

a centenary of canberra's catholics

Formidable but gentle, she earned the trust of all

In the tenth in a series of portraits of significant Catholics of the national capital, Bishop Pat Power remembers one of the city's great characters Olive Mulholland.

It takes a formidable woman to keep four Archbishops on course. Olive Mulholland was such a person.

Remembering that the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn came into being only in 1948 (previously it had been the Diocese of Goulburn), Olive began work in its service in 1950.

At that time the Chancery was located in the presbytery behind Sts Peter and Paul's Cathedral in Goulburn. Archbishop Terence McGuire was the first Archbishop and Mgr Edward Favier the Vicar-General.

When the second Archbishop, Eris O'Brien, moved to Canberra in 1960, Olive was "part of the furniture". Her home in Bonython Street, Downer, was arguably the last street in north Canberra.

She played a key part with Mgr Favier, Fr George Weissel and Fr Eddie Bourke in establishing the Chancery in the Archbishop's House in Canberra. Frs Adrian Cork and Paul Rheinberger would become part of the scene prior to Archbishop O'Brien's retirement in 1967.

It should be remembered that office equipment in those days lacked the sophistication we take for granted today. Computers, faxes, even photocopiers were unheard of then.

Olive laboured skillfully on a manual type-writer and produced the diocesan circulars on a gestetner machine.

She also kept a watchful eye on the account books, but, most of all, acted as a very important and trusted person especially in relation to the priests of the Archdiocese.

They recognised her great integrity and saw her love for the Church and the Archdiocese translated into doing whatever she could to help it carry out

its mission of bringing the love of Christ to his people.

These were the days following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and there were monumental changes taking place in all sorts of ways.

Olive was secure in her own faith and open to the adjustments which were needed in those times. Often she provided a shoulder to cry on for some who found the challenges difficult to handle.

Every Archbishop has his own particular style and personality, so when Thomas Cahill succeeded Eris O'Brien in 1967, Olive was working for a man who had very definite ideas and was probably more hands-on than his predecessor in the running of the office.

Olive played an invaluable role in providing continuity and had a great store of knowledge of the Archdiocese and the people and offices associated with it.

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She had the trust of the clergy and her own unthreatening way of communicating both to priests and bishops. A few months after his arrival, Archbishop Cahill chose another Goulburn person, Fr Ron Flack, as his secretary.

He and Olive were a powerful combination bringing their experience, wisdom, good humour and executive skills to bear on the episcopate of Thomas Cahill.

The Archbishop showed his gratitude to Olive by sending her on the inaugural Qantas one-stop flight to London. If Archbishop Cahill is often posthumously praised for the kindness he brought to his ministry as Archbishop, it should be acknowl-



Olive Mulholland (right) with her sister Betty McAlister. Betty spent many years as parish secretary at St Peter and Paul's, Goulburn while Olive was contributing mightily on the Archdiocesan level. The sisters died within a few days of each other.



The first two Archbishops Olive Mulholland served - Terence McGuire (left) and Eris O'Brien (far left)

edged that Olive and Ron played important roles behind the scenes.

Fresh from three years study in Rome, I succeeded Fr Ron Flack in mid-1975 and greatly benefited from the gentle guidance provided by Olive.

With the death of Archbishop Cahill in 1978, the leadership of the

en's conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Dickson in the early 1960s with Olive maintaining her membership of the society until failing health in 2003 necessitated her retirement.

The Vincentian apostolate included home visitation, the shelter in Turner, Ainslie Hostel, and visiting and supporting unmarried mothers and their babies in a women's refuge and in the flats around Civic. As a Justice of the Peace, she was an advocate for people in all kinds of need.

Olive was also a member of the Catholic Women's League for a time and active in other community work. She was awarded an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in 1999 for her work for the Church, the St Vincent de Paul Society and the community.

Her home was always open house where visitors experienced her hospitality and sound advice. Olive had a special love for the trainee teachers at Signadou College. Eventually, she had to give up her trusty VW Beetle (now in the proud possession of her daughter, Terri).

After independent living became impossible, this gentle but spirited lady spent her last days in Ginninderra Gardens, Page. Her death on 26 November, 2006, marked the passing of one of Canberra's great characters.

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