
Requiescat in Pace Fr Max Barrett CSsR

Born 12 December 1925, Sydney, NSW
Professed 2 February 1945, Sydney, NSW
Ordained 5 March 1950, Ballarat, Victoria
Died 10 August 2021, Sydney, NSW

Formal Name: Philip Maxwell Barrett

Parents Eugene (Gene) & Vera (nee Kennedy)

Siblings Bryan (1921) & James (1923)

Autobiography: Max Barrett CSsR

Max was born on December 12, 1925 in the Sydney suburb of Penshurst, NSW, Australia. He was the third and youngest child of Eugene (Gene) Barrett and Vera Kennedy, and his brothers Bryan and James were, respectively, five and three years older. His given name was Philip Maxwell Barrett but he always known by his second name, Max.

He was educated at the local Catholic school and then at both the Marist Brothers Kogarah and Marist Brothers Randwick for secondary school, where he graduated in 1940.

Later that same year the Redemptorists Fathers McLaughlin and Williamson gave a mission at his local parish of St Declan's, Penshurst. Father Williamson kept in touch after the mission and invited Max to finish his high school at the juvenate in Galong. He arrived there on January 25, 1941.

His first impressions of Galong lasted a lifetime and he returned again and again to capture its spirit and its story. On January 6, 1944 he entered the novitiate in Pennant Hills. After profession, he went to Ballarat for the six year course of major studies. He was ordained on 5 March 1950, and his first posting was to teach at Galong where he taught English and English literature to juvenists for six years.

In 1957 he was sent on mission work in Sydney where he became increasingly plagued by a throat condition known as an asymmetry of the vocal chords. When Max was under any sort of pressure, his voice tended to quiver, soften and crack. Specialists proposed surgery, but he resisted and just accepted that he would never be preacher in the tradition of his time.



In 1959, the provincial superior appointed him to the publications ministry of the "The Majellan!" in Ballarat, where his writing apostolate became the most important work of his life. The Majellan apostolate required discipline, whether it entailed writing an article or, more commonly, answering a letter which called for painstaking care: care over expression and care for the individual person.

In 1963, he moved with the Majellan staff from Ballarat to Brighton, Victoria with Father Bill Stinson CSsR. I had a part in deciding on this new site. It was my only involvement in purchasing real estate. The next year, 1964, Father Fredrick Jones, one of the general consultants in Rome came on a canonical visitation. Appointed him to Galong as Superior from 1967 to 1970.

In 1970 Max had a sabbatical year, including summer school at the Jesuit University in San Francisco, and travelled through Europe. He returned to the Majellan apostolate in Brighton, where in 1975 he was the first catholic priest in Australia to participate in CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education).

In 1978 he published his seminal book: **King of Galong Castle**, the story of Ned Ryan. Research had started with Father Pat Kearney CSsR which Max took over. It remains a wonder of research and skillful writing.

From 1978 to 1984, Max was editor of the Majellan, and twice during this time, he received the ARPA award for the best magazine editorial of the year. (ARPA is Australasian Religious Press Association - the association of all religious publications of whatever religious denomination.)

After 6 years, Max resigned as editor to facilitate the introduction of new journalistic blood to the Majellan and accepted a chaplaincy with the Christian Brothers in Sydney as a way to be near his elderly mother. The arrangement so suited him that he stayed with the brothers for 15 years, 10 years after the death of his mother. He would jokingly write Max Barrett CSsR, CFC. The chaplaincy gave him time for retreat giving and writing for the Majellan.

In 1988, the Tipperary parish of Clonoulty identified with Australia in its bicentennial year and a highpoint of their participation was the unveiling of a monument to the memory of 13 Irish parishioners transported as convicts to Australia in 1816. Because Max had supplied the parishioners of Clonoulty with the memory of the 1816 event in his book *King of Galong Castle*, he was invited to the unveiling of a statue in their honour. He returned again for research, which resulted in another book in 1992, a history entitled "Because of These."

After 15 years with the Christian Brothers, Max joined the community in Kogarah in 1999 where he remained for the rest of his life, enjoying his woodwork, writing, reflection time and friendships. During this period, he compiled the necrologies of the Australasian Province Necrology, a book that ran to 394 pages which contained valuable information on the confreres who served the mission in Australasia. It is a remarkable book, with every entry of a confrere from 1882-2012.

In the last year of his life he wrote an autobiography called "Cacoethes Scribendi" - an itch to write. His itch showed up in his books on Galong and in his efforts on scripture and spirituality. He was a particular fan of the English author P G Wodehouse and wrote four books to honour Wodehouse for the gifts of the English language he gave to Max.

Max wrote a poignant poem in 1976 expressing his endearment for how words had shaped his life.

My way to God has much to do with
my articulation.
My salvation, so it seems to me,
is interwoven wondrously with words.
I am a poet.
No poems have I yet produced,
except at sundry times,
some lines of prose, AND,
Praise God,
some echoes in those
with whom I've forged authentic ties of love.

The search for the right word fascinates me.

The right Word searched for me,
found me, claimed me,
said "Aha" in Lamb-of-Godly glee.
I am his mysterium tremendum,
et fascinosum
et parvulum,
et pretiosum

The word I can't get right
is me.
Could it be
that
the shattered syllables of my name
will come intact
in union with the brokenness of others,
lovers?

Then, subtly, softly, sotto-vocally,
levelling, revelling,
one-to-one reverencing,
I shall find at last
my little wholeness,
peace,
at home-ness,
shalom-ness,

when I shall speak unto that Other Word
 and not jabber
 but breathe my breathless 'Abba.'
 THUS shall I mark up my proud, primaeval ton
 through the enabling One
 who first did speak to me and said
 "My son!"

Max died, peacefully in his sleep, although unexpectedly. He asked the community to be by his side for the last four days which they dutifully did and gave him all the sacramental assistance and more for the journey home. He was a giant of our Province, a well-loved and deeply respected confrere, whose crackling voice endeared him to many. He had many friends in the literary world to whom he was loyal and he kept close contact with his family.

A province in the years to come will look back on his research with amazement for the detail and the time placed on the stories of every confrere who served. We may never see someone of that caliber again or of the love for story. May he rest in peace.

John Hodgson CSsR

Major Apostolates

1951 - 56	Teacher	English language and literature; Galong
1957 - 59	Missions & Retreats	Pennant Hills
1959 - 64	Majellan Apostolate	Writer; Ballarat, thence to Brighton in 1963.
1965 - 67	Teacher	Juvenate; Galong
1967 - 70	Retreats	Pennant Hills
1971 - 1984	Majellan Apostolate	Assistant Editor and Editor; Brighton
1985 - 1999	Chaplain	Christian Brothers, Strathfield, NSW.
2000 - 2018	Archival Research	Necrologies & biographies, family research; Kogarah
2019 - 2021	Aged Care	Sisters of Our Lady of China, Beverley Park.

Leadership Appointments

Galong	1965 - 67	Superior
Pennant Hills	1968 - 70	Superior
Brighton	1972 - 75	Superior
Brighton	1978 - 84	Superior
Brighton	1978 - 84	Editor of the Majellan

Awards

ARPA	Best editorial, Religious Magazine (twice between 1978 - 84)
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Further Study / Sabbatical

Sabbatical	USA, Europe, Asia	1971
CPE	Austin Hospital, Melbourne	1974
Counselling	Sydney Technical College	1976
Pilgrimage	Holy Land with Christian Brothers	1982
Research Sabbatical	Tipperary, Ireland et al	1988, 1990, 1997, 2000, 2008

Some publications by Max Barrett CSsR

- 1959 – 2013 100+ articles for the Majellan Magazine
- 1975 The First 25 Years of the Majellan
- 1978 King of Galong Castle: The Ned Ryan Story
- 1979 The Case for Life: Let's not abort Australia
- 1981 Alone – The Catholic Deserted Wife
- 1984 Savouring God's Word: Sunday Homilies (Years A, B, C)
- 1990 Because of These (Story of the Irish convicts sent to NSW)
- 1994 A riot of Ryans: The 19th century Ryans of Boorowa
- 1995 Galong Cemetery: The very dawn of Settlement
- 2001 Paul in Short: the man, the myth, the message
- 2003 He Laughed! A book of poems
- 2005 Read John: the fourth Gospel
- 2005 The Galong Juvenate Story
- 2011 The Four Gospel Writers: Their Script and their Subjects
- 2012 Deceased Redemptorists of the Australasian Mission
- 2013 The Eight-O-Fiver: the annals of train commuter extraordinaire, Joseph A. Meagher
- 2014 A Plum of Great Price (Tribute to PG Wodehouse)
- 2015 The Galong Story: 58 years of Juvenate Life in Pen-portraits and photography
- 2015 A Blend of Barretts and Kennedys – A Family History
- 2015 A Redemptorist Calendar
- 2017 A Dilly Bag: A trek through the Liturgical Year
- 2017 Connie, Gally & a Dash of Gin (Tribute to PG Wodehouse)
- 2019 Doubles' Troubles (Tribute to PG Wodehouse)
- 2019 It Isn't Cricket (Tribute to PG Wodehouse)
- 2020 Cacoethes Scribendi: *the itch to write* (An autobiography)

