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St Kilda (Terminus) Railway Station & Metropol Apartments, 60 Fitzroy Street, St Kilda

As the terminus of the first solely passenger railway constructed in Victoria, St Kilda Railway Station is also the oldest surviving railway station in Victoria. In fact, of the three station buildings from this very early period of rail travel in Victoria (early South Yarra and Werribee are the others), it is the most complete. It also has a train hall, one of only three in Victoria (with Geelong and Ballarat). From 1857, the rail link from the centre of Melbourne secured St Kilda's status and stimulated its development as a salubrious and fashionable residential suburb and resort.

The colonial gentry and the business class, who had settled at St Kilda from the first Crown Land sale of 1842 had wanted to escape from the oppressive environment of the city, seeking to enjoy St Kilda's fresh air, sea baths and pleasant vistas, by road only a comfortable carriage journey away. From 1844 there were daily coach services to Melbourne in the morning, returning to St Kilda in the evening, and reversed on Sundays for day-trippers. But carriages were for the wealthy. In July 1851, the publican of the Royal Hotel (10) initiated the first frequent public horse-drawn omnibus service to St Kilda from the city and in 1845, each resident in both St Kilda and the Melbourne Corporation donated £25 towards the making of the St Kilda Road.

But the St Kilda Road had problems. *The Illustrated Journal of Australasia*, declared that the road '...gives accommodation to comparatively few persons, has involved long delays, cost immense sums for cutting and occasioned no end of disputes beside the evil of a thronged road.' In October 1852, William Strutt's remarkable and famous picture *Bushrangers on the St Kilda Road* shockingly depicted his impression only hours after he visited the scene of a bushranger hold-up.

In August 1852, the Melbourne and Hobson's Bay Railway Company had been formed to construct a line from Melbourne to Sandridge [Port Melbourne], principally for freight but also passengers from the port, replacing Wilbraham Frederick Evelyn Liardet's first carriage and postal service, which had operated from December 1840. The M&HBR company's healthy 8% dividend in its first year encouraged it to then construct a branch passenger line to St Kilda, separating from the earlier direct route to the southwest, by curving off to the south at the Clarendon Street crossing and by appropriating parkland, through Albert Park (48).

James Kearney's map of 1855 already shows the proposed station beside a spectacular housing estate to be built on the southern end of Albert Park. Its streets radiate from Park Crescent like a spider's web, in the Regency manner. Fitzroy Street is depicted in its full 60-metre proposed width, as a worthy extension of St Kilda Road to the sea.

Tenders were called for earthworks and buildings on 3 November 1856 and the line opened on 13 May 1857 with a banquet in the station. The engine house and carriage shed were built later that year. The designer of the station building is not known. James Blackburn architect and engineer was the company's designer, but he died in 1854 and was replaced by the little known William Eldon.

The new station did not impress the *Illustrated Journal of Australasia*, ‘...[it] has little to recommend it on architectural grounds. It is chiefly interesting as one of the principle vomitories of the city of Melbourne.’ The station’s western embankment (now Canterbury Road) is contained by the massive bluestone retaining-wall, some three metres high and the station included a booking office, refreshment room, station master’s residence, store, staff-rooms and toilets.

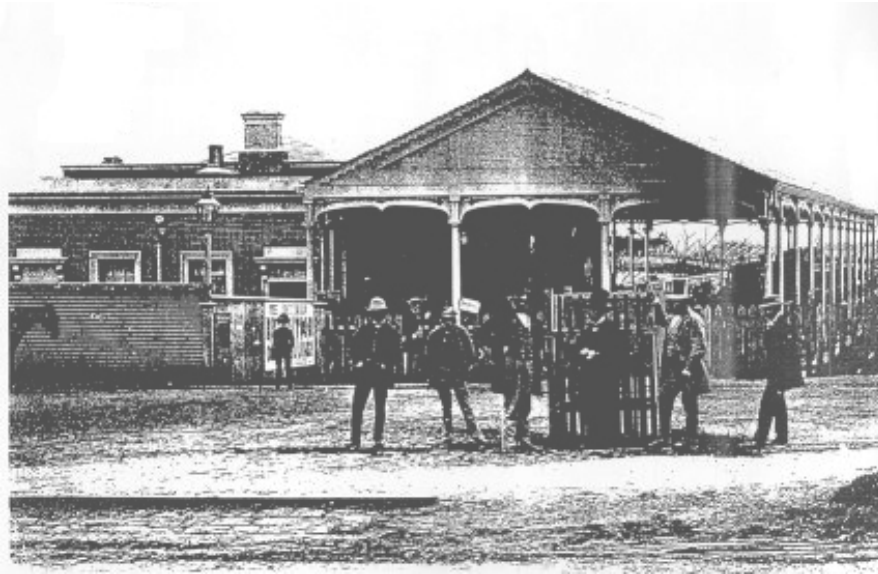


James Kearney's 1855 plan for the area around St Kilda Station, showing the proposed radial suburban subdivision into Albert Park and Fitzroy Street the same width as St Kilda Road

These first two railways were an expensive form of transport and so the line confirmed the prestige of St Kilda, Gillian Upton observes. The line was planned for these affluent local commuters, but floods of weekend tourists unexpectedly descended to the beach by the train; about 100,000 travelled each month, and the platform was doubled in length within the year. The station was also a link to the Brighton omnibus, which left from its forecourt, which faced the sea as its destination, rather than towards commercial Fitzroy Street. To the north of the train shed was the coal yard, necessary to fuel the locomotives. Fred Wimpole, licensee of the George Hotel opposite, also secured the licence for the large refreshment room at the station in 1874, within a year of his buying the hotel.

The railway line’s *Enabling Act* envisaged extending the railway on to the corner of Barkly and Grey Streets, but once locals noticed construction extending right into Fitzroy Street, and the cutting at Grey Street, they protested. The line already extended 20 metres into Fitzroy Street, so the Council expeditiously reduced the width of Fitzroy Street to only 40 metres and so the vision of St Kilda Road extending to the sea was lost forever. In 1858, the Victorian Parliament again considered extending the line south to the corner of Grey and Barkly Streets through a tunnel. The Council’s view that this would be ‘detrimental to the interests of the town’ prevailed and the proposal was abandoned. The proposal was revived in 1883, when a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways recommended extending the line on through Elwood to Middle Brighton. Gillian Upton recounts that one train did attempt to climb to Barkly Street in the 1920s, by jumping the tracks into mid-Fitzroy Street.

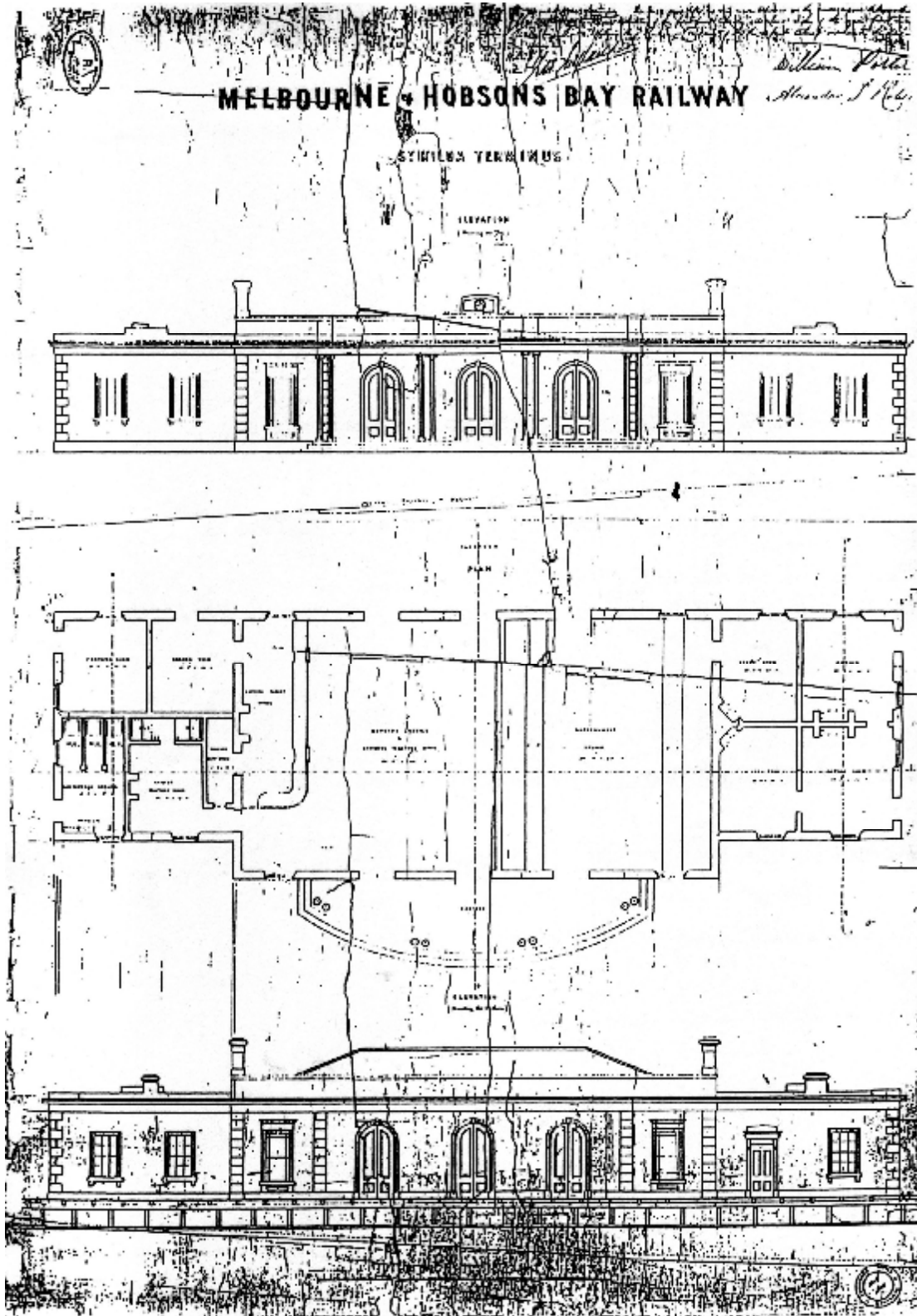
In 1859, shareholders of the Melbourne & Hobson’s Bay Railway Company voted to pay £5,000 to the Brighton & St Kilda Railway Company to construct an extension loop line curving to the north, probably aligned to Raleigh Street and around into Windsor station, by completing the arc through Alma Park as a semi-circle. Depicted by Cox’s map of 1866, by the end of the year this line had been constructed over the



St Kilda Railway Station from Fitzroy Street, c1864



Cox's plan showing the railway line extending, at centre right, towards Brighton, 1866



Floor plan and west (top) and east (bottom) elevations of St Kilda Terminus Railway Station, 1856

Albert Park swamp, past the south end of the lake, on an embankment and timber viaduct, then parallel to Union Street and by the end of 1861 it had been extended to align with the present railway as far as Brighton Beach.

The loop was an ambitious and costly folly for private enterprise and was closed 11 months later, when another company extended the Richmond line through South Yarra and Prahran to Windsor. It was completely dismantled in 1867.

The Victorian Tourists' Guide of 1895 describes the Fitzroy Street scene that met the eager tourists:

...and from this fashionable resort trains - over 60 on every week day - run at frequent intervals from six am until midnight... The service is slightly altered on Saturdays and on Sundays 39 trains travel each way... On leaving the St Kilda station, turn to the right down a wide thoroughfare flanked with pleasant residences, most of which are to be approached through well kept gardens, [which] leads direct to the sea-beach. Here on any fine day, and particularly on any fine Sunday, may be witnessed all those agreeable sights associated with a fashionable watering place, and whilst on shady balconies, individuals may be seen reclining in all the lazy luxuriousness of *dolce far niente* [carefree idleness, loafing about without employment].

In July 1878, the Victorian Government acquired all of Melbourne's private railways including what was by then the Hobson's Bay United Railway.

To bring public transport to Elwood and on to Brighton, cable tramways were opened from St Kilda Station to Brighton Road, corner Milton Street (1888) and around the Esplanade and Acland Street, to Barkly Street (1891), even though passenger numbers had declined by 23 percent. The Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company Ltd operated the cable trams, the Melbourne Tramways Trust, on which the Borough of St Kilda was represented, owned the system and there was a cable tram depot near St Michaels School in Dandenong Road. Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board electric trams replaced both the cable tram routes in late 1925.

Then in 1906, the Victorian Railways Department installed its own electric tramway, which it both owned and operated, between St Kilda Station and Brighton, via Grey, Barkley Streets, Ormond Esplanade and St Kilda Street, Head Street and Park Street to Brighton Railway Station, which was duplicated in 1913. It was the first electric tramway in inner Melbourne.

In 1907, St Kilda Station was substantially renovated. The western portico was demolished and a verandah and new refreshment room built facing Canterbury Street. The Station Master's residence was commandeered as a post and telegraph office.

The Sandringham railway line to North Brighton via Richmond and South Yarra had opened long before in 1859, when Balaclava, Elsternwick and Windsor stations all opened and it was extended to Brighton Beach in 1861 and on to Sandringham 1887 (37).

The St Kilda railway line was electrified in 1919 and in the 1920s its diagonal bridge across the Yarra carried four lines and St Kilda was the second busiest station in Victoria after Flinders Street.

Over 1957-59, the Railways tram was closed progressively due to competition from motor traffic which had increased 68% between 1947-51, leading to the decline of the station and of St Kilda itself, '...a sort of Aussie Cannes, with a better beach, has become tawdry, its one guinea now cheap at half the price,' explained the novelist Hal Porter, from his vantage point as the manager of the George Hotel.

Gradually the station facilities closed: the refreshment rooms (1969), the post office (1972), the booking hall and ladies waiting room (1976) and in 1981 services on the line were reduced and Sunday trains ended.

In January 1983 most sadly, the St Kilda railway line was converted to a tram route, under the cover of the smart name 'light rail.' In 1989, several fires damaged the timber station building and by December, its roof had been destroyed.

In 1996, Donleavy Fitzpatrick envisaged a tiny vineyard with a cheese store on the 'station site.' By 2002, Metropol Apartments designed by Billard Leece Architects, rose from the station forecourt, terminating the successful Canterbury Road series of townhouses at Fitzroy Street (22). Both projects were shepherded through the panning and development process by SJB Planners. An insulting attempt by the developers to name the tram stop at the station 'Metropol' was quickly aborted.

Catherine Heggan, a former chair of Heritage Victoria correctly declared that in its historic context, the Metropol is 'not only right for the current market, but points the way to the sort of developments we'll be seeing more of in the future. It is built around a public transport hub, it has a community focus and it injects interest and liveliness into the area and it combines living and retail.'

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