



Sr. Katherine Mulquin

Katherine Mulquin, (1842?-1930), educationist, was born at Adare, Co. Limerick, daughter of John Mulquin, landowner, and his wife Catherine, nee Sheehy. Her family was well known and comfortably situated. Educated at the Faithful Companions of Jesus Convent, Laurel Hill, Limerick, she joined the Congregation of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and was professed in 1863, taking the religious name Mary Paul.

On 22 October 1873, as Superior of a projected foundation in Melbourne, she left Limerick in response to a plea for teaching assistance from Fr. J. F. Corbett, parish priest of St Mary's Catholic Church, St. Kilda. She and six other Sisters arrived in the *Great Britain* on 21 December to make the first Presentation foundation in Victoria. To give them temporary accommodation the priests vacated St Mary's presbytery. Within a month the Sisters took over the girls' section of the parochial school. On the presbytery verandah they also conducted a fee-paying 'select school'. This adaptation of the original aim of the Presentation Order to educate the poor was necessary in Australia to answer the need for secondary classes; moreover fee-paying students at both primary and secondary levels helped towards general expenses. A short time later, when they had purchased a house in Dandenong Road, Windsor, opposite the presbytery, the nucleus of Presentation Convent and College, the Sisters enrolled isolated students as boarders.

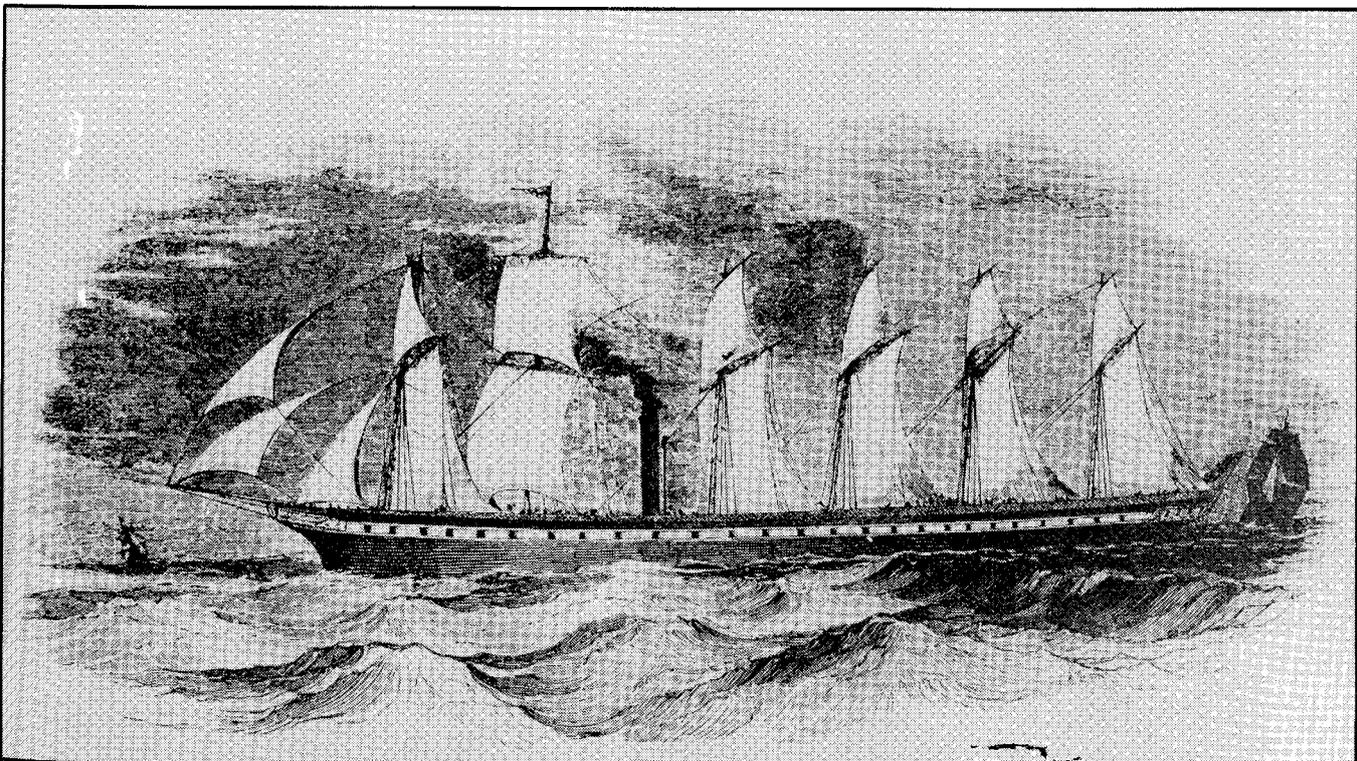


Mother Paul Mulquin, pictured at Windsor in 1875.

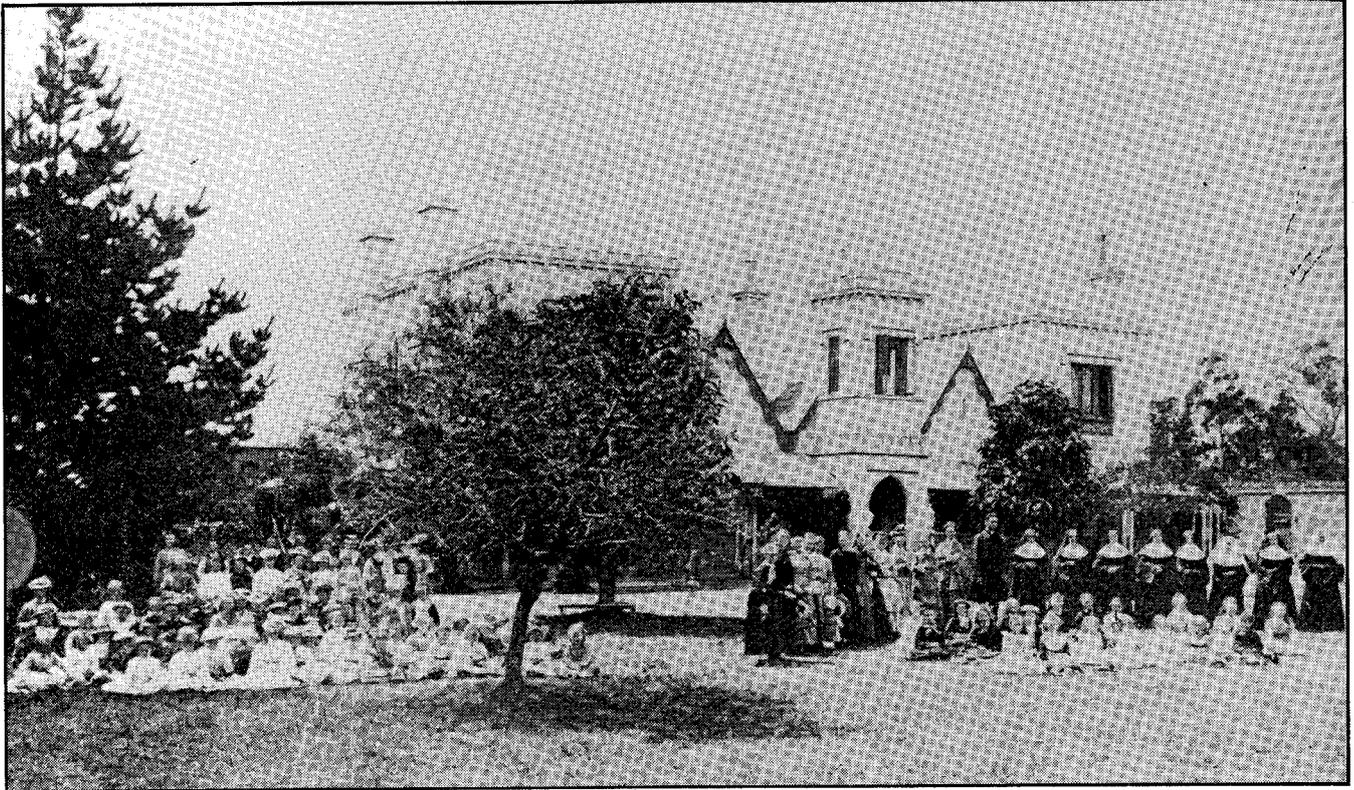
Mother Paul was an assiduous correspondent and many of her letters to and from her family and friends in Ireland are extant. These and the detailed diary she kept on the voyage out demonstrate perception, humour, strength of character and strong

spirituality, qualities which enabled her to deal capably with the vicissitudes of life in the colony. She spoke French and Italian fluently, was very fond of music and gently insisted on the social graces: 'the noiseless opening and closing of doors, the proper way to fold a letter, the courteous inclination of pupils when passing their teachers, the keeping of appointments or a timely excuse for failure, the immediate expression of gratitude for favours'. Her teaching was integrated and timetables foreign to her. However, when the University of Melbourne opened to women in 1881, stimulating the academic element in the education of girls, examinations began to take precedence over accomplishments. Although Mother Paul had reservations about this new trend, she appreciated the value of examinations as a key to a girl's independence. Here, too, was an application of the Presentation principle that girls be trained to earn their own living.

By the mid-1880s Windsor was sending candidates for the matriculation examination, and the school soon achieved a considerable reputation for combining personal spiritual development with genuine intellectual enquiry. Several country and city convents and many parish primary schools were founded on Windsor personnel and resources.



The *Great Britain* steamship on which Mother Paul Mulquin travelled to Australia in 1873.



The Windsor Community in 1875.

In 1890 Mother Paul retired as Superior. However, she was again Superior in 1891-94 after her successor's death, and also from 1899 until succeeded by Mother Ita Cagney in 1906. The amalgamation of the various Victorian Presentation convents in 1908 met with her approval. Mother Paul became a semi-invalid

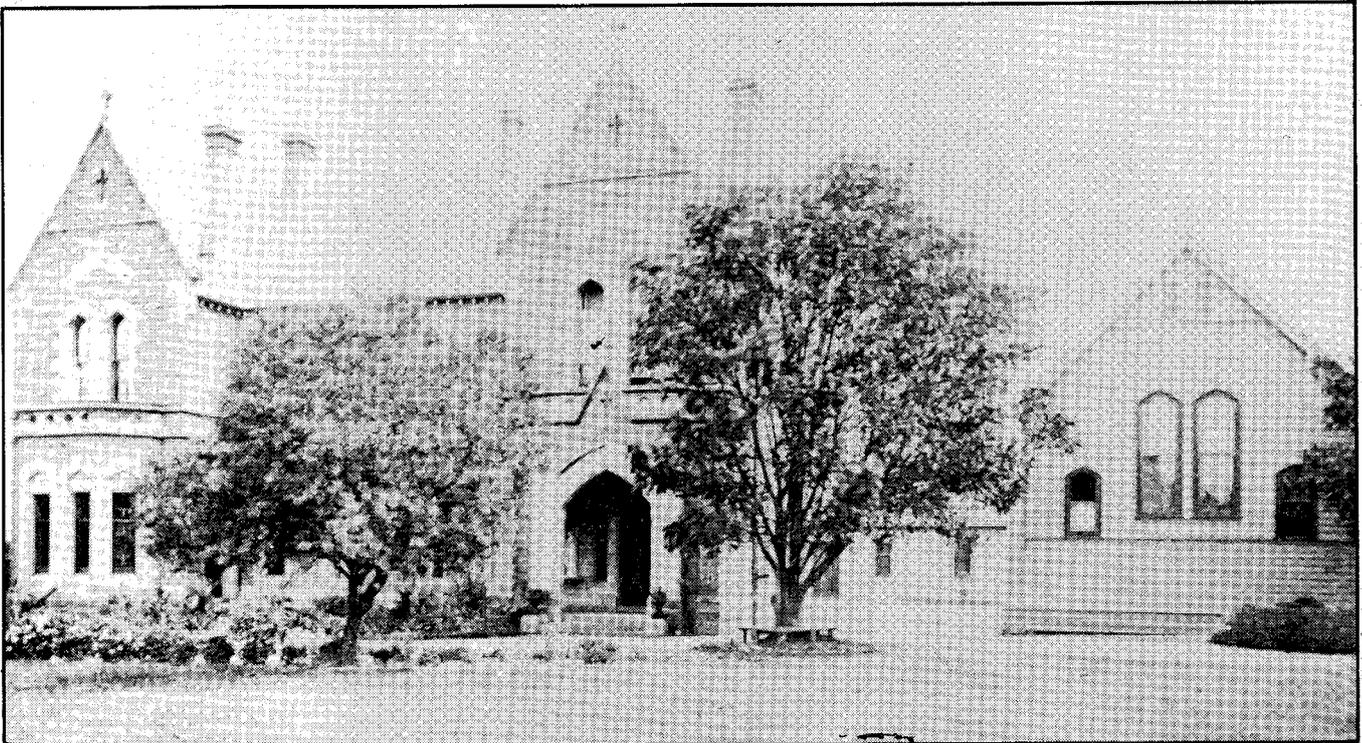
in her last years but always retained her keen alertness. She died at Windsor Convent on 10 February, 1930.

Sources

K.D. Kane, *Adventure in Faith* (Melb, 1974); *Aust. Women's Weekly*, 28 Nov., 1973; *Advocate* (Melb), 27 Dec., 1873, 3, 10, 17, 31 Jan., 1874, 13, 20

Feb., 1930, M. Kavanagh, 'The educational work of the Presentation Sisters in Victoria 1873-1960' (M.Ed. thesis, Univ. Melb, 1965); Presentation convents' archives (Limerick, Ireland, and Windsor, Melb).

Katherine Dunlop Kane
(Reprinted from the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*)



The Presentation Convent, Windsor, at the turn of the century.