Time: 8.45 a.m. - 9.35 a.m. for registration.
9.35 a.m. Start of Conference.

Cost: $10.00 (Students free) lunch and teas included.

Note: Applications for registration for the Conference, together with a remittance for the Conference cost, should be lodged with the Conference Convener, Don Reynolds, 21 Toorak Avenue, Wollongong, before Tuesday 1 May, 1990.

RESULTS OF ELECTIONS

At the Annual Meeting on 7th March, 1990, the Society made several amendments to the Constitution, including changing the name of its Council to 'Board'.

Officers elected for 1990:

PATRONS: The Right Worshipful Lord Mayor and Member for Illawarra, Ald. Frank Arkell, M.L.A.
Mr. W. G. McDonald, B.A., LL.B., Hon. Life Member of the Society.

PRESIDENT: Dr. W. Mitchell
VICE PRESIDENT: Mr. F. Osborne
HON. SECRETARY: Mr. M. Organ
HON. TREASURER: Mrs. A. Pezzutto
HON. BULLETIN EDITOR: Mr. J. Davis
HON. RESEARCH OFFICER: Mr. P. Doyle
MUSEUM CO-ORDINATOR: Mrs. M. Christie
PUBLICITY OFFICER: Mrs. D. Mowbray
FOUR OTHER BOARD MEMBERS: Annabel Lloyd, Mrs. J. McCarthy, Mr. G. Boniface, Mr. S. Dillon.

HON. AUDITOR: Mr. T. D. Grant

Both Jack Maynes, who retired after 23 years as a Council member and Margaret McDonald, also after many years Council service, were warmly thanked, as was the retiring Secretary Kath Condell and Mr. T. D. Grant Hon. Auditor.

To conclude the meeting Mr. F. Osborne showed slides of old Thirroul and new member Mr. L. Cripps was welcomed.

MUSEUM NEWS

Special Exhibition for Heritage Week 22 - 29 April. There will be an exhibition of one hundred years of sewing machines. These have been put into working order by Mr. J. Devitt. Visitors will be able to try out the hand-wheel turning as well as the treadle type. There will also be available other "hands on" equipment: early typewriters and adding machines.

DOCTOR FRANCIS CROSSLE: MIDWIFE TO THE ARTS

Most people would probably assume that during the first three decades of this century the northern Illawarra would have been something of a cultural desert.

To do so, however, is to ignore the very vibrant working class social and political culture of the many miners and their families who made up most of the area's inhabitants.

Few today can remember the extraordinarily sophisticated working class social networks which came into existence to cope with both the 1917 and 1949 General
Strikes and the lively political culture these local communities supported. In villages such as Thirroul, the beach on Sunday afternoons during these periods often rivalled the Sydney Domain for political speakers.

It is perhaps understandable that conservative historians have chosen to ignore how successful local working class communities could be in organizing their daily lives in complete opposition to their employers and their political opponents in Government.

What is less understandable, however, is how historians and commentators have ignored the fact that throughout the 1920s and 1930s the Northern Illawarra was often home to what was probably the most extraordinary and vibrant literary and artistic circle in all Australia.

Few would today know that some of the nation’s finest artistic talents and minds were then drawn to the Northern Illawarra because of an immensely able medical man who, as part of his daily working life, served the many working class residents of the district.

In his all too little spare time, however, this local doctor was host and confidant to the greats of Australian literature, music and painting.

This man, who was to become known as ‘The Doctor to the Artists’, was Dr. Francis Clement Crosslé - an exceptionally skilled surgeon and gynaecologist whose fame as a medical man is no doubt still familiar to many long-time residents of the Illawarra.

A protestant Irishman, born in Newry, Crosslé was a friend of the poet W. B. Yeats and Gogarty in the early days of The Abbey Theatre.

On arrival in the Illawarra during the years of the First World War, Dr. Crosslé purchased a practice in the Bulli Area.

His timely arrival was to prove a godsend for the local residents, for soon the worldwide Spanish influenza Pandemic began to lay waste to the Australian population.

Thanks to Crosslé, who in 1919 set up the ‘Brayside’ guesthouse in Thirroul as an infirmary, not a single life was lost to Influenza in the Northern Illawarra, whereas some 12000 Australians throughout the country were to die from the contagion.

The local community presented Crosslé with a magnificent illuminated scroll to honour his remarkable efforts and services to the district.

Crosslé was an asset in other respects too, for he was an extremely skilled surgeon (at a time when few other local doctors possessed such skills) and a pioneer in the treatment of burns. His speciality, however, was gynaecology.

As a consequence, Crosslé’s practice flourished. People came from far and wide to be treated, and eventually he was forced to practice one day a week in Sydney in order to satisfy the demands of his many more distant patients.

Yet amid this busy schedule, Crosslé still found time for his artistic interests.

As early as 1918, he appears to have made contact with the artist and writer Norman Lindsay and the two became great friends.

Lindsay was the author of Australian children’s classic The Magic Pudding and also notorious among the wowsers for his paintings of buxom nudes and classical nymphs and satyrs.
By 1926, when the English writer Richard Pennington visited the Crosslé household at Bulli, he found the walls were lined with large numbers of Lindsay’s extraordinary oils and sketches.

Through Lindsay, Crosslé was introduced to the great Australian landscape artist Elioth Gruner and others of Lindsay’s circle, such as the sculptor Raynor Hoff who did most of the art for the Sydney War Memorial in Hyde Park.

Crosslé thus became known to a wide circle of the finest literary and artistic minds in Australia.

As a consequence, many famous artists regularly came to the Northern Illawarra to visit the grand old Crosslé home, shrouded in wisteria, in Park Road, Bulli.

Crosslé is even believed to have treated the English novelist D. H. Lawrence during that famous author’s stay at Thirroul in 1922.

In his role as ‘Doctor to the Artists’, Crosslé is reputed to have brought back Elioth Gruner from the grave on a number of occasions in that hapless artist’s fight with the bottle.

In doing so, Crosslé enabled Gruner to live on to paint some of the finest Australian landscapes.

Such was the regard in which Crosslé was held that a number of famous Australian artists chose to spend their last days in the Illawarra under Crosslé’s care.

The composer and musician, Adolphe Gustave Beutler, for example, died peacefully in Thirroul in 1926.

During all this time, Crosslé kept up his great work for the local community.

He attended numerous tedious school prize days and church functions, while also raising funds for the Bulli Cottage Hospital and ministering to the daily needs of his very large practice.

He even found time in 1921 to address a monster political rally of 5000 people in Wollongong on one of his political passions - Irish self determination.

It must have been an exceedingly exhausting schedule, and Crosslé’s only real relief was the occasional day or two spent at Norman Lindsay’s home at Springwood in the Blue Mountains or fishing down the coast at Bateman’s Bay.

There were no sophisticated facilities available to a surgeon as skilled as Crosslé at Bulli, but despite this he persevered and managed to make do with what was available.

Indeed, there are still some local residents alive today who can remember Crosslé removing their tonsils while they lay on the kitchen table of their family homes.

Skilled, cultured and cosmopolitan as he was, Crosslé also appears to have possessed the common touch.

Slightly built, with corn-coloured hair, his gentle manner enabled him to relate well with people of all kinds.

Crosslé appears to have had the extraordinary ability to meet people at their own level, but to never become like them.

At all times, he remained a very singular and disarming individual.

When he spoke in his soft, lilting voice, some recall that in conversation he could make people feel that they were the most important person in the world.
To women of all social classes, his gentle charisma was particularly attractive. Miner's wives and society matrons, along with the leading artists of his day, all appear to have fallen under his spell.

Yet while charming all and sundry, Crosslé kept up his community work - even in the area of sport.

In the early 1920s, he was President of the Thirroul Golf Club and, later, it was through Crosslé's generosity that the Thirroul Surf Club purchased its first surfboat, the 'Francis Crosslé', in 1938.

Because of the allure of Crosslé's personality, we can today rejoice in the large number of extant works of the Northern Illawarra by some of the greats of 20th century Australian art - Gruner, Lindsay, Grace Cossington Smith, Arthur Murch and Margaret Coen.

For Arthur Murch, who later went on to win the Archibald prize for portraiture, the beaches of the Northern Illawarra appear to have been a particularly important influence on his early beachscapes with figures.

Little wonder then that places like Thirroul have continued to attract the attention of artists of the calibre of Brett Whitely, Colin Lanceley and Paul Delprat, along with Australia's foremost composer, Peter Sculthorpe, who dedicated his composition 'Small Town' to Thirroul and its connections with the author D. H. Lawrence.

Crosslé was also an artist in his own right. His novel, Dona Juaná, was written at Bulli throughout the 1920s and eventually published in 1931. In this great labour of love, Norman Lindsay offered constant advice and criticism. Crosslé also wrote the introductions for a number of Lindsay's publications.

In 1945, Crossle was posthumously awarded the France Libre Medal for this services to members of the French community in Australia during World War Two.

As surgeon to the many, midwife to the arts, and friend to Australia's gifted artistic elite, it is surprising that the only monument to this important figure in Australian cultural and medical history is the 'Crosslé Ward' at Bulli Hospital.

No doubt, in time, wider recognition will come to Doctor Francis Clement Crosslé - one of the Illawarra's most distinguished and cultured citizens.

Joseph Davis

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE ILLAWARRA
150 YEARS 1838 - 1988


One's first impression on being confronted with this massive volume is that it must be the largest, most sumptuously produced and most amply illustrated work in the local history fold that we have encountered. But the compilers would be the first to avow that this is a secondary consideration. It is not a great work of literature. Large as the book is, the number of persons demanding mention is enormous, and there is little space for personal sketches or "human interest" stories. First things must come first; but if you want to ascertain any point in the history of the Church in Illawarra, this will be the first place to which you should turn for information.