

Marist history/histoire mariste

St. Patrick on Bougainville, Papua New Guinea¹

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One of the many virtues of the *virtù*-suffused writings of Patrick O'Farrell is their substantive treatment of the impalpable. In them such things as ideas, imaginings, dreams and myths are presented not only in a subsidiary way as causes or as residues of the events that stud his historical narratives. Rather, nebulous as they might be, such things are also dealt with as ascertainably empirical phenomena. This approach is most conspicuous in his study of conflicting ethno-cultural mentalities in *Ireland's English Question* (1971) and, of more relevance to the following tale, in Chapter 8, 'Dreams of Irelands' of his *Vanished Kingdoms* (1990).² In this latter, and poignantly personal, disquisition he deals with several manifestations of romantic and idealised, even utopian, imaginings that occurred within 'the Australasia-Ireland mental relationship'; and which were expressed less by homesick migrants from Ireland than by various of their descendents. In so doing he illustrates that the story of 'the diaspora' (a term – and a concept – which Tim Pat Coogan wryly notes has come in recent decades to replace the older usage of 'the migration')³ is more than just the story of people shifting out to find a better life elsewhere and of then striving to adjust to new circumstances. It is also that of some who, though a generation or more removed from Ireland, would cultivate and hold dear a fond, even nostalgic, consciousness of an ancestral homeland

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² *Ireland's English Question: Anglo-Irish relations, 1534-1970*, London, 1979; *Vanished Kingdoms: Irish in Australia and New Zealand, a personal excursion*, Sydney, 1990, p.199-239. For a wide-ranging exploration of ideas about Ireland's 'mythical' past, see Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: a literary and intellectual history*, Syracuse, N.Y., 2009.

³ Tim Pat Coogan, *Wherever the Green is Worn: the story of the Irish diaspora*, London, 2000, p. ix. The term appears to have been highlighted by being used in the title of a piece of academic writing first by Sheridan Gilley in an article in 1984, and then conspicuously by Donald Harman Akenson in *The Irish Diaspora: a primer*, Toronto, 1996. Lyndon Fraser, *Castles of Gold: a history of New Zealand's West Coast Irish*, Dunedin 2007, p.171, n.25, p.182, n.2, p.189, n.3.

(commonly a Catholic one); one that far transcended a simple awareness of a few, commonly generalised, facts of family history.

A case in point is provided by Br. Patrick Thomson sm, an Australian member of the Catholic religious congregation of the Society of Mary (Marists). While more muted than the resonant examples discussed by O'Farrell, he belongs in their company; but he stands out because his journey 'to Tara via Holyhead'⁴ took him well beyond his own native community to the ethnically and culturally foreign Melanesian island of Bougainville. That geo-physical entity is a Solomon Islands component of what was destined on 16 September 1975 to become the independent nation of Papua New Guinea). There, presiding over what was designated in *Tok Pisin*⁵ as *Sen Patrik's Egrikulsa Trening Skul*, located at Mabiri on the central-east coast of the island, from 1969 to 1984 Patrick Thomson was concerned to do more than merely to train young people in the arts of farming. His operation was distinctive in that as a feature of its religious dimension he also sought to instil in them a fervent appreciation of their sainted patron, and to impart to them his awareness of his own cherished, colonially refracted Irish heritage.

Patrick Thomson was born at Coroki, south of Lismore, in north-east New South Wales in 1921. Portentously, for he was himself to become a composer of folk poems and songs in the style of Henry Lawson and 'Banjo Patterson, among others (including my own grandfather⁶), that was also the year in which John O'Brien's enduringly admired volume of Irish/Australian verse, *Around the Boree Log*, was published. The eldest of four children, Patrick was of Irish (though with an acknowledged hint of Scottish) descent, but was more conscious of the former than the latter. In a 1994 letter to an Irish confrère, which he signed 'Padraig', and in which he compared the current tensions between PNG and Bougainville to those between England and Ireland, he noted that he had four Irish-born grandparents and that, therefore, 'I

⁴ This phrase from James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* (1916) serves as an apposite title for Lyndon Fraser's study of Irish Catholic immigrants in nineteenth-century Christchurch (Auckland, 1997).

⁵ The vernacular term for 'Pidgin English' in PNG; in Solomon Islands the equivalent is *Pijin* and in Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides) it is *Bislama*.

⁶ Hugh and Eugénie Laracy, 'Mick Laracy: shearer and unionist in Australia and New Zealand', *Labour History*, vol. 14 (1980) 40-58; *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (1996), vol. 3, p. 274-5.

am naturally steeped in Irish history and culture'.⁷ His parents, John and Jane Thomson (both Catholic) were dairy farmers. His mother was an O'Farrell from Dungarubba on the Richmond River. She died in 1925, when Patrick was only three and a half years old. He was thereupon placed in St. Joseph's Orphanage at Cowper, where he was raised by the Sisters of Mercy. There, in addition to other Ireland-derived influences, he was deeply impressed by readings from *The Far East*, the promotional magazine of St. Columba's Mission Society, recently founded at Maynooth Seminary for the evangelisation of China. On leaving school in 1934, in the days of the Great Depression, he became a rural labourer. Then, in 1940 he joined the Marist community at St. John's College, Woodlawn (near Lismore), where he was professed as a lay-brother in 1942. There his main work was milking cows. But following his taking of religious vows he was transferred to the seminary at Toongabbie, near Sydney, where he took charge of the stud cattle farm. He remained there for sixteen years. Then in 1957, during the post-World War II era of transformational economic and political development in the then Australian-administered Territory of Papua New Guinea, he was assigned at his own request to Bougainville.⁸ That island constituted the bulk of what at that time was ecclesiastically designated the Vicariate Apostolic of North Solomons, and was operationally included within the regionally extensive and internationally staffed Marist province of Oceania.⁹

Geographically, Bougainville was the northern-most of the main islands of the Solomons chain. But it had been politically severed from them in 1899, when an imperial conference in Berlin tied it to German New Guinea. Later, from 1914 - 1975, when PNG was born as a sovereign independent state, it was administered by Australia. Meanwhile, thanks to the Marists, who not only established the first

⁷ Thomson to Aidan Carvill, 9 April 1994, Thomson file, archives of Marist province of Oceania, Suva.

⁸ Patrick Thomson, autobiographical essay 'About the Perpetrator', in *Little Gems From The Pacific*, Taveuni, [c.2000], p.51-54.

⁹ Hugh Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians: a history of Catholic missions in the Solomon Islands*, Canberra/Honolulu, 1976, p.50.64. Established as a prefecture apostolic in 1898, the ecclesial jurisdiction of North Solomons/Bougainville was classed as a vicariate apostolic from 1930 until 15 November 1966 when, together with those of Honiara and Gizo, it was raised to the status of diocese, thereby marking the canonical transition from 'mission' to 'church'.

Christian missionary post on Bougainville in 1901, but were also the first Europeans to settle there, the island had become 80% Catholic.¹⁰

For his first five years there, at Tearouki, Br. Patrick worked at furniture-making, at managing coconut and cocoa plantations and at running a few cattle. Then, in 1962, he was transferred to the mission station at Mabiri (opened in 1958), and it was there in 1968 that he was asked by Bishop Leo Lemay, an American, to train local people as farmers. There was some precedent for this initiative. Such work had been pioneered since 1938 by the recently deceased Fr. Joseph Schlieker, a German, who is credited with having introduced the first cattle to Bougainville; while subsequently another Marist, Fr. 'Wally' Fingleton, brother of the celebrated Australian cricketer Jack Fingleton, had contributed to the cause by importing some Brahman cattle.¹¹ But such were isolated efforts.

Thus it was that a formal start was made on 11 February 1969 when *Sen Patrik's Egrikulsa Trening Skul* opened with eleven students. In preparation for this event Br. Patrick had prepared cyclostyled copies of his pidgin translation of three Australian text books for distribution to the students.¹² Styled the *Wokim Graun* series (Gen. 1:28 'till the soil'), they dealt with the husbandry of *ol Pik*, *ol Bulmakau* and *ol Kakaruk* (ie. pigs, cattle and poultry). They were the first agriculture text books in PNG to be written in *Tok Pisin*.¹³ The graduation ceremony for the first students, in 1971, set other precedents: it was held on St Patrick's Day, and in conjunction with the island's first agricultural field-day. The occasion was also significant in that it marked the birth of an alumni association, the *Bougainville Yang Famas Klap*, renamed in 1975 the *Not Solomons Kristen Famas Asociesen*. Under the auspices of the *Klap/Club* (the first of its kind in PNG) Patrick issued a bi-monthly news letter in pidgin, *The Bougainville Fama*, in order to continue the education of his protégés and to encourage them to become educators in their own villages. The second such occasion, this time for only six students, was in 1973. Thereafter the course was shortened, and

¹⁰ Hugh Laracy, "Imperium in Imperio?": the Catholic Church in Bougainville', in Anthony J. Regan and Helga M. Griffin (eds.), *Bougainville Before the Conflict*, Canberra, 2005, p.125-135.

¹¹ Thomson, 'About the Perpetrator'; Thomson to Reynolds, 1 March 1988, enclosing invitation to graduation, Archives of Australian Marist Province, Sydney.

¹² The English originals derived from Stott's Agricultural College, Melbourne.

¹³ They were re-printed in revised versions in 1986.

graduations were held annually. Graduates all received (when they had completed the requisite farm fencing at home) one bull and one heifer. During their course students were given female pigs, ducks and fowls (one each) to rear, and after Graduation these and their progeny were taken home to help start farms. Further to the work of the school: from 1971 there was a field day held annually in a different village; staff of the school offered extension classes at high schools at Tarlena and Asitavi; from 1975 women (the first such trainees in PNG) were admitted as '*ledi famas*'; and from 1977 satellite training schools were established in various villages.¹⁴ By 1984 there were six of the latter, and a total of '667 farmers had been trained in theory and practicals' through the agency of St. Patrick's.¹⁵ In 1984 its operations were examined by a specialist authority on rural education, Geoffrey Bamford from the International Labour Organisation, and were highly commended.¹⁶

For Patrick Thomson, though, his work in advancing the temporal well-being of Bougainvilleans was an expression of his religious vocation, and found its fullest meaning in an orientation to God. The tools with which he worked to communicate that meaning and his sentiments in so doing were redolent of conjoined Irishry and Catholicism. His report of the 1973 graduation illustrates this. The celebrations began with the Solemn High Mass of St. Patrick, and were followed by an agricultural show. The PNG national flag was carried into the show at the head of a procession led by a man riding a horse Hibernianly named Shauneen ('Little Sean'). That was the same steed which in 1966, with Patrick aboard, had become the first horse to cross the island, taking him south-westwards to Monoitu in the Siwai district for the ordination of Peter Kurongku (later archbishop of Port Moresby).¹⁷ 'The Japanese Army – an invading force – had twice tried

¹⁴ This information has been drawn from copies of *The Bougainville Fama* and from annual reports and graduation reports held in Br. Patrick's personal file in the archives of the Oceania Province of the Marists, Suva.

¹⁵ [Patrick Thomson], 'St. Patrick's Agricultural School, Mabiri, Bougainville [1967-1884]', TS, [1985], Thomson file, Marist archives, Sydney.

¹⁶ G.N. Bamford, *Training the Majority: guidelines for the rural Pacific*, Suva, 1986, p.36-39, 'St. Patrick's Agricultural School (Papua New Guinea)'.

¹⁷ Ordained a priest on 21 December 1966, Kurongku (later Sir) was consecrated auxiliary bishop of Honiara (Solomon Islands) on 15 March 1979, and appointed Archbishop of Port Moresby on 27 October 1981. *Catholic News*, Bougainville, October 1966; *Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Papua and New Guinea and Solomon Islands, 1993-1994*, s.l., s.d. p.143.

to cross the mountains on horseback and had twice been defeated'. But back to 1973:¹⁸

"It was fine and beautiful day (it wouldn't dare rain on St Patrick's Day!). Actually it poured rain for weeks to midday on the 16th, turned on a glorious day for the 17th and resumed full force on the 18th – a triumph of prayer to Our Blessed Mother, Who, one feels, must have Irish Blood!"

Other letters on other occasions contain cognate comments. Thus, in preparation for the 1979 graduation celebrations he gave lessons in Irish dancing; and in 1988, in a '*Sen Patriks De Griting*' to a confrère in Australia, he remarked fondly on scenery in Bougainville, 'green everywhere – Heaven's favourite colour'.¹⁹

The most abundant and accessible sources of Patrick's message are, though, *The Bougainville Fama*, wherein he published, with commentaries on the same, many of his verses commemorating incidents ('often hilarious') of local and school interest. A collection of them, 'designed to help us to be happy, as Our Father in Heaven wants', was issued about 1982 in a cyclostyled volume titled *Sing Sing Blong ol Fama: Songs of the Farmers*. They tend to be occasional poems in the most literal sense, and are commonly in Irish packaging. Here are some examples:²⁰

a. '*Brisi, Angela*', to the tune of *The Wearing of the Green* (Dion Boucicault, 1864), composed for the graduation in 1977 of Brigid Norma, the first woman graduate;

b. '*Nau Yumi Ken Hamamas*' ('Now We Can Be Happy'), the graduation song for the extension course graduates of St Mary's High School, Asitavi, sung to the tune of 'God Save Ireland', reportedly his personal favourite;²¹

c. '*Redio Not Solomons*' (in praise of Radio North Solomons, which in 1979 broadcast a pidgin play, 'Krismas Drama', that he had written), also to *The Wearing of the Green*;

¹⁸ [Thomson], 'Horse over Bougainville Mountains', TS, Thomson file, Marist archives, Sydney; [Thomson], 'St. Patrick's Agricultural School, Mabiri, Graduations, 1973', TS, Marist archives, Suva; 'Yumi Go Raunim Katal', a song honouring by name 47 Mabiri farm cows and Shauneen, in [Thomson], 'Sing Sing Blong Ol Fama / Songs of the Farmers', TS, p.5, copy in my possession.

¹⁹ Thomson to Reynolds, 28 January 1979, 21 February 1988, Thomson file, Marist archives, Sydney.

²⁰ a. p.12; b. p.13; c. p.15; d. p.22; 'Krismas Drama', p. 27-37.

²¹ Fr. Jim Harding, 'Homily for Br Patrick Thomson sm', 10 September 2007, *ibid.*

d. *'Harim: Maski Yu Kamap Lapun Baimbai'* (1976), in which a young man pledges enduring fidelity and affection to his beloved, sung to Thomas Moore's ballad *Believe Me If all Those Endearing Young Charms* (1808), of which its title is a literal translation.

Then there were compositions explicitly honouring St. Patrick. The most popular of these was a variation on the hymn 'Hail Glorious Saint Patrick' (Sr. Agnes, 1920). Br. Patrick's version, with the same title, was first published in English, but with a pidgin commentary, in *The Bougainville Fama* of February 1973:

Hail Glorious Saint Patrick in Heaven above
 Look down from Thy bright throne upon us with love
 And grant us Thy Blessings where ever we roam
 Protect us and guide us to Heaven our Home.
 Protect us and guide us. Protect us and guide us,
 Protect us and guide us to Heaven our Home.

Hail Glorious Saint Patrick, Thine aid we implore
 In the fight for the Faith and the heavenly shore
 Help us, in our hearts to have Jesus enshrined
 With Mary, our Mother, with Mary, His Mother,
 With Mary, our Mother, the Queen of Mankind.

Ever bless and defend these dear Isles of our birth
 And the Missions this day as when Thou wert on earth
 Lead all to the Heart of our Mother on high –
 To Jesus through Mary – our loved battle cry!
 To Jesus through Mary, to Jesus through Mary,
 To Jesus through Mary – our loved battle cry!

Those words were followed by an historical explanatory note in *Tok Pisin*:

Antap hia yumi lukim sing sing bilong onarim Sant i Lukaut Skul na bilong Bougainville Yang Famas Klap – Sen Patrik. Sen Patrik i bin nambawan Fama. Longtaim tumas, i bin stap kalabus long wanpela fam bilong wanpela man bilong Ireland. Bihain, i ronewe lusim kalabus na go painim Brata bilong Mama, Sen Martin bilong Tours long Kantri France. Hia em i skul na bihain i go long Roma, kamap Bisop na nau Pop i salim i gobak long Ireland bilong bringim gud nius bilong Jesus long ol man na Meri bilong Ireland. Sen Patril i winim ol na Ireland i kamap Katolik.

1700 yias lus pinis, tasol oltaim Ireland I stap Katolik, maski kalabus na paia na soldia bilong ol birua bilong Ecclesia.

Plenti milyon Irishman na Meri i dai pinis long dispela wanpela samting – ino laik lusim Lotu bilong Jesus. Long ol dispela 1700 yias, plenty milyon misinari i lusim Ireland na go kamap long olgeta Kantri bilong bringim i kam Jesus na Lotu bilong Jesus, long taim bilong tudak. Sampela i kam tu long hap bilong yumi.

Sen Patrik i man bilong taim nogud. Wanpela bikpela Kantri tru, oli kolim Roman Empire, i bin bosim olgeta kantri inap wan tausen yias, i bakarap pinis long taim bilong Sen Patrik. Na ol man bilong dispela taim, i poret tru – tudak i laik painim ol. Plenti wait man i wail man tru i ronebaut long Yurop olsem wail dok – taim nugud tru. Tasol, Sen Patrik ino wari. Em i tok: God Papa Lukaut i stap. Yumi stap klostu long God. Stap esi, pre na mekim penans.

Sapos yumi lukluk nabaut, yumi painimaut dispela taim tu, i taim nogud tu. Long plenti Kantri satan i wok strong tumas. Plenti man nogud i go nabaut olsem wail dok tru bilong kaikai na bakarapim ol gudpela pasin bilong pikininis bilong God. Oli tok: plenty tumas manmeri i stap long graun – kaikai ino inap - plenty i dai long hangri. Bikos graun ino inap long givim kaikai long ol. Giaman bilong satan tasol. Lukim, tupela Kantri tasol, Not Amerika na Brazil, tupela inap planim kaikai inap long olgeta namneri long graun na plento tumas kaikai i ken ova, inap long sikis hundred milyon moa. Olgeta arapela Kantri inap mekim arapela wok no plenty kaikai i stap. Sapos oli laik. Tasol.

In translation that reads:²²

Above we see a song in honour of the patron of the Bougainville Young Farmers Club - Saint Patrick. Saint Patrick was good farmer. For a long time he lived in a hut on a farm belonging to a man in Ireland. Later he ran away from the hut to find his mother's brother, Saint Martin of Tours in a country called France. Here he studied and later went to Rome, where he became a bishop, and the Pope asked him to go back to Ireland to bring the good news of Jesus to all the people there. Saint Patrick won them over, and Ireland became Catholic. For 1700 years it has been that way; Ireland has stayed Catholic, despite prison, fire and soldiers of the enemies of the Church.

Many [*Plenti milyon!*] Irish men and women died in these attacks – they did not want to lose the Church of Jesus. During this 1700 years many [*plenty milyon!*] missionaries left Ireland to bring Jesus and the Church of

²² My translation. HL.

Jesus to other countries that were still in the time of darkness. The same thing has happened here.

Saint Patrick lived in bad times. There was a big country called the Roman Empire that had ruled the neighbouring countries for a thousand years, but which broke up in Saint Patrick's time. Now the people of this time were looking for truth. Many white men went around Europe preaching truth, with others spreading error. Saint Patrick was not worried. He said this: 'God our Father will always look after us. Let us stay close to God, rest easy there, pray and do penance'.

Suppose we look about now, we find much that is not good about our times. In many countries Satan is strongly at work. Many unhappy people do not engage in food growing and so wreck to good life style of the children of God. There is talk that there are many people in the villages but that there is not enough food and that many are dying of hunger. That is the talk of Satan. Consider just two countries, North America and Brazil: they plant enough food to feed everyone in their own place and have much left over, enough for six hundred million more. Many other countries also try other ways of working and there is always enough food. Let us do the same.

In the song book the commentary is somewhat revised and corrected, and is in English:²³

The Festival of St. Patrick's Day on the 17th March is the most universally celebrated Festivals of all the national Patrons and is traditionally Graduation day for the Mabiri Kristen Famas. St. Patrick, born perhaps in France, was sent to Ireland by Pope Celestine in the year 432 – [that is] 1549 years ago. Finding Ireland pagan he left it Christian, starting in motion the long line of Irish Missionaries which has never ceased. In Europe's dark ages, Irish monks founded schools for Religion, Agriculture etc. convincing wandering tribes to put their roots in the soil. Numerous Missionaries, Irish and of Irish descent can be found in the Islands of the Pacific, part of the mighty force set in motion, under God, by St. Patrick. Mabiri's Farmer Training School rejoices to share in this great inheritance.²⁴ [He might pertinently have noted here that a number of Irish Marists also served on Bougainville (James McConville, Edmund Duffy,

²³ For Marist links with the Emerald Isle, see Hugh Laracy, 'Les pères maristes and New Zealand', *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 105 (1997) 187-198; Philip Graystone, *A Short History of the Society of Mary, 1854 to 1993*, Rome, 1998, p.11-12.

²⁴ *Sing Sing Bilong ol Fama*, p.25.

and Roger McCarrick) and an Irish layman (Sean Morahan), but they were not conspicuous for comparable displays of ‘Irishry’.]

The *Tok Pisin* version of the song, in the same book, is as follows:

*Mumira Sen Patrik long Heven Antap
Luk daun long mipela, ol pipol I stap
Long ples bilong nait na long taim bilong traiim;
Sambai long mipela na helpim ol taim.
Sambai long mipela, sambai long mipela,
Sambai long mipela na helpim ol taim.*

*Jisas em I Rot, Trut, na Laip blong yumi.
Bilong winim Heven, Jisas em I Ki.
Yu stiaim mipela, givim yumi long han
Blong Mama blong Jisas – I Kwin blong ol Man.
Em mama blong yumi; Mumiana Not Solomons;
Virgo-Mama blong Deo na Kwin blong ol man.*

The note for this version is briefer and is in English. It again acknowledges St. Patrick as the Patron of the Kristen Farmers School, affirms his feast day as its ‘traditional Graduation Day’, and states the objective of the institution: ‘The aim is Rural Development via self reliance. The School teaches that knowledge with hard work and Christian living is the key to happiness, both in this world and the next’.²⁵

The religious message is also explicit in Br. Patrick’s song of celebration, ‘*Sen Patrik’s De*’, to be sung to the tune of ‘Michael Row the Boat Ashore/*Maikol, Pulim Bot igo sua*’, and which is reminiscent in sentiment of John O’Brien’s eponymous equivalent, ‘St Patrick’s Day’, from *Around the Boree Log*. O’Brien writes:²⁶

‘Tis the greatest splash of sunshine right through all my recollection
.... Bringing hopes and idle longings that could only find expression
In the riots of our bounding hearts upon St. Patrick’s Day’.

²⁵ Ibid, p.2. In the Telei language of south Bougainville *mumira* means ‘chief’.

²⁶ As with some of Thomson’s writings drawing similarities between Bougainville and Ireland, O’Brien’s poem also has a political edge. Of the people who gathered at ‘Casey’s place’ for celebratory sports after Mass he observed that:

‘They are marching on for Ireland, with the beauteous vision gleaming
Of the altar-fires of Freedom in the land they left behind’.

Thomson's subtitle is 'If Christmas Comes Can St Patrick's Day Be Far Behind'? The words of his poem run:²⁷

Nau, tete, Sen Patrik's De, Aleluia! Now, Today Saint Patrick's Day,
Alleluia!

Bung wantaim na yumi pre, Aleluia Come, let's gather, let us pray,
Alleluia

Papa, Son na Spiritu, Aleluia! Papa, Son and Spiritu, Alleluia!
Mipela I kam long Yu, Aleluia! We are coming now to You, Alleluia!

Tengkiu wantaim hamamas, Aleluia! Thank you with great happiness,
Alleluia!

Sen Patrik I bin go pas, Aleluia! You sent St. Patrick teaching us,
Alleluia!

Fifin handet sixti yias, Aleluia! Back fifteen hundred sixty years, Alleluia!
Maski pen na plenty tias, Aleluia! In spite of pain and many tears,
Alleluia!

Yumi harim yet ol tok, Aleluia! We listen to His loved voice yet, Alleluia!
Yumi mekim yet ol wok, Aleluia! Do the work that he has set, Alleluia!

Sen Patrik tok: 'Yu harim Pop', Aleluia! St Patrick taught: 'You hear the
Pope', Alleluia!

Strong Bilip na Laik na Hop, Aleluia! Strong in Faith and Love and Hope,
Alleluia!

Mekin gut, Man Merit tu, Aleluia! Do the same to others too, Alleluia!
Olsem yu laik ol bekim tru, Aleluia! You would have them do to you,
Alleluia!

Misa olgeta Sande, Aleluia! Offer Mass every Sunday, Alleluia!
Moningtaim na nait, yu pre, Aleluia! Morning time and night, you pray,
Alleluia !

Tingim: Mary, mama tru, Aleluia! Think of Mary Mother true, Alleluia!
Bilong Jisas, bilong yu, Aleluia! Bilong Jesus, bilong you, Alleluia!

Save, Hatwok, Kristen pasin, Aleluia! Savvy, Hard Work, Christian
Living, Alleluia!

²⁷ Ibid, p.42.

Ki blong laip, blong hamamasim, Aleluia! Happy key belong you,
Alleluia!

Smail blong God bai istap wantaim, Aleluia! The Smile of God stay with
you ever, Alleluia!

Laitim rot bilong oltaim, Aleluia! Light your way to heaven forever,
Alleluia!

However, despite Br. Patrick's fervour and the patronage of the Saint, even as he was writing there were ominous warnings of impending disaster: a *taim nogut* ('bad time') was about to overwhelm Bougainville, and Mabiri and its extended operations would not be spared. Since 1899 Bougainville, as a segment of the Solomons, had been an anomalous component of the political unit of what would emerge in 1975 as the independent nation of Papua New Guinea. Indeed, the strong sense of particularity there prompted the central government to allow it a considerable degree of local autonomy. But limited power-sharing would soon prove to be more palliative than ameliorative. Bougainvillean sensitivity about identity was acutely sharpened by grievances stemming from the depredations of copper mining at Panguna in the centre of the island— at what from 1972, following extensive preliminary operations, became the biggest open-cast mine in the world. Moreover these sentiments merged with a strong politically separatist urge that had been growing since the 1960s. This latter intensified as the decolonisation of PNG gathered pace, and carried on.²⁸ Local opposition to a matter of national interest found a violent expression in November 1988 with attacks on the mine and demands that it be closed. The national government responded by sending in police riot squads, followed by soldiers. But these forces met staunch resistance in the form of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army. In March 1990 a ceasefire was negotiated. The government then withdrew its police and military forces from the island, but two months later Francis Ona, the leader of the BRA, issued a unilateral declaration of independence for the Republic of Bougainville. Incidentally, Francis was also a relative of Raphael Ona of the mountain village of Supuru, who was one of the first graduates of the Mabiri School and who, in accordance with Br. Patrick's localising policy, had become the first indigenous principal of it in 1976.²⁹ The national government, though,

²⁸ Regan and Griffin (eds.), *Bougainville Before the Conflict*, *passim*.

²⁹ *Marist Messenger*, 1972; *North Solomons Fama*, vol. 8, Krismas, 1978.

was less disposed to oblige provincial sensibilities, and replied to the 1990 declaration by imposing an air and sea blockade on Bougainville. An ordeal of unprecedented suffering disorder was then inflicted on people throughout the island.³⁰ To cut a long and convoluted story short, after a series of abortive peace agreements and a resumption of conflict in early 1996, two meetings in New Zealand in July 1997 and in January 1998 paved the way for an enduring truce and (echoes of 'Home Rule'!) the conceding of a considerable degree of local self-determination to Bougainville. One commentator, though, who visited Bougainville in April 1998, was led to ruminate on the film *Michael Collins* (1996); and he perceived in the continuing tension between intransigents and negotiators ominous resemblances between the affairs of that island and those of the new-born Irish Free State of 1922.³¹ Nevertheless on 26 January 2001 the national government and the (by then emergent) less militant leadership of the BRA agreed in principle that Bougainville should hold a referendum on its political future within 10-15 years of its eventually being granted political autonomy.³² Meanwhile, to the satisfaction of later enquirers – if scarcely to the consolation of victims such as Fr. Wilhelm Tangen of Deomori who was beaten up by PNG troops early in December 1989 - Br. Patrick had observed and reported on various matters pertaining to the early stages of what became the worst conflict in the Pacific since World War II.³³

As James Griffin has shown that set of events had deep roots.³⁴ In 1974, in a decentralising concession to local feeling, a Bougainville

³⁰ Hugh Laracy, 'Bougainville Secessionism', *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 92-93: 1&2 (1991) 53-59, and 'Bougainville: a land in agony, but who cares', *New Zealand Herald*, 22 November 1991; Douglas Oliver, *Black Islanders: a personal perspective of Bougainville, 1937-1991*, Melbourne, 1991, 201-262. Responding to a flow of refugees from Bougainville, one of Br. Patrick's confreres, Fr. Norman Arkwright, an Englishman, was led to set up a reception centre for them at Tanagai, near Honiara on Guadalcanal.

³¹ Lloyd Jones, 'Bougainville: the movie', *Metro*, June 1998, p.64-70.

³² Anthony J. Regan, 'Causes and Course of the Bougainville Conflict', in *Journal of Pacific History* 33:3 (1998) 269-285; Bill Standish, 'Papua New Guinea in 1999-2000', in *JPH* 36:3 (2001) 285-298; Stefan Knollmayer, 'A Share House Magnified', in *JPH* 39:2 (2004) 221-230.

³³ As attested by documents in Marist archives in Sydney and Suva. For example: Thomson to Reynolds, 12 December 1989, and 25 September 1990 (enclosing his 'General Situation on Bougainville').

³⁴ James Griffin, 'Movements Towards Secession, 1964-76', in Regan and Griffin (eds.), *Bougainville before the Conflict*, p.291-299.

Interim Provincial Government had been officially set up, but discontent endured. Like *Oliver Twist*, most Bougainvilleans wanted 'more'. In May 1975 the BIPG assembly voted assertively to adopt the name of 'North Solomons', and on 1 September – two weeks before PNG achieved nationhood – it issued a declaration of independence for its territory and raised the flag of North Solomons. Further discussions followed, and these led to official acceptance of a semi-autonomous Province of Bougainville; then, in December the Constitution was amended to allow for a provincial government system to be introduced throughout the country. On Bougainville the Catholic bishop, Gregory Singkai, became the Minister of Education in the Provincial government. And, as the song-book attests, on 26 November 1976 the 'Farmers of Saint Patrick's School' and the 'North Solomons Kristen Famas Asosiesen', with Br. Patrick's assistance, presented the premier Dr Alexis Sarei (a former priest) with 'A North Solomons National Anthem' titled 'God Bless Our Lovely Homeland':

She wears beneath Her Purple Sheen
 Her mantle of Green,
 Today we pledge our Love and Life
 We'll stand by You in every strife
 Our Own Dear Home, Our Motherland
 NORTH SOLOMONS, NORTH SOLOMONS, NORTH SOLOMONS.

Versions of the anthem, the authorship of which Br. Patrick attributes to Anthony Nereai of Paru village, were also published in *Tok Pisin* ('*Ailan Hom, Not Solomons*') and in the local Nasioi language ('*Deo Biranke Aung Kansii*').³⁵ The events that would erupt in the late '80s, though, suggest that St. Patrick (and indeed God himself?) had become careless of his responsibility for Bougainville.

In 1985 Patrick Thomson transferred from Mabiri (where he had maintained an advisory position) to Tubiana near the 'capital' of Kieta, from where he exercised a supervisory role over the school's extension work. Then, in 1990 he was afflicted with epilepsy, and needed medical help. Accordingly in August 1990, in the midst of the blockade, resorting to the expedient described in Lloyd Jones' award winning novel *Mister Pip* (2006), set in 1993, he made a night-time dash from

³⁵ *Sing Sing Blong ol Fama*, p. 7.10.37.

Koromira southwards to the neighbouring state of Solomon Islands (politically independent since 1978), en route to Australia.³⁶

Bougainville [he wrote] was suffering under a merciless blockade; nothing allowed in, even medicines for the sick and dying; all ships and planes banned. Two navy boats, the gift of Australia to PNG ‘for peaceful purposes!’ were circling the island and likely to shoot anything on sight. To get treatment I had to leave the island in an open boat, under cover of darkness, heading for South Solomons, a three hour trip under a full moon, and hoping the navy boats were on the west coast. Leaving at *tudak* [late at night], we had gone only short distance when a strong wind and rough seas forced us back to base. Later in the wee hours, the wind dropped and we took the risk, feeling like sitting ducks as we crossed into friendly waters in the early morning light.³⁷

He expected to return to Bougainville in due course but conditions there continued to deteriorate (as described above), and in 1991 he was transferred to the Marist post at Tutu on Taveuni in Fiji. There, in addition to making rosaries, statues and candles, he produced another book (this time, 2002, an elegantly computer-generated one) of new poems, *Little Gems from the Pacific*. These were mostly religious reflections, but some of the Bougainville verses are included. In 2004, with his health again failing badly, he shifted to Sydney for two years. Then, in 2007 he went back to Taveuni where he died on 4 September.³⁸ Meanwhile, St. Patrick’s at Mabiri had been destroyed during the fighting of the 1990s and the work of the Famas Asosiesen was crippled. As for Bougainville’s political future: on 15 June 2005 the promised autonomous government was sworn in, thereby setting the clock ticking for when Bougainvilleans would vote to decide the matter for themselves.³⁹ When they do Br. Patrick Thomson sm will surely be praying for them, and for a bounteous revival of *olgeta wok blong famas* throughout their island of green. *Em tasol* (‘that’s all’).

³⁶ In 2007 *Mister Pip* was awarded the Commonwealth Writers Prize and the Montana Medal, and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. In the event the latter award was won by the Irish novelist Anne Enright for *The Gathering* (2007).

³⁷ ‘About the Perpetrator’. Included in *Little Gems*, and also re-issued as a leaflet following his death. Refugees commonly headed for Nila in the Shortland islands, immediately across the border with the Solomons, and then proceeded to Guadalcanal. For the heroine Matilda’s escape in *Mister Pip*, see p.187-191.

³⁸ *Oceania Newsletter*, 2, 5 (2007), re. the Marist province of Oceania.

³⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 16 June 2005.