

nised as the first parish priest in Canterbury, although the Rev. Father Seon had been working amongst the Maoris of Otago and Canterbury some ten years previously.



REV. FATHER P. J. COONEY.

As the years rolled on and the population became larger, the need of a permanent place of worship became apparent, and during 1864 strenuous efforts were made to remove the reproach. The proposal was taken up most enthusiastically by the parishioners, and at the end of 1864 tenders were called for the erection of a church, which was to be built on a site in Winchester street, the gift of the Hon. F. A. Weld, a devoted Catholic and at that time Premier of New Zealand. The plans and specifications were drawn up by Messrs. Mountfort and Bury, and Messrs. Graham and Weyburn were the successful tenderers. The furnishings and interior fittings were carried out by Messrs. England Brothers. The contract price for the building was about £1200, and it had seating accommodation for 400 persons. The contract provided that grey and red stone was to be used in the construction of the building, and in this respect it was found necessary to open a quarry at Governor's Bay for the grey stone, and to blast away a portion of the hillside on the Summer road, in order to obtain sufficient red material for facing. The specifications were for a building 47ft by 26ft, 13ft high, with a porch 11ft by 6ft, and a bell turret 48ft from the ground.

The laying of the foundation stone took place on February 2, 1865, during the spiritual jurisdiction of the Right Rev. P. J. Viard, D.D., Bishop of Wellington, the day selected being the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The proceedings were carried out under the spiritual direction of the Rev. J. B. Chataigner. In the absence of the Hon. F. A. Weld Mr. E. D. Byrne adjusted the stone, under which was deposited a glass phial, containing copies of the newspapers of that day and other information. The church was duly named St. Joseph's, and on the conclusion of the proceedings Mr. Byrne entertained those present at a dinner.

The erection of the building was pushed on expeditiously, and on Thursday, June 29, 1865, the church was opened for service. The day appointed for the ceremony was the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul, and the Rev. Fathers J. B. Chataigner and J. Chevrier, S.M., officiated. After the edifice had been blessed, Mass was celebrated, the music being supplied from a

harmonium lent for the occasion by Mr. G. Taylor. Father Chataigner preached the sermon, selecting as his text the charge delivered to St. Peter, 'Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' The preacher congratulated the Catholic residents of Lyttelton on their energies in finding sufficient money to build an edifice of their own. It was announced also that the amount realised from the collection had practically cleared the building of debt.

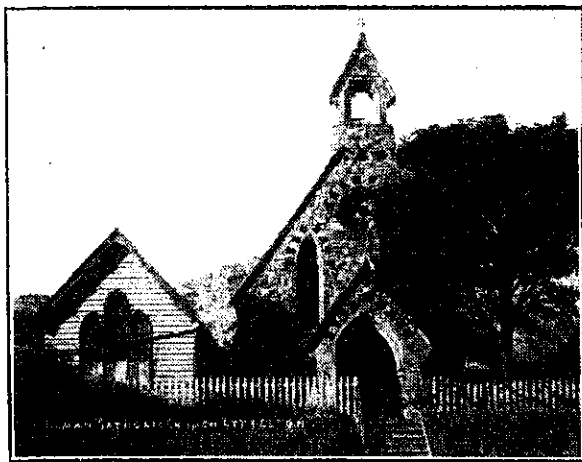
For many years Mass was celebrated only once a month, but as time went on, it was held more frequently, until the increase in the number of parishioners made it necessary to hold Mass three times every Sunday. Rev. Father Baibieux was appointed to take charge of the parish. In 1873 he was relieved by the Rev. Father Francis del Monte, who remained there until September, 1877. Four years later Father Walsh was appointed to the parish, but after a stay of about twelve months he was relieved by Father Tracy. From January, 1884, Father D. P. O'Connor was in charge, but in March, 1889, he was relieved by Father Kickham. Father Kickham remained only a few months, being followed by Fathers F. E. Loughnan, M. Laverty, and W. Purton. Father Purton remained there from May, 1893, until 1900, when Father P. J. Cooney, the present priest, was appointed. In connection with St. Joseph's it is interesting to note that

It Is the Oldest Catholic Church

in the South Island, and probably in New Zealand. Other churches were erected in the Dominion prior to 1865, but as time has passed on they have been demolished or reconstructed. That, however, cannot be said of St. Joseph's. With much foresight the pioneers built the rear of the building in brick, with the object of facilitating any extension work, but the day has not yet arrived for the undertaking to be taken in hand, and in consequence the building, which is in a good state of preservation, is the same to-day as it was fifty years ago. Another feature worthy of note is the fact that amongst the parishioners to-day is Mrs. J. Loader. She was present at the laying of the foundation stone, and although well advanced in years is still able to recall many memories of bygone days. She was a member of the well-known Pope family, who, shortly after the arrival of the first four ships, devoted much time in the interests of Catholicism.

Satisfactory Progress.

The area covered by various Catholic institutions in Lyttelton is over an acre. Apart from the church,



ST. JOSEPH'S CHURCH, LYTTELTON.

the most prominent buildings are the convent and school, which were erected in 1880. Prior to 1890 instruction was carried out under the guidance of lay teachers, but twenty-five years ago a community of Sisters of Mercy came from Hokitika and took charge. At present ten Sisters conduct the high, day, and parish schools, with an average attendance of 100 scholars. The main