They [the paternal grandparents] were very Presbyterian, very conservative and they hated Catholics.<sup>31</sup> [AUDIO 9]

'Anna' grew up in rural Victoria in the 1950s, the fourth of five girls. Her mother was a devout Catholic, reared in a mixed marriage between her Irish-born father and Anglican mother; her father grew up in a staunchly Presbyterian family but was not himself a church-goer. He worked on a dairy farm, she lived in an orchard. When they met, at a country dance, it was love at first sight. 'She thought he was just divine. He was a very good-looking man and she was apparently very, very beautiful too.' They married in 1939, both aged 23. By the time Anna was born, in 1948, the relationship had soured. 'My recollections are of a very tense family living in a little rented house and parents not sharing a room.' Religion was a source of bitter division in the home. 'He was very antagonistic towards Catholics and Catholicism. We weren't allowed to talk to Catholic children.'

Unbeknownst to their father, Anna and her sisters were being raised as Catholics. 'I believe every time a new baby went back [to the maternal home] for Christmas, Mum whipped us off and had us baptised', Anna says with a laugh.<sup>32</sup> The children went to Mass during summer hol-

idays; the rest of the year, her mother kept up clandestine instruction in Catholicism. ‘Mum taught us the Rosary; she taught us prayers etcetera when Dad wasn’t home.’

Anna and her sisters attended the local public school as nominal Presbyterians. Given her double identity, the name-calling common between Catholics and Protestants at the time left her upset and confused.

In those days there was a huge dividing line between Catholics and Protestants. You’d be walking off to the swimming pool in a school group or something and you’d go past the Catholic school ... and all the Protestant kids used to taunt them with those songs ... ‘Catholic dog, sitting on a log, eating maggots out of a frog’. I used to feel that this was really awful, but you wouldn’t say anything, because you didn’t want it to happen to you as well. [AUDIO 10]

Anna’s parents separated when she was eight. Three years later, her mother died and the girls moved in with their father. He had become fixated on eliminating the Catholicism with which he suspected they had been infected.

He would say that we had been brainwashed. The Catholics had brainwashed us. He didn’t say he was going to knock that out of us, but that’s basically what he was trying to do. In those days you didn’t eat meat on a Friday and so he tried to get us to eat meat on a Friday and we wouldn’t, which made him quite angry. So you just dreaded Friday, because you’d know there were sausages and chops in the fridge we were supposed to cook ... and then if he was angry with us because we wouldn’t eat meat on Friday we’d be woken up and we’d have to go over the road to the Presbyterian Church which I absolutely hated, because it wasn’t uplifting in any way, it was always dark and the people were always very sort of – well *Presbyterian*, you know? Very sort of severe and righteous in some ways and that used to really annoy us ... We didn’t believe all this dogma, and singing, ‘How great thou art’ in this scratchy-record sort of way. [AUDIO 11]

While the Catholic Church was prepared to tolerate Protestant spouses, it was unremitting in its efforts to see that the children of a mixed marriage were raised in the Catholic faith. Until 1970, both parties had to agree to this in writing.<sup>33</sup> Gay Wilson was horrified when the document was produced on her wedding day in 1961. ‘I thought that was such an imposition, to ask someone to do that!’ As it happened, her husband was quite willing to go along with it:

[We] agreed that children did need some religion and some guidelines and he thought the mother is the one who spends the most time with the children and has the most influence over them during those formative years.

Jean McLean, a Methodist, used similar logic to argue for their children to be brought up in her faith: ‘because I would not know how to bring up a child in the Catholic Church.’ She recalls signing a document in the vestry of St Patrick’s Cathedral in 1949 which may have suggested the opposite, but she and her husband had already agreed on her plan.



I signed, because we'd gone through the whole performance ... I probably didn't think it had much meaning for me, because I was a Methodist in my own mind and to be signing a bit of paper in a Catholic Church wouldn't have made any difference if it had been Calathumpian. I hate to say this, but remember I was only about 21!<sup>34</sup> [AUDIO 12]

Many Protestant parents, having made the promise, honoured it to the letter. Nora Dunne's husband Tom was 'a better Catholic than I'll ever be':

We never argued over religion and Tom would always make sure we went to Mass on Sunday and the girls went to the Catholic schools.

Difficulties mainly arose when both parents did not agree on the faith of the children, or changed their mind. 'Louise' believes that when her parents married, her Anglican but non-church-going father signed the document to please her devoutly Catholic mother 'because he was mad about her'.<sup>35</sup> But when their son was born, he insisted he be raised Protestant. Louise, the second child, he permitted to be raised Catholic. 'I guess because I was a girl,' Louise says. 'You know what they were like then: boys! It doesn't matter about the girls really.'

Growing up in Sydney in the 1950s, Louise attended the local Catholic school, while her brother went to the public school close by. 'We led very, very separate lives; we hardly spoke to each other really.' On Sundays, when she and her mother went to Mass, her father's antipathy was clear. 'There would be this dark cloud over the house ... a kind of great disapproval.'

At school, Louise felt different from the other girls:

I knew it was weird me being there and then over the road was my brother in the public school. My father would never come to school, like he would never take me there or pick me up or come to any speech days or anything like that; he just wouldn't have anything to do with it because it was a Catholic school ... I think I found it more puzzling than hurtful. I mean he was quite loving to me at home ... He didn't seem to make any difference between me and my brother at home ... But I think I always felt that in a way I had been rejected because I was a Catholic.

Many Catholic nuns of the era saw the children of mixed marriage as somewhere between a lost cause and an opportunity for saving souls. Some importuned the child to help their errant parent see the light, as Louise recalls:

They made it very obvious that a mixed marriage was totally, really, terrible. They used to go round and sort of say, 'Who says the family Rosary?' and then they'd come to me and this look would come on their faces and I would just say, 'No,' and then they'd do that sort of nunny thing: 'Just talk to your father Louise – talk to him about God'. [AUDIO 13]

Louise was particularly disturbed by the thought that non-Catholics would burn in Hell, especially after her father died when she was eleven. 'It was very upsetting, because I really thought he was in Hell.'

Harry Griffiths' family also adopted the girls-one-way, boys-another, plan, but with a far more relaxed attitude. His Catholic sister attended the local state school, until unsavoury tales of her schoolmates' dalliances with sailors prompted her parents to transfer her to a convent. The nuns imposed a much stricter regime:

After the first week, she comes home for dinner on Friday night: 'I can't eat meat on Friday' ... So my mother gets out a tin of salmon. My father said to me: 'This will put her to the test. We're having chops and she'll be having salad with salmon. We'll see how long this lasts! [AUDIO 14]

Harry does not recall how long his sister persevered, but the chops prevailed. Rather than dictate which religion Harry should follow, his father, a pragmatic Protestant, suggested he choose his own.

I said to my father, 'What Church are you?'

'Church of Christ.'

'That's a very small Church!' I said. 'How did you come to pick that?'

'Cause when I was a kid, they had the best picnics!' [AUDIO 15]

The children of a mixed marriage sometimes brought a thaw to frosty relations with the extended family. Heather Shepherd's father developed a good relationship with his grandchildren, but her mother never forgave her. 'She'd sit there at the table and say, "that's the ugliest child I've ever seen". She was so bitter!'

After his son was born, John Haynes resumed contact with his father:

It was okay at that stage if I brought our baby son out because you know, kids are a bit hard to feel angry with ... [But] it turned out only very partially to be an ice-breaker. Helen [his wife] was never welcome. My father had really made up his mind ... he never really got to know them ... nor did he ever express a desire to know them.

Susan Timmins was middle-aged when she first met her mother's side of the family, who had so uncompromisingly cut all contact forty years before. An uncle got in touch with her father, who arranged a dinner. But the pain of the past swirled beneath the surface:

I was hunky dory enough until I'd had a few drinks, and I suppose I then had to ask the question - just why? I said, you have to forgive me, but I'm antagonistic towards my mother's family ... It's okay for you to swan in from overseas and say 'hi' to my father - but did you ever care what happened to us children? Did you ever care that my father was in such a dire situation that he had to put his children into an orphanage? [AUDIO 16]

Susan suddenly breaks down and sobs bitterly. A resolute and sophisticated woman, who is articulate about her views and open about her feelings, she is as shocked as I am at how emotional she has become.<sup>36</sup> 'God isn't this ridiculous, I'm sixty-five,' she says, in a teetering voice. 'But he

always described that as being the most terrible, terrible time of his life.’ She is still distraught. I go to stop the tape but she wants to continue. ‘He said, it was bad enough when his wife died, but to have to put his two children in an orphanage because he couldn’t support them – it was after the war and war widows were getting widows’ pensions, but he got nothing.’

Susan regains composure, and goes on to talk about the strain she must have put on her father’s second marriage, because she was such ‘a difficult child’ due to her time in the orphanage. Although he visited every weekend, Susan developed ‘behavioural problems’, while her young brother ‘was never taught to speak’. After five years, relief came, when her father remarried. His new wife – another Catholic – reclaimed the two children and arranged for their baptism. But in a break with the religious intransigence of the past, she had her stepchildren initiated as Anglicans, in their father’s tradition, while raising the three offspring of the new marriage as Catholics. This gesture of inclusiveness established what Susan recalls as a ‘fantastic’ family life with her ‘second mother’, an independent thinker who did not want priests telling her what to do. Once they hid when a priest called; he never came back. Her half-siblings took Catholic instruction at state schools, while she and her brother attended Anglican schools. But her stepmother emphasised their similarities, not their differences. ‘She taught me to believe there was good and there was bad and it had very little to do with religion – they didn’t have the market cornered on goodness.’

In 1969, to her father’s disbelief, Susan announced she was going to marry a Catholic, in a Catholic church. ‘He said I could do what I wanted ... but he thought it was crazy, look at what ill it had brought him.’ Peter Timmins came from a large Irish Catholic family, but there the similarities ended. The family welcomed Susan, and although Peter was willing to marry in an Anglican church, Susan chose to convert to Catholicism to facilitate matters. A few years later, influenced by other cultures and events during a sojourn in wartime Vietnam, she would become a secular humanist.

The wave of ecumenism that followed the Second Vatican Council would send ripples of reconciliation through Australia’s Christian churches. From the 1970s, with Australian Catholics increasingly comprising Italians, Maltese, Vietnamese and other backgrounds, Irishness was no longer an automatic component of Protestant /Catholic dialogue. Religious attendance began to decline and Catholics became more evenly spread across the socio-economic spectrum (Armstrong 2001). The political milieu also changed. Where Catholics once voted overwhelmingly Labor, after the Labor Party split of 1954–55 they increasingly transferred their allegiance from the Democratic Labor Party to the Liberal Party; in recent times, four out of five post-Howard contenders for leadership of the Liberal Party have been Catholic,<sup>37</sup> a staggering turnaround from the era of Robert Menzies, whose last government featured only one Catholic minister.<sup>38</sup>

So blurred have the lines now become that commentators routinely refer to ‘Anglo–Celtic’ Australians, as though Irish Catholic and English Protestant Australians have become retrospectively united into a harmonious blend of core ‘Australian’ stock. In fact, as Patrick O’Farrell forcefully reminds us, nothing could be further from the truth:

It [the term ‘Anglo–Celtic’] is a grossly misleading, false and patronising contemporary convenience, one crassly present-oriented. Its use removes from consciousness and recognition a major conflict fundamental to any comprehension, not only of Australian history but of our present core culture ... At least

the terms 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' are less dismissive of the actualities of history: no conflatory term has been suggested to avoid that embarrassing unpleasantness (O'Farrell 2005: 7).

Many Catholics and Protestants who embarked on a mixed marriage can testify to that. On their deathbed, some spouses made a final commitment that transcended the divisions. Nora Dunne's Presbyterian husband, Tom, was buried from the Catholic Church and interred in the Catholic cemetery, so that he could one day be buried with her. 'He wanted to turn [convert], but I wouldn't let him', says Nora. Gay Wilson's husband died of cancer at 56. They had been married for 36 years – she was 18 when they wed. Gay believes their marriage was strengthened, rather than undermined, by his parents' unrelenting hostility. 'It drew my husband and I closer together for the pain that they were causing his wife.' His last act deeply moved her. 'He was christened a Catholic on his dying bed,' says Gay. 'What more could a man say to a woman?'



**Figure 42.4** Gay Wilson with her husband Max, and one of their grandchildren, shortly before his death in 1996.  
Source: Gay Wilson

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Statistical historian David Fitzpatrick (1986: 144) has shown that throughout the nineteenth century, single Irish women emigrated to Australia in higher numbers than did women of other backgrounds. Demographer Oliver MacDonagh (1986: 130) has pointed out that 'the proportion of Irish men to women was consistently below the Australian average, from some 30 per cent below initially to some 10 per cent below in the early twentieth century'.
- <sup>2</sup> Not all were orphans – some had parents who were unable to provide for them. Trevor McClaughlin (1991: Preface) estimates that some 47 per cent married across religion and over half married Englishmen.
- <sup>3</sup> These family histories are on display at the *Irish Orphan Girls* exhibition at the Hyde Park Barracks, Sydney, until 2010.

4 I solicited 30 interviewees from responses to my letters to a range of newspapers and religious periodicals and organisations including the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Newcastle Herald*, the *Irish Echo*, *Tain*, the *Catholic Weekly*, *Crosslight*, *Southern Cross*, the *Melbourne Anglican*, *Aurora* and the *Australian Christian Lobby*. Some newspapers, such as the *Age* and the *Illawarra Mercury* declined to publish my request. I located 18 interviewees by word of mouth.

5 See for example Block (1995). See also my own work rendering an interview two ways in different editions of *Minefields and Miniskirts*: McHugh 1993: 78–79 and McHugh 2004: 109–110.

6 Interview recorded with Gay Wilson by S. McHugh at Greenwich, NSW, 6 July 2007.

7 Excerpts from the interview, as indicated by the text ‘Audio’, can be heard online at <http://publications.epress.monash.edu/doi/full/10.2104/ha090042>. The 16 audio files are in mp3 format. The largest file size is 2.3mb, with the average file size being approximately 1.3mb.

8 Interview recorded with John and Helen Haynes by S. McHugh at Narrabeen, NSW, 9 July 2007.

9 Interview recorded with Susan Timmins by S. McHugh, Potts Point, NSW, 23 January 2008.

10 Interview recorded with Pamela Cunningham by S. McHugh, Canberra, 6 September 2007.

11 Interview recorded with Michael Flynn by S. McHugh, Canberra, 2 September 2007.

12 Paul Ormonde. ‘The man who said no to Archbishop Mannix’. Obituary, *The Age*, 15 January 2005.

13 Interview recorded with Meg Clancy by S. McHugh, Balmain, NSW, 9 September 2008.

14 A composite photo showing the 14 Victoria Cross winners, Archbishop Mannix and John Wren, the wealthy entrepreneur reputed to have organised the spectacle, is held at the Australian War Memorial: Record POI383.018.

15 Interview recorded with Colin Chandler by S. McHugh, Hurstville, NSW, 26 November 2008.

16 Interview recorded with Harry Griffiths by S. McHugh, Tamarama, NSW, 28 March 2008.

17 The sectarian proclivities of the workforce of the period are outside the scope of this article, but see Edwards 2007. My own informants offer the following with regard to the public service: in the Victorian Board of Works in the 1950s, accountants were Protestant, clerks Catholic, while the Bureau of Statistics and the Post Office were bastions of Catholicism. In New South Wales, the Water Board, the Fire Department and Egg Marketing Board were enclaves of Protestantism, while the Departments of Housing and the Railways favoured Catholics. The Masons also controlled the NSW Office of the Public Trustee, but Catholics triumphed in Taxation.

18 Personal communication by Marion Stehl, former curator, National Museum of Australia, who has chronicled the brochure.

19 Interview recorded with Heather Shepherd by S. McHugh, Woodhouselee, NSW, 22 August 2007.

20 Interview recorded with Cordelia Hull by S. McHugh, Tecoma, Victoria, 1 October 2007.

21 Interview recorded with Kimberly O’Sullivan Steward by S. McHugh, Bondi, NSW, 5 April 2007.

22 A process known as *Sanatio con Radice*.

23 Interview recorded with ‘Mary’ [name withheld] by S. McHugh, Epping, NSW, 7 August 2007.

24 Not being allowed to marry in front of the altar was often the first thing mentioned by anyone with whom I raised the topic of mixed marriage.

25 Interview recorded with Nora Dunne by S. McHugh, Shortland, NSW, 17 April 2007.

26 Interview recorded with ‘Gwen’ [name withheld] by S. McHugh, Erina, NSW, 16 April 2007.

27 Irish-born Fr Tuomey was unfazed by authority. In 1918 he was fined £30 for having ‘by word of mouth caused disloyalty to the British Empire’ in a speech denouncing English rule in Ireland (Campion 1982: 87).

- 28 Interview recorded with Fr John McSweeney by S McHugh, Kingsgrove, NSW, 26 March 2008.
- 29 Though not unheard of. Another informant, Kimberly O'Sullivan Steward, had a maternal grandfather who registered as Catholic when heading off to the First World War, recorded 'no religion' on his marriage certificate, raised his children Protestant and became a Mason.
- 30 Interview recorded with Tony Davis by S McHugh, Charlestown, NSW, 17 April, 2007.
- 31 Interview recorded with 'Anna'. [name and location withheld] by S McHugh, 18 July 2007.
- 32 Two other informants mention clandestine baptisms by Catholic mothers. The Catholic Church permitted a lay-person to conduct a baptism in certain circumstances.
- 33 Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages of 7 January 1970 revised the ruling so that only the Catholic party had to sign a document promising to raise all offspring as Catholic.
- 34 Interview recorded with Jean MacLean by S McHugh, Darlington, NSW, 31 August 2007.
- 35 Interview recorded with 'Louise' [name withheld] by S McHugh, Redfern, NSW, 13 July 2007.
- 36 By coincidence, I also interviewed Susan Timmins in 1991 for my book *Minefields and Miniskirts*, about Australian women in the Vietnam war. She was there as a diplomat's wife. We resumed our acquaintance in 2004 when that book became a stage play. So I know her better than most of my interviewees.
- 37 A point made by Professor John Warhurst at the Freilich Foundation Conference on Religion and Bigotry, Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, 21 January 2009. Malcolm Turnbull, Brendan Nelson, Christopher Pyne and Andrew Robb were Catholic; only Julie Bishop was not.
- 38 John Cramer, Ministry for the Army 1956–1973. His feelings of isolation are quoted in Henderson 1998: 112.

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## PRIMARY SOURCES

This article is based on 48 oral history interviews recorded by me in New South Wales, Victoria and Canberra in 2007 and 2008, as part of the research for my doctoral thesis. The interviews are the basis of two one-hour radio features on Hindsight, ABC Radio National for broadcast 4 and 11 October, 2009, [www.abc.net.au/rn/hindsight](http://www.abc.net.au/rn/hindsight). The collection will be available as a research collection at the National Library of Australia c. 2011, following my own publications.

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*Age*, 2005.

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