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St Kilda Park Primary School 70 Fitzroy Street, St Kilda

Virtually unique amongst government primary schools in Victoria, St Kilda Park No 2460 has a very compact, entirely double-storied, very urban design, yet is set on an acre (0.4 hectares) of land and on the edge of extensive Albert Park. Perhaps its location is why it produced three of Australia's greatest test cricketers: Bill Ponsford, Keith Miller and Ian Johnson. Other famous pupils include Sir Zelman Cowen eminent jurist and former governor general and multiple Archibald Prize-winning artist William Dargie. Carl Ditterrich, St Kilda Football Club champion coached its footballers in the 1960s.

The 1872 Education Act proclaimed education to be free (in most subjects), compulsory (until age 15) and secular. And so the Victorian government became responsible for designing and building all primary schools. An architectural competition resulted in 13 new large school designs: the design of Brighton Road (1875, **34**) school is derived from one of these. But the more compressed design of Park (1879) takes a different approach, more like the Board Schools in London. This type first appeared at Windsor-Prahran (1877), and later at Queensberry Street, Carlton (1880-81) on much tighter sites to enable more playground space and reached its apotheosis at Camp Hill, Bendigo (1877). St Kilda Park's design influenced Toorak (1889) and Richmond North (1888) and its plan, Burnley (1888).



St Kilda Park Primary School, 2002

It is a most Romantic composition with bi-chromatic red and brown patterned bricks, steep gabled roofs, a high internal tower, an inset porch and the canted master's office strategically placed to survey the entrance. It had five large schoolrooms and three small classrooms. Like the Brighton Road school, it still has its bell, which I understand rings each school day.

Even in 1874, 20 acres (8 hectares) between the railway and the Beach Reserve was proposed as the school site. The Education Department asked Council for a grant of an acre of the Beach Reserve, which was refused, The Council also opposed locating the school at the junction and residents opposed the present site, presumably as it was unhealthy, rather than that it grabbed parkland. It was purchased by the Department for £100 in December 1873, the result of a special bill passed by the Legislative Assembly on 14 November 1878. The school was designed in 1879; architectural drawings no longer survive, but a perspective view is nominally annotated with the name of the head of the Architecture Branch, Henry Robert Bastow. This does not that imply Bastow was the actual designer. Very few designs can be directly credited to him. It was completed on 1 August when the two schools it replaced were closed: St Kilda Acland Street Common School No 565, opened as early as 1851 and Punt Road National School (corner High Street), 1854.

The site was swampy, unhealthy and frequently under water. The head teacher's request for protective shelter sheds in 1885 was not granted until 1909. Even then, parents paid half the cost. One survives. In 1904, the health officer closed the school during a diphtheria epidemic. After requests, the Council agreed to relocate the municipal tip 200 metres away north from the school. The tip finally closed in 1919.

In 1922-23, the school was renovated and extended to accommodate a further 530 pupils for a cost of £8,154 and designated a central school, with classes up to grade eight. No further alteration occurred until 1969 and 1980, but even then, to modernise facilities rather than expand, by developing the Zelman Cowan library, art and craft room and multi-purpose room.

Sir Zelman (b1919) is the school's most distinguished alumni. Born in St Kilda, later he caught the 69 tram to Scotch College secondary school. After Arts-Law at University of Melbourne, in 1947-50 he became a fellow of Oriel College, Oxford University on a Rhodes Scholarship, returning as Professor of Public Law and Dean of the Melbourne Law Faculty (1951-66). He was appointed Vice Chancellor of New England University (1967-70) and Queensland University (1970-77). He succeeded the colourful Sir John Kerr as Governor General (1977-82) and re-established the dignity of that office, generally by keeping a low profile. He has been greatly honoured overseas, including as provost of his old Oxford College, Oriel (1982-90) and Chairman of the British Press Council (1983-88). Since, he has chaired John Fairfax Holdings Ltd, publishers of *The Age*.

Although William Harold (Bill) Ponsford was born and died in Fitzroy (1900-91) it is said that he also went to Park for a time. He was Australia's top batsman until Bradman. Even 'the Don' could not dominate him, as he did others. Ponsford was the only player to score centuries in his first two and last two tests and to score over 400 twice in first class innings. He averaged 48.22 runs in his 29 tests between 1924 and when he retired in 1934. One of the best ever spin bowlers, he was contemptuous of the 1932-33 bodyline tactics. He went on to work at the Melbourne Cricket Club for 37 years. The Western grandstand at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, renamed for him in 1986, has recently been demolished, and his name retained for part of the new stand.

After leaving Park, Ian Johnson (b1917) caught the St Kilda Road tram to Wesley College. An off- break bowler in the Australian XI from 1946-56 he was captain for the last two years. After commentating for Channel 9, 3AW and the *Argus* newspaper (1953-57), like Ponsford; he also came to the MCC, as its secretary (1957-83) and wrote two cricket books. He still lives locally.

Keith 'Nugget' Miller (1919-2004) was an aggressive fast bowler and batsman. In 55 tests (1946-57) he made 2,958 runs, (average 37), taking 170 wickets (average 23). He was best against the West Indies in Jamaica (1954-55) making 109 and taking 6 for 107. After Park, he took the train from Balaclava to South Yarra for Melbourne High School. He played Sheffield Shield for Victoria (1939-46), NSW (1946-56) and vice-captained Australia (1954-56). He commentated for the ABC TV and the London *Daily Express* (1956-76). The MCG's Great southern Stand has a Keith Miller Room. After his death in 2004, he received a state funeral at St Paul's Cathedral.

Sidney Nolan's 1946 painting, *Footballer*, held by the National Gallery of Victoria and currently displayed at its new Ian Potter Centre at Federation Square, is reputedly of Keith

Miller, of whom Nolan was said to be a great fan. It is less well known that Miller played 50 VFL games for the St Kilda Saints.

Sir William Dargie (b1912) won eight Archibald portrait prizes, more than any other artist (1941-56). He had been an official war artist in World War II and painted the famous. Later he headed the National Gallery of Victoria Art School (1968-72) and chaired the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board. He painted the famous 1954 Royal Tour portrait of Her Majesty in the wattle yellow dress, remembered from every 1950s classroom.

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