

Glenbrook Railway deviation works and St Finbar's Catholic Parish

Some notes by Patricia Murnane



Glenbrook Railway Station Dated: c. 31.12.1900

This section of track is now the Great Western Highway at Glenbrook

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/state-records-nsw/3481772464/in/photostream/>

Railway workers and St Finbar's Community

St Finbar's little wooden church in Levy Street, Glenbrook was built and opened in 1912, ninety-nine years after explorers, Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson, camped near a swamp at the SE corner of what is now Glenbrook Oval. It was a part of Penrith Catholic parish.

From 1911-13 an influx of many workers and their families came for the massive railway deviation works.



The spiritual needs of the many Irish workers employed for the railway, prompted the building of the Catholic Church in Glenbrook, with land donated by Mr Harold Norrie, one-time Secretary to the Sydney Harbour Trust and the drive of Fr Thomas Barlow, Penrith Parish Priest.



Fr. Thomas Barlow

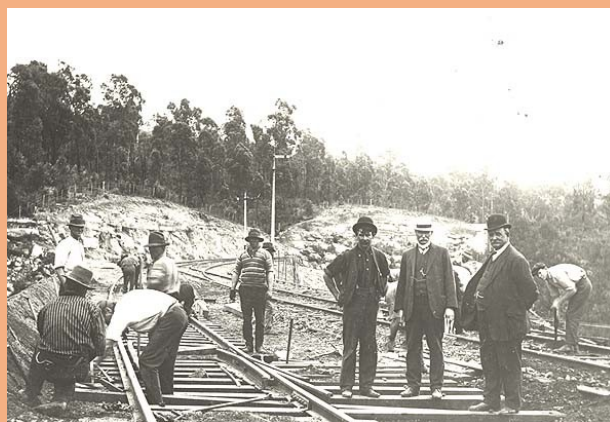
Source: St Finbar's Parish website

In 1912 there were 2 railway workers' camps in Glenbrook, the Emu Rd Main Camp and one adjacent the site of the construction new Glenbrook station, while there was another camp at Blaxland.

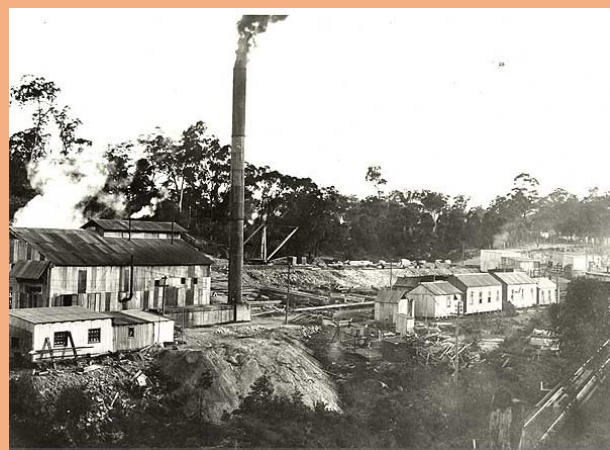
Nepean Times (Penrith, NSW : 1882 - 1962), Saturday 22 June 1912, page 3

'The Railway Camps

On Monday our representative paid a visit to the Main Railway Camp near Glenbrook, where he had the pleasure of interviews with Messrs Williams, Bratby, Lyne, and numbers of other gentlemen. Mr Butcher, the courteous engineer was also seen. Everybody is busy on the encampments, and the men appear happy and contented. A huge travelling gantry crane was seen at work at the Blaxland Camp, the engineer (Mr Butcher) supervising operations. We also saw an immense hole cut out by blasting operations. The railway camps have transformed Glenbrook station from an insignificant station to a busy centre, there being about 1800 men employed, which including wives and families, means about 3000 people, and brings prosperity to the district. We are glad to say, however, that the courteous stationmaster (Mr Hatherly) finds time to give any information required by passengers and pressman. Messrs Casey, Williams and Bratby, of the Main Camp, are live, energetic men, heart and soul in everything for the good of the district; while Mr Patrick Lyne, of the Blaxland Camp, is a man full of grit and go, and everything he takes in hand must succeed.'



Glenbrook deviation - cutting in the new trackwork, c1912 from gallery.records.nsw.gov.au



Glenbrook deviation - showing power house and workshops, c.1912 from gallery.records.nsw.gov.au



Aerial view over St Finbar's 1966 - photographer unknown

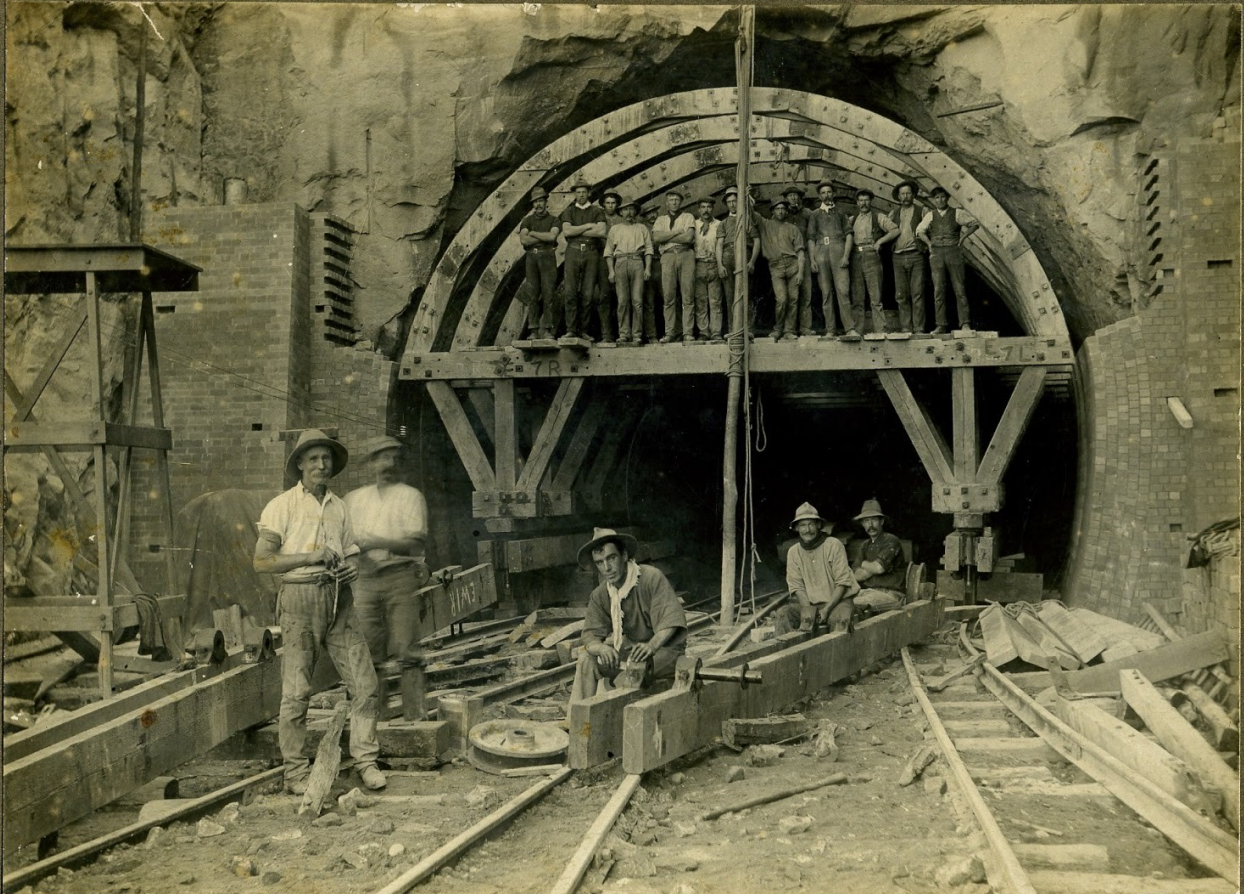
Foreground - original Church; Centre left - original school building built 1954, lost in a fire, 1978;
Background- view of the highway in 1966 highlights its former role as the railway line

Railway workers and St Finbar's Community

A Catholic Mission was conducted by Father Gilmartin, a Franciscan priest on Sunday 10th February 1912 in the newly built St Finbar's Church. The *Nepean Times* (Saturday 17.02.1912) reported that a large crowd attended the 10am Mass. The topic of the sermon was 'Death!' The Mission continued over that week and included some sessions in the Union Hall at the railway navvies camp adjacent to what is now Emu Road. Unfortunately, a number of workers died during the construction so the sermon may have been somewhat prophetic.

The *Nepean Times* (Saturday 21.09.1912) page 4:

'The Glenbrook Branch of the Railway Worker's and General Labourers' Association desire to thank Des Higgins and Pridham, the Matron and staff of the Nepean Cottage Hospital, for their kind attention to their late comrade, Arthur Jaynes.'



19 Men, Glenbrook Tunnel Deviation 1911

Format: B&W photograph by CE Welling 1911

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