

Fr Julian Tenison Woods

Missionary Priest

Julian Tension Woods was born in London in 1832. His mother was Anglican and his father a Catholic. One of eleven children, from the age of 18 he had explored a religious life. His formative years were spent in London and later in France. He entered the Passionist Order for a short time and later studied with the Marists.

Responding to an invitation from the Bishop of Hobart, Julian arrived in Tasmania in 1855. Unhappy with his work he soon crossed to the mainland and took up studies with the Australian Jesuits at Sevenhill in South Australia's Clare Valley. He was ordained a priest in Adelaide in 1857.



Within months he was sent to work in the Penola district of south east South Australia. His parish was vast, 56 000 square kilometres, more than half of it desert. The people were pioneers... farmers, shepherds, timber cutters and miners trying to carve out an existence in a harsh landscape. Their living conditions were very primitive...no roads, no water, and no sanitation.

There were only three towns in the parish – Penola, Mt Gambier and the port of Robe. The rest of the population was scattered throughout the bush. Julian rode about 30 or 40 miles a day and after experiencing heat, exhaustion and thirst, he learnt to ride at night and in the early morning.

Julian saw at first hand the desperate needs of the people, especially the children. He remembered some nuns he had encountered in France who didn't live in grand convents but quietly moved about the countryside teaching the peasants.

He saw a need for something similar in Australia, a new Order of nuns who would reach out and spread across the outback, teaching and helping the poor and sick.

His idea wouldn't come to fruition though until he met a most remarkable young girl in Penola in 1861.

Scientist

Julian was not only a gifted missionary priest and co-founder of the Sisters of St Joseph but an eminent scientist, popular lecturer and a friend of the leading Establishment figures of his time.

His interests covered geology, palaeontology, botany, zoology and botany. Julian's reputation as a scientist was well established before he met Mary MacKillop. His first scientific paper on the metamorphic rocks of South Australia was published in 1857. This was followed by three more geological papers and a book called 'Geological Observations in South Australia.'

In 1883, he spent three years travelling through Asia, exploring and reporting on the mineral and coal deposits of the Malayan Peninsula and other nearby countries.

In 1888 he won the medal of the Royal Society of New South Wales for his paper on Australian molluscs. The same year he was awarded the prestigious Clarke Medal for distinguished contribution of Natural Science.

He died in Sydney on 7th October 1889.

