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## **St Kilda Primary School (Brighton Road) No. 1479 Brighton Road, St Kilda**



St Kilda Primary School, 2002

The earliest school in St Kilda, Christ Church School in Acland Street, was founded (and funded) in 1851, by the Church of England. It later became Common School No. 565.

It survived for over 30 years until it was replaced by St Kilda Park State School (20). A second school, this time for boys only, was opened by the seventeen-year old William Cox on 24 February 1855 in a five-roomed timber house in Neptune Street. William taught in a room 8.8 x 7.3 metres which could have accommodated sixty pupils. Room sizes are important for earlier schools, in determining the number of double desks, and hence pupils, that could fit.

The next year, this school was supported by government funding as a National school, for both girls and boys. After various moves around St Kilda, its 170 pupils were accommodated behind a house in Brighton Road. It was described as one of the best schools in the colony.

The second precursor of Brighton Road State (now Primary) school was a Denominational School No 584, founded by the Presbyterian Church in Inkerman Street, on 1 October 1856. Its average attendance rose to 178 pupils. The new Education Department (unusually) leased it for a year until the end of 1874. Eleven days later in January 1875, State School No 1479, St Kilda (Brighton Road) opened.

Development of this school reflected the colonial government's increasing intervention in primary education. At the end of 1873, the new *Education Act* was enforced in Victoria. Education (at least up to age 15) was free (in most subjects), compulsory and secular. The government took over responsibility from local committees for building all schools and began a massive building programme. Amazingly, about a third of all nineteenth century Education Department schools were built in 1873-75.

An architectural competition held in July 1873 produced 13 new school designs, Brighton Road is not directly derived from these designs, (as many schools were), but is another new urban school design initiated by the head of the Education Department's Architecture Branch, Henty Robert Bastow. The initials B(?).J.M. (with D.M.) are on the drawings and could refer to Edmund J. Mapleston, Assistant Draftsman in 1876.

Lacking today's access to demographic research, the Department found it difficult to estimate the prospective number of pupils for the new school: its unusual mirrored plan and front elevation with a pair of central gables, is said to have resulted from its indecision between a building for either 320 or 640 pupils, even in the builder's contract. The design for the Brighton Road State school influenced that of at least two later schools: Daylesford No1609 (1873-75) and Geelong West (formerly Ashby) No1492 (1875).

The site is part of the triangular St Kilda Market Reserve (33). It now comprises the Town Hall (1890), Holy Trinity Anglican Church and its hall, the Uniting (former Wesleyan) Church (1877), an electrical substation, as well as the school buildings and playground. The

architects of the Uniting Church, Crouch and Wilson (44), designed its tower to closely reflect the earlier tower of the State School, which had been built three years earlier.

Duplication of the Brighton Road school's plan produced a very long single-storied façade, with gables projecting at each end and the pair of gables facing at its centre, with one entrance between and others nesting in the end angles. The right entrance has the picturesque high, square belltower. It retains its bell, still occasionally used and can be heard as far away as Balaclava. Its brickwork is polychromatic, in cream, red and brown, which the department architects frequently adopted in the nineteenth century, following the recommendation of influential English art theorist, John Ruskin for use of 'constructional colour'.

Brighton Road, under head-teacher John Hadfield (1875-88) who came from Christ Church School, soon became known as progressive. A scholars' lending library opened in August 1875. Free night classes attracted 100 pupils, many of mature age, when secondary education elsewhere was fee-paying. The school's drum and fife band achieved local fame. A photograph in 1882, shows frock-coated and top-hatted teachers, boys in knickerbockers, jackets and heavy boots and the bandsmen in braided jackets and caps. Its cadet corps was said to be one of the finest in the colony. One of the cadets grew up to become Major General Sir John Hoad, Commander in Chief of the Commonwealth Military Forces. In 1900, 24 pupils volunteered for the Boer War in South Africa. 500 ex-pupils served in World War I: 55 did not return. Their names are recorded on an honour board in the 1914 building.

Concerns of inadequate accommodation for all pupils at Brighton Road School, were confirmed by the huge initial enrolment of 604 pupils, necessitating employment of 12 teachers. This crowding was eased by the construction of St Kilda Park School in 1882, and later at Brighton Road most unusually, by the demolition of the tower in 1887 and the erection of a second storey over the central three gabled bays, culminating in a similar tower, but with a balconette.

After an amalgamation of St Kilda Park with Brighton Road, perhaps due to the Boer War, it is not known for how long, they were separated again in 1907. This may partly explain the confusion in which some famous pupils are later claimed by both schools. In 1913 a record pupil population of 1,269 was reached.

In 1919, an influenza epidemic led to the school being requisitioned as a temporary hospital for 600 patients.

Brighton Road's most distinguished pupil was Sidney Nolan (1917-92), one of the most famous Australian artists (9). He was extraordinarily prolific. Many of his works develop tragic themes from Australian history: the deaths of Ned Kelly, Burke and Wills, and of Galipolli; as well as of our flora and fauna. He also designed for the theatre, ballet and opera, both here and in England, where he lived in later life. He engaged in a memorable feud with his former friend Patrick White, for whose novels he designed several covers.

Nolan received the Order of Merit (1985), Commander of the Order of Australia (1988) and was Australia's only Royal Academician. Several of his works depict St Kilda subjects, including Luna Park, the Sea Baths, and Brighton Road State School yard, including the School's number. This last work was painted in 1944 and is held by the Art Gallery of South Australia.

Nolan explained that the central statue in the work depicts his schoolteacher: 'we were well taught and when released, ran wild at playtime, the boys trying to be masculine with feats of glory like hanging from the football scoreboard...the playground was a mass of dispersed activity and that's how I still activate my paintings...' (Sidney Nolan, 17 July 1978). He was at Brighton Road round 1922-28.

Both Brighton Road and Park Schools claim former Governor General Sir Zelman Cowen, and test cricketer Keith Miller as former pupils.

In 1901, Brighton Road School was renovated and the tiered platforms removed from the classrooms. Internal toilets were installed in cloakrooms. New classrooms were added in 1907 and in the following year, external windows enlarged by inserting concrete lintels, classrooms were divided with glass screens and the porches were sealed up. In 1914 a new, red brick Federation style pavilion-shaped infants' building was erected, designed under Chief Architect E. Evan Smith. (Drawings are initialled B.J.M. and J.H.M.).

Over 1966-67, a new, well-graded sports oval, canteen and seven new classrooms were opened. In 1969-70, a library and multi-purpose room complex was built, innovatively financed by a co-operative society.

During the 1980s, the school grounds were extensively landscaped and in 1989, the Children's Courtyard between the 1875 and 1914 buildings was created. Its bricks record names of the pupils that year.

Today, Brighton is proud of its involvement of parents in the management of the school on School Council and through its sub-committees, and as partners in the classroom. Early each morning parents observe pupils read, write and measure. Today, the school has many Chinese and Russian pupils, as well as from Japan, Vietnam, Brazil, Poland and New Zealand. It celebrates its cultural diversity and teaches about Australia's past, both indigenous and European.

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