

Remembering the mother of St Mary MacKillop

Sunday 30th May marked the 130th anniversary of the death of St Mary MacKillop's mother, Flora MacKillop – a woman who devoted her life to God, family and to the sisters who joined her daughter in her work.



Flora MacKillop.

Flora MacKillop gave birth to eight children. Three she gave to God in the priesthood and religious life. She mourned five who were lost before they turned thirty, one while still a baby.

No stranger to sorrows, Flora's life ended suddenly in the notorious wreck of the *Ly-ee-moon* off the coast of Eden, on the south coast of New South Wales. Sunday 30 May marks the 130th anniversary of her death.

Yet we do not remember Flora as a tragic figure. Rather we recall her great qualities of motherhood and acclaim a stoic woman who devoted her whole life to God, her family, and to the sisters who joined St Mary MacKillop in her work.

Flora travelled widely after Mary had established her new congregation, sometimes taking her daughter Annie.

On her travels she would stay with relations and family friends in different parts of western Victoria, as well as Melbourne and at Melrose near the You Yangs.

Flora decided to travel to Sydney in 1886 to help Mary with a fundraising bazaar. It was common at the time to travel by ship from Melbourne up the east coast to Port Jackson or Sydney Harbour.

Mary was expecting Flora's arrival, but tragedy struck. Seventy-one passengers drowned when the *Ly-ee-moon* was dashed against a reef. The only survivor was a young boy of 11, pulled unconscious through a porthole.

Kate Cameron, a life-long friend of Lexie MacKillop, became Mrs James Power of the Pier Hotel Eden. By a strange coincidence it was Kate who helped prepare the body of Lexie's mother for burial in Sydney in May 1886.

It was a beautiful final work of mercy that she could perform for her friend Lexie and the MacKillop family – and a final gift of grace for a faithful mother who indeed gave her all.

Research by Judith Geddes rsj