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'What an epic history! A true account of Loreto In Australia reaches right back to the days of Henry the 8th, dark times for English Catholicism yet spawning remarkable heroines like Loreto founder Mary Ward; lost to her own people for years yet now 'the wind beneath my wings', as one of her characteristically innovative, committed successors working in regional Australia describes her legacy. The characters, ambitions, disputes and sheer drama involved in the Australian Loretos' evolution offers both stunning surprise and inspiration.'

– Geraldine Doogue

"'Do good and do it well'. Mary Ward's words made a profound impression on me at school. Every day I watched Loreto women do exactly that. Mary Ryllis Clark's book tells the stories of extraordinary women – brave, compassionate, independent and adaptable women, living by radically beautiful principles. The resonances of this book, and the impact of the Loreto women in Australia, reach far beyond convent walls.'

– Genevieve Lacey, Musician and ex-Loreto student

Loreto In Australia

Mary Ryllis Clark

When a small group of Irish nuns arrived in Ballarat in 1875, with their charismatic leader Mother Gonzaga Barry, who could have imagined the influence they would have on Catholic education in Australia?

The women were members of the Irish Branch of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, also known as the Loreto Institute. Its original founder, the seventeenth-century Yorkshire woman Mary Ward, links them to one of the bloodiest periods in British history when being Catholic was tantamount to treachery.

Mary Ward established a community of women in Europe who followed a rule based on that of the Jesuits. They did not observe enclosure or wear habits and governed themselves, which was unacceptable to the Church at the time. Ward was eventually imprisoned for heresy and her work suppressed, but her Institute survived.

Loreto nuns in Australia have not only founded their own schools, but have run parish schools on a shoestring, worked in indigenous and other disadvantaged communities, taught in universities and held prominent positions in public life. Their commitment to a life of contemplation in action emerged out of Mary Ward's vision for a different sort of life for nuns. Loreto in Australia is the story of women of great strength, charm and deep spirituality fulfilling Mary Ward's prediction that 'women in time to come will do great matters'.

Mary Ryllis Clark migrated to Australia from the UK in 1974 and succeeded the famous Mother Borgia teaching European History at Loreto Mandeville Hall. In 1985 she went back to her original career as a freelance writer/historian. She wrote the popular 'Discover Historic Victoria' column in The Age for 13 years. Her books include *History of the National Trust* (1996) and *Timbertop – Celebrating 50 Years* (2003).

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