

## JOHN PLUNKETT - AN EARLY POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVE

Most people are aware that Henry Parkes was an early political representative of Manly in the NSW Legislative Assembly but unaware of the man who was elected with him in 1858. In those days, an electorate had a number of members and this practice only ceased in the 1920s.

In 1858, Manly and the Peninsula had a small population and the electorate of the District Of Cumberland (North Riding) stretched from the northern beaches along the north bank of the Parramatta River to Penrith, excluding Richmond and Windsor. However for a short period, Plunkett was our man in Macquarie Street and what a man he was.

He was born in County Roscommon in Ireland in 1802 and graduated from Trinity College, Dublin in 1823. He was called to the Bar in 1826 and won distinction and popularity on the Connaught circuit in Ireland in the period from 1826 to 1832. It was only in 1829 that Catholics were admitted to the British Parliament and freed from limitations in the public service.

Plunkett was offered the position of Solicitor General in New South Wales, the position he accepted and ultimately became Attorney General from 1836 to 1856. He was the first Roman Catholic to be appointed to high civil office in the colony.

One of his most famous actions was the prosecution of those responsible for the Myall Creek Massacre, resulting in the hanging of seven white men for this deed while at the same time he had to contend with an active campaign by squatters to find them innocent.

Plunkett was an important figure in the Catholic community playing a large part in the establishment of St Johns College at Sydney University and St Vincent's Hospital. He died in 1869 after making a significant contribution to the regularisation of the legal system and the betterment of the community in his adopted country.