

## Whose Church is it anyway?

LAST year, the Irish Redemptorist priest Tony Flannery was silenced by the Vatican for some of his writings. These were sensible thoughts on predictable areas in sexual morality – the kinds that the present Pope dismissed with “who are we to judge?” – but his first contact with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was his contention that priesthood did not originate with Jesus. His view was that it is not the priest alone who has the power to celebrate the Eucharist but that this belongs to the whole community.

It was an opinion that had little chance of passing without challenge, and it came to mind when reading this book about the attempts of a small community in Western Victoria to retain their church buildings against the determination of the parish priest to sell them.

That the church is in a potato-growing area named Killarney is a clue to the origins of the early settlers of the region and indeed the Irish connection is sufficiently strong to warrant a financial contribution from the Irish government for their community efforts.

The book is written by Regina Lane, the ninth of ten children of a staunchly Catholic couple who come across as exceptional people. Her youngest sibling was born when their mother Loretta was 47. Their father Mick, who had left school at 14, went back to study as an adult and graduated from the University of Melbourne on the same day as his son. If the story has heroes, it is Mick and Loretta, descendants of Famine families from Clare and Cork.

The book pulls no punches in its criticism of the parish priest Fr Bryant and his successor Fr Van de Camp. The former in particular seems to have been a bully, puffed up with his own importance; he criticised, from the altar, those

who opposed him, once referring to them as Fenians. At one stage, after Mick had written to the bishop urging that the church not be sold, he was challenged by the priest: “You’re the prick who wrote to the bishop. ... You’ll be hearing from my solicitors. I intend to take action against you for slander.”

On another occasion, at the end of what was a supervised mediation between Mick and Fr Bryant, the priest said, “We know about the issues with your daughter in the community.” The daughter in question, a school nurse, of necessity trained to deal with among other things, bullying, sought a meeting with the priest, her father also present. The priest was unable or unwilling to say to what he was referring, while Mick was present, threatening her also with legal action.

The bishop of Ballarat does not come well out of the story either. The author pointedly references events from the gospels when she says that her father was told three times, “You have my word: St Brigid’s won’t be sold.” If the bishop was a fictional character, we would be objecting to the way he is represented; those who follow the wider news will be aware that his diocese of Ballarat is one of those most hit by complaints against clergy.

One of the problems faced by the committee wishing to buy the church and adjacent hall for community use was trying to determine what would be a reasonable offer. The parish priest claimed that it was a drain on the resources of the larger parish of Kororoit of which it was part; he wanted \$700,000, but the property was insured for less than \$30,000. In the course of their campaign, they discovered that many other Catholic churches around Australia, built by the proverbial widow’s mites, had been sold to developers or private owners

### BOOKS

Saving St Brigid’s

by Regina Lane  
Bridin Books  
246 pp  
\$39.99



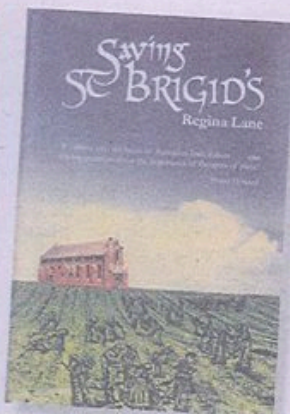
Warrnambool: A Long Way to Tipperary – The Incredible life of John Hyland

by James Nicolas  
Vivid Publishing  
132 pp



Frank O’Shea

This is not a book to be read in small doses. It starts slowly and requires some patience: many characters are referred to by their first names – Monica, Helen, Mary-Ellen, Liz, Teresa, Gerry – requiring the reader to keep track of who is related to whom. The book would be improved also by a proper map of the area covered. That being said, the book tells a quite extraordinary story of community action against odds that would frighten even the most determined. By turns passionate and angry, emotional and reflective, it draws the reader into the struggles of ordinary people against the determination of vested interests and the indifference of their fellow citizens. It is the story too of a young woman finding out who she is and what is important to her. Written with considerable skill, and featuring a powerful

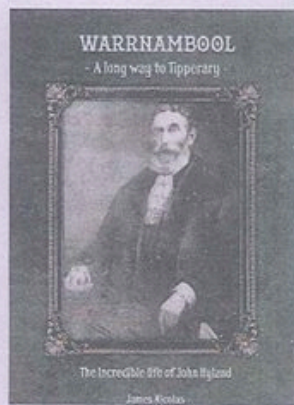


foreword by singer Shane Howard, it is an entirely gripping read.

THE second book here is set in the same area of Western Victoria and deals with the family of John Hyland, a man who came to Australia in the immediate aftermath of the Famine. After landing in Brisbane, he made his way to Warrnambool, where he prospered as a landowner and auctioneer and spent a number of years as mayor of the city.

That his life was in any way “incredible” is however, not borne out by this biography. For example, he seems to have been involved in many court cases, both as defendant and litigant. He was fined various amounts in these court cases, mainly for minor offences against public policies in the area of agriculture. The height of his success seems to have been his time as Mayor of Warrnambool.

Writing a book such as this requires a great deal of research and much time and effort. An author needs to have his/her work read by others before sending it to a publisher, particularly one



like Vivid who do not appear to use an editor. The result in this case is unsatisfactory. The work is spoiled by spelling errors, poor sentence structure, incorrect punctuation, quotation marks that are opened but not closed, missing apostrophes, erratic use of capital letters. “The Pub dates back to the 1700’s so no doubt Red Kelly Neds father would have enjoyed a Guinness or two here.”

Although these are errors that would be picked up by proofreading, the general tenor of the book is untidy. There are six short paragraphs near the middle of the book which deal in succession with a railway line, horseracing, Home Rule, a train station, auctioneering and finally Handel’s “Messiah”. At one stage, Hyland was addressed as a magistrate, though there is no mention of how or when he fulfilled that role. The tense changes to a form of the subjunctive for a big portion of the book, “Hyland would lose his beloved wife ...”, “The Australasian paper would do a story on ...”

The author deserves credit, but needed more help from his publisher.