

The Augustinians at Mount Ommaney

In 1948, an Order of Catholic priests, the Order of St Augustine (OSA), purchased a 49-acre block of land near the top of Mt Ommaney from the Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, and also acquired two nearby properties including a large dairy farm owned formerly by Alan Marr and, before that, by Fred Maurer. The blocks were adjacent to one another, forming a large landholding that comprised the land at the summit and all of the southern and western slopes of Mt Ommaney as well as adjacent farmland extending into present day Middle Park and Westlake. In 1952 they added three portions adjacent to one another, close to but on the opposite side of the old Mt Ommaney Road to the main landholding. Their total (known) holding then comprised approximately 465 acres.

Archbishop James Duhig had invited the Augustinians, formerly in north Queensland, to come to Brisbane to establish both a day and a boarding school for boys. He proposed that they establish the boarding school at Mt Ommaney, where he had held the 49-acre block for many years. His Grace chose the name 'Iona' for the College in view of the Augustinians reputation for learning that he considered to be reminiscent of the reputation of the monks of Iona. The education program would be broadly based but there would be special departments of agricultural science and industrial technology. The agriculture focus reflected Archbishop Duhig's long held interest in promoting education of rural youth that enabled them to remain on the land rather than move to cities.

After initial examination of and work on the site, plans were made for the college to be situated at the summit of Mt Ommaney after levelling of the site. A future monastery was also mooted, to be built on the high point on the ridge northward of Mt Ommaney, in the vicinity of Becker Place.

Meanwhile, the property was to be maintained as a dairy farm. It was worked as a dairy farm by a resident farm manager during the 1950s.

Norm Bremner, whose family worked the farm in the early Augustinian period of ownership, advised that the area on the river bank on the west side of Mt Ommaney Creek was cultivated for crops. His sister June recalls that the creek was at that time a series of waterholes, with a dam that had been installed by an earlier owner Alan Marr. The flat area beside the dam was also cultivated and planted with lucerne for making hay. Cattle were grazed on the higher slopes.

Dam on Farm. Courtesy of June Ross née Bremner.



The residence and farm buildings were situated toward the western side of what is now the McLeod Golf Course and near the silo that can still be seen from Tekapo St. In the Bremners' time at the property, there were two houses side by side, one older than the other, that had both been in use during a previous owner's occupancy. There were two square silos, one of which still stands. See <https://cshsoc.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/silo-story1.pdf> Other buildings included a hayshed and cattle feeding stalls, a milking shed and cow yards, and a pig sty.

Our Lady of Fatima Shrines

Our Lady of Fatima was to be named patroness of the college. Very Rev. Father J. W. Larkin, who was in charge of establishing the college and monastery, had installed a small shrine in a bush glade, using a 3-inch metal statuette of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, soon after his August 1950 appointment. After this was stolen following newspaper publicity about it, Father Larkin replaced it with an approximately 12-inch statue of Our Lady of Fatima in a very heavy concrete casing.



Two of the Bremner children, June (now Mrs Ross) and her brother Reggie, used to visit the shrine on their way home from school and place wildflowers that they had picked for the purpose. June recalls "It was on a stand about four feet high that was made of stones. On top of this was an oval-shaped structure, maybe called a grotto, probably made of plaster or concrete. The statue was inside that. There was glass/perspex across the front. And 2 little containers at the side for flowers." This small shrine is understood to have been in the vicinity of Bondel Place and Arrabri Ave, Mt Ommaney.

Early Shrine with Our Lady of Fatima Statue, Mount Ommaney, ca. 1950. Courtesy of Mrs June Ross.

In September 1951, a shrine with a life-sized statue of Our Lady of Fatima was installed on the Mt Ommaney property.

It was situated at the proposed entrance to the college, near but below the summit of Mt Ommaney. Father Larkin, who arranged for the shrine to be installed, described the site as being "on the rib of a hill midway between the highest point where it is hoped the college will be and the elevation adjoining the river where one day an Augustinian Monastery may be erected". Drawing together information from a range of sources including property boundaries, it appears that the shrine was in the vicinity of the intersection of Bowman and Becker Places or to the left (south) of it. The photograph of the dedication ceremony is from *Catholic Leader*, 13 September 1951, and was also published in *The Courier Mail*, 10 September 1951, page 3.



"Courier-Mail" block.

Archbishop Duhig dedicating a shrine on the site of a new Augustinian college at Mt. Hominy, near Darra, on Sunday.

Establishment Phase and Pilgrimages

Detailed plans for the college were drawn up and a major fundraising drive, the Iona College Appeal, ensued. The various fundraising strategies included pilgrimage style excursions to the life-sized statue of Our Lady of Fatima on the Mt Ommaney property.

Fatima Pilgrimage to Mt. Hominy.

Brisbane Catholics who would like to combine a beautiful little devotional practice with a pleasant afternoon's outing should join the monthly pilgrimage to the Statue of Our Lady of Fatima at Mount Hominy next Sunday, May 4.

This pilgrimage, sponsored by the Augustinian Fathers, on whose monastery site the Statue was blessed by His Grace, Archbishop Duhig, last year, promises to become one of the notable Catholic events of Brisbane. It is growing in popularity every month.

It assumes wider significance now on the eve of the first Chapter of the newly erected Australian Province of the Augustinians. The Order is preparing to play a larger part in the religious life of Southern Queensland, and its work will include the building of a new school for boys at Coorparoo.

The Fathers extend a cordial invitation to their many old and prospective friends to join in the May pilgrimage. Mount Hominy is reached by car from Ipswich Road through either Darra or Oxley. The direction is well indicated by signs.

Decoration of the Statue will begin about 2 p.m., the Rosary will be recited at 3 p.m., and those who attend will then be able to join in a basket picnic, for which hot water for tea will be supplied.

'Bus transport will be available on the assumption that a sufficient number indicate either by letter or 'phone to Villanova College, Hamilton ('phone MW 1652) their desire to make the pilgrimage. Detail will be advertised in Saturday morning's "Courier-Mail."

One local oral history source indicated that there were at least two trips by boat upriver to the Mt Ommaney shrine, however no evidence has been found of this. It is possible that it was trialled and found to be too difficult. Access from the creek would have been very muddy, the old disused quarry wharf on the river was said to be unstable, and there would have been a very steep walk through the bush to the shrine.

Monthly bus trips to the Mt Ommaney shrine were organized fairly soon after installation of the large statue and were advertised mainly through a weekly radio program but also in newspapers at times, as illustrated opposite and below.

Article opposite: *Catholic Leader* 1 May 1952

"**FATIMA PILGRIMAGE** A Special bus will leave King George Square at 1.45 p.m., on Sunday, 4th May, for Mt. Hominy. Fare 4/ Return." 3 May 1952, p.8. *Courier Mail*.

"**On pilgrimage.** Brisbane Catholics yesterday made a pilgrimage to the statue of Our Lady of Fatima, at Mount Hominy, Darra. The pilgrimage, sponsored by the Augustinian Fathers, is expected to become a monthly event." 5 May 1952, *Courier Mail*.

Abandonment of College Project

Rev. Father Thomas Hunt who became the Prior Provincial of the Order of St Augustine in Queensland in March 1952, decided that the site was not suitable for a college.

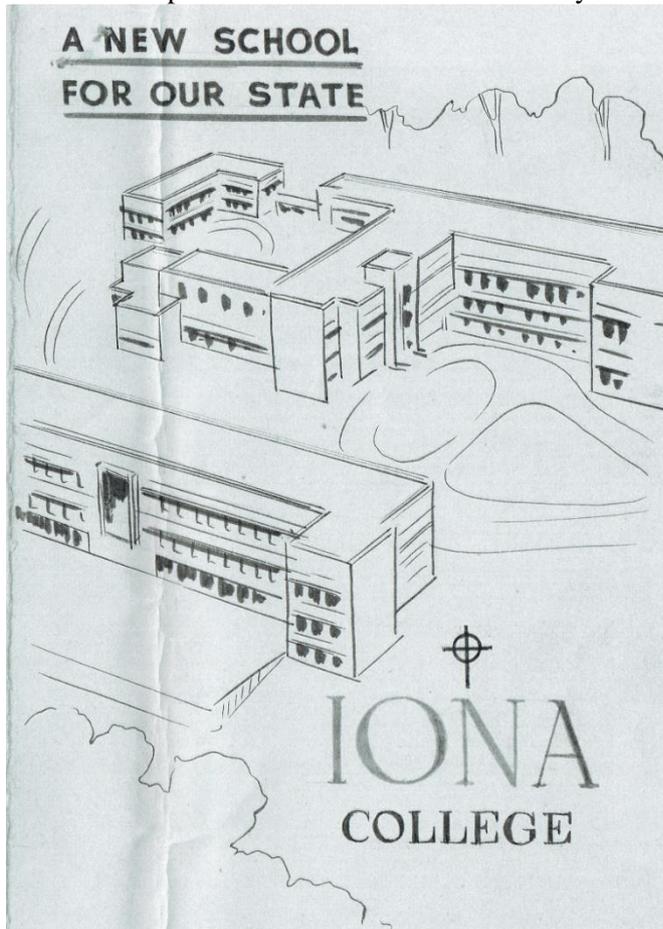
Rev. Father Hunt's decision not to proceed with building a boarding school at Mount Ommaney seems to have been made fairly soon after he took up the role of Provincial for Queensland in March 1952. On 1 May 1952, the *Catholic Leader* reported that the Augustinians were going to erect a seminary for the training of new priests at Mt Ommaney instead of a boarding school. Father Larkin had already alluded to the possibility of a Monastery 'one day' in a report

of May 1951 on the College project so it appears to have been under consideration from early in the project. In the same edition of the *Catholic Leader*, the above article promoting the monthly bus trips to Our Lady of Fatima shrine was published: it appears that the fundraising effort was continuing. Rev Father Hunt, in a letter of 25 April 1967 to Oxley-based local historian Miss Gladys Bailey, stated that the bus trips continued until 1953. However, the plans to build a seminary did not eventuate either.

In 1948, the Augustinians had established a day school for boys, known as Villanova, at Whinstanes, Hamilton. Over time, there was a perceived need for expansion to include upper primary and secondary classes but insufficient scope for this at the Hamilton site. The Whinstanes school was moved to Coorparoo to become the expanded Villanova College. While it has been suggested that the competing

need for funds for expansion of this school was an influence on abandonment of the Mt Ommaney project, the actual reasons were more complex.

There were specific concerns about the viability of the Mt Ommaney project. One significant issue



was the lack of reticulated water to the site at that time: this would render it very difficult to support the number of boys and men envisaged to live at the site. The Order would have had to incur considerable expense if it paid for the extension of reticulated water to Mt Ommaney. Another concern was that country families, who were seen to be the major source of boys for the college, may not want to send their boys to a college so far out of Brisbane. Catholic Archives has suggested that another contributory factor may have been that the fundraising target was not reached: there were concurrent appeals for the Mater Hospital and the Parish of Scarborough.

The Mt Ommaney property was sold in December 1959 and the funds were used for Villanova College and another Augustinian college in Sydney. Father Hunt advised Miss Bailey in the 1967 letter that the statue of Our Lady of Fatima was destroyed by the Order before the property was sold, to avoid vandalism.

Written by Meg Gordon, Oct. 2018, based on research undertaken by Claire Wilson and Meg Gordon 2013-early 2016.

All pages on this website remain the property of the Centenary Suburbs Historical Society. Please contact us (centenaryhistory2@hotmail.com) if you would like to use our images or articles.



Centenary Suburbs Historical Society Photo Gallery and Articles by [Centenary Suburbs Historical Society](#) are licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Australia License](#).

Based on a work at www.cshsoc.org.au.