

What you should know

■ The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building at the South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Avenue.

■ Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with inquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straightforward inquiries for a fee of \$65 per hour, including copying and postage.

■ For further information, phone 6926 3666, email archive@csu.edu.au or visit the website at www.csu.edu.au/research/archives for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.



An early shot of the Mount Erin Convent. Taken from the *Beautiful Wagga* supplement (available in CSURA search room).

THE NUN in the nightgown

at the archives
Wayne Doubleday



W

agga has been witness to a number of scandals since the township was gazetted in 1849. In the twentieth century one of the most notorious scandals to erupt in Wagga was the infamous Sister Ligouri, or alternatively "the Nun in the Nightgown" case. Sister Ligouri (whose real name was Bridget Mary Partridge) arrived at the Mount Erin Convent on February 21, 1909, after entering the Order of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Ireland.

By 1920, Sister Ligouri had apparently decided that she no longer wished to remain at the convent, and on July 24, 1920 Sister Ligouri left the convent and spent the afternoon at the Burgess family home in Coleman Street. During this time, she apparently phoned and spoke with Bishop Joseph Dwyer before returning to the convent later that evening in the company of several other nuns. She was seen by a doctor who prescribed bed rest, but when put to bed, she refused a sedative in the belief that it was poison, and when left unattended Sister Ligouri again absconded from the convent, this time in her nightgown and without any footwear.

Once Sister Ligouri was discovered missing, the convent contacted the police, who together with some Catholic laymen, searched the neighbourhood until morning, when they were informed that the nun was indeed safe, and had

COMING UP

Scandals, Crime and Corruption in Wagga Wagga
Presented by: Wagga City Library and the Charles Sturt University Regional Archives. Wagga and the surrounding district has seen its fair share of scandals, crime and corruption from the time of bushrangers such as Mad Dog Morgan and Captain Moonlight through to Sister Ligouri, the nun in the nightgown, the pylama girl and human glove mysteries. Come to the library and enjoy light refreshments while you hear about Wagga's infamous past.

When: Tuesday, September 8 from 6pm to 7.30pm
Where: Wagga City Library, corner Baylis and Morrow streets
Enquiries: 6926 9700, wcl@wagga.nsw.gov.au, www.wagga.nsw.gov.au/library
Cost: Free. Bookings essential.

sought refuge at the Thompson family home in Coleman Street.

However later in the day, under much secrecy, Sister Ligouri was driven to Adelong, and eventually to Sydney, with the help of Mr EB Barton, grandmaster of the Loyal Orange Lodge of NSW.

She ultimately reached the home of the Congregational Minister, Reverend William Touchell at Kogarah. Before leaving Wagga however, Sister Ligouri had written to Bishop Dwyer expressing her desire to resign from the order and leave the convent.

On August 5, at the request of Bishop Dwyer, a warrant was issued in Sydney for the arrest of Sister Ligouri on the grounds of insanity. Two days later she was found and arrested, and appeared before the Lunacy Court on August 9, where although remanded for

observation, she was later certified sane and released on August 13.

Interestingly, despite the saga beginning on July 24, neither of Wagga's newspapers (*The Express* or *The Daily Advertiser*) mentioned the scandal before August 5.

Yet it didn't take too long for the media to begin mass coverage of the story, especially after it was revealed that Sister Ligouri was suing Bishop Dwyer for damages of \$5,000.

The resulting trial was heard between June 30 and July 13, 1921, when the judge found in favour of the Bishop after the four man jury was unable to reach a unanimous decision.

In his summation, the judge remarked that "it is very unfortunate for the plaintiff that, at the time she left the convent she did not meet somebody with a little common horse-sense". Unbelievably, the Sister Ligouri scandal did not end there.

On the evening of October 26, 1921, Bridget Partridge was sensationally "kidnapped" by a group of men including her brother.

The next day she was recognised and taken to a police station where she renounced her religion and her brother.

Bridget Partridge continued living with the Touchell's in a number of locations throughout Sydney.

The Reverend died in 1954, yet strangely in November 1962 both Mrs Touchell and Bridget Partridge were admitted to the Rydalmere Mental Hospital. Just over four years later, still at the Hospital, Bridget Partridge died on December 4, 1966, and was buried at the Rookwood cemetery with a Congregational service.

As local Wagga historian Keith Swan surmised in his book *A History of Wagga Wagga*, "...ultimately the affair did little good to anyone involved".

■ References: *A History of Wagga Wagga* by Keith Swan, pp. 166-169; Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol 11, 1891-1939, entry written by Zita Denholm, pp. 151-152.