Influential Pioneers

The men who knelt side by side at Mass in the little school-church of St Joseph's in the early 1860s included men who would have been unusual anywhere. Some of them were part of that influx of talent and originality which was perhaps the greatest benefit the gold rush left to Victoria; all possessed in greater or lesser degree that adventurous ambition which had lured men from the security of the old world to become pioneers in a new country.

Three of the men were members of the colony's first parliament; of these, two John O'Shanassy and Charles Gavan Duffy , were to become premiers, and to be knighted. Both were Irishmen, and so was the third M.P., Michael O'Grady, M.L.C. the member for Booroondarra in the colony's first parliament. O'Grady was also the first chairman of the City of Hawthorn, when it was proclaimed a municipality in 1871.

Another was W.H.Archer, an English convert: he was a writer, a pioneer in collecting statistics and he became the colony's Registrar- General.

O'Shanassy, in his prosperity, built a fine mansion, 'Tara', near the corner of Burke and Burwood Roads; when the land was subdivided. After his death in 1883, the gates of 'Tara' were given to the Immaculate Conception Church and adorn the intersection in front of the church today.

Charles Gavan Duffy's fame as an Irish patriot preceded his arrival to Melbourne. He had been gaoled in the 1848 rebellion, finally freed, then elected to the House of Commons in 1852. Following disagreements with fellow Irish patriots, he was encouraged to migrate to Melbourne in 1856, winning a seat in the colony's first Legislative Assembly elections in the same year. He became the 8th premier of Victoria in 1871. His was an extraordinary life, well worth checking via the web.

All four were key figures on the committee assisting Fr Nolan to plan and raise funds for the church following the laying of the foundation stone on December 8th 1867.

William Henry Archer

Sir Charles Gavan Duffy

Michael O'Grady

Sir John O'Shanassy