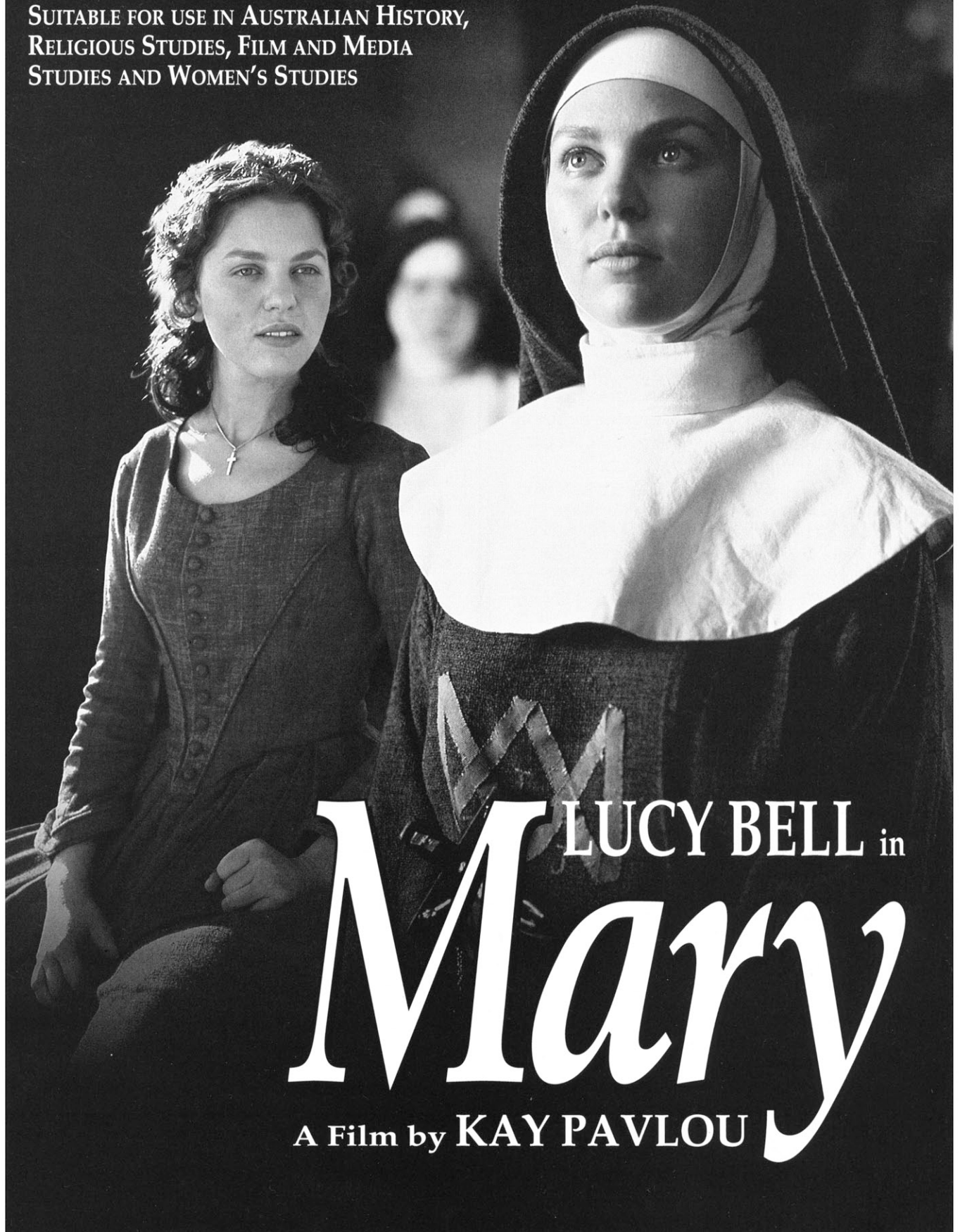


STUDY GUIDE



RONIN
FILMS

SUITABLE FOR USE IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY,
RELIGIOUS STUDIES, FILM AND MEDIA
STUDIES AND WOMEN'S STUDIES



LUCY BELL in
Mary
A Film by KAY PAVLOU

The Life of Mary MacKillop

- 1842** Born January 15 in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne.
- 1860-1** Governess to cousins at Penola Station in South Australia, Mary meets Father Julian Woods.
- 1863** Appointed to denominational school in Portland, South Australia.
- 1866** She begins teaching lessons in a converted stable. March 19, St Joseph's Day, Mary begins wearing a plain black dress to signify her dedication to religious life.
- 1867** In Adelaide, Mary opens her first school. During this year, an orphanage, refuge and providence home are also established. Mary takes her first religious vows on August 15.
- 1868** Bishop Sheil approves the rule of the Institute of St Joseph.
- 1870** Opposition to the Sisters grows, both from the Church hierarchy over the issue of independence, and from the Government over the order's refusal to accept education grants.
- 1871** Mary returns to Adelaide, she is excommunicated on September 22 by Bishop Sheil.
- 1872** The excommunication order is lifted on February 23, and an episcopal Commission is established to investigate the circumstances surrounding the events. Mary's original mentor, Father Julian Woods departs from Adelaide.
- 1873** Mary visits Rome for a personal audience with Pope Pius IX, visits Europe, England and Scotland.
- 1875** Mary returns to Adelaide. The constitution of the order of the Institute of St Joseph is accepted and Mary is elected Mother General. Free, compulsory education becomes law in South Australia.
- 1876** The Institute of the Sisters of St Joseph withdraw from Bathurst due to conflict.
- 1880** The Institute is withdrawn from Queensland. Eight foundations of the order set up in Sydney and Josephite Sisters invited to Armidale.
- 1881** Mary is re-elected as Mother General.
- 1883** First New Zealand foundation set up. Mother Mary is expelled from Adelaide by Bishop Reynolds.
- 1884** A school, a refuge for children and a home for the aged is established in The Rocks, Sydney by the Josephites. Cardinal Moran, Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, deposes Mary and establishes Mother Bernard as Mother General for a period of ten years.
- 1887** Rome refuses to approve decrees asserting diocesan control over the Josephites. Sisters of St Joseph arrive in Northampton, Western Australia.
- 1886** Mary's mother drowned in the shipwreck of the "Lyee-Moon" off Eden, N.S.W.
- 1888** Decree from Rome constitutes the Sisters of Saint Joseph as an approved Regular Congregation with its Mother House in North Sydney. Central government is confirmed, the Order of St Joseph will remain independent.
- 1889** Father Julian Woods dies in Sydney. Mary elected Assistant Mother General.
- 1891** Mary suffers from the first of many bouts of serious illness.
- 1894** Mary visits New Zealand.
- 1895** Mary returns to Australia.
- 1898** Mother Bernard dies.
- 1899** Mary re-elected as Mother General.
- 1902** Mary travels again to New Zealand, while there she has medical treatment at Rotorua Springs. While there she suffers a stroke. She returns to Australia later in the year as an invalid.
- 1904** Mary travels from Adelaide to Sydney.
- 1909** Mary dies in Sydney.
- 1925** A tribunal is set up to investigate Mary's life, people were interviewed and documents were examined but some important documents were missing so the case lapsed.
- 1951** The case was reopened.
- 1973** On January 30 following agreement amongst the Special Congregation of Cardinals the Cause for the Beatification of Servant of God Mary of the Cross MacKillop was introduced. On February 1 Pope Paul VI declared Mary Servant of God.
- 1989** The Vatican declared Mary Venerable after the completion and acceptance of the "Posito" (Mary's official biography).
- 1995** On January 19 the Mary's Beatification recognises Mary's intercession in a miracle. After the ceremony Mary is referred to as Blessed Mary MacKillop.

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY & RELIGIOUS STUDIES

LIFE & HISTORY

- What were the three things that Mary aimed to teach the children in her schools?
- This curriculum in her schools is described as 'pragmatic and practical'. What do you understand these two words to mean?
- What evidence is given in the film to show that the Sisters of St Joseph were successful in carrying out their task of educating the poor?
- What groups of people would normally have access to music lessons in colonial Australia? Why do you think that Mary MacKillop therefore would not allow music to be taught in her schools?
- What were the reasons for Mary's visit to Rome? Who did she visit? Why was she not able to wear the brown robes of the Order of St Joseph when travelling in Italy? What news was she able to bring back to Australia about the future control of the Institute of St Joseph?
- In the forward to Lesley O'Brien's book "Mary MacKillop Unveiled", Geraldine Doogue is quoted as saying; *"The more I read of her history, the more she encapsulates something quintessentially Australian... the stuff of some of our best rebels and fighters. It is a marvellously rich tapestry of guts, impulsiveness, grit, compassion and dreams."*
- Do you agree with this summing up of Mary's life?
- Is she "quintessentially Australian"? a rebel? a fighter?
- How was her life inspired and directed by her beliefs, her dreams?
- Using the table below identify the differences between Mary's model of religious life and the model of religious life known to the Irish and European clergy of the nineteenth century.



Mary MacKillop as portrayed by Lucy Bell

- Choose one aspect of Mary's model of religious life to examine in detail.
- Mary MacKillop was the first Australian to found an order of nuns, the Institute of St Joseph. Her aim was to create a teaching order of nuns which would be *"uniquely designed for this country"* and would *"teach only the poor"*. What does the film tell us was different about the Sisters of St Joseph compared to the other orders of nuns imported from Europe? In what ways was the order unique? Why was it necessary?
- What reasons are given in the film for the long delay between Mary's death in 1909 and the declaration by the Pope that she is a Saint of the Church in January 1995?
- Write about the attitudes to women shown in the film. In what ways was Mary MacKillop similar and in what ways was she different to other Catholic women last century.
- How was Mary's life inspired and directed by her beliefs?
- Apart from watching this film, how else could people learn about Mary MacKillop and the Sisters of St Joseph?
- Many people who live good lives are called 'saints' but certain things are necessary before the Catholic Church is able to declare a person an official saint. What are they? What is still required before the Catholic Church is prepared to make her a Universal Saint?

	RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY	RELIGIOUS LIFE PROPOSED BY MARY MACKILLOP
MODEL OF RELIGIOUS LIFE	Institutional - groups of sisters lived in privately owned convents	
CLASSES OF SISTERS	Choir sisters - educated daughters of the rich who could provide a dowry in money or kind. Lay sisters - daughters of those who could not afford a dowry (often uneducated). These women usually did the convent's domestic duties.	
FORM OF GOVERNMENT	Authoritarian - each convent under the leadership of a superior, who was responsible to the Bishop of the Diocese in which the convent was located.	
FORM OF SPIRITUALITY	Contemplative and devotional - emphasis on the saying of prayers in community at particular times of the day.	
FORM OF MINISTRY	Institutional - sisters involved in schools, hospitals and other institutions centre around the convent.	

- At the very beginning of the film, Clare Dunne says, “*It is almost a prerequisite that Saints disturb the natural order of things*”. What do you think this means? What could the ‘natural order of things’ refer to in the Catholic Church and in the wider Australian community?

- The film tells us Mary MacKillop set up ‘a democratic order of nuns’ and when Governor Daley’s grandson is brought to Mary’s school and she is asked for preferential treatment for ‘young Thomas’, she says ‘*everyone is equal before God, Sir*’. How is this relevant to Australian ideals of mateship?”

- Did Mary challenge any of the ideas of the Catholic Church in Australia last century? What were these ideas?

DREAMS & STRUGGLES

- Mary had major disagreements with some of the Bishops and other church leaders. What does the film say were the reasons for these disagreements?

- Mary set up ‘houses of providence’ for homeless children and other unfortunate people where ‘God would provide’. According to the film, where did the money and food come from to run these ‘houses of providence’?

- “*To be heroic you’ve got to battle and Mary obviously had her battles*”. Briefly describe three of Mary’s many battles which are shown in the film.

- “*I have always felt the compassionate presence of Eternal Love. When storms rage and persecutions threaten, I quietly creep into its deep abyss and securely sheltered there, my soul is in peace, while my body is tossed upon the waves of a cold and selfish world. If our intention is pure and we have charity in our hearts we need never fear.*”

Mary MacKillop

Mary MacKillop’s religious experience is founded in her own life experiences. As a child she experienced and recognised the difficulties facing the impoverished lower classes of colonial Australia. What was her motivation in addressing the needs of these people?

- Marie Foale says in the film that: “*Mary was excommunicated because basically the clergy could not accept the Josephites as proper nuns... they did not fit the mould.... there were things happening among the nuns that were not quite right*”. Give evidence from the film that verifies this statement.

- The quotations from Mary MacKillop’s letters which open and close the film tell us much about the attitudes of Australia’s first saint. How do the incidents recalled in the film portray the heroic virtues which declared Mary Blessed?

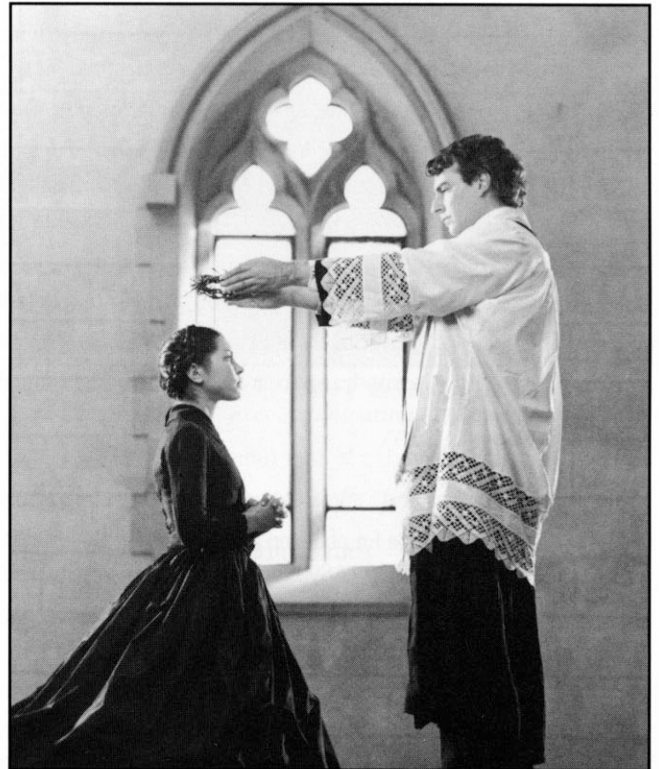
- Spirituality, or the way of holiness, can be defined as a way of living, a way of becoming, that provides us with understanding about ourselves and the world about us... it shapes what we see, how we feel, and the way we think. Describe the factors that reflect the spirituality of Mary MacKillop and the world as you think Mary MacKillop saw it and why this vision drove her to live and act as she did.

ACHIEVEMENTS

“*Mary is the kind of saint we can identify with. She’s been through the mill and we can see how she handled it. ...she kept herself open, kept her heart open, even in the midst of the hells she was going through. She remained bigger than the circumstance... but she called spiritual help and strength from the world that is beyond time and space the larger reality to which we all belong*”.

- Comment on this statement made by Clare Dunne in the film.

- It could be said that “in recognising the transcendent dimension of her life, Mary recognised her God as not only being beyond but also with humanity”. Comment on this statement.



Mary MacKillop (Lucy Bell) takes her religious vows with Father Julian Woods (Brendan Higgins)

- Through the ongoing work of her Sisters, Mary MacKillop has made an outstanding contribution to the development of Catholic Education, Health Care and Social Welfare in Australia and New Zealand. Research the ways Mary MacKillop’s dream lives on in the Church today.

- Do you know of any other Australian women, either living or dead, who have achieved as much as Mary MacKillop achieved in her life? Write down the names of these women and the particular area of their achievement. (You could check an Australian encyclopaedia or the Australian Dictionary of Biography to help you answer this question).

- From what you have seen in the film and other knowledge, do you agree that Mary MacKillop was ‘A Great Australian’? Why?

- It has been said that “Mary made a significant impact on the development of the Catholic Church in Australia and New Zealand”. Do you agree with this statement? From what you saw in the film, argue for or against this statement.

- If you had to prepare a series of posters for example, Mary A Great Australian; Mary The Saint; Mary The Teacher; Mary The Religious; what scenes from the film would you use and why?

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY & WOMEN'S STUDIES

WOMEN AND POWER

Much of the film concerns the position of women in society and in the Catholic Church. Mary believes strongly in the right of the poor to an education, and this belief coincides with the vision of Father Julian Woods to establish a teaching order of nuns devoted to the education of the poor. This brings her into conflict with the hierarchy of the church. Several scenes throughout the film highlight this conflict.

Mary confronts Bishop Sheil

In this scene Bishop Sheil usurps Father Woods' control and takes over the order. He dictates that the nuns develop a hierarchy based on class, and directs Mary to teach music.

- Why does this create a "crisis of conscience" for Mary?
- What does Bishop Sheil's comment "I will not humour the whim of a female" tell us about the church?
- Look at the setting in which Mary is received by the Bishop. How does this conflict with Mary's own position and beliefs?

Excommunication Scene

Mary battles with her crisis of conscience and consequently writes to Bishop Sheil and tells him she cannot comply with his ruling. He summons the nuns to meeting in the church where Mary is excommunicated.

- When we first see Bishop Sheil in this scene he is dressed differently from previous scenes. How is he dressed and what does this represent?
- When Mary finally appears in the scene, how does the Bishop address her?
- How does the physical positioning of the characters in the scene reinforce what is happening? (note camera angles)
- What is the effect of excommunication for Mary and her nuns?

Bishop of Queensland versus Mary

Once again in Queensland Mary faces pressure to open her schools to the rich. The point of issue here is who has authority over the order and what is its primary function.

- How does the Bishop's view of the purpose of the order, differ

from Mary's? What is it that he wants her to do that she objects to? In this scene Mary refers to a principle that the Bishop does not recognise. What is this principle?

- What language does the Bishop use to describe Mary, the Mother General of the order?
- What is Mary's response to the Bishop's order?

Gender in the Church

A very important scene in the film is the one between Father Woods and Mary discussing the recent mystic visions of Woods and the nuns. These mystic visions have caused the order to come under scrutiny and receive the disapproval of the church hierarchy. In this scene Mary is represented as rational, sensible and grounded, as opposed to Father Woods.

- How do the lighting and camera work highlight the difference between Mary and Father Woods in this scene?
- There is a particular object that appears in every shot with Mary. What is it and what does it suggest about Mary?
- In the scene that immediately follows, the Saintmaker discusses the nuns' hysteria. Why is Father Woods absent from this discussion? In the following dramatic reconstructions, how does the church treat Father Woods in relation to these incidents? How does this compare with the treatment of Mary?

A very interesting documentary which also explores the role of women in the church is "The Fully Ordained Meatpie". This film looks at the attitude of the church to the ordination of women as priests, and follows a group of women lobbying for the right to be ordained into the Anglican priesthood.

- What are the similarities and differences between Mary's struggle and women's struggle for ordination in the 1980s and '90s?
- In what ways is the role of women changing in the church?

Mary the Saint

There are two instances in the film when Mary is represented in the traditional way. The first is as a child lying in bed talking to the special presence, and the second is at the Vatican where she is framed against the chapel ceiling of saints.

- Think of churches, stained glass windows, holy cards and other religious images. In your experience how are saints visually represented?
- What are the visual similarities between the early scene of Mary in bed as a child, and the dying woman in hospital as she is miraculously cured.



Mary MacKillop (Lucy Bell) leaves the church after her excommunication

FILM AND MEDIA STUDIES

Mary - The Film

The film **Mary** is a representation of the life of Mary MacKillop. It is also about the establishment of the first religious order (The Sisters of St Joseph) by an Australian and an investigation into the life of a woman who has been proposed as Australia's first saint.

The film takes the form of both a drama and a documentary, a docu-drama. The components of this form as represented in **Mary** are dramatic reconstructions and interviews with authorities on her life. It is important to understand the way in which films are constructed to present the subject matter in a particular way and to elicit a particular response from the viewer. The following questions will help to analyse how this film works.

1. The Structure of the Film

- Is there a pattern to the use of interviews and dramatic reconstructions?
- What is the relationship between the interviews and the reconstructions? Do they legitimate or contradict each other?
- Who are the people used as interviewees? How are they represented? In what surroundings? How do the views of each relate to those of the others?
- Are there any critical voices in this film and what are they critical of? Why might this be the case?
- Have the interviews more authority than the dramatic reconstructions? Which is more convincing and why?

2. Reconstruction and Historical Drama

- What would motivate a documentary maker to include dramatisation in a documentary? What periods/events are represented in this way? What is the effect of such representations?
- Do you think these constructions are more or less valid than archival footage?

3. Representation of Mary, the Individual

The opening scene establishes a lot of what we come to know about Mary's character and motivation. We see Mary riding alone through the countryside in a red dress, bathed in golden light, with a crucifix prominently placed around her neck and accompanied by a soundtrack of religious music and Mary as narrator, voicing her religious beliefs.

- What does this scene suggest about Mary's character and future?
- This scene is repeated several times throughout the film with minor variations. At what points in the film does this occur and what qualities of Mary are being reinforced by this repetition?



Mary MacKillop in the year of her excommunication (1871) at the age of 29 (Mary MacKillop Archive)

RECOMMENDED VIEWING

- **The Business of Making Saints** Ronin Films, 1994
- **God's Girls: Stories from an Australian Convent** Ronin Films, 1992
- **Fully Ordained Meatpie** Film Australia, 1988
- **Mary MacKillop** Film Australia, 1988
- **The Song of Bernadette** 20th Century Fox, 1943

RECOMMENDED READING

- **Mary MacKillop Unveiled** Lesley O'Brien, Collins Dove, 1994

AN R.B. FILMS PRODUCTION STARRING LUCY BELL
FEATURING LINDEN WILKINSON • BRENDAN HIGGINS • BRIAN HARRISON
PRODUCER ROSEMARY BLIGHT • DIRECTOR KAY PAVLOU • WRITER KAY PAVLOU
ORIGINAL CONCEPT JULIE MACKEN • DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY JAN KENNY ACS
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