

# **SALVADO'S ARCHIVES: A UNIQUE LEGACY**

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I am here today to talk about the legacy that Bishop Salvado left us – an exceedingly rich legacy which is possibly without parallel amongst private archives in Australia. However, this extraordinary legacy is not without its problems, and that is why I want to add a further subtitle – “unlocking the possibilities” – to my talk, but more of that later.

Firstly I would like to talk briefly about New Norcia, its establishment and its archives and then to explore what Salvado’s legacy is.

I imagine that most people here today are not familiar with New Norcia so I hope you will excuse me while I take a few minutes to set the scene.

The monastery was founded in 1846 by a group of Spanish Benedictine monks under the leadership of Bishops Rosendo Salvado and José Serra; their purpose was to set up a mission to civilise and convert the Aboriginal population of the Moore River to Christianity. The location they chose for the mission lies on a bend in the Moore River 140 kilometres north-east of Perth, the capital city of the state of Western Australia. Perth in 1846, though, was at the ends of the earth, on the very edge of civilisation, so you can imagine that another 140 kilometres further away, there was nothing: just endless vistas of woods and forests, undulating hills, scarce water resources, heat, flies, kangaroos, snakes and other dangerous wildlife.

For the next 50 years, under Bishop Salvado, the monks established and expanded their mission, set up a farm, educated the local indigenous population in farming practices amongst other things, and built a school for their children. Under the second abbot, Torres – who was an architect as well – expansion took place and a further school for the Aboriginal children was built, together with two very grand schools, St Gertrude’s for fee-paying white girls in 1908, and St Ildephonsus – a similar institution for boys in 1913. Soon after, in 1927, the other grand building at New Norcia, the hotel, or hostel as it was then, was built to accommodate visiting parents.

That second phase of New Norcia – education – came to a close in the early 1990s and the monastery entered its third phase under the previous and sixth abbot, the late Placid Spearritt.

The monastery now exists to accommodate the nine remaining monks (from a peak of around 80 in 1900) who continue to practise the Rule of St Benedict. New Norcia is the only monastic town in Australia and it is also heritage listed so, somewhat naturally, missionary work and education have given way to tourism, which now plays the primary role, with some 70,000 people visiting the town each year.

Let us now turn our attention to the archives: the abbots were learned men; they were also prolific writers and photographers. As a result, we are blessed with a vast body of correspondence and numerous diaries written during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Bishop Salvado was held in such high regard that, after his death in 1900, his papers seem to have been dispersed under the beds of the monks for safe keeping for it was not until the 1950s and 1960s that a concerted effort was made by Fr Eugene Perez, a scholar monk, to pull together the huge quantity of material that had accumulated over the previous 100 years.

In the 1970s and 1980s, an arrangement with Perth's heritage library, the Battye, led to the micro-filming of the bulk of these historical documents. I should point out at this stage that the New Norcia archives are a private archives and therefore do not receive any automatic state funding.

The late Fr Placid arrived in 1983 and, under his direction, the archives became an entity managed by the monastery's first official archivist, Tony James. Fr Placid himself was a founding member of the Catholic Archives Group in England when he was at Ampleforth Monastery in Yorkshire; he, like Tony James, was a qualified librarian.

In 1984, a Lotteries Commission grant funded the establishment of a suite of rooms to house the archives. A second grant in 1986 made possible the indexing of the vast photograph collection. This huge task was undertaken at the Battye Library and was completed over the next two years by Wendy McKinley. At the end of 1988, Tony James moved on and Wendy took over as the logical successor.

With Wendy as the new archivist, the archives expanded into five rooms; Compactus shelving was introduced and proper archival practice commenced. Computers arrived and soon the bulk of the collection was on a database. Wendy retired at the end of 2007 keen to see the archives move to the next phase – digitisation – which I inherited.

So what do these archives hold? During the six and a half years that I have been archivist at New Norcia, it has become more and more obvious that we, in effect, have two separate and distinct archives. One of them comprises everything from Salvado's death to the present day but by far the most interesting and important are the documents from Salvado's era; they are completely different from the documents from the reigns of successive abbots. They are still documents, still diaries and correspondence, so what is it about Salvado's collection that makes them so different, so unique? This is a question that I have asked myself many times and the answer that keeps coming back to me more than anything else (and more often) is "completeness".

As I will outline in the next few minutes, everything to do with the running of a monastery in the second half of the nineteenth century is here: the maps, the diaries, the letters, the registers, the employment records, the financial ledgers. Some, but not all, are evident to varying degrees in the records of the later abbots. It is almost as though Bishop Salvado had just left the room – a monastic *Marie Celeste*, or ghost ship, if you will.

In contrast, the records from later abbots are much more bureaucratic; in 1905, the government introduced an act called the Native Welfare Act which essentially removed indigenous children from their families and placed them in institutions so that they could be cared for and educated. Prior to 1905, children had been placed at New Norcia voluntarily by their parents, many of whom worked at the mission anyway. After 1905, this was not the case and New Norcia effectively became an unwilling agent of the government. This seems to have brought about a significant change in what we might call the "tone" of the records, which increasingly become less compassionate but more bureaucratic.

Looking back then at Salvado's records, we see a society that intermingled with the Aborigines and treated them like family, in stark contrast to what followed, particularly from 1905 onwards. I mentioned earlier that Bishop

Torres, who followed Salvado, was an architect – it was he who also built the walls to keep the indigenous community and the monastic community separated. Little wonder then that the tone of the records changes as, clearly, the attitudes had changed.

So, if we concentrate only on the Salvado era, we have a collection of documents and photographs spanning 54 years, from the time the monastery was established in 1847 to Salvado's death in Rome in December 1900. What does it include and why is it so important?

Importance of course is relative in this collection – for one reason or another, every piece of paper is important because it is a witness to, or a record of, the great themes in Australian history. Australia was claimed by the British in 1788, the Swan River Colony (now the state of Western Australia) was founded 43 years later, in 1829, and the monastery only 18 years later than that, in 1847, so it can be seen that New Norcia was in existence almost from the start of the Swan River Colony and not really that long after Australia was claimed by Captain Cook.

As a result, these great themes of Western Australian, and very often Australian, history are to be found in the registers, diaries, letters and records of Bishop Salvado – themes that cover agriculture, immigration, settlement, education, religion and interaction between settlers and indigenous peoples. And, uniquely, importantly, this story is told from a European point of view, not from the traditional Anglo-Irish.

Amongst the Registers are those which cover births, confirmations, marriages, deaths, and burials for New Norcia and its surrounding parishes, of which the baptism, marriage and burial registers have so far been digitised. Some of these have been microfilmed by the Church of the Latter Day Saints, which has made searching for individuals much quicker. A surprising consequence of Salvado's single-mindedness with regard to records is that Aboriginal families who grew up in and around New Norcia now have a wonderful family history database resource which goes back well over 100 years. It must be remembered that, prior to Salvado's arrival, the Aboriginal community had no written records, only an oral history tradition.

Farm records and registers for crops, horses, land, sale of produce, livestock, even weather conditions such as temperature and rainfall, have all been recorded.

Additionally, there is a very valuable and extensive map collection consisting of over 300 maps and diagrams, together with manuscript maps of the local area dating from 1863. These show that, at its peak in the 1880s, Salvado's land holdings comprised nearly a million acres, which in modern metric terms is the equivalent of 4,000 square kilometres, or just slightly smaller than the land mass of the Balearic Islands.

And, just to summarise the remaining facets of Salvado's records before I turn to the most important documents, we have accounts for the monastery farm, the building and running of the monastery and, later, the schools, as well as pay sheets and records for the workers.

Also to be found are land records which, in addition to the maps, include diagrams, leases and agreements with workmen. There are also building records, water and sewerage plans together with floor plans.

Bishop Salvado was also a very good musician and pianist, famous for an impromptu concert he gave in Perth to raise funds. Music was an important part of life at the monastery throughout its history, even if it is only Salvado's concert, together with the Aboriginal boys' brass band of the late 1940s, which most people remember. There is a separately housed music archive (located within the main part of the monastery) devoted to the storage of music collected, and created, by monks at the monastery. Salvado's music has attracted considerable interest in recent months, as might be expected, and recordings of music not heard for many years have just been made.

We also have a substantial photograph collection. It is estimated that the collection has about 60,000 photos, many of them dating from the early days, including two daguerreotypes, one of Bishop Salvado, the other of his brother Santos. Indeed it was Santos, Queen Isabella II's chaplain, who introduced the camera to New Norcia in 1867; since then, the monks have been camera-happy. There are photographs of every building from every conceivable angle at every conceivable moment of the day, month and year, thus providing an extraordinary history of the development of the buildings and the town for the last 140 years. We have scanned about 20,000 of these photographs so far and, although they are not to be found on any online site, many of the Salvado era photos have since appeared in newspaper articles, magazines and books and one has even been used by the Australian postal service. An exhibition later in the year at the

Western Australian State Library will exhibit the photographs from Bishop Salvado's time.

But the two areas which I consider to be the most important are the letters and the diaries. It is in these media that the real life of the mission and its interaction with the Swan River Colony can be experienced. It is here that the hopes and fears of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Western Australia are acted out, together with all the mundane details of daily life, as well as the surprising twists of history, and the happy and the sad, and often tragic, moments.

It is estimated that there are close to 20,000 items of correspondence in the archives – not all of this comes from Salvado's time but a disproportionately large amount does originate with Salvado. Amongst the correspondents are European royalty (particularly Queen Isabella II of Spain), Church and Vatican officials and the Colonial Office in London, whilst Western Australia correspondents included the explorer and Governor Sir John Forrest, as well as Governor Weld and well-known personalities such as Daisy Bates, who was a famous, often controversial but always eccentric Australian lady anthropologist of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The famous English nurse Florence Nightingale even sought advice from Bishop Salvado, so surprised and impressed was she at the extraordinary state of health to be found amongst the monks and the Aboriginal population. There is also a substantial body of correspondence from "ordinary" people, for example shepherds, sawyers, shearers, neighbours, businessmen, right through the social spectrum down to humble workmen.

Additionally, there are important collections of letters, such as a substantial 250-plus body of correspondence from Canon Raffaele Martelli, an Italian priest who accompanied Bishop Salvado to Western Australia in 1853 and who later became the parish priest at Toodyay, a small town to the east of New Norcia, and also at Fremantle, the port city for Perth. We have a similarly large collection of letters from a French monk, Léandre Fonteinne, who, with Irishman John Gorman, accompanied Salvado on his very first expedition to the Moore River in 1846, where one rainy night he accidentally shot and killed Gorman while cleaning his gun. The event obviously had a profound effect on Fonteinne's sanity as he subsequently returned to France, a broken man, from where he wrote long, rambling, often incoherent letters to Abbot Guéranger at Solesmes, near Paris, for many years to come. There is also the correspondence



of Théophile Bérengier, the abbot of the Benedictine community in Marseille, whose collection is equally as large as the first two, if not larger, as we now have scans of Salvado's letters back to Bérengier, discovered at Ganagobie in 2002. These are but three examples of large collections of letters from significant people. All of these letters I have just mentioned have been scanned for academic purposes, which I shall speak about later.

Finally we come to the most fascinating and valuable of the archives' documents – the diaries. The diaries of New Norcia are a remarkable collection of documents; these diaries, or perhaps more accurately, chronicles, provide an almost continuous daily narrative of the history of New Norcia since its foundation in 1846. Salvado's diaries, written in a miniscule hand in many tiny volumes over a period of fifty years, are the most valuable documents the archives have, and they have been the subject of much research over many years.

Salvado's successor, Bishop Torres, was not the diarist that Salvado was but he clearly recognised the importance of keeping some sort of community history because he initiated *The Community Diary or Chronicle* – a diary of daily events – in 1901 and this diary continues unbroken to the present day but, alas, not written with a quill on parchment by candlelight but in Word on a Toshiba by electric light. Until the early 1950s, it was written in Spanish, thereafter in English. These, too, provide a fascinating insight into daily life, where even the most ordinary of details can be discovered. We know, for example, that in the 1930s and 1940s the monastery cars were an American Essex, a Chevrolet, a Pontiac and a Hudson, which had been the German consul's car up until 1939, when he was obliged to part company with it. By the 1960s, it was an Australian Holden.

Because these diaries are so important not only for the history of New Norcia but also for what else was happening in Western Australia and further afield, I would like to look a little deeper into some of the more important and see what they can reveal about life in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Salvado kept a diary for over fifty years and his diaries are by far the most important, simply because of the huge time span they cover and because they were written by the Bishop himself. He was not always at New Norcia, as he was often in Europe raising funds and looking for new missionaries. Unwittingly,

the other diarists, shown previously, Francisco Marsa, Manuel Beleda, and Joannes Garrido, filled in the gaps with their own diaries.

Salvado's diaries comprise 15 tiny volumes written in a microscopic hand; the language is, naturally, Spanish but other languages are to be found, including Latin, French, Italian, English and a smattering of Aboriginal words. His diaries were partially translated many years ago by Fr Eugene Perez but sadly, Fr Eugene had a reputation for being a bit of a revisionist when it comes to historical fact, so we can't take his translation as being entirely accurate.

However, in recent years, an extremely generous bequest has allowed us to have the diaries transcribed as a first step towards their eventual translation. For this talk, the examples I shall give are taken from the 1876 and 1877 diaries. Unlike Beleda and Garrido, Salvado's diaries have everything: stories, humour, compassion, and tragedy and, throughout, we are always aware of how the Bishop felt about whatever he was writing about. Take, for example, the illness and eventual death at the age of 32 from consumption of Helen Cuper, the first Aboriginal telegraphist, on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1877. Her slow decline over many weeks is faithfully and sympathetically recorded by Salvado and, towards the end, her plight starts to dominate his diary entries.

Some of his entries are even quite humorous: *Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> August: A number of wild Aborigines came and started a corroboree before the bell went at 8pm, and they kept going and going and going. I went out to tell them that after the bell went for bed time, I didn't want any more noise [...] and they stopped for the rest of the night.* It isn't difficult to see the humour in this – a group of young Aboriginal men all set for a really good night of partying only to have it cancelled by a grumpy old man who wants to go to bed!

His own, and other people's, health was a constant source of wonder and concern to him; poor Martin Griver, Bishop of Perth, was seriously ill in Fremantle for several weeks during July and August 1876 but, for those six weeks, Salvado was by Griver's bedside ministering to him whilst writing his diary, in which he described not only Griver's alarming symptoms but the extraordinary medication given to him. On 26<sup>th</sup> of July for example, the poor man was woken up at an ungodly hour to face the following: 4am beef soup, 6.00 medicine, 8.00 chocolate, 10.00 medicine, 11.00 beef soup, 11.45 laxative, 2pm medicine, 4.00 castor oil, 6.00 medicine, 7.00 beef soup, 10pm an egg,

then finally at 11pm another laxative. It must have been a great incentive to get better, as eventually he did, in spite of Salvado's treatment.

Finally, pity poor Br Melito, who serves to illustrate that life was pretty harsh in the 1870s and his going mad was about as unimportant as getting the sheep washed: *October 7<sup>th</sup>: Another flock of sheep washed – the twelfth such. Br Melito is beginning to show signs of madness and, this afternoon, Mr Clinch's servants returned from taking the horses to Fremantle.*

The next most important diary, The Marsa Diary, a single volume written in Spanish in the most beautiful hand, is as important as it is intriguing. It is important because it continues the narrative from 1849 through to 1853 – exactly the years Salvado was away in Europe.

Brother Francisco Marsa, a printer, was one of the 39 priests and brothers who were recruited by Bishops Rosendo Salvado and José María Serra to come to Western Australia to build the monastery at New Norcia. Salvado was not able to return to Australia at that time – it was Bishop Serra who led the group back – so his account of their 85-day trip in the *Ferrolana* (an ex-Spanish warship) is covered in one sentence and the early work at New Norcia is glossed over in a few pages. Marsa, however, experienced first-hand the physical hardships involved in colonising the Victoria Plains, the locality in which New Norcia is situated, and he was a witness to the complicated ecclesiastical turmoil which rocked the early colony.

In great detail, Marsa covers the voyage to the colony, his arrival in Fremantle, the difficult journey to New Norcia and the work and the hardships involved in building the monastery, for example the weather and the lack of water; he also provides many comments and observations about the Aboriginals. Marsa's diary is important, therefore, because it is the only continuous first-hand account of this period.

But it is the story of how the diary came to be back at New Norcia that is so fascinating. Francisco Marsa was at New Norcia for only four years; in 1853 he left New Norcia and returned to Barcelona, where he became a diocesan priest.

150 years later his diary, in perfect condition, appeared in the stock list of a Barcelona antiquarian book dealer; a visiting American antiquarian dealer saw it, bought it and took it back to the United States; in due course, it appeared in his catalogue, which was sent out to all his customers. And one of his customers

was a Californian wine merchant who just happened to be a Friend of New Norcia. Our Friend bought the diary and donated it to the monastery in 2005; prior to its discovery, its existence was completely unknown, though Marsa himself is mentioned a few times in later correspondence. So far, this diary remains untranslated but it appears to be written in the same narrative style as Salvado's. So, whilst Salvado attempted to fill in the missing years of his diary retrospectively, it will be interesting to read what Brother Marsa had to say as events unfolded before him.

As Marsa was departing in 1853, Manuel Beleda, our second contemporary diarist, arrived with the 1853 group of missionaries led by Salvado; his diary starts on Good Friday 1854 and continues through to October 1865, when he left the mission and went to work for James Clinch at nearby Berkshire Valley; the final entries are for November 1868. His diary, again a single volume but enclosed in a leather wallet, was translated some years ago by academic Judith Woodward, who also wrote a most interesting account of the man and his association with New Norcia in the 1994 edition of the *New Norcia Studies Journal*. Beleda's diary is not the continuous narrative that Salvado's diaries were; by contrast, Beleda's diary is brevity itself, to the point where many entries are meaningless. His entry for 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1863 says, somewhat mysteriously: "They bled me". There is nothing in the entries either side to indicate who "they" might be or why he was bled.

Equally brief, his entry for 27<sup>th</sup> January 1865, the day he ceased to be a monk at New Norcia, is summed up with wonderful conciseness by "I left the Mission". Why he left, his diary gives no clue. Except that, towards the end of the diary, there are inexplicable gaps, indecipherable writing in an unknown language (possibly a dialect) and, against some days, no entry, just double lines with the letters TP. In her article mentioned earlier, Judith Woodward discusses discontent among the lay brothers in the monastery at the time and hypothesises that these inscriptions are possibly messages in code to himself through which, as Woodward puts it, "Beleda is venting his growing feelings of frustration" which, in turn, compelled him to move to Berkshire Valley.

The last of our contemporaries is Joannes Garrido, who was the prior at the mission until his death in 1868; his diary is also of importance as it covers the

period when Salvado was again in Europe, 1868-1870. Garrido's diary has been translated too, again by Fr Eugene Perez.

Since we have Beleda's and Garrido's diaries overlapping, I thought it would be interesting to compare the respective entries for Beleda's departure on that fateful day in January 1865; we find that Garrido's entry for the 27<sup>th</sup> goes some way to explaining Beleda's taciturn comment: Garrido wrote: *About 9 am, Br Mauro Beleda left the Mission, going to Mr Clinch [...] He didn't say goodbye to anybody, but left a letter in which he expressed the motive for his departure. That is, as he says himself, to please all those who wanted him out of here. Safe trip and may God guard him and protect him.*

Obviously Beleda was not a happy man, but was he malicious as well, one wonders? His diary shows no animosity but then it shows no personal feelings of any sort either. Personally, I doubt that he felt any malice towards the mission as his diary, over the next few years, demonstrated a desire to maintain links with the monastery, not break them. The fact that his diary was returned to the monastery after his death, according to his wishes, also suggests that Beleda harboured no ill-will.

At the beginning of this talk, I started by saying this extraordinary and unique legacy was not without its problems, and that was why I wished to subtitle this talk "unlocking the possibilities". Most of the correspondence and all the diaries are in Spanish, and that is the main problem – in fact Spanish remained the dominant language at the monastery until the mid-1950s, when the decision was made to make English the principal language, although by then it was really only the community chronicle that was still in Spanish. Apart from Dr de Castro, a Spanish academic and historian, and member of the archives' staff, who does a wonderful job for us in translating documents from Spanish to English, and the monastery's Fr David Barry, there are very few Spanish speakers in Western Australia, and the extent of the documentation is so great that it is far too much to expect Dr de Castro and Fr David to translate everything, to unlock everything, so that they might be available to English-speaking researchers.

In 1992, a committee, the Archives Research and Publications Committee, was appointed to look into how this huge body of material could be unlocked and made available. One result was the establishment of a Studies Day, held

annually, at which people would present the results of research conducted in the archives; generally there would be four speakers. In its 22-year history, it has given rise to an amazing array of information gleaned from the archives covering an enormous range of topics, including Western Australian history, farming practices, Salvado's relations and interactions with the Aboriginal community, bee-keeping, biographies and so on and so on.

That, in turn, has generated the *New Norcia Studies Journal*, being the papers from the year's Studies Day – this year will be the 23<sup>rd</sup> edition – as well as other papers that, for practical reasons, could not be delivered on the day. The Committee also oversees the publication of a variety of books – *Salvado's Memoirs* was the first, being an English translation of his 1851 *Memorie*, originally published in Rome; this is now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> English edition. Other titles include *A Town Like No Other* (being a look at different aspects of historical as well as contemporary New Norcia), *Señor Pilich the Monastery Cat* (an amusing look at life in the monastery from a cat's perspective), and *The New Norcia Story*, a history, now in its 10<sup>th</sup> edition.

I mentioned earlier, too, that significant collections of correspondence had been scanned for academic purposes. Four years ago, the Italian Department of the University of Western Australia heard about Canon Martelli's letters, written over a thirty-year period. The Department was, and still is, interested in the development of Italian outside Italy during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and our collection seemed like a good resource. We scanned the letters and these have now been transcribed and translated; in fact, so important was this collection that it now involves exchange students from the Catholic University in Milan, in Italy, working on them. Those four years have seen not only the transcription and translation but there has been enough scope in the analysis to provide material for at least three university degrees. An interesting result from the University's work is that it seems that Italian was far more prevalent in Western Australia than had previously been thought. The Martelli letters are due to be published at the end of the year.

The letters of Léandre Fonteinne have also been scanned, transcribed and translated and they too will be published with the Martelli letters in November. Théophile Bérengier's book, *Histoire de la Nouvelle Nurcie*, has been translated

over the past four years and this is also due for publication at the same time, the first time it has appeared in English.

As you might imagine, all this scholarly work can be an expensive exercise, so we are most grateful for the extraordinarily generous bequest that has allowed us to transcribe the 800,000 words of Salvado's diaries. In 2008, the sixth abbot of New Norcia, Fr Placid Spearritt, passed away. He was a wonderful supporter of the archives and, for many years, he had dreamed that, upon retirement, he would learn Spanish and spend his remaining days in the archives.

Sadly, he passed away before this could be realised, so, in honour of his own scholarship and his dreams of furthering the research in the archives, a considerable sum of money was raised through very generous benefactors which now provides the basis for the annual Abbot Placid Spearritt Memorial Scholarship; from this, a stipendium is paid to a scholar to complete a particular area of research. So far, this scholarship has seen the completion of the letters of Martelli, Fonteinne and Bérengier, the translation of Bérengier's book, and the translation of Salvado's 300-page Report to Propaganda Fide in 1883; work currently in progress includes the translation of Salvado's letters to Bérengier, discovered at the monastery of Ganagobie in France in 2002, as well as research into the Italian origins of the engravings in Salvado's 1851 book, mentioned above. Much has been done to unlock these archives – but so much more remains.

In conclusion, I hope it can be appreciated from what has been said that the archives of New Norcia hold a uniquely valuable resource for those wishing to research the many and varied aspects of Western Australia's admittedly short history. In fact, so all-embracing are these documents that Dr De Castro concluded a paper she wrote in 2005 by stating that: *No history of Western Australia is complete if it avoids using New Norcia's records [...] and nobody wants to write a lame history of Western Australia, do they?*