

BALLARAT'S LOST CATHOLIC HISTORY IS BEING SOUGHT

It is one hundred years since an honour board was unveiled at St Patrick's Hall commemorating the war service of thirty-four Catholic Young Men's Debating Society members. The society, known as CYMS, was part of a worldwide movement founded in 1849 by the Irish nationalist and priest Richard Baptist O'Brien with the idea of giving Catholic men a forum to investigate their religion and form friendships. In Australia it has been particularly strong in sporting and debating circles, with many football and cricket sides bearing the CYMS title.



Michael Taffe is the archivist for the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat and he is hoping to find the now-missing honour board, or that a member of the public has information about it.



An article from *The Courier* of August 1916 describing the unveiling ceremony records how speakers on the evening used the occasion to debunk the accusation current at the time that Australian Catholics were shirking the war effort.

Other speakers commented on the great effort Australia had made with a voluntary force, and how it was perhaps greater than one which had been compulsorily conscripted. The society is notable for the membership of future prime ministers James Scullin and John Curtin.

Mr Taffe says he is not sure when the board was removed, but it is one of a series of historical objects he is searching for.

Another is a banner featuring the names of donors who gave to assist the wounded soldiers from the diocese. Captured in a photograph from 1920, the banner, or banners, display a large Harp of Erin at the centre, surrounded by many names still recognisable in the town today.

Mr Taffe says many items have been lost as their value for research was not recognised over time. Even recently well-meaning members of the church have consigned historical items to rubbish skips, resulting in large gaps in church histories in the region.

Anyone with items or information about the missing boards and banners, or other items of historical interest is urged to contact Michael Taffe on 53377121 or archives@ballarat.catholic.org.au

Article courtesy of the Ballarat Courier. Text and pictures by Caleb Cluff.

Photo 1: A Catholic tradition: Michael Taffe holds the photograph from 1920 featuring the banner recording donor's names from the Great War.

Photo 2: Almost 100 years ago: a close-up of the banners in the picture from 1920.