

Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society

Some pieces of history are not only beautiful, but also have a story to tell. When Patrick Keith Lenehan (known as Keith) decided to donate his grandfather's certificate, commemorating his presidency of the Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society, to the Cobden Church Community, his wish was that this piece of history be preserved for future generations, to marvel at the beauty of the document whilst gaining an understanding of the history of the Irish immigrants to the Cobden area.

On Saturday, April 13, members of Keith's family attended Mass at St Brendan's Church, Cobden to donate this beautiful piece of history to the Church community on his behalf. Angela Janes (sister), Josephine (niece) and Steven Ryan, along with Leanne Delahunty (niece) presented the illuminated manuscript to the church community at the conclusion of Mass.

The story of Micheal Baggot was shared with the congregation, who were fascinated by the story of how a baby, born in Ireland, became president of the HACBS in Cobden, Australia.



L – R: Angela Janes, Leanne Delahunty, Gerard Gleeson (Parish council)

Keith's long association with St Brendan's Parish, Coragulac

On Sunday, May 26 at St Brendan's Church Coragulac, Mr Patrick Keith Lenehan, known as Keith, received a special blessing from Bishop Paul Bird. Keith's family's long association with St Brendan's began when his mother, Mary Baggot was born in 1912 and baptised at St Brendan's Church. When Mary married Michael Lenehan from Crossley in 1933, it was at St Brendan's. It was also at St Brendan's that all sixteen of their children were baptised, of which Keith was the third.

It was Mary's great and inspiring Catholic faith that played a large part in the family. It could be said that it was Mary's faith that was the centrepiece of the family and saw the Lenehan's become one of the cornerstone families of the St Brendan's Community.

Keith, along with all his siblings, followed in his mother's footsteps and attended school at St Brendan's. On leaving school, Keith joined his father and his older brother, Jim, to work on the farm, as did many of his brothers who came after him.

The original St Brendan's Church burnt down in 1938, with the last ceremony in the old church being the christening of Mary and Michael's fifth child, Loretto, on the evening of the fire. The new (and current) church was opened the following year.

As a family, the Lenehan's have celebrated many wonderful occasions at St Brendan's, including numerous family christenings and weddings (including Mary and Michael's Golden and Diamond Wedding Anniversaries), and sadly, funerals. Francis, the fourth child and avid gardener, provided the flowers for many of St Brendan's celebrations.

Keith, along with his younger brother Les, were the last two members of the family to belong to the parish, as they never married and remained on the family farm. Sadly, Les passed away last year and Keith has gone into care in Colac.

Keith and Les have been great supporters of the church and its community and have been very generous in helping with both the maintenance and improvements to the church. For example, they were instrumental in helping restore the bell tower.

The St Brendan's community continue to remember Les, with an ongoing "Les Sat Here" tribute in the pew where he always sat.

Keith can no longer attend regular services as he is now in care, but he is still very much included in the parish. Keith enjoys attending celebrations at St Brendan's when he is able. He truly appreciates the care extended to him by the parishioners. It was at the 150th Diocesan Anniversary Mass at St Brendan's where Keith received his special blessing from Bishop Paul.

Angela and Josephine (family members)



Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society - Michael Baggott



Michael Baggott was born in Ireland on September 26, 1874. He was the second child of William Baggott and Bridget Hickey. Michael would have been barely six months old on the 7th May 1875, when he boarded the SS St Osyth with his parents and older sister (Annie) at Plymouth for the journey to Australia. The family arrived in Melbourne in June 1875 with Michael not appearing to have suffered from the journey, which was a risk with such a young infant. The family disembarked at Melbourne and ultimately made their way to the Cobden area to join the rest of the Hickeys and Scanlons. Whilst farming at Elingamite, William and Bridget had seven more children. In 1903 the family moved to Coragulac, with the exception of Michael.

Michael developed the reputation of being a hardworking man who prospered as a result of his efforts. He is said to have worked as a labourer while living at Tandarook, Bostocks Creek and later at Con Hickey's place. He remained on the Cobden dairy farm when his parents moved to Coragulac.

It was during his time in the Cobden area that Michael was a member of the Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society (HACBS), St Brendan's Branch, No 315, Cobden. The HACBS was a church-based support network, founded in 1868 by a group of Irish immigrants, to assist Irish Catholics with hospital, sickness and funeral benefits through insurance style subscription. It is described as having provided social security in the era before the welfare state. Bro. Michael Baggott held official roles within the society, with this illuminated manuscript commemorating his presidency in 1901. You will notice that he is pictured in his ceremonial collar in the centre of the document.

In 1902 Michael married Hanora Quinlan at St Patrick's Church in Camperdown. In 1907 Michael and Hanora moved to Browns Lane Cororooke and later purchased 'Loch Erin' on Lineens Road Cororooke. Whilst living at 'Loch Erin' they had two children, Mary and Francis.

Mary Baggott was born on February 12, 1912. On February 15, 1933 Mary married Michael Lenehan from Koroit. It is said that the two met at a card game to which Michael had ridden his motorbike. So that Mary would not have to move away from the district, Michael Baggott provided his daughter Mary and her new husband with a house and land, adjoining his own. This house and land remains in the Lenehan family to this day. Mary, Michael and their sixteen children prospered, becoming well respected members of the Coragulac and Cororooke communities.

It is one of these children, Patrick Keith Lenehan (known as Keith), who is donating this piece of history back to the Cobden Church Community. It is Keith's wish that this piece of history be preserved for future generations, to marvel at the beauty of the document whilst gaining an understanding of the history of the Irish immigrants to the Cobden area.